37: Fast & Famous: Cinema’s Most Recognizable Supra

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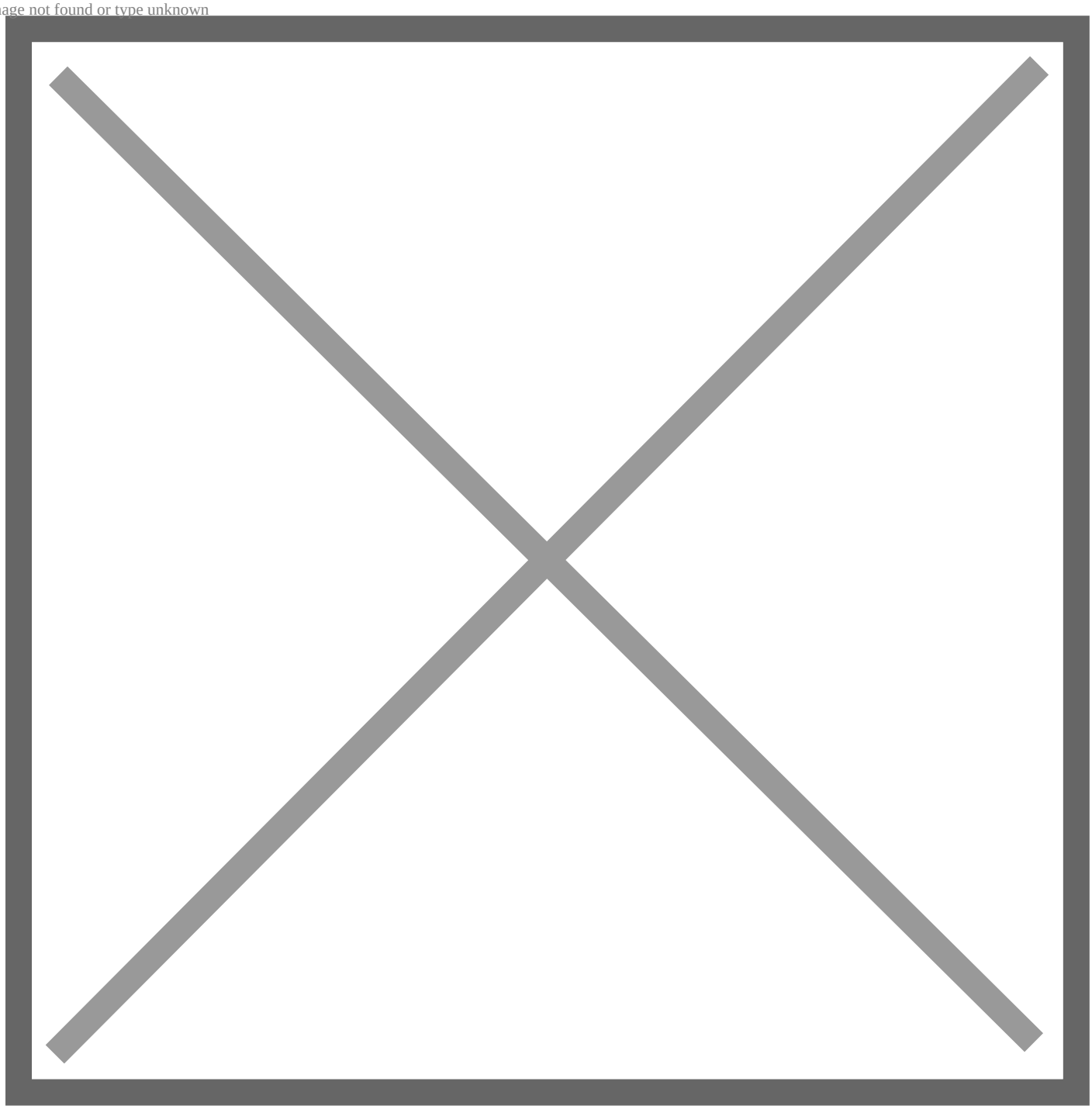

Still going strong (and into space!), the "Fast" film franchise is one the highest-grossing the movie industry has ever seen and shows no signs of slowing down. Sure, superstar names like Vin Diesel and Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson take top billing, but the franchise is built on fast cars – none more famous and sought-after worldwide than Paul Walker's orange Gladiator Supra featured prominently in "The Fast and the Furious" (2001).

We're joined by Craig Lieberman, original owner of the film's primary, hero vehicle, a 1994 Toyota Supra MK IV. We go behind the scenes and dig into what it was like to lend his expert knowledge and eye-popping cars to such a high-profile production. How did the arrangement come to be? Which actors could really drive? How real were the most dynamic driving scenes? Craig shares his perspective as only someone in the driver's seat possibly could.

After his Supra was "discovered" by movie producers and brought into the fold for filming, Craig provided consultation on all things auto for the first two "Fast" films. His deep knowledge of tuner culture and Japanese performance vehicles were key in the film's initial (and ongoing) impact on the scene – after having ignited an explosion in the modifications industry and indoctrinating a new generation of auto enthusiasts around the world.

We discover what happened to the Supra after filming and hear about Craig's new and influential place in the scene, boasting over 174k insatiably curious YouTube subscribers and over 129k Instagram followers that pepper him with questions on a daily basis.

Craig was a fantastic interview; we're thankful that he set aside time to talk with us about his (and his car's) unique place in movie history. Buckle up, this one's fast.

Kelsey Soule: [00:00:00] Alright. First, super important disclaimers before we jump in. This podcast describes stunt driving done on movie sets by professional drivers and stunt persons. Never attempt any of the movie scenes described. Toyota does not condone street racing or any other illegal driving behavior, so please always obey traffic laws. A reminder that modifying your vehicles with non-genuine Toyota parts can negatively affect your warranty, safety performance, and street legality.

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Intro: [00:01:03] [Intro]

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:01:31] Hi, everybody, and welcome to Toyota Untold. I'm Tyler.

Kelsey Soule: [00:01:35] And I'm Kelsey.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:01:36] And today, we are talking about the Fast and the Furious, not just the movie. We're actually talking about the cars, the Toyota vehicles featured in the movie and kind of how they got in there. Very exciting stuff. But my first question, Kelsey, were you into that franchise at all?

