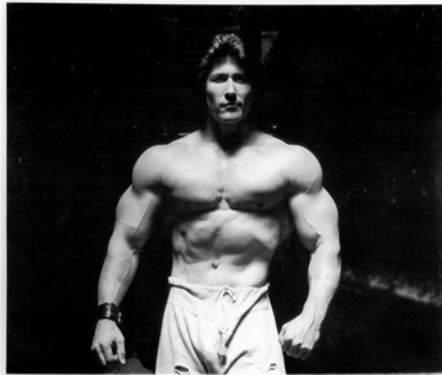


## **Don Howorth**

### **Mr. Delts**

By

Alan Palmieri



I don't care what era you discovered bodybuilding I can assure you of one thing, if it's shoulder width you admire, Don Howorth has to be on top of your list. Wide sculptured delts that are recognizable even under a shirt and sweater; Don's delts are legendary. I remember the first time I saw a picture of Don in a magazine, unbelievable! No one has shoulders like that, I thought. Don's shoulders were not only wide they looked like they had coconuts sitting on top of them. In the back of my mind I actually thought the pictures I saw in the magazine were touched up. Couldn't imagine anyone having shoulders like that.

Don started to appear more frequently in magazines and his shoulders were always the same, massive and wide. No matter what position or pose he was in his delts looked like coconuts. That's when I finally figured out the pictures were not touched up. I read several articles about Don's shoulder workouts. Some were pretty elaborate and others were short and snappy. Each presented a different training concept and that was confusing. You can't believe everything you read and bodybuilding magazines often tend to spread it on a little. I couldn't wait until I could meet Don in person and ask him about

his training. That day arrived, where else, New York's Brooklyn Academy of Music 1967 the night Don won the IFBB Mr. America Contest.

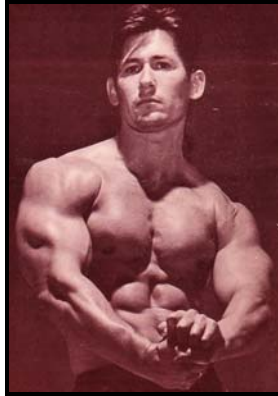


This photo of Don was taken the day after he won the 1967 IFBB Mr. America Title

It was the afternoon pre-judging and I was talking with Rock Stonewall. What a guy he was. Full of fun and life, upbeat is not the word for it. Anyway, I spotted Don and to my surprise his shoulders were not as they appeared in the pictures published in magazines... they were larger, wider, and what I said looked like coconuts sitting on his shoulders, well change that to watermelons. At all cost I had to find out the truth about Don's delt training.

Just as I started to head toward him, they called Don's height class for a line up. I stood backstage watching as Don hit pose after pose. He was standing next to Don Peters who was no slack in the delt department himself but Howorth was something else that day. When they had finished I again headed toward him, I guess I was walking too slow because three other people cornered him before I got the chance. Whatever they had to say to Don they were quick about it. Once again I moved in to introduce myself. This

time Bud Parker approached Don just as I got to him. “Don” Bud said. “Joe (Weider) wants to take you and a few others to dinner tonight if you can make it.” Now it was my turn, finally.



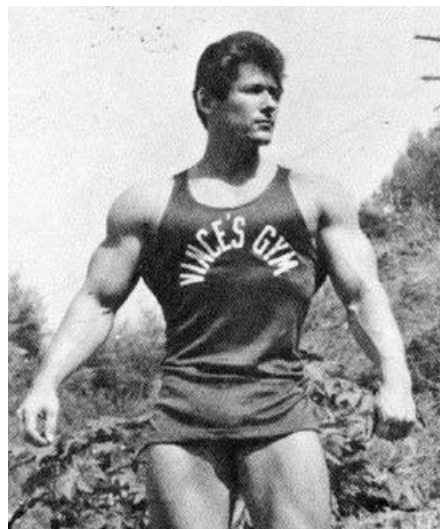
After I introduced myself, Don was kind enough to spend sometime filling me in on his training and answered all of my questions. One thing about Don, if you don’t want to know what he’s thinking, don’t ask. In fact, a good deal of the time you don’t even have to ask, he’ll tell you anyway. Personally I find that refreshing about Don. He doesn’t cover up, he’s just Don, like it or not.

