

EXPANDED ISSUE: 77 PAGES OF SCOTTSDALE COVERAGE

Keith Martin's
Sports Car Market
The Insider's Guide to Collecting, Investing, Values, and Trends

SIZE MATTERS

1932 DAIMLER DOUBLE SIX—\$3M



April 2009

\$6.00US \$6.00CAN

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SIMON HOPE: A BRITISH TREK TO THE DESERT

1932 Daimler 40/50 Double Six Sport Saloon

The long hood is a bit like a padded medieval codpiece

by Simon Kidston

Photos: Gooding & Company



Chassis number: 32382

This 1932 Daimler Double Six 40/50 Sport Saloon is, without question, one of the most imposing automobiles ever constructed by the legendary British marque—or any maker of exclusive luxury vehicles. While only 26 Double Sixes were built over a decade, the vast majority had a smaller displacement and short chassis. Among this rarified group, this 1932 Daimler Double Six stands out. It is a second-generation, long-wheelbase example fitted with the revised 40/50 engine that allows for a top speed in excess of 80 mph.

The extravagant sport saloon was designed by Captain H.R. Owen. He is most famous for his creation of Gurney Nutting's three-position Sedanca, and was one of the premier Rolls-Royce and Bentley dealers. Upon completion of the chassis, Owen's design was realized by Martin Walter Ltd., which had gained a reputation for building high quality, prestige bodies for Britain's luxury marques.

Soon after delivery, this Double Six was shown by its original owner, Mr. A. Webber, at the 1932 Eastbourne Concours d'Elegance, where it received the Premiere Award, the equivalent of Best of Show.

After steady use by its original owner, the car was sold to the Isle of Man, where it remained for several decades. At some point, that owner removed the complex Double Six engine and replaced it with a Buick straight-8; however, the integrity of the chassis had not been compromised and the original engine remained with the car.

The car and the original engine were later purchased by a U.S. collector and brought to the United States. After being returned to its original configuration, the car made its debut at the 1999 Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance and was awarded Best of Show.

Today, this car remains show worthy in every respect. The intricately detailed Double Six has been care-

fully maintained since restoration; the stunning black paint is outstanding throughout, and the interior shows not even a hint of use. All the details are stunning and deserve careful examination, as the car abounds with fascinating features. It is one of the ultimate automotive statements and is one of only a handful of cars ever to receive Best of Show at Pebble Beach, placing it in exclusive company.

SCM Analysis

This Daimler sold for \$2,970,000, including buyer's premium, at the Gooding & Company sale in Scottsdale, Arizona, on January 17, 2009.

To win Best of Show at Pebble Beach takes something special, and you don't have to be a classic car expert to realize that this leviathan Daimler is very special indeed. At 18'6" long and barely 5' high, its exaggerated proportions resemble something Cruella de Vil might have favored; "seductive and sinister" is how the catalog described it, and I wouldn't dare argue.

This wasn't the first time a Double Six had won at Pebble, either. J.B. Nethercutt stole the show with his back in 1970, whilst another veteran collector, Bob Lee, took outright honors with a stunning drophead coupe as recently as 2006. The model has proven its stature at the highest level, and collectors can't dismiss it as a one-trick pony that got lucky.

The car's condition needs no comment. It had covered only nominal mileage since its Pebble Beach victory (more on that later) and was still better than new. It's a far cry from the day 20-plus years ago when I first set eyes on this very car, looking forlorn in my employer's dark and unheated storage garage behind Sloane Square in London on my first morning at work.

