

ESTABLISHED 1937

TAYLOR & CRAWLEY



1953 BENTLEY R TYPE CONTINENTAL BY H.J. MULLINER



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Rolls-Royce bought Bentley Motors in 1931 and before the War they built over 2,000 sporting Bentley cars to fit in with their existing more formal range. In the austere post war world Rolls-Royce were unsure how the market would receive their first new model with 'in house' coachwork. In 1946, rather than risk a failure with the Rolls-Royce name on it, they launched the "Bentley Mk. VI" and in 1952 this was upgraded to the "Bentley R Type".

The car proved to be a great success and the company built 7,500 of the "Standard Steel Saloon" which as the name implies was built to a standard design which was a robust upright four door saloon. It was an exceptional car but it was evident that there was also a demand for something even more special, individual, and sporting. So it was that between 1952 and 1955 Rolls-Royce came to build to specific customer requirements the Bentley R Type Continental chassis which was to be fitted with special lightweight coach-built bodies.

Almost all the bodies were produced by H.J. Mulliner in lightweight aluminium. They were only available in a two door design, were aero-dynamically styled and featured a curved windscreen, stiffened chassis and tuned engine. They were built to order and no two cars are exactly alike as owners could choose from a variety of options including colours, manual or automatic gearbox, instrumentation and cockpit layout, spats on the rear wheels, types of seats etc.

The first 25 chassis were designated as 'A Series' and included 'Olga' the famous prototype with chassis number BC 26 A. The number 13 with its unlucky association was never allocated, accordingly chassis BC 14 A had engine BCA 13. All of this first series were built for Export Only although curiously only 4 were left hand drive.

The Bentley R Type Continental is arguably the most significant post-war car produced by Rolls-Royce. It was the fastest production four seater in the World and would cruise at 100 mph. It carried stunning light alloy coachwork and was highly exclusive with only 208 examples being built.

The complete history of BC 22 A is known and documented. It was ordered new via Garage de L'Athenée in Geneva and delivered in Switzerland to its first owner, Charles Gillet on 21st July 1953. It was supplied with black paintwork and off white leather and was fitted with the desirable manual gearbox and lightweight seats.

By 1955 it had travelled to the USA and was enjoyed by four owners before being purchased by a Canadian, Mr. William Nicholson in 1972. He like many other owners of the early Continentals with the 4.5 litre engines wanted the increased power that was available from the 4.9 litre unit that was introduced in 1954. The factory had already initiated an engine exchange programme and a total of 37 of the bigger engines were supplied in this way.





A further development to the 4.9 litre engine was a factory modified cylinder head with big valves, and improved porting, designated by Bentley: 'OPWAS' – "Overhead Ported, Water-cooled, Aluminium, Straight-Six". This was coupled with lightweight pistons, stronger con rods, full length liners and hardened exhaust valves. This was the option that William Nicholson chose. The Continental Register states that he was inspired by Ian Fleming's description of James Bond's mythical uprated R Type. It is well known that in 1953 Fleming had the use of BC 10 LB for 6 months before its American owner took delivery.

BC 22 A had four further owners in the USA before returning to the UK in 2003 and passing into the care of Tim Laughton. Prior to taking delivery the engine was rebuilt by J & M Bentley and Partners and in his ownership covered 16,500 miles.

In March 2021, with the recorded mileage showing as 31,372, Laughton sold the car to an knowledgeable enthusiast with a collection that includes a number of important Bentleys including three other R Type Continentals. The attraction of BC 22 A was not just the specification and good condition but also the high performance that is delivered in such an effortless manner. In his care the car benefitted from over

£100,000 of maintenance and improvements carried out by Padgett Motor Engineers, P & A Wood and Ashton Keynes Vintage Restorations. In four and a half years BC 22 A has covered nearly 2,500 trouble-free miles and is offered for sale in exemplary condition and with the odometer reading 34,000 miles.

In summary this is an original 1953 Bentley R Type Continental with lightweight aluminium coachwork by H J Mulliner. The svelte A Series body (later cars were two inches wider) is complemented by the desirable manual gearbox, lightweight seats and rear wheel spats. The car was delivered new to Switzerland but was in the USA from 1955 and accordingly spared the corrosive British winter road conditions.

The car has retained its original black livery and was repainted to a high standard in 2022. The interior has been re-trimmed in tan leather. The engine was upgraded in 1972. The car has been fitted with Avon 'Turbo-Steel' radial tyres for their superior performance. Air conditioning makes for comfortable cruising and an auxiliary Kenlow fan keeps the engine as cool as the occupants. An alternator was fitted to ensure the electrics could keep up.

This impressive specification is endorsed by a substantial history file, tools, running spares, and a car cover.







