

Words by TYM MANLEY  
Photography by SEB ROGERS



“MOUNTAIN MAYHEM IS ABOUT ACHIEVING THE GOALS YOU’VE SET YOURSELF AND FEELING GOOD ABOUT IT. AND THAT’S NOT JUST FOR THE RIDERS, IT’S FOR ME TOO. ALL OF MY EVENTS HAVE ENRICHED MY LIFE”

# MAYHEM



“I suppose I always over-deliver. I have a huge inferiority complex and I like to deliver what I say with a bit more”

**M**ountain biking is packed with privateers. It's not just the mindset of the riders or the bike building pioneers, but of the event promoters too. No matter where you go in the world you will find that our great gatherings have been started not by well regulated, fully staffed, and fatly funded public bodies, but by some sweating hulk of a privateer, stumbling from crisis to crisis; by someone who loves the sport not wisely but too well and is far too stubborn to quit. Sometimes they make good.

Anyone who makes a mountain bike event break even has done well; if you create one that goes huge and makes money you have, I insist, serious business acumen. But you'll never hear that said – the successful prefer to put it down to luck and hard graft with maybe a bit of passion on the side.

Take Britain's Mountain Mayhem, the first and by far the biggest of the UK's participation events. The colossus who started that game changer (and let's get this said from the start, Patrick Adams is a huge man in body as well as a monster of enthusiasm and perseverance) denies all charges of shrewdness, business competence or flair (in himself at least).

I don't believe a word of it. His timing was too good, his choice of business partners so shrewd, and his ability of get money out of sponsors when the rest of us were hard put to pick up half a dozen free waterbottles legendary. I've known Patrick for years and what I want him to admit is that, even if it feels like luck, he must have a really good business brain into the bargain.

I put that to him. He looks at me as if I'm utterly insane.





Behind every great man...

“The main question to ask about 24 hour racing is why do so many people who don’t have a chance in hell of winning do it? And the answer is because they want to be part of it”

**When people ask me why Mayhem is such a success I say it’s because Patrick Adams has a good business brain...**

“A business brain? Not really. For me, the event has always had to come first at whatever cost. For many years, my business partner Jill and I produced the very best event we could and what money was left at the end of it was ours. Often it wasn’t very much. I don’t think that approach would impress many businessmen. Besides, I couldn’t have done it at all if I didn’t have Jill who keeps me under control, unravels my haphazard way of accounting and stops me looking at things entirely from the customer’s side, which can happen, I get so wrapped up in organising the events. Jill does the finances and she does the communications. I can’t even send an e-mail, as most people in the industry know.”

**You know everybody thinks you are making absolute millions out of Mayhem, don’t you?**

“Yes. This year I asked a sponsor for a small amount towards my other event,

Sleepless in the Saddle, but they said no because ‘your events are awash with profits’. People just don’t realise what it all costs. A chap at Eastnor Castle last year said he thought you wouldn’t get much change out of £30,000 for an event like mine. I had to tell him that showers, toilets and water alone came to £35,000. That is the standard we organise to. Our first sponsors, Red Bull, demanded things like clean flushing toilets and showers before they’d make it a Red Bull event, and we have always sustained that level.”

