


# CLASSIC DRIVER



## 1939 Bugatti Type 57

Lot sold	<b>USD 0</b>	Drive	LHD
Year of manufacture	1939	Condition	Used
Lot number	143	Location	
		Exterior colour	Other
		Car type	Other

### Description

#### LITERATURE

Barrie Price, *The Last French Bugatti*, chassis no. listed on p. 185

Hugh Conway, *Bugatti Magnum*, chassis no. listed on p. 554

#### PROVENANCE

Robert Diebolt, Oberhausbergen, Alsace, France (acquired from the Bugatti factory in 1941)

D. Glöckner, Frankfurt, Germany (acquired from the above in 1957)

Oliver C. Schmidt, Northbrook, Illinois (acquired from the above in 1962)

Carlton Coolidge, Atherton, California (acquired from the above in the early 1970s)

Dr. Lawrence Arnstein, Atherton, California (acquired from the above in the late 1970s)

Current Owner (acquired from the above via Thomas Barrett III in 1986)

#### THIS CAR

The Bugatti Type 57 was introduced in 1934 and is widely regarded as a masterpiece from the hand of Jean Bugatti. Starting with the ingeniously fabricated hollow-tube live front axle, this new model was the epitome of 1930s sports chassis design. The dual overhead camshaft eight-cylinder engine was an Art Deco sculpture in itself; with its slim squared-off block, angular machined cam covers, and beautifully fabricated ancillaries, it was a striking beauty to behold.

Inside, the mechanicals of the engine were just as alluring. The cams were driven by a set of exquisitely finished helical-toothed gears, the long crankshaft was supported by five main bearings, and finger cam followers minimized side thrust on the valve stems, all making for a very sporting straight eight, eager to generate power. For the first time on a Bugatti, the gearbox was fixed to the

crankcase and serviced by a single-plate clutch, with the top three gears in constant mesh. It's no wonder the Type 57 was universally regarded as one of the very best sporting chassis money could buy.

In 1936, the supercharged 57C model was introduced and featured a stiffer frame, rubber-mounted engine, and a Roots-type compressor driven off the camshaft drive at the rear of the engine, running at 1.17 times engine speed. With a five-to-six psi boost, the potent motor punched out 160 hp, an astonishing figure at the time for a high-revving 3.3-liter car. Fitted with lightweight bodywork, close to 120 mph became possible.

This late production Bugatti Type 57C, chassis 57841, was manufactured in Molsheim, France, in August 1939 on the eve of WWII. It was given supercharged engine 109C, but the chassis was not initially stamped with a number, as sales of new Bugattis had stopped because of the general fear of hostilities to come. In 1940, like many other French enterprises, the Bugatti factory was ordered to relocate. Bugatti was considered especially vulnerable as it was situated in Alsace, where the Nazis were expected to launch their first attack.

Bugatti departed for Bordeaux and was ordered to manufacture airplane parts and, since the Type 57 frame was an expensive asset, this still-unnumbered chassis was included in the move. Factory records confirm that in 1941, the chassis was listed as "New Chassis, Engine 109C" at the Bugatti premises on the Boulevard Alfred Daney in Bordeaux. Later that year, it was returned to Alsace, as the Germans occupied France and expropriated the Bugatti factory there. Toward the end of 1941, Robert Diebolt, who was from the village of Oberhausbergen and had been a close friend of Jean Bugatti, was informed by the factory that some cars and parts were ready to be sold by the Germans who were at that time running the Bugatti business. Mr. Diebolt purchased chassis/engine 109C, which had then been given number 57841, which according to Hugh Conway's *Bugatti Magnum* and Barrie Price's *The Last French Bugatti*, was the final Type 57 chassis number assigned. To avoid expropriation of the car, Mr. Diebolt then hid 57841 near his castle in Oberhausbergen for the remainder of the war.

In 1949, Robert Diebolt's son Michel took the chassis out of storage and got it running with the help of Lucien Wurmser, the famous Bugatti mechanic who after the war was operating his own garage in Molsheim. Simple wooden seats were fitted, and through local political contacts, Robert Diebolt managed to register this bodiless chassis with so-called "practice plates"; weighing next to nothing, the car must have been very fast indeed, as he tore up the local roads around the village. The fact that the elder Diebolt was mayor of the village probably came in handy in more ways than one.

On September 24, 1955, the car was officially registered with plate 2 DB 67, and in February 1956, when the famous racing driver Maurice Trintignant came to drive the new Type 251 on the Entzheim airfield, Robert Diebolt was there with 57841. A number of journalists had been invited, and the equally famous illustrator Géo Ham posed with Trintignant in front of the Diebolt 57C.

Sometime later in 1956, Mr. Diebolt came across one of the original eight cabriolet bodies built on the Type 57 chassis by the famous coachbuilder Letourneur et Marchand in 1938-1939. That body carries no. 2951, and research indicates that it was first mounted on T57 chassis 57645, from which it had just been separated when Mr. Diebolt found it. The body was then adapted to chassis 57841, but whether the installation was done by Bugatti or Gangloff is not known. At some point after the installation of the body, 57841 received the new upper-inlet supercharger with a downdraft carburetor similar to Bugatti's improved Type 101 intake design.

In 1957, Mr. Diebolt sold the completed car to D. Glöckner, an American military officer stationed in the Frankfurt area in Germany. It is likely that Mr. Glöckner took the car back with him to the US, and in Hugh Conway's 1962 *Bugatti Register*, it is listed as belonging to Oliver C. Schmidt, in Northbrook, Illinois. In the early 1970s, Mr. Schmidt sold the 57C to the well-known West Coast collector Carlton Coolidge, who passed it on to Dr. Lawrence Arnstein in Atherton, California, later in the decade. In 1986, chassis 57841 was purchased by the current owner with Thomas Barrett III acting as intermediary.

Coming out of long-term ownership, this remarkable and rare Bugatti has seen little time on the road

in recent years, and represents a unique opportunity to acquire a French grand routière that is an important part of Bugatti lore. The lines and proportions of its Letourneur et Marchand coachwork are the very definition of Type 57 Bugatti style. Powerful and surefooted as Jean Bugatti intended, this exceptional motorcar speaks directly to the collector, the historian, and the enthusiast in equal measure. And for its next owner, returning this magnificent Bugatti to the public eye should be a thrill of a lifetime.

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& COMPANY**

**Title** Mr

**First name** Charles

**Last name** Blonigan

1517 20th Street

Santa Monica 90404 California

United States

**Phone** +1 (310) 899-1960

**Fax** +1 (310) 526-6594

<http://www.goodingco.com/>

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