

# Amongst Giants

Interview by Darrin Richardson

A Giant



The pressure of ground fighting.

**ALAN CHARLTON** is chief instructor of the Self-Protection Association. His name is as large in the martial arts as his personality. I have known Alan for many years and he has become one of my best and closest friends. I have been fortunate to teach, train with, and be a student of this self-protection expert.

**DR.** Alan thanks for taking the time out to answer these questions.

**AC.** Thank you Darrin, I'm pleased you feel people would like to know a little bit more about me. Also congratulations on getting the Gold medal in Manchester and becoming the British Sambo champion.

**DR.** Thanks, I'm still aching. Alan, when and why was it you took up martial arts and what drew you to them?

**AC.** I was about 14 years old when I went to my first martial arts class, a Kung fu class had opened up in a nearby church hall. Because of the TV programmes and films at the time in the early 1970's that's what everyone wanted to learn. The only fighting heroes I had at the time along with

my friend Steve were Adam West and Burt Ward — the best Batman and Robin ever! We would re-enact the scenes from the TV programme as we walked home from school. Like many people I was looking for something that would help me deal with bullying. Looking back now, some of the stuff I first started training in, well Batman was more realistic.

**DR.** What else have you trained in, and what drew you to these particular systems?

**AC.** If you don't mind Darrin I will answer

that question like this; looking back now with hindsight the arts I wish I had started in would have been Judo and Boxing. I realized that with the right application just how workable these arts are. But from a very brief stay with Kung fu, a year or two later I went on to train in Wado Ryu Karate then kick boxing, Wing chun, Choi kwang do and Taeguk which are all mainly kicking and punching systems. Sorry mate, looks like we are back to Batman again!

**DR.** How do you feel martial arts in Great



On the back of Alan's Gi it says "No Rules the Test".



keyboard every day. Why?

**AC.** I enjoy putting my ideas on paper and the feedback I get from people is great. When someone reads an idea or a training drill and they try out that idea I have been writing about, then they contact me to tell me it helped them, it's a great feeling. Also the support I have had from **Fighters** magazine over the years has helped, because they print it, that keeps me writing. Also I just want people to see that you can put reality into any system. Through my writing I have made friends and contacts in the USA, Canada, South Africa, Israel, Switzerland, Germany and throughout the UK and Ireland.

**DR.** What are your experiences with for want of a better word 'street fighting' and how did you cope with it?

**AC.** The best experience I have of street fighting was from a beating I got many years ago. It made me the weakest and most scared person you could wish to meet. But looking back now it taught me a lot. I can see the many problems people face, and that's why I push the virtues of self-protection. Some years after that beating I was working as a doorman. Over the next few years I had to deal with knives, bottles and faced some very angry people. You had to deal with it and controlling the fear. But my hardest fight was with you Darrin, on the mats of your Sambo club. I know you had thrown me more times than a dice on a monopoly board, but you do know that I was just pretending don't you, Ha Ha!

**DR.** Why do you continue to train?

**AC.** Because it's always changing and there is so much out there. Darrin you are the test to that, I mean when I first met you, like me you thought Sambo was a make of imported car. Now many years on you have fought in Russia and are now the British champion. If that's not changing what is?

Training and being involved within the fighting arts is something I want to do until I die. As I get older I cannot do the things I used to do but my training has changed and I work on what works for me. Writing is taking up more of my time, but how do you stop doing something you love?

**DR.** You have taught on many seminars, which stands out in your mind the most and why?

**AC.** All of them, no, it's not a cop out. I have been lucky to be booked to teach on many seminars. The one thing I enjoy most is when people first meet me they may be put off because of what they think I'm like, but by the end of the seminar we are laughing and joking. I always have a great time in Northern Ireland and in 1999 I taught and took part in a three day seminar in Canada which I had a great time doing and made some great new friends.

But if you held me down with one of your Sambo leg locks and said choose one. It would have to be the one the Self Protection Association held with Roy Shaw and Dave Turton. It was a day that is unrepeatabe,

because of all the people that came, and like them I will never forget it.

**DR.** Do you feel as many do that the brief open mindedness of cross training is drawing to a close?

**AC.** I don't think so judging by the phone calls and letters I get. People are training in Karate along with Thai Boxing, or training in Wing chun. And it's great that people are doing it, it will get them to find out what works best for them. The only comment I should make is that no matter how many arts you train in you are still just learning a ring craft. Putting someone in a leg lock as they are punching you in the face takes skill and hard training, but someone punching you in the face with a broken beer glass takes no training at all.

**DR.** When you are not writing or teaching, what fills your time?

**AC.** My children take up most of my day. For the last 9 years I have been looking after them full time, but as they are now both at school this gives me more time in the day. So at 9 o'clock in the morning I take time out for coffee and Kilroy, I will have to make sure my wife doesn't see a copy of this. I teach in the daytime and at weekends I am either writing/training or at seminars, sometimes 24 hours is not enough.

**DR.** There are still many instructors out there claiming to teach reality, they are cashing in without delivering the goods. What are your views on this?

**AC.** They are double-glazing sales men, selling and saying anything to close the deal. Reality based training/teaching is what I love and the fact there are only a few people within the UK working hard to promote it is a shame. But the fact that some people, who do not understand the core ideas of training for the street, are trying to teach it makes it dangerous. I stopped teaching with my old association and formed the Self Protection Association because what I was teaching at the time was not street effective. I could no longer teach something that I knew would not work. In fact I lost sleep over it. People who cash in, well, God knows how they sleep.

**DR.** Who do you consider as your teachers, why, and what is left for you to learn?

**AC.** Any one who has confronted me in the street, because they have taken my understanding of my training and shown me



**SPA students making it work.**

what works and taken it to the next level. I have learnt so much from so many people it's not possible to list them all, and that's not including the bad ones. I feel no matter who you train with you will learn something, the trick is to see who are the bad ones and get rid of the crap. But if I could name just a few (the good ones that is) Pete Robins and Paul Child for their workable combat training and also you don't have to look hard to be someone's nightmare. Geoff Thompson and Peter Consterdine of the British Combat Association are two people who have given me so much over the years. Dave Turton of the Self Defence Federation is light years ahead of many in his honesty and knowledge about street application of techniques. Jamie O'Keefe for his support and down to earth honesty, Kevin O'Hagan for showing many you don't have to be bigger to handle a confrontation. And yourself Darrin for your help in getting me to improve my ground fighting and teaching me to move on the mat instead of looking like a beached whale.

Thanks to the many more that I have had the privilege to teach or train with. As for what is left to learn well there is just so much out there. I am happy with the people I train with because if I am not up to scratch they will let me know.

**DR.** You have written some interesting articles on women's training and edged weapon defence. Where did you do your research for these?

**AC.** Women's self defence is something I have put a lot of work into by finding out what women want from self-defence training. Women's fear of attack may well be stronger than a man's fears, but how you deal with it is