

STUNT COMMUNITY ELECTS NEW COMMITTEE

by Michael Scherer

Stunt people are cut from a very specific cloth. If you mix that with strong egos, life threatening challenges and the ability to make large sums of money, you will inevitably have friction in the group.



There is something new yet old in place for the Montreal stunt community; a Stunt Committee. These have existed in the past in different incarnations and for different reasons. Each came and went. For those of

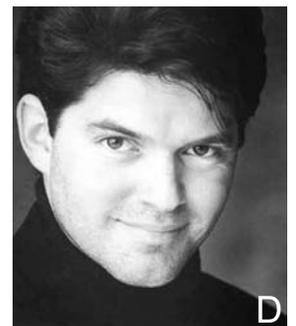
you reading this who are not stunt performers or are relatively new to it, suffice it to say that the history of the stunt community in Montreal has been fractured and more alliances have been formed and dissolved than marriages in a long running soap opera. Sadly, this is common knowledge in the film community. That is not to say that these committees never accomplished anything. In fact some good came from them. But in the end dissent always caused them to fade.

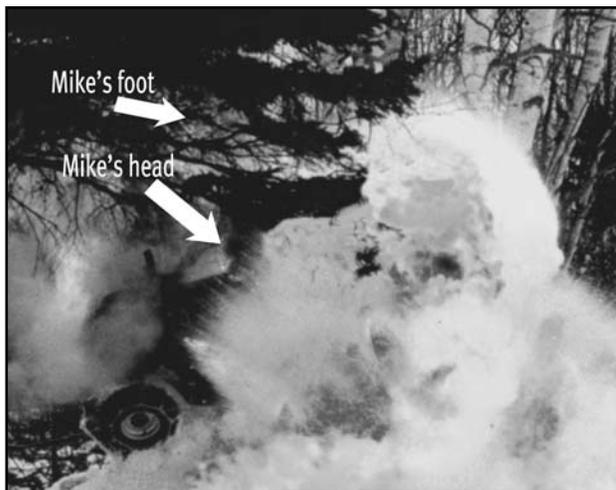
Infighting in our community can result in many problems, the least of which is that the right person for the job does not always get said job. Another result of this situation is that when a problem arises that concerns the whole group, we can't seem to pull together to solve it and in the end we all suffer. The word gets out to the producers down south that the stunt community in this town is a minor player and doesn't get along.

I have it on good authority that, along with most local crew people, some Producers and Production managers are aware of the infighting in our community and don't want to deal with the fallout. They worry they may not get the best people for the job. Their solution is sometimes to bring in a coordinator from elsewhere in Canada, whom they see as being objective. Pretty sad to think that they would pay all that extra expense just to avoid what they see as a problem within our small community.

There have been times when there was peace amongst the stunt clans but it was always a tenuous one. So once again someone came to the conclusion that things were spinning out of control and a reborn stunt committee was needed. It was initially brought up by a veteran member, quietly testing the waters, until word got out. The community reacted strongly to an appointed committee and felt unrepresented. So it was decided a vote was needed.

A. Stephane Lefebvre, Michael Scherer and Dave Mckeown; B. Participants at Stunt Community meeting; C. Michael Scherer and Dave Mckeown; D. Marc Desourdy
Photographs B. and C. courtesy of Marcello Bezina.





Michael Scherer, blasted upside-down on a motorcycle, in *If Looks Could Kill* (1991). Don't worry. Mike's body parts remain attached.

All this begs the question, "What now and how do we keep history from repeating itself?". Well times have changed along with the community. I can remember when there was so much work we could all be employed and never run into each other, no problem. The jobs are now few and far between and our little group seems more focused on the future and is now asking the right questions. And as a result, we presently have a vehicle in place to voice our concerns and have the committee take those concerns to a higher level if required.

established ranks. But the process needs to be monitored so it's not abused. The committee will also work with other committees in other cities on national issues. It will also ensure that local performers get a fair shake when it comes to import productions. We will also be coming up with a format where a performer can voice a complaint without fear of retribution. And last but not least, non stunt performers and ACTRA can query the stunt committee as to whether something constitutes a stunt performance.

To the veterans I say this. Don't hinder new talent, instead encourage the newcomers. Give them the benefit of your experience as it will reflect well on our community as a whole. It just looks better when there is solidarity on set and the best people for the job are out there representing us well.

Its time to show them what we're made of and this new stunt committee is a great start. Let's keep up the momentum.

But a problem arose. Who should vote? Who were the stunt people in town based on the established criteria? The solution was a condensed vote amongst the stunt coordinators to get something in place and form a base from which to work. A list was formed over several weeks, then a meeting was called and all on the list were invited. Having a quorum, a vote was cast at this meeting, and voila, we have a new stunt committee. It comprises Dave Mckeown, Marc Desourdy and myself. I found the results surprising in the sense that I expected one or more newer people to be involved as our community now has many new people. I was encouraged in the sense that perhaps the new generation of stunt people felt that the veterans still had something to offer in terms of experience. I would also like to mention that Tyler Hall, who did a great deal of work on the list, was voted as alternate in case of a conflict involving a committee member.

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What is the mandate of this new committee? First of all, it is a tool, not a club. It is there to fix problems, not start them. To begin with, it will work with ACTRA to advise on the permit process. In our profession permits should be given out when a specific category of stunt or skill is involved or someone has a unique look in terms of doubling or characterization. A stunt permit should be a last resort but it is a necessary process because sometimes the ability or look required is not available within



Stephane Lefebvre testing equipment



Mike Scherer, flipping a car on *The Assignment* (1997)



Dave Mckeown in the police car, leading the pack of stunt performers, on *The Sum of All Fears* (2002)



Stephane Lefebvre, flipping a car on *The Last Exit* (2006)