Jared Graves Winterview:

Hey Jared, the season 2009 has probably been your best ever. Which moment do you like to remember most?

World champs, easy haha. In front of the home crowd was amazing!

To start with we need a couple of quick shots from you:

- What's the circumferential of your calf?

Not sure, haha, I dont think they are that big, I just have really skinny ankles.

- How many gate starts did you do in the past season?

Not as many as people think, from South Africa for the first world cup, through to Maribor for round 5, the only gates I did were at the world cup races. I didn't train on a gate once. I would have trained atleast a couple days a week on the gate though, but I didnt have one in Europe at all, and there was no BMX tracks nearby either. I do lots in the offseason though, I feel my gate technique is pretty dialled, so I dont worry about it too much in the race season. Mostly other types of training.

- Who is, in your opinion, the most stylish rider at the World Cups?

Sam Blenkinsop for DH, Mitch Ropelato for 4X, the young guys like him are the future for 4X, we need more stylish riders.

- What's your favourite track?

Mont Sainte Anne and Andorra were my equal favourite this year, they were really good fun to ride. Also South Africa was good too, but just too long!

- Are you a dirt-jumper? Ever did a three-sixty?

At times I jump a lot, other times, not so much, I used to get into tricks a bit, I had 360s going a few years ago, until one day I ruined 2 wheels, and a seat, all within half an hour. I kind of gave up tricks after that. I think good racer style looks better than tricks.

How did you get into 4X-Racing? Or were you born a racer?

I grew up racing BMX, so 4X came pretty naturally to me. I was all about DH when I started racing world cups at 19, 4X was the new thing and I did it for fun, then as I got a bit older and stronger, I started getting good at it in about 2004-2005, thats when I started training for it, took up BMX again, did sprints/gym and all that, so

it became more serious from there, probably 2005 was the first year I was really serious about 4X.

In 4X it is all about the start. Can you describe the feeling in the gate? What happens until the first corner? How important is line choice?

I don't think the actual gate start is as important as people think, Qualifying well and getting lane choice is more important to me, especially with really short first straights. From there you can pick the fastest lane to the first turn. I always just try and ride as agressively as I can to turn 1, elbows wide, and be ready for anything, especially in finals, things get a bit crazy sometimes.

You are running Schwalbe tires, a German company. Which tire do you use for which purpose? What is more important: Traction and control or a low rolling resistance?

Both are very important, I mostly use a 2.25 Nobby Nic for the Front and 2.1 Racing Ralph on the rear, thats pretty much all I use, perfect combination of Rolling resistance and grip. I think if you change your tires all the time you never get totally used to them, so I never change much, unless it is really muddy, then I have the 2.1 Dirty Dan.

How would you describe your relationship to the media? How is it, that there are that little 4X-takes in the yearly Race-movies about the World Cup? And when we are already talking about it: Do you think Fourcross is more exciting that Dual Slalom? Or would you rather race Dual Slalom, if you had the choice?

I think 4X is growing, its still a new discipline, it's like any sport. When its new its popular because its different, but then the novelty wears off a bit, and it suffers, but then it slowly gains poularity again as it becomes accepted. I think that is where we are now, its getting better, and it will continue to grow. Its like when MTB racing as a sport suffered badly in the early 2000's It wasn't the new sport anymore, but now its growing rapidly as it has become more accepted and more mainstream, 4X only came along 7 years ago, but its showing signs of growth now as people are getting used to it.

It is easily the most exciting and media friendly format, with huge growth potential if its done right, and I think the tracks are getting better, and the riders are getting better and faster, so it's only a matter of time!

I love racing slalom, but I find it boring to watch, and so do people sitting at home watching on TV, theres no chance for contact, or head to head passing moves. so theres no real excitement value for the person watching at home. 4X got great coverage on Eurosport this

season, much better than DH, and I think that is showing that4X is something people want to see more of.

By now you know almost every rider on the World Cup tour, have raced against almost all of them: Who has the widest elbows in 4X? Who is hardest to overtake and to keep behind?

Widest elbows would have been Eric Carter, he was the guy I found almost impossible to pass, he just seemed to know where you were at all times if you were looking to pass, he could block you every time. Todays 4X I think any of the top guys are hard to pass and keep behind. Qualifying times were very tight at the world cups this year, so there's a lot of guys going a very similar speed, that makes it very hard to overtake!

Being one of the few riders competing both Downhill and 4X and being successful with it: Do you think that it is possible to rule both disciplines? Which Downhill-track do you like best? And where would you go for racing 4X?

No I don't think it's possible to rule both DH and 4X, you can be good at both, but the training is too different to be the best. Training for maximun acceleration and power in 4X is no good for DH when you are stuffed after 45 seconds, and you will never be 100% for 4X if your main focus in DH, and your training is all about being fast for 5 minutes. If you train equally to have good acceleration/power, and good endurance you can do well at both, but you will be far from your peak. My main focus is 4X and my DH suffered this year.

My favourite style of DH track is Mont Sainte Anne, flat out and open, I always love riding there, its more what Im used to from home. But I think the World Cup should be on more varied tracks, all we seem to race on now is roots and mud, My last DH world Cup podium in 2005 at Angel Fire in the US, was like Sainte Anne, but super rocky and dusty, and that is my absolute favourite to ride. Seeing a lot of the top 10 euro riders come over to the rocks and dust and struggle badly was cool. Thats what I grew up riding, not mud and roots, I think it's unfair that we ride on Euro style tracks for all major races. It's not a true test of the best overall rider if were not riding all the different types of terrain.

For 4X we need bigger jumps and rougher tracks. all the tracks are underbuilt. Its the biggest race series in the world, so we should be pushing the riders limits more, not to mention it would look much better for spectators, and gain outside interest. I think 4X has so much potential, but the riders havn't had a chance to show what they can do.

Last year you have reached everything possible. To which race are you

looking forward in 2010?
What do you think about only six instead of eight races?

All of them! I feel more motivated now to stay on top than i did to get on top. I feel I have many areas to improve on, and I will be doing all I can for the 2010 season. Defending my world championship is the #1 goal for next season though. I think 6 races is OK, doesn't worry me.

Many free time-racers tend to invest lots and lots into their bikes. How important is the material in 4X?

I think every rider is different, good equipment is important, but it's not the most important thing. Getting it setup right so you feel comfortable on it is far more important. Thats why I never really change my bike at all, because everytime to you change things you have to get used to it. Finding a good setup takes time, but once you have found it, stick to it! Although I think I am very lucky as Yeti has always had the best team co-sponsors for all our components, I can't remember the last part on a bike I was unhappy with.

Last but not least: Do you have a tip for all the racers out there to take home with? How do they get fast on the 4X-track? What matters in the end?

Being smooth, and getting every bit of speed out of the track. I think a big strength I have is that I am efficient on my bike, I don't waste any energy on unnecessary things. A big drift looks cool, but it's washing off speed. Ill throw down some drifts in practice, and a ton of drifts when im at home riding in the offseason, but never in a race.

We could also ask: What is it that Jared Graves has, which the others don't have?

A really good background of BMX and DH, perfect for 4X, and the knowledge of training to get the best out of myself. And a good mental attitude.