

RoadKing

HE'S NOT BUYING IT
THE ENDLESS CABOVER QUEST

WHY WEIGHT?
REASONS FOR GAINING

EFFICIENCY EXPERTS
INSIDE SMARTWAY

VIEW TO A SKILL
SPECIALIZED HAULING



AND WE'RE ROLLING!

MIKE RYAN HANDLES BIG RIG STUNT DRIVING IN FAST & FURIOUS 6





Mike Ryan, stunt driver and truck racer, checks on his rig at Gale Banks Engineering.

AND WE'RE ROLLING!

DARRYL SHELLY



Fast & Furious 6 stunts had to be bigger, faster and wilder than any in the first five films in the popular series.

Mike Ryan handles big rig stunt driving in *Fast & Furious 6*



BY NANCY HENDERSON

In the movie world of elaborate, explosive, extravagant car chases, it's hard to match the action of the *Fast & Furious* series. Racing, veering left, right, flying over obstacles, barely scraping through enclosed spaces, causing other vehicles to swerve and crash and burst into flames — it's what the audience comes to see.

It's also a great gig for stunt drivers. "Every day was a major day on that film as far as stunts go," says Greg Powell, first unit stunt coordinator for *Fast & Furious 6*. "We had cars and tanks and bikes and everything else every day on that film. It was brilliant."

The original movie starring Vin Diesel came out in 2001 and sparked a long line of sequels. *Fast & Furious 6* opens on May 24, and the creators made sure that the wheel work was bigger, better, louder and had more of everything than the five previous films. Though the sleek four-wheelers are the

Above, Ryan is in costume and ready to drive a transport truck that will be attacked. Below, another car star.





In Fast Five's bank vault scene, Ryan had a great time as he wiped out about 37 cars.

it was all steel and we were in Puerto Rico so it was anything but an ice cube."

Ryan shared vault driving duties with stunt man Henry Kingi. To avoid passing out

stars of the movie, 18-wheelers usually make an appearance at some point. And for the latest in the series, that's where Mike Ryan comes in.

Ryan, a stunt driver also known for his consistent wins racing his Freightliner at the Pikes Peak International Hill Climb, was the go-to truck operator for the last film, *Fast Five*, and came back for No. 6.

"I've been working with Mike for 15 years and he can drive anything. He is phenomenal in a big rig," says *F&F 6* stunt coordinator Andy Gill. "Anything we do nowadays we want to get that bigger over-the-top feel. Everything has to be bigger and that means trucks and tanks. As far as stunt driving, a large vehicle is not like driving a nimble car. You need someone experienced with the weight and stopping distances. For a 60-foot truck to change lanes with 30 cars whipping back and forth around him, without running over someone and killing them — that requires mastery of the vehicle."

Joining the franchise

A few years ago, Gill reached out to Ryan to work on *Fast Five*, which was less about street racing and more of a heist film. The target for the thieves — \$100 million in a bank vault. Anyone who has seen the movie knows about the big scene — stealing the vault itself and hauling it away by hooking it up to a couple of Dodge Chargers, all while being chased at high speed by the police. Ryan drove the vault.

Yes, that's right. The vault. (Well, Gill did mention that he could drive anything.)

"These guys are amazingly clever to take such a weird thing and make it work," he recalls. "We ended up building two drivable bank vaults with front and rear steering. It was very odd to be going down the road in an ice cube that you could spin anytime you wanted to. Except that

from the heat inside the vault, they had to don shirts with tubes circulating water all through them. A climate-controlled helmet kept them safe from fumes.

"Luckily, Henry did most of the vault driving since I was assigned to something that delivered big punches," Ryan says.

There were some lighter-weight vaults that could actually be pulled by the Charger duo, but to get scenes of the steel cube crashing into everything in its way, the filmmakers needed Ryan in a truck. Two three-axle Freightliner FLD Daycabs were brought in, chopped up and turned into tools of destruction and mayhem.

They cut the cab off of the trucks. They took the hood off and then welded heavy steel structures that look like the vault and packed some real weight. The vault leaned left on one truck, right on the other, so that the cameras could get good clear shots from any side of the road. Then Ryan took off, and nothing could slow him down.

"Most all of the big crashes with the bank vault where it hits things, that was me driving one of these bank vault semi tractors," Ryan says, clearly relishing the memory. "It was like having Mike Tyson's boxing gloves driving those things around. I think I wiped out 37 cars on that film!"

Of course, he was supposed to do that.

Let's do it again!

