

MEET . . .

EVEL KNEIEVEL



If Webster ever needs another definition for "unique," the words "Evel Knievel" would provide the solution. He is a rare breed of human, who loves facing danger and death by his own choice. This is a contradiction when one sees his tremendous zest for life. He is a brash, but highly personable man who lives in Butte, Montana, and whose great dream is to jump the Grand Canyon.

Evel owns an outstanding \$99,000 Custom Designed Kenworth with a plush custom made Post Coach (complete with special lounge, color television, and his own beer tap). The tractor is equipped with a 318 Detroit Diesel and a 12-speed Allison Automatic. Although Evel often drives the rig himself, his regular driver is Mike Draper of Oklahoma.

Without question, Evel produces admiration wherever he goes. He is a showman of the first order. He

may even be crazy . . . but, it's the kind of crazy we'd all like to be sometimes! His energy, enthusiasm, and vitality are major contributors to his personal style and outlook on life.

Evel loves to gamble on the golf course, as well as on a motorcycle, and he spends most of his leisure time lining up new golf partners for an 18-hole game with thousands of dollars riding on the outcome. This pressure, which would be high for most men, means little to this guy who's planning on taking off at 350 miles an hour in eight seconds, in a thin sky cycle across a three-quarter-mile canyon that is a thousand feet deep. It's a short run and Evel is his own precious cargo.

His highest jump was nearly 50 yards, over the fountain at Caesar's Palace, a gambling casino and resort hotel in Las Vegas. He completed the jump, but he ended up spending several weeks in the hospital. He makes most of his jumps (the Snake River Canyon, excluded) on Harley-Davidsons and he carries them with him in his rig. Evel says of the jumps: "I should be moving between 94 and 96 miles an hour when I hit the take-off ramp (for 18 cars). I've got 60



The \$99,000 custom built Kenworth.

horsepower in the rear wheel of that bike. It can go from zero to 60 in three and a half seconds."

Evel is a man of action in other ways too. Recently, he ran into some hassles with members of the Hell's Angels motorcycle gang. They were taunting him at his appearance at San Francisco's Cow Palace. After he completed his jump, he got into a fight with a couple of the members of the Angels, and Evel and his buddies successfully "beat the hell out of them." Evel made the remark at that time: "God created all men . . . Winchester made them equal." It's a statement he firmly believes in and he carries a gun with him at all times.

Evel told OVERDRIVE: "There is only one other magazine in America that I feel is more valuable for me than OVERDRIVE . . . that is PLAYBOY!" He has a very high opinion of truckers and their work. Recently, he jumped 16 GMCs in Phoenix and he loves nothing better than getting behind his own rig and piloting it on the highway. We spent an entire day with this man as he drove his rig. We discovered that his whole life style is an adventure. He has managed to escape one thing that most of us are doomed to retain: ROUTINE. It's a word that doesn't make any sense to Evel. It never will.

OVERDRIVE: How long have you been driving a tractor-trailer?

EVEL: I've been doing it for over six years. I honestly love it. I've had this baby right in Madison Square Garden. It's got 64,000 miles on it (a 1971). I also have two drivers, Mike and Lee. I've never had a single problem with it. It's the longest wheel base tractor ever built in the United States—296 inches! It gets the attention of as many pretty girls as my Maserati and my Cadillac and I can get ten times as many in here. We have more fun with this truck than anything in the world. Just look behind you. When you want to make a turn in this rig, you've got everybody in the country helping you.

OVERDRIVE: Who takes care of the rig?

EVEL: Mike and Lee. They're great guys. I never look at it because I know that it's going to be taken care of like I take care of it myself. They drive it all over the United States and they've never put a single scratch on it.

I think that it's too damn bad that the Kenworth and Peterbilt people are not more promotionally minded because most of the guys I've met in truck stops all over the country, they all take a real pride in their vehicles. Hell, I love to drive this truck and the kind of guys who drive them are my kind of people. I like

to go to truck stops and b.s. with the guys because they're my kind of guys. The truck industry—the factories—GMC, Peterbilt . . . man, they could do so much more if they would get off their dead asses and do it! You can start with Kenworth. Don't get me wrong. If their public relations ability and their promotional ability was as good as this truck they built for me, they'd have a hell of a thing going for them. I figure that no matter what you do in life, everybody could use a little help, a little advice. If the trucking industry has fallen a little behind, it's because the factories are at fault. They'd better get their butts in gear and do something.

