TO RED NANNY FIELD AND BROWN NANNY NEAL...
FOR SETTING ME ON THIS MINI ADVENTURE.
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Parts of the text were originally published in The Making of the Italian Job by the same author, published by Batsford in 2001.

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First published in May 2019

Standard edition: 978-1-907085-86-4
Collector’s edition: 978-1-913089-10-8

Published by
Porter Press International Ltd
Hilltop Farm, Knights-on-Tern, Tenbury Wells, WR15 8LY, UK
Tel: +44 (0)1584 781588 Fax: +44 (0)1584 781630

sales@porterpress.co.uk
www.porterpress.co.uk

Edited by Holly Beaumont
Design, layout and Jacket design by Adrian Morris
Printed by Gomer Press Ltd

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The Italian Job was a great time in my life, we were all young and we had so much fun making it.

It all began with my friend, writer Troy Kennedy Martin. He chased me all over the place with the script until I finally read it. I loved the concept and was very pleased to have been able to help get The Italian Job off the ground by putting it in front of Charles Bludhorn, an eccentric Austrian, who at the time, had just purchased Paramount Pictures and was looking for fresh material. I also met my life-long friend on the picture, Quincy Jones, my celestial twin.

The Italian Job was not a big hit when it was first released. As a result we never did make the sequel. However, since then, it has become a cult classic and one of the most popular films of all time in England. People often ask me why it has endured. I remember a reporter asking me a year or two after The Italian Job what I had thought of the 1960s. I said, 'I’ll tell you what I think: you will still be asking me about it when I’m 70!’ It was more than just a decade – it’s a brand, a template of how to change the world. The Italian Job is a snapshot of that time and perfectly encapsulated the decade: the cars, the fashion, the fun and the optimistic attitude that was in the air.

Sir Michael Caine
May 2019
INTRODUCTION

N

early six years ago I was approached by Channel 4 to document a celebration of England’s most loved automobile, the Mini. Why was I included? I had never owned a Mini. But I had produced a movie that had turned the very pleasant little car into a big movie star – The Italian Job. Shortly after the documentary aired, I had a call from Matthew Field – a young guy who just completed his A-levels and, on his gap year, was dreaming about writing a book about his favourite film, The Italian Job.

When he told me this, I was astonished that an 18-year-old would be embarking on such a project, but I quickly realised how determined he was and agreed to meet him. Soon it was clear to me I was dealing with a young man with enough ambition that he could pull this off. In July 2001 the book was published and was an immediate success. I was happy to join Matthew on the publicity trail and together we had great fun appearing on a number of high-profile TV shows, including The Big Breakfast. During that time we spent hours sitting around green rooms waiting to go on air. Matthew loved talking about films and was hoping to have a career in the industry himself and of course we talked about my adventures in the screen trade. One day we were sitting in Wogan House at the BBC and Matthew hit me with the idea of writing my memoirs. I thought he was crazy – I can’t even type. Then I woke up and said ‘Fine. I’ve never written a book but you’ll have to do it with me.’

One obstacle was that I was never in one place for very long, skipping between London, Cape Cod and Los Angeles. This, of course, entailed a lot of travel for me and now for Matthew too. We wrote the book over five years in all three territories. We found ourselves back where we started, pedalling a book, only this time it was Blowing the Bloody Doors Off and Blending the Bloody Blues. By this time Matthew had started to achieve his ambition and had begun his movie career in the field of film publicity and marketing. Over the years we have become great pals and never am I in London without us having dinner and when working in LA Matthew will come and stay with us in Santa Barbara. We drink our fair share of wine…

And now we find ourselves celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of The Italian Job. Believe me for a producer to have the luck to enjoy a landmark like this is rare and very special. To have the anniversary so sumptuously commemorated, as it is in this new book, is particularly rewarding.

We drink our fair share of wine…

and when working in LA Matthew will come and stay with us in Santa Barbara. We drink our fair share of wine…

But The Italian Job remains the cinematic love of my life and I am very proud to have produced it. It shouldn’t be overlooked that, without Troy Kennedy Martin’s elegant heist framework for the script and Peter Collinson’s enthusiasm for the material, we would not still be enjoying The Italian Job 50 years later. Thank you Troy and Peter.

