

# Hollywood Bulldogs ITVX Press Pack



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### 1.Documentary Outline

Hollywood Bulldogs is the new feature-length documentary from the makers of Elstree 1976 and Anyone Can Play Guitar. Once again, director Jon Spira is taking a sideways glance at pop culture and pulling back the curtain to reveal another community with a story to tell. This time: Stunt performers. Narrated by British legend Ray Winstone, this film tells the story of a very special group of grizzled old geezers who, between the 1960s and 2000s, not only changed the face of British stunt work but also dominated the Hollywood blockbusters of their age.

Anyone who loves movies will have enjoyed the iconic adrenaline-fuelled moments these guys created but very few will have seen their faces. Packed with behind-the-scenes footage and spectacular stunts from classic and little-seen movies, the Hollywood Bulldogs take us on a journey from silent cinema right up to modern day in their own gruff and rye style - with more than a few choice tales of chaos, tragedy and hilarity along the way.

Like Spira's previous films, Hollywood Bulldogs plays to a wide audience demographic - there's plenty of high-octane footage and fun but the film also allows the interviewees to be reflective and ruminative and discuss issues of a more serious and meaningful nature. This documentary is a crowd-pleaser with depth and substance.

## **2.Crew biographies**

**DIRECTOR/EDITOR:** JON SPIRA has made three feature length documentaries - ANYONE CAN PLAY GUITAR (named by the NME as 'one of the top music films you must see'), ELSTREE 1976 ('sweet, quietly funny, fascinating and contemplative' - Richard Roeper, Chicago Sun-Times) and, now, HOLLYWOOD BULLDOGS. Prior to this, he was the British Film Institute's in-house documentary maker/interviewer and went on to run their video production team. Jon has freelanced for blu-ray labels such as Arrow, BFI and Eureka! - creating video essays for releases including An American Werewolf in London, Silent Running, A Trip to the Moon and Der Golem. Jon has written three books on film - Videosyncratic, The Forgotten Film Club and, most recently The Long-Lost Autobiography of Georges Melies.

**PRODUCER:** HANK STARRS First feature with Jon was ANYONE CAN PLAY GUITAR. Their subsequent collaboration ELSTREE 1976 premiered at the London Film Festival in 2015, has been released on all platforms in over 25 countries around the world and is currently screening on US Netflix and Sky Movies UK. Hank Co-Produced BEING FRANK: The Chris Sievey Story, which premiered at SXSW in 2018, screened at BFI/LFF 2018 and was released in 2019 by Altitude Films. Feature length drama TRICK OR TREAT, featuring Francis Barber & Kris Marshall was released in 2019, along with the feature Doc, CLEANIN' UP THE TOWN: Remembering Ghostbusters. Hank produced Astrid Goldsmith's stop-motion animated short RED ROVER which was long listed for a 2021 Oscar nomination.

**CINEMATOGRAPHER:** SIMON VICKERY has had a long career in British TV, shooting everything from Jack Dee's Lead Balloon through to Outlander. He has a truly cinematic sensibility and the interviews for this film have been beautifully shot.

**GRAPHIC DESIGNER:** NOLEN STRALS created our jaw-dropping title sequence and branding. He has a long history of designing striking covers for magazines such as The New York Times, Spin, Time and ESPN as well as book covers for Random House and Grand Central.

**COMPOSER:** JAMIE HYATT'S score for Elstree 1976 was regularly noted for its high quality by critics and his work on Hollywood Bulldogs is every bit as nuanced and enjoyable. Jamie is a veteran of cult bands The Daisies and The Family Machine and currently leads the band Bedd.

### **3.Rocky Taylor/ stuntman interview**

#### **How did you get into the stunt business?**

My father was an actor and a stuntman. He would often play the villain, with fight scenes that he performed himself. After I left school I was a Judo black belt and it turned out Cliff Richard needed to learn Judo for the film *The Young Ones*. The stunt coordinator Peter Diamond knew my dad, knew that I did judo and asked if I'd go down to Elstree Studios to teach Cliff a couple of throws. I was around 17 or 18 years old, working as a despatch driver, so I drove down on my motorbike to Elstree and ended up teaching Cliff the throws for a scene in a nightclub. I got some mats down, showed him what to do, and Peter Diamond said 'We need a young man to do the fight scene with him, would you be interested?' I told him 'Yeah, I'll have a go' so I was there for four weeks, got a nice few quid and thought 'This is handy'.

