New Revelations Inside the Mystery of James Bond's Stolen 1963 Aston Martin DB5: A Crime and a Car More Elusive Than James Bond Himself

Some automobiles become admired—a few become collectible. And then there is the famous white birch Aston Martin DB5, with chassis no. DP/216/1, born in July 1963. This polished silver grand tourer, suited with black Connolly leather, did not merely appear in the James Bond films — it practically swaggered onto the screen, adjusted its cufflinks, and introduced itself before anyone else had a chance. Among movie cars, this DB5 occupies rare territory. It is not simply recognizable; it is legendary.

Elegant yet dangerous, refined yet absurdly well-armed, it helped define James Bond's visual identity in *Goldfinger* (1964) and *Thunderball* (1965). And in one of the strangest turns in automotive history, the most famous Bond car of them all later disappeared in real life. The car and the crime have remained as elusive as James Bond himself.

It's theft, likely to have occurred in the wee hours of the morning on a rainy June 19, 1997, transformed an already celebrated vehicle into the centerpiece of a mystery that has fascinated film buffs, car

collectors, historians, and conspiracy-minded enthusiasts for decades. Where did it go? Who took it? Was it hidden away in a secret private collection, shipped overseas through criminal channels, or quietly dismantled by someone who did not realize they were handling one of cinema's crown jewels? No confirmed answer has ever emerged. Instead, the stolen DB5 has taken on a second life — not only as a film icon but also as one of the great missing artifacts of popular culture, with an estimated current value of over $25,000,000. This comes as no surprise, as a 2025 McKinsey report indicates that the global value of collectible cars has reached $929 billion.

Long before it acquired machine guns and a license to thrill, the Aston Martin DB5, a prototype, known as the "effects car," was already a remarkable automobile. Introduced in 1963, the DB5, priced at 4,175.7 British pounds, was developed as a more refined successor to the DB4, built by Aston Martin and styled by the celebrated Italian coachbuilder, Carrozzeria Touring, and named after Sir David Brown ("DB"), who at the time owned the company. It was a car designed to embody both speed and grace. If a Savile Row suit could somehow reach 145 miles per hour, it would probably look a lot like a DB5.

Under the bonnet sat an all-aluminum, 4.0-liter inline-six engine, an upgrade from the DB4's powerplant, producing performance that was genuinely impressive for its era. With 282 horsepower, contemporary figures put its top speed at roughly 145 mph, while 0 to

60 mph could be achieved in around 8 seconds. These numbers may not intimidate modern supercars, but in the early 1960s, they placed the DB5 firmly in the realm of serious grand-touring machinery.

Yet statistics alone do not explain the DB5's appeal. The car was also visually exquisite. As evidenced in the sequence of the winding mountain roads of the Furka Pass, Switzerland, in *Goldfinger*, the DB5 featured smooth, flowing lines, a purposeful grille, tasteful chrome, and an interior lined with leather and wood that suggested its owner probably drank martinis—shaken not stirred—not because they were trendy, but because the glassware matched the dashboard. It was a car for affluent buyers, yes, but also one with an unusually cinematic quality. Even standing still, it looked as if it might know something you did not.

The DB5 first appeared in a January 9, 1964, episode of *The Saint* titled "The Noble Sportsman," where painted dubonnet red, Roger Moore, a future James Bond, drove it.

That cinematic quality found its perfect home when the DB5 was chosen for *Goldfinger*, the third James Bond film and one of the most influential entries in the franchise. Starring Sean Connery as 007, *Goldfinger* helped establish the formula for many Bond films to follow: international intrigue, arch villains, glamorous settings, dry wit, beautiful women, and an abundance of gadgets that made ordinary consumer products seem tragically underachieving. The

DB5 was central to that formula. It was not merely transportation. It was an accomplice.

Thanks to John Stears, the "Dean of Special Effects," the producer's "Q," Bond's DB5 was outfitted with a range of devices that remain among the most famous in movie history. This was not a mere prop. It included real Browning 30 MM machine guns hidden behind the front indicators, modified to shoot just blanks, a passenger ejector seat taken from a fighter jet, activated from the center console, a working telephone (not shown in the film), rotating license plates (British, French, and Swiss) for cross-border confusion, a homing device and remote radar tracker, oil slick dispenser, retractable tire slashers, a gun tray under the driver's seat, and a bullet-proof rear shield for those moments when diplomacy had clearly failed. The combination of cutting-edge automotive design and wildly imaginative yet lethal gadgetry was irresistible.