Although The Italian Job was well received in Britain, it didn’t have the same appeal in America and we were puzzled as to why it didn’t work in another English language territory. Personally, after 50 years of thought, I have come to the conclusion that the film did not appeal in the US because it had nothing to do with America. Nothing at all. It’s a cheeky look at the difference between the British and our European neighbours. It would have worked equally well if we had shot it in Paris rather than Turin because it would have been the same old ‘us against them’ love-hate relationship that flourishes to this day between mainland Europe and Britain. The Italian Job is Euro-sceptic, which is why it is fun and why it had no resonance in America. This movie was released just as Britain was joining the Common Market – a hot topic of conversation. It’s ironic that here we are 50 years later, and still the UK is conflicted about its place in the European Union. The Italian Job is the perfect Brexit movie, whatever your view.

Michael Dolley
May 2019
Kelly of Flippers fame. She served for many years on the Foreign Language Film Award Screening Committee at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Blye died at home in West Hollywood on 24 March 2016 following a two-year battle with cancer. She was 73.

Maggie Blye: ‘I guess I felt special being the only American in the cast. Charles Bludhorn had seen me in Waterhole #3 and signed me [on] a four-year contract, which I was happy to do. Apparently, Charlie requested me for Diamonds for Breakfast and then when The Italian Job came along he wanted me to be in that. I guess [Robert] Evans approved.’

Michael Deeley: ‘Maggie Blye was a pretty young American actress whom we introduced to the mix specifically in the hope of adding some appeal to the US audience.’

Maggie Blye: ‘Lorna was a risk-taker. She was a con artist, with a child-like innocence to her, a speed-racer in heels. I saw her as a very feisty playgirl around London. My understanding is [that originally] Troy Kennedy Martin had written a much harder-edged story, and in that version Lorna had a lot more to do. There were more love scenes with Michael.

I think [in the final film] she is a bit of an arm-piece, and you can’t really do much except look pretty. I felt the character was a little bit eviscerated … I felt Lorna’s purpose in the script was taken away. She was there to stand by her man and that seemed to be what most films were like then. In the original script Lorna got to drive the little Minis just like Charlize Theron did in the remake. I’ve been driving since I was nine years old in the fields of Texas, so that was my biggest disappointment.’

Michael Caine: ‘Maggie Bye, she’s a bit of a mystery to me because I never saw her again in anything. I thought she was very pretty and very good, and I thought “She’s got a nice future,” but from my point of view she completely disappeared. I was amazed never to see her again.’

‘I was shooting some publicity stills for The Italian Job and I have the dreamiest look on my face because George Harrison, one of the Beatles, had just come to the door. George gave me a little kiss right on the mouth and wished me luck.’

Fred Emney: ‘Born on 12 February 1900, Frederick Arthur Round Emney was an English character actor and comedian, who earned a reputation playing pompous fat men – complete with monocle.

Emney was the son of a comedian and began his career as a music hall entertainer before making his film debut in Brewster’s Millions (1935). He spent 11 years in vaudeville in the United States before establishing himself in the UK. In the 1950s, the BBC gave Emney his own primetime TV show, Emney Enterprises, featuring comedy sketches and piano performances, which he often composed himself.

Emney died in Bognor Regis on Christmas Day 1980, nine days after Peter Collinson. He was 80 years old. The Times wrote in his obituary “There was no thin man inside him struggling to escape from his gargantuan frame, for he was obviously delighted with what he was. He was a highly original exponent of an old comic tradition.”

Emney’s appearance in The Italian Job was the brainchild of casting director Paul Lee Lander. Lander’s former personal assistant, Sarah Golding, remembers the discussions that took place around Emney’s casting:

Sarah Golding: ‘Paul Lee Lander, the casting director, said it was very important Fred Emney should play that part. At the time it was thought his physique didn’t lend itself to that sort of role. Paul said, “He’s absolutely great you must go with him. Get him, he’s a comedian, he has great timing.” I remember Paul sticking up for that.’

Michael Caine: ‘I remember him being in the picture and how pleased I was. I thought he was great fun.’

