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Steve McQueen: The Man & Le Mans

By Gabriel Clarke

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[interposing voices]

WOMAN:

DIRECTOR:

[race cars driving]

[sirens]

[chopper noises]

MAN:

Uh, why don't we just dive in
and have a look at uh-- Steve,
what do you think of the
circumstances that might have
led up to the disease itself?
How do you perceive that?

STEVE MCQUEEN:

One is asbestos poisoning in
my lungs, which is very rare.
Two is, I think,
there were times
when I was under pressure.
I had a battle in my
business with somebody
for about five years, so
I think I really wanted
to let go under pressure.

NARRATOR:

when a super star
who loved auto racing decided
to do a picture about his sport.

WOMAN:

seminal moment in his life.

MAN:

were shooting this movie should
happen to no man.

MAN:

get it down on film, what

I thought it was all about.
Ladies and gentlemen,
the male world
film favorite, Steve McQueen.
[applause]

STEVE MCQUEEN:

MAN:

life to do over again,
would you do it the same way?

STEVE MCQUEEN:

[Laughing]
Every bit of it,
because I think film
is a very important medium.
When he was the number one
superstar in the world,
he was, like, I
think, 38 years old.
People went nuts
wherever he went.
He was American Royalty.
Groovy.
Thanks.
[applause]
I started on a farm, in
the state of Missouri,
and I lived there in
my youth, and I got
out of there as quick as I can.

NARRATOR:

background gave him
a courageous element that stood
him in very, very good stead
at that time.

STEVE MCQUEEN:

very much about art or music,
except things that I like.
Basically, I come
from the gutter,

and I'm not a compromiser.

MAN:

a shit, you know?
If there was a fight to be had,
he would not turn his back,
and it doesn't
matter who it was.

INTERVIEWER:

you're a perfectionist.
Well, I try to do a good job.
You know, I try.
"The Thomas Crown Affair"
and "Bullet" were my two
pictures with Steve McQueen.
I convinced him that every
time he went on the set,
no matter what
the director said,
he should recite the mantra.
I decide what is right
and what is wrong,
and I don't have to
explain it to anybody.
I like women, but I'm a
little afraid of them.
I'm not going to
make a commitment,
because if you make a commitment
to a woman, they can hurt you.
I won't pick a fight, but
if you pick a fight with me
or back me into a corner,
I will fucking kill you.
He used to recite
that to himself
when he went on
the set, regardless
of what the directions were.
And he played that character,
I thought, just brilliantly.

INTERVIEWER:

more, acting or producing?

STEVE MCQUEEN:

I'm sort of hung.
I like producing, as
long as I'm acting,
because I think the ultimate
is to have creative control.
He loved the part in the
"Thomas Crown Affair,"
playing Tommy Crown.
Big business guy, no one
knows anything more than him.
He aspired to that character.
He wanted to feel like
he was a bit of a mogul.

STEVE MCQUEEN:

the movies are changed.
It's not a game anymore.
It's big bucks, heavy bucks.
And those people play
for keeps out there.
He got this into his head, that
he would build us an empire.
After "Thomas Crown," he
said, I'm going to build us
an empire, baby doll.

STEVE MCQUEEN:

have my name on there,
they can no longer
pawn me off as just
a candy ass movie star who
they've got to be easy with.
This puts me out
front as an executive.
So therefore, they
have to deal with me.
The juice.
He got the juice man,
he got the power.
It was a very smart,
intelligent, sophisticated move

for him to form a
production company
called Solar, and exercised
his clout in the way he did.
And the first
person that he told,
his agents that he wanted to
reach out to be his partner
was my father.

I'm standing here with Bob
Relyea, the executive producer
of Solar Productions.

We had been through
"The Magnificent Seven."

We'd been through
"The Great Escape."

The company was a
very well organized,
real production company.

The relationship that Steve
and I had in our families
was extremely close.

INTERVIEWER:

actually throw a temper?

Can you?

Injustice bothers
me a lot sometimes,
and I get angry about
things, and so forth.
And I suppose I fly off
the handle sometimes.

MAN:

If there was a problem, he'd
just grab him by the shoulder,
and he'd take him
off to the side.

As much as you want this, Steve,
this passion doesn't mean shit.

And Steve got it.

It was a real coup to get him
to come to Cinema Center Films,
and to be involved

with his company.
That, in itself, was a
major accomplishment.
It wasn't just "I'm the
biggest star in the world."
It was I'm going to
decide what films I make.
I'm going to decide
who the directors are,
and I'm going to make
that racing picture
that I always wanted
to make, and it's
going to define my career.
I race motorcars,
because I enjoy it.
I like the competitive element.
I like beating the other guy.
I do enjoy the feeling of power.

WOMAN:

It was his passion.
And if you find your passion in
life, you know you got it made.
I remember the first time I
raced, I was very frightened.
It scared me.
I didn't like the idea
of being frightened,
and I wanted to overcome it.
That was one element.
The other element, and
it is a very pure thing.
It's one of the few things
in life you can't fix.
When you're out
there by yourself,
you're very much by yourself.

MAN:

need for adrenaline, the what
do I have to lose attitude
that he seemed to project,
it just matched McQueen's

soul, his personality,
and his essence.
Racing drivers are
a different breed.
When you're in the
car behind the wheel,
you tune everything off.
There's one thing that
you are focused on,
and that is to perform, to win.
And he had that.

NARRATOR:

years, an almost
forgotten airport has echoed
to the fury of cars and speed.

MAN:

get to the brother of Le Mans.
If you're ever
going to get a taste
of what it's like to be in an
endurance race, this is it.

WOMAN:

he had broken his foot
in the motorcycle race.
And I said, you
better not do this.
He said, no.
He said, I can do
it, I can do it.

INTERVIEWER:

shifting and clutching?
Must be pretty difficult.
Well, it's a little difficult.
I can't use a foot rest.
And we've put some
sandpaper on the bottom,
taped it on, so I keep it on
the clutch pedal, adjust it.
We went for it.
It was like a Hollywood script.