I mentioned to Don I was confused about the various articles relaying his training programs. Which ones were accurate? “Hell, don’t know if any of them are”, Don stated. “Okay so what about your delts Don, how did”...before I could finish my sentence Don said, “My parents blessed me with a good bone structure, plain and simple.” “Not that I didn’t work my butt off to improve on what I had naturally, but I just always had wide shoulders, naturally wide clavicles. Bodybuilding made them even wider.” After hearing Don talk about his super genetic shoulder girth, I was grateful for his honesty but wanted to know about his specific training routine.

According to Don, he employed a great many different exercises and concepts in his training. This fact justifies all the different workouts he was supposed to be giving credit to in the various articles we talked about. Over the years Don had performed every delt movement you can think of and then some. What he told me however, was somewhat

of a shock. He didn't say he did any of the routines I had seen in the magazines. Some he was not even aware of.

I mentioned the fact Don was highly promoted by Vince Gironda and that Vince had said some very nice things about Don to me. I went on to say I knew Vince was on a kick against pressing movements for building delt size... again; Don stopped me in mid sentence. "Yeah, right. Well I've done thousands of barbell, smith machine, and dumbbell presses." "If you want to add size and mass you need to press, and press heavy. You can't beat pressing movements." "I do lateral work and sometimes cable work but my main stay has been pressing movements." "The delts consist of three different heads and you've got to work all of them if you want all around development."



Promotion shot of Don wearing one of Vince's Gym Tank Tops  
Picture was taken behind Vince's Gym.

We talked about sets and reps and as experienced bodybuilders know, every top champion changes routines, follows various methods and concepts, and experiments constantly in order to discover what works best. Don was no different. He left nothing to chance in his training.

Although he did alternate his training, some movements were mainstays in his workouts. Don stated, "I've done them all but what I would consider my basic routine,

the one I've had the most success with, is barbell press behind the neck super-setted with bent over rear dumbbell raises." "I stick with this program almost constantly." "A lot of what's in the magazines about my training is just crap." Well, I guess that takes care of what I had been reading. Don went on to say; "I sometimes combine behind the neck chins with rear delt raises for a change of pace."

Don said most articles failed to discuss the most important aspect of deltoid training, that being width. He pointed out, and rightfully so, that most articles were concerned with size and remained silent on width. It has been reported that Steve Reeves is the one who pointed out the importance of shoulder width to Don. Steve introduced Don to some exercises and concepts for training shoulders and from that day on, shoulder training became the most important for Don.

Although Don did not indicate to me at any time during our conversation that he used the following program. I had seen variations of it in several publications and they quoted Don as saying it was the routine he followed. I don't remember Don denying it but I also don't recall his suggesting it was accurate. Besides, he already said much of what was written about his training was "crap." Taking that which I read in some magazines and adding what Don himself told me, I came up with the following delt routine I used to push my shoulders to new growth and move beyond sticking points.

#### 1. Press Behind The Neck.

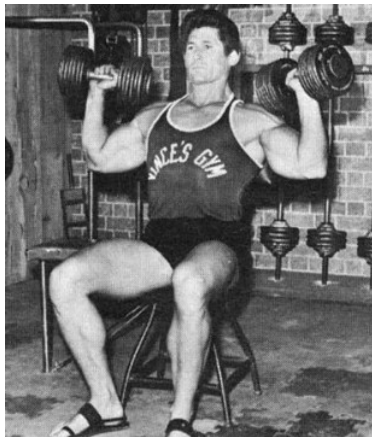
Here is the most important exercise in the program and one Don admits to using on a regular basis if not exclusively. This movement works the structure like no other and must be performed exactly as outlined for best results. The press behind the neck can be performed seated or standing. Don prefers to perform it while seated to prevent cheating. He grips the bar with a wide grip and lowers it down until it touches the back of the neck just below the hairline, immediately he will press it back overhead to a full lockout. He tenses the delts at the top and pauses for a two count before lowering the bar again. Eight sets of six reps with as much weight as he can handle.