OVERDRIVE: What would you like to see them do?
EVEL: Well, I paid for this truck, but I got a lot of help from the Kenworth people. They're first class people. But I'd like to see them get involved in several more projects. I intend to do everything I can for the trucking industry with this truck in my next two motion pictures. I want to do things with it that they (the truckers) can be proud of. I want to have it involved in the television shows I'll be doing too.

OVERDRIVE: These motion pictures you're talking about . . . will they be documentaries?

EVEL: No, fictional, but I'll be playing myself. I'm me . . . I don't want to act playing someone else.

OVERDRIVE: Is it hard for you to get insurance?

EVEL: I have a couple of policies for a hundred thousand bucks. I pay the highest insurance rate of any man on the face of the earth. I pay \$10,000 a year for a \$100,000 policy.

OVERDRIVE: Could you describe the Snake River locale for us?

EVEL: It's located in Twin Falls, Idaho. The Canyon is 600 to a thousand feet deep and it's between a half mile and three quarters of a mile across, depending on how far I go. It's right over the falls, which is higher than Niagara Falls.

OVERDRIVE: How do you prepare for a jump like this?

EVEL: Well, I've been working with Paranetics, the company that makes my parachute, for over three years. The sky rocket I'll be using cost me a quarter of a million dollars.

OVERDRIVE: Can you describe the jump?

EVEL: It'll be the greatest sky rocket jump on the face of the earth! I'm doing it the Fourth of July. We have a water heater and we heat the water to 500 degrees. We only use one kind of water . . . and this is no

baloney. This is how I got tied up with Olympia Beer. There is no purer water than Artesian well water that comes from the earth itself. I asked the Olympia people if I could draw water from their wells. That's how I ended up getting tied up commercially with them. The water is very important because you've got to get the maximum amount of pressure and the maximum amount of thrust for the jump. A steam rocket needs the best there is. I heat it at 500 degrees and let it drop off at 420 degrees (psi degrees). I open the valve, let the water from the heater into the rocket, and when it drops from 500 to 420, the engineer, Bob Truax, points at me. I'm looking right up the ramp over the canyon. I go at 350 miles an hour in eight seconds and hope like hell I get there. If I do, I drop down to both knees, grab a handful of dirt and thank God Almighty that I'm still alive. If I splat against the wall, I just get somewhere quicker where you're going someday and I'll wait for you. Dying is part of living.

OVERDRIVE: Do you practice in any way for this jump?

EVEL: You can't practice it. It's a one shot deal. The sky cycle must go 1,000 feet up at 350 miles an hour in eight seconds or it's all over for me. Sayonara.

OVERDRIVE: What was the outcome on the Grand Canyon jump you were supposed to have?

EVEL: Secretary of the Interior Udall gave me permission for the jump, but then he changed his mind and threatened to bring an injunction against me. So, I bought the Snake River Canyon. They ain't going to stop me now! I own that canyon. I bought it for the purpose of the jump.

OVERDRIVE: What will this jump cost you all together?

EVEL: I'm into it for a million already. In actual cash, I'm into it for \$500,000.

OVERDRIVE: What do you get out of all of this?

EVEL: I get to the other side the way I want to go. You know . . . we've got a choice about how we die, unless we meet with an accident. I figure that God put me here to be the best and do the best and live the best that I could. I'm going to try to do that. When He's ready, He'll take me away. I don't think that a human being can ask for more than that.

OVERDRIVE: I take it from the way you're talking that faith plays an important part in your work?



The sky cycle that will hopefully carry Evel over Snake River Canyon.



The sky cycle is carefully placed in the trailer of Evel's rig.

EVEL: Well, not that I'm going to have any help. It's just that I'll be able to do the best I can and if I die, then I hope that God Almighty will take care of me. I never pray to make a jump. NEVER! I pray to do my best. I don't ask for help to get across the jump. I've been riding a motorcycle for 21 years. If I don't know how to jump it now, a prayer isn't going to help me. If I die and I've asked, before I jumped, during that split second I was sitting there on the cycle, to be forgiven for my sins (being a motorcycle daredevil, a beer drinker, and a trucker, I may have committed a couple) . . . that's all I should worry about—to be forgiven. So, I go and hope that I'll do my best. If I haven't been right with God, myself, and my fellow man . . . I'll tell you what, in the time that it takes me to go 300 yards at a hundred miles an hour on that Harley Davidson, I'm not going to get the job done. I'll tell you something . . . what you're asking really is "Why?". There are three mysteries to life: Where we came from, Why we do what we do, and Where we're going to go from here. You don't know the answer to that and I don't. We just do the best we can.

