Beat: Automobiles

James Bond;s Lotus Esprit submarine car sold for $863,000

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USPA News - The Lotus Esprit "submarine car," used by legendary British secret agent James Bond in the 1977 movie "The Spy Who Loved Me," was sold Monday for 550,000 pounds ($863,500) at an auction in London. It was at least 110,000 pounds ($172,700) less than expected.

The white Lotus is the only fully functioning car that was specifically designed and built for the famous underwater sequence in the 1977 film, which stars Roger Moore as 007. It is a car favorite among Bond fans and was featured in a long chase sequence during which it converted into a `wet submarine.` The vehicle had been expected to sell for between 650,000 and 950,000 pounds (between 1 and 1.5 million dollars) during Monday`s auction, which also ran live on the Internet. Bidding started at 100,000 pounds ($157,000), the same amount it cost to create the car in the 70s, but the vehicle sold for only 550,000 pounds ($863,500). "We have a great track record in selling incredible and iconic movie cars, and this particular Lotus is certainly up there among the most famous cars of all time," Max Girardo, Managing Director for RM Auctions in Europe, said in June. "Over the years, millions of moviegoers have stared in awe as the Lotus transformed itself into a submarine, and now, perhaps one of them will have an opportunity to own it." Known as `Wet Nellie` on the set, the vehicle - which has no wheels and no car interior - was developed from one of six Esprit body shells used in the making of the film. As the only car to be built into a fully operational, self-propelled `submarine,` by Florida-based Perry Oceanographic, it is the vehicle which claimed the most screen time in the film. The driver of the car was Don Griffin, a retired U.S. Navy SEAL and test pilot for Perry, who operated the vehicle utilizing its motorized propellers while maneuvering with levered steering mechanisms. Separate car parts were used for close-up shots in which the vehicle`s wheels turn into wing-like fins. After filming of the underwater scenes ended, which took place in the Bahamas, the vehicle was shipped to Long Island in New York where it was kept in an unassuming storage unit on a ten year rental, paid in advance. But the storage company was unable to locate the locker`s owner when the lease ran out, and put it up for public auction in 1989 while no one knew what was inside. The winning bid, less than $100, came from a local couple who were surprised to find the iconic 007 car when they removed the blankets. After experts confirmed the vehicle was authentic, the Lotus was occasionally shown at car shows, including a stint at the Petersen Automotive Museum, but mostly kept in private.

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