COMMENTATOR:

of the 57,000 who looked on
was the McQueen
Revson Porsche 908.
The two have done
a Masterful job.

WOMAN:

about that race is suddenly,
they were winning.

COMMENTATOR:

this combination,
Sebring could have
a storybook finish.
Approaching the 11th hour,
the Porsche closes the gap
on the faltering Ferrari.
The McQueen pits were
overjoyed, thinking
the Ferrari was in trouble.
And out of the darkness, one
car would emerge the victor.

MAN:

Andretti two cars
to beat us and only pass us
on the last laps of the race.

COMMENTATOR:

of Sebring was over,
and Ferrari had won.
McQueen Revson was second.
[cheering]
We were mobbed at
the end of the race.
Steve gets up on the car
and gives the peace signal.
And it was like Moses
parted the waters
or God appeared in the sky.
Silence.
That was my biggest

thrill, for me,
because I guess being an
actor, people don't really
expect you to do
it as well, and I
was a big man of my house with
my kids for awhile, anyway.
That was a major, major
happy time in his life.
I remember when he came home.
Yeah.
He was in a good mood for
about a month after that.

MAN:

Race, he wasn't
looked at just like,
oh, he's the actor,
superstar, Steve McQueen.
He was admired by
the other drivers
as a real, professional racer.

MAN:

and racing was now perfect.
It was a natural.
His next step was the 24 Hours
of Le Mans and to race there.

MAN:

to be a lasting memory
of Steve McQueen, this film.
Steve wanted to really do the
movie of all time, the movie
for all generations, the movie
that captures the smells,
the noise, the feeling of
car racing like no other film
ever had.
It was a really big deal.
-Hi, guys.
-Bonjour.
How you doing?
[french speech]

Merci.

Wow.

It's been what, 40 years?

[sighs]

Ha!

MAN:

was even started,
McQueen decided he
was going to make
the ultimate racing picture.

MAN:

"The Day of the Champion"
that never got made.

MAN:

MAN:

there first, with "Grand Prix."
Oh my god, get out.
Get out of here, you.
Give this guy hell, this driver.
Get the Ferrari out of here.
Change the lens on
that, and let's go.
I've got to remember
which is which.

MAN:

involved in "Grand Prix."
I've been driving it backwards.

MAN:

bitter taste in Steve's mouth.
Jim, where exactly do
you use your brakes?
All right.
All right, good.

MAN:

was, taking the subject matter,
and running with it.

MAN:

above James Garner's apartment
in the same neighborhood.

And Steve would urinate
out the window at night
on the flower boxes
of James Garner below.

And as he performed this act,
he went, you pissed on my film.

And now, I piss on you.

What is that?

Paint?

No, no.

Close your eyes.

[Laughing]

It's all right.

Cut it out.

It's not funny.

I can see him sitting
in the theater,
watching that and
saying, oh, shit.

It's just another movie.

His sense of racing
was so personal.

If there was going to be
one definitive movie about
that sport, he wanted to do it.

This is a treatment for "Le
Mans" and general comments
dated October 2nd, 1969.

Ha.

"Grand Prix," a prime
example of a director
playing with himself in public.

[Laughs]

We have to reach high in
a picture like "La Mans,"
or there is no
purpose in making it.

Well, how perfect is this?

OK.

Battle stations.

[Laughing]

MAN:

in "Apocalypse Now," where
up the river, Kurtz has
built a piece of America
in the middle of hostile jungle.
That is what Steve
McQueen decided
to lower in to rural Le Mans,
and that was SoLA Village.
[french speech]

MAN:

the entire race,
and then we want to recreate it.
And we want to use
the same drivers.
Suddenly, out of the
blue, we're asked to work
on a movie with Steve McQueen.
It was like, whoa.
Wow.
Why not?
And then on top
of that, you knew
you were going to earn \$200 a
day, which was a lot of money.
Excellent.
Absolutely excellent.
We were given a Porsche 911
each to trundle around in,
and it was good news.
Well, it's quite a pleasant
surprise to be invited.
I knew Steve quite well, and
it was very nice of Steve,
letting me go racing
at the weekends,
and letting his pilot and
airplane to come back in time
for filming on Monday morning.
David Piper.
We used to call him the pirate.
[Laughing]

I think of the pipe
hanging out of his mouth.
He was a grand, old guy.
[race car noises]
Mr. Sturges, you've directed
Steve McQueen in several films,
including "The Great Escape."
And now, you're
here in "Le Mans."

STEVE MCQUEEN:

is directing this film.
We've done three
films together now,
and I tell you, we've
had nothing but fun,
simply because
we've had the time,
and we get excited about
doing really good work.

MAN:

incredible director.
It was Steve working with
John on "Great Escape"
and "Magnificent Seven" which
made the myth, and the man,
and Steve McQueen who he was.
The hero of the film
is racing in this scene.
That's what it's about.
[race car engine]

MAN:

We had the drivers.
We had an incredible array
of technical support.
We had everything,
except the script.
He said that the script
isn't entirely finished.
We're waiting for the end of
the race to finish the script,
to finalize the script?

Well, we do want to adjust
our story to the way things
happen that we
actually photograph.
That's correct.

MAN:

to start without a script.
It's not the right way.
It's not the economic way.
But it's common, and
anybody who says it's not
hasn't been there.

MAN:

once before, Sturges,
McQueen, and my father.
They had done it on
"The Great Escape,"
and it turned out well.
And after "Bullitt," my father
said the studio would have
written him a blank check just
to produce the phone book,
if he wanted to.
We have the best people
in the business with us.
Bob Relyea, he's our
executive producer.
John Sturges, he's our director.
He probably is the biggest
director in America,
and he's probably one of
the best in the world.
So with all those
things going for us,
plus Steve McQueen
and Le Mans, I
think we've got a
picture that's going
to make an awful lot of money
and make a lot of people happy.
This is the story
of racing, man.

