



“O.K., ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS
Hang on to the roof of this car. And
it draws level with the tanker. You
jump on to the cab, clobber the driver
the wheel and brake hard. Then leap
to a horse (we’ll see that it’s there) and
off screen left . . .”

Ray Austin, superstuntman and now
director, has done all that. And even
though he says he has left his stunting
behind, you just can’t keep a good
man down . . .



The man who taught The New Avengers how to fight

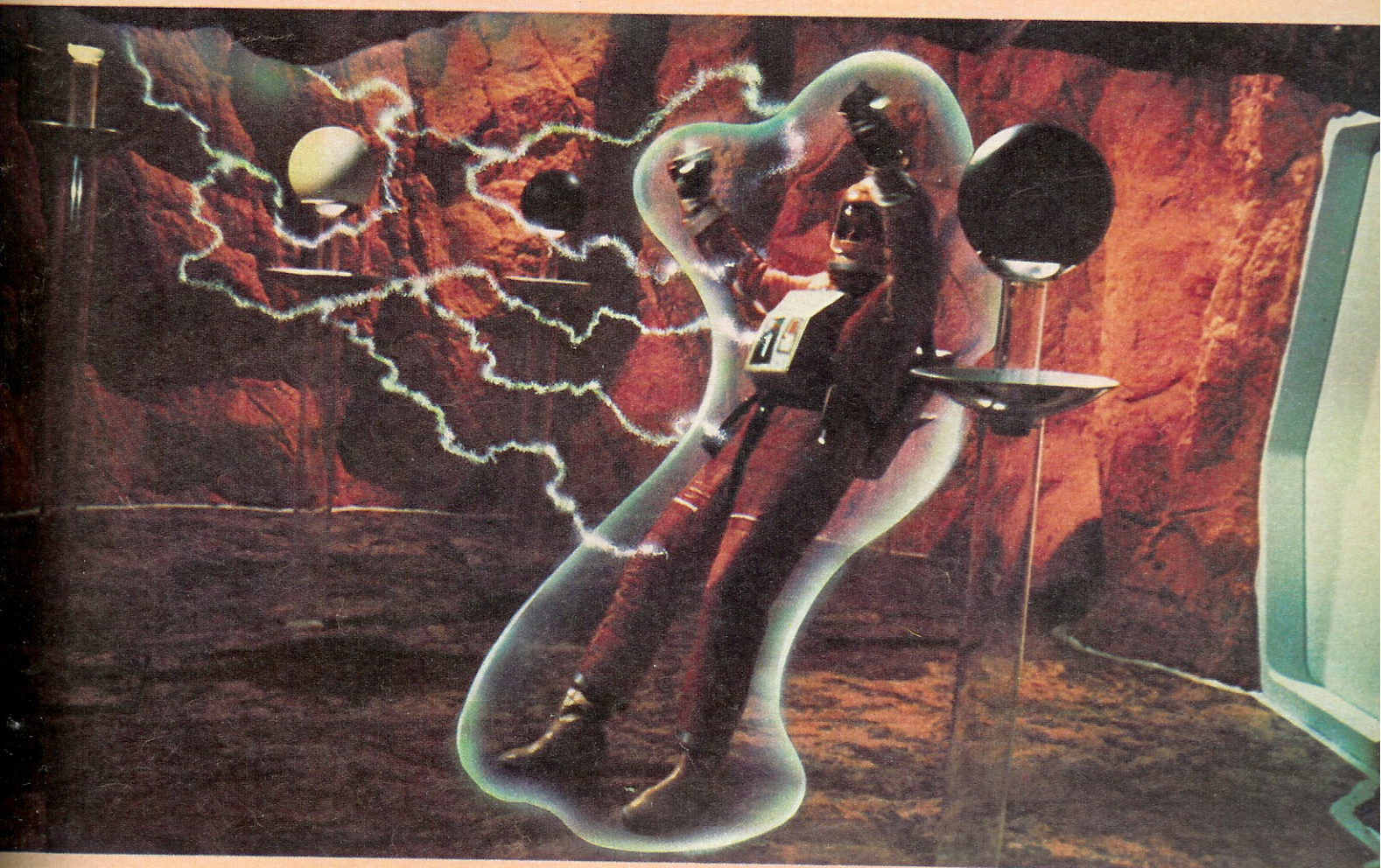
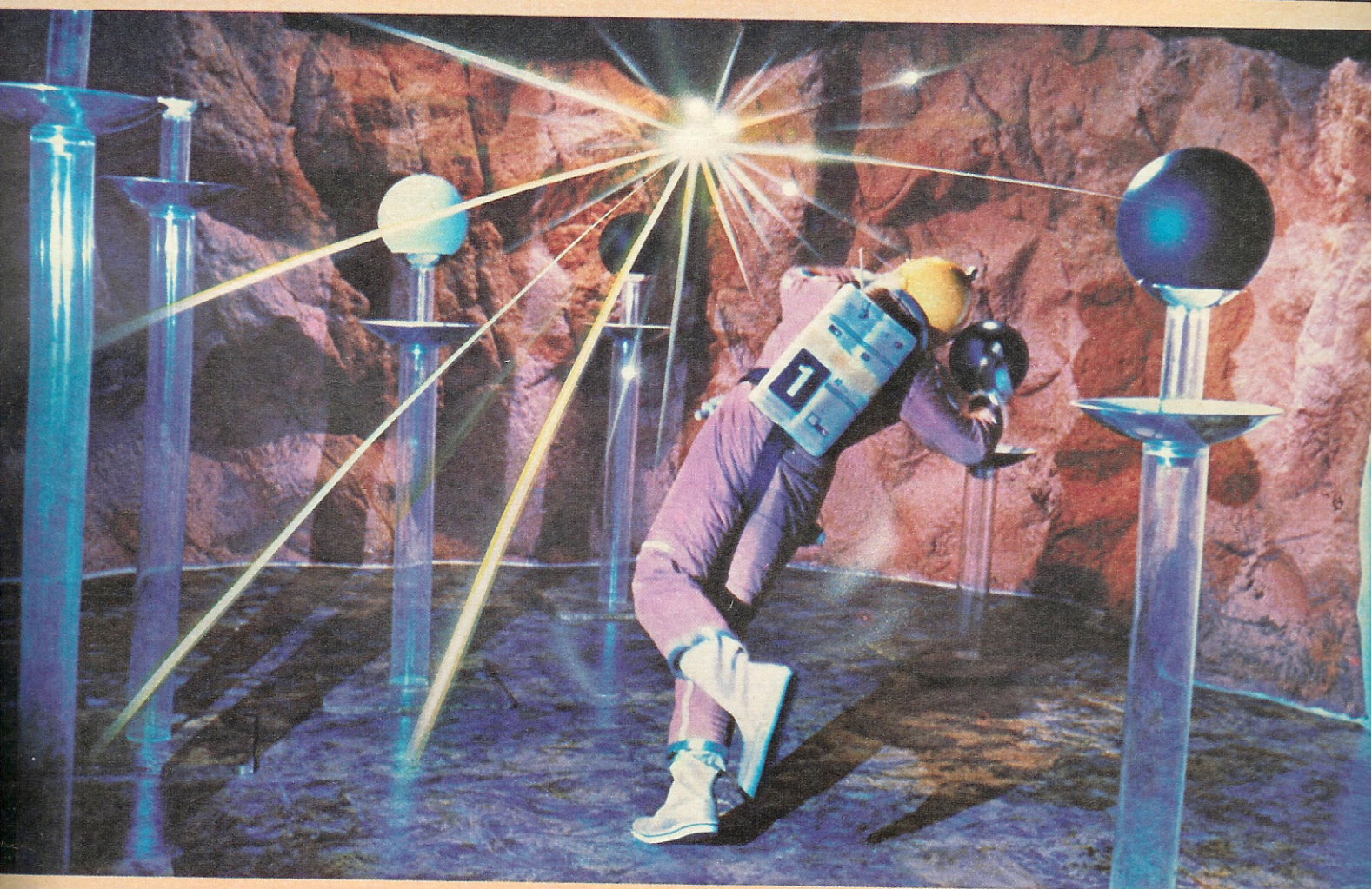
by Ken Roche

NOT TO GET HURT—that’s the first rule for a stuntman. And one man who knows how to go about surviving in filmdom’s most dangerous job is stuntman/director Ray Austin—the man who taught *The New Avengers* how to fight. In fact, he taught all the Avenger girls—Honor Blackman, Diana Rigg, Linda Thorson and now Joanna Lumley—how to create their own special brands of havoc.