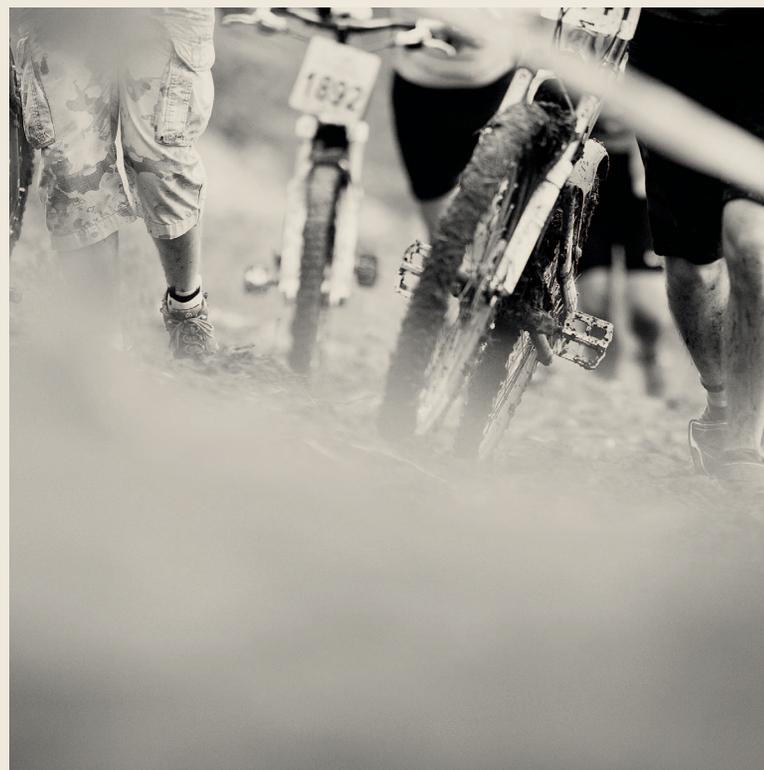
**American standards.**

“Yes and it all costs money, and gets more expensive. Yes, I have done all right. I haven’t done like people think I have done, but I have done all right. Now I have diversified into running and with the two events I do okay. But it seems to be a fascination with cyclists – they always want to know what you make out of an event.”

**It’s the British way; the default setting for a lot of cyclists is to suspect they’re being**



[Right]  
Mud and rain have been a feature of Mayhem since year dot



**ripped off. But if you have a successful institution over 20 years – be it event, brand or magazine – you expect to make some money.**

“Very much so. My wife and I live very simply and we have a nice living. But I get far more than money out of it. Mountain Mayhem is about achieving the goals you’ve set yourself and feeling good about it. And that’s not just for the riders, it’s for me too. I say this genuinely; all of my events have enriched my life. I hope I am going to live a bit longer, but when I am sitting there dotting on my last breath I will look back on them thankfully. I have thought of making a book out of all the e-mails that people have sent to us saying what Mayhem means to them, it really is quite overwhelming.”

**The position you’ve achieved is more than you could have hoped, really.**

“Yes. When you think what I have been. I was an unqualified leg-rubber with no experience. I couldn’t even organise myself a bath. But what I can

do is communicate orally. I am a good communicator and my passion and spirit for the sports that I am involved with comes over.

“I know people look at me and think: he isn’t a mountain biker and he’s certainly not a runner, why does he have this passion? And it is all about respect for the people who do it and a duty to my clients who trust in me, and give me large amounts of money to do things with. When you look at our catalogue of clients it’s impressive. Jill and I have had Red Bull, T-Mobile, Giant, Salomon, Saab, Original Source, now Wiggle – that’s not a bad collection, is it?”

**Why do you succeed with sponsors?**

“I suppose I always over-deliver. I have a huge inferiority complex and I like to deliver what I say with a bit more.”

**How does being the size you are physically affect your working relationships with people? As you say, they look at you and think: ‘He’s not a cyclist...’**

“I think because of the pedigree of the events, my business record over 18 years and my relationships with people in this very generous industry, it is overlooked. People also know the health problems I’ve had to deal with.”

**What is your background?**

“My mother was from Gibraltar and my father was Welsh. They met during the last war and they lived in a council house, in a hellhole called High Wycombe. I trained as a shoe designer. I still have a fascination with shoes and, unfortunately, I still assess people by their footwear.”

**How accurate are your assessments?**

“Very! My upbringing was difficult but that hasn’t really held me back. Whenever I saw something I wanted to do I’d do it and try and make a success of it. And that brings us back to what I was saying about Mountain Mayhem; how Jill and I, as a business partnership, have always put the event first to create a quality experience



for the riders and a quality production for the sponsors, and we hope that that has paid off.”

**You look after your customers; some might say that that is just good business sense. Astute is what I think you are.**

“I wouldn’t say astute.”

