

## Mr Awesome

### The man behind Awesome Walls



▲ Mr Awesome himself, Dave Douglas.

The impressive centrepiece of Awesome Walls Sheffield – The BMC's National Performance Centre. ▼

Awesome Walls Climbing Centres have firmly stamped their mark on the indoor industry. Even if you've never climbed in one you're probably aware of the brand through their keen advertising or ambitious social media presence. He's a hard man to track down between all his walls and running about but we achieved the impossible and pinned him down to ask him 10 burning questions.

Dave Douglas, that's my name, running climbing walls, that's my game.

I'm a regular guy who is in a very lucky position. I've chosen a diverse career path. The question of what I want to do with my life has never really been addressed. I am a free spirit that loves to push the boundaries of what's possible and rarely take 'no' for an answer. Now I find myself at 47, with six fantastic climbing walls, three children, a dog, and a very supportive and tolerant wife.

#### What makes you tick?

I like to make people happy. I'm happiness-motivated rather than money-orientated and this has always been a bit of a concern to my accountant and bank manager. I enjoy nothing more

than coming into a busy centre and having a chat with customers. The positive feedback and energy that's often given just drives me on and justifies the risks that I've taken. If I can keep customers, staff and my family happy then I'm happy.

#### How do you pass your time when you're not working?

I find it very hard to completely shut off from work. My life revolves around the world of climbing walls and not just my own. Even when I'm on holiday, I can't pass a climbing wall without popping in and saying hello. When I'm not out with my busy family climbing, swimming, fell walking and the like, I'm to be found running. Over the years trail and fell running has played a large part in my life. Four years ago a couple of friends and I set up a trail running club, The Delamere Spartans. My running veers towards the 'ultra' side with many 100+ mile races under my belt it's obvious to see that I never take the easy option.

#### When you opened your first wall in Liverpool, did you ever think that you would be opening the first National Performance Centre 18 years later?

No, when I opened my first wall, I thought this will do for the time being until I find a serious career. After the first few months I was hooked and I knew that The Climbing House, as we were named then, was just the tip of the iceberg. After climbing abroad and seeing the excellent facilities they offer, I realised the UK was years behind the European indoor climbing scene. During the building phase of Awesome Walls Dublin, I found an excellent building in





▲ A busy Awesome Walls Stockport with a good mix of angles and an impressive fin in the centre. Justin Critchlow boulders out a problem at Awesome Walls Stoke. ►  
 ◀ Awesome Walls Liverpool where it all started. The Awesome Walls staff. ▼



Sheffield that ticked all the boxes required to meet the criteria of a 'National Performance Centre'. I had to take a very deep breath before undertaking the largest commitment of my business life.

**What is the key to your success?**

If I was to give the key to my success away I'd be more of a fool than I already am. In honesty though, I'm happy to help people and be pro-active. I've got an in-built mechanism that just keeps driving me forward with positive force. My mind is a constant waterfall of ideas, some of these float around and become a reality whilst many sink to the depths they deserve.

**What are your greatest achievements to date?**

After opening the first wall, I vowed never to open a wall again because of the stress and commitment involved. It's funny how the mind forgets the stress, pain and turmoil you put your family and friends through, only to find yourself opening another one (or six in my case). Awesome Walls Sheffield, was by far the most ambitious project to date. I basically had my back against the wall from the word go and anyone else in my position would have run a mile from what I was proposing based on my cash-flow at hand.

**What three pieces of advice or quotes do you stand by?**

It would probably be very similar to the advice I stand by to this day but maybe didn't realise it then:

- 1: Karma, what goes around comes around.
- 2: If you don't try you don't succeed.
- 3: You live and learn.

These three quotes are very simplistic but mean a lot to me.

**What does the future hold for Awesome Walls Climbing Centres Ltd?**

In the UK, we have four vibrant Centres that we want to keep at the forefront of the indoor climbing industry. To do this we need to listen to our customers and follow new market trends. We're constantly upgrading our facilities whether it's new holds, auto-belays or a lick of paint, it's good for our customers to see us reinvesting. At a young age climbing and the outdoors gave me a direction in life that I'll be eternally grateful for. With this in mind we'll be investing in more youth programmes and trying to work closer with all educational facilities.

**Is there anyone in the world of Awesome that you'd like to say thanks to?**

Wow, that's a hard one! Without sounding like I'm on the radio here goes. In the beginning my parents loaned me £2,000 to buy a computer, printer and the essentials to get me going. It was a small price to pay to get me out of the house. Obviously my wife, Stephné, who has stuck by me in my mad, erratic and mostly selfish decision making. Without her as my rock and sparring partner, I wouldn't have come this far. Dave Turnbull and Nick Colton at the BMC have always been a port of call when looking at new projects, ideas or in need of a shoulder. They've always been a good sounding board to bring me back down to reality. All my staff, past and present (you know who you are) you are true stars amongst planets. Thanks guys. Finally, to our awesome customer base, it's our customers that are testament to what we are today. Please stick by us and we'll do our uttermost to keep the routes fresh, the coffee hot and the staff cheerful.

**Final words.....**

Climb hard, enjoy yourselves, stay safe, be Awesome and if you see me kicking around please, please, please say hello. ■

More details about the Awesome Walls Climbing Centres at Liverpool, Sheffield, Stockport and Stoke can be found at [www.awesomewalls.co.uk](http://www.awesomewalls.co.uk)