



## INTERVIEW: ADAM “STU” ROBINSON – FROM RACER TO TEAM MANAGER

Interview by Wil De Clercq



Adam “Stu” Robinson is known for his extensive technical and tactical racing knowledge. Over the years Robinson has been at the helm of various Rockstar Energy/OTSFF motocross and snowcross teams. Along the way he contributed his know-how and mechanical skills, especially tuning and suspension work, to national championships in both disciplines, with Iain Hayden in snowcross and Matt Goerke in motocross.

This year Robinson, acting as crew chief for Rockstar Energy/Polaris Racing/Pillar’s presented by Huber Motorsports and OTSFF, added Colby Crapo and RJ Roy to the list of champions he has been professionally associated with in their quest for glory.

Robinson has a lengthy history in the sport of off-road competition, dating back to 1994 when he started racing motocross in his home province of Ontario. That he had some talent for dirt bike racing was evident in 1998, when he claimed the 250cc Junior Provincial Championship. A severe foot injury a year later, however, in the Intermediate class, saw him drift over to the technical side of the sport.

In 1999, after his motocross accident, Robinson started working behind the scenes as a mechanic, only racing sporadically for a few more years. He took to wrenching like a duck to water and decided to make a career of it. He evolved from a core mechanic to more specialized areas including tuner, suspension specialist, team manager and crew chief, both in motocross and snowcross.

Robinson has worked for or with such Canadian motocross luminaries as Chris Pomeroy, Chuck Mesley, Ryan “Gauldy” Gauld, Mitch Cooke, as well as American riders Bobby Kiniry and Matt Goerke, and the Australian Brett Metcalfe. In snowcross, his wrenching and suspension services have been used, in addition to Iain Hayden, Colby Crapo and RJ Roy, by such notables as Michael Island, Kurtis and Shaun Crapo, Robbie Malinoski, DJ Ekstrom, Steve Taylor, Steve Martin, Cory Davis, Lee Butler, Dylan Hall and Jacob Rosko-Fong.

*Wil De Clercq:* It's easy enough to understand you getting involved in motocross mechanics, seeing you started off as a racer, but you never competed in snowcross. How did you actually get into that scene?

*Adam "Stu" Robinson:* It came about through Mike Island. I knew him and his dad Bob while I was employed at Machine Racing, which was one of Mike's main sponsors. This led me to work on his motocross bikes. At that time, he had already been racing snowmobiles in the amateur ranks. When he moved up to the semi-pro level, Bob asked me to help with Mike's mod program, basically just as a nuts and bolts guy. But that started me more in the direction of becoming serious about suspension work.

[Image courtesy of [directmotocross.com](http://directmotocross.com)]



*WDC:* Were you with Island's team when he won gold at the Winter X Games in 2004?

*ASR:* I was only with the team until 2000. About three seasons in total. But I have to give credit to Mike and his dad for my suspension career in snowcross to start picking up momentum. My relationship with them laid the ground floor for my progression as a racing team mechanic and suspension guy. They gave me the endorsement to continue on and network with connections I made through them. Because of my stint with Mike and Bob, I was able to go directly to work for Ryde FX High Performance Shocks. From there I went to work for Scheuring Speed Sports, one of the top U.S. snowcross team that has ever existed and still does. It just took off from there. I guess it was all a matter of being at the right place at the right time.

*WDC:* You actually became known for your early suspension work with Machine Racing, where you worked for the better part of ten years, at least during the motocross season. Was becoming a suspension specialist your goal?

*ASR:* Not in the beginning. I started as a mechanic but gravitated toward suspension work. That became my focus and eventually my forte. Being able to do suspension work provided me with bringing something more to the table than your everyday mechanic and parts changer.

*WDC:* Did you learn motor mechanics and suspension technology formally or more by a hands-on, self-taught method?

*ASR:* I started by wrenching on my own bikes, using a manual and things like that. Just the basics on what does what and why it does it. Like some guys, I just seemed to have a natural knack for most things mechanical. When I was finished high school, I attended trade school for small engine mechanic at Fleming College in Peterborough. I was also lucky to have the opportunity presented to me to work at different points along the way with some of the best minds in the suspension business.

