

“STONE COLD” STEVE AUSTIN

Inducted by Gary Young

For the record, it wasn't intentional. “Stone Cold” Steve Austin was meant to be a villain, someone the fans despised. Instead, they found a hero who did what they always dreamed of—“Hell, yeah!”—beating people up, flipping off the boss, driving everything from a monster truck to a Zamboni, all the while drinking on the job.

“It wasn't deliberate. I was trying to be a heel and that's just the way the world took me. We never did change what Stone Cold Steve Austin was,” explained Austin. “We just transitioned the people I was working with; I started working with heels rather than babyfaces. People wanted to be entertained ... they were ready for that ride.”

Austin was the lone wolf, black boots and black trunks, and preaching “Trust Nobody” while punching and kicking his way through the ever-loosening definition of heel and babyface dressing rooms.

At the height of his popularity, from 1998 to 2003, the goateed bad-ass with the shaved head was bringing in millions of dollars off his merchandise sales alone. The “Austin 3:16” line—a response to a Bible-thumping Jake “The Snake” Roberts at the 1996 King of the Ring tournament—probably made more money than any T-shirt in wrestling history.

Born Steve Anderson in 1965 in Austin, Texas, his name was changed to Steve Williams when his mother remarried. A wrestling fan from the fifth grade on in Edna, he was trained in wrestling the old-school way in Dallas, by star “Gentleman” Chris Adams and journeyman Chico Cabello.

It wasn't an easy ride, however. He couldn't use his real name because of the already-established “Dr. Death” Steve Williams. There were rough times in Texas and Tennessee when he survived on raw potatoes. His blond hair pulled back in a ponytail—while his hairline receded—“Stunning” Steve Austin made it to World Championship Wrestling, where he established himself as thoroughly valuable in the mid-card, holding the promotion's U.S. and tag team titles, and learning in the ring against masters such as Ricky Steamboat. He had a memorable team with Brian Pillman as the Hollywood Blonds, cranking imaginary movie

cameras on the ring apron to capture their greatness.

At 30 years of age, on the sidelines because of a detached triceps, he was released from his WCW contract. Thrown a lifeline in the upstart ECW though he couldn't wrestle, Austin started cutting real-life promos that hinted there was a lot more to Austin.

Finally, the World Wrestling Federation dialed him up, and pitched him as being the "Ringmaster," a technical master guided by "The Million Dollar Man" Ted DiBiase. "It sucked," Austin would later recall.

Fascinated by a TV show about the serial killer "Ice Man" Richard Kuklinski, Austin started mulling new nicknames. His wife made him tea, warning him to drink it before it got "stone cold," and a multi-million dollar man was conceived.

He feuded with the villainous owner "Mr. McMahon" and another star at his peak, The Rock. Together, they headlined three different WrestleMania's.

Though Austin retired from pro wrestling in 2003, he stayed involved, realizing that making guest appearances on *Monday Night Raw* or as a special referee helps keep his name fresh with those that love him best—and it can promote his latest film or television role.

— Greg Oliver