This is the guts.
Glass is all right.
All right.
OK.
You got motor racing,
and you got Steve McQueen.
What have you got?
You've got everything.
[french speech]
"Le Mans" was going
to be our number
one picture for the year.
It was a sure thing
for Hollywood.
This could not miss.

MAN:

famous race in the world.
As you arrive to Le Mans and
come up beside the cathedral,
suddenly, the adrenaline will
start to get in your stomach.
That was when I realized
I was at Le Mans.
I knew we were driving
into the unknown.
You're going to be driving
at speeds that a racing
car's never been before.
It was terrifying.
Go.
[cheering]
It was a very fast
flowing circuit.
Very dangerous, but all
circuits were dangerous.
When I started racing, no
one was worried about safety.
I mean, almost every
race I went to,
someone was killed--
sometimes, two or three people.
Life was cheap.
[crashing]

Those cars weren't very safe.
They were like sharp knives,
if you had an accident.
They cut you to pieces.
A car catches on fire,
and that's the end of it.

ANNOUNCER:

We have trouble.
Out at Nissan Dodge.
See the smoke billowing.
There is a problem.

STEVE MCQUEEN:

time to make two decisions.
You have time only to make
one, and it must be right.
You are sitting in a motor car
that maybe has 600 horsepower
and 30 gallons of gasoline.
So you know that if you
crash in this vehicle,
an impact is going
to be disastrous.
There's nothing very
glamorous about racing,
except when you're winning.
You get to the end of the race.
You're leading the race.
You're almost in tears on
the last couple of laps, just
hoping you can get
across the line.

ANNOUNCER:

toward the checkered flag.
Ford wins the 1969
24 hours of Le Mans.
And you don't get a situation
like that in life very often,
you know.
[crowd cheering]

FRENCH MAN:

speed, don't you?

Hmm?

FRENCH MAN:

speed, don't you?

Oh, it's nice.

It's cold.

MAN:

was for Steve to drive

Le Mans the actual 24 hours.

ANNOUNCER:

here is this is Steve McQueen,

and we are wondering

whether or not Steve

McQueen will run in the race.

If I weren't so rotten

inside for money,

I would probably tell

them to go screw.

[french speech]

But I need the money

to make the film.

[french speech]

And I will not race at Le Mans.

[french speech]

It was too big a risk.

And if something were to happen

to him in the actual race,

that would put the film on hold

and probably never get done.

That's how much it meant to him.

He gave up his shot

at competing at Le

Mans for the sake of the film.

Well, the insurance company

won't let Steve drive

in the race, as he told you.

We're going to be covering the

race itself very extensively,

with cameras everywhere.

And we expect to work

approximately three months

afterwards, staging the picture.

ANNOUNCER:

Productions ready the camera
car for the race.
My real contribution
was driving the camera
car during the actual race.
It was the car that Steve
and Peter Revson had finished
second at Sebring, and
then they converted
it to carry three cameras,
one in front, two at the back.

MAN:

was being fixed up Le Mans,
Steve was all around that.
And you could see written
all over his face,
I want to be sitting
where you are sitting
and to take this race on.

MAN:

was the start.
They wanted to get the
start from in the car.

MAN:

with the full grand stand of
don't know how many
thousand people in it-- this
was genuine stuff.
We were told to film
especially the leaders.
So you'd photograph them
coming up behind you,
and then switch
with the front one
on to catch them overtaking
you, and pulling away.

MAN:

the footage that they got,
they could've never
made the film.
They were brilliant.

MAN:

was bringing need
to the screen what
a driver would
see-- cars passing at speed, car
dicing, all part of the vision.
Here it is, after
all this time.

NEILE ADAMS:

And it started again,
and I meant every word,
and I liked what I said,
and I liked what I heard.
And I started to think.
I could think about
starting again.
We were laughing again
over memories, and wine,
and the years in-between
didn't seem a long time.
When I smiled, he knew why.
In a while, it was
starting again.
We had so many similarities.
(SINGING) And I
started to think.
We were raised by mothers who
really were not particularly
ready to be mothers.
Our fathers left us.
We built our career together.
We had children
together, and we were
married for a very long time.
(SINGING) You're walking
along the street,
or you're at a party.
Or else you're alone and

then you suddenly dig--
My mom-- I don't know
how old she is now.
She won't tell me.
But she still does her act.
(SINGING) There's no
controlling the unrolling
of my faith, my friend.
Who knows what's written
in the magic book?
Well, my parents
met in the '50s.
She was a star on Broadway.
And she's good at what she
does, and she enjoys it.
She loves it.
I sure did like that.
She was about the sexiest
girl I ever saw in my life.
I guess it was ever a thing
of falling in love with a girl
at first sight, I guess that
was it, because boy, I sure had
to chase her for a long time.
[applause]
It was just our
destiny to be together.
I walked out of Carnegie
Hall, and he came right to me.
And he said, hi.
You're pretty.
And I was stunned.
And I said, well,
you're pretty too.
I remember there
was a long drive.
Yeah.
This was my home for
three months, man.
The people my dad or
Solar rented it from,
they lived on that floor, there.
And they had a nutty
daughter, if I remember.

We pulled in here, and she
was chasing a chicken around.
And she had a fucking
ax in her hand.
And she grabbed it
and cut its fucking
head off, right in front of us.
It was the first time I
ever saw a chicken running
around with no head right here.
I'd come from Brentwood.
[dog barking]

NEILE ADAMS:

want to go to Le Mans.
However, because Chad had
been doing badly in school,
I said, OK.
If you improve your
grades, we'll go.
And he did, so I had to go.
I used to wait right out here
to see dad's Porsche coming up.

ANNOUNCER:

that you're here
with the likes of Hertz and--
Would you like some gum?
Thank you.
When the flower children came
along, everything changed.
Everything changed.
He was almost 40.
There was suddenly free
sex, and free love, and free
this, and free everything.
He said to me one day.
He said, I have to work so
hard for love in this house.
(LAUGHING) He said, I can
get it for free out there.

