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Official Magazine of the Jaguar Clubs of North America

May-June 2022



What A Wife! Neile Adams McQueen Bought Steve His XKSS

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JAGUAR JOURNAL

WORLD'S OLDEST JAGUAR MAGAZINE
VOLUME 68 NUMBER 3

Jaguar Clubs of North America, Inc.
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Subscriptions / Address Changes / Renewals: The is published bimonthly by the Jaguar Clubs of North America, Inc. 500 Westover Drive, No. 8354, Sanford, NC 27330, 888-258-2524 (ISSN 0743-3913). Periodical postage (permit 019-169) is paid at Arvada, CO and additional mailing locations. Postmaster: send change of address to: , Cara Dillon, 500 Westover Drive, No. 8354, Sanford, NC 27330.

Members of JCNA affiliate clubs and members-at-large automatically receive as a benefit of membership. Annual dues are \$40 through affiliated clubs' dues. For members at large, the first year is \$100 dropping to \$50 for subsequent renewal. US and Canadian subscriptions are \$40, foreign airmail subscriptions are \$40. US FUNDS ONLY. Contact Cara Dillon, 500 Westover Drive, No. 8354, Sanford, NC 27330. Learn more about JCNA and its 67 local affiliated clubs at 888-CLUBJAG (258-2524) or www.JCNA.com.

Produced by The Writers Bureau, MD.
Design and print: Graphcom, PA.

Canadian Distribution: Canada Post International Publications Mail Product Sales Agreement No. 42452017.

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www.jcna.com

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Cover Photo: Neile (pronounced 'neel') Adams McQueen poses next to the XKSS she bought for her husband, Steve McQueen.



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Art on the Move

Part 1 – Exclusive interviews with those intimately familiar with a famed XKSS

By Richard MacLean

The idea for this two-part story grew out of the discovery of the original artwork of one of the most famous Jaguars in history: the XKSS owned by Steve McQueen. His 'daily driver,' or as some might 'daily racer,' is now on permanent display in the Petersen Automotive Museum in Los Angeles for all to admire. However, only a few alive today have seen some of these decades-old images associated with this Jaguar.

Part 1 traces the history of McQueen's XKSS from the personal perspective of the individuals associated with it, including information and images graciously provided by Steve's wife at the time, Neile Adams McQueen. There are numerous articles about the XKSS and even this specific one, chassis 713. So the basic facts are there. However, the human-interest side has seldom been explored... until now.

Part 2 in the next issue will describe how to go about commissioning 'car art.' Several artists and car owners tell what you should know beforehand.

THE INSPIRATION: LEYDEN BROTHER INTERVIEW

A fellow resident of Prescott, Arizona, Patrick Leyden, saw my '67 XKE in the driveway and stopped to reminisce about his father's XKSS. Pat told me that Bill Leyden, Jr. was a Los Angeles television game show host and announcer from 1955 to 1969 with a long list of credits that earned him a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. Less known was his love for race cars and racing.



Before the XKSS: Steve and Neile in their Porsche 356 Speedster.

He raced various cars from 1953 through to 1960, including MG TCs, Triumph TR2s, and most often an OSCA at nearly a dozen West Coast racetracks, often placing in the top five. In 1956, XKD 569 had been one of the D-Types listed on Jaguar's books as unsold. It was converted by the factory to XKSS specification and given the new serial number XKSS 713, then sold to its first owner, James Peterson, who built Riverside Raceway. In 1957 or 1958 Bill Leyden bought the XKSS and was entered to drive "Jaguar XKSS #713 (XKD 569)" at two races in 1958, but it is unclear if he entered and finished these events.

This type of sports car racing at prominent tracks associated with the Sports Car Club of America (SCCA) was not a poor person's sport. Because of his entertainer's salary, he was able to buy and sell race cars, or as Italian racers say, run a 'scuderia' or stable of cars. Bill was very proud of these cars,

and he commissioned an original watercolor by a fledgling artist, Robert Genn, to paint his favorites surrounding the Leyden family crest. Robert, a Canadian, enrolled in the Art Center School in Los Angeles, studying industrial design because he was interested in designing cars. He would paint car images in LA to make a few dollars



In their prime – the star couple.
©LIFE Magazine.

before returning to Canada.