**When we first met you were a soigneur to the British team. I remember you looking after the downhillers at the World Championships. Rob Warner always says how much you helped him.**

“Yeah, I was British team soigneur. You didn’t need all the qualifications then that you need now, and that is where I met the top riders. You don’t forget people like that. I watch Rob on TV nowadays with great pride and Steve Peat and I always have a good chinwag about the old days when we meet each other. I am very pleased with the way they have built the sport in this country. They were the pioneers in the creation of mountain biking and they did it great credit.”

**You were into cycling yourself.**

“At a very low level. Just an enthusiastic, average, club rider but I had the passion for the sport in all its disciplines – road, track and time trialling. I just loved it. I haven’t always been this big remember. I was chunky as a kid but fit.

“I always wanted to be a soigneur and while working with Alan Rushton and Mick Bennett on the Kellogg’s Tours and various things, I got to speak to other soigneurs and learn skills that set me in good stead for becoming a team soigneur myself with Diamondback and then Raleigh. I also gained some event background which is still so useful to this day.”

**What I admire most is your prescience. You did an event for Red Bull called Helter Skelter, which featured downhill riders and you made it work but immediately afterwards you had decided – and I know this because we had a meeting at the time – that the youth side of mountain biking was over; the downhill side of mountain biking was over and you were**



**only interested in a wheels on the ground event aimed older people. You knew the market was moving almost 20 years ago, way before I did. Before most people. Remember, I was running a youth-orientated magazine then, full of high adrenaline riding and it went on leading the market for a long time afterwards. What had opened up your eyes to the change?**

“Having friends with good bike shops and spending hours sitting with them drinking coffee and noticing the age group of the people purchasing expensive bikes. In those days, mountain bikes were the new golf clubs. At shops like Swinnerton and Rourke, expensive mountain bikes were going out through the door in almost exactly the same way as £8,000 road bikes are today. It just clicked that this was the way the market was going. That is why I restricted Mayhem to over-18s from the start because I think there are other sorts of riding for kids between 13 and 17. There are a lot of men between 25 and 50 who like to prove that they still have it.

“The main question to ask about 24 hour racing, as with the London Marathon, is why do so many people who don't have a chance in hell of winning do it? And the answer is because they want to be part of it; whether they come fifth or 5,005th, it is still an achievement. And that is what Jill and I have worked very hard on with Mayhem, the idea that it's all about enriching people's lives. I know it sounds crass but people feel good when they have done it. It really is that simple.”

**Was the London Marathon your inspiration?**

As a soigneur, I worked on three London Marathons with people who came in the first five and, yes, I would say it pushed some buttons. When you work with someone who has come third or fourth and you know what they have put themselves through to do it and then, two hours on when you have finished working with them, you emerge and see people limping through exhausted...”



### **Dressed as ducks.**

“...exactly, dressed as ducks but still experiencing the same elation that the people in the winning places felt, it opens your eyes.”

### **You created Mayhem for Red Bull originally, how did that happen?**

“It started because I was on the Libby Purves chat show talking about my life as a soigneur and the guy in charge at Red Bull then took me on board. First he told me I had a huge budget and then told me I didn’t have any. I said it didn’t matter providing they could pay me and I went ahead with lots of Red Bull and no budget and did a good job, mainly because I knew the riders in the industry. My job was to get Red Bull into cycling.”

### **Just you?**

“It was just me. Me and my dining room table and an answerphone.”

### **Why did they think you could do it?**

“Good question! I was given an opportunity that I don’t think many people would have been given and two things happened that helped. First the legendary Harry Drnec came to head up Red Bull and Jill came to work with Harry, which is how we met. That meant that, when I came up with the idea of the 24 hour race and Harry Drnec rubber stamped it, I didn’t have to worry about the financing, communication and everything – because that is what Jill did. I had the easy side – all I had to do was bolt an event together and I had been on enough of them.”

### **Red Bull, in those days, didn’t really sponsor anything for very long, did they?**

“Red Bull were creators or originators of events; not sponsors. So in 1996, they turned round to me and said: ‘Patrick, we can’t sponsor this any more; it breaks the whole ethos, so we’re going to give it to you and Jill.’ And that is when Jill and I formed our partnership and I went out and started looking for new sponsors.”

