

## **Aidan Trimble Interview “The Evolution of a Modern Master” By Simon Oliver**

It has been my pleasure, in life to train with hundreds of great people and personalities, but only a few keep my interest constant in the martial arts, Aidan Trimble is one of these greats!

In this very honest interview, Aidan gives his own opinions about his already wide knowledge of karate. His career in karate spans over the past 34 years, and he has seen many changes. He has achieved success in every aspect of karate, from World Champion, successful author, highly demanded instructor and head of his own international association. He is one of the best communicators and figureheads the UK have ever produced to represent Karate.

Yet he remains a very down to earth guy, who always has time to work with, and encourage his students.

SBO: It's some time since we last had the chance to have a good natter, but I would still like to start with the old faithful..! What actually first motivated you into starting karate?

AT: This would have been back in 1972-73. At the time I was doing lots of other sports at school, athletics, gymnastics, cricket, football you name it. I was doing it and I was doing very well at all of them, but I got bored very quickly.

Then the kung fu boom hit Britain. Every picture house has a Kung Fu movie on. I used to think these movies were great, after watching quite a few of them and especially the Bruce Lee ones that came out I was hooked.

Clubs opened up everywhere and I suppose it was just by chance that I ended up with a guy who did Shotokan. He was just a Kyu grade who had trained with Asano Sensei and Kanazawa Sensei. We started in a little Scout hut and then he must have thought I had talent, because he took me to an instructor called Brian Collins.

Brian was a Dan grade and had been a student of Asano Sensei, he was very strong and he really did start to teach me. I learnt a great deal from him! I couldn't train at Asano Sensei's dojo because I wasn't old enough. You had to be eighteen at the time to train - quite a lot different from today. Eventually I was accepted to train at Asano Sensei's by Albert Hampson who was the Association secretary. I was still too young but big for my age and eventually was starting to hold my own with the seniors.

I had been training some time before joining Asano Sensei's dojo. I did nearly two years before taking a kyu grading. Once I joined the SKI (Shotokan Karate International) I trained with Asano every week. Before the juniors the seniors used to train, it would be packed solid with Dan grades and I used to watch them and I was desperate to be in that class .

SBO: Were you naturally talented?

AT: It has been said, but as any good instructor knows talent is not enough. I think I was very quick to pick things up and I would practice and practice until I got it right. I trained for six hours a day, six days a week for the 1983 World Championships; it takes hard work as well as talent.

SBO: Have you studied any other Martial Arts?

AT: It depends what you mean by study. I've trained with other styles. I have observed lots of martial arts and I have pinched things from them when I have thought they could be useful. I have never let pride get in the way of doing anything like that; as long as it works I have used it.

At the end of the day, I think that everybody does their own system giving the style a name is just a nice way to package it.

Style, I feel, is just a framework, and in the case of Shotokan a very good framework. But you have to build your own house upon that, your design, not someone else's.

Really I do "*Trimble-Ryu*" based on Shotokan and you do "*Oliver-Ryu*" and so on! Because your approach will be different to mine, although we both practice the same style! I think that the development of Bruce Lee's style "Jeet Kune Do" is interesting, in that he was a very talented martial artist who went through the classical training of Wing Chun, but found it (apparently in his words) restrictive. So he developed his own system, which wasn't supposed to be a system!

But since his death a lot of students, like most followers end up creating a structure to allow them to get across what they believe their instructor was trying to teach and in so doing end up giving it a label.

SBO: Asano Sensei was a huge influence on your karate, how do you feel you've evolved since you have parted from him?

AT: Well I've certainly evolved...! How that relates to leaving Asano Sensei, I don't really know. I have always looked outside for influences, even when I was with the SKI. I have always trained with other people. I have been told by people that it was not liked, within the SKI that I did this, I'm not sure if it was or not! Remember, I was with the SKI for 12 years, but I have had my own Association now for 20 years so of course I have changed in that time – and so has my karate.

For example, when I start to teach something I have to be more than 100% sure of what I'm teaching, and be able to justify it because I don't have an instructor to blame it on, you have to be more confident in what you are doing, because if I change something, hundreds or possibly thousands may change. So I have to be responsible.

