

CLASSIC DRIVER

1926 Bugatti Type 35T: A Riding Mechanic's Tale



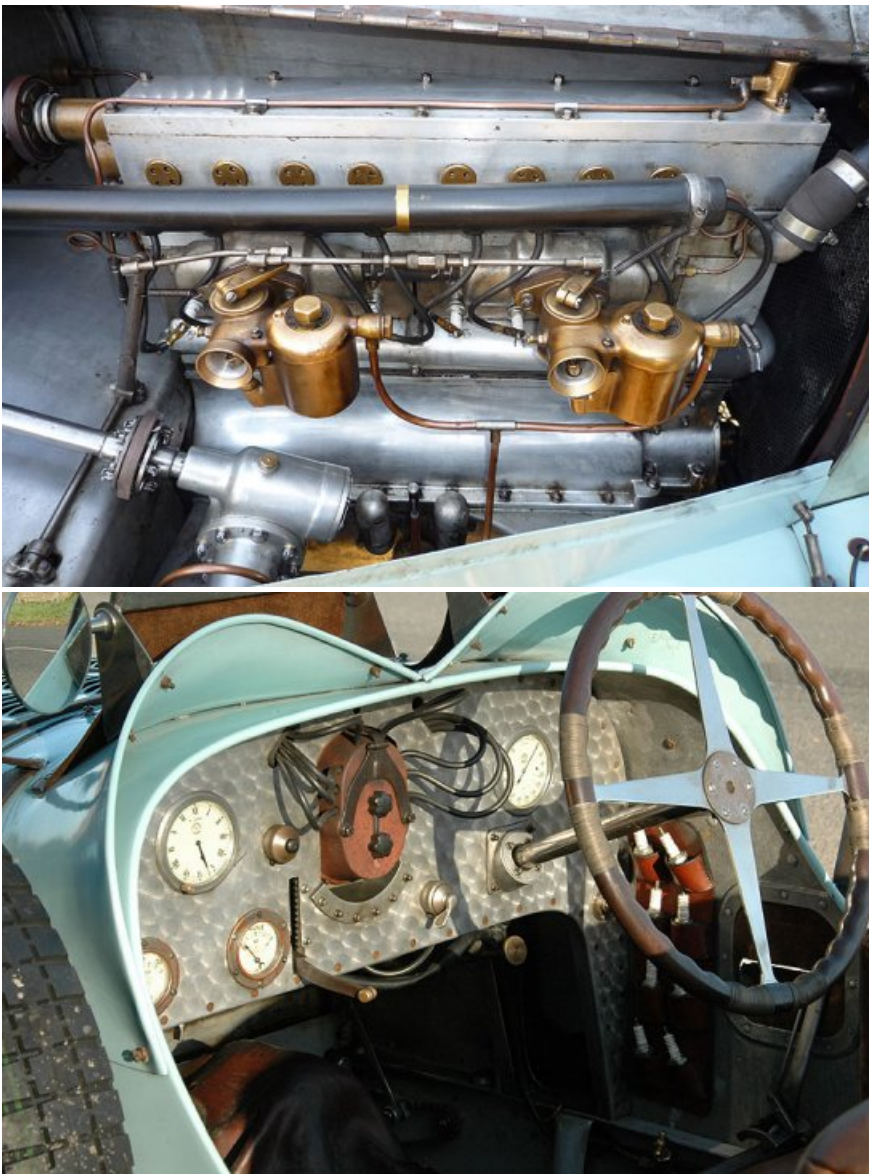
Threading your legs into the passenger footwell of the small blue car is a task relatively easy to accomplish. From then on, it's more a matter of crossing legs than fingers as Will l'Anson expertly guides the eight-cylinder unblown Bugatti along the Cotswold lanes.

This is the life. Will, of **Martin Chisholm Collectors' Cars**, had invited me to see a car that has just emerged from restoration by **Malcolm Gentry**, a leading Bugatti craftsman. A typical 'British' restoration, with the emphasis on 'sympathy' rather than gloss, the car looks as correct sitting outside a Cotswold stone barn as it would on the **Mille Miglia** or **Colorado Grand**. Indeed, either event – or many others – would be eminently suitable for the crackling two-seater.