#### **Did your father give you any help or advice?**

When I next got a job on the TV series *Sir Francis Drake* I had to do some sword work and Dad showed me some moves for that. That's how I ended up on a boat with about ten other people doing fight scenes with swords, then I had to fall off the side of the boat into the water - except it wasn't water, it was boxes, and they put the water in afterwards. I then went on to double for Patrick Macnee on *The Avengers* - the driving and fight scenes and everything - for four or five years. It just grew from there.

#### **Do you have a favourite stunt that you've performed?**

I did the film *Monte Carlo or Bust!*, doubling for Dudley Moore and Terry-Thomas. I drove a car that had to crash through an ice brick wall, turn left and go down the Cresta Run in St Moritz, Switzerland. It was such a horrendous drive, a mile and a half or two miles down, and when I finished it the director Ken Annakin said to me: "That's the most exciting stunt I've ever shot. Go away with your lads, have a bottle of champagne and come back tomorrow." Again I got a nice few quid for it and it was very exciting. As I say in my book *Jump Rocky Jump*, whenever people ask me what's the best and most dangerous stunt I've ever done that's the one that pops into my head. All the rest have their own dangers, of course, but coming down the Cresta Run was definitely the most dangerous for me.

#### **You've worked on many Bond films. Who's your favourite 007?**

That's an awkward question to answer because they were all lovely. I doubled for Sean Connery on one of them or two as well as for Pierce Brosnan and Roger Moore, and I mostly came in to do stuff like car stunts or falling over settees and the like. I've done around ten Bond films in my lifetime. Roger Moore was one of the loveliest men I ever met. I knew him for working on *The Saint* and I remember walking down the corridor with Roger's double Les Crawford at Pinewood Studios, where *The Saint* was shooting. Roger popped his head round the corner at the end of the corridor and went 'Rocky, Les, come here!' We ran down, wondering if something was wrong, and he whispered in our ears: 'You're now looking at James Bond! I've just signed the contract with Cubby Broccoli.' We both went 'Yeah, that's fantastic!'

#### **Are there any other actors you've especially enjoyed working with?**

I doubled for Michael Elphick on *Boon*, driving motorbikes, having fight scenes, car crashes and stuff. He was lovely. And Dennis Waterman was wonderful to work with on *Minder*. It was sad when he died because he was so young.

**Have you ever said no to a stunt?**

Well, I'm not a 'high fall' man. If they want someone to fall over 150 or 200ft, that's not my game. I'm more of a floor man and I don't like doing falls that are that high. I'll leave that to the experts. You've got to control your body on the way down. It's not just about jumping off and landing on boxes. You've got to land flat on your back otherwise you might break your neck.

**You famously broke your back and pelvis during the filming of Death Wish 3. How long was the recovery process?**

That was one of the worst moments in my life. I had to jump through flames from a burning building and I hit the ground and the boxes at the same time. I remember lying in bed in hospital, with tubes coming out of every orifice, burnt and in pain. The director Michael Winner came in to visit me and when I said to him I hoped to get back to work the doctor told me 'It's going to take a bit of time, Mr Taylor'. Eventually I did get back to work, thank God, but only after about two years.

**At age 78, you've been hailed as Britain's oldest stuntman. Do you think you'd ever retire?**

I'm only the oldest because everybody else around me has died. All the stunt people I knew have all gone. I'm the only one left out of that group. I was the youngest and now I'm the oldest, because now there are a load of young stuntmen aged around 25 or 30. Retirement? You don't retire. The film game retires you - i.e. if the phone doesn't ring then you're retiring. Well, my phone is twinkling and I'm still working a bit. I've just finished the new Mission: Impossible film, where I drove a train that crashes. People ask me what Tom Cruise is like and I must say he's one of the nicest people I've ever met in my working life. Roger Moore was right up there and now Tom Cruise has taken over. He's so nice to talk to, with none of that 'I'm a big star' stuff. He's a lovely man and I hold him in very high regard.

**The documentary will be streamed on ITVX. Are you excited about it reaching a wide audience?**

Of course I am. I think people will find it interesting. In the early days you were told not to say anything about what you did. If you told people you were doubling for an actor you got told off. Nowadays stunt performers have more of a high profile and that's great. I get asked for autographs when I'm walking down the high street, which is really nice.

**4.Greg Powell/ stuntman interview****How did you get into the stunt business?**

My father and my uncle were stuntmen and as a kid I'd go to the sets with them. One of the first ones I remember going along to was From Russia With Love when I was eight or nine years old and also a TV programme called It's a Square World with Michael Bentine. When later on I started doing stunts myself, most of the time it was with horses and riding because there's a horse-riding background in my family. I rode a lot as a kid, so a lot of my work when I first went into the business was with horses. My first job was You Can't Win 'Em All with Tony Curtis and Charles Bronson, then after that I did Blind Terror with Mia Farrow and The Mackintosh Man with Paul Newman.

