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1931 BUGATTI TYPE 54

From the mid to late 1930s, Grand Prix car manufacturer Ettore Bugatti had a mighty task: to stave off competition from the Italian marques of Alfa Romeo and Maserati, as well as the dominant German government-supported Mercedes-Benz and Auto Union. W.F. Bradley wrote in *Autocar* (11 September 1931), 'in view of the Italian models prepared for the Monza race it was realised that something faster than the twin-cam 2,300cc racing machine would have to be prepared'. The Type 54 was a direct response to this attack, based on the bloodline of the Type 35 but enhanced for Grand Prix competition in nearly every way. The T54s were the largest capacity Bugatti Grand Prix cars ever produced.

Chassis 54201 was the first of these 4.9-litre twin overhead cam supercharged straight-eight cylinder beasts to race at a Grand Prix. The race in question was held at Monza towards the end of the 1931 Grand Prix season, with the renowned Achille Varzi at the wheel. Although coming first in the heats, and setting the fastest lap during the race itself, two burst tyres affected his chances of winning overall. He recovered to finish third.

This car, featuring road registration 4311 NV1, is the only Type 54 not to be subsequently modified by the Mosheim factory, sporting the original engine and gearbox position and accompanying tall body and bonnet. In 1932, the Molsheim factory sold 54201 to the Bohemian Czech Prince Georg Christian Lobkowicz and it was delivered to his chateau close to Melnik. The young Prince had started racing at the tender age of 20, largely behind the wheel of an Austro-Daimler. Unfortunately, at the AVUS Rennen race in Berlin of that very year, the Prince lost control of the car and was tragically thrown from its seat.

Damage to the car following the accident was mainly limited to the body and wheels, with the chassis largely unaffected. The Prince's mother gave the car to his teammate, Zdenek Pohl, who repaired it to Grand Prix configuration, including the replacement of the Brooklands-type glass screen with new glass – etched at the bottom with 'Praha' or Prague. Pohl entered the car at the Jeneralka hillclimb in April 1935 but found it to be ineffective against more modern machinery developed in the four years since 54201's creation. Therefore he had it rebodied by Uhlik, a famous Czechoslovakian coachbuilder who fitted a stylish two-seater road body to Pohl's specification. In its new guise, 54201 was road-registered under the number C 49 259 and became hallowed as the fastest road car in the country. Pohl kept the car for some 38 years until 1970 when he passed ownership to British collector, Peter Hampton. Hampton had the two-seater roadster body removed and the car was sent to leading Bugatti specialists, Crosthwaite and Gardiner, for a complete overhaul. The Bugatti was to be restored to its former 1931 Monza glory specification, including a new replica body.

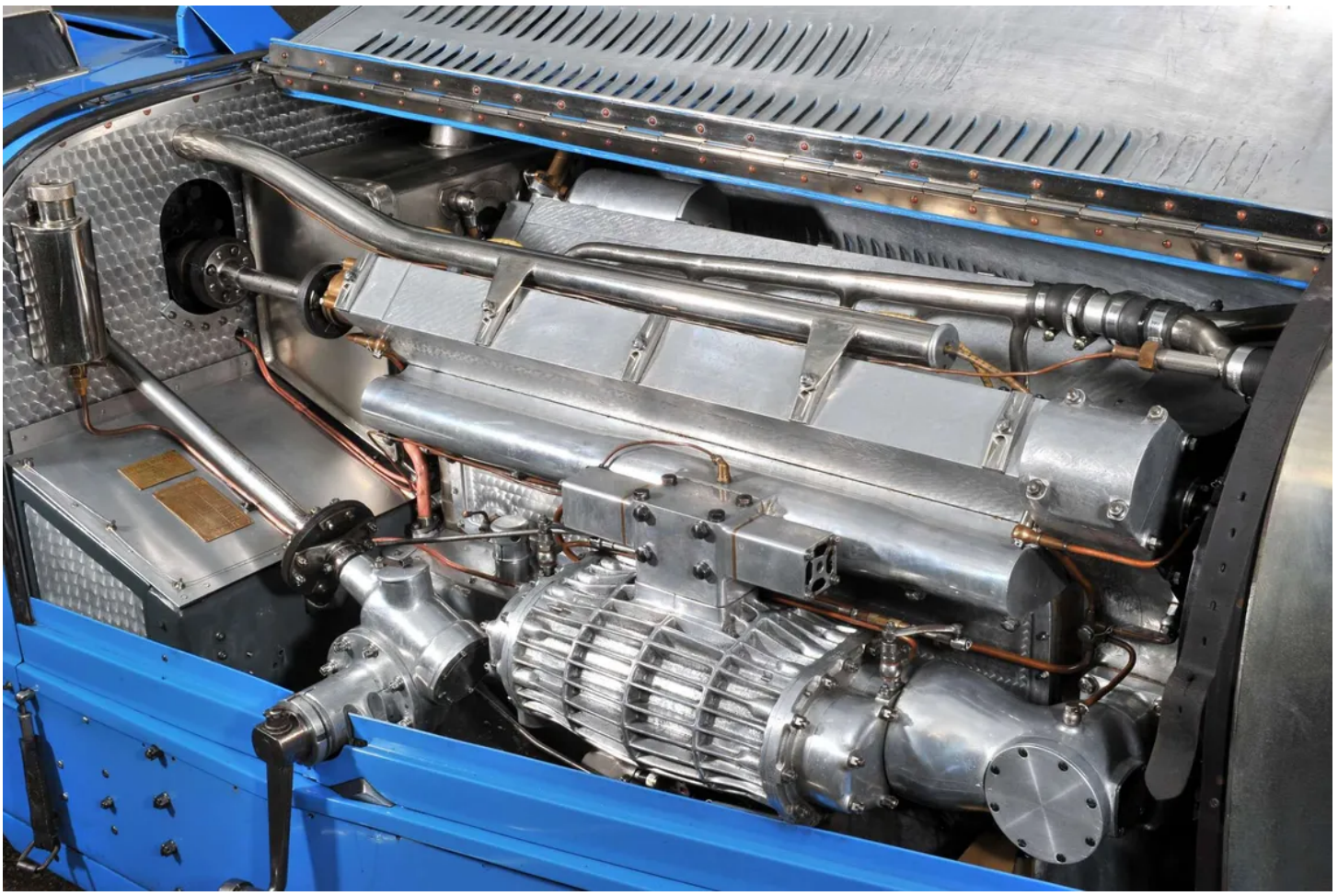
The car's right-front engine mount shows the stamp '5013', a mark associated with its debut race at Monza in September 1931. The original crankshaft is stamped with the number '2', and the chassis stamped '3'. It is assumed that chassis numbers 1 and 2 were used for its sister car, 54202, and possibly an example of the technically similar Type 47 tourer.

