

Entertainment

If at first you nearly drown . . .

By MARY LOUISE BIRKS
Times staff writer

Undaunted by criticism that he cheats, a teenaged amateur escape artist — who once nearly drowned trying to imitate a Harry Houdini escape — perseveres in his quest to be the best.

For Randy Audas, 18, of Ireson Crescent in Malton, mastering the great escapes of yesteryear isn't a hobby. It's the goal to which he devotes much of his time in the hope of one day be-

ing able to bring his own stage show to packed audiences everywhere.

His parents aren't thrilled about his preoccupation, he admits, but while they don't encourage him, they don't try to stop him either. No doubt with hearts in their mouths everytime he performs, they're among his biggest fans.

Audas, who bills himself as "The Amazing Randaz", first made headlines last March when a Houdini-type escape act he attempted at

a school talent show backfired.

Trapped inside a closed and padlocked 45-gallon drum filled with water for almost three minutes, (Audas says he can hold his breath for 2½ minutes), he was pulled out in the nick of time, while a horrified audience of Morning Star Secondary School students looked on.

Audas has since repeated the act successfully in practice and on stage. However, his performance at the Malton Community Centre, where he and friends got together to present an evening of magic last month, was marred by criticism that Audas fudged the act.

The Toronto Star reported that observers questioned whether Audas was completely submerged in the drum, noting that no water flow-

ed from the drum when he got in and when he emerged from behind a curtain placed around the drum two minutes and 15 seconds later, his shoulder-length hair was dry.

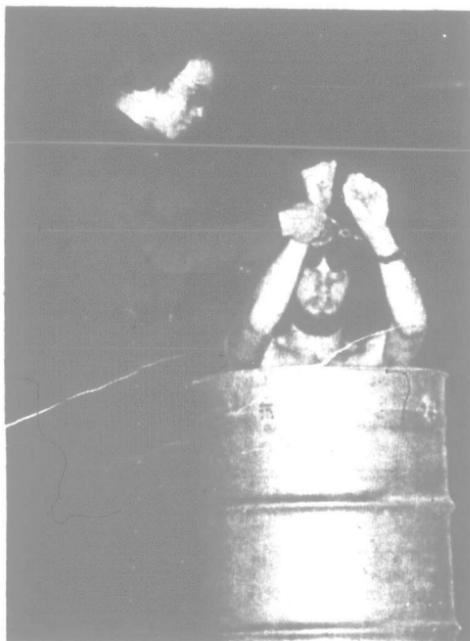
The young escape artist says his face was underwater when he was locked in the barrel. After the accident, he did build some safety features into the act because he believes he ran into trouble when the water pressure distorted the shape of the barrel, making the lid too tight to force it off from the inside after he removed the handcuffs. For this reason, the drum wasn't filled to the brim as it was for the earlier unsuccessful attempt, he told The Times, adding the trick is performed behind the curtain to protect his technique.

Says Audas, "When I

attempt tricks that put my life on the line — and it is — I never think that I

won't make it. Like the last time (the accident), I knew they'd get me out." Audas says he hasn't

pondered his motives, he just knows he's hooked on being a professional entertainer.



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Randaz prepares to submerge

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