
1929 Bentley 4 1/2 Litre

Lot sold	USD 205 420 - 342 367 GBP 150 000 - 250 000 (listed)	Drive	LHD
Year of manufacture	1929	Condition	Used
Chassis number	PB3527	Location	
Number of seats	2	Fuel type	Petrol
Drivetrain	2wd	Exterior colour	Other
Lot number	171	Engine number	PB3526

Description

In family ownership since 1935, recent discovery, matching numbers example

1929 Bentley 4½-Litre Sports Saloon

Coachwork by H J Mulliner

Registration no. RX 6108

Chassis no. PB3527

Engine no. PB3526

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 being built on the 3-Litre's 'Long Standard', 10' 10½"-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.

This remarkable 4½-Litre Bentley is one of just 657 built on the long (10' 10½") chassis and was delivered via Gaffikin Wilkinson & Co Ltd to one N H Player of Sonning-on-Thames on 11th February 1930. Service records show that the chassis left the factory fitted with engine number 'PB3526', the C-type gearbox (number '6771') and an Elektron cam casing. Player commissioned the highly regarded coach builders H J Mulliner to clothe the chassis with a sporting saloon body, which was then registered 'RX 6108' in the UK. Player sold the Bentley to Orlando Ford of Bristol in 1931 followed by G T S Bevan of Witham, Essex also in 1931. The vendors grandfather, E J Harwood from Epsom, England purchased 'RX 6108' in 1935 from Bevan. When Harwood joined the Bentley Drivers' Club in 1951 he confirmed ownership of the Bentley and was still the owner at the time he left the Club in 2005. Clare Hay in her authoritative works 'Bentley the Vintage Years' (1997 edition) states that there had been one owner since 1935.

Whilst the Bentley Drivers Club archives do not have period images, there are many photographs on file of the Bentley on family holiday trips to Cornwall taken in the 1930s and '40s, towing the family's Eccles caravan. Indeed, 'RX 6108' is still fitted with a tow ball and carries a Caravan Club badge as well as those of the AA and BDC.

□ In 1985 Mr Harwood parked 'RX 6108' in his garage as fuel consumption was becoming a concern and the car has remained there, unused, for the last 30 years which accounts substantially for its quite remarkable condition. The doors close with a pleasing click with good shuts and the entire car is in fundamentally solid and sound condition in every respect. Since discovery 'RX 6108' has been inspected by many Bentley specialists, all of whom have been astonished by its outstanding originality. It should be noted that the engine is seized but shows no signs of frost damage.

Accompanying documentation consists of a copy of the car's factory record; BDC correspondence dating from 1950; the original Bentley Handbook for PB3527; a duplicate 1951 tax disc; and a V5C registration document, erroneously listing the chassis number as 9608.

With matching and correct chassis, engine, gearbox, steering box, rear axle and bonnet numbers; an original green leather interior and a full complement of correct instruments, this untouched 4½-Litre ticks every box. Without exaggeration, it is quite simply one of the most significant and exciting barn discoveries of the decade, and every restorer's dream.

Bonhams 1793

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