

Starting Strength

Pat Casey: The First Powerlifting Superstar

by
Marty Gallagher

Patrick Joseph “Pat” Casey was born in 1936 and grew up in and around Los Angeles. He was unarguably the first powerlifting superstar in that he was the best lifter in the world when powerlifting became an official sport in 1965, complete with rules and championships. Pat was a powerlifting pioneer, a primordial specialist, a man that built a sensational physique using a simple selection of barebones strength exercises, all done using bar-bending poundage in marathon training sessions. In order to recover from the intense pounding Pat subjected himself to in the weight room on a near daily basis, he purposefully consumed a massive amount of wholesome food and amplified the food intake by drinking 4-6 quarts of whole milk each and every day. His physique and feats captivated an entire generation of young lifters. Pat looked incredible and backed it up with world record-level lifting.

Every knowledgeable expert that saw Pat Casey lift at his peak came away awestruck. He was the first man to break the 800-pound squat barrier and the first to shatter the 2,000-pound three-lift total barrier. His bench pressing and seated overhead pressing exploits are the stuff of legend. Done “raw,” without any strength-obfuscating supportive gear (as Huge Cassidy once observed about the diabolical bench shirt, “Where does the shirt end and the man begin?”), Casey’s 622-pound raw bench press, done in 1967, would rank him 6th in the world on the 2012 super-heavyweight raw bench press rankings list. Pat offers up an ancient method based on volume and intensity: long sessions were done often performing many exercises while exerting maximum intensity.



The mighty Pat Casey at his peak.

Pat Casey

A plausible case could be made that Pat Casey is the greatest bench presser of all time. What is inarguable is that Casey was the first man to shatter the 600-pound bench press barrier. Pat's 1967 615-pound effort was subjected to stringent judging that required a 2-second pause on the chest, no uneven arm extension, no bouncing the bar off the chest and no butt raising during the lift. Casey had a savage training ethic that could be encapsulated as, "all day, any day, everyday." Pat was legendary for engaging in marathon training sessions. He exemplified the old Nietzsche adage, "That which does not kill me makes me stronger."

Pat was equally strong on any type of incline or overhead pressing. He was unable to clean as much as he was capable of pressing, but so what? Pat was not an Olympic lifter, he was a pioneer in the sport of Powerlifting. While sitting erect on an exercise bench he took 405 out of the rack, lowered it to below his chin before rocketing it upward to lockout. Casey was strict seated-pressing 405 at a time when the overhead clean and press record was 436 pounds. Olympic presses more closely resembled a barbell incline barbell press than a 90-degree seated press, the type Patrick practiced. Casey could incline press a pair of 220 pound dumbbells for 5 reps. He could do a behind-the-neck press with 385. These presses were the purest, strictest expression of raw pushing power.

On March 25, 1967, Pat shattered the 600-pound bench press barrier with a 615 effort. This was a truly monumental feat. Pat was a Paul Bunyon-esqe man, an Irish behemoth that looked the part. He was gigantic, standing well over 6 foot and weighing 335 pounds, most of it in his immense upper body. Pat Casey didn't finesse the weights – he manhandled them. Pat's peak competitive years coincided with the birth of powerlifting as a formalized sport. He was light years ahead of the rest of the world in the bench press, and for a time was as far ahead of the rest of the world as any man has ever been, before or since.

Pat trained hard, Pat trained heavy, and Pat trained often. Pat augmented his marathon lifting sessions with a massive caloric intake. He broke his body down then rebuilt his shattered body with a massive infusion of calories. If plotted on a graph, his strength curve and his bodyweight curve would parallel one another. Pat started his lifting journey at age 14 and by age 18 he had become the youngest man to enter the 400-pound bench press club. The teen benched 420 pounds, this at a time when less than a dozen men in the world had crashed the 400-pound bench press barrier. Here are Casey's staple exercises that were used throughout his (rather short) career:

- Competition style bench press
- Bench press lockouts, two positions: 4 inches off chest, 7 inches off chest
- Dumbbell or barbell incline press, 45-degree angle
- Lying triceps extensions
- Dips
- Seated front press
- Seated press behind the neck
- Chins
- Rows

Later in life Pat said that he would have included "more curling" into his limited exercise roster.

