

Elyse: Our next story takes us behind the scenes of one of the most famous movies of the 1950s. It's 1955, and Alfred Hitchcock releases his new film, *To Catch a Thief*, a romantic thriller starring Cary Grant and Grace Kelly. In the film, Kelly drives a sleek, sexy Sunbeam Alpine, speeding down French country roads and parking for a romantic interlude with Grant. "You have a very strong grip, the kind a burglar needs." But off-screen, between shoots, Kelly takes a drive of her own, exploring the French countryside and catching her first glimpse of the palace at Monaco, home to Prince Rainier. Within two years, Kelly will say goodbye to her Hollywood career forever, becoming the Princess of Monaco in one of the 20th century's most celebrated weddings. Now, a man in Los Angeles thinks he owns the original Sunbeam Alpine that played a leading role in the film and a big part in turning Hollywood celebrity into real-life royalty.

Matt: After watching *To Catch a Thief*, I fell in love with that car. So I spent about four years looking around, finally found one that I liked, and when the owner told me that that was actually the car from the movie, I nearly fell off my chair.

Elyse: I'm Elyse Luray, and I'm in Hollywood to find the truth behind this automotive legend. Wow, she's beautiful. She's in great condition. Where'd you get her?

Matt: I bought it from a lady in San Diego, and she claims this was the car driven in the movie.

Elyse: And did she give you any documentation?

Matt: No, she didn't. And I started doing some research and came to a dead end. I want to know if Grace Kelly actually drove this in the movie *To Catch a Thief*.

Elyse: I'm pretty skeptical. All Matt has to go on is a story he can't back up. And I know the film was shot on location in France, so did the car really end up in L.A.? And do you have any other information that you think might be helpful to me in my research?

Matt: I do know the car was repainted. This is not the original color.

Elyse: Oh, it's not.

Matt: No. But in the trunk, on the bolt heads, on the hinge, is the same sapphire blue that was used in the movie.

Elyse: Oh, I see. Okay. Well, that gives me something to go on. One last thing.

Matt: Yes.

Elyse: I'm going to need to take the car.

Matt: Okay.

Elyse: You trust me?

Matt: Of course. Okay. Here's the key.

Elyse: Thank you. [Engine turns over] I'm a professional appraiser and auctioneer. If this car really is the same one Grace Kelly drove in the film, it would be worth close to \$100,000. My first step is to watch the

film to see if I can find any clues about the car. Leonard Maltin is the author of nearly a dozen books on Hollywood films. He tells me *To Catch a Thief* was a huge box-office hit.

Leonard Maltin: It was a can't-miss formula. You had Cary Grant at his most dashing, Grace Kelly at her most gorgeous, on the Riviera, in Technicolor, directed by Alfred Hitchcock.

Elyse: In the film, Cary Grant plays John Robie, a retired jewel thief who needs to find out who's responsible for a string of robberies to clear his own name. Grace Kelly plays a young socialite vacationing in France who uncovers Robie's criminal past. "Hold this necklace in your hand and tell me you're not John Robie, the cat." A romance blossoms, and together they set out on an elaborate journey to solve the crime before Cary is carted off to jail or killed by the real thief. This was written by one of Hitchcock's favorite screenwriters, John Michael Hayes, a very witty, stylish writer. And the cinematography for the film—it is stunning—won an academy award. Leonard tells me the Sunbeam Alpine was the perfect sleek, stylish car to showcase one of Hollywood's brightest stars. Hitchcock was really smitten with Grace Kelly. He used her in three movies in a row: *Dial M for Murder*, *Rear Window*, and *To Catch a Thief*. But it's *To Catch a Thief* that starts Grace Kelly's life on a whole new path. While shooting in France in 1954, she takes a drive along the coast and gets her first look at the palace at Monaco. The following year, she returns to France for the Cannes film festival. What had begun as a location shoot with Cary Grant and a sexy convertible was about to become something much, much bigger. And it was on that trip that she met Prince Rainier, and the course of her life and career changed. By 1955, Kelly is engaged to the prince. And that spring, she set sail for her new home in Monaco, leaving her acting career behind.

Newsreel announcer: Bon voyage, Grace. America wishes you happiness.

Elyse: She met a prince, got married, and lived happily ever after in a castle. I mean, what more can you say? As Leonard and I talk and watch the film, I notice the color of the car on the screen doesn't seem to match the original color of Matt's car, the color he showed me on the bolt heads. Does Matt have the wrong car? I ask Leonard to take a look at the car with me.

