
1924 Minerva Liberty Special

Lot sold	USD 0 GBP 0 (listed)	Drive	RHD
Year of manufacture	1924	Condition	Used
Gearbox	Manual	Location	
Lot number	166	Exterior colour	Other
		Car type	Other

Description

"A standard Minerva will not win Le Mans, Goodwood or the Venasco Silver Flag in Italy. It won't shine at Pebble Beach or Monterey. But, and this is a big 27 litre but, if the body is replaced with a totally bespoke aluminium one and the engine is swapped with a Liberty aircraft unit with fire-spitting exhausts that require a health and safety personage complete with fire extinguisher just in case the grass catches fire, it might just. So, the Minerva story begins in 1883 in Belgium with Sylvain de Jong manufacturing bicycles and then cycle cars and motocyclettes, as indeed so many of his peers did. But it was his engines that drove the business. They were exported around the world and, by 1904, finally, car production took over with the Société Anonyme Minerva Motors in Antwerp. Interestingly, Charles Rolls was the first Minerva dealer in the UK selling the 2.9 litre, 14hp model. Sporting successes continued with the new double sleeve valve engines in the Austrian Alpine Trials and Swedish Winter Trials. Customers for the Minerva would include kings of Belgium, Sweden and Norway as well as Henry Ford and the impressionist artist, Anna Boch. During WWII, production continued in secret with cars used for hit and run attacks against the Germans with rifle fire and light machine guns on open topped vehicles. Post-war, luxury cars were exported not only to Europe but to the US as well. The quality was good and much appreciated, especially by the buyers of Rolls-Royce and Bentley motorcars right through to the 1930's when it was bought out and sadly dismantled. The thing about aero engined cars is that they are not easy to put together. First of all, they are massive, then they require fitting to relatively conventional, earth-bound motorcars and driving them is like riding a bull with a chilli jockstrap. The heritage is undeniable, almost all land speed records, right back to the early days of 'Babs', Bluebird and the Railton at our very own Brooklands, all made use of

aircraft engines. And the same is true here. Liberty made engines for many different aircraft, even selling their units to other manufacturers at the time. There were many variations as time went on with their flexible engines also finding homes in Cruiser, Cavalier and Centaur tanks both in the US and UK, even replacing the Rolls-Royce Merlin in some cases. So we have a well-built chassis and an engine with proven reliability, it seems only a matter of time before someone put two and two together. The ladder frame from the Minerva 20CV accepted the Nuffield Liberty Mk. II engine from a decommissioned tank. The axles, both front and rear remained the same as did the differential. The front suspension was rebuilt to accommodate the additional engine weight with custom rollers and clamps. The rear springs remained as de Jong intended. Due to the extra weight, jacking should be executed with care and from the axles only. The wheels are 21", 4½" rims, powder coated wires with a centre spline and new Blockleys all round, including the spare. Stopping made use of drum brakes all round upgraded to a hydraulic master cylinder. The meat in the sandwich, of course, is this 27 litre, Liberty engine pushing out 400hp at the flywheel; it is an open-tappet, V12 model with an aluminium crankcase and dry sump lubrication. Feeding this leviathan are twin Solex carburettors with six short (61mm o/d) exhausts each side and exiting straight down. Coming out the other way, power is met with a Liberty flywheel and a step-up gearbox leading to a US-built Tramec manual gearbox with five forward and one reverse gear. The original Minerva gearbox is included within the spares package. Cooling is helped by a large, re-cored, classic brass radiator and electric fan. Lighting takes the form of Type RB50 headlamps fitted with Bentley Mk. VI reflectors (original un-restored reflectors included) with rubber 'Diver's Helmet' units to the rear. On top has settled a completely bespoke and hand-crafted aluminium body. The last, but one, owner created the rear end of the car with the vendor building the front cowl section and starter motor apron. Cooling was a problem so the vendor also crafted louvres down both sides of the bonnet and side panels. The steering column was also rebuilt as well as the steering wheel to include new taper and keyway. A new dash was also fashioned with re-furbished Smiths and Jaeger instruments, the rev. counter red-lining at 2,000rpm! Sitting inside has been well-considered, the 'Roi de Belge' style bucket seats use Connolly leather and all dials and switchgear is within easy reach. It needs to be. Looking down the bonnet, your attention is focused on an original Minerva mascot in superb condition. The starting procedure for this bespoke motorcar is not difficult but must be followed. After turning the oil tap on at the rear, switch on power to arm the system. Next, turn on the four ignition switches, these control the four coils which, in turn, lead to two sparking plugs per cylinder, six cylinders, two banks. Now press the starter for 10 seconds circulating oil around the bearings, this sounds like a jet engine winding up. Turn on the two petrol pumps filling the carburettors (nearly there), pull out the choke, retard the ignition and press the starter button. There will now be 12 explosions, then 12 more and this process will continue. Push the choke almost all the way back in and the engine will settle into what aviation engineers call 'an idle'. We mere mortals call it an incredible, deafening noise that will weaken all but the sturdiest of bowels. Handbrakes off, into first and off you go. There is no getting around the fact that this weighs probably in excess of two tonnes but, once underway as we noticed during our photography session, it quickly became graceful and a relatively nimble creature to drive. Avoid built-up areas as you will leave a wake of car alarms in your trail but on the open road and through the be-hedged lanes of rural Kent, it is a delight although with a firm hand at the tiller. It will overshadow any other car in your collection and occupy pole position at any car show, concours event or gathering of like-minded motoring enthusiasts. Turn up to the local pub in this and you'll need to buy a drink ever again. There is only Minerva Liberty Special and only one chance to acquire it."

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