Kelsey Soule: [00:01:53] I love the Fast and the Furious franchise. I love all nine movies. I love the aspirational aspect of it, where it's like it's something I don't know a lot about, I will never do. And I don't know, I just felt like it was like cool, especially in 2001, it was cool. It was cool to watch. And I love all the people in it. I love all

the actors.

Kelsey Soule: [00:02:16] And I mean, the Supra was iconic. Like I will say, like I didn't know a lot about cars when I was 11, but I definitely didn't know much about the Toyota Supra, but that movie brought the Supra a lot of notoriety that people in the community already knew that it had, but now, it was mainstream. And so, I was really, really curious on how it got placed in this movie.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:02:39] Yeah. So, it's the type of movie that we had on, on the weekends, and it would be on. My husband loves to watch it and put it on. And I watched them, some of them, kind of through osmosis. I like the movies. I think they're good and they're fun to watch. You can't say it's a boring movie to watch.

Kelsey Soule: [00:02:56] Right. And I mean, I think a lot of people would want to know, how do they pick the cars that went into the movie? And why those cars?

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:03:04] Yes. And so, today, we're going to talk to Craig Lieberman, who actually had his car in the movie and was deeply involved in kind of talking about this car culture. So, with that, Kelsey, let's get into it.

Kelsey Soule: [00:03:20] Let's go. So, the Fast and the Furious was released in 2001, as most of us know, and the movie has gone on to spawn one of the biggest media franchises in the world. The series is largely known for its wealth of huge stars, including Vin Diesel. Let's not forget The Rock. Okay. Thank you. Ludacris, just had to pause for a moment, and Michelle Rodriguez.

Kelsey Soule: [00:03:50] But those are just the people. So, what about the cars? One of the series' most iconic non-human stars is the Toyota Supra, driven by Paul Walker's character in the first movie. That car belonged to Craig Lieberman, former director of the National Import Racing Association, and technical adviser on the Fast and the Furious, and its sequel, 2 Fast 2 Furious. I love that one.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:04:14] In another episode of Toyota Untold, we talk about, do cars have souls? And if any car has a soul, it is that Toyota Supra from Fast and the Furious. You are just a passionate enthusiast of vehicles overall, correct, Greg?

Craig Lieberman: [00:04:33] Yes, it's an addiction for which there is no cure, apparently.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:04:37] Except maybe a larger garage.

Craig Lieberman: [00:04:39] I like where your head's at.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:04:42] Cars can become a lifelong obsession and it's something that often starts young. When I was little, my dad got a 1967 Chevy Camaro that we found covered in sap underneath a tree in New Jersey. And he and my brother started to fix it up. And of course, who else gets involved but me? I got the spark plugs, I changed the tires, took batteries out on that vehicle, and I just helped my dad and my brother with whatever was needed on that Camaro. We still have it. It is gorgeous. And we love to take it out. In fact, a couple of weeks ago, we took it out, and my son cried, because it was too loud. So, we actually asked Craig how he became a motor head.

Craig Lieberman: [00:05:25] When I was about three years old, my dad handed me a Batmobile and I was inquisitive about the car, and then there was a cartoon that was on back in the days of television, where people actually watched television when there was a cartoon called Speed Racer. And I said to myself at a young age, someday, I'm going to own a car with lots of buttons on the steering wheel. And that got me motivated. And then, by the time I was a teenager, my father said to me, I don't know why you're messing around with cars,

going to do nothing for you in life, it's a waste of time, what are you doing over here?

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:05:54] At that point, you've got to prove a point.

Craig Lieberman: [00:05:57] Absolutely. If your parents tell you not to do it, you are absolutely going to do it. I just started tinkering with cars, because when I was young, we weren't exactly rich. So, I was always into Japanese cars where I grew up, north of the San Fernando Valley in Santa Clarita. Most people in my neighborhood were into muscle cars and I just didn't get that gene that was all about muscle cars.

Craig Lieberman: [00:06:21] I like the little cars, like '76, '77 Celica hatchback, one of my favorite cars ever. I had a couple of Datsun Zs back in the early days. I just went through a whole bunch of those Japanese cars, and people looked at me like, why you're doing this? What do you find attractive about it? And it just went on from there. And over the years, my car's got a little better and I'd like to think a little faster.

Craig Lieberman: [00:06:45] And I just kept going, just never stopped. Back in the old days, this was with carburetors. If you know what a carburetor is, you can Google it, you'll see pictures of those devices in museums probably. But that's before fuel injection. But tinkering with these cars, trying to make them a little bit faster always intrigued me. And by the time we got into the late '90s or mid-'90s, I had a crush on the Toyota Supra Mark IV.

Craig Lieberman: [00:07:10] It's not the first time I had seen a Toyota Supra. I saw when the Celica ST came out in 1982, I really wanted one of those. And then, I saw the Mark II Supra and I really wanted one of those. And then, I saw the Mark III Supra and I really wanted those. I could not afford any of those. And then, in 1997, I was in my built Mustang GT and I got smoked on the freeway by a Toyota Supra, and I said, that's it, I'm buying one. And that car became the car that Universal used in the first movie.

Craig Lieberman: [00:07:44] So, the tuner culture in the mid-'90s was—or early to mid-'90s was in Southern California and it was very big, but still underground. And by the late '90s, we had car shows like Imports Showoff, Hot Import Nights, and any number of other shows, and even a few drag racing series like Battle of the Imports. And I was very excited about the whole culture, because it was all about taking something small, the underdog, and making it a powerhouse, and beating the big guys with the big engines. And that always appealed to me.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:08:18] So, when you say you're tinkering with it, what are the first things that you look for to do on a car? Because I feel like people immediately have a vision of what the car they want it to look like.

Craig Lieberman: [00:08:30] I think any tuner will tell you that no matter what the base platform is, the first thing you want to change is probably the wheels. And we look to the wheels that they are using in Japan on these cars, because what starts in Japan finds its way across the ocean to us in Southern California and we copy that. So, we take a look at these magazines like Options magazine or Options videos, and see what they're doing with their cars. And we as tuners in Southern California are really hooked into that. We wanted the same parts.

