

THE

Nick Zeglarac's

Hollywood

ART



GRAND PRIX

Frankenheimer's Day at the Races

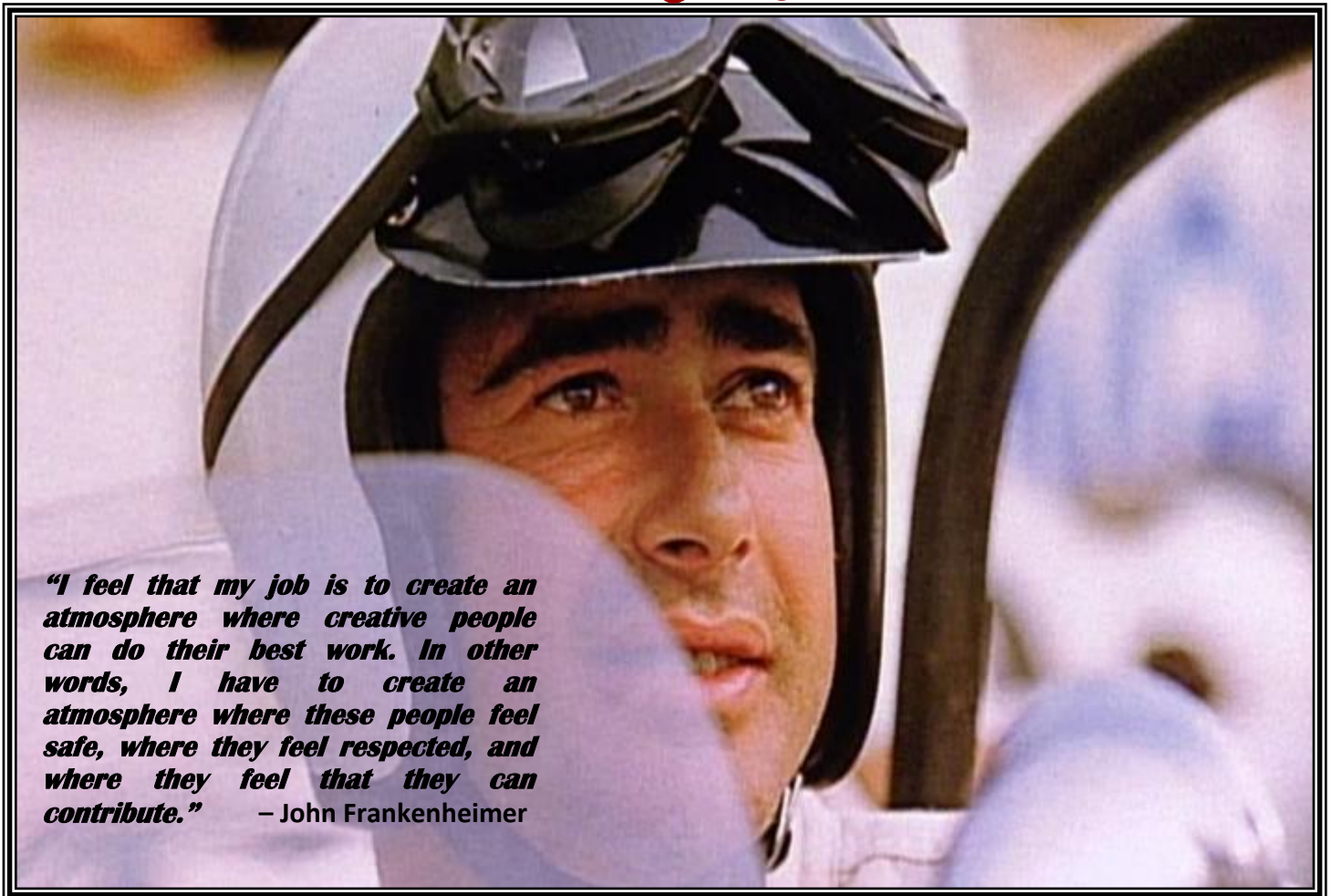






# GRAND PRIX

*Frankenheimer's Day at the Races*



***"I feel that my job is to create an atmosphere where creative people can do their best work. In other words, I have to create an atmosphere where these people feel safe, where they feel respected, and where they feel that they can contribute."*** – John Frankenheimer

In 1966, director John Frankenheimer debuted one of the most exhilarating and immersive 70mm movies in modern screen history. In many ways, the film **Grand Prix** proved a groundbreaking experience. To be certain, films about racing and its unsung heroes were nothing new; Hollywood's love affair with speed well ensconced in a string of minor and largely forgettable programmers. Even Hollywood's 'king' - Clark Gable - exploited the allure of Formula-1 racing while simultaneously wooing Barbara Stanwyck in the potboiler, **To Please a Lady** (1950). Yet, if race cars appeared at all on





the big screen, they were usually as backdrop – a stylish and gleaming prop, photographed against rear projection with little regard for accuracy or, in fact, to capture the realities and the harrowing experiences of the actual moment on film. Frankenheimer was looking to do something different with *Grand Prix*; to create an immersive ‘*you are there*’ racing experience that would put the audience in the driver’s seat, so close in fact, they could almost feel the rush of wind at their back as effectively as he could make them hear the ear-shattering roar of the engines flooding in on all sides of the theater in stereophonic sound.

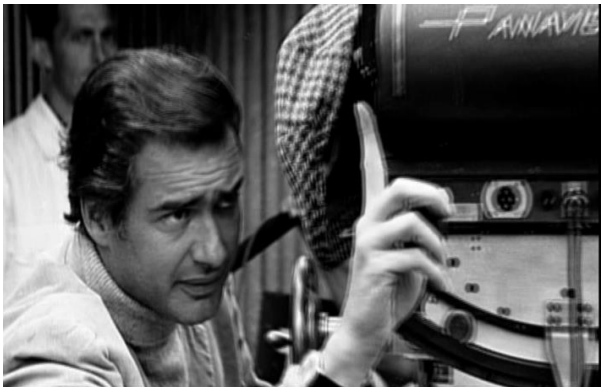
At the time **Grand Prix** was set to go before the Cinerama cameras it was being touted in the trade papers as one of MGM’s road show ‘*landmark*’ movies. By the mid-1960s, MGM – the studio that had once boasted ‘*more stars than there are in heaven*’- had succumbed to a relentless cost-cutting brought on by an ever-revolving line of executives who came and went almost as quickly as their name plates could be removed from the front office doors.

Profits from studio-produced films had dwindled to less than half of what they had been a decade earlier. As a result, by 1966 each film MGM green-lit assumed a daunting responsibility; the future of the studio entirely dependent on the success and/or failure of one or two epic scale/big budget projects thrown into the hopper per annum.

