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Frank Dale & Stepsons: Generations of knowledge

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Not only are there around 100 Rolls-Royces and Bentleys at Frank Dale & Stepsons' West London premises – an even split between cars for sale and those being worked on – but also a depth of knowledge that can only be passed down through several generations...

Frank Dale founded the company in 1946 as the world's first independent Rolls-Royce and Bentley specialist. His two stepsons Ivor and John Gordon were to join the company the following decade, giving the company not only a longer name, but also a future lineage through which the ever-expanding company would operate to this day. In addition, James Crickmay joined the company in 1980, and now shares directorship with his son, Giles.

Small-knit workforce with a global presence

"There are four factors we consider when sourcing a car: style, condition, originality and rarity" - Giles Crickmay, Director

The efforts of this small-knit group over the decades have led to Frank Dale & Stepsons being widely considered as one of the foremost Rolls and Bentley specialists in the world – a claim endorsed by its global customer base. Giles Crickmay takes pride in sharing his knowledge with clients both domestic and foreign – in fact, during our visit, he was seen taking snaps of a Continental's engine bay on his phone, and instantly forwarding them on for a client in Dubai to use as a reference. In addition to this informal 'service', the company is also special in the fact that its sales, maintenance, restoration and re-upholstering activities all take place under one roof.

A shift in sales activities five or so years ago has put Frank Dale in a stronger position than ever – this involved refocusing on its specialist area of pre-War (Silver Ghosts, Phantoms I through III, Derby/Cricklewood Bentleys) and the post-War, coachbuilt eras. Of the many cars offered to the company by its worldwide contacts, Giles Crickmay estimates that only 10% are taken on: "There are four factors we consider when sourcing a car – style, condition, originality and rarity. With the W.O. Bentleys in particular, the difference in values between an all-original, matching-numbers car and

one that's been put together is phenomenal."

The future of the past?

If Giles' predictions about future demand are correct, the narrowing of the company's sales focus was a good move: "I can see the top-end, pre-War models continuing to be successful, in particular the more exotic, open cars. The 50s and early 60s cars still have the most scope for appreciation, such as S1 through S3 and R-Type Continentals, or a good Standard Steel Silver Dawn or Cloud III. They're usable, lovely to drive, and the majority of the bodies fitted are great looking".

Photos: Classic Driver

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