



## DANNY MACASKILL

is famous for street trials riding: an obscure cycling sub-genre involving physics-defying tricks in urban environments, like pogoing onto ledges, balancing along fences and backflipping off steps. It's like parkour on two wheels.



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MINUTES

# DANNY MACASKILL

He's most famous for his urban tricks, but did you know that part-man part-bicycle Danny MacAskill grew up mountain-biking on the Isle of Skye, where his dad runs a museum about his ancestor, who was an actual giant?

WORDS SARAH STIRLING

**W**hen Danny MacAskill uploaded 'April 2009', a video his flatmate made of him biking up trees, flipping down

impossible drops onto concrete and riding along spiky railings (with a few eye-watering wipeouts cut), he had no idea that it would be watched a few thousand times overnight, get reposted by Lance Armstrong, rack up a million views in less than a month, and project him from his career as a bike mechanic and into the Red Bull sponsored athlete books.

They say it takes 10,000 hours of labour to achieve mastery in a field. By that stage, aged 26, Danny had been riding for 22 years. A playful ginger kid, he'd started learning tricks on the way to school, got quite obsessed, and progressed to inventing and practicing tricks for three to four hours a day. No wonder he feels more bike than human sometimes. It paid off: nowadays biking out his fantasies on film is his full-time job. From flipping over Cape Town rooftops to playing on giant versions of toys from his childhood, these days if he can dream it, he can probably do it.

We noticed that Danny's come full circle recently: in his latest videos he's swapped urban globe-tricking for natural Scottish playgrounds. In *The Ridge*, he fulfills his childhood dream to bike along Skye's teetering Cuillin Ridge, the holy grail of British mountaineering. The other,

*Wee Day Out*, showcases rural Scotland, complete with tricks on rolling hay bales, and ending with his mam getting the tea on. While he was at home reminiscing for a bit, Sarah Stirling rattled her shortbread tin, hoping the Scot would stop for a 15-minute tea break.

**Sarah Stirling: Do you remember the first time you rode a bike? How long did you have stabilisers for?**

**Danny MacAskill:** Haha! I started riding a bike when I was about four, but I can't remember how long it took for me to stop using stabilisers! I've been obsessed with bikes ever since. I used to ride to school with my friends and learn tricks on the way. I really got into street trials in my teens and it all took off from there.

**SS: When did you first realise you could do things on a bike that most other people can't?**

**DM:** I've been riding for decades to get where I am today. I wasn't born doing backflips and bump-front flips. I was and am crazy about bikes, and just loved to try things and to see the world from a different perspective. I'm not sure whether it is really natural ability that got me to where I am, or whether it was my greater interest that led me down this path. Maybe more people would be able to do the things I do if they had the same amount of practice.

**SS: If you could go back and tell your younger self you'd be doing this for a living right now, what advice would you give him?**

**DM:** "Keep on riding, no matter how much is going on." I'm happy with what I'm doing today, and how I can decide what I do on my own terms. I would also tell him to stay true to himself and just carry on doing what he loves. I have no regrets.

**SS: I'm currently researching what happens when you get into flow states in sports. How does it feel when you get into it on a bike – do you feel superhuman?**

**DM:** Superhuman would be an overstatement, but it certainly is a good feeling. It's difficult to describe because when I enter that mindset I usually have my tricks or a line dialled and then I don't think about it really. Things just happen smoothly.

**SS: That's really interesting and in line with everything I've read. Peak performance seems to be all about training the right skills, then getting into the flow so your mind switches off and instinct takes over. But how do you train for this?**

**DM:** I don't (laughs). No, seriously I don't really like to call it training. I just go out on my bike as much as possible and ride. I used to ride three to four hours every day. Nowadays things are a bit busier, so I have to cut back on riding sometimes. When there are periods of time where I do little riding, I really do get withdrawal symptoms. It's not quite cold turkey, but my body and mind let me know I have to go out there and ride.

