



Racing Through the Dark: The Fall and Rise of David Millar

By David Millar

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The SUNDAY TIMES bestselling memoir from the Tour de France cyclist who lifts the lid on his drug use and return to sport. By his eighteenth birthday David Millar was living and racing in France, sleeping in rented rooms, tipped to be the next English-speaking Tour winner. A year later he'd realised the dream and signed a professional contract. He perhaps lived the high life a little too enthusiastically - he broke his heel in a fall from a roof after too much drink, and before long the pressure to succeed had tipped over into doping. Here, in a full and frank autobiography, David Millar recounts the story from the inside: he doped because 'cycling's drug culture was like white noise', and because of peer pressure. 'I doped for money and glory in order to guarantee the continuation of my status.' Five years on from his arrest, Millar is clean and reflective, and holds nothing back in this account of his dark years.

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Editorial Review

Review

Millar is never less than candid in a memoir that is part confessional, part catharsis. **THE SCOTSMAN** His description of that agonising 2010 mountain stage, during which he scoured the depths of his soul while falling helplessly behind the rest of the field, deserves to stand among the great first-person accounts of sporting experience. -- Richard Williams **THE GUARDIAN** His career almost destroyed by a doping scandal in 2004, the cycling champion faces his demons in this eloquent and revelatory memoir. Millar's gutsy slog to restore his reputation is inspirational. **THE SUNDAY TELEGRAPH** **SEVEN Magazine** This is the superbly narrated story of one man's evolution from talented ingenue to disillusioned doper and back again... one of the very best snapshots of professional cycling in the noughties. **OUTDOOR FITNESS** Highly articulate, Millar has written a courageously combative book that both exposes the conditions that create drug cheating and explains how his sport has to confront those conditions if it is to break from this most murky of pasts. -- Mark Perryman **PHILOSOPHY FOOTBALL** The thoughtful British doper-turned-campaigner delivers an eloquent, highly rated memoir about life in troubled peloton. -- Simon Usborne **THE INDEPENDENT**

About the Author

David Millar was born in Malta in 1977. He is a British road racing cyclist and the only British rider to have worn all Tour de France jerseys and one of four to have worn the yellow jersey. He is now a part-owner of the Garmin-Chipotle team and a key figure of the World Anti-doping Agency's athletes committee. Follow David Millar on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/millarmind>.

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Life is about making decisions, and my relationship with David Millar has informed some of the toughest and most critical decisions in my career. Looking back, his experience has also been pivotal in fueling my passionate belief in clean sport.

I first crossed paths with David in 2002 at the World Road Championships in Belgium. I was working as performance director to Team GB, and he was riding for the British team. It was clear from the outset that he was different from any other bike rider I'd met before. Hugely talented, ambitious, and extroverted, Dave was a thoroughbred.

He was intelligent and strong-willed, yet also very vulnerable. It is rare for me to mix personal with professional, but we got on immediately, and he is one of the few riders that I have also become close friends with.

Dave was already clearly frustrated with the “old school” thinking of the European scene. We talked about working together, developing new ways of thinking about racing and equipment, and taking those ideas into Europe. I knew that with the right environment he could go on to great things.

Yet in hindsight, I can look back and see that there were nagging worries. Dave was something of a wild child, living life to the full, lacking the kind of mentoring that he needed at the time. I knew he had doubts about the team that he was on, that he was under a lot of pressure, that some aspects of his lifestyle were

extreme, but I didn't know how far that extreme lifestyle had gone, or that there was another side to his life that he couldn't share.

I had just come back to Biarritz with him, after watching him race in the buildup to the Athens Olympics, when it all came tumbling down. I looked on in horror and disbelief as the French police arrested him, just as we settled down to dinner in one of his favorite restaurants in Biarritz. It was a shocking moment, something I never want to experience again. Only then did I begin to understand his secret life and how deeply ashamed he was of betraying his ideals and his family and friends.

Dave's arrest put me in a difficult situation. I was advised, in no uncertain terms, to leave as quickly as possible, to ensure that British Cycling was not tarnished by scandal. Ultimately though, I had nothing to hide and had done nothing wrong. I was warned that it could be damaging to my reputation, but I felt that I had a duty of care to Dave. I decided that the right thing to do was to stay.