### **I understand the risks of taking it on but you had it on a plate; the event existed.**

“It existed. And I had also been able to learn my craft. I was paid a salary by Red Bull so I was able to learn my craft without counting pennies, which very few people have the opportunity of doing.”

### **So that was you – sentenced.**

“Yes, that was it. I was sentenced to Mountain Mayhem and happy to be. It has become almost a cult. I would like it to last 20 years. And I hope the new venue, Gatcombe Park [which was used for the first time this year and will be used again in 2014], will automatically trigger off interest with people because it is on the Princess Royal’s estate and Mayhem will be the only opportunity to ride those trails.”





**JILL GREENFIELD,**  
THE ORGANISING FORCE BEHIND MAYHEM

“I trained as an actress but left the theatre after six years because one of my ‘resting’ jobs was at Bob Monkhouse’s conference company MMA, and I ended up running road shows for IBM for them. Then a producer needed a PA for the launch of Budweiser to the UK market and I had to make a commitment. I was in at the deep end with high-powered meetings at top ad agencies and I found myself having to sort out all manner of problems and essentially making things work. The end result was that the European marketing director for Budweiser thought I was the best thing since sliced bread. He is fond of saying: ‘If you need an elephant in Trafalgar Square tomorrow, Jill will get it for you.’ That guy was to become MD of Red Bull, his name is Harry Drnec.

“We stayed in touch over the years and worked together a couple of times. When Harry was headhunted to make a success of an energy drink called Red Bull he asked me to run a sampling team and get the word out there about what Red Bull was and what it did. Events became a part of my work for Red Bull, and one of those events was Mountain Mayhem, a 24 hour mountain bike endurance race that would epitomise the specific qualities of what Red Bull actually did – keep you going stronger for longer.

“That’s how Patrick and I met; my role was to look after the Red Bull side of things while he looked after the mountain bike side. Even now, after 16 years, I don’t know that much about mountain biking but Patrick does and I know a lot about marketing. He is ying to my yang and visa versa. End of story.

“At first glance, Pat doesn’t look like a mountain biker! But once you get talking to him there is no doubting his knowledge and, most of all, his passion for the sport. His passion and desire to succeed are the qualities that have made Mayhem what it is. His greatest failing in the early days was a tendency to panic, but I helped him realise that in event organising, the last thing you do is waste time and energy panicking about a problem when you should be solving it. He doesn’t panic now.

“Mayhem was entirely Patrick’s idea but the fact it was a Red Bull event had a lot to do with the success. Red Bull was increasingly becoming a byword for cool. Also, if Red Bull was involved in something you knew it would be good. Mountain Mayhem and Patrick were very lucky to have had Red Bull involvement.

“Even so, after two years when Red Bull stopped sponsoring the event and offered it to us we didn’t hesitate. We weren’t going to let Mayhem go for anything. It had strength. As more people experienced the event, the inestimable power of word of mouth came into play. As did the attraction of riding with your heroes. Gary Fisher rode the event, so did the Giant Factory Team, even Tinker Juarez came! We had all the top mountain bike companies in attendance too. People came along and rode the event and knew that they were part of something special. They still do.

“About 50 per cent of our riders are Mayhem virgins, you know. Amazing, isn’t it? The events were and are good. Mountain Mayhem is the best mountain bike endurance event in the world. Mayhem grew organically because of all of these things, not just one of them.

“I’m not going to pretend there isn’t a lot of hard work too. Even when we are planning the next Mayhem we are looking beyond to the one after that. After a week on site you are knackered, but that week is the easy bit. The hard bit is the constant effort to keep the event out there in the forefront of people’s minds, and getting companies to part with the cash to make it all happen. It’s about proposals, meetings, cold calls, all of those things all year round. I don’t spend all day every day 365 days a year, but if you ask my husband he would tell you that I spend at least half a day every day 365 days a year! You have to love it to do that.

