

Stuntwomen Risk Necks for the Pay and the Adrenalin

From United Press International

The fugitives, wanted for robbery and murder in six states, sped down the street in their hot car with police in pursuit and slammed into a construction crane that turned the car into scrap metal.

The driver and two passengers calmly undid their seat belts and wormed their way out of the wreckage unscathed. Their job for the day was complete.

Car demolition, high falls—which involve jumping off buildings onto air mattresses—and immolations are among the riskiest stunts these women perform for movies and television shows.

For their expertise, they are paid a base rate of \$431 a day, with an additional charge determined by the amount of risk involved.

Lynn Salvatori was the driver in the car crash, a scene in an upcoming episode of "The Flash" series; her passengers were stuntwomen Mary Albee and Debby Lynn Ross.

Salvatori, a stuntwoman since 1984, laughed and said her human cargo prayed when she drove into the crane at 25 m.p.h. Her favorite stunt isn't crashing, though; it's being set on fire while wearing flame-retardant clothing.

"I love fire. It is my favorite stunt because it is the most spectacular. It's dramatic," she said.

All three downplayed the danger.

"Stunt people just need that Adrenalin rush. . . . I don't think it's courageous or anything, but there are some stunts that take a lot of guts," Salvatori said.

Albee said: "We do this for a paycheck. . . . It's fun, and we go to a lot of places." She says she relishes the freedom of not being tied to a steady job.

She said the stunts she performs can get hair-raising sometimes, but fear "is how you stay alive."

The work schedule is often grueling. Stunt people may be on the set from 4 p.m. until 5 a.m.

The stuntwomen said natural physical coordination is a requirement, which must be backed up with extensive stunt training before looking for work. Generally, stunt people train each other, with the more experienced lending a hand to newcomers, they said.

Stunt work is competitive, particularly because there isn't as much work for women as for men, officials say.

Roydon Clark, a veteran stuntman and coordinator, said stunt people are well-trained: "We're not daredevils; this is a job. I don't need macho stunt people working for me. It doesn't lead to longevity; it leads to unemployment."