Pat was yet another marathon trainer, typical of the iron elite of his day. Regardless of barbell sport – be it Olympic weightlifting, bodybuilding, and later, powerlifting – men of the 40s, 50s and 60s trained much longer and much more often. As with so many of the iron greats of yesteryear, Casey thought nothing of spending 4-6 hours in the gym. Pat found he had the fire for lifting very early

Pat Casey

on. At age 14 he joined George Redpath's – a legendary old school West Los Angeles gym located in his neighborhood. Casey fell in love with the gym vibe and began spending all his free time training. Almost immediately Pat became a formidable competitive opponent at the adult level.

Casey's early ambition was simple: hoist ever heavier poundage, grow larger and ever more muscular. His continual training and his copious consumption of calories had an incredible effect on his physique. The more he ate, the larger he grew; the larger he grew, the stronger he became; the stronger he became, the hotter his young male metabolism raged. Pat drank six quarts of whole milk each day in addition to eating everything he could lay his hands on. It was reported in *Muscle Builder* magazine that Casey used to stop and eat a packed lunch ("meatloaf sandwiches smothered in mayonnaise") during his day-long iron sessions.

Round and round it went, and eventually he hit his upper limit in bodyweight and strength. He felt in retrospect that his long training sessions contributed to the rash of injuries that eventually ended his career.

As an adult he became a police officer. Later, after retiring, he became a private investigator. Mae West once said, "The wildest men make the best pets." And so it is with 90% of the iron elite: "The wildest children make the best competitive athletes." Pat flirted with reform school before being introduced to weight training. He mimicked what he saw the gym rats at Redpath's gym perform: lots of exercises, lots of sets, marathon training sessions, training the same muscles three times a week. Those endurance weight training sessions beat the chubby Irish boy into shape. Pat thought nothing of spending all day in the gym, doing whatever suited his fancy, taking as long as he needed between sets to rest and fully recover.



No one trick pony: Pat becomes the first man to officially squat 800.

What better way for a young man to spend his free time than training? Casey bench pressed 420 pounds at age 18 in front of a gobsmacked Bill Pearl, who recalled, "Here I was, the hot dog of the physique world, and this kid could blow me away!" Bill Pearl purchased George's gym in 1962 and began mentoring Pat. Bill watched in ever-increasing amazement as Casey came into his prime. Pat could generate world record-level performance in just about any exercise he turned his full and undivided attention towards. At his peak he was capable of these lifts:

- Bench press with pause, 630
- Seated overhead front press, 405
- Dips, rock-bottom reps with 330 for 5s, 1RM 380
- Incline dumbbell press, 220s for sets of five
- Incline barbell press, 525
- Squat, 835 (he was first man to squat 800 officially)
- 3-lift total, 2,025 (first to shatter the 2,000 total mark)

Pat Casey

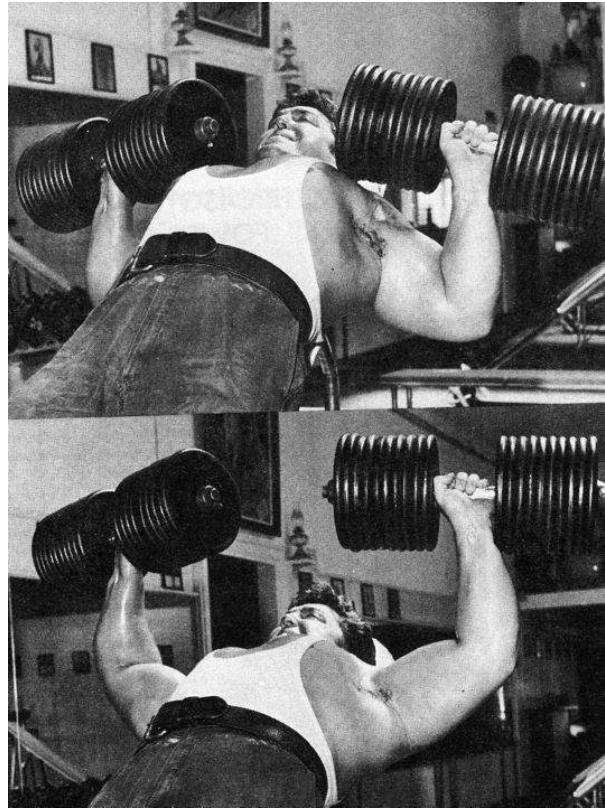
Casey was extremely charismatic: tall, muscular, strapping, an Irishman, an athlete-later-to-become a cop – he seemed right out of Central Casting. Above all else, and before all else, Pat Casey was first and foremost a bench press superstar – the first man to shatter the 600 pound barrier. Casey’s reign ran for about five years; many feel that no one ever benched better. But Pat was no One-Note Johnny: he was the first man to register an official 800 pound squat, and the first man to break the 2,000 pound three-lift total barrier.