The XKSS was Jaguar's solution to the problem of unsold D-Types. Though no longer fully competitive at international level, by making them street legal they were easier to sell. Bill Leyden III, Pat's older brother, states, "My mother told me that he would use it as his daily driver to work and park it in the NBC lot on Sunset Strip. My brother and I enjoyed it when Dad would stuff us into the passenger seat and take us to Beverly Park Kiddieland. Fancy cars in LA are not unusual, but it must have been quite the sight to see us kids in the XKSS."

FAST CAR FOR A RISING STAR

Steve McQueen probably spotted the car parked while driving to the CBS series, *Wanted Dead or Alive*. Alternatively, he perhaps saw it on his visits to the local racetracks. There is a great picture of Steve aside Bill's OSCA TN Le Mans cockpit at the *Los Angeles Examiner* Grand Prix on March 8, 1959, in the Pomona, California, fairgrounds. The CBS copyrighted image is available online at Getty Images. Bill III states, "The number 77 on the side of the OSCA in the drawing was preferred, but sometimes Dad added a 2 or a 1 if other racers registered 77 earlier."

Either way, a friendship developed between these two TV personalities and race car drivers. It led to Steve's appearance in 1960 on *It Could Be You*, a game show hosted by Bill. Steve approached Bill and negotiated a price. He had just traded his Porsche Speedster for a Lotus II and wanted something he could drive on the street... fast. More about 'fast' later on.

Brothers Pat and Bill were young, not even teenagers at the time.

But they understood that in spite of their father's love for his racecars, he would be more than willing to part with one at the right price, only to buy another. He was not a car collector. Bill wanted and got a fortune for this "used car," namely \$5,000 or nearly \$50,000 in today's dollars. Pat states, "It came as no surprise to us he was willing to part with the XKSS." In addition, according to Bill, his racing days were coming to an end. "My father flipped an OSCA at one event and severely injured his arm. But it healed well and he continued racing. He won at a subsequent event and got a trophy with the racer figurine inverted." Tragically, he lost an eye in a hunting accident in the early '60s that ultimately ended his competitive racing. He died in 1970 at the age of 53.

The painting of Bill accompanying this article is one of the few images of any type that the family owns. Pat explains, "A fire in 1961 at our Brentwood home destroyed almost all the pictures we had of Dad. There are dozens of him on the Internet, but others control these. We were lucky to save the artwork and artifacts, such as his trophies and a racing helmet. The watercolor hung in Dad's office, so it survived. It is heartbreaking that if the family wanted copies of pictures of Dad, we'd have to pay for them." [Author's note: Neither Getty Images nor Alamy would release affordable images to JCNA for this article.]

THE WIFE: NEILE ADAMS MCQUEEN INTERVIEW

Steve's wife, Neile Adams McQueen, picks up the story from here.

"Steve was starting his career and mostly used motorcycles to get around and occasionally the



Neile Adams McQueen – Photo by Ellen Feder.

Porsche Speedster. Steve landed the lead role for the *War Lover*, and we went over to London in 1961 for filming. He had told me about the XKSS earlier, but it was not until around that time that he told me he wanted to buy it and the cost. I was an established performer with resources. He was just beginning. So, I wrote the check! Soon we were off to Germany where he was starting work on *The Great Escape*, and the car sat in our garage."

[Author's note: According to Leslie Kendall, chief historian at the Petersen Automotive Museum, McQueen bought the XKSS in 1958. The Leyden brothers recall that it must have been closer to 1960 because they have a 35mm slide dated 1959 with them behind their Dad's XKSS.]

"When he brought it home, it was white with a red interior. [Author's note: listed as 'Cream' in factory records]. I recall some comments about the color, but it was solid white or an off-white. I thought the car was fabulous looking and loved riding in it. As strange as it seems, I never drove it. It was a stick shift.

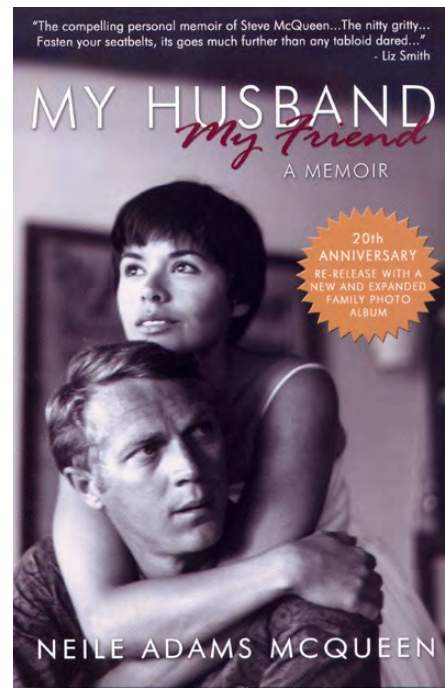
Steve had a Corvette and attempted to teach me how to drive a stick shift, but I crashed the car. We were in Las Vegas for a show I was performing in. Fortunately, I was still able to go onstage. He later got me an automatic; he even converted one car. It was big, automatic drive cars like my Cadillac Escalade after that (laughs)!