Fred Emney’s scenes had to be completed as soon as possible due to concerns over the actor’s health.
Crew member David Wynne Jones took this collection of photographs of the Lamborghini Miura on location in the Italian Alps.
‘IT’S A QUESTION OF PRESTIGE’

Bridger gives Croker and his mob one final warning before they set off for Italy. Arranging a bogus funeral for his Great Aunt Nellie, he whispers to Croker, ‘You’ve forgotten one thing: the Mafia. They’ll be waiting for you. If you muck it up, don’t ever think of coming back here except in your coffin.’ With the gang gathered around the graveside, Bridger asserts, ‘If you don’t come back with the goods, Nellie here will turn in her grave and likely or not get right out of it and kick your teeth in!’

The scene was originally to have been shot in London at Highgate Cemetery. For tax reasons, however, the majority of Noël Coward’s scenes were filmed in Ireland. He mentioned the film in his diaries, published in 1982.

Noël Coward: ‘Life passes gently on, but the smooth pattern will soon be shot to hell as I go to dear old Dublin the day after tomorrow to start work on The Italian Job. It’s a good part and a good script so I expect I will enjoy it. It is also to be directed by Peter Collinson, who has offered to have his Rolls-Royce specially sprayed white for me! This is heart-warming when one reflects that he was the little Actors’ Orphanage boy whom I saved from expulsion by giving him a brisk heart-to-heart talk on a garden seat!’

Coward was greeted by a bunch of young enthusiastic actors as he arrived at Cruagh Cemetery on the outskirts of Dublin.

Frank Jarvis: ‘A rather small man got out of the car at the cemetery on the first day, walked along and met us all. We were awe-struck.’
‘Oi, sort that bloody water cannon out!’

Charlie Croker

Derek Ware: ‘Peter said “I want it to look very, very British. They are not going in with guns, they’re not going to be blowing things up. There’s going to be a smoke bomb then they are going to set about everybody.” He said, “What do you think we should use?” I said, “Well, as far as I’m concerned, the pickaxe is the favourite heavyweight weapon for the English criminal.” He said, “Well, what are they going to do?” I said, “They can knock people off motorbikes, they can knock people off wagons, smash windcreens.” In fact, that was the toughest stunt I had to do on the picture – smashing in that windscreen. I was hitting it and hitting it and it wouldn’t shatter. In the end we put a nail through the pickaxe handle and that is how I got that windscreen to shatter after about 14 takes!’

To Derek Ware’s surprise, Collinson asked him to provide doubles for each of the key cast members.

Derek Ware: ‘I thought [that] was a bit ridiculous, [as] all the fellas playing the gang were all young and fit, none of them were over 30. One of the stuntmen, Mickey Ball, had to be hit in the course of the robbery, he is on top of the Land Rover and he gets hit by a jet of water, which knocks him flying. His foot must have slipped on the water and he overshot the mattresses and he struck his foot on the curb and broke his toe. He had to be carted off to hospital. Peter gave me a dressing down in front of the entire crew.

Unlike L’Equipe Rémy Julienne, Ware felt HAVOC did not get the recognition for their work on the film they deserved.

Derek Ware: “I said to Derek Kavanagh, ‘I don’t suppose there’s any chance of a credit?’ ‘No room. I’m not giving you a credit for showing them how to wave pickaxe handles around.’ [Bob Porter] didn’t want to pay adjustments for any stunts. He didn’t want to give me extra money because I was appearing in the film as well. Marc Boyle went up to him and said, “Bob, you are a mean man.” He said, “Alright I’ll give you an adjustment.” That was only because he felt intimidated.”
THE GETAWAY CAR

Troy Kennedy Martin: ‘From day one, the Mini was built into the very concept of the script. I decided to use the Mini because it was “the” icon. It really was what made the sixties the sixties. It was full of character, it was very British. I had one, and everyone I knew had one. I was attempting to show this [modern] young Britain, and the Mini was right at the centre of it. They [were] egalitarian – a prince or a student could own one.’

Michael Caine: ‘We were all working class guys and it was a very cheap new car, not like these posh Minis you see now. So it worked for us, and they were small and they were inexpensive, and we were going to have to smash a lot of them. So it worked on every level.’