Austin, who spends most of his time these days behind the cameras as a director rather than as a baddie falling off a three-storey building, has worked in virtually every/continued on page 6



A stuntman’s life is always dangerous, but there are compensations . . . Here’s Ray Austin on the receiving end of a well-timed ‘right’ during a training session with Joanna Lumley. Opposite: brilliant special effects and action which were directed by Austin for *Space 1999*. He says: ‘I never ask anyone to do something I know is impossible or I haven’t tried myself.’



Risks are naturally high but 'experie

from page 4/form of stunt-ing. In his "action" days he was daring, too. He was one of the few stuntmen who would dive through a genuine plate-glass window. "The secret there is speed," he says. "Speed and the landing. You must make sure you don't land on top of the broken glass. You must beat the falling glass to the floor. It's much safer having the glass fall on you than you on it."

Easy-to-break "sugar glass" is used for bottles to smash over people's heads and it's also used often for windows. "But even with sugar glass you have to be careful, because it can still cut."

It goes without saying that physical fitness is a prime requirement of a stuntman. But all the fitness in the world can't make up for experience, timing and rehearsal.

There must also be realism. "A man doing a fall from a building and who is supposed to be unconscious or dead has to fall like a sack of potatoes. The greatest Olympic diver may make a perfect dive, but that's no good if you are simulating someone out of control of his body."

When a stuntman falls he lands on a combination of loosely-folded cardboard boxes laid out to form a bed of air, and mattresses.

Years of practice and rehearsal are basic requirements for any stuntman, and every move of a violent stunt like a car chase or crash is worked out in advance. A crashing car is stripped of its petrol tank and a container carrying only enough petrol for the sequence is fitted. Doors are loosened when a car "blows up" and welded fast when a car has to roll over. This minimises the risk of a door buckling in on the driver.

New Avenger Mike Gambit, played by Gareth Hunt, has done all his own stunts so far in the series. "But once a stunt is called for that I think is too dangerous, a stand-in will have to be used," says Austin.

Joanna Lumley, as Purdey, was fit when she signed for the series, but she took a commando training course

to toughen herself up. Every move in the fight sequence is worked out almost balletically beforehand with Austin. Sometimes, for a close-up when Purdey may be seen kicking straight at the camera, her leg is held up on a tripod to achieve the right height.

Risks for a stuntman are naturally high. "But experience, care and rehearsal reduce the dangers," says Austin.

Ray Austin himself is a kind of "graduate" tear-away. As a youngster he was a big lad, mixing it with the other tough kids in Islington, London, and his favourite stamping ground was the brightly-lit streets of Soho. The local fraternity, like so many Anglicised Damon Runyon characters, took "Ossie" as they called him, under their wing and appointed him bookie's runner.

H E'D earlier developed the flavour for earning a few bob on the side as a youngster in the war. In the evening, as families settled for the night in the Underground to escape the bombing, Ossie would collect their orders for fish and chips and deliver the oily newspaper-wrapped packages from a battered old suitcase.

In Soho he became a regular "runner" for colourful names like Jack Spot, Billy Hill and Tommy Falcon. "When they won they were generous guys," recalls Austin. "I used to make about £10 a week, which was a lot of money for a kid of 11, 12, 13."

He also carried the bets for the ladies of the area. "They used to say: 'Hey, Ossie, d'you want your tip in kind, dearie?' and I'd give them a mouthful of abuse and scuttle off down the alleyways."

As he grew he became useful with his fists. "But not useful enough. I won some, but I got a lot of hidings, too." He also had a 'delicious streak of naivety in him.

"We moved to Tooting and there was a fairground fighter there called Bomber

Newton. He never lost a street or a pub fight and I somehow worked out that his invincibility was due to the fact that he was covered in tattoos.

"So off I went to the tattooist and had some done myself." (Beautiful blue-birds they are, on his hands, arms and shoulders). "I felt the tattoos would automatically toughen me up. A lot of good they did—the first fight I got into I went out with a black eye . . ."

Austin always had a natural aptitude for gymnastics and served his National Service as a P.T. instructor. But when he came out the only related job he could get was as an instructor at Merton Boys' Club in South Wimbledon for 7s. 6d. (37½p) a session for two nights a week.