**SS:** It can seem to us regular humans that sponsored heroes are living the dream; just doing what they love all the time and getting paid for it, too! So how much time do you spend promoting what you do compared to biking?

**DM:** The time I spend off my bike has certainly increased actually, but it is still very important for me to get my fix of riding in regularly.

**SS:** You must fall off a lot. How come you don't spend most of the year wrapped in bandages?

**DM:** All thanks to the good Scottish grub on the Isle of Skye growing up! (laughs). No, I have had a number of injuries in the past. They are part and parcel of the sport. I think that with increased experience I have — maybe subconsciously — learned to fall better. Knock on wood it stays that way.

**SS:** Sounds like flow state again. Tell us about riding the Cuillin Ridge on your home turf, you must have been wondering if that was possible for a long time, since you grew up below it?

**DM:** Yeah, that was a great experience. When I was younger living on Skye I used to look up at the Cuillin Ridge and imagine riding my bike up there. Filming *The Ridge* was a lot of fun and one of the hardest and most physically demanding projects I have ever worked on. But for me it was definitely a labour of love. I kind of wanted to show Skye off because it's my home.

**SS:** Tell me about growing up on Skye, it seems like a magical place?

**DM:** Skye was awesome. I loved growing up there and was lucky that my parents gave me quite a lot of freedom. I was always jumping, climbing and building contraptions with my friends. There was more than enough to discover. I had a whale of a time.

**SS:** There are some gnarly drops off the Cuillin. How do you manage the fear of falling off?

**DM:** It's not so much the fear of falling, rather not doing the trick to perfection. Sometimes it gets to me and I need a number of run-ups before committing to a trick and following through. Music helps me to get through those situations. When the chorus kicks in it is like a cue for me.

**SS:** How did you get your bike on the Inaccessible Pinnacle? And did you actually knock the top of it off?

Part-man, part-bicycle, part-acrobat



Wee Day Out showcases rural Scotland, as well as Danny's bonkers bike skills

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**DM:** Ah, that's just a rumour (laughs)! It didn't actually fall off when I was up there! Going up there with my bike on my back was a real challenge, but it was worth it.

**SS:** You seem to have moved away from urban trials riding and into mountain biking in natural environments with your last two videos, why?

**DM:** Well, I still do a lot of street trials riding, but I have always done both. I love riding my mountain bike over trails in Scotland and other places in the world. The *Wee Day Out* video actually combines many elements of both riding styles. When shifting bikes it always takes a little getting used to and until the tricks are dialled.

**SS:** Is your father really as chilled out about your exploits as he appeared in his *Wee Day Out* cameo?

**DM:** Yeah, my dad is a true island man. That is actually how he dresses day to day when he is working in the Giant MacAskill Museum. It's a museum he runs about one of my ancestors, who was 7ft 9ins.

**SS:** Hardest trick you've ever pulled off?

**DM:** That is a really difficult question to answer because each trick is a challenge in itself. My first flip was just as challenging to me at the time as some of the tricks I have done in my more recent projects.

**SS:** Do you feel part bicycle? I read somewhere that you can cycle a slackline but not walk one!

**DM:** I definitely feel more comfortable on two wheels than on two feet!

**SS:** You published your memoir, *At the Edge: Riding for My Life* last year. What was it like to sit down and write it?

**DM:** Well, I had plenty of help thanks to Matt Allen. He was very patient and the book wouldn't have been possible without him and all at Penguin Random House. We sat together numerous times to work on it.

**SS:** Did you enjoy the process?

**DM:** To be honest, it wasn't the easiest project I have worked on. I am more into riding and filming and don't really like being in the spotlight and talking about myself. But it was a great experience and I am happy that we did it.

**SS:** Tell us your favourite bit from the book?

**DM:** I really enjoyed telling some of the stories from my childhood growing up on the Isle of Skye. Trying to come up with the formula for making bike videos that go viral was also interesting, and it made me realise that the concepts for my films are almost more important than the riding. Almost, but not quite... oag