

Statham on point

Jason Statham has never lacked swagger or self-belief, writes Harold von Kursk. He has always known that the best way to succeed in life is to set your goals, work hard, and carve out your own path. No nonsense, no hesitation – just get the job done

The former British Olympic diver who once hawked imitation luxury goods while cruising around South London in a BMW, Statham has parlayed his working-class charm and fearless bravado into a massive Hollywood career. His films have earned close to \$9 billion (£6.5 billion) at the global box office on the strength of his work in multiple film franchises – *Fast & Furious* (including the *Hobbs & Shaw* spin-off), the *Transporter* trilogy, *The Expendables* and *Crank* – often commanding \$20 million pay-checks per project.

Statham has also proven that his name alone can carry a film. As the titular hero in last year’s *The Beekeeper*, produced for a modest \$40 million, his mass appeal powered that film to \$160 million in worldwide earnings while subsequently achieving even greater popularity on Amazon Prime Video.

He’s the kind of actor who brings a powerful aura to his work. Audiences trust him to play reliably heroic, relentless, principled, and often violent

Right: Jason Statham arrives for the *Fast & Furious Presents: Hobbs and Shaw* World Premiere in Hollywood

characters from one picture to the next. His steely determination and laconic menace are qualities that made Clint Eastwood famous and would later see Liam Neeson enjoy a screen renaissance as an action hero well into his 50s and 60s.

But even at age 58, what separates Statham from many of his peers is the legitimate view that he is actually capable of inflicting serious harm when duty calls – all without the benefit of a stunt double. His evident physical prowess is the residual benefit of the thousands of hours he spent in the gym as a restless teenager practicing various martial arts. But having grown fond of diving as a child, he switched his attention to the pool where he trained to be a competitive diver, eventually earning a place on England’s national diving team in the late 80s.

His best performance came at the 1990 Commonwealth Games in New Zealand where finished eighth in the one-metre springboard event while representing England. To his great disappointment, he would fail to qualify for the 1992 Barcelona Olympics. This would prove to be a turning point for Statham which he believes would spur his acting ambitions.

“It was a great experience to travel the world and compete at a certain level in sports. It teaches you discipline, focus, and certainly keeps you out of trouble,” said Jason Statham of his time on the diving board.

“[But] what I didn’t achieve in diving probably helped me take my acting career more seriously.”

Statham would ultimately make a far bigger splash as a formidable, soft-spoken action hero whose icy gaze and martial arts skills has proven irresistible to audiences. He got his start appearing in three consecutive Guy Ritchie crime comedies – *Lock, Stock, and Two Smoking*

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Barrels, Snatch, and Revolver – before *The Italian Job* saw him display the kind of roguish charm that would compliment the threat level he brought to later work in *The Bank Job*, *The Mechanic* and similar fare.

Like so many other actors who know instinctively what kinds of roles would propel them to fame, Statham understands what works on screen for him and how to harness his effortless sense of menace as a leading man. “I know what I’m good at and what the public is going to want to see me do,” said Statham.

“I’m suited to playing guys who have a strong sense of duty and mission and don’t mess about. I feel comfortable playing characters who have a physical edge and are capable of violence. Any sort of physical fights, any hand-to-hand, any skill, anything of that nature, I’ve been doing it since I was a teenager. It’s still an adrenaline rush. ➤



Left: Jason Statham, Harrison Ford, Sylvester Stallone & Mel Gibson at the photocall for their movie *The Expendables 3* on the Croisette at the 67th Festival de Cannes

You never lose that thrill that comes from executing a difficult jump or fall or a very well-choreographed fight sequence... I don't need a stunt man to do that for me and I think audiences appreciate the physical element I bring to those scenes."

This street-fighter sensibility has propelled Statham about as far he could ever have imagined. He honed his distinctive brand of charismatic cunning on the streets of London where at age 15 he learned the friendly art of persuasion while fending for himself. "When you're trying to convince people to buy something you're selling on street corners, you better be convincing and talk a good game. But it was really the work I put into training (as a world-class diver) and finding the discipline to try to compete at the highest level that made me who I am.

"It gave me the confidence that if you put the work in, you're going to make it. And if you push yourself harder than you think you're able to do it, then there's no limit to what you can achieve." *The Beekeeper*, first released in 2024, is the kind of project that

best defines Statham. Directed by David Ayer (*Fury*, *Suicide Squad*) and co-starring Jeremy Irons, this high-octane actioner follows the familiar narrative pattern of a solitary figure living a quiet life who is summoned to defeat nefarious forces.