In real life, the DB5, with its added gadgets, was too heavy to perform well. Another vehicle with chassis number DB5/1486/R, the "road car," was used in road scenes. A third and fourth car were later used to promote Thunderball, one of which had the gadgetry installed. A fifth DB5, dubbed the "stunt car," was built by Aston Martin, which strangely denied its existence for decades. Litigation between Aston Martin and the producer of the Bond films was later brought and settled confidentially.

The car's appearance in *Goldfinger* did more than make it memorable; it made it mythic. The DB5 did not simply support Bond's image — it amplified it. Bond was cool, efficient, and a little dangerous. So was the car. In a franchise filled with memorable objects, from watches to weapons, the DB5 stood apart because it felt like a fully realized extension of the character himself.

The DB5 returned in *Thunderball* (1965), where its association with Bond deepened further. By then, the DB5 was no longer just a handsome British sports car. It was *the* Bond car, the benchmark by which all future 007 vehicles would be judged. Plenty of later Bond machines were faster, more exotic, or more technologically implausible, but few carried the same blend of glamour, menace, and dry theatricality. The DB5 set the standard.

The impact of those appearances was enormous. The DB5 became one of the most famous automobiles in the world, transcending both the automotive and film industries. Despite initially balking at being associated with an agent of the British Secret Service with a license to kill, Aston Martin benefited enormously from the association, and the car itself became shorthand for a whole style of British sophistication. Between 1963 and 1965, 1,023 DB5's were sold by Aston Martin to the public. To this day, mention the DB5 and people do not merely think of a classic sports car. Instead, they think of 007, tuxedos, espionage, and the possibility that the center armrest may conceal something highly inadvisable.

Its fame only grew in the years that followed. Replicas were built. Toys were sold. Posters were printed. Collectors pursued Bond memorabilia with increasing seriousness. The DB5's image became so embedded in popular culture that it continued to reappear in later Bond films, including *Skyfall* (2012) and *Specter* (2015), where its presence served as both fan service and a reminder that true style never really goes out of fashion. All of which makes what happened with the car feel especially surreal.

The 1963 DB5, with chassis number DP/216/1 (DP-development project), was loaned to Eon Productions, the producer of the Bond films, by Aston Martin. At the time, Eon did not have the funds to buy the car, even at its then-current price. As a prototype, it was unique among the DB5s in retaining the side-marker lights of its DB4 predecessor. The color was later changed from dubonnet red to silver birch (or snow meadow) to match Ian Fleming's description of Bond's car in Dr. No.

In 1967, Eon Productions released the next iteration of the James Bond Franchise, *You Only Live Twice*, and opted for a Toyota 2000GT, a better fit for Japan, where the film was set.

After its film career, the original DB5 used in *Goldfinger* and *Thunderball* entered the collector world. But it was first stripped of all its gadgetry by Aston Martin. It was then sold in 1969 by Aston Martin to Gavin Keyzar, a London businessman, who reinstalled the gadgetry to enhance its authenticity and, no doubt, value. The DB5 thus remained a high-value, high-profile piece of movie history. This was

not an obscure prop gathering dust in a warehouse. It was the original DB5 prototype—modified for the Bond films, and its significance was understood by enthusiasts long before movie memorabilia became the booming market it is today.

In 1971, the DB5 was sold by Keyzar to Richard Losee, who lived in Utah, for $12,000. Interestingly, although the next James Bond, Roger Moore, never drove the DB5 in his official Bond films, he did make a cameo appearance behind the wheel of DP/216/1 in the 1981 comedy *The Cannonball Run*, where he played a character who humorously presented himself as James Bond. In that film, the silver birch DB5, loaned by then-owner Losee, was, of course, equipped with gadgetry. This appearance helped extend the DB5's screen legacy beyond the Bond franchise and reinforced its status as one of cinema's most recognizable automobiles.

In 1997, the world's most famous car was stolen from an airplane hangar at Boca Raton (Florida) Airport. Sometime between 4:00 p.m. on June 18 and 7:00 a.m. on June 19, presumably at night. It was reported that thieves cut through a chain-link fence, disabled the alarm, sliced through flexible molding on the hangar door, and sawed through a steel padlock to gain access to the DB5. Modern lore holds that the thieves either flew the car out of the airport on a Lockheed C-130 Hercules (the military cargo plane theory) or loaded it onto a flatbed truck (the carted-away-by-flatbed-truck theory) and drove it

out the exit. Aside from a fuel service operator, the airport had a single night watchman who, at the time, was either on rounds or asleep, and who purportedly noticed nothing unusual.

