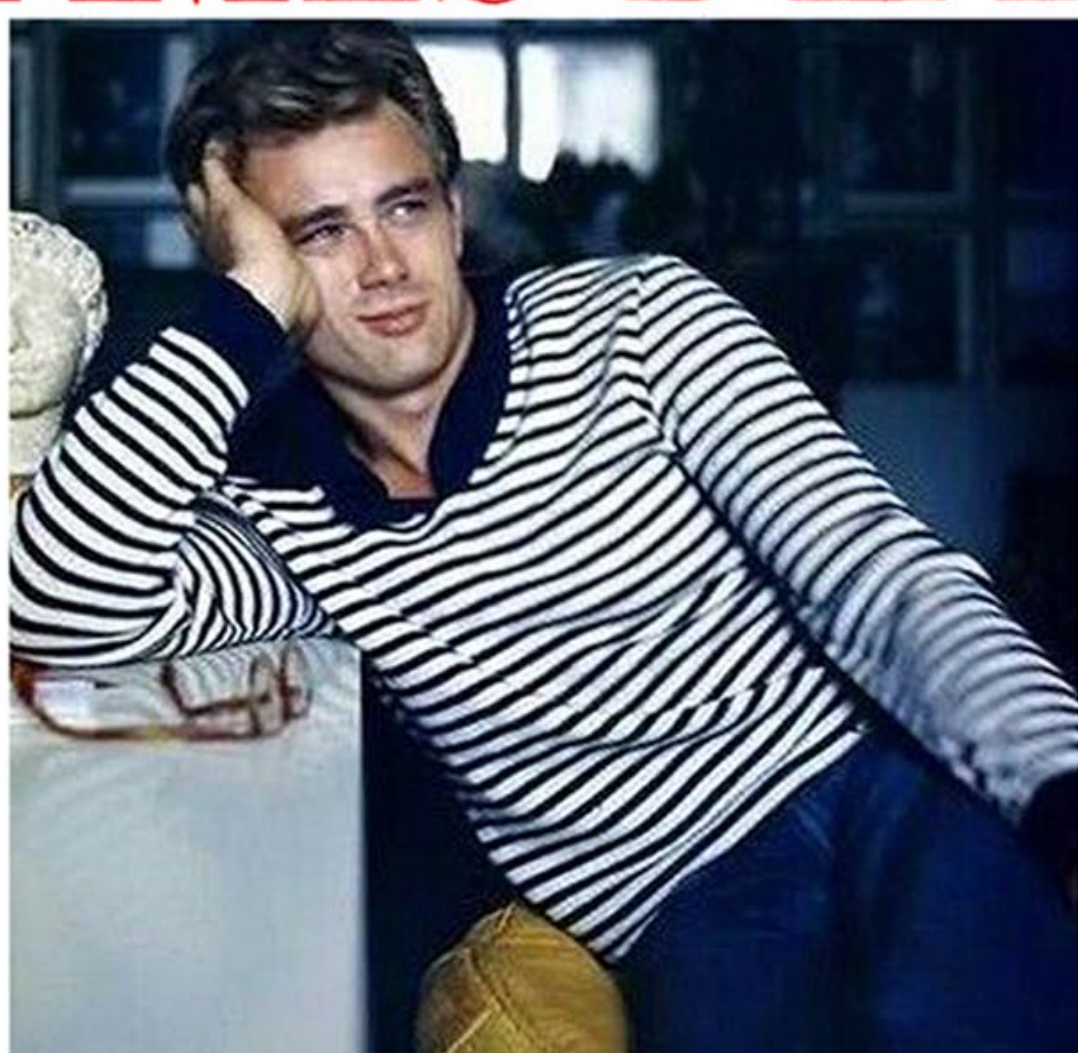


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The Late JAMES DEAN



Here is a warm, close-up glimpse
of a star who shone briefly—
but brilliantly—on the
theatrical horizon

Photographs and Text by SANFORD H. ROTH

ON SEPTEMBER 30th, James Dean, a brilliant, moody, twenty-four-year-old actor, was killed in a collision on a California turnpike. He was on his way to take part in the weekend road races at Salinas, driving his new Porsche Spyder sports car. I had gone along, a lap or two behind in Jimmy's station wagon, to complete a photographic essay about him which I'd been working on for a couple of months. The highway patrol came quickly, and I was there when they took Jimmy out of the car.