Pat was an upper-body monster in just about any lift. He used to engage in marathon dip sessions. “In 1964 at a bodyweight of 300 pounds, I attached a 250-pound dumbbell to my waist and over a four-hour period performed 200 cumulative repetitions. I started with sets of five rep sets, then I did four rep sets, then threes, twos and finally I had to do single reps with the 250 pounds until I hit 200 cumulative reps.”

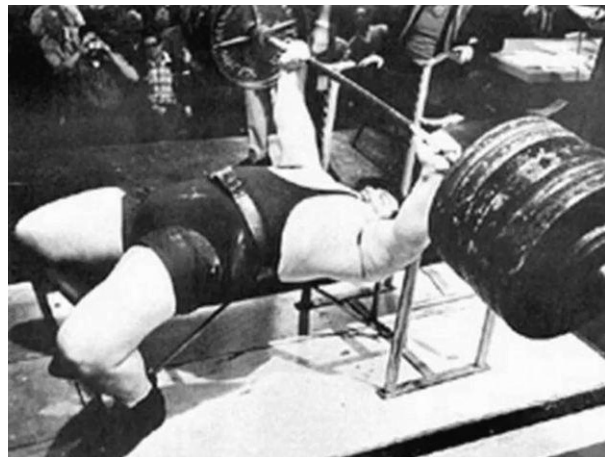
Mighty Casey’s main claim to fame lies in the gap between him and the rest of the world during his bench press peak. It is highly probable that no man was ever further ahead of the rest of the world than Casey was when he blasted up 615 and then 622 – we were just getting our mind wrapped around 550 pound bench presses and Casey suddenly blows through the 600 pound barrier by 4%! Stunning!

Pat was a huge fan of power-bodybuilder Marvin Eder. Marvin was an amazing combination of form and function. He had world record poundage-handling ability in the clean and press (355 weighing 193), the bench press (the first man under 200 pounds to bench press 500), and dips. Eder’s dip power was legend: bodyweight plus 435 pounds for a single rep. Pat copied Marvin’s “train long, train heavy, train often” philosophy.

Pat’s training approach could be summarized as high volume/high intensity/high frequency. For those with the time and situation, a straight dose of the Casey approach would undoubtedly blast you through whatever plateau you found yourself mired in. But be prepared: this is the most brutal iron regimen imaginable!



Pat incline benches a pair of 210 pound dumbbells for 5 paused reps. No half reps – dumbbells touch the chest at the bottom of each and every rep.



Mighty Casey is shown benching 615 after taking it out of the racks unassisted.

Pat Casey

Typical Pat Casey weekly workout template:

Monday

Bench Press Lockouts	3 single reps from 4 inches off chest; 3 singles from 7 inches off
Bench Press	405 x 3 for two sets
Dumbbell Incline	3 warm-up sets, then 120 x 10, 200s for 3 sets of 5
Chins	2-3 sets of 8-10
Curls	3 sets of 5

Tuesday

Squats	135 x 5, 220 x 3, 315 x 2, 405 x 2, 585 x 2, 650 x 1 x 5, 515 x 10
Leg Extension	3 sets of 20
Leg Curls	2 sets of 12
Rack Deadlifts	315 x 5, 405 x 2, 515 x 1, 565 x 6

Wednesday and Thursday: Rest

Friday

Bench Press	135 x 20, 225 x 10, 315 x 5, 405 x 5, 515 x 1, 570 x 5 x 1, 405 x 10, 315 x 20
Seated Military Press	135 x 10, 225 x 5, 315 x 3, 400 x 1, 315 x 5, 225 x 8
Dips	Bodyweight x 5 x 3, then 205 x 5 x 10

