
1934 Bentley Derby - 1934 BENTLEY 3½ LITRE PILLARLESS COUPÉ BY GURNEY NUTTING

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Price	USD 171 886 GBP 125 000 (listed)	Drive	RHD
Year of manufacture	1934	Interior colour	Green
Gearbox	Manual	Condition	Restored
Number of seats	4	Location	
Number of doors	2	Fuel type	Petrol
Drivetrain	2wd	Exterior colour	Green
		Car type	Coupé

Description

MODEL HISTORY

In 1931, Bentley Motors was on the brink of bankruptcy and negotiations with Napier & Son seemed to be pointing to a takeover that would save the marque. Just as it seemed the deal was in the bag a new interested party going by the name of the British Central Equitable Trust outbid Napier at the eleventh hour. It was only after the deal had been settled and all contracts signed that it was revealed that Bentley's saviour was in fact their arch-rival Rolls-Royce.

W.O. himself was kept on until 1935, during which time he helped develop the new models. These were to be produced at Rolls-Royce's factory in Derby and as such became known as Derby Bentleys. The brief of the new Derby Bentley was to combine the sporting prowess of a Bentley with the refinement and comfort of a Rolls-Royce. Using the 3.7 litre straight six from the Rolls-Royce 20/25 as a basis, the new powerplant featured sportier cam profiles, two S.U. carburettors and a higher compression crossflow cylinder head. The chassis was extremely strong and as a result, there was no need for cross-bracing which in turn meant the chassis was much lighter than those of its competitors. The gearbox was a four speed unit with synchromesh on 3rd and 4th gears. The brakes were servo assisted all round. This combination of power and refinement was exactly what Bentley

was aiming for and while some of the more traditional clients were not impressed by the new Bentley 3½ Litre, the majority were. Even W.O. himself was reported as saying he would: "rather own this Bentley than any other car produced under that name".

Production of the 3½ Litre ran from 1933 to 1936, during which time a total of 1,177 examples were produced, all of which carried coachwork from various coachbuilders from around the world with nearly half of the production being bodied by Park Ward.

THIS MOTOR CAR

The Bentley 3½ Litre for sale at The Classic Motor Hub is a very special car indeed. Ordered on the 3rd October 1933 and on test with Bentley Motors on the 28th December 1933, chassis B-91-AE is one of the earliest Derby Bentleys in existence and thought to be the fifth Derby Bentley delivered to a customer. It is also the first Derby Bentley with coachwork from legendary coachbuilders Gurney Nutting and is thought to be the first Fixed Head Coupé on the new Bentley chassis. The style of body was used on a further 11 chassis but the specific details of this car are totally unique to this example, the first of the Gurney Nutting 'Swept Panel' Coupés.

The first owner was Mr. J. Cowley, the Chairman of the Daily Mirror at the time. He would keep the car until his death in 1944. In 1947, a combination of the state of the roads in Britain at the time and the lightweight aluminium coachwork, led to the body suffering from structural issues, as a result of which, a Vanden Plas Saloon body from a Bentley Mk V (Chassis B-40-AW) was fitted. The ownership history of B-91-AE is known right back to new and the incredible history file contains many letters of correspondence between owners at different times in the cars history. These letters tell us the incredible story of how Mr. Frank Brooks, who had bought the Bentley in 1984, saw an advertisement for a body that had come off of a Bentley 3½ Litre. With the Vanden Plas body in need of restoration, Mr. Brooks had been on the look out for a good second hand body to fit to his car as a more economical solution to restoring the current body, especially as the formal style was not very exciting.

Mr. Brooks travelled to Camberley in Surrey to see and buy this other body. It was only upon getting home and going through the parts that he discovered the original numbered bonnet for the car that had originally worn this coachwork and it was stamped B-91-AE, inadvertently he had bought the original coachwork for his car! To think that somebody had kept the body and panels all this time, is so amazing and fortuitous that we can only be grateful to them. Sadly, Mr. Brooks passed away before the project could be started and in late 1991 a Mr. R. Hipkiss of High Wycombe bought all the parts of B-91-AE, including the remains of both bodies. With the Diamond Jubilee of the launch of the Derby Bentley just on the horizon, Mr. Hipkiss immediately embarked on a ground up restoration of B-91-AE, all of which is documented in not only the invoices and two large photo albums but through the original workshop logs of the restorers who did it. Fiennes Engineering were entrusted with the mechanical side of the restoration and Stephen Penny did all of the coachwork. After nearly two years and £74,000 in 1991-1993, B-91-AE was back to how it had been delivered nearly fifty years before. It was such a special event that the Bentley Driver's Club Review decided to re-enact the photograph of the Press launch of the new Derby Bentley in 1933 outside the Aldenham Club with B-91-AE and B-1-AE, the Vanden Plas Open Tourer that featured in the original photograph and Press launch.

That year, the BDC Annual Concours celebrated the Diamond Jubilee and B-91-AE was entered and swept the board, winning 'Best in Class, Derby Saloon', 'First Prize, All Derby Bentleys' and 'Overall Champion'. Concours success would continue into 1994 and Mr. Hipkiss would care for B-91-AE until 1999 when the decision was made to pass her on to a new custodian, who came in the form of Mr. Tennant-Eyles, an extremely skilled and fastidious engineer who would further improve this stunning Bentley including the installation of an overdrive. Such was the attention to detail of this job that it not only led to an article in The Derby Bentley Technical Scheme but we have pages upon pages of hand drawn plans, sketches and photographs documenting the process. At this time the clutch, a common weak point on early Derby Bentleys was upgraded.

In 2015 after sixteen happy years of ownership, Mr. Tennant-Eyles entrusted respected marque specialists, Frank Dale & Stepsons to find a new home for B-91-AE. That new home is the current home and this Bentley has been part of a small private collection and continued to win prizes at

various events.

Accompanied by two huge history files with a staggering amount of invoices, correspondence, photographs and even MOT certificates from the early 1960's, the provenance of this fabulous motor car is well documented. Being a one off body style, the first Derby with coachwork by Gurney Nutting and one of the earliest surviving Derby Bentleys, makes this incredible Bentley 3½ Litre for sale at The Classic Motor Hub a unique opportunity to acquire not only one of the most refined and best cars of its day but undoubtedly, one of the rarest and best examples.

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