The airport had no control tower, and the landing lights were activated via radio signals from approaching aircraft. Pilots could land and take off as they saw fit, and the airspace was uncontrolled. That single event elevated the DB5 from treasured collectible to an international mystery.

At the time of the theft, the car was owned by Anthony V. Pugliese III, a Boca Raton real estate developer, memorabilia collector, and movie producer, who had purchased it at a Sotheby's auction for $250,000, with a $25,000 premium from Losee. Before the theft, Pugliese had regularly increased the DB5's insurance coverage, claiming it was rapidly becoming more valuable. At the time of the theft, the DB5 was insured by Chubb for $4.2 million, more than 16 times its purchase price. Pugliese's insurance claim was paid because there was no evidence of his involvement in the theft. By all accounts, the DB5 was worth a mere fraction of the insurance proceeds at the time.

There was litigation over the proceeds from the insurance. company. Pugliese had purportedly promised his then son-in-law, Robert Luongo, at least 10% of the sales proceeds from the DB5, if and when he sold it. In return, his son-in-law spent considerable time promoting the DB5 at events across the country. When the DB5 was

stolen, Pugliese allegedly reneged on the promise, and after a trial, a Palm Beach County jury awarded Luongo $1,100,000.

Pugliese, an avid collector of famous memorabilia, reportedly hoped to use the DB5 in a Bond-style movie. The car's location in the hangar at Boca Raton Airport was likely well known, as hangar parties were very popular in the community at the time. Just three months before the theft, Pugliese's brother-in-law had shown the DB5 at the Henry Ford Museum, an event that certainly brought this iconic car into the spotlight. Just a few days before it was stolen, the DB5 was exhibited at a flea market in Delray Beach, where an attempted theft of the car had occurred.

A stolen car story is not normally international news. But this was no ordinary stolen car. This was, quite arguably, the most famous missing movie vehicle in the world. The theft generated significant media attention, not just because of the car's monetary value, but because of its cultural weight. It was part automotive masterpiece, part cinematic relic, part modern myth. There is currently a $100,000 reward for information leading to the recovery of this iconic car.

The details surrounding the theft have long contributed to the intrigue. How does a car this recognizable vanish? It is not exactly the sort of object one can casually park behind a supermarket and hope no one notices. One imagines it is difficult to disguise a Bond car, even without the rotating license plates.

Following the theft, law enforcement agencies, including the FBI, became involved in efforts to locate the vehicle. Numerous leads emerged over the years, and alleged sightings were reported from several parts of the world. The car has been "found" more than two dozen times. Yet despite the car's fame and distinctive identity, none of those investigations resulted in its recovery.

That failure is part of what has kept the story alive. If the car had been found quickly, it would be an interesting footnote in the history of movie memorabilia. Because it remains missing, it has become something larger: a long-running mystery with just enough facts to be credible and just enough uncertainty to invite endless speculation.

The most widely accepted theory is that the DB5 was stolen for a particular buyer rather than by an opportunistic thief. In this scenario, the car was quickly moved to a secure location and concealed within a private collection, possibly in another country, where it remains out of public view. It is a plausible explanation because a car of this fame would be nearly impossible to sell openly. If someone wanted it, they would need wealth, discretion, and an unusual willingness to own perhaps the least subtle secret in automotive history.

Another common theory suggests the DB5 was moved out of the United States soon after the theft. Luxury vehicles have long been trafficked across borders, and the car's value would have made it attractive to organized criminal groups. Once overseas and a buyer

was found, it could have disappeared into a region where private ownership and secrecy made recovery especially difficult.

Some believe the DB5 may simply be sitting untouched in storage. This theory imagines the car concealed under a cover in a warehouse, garage, or shipping container, preserved rather than used. Strangely, this is one of the more romantic possibilities: the car not destroyed, not altered beyond recognition, but merely waiting for its dramatic third act.

The least glamorous theory is that the DB5 may have been modified, partially dismantled, or stripped of identifying details to reduce the risk of detection. Given the car's fame, however, this would have been a difficult and sacrilegious undertaking. Dismantling the Bond DB5 would be rather like breaking up the Mona Lisa to make souvenir bookmarks.

Reports and rumors have placed the DB5 in several possible locations over the years:

- Florida, shortly after the theft, where some believed it had remained nearby before being moved.
- The United Kingdom, where rumors claimed it had surfaced at private events or among discreet collectors.
- A Home Depot parking lot in Seekonk, Massachusetts.
- Elk Grove Village, Illinois, near O'Hare airport.
- The Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina.