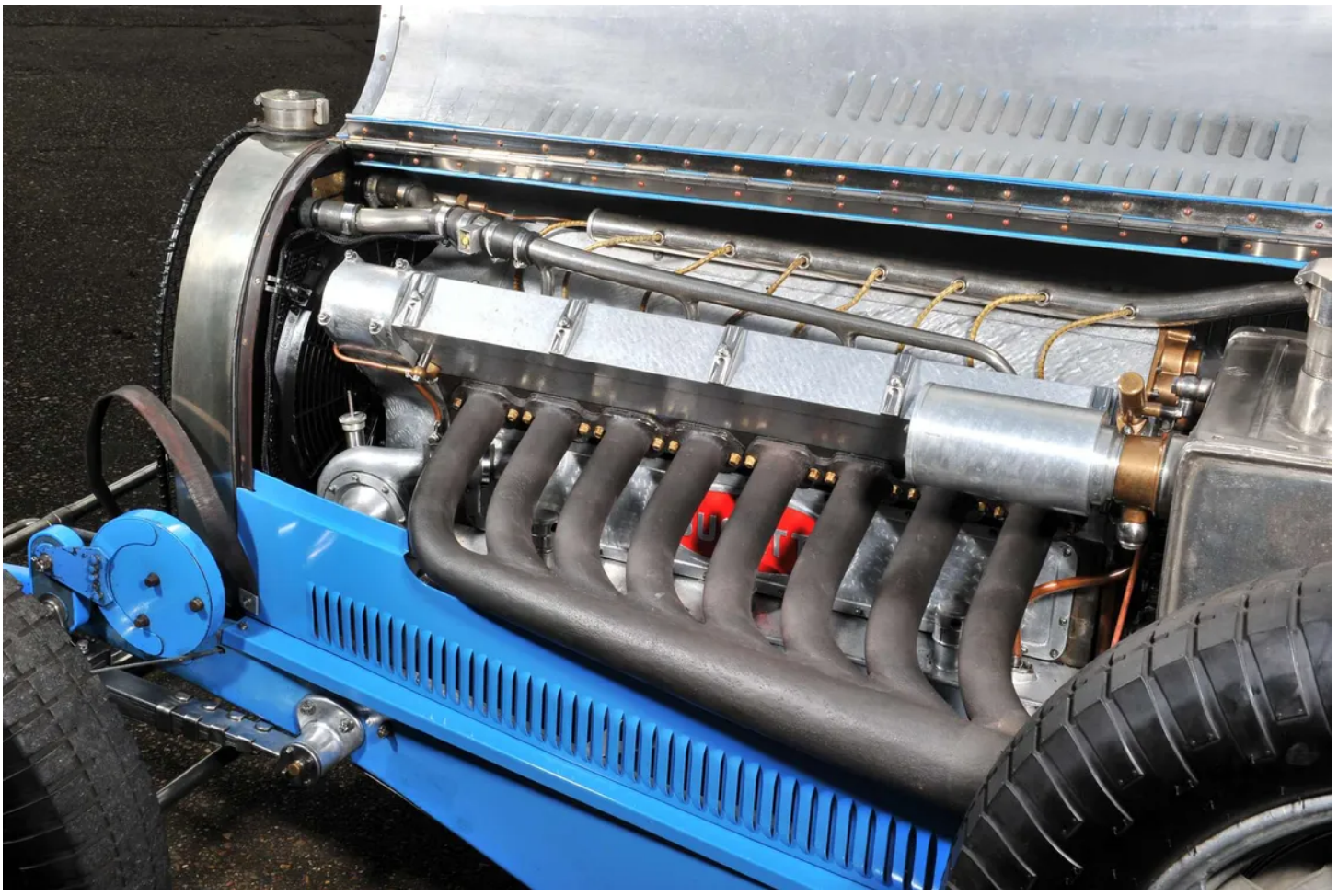
To conclude, this T54 is one of only four surviving cars from just nine built between 1931 and 1932. 54201 is the ***only*** example of the model which still has its original major mechanical components and is aesthetically correct as turned out of the Mosheim factory. This star-studded Bugatti is fully restored, with engine and gearbox overhauled, and has been raced by Tim Dutton and Simon Diffey at Goodwood Revival meetings, shown at the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elégance and achieved the accolade of class winner at the 2009 Goodwood Festival of Speed. The car is presented in race-ready condition and is sure to be welcomed by the organisers of major historic race and hillclimb events worldwide.