SBO: How do you feel about the titles that are given to people, such as “master”, “martial arts genius” or such like?

AT: Nothing surprises me anymore. People insisting that their students call them master! People I’ve never heard of who claim to be 10<sup>th</sup> Dans. What I find most disturbing is that people fall for it; these people appear to do very well.

SBO: Which aspect of your karate takes dominance, the teaching or the training?

AT: They are of equal importance! And I enjoy both however on a practical level my teaching schedule is of importance because it pays my mortgage. My training schedule is important because if I don’t develop on a personal level it will show in my teaching.

Neglect training at your peril. I know it happened to me once through injury. You have to get used to just putting your gi on every day.

SBO: What are the points you stress most in your personal training?

AT: Variation, keeps it interesting, that’s why I personally like training at a gym as well as The Dojo because I like different types of training, but one thing I always do is basics. I actually enjoy basic karate technique even after this many years. I try to put that variation into my teaching, keep it interesting so people don’t realise how hard they are training!

The great thing about karate is its adaptability regardless of age, gender, ability, mental or physical disability. Your Karate should change with you. I spoke recently with someone who was asking about sport karate, or rather the emphasis on sport karate and I was saying that a number of people that were on the All Styles British Squad with me in the late seventies, early eighties, some top fighters you don’t hear of or see anymore. It makes you wonder if they had their priorities wrong or they set their personal goals too low! You may say that winning a World Championship title is a pretty high goal, but what happens when you have achieved it? If that was the case I would have stopped training at twenty-two!

I’m not joking when I say that my karate really started when my competition career finished or a big part of it, but don’t get me wrong that competition career helped me and the experience of getting out there and competing with people enabled me to develop another side to my karate.

SBO: It is 23 years since you won the SKI World Championships, what is the greatest landmark since then that you think you have achieved?

AT: It doesn’t seem that many years since that I must say, so much has happened in that time, writing the books, producing the videos/DVDs, producing so many champions of my own. Forming the FSK and seeing it develop and become so successful and of course most recently opening my Honbu Dojo in Nottingham.

SBO: You have been involved in many schemes that have been very unique in promoting karate in a very positive way to young people?

AT: It is hard work as you well know teaching children, but if you can put it across in a fun way and still get a child to do the work, get them over the first hurdle and find the children that are really serious about it, then you can shape a child into achieving their maximum potential, improving their level of concentration, independence and social skills etc. Both my children do karate and it has helped them a great deal.

SBO: You were involved in sports development at one time, how do you think karate fits in that world?

AT: The one thing I learned is that we may have a lot to learn from other sports, but they have got equally a lot to learn from us. There are not many sports that have a structured warm-up and cool-down, and very little stretch – a lot of them will recommend you do but very few will actually do it. We karateka have always done it, we may have done some bad stretching exercises and we may have done some bad strengthening exercises, but we do a lot more good in pre and post training preparation to prevent injury and create speed and agility than most sports.

Most experienced sport coaches now introduce ability assessment into their chosen sports. Karate, and in general all martial arts has always had periodical assessments, we call them gradings. When they are used properly grading can be a good aid to teaching.

SBO: I would imagine one of the major changes in your career was going from a very enclosed environment with the SKI to heading and running your own organisation, has this situation shown you a side of karate you wish you hadn't seen?

AT: The thing with karate is that our strengths are also our weaknesses. We are a people "business" and that means personalities and that leads to clashes and egos. I have learned that it is not your karate ability that will build a strong association, it's your people skills, and unfortunately our generation of influences just barged through and beat the crap out of us because that's what they were taught to do! It's just not productive. If that sounds like I have done everything right in my group that's not the case but as long as you learn from your mistakes.

SBO: In your own Association you have obviously a defined philosophy or 'Mission Statement' that you want your association to achieve?

AT: I have an idea or a vision of how I would like the group to develop. I would like it to maintain good traditional, Shotokan based karate with instructors that have good knowledge and are experienced teachers, and are continuing to train and study themselves. But they should be open-minded and not restricted by that tradition.

SBO: One thing that I have noticed, after several years of attending as a guest at a number of your association events, the atmosphere is fantastic and your members as well as training hard really enjoy getting together! I have also noticed that as a group you have promoted karate in some very unusual areas, areas that most karate groups have a fear to tread. For instance, one of your members Dirk Robertson, and his work with disabilities.