With **Grand Prix** John Frankenheimer and MGM effectively moved Formula-1 racing out of its relative obscurity as a niche sport for racing enthusiasts, seen only in fuzzy black and white newspaper clippings, into an extreme and viscerally nail-biting motion picture. Both a fiscal and critical success, **Grand Prix** earned MGM millions, temporarily staving off the inevitable demise that would become the studio’s last act finale a few short years later; Hollywood’s premiere studio the victim of a very hostile corporate takeover.

Determined, as he was, to capture the experience of the actual 1966 Grand Prix race on film, Frankenheimer was given unprecedented access to the racing circuit, inserting fictional characters into a compelling back story that, for many a racing enthusiasts since, has served as a vintage snap shot and time capsule marking the moment when Formula One (F-1) racing left its ‘independent’ roots behind and became a worldwide commercial phenomenon.

(Top left): John Frankenheimer, camel-hair coat foreground, poses with an assortment of real-life racers and film cast. Brian Bedford, who plays doomed British driver, Scott Stoddard is to Frankenheimer’s right, with Yves Montand, cast as French racer, Jean-Pierre Sarti: blue racing suit behind him. In background, left is James Garner, arguably **Grand Prix**’s ‘star’ – as American, Pete Aron, and Antonio Sabato (blue suit and bomber jacket) as Nino Barlini, representing Italy. (Middle): Frankenheimer’s intensity on the set is plainly visible. Shooting in and around the actual race presented certain challenges; particularly in time constraints. As the real Grand Prix would not be delayed on account of the movie, Frankenheimer often had one chance only to get his camera setups right. (Middle): Co-star Eva Marie Saint, cast as fashion magazine writer, Louise Frederickson, with James Garner and (bottom) with Yves Montand, who plays her married lover in the film.







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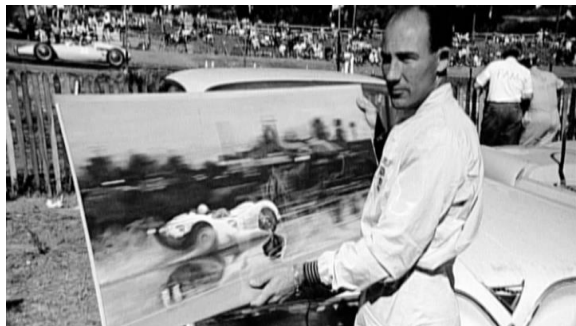
Grand Prix motor racing originally began in France in 1894. Quickly, it escalated in its appeal from a simple competition into an extreme test of physical endurance for both driver and car. Innovations in automotive design ever-increased the stamina of both throughout the early part of the 20th century, and by 1920 spectators had already seen records of 100mph readily challenged and broken.

Despite these advances, Formula One racing circa the early 1960s had very much retained an elusive quality as belonging to a moneyed and inbred sect for true thrill seekers. Driving vehicles that, by today's standards were perilously unsafe, with very little control over brakes and grip – and, at speeds topping over 150mph - F-1 drivers were amongst the most daredevil and respected sportsmen, at least within their chosen profession. This gregarious brotherhood of wild, risk-taking personalities gave rise to its own mythological characters under a sustained camaraderie - all flashy expertise being tested, matched and outperformed on the race track.

It was the Cooper Car Company's evolution in racer design – brought on by the relocation of F-1 engines behind the driver instead of in front – that began the new era in auto racing. Within a few short years, rear engine design had become the accepted standard and, by the mid-60s, the 1 ½ liter engine had given way to a deluxe 3 liter model, adding to the complexity of each racer's engineering. In this pre-commercial dawn of F-1 celebrity, cars were primarily built by individuals – not car companies; Ferrari being the one exception to this rule. F-1 racer, Jack Brabham, as example, built the car that won him the 1966 Grand Prix, the year the fictional Pete Aaron (James Garner) took home the trophy in the film.

The men who designed these vehicles were interested in only one criteria of performance: speed. It was a recipe for disaster. In excess of 180mph, and on race courses that had not been designed with such velocities in mind – let alone properly maintained between races – F-1 drivers of this 'golden period' owed much more to the risk takers of the early 1920s than the Jeff Gordon's of today. In less than capable hands, no aspiring wunderkind could hope to compete. As a seasoned veteran one could ostensibly aspire to finish the race alive and unharmed.

If to the outside world racing seemed like a display of the most foolhardy, then it also cultivated a distinct roster of rugged personalities behind the wheel; total originals like Dan Gurney, Graham Hill, Jackie Stewart, Phil Hill and Bob Bonduran: enigmatic emcees of the sport – shiny superstars fueled by a love affair with their cars and the overwhelming machismo to stand above the rest. Their level of commitment far outweighed the dangerous aspects. They were comrades of road, cavalier in their attitudes about death, but imbued with a titanic joy to push the limit to its absolute extreme.



Although love of craft may have resulted in F-1 cars of this vintage bearing a more esthetically pleasing outward appearance this photogenic quality came at a great expense to life and limb. The lack of uniform fabrication of these vehicles on a mass scale – with all the prescreening and crash-testing that occurs today during the design stages - yielded to a virtual litany of guaranteed mechanical failures during every racing season. Some were minor disappointments. Many, however, proved near fatal. One of F-1's most celebrated champions, Sir Stirling Moss broke both his back and legs when the wheel of his Lotus came off at 150mph. Moss survived the ordeal and continued to race, eventually racking up 525 competitions, all of them without the benefit of a seatbelt. The reason for this latter omission seemed prudent at the time; a wipeout almost always involved the car catching fire; hence a driver needed to escape his vehicle quickly – if, in fact, he could do so at all.

Today, this lack of general safety seems utterly appalling. Yet, in the climate of competition, and, without the luxury of professional sponsorship, this absence of common sense is almost forgivable. In point of fact, safety had never been an issue in Formula-1. The cramped nature of each car's skeletal metal cocoon, separating its human element from flashes of speeding pavement only inches below, trapped the driver in an aluminum skin encompassed by highly flammable reserves of fuel. Roll bars – designed to protect the driver in the very real event of a wipe out – were often lower than the driver's own head.

With such disregard for driver safety and the increasingly severe and unpredictable state of racing conditions, F-1 racing practically guaranteed a few men would die each season. Those odds exponentially grew for each driver with each year he entered the competition and remained accident free. Veterans of the sport had little more than five years behind them. Titans could proudly boast surviving ten years with life-threatening injuries as their badges of courage and honor. Reporters assigned to cover these races often focused more intensely on the casualties rather than the survivors – or perhaps even the winners, for that matter. After all, a 'good' disaster sold lots of copy.