OVERDRIVE: What's your longest jump so far?

EVEL: Well, I jumped 21 cars in Seattle. No one's ever done that before. In Phoenix, I jumped SIXTEEN SEMIS, GMCs. I couldn't find a truck dealer in Phoenix who would give me the trucks. GMC in Phoenix on Saturday afternoon gave me the trucks. They said they liked what I was doing and thought it wasn't easy traveling the country with a name like Evel Knievel, riding a motorcycle. You made it so we want to help you. A group of my truck driving buddies in Phoenix helped me set them up for the jump. I've gotten a lot of help from truckers and individual

dealers like GMC, Peterbilt, Mack, Kenworth. A Mack dealer in Butte, Montana takes care of this Kenworth for me.

OVERDRIVE: What kind of people are truckers to you?

EVEL: They're just down to earth guys. They're not impressed by a bunch of bull con. They're great guys. I've always said that in life, if you can get a little kid to smile at you and ask for your autograph, if a dog will wag its tail and bark at you, and if a truck driver will shake your hand . . . you've got it knocked, believe me. I've got it knocked!

OVERDRIVE: Have you given any thought to quitting?

EVEL: When I'm 40 maybe. (*He's 33 now*).

OVERDRIVE: Do you save your money?

EVEL: I spend it all. I don't believe in saving it. I had a banker one time who said: "Why don't you take care of your wife and children, put your cars in the garage, save your money, build a new home." If I got killed next week, he'd want to drive my Rolls Royce, spend my money, sleep with my wife, kick my kids in the rear, run my dog over the hill . . . and he doesn't have the guts to carry my shoes across the street. I'M RISKING MY LIFE FOR IT AND I'M GOING TO BLOW EVERY GOD DAMN DIME OF IT! You know, I love this life I lead. I play golf every day and I bet big money on it. I bet three or four thousand a day on a golf game. These guys I play with think that there's a lot of pressure on me when I play a golf game because of the money. Hell, they don't know what pressure is. They should see me face those 16 semis off of that takeoff ramp.

OVERDRIVE: How many jumps do you have each year?

EVEL: Quite a few. I'm booked for two years.

OVERDRIVE: Have you had much tragedy in your life?

EVEL: Very recently. My father-in-law. He and my sons and I went boating. The water was rough and he told me that I should get to the shore fast. The boat tipped and I held on to my smallest son and he saved the life of my other son. He put my son up on a log and the water took my father-in-law right off. It's the most helpless feeling in the world to see somebody that you love floating away from you in the river and there's nothing you can do. But I tell you . . . dying is part of living and if there's anything good about dying, it's that you'll catch up with your loved ones that passed away. It's part of life. I feel sad for myself and not him. I would have liked to have seen him live, of course, but he's gone to where I'm going some day and he's waiting for me. It's the people that are left behind that have it tough. You know something? I fought with my father-in-law all my life. He wouldn't let me marry his daughter. He wanted to shoot me. But I can't blame him. He was right. He ended up giving me a daughter and then he saved my son's life. I can't ask for more than that.

OVERDRIVE: We've all heard the stories about all of your broken bones. Just how many have you had?

EVEL: I've had nine major open reduction operations and 14 total operations. I've broken every bone in my body with the exception of my neck and my right hip. I have a hell of a doctor in Los Angeles, Dr. Graham. I also have a number of doctors across the country. My stunts at Caesar's Palace were the most serious injuries. You have to have a will to live and a power to exist.

OVERDRIVE: Have you had any interesting experiences with this rig?