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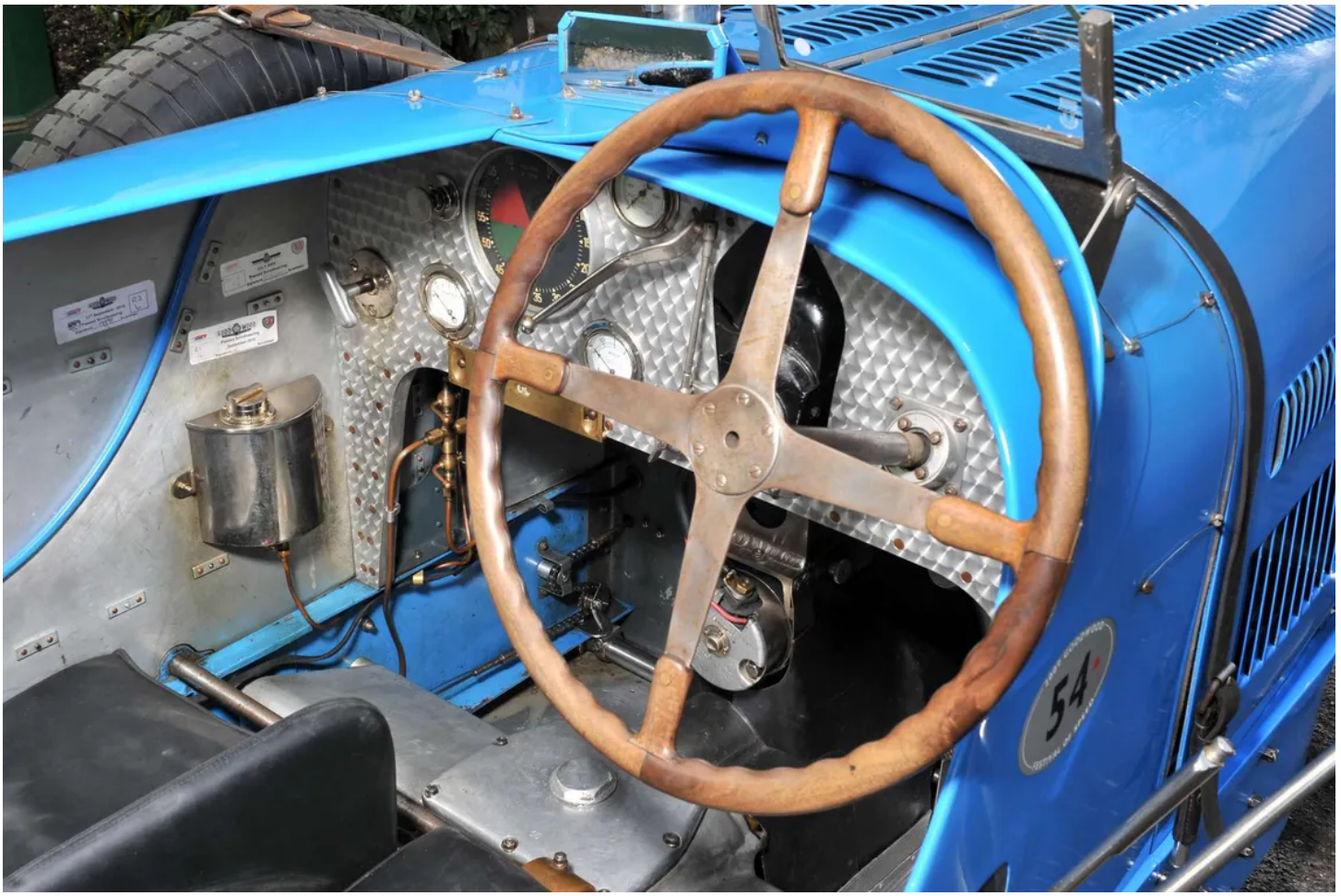