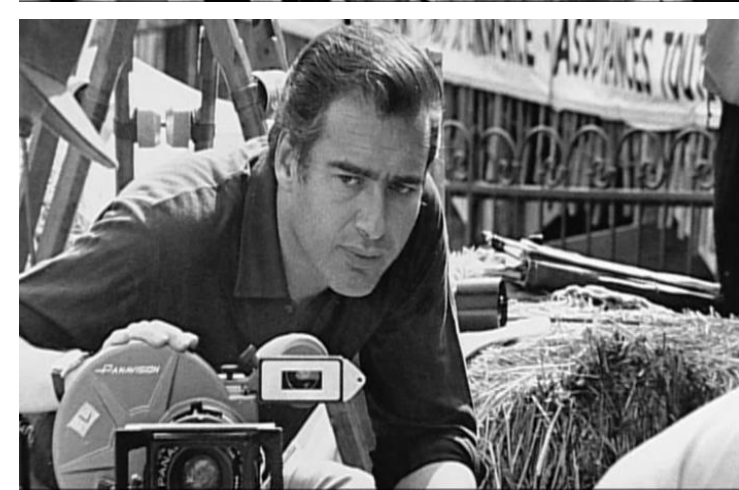


# FRANKENHEIMER

- man of **DECISION**



At the start of **Grand Prix** – the movie, director John Frankenheimer could have so easily chosen to open his fictional story with various shots of his actors preparing for the race. He did not. Instead, Frankenheimer used legitimate shots of the crowds and the actual F-1 drivers, mechanics and pit crew, capturing the frenzied backstory unfolding moments before the 1966 Monte Carlo length of the journey. At once, both the genius and the mystery behind Frankenheimer's storytelling prowess is established. We are pressed to question; is this a movie? Or is this reality?



Indeed, much of Frankenheimer's early career had been spent attempting to bottle the illusiveness of verisimilitude; having reality and fiction run their parallel course. As remarkable as it may seem; **Grand Prix** was only Frankenheimer's eighth movie; by far his most technically ambitious, after nearly a decade of solid work put forth on television, directing episodes for such serials as **Danger** (1954-55), **Playhouse 90** (1956-60) and **The Sunday Showcase** (1959-60). Television's breakneck speed gave Frankenheimer the ability to think on the fly and to act quickly under adverse conditions – assets indeed when attempting helm a mammoth spectacle like **Grand Prix**. In the interim, Frankenheimer had also experiences some major success in Hollywood: **The Manchurian Candidate** (1962), **Seven Days In May** (1964) and **Seconds** (1966) among his outstanding repertoire. Overall, he was a congenial sort, but he knew what he wanted and could frequently lose his patience when he felt he was not getting everything from an actor or particular crew member that he needed to make his ideas work. This delicate balance between benevolent collaborator and tyrannical despot set precedence while on location for **Grand Prix**. Everyone knew they had better come ready to perform. But they were well rewarded when they did.





(Previous page: Frankenheimer strikes an imperious pose on the set of **The Manchurian Candidate** (1962). Working with such seasoned pros as Frank Sinatra, Laurence Harvey and Janet Leigh, Frankenheimer would later describe making the movie thus, *"If you cast it correctly there's a lot of leeway. You can make your mistakes with other aspects but pull it off with the right cast...and we had the right cast. On the other hand, I've found that the more 'experts' you have on a movie the less control a director has."* In retrospect, Frankenheimer was being kind. Sinatra in particular insisted on doing things his own way. *"You couldn't tell Frank anything,"* Frankenheimer once admitted, *"Believe me...I tried."* (Middle): Couching James Garner on how to handle himself in the F-1 racer. Garner had his misgivings about doing his own driving – understandable, given he was going to be in a race with a lot of pros and not only have to drive the car with a weighty camera strapped to its body, but also act in the scene too. (Bottom): directing an intense Karl Malden as Harvey Shoemaker in **The Birdman of Alcatraz** (1962). (Above left): Frankenheimer, age seven, proudly dressed like a fireman and driving his toy fire engine in his backyard in Queens. (Middle): Frankenheimer, in the driver's seat again, this time with a bottle in his hand and a pair of college buddies at his side, pose for this humorous photo at Coney Island in 1949. (Right): overseeing the camera setup on a sequence from **Seven Days in May** (1964). *"I look at actors very closely,"* Frankenheimer explained, *"It's no accident when the actors excel."*

Frankenheimer broke new ground on **Grand Prix**. The movie not only introduced audiences to the spectacle of F-1 racing, but it did so in a tremendous splash of sights and sounds captured in the grandiloquence of 70mm Cinerama; a thunderous hi-fidelity gauge of motion picture presentation that arguably has never been equaled. It is important to note that by 1966 the cumbersome 3-camera setup of early Cinerama had given way to a newer less problematic single-strip wide gauge precursor to modern day Panavision. While some Cinerama purists have poo-pooed this alteration as not having the same equilibrium-altering effect as the earlier process, when projected on its massive curved screen inside a darkened theater, **Grand Prix** proved every inch the exhilarating *'you are there'* movie-going experience, capable of placing the audience in the driver's seat.

Born on February 19, 1930, John Frankenheimer had initially toyed with the prospect of becoming a professional tennis player. Although his interest in the movies would eventually surpass this early pursuit, another real love of Frankenheimer's, particularly as a young man was racing. *"I learned early on that I lacked the genuine skill required to become a pro,"* Frankenheimer would later muse, *"So my passion for racing became my hobby and movie-making my career."* Maybe so, but Frankenheimer found a way to combine the two in **Grand Prix**; his fascination, nee love of the automobile clearly represented in every frame of the finished movie. During WWII, Frankenheimer honed his talents as part of the Motion Picture Squadron for the Air Force – a tenure that directly launched his career in television in 1953 – directing episodes for **'You Are There'** on CBS, under the guidance of Sidney Lumet. Frankenheimer's first movie, **The Young Stranger** (1957) was a hateful experience.

*"I became a director at twenty-four..."* he would later muse, *"...which is probably pretty good (except that) everybody thought I was an inexperienced kid who didn't know what the hell I was doing. The only way I could get it done was to just say (in a commanding tone) 'Do it!'...and I've never stopped that."*

Frankenheimer concentrated doing solid work within his comfort zone on television, accruing 152 episodes to his name. Then in 1961 Frankenheimer once again took a chance on helming a movie – this time, **The Young Savages**. The experience proved rewarding with Frankenheimer acknowledged for his subtly in expressing complex philosophical ideas in an uncomplicated and highly entertaining way. His biggest successes prior to **Grand Prix** were a pair of political thrillers; 1962's **The Manchurian Candidate**, regrettably yanked by Frank Sinatra after the assassination of President Kennedy, primarily because of its similarly themed plot to murder a political official, and, 1964's **Seven Days in May**. Having already proved he could do witty and sophisticated – Frankenheimer next decided it was time to try for something 'grittier' – more viscerally alive. After all, there was no subtlety to Formula-1 racing.