*WDC:* Could you elaborate a bit on that?

*ASR:* To begin with, during the time I worked for John Nelson at Machine, I learned a lot from him. He was my mentor at a young age. He was the first guy that taught me how to do suspensions, take stuff apart, put it back together again, test procedure, the basic theory behind it all. I also learned a lot from working with RG3's Rob Hendrickson. And I was really fortunate to also develop a relationship with Mike Haist at Factory Connection. He definitely helped elevate my knowledge base. On the snowmobile engine side of things, I've worked with some great people too, including Chris Bondi, who continues to work with me on our new mx program, Steve Scheuring, and Polaris' Tom Rager Jr, to name a few. I owe all these people a debt of gratitude for the contributions they made towards my proficiency as a mechanic and suspension tech.



*WDC:* You seem to have created a viable niche for yourself in both snowcross and motocross as a mechanic/suspension technician as well as a leader, whether it be team manager or crew chief.

*ASR:* It's a nice situation to be in, although, needless to say it didn't happen overnight. But I've been very fortunate. I've never really been unemployed in the racing field. Starting with Machine Racing during the motocross season, then winter side projects with Ryde FX and Scheuring Speed Sports in American snowcross. From Machine, I went directly to OTSFF in 2007. I stayed there until the end of the 2016 motocross season. I took the winter of 2016 off and wasn't involved with OTSFF's snowcross program. It was my first winter off in many years. I felt I needed to step back from snowcross for a while. Having said that, I didn't just sit in front of my TV all winter. I did do several bike testing sessions with Matt Goerke and Brett Metcalfe in California, to prepare the Rockstar Energy OTSFF Yamaha motocross team for the 2016 Nationals. I worked as team manager on that program.

*WDC:* So from OTSFF you went over to Huber Motorsports for the 2017 snowcross season to be the team's crew chief.

*ASR:* That's correct. I got to know Gerhart & Christian Huber on the snowcross circuit. Last year his Piller's team received minimal support from Rockstar, Polaris, and OTSFF. When I left OTSFF at the end of summer in 2016, Christian asked me to come and work for them. With the Rockstar/Polaris/OTSFF team having disbanded at the end of the 2016 season, it was a natural fit for me because Huber Motorsports became the main Rockstar Energy/Polaris Racing team.

*WDC:* Let's backtrack a bit here and return to motocross. How did you get into that? Was it a family thing like for many of the guys who take up the sport?



*ASR:* No, it wasn't a family thing. My parents bought me a trail bike when I was a kid, but my dad wasn't a motorcycle guy. My folks weren't keen on me taking up motocross, which I didn't do until I was old enough to do it on my own. In 1994, when I was eighteen, I got my first motocross bike and started racing. After I hurt my foot in '99 I didn't race for about two months and for the next five years or so it was more a hobby thing, doing the odd race here and there. My interest had totally shifted to the mechanical side.

*WDC:* Considering how young most kids start racing, eighteen is kind of old to take up the sport.

*ASR:* Yeah, it is. I was racing guys a lot younger than myself when I started. I actually got the moto bug when I was really young, though, probably because I grew up living next door to Doug Hoover in Mount Albert. Doug was a top motocrosser back then. He won a couple of national championships and quite a few provincial ones. I used to watch Doug ride on his practice track at the back of his family's property and I got really hooked on dirt bikes. Sometimes there would be other top guys come and practice with Doug. For a kid it was really cool to have a motocross star as your neighbour.



*WDC:* So how did you end up being a behind-the-scenes guy in motocross?

*ASR:* That came about when Chris Pomeroy asked me to wrench for him for the 1999 season. Seeing I couldn't race myself at the time, because of my foot injury, I decided to go for it. But then he got hurt at the first round of the season at RJ's in Barrie and missed a bunch of races while recovering. In the meantime, Gauldy invited me to do the national tour with him, and I ended up being his mechanic for the season.

*WDC:* Did you ever get the urge to race snowmobiles?