- Eastern Europe, particularly in the early 2000s, amid suggestions that it may have traveled through smuggling routes used for luxury vehicles.
- The Middle East (Bahrain and Kuwait), where demand for rare and prestigious automobiles has fuelled speculation that the car was acquired by a wealthy buyer with the intent to keep it out of public view.

Other possibilities have included hidden warehouses, private restoration workshops, clandestine auctions, and underground collector networks. In the age of internet forums, blurry photographs and bold declarations have only added more noise to the case. Unfortunately, none of these has led to anything definitive. In every case, these sightings turn out to involve replicas, tributes, restored DB5s with no criminal past, or wishful thinking disguised as investigative instinct. This makes sense as there are over a thousand DB5's of that era in the hands of collectors around the world.

Because the car has never been recovered, several theories about its fate continue to dominate discussion. In late 2021, Christopher A. Marinello of Art Recovery International (ARI) reported that he had located the DB5. Turns out, based on publicly available information, all he had were sources who claimed to know the car's whereabouts. They knew the chassis number and were aware of a purportedly "secret" location on the DB5 where an identification

number was located. Later, in 2025, Marinello claimed that the DB5 was in the hands of a collector in the Middle East "who has maybe 4000 vehicles…." This made big news, but the information is of questionable value.

First, there are no "secret" locations for the chassis or other identification numbers. Of course, anyone who owns a 1963 DB5 would know the location of all such markings. It is well known, or at least easily discoverable, that a chassis number is located on a plate attached to its offside wing valance, with an engine number on the nearside front of the cylinder block, with a traceable number on the top of its gearbox, and a back axle number stamped on the pinion nose.

Second, the DB5's chassis number, DP/216/1, is all over the internet. Thus, virtually anyone could pose as someone who knew the iconic DB5's whereabouts.

Third, there are fewer than a handful of collectors in the world with an inventory of 4,000 collector cars, including one in the Middle East. Those collectors are well-known. The last thing ARI would do is disclose such an obvious clue about the DB5's location. Indeed, ARI stands to gain millions of dollars from the insurance carrier if it recovers the missing car.

Fourth, ARI claims that its tried-and-true strategy is to privately call out the individual and give them a chance to negotiate a return of the stolen property. When that fails, ARI will publicly call out the

perpetrator. In over four years, ARI has done nothing of the sort.

The so-called straw that breaks the camel's back, for me, is this: ARI claims that it believes that the current proprietor of the DB5 purchased the car in good faith. I am sorry, but nothing could be further from the truth. How could anyone acquire a 1963 Aston Martin DB5, chassis number DP/216/1, painted white birch, with black Connelly leather, equipped with gadgets such as machine guns and an ejector seat, and not know, or at least suspect, that it is the iconic 1963 Aston Martin DB5 driven by Sean Connery in *Goldfinger* and *Thunderball*? If that were not enough, the price tag, which, no doubt, included a multimillion-dollar premium over the fair market value for a similar 1963 DB5, would certainly have made the car's provenance beyond question.

Now, years after ARI's purported revelations, the location of the DB5 remains as elusive as ever.

Based upon my research, this is what happened: Contrary to many news reports, the Boca Raton airport was not "heavily secured." Not even close. In fact, only a sagging seven-foot-tall fence separated the road from hangar # 6, where the DB5 was stored. There were prior reports of people climbing over the fence undetected and stealing valuable items. The DB5's location and provenance were well known at the time, thanks to the marketing of the car by Pugliese and Luongo.

There was no need to cut the fence, as reported. In fact, all one needed to drive a vehicle into the gated area was an

unsophisticated, readily available key card. It was also reported that, at the time, all that was needed was a piece of metal to breach the entrance gate, a defect known to anyone who used the facility. The likely covered transport truck drove into the hangar area at night, especially since the night watchman was either asleep or on his rounds, which did not include the area where the DB5 was stored. It rained heavily that night, which may have obstructed the night watchman's vision and hearing.

The security measures at the hangar were dismal at best. There were no surveillance cameras on the premises. The alarm system was not even connected to a monitoring service. Instead, it rang at Pugliese's office. The door was equipped with a simple "padlock," the kind you might lock up a modern bicycle. The thieves cut the latch to which the padlock was affixed with a simple hacksaw.

