



Famous French People

Alain Delon©

by Robert Shepherd

Vocabulary & pronunciation study by Laurent Dufour©

Words are explained alongside the text

Stressed syllables are underlined and in bold*

Hello, you're listening to EnglishWaves and this is Robert Shepherd with Famous French.

This week we **shine** the spotlight on one of French cinema's most **recognisable icons**. He's an **actor** whose **career** has **spanned** more than half a **century**. Our subject is Alain Delon.

He was born Alain Fabien Maurice Marcel Delon in Sceaux, Hauts-de-Seine on 8th November 1935.

Delon's father managed the local cinema and his mother worked for a **pharmacy**. However, his parents divorced when he was just four-years-old, and he was placed in a **foster** family. His foster father worked in the prison next door as a **warder**.

Delon was described as a **rebellious** and unhappy child and was **expelled** from school on **numerous** occasions. Unable to **settle** with his foster family, Delon later went to live with his **biological** mother after she re-married. He then served an **apprenticeship** as a butcher, before **enrolling** in the French **marines** when he turned 17.

During France's war with Indochina, Delon was posted to **Saigon**, where he saw active **service**. Delon later said that the whole **experience** had been very **beneficial** to him, because it **installed discipline** and built his **character**.

Delon returned home to France in 1956 and found work as a porter and waiter in Paris. During that **period** he **befriended** the **director** Yves Allégret, who was later **responsible** for handing Delon his first acting role - a

to shine (shone-shone) (vb.) to point (a light) in a particular direction

to span (vb.) to exist or continue for a particular length of time

foster (adj.) adoptive

warder (n.) prison guard

to expel (vb.) to force someone to leave a school, country, etc.

to settle (vb.) to become calm, stable

director (n.) film maker

walk-on part in the 1957 motion picture *Quand la femme s'en mêle*. Delon proved an instant **hit**, so Allégret's brother Marc **cast** Delon in the **comedy** thriller *Sois belle et tais-toi*, alongside a **promising** young actor called Jean-Paul Belmondo, whose **popularity** would **rival** Delon's for years.

Delon's major **breakthrough** came a year later in the **historical** romance *Christine*, appearing **opposite** the well-known Austrian Romy Schneider. Delon and Schneider fell in love while making the film and they soon got **engaged**.

By this point, Delon was a **household** name and his **performances** in two 1960 films: *Plein Soleil* and the **Italian** hit *Rocco and his Brothers* only **cemented** his status as one of France's finest actors.

However, his **personal** life was even more **dramatic** than the productions he appeared in. Delon's five-year engagement to Schneider ended when he **fell for** the young actress Nathalie Canovas. They married in 1964 and had a son together called **Anthony**. The couple divorced in 1968 when Delon started a 15-year affair with Mireille Darc. Just one year later he appeared with Schneider for a second time in the **classic** thriller *La Piscine*.

Although Delon's career was in the **ascendancy**, his popularity began to **suffer** in the mid-1970s. He received a lot of **negative** press for his **alleged** association with **criminal** gangs. It was even **claimed** he was **complicit** in the murder of his own **bodyguard**.

Delon still appeared in big films such as Michael Winner's *Scorpio* - in which he played opposite Burt **Lancaster** - but he had one eye on **alternative avenues** of **income**.

He **created** his own production **company** and cast himself in the films it **produced**. Then in 1978, he formed Alain Delon Diffusion - a company which marketed everything from **perfumes** and leather goods to fine wines and **spectacles**. Delon also **got involved in** horse racing and **organized** boxing matches.

Not only was Delon a **successful businessman**, it was often said he was a **ruthless** one - **illustrated** by the fact

walk-on part (n.) acting role with no spoken lines

hit (n.) person that is very successful

to cast (cast-cast) (vb.) to assign a role to (an actor)

breakthrough (n.) first important success

engaged (adj.) to be married

household (adj.) widely familiar

to cement (vb.) to ensure that something is solid and long-lasting

dramatic (adj.) full of action and excitement

to fall for (fell-fallen) (vb.) to be attracted

alleged (adj.) stated without proof

to claim (vb.) to state as true

avenue (n.) method or way of doing something

spectacles (n.) eyeglasses

to get involved in (got-got) (exp.) to play a part in

ruthless (adj.) cruel and unfeeling

he **took** his own son Anthony **to court**, **accusing** him of **infringing** his own **brand**.

While Delon was making big money away from acting, he was never really far away from the big screen. In the 1980s he directed his own films such as *Pour la peau d'un flic* and *Le Battant*. Once again, he cast himself in the **lead role** both times.

In 1997 he appeared in Bernard-Henri Lévy's *Le Jour et la nuit* alongside the American Lauren **Bacall**, but the film **disappointed**. Then following another disappointment a year later, in the shape of *Une Chance sur deux*, Delon **announced** he was to give up acting.

Thankfully, it turned out just to be a long break and he made a **comeback** after the **millennium**. Delon took on a **cameo role** in the 2000 production *Les Acteurs* but his real comeback was in 2002 when he starred in the **popular** French series *Fabio Montale*.

Having been made **Chevalier** of the Légion d'honneur in 1991, Delon was **promoted** to **Officer** in 2005.

Now in his 80s, Delon is still working and is widely **regarded** as one of France's greatest ever actors and is still a successful businessman – a status that **belies** his rather humble beginnings.

Stay tuned to EnglishWaves.

to take (someone) to court (**took-taken**) (exp.) to take legal action against someone

to infringe (vb.) to do something that is against a law, an agreement, etc.

brand (n.) trademark

lead role (n.) central acting part

cameo role (n.) small but notable part, played especially by a well-known performer

to belie (vb.) to contradict

*** Tip !**

Syllable stress can help us to understand spoken words.

Let's take the words 'popular' and 'popularity' as an example. First count the syllables : 'pop.u.lar' has 3 syllables and 'pop.u.lar.i.ty' has 5 syllables.

Syllable stress is when you say one of the syllables slightly louder and with more emphasis.

So in this example we say : **popular** and **popularity** .