

CLASSIC DRIVER

It's not a toy! We drive a lap of Jersey in the Bentley Blower Jr

Lead

We've long admired the playful creations of The Little Car Company — recently rebranded as Hedley Studios — so when the invitation came to drive their latest model, the Blower Jr, our man Błażej Żuławski didn't hesitate for a second..



After a short flight from London, we touch down on the Crown Dependency of Jersey - not to be confused with the American state of the same name. This small rock in the English Channel was once, in fact, a proprietor of that far larger landmass on the other side of the Atlantic, hence the similarity. The only thing I really knew about this island going in was that it sits closer to France than the UK — just 14 miles off the French coast — and that it played a complicated role in history. Think William the Conqueror, the Norman conquest of Britain, and later, the Hundred Years' War for the French throne (yes, the one with Joan of Arc in it).

Oh, and one other thing I knew: the cult British crime series "Bergerac" was filmed here. In it, the titular detective - part of the fictional Bureau des Étrangers - navigated Jersey's 350 miles of twisty inland roads in a burgundy 1947 Triumph Roadster. And those are the very same roads we're driving today. Except our vehicles are a bit... different. No, not from Bergerac's Triumph. From everything else I've ever driven. The cars I'll be driving are not only electric and brand new - crafted from steel, aluminium, and carbon fibre - but they also replicate, as closely as possible, the legendary late-1920s Bentley Blowers.



Originally built by the infamous “Bentley Boy” Sir Tim Birkin, the Blower gained fame (and notoriety) for its Amherst Villiers supercharger, slapped unceremoniously onto the front of a 4½-litre Bentley. The twist? The Blower Juniors we’re piloting are 85% scale. Now, before you say “What the hell?”, let’s rewind a bit. Bentley were kind enough to bring along the original Team Car No.2 (UU 5872), raced by Birkin and valued today at over £25 million, making it the most valuable Bentley in existence. This gave me the chance to reconnect with its history, which is also complicated. While Birkin was busy persuading Bentley chairman Woolf Barnato to build 55 production Blowers for “homologation” (with five destined for racing), W.O. Bentley himself was famously opposed. He believed the supercharged engine lacked the durability for racing. And, well, he was right.



Sure, with 240 horsepower, the Blower was likely the fastest car in the world at the time (and I can confirm after having a ride that it still feels fast as hell today). But it never won a race - second place at the Circuit de Pau was as good as it got, and at Le Mans, it never even finished. W.O., however, would later prove his point with the 6.5-litre Speed Six, the most successful Bentley of all time, which crushed the competition at Le Mans in 1929 and 1930. But as is often the case, the best car isn’t necessarily the most iconic. Which is how I find myself threading through Jersey’s narrow lanes in a “Red Pack” Blower Jr., inspired not by the Speed Six or the stately 8 Litre, but by another legend: Blower No.1, also known as the Brooklands Battleship. Take that, W.O.!



Having already driven the original, I can immediately spot some key differences. First, the powertrain. Instead of 240 wild horses, I've got about 20. The big supercharger housing up front? It now contains a charging port and serves purely decorative purposes. I'm also sitting dead-center in the cabin, and if I had a passenger, they'd be tucked in behind me in a tandem layout. In that scenario, we'd both be wearing seatbelts - a luxury the original never offered.

Also new: a reversing camera, discreetly mounted in a seatbelt pillar, beaming its feed to a tidy little screen that doubles as a clock and sat nav. My Blower Jr. also features driving modes: Comfort, Bentley, and Sport, which tweak throttle response and dial in the modest amount of power available. Stopping is courtesy of Brembo disc brakes from a Ducati Diavel, and thank goodness, because at a top speed of 45 mph, things already feel excitingly sketchy. Anything over 30 mph delivers a potent mix of adrenaline and existential dread - especially when a lorry comes at you around a blind corner.



Beyond these 21st-century upgrades — like the battery pack beneath the floor for better weight distribution and the lack of a gearbox — the rest of the driving experience is tuned to mimic that of a 1920s–30s original. There's no power steering. Suspension is by leaf springs with friction dampers, tuned with the help of none other than Andy Wallace. The engine-turned dash, the period-correct levers (one of which resembles the original ignition advance control), the abundance of leather and the magneto-style switches for lights and indicators all nail the vintage vibe. Even the horn is lifted straight from the Roaring Twenties, and yes, I used it liberally to greet curious passersby. It's part car, part amusement park ride, part history lesson. What a machine.



On rougher roads, the original actually rides better, thanks to its longer wheelbase and heavier frame - the Jr. weighs just 500 kg. But that's my only real criticism. The Jr. is a blast to drive. Its skinny "bicycle" tyres follow every groove in the road, and you have to stay focused to keep it in line. It's not a chore - it's engaging. Add in a functional boot (where the fuel tank would be) that can hold a charging cable or a grocery bag, and suddenly I can picture myself using this every day. A trip to the shops. A run to the beach. With a 65-mile range (just over 100 km) and full road legality, it's weirdly usable as a commuter.

The catch? The price. This handmade toy-for-grownups costs a rather staggering £129,500 (before tax and delivery). That's Lotus Emeya territory.



Of course, this comparison is a bit absurd. No one seriously shopping for a real car, electric or petrol-powered, is cross-shopping a Blower Jr. This is a car for a different sort of buyer: the millionaire collector who buys it simply because they can. And because Hedley Studios offers a suite of customisation options — paint, trim, and finishes — that let you make your Jr. resemble any vintage Bentley you like, even the mighty UU 5872. When the original is worth £25 million, the Junior starts to look like... a bargain?



If I owned one, I'd use it as much as possible. As founder and CEO Ben Hedley told me, some buyers of their Bugattis, Aston Martins, or Ferrari replicas just like to look at them. Others figure out how to register them and drive them. One owner racked up 5,000 km in a year. That's impressive. Honestly, it deserves its own TV series. In the end, the Blower Jr. isn't trying to be practical, or rational, or even especially modern. It's a celebration of history, eccentricity, and of the kind of engineering madness that made the original Bentley Boys legends. It won't change your life, but it might just make your morning commute feel like a lap of Brooklands. And honestly, isn't that the whole point?

Gallery

