

CLASSIC DRIVER



Bonhams at Goodwood: the George Daniels motorcycles

26 January 2012 | Simon de Burton

Regular Classic Driver readers will have seen our recent piece about the forthcoming sale of motor cars from the estate of Dr George Daniels, the legendary English watchmaker who died last October, writes Simon de Burton.

The great man's remarkable career in horology enabled him to indulge his passion for automobiles to the extent that the collection he left behind is expected to fetch up to £8 million when it comes under the hammer with Bonhams at the Goodwood Festival of Speed – but while his VSCC exploits with various Bentleys, his ex-Tim Birkin Alfa 8C and the remarkable 1908 Grand Prix Itala mean he is primarily associated with four wheels, it should also be remembered that Daniels was a lifelong motorcycle fanatic.

When I started as a lowly employee of Sotheby's back in the early 1990s, those of us who travelled to work on motorbikes were allowed to park on a narrow strip of pavement beside the Aeolian Hall, a former BBC recording studio behind New Bond Street. One morning I was struggling to relocate the camchain tensioner bolt into an ancient Yamaha after it had rattled loose during the commute, when a man drew up on a BMW twin.



He stepped off the bike, assessed what I was trying to do and, taking the bolt gently in a giant hand, relocated it with remarkable deftness before starting the engine and adjusting the previously noisy camchain to perfection. Only later did I learn that this was George, arriving for work in his capacity as a consultant to the Sotheby's clock and watch department.

As well as being a BMW fan, he also had a soft spot for the English Sunbeam marque and, as well as the Daniels cars, Bonhams will also sell two delightful 1950 examples of the S7. Bonhams' motorcycle specialist Ben Walker says both bikes are in sound condition and have certainly not been over-restored - they are tidy-looking yet well-patinated, and George clearly rode them regularly. Estimates are £4,000 - 5,000 apiece.

With its balloon tyres, four inches of ground clearance and modest 25 horsepower engine, the S7 was never destined to set the world alight with razor-sharp handling and road-burning acceleration - but, in an era when people were getting itchy for clip-on handlebars and café-racer crouches, it did offer a gentlemanly alternative with comfort and convenience being the order of the day.

As a result, you get shaft drive, electrics that are shielded from the elements and directly interchangeable wheels. One of the Daniels bikes is black and the other 'mist green', but both are 'Deluxe' models which have a more reliable engine than earlier S7s.

However, bearing in mind George's mechanical genius with nuts and bolts both large and small, mechanical condition should not be too much of a problem...

The George Daniels Sunbeams will be sold at Bonhams' Goodwood Festival of Speed auction on June 29. More details from Ben Walker on +44 (0) 20 8963 2819 ☐ +44 (0) 20 8963 2819.

Photos: Bonhams

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