

CLASSIC DRIVER

1931 Duesenberg Model J - Roadster "Green Hornet"

Roadster "Green Hornet"

- Lot sold USD 0
- **Year of manufacture** 1931
- **Lot number** 279
- **Condition** Used
- **Location** 
- **Exterior colour** Other
- **Car type** Other
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Description

- Offered from the Collection of Robert Thayer
- Sporting coachwork installed by Duesenberg
- One of very few true roadsters on the Model J chassis
- Wonderful, storied history with Duesenberg enthusiasts
- Classic Car Club of America (CCCA) Full Classic
- Auburn Cord Duesenberg Club Certified (D-071)

Please note that this lot is titled as a 1932.

The Classic enthusiast will behold this Duesenberg at first glance and wonder what looks so familiar. Finally, it will click: the body resembles a Packard roadster of 1930-1931. The reason, of course, is that the body is a Packard roadster of that vintage. The body, as noted by prominent Duesenberg historian Ray Wolff, was bought by a Duesenberg Factory Branch "in the white" and installed on this Model J chassis when it was nearly new; sources differ on the date of the installation, 1931 or 1932, and on the location of the Factory Branch, describing it as either Chicago or New York. All concur that Duesenberg did indeed perform the work.

Only a new cowl, which effectively lowered the windshield, was required to make the marriage of Packard body and Duesenberg platform work—and work they do, masterfully. The result is, by Duesenberg standards, relatively lightweight, and dramatically fast on its feet. Most significantly, it is one of very few true roadsters—two-passenger open cars, without side windows—to have been constructed on Model J chassis, offering a more dramatic alternative to the slightly more common convertible coupes.

The roadster was completed for Duesenberg customer G. Tucker Smith of Virginia. About 18 months later, he traded it into the Philadelphia Factory Branch on Rollston Convertible Victoria J-272. The roadster soon made its way up the East Coast to New York and resided in that area well into the early 1940s, then journeyed back to Virginia. Owned by US Navy lieutenant Cecil R. Haycraft, it was sold by him to Theodore "Ted" Cole, who worked at the Norfolk Navy Yard. Longtime Duesenberg enthusiast Bob Roller came in contact with Cole later in his life, and recalled him as a colorful, rough-and-ready character, "of questionable scruples and anything but a gentleman," who once dispatched a would-be mugger with his sidearm.

Cole recounted to Roller the eventual sale of the Duesenberg to a "hillbilly lawyer." That would be Melvin Clemans, the legendary West Virginia-based attorney and Duesenberg enthusiast, who acquired the car from Cole in 1946 as one of his first Model Js. An equally storied individual who believed in running his numerous Duesenbergs as everyday transportation, Clemans and his family dubbed this particular Model J "Green Hornet," a nickname which has stuck ever since. While it was freshened up somewhat in 1972, he used the car regularly for nearly half a century, even occasionally loaning it to friends to drive long-distance to shows (and to short-distance victory in the occasional street race). Even his daughter and son-in-law recounted being allowed to drive the car while visiting her father at his farm in the hills above Bridgeport. With Clemans being of the "driver" mentality, he exchanged engines in the Duesenberg twice, eventually fitting the current unit, J-434. In 1989, the Model J was Certified for Clemans by the Auburn Cord Duesenberg Club, a Certification which has been reissued for the present owners, recognizing that the Packard body was indeed fitted by Duesenberg and is thus considered an original Duesenberg body.

In 1992, the car finally left Melvin Clemans's hands in a creative trade, and was soon in the collection of avid Auburn Cord Duesenberg enthusiast Bill Bools of Cincinnati. It remained with Mr. Bools until his passing, and was then acquired in 2008 by Robert Thayer, who undertook its first true full, body-off restoration in the hands of RM Auto Restoration. A masterful job was done, with every component meticulously returned to correct and original condition, as documented by detailed photos included within the file. Naturally, Green Hornet remained in that livery, albeit beautifully applied, with rich caramel-toned leather upholstery and a khaki cloth top.

Green Hornet has been very popular in national competition, winning an Amelia Award at the Amelia Island Concours d'Elegance in 2011, and a class award at the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance later that same year. Not shown regularly in more recent years, it remains in superb overall condition, and would continue to be welcome to any number of important concours and club events. More significantly, it remains, as it was when new, a very fast Duesenberg, one that would be a joy for the Duesenberg Tour or any other driving event where it could be exercised as its makers intended.

There are few more storied, more appreciated, and more beloved Model Js than Green Hornet, a very sporty Duesenberg with a special provenance and character that are truly all its own. To view this car and others currently consigned to this auction, please visit the RM website at [rmsothebys.com/en/auctions/hf21](https://www.rmsothebys.com/en/auctions/hf21).

RM Sotheby's

Title Mr

First name Augustin

Last name Sabatie-Garat

5 Heron Square

Richmond

TW9 1EL

United Kingdom

Phone +1 (519) 352-4575

<https://rmsothebys.com>

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