He was in custody for seventy-two hours. The French police were brutal and very aggressive. I was interrogated for almost five hours, but they finally completely acknowledged that I had no involvement at all. I waited until Dave was released, exiting through the back door of the police station to avoid the media. Then I told him to tell me everything.

Over the next few days, as we talked openly about what he had done and what he had been through, the murky world of doping—something I had never encountered—became real. It opened my eyes as I learned how the culture of doping had poisoned his life. It was a steep learning curve for me, but his experience has given me valuable insight and helped me to further develop the strong ethical values that are now the foundation for Team GB and Team SKY. I have seen firsthand how doping can almost wreck an athlete's life—I am determined it will not happen to any athlete in my charge.

Dave and I came close to working together a couple of years ago, when Team SKY was being developed. The team would have benefited from his racing knowledge, from his performances, and from his experience as a captain on the road. In the end, however, the premise of Team SKY, emphatically founded on creating a team that exemplifies clean sport and that has a zero tolerance on employing anybody with any doping history, made it impossible for him to join.

I am convinced Dave has learned his lesson. Since his comeback, he's become a reformed character, a voluble contributor to the anti-doping debate through his work with Garmin-Slipstream, UK Sport, and WADA. More remarkably, his passion for cycling is undimmed, despite everything he went through. It's very clear to anybody who knows him that he will always love riding his bike. That alone probably tells you more about who he really is than any number of speeches.

Most importantly, Dave's story reveals what I have long believed—that, in the wrong environment, under the wrong influences, even people with the greatest integrity can make the wrong decisions. Although the culture of doping in sport is often depicted as black and white, it can be insidious and subtle: on the one hand, it exploits the vulnerable and pressurized athlete; on the other, it enables the cynical to clinically cheat. That's why the David Millar story is so valuable and so instructive to all those who care about ethics in sport.

David Brailsford, CBE

Performance Director,

British Cycling and Principal,

Team SKY

Manchester, May 2011|

My Early Years

Even though I was born in Malta—for those who need to know, on January 4, 1977—I have always thought of myself as a Scot.

My parents, Gordon and Avril, left the island when I was eleven months old and returned to Scotland. This was a homecoming, a return from abroad to our brethren. Yet because my father was in the Royal Air Force and subject to their postings, it wasn't really his choice where we ended up.

We lived in Forres. My earliest memories are of a housing estate, a school bus—with a metal bar across the top of the seat in front of me that I'd try to bite but couldn't, because of the bus bumping around—and of my grandma giving me chocolate eclairs.

The RAF housing estate was my playground. I could usually be found playing with my *Star Wars* figurines and space ships—a quiet little boy by all accounts, living in his own little world.

1977, Malta. Proof that I was born in the seventies under the Maltese sun. Gordon looks like a *Starsky & Hutch* extra, while Avril looks like she's come straight off the *Buck Rogers* set.

I've been told a story, by both Mum and Dad, about a birthday party they held for me at home. I disappeared early on and was found playing alone in my room, asking when everybody was going home. I remember being like that when I was young.

I liked drawing. In fact, I drew a lot. There was another toddler whom I was best friends with, but I can't remember his name now. My sister Frances—sometimes “Fran,” sometimes “France”; “Fran” to others, “France” to me—arrived a little less than a year after our return to Scotland, and she quickly became my new play partner.

Fran was a quick developer and walked and talked at a freakishly young age. When people learned that I, not Fran, was the older sibling, this confused them. I've never had a problem with it—Fran's propensity for talking, that is. I simply point out that I'm older than her anyway and claim seniority that way.

Dad was stationed at Kinloss, the RAF base not far from Forres. On occasions when he wasn't flying, he'd take me to the base and I'd play on the grass-covered aircraft hangars and run around after him among the aircraft. Even now, it's a vivid memory. Sometimes I'll pass a garage that will have that same smell of warm metal and diesel and I'll be back there, running among those big war machines, with my dad, in the grass-covered hangars. I wish more garages had that smell.

