

## What is a vehicle supervisor?



Vehicle supervisors manage the picture vehicles on a film set

### Vehicle supervisor

The most valuable resource on a film is time.

On a modest film, an hour lost on set can cost up to \$5,000. On a big budget film - with a highly-paid cast, numerous extras, a big crew, shot on location, using big lighting and crane rigs – that lost hour can cost a lot more.

The most frequent cause of delay on film sets is vehicle breakdown. On a film with even a moderate number of vehicles scripted, a vehicle supervisor is desirable. On a big film, it is absolutely essential.

The vehicle supervisor is part of the art department, accountable to the production designer for the choice and modification of vehicles, and to the art director for their cost, organisation, transportation and maintenance.

Vehicle supervisors have generally trained in a different field such as motor mechanics or industrial design. They often work their way up the ranks of the film crew through their skills and their understanding of what the job involves. And it can be a huge job. Think of the number of period vehicles required for *The Great Gatsby*, some of them imported from the USA. The *Mad Max* films make massive demands on the vehicle crew. The *Fury Road* vehicles, for example,

were created and modified in Sydney, shipped to Namibia for shooting, then back to Sydney for additional filming.

Early in pre-production, the vehicle supervisor breaks down the script to establish the vehicle requirements and then meets with the director, the production designer and the director of photography. During this meeting, they “cast” vehicles. What type of cars will the characters drive? What colour will they be? Do they need to be modified for stunts? Do they need extra-bright headlights to be visible on film during night shoots? Do they blow up with the bad guys at the end of the movie?

Period films pose challenges for the vehicle supervisor. There are many vintage car clubs, but the owners take great care of their cars. A 1940s ute today won't look like a hard-working farm vehicle of the 1940s. Owners are often reluctant to let others drive the car, transport it long distances, drive it on dusty roads or leave it on location.

The vehicle supervisor works closely with other crew – the production office for scheduling vehicle transport to and from set, the first assistant director for the placement and movement of vehicles, the stunt coordinator for stunt and safety modifications. The grips department is very important - they provide camera rigs and tracking vehicles for scenes that take place in cars. Generally actors don't drive the cars and the grips will hire [low loaders](#) so they can shoot cars that appear to move at the normal height but are in fact being towed.

Although the cast is unlikely to drive the vehicles, the vehicle supervisor may need to train and rehearse the actors so that on screen it appears that the character is actually controlling the car.

Before the shoot begins, the vehicles are all prepped so they are in working order. If cars are to be driven on the roads, stunt assistant personnel have been hired as drivers, or cast to double the actors. Some cars have been purchased because they are needed for a number of weeks or are scripted to be damaged. Other cars have been hired for the day from film car specialists or individual owners, who have been made aware of the shoot date, time and place, or who have been told that a car transporter truck will take the vehicles to location. Based on the shoot schedule, the production department will rent a low loader and tracking vehicle for the scenes where the actors apparently “drive” the cars. If filming is to take place on a public road, traffic controllers will be required. The location manager coordinates a traffic plan with local council and police, and alerts residents to the filming activity.

As with others in the art department, the vehicle supervisor’s daily tasks are determined by the schedule and call sheet.

Consider a shoot a day involving a total of ten modern cars of various kinds, some on low loaders and others as either moving or stationary background vehicles. The vehicle supervisor liaises with the owners, drivers and production coordinator. If driving doubles are required, the stunt assistant personnel arrive early and go to costume and makeup so they can be made to resemble the actors they are doubling.

When the vehicles arrive on location, the vehicle supervisor gives them a last-minute check, and the drivers go through final details with the owner. The first assistant director and the vehicle supervisor set the cars for the first shot, and they rehearse. With all the crew and cast, including traffic controllers and safety officer, fully briefed, shooting can begin.

From time to time, things go wrong, so the vehicles team always includes at least one experienced mechanic, and a support truck with a wide range of car parts, tyres, patches and paints.

Even if all goes smoothly, filming with moving vehicles is a slow process. A simple tracking shot of actors chatting in a car will involve a long string of vehicles – a lead car to be sure the road is clear, the low loader with the “hero” car on its trailer, the tracking vehicle with the director and camera and sound crew and a follow vehicle to warn traffic coming behind. For every take, this convoy has to find an area where it can safely turn around and return to reset the shot.

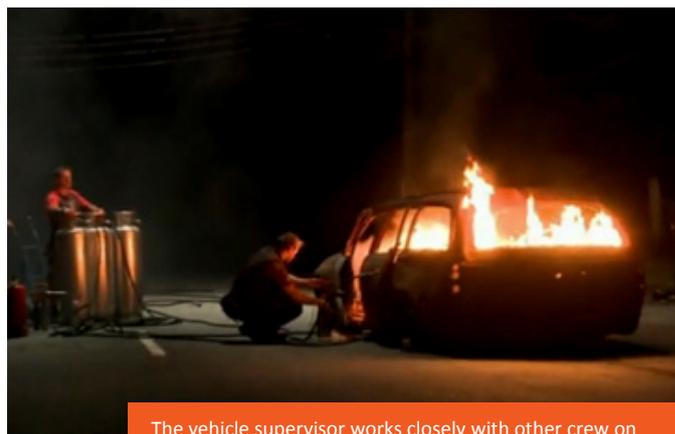
Just imagine what was involved for the vehicle supervisor for the tank car chase sequence in *Fast and the Furious 6*! It’s little wonder that in this digital age blue screening has become a popular solution to shooting vehicle action. Have a look at this behind the scenes video from [The Great Gatsby](#).

After the shoot, purchased cars are registered as sold or scrapped. If an owner has allowed modifications to a hired vehicle, these are reversed and the vehicle returned. The vehicle supervisor keeps a record of useful and interesting cars, and people, for future films.

[Click here to view interview with vehicle supervisor Geoff Naylor](#)

#### Useful resources:

- [The Guardian: Building Batman’s car](#)



The vehicle supervisor works closely with other crew on transporting vehicles, co-ordinating stunts and ensuring safety

Creative Content Australia is a not-for-profit organisation committed to raising awareness of the significance of copyright, the value of screen content and the impact that downloading and streaming pirated films and TV programs has on the creative industries: [www.creativecontentaustralia.org.au](http://www.creativecontentaustralia.org.au)

Creative Content Australia develops and distributes free online education resources to schools throughout Australia to stimulate classroom discussion about copyright and promote the value of creative content and good digital citizenship online [www.nothingbeatstherealthing.info](http://www.nothingbeatstherealthing.info)

