

GERLACH Joe

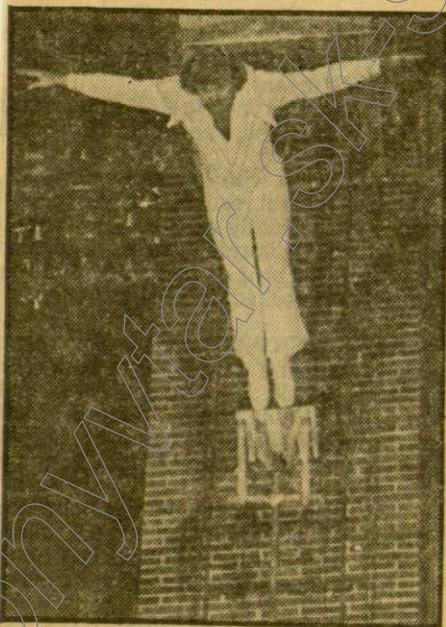
Jumpin' Joe Gerlach having survived his (wheel-less) test plunge-into-a-sponge from the 100-foot high rafters, the World of Wheels at D.C. Army is off and spinning through Sunday. Even Gerlach, a former Olympic diver (for Hungary) and all-America at Michigan, though, has a wheel for the show—a one-wheel cycle, which he rides inside.

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Jumping Joe's takeoff

A 2½-Second Act, But Tough to Follow

By John Sherwood

Washington Star Staff Writer

Joe Gerlach the Jumper, a visiting Zany who high-dives into an 800-pound "sponge," looked worried, as well he might. He kept glancing up nervously to his eagle's perch near the roof of the D.C. Armory.

Ed Turney, Henry Tenenbaum and Arch Campbell — the resident TV news Zanies — also looked worried, as well they might. They kept stealing secret glances at one another, wondering about their own production acts for the late-night news.

Gerlach, preparing for his \$4,000, 90-foot jump to publicize this weekend's World of Wheels Custom Car Show at the D.C. Armory, was telling the lensmen of the press yesterday how best to shoot his daredevil leap. He said the most favorable camera angle would be from the catwalk above him, 100 feet off the floor. The lensmen ignored him and stayed put. The soundmen grunted. The lightmen, the Neanderthals of the TV film crews, stared their vacant stares.

Turney (WMAL), Tenenbaum (WTOP) and Campbell (WRC) paced the floor. To jump, or not to jump. What was the other guy *thinking*? What kind of angle would he come up with? Gerlach's act was not their concern; they had their own acts to get together.

GERLACH, 34 — who has been doing this since 1965 after he gave up amateur and professional championship diving — donned his leathery-white, Evel/Elvis leader-of-the-pack jump suit with the silver studs and Ming the Merciless collar. He began climbing the ladder of success to the platform high above the 12x6x4-foot mattress.

Way up there, he looked like one of those Ken/Knievel dolls in his white boots and flared bell-bottoms. Turney, Tenenbaum and Campbell looked up, and then secretly began looking at one another again. What to do? What to doooooooo?

Meanwhile, Jumping Joe stretched out his arms in the classic swan dive take-off position. But first he had a message for the lens-

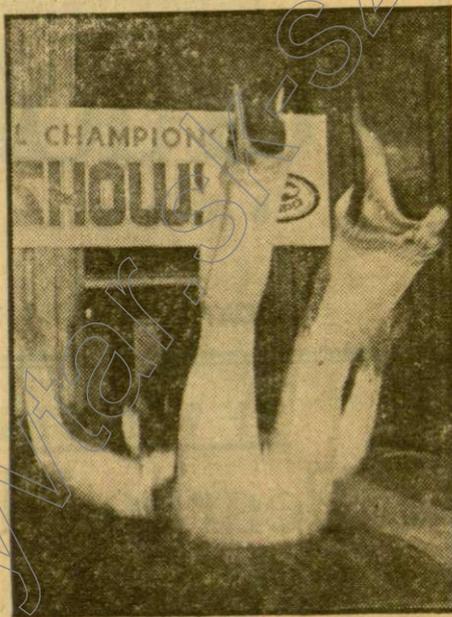
men again: "I think a good way to shoot this thing is at regular speed, but slow motion is better," he shouted. "The fall is over in 2½ seconds. Are you guys ready? Here goes!"

PEOPLE GASPED when he actually jumped. He soared through the air, headed for sudden death, but did a tuck at the last millisecond and landed on his back. A cannon under the mattress went off at the same time. It was a record indoor jump for Gerlach.

There was applause, and Gerlach did a show biz bounce and flashed a studio smile. He was perspiring in the drafty armory and his dry mouth was full of "cotton." He said he was "very nervous. I've never seen my sponge look so small before."

The jumping fool is slated to take the dive four more times over the three-day show, once tomorrow night when the show opens, twice on Saturday and once on Sunday.

Isn't show business wonderful?
So . . . lifelike, you know?



—Washington Star Photographer Brig Cabe

Jumping Joe's landing