

So you want to be a Stunt Performer?

The professional stunt industry is a highly competitive field in the film and television world. It is a tightly knit community of martial artists, gymnasts, dancers, circus performers, motocross racers, race car drivers, skateboarders, elite athletes and the list goes on. It is also extremely difficult to break into.

As a potential stunt performer, you should be bringing a solid skill set to the table.

Unfortunately, frequent gym visits, yoga, running, weightlifting and the like simply aren't enough and don't constitute as 'special skills'. There is the occasional 'natural athlete' who succeeds but, for the most part, stunt performers come to the job with some unique skill set under their belts, to set them apart from others.

Most stunt work requires fighting and falling down so, in terms of training, that is the best place to start. Fight training in boxing, kick boxing and martial arts are a great foundation, paired with reactionary movements. Parkour, circus training and obstacle course gyms are other possible training locations to start to dial in the dynamics of falling and motion. There are many other courses or sports that will help you along your path to becoming a stunt performer, adding to your skill sets; rock climbing, gymnastics, dirt biking, trampoline, motor cycle license and your SCUBA ticket are just some examples. Taking courses in acting, firearms handling and work with all kinds of weapons — there are literally unlimited things you can do to develop your career. The more diverse and wide range of skills you have to offer, the better; as it makes you a more valuable asset.

A good question to ask yourself is, "What is the skill set that you are bringing to the table?" All too often the answer is "I don't really do anything specific but I'm crazy! I'll do anything!"

Translation: "I'm unqualified, irrational and willing to take risks". Great!..... **No**, not great! A stunt performer's job is to maximize the safety and minimize the risk in an action performance through knowledge, training, expertise and experience. Stunt performers are team players who work together and depend on each other to stay safe. Would you want to trust your safety to someone who proudly self-identifies as "crazy"?

There's another kind of would-be stunt performer; the adrenaline junkie, the thrill seeker who lives for excitement. These people are barking up the wrong tree and should be encouraged to pursue something more directly related to their personal adrenaline needs. For those folks, an "adrenaline high" is the end goal. But getting "high" isn't the same thing as performing well or getting the job done safely. For stunt performers, an increased adrenaline level is simply another factor to be reckoned with because, if not correctly managed, it can actually impede judgment. A stunt performer's end goal is a good, safe 'performance' that reads well on film. The idea is that the audience goes home excited, being thoroughly entertained and the stunt performers get to go home.

Having read the above, if you still feel that you would like to get into stunts, ask yourself a couple of questions:

- Do I have a high pain threshold or, more importantly, a high 'discomfort' threshold?
- Do I scare or panic easily?
- Am I someone who operates under disclaimers (i.e. I don't like cold, heights, falling down, working nights, etc.)?
- Am I someone who listens intently to and can follow instruction?
- Do I have good spatial awareness?
- Am I looking for fame and attention (consider stunts as Special OPs; you're in and you're out, as discreetly as possible).

So, where do you go from here.....

It's important to document your expertise in a resume or cover letter; mentioning any special skills especially if they apply to stunts..... It's not necessary to go the route of a professional headshot. A simple current selfie and body shot to show your build is exactly what a coordinator is looking for. If you have clips to highlight your skill set, that can be a bonus.

Now, it's time to get your documents to the right people; that is the Stunt Coordinators. In the stunt world we do not use agents nor do we pay a commission to anyone for the work that we do. To help with connecting, it never hurts to become a Background Performer. This has multi-faceted benefits; you can learn how a film set works and you may have the opportunity to

introduce yourself first hand to the stunt coordinator when he or she is present. Plan your introduction wisely, keeping in mind that they are very busy when on set.

Whenever you have an opportunity, ask stunt performers about their job, their background and their recommendations on how to proceed with your own career. If you ask five different stunt performers how they got into the industry, don't be surprised to get five different answers (they are not messing with you); everyone has a different "how-I-got-my-first-stunt-credit" story. Keep in mind, the stunt industry is very competitive so you may be met with some resistance. If you are passionate about this as a career, do not let that dissuade you. Commitment, determination and hard work will help move you forward in this business. Regardless, it often takes many, many years to build a solid, 'full-time 'career as a stunt performer. It helps to have regular employment that allows you the flexibility to pursue your stunt ambitions.

The simple truth is that the stunt industry is a difficult, demanding and highly competitive business that is challenging both physically and mentally; patience and persistence will be necessary. If you truly feel you have the skills and mentality it takes...go for it and don't give up. The stunt realm is a tough one to crack, but it's a very rewarding career, once you've kicked in the front door...so-to-speak!