Craig Lieberman: [00:09:03] They had the same body kits, the same wheels, and the same performance parts. But generally speaking, if you're buying a tuner car, a lot of people will go for a front engine, rear drive, turbo-charged vehicle. That's the way it came from the factory. That is the base platform. It would be akin to buying a brand new house, which is a perfectly good house, it's ready to move in, but then you go through, and you select different floors, and you select different window dressings, and all that. It's the exact same thing, really, probably as close to it being as expensive as that.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:09:36] So, when you see the vehicle, you see the vision of what it could be, much like the people on HDTV who are, well, we can move this wall here and put in a bathroom there, right?

Craig Lieberman: [00:09:47] Right.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:09:47] Yeah. So, talk about the cars that you've had and that you accumulated, and some of your favorites.

Craig Lieberman: [00:09:53] I'm on my 43rd car right now in my life. Okay.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:09:57] Amazing.

Kelsey Soule: [00:09:59] How many of them do you still have?

Craig Lieberman: [00:10:01] I'm sitting on two right now. I have one sports car and my wife has an Audi S3. I'm currently sitting on Paul Walker's personal R34 GTR, which is on loan to me, but I've had some great cars, I've had an Audi RS 4, a couple of BMWs, a couple of Benz's, quite a few Lexus's, quite a few thousand-horsepower Supra, the 500 horsepower Supra that was in the movie, two Lamborghini Diablos at different times, Porsche Turbo. I've had some fun cars, so I've had a lot to compare.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:10:33] What are the more memorable or your favorite ones?

Craig Lieberman: [00:10:36] E46 M3, pretty good car. Lexus GS 350, not the F, sporty F, the GSF. My Audi RS4, R35 GTR, 996 Turbo. Those have been some of my favorite cars. And of course, the Toyota Supra.

Kelsey Soule: [00:10:52] They say, do what you love and you'll never work another day in your life. Turning a hobby into a career is a dream for many of us, and yet it's exactly what Craig Lieberman did. Here's how.

Craig Lieberman: [00:11:02] So, since the 1980s, I've been working in the automotive aftermarket sector in one way or another. My first jobs were in auto parts stores. In '91, I landed at NGK Spark Plugs, which was a tier one supplier to Japanese car manufacturers, and I was working out of the—I actually spent a year in Japan, and then I was working at the Irvine facility here. So, I was going to a lot of race events as a motor sports marketing manager, and learned a lot about cars and engine stuff that I didn't already know through my previous experiences.

Craig Lieberman: [00:11:30] And then, I became director of NIRA in 1990. I want to say it was 1996, 1997, I think it was. And that was a series built around import drag racing cars. We were going professional. They had pro racing teams, sponsors, the whole deal. In December of 2000, a man approached me at a car show where I had my little yellow Supra, and he told me about this movie that we're working on. It's called Red Line.

Craig Lieberman: [00:11:57] And he asked me to bring my car to Universal to show it around. And from there, it just took off. Once they picked the car, so there's a whole another story around that, but that's basically how I got into it. When they first saw the car, they had a lot of questions, and then they took me upstairs, and I proceeded to lay out food chain of Japanese tuner cars, the cars that you would see at the top. These are the top five most desirable cars at that moment in time and these cars are the cars you should consider putting in your movie.

Craig Lieberman: [00:12:27] You got all the usual suspects, the Toyota Supra, your 3000 GTs, NSXs, GTRs, all that kind of stuff. And then, you go down the list, SW20 MR2, Toyota Celica, GT4, all those cars, all those great cars, and so forth and so on. And so, they asked me to set up casting calls. And so, every Friday, R.J. de Vera and I were calling all of our friends, hey, because this was before the internet, really, because MySpace was

it. There was no Facebook, no YouTube, no Instagram, no Snapchat, no TikTok, none of that. So, it was internet forums and the good old-fashioned phone call.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:13:04] You're going through everybody's top eight, and looking at their cars and their pictures.

Craig Lieberman: [00:13:07] I said in my book, the first chapter is Dumb Luck. I happened to be standing in the right place at the right time. An older gentleman who is probably than the age that I am now starts talking to me and we have a conversation. And then, he invited me up to Universal and all that kind of thing. But honestly, tens of thousands of people could have done that job as technical advisor, I just happened to have three distinct qualifications. One, I had a car that they wanted as the main car, so they can rent it from me.

Craig Lieberman: [00:13:35] Number two, working for NIRA, I was personal friends with all the directors of marketing of the companies that would be providing the aftermarket parts that we would need to build the replicas of these cars, because for every one car that you have, you need to have five, six, seven, eight cars as backups, stunt cars. So, I had those connections. I also had the connection with Super Street magazine, because I worked under the same umbrella. So, there was going to be some cross promotion that went on there. So, I was just a conduit and a Rolodex essentially, and I had a car.

Kelsey Soule: [00:14:07] They got just as lucky as you did then.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:14:09] Right.

Craig Lieberman: [00:14:09] I would like to think so. But honestly, like I said, there are so many thousands of people who could have done that same job, seriously.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:14:16] Maybe Craig did just chance his way into an amazing job through dumb luck. It's pure chance that a movie producer in need of a tuned-up car saw his Supra one day. But at the same time, he put a lot of time and effort into customizing it, and he had the passion to show off his work. Some would argue that Craig made his own luck. Regardless, he found his way into an amazing job and one that barely anyone in the world will ever get to experience. Few of us will ever work on a Hollywood production full stop, but even fewer will know what it's like to serve as the technical director. And that's why we asked Craig to give us all the details.

Craig Lieberman: [00:14:54] So, the day to day was I would go in, and I would put together a build list, and show pictures to the producers, the directors, and the picture car captains, saying, these are the parts I would like to put onto these cars. And so, I would call these manufacturers, and say, hey, we'd like to use your parts in the movie. And the way it usually works is there are product placement fees, but Universal recognized that this was a budding enterprise and they didn't have the clout yet.

Craig Lieberman: [00:15:21] So, they were willing, for the most part, to waive product placement fees in deference to donated parts or parts at cost. And so, that was a big thing, getting those parts for cheap, because we only had a two-million-dollar budget for the picture cars, which is a very low budget, and we had 48 cars to build, so it was the big thing. Then, after that, it was making sure that there was proper signage on the cars, the decal placement, that sort of thing.

Craig Lieberman: [00:15:50] I was involved with dialogue for the movie, so I was working with script writers to help them provide an element of authenticity to the dialogue. Again, as an adviser, you give them advice, they don't always take it. But again, as I was reminded many times over, the movie was not a documentary. It needed to be, I don't want to use the phrase dumbed down, but-

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:16:11] It's cinematic. People probably don't stand around with the girls on the hood of the cars, blasting the music, but it makes really good look.

