

SQUARE WHEELS AND SINKING CARS

Mythbusters come to Eugene

They've checked to see if Pop Rocks and Coke will make your stomach explode and tried to tip over a car with a jet engine, but they've never put a poodle in the microwave (that would be cruel). The show started off busting "urban legends," *Mythbusters* star Jamie Hyneman admits, but "*Mythbusters* sounds better than *Legends*."

True.

Mythbusters applies the scientific method to exploding things large and small and to otherwise debunking legends, movie scenes, rumors and news stories; Hyneman and fellow special effects expert Adam Savage bring the 10-year-old Discovery Channel show's "Behind the Myths" tour to Eugene March 15.

Hyneman, he of the walrus 'stache and beret, took the time to answer a couple of *EW*'s pressing questions, like: Is *Mythbusters* a public service — stopping people from doing stupid things? After all, you don't need to risk blowing up your own belly with a soda and fizzy candy explosion if the clever people of *Mythbusters* have already done it for you (and no, you won't explode, consider that belief "busted").

"More than thinking of it as a specific public service, the main value to the public at large is encouraging critical thinking," Hyneman says. "We are not scientists or engineers," but people with "a critical eye." "Science isn't just for guys in lab coats, it's for anyone trying to figure things out," he says.

Turns out the show has saved some lives — four or five people have gotten out of submerged cars after seeing the episode in which it's proven you have to wait until the pressure equalizes with water filling the car before you can open the door, Hyneman says.

After a decade on the air, aren't the men of myth afraid they will run out of things to bust?

"We are fond of joking that we will run out of things to test when people stop believing in stupid stuff," Hyneman says, but he adds, "we're allowed to investigate anything that we find interesting." Suggestions, he says, come from their own minds, as well as viewer comments on their website.

What Hyneman found interesting was square wheels: "If you drive fast enough on square wheels will you get a smooth ride?" Full disclosure: I've driven my Subaru very fast down logging roads, convinced the faster you go, the less you feel the bumps.

The square wheels thing is true, Hyneman says — but in between the beginning and getting the truck up to smoothness speed, you'd have "quite the adventure." He gleefully describes what happened to the undercarriage of the truck when it hit 20 miles per hour and the square wheels "were bouncing on ahead of us."

Sounds crazy, but it's "representative of what we do with the show," he says. "Obviously you don't make wheels square and put them on cars, but there is actually a case where square wheels might be a good idea — if you are on soft dirt or sand or snow," he says.

Silly-seeming square wheels become science as Hyneman describes how round wheels spin out and dig a hole in super-soft ground, but square ones are less inclined to sink due to their larger surface area and the way the sharper corners can get purchase on squishy ground.

Investigating square wheels may lead you to other questions and to invent or come up with solutions to

other problems, Hyneman says. "That's the wonderful thing about investigation," he says.

The mythbusting at Matt Court will feature audience participation, behind-the-scenes stories and onstage experiments. Grab some Mentos, buy some diet soda at the dubiously named "Uncle Phil's" concession stand and go blow some (small) things up. ■

Mythbusters come to Matthew Knight Arena 8 pm Friday, March 15. Tickets \$38, \$48 and \$88 at matthewknightarena.com. For more hands-on fun, go to OMSI in Portland through May 5 for "Mythbusters: The Explosive Exhibition."



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