**What have been your favourite jobs over the years?**

They've all got their good bits but I always go back to *The Wild Geese*. That was back in the late 1970s and it was like all films should be made. We were all staying on location in a resort all together - actors, stunt people, crew, everyone. There were no monitors and the director Andrew V. McLaglen used to stand on the set, next to the camera. It was proper old-school filmmaking and the actors would sit on the set in their chairs when they weren't in a scene, reading the papers and chatting. They didn't disappear into their Winnebagos for 45 minutes' rest in between shots. It was the good old days. I also loved working on the *Pink Panther* series and Bond movies. The first Bond film I worked on was *The Spy Who Loved Me*, in the scene where the guys on top of a submarine get shot. I was one of the three guys who fell off the sub on the 007 stage.

**Are there any actors you've especially enjoyed working with?**

Roger Moore was fantastic, as was Gary Oldman, who I worked with on *The Hitman's Bodyguard* and *Lost in Space*. Going back to the old days, there was Richard Burton and I've worked with Tom Cruise quite a lot. The first one I did with him was *Far and Away*, followed by *Interview with the Vampire*, the first *Mission: Impossible* and *Valkyrie*. Tom's great. I've always gotten along with him and he's always treated me with the utmost respect.

**What's the trickiest stunt you've ever done? And have you ever said no to a stunt?**

The trickiest was when I turned over an articulated lorry in the Dutch film *Flodder*. Prior to that I'd mainly done horse falls but this involved a big truck, smashing through caravans on a campsite, so it had to be perfectly timed. As for saying no to a stunt, personally I've never had to do that. What would make me say no? [Laughs] If I knew I couldn't do it.

**Have you sustained any injuries?**

Plenty! I've injured my ankles, arms, shoulders, knees - in fact I've now got two new knees through wear and tear and bangs, as well as a replacement bit of shoulder. The first knee operation kept me out of action for quite a few months. It's interesting to see the likes of the musical *Victor/Victoria* on your resume alongside *Indiana Jones* and Bond movies... There were quite a few of us on that one. I doubled for James Garner in fight scenes. Viewers don't always realise when films contain stunts but then part of the job is to be sort of invisible. You don't want to take anything away from the actors. [Laughs] Well, you can't take it away from Tom Cruise because he does the stunts himself. But with other actors who don't want to do them - which is fair enough - you don't want to steal the limelight from them. That's probably why they don't want to give us Oscars or BAFTAs, though, and that's annoying.

**You mainly work now as a stunt coordinator. What does that entail and do you still perform stunts yourself?**

It's about seeing the script and trying to come up with new ideas, which isn't easy because most of it has all been done these days. Then it's about developing that idea. And occasionally I'll do a stunt myself if it's driving, riding or something like that. I don't throw myself as much anymore. I'm 69 and do I want to do it really - sitting on an emergency ward waiting to get my finger fixed? The last stunt I did was when I crashed a van a couple of years back, just after the pandemic, on a TV show.

**Do you think stuntmen have been given their due in Hollywood history?**

I don't think so, no. As I say, the stunt coordinators should be acknowledged at awards ceremonies like the BAFTAs and the Oscars. Personally I don't think that stunt individuals should get awards because what you'll find is that some daredevils will end up doing ridiculous stuff for nothing to get that Oscar. We don't do it for nothing. We have to get up tomorrow morning, do another stunt, then another stunt. I'd give out awards for Best Stunts, with the award going to the co-ordinator. Everyone else gets awards now, even casting directors, so why not us? Visual effects teams get awards but without some of the stunt guys they wouldn't have anything to work with. Stunt people do a hell of a lot on films and shows, looking after not just the actors but also the crew. Recognition for that is long overdue and Hollywood Bulldogs helps address that. To be honest with you, I think they could do another one because there are even more stories to tell.

**The documentary will be streamed on ITVX. Are you excited about it reaching a wide audience?**

I am, yes. It's nice for people to go 'I saw you in that documentary on telly last night and it was cool'. It's nice for stunt performers to get that acknowledgment. At the end of the day they spit blood for their work. It's also good to see British stuntmen getting that recognition. Of course filmmaking has changed but in films like the Harry Potter franchise every one of those guys flying through the air was a stunt person who was then enhanced through CGI.

