
1957 AC Bristol

Lot sold	USD 464 720 - 580 900 EUR 400 000 - 500 000 (listed)	Condition	Used
Year of manufacture	1957	Location	
Chassis number	BEX365	Exterior colour	Other
Lot number	10		

Description

Le Mans 24 Hours participant 1960
1957 AC Ace-Bristol Roadster
Chassis no. BEX365

"Of them all, the Ace was the truest sports car: it could be used for daily commuting or for high-speed long-distance touring, but it could also be driven to a race meeting, campaigned with distinction, and driven home again - even if that race was the Le Mans 24 Hours." - AC Heritage, Simon Taylor & Peter Burn.

The success of Cliff Davis's Tojeiro sports racer prompted AC Cars to put the design into production in 1954 as the Ace. The Davis car's pretty Ferrari 166-inspired barchetta bodywork was retained, as was John Tojeiro's twin-tube ladder frame chassis and Cooper-influenced all-independent suspension, but the power unit was AC's own venerable, 2.0-litre, long-stroke six. This overhead-camshaft engine originated in 1919 and with a modest 80bhp (later 100bhp) on tap, endowed the Ace with respectable, if not outstanding, performance.

In 1955 AC added a hardtop version - the fastback-styled Aceca - and both models became available from '56 with the more-powerful (up to 130bhp) Bristol six-cylinder engine. The 1,971cc Bristol six was based on that of the pre-war BMW 328, which featured an ingenious cylinder head, designed by Rudolf Schleicher, incorporating hemispherical combustion chambers and inclined valves without recourse to overhead, or twin, camshafts. Instead, the earlier BMW Type 319 engine's single block-mounted camshaft and pushrod valve actuation were retained, thus avoiding an expensive redesign. Two rocker shafts were employed, one situated above each bank of valves, giving the engine an

external appearance almost indistinguishable from that of a twin-overhead-cam design. Downdraft inlet ports contributed to the motor's deep breathing, and its tune-ability made it a popular choice for British racing car constructors, most notably Cooper, during the 1950s. Externally, Bristol's clone of the BMW motor differed little from the German original, the most obvious difference being the adoption of SU, rather than Solex, carburettors part way through production. The most significant changes made by the Bristol designers were metallurgical, their utilisation of the highest quality materials contributing to greatly increased engine life.

The combination of a fine-handling chassis and a decent power-to-weight ratio - in Bristol-engined form the car could touch 120mph - helped the Ace to numerous successes in production sports car racing, arguably its finest achievement being a 1st-in-class and 7th overall finish at Le Mans in 1959. Indeed, its basic soundness and versatility were reflected in the fact that relatively few major changes were found necessary when the Ace was endowed with Ford V8 power to create the legendary Cobra.

Towards the end of production the Ace was also available with the 2.6-litre overhead-valve Ford Zephyr engine installed. Only 223 cars were delivered with the 2.0-litre AC engine compared with 463 Bristol-engined cars and a further 37 Ford-powered examples.

The left-hand drive AC Ace-Bristol offered here, chassis number 'BEX365', was manufactured on 30th October 1957 and left the factory finished in silver/blue livery. The Ace participated in several French rallies in period including Beaujolais, Dieppe, and Touraine-Normandie, and also contested the Le Mans 24-Hour race in 1960 driven by Messrs Jean Rambaux and Pierre Boutin. Registered '1445 ER 76' and carrying competitor number '57', the Ace retired in the 14th hour due to engine failure having completed 130 laps (1,750km). Although it no longer has the original engine now fitted with 100D 784 ST2, this car retains all of the original Le Mans modifications to the body and chassis: quick-filler fuel cap, special split windscreen, additional lighting, and the aerodynamic top cover for the front grille.

A document on file records seven subsequent owners including the current vendor, a member of the AC Owners Club France, who acquired the Ace in 2000. Since then the car has been regularly maintained by Auto Techno Sports of Le Mans. Related invoices are on file, including one for an extensive restoration carried out in 2015 at a cost of 20,027. As one would expect, this well maintained Ace performs impeccably. In 1990, while registered '9802 JR 94', 'BEX 365' featured in Auto Retro magazine (May edition) in an article about the AC company and the Ace (copy available). In addition the AC comes with side screens, a made to measure soft top and the original wheels as it's currently fitted with much lighter alloy wheels.

A classic of sports car design in its most desirable form, with the powerful Bristol engine, this extensively campaigned and well documented AC Ace, a former 24H Le Mans entrant is worthy of the closest inspection.

Bonhams 1793

Title Mr

First name Jamie

Last name Knight

101 New Bond Street

London

W1S 1SR

United Kingdom

Phone +33-142611011

Fax +44-2074477401

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