

DANNY WAY

PROGRESSION REDEFINED

WORDS BY OLIVER PELLING

Danny Way seems tired. He arrived in Melbourne for the screening of his new documentary, *Waiting For Lightning*, only this morning, and he's had a full day of interviews in a plush function room at The Westin Hotel. Ours will be his last of the day. He's losing his voice and he's probably had enough of getting asked probing questions from complete strangers. I've been told he hasn't eaten anything either. Despite Danny's apparent fatigue, he greets me with a handshake and a steely smile, and immediately sits in one of the two chairs set up for our interview and waits for me to join him. It's evident from the get-go that D Way is all business.

As I begin with my questions, Danny's quiet and candid responses have me thinking that he'd rather be somewhere else – perhaps catching up with his old friend Tas Pappas, who happens to be sitting in on our chat. He's friendly, but seems weary of what he says and how he says it. We talk more and Danny begins to become more animated, especially when talking about his two children. "Raising children is definitely the most challenging and rewarding thing I've done," says the 38-year-old. "Skateboarding doesn't really have that much relevance in the big picture of what matters in life. Family's definitely a priority."

You'd be hard pressed to find anyone in the industry that doesn't describe Danny Way as anything less than extraordinary. From humble beginnings and a troubled childhood, Danny put every last ounce of energy into his skateboard and he's been going full-bore since his first push. He won his first contest in 1986 at just 11 years old and has been collecting gold and silver medals ever since. In 1991 he became *Thrasher's* Skater of the Year and was crowned again 13 years later, becoming the first skateboarder to ever win the award twice. Then there's his highest air record and helicopter jump, the Great Wall of China hurdle, the Hard Rock Café guitar bomb drop, as well as his mega ramp creation and the subsequent earth-shattering video parts he filmed on it. Danny is the result of what you get when you mix raw talent and unwavering determination in their purest forms. Now, with his story committed to film courtesy of his close friend Jacob Rosenberg (the only person Danny could trust to articulate his vision), the rest of the world can witness the makings of a man who is widely regarded as one of the greatest skateboarders of all time.

Despite the hype and furore surrounding *Waiting For Lightning*, Danny lets on that there was another reason he agreed to the documentary. "I put together this wish-list of things I would potentially want to do for DC and each item on my list had a hidden agenda – which was to get a budget to build a ramp," he says. "When I presented the list of ideas in a couple of meetings they honed in on the documentary idea. I was like: 'I'd love to do the documentary, but I have to end it on a bang.' I didn't set out on having this goal to make a movie, it was one of a few ideas we tossed around and it stuck." The ramp – and the bang – that Danny's referring to resides in Kauai, Hawaii, where he bought a property with the specific intention of building a



Kirby

skateable structure in the valley behind it. At the end of *Waiting For Lightning*, the final section plays host to footage of Danny skating this volcanic-looking beast in all the HD slow-mo glory you could possibly ask for. And, like most of the things Danny has done during his time on-board, it verges on unbelievable.

While most people might see becoming a parent as a good reason to take fewer risks in life, Danny offers a different point of view. "Having children just inspires me more," he says. "I don't want my kids to see me afraid to pursue my goals just because they're here. I want them to be inspired by watching me pursue my goals while I'm here. I want my kids to be proud of the things I accomplish, not the things I don't." And if the Way brood decide they want follow in their father's footsteps and put themselves in potentially perilous situations for the sake of progression? "I would support them 100 per cent. I would love for my kids to want to do that," says the proud father.

Waiting for Lightning is a deeply personal story that follows the skate-pioneer through his turbulent youth, right up to his Great Wall feat back in 2005. Intertwined with retro footage (which remains influential to this day) are interviews with Danny's family, friends and peers – all of whom help paint a vivid and at times intimidating picture of an intensely determined human being.

In a documentary-type segment in *ON Video* from the summer of 2000 that shone a light on Danny's career up to that point, his peers were already praising him as one of the most influential skateboarders of all time. That was 12 years ago, and D Way is still pushing himself and skateboarding to the absolute limit. "Skateboarding is a unique profession in that way," says Danny on how he's remained at the forefront for so long. "I think I've been blessed and I've been very lucky and somehow managed to stay relevant through the years. People could not care about what I do, but I didn't set out to do anything other than stay on the path that I'm passionate about."

Although best known for his handiwork on ramps of all shapes and sizes, Danny is also a formidable street skater. Of his early video parts, his section in Plan B's *Questionable* from 1992 is probably the definitive example of this. *Thrasher* have dubbed the six-minute section as "the absolute benchmark" of all-terrain video parts. Praise even more astounding when you consider that it took Danny less than six months to film it. Adaptable as he is, Danny explains the rush he gets from shredding the plywood is what made him focus less time on the concrete and more time on transitions. "I've dabbled so much in the vert and ramp skating arena that I know how much fun it is, and it's hard to find that feeling street skating," he says. "Street skating has its own feeling and its own perks, but there's something you can't find on the streets that you can find on the ramp. Going that fast and generating speed without pushing, being able to do something that fast and that fluid. It's a whole different experience."

With all of the high-profile, high-pressure undertakings Danny has ploughed through over the years, it'd be easy to imagine the fun getting sapped out of it all. "For the most part," he replies, "I have some of the most glorifying days skateboarding behind closed doors with my friends and nobody ever sees it. At the end of the day, what thrills me the most and what drives me the most is the moment."

Looking over his track record, you'd be forgiven for thinking that Danny Way is immune to the big F. "I'm definitely not fearless," he retorts. "Fear is the grounding factor in preventing being overconfident. There's a balance between the fear and the confidence that gets you to that certain place you need to be to accomplish something that's risky. Fear's a good thing. Without it we wouldn't be sitting here. I think the understanding of fear is a great asset to have." That said, Danny struggles to remember the last time he was scared. After some head scratching, he replies frankly: "I don't know an exact moment," and seems surprised, almost humoured, by his admission. ●