

CLASSIC DRIVER

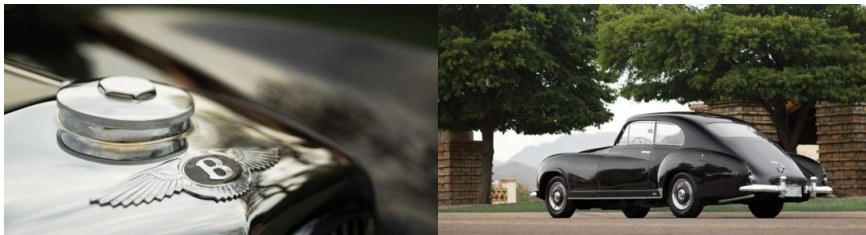
Timeless Classics: Bentley R-Type Continental

Lead

To satisfy the far-reaching geographical palate of the world's elite, the Bentley R-Type Continental was given increased dynamic prowess and gorgeous coachbuilt bodywork – and it became a timeless classic in the process...

The Continental name was first used for enhanced-specification Rolls-Royces long before WWII – but with post-War recovery bringing with it the advent of a high-speed road system across Europe, it was to become an appellation reserved for the Bentleys best equipped to exploit it. The first Bentley Continental (only named an R-Type retrospectively) would arrive in 1952, mechanically overhauled for a bias towards long-distance, high-speed cruising. All cars were delivered as rolling chassis to their coachbuilders, with the focus thereafter placed on aerodynamic efficiency and reduced weight.

Exclusively coachbuilt



The R-Type Continental was the fastest and most expensive saloon of its time

Of the 207 R-Type Continentals built, some 192 were sent to H.J. Mulliner to receive the lightweight aluminium bodywork that the London-based coachbuilder had been pioneering; the remainder were delivered to the likes of Franay (seen here), Park Ward and Pininfarina. Now with faired-in headlamps and a 'fastback' profile flanked by rear fins, the slippery-silhouetted Continental could achieve 120mph – should the hard-fought weight savings not be negated by options such as radios and electric windows. Either way, the R-Type Continental was not only the fastest and most expensive saloon of its time, it also executed its cross-country duties in the silent, sure-footed manner for which Bentleys had long been held in high regard.

Lasting the distance



Even once the glittering press reports had diminished and its S1 successor had arrived in 1955, the R-Type Continental would continue as a rolling attestation of mechanical excellence. In some cases, the inline-6 engine and other enhanced components have seen more than 350,000 miles pass beneath them – with the occupants enclosed by sumptuous coachwork, and swathed in the finest Connolly leather. The long-distance abilities that made the car so desirable (and expensive) in period have matured into those that make the R-Type Continental one of the rarest and most sought-after post-War Bentleys – as recent auction records will verify.

This particular 1954 Bentley R-Type Continental Fastback Sports Saloon by Franay will be offered at RM Auction's 2014 [Monaco Sale](#) in May.

Gallery

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