

Setting fire to record books

Stuntman wants his flesh aflame the longest

BY LAURA STONE, THE PROVINCE SEPTEMBER 4, 2009

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Vancouver stuntmen Colin Decker, left, and Dustin Brooks test out their special flame-resistant gel.

Photograph by: Nick Procylo, The Province, The Province

Only a stuntman would woo his girlfriend by setting her on fire. On the second date.

Then again, only a stuntman like Colin Decker would set himself alight to prove a point.

"No one else is setting flesh on fire for film," said Decker. "It definitely brings attention to the Vancouver film industry, that we are world-class."

The 33-year-old, who runs stunt company Fire 4 Hire with Dustin Brooks, 28, will on Sunday attempt to perform the longest full-body burn without oxygen.

Which, in stuntman terms, means one visceral thing: "We're actually pouring fuel on skin and setting it on fire," said Decker.

Well, sort of. The skin in question will be covered in three layers: A garment of Nomex flame-retardant material resembling long underwear, a denim suit and a special gel created by Decker and Brooks.

The gel, developed by the pair over the course of months, is hypo-allergenic and non-toxic.

They won't disclose what it's made of, to dissuade copycats. (They also make it very clear that no one should try this stunt at home.)

Decker described the gel's function much like putting your hand in a pot of water slowly coming to the boiling: Eventually it will get too hot. Similarly, the gel does protect the flesh for a time, but it does heat up to an unbearable degree.

And when it does, Decker will dip himself in a cold-water pool, or have one of six supervisors spray him with a fire extinguisher.

The time to beat is two minutes and 38 seconds. Decker's goal is three minutes.

If he succeeds, he'll earn himself a Guinness World Record – and realize a boyhood dream.

Decker and Brooks, who also perform non-flammable stunts and were nominated for a technical Oscar two years ago, have worked on local sets such as Marmaduke and Fringe.

They've also set fire to some famous extremities, including the hands of martial arts star Jet Li.

Contrary to public perception, they say that stuntmen are a cautious type, who slowly build up their skills and take "calculated risks."

But it's still a fun gig, admitted Decker. "How often do you get to say, 'I set people on fire for a living?'"

And for love, too, apparently. Decker demonstrated his gel's properties on his girlfriend's skin – and now they're engaged.

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