

CLASSIC DRIVER

Frivolous fantasy: How Oasis sank a Rolls-Royce

Lead

In 1997, the Oasis album ‘Be Here Now’ became the fastest-selling album in British history. On the cover was a Rolls-Royce submerged in a swimming pool in true rock ‘n’ roll fashion, but What’s The Story behind it? Classic Driver asked the photographer who captured the well-known image...

You might think plunging a car into a swimming pool would be simple enough for a rock ‘n’ roll band, especially given the devil-may-care nature of many heroes of the music business.

With the intention of paying homage to Keith Moon’s much-rumoured ‘carpooling’ antics, the crew needed to find an appropriate venue. Stocks House in Hertfordshire, UK, was deemed the most appropriate by famous rock photographer Michael Spencer Jones: “It had a swimming pool directly in front of the house, and from a photographic point of view was ideal”. Perhaps just as importantly, it also had the required history: “In the 70s it played home to Playboy’s UK arm, regularly holding parties of a ‘hedonistic’ nature. Make of that what you will...”

“With the band’s arrival imminent, I began to imagine their reaction...”

Jones recalls: “The white Rolls-Royce arrived at Stocks the day before the shoot, albeit without an engine”. Although the final cover image embodied the frivolous ‘rock star’ lifestyle, the Rolls had in fact been destined for the scrapheap, before being purchased for £1,000 by the crew.

Otherwise in good condition, the Silver Shadow was lowered into the empty swimming pool – the only change being a new numberplate. “It needed to be replaced with a more interesting number” explains Jones, “and it was suggested that it should be replaced with the number plate 28 IF, as seen on the VW car on the cover of The Beatles’ album Abbey Road. This was too obvious, so I decided it would be better to have the plate from the black police van, which was SYO 724F.”

Once the car was lowered into the pool and the scaffolding arranged to support the car at the ideal angle (with the registration number visible just above the water line), the local fire brigade helped to refill the pool. However, “the oil and dirt from the underside of the Rolls had transferred into the swimming pool, creating a scummy mess on the surface,” Jones reminisces. “With the band’s arrival imminent, I began to imagine their reaction. Luckily oil and water don’t mix, so with the aid of a rowing paddle, the top layer of oil and scum was carefully removed from the surface.”



With everything in place – including the band members and associated props – the scene was set to become one of the most iconic images in musical history.

Photos: © Michael Spencer Jones

Gallery





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