*ASR:* No. Ironically enough considering how long I've been involved in snowcross. I was never even a big fan of recreational riding. My dad owned a snowmobile, a 1969 Olympic, and I did some riding as a kid. Later I bought a sled for myself, a 1994 MXZ470, but never rode it that much and it's the only snowmobile I've ever owned personally. I've always been a moto guy. After I gave up racing motocross in 1999, I still went trail riding, usually on bikes that were made available to me through my work. But I haven't owned or ridden a dirt bike since 2008. I'm around bikes and sleds so much during the racing seasons, when I don't have to be

around them I invest my free time in my family. Quality time with my wife Sonya, daughter Paisley, and son Evan is very important to me.

*WDC:* What exactly was your job description as "crew chief" with the Rockstar Energy/Polaris Racing/Miller's presented by Huber Motorsport and OTSFF team?



ASR: I guess there are different definitions for that term, but in my case, you could say I was the elder statesman on the team. I brought a lot of experience to the program and championship winning credibility, so I was looked upon for guidance. This year the whole racing effort was a collaboration by everyone on the team. It wasn't really a case of me standing on top of the stairs dictating and pointing fingers down and being "the chief". We pooled our knowledge, put our heads together to solve problems when they arose, and see what we could come up with to make sure Colby and RJ had the best sleds out there. At the end of the day the crew guys would look to me to either approve, disapprove, or further discuss any issues if necessary. And when I say issues, I

don't mean personal issues, but technical stuff. There was never any arguing or bickering or egos clashing, just people putting their heads together and being part of a championship winning formula. Everybody was very focused. I think the results we achieved speak for themselves.

WDC: As you know I interviewed both Colby and RJ for the Huber Motorsports website, and they were just totally effervescent about what a great team atmosphere there was in the trailer, team spirit, camaraderie, the whole nine yards.

ASR: It was so cool it almost seemed beyond belief. Some teams mesh well, some don't. But on this team everything just jelled. I've been on some good atmosphere teams, but this one was exceptional. It's one of those deals that if you tried to put it back together, with exactly the same people and same formula, you probably would be disappointed just because the chances of it ever unfolding like that again are slim. It was a moment in time that stretched over the course of one season.

WDC: Colby and RJ had their own mechanics to do the wrenching. Did you ever have to get your hands dirty?

ASR: Not in the sense of a nut and bolt mechanical guy. I was more or less an advisor and a tuner. The team data acquisition, clutching, carburation, and things like that. Walker Evans did all of our shock calibration and the valving test work. I would be the tuner on the weekend for suspension chassis and that kind of stuff. It's something I really enjoyed doing because this work allows you to step back and really truly think your ideas through. It allows you to analyse every piece of information that's in front of you and make a good decision. You're not worrying about a bolt that you may or may not have tightened while at the same time trying to decide what jet or clutch component to put in.

WDC: Do you also act as a mentor for the riders regarding their on-track performance?

*ASR:* I'm there for them if they have questions. If they need some pepping up or moral support, I'm there for them. Racing is more a mental thing than anything else so a rider sometimes needs some input from a different perspective on things to put it all together. If I have that perspective to offer, because of past my experience, and I'm asked my opinion, I will offer it. But I've never been the guy to stand in front of a racer and tell him he needs to do this, this and that. You gotta hit that line and be there and there. My relationship with riders and crew members have always been about doing my own job to the best of my ability so that I make their job easier.

*WDC:* With the snowcross season behind you, what are you currently involved in?

*ASR:* Actually, it's a continuation of what I've been involved in with Gerhart since last November, and that is putting together a motocross program for the 2017 CMRC MX1 Nationals. As you know this isn't something that happens overnight, especially when you're starting from scratch. We've been tooling away at this throughout the winter and early spring. We're pretty well ready to go now and looking forward to getting the season underway. The team, which is called Royal Distributing/ Motovan/Piller's Racing presented by Huber Motorsports, will feature Tyler Medaglia, Kyle Chisholm, and Nathan Bless riding the 2017 Honda CRF450R.

*WDC:* I'm assuming here that you won't be sitting at home watching the living streaming of the races on your computer or tablet?

*ASR:* You're right. I'll be at track to oversee things as team manager. I'm pretty excited to be involved in this project.

*WDC:* Well, I guess the old saying "there's no rest for the weary" is true. Good luck with the new team, Stu. Thank you for your time doing this interview.

*ASR:* You're welcome ... and thank you as well.