

TANG SOO DO IS MY LIFE!

Master Graham Mason interviewed

Master Graham Mason is a very unassuming man. Quietly spoken and very considered, he would be very easy to underestimate. Only the more observant of us would actually notice the incredible calluses on his knuckles, and realise that this is someone who takes his conditioning very seriously.

Tang Soo Do still being a little known art in the UK (although it does well in certain regions), I was curious to see why he had chosen it as his style of choice.

"I'd done a little bit of martial arts when I was a teenager myself, and we were looking for a martial art for my son Nathan. We went around a number of clubs and found the Tang Soo Do class, and they were more welcoming there. It looked like quite a good friendly class and the sort of class that we'd enjoy."

It's obvious that he has a great love for Tang Soo Do, not least the fact that he's a 4th Dan. Surely there must be something that held his interest, and Graham agrees saying:

"I think it's the interacting with other people. You have the free sparring, the one step sparring and that's where you start doing other stuff with people seeing how practical it is, doing the self-defence with other people. I love the forms as well but I definitely prefer the sparring."

Practicality is something close to my heart, and so we moved onto discussing what the most important thing about making a martial art practical was.

"It's so that it works on the street when someone attacks you. We're quite a traditional martial art in Tang Soo Do, but there's also making sure that you have the practical side as well. This means that all the forms, the Hyung we do, have all got self-defence moves in them as well. It's about making sure that you're practicing



Age: 39

Location: Warwickshire

Rank: 4th Dan

Duration Training: 14 Years



and programming yourself in order to learn the separate moves, but it's also that you can put them into practice should someone attack you."

Hand in hand with practicality comes pressure testing. That is, testing the techniques you have come up with through various levels of resistance, starting with none to one hundred percent. Graham agreed: *"Yes, we do a little bit of pressure testing."*

As mentioned above, Graham has very impressive calluses. Have a look at the photos to see what I mean. These things are amazing, the sort of thing you see in an old-school Jackie Chan movie. How on earth does he get them like this and what is his training regime like?

"I get up pretty early every day so that I can train for a couple of hours. Every day I do training before work, got to work, come home and then go to a lesson and

do more training at home.

For the conditioning side of it I do makiwara punching. I do about 200 punches on the post in the back garden and also sudo strikes and back fists as well. I also do some inner arm conditioning by striking against the side of the posts."

Such dedication is rare these days, with many masters resting on their laurels rather than punishing themselves in such a way. Hearing such about such a regime could only lead to me asking what it was that kept him training.

"It's the goal of bettering yourself all the time. There's a lot of self-motivation as

well because I really enjoy it but the main thing is that I can always improve, I'm never perfect. It also keeps me fit and healthy, and gives me something to have in common with my son as well. My daughter used to do Tang Soo Do, but she's gone to University so it was a real family thing. It's really nice being able to do stuff together."

Master is a strange term to use, and is probably more of a mistranslation, as Master implies perfection. However, no-one can be perfect at everything in their martial art and I was keen to see what he felt was the worst aspect of training for him, as well as what he

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might be weakest at. Leaning back and smiling he says: “That’s a hard question that is. Probably the jumping techniques, which means I have to train in them the most. I’m quite a heavy guy. I float like a brick.”

With his son Nathan (see the article on him for more details) being an amateur boxer, I wondered whether he thought that children in competition should be allowed to make head contact regardless as to the level of contact.

“I think if there’s the correct sort of protection then I can’t see a problem. It’s excessive contact that would be the problem. Contact anywhere in some ways could do wrong, so I think if contact’s allowed (our system is pretty much non-contact with an emphasis on controlled techniques) it’s okay, but within bounds and under rules.”

Favourite Colour: Green

Food: Tofu

Film: Drunken Master - Jackie Chan

Music: Meatloaf

Reading: ‘From Hell’ by Alan Moore

Technique: Back kick

Pattern: Moo Kwon Shodan