So he headed for Hollywood seeking . . . he's not too sure what. The first job he landed was on the vast stunt team for *Spartacus* where he literally had a baptism of fire in the stunt business. He had to dodge flaming bushes rolling down a hill on to the soldiers. "We had no protection; we were stripped to the waist and if one of the bushes hit you—which they were supposed to do, anyway—you took the consequences. I got burned and blistered, but nothing very drastic."

His next picture was Hitchcock's *North By Northwest* with Cary Grant, graduating to car stunts and falls. "I learned something new all the time. It stood me in good stead when I became a director. I've never had anyone hurt on a film of mine, nor asked them to do something I knew was impossible or that I haven't tried myself."

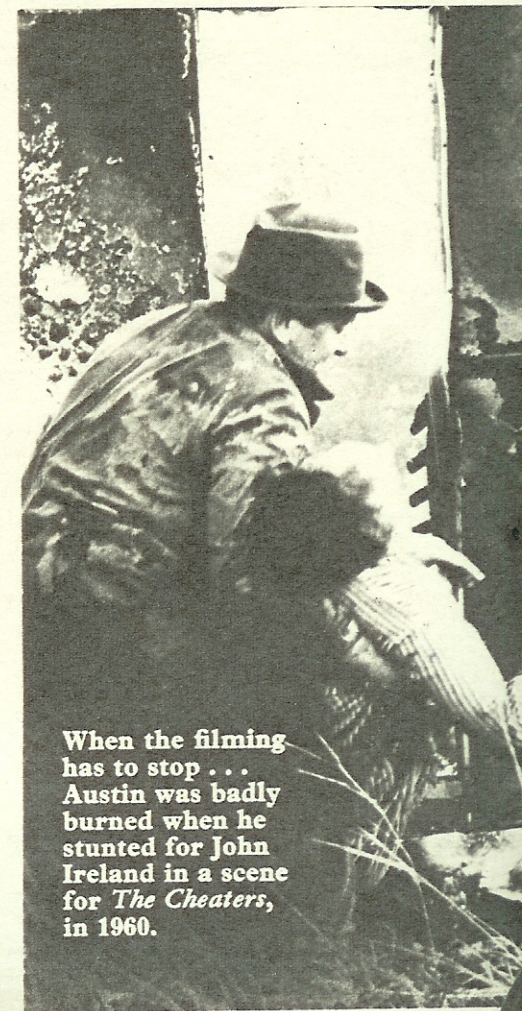
After a string of films he returned to Britain and television, and soon found himself directing. Since then he has been involved in many popular TV series—*Department S*, *Randall & Hopkirk (Deceased)*, *Black Beauty*, *Space 1999*, and now, of course, *The New Avengers*—for which he continues to organise the stunts.

Stuntmen have their own personal appreciation of the stars they stand in for—and for what those stars can do

themselves. Austin has a high regard for Gareth Hunt. He also approves of Steve McQueen, whose fanaticism for motor-bikes has spilled over into his films, doing the stunts himself. But top-of-the-heap in Austin's book is Roger Moore. "He can do nearly anything in terms of fights and handling awkward stunts," says Austin. "He is only stopped from doing a stunt himself where it becomes too dangerous."

Obviously, there is a limit to what a highly-paid star is allowed to risk—if only for the possible financial loss a film or television company could face if a star were "out of action" for any length of time.

After a day of supervising boppings, beatings and general mayhem, Ray Austin's great pleasure in life is to return home to his wife — his fourth, incidentally—lovely Japanese actress Yasuko Nagazumi. "It's a pleasure to get back to a bit of peace and quiet," he says.