Troy Kennedy Martin: ‘I had the cheapest one, which cost about 400 or 500 quid. I drove it down to Italy and I was in the Mini when I went around Turin looking at locations. The other thing about the Mini was it was front-wheel drive. So, if you are going to move them into a coach at speed you needed [front-wheel drive]. It was the natural vehicle of choice.’

For the Hollywood executives backing the movie, however, ‘Mini’ was a distinctly foreign word. As Robert Evans, Head of Production at Paramount recalled: ‘I knew what miniskirts were, but I didn’t know about Mini cars!’

Paramount Pictures purchase orders reveal a wealth of information about the cars used in The Italian Job, and what work they needed to get them ready for filming.
RÉMY JULIENNE

After British stunt driving teams existed, none were as impressive as Julienne. There was a sense when he came on board that anything was possible. He had already worked with French film-makers but was not particularly well-known in the UK. Rémy was joined by seven other drivers and mechanics: Claude Bonnichon, Christian Bonnichon, Gerard Gardel, Jacques Joserand, Raphael Olivotti, Roger Mailles and Alan Daric.

David Salamone: ‘Originally my job was just to source and supply all the vehicles for the film. I was then hired to do the car driving stunts. However, the production team then found Rémy Julienne who was far more qualified in stunt driving than I was. Once he was on board, the scale of the action changed. They then gave me the part of Dominic to compensate, as I already had a signed agreement. Rémy is fabulously French. We communicated with hand signals and the classic way was with three Dinky toys. I don’t know who found him, but they found a star.’

Michael Flint: ‘Halfway through production, I got a call from Michael Deeley in Turin and he said he needed more Minis. I rang the Chairman of British Motor Corporation. He said, “That’s quite enough, we’re not going to give you any more, you’ll have to buy some more.” I said, “Fiat are supplying – for free – Fiat Dinos, and they will supply us with more cars. What we will do is re-write the ending and have all the Minis break down and the Mafia will catch us.” Rémy rang me back and said, “Okay, you can do anything.”

Douglas Slocombe: ‘I speak French fluently because I was partly brought up in France, and I stuck up quite a friendship with Rémy. One had to liaise with him in how we were going to shoot it, whether we would be able to hire cars with those Minis that I certainly hadn’t contemplated. He was on board with what suggestions there were in the script and embellished them in every possible way to make the stabbing pace of the greatest car chases we have ever seen in movies.’

TROY KENNEDY MARTIN: ‘The chase was broadly there – all the major elements as to how they were going to get out of the city. Julienne’s contribution to this film was drably important. He and his drivers were able to do anything with those Minis that I certainly hadn’t contemplated. He was on board with what suggestions there were in the script and embellished them in every possible way to make the stabbing pace of the greatest car chases we have ever seen in movies.’
of the chinless wonders, and so I became Chris in the white Mini.

David Salamone: ‘I was in the red Mini with Michael Caine, which was a little intimidating because he was a big star and I wasn’t even a real actor. My character, Dominic, was wearing red overalls. This caused a problem because red overalls were not allowed in any official racing competitions, because they would not show the blood in an accident. So, we had to have them made. They were not branded like the Dunlop and Goodyear race suits.

The remainder of the gang were dressed in blue Les Leston racing overalls, with black and white Converse All Star training shoes and Les Leston Grand Prix motor racing helmets.

John Morris: ‘I spent a lot of time sitting in the passenger seat of the red Mini as Michael Caine’s double. Rémy was brilliant. I will never forget him. The French drivers couldn’t speak English and I didn’t know what they were going to do, and I’m a nervous passenger at the best of times. I used to just bite my lip and look the other way! Every day was exciting for me on The Italian Job.’

‘When the film came out, one of the things talked about was how many Minis had been destroyed. The point [BMC] should have made was how they survived. Minis did survive the whole shoot.’ – Troy Kennedy Martin
because it was emotional, because it was difficult. When I [first] talked to the production about the jump they said: ‘Hey! It’s too dangerous, we cannot give that permission.’ But I insisted so much that they eventually gave in.’

Michael Dewley: ‘I wasn’t taking any chances. I wanted to see a test done first on the ground. Julienne and his boys practiced many times on the flat. Imagine Fujita thought their feet had slipped off the accelerator just before they took off! They would have splattered against the wall!’