“Now we’re looking at 20 years of Mayhem and beyond. Who would want to stop at 20 when there would be a 21st to celebrate? Then you are part way to 25 or the silver anniversary year, aren’t you? As long as we keep working to make sure that we are the best in the world, there’s nothing I can see that will stop us.”



## THE MAYHEM GENERATION

MANY OF THE OPINION FORMERS OF THE '90S FORMED A LASTING BOND WITH MAYHEM



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### CHIPPS CHIPPENDALE

EDITOR, SINGLETRACK

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“In 1996 I raced the 24 Hours of Canaan in the US; the original 24 hour race. In 1997 Pat was helping publicise Red Bull to the cycling world and had the idea of organising an event that would test riders’ stamina and endurance. He’d heard of these American 24 hour races but he didn’t actually know how they worked, so he asked if I would advise him on how the event ran, what the rules might be and so on. That quickly grew into help with designing the course, course marking, rider briefing and so on.

“That first event saw something like 125 teams turn up on spec. Pat was then an unknown bike race organiser, but this was a new and exciting cycling event. We’d made it sound terribly hard in the pre-publicity and I think that might have reduced numbers that first year but, on the plus side, when it rained for much of the event, nobody was that bothered because they were expecting it to be tough. There were so many great war stories from that first year that the second year sold out in 24 hours and subsequent events have done the same.

“Mayhem was cool because Mr Average Racer like myself could not just race on the same course as Barrie Clarke, Gary Fisher et al, but at the same time. Pro bike

racers at that time were still deified by the regular racers and people were genuinely chuffed to be waiting in the handover area with the likes of Nick Craig.

“Mayhem began in the pre-broadband, pre-social media days. Many people’s riding scenes were pretty small. You’d ride with your pals, then you’d go away for a few weekends to races and events and then, come October, you’d sink back into your local scene until April and do it again. Mayhem appeared around the same time that The Malverns disappeared. It became the social focus for the year. Riders quickly realised that it wasn’t actually 24 hours of racing – it was two or three days of camping and socialising with your friends from all over the place and, every now and again, you’d go out and do a lap.

“I think that, with Pat’s drive, the event couldn’t help but be a success, but his timing was also perfect. It fitted in as the event that those XC racers of old could compete in without the two hour scramble of a cross-country race, and it was where the have a go heroes could go flat out on a course with some of their idols and come away with a real sense of satisfaction. Everyone who finishes the race has beaten the clock and the course. Who cares about the result?”



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**MIKE DAVIS**  
RIDER, WRITER, JOURNO AND PROTO WEBMEISTER

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“From about '97 or so downhill properly started diverging from the rest of mountain biking. By then it had specialist bikes, DH-specific forks and other stuff that was no use for anything else – the bikes were no longer regular MTBs with the seat down and a bigger chainring. A lot of people had been pumping money in as it got more popular, but as it gradually drifted free from mountain biking as regular folk knew it, I think the industry noticed that they weren't getting the returns they wanted.

“Meanwhile XC racing was on a generally downward trajectory, especially at grassroots level. Mountain biking was driven by racing in the early days, but as it grew an ever-smaller proportion of riders could be bothered with formal racing. Trying to beat your mates down the last hill of the day, yes. Paying for the privilege, not so much.

“Mayhem tapped into something that seems somehow fundamental – it was an

event that people genuinely didn't know if they could complete or not. Even the early ones before soloing was allowed presented a challenge, especially since the weather rarely seemed to play ball. The challenge was in going the distance (or rather time) rather than winning, and that appealed to a lot of people. There's no challenge to completing an XC race, winning it is the hard part. At Mayhem nearly everyone was happy just to finish.

“It's still an essential annual event for a lot of people. Being first and being biggest gives it a strong position. It's seen off several other 24 hour races and it's one of the very few mountain bike events that's got a real sense of being big – there are lots of riders, but there are lots of hangers-on and families too. Industry support is strong as far as being there with demo bikes and things goes; it's almost a proper bike show away from the racing. I think it'll make 20 easily.”

