Terence Steven McQueen (March 24, 1930 â€“ November 7, 1980) was an American actor.

He was called “The King of Cool”, whose “anti-hero” persona developed at the height of the counterculture of the 1960s and made him a top box-office draw of the 1960s and 1970s. McQueen received an Academy Award nomination for his role in The
McQueen was combative with directors and producers, but his popularity placed him in high demand and enabled him to command large salaries.

Contents

1 Early life
   1.1 Military service
2 Acting
   2.1 The 1950s
   2.2 The 1950s
   2.3 The 1960s
   2.4 The 1970s
   2.5 Missed roles
3 Stunts, motor racing and flying
4 Personal life
   4.1 Relationships and friendships
   4.2 Lifestyle
   4.3 Manson connection
   4.4 Charitable causes
5 Illness and death
6 Legacy
   6.1 Archive
   6.2 Ford commercials
   6.3 Memorabilia
7 Filmography
8 Awards and honors
9 Notes
10 References
11 Bibliography
12 Further reading
13 External links
   13.1 Share this:
   13.2 Like this:

Early life

Terence Steven McQueen was born on March 24, 1930, at St. Francis Hospital in Beech Grove, Indiana, a suburb of Indianapolis. His father, William Terence McQueen, was a stunt pilot for a barnstorming flying circus who left McQueen’s mother, Julia Ann (a.k.a. Julian; née Crawford), six months after meeting her. Several biographers have stated that Julia Ann was an alcoholic. Unable to cope with caring for a small child, she left him with her parents (Victor and Lillian) in Slater, Missouri, in 1933. As the Great Depression set in shortly thereafter, McQueen and his grandparents moved in with Lillian’s brother Claude at his farm in Slater. McQueen was raised Catholic.

McQueen expressed having good memories of living on the farm, noting that his Uncle Claude “was a very good man, very strong, very fair. I learned a lot from him.” Claude gave Steve a red tricycle on his fourth birthday, a gift that McQueen subsequently credited with sparking his early interest in racing. At age eight, he was taken to Indianapolis by his mother, who lived there with her new husband. McQueen’s departure from his uncle’s home was marked by a very special memento given to him on that occasion. “The day I left the farm”, he recalled, “Uncle Claude gave me a personal going-away present—a gold pocket watch, with an inscription inside the case.” The inscription read, “To SteveÂ–â€” who has been a son to me.”
Dyslexic and partly deaf due to a childhood ear infection, Steve did not adjust well to his new life. His new stepfather beat him to such an extent that at age nine, he left home to live on the streets. Soon he was running with a street gang and committing acts of petty crime. Unable to control his behavior, his mother sent him back to Slater. When he was 12, Julia wrote to Claude, asking that her son be returned to her again to live in her new home in Los Angeles, California. Julia’s second marriage had ended in divorce, and she had married a third time.

By McQueen’s own account, he and his new stepfather “locked horns immediately.” McQueen recalls him being “a prime son of a bitch” who was not averse to using his fists on McQueen and his mother. As McQueen began to rebel again he was sent back to live with Claude a final time. At age 14 he left Claude’s farm without saying goodbye and joined a circus for a short time, then drifted back to his mother and stepfather in Los Angeles, resuming his life as a gang member and petty criminal. McQueen was caught stealing hubcaps by police, who handed him over to his stepfather, who beat him severely, ending the fight by throwing McQueen down a flight of stairs. McQueen looked up at his stepfather and said, “You lay your stinkin’ hands on me again and I swear, I’ll kill ya.”

After the incident McQueen’s stepfather persuaded his mother to sign a court order stating that McQueen was incorrigible, remanding him to the California Junior Boys Republic in Chino. Here, McQueen began to change and mature. He was not popular with the other boys at first: “Say the boys had a chance once a month to load into a bus and go into town to see a movie. And they lost out because one guy in the bungalow didn’t get his work done right. Well, you can pretty well guess they’re gonna have something to say about that. I paid my dues with the other fellows quite a few times. I got my lumps, no doubt about it. The other guys in the bungalow had ways of paying you back for interfering with their well-being.” Ultimately McQueen became a role model when he was elected to the Boys Council, a group who set the rules and regulations governing the boys’ lives. He eventually left the Boys Republic at age 16. When he later became famous he regularly returned to talk to the boys and retained a lifelong association.

At 16 McQueen left Chino Hills and returned to his mother, now living in Greenwich Village, New York. He then met two sailors from the Merchant Marine and volunteered to serve on a ship bound for the Dominican Republic. Once there he abandoned his new post, eventually being employed in a brothel. Afterwards McQueen made his way to Texas and drifted from job to job. He worked as a roughneck, a carnival barker and a lumberjack.