*"The idea was to put the audience in the car."  
- John Frankenheimer*

# GRAND PRIX

## THE RACE BEGINS







(Above left): F-1 professional race car driver Phil Hill gives Yves Montand some last minute advice in preparation for the climactic race in which Montand's Jean-Pierre Sarti meets with an untimely fate. Montand proved a quick study in his ability to drive like a pro. It couldn't have been easy. The early racing cars were fairly primitive in their gear shifts and steering control. (Middle): James Garner and Japan's Izo Yamura – in brown coat – inspect the engineering that will give Pete Aaron his edge. In the movie, Aaron is an outcast after a deliberate attempt to pass fellow racer Scott Stoddard (Brian Bedford) results in Stoddard's near fatal crash. Branded a pariah and relegated to the press corp. Aaron has his day on the track again, this time for a wealthy Japanese manufacturer looking to enter the competition. (Right): James Garner's movie career had taken off after appearing in William Wyler's *The Children's Hour* (1961) opposite Audrey Hepburn and Shirley Maclaine. A string of notable movies followed, including *The Great Escape* (1963), *The Americanization of Emily* (1964) and *36 Hours* (1965). Despite the fact that Steve McQueen had been Frankenheimer's first choice for the role of Pete Aaron, Garner proved an inspired second choice. Garner looks like a rugged stock car racer. Moreover, by the time he had completed his training with professional Bob Bondurant, Garner was given a glowing recommendation. Bondurant even speculated that in a real race he might beat out several prominent contenders.

Actor Steve McQueen had always been Frankenheimer's first choice for the part of American driver, Pete Aaron. Initially, McQueen had expressed a genuine interest in making **Grand Prix**. This was a definite plus since McQueen had already established himself as one of the most iconic stars of the decade. Unfortunately for Frankenheimer, he sent his assistant Eddie Lewis in his stead to negotiate and iron out the contractual details. Reportedly, McQueen took an instant dislike to Lewis, or perhaps was simply appalled that Frankenheimer had not come himself; thereafter dropping out of the project. It was a bitter pill for Frankenheimer to swallow. But once McQueen had dug in his heels there was virtually nothing to be done about it. His refusal stood; the part of Pete Aaron going to James Garner instead. Ironically, when **Grand Prix** proved to be one of the biggest hits of the year McQueen begrudgingly began to look for a movie with like-minded appeal; settling on **Le Mans** (1971): an inferior rip-off of **Grand Prix**.

Garner always felt he had been foisted onto Frankenheimer's good graces by MGM who, after several solid efforts for them probably felt confident in his clout to carry the box office. Although director and star eventually fell into a syncopated rhythm of working together, Garner would later muse that Frankenheimer ran roughshod over most of the cast, including him. *"He was a tough son of bitch,"* Garner once declared, *"Bossy and exacting. But we came to an understanding. It was either that or get the hell out of his way. I did a little of both and it all worked out – although I don't know, given the chance, that I'd do it again."*

In service to Frankenheimer's quest for authenticity, the rest of **Grand Prix's** roster was rounded out by an international cast; including French matinee idol Yves Montand (as introspective driver and lady's man Jean-Pierre Sarti), Japan's Toshiro Mifune (as automotive designer Izo Yamura), England's Brian Bedford (the ill-fated Scott Stoddard), Italy's Antonio Sabato (ego driven, Nino Barlini) and Eva Marie Saint (fashion writer, Louise Frederickson). The one cheat in **Grand Prix** – in other words, the only aspect of its production that was not in keeping with Frankenheimer's pursuit of exact recreation - stemmed from his decision to use Formula-3 cars outfitted to look like Formula-1 racers; a choice made more for consideration of where and how to mount the weighty Cinerama cameras rather than for mere artistic license. In the film, these replacement vehicles are indiscernible in either appearance or performance to their F-1 counterparts, so the cheat – though necessary, is nevertheless forgivable.

Meanwhile, principle cast – except for Garner - were remanded to the care of Jim Russell's racing school for an intense three week training session on how to drive the hairpin turns and twists of each course in the circuit. Frankenheimer absolutely



(Above top): this fascinating image taken of Garner peering from behind Frankenheimer's careworn stare with a piercing one of his own seems, at least in retrospect, to typify their working relationship. Each respected the other's opinion, although infrequently neither was particularly pleased with the other. (Top right): Pete Aaron's penultimate victory in the movie is a rather curious epitaph, Garner walking the track long after the crowds have gone home, left to imagine the roar of the engines and without anywhere else to go, except in training for next year's race. (Bottom left): a bearded Prince Rainier, luminous Princess Grace Kelly and their son, Prince Albert makes an impromptu pit stop to schmooze with James Garner during the Monte Carlo shoot. A fracas between the Grimaldi and Onassis households briefly held up production, but Rainier was particularly cordial to cast and crew, perhaps as a favor to his wife who still retained a fascination for movies and film-makers after her own retirement from the fray of Hollywood. Kelly's story is, like all fairytales, one of both magic and tragedy. In retrospect, her surrender of stardom to aspire to the throne paved the way for a terrible accident, ironically not far from where **Grand Prix's** exhilarating racing sequences were filmed and, in fact, where Kelly had driven a silvery sports car with Cary Grant for 1955's **To Catch A Thief**. (Bottom right): Frankenheimer attempts to give Antonio Sabato a bit of advice about staying the course as co-star Francois Hardy looks on. In the movie, Sabato is a self-appointed hot-shot with a giant-sized ego. In reality he was much easier to get along with. Hardy plays his disposable love interest.

refused to use doubles during these races. He was eventually *'convinced'* to accept Russell's recommendation that actor Brian Bedford was hopelessly out of his element. He simply could not learn to shift gears. As the Grand Prix at Monte Carlo alone requires no less than 250 gear shifts, Bedford's failure to grasp the esthetics proved an insurmountable obstacle. As a result, professional racer Phil Hill doubled for Bedford's driving, wearing dark goggles and a face mask to conceal his identity.

As for James Garner; he was assigned F-1 champion Bob Bondurant as his driving instructor. The two spent a month racing various professional cars at Willow Springs, at the end of which Bondurant gave a glowing review of his student's capabilities: *"If he is in a real race he would have been able to beat several drivers. In Formula-1 that's saying a lot!"*

As cast continued to hone their racing craft, Frankenheimer was enduring a bit of negative press at Monte Carlo. The director's penchant for doing things his own way (some would suggest *'the hard way'*), coupled with a certain dispensation for the niceties and his own quest for total perfection, circulated a rumor that Frankenheimer could be counted on to be utterly rude towards cast and crew. In an interview conducted at the time, Frankenheimer publicly apologized if his





(Above): From the vast and expansive to the most miniscule detail, Frankenheimer's **Grand Prix** captures the essence of F-1 racing as no movie before or since. Saul Bass' exquisite use of split screen and layering of images, from crowd shots to close ups on pistons and stopwatches, evokes a pure adrenaline rush from the audience; the need for speed met with some truly exquisite visuals lensed by cinematographer Lionel Lindon.

gregariousness had lent itself to such interpretation. But behind the scenes, he continued to craft his production according his own likes and with the same clear-eyed sense of determination that had been misinterpreted as 'rude.'

