

The Filmstar

» Car fanatic Steve McQueen at Le Mans 1970. His rival in the film of the same name, Erwin Strahler, was played by Siegfried Rauch. The two developed a close friendship, with McQueen often visiting Rauch at home in Bavaria.

Among cineastes, *Le Départ* is considered a little gem. During a period of approaching civil-war-like disturbances and cultural upheaval, the young Polish director Jerzy Skolimowski created a light, carefree film about a 19-year-old trainee barber who was determined to become a great rally driver—behind the wheel of a Porsche 911 S.

In this anarchic feature film the 911 S, completely new at the time, played the role of an object of desire for a rebellious, fun-loving adventurer. The film begins with a joyride through nighttime Brussels in a classic white 911 that Marc has stolen from his boss' garage. Following the frenzied drive with his best friend, he refuels the Porsche with the gasoline he has brought along, mechanically rewinds the kilometers on the speedometer, lovingly washes the car, and can't avoid checking the trunk and engine compartment in an overcautious reflex. Finally he checks the oil level, at which point his friend calls him to his senses. Thus the film begins with an erotic encounter, which, in a relatively unsubtle fashion, announces the theme, while the plot itself largely consists of a 48-hour search for a Porsche 911 that Marc can use to compete in his first rally.

The fast-paced scenes of the predominately underhanded attempts to gain possession of a 911 are set against the backdrop of Krzysztof Komeda's cool and racy soundtrack—which lends the Porsche-obsessed hero's attitude to life both a romantic spirit and a contemporary modernity. The protagonists' hastily delivered monologues, the hectic movements of the young eccentric, the impelling music—nearly every element of the film contains the promise of speed, which for the hero, can only be fulfilled by a Porsche 911. Largely misunderstood by contemporary film critics, it transformed the stylish car-fanatic into a quintessential

hero of his time: aimless wanderer. One year after Godard's *Masculin Féminin*, from which Skolimowski borrowed the two lead figures (played by Jean-Pierre Léaud and Catherine Dupont), this film de-ideologized the youth at precisely the time they were becoming radicalized in the schools and universities. At no point in Skolimowski's film do the figures see themselves as political subjects of revolutionary change. Instead, blindly searching for meaning, they flee every profundity in a state of dizzying pursuit.

If, almost 50 years later, one asks the director how a Pole ended up making a film in Belgium about a steel-plate hero from Baden-Württemberg, the answer is quite simple: "At this time the Porsche 911 was the most beautiful car in the world for me." Furthermore, his producer was married to the publisher of a major Belgian car magazine, and so he had easy access to brand new sports cars. For Skolimowski, himself a young car fanatic, the 911 was an electrifying symbol of freedom and anarchy. Although dirt poor and unable to afford a Porsche, one year after completing his film studies he invested the proceeds from *Le Départ* in a similarly emblematic sports car: a Ford Mustang. In a Polish gesture, in search of Western freedom he ignored the more obvious German variant, opting instead for that pony car that stood in a direct mythological relation to the wagon trains of the wild west era. Skolimowski derived great pleasure from driving the Porsche during shooting, and to this day the sound of the classic 911 continues to ring in his ears. This was also an important element in the sports car's cinematic presence, accentuated and dramatized by the soundtrack from his close friend Krzysztof Komeda.

The film retains its subversive quality to this day, with its wild antics destroying libidinous conventions. The hero stops at nothing. He wants a Porsche 911. It is his destiny. He flirts with women as old as his mother, sells all his belongings, destroys friendships,