Military service

In 1947, McQueen joined the United States Marine Corps and was promoted to private first class and assigned to an armored unit. Initially he reverted to his prior rebelliousness and was demoted to private seven times. He took an unauthorized absence by failing to return after a weekend pass expired, staying with a girlfriend for two weeks until the shore patrol caught him. He resisted arrest and spent 41 days in the brig. After this he resolved to focus his energies on self-improvement and embraced the Marines’ discipline. He saved the lives of five other Marines during an Arctic exercise, pulling them from a tank before it broke through ice into the sea. He was assigned to the honor guard, responsible for guarding the yacht of US President Harry Truman. McQueen served until 1950, when he was honorably discharged. He later said he had enjoyed his time in the Marines.

Acting

The 1950s
The 1950s

In 1952, with financial assistance provided by the G.I. Bill, McQueen began studying acting in New York at Sanford Meisner's Neighborhood Playhouse. Reportedly, he delivered his first dialogue on a theatre stage in a 1952 play produced by Yiddish theatre star Molly Picon. McQueen's character spoke one brief line: "Alts iz farloyrn." ("All is lost."). During this time, he also studied acting with Stella Adler in whose class he met Gia Scala.

McQueen began to earn money by competing in weekend motorcycle races at Long Island City Raceway and purchased the first of many motorcycles, a Harley-Davidson and Triumph. He soon became an excellent racer, and went home each weekend with about $100 in winnings (equivalent to $900 in 2017). He appeared as a musical judge in an episode of ABC's *Jukebox Jury*, that aired in the 1953–1954 season.

McQueen had minor roles in productions including *Peg o' My Heart*, *The Member of the Wedding*, and *Two Fingers of Pride*. He made his Broadway debut in 1955 in the play *A Hatful of Rain*, starring Ben Gazzara.

In late 1955, at the age of 25, McQueen left New York and headed for California, where he moved into a house on Vestal Avenue in the Echo Park area, seeking acting jobs in Hollywood. When McQueen appeared in a two-part television *Westinghouse Studio One* presentation entitled *The Defenders*, Hollywood manager Hilly Elkins (who managed McQueen's first wife, Neile) took note of him and decided that B-movies would be a good place for the young actor to make his mark. He landed his first film role in a bit part in *Somebody Up There Likes Me*, directed by Robert Wise and starring Paul Newman. McQueen was subsequently hired for the films *Never Love a Stranger*, *The Blob* (his first leading role) which depicts a flesh eating amoeba-like space creature, and *The Great St. Louis Bank Robbery*.

McQueen's first breakout role came on television. He appeared on Dale Robertson's NBC western series, *Tales of Wells Fargo*. Elkins, then McQueen's manager, successfully lobbied Vincent M. Fennelly, producer of the western series *Trackdown*, to have McQueen read for the part of bounty hunter Josh Randall in a *Trackdown* episode. McQueen appeared as Randall in the episode, cast opposite series lead and old New York motorcycle racing buddy Robert Culp. McQueen then filmed the pilot episode, which became the series titled *Wanted: Dead or Alive*, which aired on CBS in September 1958.

The 1960s

In the interviews in the DVD release of *Wanted, Trackdown* star Robert Culp claims credit for bringing McQueen to Hollywood and landing him the part of Randall. He said he taught McQueen the "art of the fast-draw", adding that, on the second day of filming, McQueen beat him. McQueen became a household name as a result of this series. Randall's special holster held a sawed-off .44-40 Winchester rifle nicknamed the "Mare's Leg" instead of the six-gun carried by the typical Western character, although the cartridges in the gunbelt were dummy .45-70, chosen because they "looked tougher". Coupled with the generally negative image of the bounty hunter (noted in the three-part DVD special on the background of the series) this added to the anti-hero image infused with mystery and detachment that made this show stand out from the typical TV Western. The 94 episodes that ran from 1958 until early 1961 kept McQueen steadily employed, and he became a fixture at the renowned Iverson Movie Ranch in Chatsworth, Los Angeles, California, where much of the outdoor action for *Wanted: Dead or Alive* was shot.
At 29, McQueen got a significant break when Frank Sinatra removed Sammy Davis, Jr., from the film *Never So Few* after Davis supposedly made some mildly negative remarks about Sinatra in a radio interview, and Davis’ role went to McQueen. Sinatra saw something special in McQueen and ensured that the young actor got plenty of closeups in a role that earned McQueen favorable reviews. McQueen’s character, Bill Ringa, was never more comfortable than when driving at high speed—or handling a switchblade or a tommy gun.

After *Never So Few*, the film’s director John Sturges cast McQueen in his next movie, promising to “give him the camera”. *The Magnificent Seven* (1960), in which he played Vin Tanner and co-starred with Yul Brynner, Eli Wallach, Robert Vaughn, Charles Bronson and James Coburn, became McQueen’s first major hit and led to his withdrawal from *Wanted: Dead or Alive*. McQueen’s focused portrayal of the taciturn second lead catapulted his career. His added touches in many of the shots, such as shaking a shotgun round before loading it, repeatedly checking his gun while in the background of a shot, and wiping his hat rim, annoyed costar Brynner, who protested that McQueen was trying to steal scenes. (In his autobiography, Eli Wallach reports struggling to conceal his amusement while watching the filming of the funeral-procession scene where Brynner’s and McQueen’s characters first meet: Brynner was furious at McQueen’s shotgun-round-shake, which effectively diverted the viewer’s attention to McQueen.) Brynner refused to draw his gun in the same scene with McQueen, not wanting his character outdrawn.