In retrospect, this snap assessment of Frankenheimer's general demeanor seems quite unfair. After all, Frankenheimer was an artist, and artists are regularly allotted a certain margin for temperament. Yet, even prior to stirring the buzz about his reputation for being difficult, Frankenheimer quickly discovered a genuine and growing animosity amongst the professional drivers. *"Everybody was skeptical about another movie being made about racing,"* Frankenheimer confided many years later, *"As a matter of fact, Ferrari wanted nothing to do with it."*

The rebuke from the automotive designer and manufacturer is significant – since without Ferrari's participation, **Grand Prix** lacked the necessary air of authenticity indigenous to F-1 racing that Frankenheimer so desperately needed to include in his film. But Frankenheimer was also encountering skepticism from professional racers who had already decided for themselves that Hollywood was horning in and cheapen the sport. The one Formula-1 racer on Frankenheimer's side was Carroll Shelby, who proved to be the lynch pin in securing drivers Dan Gurney and Phil Hill to a two year exclusivity contract. Eventually, pro drivers Graham Hill and Bruce McLaren joined the cast, adding even more authenticity to the production.

Still, the grumbling continued. After all, allowing Frankenheimer's crew to shoot key sequences along the circuit just hours before the actual race meant less time for the real mechanics and drivers to test the course prior to the real thing. The Monte Carlo shoot was further complicated by a minor internal feud between the two 'owners' of this coastal principality; with both the Onasis and the Grimaldi families quietly refusing the director access to portions of the streets necessary to shoot the race on the same day. For the most part, Frankenheimer kept his cool throughout these gripes and groans, although at one point, the film's star, James Garner had unkind words of his own to pass along to one of Monte's shop keeps.

The incident began innocently enough with a negotiation between Frankenheimer and a small band of locals whose area businesses lined the narrow and winding streets. The production unit manger had paid compensation to all of them to stay indoors and keep their doors closed while Frankenheimer restaged portions of the race for the benefit of close ups and in-car shots. However, upon further consideration, a few of the owners banded together, feeling that more remuneration was in order.



(Above): **Grand Prix's** back story attempts to reveal some fundamental truths about the sport itself. Above, promoter Jeff Jordon (Jack Watson) spurs on Scott Stoddard as he rounds the first bend in his qualifying meet. But Jordon is a pariah; a manager who saw Scott's brother die on the course a year ago and has since goaded Scott – who comes from a wealthy family - into assuming the racing mantle in order to maintain his own cushy lifestyle. But Scott suffers from anxiety and bouts of depression over his brother's loss. Hence, when co-driver Pete Aaron cuts him off during the race, Scott loses control and sustains horrific injuries in a terrible crash. Everyone blames Pete, but in **Grand Prix's** penultimate moment – Pete's victory at the final race - Pete hoists Scott (sufficiently recovered from his physical injuries, though arguably never to be fully cured of his inner demons) by his side, sharing his laurel and trophy with Stoddard who has come in second. More than anything else, **Grand Prix** is a movie about valor, honor, integrity and sportsmanship; of men achieving greatness through the spirit of competition and recognizing the importance of their comrades, both living and fallen, who have made this sweet moment of victory possible.

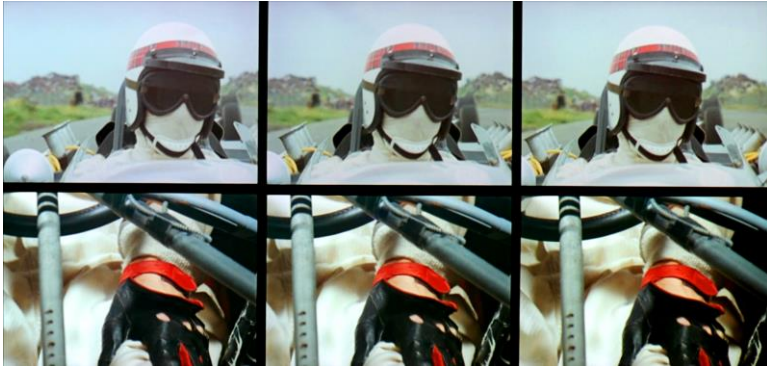
Meanwhile, Garner – who had been dunked in the Mediterranean and loaded onto a boat for a key sequence, was quietly developing a chill in the corner. After thirty minutes of stalemate between Frankenheimer and the shop keepers, Garner ordered his boat back to shore, whereupon he made it quite clear in no uncertain terms that unless the proprietors cleared the premises immediately he was prepared to start tossing each and every one of them into the Mediterranean for an impromptu swim.

As the actual Grand Prix got underway, Frankenheimer found yet another form of opposition brewing from the local officials in Monte Carlo. His cameraman, John Stevens had been outfitted on a rig inside an Alouette-3 helicopter for aerial photography. But the pursuit of cars around the difficult terrain and winding streets necessitated the copter swooping down on crowds at very severe and dangerous angles. Publicly, Frankenheimer instructed the pilot and Stevens to remain more removed from the action – then, in private commanded them to come as close as possible to the spectacle: the result, some of the most breathtaking aerial racing footage ever captured on film.

To stage the initial horrific accident that cripples fictional character Scott Stoddard, Frankenheimer and special effects man, Milton Rice came up with the inspired notion of removing the engine from one of the cars, creating a mock up with a dummy on board, then firing the car from a hydrogen canon. The final effect proved startlingly real. However, there is a postscript of irony pertaining to this event but removed from the actual film. During the planning stages for this catastrophic wreck, Frankenheimer had walked the Monte Carlo course with F-1 driver, Lorenzo Bandini to make inquiries as to where on the actual course such an accident would be most likely to occur.

