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Feature

Knight Rider Behind the Scenes

Inside Line Reports From the Set of the New Knight Rider Movie

By [John Pearley Huffman, Contributor](#) | Published Feb 11, 2008

There are a dozen or so semis filled with lighting equipment, enough mobile dressing rooms to constitute a midsize Kentucky trailer park and about 70 people out in the middle of a seldom-trafficked road, freezing

their butts off. Yep, the set of the new *Knight Rider* TV movie is Hollywood at its most glamorous.

We're standing on the Templin Highway, a chunk of long-ago bypassed four-lane road, alongside California's Interstate 5 "Grapevine." Featured in literally hundreds of TV shows and movies, the Templin Highway even made an appearance in at least a half dozen of the original 90 *Knight Rider* episodes.

Yep, some things never change — like the fact that anywhere near the Grapevine is freaking cold on January mornings and a pretty guy fighting crime in a cool car is a moneymaker. But some things do change, and for the better. Like KITT, the real star of this show. Now a black [2008 Shelby GT500KR](#) instead of a black 1982 Pontiac Trans Am, the wisecracking muscle car is ready to wow a new generation of fans, a demographic too young to remember David Hasselhoff as anything but tabloid fodder.

But the new *Knight Rider*, which will air Sunday, February 17 on NBC, should also have plenty of appeal for those of us who remember the 1980s. David Andron, the show's 29-year-old writer-producer, is seeing to it.

Re-Envisioning

"Let's see," Andron says, doing the arithmetic in his head. "It was '82 to '86. So I was 3 or 4 years old when *Knight Rider* first aired and 8 when they took it off the air. And I loved the show as a kid. I remember going to Universal Studios and seeing the original KITT car. So I was very excited when NBC approached me about possibly being part of this, uh... re-envisioning."

Fortunately, the "re-envisioning" includes serious wreckage. Just behind Andron is the day's set — a 2004 [GMC Yukon XL Denali](#) the production company had run head-on into a large reinforced concrete block at 70 mph and the "Attack" version of the Knight Industries Three Thousand Mustang.

The gag here is that the SUV has run into KITT, destroying itself in the process while the car remains undamaged. The scene being shot is the aftermath. Some computer will replace that cement block with the Mustang in post-production.

"We kept a lot of the ideas as part of the back story," Andron continues as set dressers add fake smoke to the real wreckage. "I made a real effort in all the research and looking back to really try and incorporate as much of the original mythology as we could. But there really was a need to take some liberties as far as re-creating everything."

Get Hasselhoff on the Phone

So the Foundation for Law and Government (FLAG) returns as the organization that supports KITT and sends the car out to fight crime in the world — ironically once again without the support of either any law or government.

There may even be some glimpses of the original KITT Trans Am and the 55-year-old David Hasselhoff, who has been unfrozen from his cryogenic slumber and released from rehab to make a cameo appearance as Michael Knight. But the rest of the cast is new and so is the story.

"I don't know if it was ever specified if Michael Knight had a son in the original," Andron explains about the movie's jumping-off point. "I'm almost positive it wasn't. I mean, I know he had various relationships with women throughout the series. So we took a liberty there, that at some point, one of those relationships bore a child."

No wonder Hasselhoff is back for a cameo.

The actor playing disillusioned former Army Ranger and Iraq vet Mike Tracer — that is Michael Knight Jr. for all intents and dramatic purposes — is 28-year-old Jason Bruening. At 6-foot-3 he's lanky enough to pass for Hasselhoff's son, and like the Hoff he looks good in a black leather jacket.

Bring in the Stuntman

Bruening isn't doing much driving in the show. For some scenes inside the car, he sits in KITT's driver seat but a driver in a pod on the car's roof controls the vehicle. In other scenes KITT doesn't move at all as scenery is digitally inserted using "green screen" technology. But from what we see on the set, Bruening does an excellent job of opening a door and jumping out with a mixed look of concern and action-readiness on his face. You know, just like Hasselhoff.

And yes, Bruening has signed a contract that commits him to *Knight Rider* should NBC decide to once again pick it up as a series.

Also in the cast are Deanna Russo (an escapee from *The Young & The Restless*) as Sarah, the daughter of KITT's inventor Dr. Charles Graiman, and Sydney Tamiia Poitier (memorable in last year's *Death Proof*) as federal agent Carrie Ruvai. The most recognizable face in the cast is Bruce Davison as Dr. Graiman. Trust us, you'll know him when you see him.

KITT's Drivers

On the set of the new *Knight Rider* movie, KITT is treated like another cast member. The car has its own equivalent of make-up people and the crew talks about the car as if it were "working." But in reality KITT is just six Mustangs — big lumps of steel. Stunt drivers are the ones who determine how KITT behaves.

"Ted Moser, our car captain, set up all the cars with special e-brakes and stuff," says stunt driver Troy Brown. "It's all been fun — just sliding cars and bumping into stuff. We had four stunt Mustangs and then KITT in Attack mode." One Mustang, Brown reports, was wrecked performing a stunt where it banged into another car. But there are no big jumps in the movie. Turbo boost, it seems, is on back-order.

"I don't want to reveal too much," says David Andron, "although I will say that we wanted to make sure that we kept people waiting for the series, when we could bring those things out there."

And KITT will have something to drive up and into like the semi he had in the series. Only this time it won't be a truck. "It's better than a truck," promises Dave Bartis. "You'll see. It's a good reveal."

KITT's Voice

There's some irony that a GMC crashes into KITT in the movie. Because it's GMC that's determining who supplies KITT's voice.

Will Arnett, a comedic actor who starred on *Arrested Development* and has appeared in a dozen or so popular comedy movies, was originally cast as the voice of KITT for the new *Knight Rider* movie. In fact, Arnett had recorded all his lines as KITT and the producers were happy.

"Will Arnett, who we were lucky to get to be the voice of the car, has his own personality," says Bartis, "you know, that he brings with his voice." Unfortunately for *Knight Rider*, the personality in Arnett's voice is so incredible that it was already the voice of GMC's TV commercials.

So it's Val Kilmer — that's right, the Iceman, Nick Rivers and Batman number two — who we will hear as KITT when the movie airs. Here's hoping he says something like, "Michael, you can be my wingman any time."

Speed Check

As the cast wraps up its tough day of emoting next to cars, the crew is whittled down to just about a dozen people. Under the guidance of Director Steve Shill, they quickly move to another part of Templin Highway and in the brief hour or so before the sun goes down, put together a quick string of shots of the Attack KITT passing at high speed.

With Troy Brown behind the wheel, KITT roars past the camera at about 120 mph, and then the crew quickly scrambles into the surrounding hills to set up another shot. Then KITT comes back the other way. It's lightning-fast, high-adrenaline, improvisational filmmaking. And for those of us just visiting the set, the highlight of the day.

The new KITT looks plain wicked. And sounds even better. The *Knight Rider* movie should be worth watching.