McQueen played a lead role in the next big Sturges film, 1963’s *The Great Escape*, Hollywood’s fictional depiction of the true story of a historical mass escape from a World War II POW camp, Stalag Luft III. Insurance concerns prevented McQueen from performing the film’s notable motorcycle leap, which was done by his friend and fellow cycle enthusiast Bud Ekins, who resembled McQueen from a distance. When Johnny Carson later tried to congratulate McQueen for the jump during a broadcast of *The Tonight Show*, McQueen said, “It wasn’t me. That was Bud Ekins.” This film established McQueen’s box-office clout and secured his status as a superstar.

In 1963 McQueen starred in *Love with the Proper Stranger* with Natalie Wood. He later appeared as the titular *Nevada Smith*, a character from Harold Robbins’ novel, *The Carpetbaggers*, portrayed by Alan Ladd two years earlier in a movie version of that novel. *Nevada Smith* was an enormously successful Western action adventure film, that also featured Karl Malden and Suzanne Pleshette. After starring in 1965’s *The Cincinnati Kid* as a poker player, McQueen earned his only Academy Award nomination in 1966 for his role as an engine-room sailor in *The Sand Pebbles*, in which he stars opposite Candice Bergen and Richard Attenborough (with whom he had previously worked in *The Great Escape*).

He followed his Oscar nomination with 1968’s *Bullitt*, one of his best-known films, which co-starred Jacqueline Bisset, Robert Vaughn, and Don Gordon. It featured an unprecedented (and endlessly imitated) auto chase through San Francisco. Although McQueen did do the driving that appeared in closeup, this was about 10% of what is seen in the film’s car chase. The rest of the driving by McQueen’s character was done by stunt drivers Bud Ekins and Loren Janes. The antagonist’s black Dodge Charger was driven by veteran stunt driver Bill Hickman; McQueen, his stunt drivers and Hickman spent several days before the scene was shot practicing high-speed, close quarters driving. *Bullitt* went so far over budget that Warner Brothers cancelled the contract on the rest of his films, seven in all.

When *Bullitt* became a huge box-office success, Warner Brothers tried to woo him back, but he refused, and his next film was made with an independent studio and released by United Artists. For this film, McQueen went for a change of image, playing a debonair role as a wealthy executive in *The Thomas Crown Affair* with Faye Dunaway in 1968. The following year, he made the Southern period piece *The Reivers*. 
The 1970s

In 1971 McQueen starred in the poorly received auto-racing drama *Le Mans*. Then came *Junior Bonner* in 1972, a story of an aging rodeo rider. He worked for director Sam Peckinpah again with the leading role in *The Getaway*, where he met future wife Ali MacGraw. He followed this with a physically demanding role as a Devil's Island prisoner in 1973’s *Papillon*, featuring Dustin Hoffman as his character’s tragic sidekick.

In 1973 The Rolling Stones referred to McQueen in the song “Star Star” from the album *Goats Head Soup* for which an amused McQueen reportedly gave personal permission. The lines were “Star fucker, star fucker, star fucker, star fucker/Yes you are, yes you are, yes you are/Yeah, Ali MacGraw got mad with you/For givin’ head to Steve McQueen”.

By the time of *The Getaway*, McQueen was the world’s highest-paid actor, but after 1974’s *The Towering Inferno*, co-starring with his long-time professional rival Paul Newman and reuniting him with Dunaway, became a tremendous box-office success, McQueen all but disappeared from the public eye, to focus on motorcycle racing and traveling around the country in a motor home and on his vintage Indian motorcycles. He did not return to acting until 1978 with *An Enemy of the People*, playing against type as a bearded, bespectacled 19th-century doctor in this adaptation of a Henrik Ibsen play. The film was never properly released theatrically.

His last two films were loosely based on true stories: *Tom Horn*, a Western adventure about a former Army scout-turned professional gunman who worked for the big cattle ranchers hunting down rustlers, and later hanged for murder in the shooting death of a sheepherder, and *The Hunter*, an urban action movie about a modern-day bounty hunter, both released in 1980.

Missed roles

McQueen was offered the lead male role in *Breakfast at Tiffany’s*, but was unable to accept due to his *Wanted: Dead or Alive* contract (the role went to George Peppard). He turned down parts in *Ocean’s 11*, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (his attorneys and agents could not agree with Paul Newman’s attorneys and agents on top billing), *The Driver*, *Apocalypse Now*, *California Split*, *Dirty Harry*, *A Bridge Too Far*, *The French Connection* (he did not want to do another cop film), and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. 
Steve McQueen

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According to director John Frankenheimer and actor James Garner in bonus interviews for the DVD of the film *Grand Prix*, McQueen was Frankenheimer’s first choice for the lead role of American Formula One race car driver Pete Aron. Frankenheimer was unable to meet with McQueen to offer him the role and sent Edward Lewis, his business partner and the producer of *Grand Prix*. McQueen and Lewis instantly clashed, the meeting was a disaster, and the role went to Garner.