In this case, Statham's titular "beekeeper", real name Adam Clay, is a highly skilled operative working for a covert law enforcement agency that only intervenes when the "system" fails to protect the public from tangible threats. This is the point at which Clay is reactivated and tasked to neutralise a corrupt corporation and its evil boss.

Interestingly, his character actually does spend his downtime overlooking a small bee colony and lives a double life as a man who has mastered the Zen art of beekeeping. But this is merely a refuge that eases the stress that comes with the job of being a professional killer. Statham likes to tease that his manager conned him into playing in another violent action flick. "I told my manager that I wouldn't do any more "kill 'em all" movies. I've done too many of 'em. I wanted to do something artsy. Something quiet. And he told me about a film where I'm keeping the bees. I'm responsible for them, mind you. But it was the same story," says Statham, trying to suppress his characteristic mischievous nature.

Statham added: "They just keep dragging me back into these movies. I signed, and then they showed me the rest of the script. My manager betrayed me. He said "This is who you are. This is what you do"... I'm a killer!"

The Beekeeper's surprisingly solid box-office and streaming performance has spawned a sequel that is scheduled to start shooting later this year. In addition, this December pre-production work begins on

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Fast X: Part Two, in which Statham returns as Deckard Shaw alongside Dwayne Johnson, Vin Diesel, and Jason Momoa.

Raised in Great Yarmouth, Norfolk, by a street salesman father and dancer mother, Statham is estimated to have pocketed over \$100 million alone for his work in the *Fast* franchise including 2019's *Hobbs & Shaw* spinoff, which he also produced. "I never had any aspirations or any grandiose expectations that I would get to play major roles in *Fast & Furious* movies or co-starring or starring alongside Dwayne Johnson in my own mega-budget movie. That was way beyond anything I had allowed myself to hope for... but it does feel good to get there." ➤



Right: Statham at the Yas Marina Circuit for the 2024, Abu Dhabi Formula One Grand Prix last December where compatriot Lando Norris won his fourth race of the season



Statham has never followed any master plan. Instead, he has relied on his innate sense of how his unvarnished persona would compensate for an utter lack of formal training as an actor.

"When I made *Lock, Stock* back in the day, I thought 'This is it, I've just made a movie!' And that was it, I never thought any further than that. Because I wasn't a Shakespearean actor, I didn't have the credentials, I didn't go to RADA. I didn't have anything

Above: Jason Statham with his former-supermodel wife Rosie Huntington-Whiteley – with whom he has two children – at the Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts Vanity Fair Oscar Party in Beverly Hills, CA

that gave me an authentic stamp that made me worthy of a movie. And what I learned was that I didn't need that...

"The trick in this business is to try and pick your spots and work with top people. You also need to put yourself in the right place at the right time where the lightning strikes and make the most of that opportunity.

"It's not a conscious path that I'm following. It's more instinctual. I landed on a few ladders, and you can certainly land on a few snakes. The film industry can take you up, it can take you down. I've stuck to playing to my strengths."

Fiercely private, Statham never discusses his family life and rarely appears in public with his partner of 15 years, former

supermodel Rosie Huntington-Whiteley, with whom he has two children, eight-year-old son Jack, and daughter Isabella, 3. In a rare break with secrecy, last November he posted several photos on Instagram in which he is shown enjoying a family vacation aboard a yacht.

Otherwise, Statham is one of those rare movie stars who has managed to ply his trade without becoming tabloid fodder or otherwise being drawn into public controversy.

This is very much in keeping with the clear-headed philosophical bent that has guided him and kept him grounded. Everything you see on screen is a variation on Statham's fearless, indomitable spirit. There's no

pretense or artifice to the man, only a common sense approach to life that informs his screen roles and endears him to audiences. How has he managed to stay real in an industry known for smoke, mirrors, and all manner of hype and deception? "By getting to the point! (Laughs) I have a huge advantage in that I used to dole out the bullshit for a living (as a London street vendor). So I can spot it a million miles away and they love to lay it on thick in this business. They always tell you that they love you no matter what they really think.

It's cool, though. I know what it's all about and it's just a matter of getting on with your own work and looking after yourself. I've been doing that all my life." ■