

# Agent of change

COMMANDER JAMES BOND IS BACK – AND TO THE DELIGHTS OF THE PURISTS, HE'S DRIVING A BENTLEY ONCE AGAIN. **NICK FOULKES** DESCRIBES A UNIQUE COLLABORATION BETWEEN PUBLISHERS PENGUIN, BENTLEY'S DESIGN TEAM AND A REBORN 007 >



Right Ian Fleming, creator of James Bond, was an impressionable young man when the Bentley Boys were at the peak of their fame. They had a lasting influence. Far right Fleming's 14 James Bond novels will be re-released in hardback by Penguin in May, featuring new cover illustrations of the original jackets.



## Agent of change *continued*

'Bond had the most selfish car in England. It was a Mark II Continental Bentley that some rich idiot had married to a telegraph pole on the Great West Road. Bond had bought the bits for £1,500 and Rolls had straightened the bend in the chassis and fitted new clockwork – the Mark IV engine with 9.5 compression. Then Bond had gone to Mulliners with £3,000, which was half his total capital, and they had sawn off the old cramped sports saloon body and had fitted a trim, rather square convertible two-seater affair, power-operated, with only two large armed bucket seats in black leather. The rest of the blunt end was all knife-edged, rather ugly, boot. The car was painted in rough, not gloss, battleship grey and the upholstery was black morocco. She went like a bird and a bomb and Bond loved her more than all the women at present in his life rolled, if that were feasible, together.'

I can't be alone in wondering just what Commander Bond's Bentley, described in such detail by his creator Ian Fleming in the 1961 novel *Thunderball*, actually looked like. It is surely the most famous Bentley that was never built.

But this summer we need speculate no longer: 47 years after that description was published and in the 100th anniversary of Fleming's birth, Bond and Bentley aficionados are in for a treat as, in a bravura piece of retrospective engineering, the Crewe works will be building Bond's Bentley to the specification so clearly laid down by Mr Fleming almost half a century ago. I just hope that Dirk van Braeckel and his design team remember to include the twin exhausts – 'Bond had demanded two inch pipes; he hadn't liked the old soft flutter of the marque' and 'big octagonal silver bolt' at the nose.

Sadly this will not be a drivable version, but a 1:43 scale model that will be just one of the elements in a unique collaboration between the Crewe works, Penguin books and the Fleming Estate. To mark the 100th anniversary of Fleming's birth, Penguin has commissioned a Bond novel from Sebastian Faulks, the bestselling popular novelist, and in a stroke of sheer genius approached Bentley to assist in the design of a limited edition collector's item book. Called *Devil May Care* (published May 28, 2008 – the Ian Fleming Centenary date) and set, like all the Bond novels, at the height of the Cold War, this novel will see Bond back where his creator Ian Fleming put him, behind the wheel of a Bentley, as the fast-paced action is played out in exotic locations and thrilling cities across two continents.

This is not the first time a new Bond novel has been attempted – back in the 60s Sir Kingsley Amis wrote *Colonel Sun* – but if there was any