Director Steven Spielberg said McQueen was his first choice for the character of Roy Neary in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. According to Spielberg, in a documentary on the *Close Encounters* DVD, Spielberg met him at a bar, where McQueen drank beer after beer. Before leaving, McQueen told Spielberg that he could not accept the role because he was unable to cry on cue. Spielberg offered to take the crying scene out of the story, but McQueen demurred, saying that it was the best scene in the script. The role eventually went to Richard Dreyfuss.

William Friedkin wanted to cast McQueen as the lead in the action/thriller film *Sorcerer* (1977). *Sorcerer* was to be filmed primarily on location in the Dominican Republic, but McQueen did not want to be separated from Ali MacGraw for the duration of the shoot. McQueen then asked Friedkin to let MacGraw act as a producer, so she could be present during principal photography. Friedkin would not agree to this condition, and cast Roy Scheider instead of McQueen. Friedkin later remarked that not casting McQueen hurt the film’s performance at the box office.

Spy novelist Jeremy Duns revealed that Steve McQueen was considered for the lead role in a film adaptation of *The Diamond Smugglers*, written by James Bond creator Ian Fleming; McQueen would play John Blaize, a secret agent gone undercover to infiltrate a diamond-smuggling ring in South Africa. There were complications with the project which was eventually shelved, although a 1964 screenplay does exist.

McQueen and Barbra Streisand were tentatively cast in *The Gauntlet*, but the two did not get along due to a clash of egos. Both withdrew from the project, and the lead roles were filled in by Clint Eastwood and Sondra Locke.

McQueen expressed interest in the Rambo character in *First Blood* when David Morrell’s novel appeared in 1972, but the producers rejected him because of his age. He was offered the title role in *The Bodyguard* (with Diana Ross) when it was proposed in 1976, but the film did not reach production until years after McQueen’s death. *Quigley Down Under* was in development as early as 1974, with McQueen in consideration for the lead, but by the time production began in 1980, McQueen was ill and the project was scrapped until a decade later, when Tom Selleck starred. McQueen was offered the lead in *Raise the Titanic*, but felt that the script was flat. He was under contract to Irwin Allen after appearing in *The Towering Inferno* and offered a part in a sequel in 1980, which he turned down. The film was scrapped and Newman was brought in by Allen to make *When Time Ran Out*, which was a box office bomb. McQueen died shortly after passing on *The Towering Inferno 2*. 
Stunts, motor racing and flying

McQueen was an avid motorcycle and race car enthusiast. When he had the opportunity to drive in a movie, he performed many of his own stunts, including some of the car chases in *Bullitt* and the motorcycle chase in *The Great Escape*. Although the jump over the fence in *The Great Escape* was done by Bud Ekins for insurance purposes, McQueen did have considerable screen time riding his 650 cc Triumph TR6 Trophy motorcycle. It was difficult to find riders as skilled as McQueen. At one point, using editing, McQueen is seen in a German uniform chasing himself on another bike. Around half of the driving in Bullitt was performed by Loren Janes.

McQueen and John Sturges planned to make *Day of the Champion*, a movie about Formula One racing, but McQueen was busy with the delayed *The Sand Pebbles*. They had a contract with the German Nürburgring, and after John Frankenheimer shot scenes there for *Grand Prix*, the reels were turned over to Sturges. Frankenheimer was ahead in schedule, and the McQueen-Sturges project was called off.

McQueen considered being a professional race car driver. He had a one-off outing in the British Touring Car Championship in 1961, driving a BMC Mini at Brands Hatch, finishing third. In the 1970 12 Hours of Sebring race, Peter Revson and McQueen (driving with a cast on his left foot from a motorcycle accident two weeks earlier) won with a Porsche 908/02 in the three-litre class and missed winning overall by 23 seconds to Mario Andretti/Ignazio Giunti/Nino Vaccarella in a five-litre Ferrari 512S. This same Porsche 908 was entered by his production company Solar Productions as a camera car for *Le Mans* in the 1970 24 Hours of Le Mans later that year. McQueen wanted to drive a Porsche 917 with Jackie Stewart in that race, but the film backers threatened to pull their support if he did. Faced with the choice of driving for 24 hours in the race or driving for the entire summer making the film, McQueen opted for the latter.

McQueen competed in off-road motorcycle racing, frequently running a BSA Hornet. He was also set to co-drive in a Triumph 2500 PI for the British Leyland team in the 1970 London-Mexico rally, but had to turn it down due to movie commitments. His first off-road motorcycle was a Triumph 500 cc, purchased from Ekins. McQueen raced in many top off-road races on the West Coast, including the Baja 1000, the Mint 400, and the Elsinore Grand Prix.

