

A FRENCH KISS WITH DEATH **Steve McQueen and the** **Making Of Le Mans**

By Michael Keyser with Jonathan Williams
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If you are enthusiastic about Porsches and the rich history of the marques, then you are by default a racing fan. Competition is what this car manufacturer has been about from its inception. The David v. Goliath parallels were there when the good professor and his son Ferry began to build motorcars to compete with giants the likes of Mercedes and Ferrari and have continued to the present as we see the current giant automakers worldwide on their knees and the Porsche Company comfortably preparing to introduce a new product, the Panamera, to the market.

Porsche has always been about using the least in terms of weight and displacement and the most in terms of efficiency to dominate the competition. A small company that even in the bleakest of financial times has managed to maintain the quality and focus on performance that has earned them the rock solid support of customers for decades.

Steve McQueen was by all accounts a "challenge" to deal with. A prostitute's son, he had overcome a lot making his way to the stardom he had earned by the mid sixties. He had made a name for himself in racing circles along the way as well and he dreamed of combining the passion for acting with the equally competitive love of racing. He achieved the goal but not without a lot of tenacity on his part and that of scores of behind the scenes partners and negotiators who believed in the project. This book is really a document that concisely describes and illustrates the miracle that Le Mans became a movie while relating the wonderful tales of all the events during

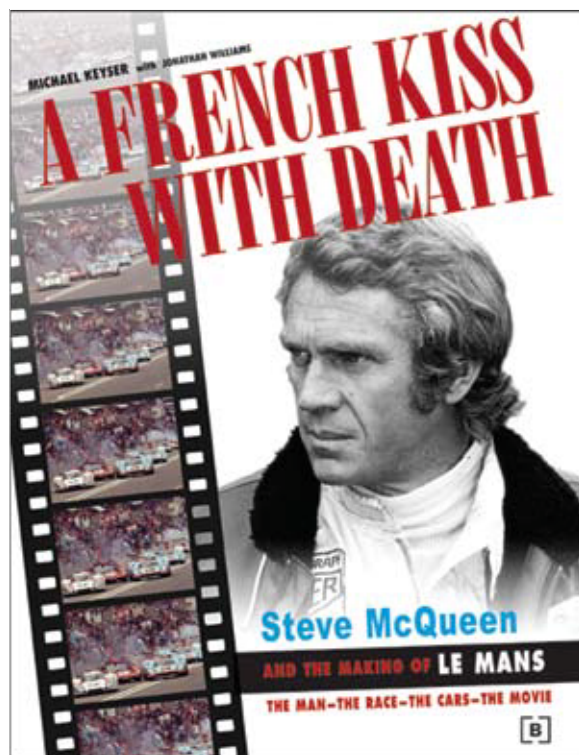
production that allowed the finished product to attain the iconic status it now enjoys.

The title of this book may seem provocative and perhaps overly dramatic but in fact is an accurate description of what it took for McQueen to make his dream come true. At over 460 pages in length, the authors had me feeling involved with even the most minute aspects of the history and production of the film. There is a wonderful history of the Le Mans race itself with loads of period photos and diagrams of the track as it changed through the years as well as the cars and drivers that became champions of the twenty four hour contest.

There is also a thorough documentation of McQueen's Solar Productions, his film company, and the relationships and the negotiations involved in keeping the project on track and getting it to completion and the silver screen. All this substantially illustrated with black and white photos, artwork and promotional posters from the time. No nuance seems neglected in this tale. The detail is truly impressive. Even very specific accounts of races leading up to the production and how they affected the mood of investors and McQueen himself are included and in such a way as to make the reader feel like a spectator. Relationships between actors and stunt people and the racers are explored as are logistical details like how the race cars were moved around for various shots in the local countryside both pre and post race.

Michael Keyser is no stranger to the racing scene or to filmmaking. A Baltimore native he produced the book and feature length documentary 'The

Speed Merchants' in 1973. He is also a still photographer and an accomplished driver in FIA and IMSA Camel GT series. Here he takes what could easily be tedious material and organizes it into a delightfully detailed account of what it took to produce arguably the best motorsports movie of its time.



Jonathan Williams the co author also has impressive driving credentials including a stint with Ferrari at the request of Enzo himself. After hanging up his helmet in 1972 he seems to have supported himself as private pilot for the rich and famous, and generally leading the life of a happy playboy.

If you love Porsche history, you like the movie Le Mans and are a Steve McQueen fan you will not be able to put this book down. You will feel like you were there during every aspect of the project and you'll have a lot of respect for the Herculean effort required to get this movie to the screen for all of us to see.

I rate it at five stars.