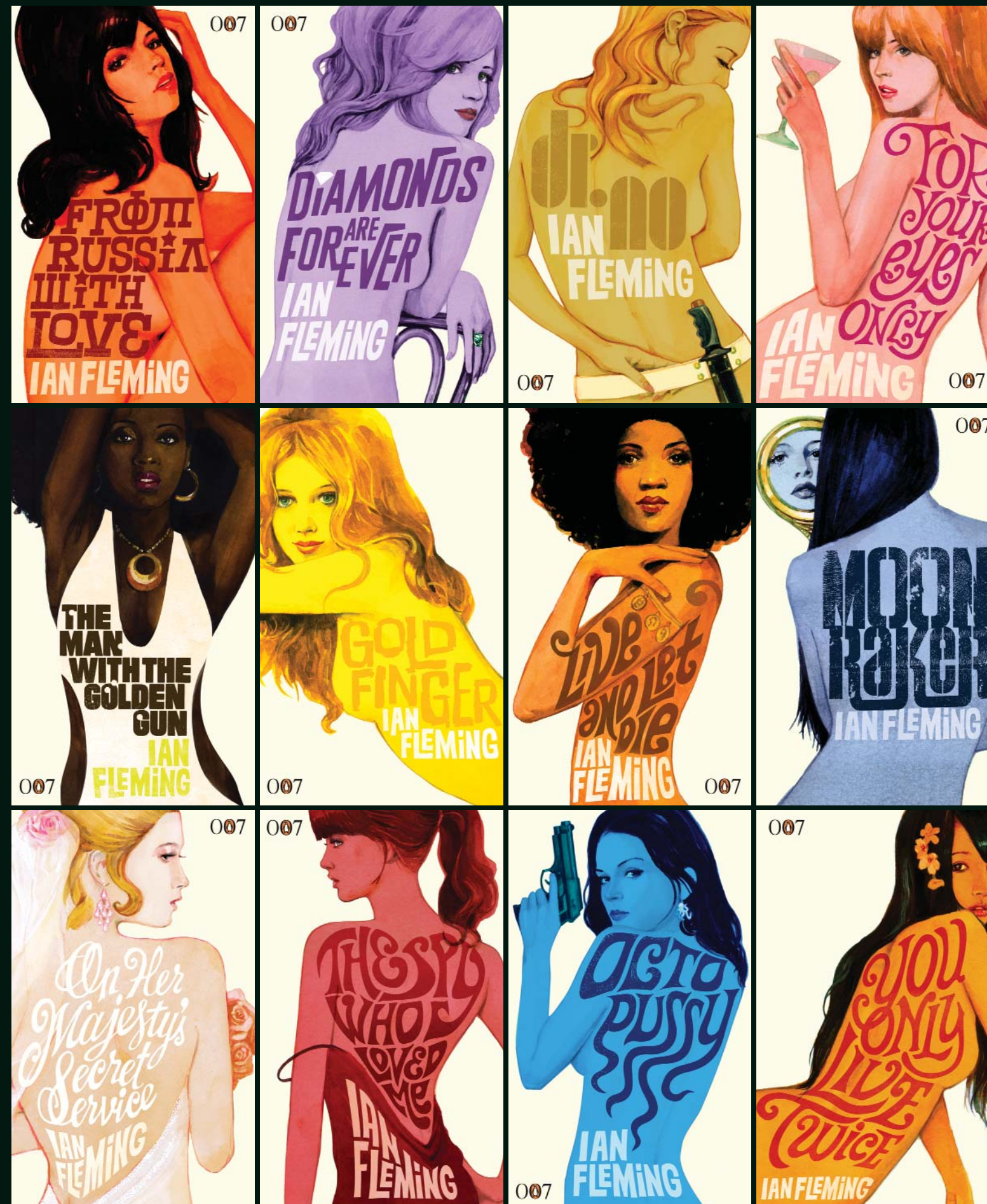
doubt as to the level of expectation that would be raised, it evaporated when the announcement was made last summer resulting in stories in the national press, television news and even the prestigious *Today* programme. It would appear that Faulks has found Fleming's voice almost perfectly: it is said that when Barbara Broccoli, whose family has produced the films, read it she said she would have believed it had she been told that a hitherto unpublished Bond Novel had come to light.

In addition to this exciting new novel, there will be a special Bond exhibition at the Imperial War Museum and even a set of commemorative Fleming stamps, celebrating the creation of one of the most enduring fictional characters ever to spring from a writer's mind. However, it is the chance to read about Bond back in the driving seat of a Bentley that is guaranteed to excite petrol heads around the world. As anyone who has made a serious study of Bond and Bentley knows, the secret agent of the books was wedded to the winged B in a way that he never could be to one woman.

When it came to delineating a man's possessions, Fleming never made a mistake; his journalistic sense of observation and eye for detail is what makes his books as compelling, captivating and immediate as they were half a century and more ago.

Anthony Burgess put it rather well when he commented: "it is the mastery of things rather than people that gives Fleming his particular niche." And it is his deep understanding of what others see as the superficial things that sets Fleming apart from other espionage writers. This gift of conveying a character through the accretion of patina bestowed by precious possessions has been called the Fleming effect. Certainly Fleming's obsession with branded goods, fine wine, good food and, of course, the best in motor cars is infectious, as anyone who has read and enjoyed his novels will attest.

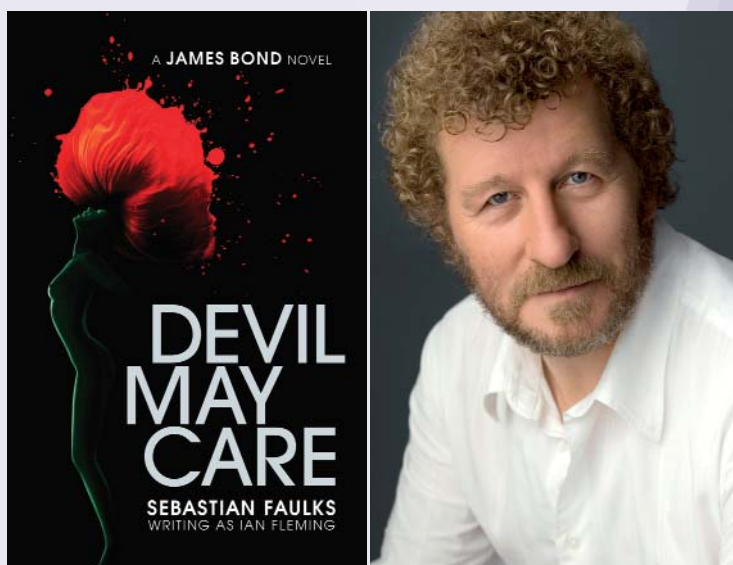
Fleming was a consummate craftsman and when he made Bond a Bentley driver he did so for a reason. As well as being a Cold Warrior, Bond is a throwback to a more adventurous era, and when casting about for the period he wished to evoke Fleming settled on the spirit of the Bentley Boys, very much 'Devil May Care' characters: elegant, brave, fast-living, slightly ruthless characters who were irresistible to women. Born in 1908, Fleming would have been in his teens when the Bentley Boys were at the height of their powers and the young Fleming could not but have been seduced by their exploits on the racing track and in the nightclubs of the West End.