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In 1964 McQueen and Ekins were part of a four-rider (plus one reserve) first-ever official US team-entry into the Silver Vase category of the International Six Days Trial, an Enduro-type off-road motorcycling event held that year in Erfurt, East Germany. The ‘A’ team arrived in England in late August to collect their mix of 649Â cc and 490Â cc twins from the Triumph factory before modifying them for off-road use. Initially let down with transport arrangements by a long-established English motorcycle dealer, Triumph dealer H&L Motors stepped-in to provide a suitable vehicle. On arrival in Germany, the team, with their English temporary manager, were surprised to find a Vase ‘B’ team, comprising expat Americans living in Europe, had entered themselves privately to ride European-sourced machinery.

McQueen’s ISDT competition number was 278, which was based on the trials starting order. Both teams crashed repeatedly. McQueen retired due to irreparable crash damage, and Ekins withdrew with a broken leg, both on day three (Wednesday). Only one member of the ‘B’ team finished the six-day event. UK monthly magazine Motorcycle Sport commented: “Riding Triumph twins...[the team] rode everywhere with great dash, if not in admirable style, falling off frequently and obviously out for six days’ sport without too many worries about who was going to win (they knew it would not be them)”.

He was inducted in the Off-road Motorsports Hall of Fame in 1978. In 1971, McQueen's Solar Productions funded the classic motorcycle documentary On Any Sunday, in which McQueen is featured, along with racing legends Mert Lawwill and Malcolm Smith. The same year, he also appeared on the cover of Sports Illustrated magazine riding a Husqvarna dirt bike.

McQueen designed a motorsports bucket seat, for which a patent was issued in 1971.

In a segment filmed for The Ed Sullivan Show, McQueen drove Sullivan around a desert area in a dune buggy at high speed. Afterward, Sullivan said, “That was a 'helluva' ride!”

McQueen owned a number of classic motorcycles, as well as several exotics and vintage cars, including:

- Porsche 917, Porsche 908, and Ferrari 512 race cars from the Le Mans film
- Porsche 911S (used in the opening sequence of the Le Mans film)
- 1963 Ferrari 250 GT Berlinetta Lusso
- 1967 Ferrari 275GTB/4
- 1956 Jaguar XKSS (right-hand drive) (now on exhibit at the Petersen Automotive Museum in Los Angeles, California)
- 1958 Porsche 356 Speedster 1600 Super (black exterior, interior and top) (McQueen drove the car in numerous SCCA racing events)
- 1968 Ford GT40 (Gulf liveried) (used in the Le Mans film)
- 1953 Siata 208s (McQueen replaced the Siata badges with Ferrari badges and called it his “little Ferrari”)
- 1967 Mini Cooper-S (McQueen had the car customized by Lee Brown with changes including a single foglight, a wood dash, a recessed antenna and a custom brown paint job)
- 1951 Chevrolet Styline De Lux Convertible (used in The Hunter, McQueen bought the car in 1979 after filming ended)
- 1952 Chevrolet 3800 pickup camper conversion (McQueen used the truck for cross-country camping trips. It was the last car he rode in before his death)
- 1950 Hudson Commodore convertible
- 1952 Hudson Wasp 2-door sedan
- 1953 Hudson Hornet 4-door Sedan
- 1956 GMC Suburban
- 1958 GMC Pickup Truck (Reportedly one of McQueen’s favorite cars, it is powered by a 336 Ci V8 which has been modified. The tag “MQ3188” is a reference to the ID number assigned to him when he was in reform school)
- 1931 Lincoln Club Sedan
- 1935 Chrysler Airflow Imperial Sedan
- 1969 Chevrolet Baja Hickey race truck (Originally debuted at the 1968 Mexican 1000 Rally and was driven by Cliff Coleman,
Johnny Diaz, Mickey Thompson and others during its racing career. Said to be the first truck specifically constructed by GM for use in the Mexican 1000, McQueen bought it from General Motors in 1970.

In spite of multiple attempts, McQueen was never able to purchase the Ford Mustang GT 390 he drove in Bullitt, which featured a modified drivetrain that suited McQueen's driving style. One of the two Mustangs used in the film was badly damaged, judged beyond repair, and believed to have been scrapped until it surfaced in Mexico in 2017, while the other one, which McQueen attempted to purchase in 1977, is hidden from the public eye. At the 2018 North American International Auto Show the GT 390 was displayed in connection with the 2019 Ford Mustang "Bullitt" in its current non-restored condition.

McQueen also flew and owned, among other aircraft, a 1945 Stearman, tail number N3188, (his student number in reform school), a 1946 Piper J-3 Cub, and an award-winning 1931 Pitcairn PA-8 bip, flown in the US Mail Service by famed World War I flying ace Eddie Rickenbacker. They were hangared at Santa Paula Airport an hour northwest of Hollywood, where he lived his final days.