Rémy Julienne: ‘We worked on the ground, we prepared the ramps, calculated distances, speed, etc. [Originally] it was decided I had to do three separate jumps in each Mini. I explained that, as the roof was very wide, we could make the three Minis jump all together... It looked much better as a shot. It was more complicated, but really amazing.’

Douglas Slocombe: ‘There was always the possibility, however well it worked on the ground, that at the last moment when they were going along the roof top there could be a slight engine failure or a cough in the engine that they would suddenly lose speed at the wrong moment, and it would end up in disaster.’

Terry Apsey: ‘Afterwards, I said to Rémy, “Bloody hell, my heart was in my mouth.” He said, “Michael, it’s mathematics.” I thought they were just saying, “To hell with this, let’s just see if we can make it!”’

Rémy Julienne: ‘I remember Douglas Slocombe was sick having to make us wait because every time we were ready to shoot, a cloud was coming over the sun and the light changed. We were ready, very hot, seatbelts fastened. This little game lasted two hours and that was the last breakdown – he ran off in tears. We found him two hours later. Peter Collinson said, “If it all goes well, I will come up on the roof with a bottle of whisky.” I said, “Well, I don’t like whisky, I only drink Champagne!” We laughed.’

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Michael Deeley: ‘Not only was I looking after the safety of the drivers, I also had my own film to worry about. I was told that, as the principal in charge of the ballet, I would be the one held liable. There was an accident. I would immediately be nabbed and thrown into a Turin jail if something went wrong. Thus, we arranged there would be a getaway car by the side door of the factory and a plane fuelled and ready at the airport. If the worst happened, I could argue my case from outside the country, rather than from inside an Italian jail.’

Douglas Slocombe: ‘There was always the possibility, however well it worked on the ground, that at the last moment when they were going along the rooftop there could be a slight engine failure or a cough in the engine that they would suddenly lose speed at the wrong moment, and it would end up in disaster.’

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Terry Apsey: ‘All day long, the sun wasn’t coming out and we had absolutely no control!’

Rémy Julienne: ‘I remember Douglas Slocombe was sick having to make us wait because every time we were ready to shoot, a cloud was coming over the sun and the light changed. We were ready, very hot, seatbelts fastened. This little game lasted two hours and that was really hard on our nerves. It was really emotional.’

Ken Morris: ‘The unit really didn’t want to watch it because they were all afraid they wouldn’t make it.

David Salamone: ‘We all had absolute trust in Rémy. But even though they had practised on the ground, it’s a totally different story when you are doing something like that for real. When it came to the moment, their hearts were in their mouths. You just hoped it was going to work. Once the Minis were in mid-air, those drivers had absolutely no control!’

Rémy Julienne: ‘We did a 24-meter jump at 110 – 120kph. I was calling my team by radio, “3-2-1, go!” On the word “go”, the three cars went off together and our mission was to accelerate to 6,000rpm in first gear, then into second gear, back up to 6,000rpm, and then into third with our feet flat to the floor. We had to keep to that perfectly so that I would look good as a shot.’

Michael Deeley: ‘Afterwards, I said to Rémy, “Bloody hell, my heart was in my mouth.” He said, “Michael, it’s mathematics.” I thought they were just saying, “To hell with this, let’s just see if we can make it!”’

Terry Apsey: ‘They did the shot, missed the landing ramp and went much further than they thought, and almost went through the roof. They did dig into the roof of the actual building a little bit.’

Kent Morris: ‘When we lifted the cars up on to the roof with a crane, the Fiat factory workers all said goodbye to us and touched their necks. They must have [had]
WHAT HAPPENED TO THE MINIS?

Ken Morris: ‘I still had something like six Minis left. All I did was just [leave] the garage, lock the door and head to the airport. Whatever happened to those Minis, I have no idea. Whichever owner the garage had the Minis.’

Once filming was completed in Turin, the six hero Minis were returned to England. One set was still required for interior and back-projection shots at Twickenham Studios.

Richard Essame: ‘The blue Mini – I had to take it back to England after the filming was finished.’

