

Bond, James Bond: 8 Actors Who Played 007, From Past To Present

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When Ian Fleming created the character of James Bond in his 1953 novel *Casino Royale*, he probably never imagined that it would start a media franchise that would not only outlive him, but also span more than 50 years of action. With countless books, [24 films](#), and other adaptations and depictions having taken place, there's certainly a lot of Bond to go around for anyone who wants it.

But those who have most indelibly ingrained the character on our minds are, of course, those who got to play the character on film, and for one brief instance on television. Those eight actors are the historic watermarks for James Bond's longevity on the screen, and without their contributions, the series just might not be the behemoth that it has evolved into. Who are the people who have played James Bond over the years? Let's catch up on them all.



Barry Nelson

Year(s)

Active: 1954

Number Of Films: 1

Believe it or not, James Bond began his journey to the silver screen as a live TV adaptation for the hit show *Climax!* Adapting the first book in the series, *Casino Royale*, writers Charles Bennett and Anthony Ellis made a rather interesting change

to the source material in order for Barry Nelson to star as 007 himself. Which is why this is the only version you'll see with an American James Bond, and a British Felix Leiter. All other versions after this would revert Bond back to being a renowned super spy for MI6, but in the *Climax!* version, he works for the Combined Intelligence Agency.



Sean Connery

Year(s) Active: 1962 – 1967, 1971, 1983

Number Of Films: 7

Probably the most iconic James Bond to ever hit the screen, [Sean Connery](#) is the person that everyone thinks of when you say the words, “Bond, James Bond.” While Ian Fleming initially doubted the casting, his successful debut in 1962's *Dr. No* not only won the author over to his side, it also caused him to write the character closer to the actor's own background in subsequent novels. But while he's one of the most iconic actors to have played the role, he's also one of the most complicated actors to have taken the role.

This is because of the fact that while he had a straight five year run as the character, from 1962 to 1967, he was lured back twice after that golden age to reprise the character. One of those performances, 1983's *Never Say Never Again*, is counted as an unofficial James Bond film; considering it was made outside of the EON Productions canon, and is a remake of *Thunderball*, driven by the film's original creator, Kevin McClory. Save for a video game voice-over role in an adaptation of *From Russia With Love*, that was the last time Connery ever donned the tuxedo – and it's still a source of debate between Bond fans who love it or hate it.



David Niven

Year(s) Active: 1967

Number Of Films: 1

Whenever David Niven enters a conversation on film, the James Bond series is something folks wouldn't be likely to cite as part of his resume. And yet, when Columbia bought the rights to turn *Casino Royale* into a comedy send-up of the still young 007 franchise, he was indeed the man they chose to play the O.G. James Bond. The second of the non-EON Productions films that is argued to either be canon or not, it took an interesting approach to the character that saw Niven being the classiest, most atypical Bond of all.

In the 1967 spoof, MI6 decides to name several agents James Bond, complete with the 007 designation. Their reasoning? Because it'll confuse the enemy. And the one to train all of them is Niven's Sir James Bond, who doesn't do fancy gadgets or womanizing, but instead is a stiff upper lip type who knows his craft. The film remains an oddity for Bond fans to discuss, and while co-stars like Peter Sellers and Woody Allen technically had the Bond name as covers, David Niven was the only one to really *be* James Bond.



George Lazenby

Year(s) Active: 1969

Number Of Films: 1

A first time actor and Australian model, [George Lazenby](#) was the man selected to take on the role of James Bond after Sean Connery had first bowed out of the role after 1967's *You Only Live Twice*. His one, and only, turn in the role was in the 1969 format breaker *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*. It's a format breaker for two key components: there's only one, big gadget used in the entire film, and Bond ends up having a female partner / love interest.

While he was considering returning for *The Man With The Golden Gun*, back when it was slated to be the next film in line, Lazenby eventually vacated the role, triggering Connery's first return to the role. Apparently, the production of *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* was so disheartening for George Lazenby, as he felt the creative forces mistreated him and he had grudges with two of his co-stars. Though after this slight bump in the road, the James Bond franchise would experience its most stable period yet.