MAN:

women behind his wife's

back probably averaged
about a dozen women a week.
It was a little
less than two a day.
They wanted to say, I had
sex with Steve McQueen.
He loved cars, liquor,
women, and he was interesting,
and cool, and dangerous.
See, they liked
the danger in him.
Whatever Steve's
activities might
have been when he had a break
in the afternoon, so to speak.
His trailer was never empty.
I had came from the Royal
Dramatic School in Stockholm,
and I was there for the job.
Only if you'd like it better.
He had something hidden.
Maybe that also made him
attractive on the screen.
And as a woman, that's something
that I want to get to know.
I don't know who cast her.
Think Steve had an eye for her.
She appealed to him.
She was an attractive lady.
My respect for him was
not as big as his for me.
We shared this thing
about the accident.
I had worked for
Steve about two years,
almost, before we did "Le Mans."
I was involved more
with the car racing
and other personal matters.
I had dinner
together with Steve,
and the count and the countess
from whom he rented this castle
in which he was living.

He would drive me home.

It was like 12:

1 o'clock in the morning.
And Steve comes into my
room and says, come on.
We've got to go.
Where are we going?
Why don't we go tomorrow?
I'm tired.
I haven't slept.
He told me to screw
myself and said,
what are you worried about?
You're only 21.
You'll sleep when you die.
I never knew her name.
I never got introduced.
And it wasn't just any night.
It was my first night
arriving in France.
I sat down next to
him in the front seat.
Steve was not driving a Porsche.
He was driving a Peugeot,
or something like that.

MAN:

maniac, and it started to rain.
And I keep telling
him to slow down,
and he keeps telling
me to shut up.
Suddenly, there was a curve.
[brakes screeching]
[cutting noise]
He drove at the side, and
we rolled over the field.
[clunking noises]
Ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-- I remember
them smashing their heads
into the windshield.
I went flying.
I remember looking at my arm,

holding on, as we're crashing
down, and it just broke.
I could see it snap.
I was just out.
[whistling]
Tss-- And I
remember reaching up,
and opening the door, and
pushing the door open, and cut.
Steve thought that I was dead,
because I was lying there.
The water, the light
rain, woke him up.
And he said, what
the fuck happened?
Holy shit.
What have I done?
Oh my god, she's dead!
Is she dead?
And of course, my
arm's like this.
It's just hanging.
And she comes to.
She seemed OK, not too bad.
He didn't have a scratch.
They didn't call an ambulance,
because they didn't want this
to get official, of course.
We saw a little farmhouse.
Steve says, there's a car there.
Let's go hot wire it.
And all of a sudden, we
hear the dogs barking.
And this French guys
comes out in pajamas,
and he's got a shot gun, and
old, big gun in his hand.
And he's screaming in French
something-- [french speech]
Pow!
[gun shot]
My makeup, early in the
morning, she didn't know.
She asked me why I had bruises,

but they were not too big.
And I said, ah, well, you know.
The production team, so to
say, must have known about it.
Well, I know that
there was an accident,
but I don't want to go there.
I don't want to go there.
I took the wrap for it.
They said that I was the
one who caused the problem,
but the fact that Steve was with
the girl was never revealed.
You just have to protect
Steve, and it's no big deal.
Nobody got killed.
Don't worry about it.
It's part of our jobs.
What would have happened if
it'd been on the headlines
just before we started shooting
the movie saying, Steve
McQueen, the great
driver, he had an accident
with a young actress.
[clacking tongue]
Could you imagine?
He was so afraid.
I could see how scared
he was that I would
ruin him and his production.
He said to me, I'd appreciate
it if you don't talk about this.
So I said--
[pops lips]
no, I won't.
no, I won't.
[train station noises]

NARRATOR:

through the sleepy French towns
and countryside.
Strange, slow parade
of muttering monsters.

PRODUCER:

MAN:

achieve something that hadn't
been done in mainstream
films about a sport
that he had a true passion for.
Cars underway.

MAN:

to break through
and do a film that
was as authentic
as you could possibly get.

MAN:

person in the theater, put
them in the seat of a race car.
He wanted them to feel what
he felt as a driver himself.
That was always his intent.
Wes, I think this is the first
time this sort of a production
has been undertaken.
Yes, it is.
This is the first time anything
like this has been filmed.
[cars racing]
The things with this
car and the mounts on it,
and the cameras on
it that have never
been used before--
they're entirely new
mounts, entirely new concept of
the way to shoot a racing film.
So far, everything is
going so beautifully,
it's almost unbelievable.

STEVE MCQUEEN:

able to achieve camera mounts
on automobiles that never before

had ever thought of being used.
To be able to get the feeling
of speed on film, helping us
crash which we call
the film barrier.
When Steve talked about
breaking the film barrier,
he was using language
that Hollywood didn't use.
Nobody ever thought
of doing it that way.
What he was trying
to do was give
the total visual experience.
I'll tell you, Steve was ahead
of his time with his vision.

STEVE MCQUEEN:

reality film's concerned,
that's where it's at.
That's where it should be.

MAN:

shot at race speeds.

STEVE MCQUEEN:

going 20, 40 in the race,
we're doing 240 in
every shot we do.
[racecar vrooming]
Every driver that
was on that picture,
I mean, they were risking
their lives every single day
they were there.

MAN:

shot were choreographed.
You had to do a ballet
out on the track
and do what the director
had asked you to do.

MAN:

film was, in many ways,
a lot more dangerous
than the race.
And Steve did also not have
much of a sense of danger.
So everything was
pushed to the extreme.
Now, we're going
220 miles an hour.
Now, we're dicing.
Now, we're setting up a shot.
Not what might
happen consciously
to a driver in his mind.
At a certain spot, we're
asking drivers to do this.
It's death.
[people talking]

NARRATOR:

is the first driver
to experience a narrow escape.

