

Steve McQueen's 1963 Ferrari 250 GT Berlinetta Lusso recently went under the hammer at Christie's in Monterey, offering another reminder of a man whose motoring exploits mirrored some of his most famous onscreen performances. Christopher Kanal pays tribute to a legendary car driven by a screen icon.

The getaway



On 16 August 2007, Steve McQueen's 1963 Ferrari 250 GT Berlinetta Lusso went under the hammer at Christies. This remarkable car was bought by an anonymous owner, who placed his bid by phone, for a cool \$2.31 million – nearly twice the estimated pre-sale price. The auction drew 800 people to the Monterey Jet Center in California and attracted spirited bidding according to Christie's Rik Pike.

So begins another chapter in the life of one of McQueen's favourite cars, which he drove for nearly a decade. McQueen's Lusso inspires an almost fetish-like fascination, created from a potent blend of McQueen mythology and an insatiable desire for limited-edition 12-cylinder Ferraris. McQueen is dead 27 years but his iconic status has never been more assured. The Lusso is widely acknowledged as Ferrari's greatest aesthetic and engineering achievement.

McQueen's is a name synonymous with cars, thanks to films such as *Le Mans* and the incredible (and endlessly imitated) car chase through San Francisco in *Bullitt*. He started collecting cars after receiving his first acting paychecks in the early 1950s – his first pair of wheels was an MG. In 1963 he purchased a Ferrari 250 GT Berlinetta Lusso from Otto Zipper Motors in Santa Monica. With its marrone paint work, elegant beige leather interior, Borrani wire wheels and Pininfarina body – sculptured by renowned coachbuilder Scaglietti – the car is one of the finest Ferraris ever built. In 1974 the Lusso was sold to San Francisco collector Tom Sherwood and in 1997 it was acquired by Michael Regalia, who restored the car to its original condition. But McQueen left an indelible mark. 'Owned by a man who made hard driving cool in the 1960s and 1970s, this Lusso is a truly unique opportunity for the collector,' commented Christie's Christopher Sanger ahead of the auction.

Other top marques owned by McQueen during his career included a Porsche 917 and a Jaguar D-Type XKSS – one of only 18 ever made. At one point he owned 210 motorcycles, over 55 cars and five planes.

McQueen was also an avid racing enthusiast, performing many of his own stunts, and at one time considered becoming a professional racing driver. Two weeks after breaking an ankle in one bike race, he and co-driver Peter Revson raced a Porsche 908/02 in the 12 Hours of Sebring, winning their engine class and finishing second to Mario Andretti's Ferrari by a margin of just 23 seconds.

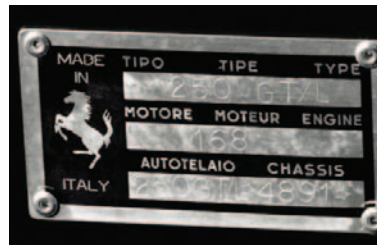
'RACING IS LIFE,
ANYTHING BEFORE
OR AFTER IS JUST
WAITING.'

McQueen was also an accomplished motorcycle racer, competing in many of the top off-road races on the West Coast during the 1960s and early 1970s, including the Baja 1000, the Mint 400 and the Elsinore Grand Prix. In 1964 he represented the US in the International Six Days Trial, a kind of off-road motorcycling Olympics.

By the time of his premature death in 1980, McQueen's collection included over 100 motorcycles, valued at several million dollars. To his dismay, McQueen was never able to own the legendary Ford Mustang GT he drove in *Bullitt*, which featured a highly modified drive train. The car also featured a NASCAR-style racing engine, which suited his driving style down to the ground. Two cars were used for filming. Both cars are still in existence, one of which sits in a barn in Kentucky. The owner refuses to sell at any price. ■



The history of the Lusso is well documented in the photographs of McQueen's close friend, William Claxton. McQueen's first big road trip in the Lusso was with his wife Neile and William and Peggy Claxton, up the California coast through Big Sur and Carmel to Monterey and San Francisco, then over the Sierras to Reno and Lake Tahoe, down through Death Valley and back to LA. Claxton has recounted how McQueen would set up a rendez-vous point, then take off in his Lusso to arrive early, 'pretending to be bored waiting for us to arrive. It was a great time. He really loved that car.'



Ferrari 250 GT/L Lusso Berlinetta

Built
1963

Design
Pininfarina, coachwork by Scaglietti

Engine
V12, 2,953cc, three Weber dual-throat carburetors, 250bhp at 7,000 rpm

Gearbox
Front-mounted four-speed manual

Top speed
150 mph

0-60mph
8.0 seconds

Length
173 inches

Width
71 inches

Height
51 inches





The Lusso's short 2,400mm wheelbase chassis was modified to place the 250hp 3L Colombo-derived engine and engine-mounted four-speed gearbox between the front wheels for more cockpit room • McQueen never let a valet park his Lusso; he always did it himself • Restoration work began on the car in late 2000 – Mike Regalia disassembled it himself and stripped the body to bare metal • The Lusso's engine and drive train were disassembled, found to be in perfect condition, then carefully rebuilt and reassembled.

