**1914 Stutz Bearcat**

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**Description**

Harry Stutz’s meteoric career in the automobile industry began in Indianapolis in 1903. Two years later, he was appointed chief engineer for the American Motor Car Company, whose dashing Underslung would gain fame during pre-WWI years. In 1906, Stutz moved on to the Marion Motor Car Company, also based in Indianapolis, remaining there until 1910, when he and a colleague founded the Stutz Auto Parts Company. While they built and sold axles and gearboxes, Stutz developed his own advanced transaxle design, which would go on to become a defining feature of early Stutz automobiles.

It was a short journey from parts maker to automaker in those early days, and Harry Stutz’s first car was ready in early 1911. To test his design and gain publicity, he boldly entered his prototype in the inaugural Indianapolis 500. Despite suffering from tire trouble throughout the race, the new Stutz managed a respectable 11th Place finish with an average speed of 68 mph. It was a remarkable performance from a car just weeks off the drawing board.

The ensuing publicity launched the Stutz name, and Harry Stutz capitalized on the Indy results by advertising the slogan “The Car That Made Good in a Day.” Indeed, it had, and this would mark the beginning of many impressive performances on the racetracks of America and Europe.

Stutz improved its finishing position in the 1913 Indianapolis 500 to 3rd Place. The company’s famous “White Squadron” of racing cars roared from victory to victory in 1915, capturing wins at Elgin, Point Loma, and Sheepshead Bay, while also finishing 3rd, 4th, and 7th at the 1915 Indianapolis 500.

Building on its reputation for speed, Stutz debuted the Bearcat in 1912. A stripped-down, two-seat
sports car, the Bearcat’s intent was clear. Stutz sales literature of the period boasted the Bearcat was “designed to meet the requirements of the customer desiring a car built along the general lines of a racing car and with a slightly higher gear ratio than our regular torpedo roadster.”

Although the Bearcat could be specified with either four- or six-cylinder engines, the definitive version featured the mighty 389 cid four-cylinder T-head engine produced by the Wisconsin Motor Manufacturing Company of Milwaukee. Available in four colors – Vermilion, Monitor Grey, Mercedes Red or Yellow – the Bearcat cost $2,000 and was equipped with a Warner speedometer, Bosch ignition, three-speed transaxle, and a tool kit.

Cannon Ball Baker proved the Bearcat’s toughness in 1915 when he took a stock example on a record-breaking cross-country run. From the Midwest to the West Coast, roads were virtually nonexistent – but Baker pressed on in his inimitable style, shattering the existing record and making the crossing in 11 days, seven-and-a-half hours. The total damage to the Bearcat from this grueling challenge amounted to one broken shock absorber clip. Extraordinary feats such as this one led to the nickname “The Sturdy Stutz.”

By this time, the Bearcat had firmly established a rivalry, in racing and on the road, with the Mercer Raceabout. While the Mercer was lightweight and agile, the Stutz was a study in strength and brute force. Despite their marked differences in character, both the Bearcat and the Raceabout were favored by pioneering automobile collectors, maintaining their prewar reputations well into the postwar era.

The legend of the Stutz Bearcat was cemented in the 1950s, thanks in part to memorable reviews, such as the one Tom McCahill penned for Mechanix Illustrated: “With its big, barrel sized fuel tank just behind the two leather bucket seats, with its waist high wooden spoke wheels and its wide-open construction, it made you feel you were riding Man ‘O War on wheels... It could Waltz through a stone wall or the side of a house like a Sherman tank. It had pistons that resemble ash cans and a five and one half inch stroke that drew in enough air on the down breath to start a Kansas Tornado. Even today, the memorably named Stutz Bearcat conjures up images of power, speed, glamour, and endurance.

The history of this Series E Bearcat, chassis 2250, can be traced back to its original owner, Thomas Ives Hare Powel of Middletown, Rhode Island. Born in 1887, Mr. Powel was a typical Bearcat owner. A descendent of Nicholas Brown, one of the founders of Brown University, Mr. Powel was himself a graduate of Harvard, a successful banker, and onetime candidate for mayor of Newport. He purchased this Stutz new in April 1914 and registered it in Rhode Island with the license plate no. 51. In 1923, Mr. Powel married Hope Knight Hodgman, whose family owned the textile mills that produced Fruit of the Loom clothing; they drove the Stutz on their honeymoon.