I was too young to understand his job, but I remember his leaving for the Falkland Islands. He just disappeared one day, and we didn't see him again for what seemed like forever. It's the only time I can remember my mum telling my sister and me to pray at night. There was never any news, and it must have been very hard for her.

My godfather, Major Mike Norman, was involved in the Falklands War, too. He and his wife, Thelma, were friends with my parents in Malta. Mike had given my mum a Royal Marine insignia to be flown above the

house when she went into labor. She still has the flag.

Mike was something of a war hero, and, years later, while I was living in Hong Kong, I learned what a significant part he had played in the conflict when I saw a BBC film called *An Ungentlemanly Act*. Mike had been the commanding officer of the Royal Marines unit on the Falklands when the Argentinians invaded.

When it became clear that the Argentines were mounting a full invasion, he was charged with defending the island by Rex Hunt, the island's governor. Although outnumbered, Mike led his men with courage and skill, but after hours of defending Governor's House he was ordered to surrender.

Two months later, when the Argentine army capitulated, he raised the British flag once again. Nonetheless, the war left its mark on him. Many years later, after Mike had retired, my mother spoke to Thelma on the phone and asked how he was.

"Oh, he's fine," she said. "He's out gardening. But you know, Avril, his knees never really recovered from that bloody yomp."

In many ways, growing up as a forces child made us different from other kids. Our dads, whether in the RAF, army, or navy, couldn't just switch off their value systems on coming home and taking off their uniforms. They worked in an environment with hundreds of years of history and standards. It made for a disciplined and regimented childhood.

My sister and I could be taken to any restaurant in the world, and there would be no risk of our behaving badly. Without being too hard on us, my father was a disciplinarian. But he was also incredibly funny and loving when he was relaxed and happy, which was all the funnier because it was impossible to imagine him ever being the same when he was in his uniform.

I remember one flier friend never stopped calling him "sir," even when they were both in civilian clothes.

"Why don't you just call him Gordon?" I asked him once.

"I can't, David," he replied, deadpan. "He's my commanding officer."

Years later, after my dad had left the forces and joined Cathay Pacific, I appreciated what a change it must have been for him going from being a young wing commander in the Royal Air Force to a middle-aged copilot in a commercial airline. It couldn't have been easy for him.

My dad was reckless at times. I remember seeing him, around the time that he was a squadron leader, standing in the dining room looking out of the window, staring at his white Lotus Elite. There was something broken about his expression—he told me that he'd crashed his car and that he felt sad.

I first learned to ride a bike in Scotland. But it was hardly the most auspicious start to my cycling career, as I rode into the back of a parked car on one of those first rides.

In fact, I was a little accident-prone. Playing tag at school, I managed to break my collarbone for the first time. It took my mum, bless her, three days to believe that I'd broken it. I'm not sure if that says more about me, or my mum.

My mum is one of the most intelligent people I know, able to maintain a challenging conversation on almost

any subject. She studied engineering at Glasgow University, based on her admiration for her adopted father, yet, forty years on, she is now on her fourth different career. She came from a loving yet unorthodox family, adopted as a baby by a couple already in their mid-forties. Today the only family she has is my sister and me, and her fabulous piano-playing neighbor Terry. Her background probably explains her absolute love for France and me, yet this collarbone incident also showed she was no pushover.

Just before we left Scotland, I did it again. One of my best friends had a hill in his back garden that in winter hardened to a stony mix of frost, ice, and snow. Naturally, we considered it our duty to ride down this. I must have taken it more seriously than him, because I was the one who ended up crumpled at the bottom of the hill, nursing a second broken collarbone.

There's a final memory of our time in Scotland—of leaving in 1984, and Fran and I, cocooned in the bucket seats of my dad's Lotus, singing along to Yazoo. Dad had a new posting. We were moving on again, heading south to our new house in Stone, Buckinghamshire.

It's hard to imagine Frances and me arriving in England as wee Scots, the two of us arguing away with our strong singsong accents. The years since, traveling and living in many different places, have left me with the most neutral of accents.

If anything, what I have now is an expat Brit accent that morphs itself spontaneously to mimic those around me. It's not something I'm proud of; I would much prefer to have held on to the Scottish accent that I had as a child, because I remain very proud of being a Scot.

