
Classic Driver Dealer: Frank Dale & Stepsons

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There's a lot of Rolls-Royce and Bentley experience under one roof at the West London premises of Frank Dale & Stepsons. The company was established in 1946 by the current chairman Ivor Gordon's stepfather, and Gordon himself has now been in the business for over 45 years. Another director, James Crickmay, has been with the company for 30, with James's son Giles joining them in 2005.

The company is known throughout the world for specialising in the sales, service and restoration of the two British marques that were once separate, and then conjoined until their purchase by two different German motor manufacturers in the late 1990s.

There's no bias towards one make or another, "We tend to have more **Bentleys** in stock because there are that many more models," says **Giles Crickmay**. "And as far as age is concerned, we have dealt in many significant **Silver Ghosts**, going through the '**Derby**' **Bentleys** of the 1930s, via R-

type Continentals, Silver Clouds and Corniches, to the latest Continental GT and Flying Spur."



In the showroom at the time of my visit was an **R-type Continental** - "The best investment you could make," commented Crickmay Snr. - as well as a typical **Hooper-bodied 1953 Rolls-Royce Silver Wraith Sedan de Ville** specially built for **Nubar Gulbenkian**. A rare car, one of a handful commissioned by the colourful 1950s Armenian oil trader, but incredibly in the workshop there's another; chassis LELW 74, Gulbenkian's famous '**Perspex Top**' **Silver Wraith**.

This car - destined for sale at the forthcoming **Paris Rétromobile** auction, and just coming out of a total restoration - is the one with a roof fabricated from clear perspex. Protection from the summer sun came courtesy of a rolling fabric blind, as well as air-conditioning. Both cars have Gulbenkian's trademark rear instrument panel with speedometer and radio, as well as leather-covered dashboards.



Just a few feet away from the outrageously individual styling by **Hooper** are examples of classic **Mulliner Park Ward** and **H.J. Mulliner** bodywork, carried by the Olympic White **1957 Bentley S1 Continental** and the Black **1965 Rolls-Royce Silver Cloud III 'Chinese Eye' Fixed Head Coupé**.

However, **Bentley** and **R-R** ownership is not always about big-ticket cars for collectors. Asked for a tip for Bentley owners-to-be, Giles Crickmay swiftly suggests the **1991 - 2003 Continental R/S/T** series. "These are undervalued cars. They are usable, stylish and hand-made four-seater coupés - yet the prices can start at under £40,000."

In fact Dales had sold one such car the week before, as well as two **R-type Continentals** not so long ago, too.

Working with the 'real' family is a tight-knit group of craftsmen led by Workshop Manager **Vincent Roma**, who has been with the company for more than 25 years. Frank Dale can carry out routine service work as well as restoration and also specialises in upholstery and trimming for all cars, not

just those from Cricklewood, Derby or Crewe.

The company is very proactive in the marketplace, attending club events and shows including **Essen** and having a 'period' stand at the **Goodwood Revival**; the stocklist sadly at 21st Century prices.

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Frank Dale & Stepsons

125 Harlequin Avenue

Great West Road

London TW8 9EW

Phone: +44 (0)208 847 5447

Fax: +44 (0)208 560 5748

Email: gilescrickmay@frankdale.com

Website: www.frankdale.com

Text: Steve Wakefield

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