

SCREECHING TO A START

Skid Row Downunder

It's Friday night in Sydney and the bar at Springfield's rock and roll night club is all but obscured by a wall of leather jackets and long hair. But one head of blonde hair looks familiar, as confirmed by the red satin words stitched on the bottom of his black leather: Sebastian Bach from Skid Row is here! And there's Dave "the Snake" Sabo standing beside him, a baseball cap perched on his tangled mop, sucking on a beer and looking bleary eyed. Dudes! We could be in some bar in New Jersey but here they are, the latest additions to the international fraternity of million-plus selling American hard rock bands, hanging out and getting plastered just like everybody else.

Skid Row got the proverbial lucky break when New Jersey neighbours Bon Jovi invited them to open their US tour dates. But by the end of the stint punters were coming to see Skid Row in their own right, the *Skid Row* debut LP had gone platinum in the US and the band was taking time out to do their own mini-tour of Japan. All this is in the space of one whirlwind year.

"It didn't just happen because of a lucky break, ya' know." It's now Saturday afternoon and Dave Sabo is lying back on his unmade hotel bed, keeping one eye on a sports show while he talks (a little slurred after last night). "I've said countless times we sat in a garage and played every fucking night. Come from the day job and go right in that fucking garage and play any shithole, any toilet that would have us. Even before we were together, in other bands. So there is no such thing as an overnight success. I've never seen one, I've never heard of one. It's impossible."

Dave Sabo knew music was going to be his life the minute he picked up an electric guitar at the age of fifteen. He grew up in a house with four older brothers listening to anything from Hendrix and Procol Harum to Black Sabbath and the Jackson Five. By the time he was twenty he was working in a record store in New Jersey, bidding his time, writing his songs and playing with guys just so he could hear what his

songs sounded like, when one day Rachel Bolan walked in (Skid Row's nose-chain wearing bassist, co-founder and writer along with Dave).

"He has this really strong presence about him. He's got what is termed as *It*," explains Dave. "Certain people have *It* and it's not really noticeable but certain people have *It* and it's noticeable. When he used to come into the music store I wanted to get to know him and find out what he was about so we started talking and he was a great guy. I found out he was a bass player and he wrote songs and I said I'm a songwriter too. We decided to get together and start writing and it turned out really well because we found out that together we could write better. We just built things from there."

Guitarist Scotti Hill and drummer Rob Affuso joined up, people they'd known for a long time through clubs and friends. Finding a lead singer was the hardest part but worth the wait because twenty-one year old Sebastian Bach is a frontman from hard rock heaven. Astonishingly good-looking, bursting with rock n' roll attitude ("As soon as people start listening to authority and agreeing with authority they become authority and that's the opposite of what rock & roll is all about" is typical of his quotes) he can sing like anything — belting out a ballsy rocker like 'Big Guns' or warbling a ballad like 'I Remember You'.



Skid Row (L-R) Rob Affuso, Sebastian Bach, Dave Sabo, Rachel Bolan and Scotti Hill.

Friends witnessed 'Bas' singing at a rock photographer's wedding and notified Dave and co who flew him down from Toronto.

"He's just got that look that people would kill for," reflects Dave, "and that's not his greatest quality — his greatest quality is his talent and his looks are secondary to him and I respect the shit out of that because a lot of people blessed with the way he looks would use that as their tool and that's not the case with him."

These guys are so cool to one another. Male bonding or what! Their music, the lyrics, the name of the band all suggest they might be heavy dudes, snarling, tough, inarticulate. But no. Words like 'generic' crop up in Dave Sabo's conversation, books litter his hotel room (admittedly about Charles Manson) and half the dedications on their album sleeve are directed towards their parents. And Skid Row on tour are like a bunch of naughty schoolboys. Scotti wanders into the hotel lobby in baseball cap and long black shorts out of which poke pale matchstick legs. Sebastian saunters into the hotel restaurant in tiny cut off shorts and bare feet and is politely asked to leave by management. So baad. He pauses by the door and

looks up innocently from under his dark glasses: "At least my fans love me," he whimpers.

Are you having a good time on the road?

Dave's face lights up like a Christmas tree: "I have had the best fucking time of my life. It is the best! I can't think of anything else that I'd rather do or be with. 'Cos you hear a lot of bands say these guys are my family and it's not really the case but that's the case with us. When we're off the road we talk to each other every day, we hang out and go clubbing or whatever. This ain't a job. This is a twenty-four hour a day thing."

"I can't explain to anybody enough how much fun this is. We've been out on the road for sixteen months and we love it. You should have seen us on the plane — we're like 'We're back on the road again!' We were home for four weeks and that's cool because you get to see your buds and you go out partying but it sure is great to be back out."

What about these tales of you guys being so wild you're not allowed glasses backstage and all your fruit has to be peeled?

"Nothing is malicious. We just dig having a good time. We haven't grown up — we never will. You can't

grow up out here. If you do it takes all the fun out of it. We're like little teenagers because you can get away with so much shit out on the road. Basically you can do whatever you want, it's the sick thing, it's hilarious. That's why you've got grown ups around you to handle that end of it. 'You're our manager, you're our tour manager, you be the grown-ups because we're the kids'."

One minute Dave is chortling over their license to thrill, the next he's talking about how much he respects someone like Prince who is still "searching for the ladder to climb new heights" and how "there's always got to be something to reach for because if there's not what are you living for?"

So is it hard to handle such a rapid rise to fame and fortune?

"I'm still amazed that people want my autograph. I think I always will be. It's one of the ultimate compliments, a really cool thing. I've always felt that if one person bought the album that's a compliment, y'know. I can't think of anything that means more to me than that — that's pretty wild." Dave looks thoughtful, "As far as it being hard to handle, I'm still amazed at all the things that go along with it but I don't look at it as a given. Once you start to

believe your own bullshit you're finished. It can all stop tomorrow and when I'm ninety I can always look back and say I had my day in the sun and God bless me. As long as everyone keeps the same attitude that we're not God's gift, we're just five musicians who play in a band."

Who happen to have sold three million copies of their first album, played Moscow alongside the likes of Motley Crue and Bon Jovi in their first year of action and are already penning songs for a follow-up later this year. Perhaps the secret of their success is that they please themselves first.

Says Dave: "We made a pact with ourselves that we wouldn't be pushed into doing anything that we didn't want to do. We're not going to release a record because it's a prime marketing time or something stupid like that. No matter what happened with this album I would have been proud as a motherfucker because we really put our heart and soul into it. It's not to be selfish or anything but what we're doing is for us first. As long as we can look in the mirror and say we did our best."

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