

KNIEVEL VERSUS THE VOLCANO

Forty-one years after Evel Knievel leapt the Caesars Palace fountain, Robbie “Kaptain” Knievel continues the family legacy by jumping his motorcycle in front of the iconic Mirage volcano

BY E.C. GLADSTONE PHOTOGRAPHS BY ERIC JAMISON

For a city hell-bent on constant change, Las Vegas is starting to really relish its past. Why else would The Mirage have celebrated the \$25 million remake of its iconic volcano by hiring Robbie “Kaptain” Knievel to jump his motorcycle over it on live television this past New Year’s Eve, 41 years to the day after his father, Evel, leapt that pioneering Strip water feature, the Caesars Palace fountain?

Unlike his father, though, Robbie, 46, made the estimated 180-foot jump with little more than a backache and a cough to complain about. (Evel was laid up with injuries for months.) He did not actually jump over the man-made mound itself—Robbie had told The Mirage he would need the hotel to pull out some newly planted palm trees and construct a ramp over the north valet port for that—instead leaping in front of it on a closed Las Vegas Boulevard. Still, Knievel did face some dangers that weren’t entirely obvious. The ramps had been assembled in haste, the daredevil had only about an hour to practice on the Strip and, as he noted afterward, “with the flame projectors, you get blinded halfway across, so you can’t even see the landing ramp.”

The stunt was not his most daring, nor as groundbreaking as the leap up and drop down from the Arc de Triomphe that Robbie Maddison performed the same night at Paris Las Vegas. But Knievel seems more interested in bettering his father’s feats than in competing with anyone in the more crowded current field of daredevils. Next in his sights: jumping 16 London buses (instead of his father’s 13) on one of Evel’s heavier vintage Harleys, and maybe going back to Snake River Canyon. “Just to shut everybody up,” he says.

Still, Knievel is humble in the shadow of a legend. “You can’t fill those shoes, whether you’re Evel Knievel’s son, Muhammad Ali’s daughter, Elvis Presley’s daughter or Joe Frazier’s son.”

Only a year after his father’s death, Knievel, with a cartoon, a motorcycle line and a restaurant in the works, is talking about his own retirement. (“This will probably be the last jump I do in America,” he said when announcing it.) But Spike Feresten, who co-hosted the Fox New Year’s Eve live broadcast from The Mirage, is dubious.

“The Knievells have been doing this longer than anybody,” Feresten says. “It’s in this guy’s blood. That’s not going away.” ♠

