

Rebels with cars go east of Eden

John Connolly
14jan06

HOW to make money while you are dead: two rules.

Rule 1. Don't be in a museum dedicated to you.

The world's only privately owned museum to James Dean looked set to close this week after 20 years due to high costs and low revenue. But financial help may be on the way.

David Loehr, owner of the James Dean Gallery, told The Weekend Australian that while the The New York Times told its readers the gallery had closed, he had "some meetings in LA next week and we may be reopening".

Phew! David's palace to Dean is in Fairmount, Indiana, where Jimmy grew up and the gallery includes a perfect replica of the Porsche Spyder the 50s film star was driving when he died.

James Dean remains the perfect 20th century man. Successful actor, violin player, serious car racer, smoker, MG, Porsche, Harley and Norton owner and bisexual, Dean is perfect proof of my old maxim "the only sure way to increase the value of your assets is to die young".

You see Jimmy is big business but not for the museum. Despite dying in 1955 he has recently appeared in ads for McDonald's, Gap, Barneys New York, Lee Jeans and Hamilton watches.

Rule 2. Get a good agent after you die.

Dead stars made over \$US186 million last year. While Elvis is by far the biggest earner, Marilyn Monroe raked in a handy \$US8 million.

Marilyn's agent, Mark Roesler, is the boss of CMG Worldwide, a talent agency that specialises in dead people. His clients include James Dean, Humphrey Bogart, Ingrid Bergman, Bette Davis, Buddy Holly, Malcolm X, Amelia Earhart, Mark Twain and Frank Lloyd Wright. He also represents nearly dead people like Sophia Loren, Lauren Bacall and Ivana Trump.

Headquartered in Indianapolis, Indiana, Roesler has a museum featuring, you guessed it, "a replica of James Dean's 1955 Porsche 550 Spyder".

Luckily for Mark, Jimmy made three huge movies (Rebel Without a Cause, Giant and East of Eden), became a beat giant and died young driving a legendary Porsche.

Jimmy was really a serious car person. Apart from the first car his father bought him, a 1939 Chevy, he used the money

from his acting caper to buy a red MGTA in 1954, a Ford Woody and a 356 1.5 litre Porsche in 1955 and then a very unlucky silver Porsche 550 Spyder.

Straight out of race school Dean entered three major races, taking podiums in two.

But Jimmy was never ever going to survive in that Porsche Spyder.

His Spyder was one of 90 made. Customiser, George Barris, painted number 130 on the hood and Dean's nickname "Little Bastard" on the back.

On September 30, 1955, Jimmy and his mechanic Rolf Wutherich were heading to a race. Driving into the sunset at 57 mph (90km/h) the Porsche hit a Ford, trying to turn out in front of it.

The coroner said Dean died of a broken neck and other injuries. Some fans say he is still alive but badly disfigured. George bought what was left of the car for \$US2500. When the wreck got back to his panel shop, it fell off its trailer and broke the legs of a mechanic.

Later Barris sold parts from Little Bastard to two doctors for their race cars. First time out with the Dean parts in their cars, the first doctor crashed and died and the other car caught fire and flipped, seriously injuring its driver.

Another racer who bought two tyres off Dean's car had a blowout, crashed and was nearly killed.

Then the California Highway Patrol used the Porsche in a mobile road safety exhibit. The garage in which it was stored burned to the ground but the car survived. At the first exhibit stop, the car fell off the wall it was mounted on, breaking a teenager's hip.

When the police shipped the Porsche wreck back to Barris the car and the transporter simply disappeared.