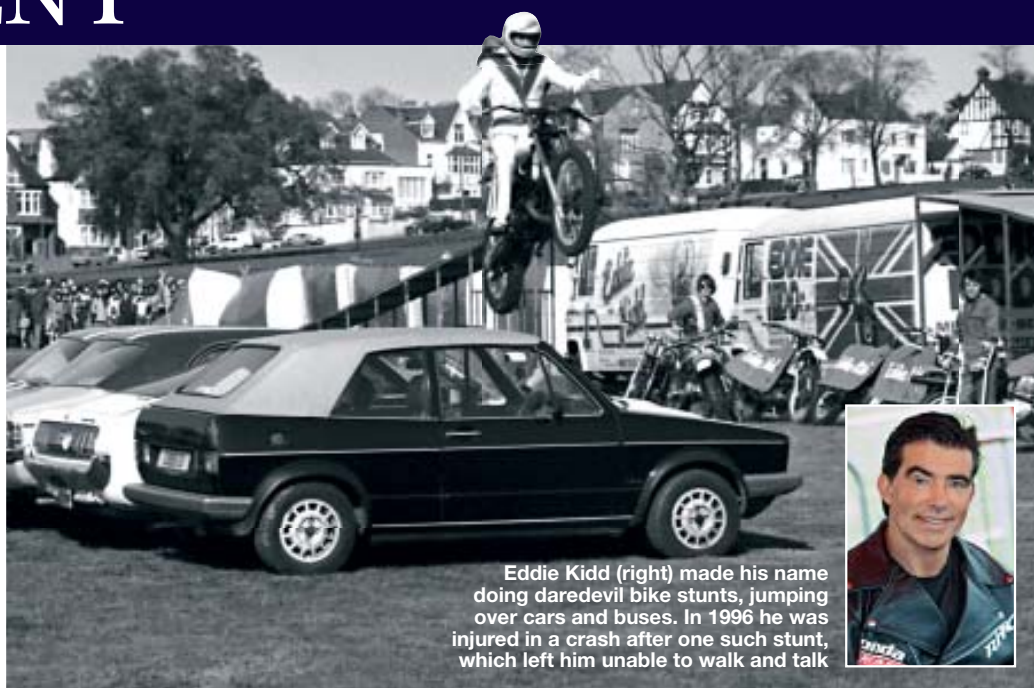


COMMENT



Award-winning actor Ray Winstone, 53, has starred in films including *Nil by Mouth* and *Sexy Beast*. Born in Hackney, North London, he now lives in Essex with his wife Elaine, with whom he has three daughters



Eddie Kidd (right) made his name doing daredevil bike stunts, jumping over cars and buses. In 1996 he was injured in a crash after one such stunt, which left him unable to walk and talk



TOUGH GUY ACTOR OF FILM AND TV

RAY WINSTONE

ON WHY HE'S FIGHTING FOR THE RIGHTS OF INJURED STUNTMEN

I've had the odd fall and cut while filming, and I even broke my ribs when filming *Beowulf*. (I smashed into a scaffolding pole while swinging across to kill a dragon, but I was back to work the next day – I'm a man!)

If they'd asked me when I was 22 to do my own stunts, I wouldn't have hesitated. But when a stunt performer says to me now, "That's a stunt," I listen.

I've known Eddie Kidd, one of our most famous stunt performers, since he was a young man. He didn't live far from me in Enfield. He was a vibrant, good-looking, game kid and good at what he did. When he was injured in a motorcycle stunt in 1996 we all expressed our sadness but then forgot about him. I was as guilty of that as anyone. It was only when I saw Eddie in a wheelchair at a party – the accident had left him brain damaged – that I realised just how bad his situation was.

Today, 14 years after his accident, his speech is getting better and he's on the point of walking again. And he's done it all by himself, with the help of his fiancée Sam, whom he will marry this summer.

Next year he hopes to take part in the London Marathon. When people talk to me about marathons, I think: "Marathon? Get a taxi." If it was anyone else thinking of doing a 26-mile hike after only just learning to walk again, I'd think: "That's not going to happen." But the way Eddie has dealt with what has happened to him is amazing. He's a very inspiring person. There but for the grace of God go any of us. How would we cope?

That's why I became involved in The Eddie Kidd Foundation, which aims to raise money and awareness for the

rehabilitation of injured stuntmen and women and extreme sports performers. With about 24 stunt performers injured every year, it's important to get the message out that, once injured, they are no longer able to earn a living from their chosen profession. They may not even be able to earn a living at all.

The foundation provides advice to injured stunt performers, and offers practical support in terms of treatments and therapies. It also plans to set up a helpline in the near future.

A DANGEROUS GAME

Stunt work is dangerous, injuries are common and deaths too frequent. Some stunts are achieved through



Ray's daredevil younger days (above), as Will Scarlet in *Robin of Sherwood*

special effects or clever editing, but many are performed by daring professionals such as Eddie.

A famous early stunt was performed by Buster Keaton in 1928's *Steamboat Bill, Jr.* – the front of a house collapses on him but he escapes unharmed, saved by an open window on the façade. Keaton wasn't even scratched, but others have not been so lucky. During the filming of *Death Wish 3*, stuntman Rocky Taylor was about to jump from an exploding building when it blew up too soon and he was trapped for five minutes. When he freed himself, he jumped, breaking his back and pelvis on landing.

And Tip Tipping, one of the industry's top stuntmen, was killed in 1990 during a TV reconstruction of a near-fatal parachute accident. More recently, David Holmes, a stunt double for Daniel Radcliffe, has been confined to a wheelchair after falling when rehearsing a flying scene in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*.

There have been stunt performers on almost every film I've been in and I'm always happy to let them stand in

for me. Besides, you're not allowed to perform stunts if you're "the money" – the insurance companies would never allow it.

Stunt performers bring professionalism and a kind of stability to a set, preventing things from descending into free-for-all mayhem. We owe them our safety and even our performances much of the time. Steve Dent, who is one of the stunt industry's best horsemen, taught me how to ride, but even he broke his pelvis on *King Arthur*. They also add a certain atmosphere to a set – you need to be a little bit crazy to do what they do, I guess, but you've also got to know your game 100 per cent.

Do I think they should get more recognition outside the film industry? Yes, of course I do. We actors take the applause while the stunt performers just get on with their jobs. I've got so much respect for them, and the only difference between them and guys like me is that they're on the physical side of it and I read poems!

But they love making films as much as I do. Maybe it would kill the illusion if we knew too much about them, but you can say the same about actors – if you know too much about us, it kills it. But they're as important to a film, if not more so, especially films like the James Bond series, which rely on the action. Films in that genre need to take a look at protecting their people a little more.

Stunt performers are unsung heroes, and Eddie is carrying the flag for them. I guess people do that when something happens to them, but he's not doing it for himself – he's trying to do something for the whole stunt industry. There have been a lot of people injured who have been forgotten about. I've got a lot of time for Eddie, and I really hope he walks in that marathon because that will be amazing. I'll be there to support him and I'm really looking forward to his wedding this summer.

'It's important to get the message out that, once injured, stunt performers may not be able to earn a living in their chosen profession. They may not be able to earn a living at all'

For more information about The Eddie Kidd Foundation, visit eddiekiddfoundation.com