Personal life

Relationships and friendships

While still attending Stella Adler’s school in New York, McQueen dated Gia Scala. On November 2, 1956, he married actress Neile Adams, with whom he had a daughter, Terry Leslie (June 5, 1959 – March 19, 1998,) and a son, Chad (born December 28, 1960). McQueen and Adams divorced in 1972. In her autobiography, My Husband, My Friend, Adams stated that she had an abortion in 1971, when their marriage was on the rocks.

On August 31, 1973, McQueen married actress Ali MacGraw, his co-star in The Getaway, but this marriage ended in a divorce in 1978. MacGraw suffered a miscarriage during their marriage. Friends would later claim that MacGraw was the one true love of McQueen’s life: “He was madly in love with her until the day he died.” On January 16, 1980, less than a year before his death, McQueen married model Barbara Minty. One of McQueen's four grandchildren is actor Steven R. McQueen (who is best known for playing Jeremy Gilbert in The Vampire Diaries).

In 1971–1972, while separated from Adams and prior to meeting MacGraw, McQueen had a relationship with Junior Bonner co-star Barbara Leigh, which included her pregnancy and an abortion. Actress-model Lauren Hutton has said that she had an affair with McQueen in the early 1960s. Mamie Van Doren has also claimed to have had an affair with McQueen and tried hallucinogens with him.

In 1973 McQueen was one of the pallbearers at the funeral of Bruce Lee along with James Coburn, Bruce’s brother, Robert Lee, Peter Chin, Danny Inosanto, and Taky Kimura.

After discovering a mutual interest in racing, McQueen and Great Escape co-star James Garner became good friends. Garner lived downhill from McQueen, who recalled:

“I could see that Jim was neat around his place. Flowers trimmed, no papers in the yard… grass always cut. So to piss him off, I’d start lobbing empty beer cans down the hill into his driveway. He’d have his drive all spic ‘n’ span when he left the house, then get home to find all these empty cans. Took him a long time to figure out it was me.

McQueen’s third wife, Barbara Minty McQueen, in her book Steve McQueen: The Last Mile, writes of McQueen’s becoming an Evangelical Christian toward the end of his life. This was due in part to the influences of his flying instructor, Sammy Mason, Mason’s son Pete, and Barbara herself. McQueen attended his local church, Ventura Missionary Church, and was visited by evangelist Billy Graham shortly before his death.

Lifestyle

McQueen followed a daily two-hour exercise regimen, involving weightlifting and, at one point, running 5 miles (8Â km), seven days a week. McQueen learned the martial art Tang Soo Do from ninth-degree black belt Pat E. Johnson.
According to William Claxton, McQueen smoked marijuana almost every day; biographer Marc Eliot stated that McQueen used a large amount of cocaine in the early 1970s. He was also a heavy cigarette smoker. McQueen sometimes drank to excess, and was arrested for driving while intoxicated in Anchorage, Alaska, in 1972.

Manson connection

Two months after Charles Manson incited the murder of five people, including McQueen’s friends Sharon Tate and Jay Sebring, the media reported police had found a hit list with McQueen’s name on it, a result of McQueen’s company having rejected a Manson screenplay. According to his first wife, McQueen began carrying a handgun at all times in public, including at Sebring’s funeral. Sebring had invited McQueen to the party at Tate’s house on the night of the murders; according to McQueen, he invited a girlfriend to come along but she instead suggested an intimate night at home.

Charitable causes

McQueen had an unusual reputation for demanding free items in bulk from studios when agreeing to do a film, such as electric razors, jeans, and other items. It was later discovered McQueen donated these things to the Boys Republic reformatory school, where he spent time in his teen years. McQueen made occasional visits to the school to spend time with the students, often to play pool and speak about his experiences.

Illness and death

McQueen developed a persistent cough in 1978. He gave up cigarettes and underwent antibiotic treatments without improvement. Shortness of breath grew more pronounced and on December 22, 1979, after filming *The Hunter*, a biopsy revealed pleural mesothelioma, a cancer associated with asbestos exposure for which there is no known cure. A few months later, McQueen gave a medical interview in which he blamed his condition on asbestos exposure. McQueen believed that asbestos used in movie sound stage insulation and race-drivers’ protective suits and helmets could have been involved, but he thought it more likely that his illness was a direct result of massive exposure while removing asbestos lagging from pipes aboard a troop ship while he was in the Marines.

By February 1980, evidence of widespread metastasis was found. He tried to keep the condition a secret, but on March 11, 1980, the *National Enquirer* disclosed that he had “terminal cancer”. In July McQueen traveled to Rosarito Beach, Mexico, for unconventional treatment after US doctors told him they could do nothing to prolong his life. Controversy arose over the trip, because McQueen sought treatment from William Donald Kelley, who was promoting a variation of the Gerson therapy that used coffee enemas, frequent washing with shampoos, daily injections of fluid containing live cells from cattle and sheep, massage, and laetrile, an anticancer drug available in Mexico, but described as canonical quackery by mainstream scientists. McQueen paid for Kelley’s treatments by himself in cash payments which were said to have been upwards of $40,000 per month ($119,000 today) during his three-month stay in Mexico. Kelley’s only medical license (until revoked in 1976) had been for orthodontics. Kelley’s methods created a sensation in the traditional and tabloid press when it became known that McQueen was a patient.