Acquired 15 years earlier from a caravan park owner

Details

Years produced: 1926–1937
 Number produced: 26 (some say 751)
 Original list price: £2,450 (\$12,250) in 1926
 SCM Valuation: \$2.9m on this day
 Tune-up cost: \$1,000 approx. (using RR Phantom as benchmark)
 Distributor cap: n/a
 Chassis #: On plate fixed to cabin firewall
 Engine #: On same plate
 Club: The Daimler Enthusiasts Club
 102 Fairmile Road, Christchurch, Dorset, BH23 2LN, UK
 More: www.daimlerclub.co.uk
 Alternatives: 1932 Buccioli TAV 12; 1929–32 Bugatti Type 41 Royale, 1931–38 Hispano-Suiza J12
 SCM Investment Grade: A

Comps



1931 Bentley 8-Liter
 Lot# 263, s/n YR5076
 Condition 2-
 Sold at \$2,200,000
 RM, Amelia Island, FL, 3/8/2008
 SCM# 115955



1933 Rolls-Royce Springfield PII
 Lot# 453, s/n 218AMS
 Condition 2
 Sold at \$2,310,000
 RM, Monterey, CA, 8/14/2008
 SCM# 117425



1930 Duesenberg Model J
 Lot# 441, s/n 2270
 Condition 3
 Sold at \$1,760,000
 RM, Monterey, CA, 8/14/2008
 SCM# 117428

for £7,000 (about \$18,000) and missing its engine and gearbox, it had been pushed against a wall and didn't look as if it had moved for years; we cursed the amount of space it occupied. The garage has now become a smart townhouse and the car a gleaming trophy; I wonder if the current residents have any idea of what used to lurk downstairs.

High quality, but unadventurous

The catalog made much of Daimler's royal associations, and there's no denying that in the marque's early years, before it stooped to lending its name to embellished Jaguars driven by Home Counties golfing types, Daimler made high quality if mostly unadventurous motor cars favored by King George V and his entourage. I judged one during the recent Cartier Concours in India. Like most of its brethren it was built more for luxury than speed (crown wearers like headroom) and was, to use RR-speak, "failing to proceed." Getting a 12-cylinder, sleeve-valve engine to run properly taxes even the best mechanical minds...

Style, of course, is what this particular Daimler is all about—less suited to a King, more to a wayward prince. Nothing short of a Bugatti Royale could match it for outrageousness in 1932. Does the hood need to be that long? Of course not. It's a bit like a padded medieval codpiece, and the 150 hp underneath is similarly underwhelming.

In fact, there's enough room behind the engine to fit a drawer of tools one-and-a-half feet deep in front of the passenger's feet. Talking of space, despite the prodigious amount of road it occupies, Martin Walter's masterpiece is rather less generous with its occupants (just three plus the driver) than the coachbuilder's better known but less glamorous mainstay, the Bedford Dormobile camper van. Turning circle? Don't ask, but the Titanic comes to mind. Watching it navigate the roundabouts outside Villa d'Este last year and seeing nearby Fiats scurrying for cover couldn't help but raise a smile.

The ever insightful Miles Collier makes an important distinction between "experiential" and "contemplative" collectors: those who like to drive and those who prefer to look. It won't come as a great surprise to learn the seller of the Daimler, who acquired it four years earlier from its Pebble Beach-winning dealer entrant, hadn't covered much mileage in the car.

The previous owner enjoyed the car as automotive art

In fact, he hadn't even sat in it. He was happy to enjoy it as a piece of automotive art, leaving the occasional sortie to his charming lady restorer, who confides that



it starts easily, "doesn't take off like a rocket," steers easily despite its size, and stops well, although you need to "beware the center throttle to avoid putting it into a building." I'm not sure which would come off worse.

Was it worth the price paid? The market for anything of this era will always remain limited compared to the usual Ferrari, which even a novice collector can understand and enjoy. The Daimler was apparently available privately for some time before the auction with no takers, but such cars always require the right buyer.

Four "heavy hitters" were bidding, and the one who prevailed is said to be over the moon with the new centerpiece of his collection. I know the seller is pleasantly surprised by the result, which rewarded his patience.

A white elephant, yes, but extravagant indulgences launched at a time of world recession tend to be rare and become collectible—think Bugatti Royale and McLaren F1. I see no reason why this one shouldn't remain an appreciating asset for a new generation of collectors with ultra-deep pockets... and an ultra-large garage. ♦

(Introductory description courtesy of Gooding & Company.)