AT: Yes! Dirk and I have done a lot of work teaching people with disabilities. Dirk started that in the early 1980's, when he was a Social Worker, and he started teaching people in a care home because they wanted to do something a little bit different. It wasn't a conscious decision from Dirk; he was suddenly dropped in it. To his credit he adapted karate to people in wheelchairs in a way that worked.

I saw those sessions and at the time I couldn't quite get it, because I was suffering from those preconceived narrow ideas of what karate is or can be. If we look philosophically at karate we can say it's about, personal development, and some of us neglect to stress that some fights are not always physical. It made me think about the wider benefits of karate.

By teaching kata we found that people with cerebral palsy for example, were able to extend their range of movement and increase their ability to control their muscles. The kata is simplified to a large extent, modified around the individuals range, but still encouraging someone to face new body movement and breathing techniques. I think that if you had just tried to teach the exercise and not taught it from a karate class, some of these people would have got bored very quickly. It was the karate aspect of the training that kept them coming.

Both Dirk and I were invited by The Sasakawa Foundation to go to Japan, to visit disabled groups. They had been to see the work we had done in the UK and they felt that, it could be introduced into Japan. It was an interesting trip because we also met Mr. Sasakawa himself, who showed great interest in the work we were doing. We also met the head of FAJKO at that time, Mr Mano, at the FAJKO office's and spoke at length about Karate and our project for the disabled. I did ask him if he knew of anybody doing anything similar in Japan, he told me that not currently to his knowledge. He did say that the JKA , had done some work with people who had disabilities, but only people who had lost limbs and that was many years ago. That trip was a few years ago now so things may have changed since then.

SBO: Let's just go back to Japan, this was your third trip to Japan, how did it compare to the others?

AT: The trip with Dirk was very different. I was not there to train. My first trip to Japan was in 1983, for the World Championships and I didn't get a great deal of time to see

Japan. Then the time after that was when we all went, in 1991 that was an experience in itself.

There were 12 of us that went, and by the end due to one thing or another, eight of us saw the end of the trip. The purpose of that trip was to train on Yahara Sensei's Gasshuku (training camp), out on an island called Hachijo Jima where they once sent convicts – do you think they were trying to tell us something?!

The training was quite brutal at a time which wasn't unusual for us but I think it would have shocked a great deal of karateka who trained here in Europe. There were broken noses, jaws and black eyes, fortunately none of them were ours! As they say it is better to give than to receive! Don't get me wrong, it wasn't all from us, they were battering each other.

I remember at one stage standing, lining up to fight. I had heard that Yahara liked people to get 'stuck in' but I wasn't sure how heavy and then I watched Dave Hazard with his first opponent. Fair enough I thought that'll do for me. A few seconds later the guy was sliding down the wall!

SBO: Yes I remember Dave saying that you had Japanese slippers on, because every time he looked around, you had one on the end of your foot!

AT: It was a worthwhile trip but a lot of us had mixed feelings at the end of it, because we felt we hadn't learnt a great deal. We did oi-zuki for a week, and we basically beat each other up. On reflection, when I came back, I felt there was a positive side to the trip. The comradeship, everybody training and fighting together. It was good for me, because I don't really get too much of a chance to test myself in that way, it was great because I don't think any of the students had a clue who I was, so there was no holding back, it was good.

SBO: Are you saying that the kumite you experienced on the Gashuku was nearer real combat?

AT: No, there is a big difference between fighting in a dojo and fighting out in the street. But it was more how we used to train. If you do that now in the dojo, you end up with no students and you will probably end up with a serious injury or a serious law suit against you.

SBO: You seem to strike a happy balance between teaching karate as a sport and as a martial art?

AT: I like to think I've managed a good balance, I think that's because I have practiced each aspect with equal importance at various stages in my karate.

SBO: Who were you're the major influences in your karate, and who inspires you?

AT: I have been influenced by many people over the years. from my first instructor as mentioned earlier to Asano Sensei, Ticky Donavon and Dave Hazard as well as the many other Japanese and European Instructors. When you reach the stage that I have about 35 years training now I tend to be inspired by people outside of the martial arts and not just sport.