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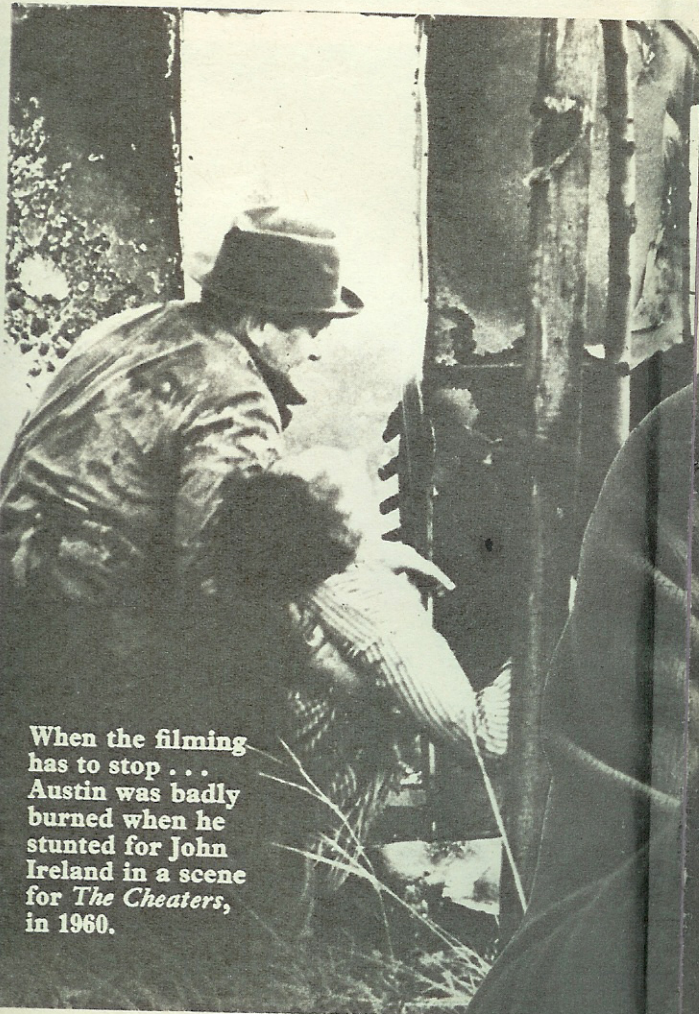
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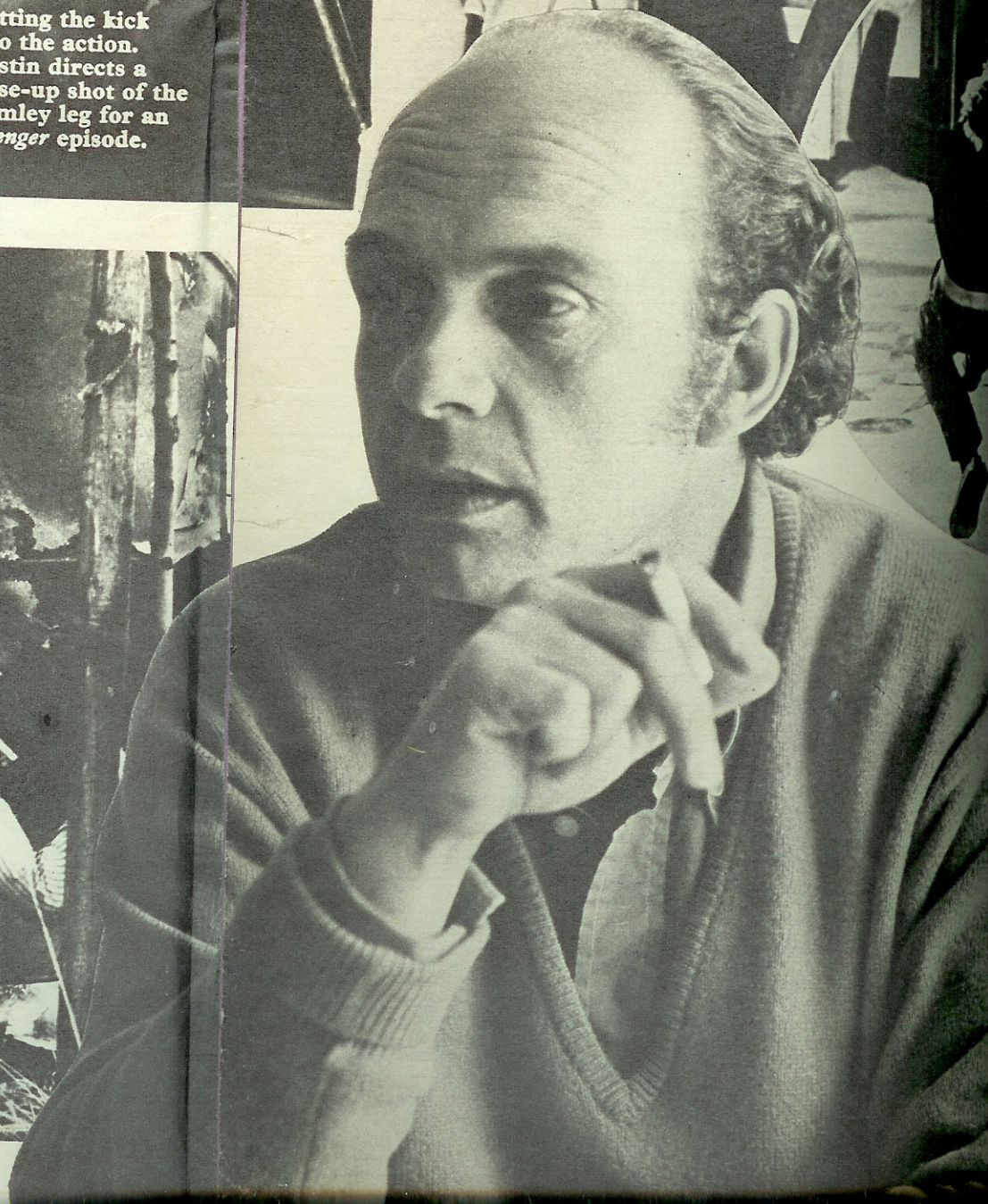
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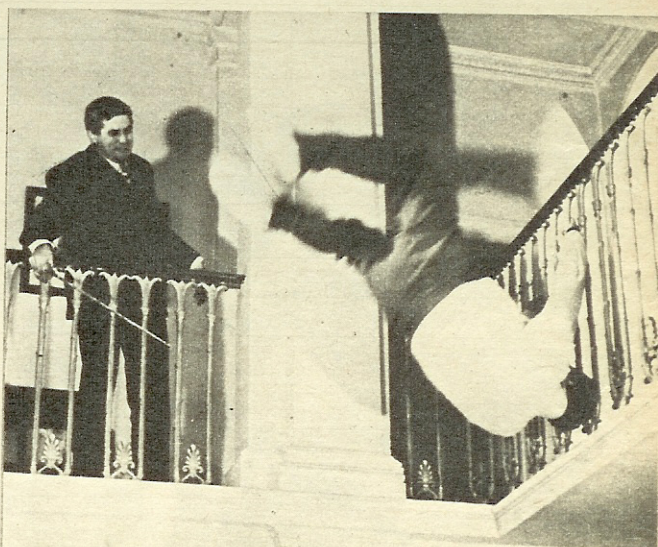
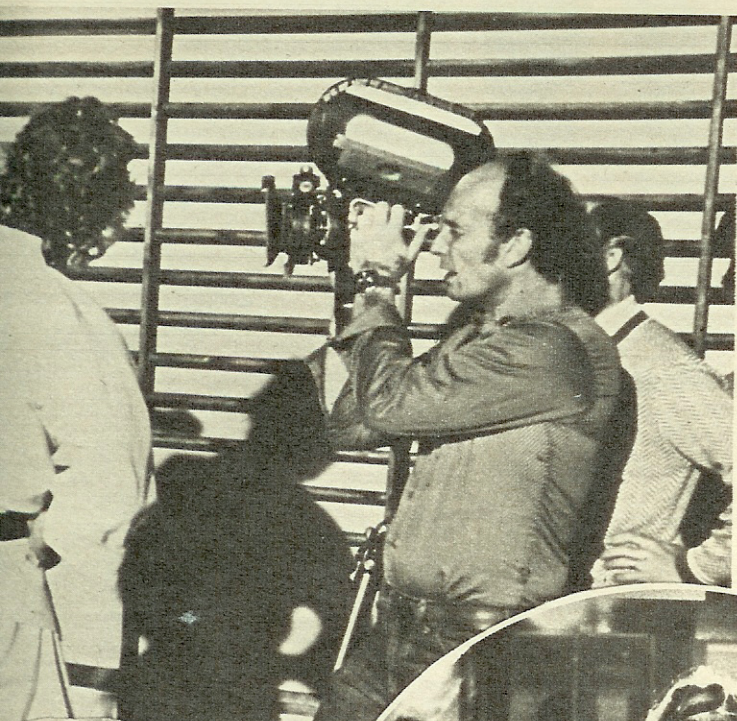
Getting the kick into the action. Austin directs a close-up shot of the Lumley leg for an *Avenger* episode.



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Ray Austin and Ray Barrett in a balcony scene from *Ghost Squad* in 1963. Austin tumbles; and then falls for ex-Avenger Diana Rigg.



Tony Maiden is the one who is about to get wet. The young star of *Black Beauty* only agreed to do this because of Austin's reputation as a stuntman.