



Famous French People

Alain Delon©

by Robert Shepherd

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 walk-on part in the 1957 motion picture *Quand la femme s'enmêle*. 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 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 surdeux*, 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.