SBO: I remember the first time I introduced you to Dave Hazard I left the pair of you in a nightclub together talking shop. The pair of you got so absorbed in demonstrating on each other, that the remaining bouncers at the end of the night daren't interrupt you to ask you to go home!

Yes we did hit it off from day one and he has influenced my teaching. I have a great deal of respect for him. It was liberating training with Dave for the first time. I had been thinking about the way I did my karate and the way I taught it and the fact that I should be able to adapt it to a more close in and realistic application without losing the integrity of the basic technique, but I hesitated because I didn't feel I was senior enough to start playing around with it. But Dave Hazard was doing exactly what I had in mind. With Dave's background in Japan, knowledge in kata and his experience of using karate in a street situation gave it legitimacy. That must be twenty years ago now, we have done a great deal together since then.

SBO: The book you did with Dave, '*Fundamental Karate*' although elementary is a great book for beginners and advanced students alike. It has also had several translations I hear.

AT: Yes! That book has been very successful. It was published in 1993 and was very enjoyable to do. It's being revised and re-printed as we speak and makes a good companion to the DVD series.

SBO: What about the other books?

AT: The books that Vince Morris did with me produced a format that hadn't been done before. I did not want to just churn out another karate book. I think we achieved that! The first book Advanced Karate we did in 1987.

We did '*Karate for Kids*' which was done in a way that would related to children and parents with a question and answer format that worked very well as incidentally is also being re-printed. We did the major series of kata books, which we had to fight to get produced. Most publishers are reluctant to sign for such projects. That was going to concentrate on the bunkai.

I've never been totally happy with the books or Videos/DVD's because your karate changes and you hopefully improve your knowledge but you just have to except that that was the karate you were doing at that time. The response however that we get is fantastic from around the World. I receive letters from places like Papua New Guinea,

Australia USA and India. They get a copy of one of the books from whatever source, and it's their only exposure to karate, and they write very complimentary things on how the books have benefited them and inspired them to continue training. So maybe I shouldn't be so hard on myself!

SBO: I remember you finding one of your books on sale in Japan.

AT: Yes, that was strange. It was on sale in quite a few shops there too.

SBO: Your association has had some rather unusual opportunities to compete internationally?

AT: When I started the association one of my goals was to take a team away internationally. In 1989 I made a reconnaissance trip to Las Vegas. We received an invitation to attend Ozawa's competition in Vegas. Dirk, Vince and I went. What was unusual was that Dirk and I were sponsored to go by Penthouse magazine!

SBO: That was obviously for the centrefold you did?

AT: Yes I have still got the marks from where the staples went! The other sponsor was even more unusual – it was PRAVDA the Russian news agency. This was obviously long before 'Glasnost'. This all happened because Dirk was writing for various magazines at the time. He had set it up that he was going to cover a story on me, a former World Champion travelling to Las Vegas to compete.

It was in Penthouse but I never saw the story (honest). The PRAVDA deal was strange, they couldn't pay for the trip, but they would pay 'in kind'. Apparently this was standard practice at the time. If you did any work for U.S.S.R bodies you would get paid in commodities like car parts. We negotiated with the Russian Embassy to be paid in caviar and vodka!

This was all arranged, I had this vision of Dirk and myself reversing this truck up to the back of the Russian embassy in the dead of night and loading it with vodka and caviar. It never happened because the guy that Dirk was dealing with was one of several Russian diplomats who were expelled for spying in a tit for tat expulsion. So we never got our vodka. I can't remember if it was ever in PRAVDA if it was, it certainly would have been unique.

To get back to the trip, I competed and injured my knee at the time during a fight. I decided then because it was a good trip that I would take a team to the next one. We took twenty-two people on the next trip to Vegas. There were 1,500 competitors, and we came third in the team. I was really pleased with the result for a first outing.

I took a team to the JKA World Championships in Dubai. I competed in that competition myself after a two year layoff - I was dragged back. I had some good fights; I won all my team fights. We beat Palestine, our last team fight was against Syria and unfortunately we lost by one wazari. Syria went on to beat Japan and win the competition.

