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Bullitt (1968), faster than a speeding train

Description

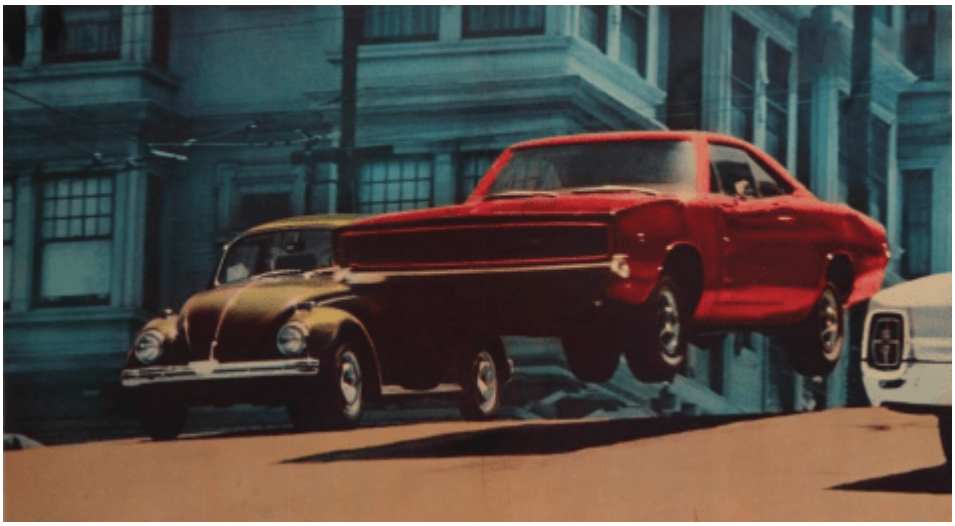
Reviewed by Larry Gleeson during the annual TCM 31 Days of Oscar

Bullitt (1968), directed by Peter Yates, is a star vehicle for actor Steve McQueen. McQueenâ??s Solar Productions produced the Warner Bros. film. *Bullitt* was shot on location in San Francisco and features the groundbreaking car chase that is considered one of the greatest car chases in film history. The chase scene is clocked at nine minutes and forty-two seconds. Both vehicles involved in the high-speed chase scene had reinforcements to handle the steep San Francisco hills. McQueen (Lt. Frank Bullitt) drove a 1968 Ford Mustang GT Fastback. The other vehicle was a Dodge Charger with a 460-horsepower engine. Speeds topping 100 miles per hour were recorded during the chase scene. *Bullitt* won the 1969 Best Editing Oscar for Frank P. Kellerâ??s efforts.

Bullitt is a non-conforming Lieutenant in the San Francisco Police Department assigned, under request from U.S. Senator Walter Chalmers (Robert Vaughn) to guard Johnny Rossi, an infamous West Coast racketeer turned whistleblower. In a mix-up, two men get access to the apartment where Rossi is holding up blasting a shotgun and wounding a police officer while mortally wounding Rossi. Bullitt has a hunch foul play is at work. What transpires is a game of cat and mouse involving police captains,

detectives, doppelgangers, racketeers, and a United States Senator. Senator Chalmers demands Bullitt take responsibility for Rossiâ??s murder with a sworn statement. However, itâ??s a Sunday and the statement cannot be completed on a Sunday. This gives Bullitt the time he needs to bring to fruition his hunch.

As I was watching the infamous chase scene, I began noticing a few interesting anomalies with a green Volkswagen Beetle. In addition, the Dodge Charger lost three hubcaps. Yet, the vehicle had three hubcaps on before crashing and burning. Due to an accidental fire while filming, footage was destroyed. Editor Keller stitched scene footage from different cameras for coverage. Typically, the majority of films aim for a seamless edit through continuity editing. The chase scene is a prime example of discontinuity editing. Nevertheless, the chase scene generated significant buzz in the film-going world. Interestingly, the 1972 comedy, *What Up Doc?* parodies the scene including a few moments of discontinuity. But thatâ??s for another timeâ?¦



I couldnâ??t help but compare *Bullittâ??s* sound design to James Mangoldâ??s *Ford v Ferrari,* winner of the 2020 Oscar for Best Achievement in Sound Editing. *Bullitt* received a nomination in 1969 for Best Sound. The sounds of the 1968 Mustang GT Fastback roared impressively and to a lesser degree the sounds of screeching tires, and cars launching and landing on the hilly streets of San Francisco sounded quite realistic. While McQueen did not receive a nomination it established him as a top box

office draw. With a budget of $5.5 million, the film grossed over $42 million. *Bullitt* also established San Francisco as a premium film location outside of Los Angeles.

Lastly, the narrative of *Bullitt* has twists and turns. Itâ??s complex and it requires attention to make sense of the ending. The payoff is definitely worth the price. The film is based on Robert L. Fishâ??s 1963 novel, *Mute Witness,* and features a strong cast, including a young Jacqueline Bisset (Cathy). One of the filmâ??s more colorful scenes has Cathy escorting Bullitt to the location of a potential witness in a canary yellow, 1965 Porche Cabriolet convertible. With a compact and succinct runtime of one hour and fifty-one minutes, and for the original modern-day car chase â?? one of the greatest in cinematic history â?? *Bullitt* is a â??must-see!â?•

Category

1. #TCM
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