Craig Lieberman: [00:16:21] They do though. If you go to Hot Import Nights, you'll be like, good grief. It's exactly like it was in the movie.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:16:27] Oh, man. Now, I need to go.

Craig Lieberman: [00:16:29] Yeah, it's interesting. And then, after that, because I was a technical adviser, I was involved in everything from sound recordings for the cars to marketing, international DVD marketing, international release. They actually had me do a stand-up piece where I did a special feature on the DVD. It was me and the Playboy Playmate of the Year, Dalene Kurtis, where we built a tuner car from scratch, basically, which was a fun, cheeky little bit. And then, sound recordings, ADR loops. It was a weird position, technical advisor, because I was there from pre-production, building the cars, stunts, actual post-production filming, all the way through to right up until we started to work on 2 Fast 2 Furious. So, it was a weird place to be in, but a really good place as it turns out.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:17:14] It sounds like you're a jack of all trades, you did a little bit of everything, right?

Craig Lieberman: [00:17:17] I'm really good at giving advice.

Kelsey Soule: [00:17:20] I love that, director of unsolicited advice.

Craig Lieberman: [00:17:22] There you go.

Kelsey Soule: [00:17:24] One way or another, Craig's advice on the production definitely paid off. The Fast and the Furious debuted at number one at the US Box Office, and the franchise it launched is now the 13th highest grossing movie series of all time, ahead of the Pirates of the Caribbean, Transformers, and even the Lord of the Rings movies. Wow. However, the Fast and Furious movies are known for taking a lot of creative liberties. As Craig just said, just because you give them advice doesn't mean that they'll necessarily take it. Lord, don't I know it. I wanted to know if back in 2001, Craig had any idea just how successful the movie was going to be. I also wanted to know how he felt about the technical inaccuracies that made their way in.

Craig Lieberman: [00:18:08] We, as people, who eat, sleep, and breathe the tuner world, we look at the movies as like a spoof movie, if you will, that the lines are quoted in meetings all the time. I see on CNN, will post a news story, and somebody go in there, and say, don't let this distract you from the fact that Hector is going to be running four SR20DET engines [making sounds] and he bought Motec system exhaust, and T66 turbos, and all that. It's just everywhere. It's part of American pop culture now. It literally is. I'm going to give you my candid-

Kelsey Soule: [00:18:42] He already said what he thought about the movie, so I don't know.

Craig Lieberman: [00:18:43] Well, no. So, you got to—okay. Look, let me put this in perspective. Universal treated the car owners, the people who rented cars like gold. We were gods. They treated us like a—we got invited to a special airing of the movie months before it came out. This was after the Super Bowl commercial. And remember, the movie came out in June, so I think it was February or April. I have to look at my book. I have the parking test on that day.

Craig Lieberman: [00:19:07] We go in there, and sit, and watch the movie. Some of it didn't have the music. Some of it had other music. Some of it had time to—we get all done with the movie, and then all the cheesy dialogue. I don't know if you've ever watched yourself on home movies. Remember when you were really little

and you were really adorable to your parents, but then you look at it when you were a teenager, and you say, oh, my goodness, I was so goofy back then. That's-

Kelsey Soule: [00:19:28] We can't listen to ourselves on this podcast.

Craig Lieberman: [00:19:32] Everybody is always super critical of themselves, but I'm looking at this movie having being on set for many of days and seeing how cheesy the action was, because all the action is being done without sound effects, music in the background, and all of it is [making sounds] cut. That's going to not play. Anyway, so I get out of the movie, and I get in the car, and I follow my wife, and she says, how was it? I said, straight to DVD. Just straight to DVD, are you sure? I said, actually, sorry, they're not going to be able to afford to put this on DVD, it's going straight to VHS, because yeah, it's really cheesy. It's really cheesy.

Kelsey Soule: [00:20:08] But it's so good.

Craig Lieberman: [00:20:09] And so, the movie came out and the story I like to tell, which is right out of Rob Cohen's own mouth, when the movie came out and he watched it the first night in the theater, he called up Neal Moritz, the executive producer, and he said, we have a called classic on our hands, and they were right. And this is why those guys get paid the big bucks, because they're absolute geniuses.

Craig Lieberman: [00:20:29] But as a technical adviser, I've become hypercritical of movies, that the fact that I'm a World War II historian buff, technically, for years, people are blasting me on email saying, this car doesn't do that, that car didn't have a turbo, even though you said it had a turbo in the movie. I'm like, technical advisor, you think the guys that advised for Star Trek didn't tell them that spaceships don't need a bank in space?

Kelsey Soule: [00:20:54] Right. It's all for the movie.

Craig Lieberman: [00:20:56] It's all for the movie, yeah.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:20:57] Similarly, Kelsey and I, we work in social media, we just had to reshoot something for fun with a mountain bike, because the mountain bike community was upset with us. So, we reshot it. And literally, I used my husband, who is a mountain biker, and his mountain bike, and he wears low socks. That's how he mountain bikes. And we reposted it and everybody in the comments as well, you got it wrong again, he's wearing low socks. And I'm like, that's how my husband mountain bikes, I don't know what you want me to do.

Craig Lieberman: [00:21:25] What are they supposed to be wearing?

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:21:27] High socks, apparently. People were very upset about it.

Kelsey Soule: [00:21:32] Yeah.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:21:32] In the Fast and the Furious, Brian O'Connor, the film's lead character played by Paul Walker, owes Dominic Toretto, Vin Diesel, a new car after getting his old one destroyed. He finds a rusted Supra in a junkyard, and the character set about restoring it with the car ultimately winning several street races and taking part in a climactic chase sequence. Of course, the Supra in question belong to Craig. We wanted to know what led him to a Supra in the first place, and if it was the same reason the movie's producers were drawn to it when they came to make the movie.

Craig Lieberman: [00:22:04] There was always a fondness for my Mark IV Supra, because the thousand-horsepower one was absolutely obscene. It was just a show-off car, and the orange car was like driving down the street with no clothes on. It's like everybody looked. It doesn't matter if they were young or old, but everybody

looked at that car, good or bad, whether you like the graphics or you don't, but still, it was a magnet for attention.

