

CLASSIC DRIVER

Bonhams to Sell Unrestored Bugatti T57S at Rétromobile 2009



When the mainstream worldwide media picks up on a story, you know it must be something important. Or maybe it was a dearth of good news at Christmas - and some good PR by Bonhams - that saw a rush of features about the “mysterious garage-find rare Bugatti, said to be worth millions and hidden away for many years”, hitting our screens over the holiday period.

Those in the know have been aware of the car for some time and Bonhams had, in actual fact, released the news on 26th November 2008. Oh well, that's the national press for you.

In anticipation of the car's sale at **Rétromobile Paris** on 7th February, Bonhams invited members of the media to view the car at the world-famous **Phoenix Green Garage**, at Hartley Wintney in Hampshire.

Few would dispute that the **Type 57S Bugatti** is one of the 'greats'. Based on a shortened version of the Type 57 chassis, and fitted with a high-compression, lowered - now dry-sump - version of the immortal 3.3-litre DOHC straight-eight, the car was celebrated as the fastest production sports car available in 1936. **Alfa Romeo** was to contest that claim but if you were to think of the performance of a **599 GTB** with the price, exclusivity and rarity of a **Rolls-Royce Phantom Coupé**, you'd get the picture in the context of today's luxury cars.

The bodywork of the 42 cars built varied, as was the practice of the day, and different coachbuilders came up with timeless styling in coupé or cabriolet form. The most celebrated are the three, supercharged **57SC Atlantic** coupés styled by **Jean Bugatti** himself. **Gangloff**, **Corsica** and **Bertelli** supplied coachwork in addition to the **Atalante** factory styling you see here.



To be in a position to order a 57S in the late-30s, you not only had to be passionate about owning the very finest sporting machine with Grand Prix and sports car lineage, you also had to be very wealthy indeed. So, enter **Francis Richard Henry Penn Curzon, Viscount Curzon**, the 5th **Earl Howe**, victor at **Le Mans** in 1931 (driving an Alfa-Romeo and partnered on that occasion by **Sir Henry Birkin**) and the first President of the **British Racing Drivers' Club**.

Howe, using his excellent connections with the Molsheim company (he'd campaigned several cars including a Works Team **Bugatti Type 59**) ordered a new **57S Atalante** in late 1936, registering the car in the UK in early summer the following year.

This is the car you see here. Howe sold the Bugatti in 1945 and from that point it passed through various discerning owners' hands at prices that would today make you wince but, at the time, were still significant. £2000 in 1945 wasn't small change.

In 1955, **Dr Harold Carr** acquired chassis 57502 (fitted with a Marshall K200 supercharger since 1948) from **Lord Ridley**. He drove the car for the first few years but in the early 1960s it was parked in his garage where it remained for nearly 50 years, until Dr Carr's death in 2007.



A very private man, Dr Carr had kept the elegant Bugatti in almost 'time-warp' condition: untouched, and neither 'improved' nor restored for 50 years.

For this very reason, Bonhams has received a high level of interest in the ex-Howe Bugatti that, although officially 'Refer Dept.', is likely to exceed 3 million euros.

Gooding & Company sold a beautifully restored, but nicely aged, **57SC Atalante** from the Williamson Collection at [Pebble Beach last year](#) for \$7,920,000. That's around 6 million euros at today's volatile exchange rates, so who's to say what will happen in February?





Following my [Type 35T experiences last autumn](#), I'm a firm fan of the marque. Every angle of the bodywork delights and the beautifully finished engine is typical Bugatti: clean and functional in a classical style.

Yes, it needs restoring, but sit behind the wood and alloy wheel with its oh-so-long steering column, the gearlever in turned steel and bakelite lying conveniently to hand, and the imagination runs riot. It's even (in the grand European tradition) right-hand drive.

If you have time, do go to Rétromobile. And if you are there, buy an auction catalogue and see for yourself. As far as bidding is concerned: 3 million euros? It's only money, and keeping a car in the garage (though not for another 50 years, please) could well be safer than money in the bank. Particularly nowadays.



To see the full entry for Bonhams' 7th February Automobiles d'Exception à Retromobile auction, please [CLICK HERE](#).

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