

# CLASSIC DRIVER

## 1901 Panhard et Levassor 7 hp

- Lot sold  
USD 240 629 - 300 786  
GBP 200 000 - 250 000 (listed)  
**Year of manufacture** 1901
- **Chassis number** 2881
- **Number of seats** 2
- **Drivetrain** 2wd
- **Lot number** 214
- **Drive** LHD
- **Condition** Used
- **Location** 
- **Fuel type** Petrol
- **Exterior colour** Other
- **Engine number** 2881
- 

### Description

1901 Panhard et Levassor Twin-Cylinder 7hp Rear-Entrance Tonneau  
Coachwork by Henri Labourdette  
Registration no. to be advised  
Chassis no. 2881  
Engine no. 2881

Presented in excellent condition, the early Panhard et Levassor offered here retains its original tonneau body by Henri Labourdette of Paris, one of the oldest of French coachbuilders with a reputation for quality second to none. Established as a carriage maker in 1858, Labourdette built its first motor car bodies in 1899/1900 on Panhard et Levassor chassis and remained in the front rank of European coachbuilders until WW2. This particular car is powered by a 1,650cc twin-cylinder engine rated at 7hp, which drives via a three-speed gearbox and chain final transmission. Particularly worthy of note is the magneto ignition, an advanced feature specified by the original owner in preference to the standard hot-tube ignition, which is recorded on the surviving factory build sheet. Other noteworthy features include a single Ducellier headlight, a pair of Neverout sidelights, bulb horn and a brass luggage rack, the latter mounted on the roof. The provision of an electric starter is the only notified deviation from factory specification.

René Panhard was a qualified engineer whose Paris-based business made woodworking tools and built Deutz engines under license. With his partner, Émile Levassor, he experimented with horseless carriages using engines licensed from Daimler. In 1891, Panhard et Levassor offered for sale what was arguably the world's first production car, using a built-under-license Daimler engine. Both Daimler and Benz had made automobiles before Panhard but these had been individual 'prototypes' rather than models intended for

series production. Above all, the firm was responsible for bequeathing the automobile world the Système Panhard, which embodied the now familiar layout of a front-mounted engine driving the rear axle via a clutch, gearbox and differential. The modern motor car had been born.

After Emile Levassor's death in 1897, René Panhard re-organised his company as a joint stock corporation to attract wealthy investors, while Commandant Arthur Constantin Krebs succeeded Levassor as technical and production manager. Krebs began work by designing a series of four-cylinder engines with nominal power outputs ranging from 8CV to 20CV. His Paris-Amsterdam racer of 1898 featured a tilted (as opposed to vertical) steering column and this innovation was soon carried over to the production cars. Racing developments continued to influence the production Panhards, which soon featured front-mounted radiators, first seen on the Paris-Bordeaux racer of 1899. Battery/coil ignition and Krebs' own diaphragm carburettor were features of Panhard et Levassor engines by the end of 1901.

Panhard et Levassor swiftly established a reputation for fine engineering, excellent craftsmanship, superior reliability and outstanding performance, qualities that placed the company at the forefront in early motor sport, notably the great Continental city-to-city races of the time. Little wonder therefore that such notables and sportsmen as the Hon C S Rolls, René de Knyff, Maurice Farman, Léon Girardot and Fernand Charron were associated so closely with the marque. As early as 1898 Charron had driven a Panhard et Levassor to victory in the Paris-Bordeaux race, covering the course at an average speed of 26.9mph, while in 1899 Girardot's 12hp car covered the 201 miles of the Ostend-Paris race to win at an average speed of 32.5mph. Significantly, it was with a Panhard et Levassor that Charles Rolls chose to commence his competitive career, driving one of the French manufacturer's cars on the 1,000 Miles Trial of 1900. In that same year Rolls used his Panhard to give the Duke and Duchess of York (later King George V and Queen Mary) their first ride in an automobile.

Surviving Panhard factory records show that this particular car, chassis number '213', was delivered new on 5th June 1901 to Michel Plancard in Carcassonne, Toulouse. On 3rd December 1901 the car was registered to Jacque Gustave with the number '11 T', signifying that it was the 11th car registered in Toulouse. The history file contains a period photograph of the Panhard with the first owner's family.

Having spent some time stored in the basement of a castle in Carcassonne, the car was rescued by Dutch dealer Jan Bruin and shipped to the USA in the 1990s. Shabby but running, it was sold to Rick Rawlings. Treated to a full and sympathetic restoration, retaining the tonneau's original leather, the Panhard successfully completed the London-Brighton Veteran Car Run's 100th anniversary event in 1996. The car subsequently passed to the private collection belonging to Richard J Solove, who acquired it to participate in the London-Brighton Veteran Car Run with his family. In 2007 the Panhard was one of several cars offered from the Solove Collection and sold at auction.

Since acquisition by the current vendor the car has been fastidiously maintained by Richard Peskett and successfully completed another two London-Brighton Runs, finishing in the first dozen cars last year. Richard informs us that it has required little work apart from new batteries (fitted this year), professional conservation of the original leather tonneau, and new upholstery to the front matching that in the rear.

Possessing an entry for this year's Run and presented in superb condition, this early example of the Système Panhard is offered with recent VCC dating certificate, V5C registration document and current MoT/tax. It should be noted that the registration 'A 72' is being retained by the vendor.

Bonhams 1793

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