2. The next two movements are performed in super-set fashion. Immediately after completing the first set of the first movement perform the first set of the second movement, and then take a short rest before continuing on to the next set.

First Movement. One Arm Press. While standing, hold a dumbbell in one hand at shoulder level and grab a bench or post with the other hand for stability. Now perform one arm dumbbell presses for eight reps holding the dumbbell in the raised position for a two count, lower and repeat. After eight reps, switch to the other arm for eight reps. Immediately move to the next super-set exercise.

Second Movement. Side Incline Raises. Position yourself on your side lying on an incline bench. Hold a dumbbell in your hand not quite touching your thigh. Now slowly but in a rhythmic motion raise the dumbbell as high as you can. Once at the top twist your hand so your little finger (pinky) is pointing toward the ceiling. This little move really contracts the deltoid. Perform eight reps, switch to the other arm and then take a brief rest before continuing on to the One Arm Press for your second set until you have completed four super-sets.

3. Dumbbell Press. These are performed either sitting or standing. No need to go into a description here as everyone is familiar with the movements. Perform four sets of eight reps.



4. Three Way Raise. This is a unique and productive movement. Begin with a pair of dumbbells in each hand resting on the outer thighs. Now perform a side lateral raise up to shoulder height only for five reps. For the next part of this movement, without resting from what you have just done, with the dumbbells at shoulder height, raise them above your head for five reps. and the final part of the movement consists of starting with the dumbbells at the thighs and raising them all the way overhead for five reps.

Three separate actions performed, one immediately after the other, for a total of five sets of 15 reps (5 reps from thigh to shoulder, 5 reps from shoulder to overhead, 5 reps from thigh to overhead), similar to “21” Curls.

Don did say that he often would perform lat work immediately after this delt routine as he felt it helped him develop his width to a greater extent. He suggested wide grip chins and wide grip bent-over rows.

This is a vigorous routine to say the least and definitely not for a beginner. In fact, most advanced bodybuilders could not follow this program without overtraining the shoulders. I’ve used it in the past with a great amount of success however; I’ve used it as a shock routine and followed it only for two weeks using it twice a week. It did get my delts moving forward producing great results.

Although some articles have carried like descriptions citing them as Don’s shoulder routine, he gave no indication as to that being the case. What I just outlined is a workout I followed many times with great success based on the articles I had read and my conversations with Don.

Don is genetically gifted in the shoulder region; he admits it but that never kept him from putting an all out effort into his delt training. He trained heavy and fast, heavier and faster than most. Don would use as heavy a weight as he could to perform each movement and rested barely long enough between sets to catch his breath.

I hadn't seen Don in years and was working the "Vince Gironda Legend And Myth" CD. I really wanted his comments because he not only trained at Vince's he lived upstairs for a period and also managed Vince's Gym. Without a doubt he had a lot he could contribute to my project. I contacted Don and he was gracious enough to do an interview for me to include in my project. Here is that interview taken from the CD, "Vince Gironda Legend And Myth."

### **Don Howorth Interview**

**AP:** Don it's an honor to get to speak with you again. As I mentioned earlier, there is only a small handful of not only pioneers but original bodybuilders from back in the 60's and you are definitely one of those. You helped inspire a lot of people to enter the sport. You most likely don't remember but we first met the night you won the Mr. America title in 1967. As you know I am working on a project, an update to my book on Vince Gironda. You trained at Vince's back in the 60's.

**DH:** I trained there in 1964. I didn't go back in 1965 because I knew Dave Draper was going to win the Mr. America. Then I went back to work at the studio for about a year I guess. I started training again in 1966 and over did it and was defeated by Chester Yorton.

