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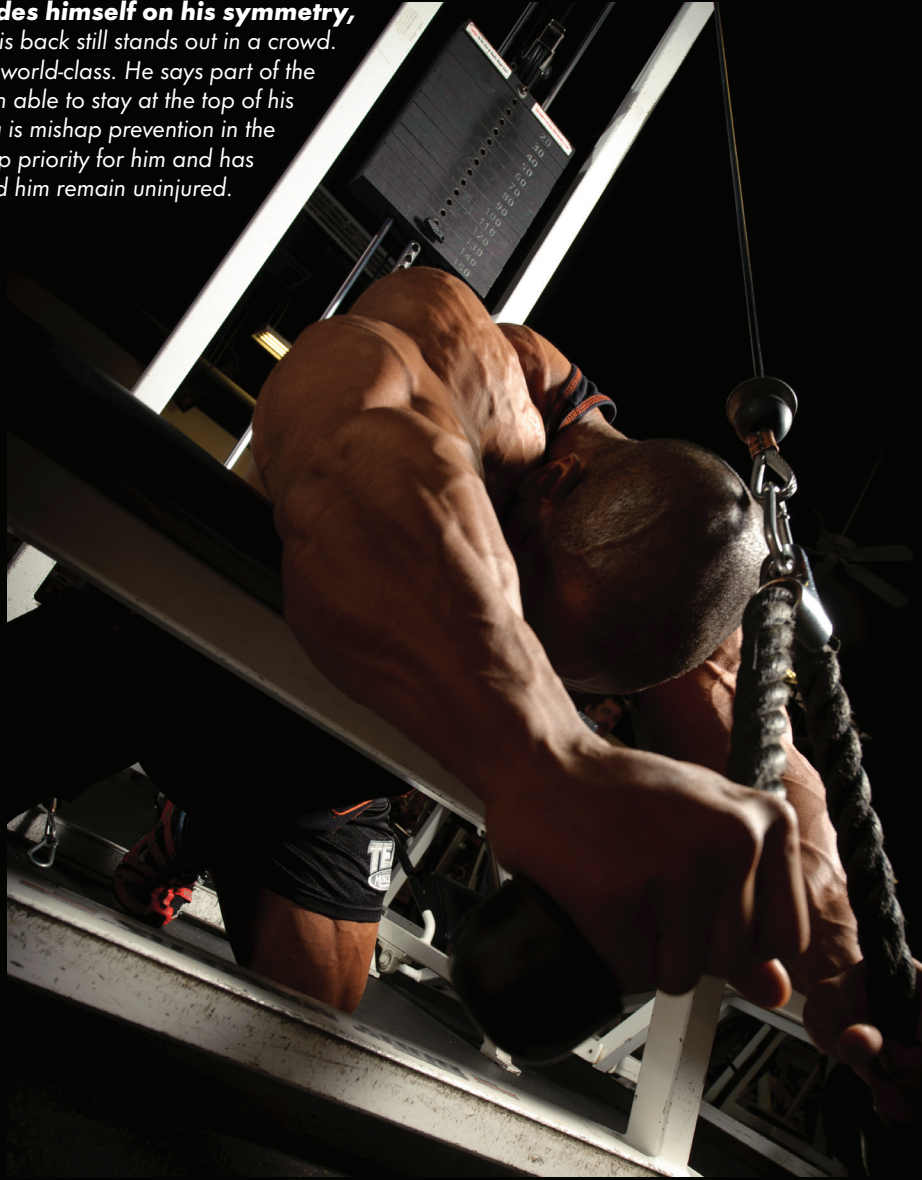
Airman is world-class bodybuilder

Story and photos by Tech. Sgt. SAMUEL BENDET

Crowned the 2008 Mr. Olympia,
Tech. Sgt. David Henry is still ranked
number two in the world in his weight
class because of a strong work ethic.



While Henry prides himself on his symmetry, he has to admit that his back still stands out in a crowd. His back muscles are world-class. He says part of the reason he has been able to stay at the top of his game for so long is mishap prevention in the gym is a top priority for him and has helped him remain uninjured.



When Tech. Sgt. David Henry was in high school, he played drum in the marching band. But he isn't your typical band camper. Henry is a muscle-bound Mr. Olympia. A weapons expeditor at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Ariz., Henry has won five professional International Federation of Body Building titles and was crowned Mr. Olympia in 2008 in the under 202-pound category (he took second in both 2009 and 2010).

Henry grew up in Schertz, a suburb of San Antonio. He's a military brat and part of the Air Education and Training Command family. His parents both worked at Randolph AFB, Texas — his father an active-duty Airman and his mother an employee of the base commissary.

As a matter of fact, the first bodybuilding competition Henry tested himself in was at Lackland AFB, Texas, in 1991. He was 16 years old, and though he had never worked out with weights before, he had a naturally muscular build. With encouragement from some friends, he took part in the Lackland Classic, the military's oldest running bodybuilding competition, ongoing for 27 years.

"I placed third in the lightweight novice without ever having touched a weight," the Airman said.

From that point on, Henry began marching to the beat of a different drum. Today at 35 years old, he is leaner and meaner than ever.

