
1929 Bentley 4 1/2 Litre - Vanden Plas Le Mans Style Tourer

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Price	Price on Request	Drive	RHD
Year of manufacture	1929	Interior colour	Green
Gearbox	Manual	Condition	Restored
Competition car	Yes	Location	
FIA Papers	Yes	Fuel type	Petrol
Drivetrain	2wd	Exterior colour	Green
		Car type	Convertible / Roadster

Description

Of all the designs emanating from the concise and fertile brain of the late Walter Owen Bentley, that quiet and self-effacing engineer and gentleman, the 4 1/2 litre (actually 4398 cc) 4 cylinder gave him the fewest starting problems and perhaps the most personal satisfaction.

It was also the preferred model of his regular racing drivers, who found it smoother than the 3-litre, and who appreciated the inherent safety and stability afforded by its understeer characteristics. The 4 ½ litre prototype was ready to race in June 1927, and production examples were sold to customers in September of that year, but the period leading up to its debut was marked by administrative and financial worries. Indeed, for Bentley Motors Ltd. the years 1925 and 1926 were a period of constant worry about the racing and production programmes.

After winning Le Mans in 1924, they had failed to bring a car home in 1925 and 1926. Simply put, they were short of money and, because of this, could only place small orders with their component suppliers, which limited the economic production of their cars.

The volume of Bentley's orders depended largely on the publicity resulting from the racing success of their products, highlighting their above-average reliability and speed. At the same time, the firm was very preoccupied with the launch of the 6 1/2 litre six cylinder Bentley, in response to the demand for

a chassis capable of carrying heavy, luxurious bodies at high cruising speeds, combined with exceptional engine flexibility.

The failures of the previous two years at Le Mans were due, in 1925, in one case to a miscalculation of the exact fuel consumption with the bonnet up, resulting in a dry run before the first permitted refueling stop after 20 laps, and in the other to an abandonment when a cracked float chamber caused a fire in the carburettor.

The following year, 1926, the failures were due to the speed the cars had to maintain to challenge the 3.5 litre Lorraine. The Bentleys suffered respectively from stretched valves, a broken rocker arm and (in the last twenty minutes of the race) a lack of brakes and an accident at Mulsanne. The fact is that the 3-litre Bentleys were overstretched; they had reached the limit of reliability required to win at Le Mans, while the new 6 1/2-litre had not yet proved itself sufficiently at extended race speeds to be subjected to the limelight of the big races with the confidence that it would acquit itself favourably. It was at this critical time that W.O. wisely approached Woolf Barnato, one of his regular customers who had been successfully racing Bentleys privately at Brooklands, with the message that if he wished to continue to enjoy this particular facet of his sporting activities, financial support became imperative. The 7-year trial over the notorious Barnato Millions had just been settled in Woolf's favour, and in May 1926 a new lease of life was breathed into Bentley Motors when Barnato agreed to join the company with sufficient funds to enable both an increase in production and the development of a new model.

By 1926 it was clear that the 3-litre was no longer holding up, the tendency of customers to kill the performance of the Three by fitting unsuitable bodywork, led to the introduction of the 4 ½ litre, the reintroduction of the 'bloody thump' for people like Foden for whom the Six was a bit too sophisticated. Basically, the new car was a combination of bits and pieces of the 3 litre - the frame, transmission, brakes and other bits and pieces of that car with an engine based very roughly on 2/3 of the cylinder block of the 6 cylinder car. With the same 100 x 140mm bore and stroke as the 6 litre engine, the connecting rods and pistons were interchangeable, although fitting 6 ½ pistons to a 4 ½ engine increased compression. The new 4 ½ litre engine had a one piece crankcase, the crankcase of the 3 litre engine but bored out to accommodate a larger crankshaft, and the same vertical drive: water pump/magneto drive as the 3 litre, but shortened in the upper bevel by 9 mm, to allow for the reduced stroke. For some unknown reason, the 4 ½ litre engine was originally named 25/100, suggesting an RAC output of 25 bhp with a 100 mm bore.

