


CLASSIC DRIVER

1938 HRG 1.5 Le Mans

- Lot sold
USD 36 182 - 48 242
GBP 30 000 - 40 000 (listed)
Year of manufacture 1938
- **Chassis number** W73
- **Number of seats** 2
- **Drivetrain** 2wd
- **Lot number** 382
- **Drive** LHD
- **Condition** Used
- **Location** 
- **Fuel type** Petrol
- **Exterior colour** Other
-

Description

1938 HRG Le Mans Sports Project
Registration no. GPH 477
Chassis no. W73

In 1935, ten years after the dissolution of the GN cyclecar company, the "G"- H.R.Godfrey was back in business with new partners E.A.Halford and G.H.Robins, the trio adopting the name "HRG" for their new firm. Their aim was to build a lightweight Vintage-style sporting car endowed with the virtues of brisk acceleration and positive steering and in this they succeeded brilliantly. With its sturdy yet flexible ladder-type frame, tubular front axle, firm suspension, ash-framed alloy coachwork and using the 1 ½ litre Meadows 4ED engine, the highly versatile HRG soon made its mark in racing, rallies and trials. The Meadows 4ED, developing 58 bhp with twin SU carburettors and improved exhaust manifolding, combined with an overall weight of less than 1,600 lbs (approximately 727 kg) meant that 50 mph came up in under 10 seconds, with a top speed offered of 90 mph, coupled with remarkable roadholding, an excellent performance for a 1½ litre car of the period. Known to owners and enthusiasts as "Hurgs", HRGs embodied the principal virtues of the ideal owner-maintained sports car, being amenable to daily use, yet capable of showing a decent turn of speed in weekend competitions, coupled with rugged reliability, was the Holy Grail of the gentleman driver.

Archie Scott, Old Etonian and turf accountant to the nobility, drove his production HRG with Ted Halford into 2nd place in class at Le Mans in 1937 and at the end of the racing season he commissioned the HRG factory at Tolworth to construct a true sports-racing model, designed with Le Mans 1938 in mind. Scott's aim was to win the Biennial Cup, won the previous year by Mort Morris-Goodall's Aston-Martin, which had finished 11th overall. However, in the interim Scott had got married and family pressure resulted in the car being withdrawn. It was nonetheless completed and was offered as a catalogued model, along with an 1100cc

version in the autumn of 1938. The "Le Mans", priced at £535, featured a tuned Meadows engine with 8.0-1 compression pistons, complete with a modified cylinder head, close ratio gearbox, a long-distance fuel tank with twin fillers and spare wheels, mounted within the pointed tail of the body. All fastenings were lock-wired or split-pinned and other fitments included twin fuel lines and pumps, a gauze racing windscreen and aero screens, bonnet straps, a dashboard lap scorer, plus an identification light for night racing- in short, it was a ready-to race machine, with body by Alban Crofts of Croydon, a coachbuilder who had supplied all the early production HRG bodies. It was expected to have a maximum speed of 100 mph. Sadly, the deteriorating world political situation deterred buyers and W73 was the only one of its type completed. It may have been driven competitively, but no records exist.

The car, registered GPH 477 was purchased in 1939 by Sussex garage owner Gerry Ruddock. During his first ownership, he was able to rectify a number of teething problems and improve the performance of the car, notably by changing the cylinder head, which had been damaged and fitting an experimental Godfrey-design unit, with enlarged water passages and with a reversed layout, with the exhaust on the offside and nearside-mounted inclined SU carburetters. A description of the car appeared in 'The Autocar' Talking of Sports Cars in June, 1942, by which time Ruddock had sold it.

Following the war years, when the car was owned by several notable HRG enthusiasts, including Ken Baillie-Hill, Ruddock re-purchased GPH and entered it for the first Goodwood meeting in September 1948, thence competing with it for the next three years with considerable success. However, at the end of 1949, believing that he had reached the limit of the car's performance, he stripped off the Croft body, replacing it with a lightweight construction, featuring a radiator cowl extending over the front axle. GPH is described and pictured, both as originally built and with the 'new' body, in "HRG-The Sportsman's Ideal" by Ian Dussek who states "Gerry Ruddock's lightened and extensively rebuilt Meadows-engined HRG was one of the fastest cars in its class, though, sadly, its original Le Mans body was sacrificed in the process of updating it performance."

GPH was sold in 1951, when Ruddock became a founder member of the 'Monkey Stable', having purchased one of Harry Lester's remarkable Lester-MGs. The HRG had several owners in the 1950's and continued to race in club events. Unfortunately, it was left unprotected during a particularly cold winter and the resulting freeze destroyed the engine, which was replaced by a four cylinder Ford Consul engine and gearbox, in which form it was subsequently raced by Chris Hillier, who sold it to John Andrew Green, the deceased owner, in 1965. From circa 1970, the HRG was garaged in dismantled condition; all instruments are present, as is the all-important chassis plate and the car will have been carefully pieced back together for display purposes by Ashridge Automobiles of Great Billington prior to the sale. An exciting opportunity to return this unique and historic HRG competition car to the racetrack.

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