**AP:** Don what about Vince's facilities, how where they when you were there, was it pretty advanced?

**DH:** Well to tell you the truth I had to do a lot of adapting because I came from Pasadena Gym which was an incredible gym. They had a lot of equipment and a lot of heavy weights and pull down machines. Vince's did not have all that equipment and in some ways that probably did me some good because my workouts were like three and a half to four hours long.

**AP:** Four hours a day is a long time Don.

**DH:** Yeah, it was kill and take no prisoners, you know what I mean.

**AP:** That's the way it use to be.

**DH:** When I got to Vince's I had to adapt my workouts to you know, Vince's things. He didn't have a very good pull down machine I think it belonged to Jack LaLane at one time. It was not a very good unit. What I basically did was chins and of course Vince didn't like for anyone to do bench presses but I still did them anyway. Being at Vince's I did change my workout around. I was also introduced to Rheo H. Blair. Prior to that I



was taking just a bare minimum amount of supplements. Back then not many knew about them or how to use them correctly.

**AP:** I remember seeing several pictures of you working out at Vince's on what looked like a homemade smith machine.

**DH:** Yeah, I forgot who made that up but Vince did have a smith machine but it was nothing like what they have today. I used it a lot for toe raises.

**AP:** Did Vince have a lot of influence on you as far as the type of routine and program you worked on?

**DH:** Not at all.

**AP:** So basically you used your own routines.

**DH:** Everyone always asked "How did you get so big", and I would say; "do you want the truth," I did everything Vince told me not to do (laughing). Vince would tell me I wasn't rolling my shoulders doing incline curls and I use to tell him "Yeah but Vince, my arms are twenty." Vince taught me really how to pose and about nutrition. What I picked up on nutrition I got from Vince and Rheo H. Blair. The way Vince's Gym was set up I had to compress everything and worked out a lot faster. It cut my workout from four down to about two and a half hours. Of course that was with fifteen seconds rest between sets and probably a minute between body parts. I made it through but I was taking a lot of supplements at that time also and that helped.

**AP:** Don were you using heavy weights during your time at Vince's?

**DH:** Oh yes, very heavy weights and I employed the pyramid program that Joe Weider said he invented. I used that back in 1960 at Pasadena Gym. I always went up to a peak. I always started out with bench presses and warmed up with about 225 then dumped 50 pounds for maybe 8 reps or whatever it was because I always went up to a very high weight with low reps. I would keep on going like that. I would do twenty-eight sets for pecs and arms. Together it would be like thirty-six sets. And in-between all that before the Mr. America, I was working on my weak points each day and everybody was telling me "You can't do that and recover." But you know that's what got me in that particular shape that day, that night, that's what got me there. I was working my back, my thighs, my calves; five – six days a week.

**AP:** That's a pretty heavy schedule.

**DH:** Vince and I both sat down one day and said: "Okay let's start to get some calves." We started to do some things together. Vince and I were pretty together in the sixties. But we kind of split in the seventies and eighties and went different ways. Anyway, we said we were going to try and do something so we did two sets of as many reps as we could, (calf raises), on the smith machine without any weight. We got something like fifty or

sixty reps. I'll tell you what, the next day I tried to step out of bed and I couldn't put my feet down because my calves were so sore. I started using that as a premise to build bigger calves because I would work my calves very heavy one day and the next day I would do two sets with no weights on the smith machine until I got to a hundred reps.

**AP:** Right. (Taking it all in because this is the side on one bodybuilders training that most people don't get to hear about).

**DH:** I also worked my legs everyday. Heavy one day and light the next day. By heavy I mean one day I would do eight sets of hacks, six sets of leg extensions and six sets of leg curls. I was never a squatter because before I got to Vince's Gym I had two herniated disks and that puts a little kink on trying to do squats. I squatted before, like when I entered the AAU Mr. America. You had to have a weightlifting total so you had to do a Clean and Jerk, a Snatch, and a Press. The Snatch and Clean and Jerk are not very easy on the back, you know.