Bandini prophetically directed Frankenheimer's attention to *'the Dog Leg'*; a perilous twisting stretch of road that would claim his life two years later under an almost identical set of circumstances as depicted in the film. Immediately following wrap up on the Monte Carlo location Frankenheimer rushed to complete what would ultimately become his *'minor miracle.'* Frenetically cutting together the first thirty minutes of the film, including all of its racing footage, the director telephoned





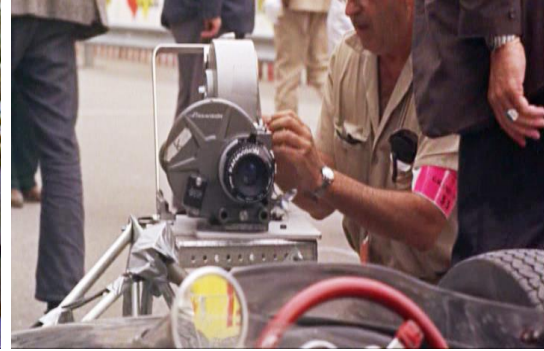
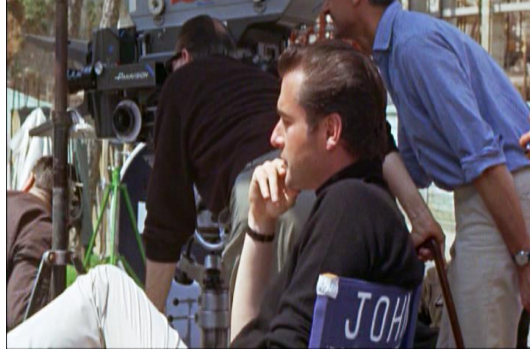
(Top left): Louise comforts Sarti in a courtyard after a fashionable victory party given in his honor. The fashion maven has instantly become a groupie of the racing circuit after getting involved with the dashing – married – Frenchman, though she is as yet unaware of what it means to love a man who is destined to die. (Top right): After being stripped of his ride, Pete Aaron makes a pit stop at Ferrari in the hopes of securing a new sponsor. Agostini Manetta (Adolfo Celi) is sympathetic to Aaron's plight but offers him a job on the press corp. instead of a position as a driver. Pete takes his lumps, but is quickly picked up by Japanese auto manufacturer, Izo Yamura (Toshirō Mifune). (Middle left): one of many contributions made by Saul Bass, whose stylized fragmentation of the action sequences transformed mere racing footage into a sumptuous parade of almost balletic images; creating a dance out of stock car racing. His stylistic approach was almost immediately snatched up by commercial artist Andy Warhol and then Haskell Wexler who used it almost identically when lensing the romance between Faye Dunaway and Steve McQueen in 1968's **Thomas Crown Affair**. (Middle right): Jessica Walters as Pat Stoddard strikes a particularly accusatory glance. Perhaps once a groupie herself, she has since come to despise the racing circuit, primarily for what it's done to her husband and their marriage. Even in consoling herself with presumably various lovers, Pat is still unable to rid herself of her love for Scott, and, her overriding contempt and pity for any man who thinks he can conquer the circuit unharmed – a sobering truth that Louise will ultimately have to discover for herself. (Bottom left): the absolute genius of **Grand Prix** is how many unique ways Frankenheimer and cinematographer Lionel Lindon discovered to shoot a series of car races. Herein we see the careworn look of immanent death on Sarti's face mere seconds before the moment of impact and death occurs. (Bottom right): Pete Aaron's final look about the deserted track. Does it suggest displeasure, sorrow or more of the same to follow? **Grand Prix's** ending suggests more than the obvious; that F-1 racing is a young man's sport. It also hints, if only from the peripheries, that perhaps it's time for Pete to retire. What comes next? We'll never know. **Grand Prix** concludes on a deliberately ambiguous note of introspection and contemplation; something of a tradition in 1960s movies, but poignantly given its due in these final moments.

Ferrari with an invitation to a private screening. Although the word on high was at first as cold as the initial reception, Ferrari eventually relented to the request after Frankenheimer, a projectionist, and, all the necessary equipment were flown out to Ferrari's estate. Any apprehensions Frankenheimer may have had going into the screening were immediately quashed after the house lights came up.

Not only was Ferrari overwhelmingly impressed with the footage and Frankenheimer's direction, but the wily automotive pioneer immediately provided the film crew with complete access to his facilities and the right to use the Ferrari name in the rest of his movie. **Grand Prix** now had the official seal of authenticity and approval that Frankenheimer had hoped for. It would be the last bit of positive news for the rest of the film shoot.



# FRANKENHEIMER WIND at his BACK



(Above): **Grand Prix** was an arduous shoot to say the least and the toll it took on Frankenheimer frequently showed. MGM was constantly pressuring to shorten the shoot by cutting off the purse strings, leaving Frankenheimer deflated. As much as he had championed to make the picture at the start he was just as relieved to have its production behind him. Frankenheimer had invested so much of himself in the movie that the resultant spectacle was clearly the vision of one artist. The purity of that vision is evident in every frame. Years later, **Grand Prix** continues to hold up under the most microscopic of artistic scrutiny. Whether the movie is beloved or discounted as good storytelling, no one can deny the unique place it occupies in American cinema; the seemingly irreconcilable realms of art and sports brought together in one hell of a thrill ride.

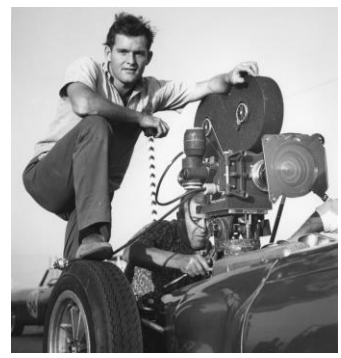
***“It’s very eclectic, the way one chooses subjects in the movie business, especially in the commercial movie business. You need to develop material yourself or material is presented to you as an assignment to direct.” - John Frankenheimer***

The beauty, or perhaps the curse, inherent in the Grand Prix circuit is that no two courses are alike. During the mid-60s, when the film **Grand Prix** was being prepared, the course at Spa in Belgium was considered amongst the most dangerous – not the least for its unpredictable weather conditions. True to form, Spa had another surprise in store for Frankenheimer’s cast and crew.

With cameraman John Stevens mounted inside his helicopter perch, the staged race necessary for capturing close ups of the stars driving their vehicles in excess of 150mph began in earnest. However, midway through the shoot cast and crew suddenly found themselves at the mercy of an unexpected torrential rain. The intensity of the storm proved such a concern that at one point Phil Hill’s camera car accidentally passed Dan Gurney’s racer. In a moment’s notice, other racers began to pile up along various points of the embankment.

F-1 racer cum stunt man, Jackie Stewart lost control of his vehicle, breaking his shoulder in a wreck along the route. Bob Bondurant missed a turn and became trapped beneath his car when it flipped upside down. Most of those who remained in the race did not make it past the third lap. Upon viewing these wrecks, spectacularly captured by Stevens in the helicopter, Frankenheimer was suddenly faced with an esthetic dilemma. In editing the footage together, the rain storm seemed preempted by no dramatic signifier. It simply appeared out of nowhere. Quickly, Frankenheimer improvised a close up shot of his own hand holding a starter’s watch – dropping a few beads of water from above and off camera. Later, in post-production, Frankenheimer and sound editor Gordon Daniels would add audio of a thunder clasp to signify the beginning of the storm.





