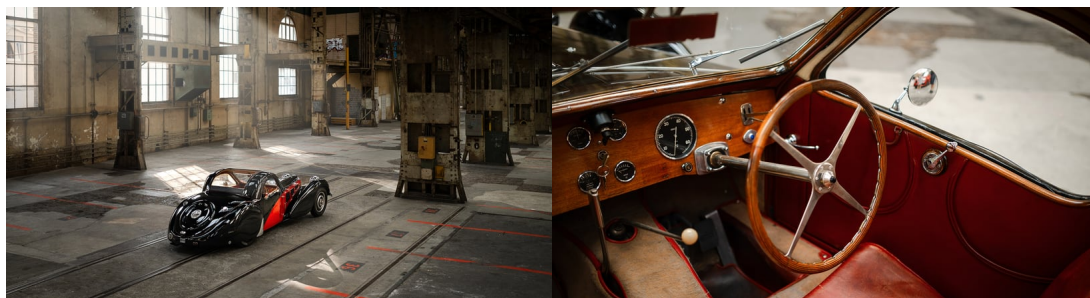


CLASSIC DRIVER

[Crown your collection with this spectacular Bugatti Type 57 Atalante](#)

Lead

The first Bugatti Type 57S Atalante to leave the Molsheim factory and one of just a few known to have raced in period, this desirable collector car is coming up for sale with RM Sotheby's on 9 September in St. Moritz.



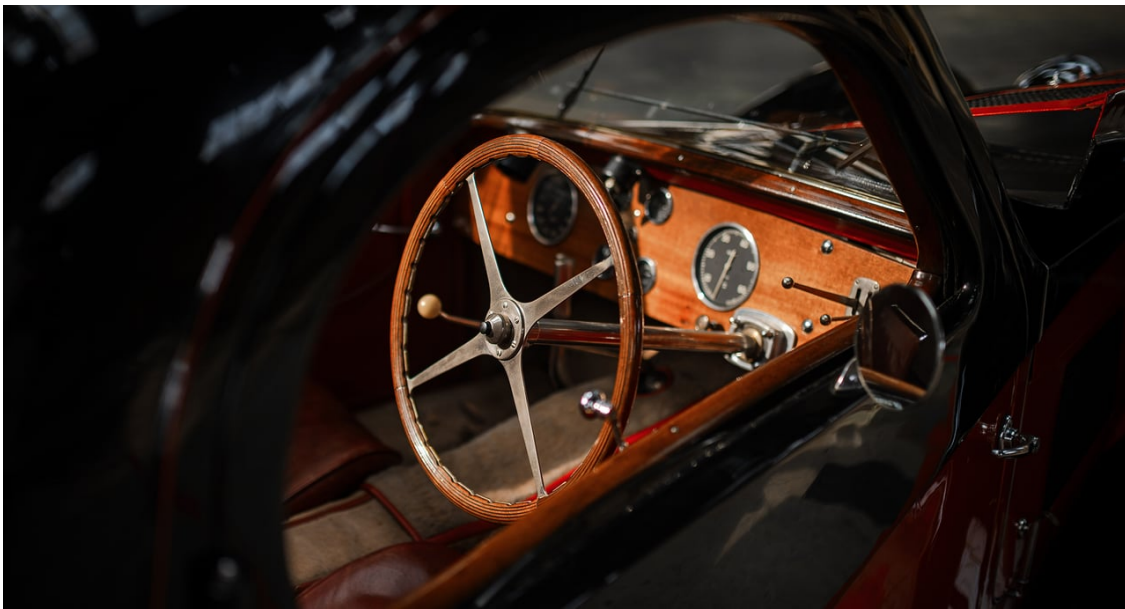
Watch brand Richard Mille's 'Rallye des Princesses' may be one of today's most high-profile all-women motoring events. But it certainly wasn't the first. That accolade belongs to the extensively-titled 'Concours International de Tourisme Automobile Femenin Paris-Vichy-St Raphael' that dates back almost a century - and into which [this spectacular Bugatti Type 57 Atalante](#) was entered in 1937.

