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1929 BENTLEY SPEED SIX LE MANS

Chassis Number: BA2580

Picture the scene in the Bentley camp at Le Mans in 1929. Winners of the two most recent editions of the race in 1927 and 1928, the appetite for a hat-trick victory must have been contagious. The Bentley Boys were undoubtedly the most dashing group of drivers the La Sarthe paddock had ever seen. The new 6.5 litre Speed Six was strong, powerful and ready to prove itself at the world's toughest race. Place all this within an era – the Roaring Twenties – known for its excesses, glamour and sophistication and the stage is set. Team Bentley was on a veritable roll.

1929 turned out to be one of the most attrition-filled editions in the race's history. Despite this, Captain Woolf 'Babe' Barnato and the legendary silk-scarfed and extremely rapid Sir Tim Birkin piloted a Speed Six – later to be known as 'Old Number One' - to outright victory, followed by a trio of 4.5 litre Bentleys claiming second, third and fourth places respectively. Huge celebrations commenced, including a huge party held by Barnato at his country pile in Surrey where the drive was turned into a racetrack and the bars were fashioned as pitstops! 'Old Number One' was brought out for another victory at Le Mans in 1930, with Barnato still in the saddle, joined by a new driver in the form of Bentley Boy, Glen Kidston. So proud was W.O. Bentley of the Speed Six that he declared it his favourite car.

Le Mans rules required that cars raced must be production catalogue models. This ensured that the Speed Six was quickly introduced for sale to the general public. Out of 544 6½-litre examples made in Cricklewood, just 182 were to Speed Six specification. This example, BA2580, was originally fitted with a fixed head coupé Gurney Nutting body as ordered by Bentley Motors prior to its sale. The first owner is listed as C. Bruce-Gardner of Stafford, London and the Speed Six was furnished with registration number UU6922. The service record shows a transfer of guarantee to William Ruben Doe of Hounslow in November 1930 and to Errol Hignett of Henley-On-Thames in 1932. The service record is continuous through to September 1938 with no further change of owner listed.