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**STEVE WORLAND**  
RACER TURNED JOURNO AND THE DOYEN OF UK BIKE TESTERS

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“My first Mayhem was the second one Pat did, in 1999. I've heard that the idea came from America but for us at the time The Malverns Classic came closest in atmosphere and that was just finishing.

“Red Bull was a new thing then, looking for interesting events to get involved in. They were the only game in town; you'd have been lucky back then to get big money from a bike industry sponsor. Most just wanted to donate a few prizes.

“It came at just the right time. If others were thinking like I was about competitions, they were getting fed up with travelling, getting older and/or adding family commitments and, in downhill in particular, feeling that the stakes were getting higher and they were going to get hurt. Both XC and DH were getting more elitist and there are only so many times you can come 35th before you start questioning your motive for doing it.

“I think Mayhem captured the feeling of doing something with a bunch of mates in a way that no other event had. And, like all the city marathons that were taking off back then, there's something special about being at a big event. Before that we'd all been looking for somewhere new to go riding – this was pre-trail centre and a lot of people weren't into map reading.

“My favourite Mayhem was one in the park at Birmingham with the Gary Fisher/Paul Smith team. It was a nice mix of being on a race team and not being under too much pressure to perform.

“I stopped doing the event because it started feeling a bit samey and I begrudged the week it took to get back to normal sleep patterns. Despite that I think Pat will make it 20 years of Mayhem. He deserves to; it has been a good thing for mountain biking.”



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## JO BURT

RIDER, ARTIST AND CARTOONIST CREATOR OF MINT SAUCE

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"I've always raced, right from the very start of my mountain bike career, but I think I was in the middle of a huff about racing when Pat started. It was costing too much money and involved too much running around the country. Mountain Mayhem looked like something different and racing for an entire day meant you got your money's worth. It was a new challenge.

"A full range of riders turned up, from shiny fast XC racers cosseted in team trucks with fresh kit each lap, to the bunch of mates doing it for giggles wearing the same fancy dress for each of their wet muddy laps and having beer and sausages in between times, with soloists grinding out laps that make most teams look inadequate. That's what makes it special.

"Mayhems all kind of merge into one tearful mess really but my favourite would be the first sunny one at Eastnor – warm, dry, dusty and fast, with lots of friends involved, so it was a very social and fun affair. Ice creams at the end, cheering mates on the podium.

"I do hope Mayhem makes 20. It might be a struggle – a whole load of people don't want or need to do it any more – but if it does I will be there whatever, with my team. We intend to keep going until one of us dies. That's the rules.

"The one year I couldn't race I turned up to pit-bitch the team and I had to hide behind a tent to cry when the start gun went off."



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## TIM FLOOKS

RACER AND SUSPENSION GURU

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"I am the only one, I think, who has raced every Mayhem and always on the same team. Doing a 24 hour race with your mates was an exciting new challenge so we put together Team My Knees Hurt – we rode singlespeeds – in 1998.

"We loved it. Some people like to watch bands play in muddy fields while camping, drinking and hanging out. Mayhemers like to do the same thing: we just interrupt hanging out with our buddies to ride our bikes around a marked course through woods and fields from time to time. (Don't ask me what the solos get out of it apart from a lot of pain, I've never tried.)

"And so it goes on. Pat has always managed to bring in great sponsors over the years, but it's the event itself that keeps it popular. It has always had a great feel,

which I thought was back again this year at Gatcombe. Thousands of like-minded riders encouraging each other on through the adversity that mud and riding in the dark can bring. Then there's the fact that it's well organised, with great facilities (for the middle of some field) and now by Royal appointment...

"The courses are in the most part okay and designed for the masses. You can't have loads of flowing singletrack as this would lead to massive logjams. There are always a few more challenging lines and when it rains the whole thing becomes tough. On the social side of things I get my annual catch up with my team-mates Rory, Jo and Fraser, have several beers in what we fondly call our team bonding session on Friday evening before riding our bikes and having a fun weekend. And it's way cheaper than Glastonbury."