MAN:

Get the men out of the way.
Steve and I were doing a shot.
Suddenly, the car
sort of just exploded.
It sort of went up
in flames in my face.
[fire burning]

STEVE MCQUEEN:

it appeared that he
took to unfasten the seat belt
and climbing out of the door.
It's when I got burned.
Oh, I just got very
burnt around here.

STEVE MCQUEEN:

have been a lot worse.
I could've been dead,
just as easy as that.

MAN:

He put his but on the line.
Let's put it that way.
Every day, we shot
with him in the car.

MAN:

That's Steve McQueen.
That's the loner with the dream.
If you have this unlimited film
barrier that you want to crash
through, you're going to
be worried about if you're
going to die in the process?
[cars racing]
In the film, I played
a race car driver.
I drove for Ferrari.
And Steve drove for Porsche.
I do some paintings.
You need a place where
you are by yourself.
And of course,
Steve is here too.
[Laughs]
Steve always did it different.
We were talking about reading.
And I said, I don't
like reading too much.
I read my scripts, and aw, I
don't like it either, he said.
I only read one book
in my life, he said,
a book about
Alexander the Great.
And I was very impressed
by one sentence, he said.
I can't get the world, but
I didn't conquer myself.

PRODUCER:

DIRECTOR:

Who are you?
Especially as an actor,
you ask yourself.
Who are you, really?
Sometimes, I had
a feeling he was
always searching for something.
[cars racing]

STEVE MCQUEEN:

theory had always
been the racing world
is no less creative
in expression than film itself.
It's only an oddity,
because it's a blood sport.
He wanted to leave
his scratch marks
on the history of filmmaking.
I'm a driver.
I'm an actor, and a filmmaker.
[french speech]

MAN:

He would say, look.
It would be great to
get a shot like this.
It caused quite a bit of
conflict with John Sturges.
This will be a
serious film, and
since the romantic interests
will be kept down to a minimum,
this will concentrate on sports
car racing and the 24 hours
at Le Mans.
Is that right?
Well, I'll go with you that we
concentrate on the race, yes.
Whether anything else is
kept to a minimum or not--
I don't know.

MAN:

executive producer.
He outright Sturges.
This was not the
same McQueen that
worked with Sturges
on "The Magnificent
Seven" or "The Great Escape."

STEVE MCQUEEN:

believe in what you're doing.
I believe in what I do.
And if I'm shooting
my best shot for me,
then I'm doing my
best for the audience.
But my obligation's
got to be to myself.
To me, he became the
character, which I
described to him in the mantra.
He made his own rules.
He knew his own right and wrong.
He didn't have to
answer to anybody.
Well, I'll get all these
idiots away from you.
[cars racing]
If they tell you
you're a genius
with sufficient frequency,
you start to believe that.
And I think most people out
there who get that sort of fame
have a great deal of
difficulty handling it.
have a great deal of
difficulty handling it.
[chopper noises]

MAN:

It was a time of
great rebelliousness
and attempting to overthrow
the gods of Hollywood.

Jay Sebring was a very
good friend of ours.
And I liked Sharon Tate.
Sharon was married to
Roman Pilanski at the time,
and she was pregnant.
Jay said, why don't
you and Neil come over
and have dinner with us?
And Steve said, oh, yeah, sure.
I knew I wasn't coming,
and I didn't want to go.

MAN:

be made in the examination
by the coroner.

REPORTER:

evident cause of death?

MAN:

say at this time.
People kept calling the next
day and said, is Steve OK?
An employee came to
work at 10050 Cielo
and found several
bodies in the house.

NEILE ADAMS:

I find out that there
had been these murders, and
they thought Steve was there.
A tentative identification
of the persons are as follows.
Sharon Polanski, Jay Sebring.

MAN:

to be at the party.

MAN:

MAN:

something, and didn't show up.

Voytek Frykowski, and
another man who is unknown.
Was there anything
scrolled on the front door
of that house in blood?

MAN:

that question.

MAN:

Good.

How are you this morning?

NEILE ADAMS:

was Charles Manson,
and he had a gang of misfits.

MAN:

MAN:

rather not discuss.

NEILE ADAMS:

of people who massacred the way
they massacred these people.

[Laughing]

It's all a play, isn't it?

MAN:

on the list of other people
that Manson wanted to murder.

It'd freak him out a lot.

Dear Eddie-- Eddie

Rubin was our attorney.

As you know, I have been
selected by the Manson group
to be marked for death.

In some ways, I find it
humorous, and in other ways,
frighteningly tragic.

But I must, I must
consider it may be true.

If you could call Palm
Springs and have my gun

permit renewed, as it is the only sense of self-protection for my family and myself.

I'm waiting for an immediate reply.

My best, Steve.

This was 1970, on the set of "Le Mans."

MAN:

already what I would call in a heightened state; extremely paranoid.

Everything was raised.

The levels of craziness, anxiety were heightened.

Everything is zz-- up.

NEILE ADAMS:

the same at any one point.

That marriage was

fraying at the seams.

MAN:

set, they appeared on and on.

They appeared devoted.

But you can also see in Neile's expression, a certain weariness to the whole situation.

He said, by the way,

I'm having friends

visit me from all over Europe.

I said, really?

Who are they?

He said, well,

they're mostly women.

And you know, that

really got to me,

and I remember sobbing away.

MAN:

She was a smart woman.

I would say to him, you're

going to ruin your marriage.

What is wrong with you?
Until one night, I told him,
I had gotten even with him.

MAN:

she'd ever had an affair.
I said, well, as a matter
of fact, I said, yeah, I had.
I was the one
person in the world
that he trusted, the
one person he thought
he could do anything to.
I would never retaliate.
For him to hear
that coming from me
was totally unbelievable to him.
He was really, really,
deeply wounded.

MAN:

He's the one that
just had this hunger.

MAN:

my god, the next day
he's got to get up,
and go out, and drive
a 917 at 200 miles an hour.
The whole situation
was problematic.
[car racing]

MAN:

to do is what we were doing.
He wanted to be a racing driver.