Barry Cox: ‘David, Richard and I were asked to take the Minis back to London. So, we decided to race each other!’

David Salamone: ‘We had an altercation with a Swiss gentleman in a Citroën DS, who was proving difficult to pass. Every time we tried to overtake him he went faster, and the Minis don’t have a great top speed. Eventually we both passed him but in the process slightly knocked him off the road. What we hadn’t calculated was that 10 minutes down the road we hit the Swiss border and we were having our passports checked and I could see this guy coming in the mirror with all his headlamps flashing, trying to attract the attention of the police. We just got our passports back and roared off. The Minis got home in one piece.’

Barry Cox: ‘The problem is you have spent three months trying to attract the attention of the police. We just got our passports back and roared off. The Minis got home in one piece.’

But what happened then to the six hero Minis – NOC 728F, NOC 738F, NOC 748F, NOC 758F, NOC 768F, MON 793F – once filming wrapped at Twickenham Studios?

David Salamone: ‘At least three of them had kinks in their roofs. The chassis had bent. The three cars used for the roof-top jump had serious suspension damage, the bodies had kinked. You could still drive them, but BMC would never have been allowed to sell them. So they must have been destroyed. The second set was ok and the bodies had kinked. You could still drive them, but BMC would never have been allowed to sell them. So they must have been destroyed. The second set was ok and the bodies had kinked. You could still drive them, but BMC would never have been allowed to sell them. So they must have been destroyed. The second set was ok and the bodies had kinked. You could still drive them, but BMC would never have been allowed to sell them. So they must have been destroyed. The second set was ok and the bodies had kinked. You could still drive them, but BMC would never have been allowed to sell them. So they must have been destroyed. The second set was ok and the bodies had kinked. You could still drive them, but BMC would never have been allowed to sell them. So they must have been destroyed. The second set was ok and...’

Derek Kavanagh: ‘The Minis from BMC had to go back, and we had to pay for damage done to them.’

David Salamone: ‘The Minis from BMC had to go back, and we had to pay for damage done to them.’

Ken Morris: ‘I would have loved to have taken a Mini home with me when all the shooting was done, but when the movie finished, everything went back to England.’

Ken Morris recalls he left a number of Minis in Turin, surplus cars intended for throwing down the mountain.

For security reasons, the British Motor Museum archive at Gaydon, who hold BMC’s papers, do not allow general access to the Mini Cooper Mk I register – to avoid attempted duplication, or cloning, which has happened with Coopers in the past. Interestingly, they did confirm that there are no dispatch records for the cars on the ledger. There are also a further 10 Mk I Coopers in red, white, blue and grey (close in sequence to the six hero cars) without BMC dispatch records. Could these cars have also been used in the making of The Italian Job?
POST-PRODUCTION BEGAN ON THE ITALIAN JOB ALMOST IMMEDIATELY. EDITOR, JOHN TRUMPER WORKED FROM A MOBILE CUTTING ROOM IN A CELLAR IN TURIN, BENEATH A COMPANY THAT MANUFACTURED FILM PROJECTORS.

Trumper was an obvious choice for the film, having cut all three of Peter Collinson’s previous pictures. He had begun his career working for the British Crown Film Unit, the Government’s principal production facility, who made public information films and documentaries. He later went on to cut another Michael Caine classic, Get Carter (1971).

Assistant editor Chris German joined Trumper in Italy. Back at Twickenham Studios, prolific sound technician Gerry Humphreys served as dubbing mixer, taking on the delicate task of balancing out and delivering the final audio track of dialogue, music and sound effects. Humphreys later became the head of Twickenham Film Studios. Future James Bond editor and director, John Glen, also worked in Trumper’s team, as an additional sound editor.

John Trumper: ‘I find it ironic that The Italian Job is currently attracting so much attention. When Get Carter (1971) set up shop in Newcastle two years later, Michael Caine told me what a pleasure it was to be involved in a real film after the ephemeral nonsense that was The Italian Job! I was in Turin for the entire shoot. It was the first film I had cut on location. We cut the Turin [segment of the film] in Turin. The rushes [the entire raw material from each day’s filming] would be sent back to England. The second assistant would sync up the rushes and then send them out to us in Turin and I cut the film there.

