

Lifestyle | Features

'Run OJ Run': 25 years since the world's most famous police chase

It was the car chase that brought a nation screaming to a halt. On June 17, 1994, a white Ford Bronco containing a fugitive OJ Simpson led a convoy of police cars down southern California's freeways—and 95 million Americans couldn't take their eyes off it. Coverage of massive sporting events like the NBA finals and US Open was interrupted with footage of the chase, while Domino's Pizza reported record delivery orders from viewers unwilling to miss a single moment. Twenty-five years later that moment captured by hovering TV helicopters and breathless newsmen, and broadcast around the world, remains an obsession.

But for one viewer, it held a particular fascination. "We were all huddled around and watching, no one was breathing—we just stood there in complete awe and fascination," recalls Kim Goldman, in a new podcast. "It was weird because there (were) people hoping that he would kill himself ... And my dad and I just didn't—we wanted him to be brought in and held accountable." Five days earlier, Goldman's brother Ron had been stabbed to death alongside Simpson's ex-wife, Nicole Brown Simpson.

In her 10-part podcast "Confronting OJ Simpson," launched on the anniversary of the killings, Goldman sets

out why she feels justice has not been served. Simpson was famously acquitted in 1995 by a Los Angeles jury in a case decried by many as a media circus which became known as the "Trial of the Century."

The former football star and Hollywood actor's acquittal was greeted with disbelief by many Americans, with opinion on the black athlete's guilt divided sharply along racial lines. Simpson was later found liable for the deaths in a 1997 civil suit and ordered to pay damages to Goldman's family totaling \$33.5 million. The majority remains unpaid.

'Waiting for the collision'

Simpson maintains his innocence and has always denied he was trying to flee during the famous Bronco chase, even though he ignored a police deadline to turn himself in. He told a LAPD detective over the phone during the slow-speed pursuit to "let them all know I wasn't running," but rather visiting Nicole's grave. A duffel bag containing Simpson's passport and cash—as well as a gun—found by police in the car led many to question this, but was never submitted as evidence by the prosecution.



O.J. Simpson

fascination with that kind of event in the States than anywhere else," he added. "It goes back to the days of horseback riding when someone would rob a bank and the sheriff would jump on his horse and chase him."

The car itself, owned by Simpson's friend Al Cowlings who was driving during the pursuit, is on display in a Tennessee crime museum. A Los Angeles tour company reportedly explored the idea of offering rides in the vehicle up and down the same freeways. To the disappointment of fans who gathered on overpasses along the chase route that day with signs saying "Run OJ Run" and "Go OJ," Simpson eventually surrendered. But for Goldman, that has not led to any closure. Simpson, now 71, was released from jail in 2017 after serving nine years behind bars for an unrelated armed robbery. He lives in Las Vegas, where he is regularly spotted playing golf. "People routinely every time I get interviewed say, 'Are you OK now?'" Goldman said. "And I look at them and say 'I know you want me to say yes, and I'm never going to say yes.' Because it's never going to be true."—AFP

For Geoffrey Alpert, a professor at University of South Carolina who studies police chases, Simpson's celebrity heightened a deep-rooted fascination with the idea of a dangerous pursuit. "We're waiting for the collision. No one wants anyone to die but we certainly like to see some mayhem," he told AFP, comparing televised chases to wildly popular Nascar races. "The media has a broader



Visitors walk in the ghost city of Pripjat during a tour in the Chernobyl exclusion zone.



The medical facility in the ghost city of Pripjat where the first victims of Chernobyl disaster were treated after the accident in April 1986.



Visitors buy snacks and souvenirs at a souvenir shop next to the Dytyatky checkpoint after a tour in the Chernobyl exclusion zone.

'I'm no hero', says Chernobyl diver portrayed in hit TV series

In the acclaimed US mini-series "Chernobyl", Oleksiy Ananenko is hailed as one of three men who helped avert an even greater disaster after the worst nuclear accident in history. Now living in a modest one-bedroom apartment on the outskirts of Kiev, Ananenko insisted that what he did was not heroic. "I never felt like a hero. I was doing my job," said the 59-year-old former engineer who in the aftermath of the 1986 Chernobyl disaster took part in a risky operation to drain water from under the power station to prevent a further explosion. In one of the most dramatic episodes of the HBO mini-series, actors playing Ananenko and two other engineers, Valeriy Beshpalov and Boris Baranov, wade through flooded corridors to empty a water tank located three meters (10 feet) below the burning reactor.

