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1931 BENTLEY 8 LITRE

Chassis: YF5015

While the 8 Litre is sometimes said to be the car W.O. Bentley was most proud of, few doubt that it was what finally bankrupted the business. Built on the largest chassis the company had produced and promising to be most luxurious Bentley yet, the colossal 8 Litre's launch coincided with a global socio-economic disaster: the Great Depression.

With continuing inflation making money worth less than the paper it was printed on, the car's £2,200 price tag severely restricted W.O.'s audience. Numbered in four batches of 25 – with each signified with either a YF, YR, YM or YX chassis prefix – deliveries commenced in late 1930. However by the following spring Bentley had gone into receivership, with a Rolls-Royce takeover finalised in November. Seeing the 8 Litre as a gross financial waste, the new owners hastened the model's cessation. Deliveries continued until December 1932, when the 100th and final 8 Litre was completed.

For the fortunate few who were unaffected or indeed bolstered by the Depression, the Bentley 8 Litre provided a platform for wealth-inspired imagination. No fewer than 21 coachbuilders received commissions to body the cars, resulting in a number of unique looks that meant no two 8 Litres were the same.

The 8-litre straight-six engine supplied trademark Bentley smoothness and power, creating a class of car for both the chauffeur-driven and owner/driver markets. Chassis YF5015 was delivered to none other than Francis Victor du Pont. Though part of the family chemical dynasty, Francis was the President of the Equitable Trust Company and U.S. Highways Commissioner in his own right.

H.J. Mulliner bodied the greatest number of 8 Litres – 23 in total – and YF5015 is one these, clothed in handsome panelled Weymann Saloon coachwork.

Sold by the Du Pont family in 1948, YF5015 eventually found a long-term home in the world-renowned Harrah Collection in Reno, Nevada. A quarter of a century later it returned to British shores for the first time since its creation.

Driven fleetingly over its 83-year existence and benefitting from careful custodianship, YF5015 has remained in terrific condition and recently enjoyed a world-class restoration. Indeed, confirmation of its quality and importance came in the form of an invitation to the 2013 Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance.

With fewer than 80 of Bentley's greatest road car thought to have survived these last eight decades, YF5015 represents the rare opportunity for a discerning collector to invest in arguably the best H.J. Mulliner-bodied example extant.

SOLD