
1957 AC Bristol

Lot sold	USD 316 148 - 361 312 EUR 280 000 - 320 000 (listed)	Condition	Used
Year of manufacture	1957	Location	
Chassis number	BEX 269	Exterior colour	Other
Lot number	31	Engine number	100D 597

Description

Original left-hand drive example

1957 AC Ace-Bristol Roadster

Chassis no. BEX 269

Engine no. 100D 597

"Of them all, the Ace was the truest sports car: it could be used for daily commuting or for high-speed long-distance touring, but it could also be driven to a race meeting, campaigned with distinction, and driven home again - even if that race was the Le Mans 24 Hours." - AC Heritage, Simon Taylor & Peter Burn.

The success of Cliff Davis's Tojeiro sports racer prompted AC Cars to put the design into production in 1954 as the Ace. The Davis car's pretty Ferrari 166-inspired barchetta bodywork was retained, as was John Tojeiro's twin-tube ladder frame chassis and Cooper-influenced all-independent suspension, but the power unit was AC's own venerable, 2-litre, long-stroke six. This single-overhead-camshaft engine originated in 1919 and with a modest 80bhp (later 100bhp) on tap, endowed the Ace with respectable, if not outstanding, performance.

In 1955 AC added a hardtop version - the fastback-styled Aceca - and from 1956 onwards both models became available with the more powerful Bristol 2-litre, six-cylinder engine with its ingeniously arranged, pushrod-operated inclined valves. Although taller and heavier than AC's own engine, the BMW-based Bristol was considerably more powerful thanks to its superior cylinder head design and down-draught carburettors. Up to 130bhp was available from the Bristol unit in road trim, in which form the Ace could touch 120mph (195km/h), while around 150bhp could be wrung from it

for racing.

In 1955 AC added a hardtop version - the fastback-styled Aceca - and both models became available from '56 with the more-powerful (up to 130bhp) Bristol six-cylinder engine. The 1,971cc Bristol six was based on that of the pre-war BMW 328, which featured an ingenious cylinder head, designed by Rudolf Schleicher, incorporating hemispherical combustion chambers and inclined valves without recourse to overhead, or twin, camshafts. Instead, the earlier BMW Type 319 engine's single block-mounted camshaft and pushrod valve actuation were retained, thus avoiding an expensive redesign. Two rocker shafts were employed, one situated above each bank of valves, giving the engine an external appearance almost indistinguishable from that of a twin-overhead-cam design. Downdraft inlet ports contributed to the motor's deep breathing, and its tune-ability made it a popular choice for British racing car constructors, most notably Cooper, during the 1950s. Externally, Bristol's clone of the BMW motor differed little from the German original, the most obvious difference being the adoption of SU, rather than Solex, carburettors part way through production. The most significant changes made by the Bristol designers were metallurgical, their utilisation of the highest quality materials contributing to greatly increased engine life.

The Bristol-engined Ace was not only more powerful, it was also considerably more expensive, costing £2,011 in 1957, an increase of 22% over the price of the AC-engined version. For that you could buy two MGAs, and even Jaguar's XK140 was cheaper than the Ace Bristol. Nevertheless, by the time Ace production ceased in 1963, more than half the 723 cars built had left the factory fitted with Bristol engines.

The combination of a fine-handling chassis and a decent power-to-weight ratio helped the Ace to numerous successes in production sports car racing; arguably its finest achievement being a 1st-in-class and 7th overall finish at Le Mans in 1959. Indeed, its basic soundness and versatility were reflected in the fact that relatively few major changes were found necessary when the Ace was endowed with Ford V8 power to create the legendary Cobra.

This Bristol-engined AC comes with an AC Cars' letter dated 31st July 1957 confirming matching numbers and stating that it was delivered new to the USA and first owned by a Mr J Duffy. Circa 1998 the Ace was advertised for sale in Los Angeles, California described as 'a three owner car... which has been in storage for a long time' (advertisement copy on file). A copy of the AC Ace Bristol Register reveals 'BEX 269' was originally black with a matching interior and remaining very original but in need of restoration. The car was exported to Belgium shortly thereafter and subsequently restored (circa 2001), the bodywork being entrusted to renowned coachwork specialist Rod Jolley in the UK. During the professional restoration some sections of the body were replaced however the original panel sections remain with the car, preserving as much of the original material with the car as possible. Related bills and work-in-progress photographs are on file together with a valuation report; a copy of the car's AC Bristol Register entry; US bill of sale (1998); and Belgian registration papers. The car has been well set-up by its previous owner and known specialists Racing Box, the Bristol remained in Belgium ever since. It was sold to the current vendor around 2014 who used it occasionally on some local rallies.

Nicely presented with a silver hardtop (mainly for regularity-rally use) and well-documented, 'BEX 269' represents an exciting opportunity to acquire the most sought-after Bristol-engined version of this classic British sports car, eligible for just about every historic event including the Mille Miglia.

Bonhams 1793

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