Saturday

Lockout Squats	Above parallel, squat down and stop on pins. Dead stop. No bounce at the bottom. 135 x 10, 225 x 5, 315 x 3, 405 x 2, 515 x 1. 585 x 1, 650 x 1, 750 x 1 x 5.
Full Squat	405 x 5 with a pause at the bottom
Leg Extension	3 x 20
Leg Curls	2 x 12
Neck Work	

Sunday: Rest

Here is a strength truism: increasing the overhead press will increase the bench press – push up the overhead press and push up the bench, but the converse is not true: improving the bench press will not improve the overhead press. In the November 1965 issue of *Strength & Health* magazine Pat Casey revealed the exact routine he used to increase his seated front press to 405 pounds – this at a time when a 225 seated front press was outstanding. Pat identified this routine as “a severe program. This is a routine for the advanced man.” The reason this is a horrific yet effective approach are numerous:

Pat Casey

1) this program combines high volume with high intensity and high frequency, 2) the secret is to not break the machine, but to push it as far and as hard as it will go, and 3) this type of training can be super-effective in short bursts. Pat recommended this shoulder and press specialization program for six weeks:

Monday

Wide-grip seated front barbell press: Warm-up thoroughly, then 10 sets of 5 across, then 1 set of 20
Cheating one arm lateral raises with a dumbbell: 5 sets of 5, then 1 set of 20
Cheating one arm front raises: 5 sets of 5, then 1 set of 20
Dips: 8 sets of 5, then 1 set of 20

Tuesday: off, no shoulder training

Wednesday

Handstand pushups against a wall: 10 sets of 5
One-arm lateral raise on incline bench: 5 sets of 8, then 1 set of 20
Rear lateral raises: 5 sets of 8, then 1 set of 20
Shoulder shrug with dumbbells, shrug high on each rep: 10 x 10, then 1 set of 20

Thursday: off, no shoulder training

Friday

Seated barbell press behind the neck: 10 sets of 5, then 1 set of 20
Shoulder shrug with dumbbells, shrug high on each rep: 5 sets of 10
One-arm overhead dumbbell press, brace with the other hand: 10 sets of 5, then 1 set of 20
Strict standing lateral raise with dumbbells, raise them high simultaneously: 6 sets of 10

This three day per week shoulder specialization program is one hell of a lot of very intense shoulder work. Anyone out there still man enough to try this crazed and insane training from a bygone era?

Pat recommends the “advanced man” use his approach for six weeks. That’s a long time for someone training all-out every M/W/F, and 3-4 weeks might be more realistic on the first go-round. Those that diligently adhere to the Casey precepts will grow and become stronger – but the price of admission is steep: body-shattering sessions done every other day, come hell or high water, and the dietary support to match. Whatever size and strength plateau that existed will be decimated by this approach – assuming the user can tolerate the pain!



Pat was capable of a seated front press with 405 – this when 405 was a big bench

Pat Casey

Caveat emptor: This is a man-breaking approach, you best be ready to eat big or you will not survive. You cannot use Casey's training approach and under-eat. The body needs excess calories in order to establish anabolism and prevent turning the lifter catabolic. Calories are needed in order to heal, recover and grow. And all the recovery and growth need occur before it is time for the next body-shattering session. Monday/Wednesday/Friday for six straight weeks you will be working long and hard.

Pat's savage training philosophy needs resurrecting. Pat Casey wanted to determine the outer limits of his body's capacities – how hard could he train, how often and how long he could train before his body broke. He felt a compelling duty to push past all previous limits insofar as combining poundage with sheer training volume. His approach deserves reexamination and resurrection. For intermediate level lifters ready to get a little crazy in order to bust on through to the next level, a short dose of pure Casey works every single time it is correctly implemented.

Marty Gallagher has been a national and world champion masters powerlifter and is widely considered one of the best writers in the iron game. Since 1978 he has written over 1000 articles published in a dozen publications. He has authored more than 100 articles for Muscle & Fitness magazine and produced 230 weekly [live online columns](#) for the Washington Post. Gallagher has coached some of the biggest names in powerlifting and witnessed some of the greatest strength feats of the last half century. If you like his style pick up a copy of his masterwork, [The Purposeful Primitive](#).

[Starting Strength](#) : [Resources](#) : [Articles](#) : [Forums](#) : [Discuss This Article](#)

Copyright 2014 The Aasgaard Company. All Rights Reserved
Photographs courtesy of the author.

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. Distribution and use of this material are governed by copyright law.