STEVE MCQUEEN:

It's a combination
of trying to use a motor car and
yourself as one complete unit.
It's really an umbilical
connection between the two,
the man and the machine.

MAN:

Just imagine losing control
and hitting that Armco rail.
Well, racing, it's life.
Anything that happens before
or after is just waiting.
That's a good
sentence for Steve.
Sometimes, I had the
feeling it is like this.
It meant a lot to him,
almost everything.
And we had a scene where
we get out of the car
after two hours of driving.
Of course, you sweat.
And the makeup man
came, and put some water
in my face, and hair.
And he wanted to
do this to Steve.
And Steve said,
no, no, no, no, no.
He stepped in his car.
He drove a couple of
rounds, got out of the car.
He was sweating naturally.
And he said, Siggy,
look at this.
It's swollen here, the vein.
So that is the perfect thing.
The makeup man can't do this.
It has to be real.
And Steve wanted it like this.

STEVE MCQUEEN:

if you get in the position
to be able to have
control, or as a filmmaker,
you must carry your project.
Carry it all the way
through, to the end.
That means you can't give up.

You can't let a thing go.
And nobody will make
a decision for you,
and nobody's smarter
than you are.

MAN:

We were winging it.
In the meantime, until we
got somewhat of a script,
we were shooting just footage.
Hollywood is a
formula they like,
and they like to stick to it.
They wanted to have
more of a love story.
My dad wanted cars and realism.

MAN:

of a documentary, something that
was paired down to give you
the total experience of what
was going on.

MAN:

myself felt Le Mans
would make a great background
for a dramatic story.
That debate caused
writers to come,
and go, and take a shot at the
script that would make sense.

MAN:

dueling caravans,
because they were lined
up next to each other.
Who could get the latest new
script on Steve's desk first?

MAN:

great American novel when he
was trying to write the script.
And because the first sentence

written was in the greatest sentence ever written, he couldn't get himself to that point, putting it down on paper.

MAN:

to the box office back then said, oh, he's going to win it. He's going to win it. So let's throw a little wrench in this. I'm going to give him something different. OK, Steve. You walk into this caravan. You see this girl you haven't seen in a long time. And she looks up at you and says, hello. What would you say, hello? And he said, not necessarily. That was the lowest point for me. I thought, we're never going to get a script. If I had written the script, I know it would have worked. It would have worked. I was his boy. I was his writer. His favorite expression is the son of a bitch knows me. I don't know how, but he knows me. The meeting took place in Steve's home. He insisted that the character had to be a loser, and I didn't want to write a loser. You have to remember, I was also a star. I thought I had a write

to insist on my position.
He just wanted to lose in that
movie, and I don't know why.
Steve wanted to have
something more than just
Steve McQueen doing
Steve McQueen on film.
You're talking
about something he
wanted to do that was more
important than acting.
You shouldn't argue
with a superstar,
even if you helped
make him a superstar.
I was the highest paid
screenwriter in town
when I went to that meeting.
And after that meeting,
the phone never rang again.
[cars racing]
His love of cars
were so infectious
that is screwed me up for life.
Since day one when I
got here, I'm like, dad,
can you just give me a ride
in one of the race cars?
That's all I wanted.
Must've been two months
went by, and my dad
turned the car around.
He opened his right
door, the side door,
and went like that,
turned around,
and he sat me on his lap.
And I just put my hands
inside of his hands.
For a second, he pulled
his hands out the wheel,
and I was steering the 917.
And that was pretty bitching.
Yeah, baby!

Ha, ha!

NEILE ADAMS:

that he hit a wall in Daytona.
He's got 16 screws on his
neck, and he's got a rod
on either side of his spine.
I broke everything in my body.
And the reason
I'm wearing shades
is my right eye
is still towed in.
I was in a coma for
three and a half weeks.
Did I say that?
Would I change anything?
No.
I wouldn't.
Pretty neat, huh?
There is nothing
better, nothing better.
I mean, motorsports is the
strongest drug in the world.

STEVE MCQUEEN:

to show in the film,
rather than to explain it,
just to show why a man races.
The feelings that
he gets from it.
It's a great sense of freedom.
It's a high of one
sort or another.

MAN:

perfect condition to the limit
was the most gratifying
thing you ever did.
It's almost like a
ballet, with the car
going in through the corners.
And it's a thing of beauty.
It is a work of art.
I went 330 kilometers per hour.

The faster I went, the
more relaxed I was.
But when it's finished,
you have the time to think,
and then you're glad that
nothing happened more.

MAN:

without them knowing it.
The freedom of an eagle
floating in the sky
was something that
racing brought to him.
Whatever that other stuff was
that came from his upbringing,
he could set that aside.
Death is so close.
It's right on my shoulder.
And yet, there's a peace here.
And he actually found
such joy in that, that he
wanted to give that to people.
I've always wanted to shoot
a motor racing picture,
because it's always been
something close to my heart.
I sometimes thought, well,
maybe I shouldn't do it.
When something is
close to you, you
have a tendency to become too
much a perfectionist with it.
And I don't think there's
any race driver that can
really tell you why he races.
But I think he could
probably show you.
[cars racing]

MAN:

He was Icarus.
Steve wanted to fly so
high, and he didn't quite
understand the point where the

wax starts to leave your wings.

PRODUCER:

set, through the set.
And cars are rolling.
[crashing]

MAN:

They had to pay the drivers.
They had to pay the camera men.
They had to pay the sound men.
They had to pay the people
that fed them at lunch.
[tires screeching]
And the people in the cinema
center were checking in.
How are things going over there?
Well, not so good.
We ain't got no story.
We were approximately
\$1.5 million over budget.
And the studio was expecting
a Steve McQueen movie to bail
us out, and we didn't have it.
We were going to make
the most expensive
documentary in the world,
if somebody didn't talk.
Everybody was looking
for the same thing,
with one exception--
with one exception,
and that would be Steve McQueen.

