

**James Stenhouse**

**July 2011**

I wrote this in pen on the back of a contract whilst I was bored on a flight from Bilbao to Brussels on 1st July 2011. I thought I'd write it up online.

Last night I made an unsuccessful attempt to jump a fountain of diet coke on a child's bicycle for the 33rd time. The ramp was positioned too close to a pillar, I went over the handlebars and collided head first with the corner of the pillar. The sound of the collision provoked a gasp from the crowd followed by silence. I was unhurt though because I was wearing a crash helmet. I'm making one more jump with this helmet in Manchester before buying a new one., and the decision to replace it has made me look at it closely and I realise I've fallen in love with it as an object. It carries the marks from all the 33 performances its been part of. Big gouges and sweeping scratches scar most of one side. The traces left from Gemma's high heels. The top is scalded and burnt from being set alight over and over. Its started to blister and flake and the number one that used to be emblazoned in the colours of the U.S flag on the front is almost all gone. A new scratch marks the place where my head met the pillar last night. Like the show it reveals a dirty reality behind the spectacle. It looks worn, tired and faded. But there's a glimmer of something heroic about it that makes me want to keep it or show it off. There's something romantic about its unglamorous scuffs and burns. We've carried it with us on exciting journeys to New York, Paris and Barcelona but Its also been with us to Colchester, Chichester, Leeds and Crewe. Its been in the boot of a broken down car on the side of the A1 in January and unable to start in the fog and drizzle of the Pyrenees. Its been soaked in coca cola and gone moldy in the basement of an old police station in Bristol. Its life replicating the pathetic desperation of Evel Knievel's broken bones in dead end mid-Western U.S towns. The subject of thousands of photographs taken by audience members it sometimes is the only thing you can see on the developed film, reflecting the light from a theatre rig in Aberystwyth, a tunnel in London, a club in Glasgow, a gallery in St Etienne. Like the surface level glamour of big jumps in Las Vegas and Wembley stadium you can't see its burn marks and shoddy stickers peeling off.

We have to replace the helmet because its started to fail. For so long it has stoically deflected the kicks from Gemma's left and right feet while I've felt nothing except a disconcerting shove. No pain, no headaches. But recently it hasn't felt quite so tough. I can feel the heel when it strikes and it sends a gasp of air from my lungs. I can hear the crackling of the fire as it burns above my head. Once it can't take a beating anymore its useless. So we're looking for a shiny new one to take to Edinburgh in August and because the old one no longer has a role to play in our home made stunt show its made its last fly. But I feel like I can't throw it away. I feel attached to it. I want to exhibit it on a plinth and celebrate its life spent protecting my head from self-inflicted idiocy. Its such a wonderful document of our show but also of our life in the last few years. The absurdity of jumping over mentoes fountains off a wooden ramp for a living. Standing in front of a room full of strangers, getting my head kicked in over and over again while people take photos and grin. I've poured 64 litres of coca cola into my partners mouth. I've been put out by a fire extinguisher, I've run around naked from the waist up and bleeding trying to pick up ping pong balls from under the feet of clubbers on a dancefloor in Glasgow. I've watched Gemma break her arm in Newcastle, sat on the side of a Spanish motorway in +30 degree heat watching smoke stream from the bonnet. I've washed cola out of my jeans in the laundromats of New York, France and Wales. I've had beer bottles thrown at my head, I've been stood on by a drunk, I've loaded a ramp and a child's bicycle into my car and unloaded it and loaded it and unloaded it and loaded it and unloaded it and carried it on a subway and loaded it again and unloaded it over and over again. The helmet has been with me all the way and when I look at it now it looks completely ridiculous, completely stupid, completely brilliant.