Craig Lieberman: [00:22:30] As an SME, as you should probably know, I know Toyota and Lexus love those terms, SME, subject matter expert, it's just my favorite, makes it sound really important, but what it really means is you're a geek, and I can live with that. Why did they want the Supra? There were a couple of qualifications about the Supra. Number one, it had a targa top. Okay.

Craig Lieberman: [00:22:50] And there's a scene at the end of the movie where Paul Walker is rescuing Matt Schulze off the side of a big rig, and the only way to really pull that off is in a convertible, which wouldn't have worked, or a targa roof. And there were only really three cars that had a roof that might be acceptable, the 300 ZX, but it was a T-bar roof, so that wouldn't work. It's a T-top, not really a targa top.

Kelsey Soule: [00:23:12] So, they wrote the script, and then had to find a car to fit the script.

Craig Lieberman: [00:23:17] Yes, that's what happened. So, they needed a targa top. They needed a car that was in the tuner world and would be respected as one of the top tier cars. And that pointed strongly to the Supra. One, I came to Universal, there's actually a behind-the-scenes feature where Paul Walker comes down and sits in the car when it was yellow. Rob Cohen, the director, used to take me for a little ride, so he saw that I had the two big nitrous bottles on the back.

Craig Lieberman: [00:23:40] So, I got on the 101 freeway, I don't know if you're familiar with Studio City, but the 101 freeway midday is not exactly a speedway. So, I get on, I roll on in second gear, get up to the top of the on-ramp and I'm about 4,000 rpm, and I just lay into it, all the way to red light, all the way through third gear, second, third gear, and he screams over me, is that the nitrous? I said, no, that's the turbo.

Craig Lieberman: [00:24:08] So, we get back to the place, and he's shaky with just a rush of joy and excitement out of him, because he's a very passionate guy. He gets out of the car, he says, okay, this is the car we're going to use. And I was like, what? I've been there 15 minutes, they decided that this is the car they're going to use. And then, I went upstairs in the meeting and started telling the story.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:24:25] And then, they asked you to find five more of them, then seven cars.

Craig Lieberman: [00:24:29] We did. That's funny. I literally just got back from Barrett-Jackson, I just got off a plane yesterday, where stunt car number one is being sold at auction, right?

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:24:40] Wow. Incredible.

Craig Lieberman: [00:24:40] Yeah. So, it goes to auction at Barrett-Jackson in Las Vegas. I was there with Craig Jackson. And I was telling him all these stories I'm telling you and the prices of Supras back then, I'm sure you've looked at prices of Supras today, a good, clean Mark IV Supra, six-speed, arrow top, left-hand drive is up over one hundred thousand dollars.

Kelsey Soule: [00:25:00] Wow.

Craig Lieberman: [00:25:01] That's crazy.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:25:02] That's incredible, yeah.

Craig Lieberman: [00:25:03] Right. And we were paying about $17,000 for Supras. We had eight of them, a total of eight, including mine.

Kelsey Soule: [00:25:13] Wow.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:25:13] Yeah. And then, also speaking of Barrett-Jackson, when we first released that 2020 Supra and we had the first one with the VIN number 001, or whatever it was, we auctioned it off for charity at Barrett-Jackson.

Kelsey Soule: [00:25:30] And we talked to Craig.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:25:30] We did, yes. We talked to him for the podcast.

Kelsey Soule: [00:25:33] Yeah, we interviewed Craig on the podcast. So, was it really just the experience in the car? And he was like, yeah, this is it.

Craig Lieberman: [00:25:39] The car checked a lot of boxes, right? Mark IV Supra is a classic look. The car was bright candy yellow at the time. It was a Mazda RX7 color. And the targa top off, it had all the audio video in there, the three TV screens in the car, two polished nitrous bottles in the trunk, a big wing, but a tasteful wing.

Kelsey Soule: [00:25:58] Tasteful wing.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:25:59] That's what everyone says.

Craig Lieberman: [00:26:02] Yeah, the aluminum wings back then were all the trend today. I look back on them, and say, yeah, not so much. It's like that bolo tie I had back in the '80s, I don't know what I was thinking at that-

Kelsey Soule: [00:26:13] That vehicle made 16-year-old boys across the nation put wings on their Honda Civic.

Craig Lieberman: [00:26:22] See, now, I'm getting blamed for everything now.

Kelsey Soule: [00:26:24] For our friends in legal, Toyota does not support or condone illegal street racers.

Craig Lieberman: [00:26:28] No, that was another consideration about illegal street racing. The directors and producers of the movie were very concerned about illegal street racing. Of course, illegal street racing has been going on since 1947. It's always been around. There've been many movies about it, Two-Lane Blacktop, American Graffiti, I could go on and on, but they actually had Paul Walker do a public service announcement at the front of the movie when you sat in the cinema, and they basically said, yeah, all the—there was sort of—but kids are going to be kids. And I go to cars and coffee every Saturday, and see grownups with Lamborghinis doing burnouts. It's really—what are you doing?

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:27:01] And now, there is a whole show, right? Street Outlaws that talks about it in the background of that-

Craig Lieberman: [00:27:07] Unfortunately, I don't think it's ever going to go away.

Kelsey Soule: [00:27:09] Of course. Even in a controlled environment like a movie set, the driving and stunts depicted in the Fast and Furious movies are incredibly dangerous and require the expertise of highly skilled professionals. Craig told us how they were able to pull some of the effects off. Again, we must remind you to never attempt any of the movie scenes described.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:27:26] Don't do it.

Craig Lieberman: [00:27:28] For Fast and Furious 1, the company that was doing it was a company called Stunts Unlimited and they did the bulk of the work of stunts. There are actors who have their own stunt players that typically travel with them, as I understand it, because they look like that person, like Chris Tuck was a stunt driver for Paul Walker. And he was, from my understanding, he did lots of stunts for Paul Walker, because he generally fits the look of Paul Walker, same color hair, same height, same build, that kind of thing.

Craig Lieberman: [00:27:55] As far as actors doing stunts, as you can imagine, for insurance purposes, certain actors do more stunts, like Tom Cruise does a lot of his own stunts. I think Johnny Depp did some of his own stunts, that kind of stuff. But for Fast and Furious, Paul Walker was a car fan before the movie. He had owned a bunch of shoebox Chevys and that kind of stuff, Chevy Nova, Chevy 82 from the mid-'60s. But as the franchise went on, he got more involved in cars. He started racing and that kind of thing.

