
1926 Bentley 3 Litre

Lot sold	USD 508 684 - 562 230 GBP 380 000 - 420 000 (listed)	Drive	LHD
Year of manufacture	1926	Condition	Used
Chassis number	DE1220	Location	
Body no.	1292	Fuel type	Petrol
Number of seats	2	Exterior colour	Other
Drivetrain	2wd	Engine number	DE1225 (see text)
Lot number	353		

Description

1926 Bentley 3-Litre Speed Model Sports Tourer

Coachwork by Vanden Plas

Chassis no. DE1220 Body no. 1292

Engine no. DE1225 (see text)

The genre of the sporting Vintage Bentley dates from the earliest days of Walter Owen Bentley's founding of the firm that bore his name and the partnership of his chassis and coachwork which was provided by local coachbuilder Vanden Plas. Between them they created a style that remained with the company throughout its first era of production: that of a compact sports car with lightweight open four seater touring bodywork. It was in this same guise that virtually all of the famed Le Mans campaigns were undertaken. Even when the 4-cylinder cars were usurped by their 6-cylinder models, the most sporting examples were still built in this guise. The legend of the 'Bentley Boys', Tim Birkin and their Le Mans successes, created the spirit and character of the brand that perpetuates today, particularly since its reinvigoration from the early 2000s. It is for this reason that the iconic Bentley 3-Litre Speed Model with Vanden Plas coachwork is such an important part of the Bentley story.

The story begins with early success in the 1922 Isle of Man Tourist Trophy, where Bentleys finished second, fourth, and fifth and took the Team Prize, which led to the introduction of the 3-Litre TT Replica (later known as the Speed Model) on the existing 9' 9½" wheelbase, short standard chassis.

Identified by the Red Label on its radiator, the Speed Model differed by having twin SU 'sloper' carburetors, a higher compression ratio, different camshaft, and the close-ratio A-type gearbox, the latter being standard equipment prior to 1927 when the C-type gearbox was adopted. These engine changes increased maximum power from the standard 70 to 80bhp and raised the top speed to an impressive 90mph. Other enhancements included the larger (11-gallon) fuel tank and (usually) Andre Hartford shock absorbers.

The 3-Litre was by far the most popular model of Vintage Bentley production, with some 1613 chassis built, however of those only a third were the short chassis Speed models. By the very nature of their racing association the privateers that bought these cars in the Roaring Twenties were keen to push these cars to their limits. A cursory glance through a few of the period service records show many returns to the factory following accident damage, making the actual survival statistics for all 3-Litres less than half of the original production. When it comes to the Vanden Plas 3-Litres, the actual number of surviving examples of what is undeniably the iconic Vintage Bentley look is rather modest, and they rarely appear for sale.

Bonhams is proud to offer one of these much coveted original Vanden Plas bodied Sports Touring 'Speed' Models. This jewel-like 3-Litre Sports model has an illustrious and well-known history having remained in the UK for much of its life and being prized since the early days of the car hobby. The extensive file with the car, comprising three full leather-bound volumes, charts photos of the car from the 1920s onwards.

DE1220 left the works in September 1926, destined for its first owner Eric Loder, and was accordingly registered with him in London, with the now distinctive plate 'YR 509'. When new, it was finished in silver over maroon paintwork and in this form can be seen as one of a group of cars in a photo in the Autocar on the seafront in Cannes in the South of France. By the mid-1930s however it had been repainted green, a colour scheme it retains today. It survived the 1930s and war era without issue, such that by the early '50s it was already well known in the Bentley Drivers Club circles, by now owned by noted enthusiast Philip Mann.

In his hands the car is likely to have received its first restoration and in testament to that rebuild, when exhibited at the 1956 Bentley Drivers Club Concours in Kensington Gardens then one of the premier events of its kind in the world it was awarded First in Class honours! It was also raced at Silverstone, and other events during this period, and there are many contemporary pictures on file showing the car in action.

It is thought that during this part of its career it may have had damage to the engine, as the upper half of the crankcase, while re-numbered correctly with the original number, does date from an earlier engine, and must have been replaced. Around this time, the car was also driven by much loved racer Mike Hawthorn in a Cavalcade of British Cars at Le Mans, and it features pictorially in the Hawthorn book "Golden Boy". In the 1960s, another popular racer, and hero of the Bentley Le Mans story S.C.H. 'Sammy' Davis would drive the Bentley at Oulton Park.

At this point, the car migrated to the USA where it remained with two long term owners, again active in the BDC, until the mid-1980s. Its original registration number was returned to the car on the arrival back in Britain and it would continue a lower key, but well maintained and managed life back home. At some point in this journey, perhaps for fashion and to cover its aging lightweight alloy coachwork, the metal tub was covered with fabric. The present owner, a passionate enthusiast for the 'Best of British' cars, acquired the '3' in 2010. Recognising its rarity as one of few original-bodied examples that have survived their 90+ years he commissioned a full restoration of the car.

The car was rebuilt from the ground up. Its engine was checked over carefully and found to need little attention, having previously been rebuilt with a new Phoenix crankshaft and rods. The cosmetics and bodywork were by now somewhat tired and in need of a thorough and careful refurbishment. This work was carried out to the highest possible standards, the later fabric and old skins removed from the wood frame, and the wood repaired where necessary.

The entire car was repainted in Brewster Green using traditional and correct nitro-cellulose paint, echoing the works Napier Green racers. The leather upholstery was completely retrimmed and chosen to match the coachwork, while all brightwork was exquisitely re-plated in contrasting nickel,

and the imposing high-quality Carl Zeiss headlights, which had been on the car from the 1950s, were retained.

The result is simply stunning, it has taken a car that is rare by definition and placed it in a condition which very few of these cars have been treated to. In 2018, the Bentley has been freshly serviced by R.C. Moss and, adding to its extensive file, the car has received a report by Dr. Clare Hay.

Bonhams 1793

Title Mr

First name Jamie

Last name Knight

101 New Bond Street

London

W1S 1SR

United Kingdom

Phone +44-02074477447

Fax +44-2074477401

<http://www.bonhams.com/auctions/24876/>

<https://www.classicdriver.com/en/car/bentley/3-litre/1926/541247>

© Classic Driver. All rights reserved.