



# LIFE IN THE FAST LANE

Vibrant, diverse landscapes make South Africa a prime filming location, particularly for high-octane action movies involving fast cars as iconic as the films' stars. **Ally Wybrew** meets the female petrolheads supplying vehicles to speed across the country's set-jet gems. ➤

*Photography: Kent Andreassen*



**Backseat driver**  
Adriana du Toit on a pickup truck in one of the many garages she has in Joostenberg Vlake





**Driving mad**  
Clockwise from left:  
Sarah de Waal sits in a gold  
Cadillac belonging to the  
owner of an impressive  
classic car collection;  
Adriana Du Toit's garden  
and entertainment area is  
full of car parts repurposed  
into seating and decorations;  
De Waal's workshop; a  
classic BMW 328 Roadster

**"F**ind me three identical Bentley Continentals in two days and you've got the job." That was the challenge that executive producer Peter McAleese gave Adriana du Toit in 2007. He was filming Neil Marshall's *Doomsday*, starring Bob Hoskins, and although Du Toit was producing up to 13 car commercials per day, her dream was to break into Hollywood movies.

When she called back 48 hours later confirming she'd located his desired trio (in Ireland, Italy and the UK, for roughly £163,000 each) McAleese was impressed. Then he put her on a plane to Russia to source military tanks.

Since then, in her role as an action vehicle coordinator, Du Toit has provided 1990s Volkswagen Golfs for Clint Eastwood, Range Rover Discoverys for Viola Davis, Toyota Land Cruisers for Idris Elba and a Scania truck with a 12m container for Vin Diesel. She's worked with Netflix, Amazon, Apple and Universal and with countless A-listers but, for her, the vehicles she scours every corner of the globe to find are the true talent.

Du Toit's company, Ugly Ducklings, is one of a handful of female-owned, South African businesses — some other notable ones are Car Action and FilmAble — that wrangle Humvees, Jeeps and vintage vehicles for some of the biggest movie-makers on the planet. Based at her home in Joostenberg Vlakte, a town north of the vineyard-studded hills of Stellenbosch, Du Toit's 1,300sqft property includes

a smallholding and two warehouses — the latter filled with her collection of "well over 100" vehicles.

"We have the bushveld and beaches and street locations in Cape Town that could be almost any European country," says Du Toit, explaining why directors are drawn to there. The tax breaks and low production costs are also helpful from a bottom-line perspective.

The 200km-long Drakensberg mountain range is a popular action movie filming spot. The Great Escarpment was seen most recently hosting Tom Cruise's death-defying aerial stunts in *Mission Impossible: The Final Reckoning*, a blockbuster that grossed \$579m globally.

The creative industries contribute three per cent to South Africa's GDP, a figure no doubt bolstered by Netflix's hefty £165m investment between 2021 and 2024 (split between Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa). Its current hit is the live-action remake of the manga and anime *One Piece*, which broke viewing records on its release in 2023 and was shot primarily at Cape Town Studios.

Cape Town has proven a particular draw in recent decades, moonlighting as London (*Tomb Raider*), Seattle (*Chronicle*) and Islamabad (*Homeland*, season 4), but South Africa's second cities have appeal for specific genres. Johannesburg's CBD — particularly Ponte City Tower — is popular with sci-fi productions, featuring in *District 9*, *Resident Evil: The Final Chapter* and famously getting 'Hulk smashed' in *Avengers: Age of Ultron*.

To the west, the Western Cape's penguin-filled beaches, dramatic coastline and iconic Table Mountain are some of the most verdant in the country, sporting more species of wildflower than the entire UK. Clint Eastwood, a man with an impressive vintage car collection of his own, shot the Oscar-nominated *Invictus* against its impressive panoramas. "He's a real gentleman, who knows exactly what he wants," recalls Du Toit.