Craig Lieberman: [00:28:23] So, in Fast and Furious 1, I witnessed him doing the e-brake to slide for the Toyota Supra, the scene where they're shooting Johnny Tran near the climactic end of the movie. So, I saw him personally doing some of that stuff. He was also in the mech red car, which is a car that's mounted to a trailer, and the stunt person drives the rig, and he's just like turning the steering wheel to make it look like he's steering, that kind of thing.

Kelsey Soule: [00:28:45] That's what I thought the actors did for the most part.

Craig Lieberman: [00:28:47] Yeah, there's a lot of that. Michelle Rodriguez did not even have a driver's license before the movie, so she literally could not drive a car. Jordana Brewster, no driver's license before the movie. Stunt Director, Mic Rodgers taught Jordana to drive and do power slides in a Mustang.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:29:05] With some of the actors not even holding a driver's license, I wanted to know if Craig was ever nervous letting other people drive his pride and joy, the Supra.

Craig Lieberman: [00:29:14] Not really. I mean, it was insured. I had insurance certificate, rental agreement. And I don't get that attached to inanimate objects that can be replaced. Well, back then, it could be replaced. But had they been renting that car today for the providence of being in a movie, yeah, I'd be watching it like a hawk.

Kelsey Soule: [00:29:30] Right. Yeah. You didn't know what you didn't know at that point.

Craig Lieberman: [00:29:33] And then, years later, when we did 2 Fast 2 Furious, Paul started doing some more of his own drive, and they took him out to—they created a professional driving school for the actors. In the stadium where the Miami Heat plays, they brought in a bunch of stunt drivers and race car drivers, and taught the whole cast how to drive fast.

Kelsey Soule: [00:29:50] That's awesome.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:29:50] That's great.

Craig Lieberman: [00:29:51] Some people got it. Some people, not so much. But we had some really good people who just learned it naturally. Devon Aoki, the daughter of the Benihana, the founder and brother of Steve Aoki, the DJ, she was a mad man, man. She was a mad man. She was great. They were all pretty good. Tyrese, he was having a lot of fun. He's a passionate guy.

Kelsey Soule: [00:30:13] The cars in the Fast and Furious are bright. Honestly, the colors are obnoxious. Craig's Supra was a bold orange pearl, and the other prominent vehicles in the movies are everything from dazzling reds to neon greens. Their bold choices, Craig had this to say.

Craig Lieberman: [00:30:30] I learned a lot of this while working in the franchise. If you've ever been to design school, which I have not, if you've ever been an artist or know an artist, you can talk to them about something called color theory, right? And basically, it's what colors go with what colors and all that other kind of stuff. Me, thank God I have a wife who's in fashion, otherwise I'd be poorly dressed or more poorly dressed.

Craig Lieberman: [00:30:49] But be that as it may, they wanted bright, vibrant colors. And if you recall those scenes from the movie, you notice that everything seemed to have a warming filter over it. There was very orange tint to the film. That was done deliberately. Okay. So, all the cars had to be bright colors so that once the warming filter was on it, they would still appear bright and be separated naturally by their colors from the background cars that we would end up having to use.

Craig Lieberman: [00:31:16] Because while the actors' cars were handpicked, and selected, and painted a certain way, all the background cars, we had no control over that, because those were people that were just renting cars to Universal for a day or for a few days. So, that's how that whole thing came about, where they picked the colors, and then they had to go into the graphics.

Craig Lieberman: [00:31:39] And so, that's why all these cars have strange-looking graphics with very bright colors, nuclear gladiators, all kinds of stuff. R.J. De Vera and I, R.J. was a co-technical advisor focusing on other areas of the production, but when we looked at the graphics, we were like, oh my goodness, this is not good. What are we doing? We felt like they were mocking us. Seriously. We felt like they were mocking us, like we were that ridiculous.

Craig Lieberman: [00:32:09] Rob Cohen said it most eloquently, he said, look, you guys look at this, because you're subject matter experts and you think of it as, this is completely unrealistic, it's inauthentic, it doesn't really fit what you guys are actually doing, but we have to remember, this movie is not for car experts. This movie is for average middle American young people, 14 to 24, who grew up inm saym just pick a random state, Kansas, Indiana, Ohio, and whatever. And they're not exposed to this culture, because the cars in the different parts of the country do not look like the cars in Southern California.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:32:48] According to research by InsurerTheGap, an astonishing 78 cars were destroyed during the filming of the first Fast and the Furious movie, and significantly more in each of the sequels. But what about the cars the production returned in working order? We wanted to know if they were restored to their original condition or if their owners kept them with their new paint jobs and modifications.

Craig Lieberman: [00:33:10] So, typically, the cars that were rented to them already had a bunch of stuff on the car. They already had body kits. They already had wheels, tires, maybe big brakes. They had audio, video, racing seats, and all that kind of stuff. There were a few cases where cars were completely repainted, and then a few cases where those same cars got different body kits. Now, the people who were in that position where their car had been changed, they were paid a reconditioning fee.

Craig Lieberman: [00:33:34] They could keep the parts that were on the car and get a reconditioning fee to paint their car back. Universal was very good about that, because even with the rental fees and the reconditioning fees, it was still cheaper than buying and building one. So, they were very cognizant of that. So, there are some people who chose to get their reconditioning fee, and go out and recondition their cars, and threw away the parts. There were other people who kept the car exactly the way it was. Now, I'm sure had anyone known that this movie would be so crazy, they would have saved every part, hung it on a wall, had the actors sign it, and then sealed it in plastic.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:34:10] Yeah. As they say, put it in a box and hold on to the key.

Craig Lieberman: [00:34:15] And store it.

Kelsey Soule: [00:34:15] Yeah.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:34:15] Yeah.

Kelsey Soule: [00:34:15] So, despite its iconic status, Craig is actually no longer the owner of the Supra seen in the movie. We had to know how he could bring himself to part with it.

Craig Lieberman: [00:34:24] So, I do know where the car is. It's in the Netherlands. It got sold to a buyer in Belgium about a year or so after the movie, and then another buyer bought it in the Netherlands. He still has the car. I talk to him often, nice guy. And it's a private collection. He takes it out to some car shows as part of a tractor trailers thing he does some stuff in Europe. But when COVID lifts, I will be on an airplane, I'll go be reunited with the car.