In 1936, Mr. Powel sold his Bearcat to Smith Hempstone Oliver. “Hemp,” as he was known, was no ordinary car enthusiast. He was a key figure in the nascent “old car” hobby, integral in the founding of the AACA and VMCCA. His love of both automobiles and photography put him on the scene throughout the Northeast in the 1930s, documenting many early barn finds, races, and old car meets. After WWII, he was hired by the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., to serve as curator of the museum’s transportation department. Today, Hemp Oliver’s magnificent photo collection is featured in the Revs Institute archives.

Hemp bought the Bearcat, got it running, and drove it home to New York, where he used it as his daily driver. That October, the Vanderbilt Cup was revived to celebrate the newly opened Roosevelt Raceway in Westbury, New York. This historic event attracted the biggest names in racing, including the Auto Union factory team and Scuderia Ferrari, who sent Tazio Nuvolari to drive one of their Alfa Romeos. George Robertson, who had won the 1908 Vanderbilt Cup, organized a one-lap old-timers exhibition prior to the main race, pairing his old racing friends with vintage race cars. The famous Locomobile “Old 16” was brought out of retirement, and a Mercer Raceabout was loaned to the legendary Ralph DePalma, but it was Hemp’s Bearcat that won the race. It was driven to victory by none other than “Smilin’ Ralph” Mulford, winner of the 1911 Vanderbilt Cup.

In 1940, the Stutz was entered in two different activities at the New York World’s Fair. The first was a
tour put on by the VMCCA, and the second was the World's Fair Grand Prix, the final race organized
by the Automobile Racing Club of America (ARCA). For this event, DePalma now had his chance
behind the wheel of the Bearcat, which served as a pace car for several laps before the start of the
race.

When Hemp joined the US Navy in 1942, he sold his Bearcat to Jack Fetterolf, who kept it for about a
year, later selling it to Thomas McKean of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Another avid car enthusiast, Mr.
McKean was an SCCA regional executive and the first curator of the Free Library of Philadelphia. A
prominent literature collector, Mr. McKean’s Automobile Reference Collection is now housed in the
collections of the Simeone Foundation Automotive Museum and the AACA Library and Research
Center. He kept the Stutz until 1949, when it was sold to Charles Dearnley Jr., of Abington,
Pennsylvania.

In 1965, Mr. Dearnley sold the Bearcat to Winthrop Rockefeller, the son of John D. Rockefeller Jr., who
served as the governor of Arkansas from 1967 to 1971. Mr. Rockefeller fully restored the Bearcat in
the traditional yellow and black color scheme and displayed it in his magnificent Museum of
Automobiles on Petit Jean Mountain near Morrilton, Arkansas.

Upon Mr. Rockefeller’s death in 1973, much of his car collection, including this Stutz, was sold to
William F. Harrah. As Harrah’s Automobile Collection already contained two early Bearcats, this car
was deemed superfluous and was offered at auction in April 1976 with other cars acquired from the
Rockefeller and James Melton collections.

It was purchased at auction by James A. Conant of Rocky River, Ohio. A well-known and respected
collector of early automobiles, Mr. Conant owned an impressive stable that included significant
examples of Mercedes, Napier, and Locomobile, along with several fascinating Brighton-era cars.

The Stutz became one of Mr Conant’s favorite cars and remained a centerpiece of his collection for
the rest of his life. During his three decades of ownership, the Bearcat won an AACA National First
Place award at Hershey, was shown at the inaugural Meadow Brook Concours d’Elegance, and took

In 2006, Gooding & Company sold the Stutz at Pebble Beach on behalf of the Conant Estate; it has
since resided in a private collection comprised of the finest antiques, sports cars, and motorcycles.
Exercised a few times a year, the Bearcat has otherwise led a relatively quiet existence. Its only
recent publicity came in December 2011, when it was the subject of a feature article in Road & Track,
titled “New School Meets Old Cool.” The article, which compares the Stutz to the latest Corvette
Roadster, concludes: “In their respective eras, they built sports cars that were appreciated by the
driving public and proven on the racetrack. One hundred years later, it’s a recipe that hasn’t
changed.”

Among the most famous and recognizable models built prior to WWII, the Stutz Bearcat is the
quintessential Brass Era sports car and one of the all-time great icons of the American automotive
industry. Since their introduction more than a century ago, these cars have remained at the top of
collectors’ wish lists, prized by enthusiasts from every generation. Powerful, good-looking, and
bearing an evocative name and mystique, the Stutz Bearcat embodies the most romantic
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