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1904 F.I.A.T. 24/32 HP

1904 FIAT 24/32 Rear-Entrance Tonneau

- Sold new to George and Mabel Agassiz of Cape Cod
- Buried on the Agassiz estate in the 1930s before being exhumed in 1942
- Continuous history from new and part of The Uihlein Collection for 55 years
- Regular entrant on the London to Brighton Veteran Car Run

Surviving veteran cars from the pioneering days of motoring often have great stories to tell, and that's certainly the case with this 1904 FIAT.

The Italian marque built the 24/32 model between 1903 and 1905, and this is a 'second series' car featuring a 6.9-litre four-cylinder engine, a four-speed gearbox and twin-chain final drive. Ordered new by wealthy American couple George and Mabel Agassiz during their honeymoon in Europe, it was delivered via New York-based importer Hollander & Tangeman in the summer of 1904 and kept at the family home in Yarmouth Port on Cape Cod. George came from a Harvard Science dynasty and was a Zoologist at the school, and Mabel (nee. Simkins) was an ardent benefactress of notable beauty; her John Singer Sargent painting hangs in the Smithsonian Museum.

The FIAT was driven not only by Mabel, but also by her brother – Charles Ritchie Simpkins. When Charles unexpectedly died in 1931, the car was placed in storage and then Mabel, overcome with grief, took the extraordinary decision to remove the original body and bury the car.

A few years later, in August 1942, Ted Robertson was visiting friends on Cape Cod and staying in a house that was part of the Agassiz estate. While there, he heard about the FIAT and, with two friends, managed to locate its 'grave' and dig it out.

In a letter written on 12 April 1944, Robertson – co-founder and first President of the Sports Car Club of America – said of the discovery: 'The grave was on a slope, in sandy soil with good drainage. Consequently, even the plating on the lamps was unharmed. The day after removing the car from the ground, we negotiated with Mrs Agassiz's nephew and bought the car for \$50.'

It was soon sold in unrestored condition – and lacking any sort of bodywork – to D. Cameron Peck, Vice-President of the Bowman Dairy Company and a passionate collector of 'Brass Era' cars. He subsequently offered it for sale in late 1949 as 'the famous buried FIAT' and noted that it 'has just been fitted with new wheels, tires and rims ... engine is free ... all mechanical parts present.'

The next owner was Clay Claberg of Oxnard, California, and the car then passed to David Uihlein in 1952. From surviving correspondence, it appears that Claberg offered to give it away simply because he wanted the still-unrestored FIAT to go to a good home.

Uihlein – a noted collector and historian – covered the cost of transporting it to Milwaukee and would end up keeping it for 55 years, despite receiving numerous letters over the decades from would-be buyers. He eventually had the FIAT restored during the 1990s and fitted a new Rear-Entrance Tonneau body made by skilled craftsman Joe Silnes to a design by Quimby – the New Jersey company that bodied many American FIATs in period.

In 2007, the car was sold to Jan Bruijn of The Netherlands, who had long admired it and had been one of those who'd previously written to Uihlein in an attempt to buy it. After being inspected in painstaking detail by the Dating Panel of the Veteran Car Club

of Great Britain, a build date of 1904 was confirmed after the number '745' was found stamped at various locations and cross-referenced against a copy of the original Type 24/32 ledger.

In subsequent years, the FIAT has been a regular entrant in the London to Brighton Veteran Car Run and boasts an impressive finishing record. After being sold to its latest owner in 2018, it was fully restored and a body faithfully recreated from period photographs and drawings of a 24/32. It then won its class at the Concours of Elegance at Hampton Court.

Driving any veteran car is a unique experience, and with its strong performance and robust nature, this FIAT is ideally suited to prestigious events such as the iconic London to Brighton Veteran Car Run. A very rare and truly remarkable survivor, it's offered with an extensive history file that includes correspondence going back to the 1950s, photographs of it being unearthed in 1942, restoration photographs, and a copy of the VCC Dating Report.

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