While in Mexico Steve McQueen met with Billy Graham. Graham gave him his personal Bible (a Bible he was holding when he died).

McQueen returned to the US in early October. Despite metastasis of the cancer throughout McQueen’s body, Kelley publicly announced that McQueen would be completely cured and return to normal life. McQueen’s condition soon worsened and “huge” tumors developed in his abdomen.

In late October 1980, McQueen flew to Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico, to have an abdominal tumor on his liver (weighing around five pounds) removed, despite warnings from his U.S. doctors that the tumor was inoperable and his heart could not withstand the surgery. McQueen checked into a small Juárez clinic under the assumed name of “Sam Shepard”, where the doctors and staff were unaware of his actual identity.

On November 7, 1980, McQueen died of cardiac arrest at 3:45 a.m. at the Juárez clinic, 12 hours after surgery to remove or
reduce numerous metastatic tumors in his neck and abdomen. He was 50 years old. According to the *El Paso Times*, McQueen died in his sleep.

Leonard DeWitt of the Ventura Missionary Church presided over McQueen’s memorial service. McQueen was cremated and his ashes were spread in the Pacific Ocean.

**Legacy**

McQueen remains a popular star, and his estate limits the licensing of his image to avoid the commercial saturation experienced by other dead celebrities. As of 2007, McQueen’s estate entered the top 10 of highest-earning dead celebrities.

McQueen was inducted into the Hall of Great Western Performers in April 2007, in a ceremony at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum.

In November 1999, McQueen was inducted into the Motorcycle Hall of Fame. He was credited with contributions including financing the film *On Any Sunday*, supporting a team of off-road riders, and enhancing the public image of motorcycling overall.

A film based on unfinished storyboards and notes developed by McQueen before his death was slated for production by McG’s production company Wonderland Sound and Vision. *Yucatán* is described as an “epic adventure heist” film, scheduled for release in 2013 but still unreleased in February 2016. Team Downey, the production company of Robert Downey, Jr. and his wife Susan Downey, expressed an interest in developing *Yucatán* for the screen.

The Beech Grove, Indiana, Public Library formally dedicated the Steve McQueen Birthplace Collection on March 16, 2010 to commemorate the 80th anniversary of McQueen’s birth on March 24, 1930.

In 2005, *TV Guide* ranked McQueen 26th on its “50 Sexiest Stars of All Time” list.

In 2012, McQueen was posthumously honored with the Warren Zevon Tribute Award by the Asbestos Disease Awareness Organization (ADAO).

The 1973 Rolling Stones song “Star Star” about a groupie who makes the rounds with famous people contains in the third verse the lyric “Yeah, Ali McGraw got mad with you, for giving head to Steve McQueen...” [Star Star lyrics © Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC]

*Steve McQueen: The Man & Le Mans*, a 2015 documentary, examines the actor’s quest to create and star in the 1971 auto-racing film *Le Mans*. His son Chad McQueen and former wife Neile Adams are among those interviewed.

On September 28, 2017, there was a selected showing in some theaters of his life story and spiritual quest, *Steve McQueen – American Icon*. There was an encore presentation on October 10, 2017. The film received mostly positive reviews. Kenneth R. Morefield of Christianity Today said it “offers a timeless reminder that even those among us living the most celebrated lives often long for the peace and sense of purpose that only God can provide.” Michael Foust of Wordslingers called it “one of the most powerful and inspiring documentaries I’ve ever seen.”

**Archive**

The Academy Film Archive houses the Steve McQueen-Neile Adams Collection, which consists of personal prints and home movies.

**Ford commercials**

In 1998 director Paul Street created a commercial for the Ford Puma. Footage was shot in modern-day San Francisco, set to the theme music from *Bullitt*. Archive footage of McQueen was used to digitally superimpose him driving and exiting the car in settings reminiscent of the film. The Puma shares the same number plate of the classic fastback Mustang used in *Bullitt*, and as he parks in the garage (next to the Mustang), he pauses and looks meaningfully at a motorcycle tucked in the corner, similar to that used in *The Great Escape*. 
In 2005, Ford used his likeness again, in a commercial for the 2005 Mustang. In the commercial, a farmer builds a winding racetrack, which he circles in the 2005 Mustang. Out of the cornfield comes Steve McQueen. The farmer tosses his keys to McQueen, who drives off in the new Mustang. McQueen's likeness was created using a body double (Dan Holsten) and digital editing. Ford secured the rights to McQueen's likeness from the actor's estate licensing agent, GreenLight, for an undisclosed sum.

