
1938 Bentley 4 1/4 Litre

Lot sold	USD 192 983 - 220 552 GBP 140 000 - 160 000 (listed)	Condition	Used
Year of manufacture	1938	Location	
Chassis number	B8MR	Exterior colour	Other
Lot number	238		

Description

The ex-Paris Motor Show
1938 Bentley 4¼-Litre Coupé
Coachwork by De Villars
Registration no. GAS 905
Chassis no. B8MR

Although Rolls-Royce's acquisition of Bentley Motors in 1931 had robbed the latter of its independence, it did at least ensure the survival of the Bentley name. Launched in 1933, the first of what would become known as the 'Derby' Bentleys continued the marque's sporting associations but in a manner even more refined than before. Even W O Bentley himself acknowledged that the 3½-Litre model was the finest ever to bear his name.

Based on the contemporary Rolls-Royce 20/25, the 3½-Litre Bentley was slightly shorter in the wheelbase at 10' 6" and employed a tuned (115bhp), twin-SU-carburettor version of the former's 3,669cc overhead-valve six-cylinder engine. Add to this already remarkable package an all-synchromesh four-speed gearbox and servo assisted brakes, and the result was a vehicle offering the driver effortless high performance in almost absolute silence. 'The Silent Sports Car', as it was quickly dubbed, had few peers as a tireless long-distance tourer, combining as it did traditional Rolls-Royce refinement with Bentley performance and handling.

By the end of the 1930s the 'Derby' Bentley had undergone a number of significant developments, not the least of which was an increase in bore size in 1936 that upped the capacity to 4,257cc, a move that coincided with the adoption of superior Hall's Metal bearings. This new engine was shared

with the equivalent Rolls-Royce - the 25/30hp - and as had been the case with the preceding 3½-Litre model, enjoyed a superior specification in Bentley form, boasting twin SU carburettors, raised compression ratio and a more 'sporting' camshaft. Thus the new 4¼-Litre model offered more power than before while retaining the well-proven chassis with its faultless gearchange and servo-assisted brakes.

It was the construction of modern highways in Continental Europe, enabling cars to travel at sustained high speeds, which had prompted the introduction of the Hall's Metal bearings and would lead eventually to the adoption of an overdrive gearbox and improved lubrication system on Bentley's peerless Grande Routière,, improvements that coincided with the introduction of the 'M' series cars in late 1938. Refinement, reliability, and effortless long-distance cruising were hallmarks of the coveted overdrive-equipped 'M' series. Only some 200-or-so were produced and all are most highly regarded today.

The Derby Bentley was, of course, an exclusively coachbuilt automobile. Of the 2,442 manufactured, almost 50 percent were bodied by Park Ward in a limited number of styles. Most of the remainder went to other British coachbuilders with relatively few finding bodies abroad, which makes this De Villars-bodied example something of a rarity. Although founded in 1925 in Courbevoie, Seine, De Villars was financed by an American - Frank J Gould, son of the immensely wealthy railroad developer and speculator, Jason Gould - who owned numerous businesses and properties in France. Roland de Graffenried de Villars headed the company in its early days, when its main activity was looking after cars owned by Gould and his associates. Perhaps not surprisingly, De Villars' favoured American styling, with long wheelbase chassis preferred. Quality makes were the order of the day, with notable De Villars creations appearing on Delage, Hispano-Suiza, Mercedes-Benz, Minerva, Renault and, of course, Bentley chassis. Bodies were made in small numbers, approximately 25 per year, and most were unique, like the one fitted to chassis number 'B8MR' (only the fourth M-series car produced) which was supplied new to the De Villars coachworks in 1938.

After bodying, the Bentley was displayed at the 1938 Paris Motor Show, at the end of which it was purchased by one Alfred Benhaim. The car's next recorded owners are Edgar de Evia and Robert Denning of New York, who purchased it in 1955, by which time the interior had been re-trimmed in red. There were two further owners and then in 1975 the Bentley passed to Dominic Cappelli of North Carolina. Mr Cappelli commissioned a restoration, which was completed in 1989 by John Griffin of Montgomery, Alabama at a cost of approximately \$50,000. The Real Car Company then bought the Bentley, imported it into the UK and sold it on to Graham Thompson in Norfolk. In Mr Thompson's ownership the car was maintained by Fiennes Engineering, who sorted out various problems and fitted a heater (see bills totalling circa £30,000 on file). The Bentley was then offered for sale by Frank Dale & Stepsons, who serviced it, passing in 2007 to Barry Brown, who enjoyed rallying and showing it over the next few years. The Bentley passed to the current vendor, via Germany, in 2017, since when it has been maintained by Kenworthy & Co regardless of cost and used on long-distance tours and rallies; indeed, the owner would happily drive it as far as Scotland at a moment's notice. Kenworthy's most recent service was carried out in November 2019.

Described as in generally excellent condition, 'B8MR' is offered with an extensive file containing sundry restoration invoices and photographs; copy chassis cards; expired MoTs; service bills; V5C registration document, etc (viewing recommended). The only known surviving De Villars-bodied Bentley, this is a real connoisseur's car, ready to use and enjoy.

Bonhams 1793

Title Mr

First name Jamie

Last name Knight

101 New Bond Street

London

W1S 1SR

United Kingdom

Phone +44-2074477447

Fax +44-2074477401

<https://www.bonhams.com>

<https://www.classicdriver.com/en/car/bentley/4-14-litre/1938/788057>

© Classic Driver. All rights reserved.