

CHRIS SHARMA WILL BE MAKING A RARE UK APPEARANCE AT THE SHEFFIELD ADVENTURE FILM FESTIVAL IN FEBRUARY AS THE HEADLINE SPEAKER ON THE SATURDAY NIGHT. WE TOOK THE OPPORTUNITY TO ASK CHRIS A FEW QUESTIONS:

C H R I S S H A R M A

“Training guru Marius Morstad once said that people like you find climbing the easiest part of your life – would you agree with that?”

“Yeah I would definitely agree with that. Climbing is what I do – it’s my passion and my life – I’m super happy when climbing because I’m focused, determined and concentrated. It’s harder to get into that mindset when I am doing things other than climbing. It’s not as fun.”

“Do you ever get bored of climbing and think you might like to try a different career?”

“There have been brief periods where I’ve maybe been bored. I’ve been climbing for 15 years and I’m still super passionate, though.”

“Genius is said to be 99% perspiration and 1% inspiration – given that a lot of people would call you a climbing genius do you agree with that percentage breakdown?”

“It’s the other way around for me: climbing is all about motivation and inspiration. If I’m not motivated I don’t have the energy, physically, to climb; I don’t believe I’m capable. It would be impossible to climb without motivation and inspiration, actually. When I’m motivated it’s like flipping a switch and everything turns around – my body turns on and I’m inspired.”

“What motivates and inspires you?”

“Just, you know, finding a beautiful climb that is right at my limit with nice moves on nice rock. Also, the whole process of a first ascent and bolting a route and finding the moves. For me, climbing is about finding something beautiful in nature that is barely there.”

“Do you train specifically for routes or do you just climb lots?”

“I just climb a lot. Lately I’ve been equipping a lot of new routes in Spain and that’s really good training. Bolting new routes is really hard work, actually.”

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“What makes you so special? Is it your genetics?”

“I guess genetics is helpful! I’m not really sure I’m that special. Just my level is a little bit higher than other people’s, maybe. Climbing is the same experience for everyone, though, at whatever level.”

“The trad climbing scene in Britain is really healthy at the moment but sport climbing isn’t so big here; do you think that is to do with the lack of cutting edge development (ie only Steve McClure seems to be pushing things) or is it to do with our lack of rock for sport climbing?”

“I haven’t really done any sport in the UK – but I think the sort of climbing you are motivated on depends on what there is around you. So, for example, the US is great for bouldering and trad rather than top notch sport climbing. In Europe there are a lot more limestone cliffs that lend

themselves to sport climbing, and there’s not much bouldering opportunities. The UK is a bit different though, because it’s about culture as well as rock: you have more of a culture of traditional climbing than sport climbing.”

“‘Team USA’ came over here and rocked the grit. They got a massively positive response from the Brits. Do you fancy a go at that?”

“Sport climbing is my focus right now. I can’t really figure getting really into grit as I’m not in that head space of pushing my limits with the danger – if trad grit is not something you’re really passionate about then it’s even more dangerous. If it’s something you want to do, you have to put all your mental energy in that direction. I’m not really in that direction right now. And yeah, it would really suck to break to my leg.”

“Are there any routes in the UK that you would like to try?”

“I would like to try some of the classics – the rock is such good quality over in the UK. I don’t have a ticklist of favourites I’d like to do, though. Actually, I’d be inspired to try some of Steve Maclure’s routes more than anything.”

“You don’t climb much trad these days. Do you find sport climbing as spiritually as rewarding as trad climbing?”

“I do climb trad, just not as much – and I’m not really into that head pointing stuff. I guess, yeah, I do find it as rewarding, actually. To me, climbing is about getting into a certain head space. I can access that same head space and I have the same feelings inside me whether I’m pushing myself on sport or trad.”

“How hard are sport routes going to get? Do you think there’s a limit to the size of holds humans can pull on?”

“I think a blank wall with no holds on would be

unclimbable! If you took the hardest moves possible and repeated them – like a wall of the world’s hardest boulder problems – that would be the limit, I guess.”

“Do you think there is there more scope to push the limits of route climbing or bouldering?”

“I think there is more scope to push the limits of route climbing because you are basically adding hard boulder problems on top of each other. Bouldering moves are more about pushing yourself to your max power and you can’t go beyond that maximum.”

“You graded your recent new route Golpe de Estado F9b. You don’t always grade your own routes – why is that?”

“In the past, I’ve mostly been into bouldering. I’ve had much more experience at that than climbing routes. I’m based in Spain now, and I’m doing much more route climbing so I have more

opportunity to compare routes and I can give something a grade better.”

“Do you enjoy grading routes?”

“It is interesting to grade and compare routes. You know, on the one hand, grades are important but I also believe it’s best not to get too caught up in them.”

“Can you explain to mere mortals how hard F9b is? For instance Marc Le Menestrel once said the crux of Just Do It F8c+ was Font 7a+.”

“The route is basically like a F9a route with a slopy rest at like F8c+. The hardest boulder problem on the upper part of the route is probably Font 7c+ but there’s a bunch of moves in a row that is like that. The lower section is broken up into two boulder problems, which are, like, Font 8a.”

“Talking of Just Do It, you took your jumper off halfway up the route – was that a stunt or was it always part of the plan?”

“Climbing is about having fun for me, and I guess especially when I was a kid back then, I liked goofing around. I think it’s really healthy for climbing to show that, even on a really hard route, you should be enjoying yourself.”

“Is Golpe de Estado the hardest route you’ve ever been on or is there something harder, that either hasn’t been done yet or has been done by someone else?”

“There are harder routes. One guy, Bernabé Fernandez, claims he climbed *Chilam Balam* at Villanueva del Rosario in Málaga and graded it F9b+. It’s a bit controversial as to whether he climbed it or not, but that would be the hardest thing out there. I have some other projects that would be harder if I could climb them. But *Golpe de Estado* is definitely one of the hardest things up till now, yes.”

“Do you have an ultimate project that has holds but there’s no way you can imagine it being done?”

“I guess I have some ultimate projects that I can imagine being done, but barely. I have a project at Oliana this summer – I also bolted another to the left of *Realization* – it has some holds but I can never imagine me doing it.”

“You’re speaking at the Sheffield Adventure Film Festival at the end of February. Climbing films have clearly helped make you the person you are. Do you enjoy climbing for the camera: is it a bind, or do you just switch off to it?”

“Normally I do media work with friends of mine from *Big Up Productions* and *Momentum* and it’s a good excuse to take friends and go on fun trips. I have worked with them a lot over the years so it’s not imposing like having a film crew. They are just there documenting whatever we are doing.”

Chris Sharma was talking to Sarah Stirling. He will be headlining at ShAFF on Saturday 28th Feb. For more details visit: www.shaff.co.uk



Chris Sharma on his latest super-route *Golpe De Estado* (F9b) Siurana, Spain. SAM BIÉ