

Designs on Bond

AS TRUE FLEMING AFICIONADOS KNOW, JAMES BOND WAS A BENTLEY DRIVER. NICK FOULKES FOLLOWS THE TRAIL TO A REMARKABLE NEW LIMITED EDITION >



Designs on Bond *continued*

Kate Whatmore really is a most remarkable young woman. This elfin 23 year old in skinny leggings and gamine cropped haircut is calmly explaining her contribution to what is arguably the biggest British publishing event of the year. She speaks with an assurance beyond her years.

We are sitting in the office of Bentley's chief designer Dirk Van Braeckel looking at the final dummies and mock-ups of the limited edition sets of Sebastian Faulks's Bond novel 'Devil May Care', publication of which is the high point of celebrations to mark the centenary of the birth of 007's creator Ian Fleming. Fleming was a master when it came to the judicious use of luxury brands to create an air of plutocratic verisimilitude in his espionage novels and as a student of the good life it was natural that he put his fictional creation in the driving seat of a number of different Bentleys over the course of some 20 novels, novellas and short stories.

Fleming was friendly with Amherst Villiers, the designer of the supercharger that powered Sir Henry 'Tim' Birkin's 'Blower' Bentleys, and the mixture of style and dash, élan and speed of the Bentley marque slotted perfectly into the life of Taittinger Blanc de Blancs, Charvet shirts, vicuna knitwear, Anderson & Sheppard suits, watches by Patek Philippe, Girard Perregaux, Rolex ... and of course saving the world from imminent destruction...into which he immersed his hero.

'Devil May Care' is a meticulous piece of literary reconstruction, the book that Fleming himself would have written' and as such it sees Bond back where Fleming always had him: behind the wheel of a Bentley. I was chatting this over with Bentley marketing's Stuart McCullough the other day and he was characteristically generous to another British marque that has also been associated with Britain's longest serving intelligence officer: "We would never pay to have Bond drive a Bentley on the screen. It is enough for us to know that Ian Fleming who created the Bond legend in the first place, was a Bentley Boy at heart and given Bond and Fleming's taste for the best things in life, it is great to number James Bond as one of our many prominent customers past and present. What fascinates me is that on re-reading the books just how many of the brands and luxury items that Fleming mentioned 50 years ago are still around today: it really goes to show that quality endures."

All of which places considerable responsibility on the svelte shoulders of Ms Whatmore. Her brief was to design a limited edition book that would capture the spirit of Bond and the essence of Bentley while slipping seamlessly into the world of luxury understood by the fortunate few Bentley drivers and Bond aficionados who will be lucky enough to buy one of the 300 books being produced. To put it crudely this is a book that will be judged as much by its cover as its contents.

But then Kate Whatmore knows a thing or two about Bentley. She came here on a work placement aged 15. For her it was a Damascene moment. After a month at the Crewe works including a fortnight shadowing the designers working under the recently arrived Dirk Van Braeckel, she knew the path she wanted her life to take and she spent the following six years of her life making what was in effect an extended job application. "Bentley was what inspired me and gave me the drive to get to the top of my game, everything I have done has been affected by my experience at Bentley." Her studies culminated in a degree in automotive design and a final show that included the exterior design of a car for a major British luxury goods house. Of the hundreds of CVs that roll across van Braeckel's desk, hers certainly stood out. "It is not unusual to have women working in interior design and detailing, but to have a female presence in exterior is an exception so I was keen to get a female designer in exterior design" says Van Braeckel, "I remembered her coming in as youngster, I had kept an eye on her progress afterwards and when I saw her degree show work, I decided that we had to get her in."

What distinguishes Whatmore's work is a sense of context and history, in her degree show for example she featured embossed surface detailing inspired by the body panels of old Mulliner vehicles. "Kate prepares her work very well," explains van Braeckel approvingly "she researches thoroughly and makes her design decisions based on that rather than the doodles that many designers begin with." And when this project was put out to informal 'tender' within the design department, Whatmore's thorough approach and grasp of all aspects of the task made Van Braeckel's decision easy. "Everyone was so impressed with Kate's proposals."

"I studied the graphics of the early Bond books [published by Jonathan Cape] and one of things I liked was the way that icons

Previous page and left

The special edition, with its secret pewter Bentley, will be limited to just 300 copies worldwide.

Right Bentley's Director of Design, Dirk van Braeckel, with Kate Whatmore.

