
1932 Pierce-Arrow Model 52 - Custom Club Berline

Custom Club Berline

Lot sold	USD 0	Condition	Used
Year of manufacture	1932	Location	
Lot number	115	Exterior colour	Other
		Car type	Other

Description

- One of 194 Model 52s built in 1932
- The only known surviving Custom Club Berline example
- Formerly owned by Hollywood Golden Era studio RKO Pictures
- Frequent concours and show entrant and winner following a 1991 restoration
- A carefully maintained Classic Car Club of America (CCCA) Full Classic

In 1932, the Pierce-Arrow Motor Car Company began identifying its range-topping offerings as the Model 52. The marketing emphasis was focused on selling the flagship “Custom” line, which offered five body types on either a 142 or 147-inch chassis, all of which were powered by the 150 horsepower 429-cubic inch V-12. At the height of the Depression, the Model 52 offerings were among the most exclusive and expensive luxury cars available. One of the less common body types available was the Berline, which was designed for the upper-class lifestyle. Riding on the shorter “close-coupled” 142-inch chassis and featuring a divider window fitted for chauffeured driving, it was a rare and exclusive style then as today. The example offered here, the final 1932 Model 52 built and, is one of the finest Berlins, of any marque, available anywhere.

The Model 52 offered here is a truly special example with a fascinating Hollywood ownership history. RKO Radio Pictures Studio—which would eventually come to be owned by the eccentric Howard Hughes—purchased one of the Pierce-Arrow Company’s new V-12 automobiles, the very Model 52 Custom Club Berline offered here, in late February 1932. This body style was designed as a chauffeur-driven two-passenger or, with the divider retracted, an owner-driven five-person close-

coupled sedan. In this case, it was most likely used for executives and RKO's stable of star actors, which at the time included the likes of Jean Harlow, Katherine Hepburn, John Barrymore, Fred Astaire, and Ginger Rogers.

Though the car's intervening history is not documented, by the 1950s the car was owned by an attorney who had been a stunt man for RKO in the 1940s. The attorney collected RKO memorabilia and is said to have acquired the car from the studio about the time Howard Hughes, who had purchased a controlling stake in RKO in 1948, sold its film rights to General Tire and Rubber subsidiary General Telradio in 1955. The car was later transferred to another caretaker in the early 1960s before being damaged and partially dismantled by the early 1970s. In 1989, it was found in a central California barn by Pierce-Arrow collectors Gerald and Grace Schimke. In their ownership, the car would be returned to the limelight.

After two years of diligent and meticulous restoration, the Pierce-Arrow was completed in 1991, just in time for its debut at the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance. The quality and integrity of their restoration was recognized with numerous First in Class and Best of Show awards at prestigious events around the country before it was retired from the show and display circuit in 2009. It remains in superb condition and, after its years out of the spotlight, the car has reportedly undergone an extensive concours-level detail and service to prepare it for re-entering the concours scene once again; it is very much a vehicle that deserves to be seen.

With its incredible history, immaculate restoration, and wonderful preservation, this rare Pierce-Arrow would make an ideal addition to any full classic collection. Included with the sale is a selection of restoration photographs, receipts, manuals, luggage, and RKO memorabilia.

To view this car and others currently consigned to this auction, please visit the RM website at rmsothebys.com/en/auctions/az21.

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