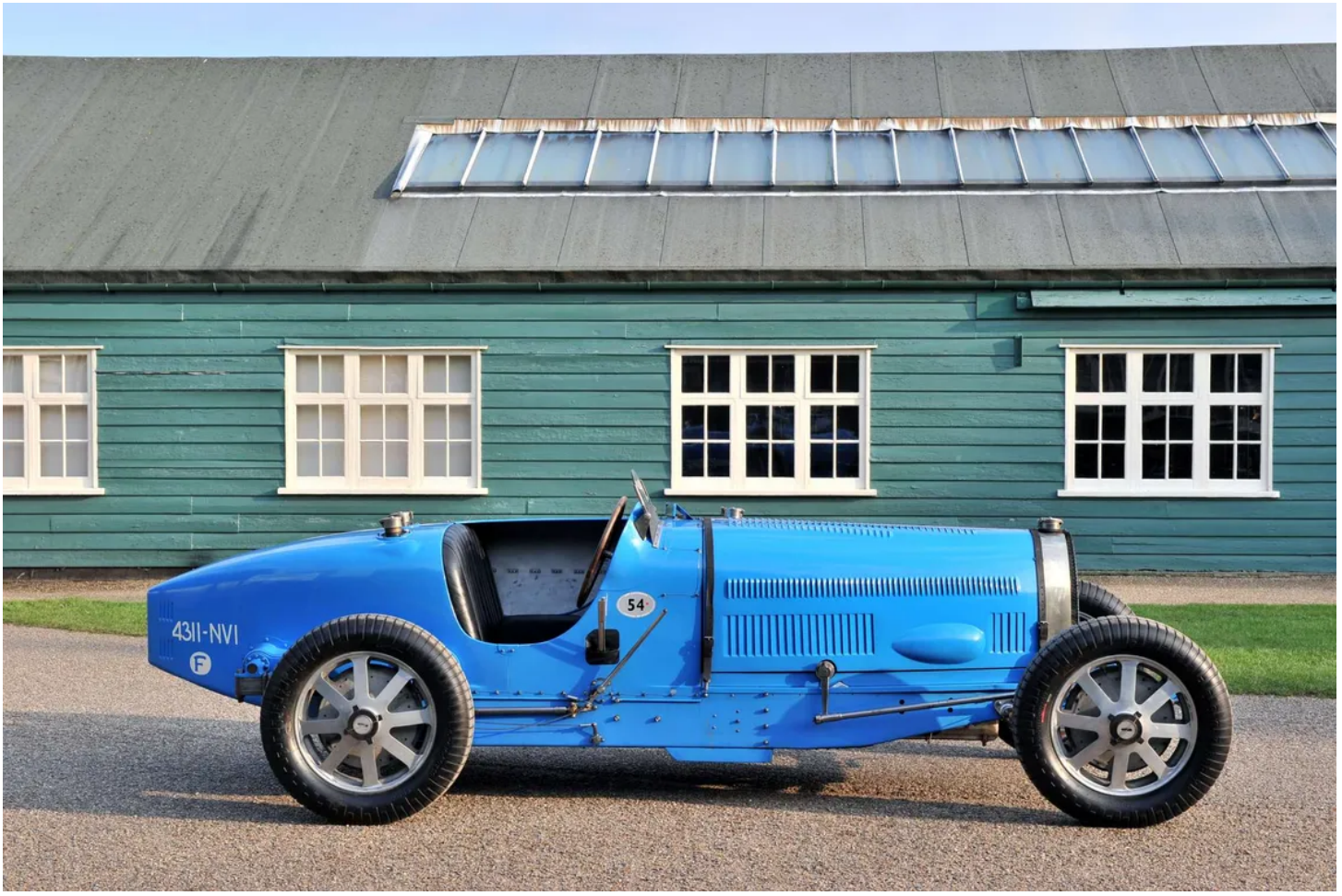

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