EVEL: Yeah. I'll never forget in Washington, D.C., a cop came up to me and stopped me and said, "You're not supposed to be in downtown Washington with that rig!" I didn't have the coach on it yet and I had just picked up the tractor. I was on crutches at the time and it was very cold outside. I drove it right into Washington with the trailer attached. The cop said, "Get down out of there." I said, "I ain't getting down out of here. I'm on crutches." He looked at me and said, "You got a permit to drive that thing?" I had a new vehicle permit on the right hand window. I pointed at it and he went around to the other side to look at it. I blasted my horn right at him. He fell back down on the pavement and he said to me, "Are



"Dying is part of living."

you that guy I've seen on TV? What's the matter with you driving this thing. Can't you get something decent to drive?" I'll never forget him saying that to me. I looked at him and said, "What's the matter with you? The tractor cost me \$40,000." I couldn't believe it. He liked me! He gave me an escort through downtown Washington.

OVERDRIVE: What kind of reaction do you get with this rig on the highway?

EVEL: Well, you know that the whole thing is custom designed. When I come to a weigh station with the highway patrol, if they give us any lip, I invite them inside the coach. I sit them down in the love seat or the recliner, give them a little Olympia Beer and a little Wild Turkey . . . then they always want to quit their job and go with me. Hell, a lot of guys out there feel the same way about their trucks as I do. We have a lot of pride in them. They mean something to us. We want to show them off. You know . . . Liberace is a good friend of mine. He's a great showman you know. Well, he wants one of these for himself. Liberace!

OVERDRIVE: I imagine the truckers themselves get a kick out of your rig?

EVEL: Yeah, they like it. I let them drive it too. They've never driven an automatic. I stop by the truck stops and invite them in for a drink. I b.s. with them a lot. I'll tell you one thing though. We take care of this truck. We don't drive it fast. We keep it about 50-55 and never higher. I had one accident with it. Get this: It was parked at a race track in Minneapolis. I had a pilot fly one of my turbo prop airplanes into the race track. He couldn't stop the plane and he flew head-on into the back of this trailer and did \$70,000 worth of damage to the trailer and the plane. I put on a hell of a show. I told everyone I was then going to fly a plane head-on into the tractor. I was told it would be very expensive. It would be without a big crowd, I'll tell you.

OVERDRIVE: Didn't you have a former career as a thief?

EVEL: Yeah. I wasn't any penny ante thief, either, I'll tell you. I robbed banks. I made a lot of money at it. But, I got tired of it and decided to get into something legitimate. I never got caught. I've never done any time for them. I got out of it. I saw the rest of the world and saw that there was more to life than that. I saw that if I didn't quit stealing, I'd lose my wife and kids.

OVERDRIVE: You sound like you've lived a great life no matter what happens?

EVEL: We only pass this way once. I drive motorcycles, drink beer, fly planes, make money . . . what more can a guy ask for? I've got a great family and plenty of friends. But I'll tell you one thing. I'm going to go out in style. Three days before the Snake River Jump, I'm going to throw a party that will make the parties in ancient Rome look sick. I mean it. I'm going to throw the greatest parties in the history of the world. I'm going to blow at least a half million

bucks on them in Butte, Montana. I'll buy the bars up for the entire event. It's going to be open for everyone. I'm going to spend it all! Now, don't get me wrong, I've got two little boys and a little girl, and a wife. I want to take care of my family. But my kids are smart. They don't need a lot of money left for them. Give them a little start and they'll make it the rest of the way.

OVERDRIVE: Do you think that either one of your sons will pick up where you left off?

EVEL: They both started jumping when they were five years old. If they want to some day . . . fine. It's been a good life for me. I've met people in all walks of life. I feel that I'm contributing something to life. I feel that I'm doing the right thing by people because it's right. That's the most important thing in the world.

OVERDRIVE: You once worked in the copper mines?

EVEL: Yes. I did for three years. I drove a truck in the open pit. I drove a Euclid and a Mack for Anaconda.

OVERDRIVE: Evel . . . today everything you talk about points to this big Snake River Jump on July Fourth.

EVEL: Yes, it does. I want you to be sure to put this in the article: I'M GOING TO JUMP THAT CANYON WHEN I GET DAMN GOOD AND READY AND THAT'S IT! I M NOT SETTING OUT TO COMMIT SUICIDE. JULY 4TH IS THE TARGET DATE AND WHEN THE ENGINEER POINTS HIS FINGER AT ME . . . I'LL TAKE OFF IN THE SKY CYCLE AND TAKE WHAT'S COMING TO ME. At that point, there will be no turning back. There's going to be one hell of a party before that happens though. It will be the biggest party on the face of the earth. The biggest, believe me!



I'm risking my life for it and I'm going to blow every God damn dime of it!