During its four years of production, the 4 1/2 Litre underwent many changes in detail - the first cars were fitted with either A or C type gearboxes, before the introduction of the well-known type in 1928; a much more robust gearbox than the A, but with the same ratios. The standard chassis reverted to the C type later in 1928, especially for chassis with an enclosed body. It is, however, very dangerous to make generalizations about what was or was not "standard" equipment on a vintage Bentley chassis, whatever the year. The customer could choose more or less what he wanted, and variations on gearboxes, rear axle ratios, road springs, dampers and other parts abound - and in the case of electrical equipment and lamps, the customer could have anything he was prepared to pay for. Indeed, with the 6 4/2 litre, when the prospective customer was taken for their test drive, the salesman used to note their driving style, which determined whether their car would be fitted with a standard camshaft or one of the more advanced "Le Mans" type camshafts! The 1930 heavy crankshaft engines were also fitted with the Blower cylinder block (with revised mounts), Blower villo (75lbs vs. 47lbs) with the Supercharger drive spigot cut off and Blower crankcase. The very late chassis also received the Elektron housing and the reinforced housing.

Although the Long Standard 3 Litre 10' 10" chassis was standardised for the 4 1/2 Litre, there were also nine special 9' 9 ½" chassis built to customer order. The fact that half of the 4 ½'s running today appear to have a 9' 9 ½" wheelbase is due to excessive use of 'hacksaws'. This is understandable when one remembers the oft-expressed view that 4 ½ litre 'shorties' were the most enjoyable Vintage Bentleys to drive, combining compact appearance with a higher power to weight ratio. However, in its day, the 4 ½ was intended to be a luxury saloon as much as a high-performance sports car; another intention that has been obscured over the years. Certainly, the enduring strength of the 4 ½ litre, coupled with the engine's sensitivity to tuning, has made this model the most popular race car in the Bentley family, a trend which, shows no sign of abating.

Produced at the end of 1929, the Bentley we present was delivered in 1930 to Mrs DW Furlong according to Michael Hay in his book Bentley - The Vintage Years. He states: "Car was built as a carrosserie Vanden Plas no. 1607. coupé d/h, registration HAA 16 - now carrosserie Le Mans registration RX 6040".

According to the original documents of the coachbuilder Vanden Plas, this car was originally fitted with bodywork no. 1607, i.e. a 4-door British flexible Saloon like the one in the "Olympia Show" brown cloth 01/1930.

The first registration of PB3535 was RX6040 which it still retains today.

In 1949 it was registered HAA16 and was in the hands of Lt Col. C.F. TRACY in January 1952.

It passed through various hands and was modified into a Le Mans Tourer body by Townsend before arriving in the expert hands of Stanley MANN in early 1977 who spoke of it in these words a few years later: "Here's a Vintage Bentley I can talk miles about as I purchased and restored this car in the late 1970s. My brief at that time was to build this very original Bentley to full Le Mans spec. Some 2 years later I had finished the rebuild and now looking at the speedo she has done some 19000 miles.

I have seen her over these 25 years giving lots of pleasure to her past owners and always looking very smart. The paperwork shows some 5000 miles ago a full once over including a full engine rebuild. This is a very, very good Le Mans Bentley. I've bought it back four times in the last 28 years." Exported to South Africa by Mr. OWNEN it has been re-imported by Paul REECE in 1995:

"I Owned the car for some years in 80s and 90s. It was registered HAA 16 from 1948 when it returned from South Africa. I obtained the original registration RX 6040. Believed owned by S.A. Embassy and exported at outbreak of War. Rebuild by Townsend into Le Mans, the first one he did I believe. I still have Reg HAA 16."

In 1999 it was again owned by Stanley MANN who sold it to Ian Mc FOREST. It then passed into the hands of a French prewar collector in 2010 who sold it to the current owner in 2013.

Our Bentley is accompanied by a very voluminous file including notes dated from 1930 to 1935, and many documents since 1974. The current owner, a fine connoisseur and demanding collector, will undertake to bring this Bentley back to its former glory by undertaking major work without forgetting a multitude of details that make this car unique. Amongst the numerous works he will entrust the car following the 2018 Le Mans Classic to the Twaites family in the renowned Atelier Restaucar in Switzerland. The latter performed a complete mechanical rebuild: engine and gearbox as well as the electricity. Still equipped with its original "uncut" chassis, engine and steering, it is now time to find a new home for this exceptional 4 ½ litre car which is only too happy to return to the Hunaudières for the next Le Mans Classic!

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