**AP:** Right, none of those movements are.

**DH:** I started working my thighs on Vince's advice, one more time. I think there was a problem with my father's side of the family with disk injuries and those affect the lower part of the body, the legs. But at that time my legs felt great because on my off days I would do four sets of front squats for about twenty-five reps.

**AP:** That's a pretty intense workout, much more so than the average person would ever think you would go through.

**DH:** Ah yeah, well, I tell people about the routines and they think I'm crazy but to me it was easy because I cut it down from four hours. I use to do forty sets a body part. Everybody now asks, "why'd you do that many?" Well, there was nobody around to tell you what to do; you had to go by what felt right. Then as I got closer to the Mr. America I started doing less and when I started doing less of course I started recovering a lot faster and I started getting bigger. I really started getting bigger. I knew before I got there that was my year because the times I went before I never had that great pump, that great feel. You know what I mean, the one that you didn't have to stand there and just shake from intense flexing to show your body off, you can just, you know, bang and there you are.

I remember I had a conversation with Frank Zane and he said; "oh you'll be back next year." I said, "No no Frank this is it." I knew when I stepped up on the stage that was the year. They told me that Rock Stonewall was ahead in the pre-judging. In fact Dick Tyler and Dave Draper just put a book out and it's on the market. They were selling them at the Pro Am a couple of weeks ago. It's called West Coast Bodybuilding Scene. Dick relayed that story in there because he was one of the judges at that time. It was like being released from bondage. I quit for several years after that. I went on and did a few posing exhibitions and some small seminars. We would just sit around and talk with people. We didn't charge any money in those days. I have always liked helping people.

**AP:** You were very gracious with me the first time we met. It was backstage at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in 1967, the year you won the Mr. America title. You gave a lot of your time to answer my questions and I noticed you spent a lot of time talking with others and helping them also.

**DH:** Well I sure didn't get gracious from Vince I can tell you that. He could really be a case. You know he had some good ideas and things about training, nutrition, and equipment. I think the reason Vince and I got along so well is we were both born on the same day, November 9<sup>th</sup>. He was just eighteen years older than I was. So that's why I think we got along so well. I remember the first time I went into his gym he said; "Hey, Hi fat kid." I was weighing about 218 and I said, "Yeah, I feel like a glazed donut", Vince started laughing.

**AP:** Vince had a reputation for being hardnosed about things but knew his business.

**DH:** Vince was really all right at first. In fact I ran the gym in 1966 and 1967 and Vince basically just stayed home. I would workout from about 11:00 to about 1:30 or so everyday.

**AP:** You trained with Larry Scott for awhile didn't you Don?

**DH:** Well no, not really. We trained at Vince's but we never trained together. Larry basically had a set routine that he did.

**AP:** I recently spoke with Bill Pearl who said that Vince liked dumbbells because barbells took up too much space in his gym.

**DH:** I use to say that I won the Mr. America title while working out on a leg extension leg curl machine that was made out of galvanized pipe. I never used a hack squat machine until I came to Vince's Gym. I worked out twelve or thirteen years before I ever used a hack machine. Of course we use to hold a bar behind our butt but that was real hard on the knees and back. I squatted some but not a lot because, like I said, I had a herniated disk in my back. In 1958 I didn't start training really heavy until right after that when I went to Pasadena Gym.

**AP:** Don do you have any last thoughts you might want to share about Vince.

**DH:** Vince had a lot of people working out at his gym. You had Larry Scott, Bill McArdle, John Tristram, Gable Boudreaux, Don Peters, really a lot of champions. Vince of course taught me how to pose and that was a big thing. Another reason we got along so well is Vince liked symmetry and I was in the same frame of mind. My shoulders, fortunately in those days, grew very easily so right before the Mr. America I just kind of backed off of them for about two weeks beforehand. Vince suggested I just do some dumbbell presses and some side raises and basically that's all I did. Years before that I did hundreds of presses behind the neck

**AP:** Don, I want to thank you for taking the time to talk with me. It's been many years and it's good to know you're doing fine. I still think you are one of our sports greats and I wish you continued good luck in the future.



Don six weeks after winning the Mr. America Title

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