

CLASSIC DRIVER

1929 Bentley 4 1/2 Litre

- Lot sold
USD 588 941 - 687 097
GBP 480 000 - 560 000 (listed)
Year of manufacture 1929
- **Chassis number** HB3407
- **Number of seats** 2
- **Drivetrain** 2wd
- **Lot number** 4
- **Drive** LHD
- **Condition** Used
- **Location** 
- **Fuel type** Petrol
- **Exterior colour** Other
- **Engine number** HB3406
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Description

1929 Bentley 4½-Litre Tourer Coachwork in the style of Vanden Plas
Registration no. GE 3547
Chassis no. HB3407
Engine no. HB3406

W O Bentley proudly debuted the new 3-litre car bearing his name on Stand 126 at the 1919 Olympia Motor Exhibition, the prototype engine having fired up for the first time just a few weeks earlier. In only mildly developed form, this was the model which was to become a legend in motor racing history and which, with its leather-strapped bonnet, classical radiator design and British Racing Green livery has become the archetypal vintage sports car.

Early success in the 1922 Isle of Man Tourist Trophy, when Bentleys finished second, fourth and fifth to take the Team Prize, led to the introduction of the TT Replica (later known as the Speed Model). However, by the middle of the decade the 3-Litre's competitiveness was on the wane and this, together with the fact that too many customers had been tempted to fit unsuitably heavy coachwork to the excellent 3-Litre chassis rather than accept the expense and complexity of Bentley's 6½-Litre 'Silent Six', led to the introduction of the '4½'.

The new 4½-Litre model effectively employed the chassis, transmission and brakes of the 3-Litre, combined with an engine that was in essence two-thirds of the six-cylinder 6½-litre unit. Thus the new four-cylinder motor retained the six's 100x140mm bore/stroke and Bentley's familiar four-valves-per-cylinder fixed-head architecture, but reverted to the front-end vertical camshaft drive of the 3-Litre. Bentley Motors lost no time in race-proving its new car. It is believed that the first prototype engine went into the 3-Litre chassis of the

1927 Le Mans practice car. Subsequently this same engine was fitted to the first production 4½-Litre chassis for that year's Grand Prix d'Endurance at the Sarthe circuit.

The original 4½-Litre car, nicknamed by the team 'Old Mother Gun' and driven by Frank Clement and Leslie Callingham, promptly set the fastest race lap of 73.41mph before being eliminated in the infamous 'White House Crash' multiple pile-up.

The 4½-Litre was produced for four years, all but nine of the 665 cars made being built on the 3-Litre's 'Long Standard', 10' 10"-wheelbase chassis. Purchasers of the 4½-Litre model were, in common with those of all vintage-period Bentleys, free to specify their preferences from a very considerable range of mechanical and electrical equipment, in addition to whatever body style and coachbuilder might be required.

In Michael Hay's definitive work on the marque, 'Bentley, The Vintage Years', chassis number 'HB3407' is recorded as leaving the factory fitted with engine number 'HB3406'. The car was first registered 'GE 3547' and delivered to its first owner, Mr D G Ellis, in September 1929 fitted with a Weymann saloon body by Maythorn. Mr Ellis is known to have kept the car until July 1930 when it was sold to its first long-term owner Mr J A Roberts, who according to Bentley Service records enjoyed it well into the 1930s. The two buff continuation logbooks that accompany the car show that it had six owners between 1946 and circa 1966, and that at some point between 1936 and 1946 was fitted with an open four-seater tourer body. It is highly likely that this is the same body that it carries today and that it originally came from another car, as the construction methods and materials are identifiable and the front seats appear to be Vanden Plas originals. These logbooks record the registration number as 'GC 3547' and the engine number as 'BM3441', both of these (presumably clerical) errors being corrected in the more recent logbook (issued 1962). There is a (copy) photograph in the file depicting a 4½-Litre tourer registered 'GC 3547' together with a letter from The W O Bentley Memorial Foundation stating that the first time the car was registered with BDC was in December 1955 when owned by the Hon J S T Hawke of Northwich, Cheshire.

'GE 3547' is a really nice example of the marque, the perfect events car and long distance tourer. Importantly, its mechanical integrity is very good and all of the large numbered parts are present and correct, including the front chassis knuckle, chassis cross member, steering box, engine, gearbox, front axle, rear axle and master switch plate, and the original bonnet sides. The Vanden Plas-style tourer body is well preserved and has a very authentic patina, an authenticity bolstered by the presence of those Vanden Plas front seats.

Over the last 20-plus years, 'GE 3547' has been fastidiously maintained with no expense spared by its current owner (a well known BDC member) using highly regarded specialists including Dick Moss, Elmdown Engineering and Ed Watson. The vendor bought the Bentley in February 1991 and, being a keen driver, had Dick Moss completely rebuild it after five years of ownership. Since then he has travelled with the car around the USA, New Zealand, South Africa and all across Europe. Still fitted with its original C-type gearbox, twin SU carburettors and self-wrapping brakes, 'GE 3547' is said to be a delight to drive, with an easy gear change and lusty motor. Consisting of two ring binders, the accompanying history file includes the aforementioned buff logbooks, old/current V5/V5C registration documents, SORN paperwork, assorted correspondence, a substantial quantity of bills, some old MoT certificates (most recent expired August 2013) and various photographs. There is also a copy of the original Bentley Motors service record covering its early years.

If there is one car from the 'Roaring Twenties' that embodies the spirit of British motoring achievement during that era, it is the Bentley 4½-Litre. Establishing its reputation at the arduous Le Mans 24-hour endurance race, an event it won in 1928, it has become a motoring icon recognised the world over. A good '4½' such as that offered here is a great all rounder capable of touring, racing and rallying, and will always draw a crowd wherever it is parked.

Bonhams 1793

Title Mr
First name Bonhams Collectors' Car department
101 New Bond Street
London
W1S 1SR
United Kingdom
Phone +44-2074685801

Fax +44-2074477401

<http://www.bonhams.com>

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