When the call came asking him if he was interested in a job on *Fast & Furious 6*, Ryan didn't hesitate. He signed on.

His first task was to jackknife a truck in a London tunnel. No problem. Ryan has a rig set up that he can jackknife so precisely insurers would not need to be

concerned about any tunnel damage.

"Ultimately, it was seen as too expensive, and the scene was cut," Gill says. "When I told Mike, he thought about it, called me a while later and said, 'If it will help with costs, we can do it old school.'"

Meaning no special rig. Just a few adjustments and lubrication that help the trailer drift, and Ryan at the wheel keeping the rig under control. (You may have seen him do just that in *Men In Black III*.) In the end, the scene didn't happen, and Ryan actually had to bow out of a portion of the filming anyway. The Pikes Peak International Hill Climb was delayed due to severe wildfires, and rescheduled at the same time *F&F 6* was filming in Europe. Ryan always competes in the Pikes Peak International Hill Climb. No matter what.

Fortunately, *F&F 6* had more work for him in Tenerife.

It's all about precision

Tenerife is the largest of the Canary Islands, a part of Spain. With crystal blue water, gorgeous beaches and bright sunny days, it is a far more appealing workplace than London and its dreary cold weather. Ryan was happy to get to work. He played an important role in another big chase scene, but this time he had to call on a different set of skills.

"In *Fast Five* I got to be the aggressor and amplify the energy. I could do amazing damage. It's rare that a truck gets to play that part. In *Fast & Furious 6*, I was at the other end of the scale — steady, dependable, holding an exact speed as the action took place around the truck or on the truck."



Between takes, Ryan dons a red beret and smiles for the camera.



Stunt drivers Henry Kingi and Steve Kelso take stock.

In the scene, he drives a huge semi — about 19 feet tall and 11 feet wide — that is carrying a Chieftain tank. He had to keep a very steady 45 mph while stunt people jumped onto the back of the trailer and climbed to the roof of the truck. There were vehicles that pulled up behind him and slammed a jeep into the rear of the truck, pinning it against the back so the passengers couldn't get away.

"You need that truck to hold that specific speed for a specific amount of time," says Gill. "It sounds easy, but it's not, especially with a big truck like that. We have safety measures in place, of course, but if he lets off the gas a little and then gases it back up, those people are knocked off balance."

Precision was just as vital in another

scene, where a jeep flips up in the air and lands in front of Ryan's truck. In that case he had to hit the exact mark at the exact right time.

"I would submit that that is the difference between me and my brother Joe, who has 4 million accident-free miles and is by far the better trucker, while I have spent my life being absolutely precise," Ryan says.

How do you do that?

A native of East Tennessee, Ryan grew up dirt-biking and playing around at the local Atomic Speedway. If it had wheels, he was on it, testing his limits as he rode over mountains and dirt roads. He planned to become an architect with a slightly dangerous hobby until, "I met a stunt guy when I was about 18, and I was blown away that someone would pay me to do what I would spend my paycheck doing on the weekends anyhow," he says.

Over the years he has become a leader in his craft. Colleagues rely on his expertise

during the planning phase of a stunt. He can tell them what a truck can do, what is not realistic, offer alternatives and come up with cool ideas to incorporate into a scene.

And there is plenty of discussion before a scene takes place, especially on a movie like *F&F 6*. "Once we go through the scripts and see what the director would like to do, we think about what we can do and can't do," says Powell. "Then we go into rehearsals."

After talking through an idea, the stunt crew may bring out a bunch of Matchbox cars to play it out so all can see. Drivers may then literally walk through the paces. There are camera and sound operators and pedestrians to think about, and safety is the primary concern. There may be a half-speed rehearsal before filming starts.

"That's the common misnomer about stunt driving," Ryan says. "It's not a whole big King Kong/Tarzan/pound on your chest/'here, hold my beer and watch this' kind of thing."

When it all comes together, the months of planning and weeks of filming turn out to be a few minutes of screen time — heart-stopping, thrilling, leaving the audience wanting more. And setting the next standard to beat for drivers like Ryan. ☺



Be Heard Loud & Clear On The Road

29 LTD PROPACK KIT INCLUDES

- ★ 29 LTD Classic 40 Channel CB Radio
- ★ Premium 15 Watt Dynamic External Speaker
- ★ GearKeeper® Microphone Keeper

\$99.99

After Mail-In Rebate

A \$159 VALUE!



29 LTD Classic



HG S100



GearKeeper®

Available Exclusively At