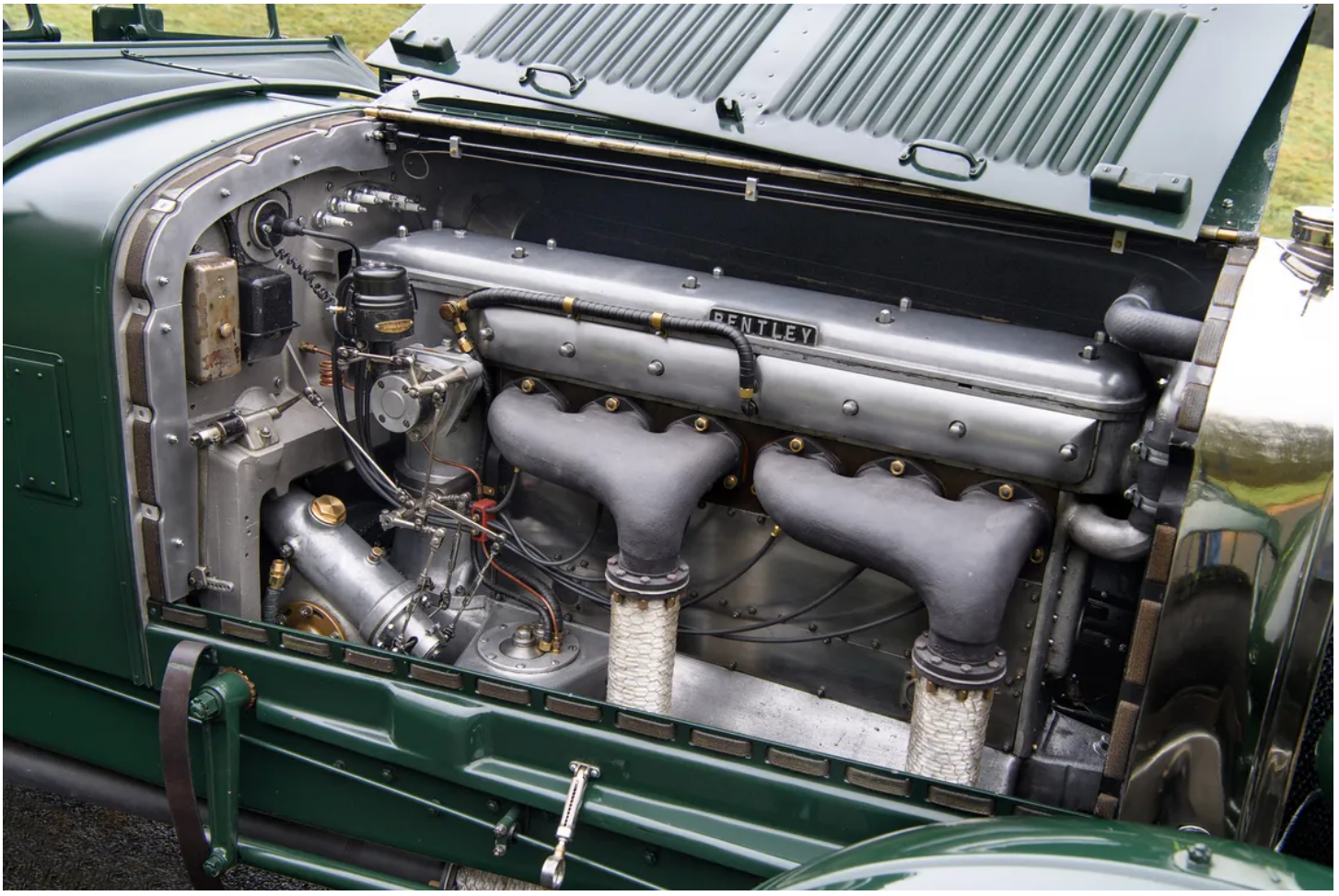
Sometime during the following years, BA2580 was shipped to Malta, probably by owner Lieutenant Colonel J.A. Sammut, who is listed in Bentley Drivers' Club records as the owner between 1947 and 1955. Its history file contains wonderful images of the Bentley on Malta where it stayed during the war, eventually returning to the United Kingdom to be enjoyed by a number of documented owners prior to its purchase by Lord Doune. Doune restored the Speed Six with Vanden Plas style four-seater touring coachwork and retained it within his fabled motor museum from the 1960s until the late 1990s.

The current owner acquired BA2580 in 2013 and set about completing a painstaking three-year restoration with revered restorer, Neil Davies. Realising the significant place that 'Old Number One' held in British motoring history - a car that ceased to exist in its 1930 Le Mans-winning guise - BA2580 offered the possibility to truly reincarnate the legendary Le Mans winner, whilst maintaining all its original matching number parts. As a tribute to 'Old Number One', the body and fittings are an accurate reincarnation, including the wire mesh fold-down screen with the twin aero screens behind and Zeiss headlamps with a stoneguard fitted to the offside only, as these cut down the light considerably in racing conditions. The owners of the two surviving original team cars allowed every detail of their Bentleys to be scruntinised and reinterpreted. Copies of Bentley and Draper hydraulic shock absorbers are fitted front and back, a racing petrol tank, sized for Le Mans, has been added, a Racing D gearbox and the instrument panel and layout is copied from a photograph of 'Old Number One'.

With a continuous, matching numbers history, this Speed Six is accompanied by a rich file of period correspondence and photography, from its time in Malta to the proud role it played in Lord Doune's collection. Since restoration was completed late last year, the Speed Six has been enjoyed on the Royal Concours tour and has been beautifully settled in. It offers, without doubt, the ultimate in vintage Bentley motoring and it drives as well, if not even better, than it looks!

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SIDELIGHT
HEADLIGHT
OFF MAIN RES
AIR
BENTLEY OIL






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