And it was indeed a crackling sound that led me to one of the barns at Chisholm's Cotswold HQ, where Will was pre-warming the car for action. A cup of tea later, and after a bit of foot-stamping and brr-brr-ing in the fresh autumn sunshine, we set forth for a brisk round-the-block run in the Bugatti. 'Round-the-block' is not being too fair on one of the most picturesque and smartest areas of England. Indeed, Will opined that there must be more Bugattis per capita in that golden part of Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire than anywhere else in the UK...

His experience of driving these cars is such that, today, it's a matter of admiring the actions of a master, rather than taking the wheel myself. "You'll need these," says Will, lobbing over a pair of ski goggles. I'd layered myself up with quilted waistcoat topped with down jacket and thermal gloves so, bearing more than a passing resemblance to *Bib*, once Will was comfortably behind the beautifully patinated wood and metal steering wheel, I hopped, gazelle-like, over the low scuttle and into the passenger seat.



There is an element of negotiating some pipe-work and chassis members but, once installed, you are in a pretty comfy position. The seats are not 'staggered'; that is to say, you sit directly next to the driver and not - as in many older GP cars - slightly behind to enable narrower bodywork. Your right arm will rest behind the driver's back (it is a RHD car, remember) over the tail but we're a couple of car enthusiast blokes and, well, it's no different to riding pillion.

At your feet lies the left-hand part of the chain-operated cable brakes, plus sundry other levers and switches including the fuel lines, and oil and fuel pumps. The fuel pump on the dash is my department so, after we've put in a few gallons of super unleaded mixed with some octane booster at the local petrol station, it's time to pressurise the fuel tank. This works on the garden sprayer principle (you can tell I'm familiar with older cars) but, once started, and up and running, needs no further attention.







For those less than familiar with the immortal **Type 35**, let me introduce you to not only one of the most perfect automotive shapes, but also a little of the car's background. Variations of **8C Alfa Romeo** apart, it was probably the most perfect all-rounder ever built. **Grands Prix**, minor and major races across the globe and the big endurance events such as the **Targa Florio** and the **Mille Miglia** were all Type 35 benefits in the 1920s. The first cars were under 2-litre, unblown, until 1926 when special 'Targa-specification', slightly longer stroke (now 2300cc) engines appeared in the **Type 35T**. Add a supercharger and you have the famous **Type 35B** - but that's another story.

Looking at the pedals, I can see why Will is wearing tight racing shoes - it's very confined, with each one seeming but a thumb's width wide. The external gearlever and handbrake do make some space in the cockpit so, in all honesty, it's pretty snug and cosy with your head behind the aero screen and back and sides supported by the dark tan leather seat.



Just taking the engine into the low-3000s for our country run means the car makes safe and swift progress. The straight-eight barks, crackles and pops, pulling strongly all the way. I think in a racing or hillclimb situation, with just one driver, this would be a pretty quick car. Will estimates the top speed to be "115mph or so", so a rally like the **Mille Miglia** would be a comfortable run and the big fuel tank allows a long time between stops. For a short sprint race he might use 4500-5000rpm (roller-bearing crank, of course...), at which point the engine is probably producing 110bhp.

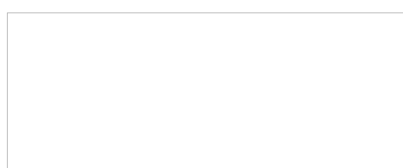
You do, obviously, have to respect the brakes but really, with the excellent period-look **Blockley** tyres, the ride and handling of the **T35T** would shame many cars built 30 years later. I needed the goggles but the small screens do their bit and you do sit fairly low down. **Mille Miglia 2009**? I'm your man.



This particular chassis - # 4794, very original and with an extensive in-period racing history that includes the **1932 Grand Prix de Nimes** and **Albi Grand Prix** - would be a fabulous mount for that, or the **2010 Monaco Historics** or really any of the other top events.

We drove back to base and - photography done - did the only possible thing and retired to the pub, Will driving a **1925 Vauxhall 30/98** and me following in the editorial BMW. Over a reflective glass we discussed the morning's work. One thing soon became clear: he is very attached to this car. How attached? Well, maybe a phone call is in order, just to find out...

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