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At times, I have to admit that, listening to my English accent while calling myself Scottish, I've felt like a fraud. But then I suppose our nomadic lifestyle made it important that we were good at "fitting in."

When I started school in Buckinghamshire, I would always play lunchtime football in Scottish national team kit. Looking back, I think losing my accent was a pivotal moment. Even so, I feel most at home when surrounded by Scots, and it was among Scots that I spent most of my time during my doping ban.

I didn't enjoy school that much, but out of the classroom, I had a blast, particularly after I discovered BMX and became the proud owner of a Raleigh Super Tuff Burner. Dad would take me along to the BMX race leagues in High Wycombe every other weekend. I was eight years old, and it was the perfect introduction to racing.

The BMX boom was at its height, and movies such as *ET* and *BMX Bandits* were big box office. I still haven't seen *ET*, even though, a few years later while on a family holiday in California, I was chosen out of a throng of children to ride the *ET* BMX against a blue screen at Universal Studios. I couldn't bring myself to tell them I hadn't actually seen the film.

I loved the rush of BMX racing. The start gate would come crashing down, and the ten riders in the field would hurtle with childish abandon toward the first ramps and left-hand banked turn, or "burn." There was very little skill involved. It was more dependent on a lot of youthful courage and blind luck.

I was still on my trusty Raleigh, competing against kids on special racing BMXs. This had never bothered me, until one day, when, after finishing in the top three and while pushing my Raleigh back up the hill for the next race, I heard the commentator remark on my less-than-special bike. I was upset to say the least.

Despite that, in my first season I finished fourth in the county for my age group. This entitled me to a number 4 handlebar plate for the next season, but I clearly remember thinking that fourth in the county wasn't really that good.

I don't know why I would have such high expectations or put such pressure on myself at such a young age. I was competing against boys who were clearly taking it much more seriously than I was. For my dad and me, it was simply a Sunday out together. He didn't allow himself to get mixed up in overcompetitive dad syndrome. Any pressure or desire I had to perform came from me and me alone.

1986, Stone primary school. Frances and I rocking the uniform. I get the impression there was a lot of giggling pre- and post-photograph.

But that number 4 plate was never used because my beloved Super Tuff Burner was stolen that winter, effectively ending my BMX career. I spent years looking in ditches and scouring bike racks searching for that bike, and it took me a very long time to accept that it was never coming back.

As well as BMX, I'd taken to roller-skating much of the time, usually at roller discos. I can't remember how often the roller discos were, but they were never regular enough for me. I was a roller-disco king—Thame Leisure Centre was my kingdom.

France, in true younger sibling fashion, had taken to copying everything I did, be it BMX or roller-skating. It was never long before France was, like me, fully equipped, tagging along. Most irritatingly, everybody still thought she was my older sister, which was not cool for an already quiet, shy, introspective boy. I'm ashamed to say that I did my best to make sure that skating was the last hobby of mine that Frances copied. At the time, I didn't see the love, only the burden of a little sister.

France was so confident, so able to talk to people. She would talk to anybody at any time on any subject. We—my parents and I—would hang back and send her forward to ask all sorts of things of all sorts of people. We didn't need local knowledge or a tour guide when we were on holiday, because we had our own little search engine on legs. Frances was our Google.

My mum and dad made a significant effort to improve us both. We were both given extra tuition outside of school, and I was learning to play the trombone and the piano. I was trombonist in the school jazz band, and now it amazes me that I pretended to enjoy it and persevered for so long.

But there were problems at home. It became impossible to ignore the troubles between my parents. At first, it had been subtle, but now there were things that I couldn't ignore. It became harder to pretend that the fights weren't happening. I suppose it had been going on for a long while, but children choose not to see such things.

Eventually, things reached a crisis point. I was woken up in the middle of the night, my tearful mum and dad sitting on my bed, telling me that they were splitting up, that it wasn't my fault and that I should look after my sister.

I don't think I cried. I certainly don't remember being tearful, but I remember being incredibly fucking angry. My childhood had come to an abrupt end. I was eleven.

The next morning, I walked to school as usual, through grass covered in morning dew, my feet leaving a trail behind me.

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