On screen, officials inform workers of the imminent danger and the three men volunteer for the mission to prevent "millions" of deaths. Nuclear experts fear a second explosion from super-hot radioactive fuel burning through a concrete floor and reacting with the large amount of water in the tank. In reality, while there were fears of a second explosion, the scale of the potential disaster was unclear at the time. And the three men depicted in the series as volunteering for a suicide mission simply obeyed orders, without being clearly informed about the risks they incurred, he recalled. "I was ordered to go there, so I went," said Ananenko, who with his brown hair and brown eyes does not resemble the blond Icelandic actor Baltasar Breki Samper playing him in the mini-series. "I wasn't afraid," he said.

'We went faster than that'

Protected only by diving equipment and simple respirators, the three men negotiated the partially flooded corridors under the reactor. Using flashlights, they managed to find the locks for the water tank in the dark and quickly opened them. "Immediately I heard a noise that meant the water was draining. That was amazing," Ananenko said. Watching the same scene on screen, he pointed out inaccuracies. "We didn't have them," he said, pointing to the divers' oxygen cylinders.

"And we walked quicker than that. Why quicker? Because if you went slowly, the dose (of absorbed radiation) would be higher." Despite carrying two dosimeters with him, Ananenko said he does not recall the exact figure for the amount of radiation his body absorbed. "That means it wasn't very high," he said. One of the other men on the mission, Baranov, died in 2005 but the third, Beshpalov, is still alive and lives in the same district as Ananenko.

Ananenko did not suffer any serious health problems straight after the mission and he was able to continue to work in the nuclear sector until 2017. But then the

Chernobyl veteran was forced to retire because he was involved in a serious car accident that plunged him into a coma for a month and affected his memory. Decorated with Soviet and Ukrainian medals and full of life and robust despite it all, Ananenko now receives a monthly state pension of around \$417 (369 euros).



The wreckage of a car in the ghost city of Pripjat in the Chernobyl exclusion zone.

Very determined

Meanwhile another former Chernobyl worker, Oleksiy Breus, who was a technician at the fatal fourth reactor, told AFP his impression of the mini-series was "positive on the whole" although he had some specific criticisms. "The nuclear scientists are shown as people who are afraid of everything and afraid of their bosses, but in reality they were very resolute," he insisted. None of the operators fled after the explosion. On the contrary, "new people came to help," he said in Pripjat, the nuclear workers' town near the power station that was evacuated after the incident.

In the disaster's aftermath, "we had to run through a building that was unlit and half-destroyed to save injured colleagues and bring them up to doctors" as well as battle the fire, he recalled. Sergiy Parashyn, a former director of the Chernobyl power station who headed its Soviet Communist Party cell when the disaster occurred, also commented on the show. He spoke to journalists inside the renovated underground bunker that is shown in the series as hosting meetings between power station senior staff and officials, scenes he insisted were unrealistic. "In fact, the specialists were trying to work out what to do, but in the series they are just (shown as) rejecting information," he said.—AFP



A wreckage of a bus in the ghost city of Pripjat during a tour in the Chernobyl exclusion zone.



Visitors walk in the ghost city of Pripjat during a tour in the Chernobyl exclusion zone.



A person visit the underground shelter of Chernobyl nuclear power plant, during a tour in the Chernobyl exclusion zone.—AFP photos



This handout from the Crime Suppression Division of the Royal Thai Police taken on June 15, 2019 and released shows Italian national Francesco Galdelli (center) after he was arrested on the outskirts of Pattaya.—AFP

Italian 'Bonnie and Clyde' arrested in Thailand for Clooney fraud

An Italian who allegedly posed as Hollywood superstar George Clooney to sell clothes online has been arrested with his wife in Thailand after years on the run, police said yesterday. Francesco Galdelli, 58, and Vanja Goffi, 45, were arrested Saturday at a house on the outskirts Pattaya after an operation between Thai and Italian authorities, officials said. "During interrogation, Francesco confessed to claiming to be George Clooney and opening a clothes business to trick people into sending money," a statement from Thailand's Crime Suppression Division said. The couple is also wanted in Italy for multiple

scams including selling fake Rolex watches online, the statement said. They sometimes mocked their victims by sending packets of salt instead of the timepieces.

Their crimes led them to be dubbed the Italian 'Bonnie and Clyde' after the notorious American bank robbers of the Great Depression era. Footage from a police drone showed the pair-wanted on an Interpol red notice since 2013 — carrying a bag as they were taken into custody. They were nabbed after police surrounded their luxury compound in a stakeout using electronic surveillance and a drone, Italian police said in a statement. The

case against the pair stretches back several years after Clooney told a Milan court that the pair—and another accomplice—had fraudulently used his name to promote a fashion range. Pattaya, the Thai town they were found holed up, is infamous as a hideout for gangsters and criminals from across the world. "They stayed in Thailand since 2014 and never left," police said, adding a court will charge them under local immigration laws before extradition proceedings begin.—AFP