'BOND DROVE IT HARD AND WELL AND WITH AN ALMOST SENSUAL PLEASURE. IT WAS A BATTLESHIP-GREY CONVERTIBLE COUPÉ, WHICH REALLY DID CONVERT, AND IT WAS CAPABLE OF TOURING AT NINETY WITH THIRTY MILES AN HOUR IN RESERVE.'



Below *Devil May Care*, to be published on May 28, 2008, is written by acclaimed author Sebastian Faulks in the style of Ian Fleming. It reads uncannily like the work of Fleming himself.



## Agent of change *continued*

Thus, in the very first Bond book, *Casino Royale*, published in 1953, 007 drives a Bentley. Not just any Bentley but: 'One of the last of the 4½-litre Bentleys with the supercharger by Amherst Villiers, he had bought it almost new in 1933 and had kept it in careful storage through the war. It was still serviced every year and, in London, a former Bentley mechanic, who worked in a garage near Bond's Chelsea flat, tended it with jealous care. Bond drove it hard and well and with an almost sensual pleasure. It was a battleship-grey convertible coupé, which really did convert, and it was capable of touring at ninety with thirty miles an hour in reserve.'

The supercharged car was, of course, favoured by the dashing Sir Tim Birkin, who used to thrash his Bentleys in pursuit of glory and, like Birkin, Bond is not a man to molly coddle his machinery. He drives it hard, pushing it to the limit, damaging it in pursuit of Le Chiffre in *Casino Royale*, and finally writing it off while chasing Hugo Drax in the novel *Moonraker*. At the end of that book Bond takes delivery of a Mark VI but this is replaced by the modified Continental that is mentioned above and which Dirk van Braeckel's design team will be recreating in miniature to be set inside the book itself, the pages cut out to accommodate the model.

"Because of the connection in the books, with Mr Bond driving a Bentley, we were asked by Penguin if we would like to do some work on the way the special limited edition of the new novel would look and to have some design input as to how the aesthetics of the book would be created," explains van Braeckel.

"What struck me with the Bond story is that throughout the novels there has always been the connection to Bentley which unfortunately has never really surfaced in the films, so unless you are an absolute Bond fan, hardly anybody knows this. Now we were offered an opportunity to get that link a bit more in the open." The Bond of the books is, of course, a creation from an era before political correctness so it was rather fitting that it was one of Bentley's female designers, Kate Whatmore, who came

up with a treatment that, in van Braeckel's words, "inspired everybody as being the right direction".

At the time of writing only early renderings of the project were available and it was stressed that these were very much a work in progress; nevertheless they were impressive, managing to evoke a feel of the Cold War period, while the automotive tone was cleverly evoked by the use of typography and design cues that recalled service manuals of the era.

"As well as the time in which the story is set, the treatment for the design that Kate came up with captures in a subtle way the values that the Bentley brand stands for: the leatherwork and bright metal parts; even the layout and the typefaces find their inspiration from the older car handbooks together with some references to what confidential and personal documents looked like in those days."

All of which is very well, but what about the famous car, Bond's Bentley Continental? What does van Braeckel think of it? "In the 60s design-wise there was a hell of a lot going on, there were some really iconic designs that we still admire today and some that we don't," he says, adding of Bond's Continental with as much tact as he can muster, "Unfortunately it was not entirely beautiful. I would say it was different, especially in terms of the back end, it has the haunches but they turn more to fins at the back; while a cabriolet took away the elegant fastback profile. The car is a 1950s' car which had been changed and built especially to that specification and once you make it into a convertible, you interfere with the elegant lines... A car that is built to be a convertible can be beautiful, but a coupé adapted to be a convertible might not be."

Next time, Commander Bond, leave the gadgets to Q and the car design to Crewe **B**

Information on how to order the Bentley limited edition of 'Devil May Care' will be available from the beginning of May at [www.penguin007.com](http://www.penguin007.com)