After that I took seniors to Ireland, California and Iran. Then we began working on the juniors and took them to Hungary, to the World Cup, South Africa and many more. We now have several world champions in our Junior Squad, two members on the Senior England All Styles Team.

SBO: You have had tremendous success as a competition fighter, and now you have a well established teaching profile, but you have also used karate in a very practical way, in the street as it were and that experience comes across in your teaching.

AT: Well it would be pretty strange if you tried to teach someone to swim when you've never been in the water.

SBO: Can you give me an example of when you had the necessity to use karate in the street?

AT: Well they are not really the incidents I talk about in a magazine article.

SBO: I understand but I think in the context of this interview in order to give the readers an understanding of how these techniques can be used in reality I'm sure you would be forgiven. I know there have been a few but I know of one instance for example with Kenny Johnson.

AT: That was some years ago. We were out in the city centre and a group of 'gentlemen' on a stag night objected to Kenny's colour and decided to have a go....which they regretted shortly afterwards!

SBO: What techniques did you use?

AT: Well there were about eight of them, Kenny laid the first one out with a mawashi empi, and as one of the others tried to kick me in the groin, I swept both his legs and stamped on him. As the next one came in I swept both his legs and stamped on him too. As I looked up, I saw the third one thinking about it, so I swept him and stamped on him just in case. All three were out cold.

I looked around to see a guy face up to Kenny in the worst karate stance I have ever seen in my life. Kenny promptly delivered a mawashi geri to his groin, which dropped him and ripped the guy's trousers in half. The remaining ran off.

It is very difficult, but some times you need that experience, because all the theory in the world means nothing until you have to fight for real. I know that sounds controversial, almost like recommending your students going out, fighting. I'm not saying that, but if you do have to fight and you survive it, you are going to certainly benefit from that experience without a doubt. You find out if you have the spirit or the 'bottle' to face an opponent. It is probably why so many karateka end up at some stage working on nightclub doors. I worked on the doors and it was an invaluable experience. I remember Terry O'Neill saying "A lot of people can fight but not a lot will!"

I think this sort of experience always benefits your teaching, because when I teach something now I always question its effectiveness. That doesn't mean that everything I do has to have a street application to it, you can go too far the other way there is more to karate than just fighting, but if I didn't think that what I'm teaching worked I would hang my gi up.

I had a comment made to me on a course recently abroad by an instructor, who said one of his students who had recently got his shodan had got into a brawl in a nightclub and not fared very well and that he was very disillusioned about his karate and is thinking about stopping his training. My response was, wrong attitude, he should learn from it. Was he too slow, did he not see it coming, was he drunk? It could be any number of reasons but he blames it on karate!

People have these preconceived ideas that it's going to be like the movies, but in reality it's blood and snot and the sound of bone on bone and someone ends up looking pretty degraded if they are lucky. In short it's not nice it's ugly! The one thing that I've learned is that when you are in the middle of it, you don't really care about how it looks or your opponent.

SBO: Do you think you owe karate anything?

AT: I don't think so and karate doesn't owe me anything. I probably have a clean sheet at the moment. I have had a lot from karate but I have also put a lot back and will continue to do so. I have had some great experiences, seen great places that I would not have seen if it hadn't been for karate. I have met some very special people.

SBO: You have also had quite a career as an actor how did that come about?

AT: I started in the mid-eighties, when I was asked to play an SS officer in a production that was filmed around Nottingham that starred Diane Cannon. I think it was called "Jane's War" they wanted somebody with fair hair who looked Germanic. This guy at a centre I was teaching asked me if I would do it. At the time it was very difficult to get roles if you didn't have an EQUITY card. They thought I was great for the role, but I didn't have a card, so it was no-go. I quite liked idea of the acting, so eventually I got a card. The next opportunity was to choreograph a fight for the British Film School, between two women. One of the women was Pamela Salem who had played Miss Money Penny in the Sean Connery come-back Bond movie, the other woman was a German actress. This was a real education, because so many unknown problems suddenly come into the open. Stupid things like you can't do that type of grab because this outfit has got large shoulder pads, or this woman had a wig so that hair grab is out.

