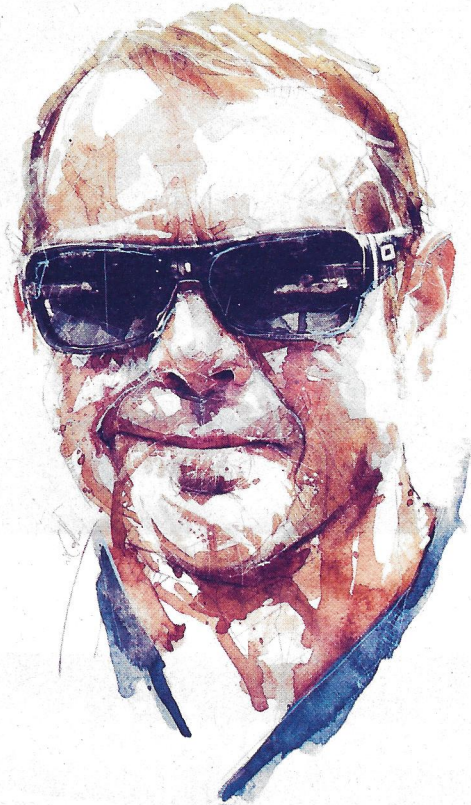


What I'd Do Differently

Chad McQueen, 55

Chad McQueen recently co-produced the documentary *Steve McQueen: The Man & Le Mans*, chronicling the out-of-control production of the 1971 movie *Le Mans*.

► interview by PETER MANSO



Q/D Did your father make you into a car nut?

CM: Growing up, there were always my dad's cars and motorcycles around... a Jag XKSS, Lotus Eleven, and Cooper Formula Junior. I started riding motorcycles when I was six and racing at nine, and he came to every race, just as he made sure my sister and I were with him whenever he'd be on location. He'd coach me, "You can go in deeper here" or "You don't need to brake so hard there." Remember, my dad came out of a shaky background, and I think I benefited from the neglect his mom had shown him. He never knew his father, his mother drank a lot, and at one point a judge put him in a place called Boys Republic, where the motto still is "Nothing without labor." He told me they turned his life around.

Q How many of his cars do you have now?

Only a few, all Porsches—a '58 Speedster, a '69 2.0-liter 911, and a twin-plug 2.2 '71 that's my canyon scalpel.

Q In the *Le Mans* documentary, you speak of racing as the "best drug" there is.

Absolutely, any race driver will tell you the same thing. It's a high. The way you feel after you finish a day's driving, there's this great sense of achievement that registers as a real calmness, and while it's happening, God, the adrenaline!

Q Was your Daytona accident that left you comatose for three and a half weeks the end of your racing career?

Yeah. I had something like nine surgeries. But I finally got a historic license so I've recently been

playing, driving a friend's 904 GTS. Even now, though, my right eye is slightly toed-in as the result of the accident, so I have a little trouble with right apexes.

Q Your documentary succeeds, ironically enough, where *Le Mans* itself failed at the box office for lack of a story line. Here the story is how your dad sacrificed all to make the definitive racing film.

I was only 10, but I remember how after screening dailies he'd show clips from *Grand Prix* to show what he didn't want to do. What he cared most about was what the racers thought, which is what he was trying to share. Unfortunately, they couldn't get anything on the page that was his vision. Director John Sturges also had a vision—he wanted racing as a backdrop, so there was a conflict.

Q But it all centered on his being so immersed?

First, I think that he wanted to be an endurance driver himself. He saw drivers as a different species, a different breed, and almost winning Sebring with Peter Revson in 1970 only made him want to be one of those guys more—another Brian Redman or Derek Bell, both of whom he got to know well during the shoot. He had all these guys working on the film, so it was a complete, total involvement. I remember that he used to piss on James Garner's flowers—Garner lived near us in Brentwood—because Garner had beat him to the punch with *Grand Prix*, which he saw as hokey.

Q He saw racers as more "authentic," more real, than actors and film executives?

He loved racers. *Le Mans* was his homage to those guys, and just how important it was to him can be measured by the fact that he showed the film to the staff down at the clinic in Rosarito Beach while he was ill, toward the end.

Q Was your dad more the racer or the actor?

The racer, no question.

Q While making the film, he did all his own driving in a 917?

Correct. Derek Bell talked to me once about their running through Maison Blanche flat-out—Jo Siffert leading, my dad in the middle, with Derek bringing up the rear, and my dad couldn't lift because Derek was

right behind him. Supposedly, he was white as a sheet when he climbed out. But, again, he loved it.

Q Was *Cinema Center*, the studio that took the film away from him when Steve kept rejecting scripts, helpful to you?

Absolutely. My dad had shot a mile of film for *Le Mans* that, so far as anyone knew, had disappeared, but Paramount (Cinema Center's successor) gave it to us. Listen, for a 45-year-old picture, *Le Mans* has turned out to be not just a cult classic but a moneymaker. My dad could have left when the film was taken away from him, but he stuck because he knew they'd shot footage that could be put together into something really great. And he was right. But the other thing I should tell you is that even though my dad was prevented from running *Le Mans* by the studio's insurance company, he may actually have driven in the race behind everyone's back. I got an email from an English guy who was next door to the Solar pits when they were filming the race and he swears that after midnight, after all the hubbub had died, he saw my dad hop into the 908 camera car and drive a stint.

Q Finally, what if anything would you do differently?

Absolutely nothing. ■

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