Leonard: Oh, Elyse, what a beautiful, beautiful car.

Elyse: She's pretty, right?

Leonard: Ooh, I'll take it off your hands cheap.

Elyse: Can't you see Grace Kelly in it?

Leonard: I can see anybody in it. I'd love to see me in it.

Elyse: Leonard agrees the car looks similar to the one in the film, but what about the color difference?

Leonard: I'm a movie buff, maybe a movie expert, but I'm not a car expert. You need somebody who really knows Hollywood cars.

Elyse: I've done some research, and I've found a true Hollywood car expert. Leslie Kendall is the curator of the Petersen Automotive Museum in Hollywood. To stroll around the museum is to take a walk back in time through some of America's most famous films.

Leslie Kendall: This is the world's first Batmobile. This is the car that was driven by Burt Ward and Adam

West: This car was originally owned by Rita Hayworth, and it's a 1953 Cadillac made with a custom body by Ghia in Italy. That's one of the sexiest cars I've ever seen.

Elyse: From the sexiest sports cars to the most psychotic of Hollywood hissy fits, the museum has it all.

Leslie: This 1971 de Tomaso Pantera was owned by Elvis Presley. And on one cold morning, the car wouldn't start, so he got out his gun and he shot it three times. [Gunshots]

Elyse: Oh, so you can see the bullet holes.

Leslie: You can see the bullet hole still in the steering wheel.

Elyse: Wow, Leslie, these cars are great, but now I need your help. I tell Leslie I may have uncovered another movie-star car.

Leslie: Let's go look at it. Okay.

Elyse: Okay, here she is.

Leslie: What a beautiful car. You see this thing driving out, it's got a nice vertical grill on it. You come up, and you can really make an entrance in this kind of car.

Elyse: Leslie tells me that Sunbeams were made famous by a British company and became famous as racecars in the French alpine road rallies in the 1940s and '50s. Sunbeams were the favorite car of world-renowned British racecar driver Stirling Moss. In 1953, Sunbeam factories released a new sports car for the general public and named it the Alpine after this famous French road race. Weighing in at a hefty 3,000 pounds and featuring an under-powered four-cylinder engine, the Alpine couldn't compete with the sporty Triumph or MG, and it never truly caught on. Instead, it became the ultimate boulevard cruiser for a handful of dedicated fans.

Leslie: All my years of going to car shows, I've only seen about six or eight of these, and this is one of the nicer ones.

Elyse: Today, there are dozens of Sunbeam Alpine car clubs around the world, but there are more would-be collectors than there are cars. Only a few hundred of these jewels survive.

Leslie: There were only about 3,000 made, and honestly, in Detroit terms, that's an afternoon shift at Chevrolet. But only about half of those were imported to America, and only a fraction of those survive today. So we're looking at something that's pretty unusual.

Elyse: I tell Leslie about the color difference I noticed while watching the film with Leonard.

Leslie: Verifying a car by its color can be tricky because the process of Technicolor can tend to shift the color of a vehicle. Technicolor films were shot using three different strips of film, one for each of the primary colors. The process created deeply saturated colors that popped on-screen but didn't always match the original. We have a great example of that in the collection. It's a 1966 Thunderbird convertible that was used in Thelma and Louise. It looks green in person, more of an aqua, but when you see it on the screen, it reads blue.

Elyse: So is there any way you can look at this car and tell me if you think it was used in the film?

Leslie: If I were trying to verify that this car was used in the movie, I'd look for a couple of things. If I knew that it was modified in some way for the movie—for example, if it had camera mounts—I would look for that. But we can't find any evidence that it was ever modified for filming.

Elyse: So in your professional opinion, do you think this car could have been used in the film?

Leslie: Everybody would love to be connected with the real thing. So it would be great if this car were the actual car that Grace Kelly drove, but there's only one, and chances are, this isn't it. [The Rolling Stones' "She's a Rainbow" plays] Leslie suggested that I find the person who bought the car for the film. I'm looking for the production manager from *To Catch a Thief*, but he's not listed in the credits. I'm searching the web for more details on the movie. And here it is: production management C.O. Doc Erickson. It looks like he's worked with Hitchcock on a lot of films. Doc Erickson has had a long career working as a production manager and executive producer on more than 30 Hollywood films, including *Chinatown*, *Groundhog Day*, and *Blade Runner*. And 50 years ago, he was working right here at Paramount side by side with Alfred Hitchcock. As we walk through the back lot, Doc tells me what it was like working with Alfred Hitchcock and Grace Kelly.

