South Carolina strength champion continues setting, breaking PRs

Military Hall of Famer is also a recognized power athlete at 67-years-old



Smith [center] is said to be stronger on bench-press than 99.9-percent of all male lifters in his age category, worldwide, according to the Cambridge University developed global strength level calculator.



Despite age and stroke deficits, Smith recorded a 315 lbs. bench press, July 17. Statistically, fewer than 0.001-percent of all 67-year-old males are capable of bench pressing 315.

COLUMBIA, SC, UNITED STATES, September 8, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Formerly deployed U.S. Marine Infantry leader, former SWAT team officer and New York Times bestselling editor W. Thomas Smith Jr. continues to set and break gym strength records despite his age, 67, and having suffered a serious stroke requiring hospitalization in May 2024.

In an article published September 1 [https://whosonthemove.com/columbia-south-carolina-recognized-as-hub-of-strength-and-power-sports/] and touting Columbia, South Carolina, as a hub of strength and powersports (powerlifting, Olympic weightlifting, etc.), several top South Carolina athletes were referenced including Smith who was singled out as being stronger than 99.9-percent of all male lifters in his age category in the world according to the global strength level calculator [https://strengthlevel.com/]. Developed at the University of Cambridge (UK) in 2007, the strength-level calculator analyzes the participants' measured strength against literally tens-of-millions of powerlifters and strength athletes, worldwide. The calculations are further based on the number of repetitions of a given weight as well as the

participating athlete's gender, age, and bodyweight. It ranks performance percentile standards using the beginner, novice, intermediate, advanced and elite thresholds.

Despite Smith's age and stroke deficits, he recorded a 315 lbs. bench press as recently as July 17, verified by One Life Fitness' (1LF) general manager Brandon Mohtassem and he achieved several lesser-weight personal records (PRs) – 305 lbs. on bench-press for two reps and 295 on bench-press for three reps – spotted and verified by former Penn State cornerback A.J. Wallace, today a 1LF trainer.



W. Thomas Smith Jr. [pictured far left last row] was one of 60 South Carolina strongmen named "bench press champions" in RCSD's 250 bench-press challenge.

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According to the Sept. 1 article, Smith has "rebounded [from the stroke] with impressive gym gains including multiple reps of 225 lbs., 235 lbs., 245 lbs., and 275 lbs. all on bench."

On Sept. 2, Smith set a documented age-specific state-record 833 lbs. on the leg-press sled at all 1LF facilities in South Carolina. That 833 PR broke Smith's previous leg-press record of 828 lbs. In recent weeks, Smith also hit elite numbers on incline bench (225 for six repetitions) and an unofficial 60 pushups – all elite category numbers for his age, 67, according to the global strength-level calculator.

Smith has also recently logged record numbers for his age on static heavy holds (literally unracking a weight-loaded barbell and locking it out above his head on the bench press for 8-10 seconds before re-racking it): Smith's most recent static hold PR, set Sept. 7, was 425 lbs. for eight seconds.

"Tom is a lion among men," said 10th-degree black belt Bruce Brutschy, a karate hall of famer and fitness instructor. "He's a beast in the gym, and the fact that he is stronger on bench than 99.9-percent of all other men his age on earth is proof."

Brutschy adds "Tom is absolutely killing it and showing us all what's possible for seniors… even younger guys."

World-champion martial artist Keith Vitali, a Hollywood martial-arts movie star (who fought

Jackie Chan) and who was the #1-ranked U.S. karate champion for three consecutive years, says Smith's perseverance is what defines him in the gym. "Tom is an excellent example of someone who – despite major health challenges [stroke] at a later age – has not been deterred from achieving even greater strength training achievements," Vitali said.

Vitali's younger brother, retired U.S. Marine Col. Steve Vitali, a veteran combat commander of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, says: "Tom's strength records continue to climb. It's quite frankly astounding. But then a Marine leader and strength athlete like Tom is the kind of man who will fight his way through hellfire and brick walls to achieve what lesser men only dream of."

In early July, Smith was named one of the Richland County Sheriff's Department's (RCSD) bench press champions when he along with 60 other S.C. strongmen and a few others out-of-state benched 250 lbs. for reps commemorating America's 250th birthday this year. Smith recorded eight repetitions of 250 lbs. on the bench press.

Since then – and since his 315 bench-press PR of July 17 and later 305X2 and 295X3 – Smith has successfully benched 235 lbs. for 16 reps.

In addition to his recent notoriety as an amateur strength athlete in South Carolina, Smith is an inductee in the S.C. Military Veterans Hall of Fame (Class of 2025), a war correspondent, an international recognized military analyst, an RCSD special deputy, and a 2019 recipient of the Order of the Palmetto, South Carolina's highest award.

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