

CLASSIC DRIVER

Evoking the spirits of motor racing with a magical Porsche 550 Spyder

Lead

Is the Porsche 550 the most beautiful car to have ever come out of Stuttgart? This fine example offered by Auxietre & Schmidt certainly has us dreaming of lapping the Targa Florio.



Inspired by the privateer-built specials running Porsche engines, the 550 was first introduced at the 1953 Paris Auto Show. Built to race and win, the design was full of purpose. Yet, 67 years later, the curves have proved to have aged very well showing it also to be a very beautiful car. On track there is a feeling of kinetic art.



The 550 was a real giant killer with its 1.5-litre engine upstaging many larger capacity race cars, helping to grow Porsche's presence in motorsports. Gradually the 550 was developed and class wins at Le Mans and success in the Carrera Panamerica quickly followed. Today Porsche use the Targa name in their line up with good reason, the lightweight racer gave Porsche its first overall win in a major sports car racing event, the 1956 Targa Florio. Beating the 'locals' Ferrari and Maserati with their larger capacity sportscars.



Off the race track, the association with James Dean has always meant the 550 is also somewhat of a fashion icon. Known as "Little Bastard", it will forever be remembered by millions as the car that tragically took him away from us too soon. The imagery of James and his 550 is recognisable worldwide.



The Porsche 550 Spyder so beautifully captured by Stephan Bauer here is offered for sale by Munich and Versailles based Auxietre & Schmidt. Christophe Schmidt is mesmerised by its purposeful beauty: "To me the 550 Spyder is the quintessential Porsche. It really fascinates me, how they built their first true racing car with the sole purpose of winning races and then it turns out to be one of the most beautiful cars ever built."



Chassis 550-0050 is one of only 90 factory-built examples. Completed on the 28th June 1955 it was delivered new to Jim Cook who went on to race the car alongside C. Pitt Browne until 1965. By the mid-80s the car was in Las Vegas, before later finding its way to Japan.



In the late 1980s the owner, a Mr Yoshida, decided to embark on a ground up, no expense spared restoration. The car comes with a full and original restoration dossier which comprises hundreds of photographs and correspondence. Christophe adds: "Even though it was performed 30 years ago, the restoration on this 550 Spyder was executed in a professional and meticulous fashion, like I have rarely seen before. Every couple of weeks during the 4 year-process, the owner of the Spyder received a set of pictures with a detailed description for each one of them. Everything is saved in six beautiful Japanese photo albums."



This car has had some fascinating owners in its illustrious career. For example, Porsche collector and enthusiast Claude Picasso - son of Pablo Picasso. Claude Picasso entered the car in the Targa Florio historic and the first instalment Le Mans Classic in 2002. In 2005 the car was auctioned in Paris and purchased by Ladurée CEO David Holder who remained the owner until the car was sold to its current owner in 2008. Since then the car has seen little use and is rarely seen in public.



The Porsche 550 is certainly one of the most beautiful cars to come out of Stuttgart and this example has nice period racing history, but not so significant that you would feel bad adding further miles to the car. Having lived a relatively quiet existence in recent years, now is surely the time to send this stunning example back into the limelight with entries possible to some of the world's most prestigious motoring events.

Photography: Stephan Bauer © 2020

Gallery

Includes video

Has video

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