"If you're looking for tropical forests, Durban is the place to go," says Mary Ashford, owner of Car Action, which she runs from her two-room Wendy house in Darling, a farming town 20 minutes' drive from the West Coast National Park. Durban's Indian Ocean-abutting locale has made it a popular spot for scenic shoots (in 2023's *The Power*, starring Toni Collette, it doubled as Nigeria), but its less luxurious locations are also vital to Ashford's work. "I spent some time in Durban exploring their scrapyards, climbing through broken bits of cars to find the right one," she says. She often works on locally produced shows, and budgets don't allow for purchasing new cars that will then be deliberately written off.

The challenge of finding vehicles — old, new, pristine or battered — is the primary joy of the job. "I stand in the parking lots of shopping centres and when I see the car I want, I wait for the owner to come out and say, "Would you be interested in making some money?" It usually works, which is something Ashford attributes to the

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fact she's female and "not young". "I'm fairly trustworthy looking," she chuckles.

Her job takes her across the aesthetic spectrum of South Africa, each Durban scrapyard counterbalanced by an otherworldly vista. She previously worked on the Bloodhound Landspeed Record in Hakskeen Pan near the border of Namibia. "I loved it there," she says. "I just loved the desert and the heat and the space. It's actually very special at night and in the early morning. One guy saw wild horses."

Since productions are near-constant, demand is high and today Du Toit, Ashford and Sarah de Waal (owner of FilmAble) form a close-knit group, often calling on each other to fulfil client requests. It was word-of-mouth that helped Ashford solve one of her most challenging commissions.

"We couldn't find the right car for Bonnie and Clyde," she explains about working on *Wanted: Dead or Alive*, a show retelling the stories of outlaws that is due to air this year. Then a friend told her about the 'Crank Handle Club' – a group of vintage car-owning enthusiasts who meet once a month in the suburb of Plumstead. Ashford pulled up to their next meeting alongside gleaming Ford Model Ts and vintage Fiat 500s in her ten-year-old Hyundai ix35. "They didn't know who the hell I was," she says. "Eventually one gentleman took pity on me and introduced me to people." Though she found the car she needed – a 1934 Ford Model 730 Deluxe Sedan – she ended up having to fabricate a fake door to protect the collector's prized possession.

As for those Bentleys that Du Toit sourced back in 2007, one ended up in a gorge. "It's a sin," she says of wrecking cars worth more than some peoples' homes. But, she adds: "I love the action stuff, it's amazing." Clearly, it's a sin she's happy to keep on committing.



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## HOT WHEELS

The vehicle experts' most memorable cars and screen moments

**ADRIANA DU TOIT**  
OWNER OF  
UGLY DUCKLINGS

**The motor:** Two Beast (American presidential limousines) replicas imported from Atlanta, USA  
**The moment:** *G20* (2025), starring Viola Davis  
**The location:** Cape Town  
**She says:** "They arrived by ship and went back by ship. The size of these cars is just unthinkable."

**MARY ASHFORD**  
OWNER OF  
CAR ACTION

**The motor:** 1938 Buick Roadmaster sedan  
**The moment:** *Wanted Dead or Alive* (2025)  
**The location:** Paardevlei, Somerset West, in Western Cape  
**She says:** "This was the most comfortable drive I've ever been in despite being on a dirt road full of potholes. The car's owner, Albert Bester, told me that it was his mother's car and his favourite. He still drives it from Cape Town to Joburg – a return journey of roughly 3,000km. Not bad for a car in its 80s."

**SARAH DE WAAL**  
OWNER OF  
FILMABLE

**The motor:** 1958 Borgward Isabella  
**The moment:** *Recipes for Love and Murder*  
**The location:** Wynberg and Prince Albert, Cape Town  
**She says:** "It was particularly challenging to find a small cabriolet/convertible with four seats as they normally only have two seats and it's the American cars that come out with four-seater convertible."

### Out in the open

From top: Yellow flowers cover the grounds of the Nassau Guest Farm, where Mary Ashford houses cars – it hosts wine tastings and features a car museum; Ashford with one of the cars she supplies to the film industry