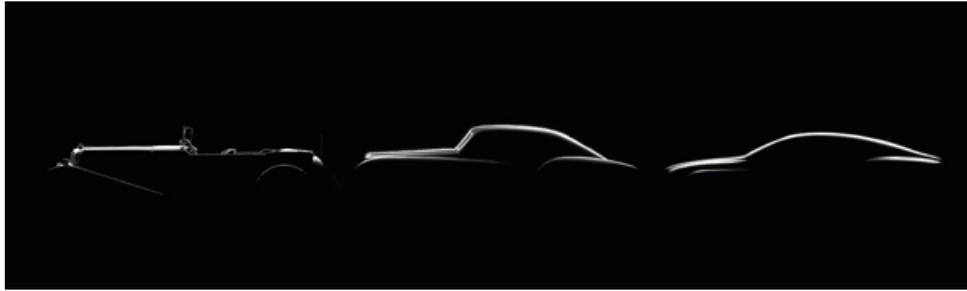


CLASSIC DRIVER



Bentley GT Coupé 2003

21 February 2002 | Classic Driver



Crewe, 20 th February 2002.... From the Speed Six of 1928, via the R-Type Continental of 1952 to the GT coupé in 2003, Bentley Motors' unique and seamless bloodline of sporting GT (Grand Touring) cars remains strong. Insiders who have seen it are in no doubt: Bentley's GT coupé clearly maintains the traditions of the powerful GT cars established by W O Bentley himself and built by the best designers and engineers of the day.

That tradition continues at Bentley Motors today where new designs not only maintain the standards set by their predecessors, but also establish new heights. Realised from the genes epitomised in previous great Bentleys, the GT coupé's design cues include the complex and powerful curves of the 1952 R-Type Continental as well as the ethos of the Le Mans winning Speed Six from the late twenties. This new Bentley's design acknowledges and reflects Bentley Grand Tourers from the past as well as showcasing the design and engineering skills of Bentley Motors in the 21st Century, skills which work seamlessly alongside each other.

Dirk van Braeckel, Bentley Motors' Director of Design explains: "We like to think we have created an automotive sculpture, bearing all the coach-building cues typical of the cars we make at Crewe, with interiors that display all the handcrafted excellence in hide, wood veneers and metal that is unique to Bentley. We believe this car will be the most pure Grand Touring Bentley since the R-Type Continental".

The 1952 Bentley R-Type Continental was, when launched, the fastest four-seat car then available. Built by H J Mulliner & Co. - a company now fully incorporated into Bentley Motors - each of the 193 lightweight bodies was an eloquent statement of aerodynamics and aesthetics. And, now, the Mulliner name graces Bentley cars that have been personally crafted for their owners in a way, and to an extent, that only Bentley Motors is capable of achieving.

Created 24 years earlier was the Bentley Speed Six. The natural predecessor to the R-Type Continental was developed as a sporting version of the Standard Six to carry grand touring-style coachwork and be a sporting car without equal, it elicited a pivotal comment from W O himself: "The ideal we have kept before us in the design of this car is not to sacrifice one atom of silence and flexibility to speed".

It was a grand claim that was confirmed by owners and the motoring press, one of the best known journalists being Maynard Greville, a writer whose views were regarded with almost Biblical reverence. He said of the Speed Six: "I consider this car to be one of the more remarkable engineering achievements of this century; the balance of speed, silence and flexibility having been maintained in a unique manner. Regardless of price, this car is the nearest to the ideal road vehicle I have ever driven."

A year after its launch at the 1928 Olympia, London Motor Show, it was driven to victory at Le Mans in 1929 and again in 1930. Having won just about every other distance race worth winning, the Speed Six, and Bentley Motors, retired from competition when the company was bought out by Rolls-Royce in 1931. Of the 182 Speed Six chassis ever made, over 100 are still in existence.

The care and attention that is paid to Bentley Motors' history is seen most effectively today in the company's design studio where the 40-strong design team is currently working on the GT coupé's interior and exterior. The words they use to express the key elements in Bentley's bloodlines are: Animal, Muscular, Poised, Predatory and Competitive.

"If you look at the muscularity of the R-Type Continental," says Dirk van Braeckel, "you can clearly see how similar it is to the haunches of a tiger. Look at the way a turbocharger is designed – the heart of our most powerful engines – and you can see the elements of a fossil preserved in nature. There is no excess on a great Bentley design, just skin stretched over muscle like you might see on a thoroughbred racehorse.

Dirk and his team are fascinated by shapes that are, as he put it, "organic". Curves that are not there for decoration but for an evolved purpose yet that are beautiful in themselves.

The GT coupé calls upon all of these cues and clues – I can tell you that it will have a proper face, a laser cut grille like the Le Mans Bentleys of 70 years ago, and it will have twin headlamps to confirm its sporting character and it will be very beautiful."

Bentley's new GT coupé will reincarnate the muscular Bentley spirit delivered by the Speed Six and the elegant and distinctive design cues introduced with the R-Type Continental. But more importantly that Bentley Motors' designers and engineers remain world leaders in creating a peerless – and beautiful – Grand Tourer.

Story and photos: *Bentley Motors*

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