

DON'T MESS WITH... **GENE WHACK-MAN!**

Fists fly as 71-year-old actor **BRAWLS** with two guys after car crash



GENE HACKMAN still packs a mean punch – and the two-fisted star proved it by duking it out with a pair of belligerent bullies half his age after a fender-bender.

"I was Popeye Doyle in the French Connection all over again," the 71-year-old ex-Marine told a pal. "I got in four punches first. That'll teach those punks to mess around with us older guys."

Hackman held his own at first, but the two guys, both reportedly in their 30s, ganged up on him and chopped the 6-foot-2 star down to size with a low blow that knocked him flat.

"I was so much faster than they were – thanks to all the fights I've had in my movies," he boasted to his friend. "I threw the four punches before either guy knew what was happening."

"But they kicked me in the groin and I actually went out. I literally saw stars. They both jumped me. They played a little dirty and they got me where it hurts."

The impromptu fistfight broke out after Hackman, driving a Volvo sedan, clipped the rear of a Volvo station wagon at a busy West Hollywood intersection.

The two-time Oscar winner stepped into the median to exchange insurance information and found himself face to face with two angry men.

"At first, Gene kept his cool," an eyewitness named Jay tells GLOBE. "But the other driver was totally in his face. The guy and his buddy

started yelling at Gene, as though purposely trying to provoke him.

"So Gene hauled off and socked him. After that, the driver's friend wrestled him to the ground and hit him in the groin."

Another witness, Nathaniel Keefer, tells GLOBE, "Gene was calm and composed, but the guys from the other car went toward him in a mean, threatening way. After several minutes, the driver said something to set him off and Gene hit him in the face three or four times."

Bystanders were shocked to see Hackman, who won Oscars for *The*

French Connection and *Unforgiven*, trying to fight off two men.

"I couldn't believe it!" an eyewitness named Michelle tells GLOBE. "I see Hackman on the ground with a young guy standing over him and the other driver

rubbing his face and jaw.

"Hackman's hand was bleeding badly, so he must have really hit the other guy hard."

It was all over by the time cops arrived. Hackman and the other driver exchanged insurance information, but neither wanted to press charges for the battle.

"The police talked to everyone separately for a few minutes," Michelle says. "Then they all got in their cars and drove away."

A few hours after the fight, Hackman's publicist Dick Guttman told GLOBE, "Gene is home and he's feeling fine. We thank everyone for their concern."

- ROBIN MIZRAHI

'I threw four punches before they knew what was happening'