Craig Lieberman: [00:34:45] I have not seen it since it left. It was 18 years ago—19 years ago. The car sale came about like this, I was driving the car around doing some car shows and appearances for the first couple of months, and I was sitting in a gas station, and this kid, who was probably 11, sitting in the back of his mom's Ford Expedition, and she's got one of those TV screens in the back, and he looks over me with consternation, he goes, Aren't you a little old to be driving a copy of a movie car?

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:35:16] What was your response?

Craig Lieberman: [00:35:18] There's a scene in Blazing Saddles where the guy says, well, I just threw down my guns and walked away. I said, maybe this car is not age-appropriate for me. And so, I started entertaining offers. How are you going to drive around? Thirty-five years old, drive around with a bright orange car with a shopping cart wing, in a nuclear gladiator on the side of the car, and then get preferential parking at Pelican Hill valet service?

Kelsey Soule: [00:35:42] Priorities, man.

Craig Lieberman: [00:35:45] I mean, you live in South Orange County, man. You can't take that car anywhere. It just wasn't. And I replaced it with another Japanese Supra car, so that one followed pretty much the exact same path as the Supra, got in a movie, got all of the crazy stuff put on the car, I got it back, and then I said, yeah, maybe this is not age-appropriate. And then, somebody offered me a ridiculous amount of money, and I said, maybe I'll just move on to something else.

Kelsey Soule: [00:36:13] Was that in another Fast and Furious movie or a different movie?

Craig Lieberman: [00:36:16] It was in 2 Fast 2 Furious. It was the silver GTR that Paul drove.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:36:20] You've cornered the market.

Craig Lieberman: [00:36:22] Honestly, it is sheer luck. Just in the right place at the right time or the wrong time, but just spending on your perspective.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:36:30] The Fast and the Furious movies are a huge part of American pop culture, and they've helped shape the way we think about many cars, the Supra, arguably more than any. We asked Craig what impact he thought the film had on the world of cars.

Craig Lieberman: [00:36:44] It brought a lot more people into the industry to do modifications to cars. And you can argue that the later movies have done the same thing as well with other brands. But the Toyota Supra was already on a lot of people's radar back then, but now, it's iconic. It is at the top of the food chain. From my own studies and looking it, I can tell you that these people that are 35, 40 years old have been into cars pretty

much their whole life. Were they into tuner cars?

Craig Lieberman: [00:37:11] Probably, because it's very difficult to go from a Mustang or a Charger into a Japanese car, because there's some kind of weird stigma in certain parts of the country that having a Japanese car is not as cool as having an American car, because that was the culture. But I think a lot of people will tell you that they've seen the movie multiple times. They learn more about Supras because of the movie. And I've talked to kids now that are 12, 14 years old who weren't even around when the movie was made, and they're telling me, I want a Supra when I grow up. The movie had an impact. It's undeniable.

Kelsey Soule: [00:37:41] Like Tyler said, when we relaunched the Supra, even in the comments, it's still, oh, I remember this from the Fast and the Furious. So glad you guys brought it back, whatever. So, like the association is always there. So, obviously, this is a Toyota podcast, so even though Craig sold his Supra, we had to ask if he owns any other Toyota vehicles currently, because it's our job.

Craig Lieberman: [00:38:02] I do not. I'm between Toyotas. I was looking at other Supras, but the price tag for me, would be very difficult to justify that to my wife. Now, if Toyota would like to send me an orange Supra to drive around for a couple of months, I'll put a graphic package on it.

Kelsey Soule: [00:38:19] Just see what happens, see if your luck comes back.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:38:25] Never say never.

Kelsey Soule: [00:38:25] You said you were done driving orange cars with decals on them.

Craig Lieberman: [00:38:28] But it's the 20th anniversary. We just have enough time to get the graphics on it so I can go to the movie premiere.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:38:35] When you head to the Netherlands, maybe we can call our friends at TME and see what they have in stock, for a now and then photo, how it started and how it's going, so-

Craig Lieberman: [00:38:44] And how it ended.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:38:46] Yeah.

Craig Lieberman: [00:38:46] I'll be the poster boy for how it ended badly.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:38:49] Working in the movie industry is a glamorous career path for a number of reasons. As well as spending time with the Hollywood stars, one of the most exciting perks of the job is the amazing places you get to visit.

Craig Lieberman: [00:39:01] The people who come up with the locations are just amazing. I don't know how they find these gems. Bob's Market now, every Sunday, if you go up to Bob's market up there in LA, that places a mob. Every weekend, it's mobbed. It's crazy. And then, the house, the Dominic Toretto house is just up the street around the corner on East Kensington. The warehouse where we did the 2 Fast 2 Furious, Wynwood Warehouse, still exists. The bridge jumps that we did in 2 Fast 2 Furious, absolutely amazing stuff. So, these location people find all these great locations, that's all they do, and it was just amazing, some of the places he found to shoot.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:39:43] I can imagine that while being on set in these amazing locations, and you get to see, instead of the cars moving so fast, it's moving slower. And on movie sets, there's a lot of downtime. It's a lot of hurry up and go. Oh, we've got to wait for the lighting, is the lighting ready? You have call times. Get the actors there. Is there anything memorable interactions between you and the actors, between the actors

themselves, family members on set, et cetera?

Craig Lieberman: [00:40:11] Oh, yeah.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:40:11] Anything cool that happened.

Craig Lieberman: [00:40:12] A couple things. There is a guy, I forget the actor's name, he was in Silence of the Lambs and he was the bad guy. Remember that guy?

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:40:22] Yes, that puts the lotion on his skin or else it gets the hose again.

Craig Lieberman: [00:40:26] Bingo. So, we're standing around, right? Getting ready. We're moving some cars. We're over on staging yard where there are some cars that is needed to be moved. And the guys, which are a bunch of people, I don't know if they were grips or just other people on set, they walked over talking to the guy, and I walked up, and then said, hey, Ted Levine, Ted Levine is the guy's name. I said, can you do the voice for me? What voice? I said, you know what voice. It puts the lotion on the skin or else it gets the hose again. And everybody was just in stitches. Talented actor.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:40:57] It's still memorable. When you say the bad guy, that's literally the first thing I thought of.