Doc Erickson: Oh, it was terrific because Hitch was very disciplined. Absolute genius. No question about that. He was just wonderful, had a great sense of humor, loved to laugh, loved to make jokes. Grace, of course, was a living doll—we all loved her—and friendly with everybody, every crew member, anybody on the set. Hitch was very fond of Grace, and it shows in the work.

Elyse: Doc tells me that shooting *To Catch a Thief* took over two months, filming at 20 locations in France and on four different sound stages here at Paramount. He takes me to stage 15, where key interiors were shot. Today, carpenters are busy building sets for a new film, but back in the spring of 1954, this floor was filled with masked dancers while Cary Grant lurked in the shadows of the rooftop above. The roof was built along here so that you could look down over the roof onto the garden-party area, where the dancers were, and Hitch actually got up there, showing Bob Burks exactly where he wanted the camera for that sequence.

Elyse: So he was very hands-on, I would say.

Doc: Oh, yes, yeah. Absolutely. He was meticulous.

Elyse: There's one prop from this film that I want to show you and see if you remember it. Well, here she is.

Doc: Oh, my. How beautiful.

Elyse: Do you remember her?

Doc: Oh, she looks familiar. She looks exactly like she did back then.

Elyse: I asked doc why Hitchcock chose an obscure car like the Sunbeam Alpine.

Doc: Hitch wanted an open car, obviously. I believe it was Alma, Hitch's wife, found this one in a magazine ad and showed it to Hitch. We brought it to France, where we did all the driving scenes with Grace and Cary, and when we'd completed those, we shipped it to America.

Elyse: But why would they need to ship it back?

Doc: Here we go. You're going to love it.

Elyse: Doc explains how they shot driving scenes at the Paramount studios.

Doc: On *To Catch a Thief*, to give the moving-car effect, we would have used rear-screen projection. Now we go to the green screen, which is more simplified. So all you have to do is wiggle the car, jiggle it a little bit, have a shadow pass that gives the illusion of passing something, fan blowing your hair, and voila, we're moving. The material that we shot in the South of France is superimposed over this, and you're heading south.

Elyse: Yeah! Doing great. I'm Grace Kelly, and you're Cary Grant. Doc says that by bringing the car back to Hollywood, Hitchcock was able to have complete control so that Grace, Cary, and the Sunbeam Alpine looked perfect in every shot. So do you think this car was used in *To Catch a Thief*?

Doc: I can't tell. It certainly looks like it.

Elyse: So how would I find out?

Doc: Well, we kept all kinds of records, and you could examine those, if they still exist.

Elyse: I've searched the files of the Academy of Motion Pictures Library, and I've located a collection of memos and telegrams from Doc Erickson written over 50 years ago. Several of these mention the car specifically, and they describe it in detail: Sunbeam Alpine, sapphire blue, fawn upholstery. And then I find the telegram I've been looking for. It's another telegram from Doc Erickson. It's short, but it gives the vehicle identification number of the car that Grace Kelly drove. I'm comparing that number to the number on Matt's car. And I got the answer I'm looking for. It's time to go tell Matt the news. Matt, it was really a lot of fun, and it was a great investigation. I was able to find out that the Sunbeam Alpine used in the film was shipped back here to Los Angeles to be used on the Paramount lot, and I found the evidence that answers our big question. As I wipe away the oil covering Matt's vehicle I.D. Number, I see the first few digits, and they are a clear match: three-zero-one. But then as I read the last part of the number, the news isn't good. The numbers don't match. It's not the same car. The Sunbeam Alpine used in the film was not your car, unfortunately. I tell Matt that there are likely less than 200 of these cars still on the road. So even though his Sunbeam Alpine isn't the car from the film, it's still an extremely rare collectible.

Matt: There's maybe a slight disappointment, but I will never stop loving this car. I love this car. It's a special one.

Elyse: On September 14, 1982, Princess Grace set out on a drive down the same treacherous road that she had traveled with Cary Grant while shooting *To Catch a Thief*. She lost control of the car, and it flew off a cliff, tumbling 120 feet to an embankment below. She died the next day at age 53. Thousands of mourners filled the same cathedral that had hosted Princess Grace's wedding to Prince Rainier 26 years earlier. They mourned the passing of a Hollywood icon and a princess who had reigned over the principality of Monaco for more than two decades.