

The Fire from the Great



Colin Decker

White North

Written by John D. Ross

Photos courtesy of Keith Ahlstrom,
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Imagine you're engulfed in flames, completely naked and burning for close to half a minute. Your only protection is a thin layer of fire gel that has been applied to your skin. The fuel burns hot and long on top of the gel, but you don't feel a thing. Canadian stuntmen Dustin Brooks and Colin Decker have raised the bar for fire stunts by creating a revolutionary new gel that does just that.

Dustin, stepson of famed stunt coordinator and action unit director J.J. Makaro, has been working with fire for over twelve years. His partner, Colin Decker, a stuntman and fire expert, have formed a company called Fire for Hire based out of Vancouver, Canada. The two of them have developed an innovative, new and safe fire gel that makes it possible to do fire burns directly on the skin for up to one minute. Always in high demand, their demo at the 2007 Taurus World Stunt Awards wowed the audience and is sure to keep this duo busy for years to come. Quite simply put, there is no other product on the market that can come close

to what this gel can do. It all started with a challenge on *Final Destination 3* from stunt coordinator J.J. Makaro.

Dustin recalls the story.

We had a gag on that show where we needed to burn two girls naked on tanning beds. We called all over the world to see if we could find a gel that could do what we needed, but we couldn't find anything. So J.J. said, "Dustin, you know fire, come up with something." I had started working on a gel when Colin called me up and said he had something that could work. It was close to what we needed, but it still needed more work. So, for the next month and a half we worked around the clock to get the desired effect.

Are there any other gels out there that can protect the skin from a direct burn?

I've never seen any footage or seen any other gel that can do what ours does. There are people that say they have some,

but I've never seen it and never heard of anyone who has.

How long can you burn for?

It depends on the burn. If it's as simple as lighting a hand on fire, we've done up to a minute. If it's a full body burn it's obviously less—maybe eighteen to twenty seconds. In any case, that's more than enough for film and television. People would get bored of watching a hand burn after a few seconds.

What type of accelerant do you find works best with this gel?

We can use anything you want. We've used rubber cement, gas, diesel and we

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keep testing it every week with new fuels. We also experiment with the thickeners that we add to the fuel to make it burn longer. There are all kinds of tricks that we use in preparing the fuel and applying the gel to get the best burn possible.

Traditionally, for full body burns you would have a latex or silicone mask to protect your face, but it seems with this gel you can get away without that. Is this a fair assumption?

Yeah, we lit a girl on fire on *Andromeda Strain*, it was a full burn, she had a wig on and a little beany nomex skull cap underneath, but her face was wide open, sitting right in the fire.

On our demo reel (which you can see at www.Fire4Hire.org), I'm shooting Colin in the face for five seconds with a flame-thrower and all he has is the gel to protect him.

What about putting fuel directly on the face?

Yeah, we've done that, too. We applied fuel to a girl's forehead, cheeks and neck and then we lit her head on fire.

Actors must be afraid of you guys.

Well, we don't do anything they're not comfortable with. We start small and get them used to the gel and the fire. We'll light an arm then judge their level of comfort and build up to what they want to do. You can't jump into this with anybody too fast. We don't like to do any of the face stuff with the actors—we like to use stunt doubles or stunt actors.

I understand that the gel is not available for sale because you guys want to be there to apply it and make sure things are safe. Is that right?

Yeah, it's a liability thing, and also there is a science to applying the gel and the accelerant to make sure the stunt is done safely. Our gel is totally different from conventional gels, but it's not foolproof. If the gel is applied wrong you can get burned. We've been working with this product for three years to push it to

the level that it's at today. To sell the gel to somebody who doesn't have the experience would just be irresponsible.

With traditional gels, stunt performers would have to anticipate when they were going to feel the heat from the fire and get put out just before that because if they didn't, they'd get burnt. Your gel seems to be different.

Yeah, and that's the one distinguishing factor that a lot of stuntguys who burn with our gel have mentioned. With the old stuff, they'd feel the heat

Dustin says, "Colin's been known to be a bit of a hothead."




and then they'd be like "Shoot! It's too late! I'm getting burnt." With our stuff, you can actually feel it warming up and still be safe.

Another thing that stuntpeople love about this gel is that you never have to have it freezing cold. You can apply it at room temperature and be completely protected.

What's next for you guys?

We'll keep developing the gel to try to make it even safer so we can do bigger and better fire gags!

For more information about fire, Dustin Brooks and Colin Decker can be reached at www.Fire4Hire.org or 604-785-5744. 

Dustin Brooks