**5. Jim Dowdall/ stuntman interview****How did you get into the stunt business?**

I started out working in the circus, then I became a motorcycle mechanic and I worked for a car hire company, washing cars and doing all sorts of menial tasks. After that I got a job with a movie armourer company as an apprentice. The first film I worked on as an armourer was *The Dirty Dozen* followed by *Where Eagles Dare*. I worked on various other movies, by which time I'd met a lot of the stunt guys and thought 'This is the life for me' because I was a gymnast and it seemed the right thing to do. My first stunt was on a BBC show where I doubled for Kenneth More, who was playing King George V. I had to come down a flight of stairs in a Victorian wheelchair and go across a dancefloor. It was quite dodgy because those Victorian wheelchairs have two wheels at the back and a tiny little wheel at the front, and if you've got a bend in the stairs they don't want to steer at all. After that I worked on other BBC shows and doubled for Pike [Ian Lavender] on *Dad's Army*. It went on from there. I did various small movies, then I managed to crack it and get a part on *The Eagles Has Landed* as one of the paratroopers - getting blown up and shot. [Laughs] I even shot myself in the film. You see me as a German paratrooper firing at a jeep, which goes into a pond, then it's me in an American uniform driving the jeep off the jetty.

**What have been your favourite stunt jobs since then?**

I've jumped cars over buses and off the top of transporters. I've driven cars that were on fire into the sea, fallen out of burning buildings, crashed motorcycles... There's no particular favourite because each one has its own problems and challenges. Sometimes what you think are going to be the easy jobs turn out to be nauseatingly frightening or difficult. For example, I once had to fall backwards into a box which was built like a coffin. If I'd gone to one side or the other it would have smashed my shoulder blade or my elbow, or if I'd stretched out a bit the top of the box would have taken the top of my head off like an egg.

**Have you ever said no to a stunt?**

Yes I have. There was a TV film with Peter O'Toole called Rogue Male featuring a stunt that saw his character fire an arrow with a bit of cotton on it through a window, attaching a rope to it and swinging between two towers at a castle in Wales. They wouldn't let me go up there and have a look at it, and I realised it would mean hitting a wall at massive speed unless they took certain safety precautions. The guy who agreed to do the stunt broke I've forgotten how many ribs and his collarbone, he fractured his skull and never worked again.

**What injuries have you sustained over the years?**

I impacted three vertebrae on Superman III. I've had an arrow through my leg when I did a film in Denmark and it was funny going to the hospital because they said 'We haven't seen this for about 300 years'. I've fractured my skull, broken my nose two or three times, I nearly cut my finger off and had to have it sewn back on... [Laughs] Otherwise it's been OK!

**Are there any actors you've especially enjoyed working with?**

I used to double for Harrison Ford quite a lot and I got on really well with him. That was always good fun. And most of the actors I've worked with have been fantastic, like Johnny Depp and Brad Pitt, although others - mentioning no names - were quite the opposite. There can be a tendency for them to think they can walk on water and that's awful because the whole thing is about teamwork.

**How has the stunt business changed since you started out?**

With digital effects now they can do loads of tricks in post-production that you didn't have the option to do before. But although at one point we thought digital was going to kill us stone dead, actually in some ways it's gone the other way because people have gone back wanting to see things done in-camera. I've done nine Bond movies and we'd be there for weeks rehearsing the big fight scenes, the explosions and such. It's not so much like that anymore because there's lots of digital stuff in there but the public knows when it's digital and when it's real. You look back at films like Freebie and the Bean in the 1970s or more recently Ronin in 1998 and there's fantastic stuff in them, all of which was done in-camera. We did some good stuff in the Bond films as well - crazy stuff with cars and what-have-you that was done for real. Then you go back as far as Buster Keaton, who had nothing except his own physicality. He was extraordinary and there are a couple of stunts he did where people to this day have no idea how he did them.

**Do you think stuntmen have been given their due in Hollywood history?**

No I don't. I think it's disgraceful that both the British and American academies, both of which I'm a member, have completely ignored the requests we've made for some sort of recognition. It seems every year they add a new category but not for stunts. There are guys and girls out there risking life and limb and displaying some extraordinary skills, doing phenomenal things, and they get no recognition from BAFTA or the Oscars.

**The documentary will be streamed on ITVX. Are you excited about it reaching a wide audience?**

It's really good to think the general public are interested in what we've done and what we do. I'm glad that it's reaching a large audience, which again might help in the fight for recognition for stunt performers. [Laughs] Maybe it will also prompt people to ring me up and give me

more work but I'm quite old now and I'm enjoying doing the few jobs I do here and there, rather than sitting on a film set for six days a week in freezing cold or boiling hot temperatures. Been there, done that!

