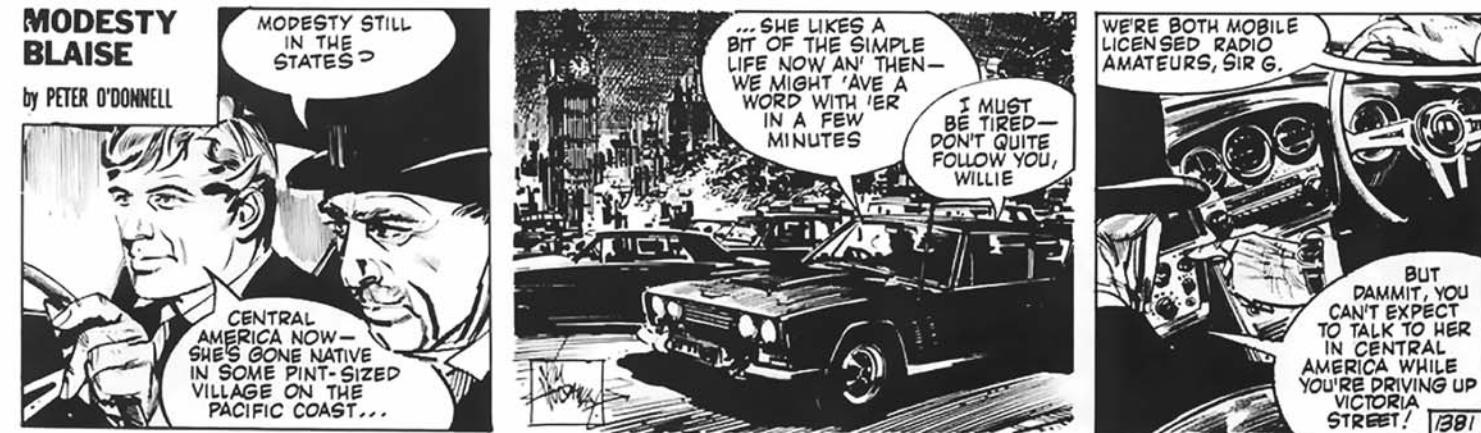


Modesty Blaise, an exceptional young woman with many talents and a criminal past, and her trusty sidekick Willie Garvin, drove a variety of exotic, high performance cars, but their favourite was the Jensen FF...



Although Ian Fleming's superspy James Bond is known worldwide, the movie franchise has diluted the character somewhat, with most having little knowledge of the very rich history and back-story that was woven into the books. However, there was another larger-than-life fictional hero — this time female and gloriously so — who was Bond's contemporary in the 1960s.

Modesty Blaise was born when author Peter O'Donnell was approached by Bill Aitken, Strip Cartoon Editor of the *Daily Express*, and asked to write a new strip for the newspaper. Fleming's *James Bond* had been syndicated by the *Express* in 1958 (7th July, 1958, *Casino Royale* was written by Ian Fleming and Anthony Hearn and illustrated by John McLusky), and had proved very popular. Peter O'Donnell then went onto develop the character who was to become Modesty Blaise: 'In order to give her the kind of background that made her plausible I had to go back to an incident I'd witnessed twenty years earlier, during the war. It took a long time to get her right and to find the right name for her. Once that was done I knew she had to have a sidekick, and Willie Garvin appeared in about thirty seconds.

The strip was going to appear in the *Express*, and I was asked to write a five-day text serial to introduce it. Then suddenly the whole thing was cancelled. I heard later that the Chairman had seen the first weeks of the drawn strip and decided that 'a woman from the underworld' was unsuitable for *Express* readers. Bill Aitken then offered Modesty Blaise to the *London Evening Standard*, which is also still going today. The then Editor, Charles Wintour, snapped it up. It first appeared on Monday 13th May 1963 and ended on my birthday, 11th April 2001. Each story ran for between 18 and 20 weeks.'

With *Modesty Blaise* and her complex world coming to life in more detail, the first novel, entitled simply *Modesty Blaise* was published by the Souvenir Press in 1965, followed by *Sabre-Tooth* the following year. Thirteen novels and short story collections were published. Terrific novels, very much of their time, and if you're a fan of the Fleming books, you should really sample O'Donnell's heroine, as there is a very rich history and back-story to the character:

In 1945 a nameless girl escaped from a displaced person (DP) camp in Kalyros, Greece.



Remembering nothing she wandered through post-WW2 Mediterranean and Arabian regions. During these years she learned to survive the hard way, befriending another wandering refugee, a Hungarian scholar named Lob who gave her an education and a name: Modesty Blaise. Eventually she took control of a criminal gang in Tangier and expanded it to international status as *The Network*.

During these years she met Willie Garvin. Despite the desperate life he was leading, she saw his potential and offered him a job. Inspired by her belief in him, he pulled through as her right-hand man in *The Network* and became Modesty's most trusted friend. Theirs is a strictly platonic relationship and is based on mutual respect and shared interests. When she felt she'd made enough money, she retired and moved to England; Willie Garvin followed suit. Bored by their new lives among the idle rich, they accepted a request for assistance from Sir Gerald Tarrant, a high-ranking official of the British secret service — and this is where the story really begins.

In 1966 *Modesty Blaise* the movie was released, directed by Joseph Losey and starring Monica Vitti, Terence Stamp, and Dirk Bogarde. Very loosely based on the first strips and first novel, it was a comedy spoof in the manner of the original *Casino Royale* movie that starred David Niven, Peter Sellers and Woody Allen. Best forgotten, if you're a serious fan of *Modesty* but fun all the same, and watched now harks back to the swinging sixties, outrageous clothes and fast Italian sports cars.

Which neatly bring us to the cars. The newspaper strips were originally drawn by Jim Holdaway. After Jim Holdaway's death in 1970,

the art of the strip was provided by the Spanish artist Romero. Eight years later, Romero quit to make time for his own comics projects, and after short attempts by John Burns and Patrick Wright, Neville Colvin drew the strip until 1986. Then Romero returned to the job and continued until the end of the strip. From the beginning Modesty and Willie Garvin drove the most exotic and



Monica Vitti and Terence Stamp played Modesty and Willie Garvin in Joseph Losey's 1966 movie version of *Modesty Blaise*.

contemporary sports cars, ranging from E-Types, the Daimler Dart and Astons, to the mighty Jensen FF that featured in quite a number of stories. It must have been a favourite. Later there was a TR6 and even a Mercedes C111. All the cars were beautifully drawn and looked like the actual models. The interior shots of the Jensen FF were incredibly accurate also, so someone on the team knew his Jensens!

[www.modestyblaiseltd.com](http://www.modestyblaiseltd.com)  
[www.titanbooks.com/categories/uk/universe-58-Modesty\\_Blaise/](http://www.titanbooks.com/categories/uk/universe-58-Modesty_Blaise/)