"I was voted in FLEX magazine as one of the top-10 hardest-training bodybuilders of all time (ranked seventh)," Henry said.

Which is ironic because the Airman prides himself on working smarter not harder.

"I'm in the gym only four days a week for an hour and a half each session," he said with a shrug of his massive shoulders. "But I have my workouts down to a science."

Amazingly, he's only been hurt once, tweaking a muscle about five years ago during a warm-up.

"I lost a little focus, and 'Ow!'" he said. "It felt like a whole strand of cables snapped in my shoulder. I saw my career quickly going down the drain, and I decided I would never lose concentration again."

It turned out the strain wasn't that serious, and he only needed to take a little time off. But that scare was enough to set him straight. He now champions risk management in the gym.

"One of the biggest mistakes people make in the weight room is not having a spotter," Henry said. "I saw one guy working out alone trying to bench press a weight he couldn't handle. We call guys like that 'sternum poppers' because they are always bouncing the bar off their chests. Well, his arms gave out, and he couldn't get the weight off his chest. Before we could jump up to help, he rolled the bar down his abs, lap and legs. That had to hurt!"

But Henry said it could have been worse if the weights had gotten stuck on his neck.

He also pointed out that a lot of guys like to work out with their wives or girlfriends.

"But if you weigh 250 and are benching 300, your 98-pound girlfriend is probably not going to be able to lift the weight off your chest if your arms give out," he said. "You should work out with someone who is approximately your same size and strength. That's what I do."

Another mistake he sees people make is not using collars to secure the weights to the bar.

"If you don't use a collar, weights can slide off one side and catapult the bar," he said. "I saw a guy take a bar to the shoulder. Another time the bar popped up and smashed a mirror."

And, of course, he always preaches about avoiding distractions or not trying to show off for the cute lady who happens to be walking by. He said more times than not, people will instead end up embarrassing themselves at best and hurting themselves at worst.

With more and more Airmen hitting the gym these days to meet more stringent Air Force fitness standards, Henry recommends they try to achieve muscle-building balance.

"Too many guys just want to work on their upper body," he said. "They get huge upstairs, but then have these little legs. We call them 'popsicles' because that's what they look like."

Henry is certainly no "popsicle," and is renowned for his evenly proportioned physique.

"Physically, the best bodybuilders are the ones who have the typical X frame: wide shoulders, top-to-bottom, front-to-back, side-to-side; overall everything is equal," he said.



Two T-bone and two rib eye steaks — nearly four pounds of beef — contain roughly the amount of protein Henry needs to consume each day to maintain his muscular build. Of course, he doesn't actually eat that much red meat every day; instead, choosing to take protein supplements, along with a healthy diet, to achieve his dietary needs.

Henry is the epitome of this with an 18.5-inch neck, 21-inch biceps, 50-inch chest, 29.5-inch waist, 29-inch thighs and 19-inch calves on a 5-foot-5-inch frame.

Those are dimensions that have served him well in his bodybuilding career and even have him rubbing elbows with some celebrities.

"I was on the stage in 2007 when Ronny Coleman did his last show — he was an eight-time Mr. Olympia and the hugest guy I've ever seen."

Henry also has met California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and hung out with Sylvester Stallone and Wesley Snipes.

"You'd be amazed at the people you meet in the industry who follow bodybuilding," he said.

But his wife, Nicole, who helps train him during the final two weeks before competitions, and his 16-year-old daughter, Alyssa, help keep him grounded.

"My daughter's friends see me and find out I'm a Mr. Olympia and get excited," he said, rolling his eyes. "But my daughter has grown up with me this way, so it's no big deal to her. To her, I'm just Dad."

And that's just the way he likes it. 🍷



Henry's wife, Nicole, is a personal trainer and helps her husband train the final two weeks before a competition.

PUMPING IRON

How to lift without injury

✓ **Wear appropriate footwear and clothing.**

It's a popular trend to wear toe socks, but that's a good way to get your toes broken. Wear loose-fitting, comfortable clothes and shoes that cover your toes.

✓ **Do a proper warm-up.** It's easy to injure cold muscles, so you need a good 10-minute warm up before getting started. But be sure to warm up the muscles you are going to be using. If you only warm up your upper body, but then go do squats, your leg muscles are still going to be cold and vulnerable to injury.

✓ **Use weight collars.** These safety devices are attached to each end of the bar to keep the weights from slipping off and catapulting the bar.

✓ **Use the buddy system.** Spotters are a necessity on free weights to ensure you don't get the weight stuck on your neck or chest. But choose your spotter well. If you are 250 pounds and bench-pressing 300, it's probably not wise to have a spotter who weighs only 98 pounds because they aren't likely able to pull the weight off of you if necessary. It's safer to train with someone who's roughly the same weight class and strength as you.

✓ **Know your limits.** Many people try training to their ego rather than their body. They try to show off and lift more than they are capable of, which is a sure way to end up either hurt or embarrassed when you're having to have people pull weights off of you.

✓ **Stay focused.** There are plenty of distractions at the gym. But when you're working with heavy metal weights, you have to stay focused or you may end up in the emergency room.

— Tech. Sgt. David Henry
Mr. Olympia