Far right The UK (left) and US (right) hardcover editions lack the tactile pleasure of the limited edition, but it's still a cracking tale.



THE SENSE OF SURPRISE AND DELIGHT AT FINDING SUCH AN OBJECT HIDDEN INSIDE THE BOOK ALSO HAS THE ADVANTAGE OF HEIGHTENING THE SENSE OF BOND-LIKE SECRECY: VERY Q DEPARTMENT.

conveying the titles were embossed on the hard covers" says Whatmore, explaining how the discreet but assured winged B appeared on a front cover that is otherwise characterised by the distinctive diamond stitching familiar to anyone who has ever appreciated the comfort (and support through tight corners) of a Bentley's diamond quilted seats. The split stitching at the edges of the cover will also be familiar to anyone who have ever spent time inside the leather walnut trimmed cocoon that is the cockpit of a thoroughbred Bentley.

Wanting to add to the design language of Fleming's first editions, Whatmore then looked through old service manuals and found inspiration in a collection of service data for the Silver Cloud and S Series, which had a compelling 'Z' graphic on its cover. This she then used as a device to frame the beginning of each chapter. Another period touch she came across was red edging to the pages, the sort of red you find in coach lines and on seat piping, not the easiest thing to achieve but, in her opinion worth the effort.

However she was far from done. "I wanted to include an element of surprise that would be unique to the person who buys it." At first she wanted to include a hidden cigar pocket inside the book, but eventually this was replaced by a hand made, polished pewter scale model of Bond's Bentley. The sense of surprise and delight at finding such an

object hidden inside the book also has the advantage of heightening the sense of Bond-like secrecy: very Q Department.

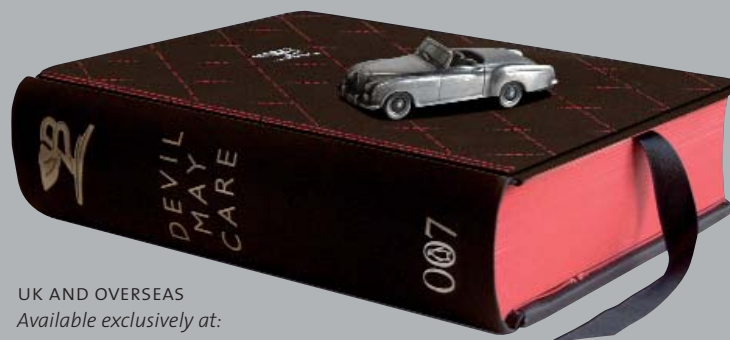
However the model car is not the blunt ended crash repair that Bond himself drove, but a rather more harmonious interpretation. I accuse van Braeckel of tampering with Fleming's original design and he holds up his hands in a mea culpa sort of way. "I couldn't allow it to look as it was described in the book," he says with a sheepish grin, "the back simply did not do justice to the beautiful front." And I have to say that it is difficult to disagree with him when he produces a period photograph of a similar car with an extraordinary angular rear that does not sit at all well with the Mulliner original. I am not saying that Fleming would agree but I am sure he would understand where van Braeckel was coming from.

But there is something else that bothers Whatmore; and it is not the veracity of the model. Early renderings and mood boards show a book with a leather strap wound around it, all meticulously documented with images of original manuals and documents featuring this sort of closure. "I do wish we had been able to put the leather strap on," she says wistfully. If you agree with her and if you find yourself lucky to get hold of one of these marvellous books I am sure that the leather strap will be available as a Mulliner option.

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Just 300 copies of the special edition James Bond novel, Devil May Care (for purchase from the 28th May 2008) are available now.



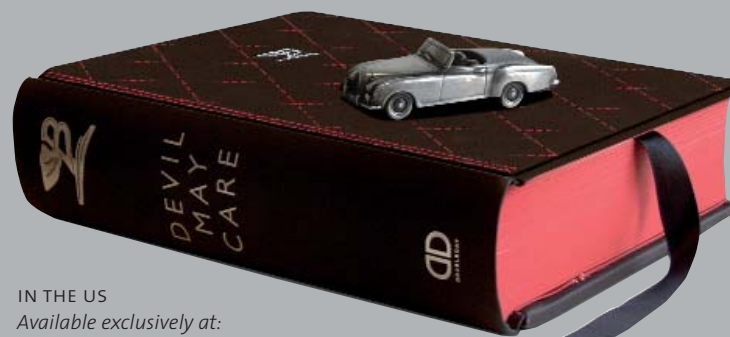
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