

Double Dare

AFI Fest

"Double Dare" very entertainingly takes us into the world of stuntwomen, a male-dominated world full of the same dangers faced by men but one that only now is grudgingly giving women their due. The film, winner

of the Documentary Audience Award at the recent AFI Fest, makes a perfect festival entry and has potential as a theatrical release.

Director Amanda Micheli follows two stuntwomen at opposite ends of the world and their careers. Jeannie Epper is a familiar name to all industry insiders as she is the first lady of the first family of stunt people. Trained by a father who once doubled for Errol Flynn and Gary Cooper, Epper not only became a top stuntwoman but has seen her brother, sister, daughter and grandkids all excel in the profession. At 62, she sees no reason to quit even though she struggles against the aging process, weight gain and the frustration of not being able to advance to stunt coordinator or second unit director as do male colleagues.

Zoe Bell, a native of New Zealand, was the primary double for Lucy Lawless on "Xena: Warrior Princess" when that show shot in that country. Finding herself out of work once "Xena" wraps, Bell decides to go to Los Angeles to attend the 2001 World Stunt Awards. There she meets Epper, who becomes a mentor to the young woman. Teaching Bell the ropes of Hollywood stunt casting and how to create a good resume,



Jeannie Epper, left, doubled for Lynda Carter on "Wonder Woman."

Epper is near the telephone when Bell lands her biggest gig to date, doubling for Uma Thurman in "Kill Bill."

Interspersed with interviews with Steven Spielberg, Quentin Tarantino, Lynda Carter (whom Epper doubled on "Wonder Woman") and Lawless, the film watches the women train, go to auditions, perform stunts and deal with rejection. For all their differences, these two women are cut from the same cloth. Both love the challenges; neither can imagine any other sort of life. "I don't think I could be a waitress," Epper muses.

Kirk Honeycutt