MAN:

into a rather lengthy debate
over the basis of the film.
My father went back to
his production office,
and in a fit of rage, threw
a lamp against the wall.
[glass breaking]
He said, this picture's
fucking out of control.

MAN:

that moment that he
turned and saw Bob Rosen
reclining on his couch,
reading a magazine.

MAN:

Bob called the studio and said,
we've got real problems now.
They're falling out
among themselves.

MAN:

that happening.
Could it have happened?
Yeah.
But it wasn't like a revelation.
Everybody knew the picture
was out of control.

MAN:

we'll take the picture over.
Now, we call the shots,
and we make the decision.
We don't care which
script you make.
Just make one of them.

NEILE ADAMS:

will lose your salary,
will not get your points.
You have nothing to do with
this picture, except act.

MAN:

Last night, they took
the picture away from us.
It says, I have
read the foregoing
and agree to render
services only as an actor
in the picture.
And then my dad signed

his name, "in blood."
It's brilliant.
It goes in character
with my dad.
I love this shit.

STEVE MCQUEEN:

deal of compromise involved
in movies, I suppose, and I get
a bit undone when people try
to use me, or there's
compromises, or injustice,
and I fly off the handle.
Steve was furious
with my father.
At this point, in
McQueen's mind,
my father had gone over to
the other side of the fence
and betrayed him.
This racing picture was
so close to all of us
that when the
studio took it over,
Mr. McQueen felt that
that had put a knife
in the heart of the company.
And Steve and I did
not speak again.
You betrayed me.
You stabbed me in the back.
I'll never talk to you again.

CHAD MCQUEEN:

a big thing with my dad.
If my dad felt in any way that
he had been burnt, that was it.
I don't think my
father betrayed Steve.
But I think he fell again,
as a business person,
as a professional, that that
was going to be the course it
was headed for, no matter what.

Thanks very much, Bob Relyea.

Thank you very
much, Mr. Sturges.

Bye.

John came to me.

And he said, I'm going to quit.

And it came about because of
the relationship with Steve.

MAN:

brought in to make
a theatrical motion picture with
characters and a story in it.

The more John tried

to have it his way,

the less ground

Steve would give him.

He said, I'm too fucking

old and rich to put up

with this type of shit anymore.

Goodbye.

Now, here we are, half

way in the production,

and they don't have a director.

Now, what?

STEVE MCQUEEN:

There's a lot of ways

that man can be

hurt in business.

They can hurt your head.

They can hurt you financially.

They can gut you.

Or they can cause that thing

to pop up in your throat.

A couple of times

a day, you start

thinking about it a little bit.

He was nothing but success

up to the point of "Le Mans."

Everything that he

did turned to gold.

And now, "Le Mans,"

everything turned to shit.

MAN:

to know if Steve had
walked off the production
at that point, what
would've happened.

MAN:

Call it his name.
It's not good press if the
world's number one box office
attraction walks off a film, a
film that meant so much to him.

CHAD MCQUEEN:

was no quit in my dad.
He had something
that he started,
and he wanted to finish it.

MAN:

Thank you.
Guys, settle, please.
[Laughing]
I come in on a Monday morning.
And Jerry Henshaw
comes in, says how
would you like to go to France?
That's how it happened.
They had no story.
They knew that Steve was
never going to win the race.
That's about what they knew.

MAN:

now with the glasses,
and that funny hat he
wore the whole time.
He wasn't this mogul, this
great icon of the movie world.
He was a guy called Lee Katzin,
who nobody had heard of.
Poor old Lee didn't know the
front of a car from the back,

so that wasn't helpful.
McQueen hadn't chosen
him, didn't like him,
wasn't impressed by him.
And he was obliged
to work with him.

MAN:

take in the pits.
And Lee said, one more please.
Steve got up.
And he said, listen, asshole.
I'll tell you when
we get one more.
Move to your next shot.
And if I like it, I'll show up.
The problems of individual's
egos were there.
It wasn't a lot of
fun that way, at all.
[cars racing]
Come on.
I want to show you something.
Come on.
Walk with me.
I want to get down here, because
this is where Dave Piper lost
it, right in this right hander.
We'd been filming
in the morning.
Everything went according
to plan, no problem.
Went to lunch, came
back to the circuit,
and the director wanted
the Ferraris to be
leading with a Porsche behind.
They haven't decided what
the script was going to be,
and they wanted both options.
[cars racing]
I drove just as I had
driven in the morning, went
into this right hand corner.

The back end just went.
[crash]
Word had gotten
back to the compound
that there was an accident.
And I got that.
And I was thinking, geez,
I hope it's not my dad.
I hear the triad a lot.
And so what's going on?
He says, I want to show you
what can happen in motor racing.
Steve, I'm calling you to tell
you that we're having accident.
David Piper, he's been
taken to hospital.
This was all grass, and
I remember a couple cows.
And there was a wheel assembly,
sitting out in the middle
of fucking nowhere.
Uh, well, he had a crash.

MAN:

onto the engine in the seat,
and the rest of the car
took off and left him.
You can see there's quite a lot
of blood coming out of your leg
in your overalls.
But it's a tremendous
relief that you're
still conscious and alive.

MAN:

I just spoke to the pilot.
He will come in at night.
It was my doctor.
He said, we're going
to have to amputate.
I said, well, take it off
four inches below the knee,
and I'll take my chances.
My mom took me, my

sister to see Dave.
And I remember
the room was dark,
and I remember he
had a sheet over him.
And you could clearly see
that below his knee was gone.
I lost it there.
I lost that much.

INTERVIEWER:

your accident have
happened if a proper
script had been in place?

Oh, no.

It probably wouldn't
have done, yeah.

Definitely wouldn't have done,
because they wouldn't have
wanted to do the shot twice.

MAN:

[engine vrooming]

MAN:

Steve was very, very aware
and very worried about it.
You'd think it was his fault.

MAN:

The bucks stops at the top.
I never saw him afterwards.
No.