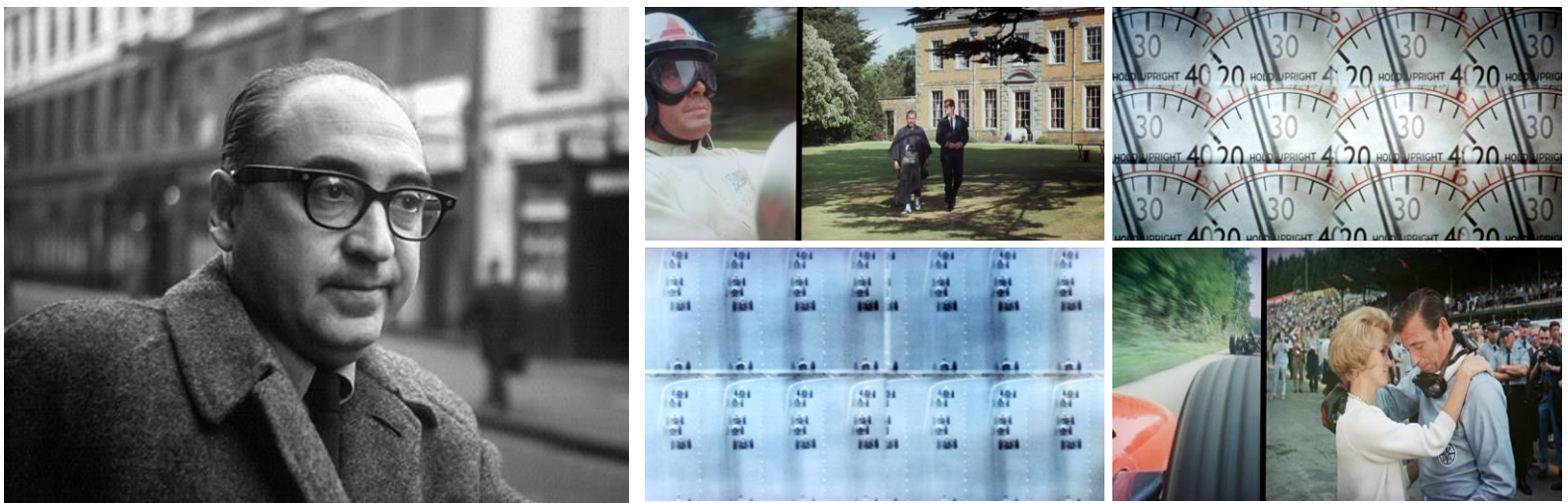
(Above left top and bottom): scenes from a wreck. The shoot in Belgium was interrupted by a torrential downpour which caused even the skilled stuntmen to lose control of their racing cars. (Top middle and right): Cameraman John Stevens; whether mounted onto the side of a low-flying helicopter or posing proudly for this portrait next to an F-3 racer being outfitted with a Panavision lens, Stevens work on Grand Prix represents some of the most exhilarating near-fatal brushes with death and racing footage ever shot for a major motion picture: spectacular stuff. (Bottom right): no – that isn't another stunt man, but the film's star James Garner being engulfed when a gas line on the racer he was driving accidentally ruptured and ignited. Thinking quickly, Garner pulled his racer off to the side and leapt from his vehicle, attended to by professional pit crew with extinguishers in hand. Garner sustained only minor burns as a result of this incident. Just how that's possible is perhaps a miracle we'll never be able to understand!

Production advanced to Brands Hatch in England where James Garner found himself the unwitting participant in a stunt sequence gone wrong. Originally, Garner's racer had been rigged with butane to catch fire as his car rounded the final lap. At first, the effect seemed to go off without a hitch. As Garner came into camera view around the last hairpin turn, the leaking gas suddenly caught fire, blazing a trail behind him. What came next, however, was unexpected.

The sequence called for Garner to propel his racer to the sidelines and quickly disembark so that a waiting crew of men with fire extinguishers could put out the controlled blaze. However, as the car came to a halt, an unexpected breeze fanned the flames into a frenzy. A fireball erupted, temporarily engulfing the car with Garner still inside. Frankenheimer chose to have the footage remain in the film, and although Garner emerged from this stunt relatively unscathed, a distinct burn mark can be seen on his neck in the close up that concludes the last shot in the film.

As principle photography wrapped, Frankenheimer turned his attention to the daunting task of beginning post production. Designer Saul Bass was called in to begin the arduous process of editing the raw racing footage into an eclectic series of visceral montages. Noted for his unusual fast paced editing (perhaps nowhere more eloquently on display than in the shower scene from Alfred Hitchcock's **Psycho** 1960), Bass' impressionistic main title sequences and a dizzying array of tri-panel action sequences effortlessly translated standard racing footage into pure cinema art. Bass undertook a monumental risk in creating these intricate tapestries out of the Formula-1 racing footage; no two sequences are alike in their rhythm, pacing or tempo.

Composer Maurice Jarre, fresh from his collaborative work with director David Lean on **Lawrence of Arabia** (1962) and **Doctor Zhivago** (1965) was hired by Frankenheimer to augment the action with an orchestral score. Jarre's rousing '**Grand Prix**' theme – part march/part ballad proved the ideal musical companion. In point of fact, Jarre's music was much more prominently showcased during the film's lengthy overture and entr'acte than anywhere else in the movie – the one exception being a beautifully staged sequence for the third race in which the multiplied images of cars tearing up



(Above top row): three views of a musical maestro at work. Born in Lyon, France in 1924, Maurice Jarre's compositions have graced more than forty feature films, winning the Oscar for Best Original Score three times for a hat trick of David Lean classics; 1962's **Lawrence of Arabia**, 1965's **Doctor Zhivago** and 1984's **A Passage to India**. In between these monumental scores, Jarre tirelessly composed for some very high profile movies, including 1962's **The Longest Day** and 1973's **Ash Wednesday**. His last composition for a feature was in 2000. A year later he retired. Although he also composed several symphonic works, Jarre's most famous contributions are undeniably in film; his approach to underscoring usually highlighted by a central theme, ably supported by other moderate, complimentary pieces of music. The main theme is almost always such that it can be interpolated throughout the movie and at various tempos to either evoke a march, a romantic interlude or even a hint of the mysterious, as in a requiem. Jarre's racing theme for **Grand Prix** falls just a hair shy of his better recalled masterworks, but remains a clever musical thread on which all of the movie's highs and lows are extracted.