‘Peter Collinson was a very easy person to work with. We did [five] pictures together. I’ve always been an editor that makes my own decisions. [Peter] never came into the cutting room, which as an editor I appreciated because he left me to it and simply saw the rough cuts in the theatre and commented on them.’

John Glen: ‘Peter Collinson could blow hot and cold. He could charm the birds out of the trees if he wanted to. I remember in the theatre one day, he came in and he insulted John Trumper in front of the whole crew, which I didn’t like at all. John was a very good editor but he was a chap who was very definite in his views. John was quite stubborn really, he was very proud, and fought for the way he wanted to edit the film.’

Quincy Jones: ‘I won an Ivor Novello last year, and a lot of the kids were saying, “There’s no way that anybody but a Brit could of written ‘[The] Self Preservation Society.’” I said, “Well guess again.”’
Fifty years of The Italian Job

Throughout the eighties, The Italian Job continued to grow in popularity in Britain, and by the mid-nineties it had become a cult classic.

The arrival of Britpop projected the image of ‘cool Britannia’ for the first time since the sixties. Anything British was cool, and the classic Mini symbolised it all. In 1990, British car manufacturer Rover re-launched the Mini Cooper after a 19-year hiatus.

Michael Caine himself also endured an iconic rebirth, as he found new popularity with the Loaded generation and the arrival of ‘lad’ culture. Soon, homages to the film were popping up everywhere: Welsh band Stereophonics spoofed The Italian Job with the promo video for their single ‘Pick a Part That’s New’; the Sun Alliance insurance company ran a marketing campaign that featured an image of the Minis racing down steps in the movie, with the line ‘Regrettably some drivers won’t qualify’; and, in 1999, Bacardi-Martini asked Rémy Julienne to re-create his nimble stunt work for a TV commercial involving a high-speed getaway in three Mini Coopers.

To the strains of ‘Get a Bloomin’ Move On’, on 4 October 2000, the very last classic Mini was driven off the production line by pop singer Lulu. Photographers and camera crews were in attendance to document this historical moment. However surprising, for some of the cast living abroad, The Italian Job’s growing popularity in England had gone unnoticed.

THIRTIETH ANNIVERSARY

In 1999, The Italian Job was re-released in UK cinemas. Triggered by a pleading letter from a fan, the big-screen re-release made good commercial sense: Paramount’s home entertainment arm, CIC, was releasing the film once again on video and in those days a theatrical re-release of a movie tended to generate higher VHS sales.

United International Pictures (UIP) – Paramount’s international distributor at the time – spent £100,000 on the re-release, creating a new trailer and a new poster campaign with Robin Behling of creative agency Ferif. The three Minis took centre stage in this bold, retro-style design, appearing next to a cool, brooding image of Michael Caine. Steve Hunt of UIP oversaw the re-release, and the film premiered at the BFI Southbank on 10 September, where it was introduced by actor Robert Powell.

Steve Hunt: ‘The original trailer was very out of date. The film is a classic and so when we went about the trailer had to represent that – classic Caine, classic cars, classic girls. The original poster (of which we found a slight [drug] aroma), good, so we did this new campaign. For the poster we wanted a classic picture of Caine. We wanted to make it “cool baby”. It was retro, flat colours, it had that cool Britannia feel, the Union Jack was in vogue … I took [Noël Coward] off the poster. To a new generation of people, they were not going to know who he was – this old bloke. He’s brilliant in the film – superb, don’t get me wrong – [but] you don’t want an old duffer.’

Robin Behling: ‘Noël Coward had equal billing [with] Michael Caine, but 90 per cent of the population don’t know who the hell he [was] and facially, he doesn’t bring anything to the party. So you have to put something more intriguing in. We ended up with a group of Mafia hodads and cars. The feeling was to reflect the culture of the movie but capitalise on a new audience. You can’t [base] the release of a film on the fact it is a cult. You need to go for as large an audience as possible.’

Michael Standing: ‘I have lived in America since 1979, and I have never been back to England. I had no idea how popular The Italian Job was over there. It was my son who told me how famous that line, “You’re only supposed to blow the bloody doors off!” has become in England.’