Craig Lieberman: [00:41:03] I had a good moment with Paul Walker after—I didn't see him. We traveled a bit after the first Fast and Furious movie together to do promotions on Universal's behalf, some car shows and whatnot, then I didn't see him again until we were on set in Florida. And I walked up to him, and he said, oh, Lieberman, you're back, what do they got you doing? I said, I'm just here to babysit my car. Which car is that? The one you're leaning on. You gave them another car? I said, what are you doing back? He said, apparently, they think I'm an actor, so as long as they keep paying me, I'm coming back. I said, alright. And talking with him further, it turns out that if the movie had guns, cars, or surfing, he was in. That was it.

Kelsey Soule: [00:41:43] Stick to what you know.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:41:45] Did you happen to make it in or make any cameos in the film?

Craig Lieberman: [00:41:50] I did. Oh, it's embarrassing stuff.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:41:52] No, it's not embarrassing. It's probably an awesome story.

Craig Lieberman: [00:41:55] Okay. So, because I was running the NIRA series, I was at the race for a scene. Remember when everybody's doing the drag racing. My job was to keep the cars moving in the background. Every 15 seconds, I needed to launch a pair of cars. So, I'm doing this stuff, the little fingers up in the air kind of thing. That's like 10 seconds of fame. But the story behind that is actually pretty embarrassing, but funny.

Craig Lieberman: [00:42:18] At one point, I get the call over the radio, Craig, you've got to move them faster. You've got to move them faster. You've got to move them faster. But most of the people that I brought up to the race, we had about 30 cars that were racing, and most of them were friends of mine or colleagues of mine, and they knew me. But that particular day when we were doing that, there was a bunch of pretty girls lining the side of the track.

Craig Lieberman: [00:42:40] They're standing within earshot of the drivers. And these girls are dressed like they would be like schoolgirl outfit kind of thing, because that was the stereotypical thing that they were doing at car shows at the time. So, all my friends being males, looking over at the girls, not paying attention to me to keep the cars moving, and I'm getting screamed at on the headset, what's going on over there?

Craig Lieberman: [00:43:03] So, finally, I went like this, right? Look at me. Look at me. And I dropped my fingers. Now, Rob sees this, he comes running over, he said, hey, we're going to do the big scene, and here's the thing, but when you launch the cars, we've got to build some excitement. So, what happens is the cars pull up and they go X, and I go like this, I just drop my fingers in the car, take off. He said, cut, cut, cut, cut, cut.

Craig Lieberman: [00:43:27] He comes over, says, you can't do that. Do what? We've got to build excitement. You ever see Top Gun? Remember the shot on the aircraft carrier right at the beginning of the movie where the guy's out, standing on the deck, and he's going like this, and then he goes that. Yes, that's what I want you to do. I said, I can't do that, all my friends are going to watch that.

Craig Lieberman: [00:43:49] Well, try to come up with something else. And then, I went right back to doing what I was doing, which was telling the guys to watch me. And then, he said, lay out some thumb gestures and all that kind of stuff. And so, that's what I did. And to this day, when I drive with friends, we pull up to a stoplight together, they look over, and they go like this and this.

Kelsey Soule: [00:44:10] I love it. That's funny.

Craig Lieberman: [00:44:11] It's never going to go away.

Kelsey Soule: [00:44:12] You're part of history. I think it's cool.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:44:16] Come on. I'm sure, now, that's a thing around.

Kelsey Soule: [00:44:19] They're just jealous.

Craig Lieberman: [00:44:21] I don't think it's jealousy. I think it's, haha, you embarrassed yourself for money.

Kelsey Soule: [00:44:26] We've all done it.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:44:29] Since the Fast and the Furious was released in 2001, there have been eight sequels and a spinoff with yet another sequel released recently. I wondered if Craig was excited for the new movie.

Craig Lieberman: [00:44:40] There's a Supra in it, right?

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:44:42] Yes.

Craig Lieberman: [00:44:43] Yes.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:44:44] An orange one.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:44:46] An orange one, yes. That's good. I'm glad to see that car make it. The movies are just guilty fun now. Other pop foreign movies, I go in there, and I see all these wonderful expensive cars, and they all get blown up, and I love it. But still, what can I tell you? I still love it. It's not a movie about street racing anymore, which is good and bad. Mostly good that it's not. They're a family now. All these people are family. It's like your extended family that comes over just to have barbecue once a year. So, that's the way I approach movies now. It's just good, clean fun.

Kelsey Soule: [00:45:16] I'd like to take the opportunity to thank Craig Lieberman for coming on Toyota Untold. He was an amazing guest and it was incredibly exciting to hear what goes into preparing cars for a movie like this. We asked him if there was any advice he wanted to give to our listeners.

Craig Lieberman: [00:45:30] We're in the golden age of automobiles, right? The cars never made more horsepower. They've never been better. They've never been put together better. It kept me out of trouble. I didn't have money or time for anything else. I was in the garage ,spending my money on car parts. Nothing puts a smile on your face like a full tank of gas and a great car.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:45:48] Craig Lieberman, thank you very much for being with us today on Toyota Untold and sharing your vast wealth of knowledge. We greatly appreciate it.

Craig Lieberman: [00:45:56] Been my honor and my privilege.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:45:59] Thanks once again to Craig Lieberman. If you want to hear more from Craig, you can check out his YouTube channel, youtube.com/CraigLieberman, that's C-R-A-I-G L-I-E-B-E-R-M-A-N, or find him on Instagram, where he's CraigLieberman_42.

Kelsey Soule: [00:46:17] And while you're at it, you should keep up with Toyota Untold by making sure you're following the show on whatever podcast platform you use.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:46:25] You can also follow us on toyota.com. Yes, we have a website. And we can't stress how much we appreciate it when people take the time to rate and review us, subscribe, and like, tell your friends. So, please, if you're enjoying the show, do all of those things.

Kelsey Soule: [00:46:40] And if you have any feedback for us, questions, suggestions, if you just like want to talk to us, or if you have a topic you'd like to hear on a future episode, we'd love to hear from you. You can email us at podcast@toyota.com. Links to all of the things we just mentioned will be included in the show notes, so check them out there, too.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:46:59] Alright. Thanks for listening, everyone. Until next time. I'm Tyler.

Kelsey Soule: [00:47:03] And I'm Kelsey.

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