

McQueen's Machine



He was *the* screen icon of his era – a survivor and a superstar – and in 1971, he made his most personal film, *Le Mans*. Seen here is the Porsche 911 that was Steve McQueen's co-star for the film's first four minutes. Richard Truesdell tells its story. Darin Schnabel provides the photographs.





Who can forget the first time they see the famous motorcycle jump as Steve McQueen tries to vault his way into Switzerland? Solidified with his starring role in 1963's *Great Escape*, McQueen's career went from strength to strength throughout the Sixties. With *The Cincinnati Kid* (1965), *The Sand Pebbles* (1966), *The Thomas Crown Affair* (1968), and *Bullitt* (1968) – arguably his most famous role – the Indiana-born actor established himself as Hollywood's most bankable star.

This level of box office success gave McQueen the clout to get any film green lighted, especially since he owned his own production company, Solar Productions, at the time. One of those projects was 1971's *Le Mans*, the first four minutes of which feature a slate-grey 1970 911S, the very car showcased on these pages.

Solar Productions had purchased the vehicle for McQueen to use in France during his time off the set. The car was equipped with almost every factory option offered at the time, including air conditioning (fairly rare in a Porsche of that era) and a U.S.-spec Blaupunkt AM/FM radio.

Apparently McQueen loved the car so much, he had it shipped home to California after the shooting wrapped up – but not before it took a detour to Stuttgart for the installation of a different set of gear ratios.

This impulse presented McQueen with something of a dilemma. A year earlier he had purchased another 911, a 1969 S model, and had gone through a great deal of effort to install a state-of-the-art audio system. With

both cars in California, McQueen apparently decided one 911 was enough. The car was sold to its second owner, a fellow Porsche enthusiast who saw it listed in the *Los Angeles Times* classifieds. (Originally willed to his daughter Terry, the "stereo" 911 has remained in the McQueen family and is still owned by his son Chad McQueen.)

The "Le Mans" McQueen 911 stayed with its second owner, a Southern California lawyer, for almost 35 years. For two decades, the car was reportedly a daily driver, accumulating 116,000 miles before it changed hands again in 2005.

The owner of four Porsche 356s, Jesse Rodrigues of Long Beach, California became the third owner of McQueen's 911. He was approached about the vehicle by the second owner's wife, who, when mentioning her husband had a Porsche for sale, initially omitted the pertinent fact that the car had once been owned and driven by Steve McQueen.

During Rodrigues' ownership, the car was the subject of a number of magazine articles on both sides of the Atlantic. Rodrigues revealed that the King of Cool was something of a paper hound: Almost every scrap of paper connected to the car during McQueen's abbreviated ownership, including its U.S. importation documents, was included with the car. There was never any doubt as to its provenance.

Mercedes-Benz and Porsche collector Frank Gallogly in New Jersey purchased the car in 2009. Gallogly jumped at what he thought might be



For high-resolution images of Steve McQueen's 1970 Porsche 911S, visit the [Automotive Traveler Image Gallery](#).



his only chance to add it to his collection. He has been quoted as saying that he paid a lot for it, but that guiding words were, "I would rather overpay for a great car, than underpay for a bad car."

According to RM Auctions, the *Le Mans* Porsche remains in mostly original condition, although it was resprayed at some point.