## **6. Jon Spira/ director interview**

### **What can viewers expect from Hollywood Bulldogs?**

If you enjoy movies like the Star Wars, Indiana Jones and James Bond films, the stories behind the action are even more incredible than what you see on screen. You see these absolutely crazy stunts in the context of how they were performed rather than how you saw them in the movies themselves. As exciting as, say, the stunts in the Bond franchise are to watch, when you find out who the guys were, who did them, how they did them and how they got into the job in the first place it's even crazier. Viewers can expect some great stories, some really big characters and of course some great action.

### **What inspired you to make it?**

I met and interviewed the stuntman Vic Armstrong for a different project I was working on about the stunt work of Buster Keaton. You look at a lot of the stunts in early silent cinema and wonder 'How did they do it?' The answer is 'They just did it'. It was really dangerous what they were doing and a lot of the stunt guys who came afterwards really look up to them. I thought Vic was a fascinating guy, so it was always in the back of my mind to do a documentary like this. Also, I tend to make films about communities of people, like the community of Star Wars extras, and this was a community that seemed fascinating. It was like 'Let's find out the story of where all these guys came from' and the story was even more incredible than I could have expected. Before the generation of guys who are in our film, the people performing stunts were just extras. They'd be on set and someone would say 'Will you fall down a flight of stairs for five quid?' or 'I'll give you an extra tenner if you'll do a bar fight'. These guys, who came up in the 1960s and 1970s, redefined what stunt work was and what a stunt performer could be and they all came from very varied backgrounds. The big joke, as they always say, is that they fell into it.

### **Do you think stuntmen have sometimes been overlooked in film and TV history?**

Completely. There was a reason for that back in the 1940s, the 1950s and the 1960s. Stunt performers were never publicised because the studios wanted you to think it was the stars doing it themselves. They didn't want to destroy the mystique. But by the 1970s people knew enough about cinema to know that these guys existed, yet they still didn't get the credit they deserved. The scandalous thing now is that there are still no Oscar or BAFTA categories for stunts. I would never want to denigrate anyone else's work but when you think that there are Oscars for, say, sound editing the fact stunt performers are overlooked seems crazy to me. They are often what make people go see the films, after they've seen the trailers.

### **Where there things you were surprised or intrigued to learn about them from conducting the interviews?**

As well as having all the fun stuff and all the crazy stories, I was surprised by how open and emotional they were - such as hearing Rocky Taylor talking about working with Michael Winner and getting badly injured through negligence on a film set. That's the stuff that really interested me, when they got through the fun, wacky stories and really opened up about what it means to put your life on the line. Vic says that for you to be able to physically perform a stunt there has to be something almost chemical in your brain that allows you to do it. As he says, no



normal person when driving a car could knowingly steer it into a wall and no normal person could get to the edge of a building and decide to jump off. The thing that connects these stunt guys is that they all have that something which inhibits the fear or the reality of putting themselves in danger in that way. It's a very calculated danger, of course, but to be able to do that is a huge thing.

**How has stunt work changed since their heyday?**

They are the guys who kind of made it into a profession, in terms of safety and accreditation. I think what's changed now is that the people who go into stunt work are incredibly fit. They are gymnasts and athletes, and I think they usually specialise in one area - so you tend to get people who are just drivers or do motorbike stunts or falls. You look at some of the guys in our film and they were not physically fit in the same way. They were big guys and they were drinkers. And they would do everything. Back in the day a stunt performer would do pretty much anything you asked them to do, whereas now I think you bring in the right person for the job. What they would say is that the character has gone out of it. Those days of hard-drinking, hard-living and playing jokes on each other have disappeared and now it's completely professional.

**You've made several documentaries about the film business. What first got you**

hooked on cinema? My dad was a cinephile so I grew up watching movies and being obsessed with them. He put a Super 8 camera in my hand by the time I was about six years old. I've always made films but it's funny how I fell into this niche. After my first movie I got a job at the British Film Institute as their in-house documentarian and because I have a wide film knowledge it was kind of natural for me to specialise in the subject. It's amazing that I get to combine my passion with my day job.

**What have been your own 'Wow!' moments in terms of on-screen feats of daring?**

I still think the greatest stunt of all time is at the beginning of *The Spy Who Loved Me* when James Bond skis off a cliff, they drop the music out and you've got, like, 20 seconds of the stunt guy just falling off the cliff, then the parachute opens and you see the Union Jack. It's everything a stunt should be; it's unexpected and dangerous, and there's this great flair and showmanship to it.

**Hollywood Bulldogs will be streamed on ITVX. Are you excited about it reaching a wide audience?**

I'm so excited. I've been making films for the past 15 years or so and they've always played to really small audiences. They're usually independent films so they don't get a lot of backing when they're released. I think *Hollywood Bulldogs* is something that people will really enjoy because it's such a fun film that, as I say, offers a great insight into what these guys have achieved.