Just never happened
to see him again.

STEVE MCQUEEN:

that took us four months
to shoot, and was
very difficult,
and we had a couple
of very bad accidents.
It was the most difficult
film I've ever done.

MAN:

at Solar Village,
no one else was there
but myself and Steve.
And he said, Lee, I see
what you're trying to do,
and I'm not going to fight you.
I'm not going to be against you.
I want to work with you.
From that time on,
it was wonderful.
We battered out an outline
that Steve agreed to.
It took 6, 8, 10 weeks
for this to happen.
And finally, we got basically
what we had in the movie,
in terms of dialogue.
When people risk their
lives, shouldn't it be
for something very important?
Well, it better be.

MAN:

the purpose of the film
by making sure it was
finished and would be
a testament to the personal
bravery of his most respected
pals, the motor racing drivers.

WOMAN:

October or November.
And the trees were
turning yellow.
It should be within
So they had to paint the leaves.
Ugh, my goodness.

MAN:

1970, filming finally
wrapped three months
over schedule,

and about \$1.5
million over budget.
He was sort of
melancholy, I think.
He said, it's done.
The last day of filming,
he got out of his car,
and he unbuckled his wrist
watch, and walked over to me,
and handed me the watch.
And he said, I want
you to have this.
Thank you for keeping me
alive all these months.

STEVE MCQUEEN:

Le Mans is close to me.
I love motor racing.
It was a film that was
very, very close to me,
and we all hope
it turns out well.

CREW:

three, marker.

CREW:

four, marker.

CREW:

five, marker.

DIRECTOR:

speed on all the cameras.
I will call action, and
then it'll be a count of 10.
If anything happens to me,
Allie gets my pickup truck.

DIRECTOR:

you hear me all right?
All right.
The fire brigade ready?
All right.

Now, may I have your
attention please?

CHAD MCQUEEN:

what anybody else says.
I think he was satisfied
as a filmmaker at what
he had done for this picture.
I've never seen the movie.
It's too difficult for me.
Steve lost his wife, lost
his marriage, lost the film,
lost everything.

MAN:

loss, at that point
in time, I think it really
speaks to how deeply he cared
about that project, and how it
was so tied into his persona,
and his soul, that I think he
sensed that if it wasn't going
to happen on that
film, it wasn't going
to happen in his lifetime.

STEVE MCQUEEN:

an actor is a gas.
Being a movie star
is a pain in the ass.
And when that happens, you
stop your personal growth.
And that's the thing
that I suffered from.

MAN:

to give back,
Hollywood wasn't there for him.
He had this vision that
came out of his heart.
I don't think any of those other
movies came out of his heart.
The world just became
a different color

to him, after that film.

MAN:

turning point in his life.
When he left Le Mans, he
turned his back on the sport.
The zest he had for
driving fast had gone.

STEVE MCQUEEN:

as me moving on myself,
I think I'm more into
life than cinema.
My conception can only be
motorcycles, and speed,
and things like that.
I don't want to do that anymore.
I don't do it no more.
Now, I'm clean.
Well, it's done.
I've got to try something else.
Do I really want
to do this anymore?
Do I want to go that fast?
And I think with David
Piper's accident,
an awareness of
the vulnerability
was in his psyche.

NEILE ADAMS:

most about in that picture
were the drivers.
He loved the drivers.
Oh.
Dear Sid, so many times before,
in the history of motion
pictures, brave men have
lost their lives and limbs,
and people have
forgotten about it.
I feel very strongly
that we should dedicate
the first premier to David

Piper and give all the proceeds
to him and his family.
Would you please pass
this on to the higher ups?
And I do think we
do this to racing
for what they gave this film.
My best, Steve McQueen.
Oh, how wonderful.
Gosh, that is terrific.
I really lost touch
when I was in hospital.
I never heard of
anything like this.
How very nice.
Well, Steve's heart was really
in the right place, wasn't it?
It's fantastic.

STEVE MCQUEEN:

to get it down on film for what
I thought it was all about.
And I guess it's going to be
up to the audience to decide
whether I was right or wrong.
Oh, it was a lot of cars.
And I was waiting for my scenes.
[Laughing]
Most actors do that, first
time they see a movie.
I was disappointed.
I could never see
how it was going
to be a roaring
success at the time,
because there was no script.
But then I saw the
film two years ago,
and I went, god,
that's brilliant.

MAN:

documentary of one of the most
glorious times of motor

racing on the greatest
track in the world.
From an actor's point
of view, loves it.
But from his point of view,
from a driver's point of view,
lovely.
And from a car's point
of view, beautiful.

MAN:

it's trying to be pure.
It's not a Hollywood concoction.
But what the film
doesn't capture
is dramatic storytelling.
Problems, they vanish
in all the years.
I think he would have
been proud that we did it.
Proud that he did it.

MAN:

cult is following this picture.
People who are into
cars revere this film.
That's all they want to
talk about is "Le Mans."
It has taken on a
life of its own.
The thing that Steve did
that moved cinema forward
was his absolute
insistence on authenticity.
You just have to say,
you went for it, guy.
I say, power to him.
They still are
not able to capture
what we captured inside those
cars with the real drivers
today.
Steve McQueen, he had no fear.
When he went to Mexico

to get treatment,
he had a copy of the
film shipped to Mexico,
and showed it to the
patients in the house.
I think it was his last
goodbye to everything.
He was just a nice man who
lost his way along the way,
and found it back.
And hopefully, he's up
there, having a good time.
Like I used to say,
safe travel, honey.
[Laughing]
I always get a sense
he's watching me,
but close your eyes,
and listen to that.
Close your eyes and
listen to this again.
So that's what my
dad envisioned,
bringing that to life.
But I think today he
would say, ah, now,
you guys finally get it.

STEVE MCQUEEN:

thing is daydreaming.
You know when you
daydream, you go to sleep.
In my life, my
daydreams came true.
[coughs]
It's just that I run out of gas.
[piano playing]