

# CLASSIC DRIVER

## [A Porsche 911 with backstage memories of Steve McQueen and Le Mans](#)

### Lead

The film "Le Mans" hit the cinemas 50 years ago, making Steve McQueen world-famous and the Porsche 917 an icon. The King of Cool's on and off-screen lover was Elga Andersen – and her farewell gift at the end of the shoot was this elegant brown Porsche 911T from Switzerland.



Le Mans, 1970. Filming of the Hollywood movie "Le Mans" with Steve McQueen in the role of racing driver Michael Delaney has been going on in the small French town since the summer. A Porsche 917K in the orange-blue Gulf livery had already competed at the 24-hour race in June to capture live racing footage. A modified Porsche 908/2 had been used as the camera car in order to capture the action as authentically as possible – and at full racing speed. Behind the wheel of the Porsche 917 sat Brian Redman and Jo Siffert. However, the Swiss racing driver was not only on set as a "race double" for Steve McQueen. Taking the motto "Race on Sunday, sell on Monday" to heart, the enterprising sports car and formula driver had set up a sports car dealership in his hometown of Fribourg, Switzerland – and was now in a lucrative deal with the production company CBS Solar, supplying most of the racing and sports cars for the film.





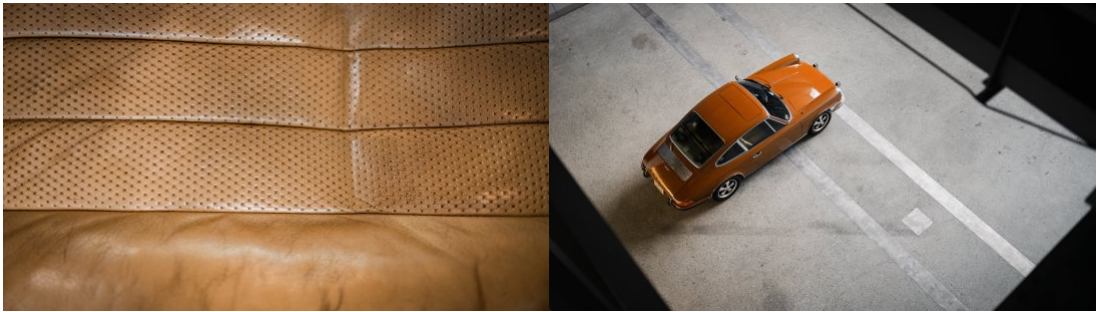
In addition to the Porsche 917, Siffert had also transported a fleet of Porsche 911s and 914s to Le Mans, which were enthusiastically used by director John Sturges, Derek Bell, and other members of the film crew – both as fast shuttles from one location to the next, but also during impromptu post-shoot races, mostly initiated by Steve McQueen. The most famous 911 from the fleet is certainly the slate-grey Porsche 911S from the opening scene of the film, which the “King of Cool” later took with him to his American homeland. In 2011, McQueen’s movie car was auctioned off for \$1.375 million.



Fast forward to Zurich in the late 1990s. As a young lawyer, Andreas Ritter looks from the backyard office of his law firm in Seefeld at the Speich garage, where the residents of the Zürichberg and the "Gold Coast" have their sports cars serviced. "I started collecting art early on during my studies. The last thing I needed was enthusiasm for expensive automobiles," Ritter recalls with a grin. However, an elderly lady’s classic Porsche 911T, which kept turning up for service, wouldn’t let him escape. "The Porsche 911 is the great design icon among automobiles – and the combination of sepia brown paint and beige interior looked stunningly elegant." Finally, one day, Ritter sees the workshop foreman stood in the office door: the elderly lady’s poodle can no longer ride in the back seat due to its age, and the Porsche is for sale. During the sales talk, the owner reports that she inherited the sports car from a good friend who was a film actress and asked him to take good care of it. Ritter pricks up his ears. Protection of cultural assets and provenance research are among his legal specialties as an art attorney – and so he begins to research the history of his Porsche 911 more closely.







A certain Elga Andersen from Nyon is listed as the first owner of the Porsche in the vehicle registration document from 1971. Profession: "Actrice" – actress. Today, the name may be almost forgotten, but in the 1950s and 1960s, the blonde-haired, blue-eyed native of Dortmund was an absolute *it girl*. She had appeared in front of the camera in "Bonjour Tristesse" and "Ascenseur pour l'échafaud" – two groundbreaking films of the Nouvelle Vague – and lived in Henri Matisse's former studio in Paris. She even dated Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the Shah of Iran. However, her greatest success was as the female lead in "Le Mans" – taking the role of the widow of Michael Delaney/Steve McQueen's former racetrack rival, whom she slowly but surely falls in love with over the course of the film.



In the casting, which was still ongoing during filming, Elga Andersen prevailed against stars such as Diana Rigg, Maud Adams and even Twiggy. Upon arriving on set, McQueen is said to have asked his acting partner, in less than charming fashion, how she would have gotten the role without going through the casting couch – only in much more tangible words, after all it was the 1970s. However, Andersen was undeterred: McQueen was a complex man who was still trying to grow up, she revealed in an interview at the time. And, as the Yellow Press eagerly reported from the production camp, Elga Andersen was not only Steve McQueen's mistress on, but soon off-screen as well.



Andreas Ritter's sepia-brown Porsche 911T was also one of the cars from Jo Siffert's fleet on the set of "Le Mans" - photos from the Solar Village bear witness to this. After the shooting break in the summer, the sports car that had just rolled off the assembly line in Stuttgart was made available to the leading actress. And who knows, maybe Elga Andersen and Steve McQueen even whispered love on the beige leather seats of the 911? Meanwhile, it is documented that the Porsche returned to Switzerland after the end of filming and that Siffert signed it over to Andersen in January 1971. Most of the purchase price was paid by CBS Solar, the actress only had to pay for the extras such as the cassette radio, which is still in the cockpit today.



Did Elga Andersen receive the Porsche 911T as part of her fee - or, as has been speculated, as a parting gift from Steve McQueen? For Andreas Ritter that is not decisive. "Of course, the history with Le Mans is great, but even without it, the Porsche 911 is a wonderful car: well maintained and in original condition, with matching numbers." Instead of



preserving it in an air-conditioned garage, Andreas Ritter is not letting the Porsche retire, even 50 years after it was first registered: "In the summer I travel a lot in Graubünden and in the Engadine – and there couldn't be a better car for the mountain passes!" Surely, Steve McQueen would have agreed.



Meanwhile, Elga Andersen remained devoted to glamor and adventure even after “Le Mans”. At the end of the 1970s, she married the department store heir, filmmaker, and deep-sea diver Peter Gimbel, whom she accompanied on his expeditions to the wreck of the legendary Andrea Doria. The bank vault, which was dug up from the depths, could be admired in the shark tank of the New York Aquarium for many years. Elga Andersen died in New York in 1994 at the age of 59. While her ashes and those of her husband were laid to rest in the Andrea Doria, she left the Porsche 911T to her friend in Zurich, until a decrepit poodle steered the sports car in front of Andreas Ritter's courtyard window. Some stories are just so beautiful and convoluted that even Hollywood couldn't tell them.

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