

# The Stunt Locker

News from the stunt community

## A GLOSSARY OF STUNT TERMINOLOGY



by Michael Scherer

I am going to take a break from my normally cynical prose to enlighten the masses. I am sure many of you have been on set and overheard stunt performers regaling each other with tales of incredible skill and bravery and have often wondered what language it is they are actually speaking. So I will now give a brief breakdown of some stunt terms you may have overheard on set. It should also go without saying “kids, don’t try this at home...”

### Fire

**The Full Body Burn.** This is where the performer does his impression of a bonfire. This requires multiple layers of protection and can go up to 30 seconds without an external air source. It can go much longer with a remote air supply and also usually includes 2 or 3 safety people.

A Partial Burn can be an arm or lower body or even just the head. Gluing Up is where the safety people apply a slow and even burning substance to the performer.

Last but not least we have Fire Gel or Stunt Gel. This is a secret and very expensive concoction that stunt performers’ use as a heat barrier and protective layer to prolong exposure to flame and is applied both to under layers and exposed skin. BBQ Sauce is not an accepted term and is frowned upon by the community as a whole.

### Cars

Here we have the basic 90, 180 and 360 degree maneuvers and sometimes all points in between. These refer to degrees of rotation of the vehicle. A 90 can either come to a stop or be thrown on the fly around a corner. A Reverse 180 is thrown on the fly going backwards and usually continues on.

E Brake is a term used in conjunction here because most of these moves require a fully functional parking brake and is the first thing stunt drivers’ check.

A Pipe Roll refers to the action of a car taking to the air as it barrel rolls around its

long axis. It gets its name from the equipment used which is a pipe ramp. A regular Rollover stays close to the ground and may use a simple wedge to get it over. A Cannon Roll is a vicious thing that uses explosives in a contained space to fire a projectile out from the bottom of the car. Physics takes over and sends the car into what can sometimes be an unpredictable series of barrel rolls.

The Car Ski is when a very good driver puts a car up on 2 wheels using a ramp and remains in control for extended distances. There is quite some prep involved and any old car won’t cut it.

A Car Hit may sound like two cars hitting each other but it actually refers to a stunt person getting hit by a car. It requires intense focus, quick reflexes and athleticism. The term “almost” does not apply here. Finally 5 Points refers to the racing harnesses we use in place of regular seat belts.



Stephane Lefebvre having a bad day with a “car hit” in *L’Or* (left) and “full body burn” in *Tripping the Wire* (right).



## Specialty Equipment

The Air Ram, Air ramp or Kicker Plate, is a device used to launch stunt performers through the air using very high pressure. These are very dangerous machines even when sitting idle and should not be approached by those not involved. I have built several of these and let me say initial testing is a puckering experience.

In the same family is the Ratchet. This is another high pressure device that pulls a person through the air using piston and cable action and with the performer sporting a custom made Jerk Vest or Jerk Harness.

A Descender is a device that drops a person at a predictably constant rate and then slows the person near the end using conventional braking and air resistance. Along the same lines is the Decelerator. This involves higher drop velocities akin to free fall with a quicker stop near the end sometimes using pneumatics. Both of these use cables.

A newer addition to the stunt inventory is the Speed Winch. These are high tech, computerized and very powerful machines that can basically perform the same actions as all the aforementioned equipment. They are a big investment and not that common but are great to work with because of their controllability and consistency. Using programmable software they enable us to perform the same actions over and over. I call it Motion Control stunt work.

Finally in this category we have the all important and versatile Mats. They come in all sizes and densities and their primary purpose involves what stunt people and some crew do when they are on standby and have nothing to do and craft service has lost its appeal. But I digress...

There is much more but this basic lexicon should help the non stunt performer navigate his or her way through a conversation with stunt performers hanging out on set. It should at the very least allow you to nod knowingly at the appropriate times. Just remember that sometimes distances, speeds and heights may be multiplied by a factor of 2 or 3. I hope it helps and I will return with my sarcastic wit intact next time.



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