"Our time in England got him even more interested in racing, especially after he formed a lasting relationship with Stirling Moss. Steve never really traveled within the 'Hollywood crowd' for friends. Sure, Steve had friends in that circle, but mostly he hung out with those he met while racing or learning martial arts. [Author's note: A quote attributed to him was, "I'm not sure whether I'm an actor who races or a racer who acts."]

"After Steve got the XKSS, he and his friends worked for months in our three-car garage customizing it. It seemed like all three bays were filled with customization stuff

for the XKSS. Tony Nancy worked on it, plus another friend, maybe Kenny Howard. While in England, he formed an attachment to cars painted British Racing Green. So naturally, when he returned from Europe, the XKSS was re-done in green with a black interior and fancy wheels as part of the customization. I was told that he later painted it red only to go back to green. I think this is not possible. He may have gotten me red cars, but red was not for his racers!

"He used the XKSS as his daily driver. Unimaginable today. We used it together for house hunting while living in Laurel Canyon. That first house cost \$17,000. Can you imagine that (laughs)! The problem was it was too small; the baby was on the way. Eventually, we had the money in 1963 to buy a house in Brentwood we called 'The Castle.' He drove the neighbor crazy every time he zoomed in and out of the driveway. It finally led to the altercation I described in my first book, *My Husband, My Friend* – A



New Book Cover - *My Husband, My Friend* by Neile Adams McQueen.

Memoir. I wrote that back in 1986. I updated my book in 2006 for the 20th anniversary, and I'm still getting royalties! [Author's note: Production is underway for a movie based on this book, plus a documentary about Neile.]

"Speeding tickets were always an issue. One of Steve's stories that writers repeated often was the incident of going to the hospital to get out of a ticket. It's true, but the details are a bit off. He had an event in Arizona, and I went with him, pregnant with Chad at the time and showing. As usual, Steve was driving very fast.

"A trooper pulled us over, and Steve claimed that I had labor pains; he was racing to get me to the hospital. At high speed, the police escorted us to the emergency room. Steve loved it! We went in and hoped that the police would soon leave. After an hour, we gave up and went out and told the trooper that it was just a case of gas pains. I do not know if he believed us, but no ticket. He



Gussied up with top, rack and sidescreens today (©Terry Larson).

said something like, 'We do have speeding limits in Arizona, so be careful.' Steve said I was furious, but it was more a case of being annoyed."

She went on, "It has amazed me how the value of this car has escalated beyond comprehension. Steve sold it to William Harrah to be displayed his collection in Reno, Nevada. It was not to be sold or raced. But Steve truly missed the car and was able to buy it back in 1978 after a few years of trying. I do not know what he paid, but I believe that William did not ask much more than what Steve sold it to him for. William was a fine, ethical man.

"After his death in 1980 the estate sold it at auction in 1984 for nearly \$150,000, and in a few years later, it was valued at \$3 million." Then, with a laugh, "I visited the Petersen Automotive Museum in 2021 and heard that it is insured for \$43

million. Astonishing!

"Steve had a number of cars in his collection and was not focused on just Jaguars and Porsches, although his XKSS and Porsche Speedster were among his favorites. His collection was distributed among family members or sold at auction after his death. My son, Chad, got one of the original Bullet cars. Chad now runs a business called McQueen Racing, and Madison [Neile's granddaughter] is involved with Porsche. She is the 'Face of Porsche.' It must be in the McQueen DNA!"

NEILE ADAMS MCQUEEN TODAY

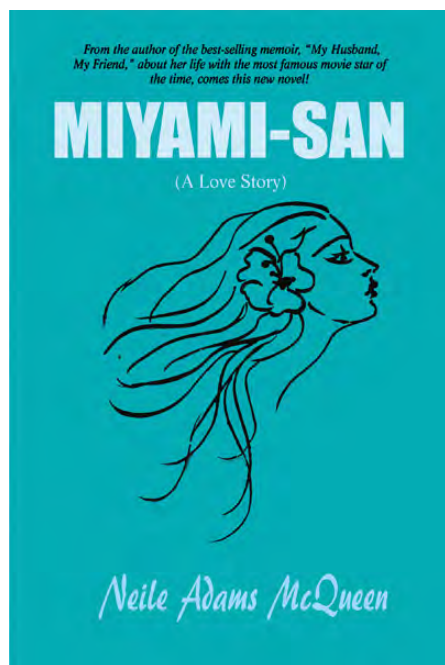
Talking with Neile was a pleasure. Her memory of events is impressive; the stories were entertaining and amusing. I have interviewed scores of individuals with varied backgrounds for various publications. Rarely do they instantly sense the information



From two wheels to four.