One of just 17 Atalante coupes built on a Type 57S chassis (and one of a tiny number to have been used in competition) the 3.3 litre straight-eight is set to fetch 10 - 12m Swiss Francs when it crosses the block [at RM Sotheby's St Moritz sale on September 9](#).



Despite being the third in numerical sequence, it was the very first Type 57S to leave Bugatti's Molsheim factory when it rolled out into the sunlight on August 27, 1936 - precisely 86 years ago tomorrow. Delivered to Toulon by Bugatti racer and Marseilles concessionaire Gaston Descollas, it had been ordered eight months earlier by a typically wealthy 'Bugattista' called Marcel-Louis Bertrand as a replacement for a previous Type 57 which he had crashed.

But within six months of the car leaving the works in its original white and blue livery, the magnanimous Bertrand loaned it back to Descollas's wife, Claire, to compete in the aforementioned all-women rally. An accomplished racing driver, she frequently served as her husband's co-pilot but was also a prolific and highly successful competitor in her own right, achieving a class win in the 1932 event driving an Amilcar - a marque which she had campaigned since the early 1920s in everything from the Allauch hill climb to the Sahara Raid.



The Paris-Vichy-St.Raphael of 1937 was not, however, a glorious event for Madame Descollas, who was forced to retire with what the results list described as 'a flooded engine' near the city of Orange. Shortly after the race the car was re-finished in its current red and black colour scheme, following which the prospect of war in Europe saw it consigned to a barn belonging to Bertrand's uncle – where the noble lines of the Type 57S were hidden beneath a giant log pile to avoid it being discovered and likely requisitioned.



The ruse worked a treat and, once hostilities had ended six years later, that legendary Bugatti engineering showed its worth when the car fired-up easily with nothing more than a strong battery and fresh fuel. Bertrand offered it for sale a couple of years later through Paris Bugatti agent Dominique Lamberjack, quickly finding a buyer in the form of marque fanatic Antoine Triper who, having acquired it in August 1947, immediately scooped the Beaune Concours d'Elegance with the car before making it his daily transport.



The early '50s saw the Type 57 sold to America where it ended-up with dealer Bill Frick Motors of Rockville, New York – a business originally famed for engine swaps, notably upgrading Fords and Studebakers with hot Cadillac motors. No such fate befell the Bugatti, however, which (having been advertised at \$4,500) returned to mainland Europe in 1971 and was bought by noted sports car racer Michel Poberejsky – competition alias ‘Mike Sparken’ – who sent it to England for the attention of specialist engineer Paul Ridgefield.



Although partially dismantled, the car is said to have been in sound and almost complete condition with its rare, sunroof-equipped bodywork intact and more than deserving of a ground-up restoration. The rebuild incorporated several parts originally fitted to the celebrated Galibier Monthery record-breaker, including that car's Type 58C engine block and the Roots-type supercharger that enabled an upgrade to the 200 horsepower 'SC' specification that today endows the RM Sotheby's car with exceptional performance.

Once the rebuild was completed, Frenchman Poberejsky became a familiar sight behind the wheel of the car as he blasted along the corniche between Nice, Monaco and his home in Beaulieu-sur-Mer. Having enjoyed it for almost two decades, Poberejsky sold the Type 57 to a Swiss buyer based in Monaco. He then moved it on just three years later to the current owner, who inherited a love of Bugattis from his father – who, remarkably, had owned the sister car to this one in 1948.



Treated to a sympathetic restoration during the 1990s by Dutch marque expert Simon Klopper – which included retaining the wonderfully patinated carpets and upholstery – the car also still sports that factory-fitted roll-back sunroof, which is believed to be the only fully-operational example of its type. Now in the same hands for almost 30 years, the Type 57 to 'SC' specification has become well known at concours events around the world, notably winning the Prix du Design award at the historic 2003 gathering of Bugattis staged during Pebble Beach.

But despite those sweeping lines and that beautifully sculpted, straight-eight engine, it deserves to be driven as much as it deserves to be looked at – and, ladies, we are reliably informed that entry forms for the 2023 Rallye des Princesses will soon be available.

Gallery

