


CLASSIC DRIVER



1953 Bentley Continental

Lot sold	USD 765 804 - 974 659 GBP 550 000 - 700 000 (listed)	Condition	Used
Year of manufacture	1953	Location	
Chassis number	BC22A	Exterior colour	Other
Lot number	118		

Description

1953 Bentley Continental 4.9-litre Sports Saloon
Coachwork by H J Mulliner
Registration no. UXG 147
Chassis no. BC22A

Please click the link to view a video of this lot: [click here](#)

The magnificent Continental sports saloon has been synonymous with effortless high-speed cruising in the grand manner since its introduction in 1952. Unlike the ordinary 'standard steel' R-Type, the Continental was bodied in the traditional coachbuilt manner and first appeared with what many enthusiasts consider to be the model's definitive style of coachwork - the lightweight, aluminium, wind tunnel-developed fastback of H J Mulliner, in collaboration with Rolls-Royce stylist John Blatchley.

Rolls-Royce's six-cylinder, inlet-over-exhaust engine had been enlarged from 4,257cc to 4,556cc in 1951, and as installed in the Continental benefited from an increase in compression ratio; the maximum power output, of course, remained unquoted but has been estimated at around 153bhp. A four-speed manual gearbox was the only one on offer until early 1954 when the first automatic transmission Continentals left the factory.

As the Continental matured, there was inevitably an increase in weight, which was offset by the introduction of a 4,887cc engine on the 'D' and 'E' series cars, commencing in May 1954. The

Continental's performance figures would have been considered excellent for an out-and-out sports car but for a full four/five-seater saloon they were exceptional: a top speed of 120mph, 100mph achievable in third gear, 50mph reached in a little over 9 seconds, and effortless cruising at the magic 'ton'.

Built for export only at first, the Continental was, once delivery charges and local taxes had been paid, almost certainly the most expensive car in the world as well as the fastest capable of carrying four adults and their luggage. "The Bentley is a modern magic carpet which annihilates great distances and delivers the occupants well-nigh as fresh as when they started," concluded Autocar.

One of the first 25 cars built on the Mark VI chassis, 'BC22A' was supplied new via Garage de l'Athénée of Geneva, Switzerland and delivered to its first owner, Charles Gillett, on 21st July 1953. 'BC22A' left the factory finished in black with off-white trim, and was fitted with lightweight seats and, of course, the manual gearbox. A copy of this car's entry in the Bentley Continental Sports Saloon Register is on file, listing all its owners and revealing that in 1955 it belonged to one Leroy Little in the USA. The Continental went on to have a further eight owners in the USA and one in Canada before its acquisition by the current UK-based private collector in late 2003.

Its Canadian owner, William Nicholson, had acquired the Bentley in 1972 and fitted it with a Rolls-Royce radiator among other modifications, which included the installation of a tuned S-series engine, twin exhausts and one-piece tail lamps, apparently inspired by Ian Fleming's description of James Bond's Continental. Fleming of course was an avid fan of the Continental and ran an example on UK roads for six-months that was originally ordered by his overseas domiciled old school friend. 'BC22A' was subsequently completely dismantled for a body-off restoration and remained so for many years.

In 1993 the Bentley passed to Gary Schenkelberg and next to Mark Clark, who restored it in 1996, refitting the original Bentley radiator and tail lamps. The tuned engine was retained. Bentley had been looking to improve the performance of the engine throughout the period of Continental production. Between 1952 and 1954 they used the B60 engine of 4,566cc followed by the B61 of 4,887cc. In 1955 Bentley introduced an improved 'OPWAS' cylinder head, which this car's engine has ('OPWAS' was merely the factory label attached to the newly developed cylinder head in 1955). The 'OPWAS' head had better ports, improved combustion chambers, and a higher compression ratio; it was not standard, but a special option.

Many of the 4½-litre cars were upgraded to 4.9 litres in later years either at the factory or at their appointed distributors. The final incarnation of this six-cylinder engine was the B61/S for the 'S' series in 1956. This 4.9-litre engine incorporated the 'OPWAS' cylinder head as standard and also benefited from developments pioneered on the Rolls-Royce B81 military engine: full-length steel cylinder liners; lighter pistons; stronger connecting rod bolts; and hardened exhaust valve seats. It is estimated that the power output was now 178bhp (nett); this is the engine fitted to 'BC22A'. Other desirable additional features include the following: Air conditioning, front lap seat belts, radial tyres, stove enamelled chassis (since 1996 body-off restoration), free-flow exhaust manifold, high-pressure fuel pump, additional electric radiator cooling fan, in-period Harvey Bailey handling kit (rear anti-roll bar; stiffer front anti-roll bar), alternator (original dynamo available), tailored car storage cover, comprehensive period tool-kit tray. It also has an MoT, valid to 25 October, 2021.

BC22A has covered 16,500 miles following its return to Europe in the early 2000s almost all within the present ownership. The vendor and his wife have taken part in two Bentley Driver's Club tours to the South of France during this period, both entirely fault free. Despite its fifties pedigree, this car is quite capable of covering huge distances, and coping with all the vagaries of modern road travel. The engine was rebuilt in 2007 at 21,700 miles, while the odometer reading at time of cataloguing was 31,332 miles.

A desirable early and rare A-series model with the much sought after lightweight seats and the manual transmission, finished in arguably the nicest colour combination of all. It has been well cared for while in enthusiast vendor's long-term ownership since 2003 mostly with respected marque specialists RR&B Garages and is presented in generally excellent overall condition, although some paint has lifted in isolated areas due to electrolytic reaction between the alloy body and other metal.

Boasting an engine more powerful than standard and equipped with numerous other very sensible upgrades enhancing both reliability and the driving experience, this delightful Continental is the perfect acquisition for the enthusiastic owner/driver.

With its outstanding aerodynamic coachwork, the Continental fastback remains the pinnacle of Bentley's achievements in the post-war era and today grace the garages of many of the world's leading connoisseur collectors.

Bonhams 1793

Bonhams

AUCTIONEERS SINCE 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>

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