

CLASSIC DRIVER

Bentley Barnato Roadster Concept

Lead

Ever wondered what the Bentley Boys might drive today? Would we see Woolf Barnato and Tim Birkin at the wheel of a Continental GT Speed – or a Brooklands, maybe?

While Bentleys are known as the ultimate British luxury cruiser, they are, at the same time, true drivers' cars, built as solidly as an English castle and blessed with lavish power from their V8 and W12 engines. Now, a new design concept by Ben Knapp Voith aims to create a modern interpretation of what the Bentley Boys – those elite and adventurous gentlemen racers of the mid-1920s, who created such monsters as the 4½ Litre Blower – would build if they were alive today.

In honour of their memory, not to mention the Bentley Boys' many race victories at Brooklands and four consecutive wins at the Le Mans 24 Hours, Knapp Voith has named the concept the 'Barnato Roadster'.

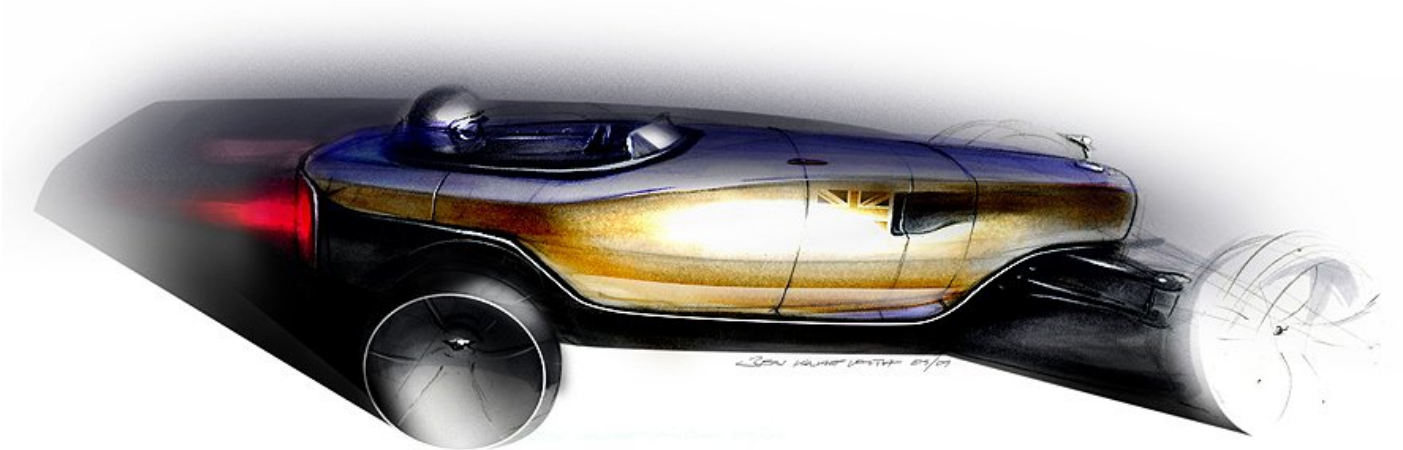




Throughout the project, Knapp Voith was supported by Dirk van Braeckel and his design team at Bentley, while attending an 8-month design internship in Crewe.

His first challenge was to capture and explore what it is that makes a Bentley so special: the proportions, from the upright fronts of the early cars through to the gracious curves of the R Type Continental. And then he needed to translate these design themes into a contemporary context.

An open-wheeled layout was chosen, since it is reminiscent of the architecture of the 1920s cars and, at the same time, makes it quite distinct from Bentley's current model line-up.



The main body design acts as the visual rhythm of the car. Starting with the grille and the upright, train-like body, iconic throughout Bentley's history, the sculpture continues through a long bonnet, softening as it flows around the driver and finally ending in an elegant, boat-like tail. From above, the car reveals an asymmetrical design approach, as shown by the feature lines inspired by racetracks. The passenger seat, hidden under a pop-up panel, is also moved back, again to demonstrate asymmetry.

The concept is modelled on a current Conti GT wheelbase, but with the driver placed further back to create the ultra-long bonnet. Knapp Voith also wanted the engine more central in the car, but still between the driver and front axle, to achieve better weight distribution for track driving.



He also suggested eliminating the Conti GT's four-wheel-drive system and instead opted for pure rear-wheel drive, placing the DSG gearbox at the rear axle. The power would be provided by a modified version of Audi's S4 V6 supercharged engine, while the body would be made from carbonfibre combined with Bentley's metal spray-on technique.



“If Bentley ever considered taking a project like this to production, a road-going car would be of very specialised appeal and it would perhaps make more sense as a track-only car for selected Bentley owners, similar to Ferrari’s FXX project,” comments Knapp Voith. “This would create an exclusive club and would certainly allow some of the Bentley Boys’ spirit to be reintroduced into the brand.”

The Bentley Barnato Roadster Concept was one of three automotive projects shown at Ben Knapp Voith’s recent graduation at the Art Center College of Design, Pasadena, CA. Ben has since relocated back to Europe to further pursue his design career.

Photos: Ben Knapp Voith / Art Center College of Design

Gallery

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