

Dream Jobs: Stunt performer

By Leo Benedictus, The Guardian, adapted by Newsela staff on 01.06.17

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TOP: A stunt performer on the set of "The Amazing Spider-Man 2" movie being filmed in New York City, June 22, 2013. Photo by Raymond Hall/WireImage/Getty Images.

Dean Forster gets asked about his job so often that he can repeat the four things people always want to know: "Have you met anybody famous? Have you been hurt? Is the money good? How did you get into it?"

Yes, he has worked with famous people. Yes, he has been hurt, but not badly. Yes, the pay is good. And, he started in this line of work with help from his family.

Forster is a stunt performer in the United Kingdom. He takes the place of an actor when filming a movie requires a dangerous scene, which means it's Forster's job to jump off buildings or run through fire with the help of special effects.

Forster has liked this type of action since he was a child watching his uncles perform motorcycle stunts at carnivals and shows. "As soon as I could walk, they put me on a bike to do little jumps, and it progressed into other areas." Forster knew all he wanted to do was be a stunt performer.

Renting An Airbag And Building A Tower To Practice High Falls

Without this dedication to his work, Forster probably would not have made it. There are no training courses in the United Kingdom for stunt performers. There are rules Forster must follow in order to be hired to work. He must register with a stunt group after gaining a certain amount of experience.

To become a good stunt performer, he had to practice on his own or with other stunt performers and even now, the learning continues. For example, he rents an airbag, builds a tower and then spends a day practicing high falls. "The higher you go, the smaller that thing gets," Forster says. "You're standing there on the edge ready to jump, and your whole body and mind are going, 'Don't do this.' ... It's never as simple as you think."

What stunt is he best at then? "Fire. Absolutely 100 percent." He admits he is afraid when somebody is about to set him on fire. He says that fear is a good thing because it helps to protect him. If he was too confident, he could become careless and get hurt.

Waiting To Jump Off A Bridge Onto A Moving Train

Everything he does is as safe as it can be, Forster says. "We're not daredevils, we take calculated risks ... If somebody said to me now, 'Jump through that window,' I'd say, 'No. Do I look stupid?' With a stunt it's different, because they'll put little dents in the window, so the second I go through it, it's going to explode. And I'm going to wear knee pads and arm pads to protect myself. And there aren't going to be people walking past the window — or if there are they're going to be stunt performers who know I'm coming through."

Forster's first paid stunt was for a "water explosion" in the movie "Mission: Impossible."

"Tom Cruise is in a restaurant in Prague," Forster says. "He throws his chewing gum at the (aquarium), and the restaurant caves in with water, and then he runs out of the restaurant. I was sitting opposite Tom Cruise when that happened."

He has since worked on many other projects, yet he is still waiting to try the one stunt he has always dreamed of: jumping off a bridge onto a moving steam train and running from car to car. "Actually, I would probably pay to do that," he says.

At the age of 40, Forster keeps fit for his job by practicing karate. "I feel like I've got another 10 years of performing in me," he says.

Job Stats

Pay: It depends on how many jobs Forster takes. It could be £30,000 to £100,000 (about \$36,700 to \$122,000) a year.

Hours: It is unpredictable. "It can be one day a week, it can be seven. I've actually been six months without a day's work."

Best thing: "When the phone rings and someone says, 'I've got a job for you.' That's the best part of the job."

Worst thing: "When you're not working."