Madison McQueen, 'Face of Porsche,' granddaughter of Steve McQueen and Neile Adams McQueen - Photo courtesy of the McQueen Estate.



Front Cover of MIYAMI-SAN written by Neile Adams McQueen – Cover Art by Gayle Davis.

being sought and deliver it in a focused response. The writing style of *My Husband, My Friend – A Memoir* reflects this talent. I commented on her writing, and she replied, “Some authors write and then edit and re-edit what they write until they are satisfied. I write and move on.”

It is no wonder that when the pandemic shut down California, she did not fret; she began writing a novel at 88. Called “MIYAMI-SAN – A Love Story,” Just released, both Neile and Madison will be available on May 28, 2022, for NCJA members to ask their questions at a book signing after the annual Garden Grove Strawberry Festival Parade in Garden Grove, California. [Author’s note: At the close of the interview, she made a particular request: “If your readers meet me, my name is pronounced Neel, as in ‘kneel down.’ Very few get it right.”]

INSIDE THE XKSS – TERRY LARSON INTERVIEW
Highly regarded by the Jaguar

community, Terry Larson is well-known for his involvement with some of the most iconic Jaguars ever built. McQueen’s XKSS? Of course, he repaired and drove it! In 2006 the Petersen Museum trusted his repair and restoration business in Arizona to do mechanical repairs and test drive the XKSS. Why?

Few have had Terry’s level of experience or seat time with the cars that made Jaguar famous. He is a collector, restorer, racer, historian and author. The third edition of the *Jaguar C-Type, D-Type & Lightweight E-Type Register* should be out later this year. He and his wife organized a tour for C and D-Types for 20 years. Among his collection is a 1924 Brough-Superior owned and raced by William Lyons, the 1935 SS90 prototype (the first two-seater sports car ever built by Jaguar), and a C-Type has driven in over 100 events.

Terry picks up the story from here. “I love Jaguars and their history, especially the innovative engineering that led the C and D-Types to win races such as Le Mans in the early ‘50s. This breakthrough design was due to the British aircraft industry, which led to the unique D-Type body design, with dry-sump lubrication, disc brakes, and aircraft fuel bag. As a result, some called the Jaguar the ‘airplane on wheels.’

“Over the years, I have been very fortunate to meet many important people from that period, including Norman Dewis, who we were dear friends with. Also, Phil Hill, who I had several races with. In addition, we became friends with Stirling and Suzie Moss, who had a house nearby in Scottsdale. The racing community is a relatively

small group and McQueen, of course, was also his friend.

“Unfortunately, I never met Steve. However, I heard an amusing story from someone who did know him well. He, Steve, and other friends would often meet at a diner for coffee on the Coastal Highway. When they left for a drive, Steve would sit behind for a bit, letting the others get ahead before he would take off. Then, when Steve passed them, he would toot his horn twice quickly and “wave” as he passed. It sounds like something he would have done.

“For Petersen’s XKSS, we pulled the engine and gearbox to rebuild the clutch, crack test and rebuild the suspension, and rebuild the brake system. This XKSS that McQueen drove is essentially a D-Type in street form. Both the C and D-Types were purpose-built race cars designed to win Le Mans. The XKSS, however, was built to meet import standards for driving on public streets. Jaguar added bumpers, a full windscreen, side screens, two doors, etc. These modifications would matter at a race such as Le Mans, where ounces matter, but not on the street. When I drove it, it handled exactly like my D-Type. McQueen was driving the real deal: a true racer on the streets of LA.”

NEXT UP...

Part 2 will appear in the July-August issue of *Jaguar Journal*. It describes how to commission ‘car art,’ such as the watercolor that inspired this article. Several artists and Jaguar owners will detail what you should know beforehand, to turn your mechanical masterpiece into a work of art. Finally, an epilog describes several unusual, if not bizarre, discoveries unearthed when writing this story. 🐾

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