



Photo: Empics

If you're looking for a champion to promote a cause, who better than a four times Olympic gold medal winner? **Matthew Pinsent** talks to Jo Moulds about his decision to stand up for recycling

Stand up for the reuse nation...

Sir Matthew Pinsent, four times Olympic gold medal champion for Britain, has put away his oars after 15 years in the British team and is following in the grand tradition of many former Olympians with his own sports column in *The Times*. He works with various charities, mostly sports-related, but also decided to champion one area that he feels comfortable with promoting, and that's the government's Waste and

Resources Action Programme's 2005 national Big Recycle campaign, which aims to get more people recycling more than ever before.

"When I'd finished with the Olympics, I was getting all sorts of offers," says Matthew. "Obviously, I considered everything and I have done a lot of work with various charities over the course of the year. I've done some work highlighting the benefits of volunteering - 2005 is Year of

the Volunteer. I help out with SpArt, which promotes sport, arts and recreation, I work with Sports London and I'm also an ambassador for London 2012."

All these activities have an obvious link with the world of sport and getting active. Recycling is different though. Why did Matthew pick out this one cause among so many others?

"It's close to my heart," he says simply. "Put it this way, in the UK at the moment, as households, we're recycling 17 per cent of our household rubbish. The government targets are 30 per cent by 2010. If you look at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs figures, they show that Greece, Ireland, the UK and Italy dispose of three-quarters or more of their municipal waste to landfill whereas Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden and Germany dispose of a quarter less of their municipal waste that way.

"We just don't have the holes in the ground available for that much longer. If you go on throwing away aluminium, plastic bottles, paper and glass into your everyday rubbish, it goes straight to landfill. I might be wrong but I haven't seen that many tin-can bushes growing from landfill sites, have you?"

Matt is 34 and married to Dee, a management consultant who he met seven years ago. They live in West Kensington, London, but also have a bolthole in Henley-on-Thames. His personal awareness of the

need to recycle started when he was on a training camp in Canada back in 1990 where they were given one bag for 'normal' rubbish and everything else produced over the next three to four weeks had to go for recycling.

"It really concentrated the mind," he says. "At the time in the UK, there was nothing like that. We just didn't think that way. It came as a shock and it did make me think. Ever since then, I've recycled as much as I can back in the UK and now it's getting much easier as the government is helping householders to recycle more, and more easily, all the time. People need to think about it like - let me think of a good example - like sunscreen. Ten or fifteen years ago, people didn't think about protecting themselves against the sun. Now, everybody uses sunscreen. It's just habit and recycling needs to become like that for everyone in the UK in the same way."

Matt says his biggest recyclable waste stream is paper. "With my column, I get through a lot of paper whilst I'm writing it. Dee's is magazines. Our house is full of glossy monthly women's magazines. If I had my way, they'd end up in the recycling bin before she's had a chance to read them. But I may get in trouble for saying that!"

Matthew is keen to stress that he is taking part in the WRAP the Big Recycle campaign specifically as a celebrity-led

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vehicle to get the general public recycling more. When you ask him about where the recycled items go, and whether businesses should concentrate more on recycling, he's typically focused. "That's not my role with WRAP. My role is to promote recycling amongst the general public – raising awareness. I am a member of the public as much as the next person and the government's campaign which has filtered down through to Hammersmith & Fulham and my house in Henley has got me recycling more. It's that simple. I wouldn't describe myself as a radical environmentalist. Recycling for me is the easiest and most obvious step along a road we should all be going. There are plenty of debates and counter-debates about so many other environmental issues – such as global warming and energy provision. I know that the climate is warming. I studied geography at university. What can I do? Recycling is something that everyone can do. It's down to laziness that people don't and that, to my mind, is wasteful."

Matthew thinks about the UK catching up with other countries environmentally in terms of culture and history. "We haven't traditionally had a culture of looking after our natural environment in this country. We're an urbanised nation and we've been using the land for centuries. Other countries have vast, unpopulated areas and places like Sweden, Canada and Denmark have always had a policy of looking after the 'untouched' environment. The UK just isn't like that. We've had to culturally shift to a position where we now think about saving resources and rethinking the way we do things. That's

why we're behind at the moment and, to be honest, against many other countries I think we'll always be behind.

"We have to get to the point where we're not just a 'one-use' nation," he continues. "I'm sure about what I believe in and I believe recycling is where we can have the most impact of change right now. It will get to the point where people buy a cup of coffee and think, 'Where's this coffee cup going when I throw it into the bin?' That's where we need to be heading."

And what about the famous rowing kit? There's a story doing the rounds that he recycles all his England kit. Matt laughs. "Yup, that's right. There's been plenty of my old rowing kit ending up in the clothes recycling bank in Tesco's in Henley over the years. It's gone to the recycling bank and I hope someone else gets some use out of it. Who knows where it will end up? I hope it's gone to a good home."

And has Matt influenced anyone else personally with his recycling habits? "My wife, I suppose, but I don't think she'll thank me for saying that."

You get the feeling that Matt believes that people should only come to decisions of their own accord. They should think things through, and be methodical about making choices. When you're interviewing him, he fixes you with an astute look as if he's assessing the pros and cons of any given thought before he answers.

If you need a recycling champion for the UK, you may as well go for a four times' gold medal winner. He's thought things through, he's come to a decision, he says what he's going to do and then he does it. If only recycling could be that simple. Ah, but nowadays, it almost always is.