(Bottom row): Saul Bass, whose multiplications of a single image, juxtaposed with split screen wipes to illustrate simultaneous action was later aped by director Brian De Palma, though arguably with far less intricacy. Bass began his career in advertising, his graphic approach soon finding a permanent home in Hollywood, creating startling main title sequences for movies as diverse as **Carmen Jones** (1954, his first feature), 1955's **The Night of the Hunter**, 1956's **Around the World in Eighty Days**, 1959's **Anatomy of a Murder** and Hitchcock's **Psycho** (1960). But without a doubt the work he contributed to **Grand Prix** proved his most prolific and extensive. Frankenheimer entrusted Bass implicitly. Bass was given practically free reign to craft whatever visuals he felt best suited the material, his only instruction – not to repeat himself for any of the individual races. He never did.

the scenery is transformed by Bass into a slow motion mechanical ballet of automobiles with Jarre's fairytale-like rendition of the march playing over the soundtrack.

Meanwhile, sound effects editor, Gordon Daniels was busy combining the various real life sound elements captured from the actual races. Daniels had placed a sound recorder inside each vehicle prior to the race, documenting the distinct noise of each engine and subtle nuances of gears shifting, axels grinding and tires screeching. In the final sound mix, the full girth and intensity of auto-racing came to life as few could have imaged. Certainly, nothing like **Grand Prix's** sound design had ever been experienced in theaters before. With its 100 ft. curved Cinerama screen divided into various portioned observations by Bass, **Grand Prix** became a truly immersive movie-going experience. Conscious of the fact that all this graphic movement caught through the Cinerama lenses might prove too much for some, the roadshow engagement of **Grand Prix** came equipped with 'barf bags' attached to the back of each seat in the theater to accommodate those faint of heart and weak of stomach.





# TESTIMENT to SPEED

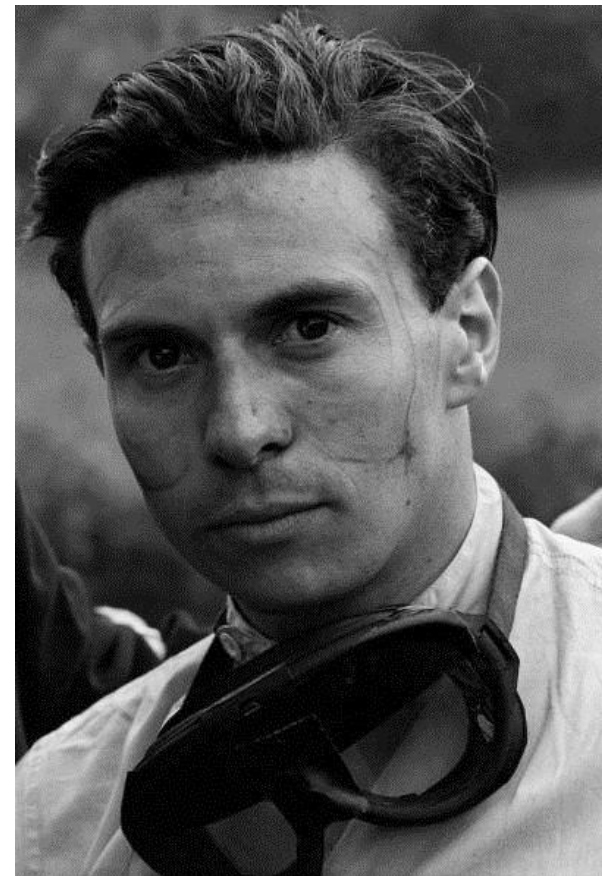
While many racing purists criticized and even denounced **Grand Prix** as sensationalizing the dangers of Formula-1 racing, the truth of the matter is that Frankenheimer had meticulously researched F-1's history. The recreated wrecks in his movie were actually ripped from sports newspaper clippings, interviews and relayed accounts from real drivers, some of whom had watched helplessly as their colleagues slipped into that margin of error and lost their lives as a result.

As though to prove the point, on April 7, 1968, F-1 racing lost one of its most enigmatic personalities, Jim Clark (left) in a horrific accident – ironically played out on an inferior F-2 course in Germany. Later attributed to mechanical error, Clark's demise sent shockwaves throughout the sport. Considered an 'untouchable' at the pinnacle of his career, Clark's death impacted F-1 racing considerably.



Most immediately, it forced engineers to redesign the width and separation of tires on all its racers. Until Clark's time, tires were apt to fly off when pressed into service under extreme mechanical duress. After Clark's death, all F-1 racers were required to have their tires bolted to their suspension.

In the wake of Clark's loss, another driver, Jackie Stewart emerged as the unsung crusader for more advanced safety measures. In fact, Stewart made it his personal manifesto to rid the sport of such unbearable calamities. Initially, he met with vehement opposition from fellow racers. Eventually, Stewart was successful getting the Sport's Commission to accept more stringent measures for security barriers and seatbelts which have since become part of the accepted standard in racing safety.



Today, Formula-1 racing is arguably no longer the sport of true daredevils. While the very real risk of injury still exists, fatalities have been greatly reduced and are rare. But in the interim, the days of the independent have given way to the commercial hybrid of corporate sponsorship and the entrance of mainstream automotive companies gearing up to out-flex each other's engineering muscle. The likes of Ferrari have been met with competition from Ford, GM, Chrysler, Toyota and Honda; revolutionizing automotive design; the bygone rickety creations have become supercharged, high-tech speeding billboards for their own companies.

In reflecting on the film **Grand Prix** today, only this obvious transformation of the sport seems to peg Frankenheimer's movie as a time capsule from the 1960s. Otherwise, nothing else seems to date the movie. It remains as compelling and exhilarating as ever. Undeniably, the skillful editing of Saul





Bass; diverse performances from the international cast and Maurice Jarre's melodious orchestral arrangements immensely contribute to **Grand Prix's** timeless allure.



Yet, at the heart of the movie there is really only one name to which almost all of the credit must remain ascribed, and it is John Frankenheimer. In his commitment to really getting down to the nuts and bolts of Formula-1 racing, his unforgiving focus that occasionally was misconstrued as belligerence rather than perfectionism, Frankenheimer's perseverance as a film maker has stamped **Grand Prix** with a mark of excellence few movies – racing or otherwise – can lay claim. In a sea of imitations depicting life behind the wheel, Frankenheimer's is the one true testament to that greatness within the sport, and, as time goes by there is little to suggest another such celebration will be coming along to better his efforts.



*"When I look back..."* Frankenheimer mused years after the thunder and roar both racers and crowds had ceased to echo in his ears, *"...I don't know how the hell we ever did that film!"*

Forty-seven years later, racing enthusiasts and film fans alike remain eternally grateful to Frankenheimer – that he dared to try.

***Gentlemen...start your engines.***

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