At the Detroit Auto Show in January 2018, Ford unveiled the new 2019 Mustang Bullitt. The company called on McQueen's granddaughter, actress Molly McQueen, to make the announcement. After a brief rundown of the tribute car's particulars, a short film was shown in which Molly was introduced to the actual Bullitt Mustang, a 1968 Mustang Fastback with a 390 cubic-inch engine and a four-speed manual gearbox. That car has been in possession of the same family since 1974 and hidden away from the public until now, when it was driven out from under the press stand and up the center aisle of Ford's booth to much fanfare.

**Memorabilia**

The blue-tinted sunglasses (Persol 714) worn by McQueen in the 1968 movie *The Thomas Crown Affair* sold at a Bonhams & Butterfields auction in Los Angeles for $70,200 in 2006. One of his motorcycles, a 1937 Crocker, sold for a world-record price of $276,500 at the same auction. McQueen's 1963 metallic-brown Ferrari 250 GT Lusso Berlinetta sold for US$2.31 million at auction on August 16, 2007. Except for three motorcycles sold with other memorabilia in 2006, most of McQueen's collection of 130 motorcycles was sold four years after his death. The 1970 Porsche 911S purchased while making the film *Le Mans* and appearing in the opening sequence was sold at auction in August 2011 for $1.375 million. The Rolex Explorer II, Reference 1655, known as Rolex Steve McQueen in the horology collectors' world, the Rolex Submariner, Reference 5512, which McQueen was often photographed wearing in private moments, sold for $234,000 at auction on June 11, 2009, a world-record price for the reference. McQueen was left-handed and wore the watch on his right wrist. From 1995 to 2011, McQueen's red 1957 Chevrolet fuel-injected convertible was displayed at the Petersen Automotive Museum in Los Angeles in a special Cars of Steve McQueen exhibit. It is now in the collection of actress Ruth Buzzi and her husband Kent Perkins.

McQueen was a sponsored ambassador for Heuer watches. In the 1970 film *Le Mans*, he famously wore a blue-faced Monaco 1133B Caliber 11 Automatic, which led to its cult status among watch collectors. His sold for $87,600 at auction on June 11, 2009. Tag Heuer continues to promote its Monaco range with McQueen's image.

From 2009, Triumph Motorcycles Ltd, licensed by his estate, marketed a line of clothing inspired by McQueen's association with their brand, particularly his 1964 ISDT participation.

British heritage clothing brand J. Barbour and Sons created a Steve McQueen collection, based on his ownership of a Barbour International motorbike jacket.

*Steve McQueen* was the second album by English pop band Prefab Sprout, which was released in June 1985. It was released in the United States under the title *Two Wheels Good* due to a legal conflict with McQueen's estate.

**Filmography**

**Awards and honors**

- Academy Awards
  - (1967) Nominated â€“ Best Actor in a Leading Role in *The Sand Pebbles*
  - (1964) Nominated â€“ Best Actor â€“ Motion Picture Drama in *Love with the Proper Stranger*
  - (1967) Nominated â€“ Best Actor â€“ Motion Picture Drama in *The Sand Pebbles*
  - (1970) Nominated â€“ Best Actor â€“ Motion Picture Musical or Comedy in *The Reivers*
  - (1974) Nominated â€“ Best Actor â€“ Motion Picture Drama in *Papillon*

- Moscow International Film Festival
  - (1963) â€“ Won – Best Actor in *The Great Escape*
References


Further reading

- Siegel, Mike. *Steve McQueen: The Actor and his Films* (Dalton Watson, 2011).
- McQueen, Terrill. *Steve McQueen: The Last Mile*, (Dalton Watson, 2006).
- Terrill, Marshall. *Steve McQueen: A Tribute to the King of Cool,* (Dalton Watson, 2010).

External links

- Official website
- Steve McQueen on IMDb
- Steve McQueen at the Internet Broadway Database
- Steve McQueen discography at Discogs
- Steve McQueen at Find a Grave
- FBI Records: The Vault – Terrence Steven (Steve) McQueen at vault.fbi.gov
- Steve McQueen at Virtual History
- Rare Photos of the King of Cool â€” slideshow at *Life* magazine
- Bell System Film “A Family Affair”, McQueen’s debut, at The AT&T Tech Channel
- The Great Escape – New publication with private photos of the shooting & documents of 2nd unit cameraman Walter Riml
- Photos of the filming The Great Escape, Steve McQueen on the set
- Photos and commentary on Steve McQueen shooting an episode of *Wanted: Dead or Alive* on the Iverson Movie Ranch
- Iverson Movie Ranch: History, vintage photos.
Jesse James

Geoffrey Kirkland

Philippe Capelle

Ram Sure

Tags: Steve McQueen Awards and nominations, Steve McQueen Career, Steve McQueen Early life, Steve McQueen Film
Steve McQueen was one of the most popular and successful film actors of the 1960s and '70s. He starred in such features as 'The Great Escape,' 'Bullitt' and 'The Getaway.' Who Was Steve McQueen? Born on March 24, 1930, in Indiana, actor Steve McQueen first earned widespread attention in 1958, with his starring roles in the sci-fi classic The Blob and the TV Western Wanted: Dead or Alive.