This really interested me, and I thought yes this is for me! I did a lot of walk-on parts – you know, the heavy standing in the background, or I was a sportsman of one kind or another. I didn't do any karate until I did that instantly forgettable movie, "I bought a vampire motorcycle" it's now a cult movie, that's what they call films that don't make any money! I did a small Karate role, then I was despatched by the vampire motorcycle! I

met some interesting people on that film, Burt Kwok ( Kato) Neil Morrissey and the guy who played C3PO in the star wars films.

I realised that I didn't want to just carry on doing these background roles, so I made a firm decision to learn to act properly. I started to train with a lady called Claire Davidson who is a director and acting coach, who worked with RADA and had taught at the British Academy. She worked with Brian Cox the Shakespearian actor, Liam Neeson and Pierce Brosnan. She is very good. I used to travel down to London once a week to her.

That was great fun as Dirk Robertson was also interested in acting so we both went to her classes and even got Terry O'Neill there a few times. After this Dirk and I started to do some script writing.

One idea was taken up by the BBC, but they found it too violent, however they did like aspects of the script and so commissioned us to write two others for them.

SBO: So what speaking roles have you done?

AT: Emmerdale, The Bill, Heartbeat, Clocking Off and the last part I did was 'Between the Sheets' with Brenda Blethyn and Alun Armstrong.

SBO: Why do you think so many top martial artists get into acting?

AT: Martial Arts have always been a big part of the movies since the 1960's and then of course in the 70's with the Kung Fu boom and Bruce Lee, and it's still huge in the film business.

SBO: Do you think your karate training has helped you with your acting or vice versa?

Acting is similar to karate in that you are learning to do a natural thing, but you have to learn the technique to do it well, and while you are learning you are very wooden. Once you have achieved it you appear very natural. Karate is exactly the same, it is natural to fight, but you have got to break somebody down and they begin to look robotic at first. The end result is to make them fluid again. To answer your question karate has helped.

SBO: Didn't you get involved in the stunt business?

AT: Well sort of, I did all the qualifications for the stunt register some years ago, horse riding, gymnastics, swimming and obtaining a racing drivers licence. I found parallels in the way I was being taught to the way I teach karate. However, after doing all the qualifications, I found out I was too old! You have to be under thirty, although I was told that because of my level in Karate I would be accepted on appeal but I didn't bother because it was the acting I was interested in really.

During this period Dirk and I went to Hollywood. I had taken a team out to fight in California and while I was there we had several appointments to see people. One of the

agents we spoke to said “There is no way you will get into the Studios. No studio will see you without an agent!”

We got straight in and saw the main casting director for Warner Bros. Their opinion was they could get work for us, but we had to live there. That was not what I wanted to do.

However, it was great being there anyway. They showed us around, we saw work going on for ‘Jurassic Park.

I would rather do what I’m doing here. I like the thought of doing a good British action film. Like the films I’ve seen in the past, like ‘The Long Good Friday’.

SBO: Yes, there is a gritty reality that seems missing from a lot of American movies. which we seem to do well occasionally over here.

AT: Dirk and I met John Mackenzie who directed ‘The Long Good Friday’. We spoke at length with him. He films in Hollywood and has made some good movies over there.

SBO: What are your hopes for the future in karate, for you and your association?

AT: I would like the association to grow in numbers yet keep a good attitude, practicing ‘traditional karate’ with instructors that are approachable, so we may maintain the friendly enjoyable atmosphere we have. I think we are achieving this.

For me personally, I just simply want to be able to keep putting my gi on and improving myself and karate I find the more I learn, the more I realise how little I know!

This keeps my interest; I want challenges all the time. If I don’t have a goal, I will get lazy! In the past people would say to me “Why bother with that competition?” The answer was simple because it gave me a short term goal to keep me motivated. Why did I go to Japan in 1991, it wasn’t for the training when I got there. It was for the training before!

SBO: If I was to ask you to sum up in one line what should be the most important attribute to training, could you?

AT: I would say “You have got to just keep on doing it!” I have seen on the back of tracksuits the slogan ‘JUST DO IT!’ and that’s perfect! People always find excuses. If you just keep on putting your gi on, things will happen!

Be honest to yourself, and don’t change your karate to suit others, if you believe what you’re doing is right, then just do it! I think that was five lines...Ha! Ha!

SBO: Thanks Aidan.