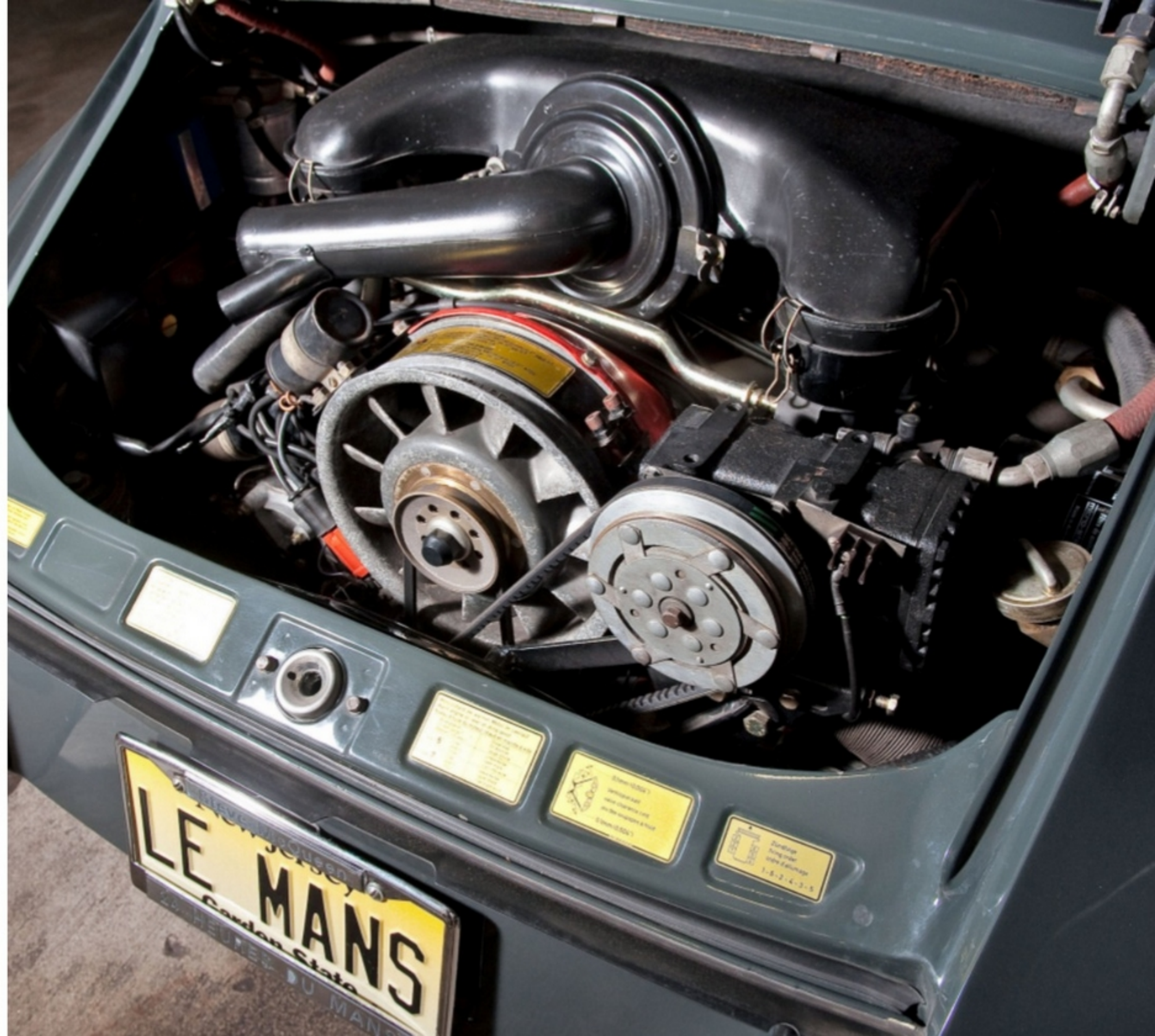
"There is no more iconic racing film than *Le Mans*, and no more charismatic owner of many of the world's great sports cars than Steve McQueen," Rob Myers, founder and chairman of RM, said in a prepared release. "We are delighted to have been selected to present this iconic car at our upcoming Monterey sale."

This is not the first time a high-profile car with a Steve McQueen pedigree has come on the market. The last time was in 2007, when Christie's auctioned one of the King of Cool's favorite cars, a 1963 Ferrari



250 Lusso. The sale price of \$2.3 million was twice the pre-auction estimate of \$800,000 to \$1.2 million.

Like the slate-grey Porsche, the Ferrari 250 Lusso was painted in what can only be considered an unusual color. Instead of red, it was finished in Medium Chestnut Brown.





No pre-auction estimate is given for McQueen's 911S, and online speculation is swirling. Several factors – screen time plus the legend of McQueen ownership – will certainly affect the price when the gavel falls. Considering, too, reports that the car's current owner paid close to \$1 million for the car and the benchmark set by the Lusso sale, I suspect it will sell for somewhere between \$1.5-\$2 million.

We must wait five months to find out. The car promises to be one of the star attractions of the RM's Monterey auction on 19-20 August 2011 at the Portola Hotel & Spa and Monterey Conference Center in Monterey, California.

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On 24 May 2011, three months before Steve McQueen's 911S crosses the block at the RM Monterey auction, Paramount Home Entertainment will bring Le Mans to your home theater in a high-

definition Blu-ray disc. It will join Blu-ray versions of McQueen's Papillon (which also has a 24 May release date) and The Cincinnati Kid (14 June release date).

The PG-rated movie was nominated for a Golden Globe award for best original score. The Blu-ray version, priced at \$24.99, will come with the featurette Filming at Speed: The Making of the Movie Le Mans.



For the definitive word on all of Steve McQueen's cars and bikes, read Matt Stone's *McQueen's Machines: The Cars and Bikes of a Hollywood Icon*.

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