

STUNTS & COORDINATORS

First of all, professional stunt performers are not daredevils. Motion picture stuntmen and stuntwomen are very much like professional athletes. They've trained and worked very hard just to get into the business. They make their living performing physical action in front of the camera. If a stuntperson gets hurt in a shot, it means they're not going to work for a while – and that means they're not going to earn any money for a while. Basic economics and self-preservation mean the Evel Knevel approach to stunt work in films and TV is totally out of the question.

And there's no reason to be reckless. Film is a business of illusion. We create the illusion that a woman has fallen from a bridge or that a man has been set on fire. But when the Director says, "Cut!" everyone gets up; dusts themselves off and gets ready for the next shot.

WHAT IS A STUNT

Physical action requiring an actor to fight, fall, jump, run and, in general, perform in an athletic manner and/or in hazardous situations may require the services of a stunt player to double the actor. Often, even professional filmmakers don't appreciate what is and what is not a stunt. If there's any question, check with a stunt coordinator. Have them read the script and discuss the action with them.

Many common activities, which may be simple tasks for someone familiar with the tool, toy, appliance or device, can be dangerous to someone unfamiliar with its proper and safe operation. Some examples are skateboards, manual transmissions, scooters and motorcycles.

Inexperienced actors (and some desperate ones – afraid of not getting the part) will often assure Directors that they are capable of performing their own stunts. They're not. Stunts, safely performed, require training, experience and natural ability. And there's another thing – you want the physical action to look "real". There's nothing that destroys the illusion faster than lame, awkward and clumsy physical action.

Professional stunt players are actors and members of the Screen Actor's Guild. They are covered by the provisions of the Basic Agreement. Many stunt players are fully capable of delivering dialogue on-camera. Smart Directors and Producers cast stuntpersons whenever possible and avoid the cost and hassle of doubling.

WHAT IS A STUNT COORDINATOR

A Stunt Coordinator is a stunt player who assumes the responsibility for supervising all the stunt work and all stunt players in a picture. In addition to hiring the stunt performers and arranging for any necessary equipment, the coordinator works with the cinematographer to work out the best possible camera angles for each gag to achieve the most effective visual impact. He also has the responsibility for keeping all members of the crew, the camera operator, and the stuntpeople safe during the filming of stuntwork.

The Stunt Coordinator is sometimes employed months before a picture starts shooting to help the writers and director work on the action in the story. Then the Coordinator breaks down the script and develops a stunt budget. Once a budget is accepted by the Producer, the Coordinator is expected to stay within it.

On smaller shows, the Stunt Coordinators may perform many of the stunts themselves.

WORKING WITH THE STUNT COORDINATOR

The performances of all stunts or hazards is preceded by a safety meeting on the site of the event with all people concerned. This meeting includes a “walk-thru” or “dry-run” with the stunt coordinator and/or special effects crew and all of the persons involved in the event. An understanding of the intended action, possible deviations, and authority to abort should be made clear.

All stunts and special effects should be reviewed by all participants prior to execution to help ensure that they are performed in the safest manner possible. The safety meeting should be documented on the Production Report.

LMU STUNT ROSTER

These stunt coordinators have worked on a number of student productions. They are qualified, reliable and reputable. To our knowledge, they do not charge for their coordinating services. If they are not able to help you ask them for a referral to someone else.

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Raleigh Wilson
805 581 6206
www.stuntgrunts.com

OTHER SOURCES FOR STUNT COORDINATORS

Stuntmen's Association of Motion Pictures

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Stunts Unlimited

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