As there was no key in the car, the thieves, no doubt local thugs (inside job or not), entered the hangar and loaded the car on the truck. After looking through three empty rifle cases located in the loft of the hangar, they whisked the car out of the automatic, front exit, and made their way down Highway 95 to their drop-off point. The thieves left the hangar's sliding doors open seven feet, indicative of a large transport truck. From there, the icon could have gone anywhere in the world, likely in a shipping container. Even though the police promptly notified U.S. Customs of the theft, the chassis number could easily have been altered to

avoid detection.

While numerous articles refer to tire tracks in the hangar, supposedly because the car was dragged on two wheels, the Boca Raton police report makes no mention of them. In any event, the "reported" tire marks were short, strongly suggesting the DB5 was towed away. As there were no keys in the car, the typical theft of such a car at the time would have involved hot-wiring the car and driving it away. That was not an option with this unique vehicle. Indeed, the DB5 has right-hand steering, a European-style license plate, and, of course, all the gadgets and accessories seen in the movies. Even in the early hours of the morning, the sight of such a car traveling down the highway would be memorable and, perhaps, suspicious.

Moreover, the theory that the DB5 was airlifted from Boca Raton Airport out of the country on a Lockheed C-130 Hercules military cargo plane is, frankly, preposterous. It is more likely that Auric Goldfinger himself stole the DB5 and hid it inside a large, solid-gold ingot.

These planes are almost 100 feet long, with a wingspan of 132 feet, and are almost 39 feet tall. Because 4 turboprop engines power it, it generates significant noise on take-off and landing, exceeding 100 decibels. Even the loading process on such a large plane is noisy with a high-powered winch at work. This would likely have caught the attention of the night watchman or the fuel worker on site. Both gentlemen confirmed that there were no flights during that period. In any

event, with such a large plane landing at such a small airport, there would certainly have been a witness to the event.

As set forth in the police report, just a few days before its theft, the DB5 had been stored in Delray Beach, Florida. The storage container it was kept in was broken open, but the car had already been moved to the hangar at Boca Raton airport. Someone was after the iconic vehicle.

Of course, how the crime was committed is not necessarily going to shed any light on where the DB5 is today, itself the $25,000,000 question. It is highly likely, however, that once it reached its destination, the DB5 ended up in the hands of a wealthy collector in return for a large sum. Under the circumstances, this was easy money, perhaps, too easy.

Given that there has never been a confirmed sighting of this iconic car, it is most certainly being well-safeguarded and out of sight. That collector has coveted the icon for years and has done a stellar job of keeping the DB5 for his eyes only. There is very little likelihood that it was chopped up, buried, or dropped into the ocean, as some believe.

The continued fascination with the missing DB5 speaks volumes about the power of objects in popular culture. Most props are important because of the scenes in which they appear. The DB5 became something more. It developed a personality. It became inseparable from the mythology of Bond and, by extension, from a wider idea of cinematic cool.

The car also occupies a special place in automotive history. Even without Bond, the DB5 would be remembered as one of Aston Martin's finest road cars — a machine that combined beauty, performance, and craftsmanship in a way that made it instantly timeless. Bond did not create the DB5's elegance; he borrowed it, added a few machine guns, and took the credit.

Its disappearance has only strengthened that aura. Missing objects tend to gather myth the way old leather gathers polish. Every year the car remains lost, it becomes a little less like a stolen vehicle and a little more like a legend. Later Bond films, merchandising, collector culture, and the simple appeal of an unresolved story have reinforced that process.

Beyond the glamour, the DB5 case also reveals the vulnerabilities of the high-end collectibles market. Rare cars, especially those linked to famous films or historic events, can command extraordinary prices. With that value comes risk. Security, provenance, documentation, and transportation all become critical concerns.

Collectors and dealers have since become more attentive to such dangers. Insurance, private security, monitored storage, and rigorous ownership records are now more common in the handling of high-profile memorabilia. In that sense, the missing DB5 changed not only Bond lore but also the practical world of collectible protection. Today, the stolen Aston Martin DB5 remains one of the great mysteries in

both film history and the collector-car world. It stands at the intersection of cinema, craftsmanship, celebrity, crime, and obsession. That combination is difficult to resist.

There is a delicious irony in the fact that the world's most famous spy car remains so elusive. For decades, investigators, enthusiasts, journalists, and dreamers have tried to solve the mystery. Yet the DB5 has avoided discovery with a level of professionalism that would probably earn Q's approval.

Perhaps one day it will emerge from a hidden garage, a sealed shipping container, or a discreet private estate, blinking into the light like a star returning for one final encore. Until then, its absence remains part of its legend.

After all, plenty of cars have had famous owners. Very few have gone on to stage their own disappearance.

And that, one might say, is very Bond indeed.

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