His death was front-page news. But the stories were something more than a tribute to a newcomer whose career stopped at the edge of greatness. They were also testimony to the pressures that today keep youngsters like Jimmy in constant warfare with the *status quo*.

Dean was what Hollywood loosely labels a nonconformist, an individualist of the Brando stripe. He wasn't easy to know. But the weeks I spent trying to record the subtleties of his personality convinced me that, while he was intense and shy (he sometimes sat for hours in his car outside a friend's house waiting for other visitors to leave), he was at the same time dedicated to his career. He had played several notable TV roles; he won Broadway's coveted Donaldson and Perry awards for his part in *The Immoralist* in 1954; and as the tortured twin son in the film *East of Eden*, he stirred up the sort of critical speculation that comes with the emergence of a star. Since then he played in Warner's *Rebel Without a Cause*, and had just finished portraying Jett Rink, the fast-living oil tycoon in Edna Ferber's *Giant*, a part some movie people think may bring Dean the first posthumous Academy Award.

Jimmy's professional life was coming sharply into focus. Off stage he was still an enigma—or a trial—to more prosaic folk. But a photographer is sometimes allowed a certain insight. Dean has been described as a meteor, a great Dane puppy, a crazy-mixed-up kid, a poet. He was all of these things and—at the same time—none of them. His laugh was a half-silent chuckle, as though he were embarrassed by exuberance. Yet his enthusiasms were huge: they ran through the whole spectrum of hu-

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Dean respected skill. He tried to excel at whatever he did. Usually he succeeded.



Jimmy rehearsed the banquet scene from Giant carefully with director George Stevens. He portrayed a 50-year-old millionaire delivering a drunken monologue to an empty room. It was a tough scene and Jimmy was magnificent. He had every worker on the set practically in tears

man interests from motorcycles to classical music, to jazz, to bullfighting (he practiced with a cape in his home), to cats. He had the austere good sense of an Indiana Quaker (which he was), and the defense mechanism of a turtle. In his case, the shell was his own private world: the music of Bartok and Schönberg, the polished steel innards of his new racing car, the writers he'd recently discovered—Jean Genêt, Curzio Malaparte and Gerald Heard. He had no time for reporters. But at least one, columnist Hedda Hopper, really loved Jimmy, and says, "He was like quicksilver. He had a sure instinct for drama. Yet, what I remember most is the little-boy quality shining from behind those thick glasses of his."

The project of the moment absorbed Dean completely. And he held skill in high esteem. I was talking to him one day about a sculptor I know in Italy—one of the great ones—about his way of working and his philosophy of life. This prompted Jimmy to tell me he, too, was a sculptor, of a very minor grade. He'd had no formal study, but worked with clay, using old toothbrush handles and spoons for tools. He wanted professional advice and criticism, and I suggested he see Pegot Waring, a friend of mine and a fine sculptor. She took him on as a student and was astonished at the ease and agility with which he worked.

His work with Pegot gave Jimmy's confidence the sort of boost he needed. "Acting is just interpretation," he said. "I want to create for myself." After making three films during one year, without respite, he also needed time for himself. My wife and I were planning to go to Europe next spring. Jimmy, who had never been there, was coming with us. He wanted to walk down the Boulevard Montparnasse in Paris, to study sculpture there, to buy crazy sweaters in Capri and to meet Cocteau and Miro. He knew the world was round, but he never stopped trying to prove it to himself.

Meanwhile, M-G-M hoped to get him for the Rocky Graziano story. It was to roll in January and be completed in March. But on the road to Salinas, Dean's destiny caught up with him. And he will never make the film Somebody Up There Likes Me.

THE END



Jimmy shot this picture of me on the Giant set. He loved photography, and he was good at it. When I had my camera on him, he'd call it "that sneaky eye"

This was the last picture taken of Jimmy alive. I had snapped it en route to the Salinas races, just about one hour before the tragic accident

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