Roger Moore

Year(s) Active: 1973 – 1985

Number Of Films: 7

Thanks to his work on a rather Bond-esque television adaptation of Leslie Charteris' *The Saint*, [Roger Moore](#) was eventually cast as the fifth actor to take on the role of 007. Starting in 1973's *Live and Let Die*, the actor would set a record for official installments played by a single actor, as he racked up seven films by time 1985's *A View To A Kill* hit theaters. Though if you were to ever discuss his tenure with die-hard Bond fans, you'll hear some of the same criticisms come up over and over again.

Between the more joke-laden tone that the Moore films took, and the fact that Roger Moore might have been wise to retire while he could still do most of his stunt work, you'll get some people labeling him as the worst James Bond of the lot. But it's hard to deny that he did possess the charm that the role requires, and when allowed by the material he was given, was able to lend an air of gravitas in moments that truly counted.



Timothy Dalton

Year(s) Active: 1987 – 1989

Number Of Films: 2

When *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* was trying to cast the role of James Bond, one particular actor was considered but eventually deemed too young for the role. That man was none other than Timothy Dalton, a classically trained actor who was eventually given another chance when someone with a very similar situation had to back out when casting 1987's *The Living Daylights*. Naturally, the role went to Dalton, and the rest was rather interesting history.

Known as a super serious Bond, Dalton only made two very experimental appearances as the character, with 1989's *License To Kill* being his swan song. In both films, 007 ditched the Moore era's tone of winks and smiles, and instead delved more into Ian Fleming's original intent for the character to be a noir-ish hard case. Even the trademark womanizing was toned down, as Bond focused more on his job and less on the ladies surrounding him on both occasions. He would never get to reprise the role, as legal troubles for the series would delay production on his proposed third film so long, his contract had expired and not been brought up for renewal.



Pierce Brosnan

Year(s) Active: 1995 – 2002

Number Of Films: 4

After legal troubles, and the end of the Cold War took place in the gap between *License To Kill* and 1995's *Goldeneye*, the storied franchise of 007's exploits was going to need a pretty severe revamp. And who better to lead the way than another actor who was previously approached for the role, but had to pass. We could have had a version of *The Living Daylights* starring [Pierce Brosnan](#), but you can thank contractual obligations with NBC's hit TV show *Remington Steele* from letting that happen. But as history has shown us, sometimes losing the role once means it just wasn't your time.

With one foot in the wittier side of the pool that Roger Moore's films occupied, and the other in Sean Connery's era of a killer edge, Brosnan's tenure in the role was a mixed, but exciting bag. Starting off with the very serious *Goldeneye*, but finishing with the very silly *Die Another Day*, the Pierce Brosnan era also brought another pleasant surprise – his first female boss. Through four films together, Brosnan and Dame Judi Dench gave the flagging series a more contemporary update, which also saw its lead surprisingly replaced with very little notice. While his last film would celebrate 40 years and 20 films in the James Bond canon, change was once again in the air.



Daniel Craig

Year(s) Active: 2006 – 2020

Number Of Films: 4 (to date)

Enter the most recent cast change, and our current era of Bond history – [the age of Daniel Craig](#). In a casting contest that had the likes of Clive Owen and Henry Cavill competing for the role, Craig won out when it came to the role of England's premiere covert operative. And it was at a moment that the series really needed a strong hand, as 2006's *Casino Royale* was announced as not only the 21st James Bond film, but also a reboot to the character's first assignment as a 00-agent.

Like a brick through a plate glass window, the film was the smash that revitalized the series that has now been operating into its fifth decade of film history. Craig brought back the edge of Timothy Dalton and the vulnerability of George Lazenby, and the charm of Sean Connery, into a cocktail that would serve Craig, and his audience, very well in the years that followed. While he was originally deemed by fans as unfit for the role, most memorably after being labeled as “James Blonde,” it didn't take long for him to convince the world that he was one of the best Bonds to have come along in some time.

While *Quantum of Solace* and *Spectre* have been seen as slight dips in quality, *Skyfall* delivered a 50th birthday present that only guaranteed that James Bond would be returning for some time to come. And as *Bond 25* serves as Daniel Craig's rumored [final entry as 007](#), the page will now turn for a new era of Bond history. Who will occupy the role next is left to be discovered. If we've learned

anything from this re-examination of history, it's that whoever fills the tuxedo next will probably be an unexpected surprise, but one worth sticking around for.