

BONUS Arizona Coverage: 1,719 sold, \$120m, 202 Cars Rated

Keith Martin's Sports Car Market

The Insider's Guide to Collecting, Investing, Values, and Trends

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1,000-hp Aero Engine in 1931 Rolls, \$451k
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1931 Rolls-Royce Phantom II Merlin Special

I fired her up on the lawn, and to my surprise the most enthusiastic onlooker was an unfortunate chap whose entire picnic I had blown away

by Simon Kidston



Photos by Pavel Litvinski © 2009 Courtesy of Gooding & Company

Chassis number: 64GX

Chassis 64GX left Crewe as a standard Phantom II saloon, but in the late 1970s, Rolls-Royce collector Nicholas Harley of London decided to create a showcase of British engineering might. The restoration that ensued spanned approximately seven years, during which time the Phantom II frame was lengthened, reinforced and fitted with this lovely Gurney Nutting-inspired body constructed by Wilkinson's of Derby, and a 27-liter Mk I Merlin V12 engine was fitted, fed by two fuel pumps delivering 100 gallons per hour.

Upon completion, the aero-powered Phantom II was tested at Donington Park, where it was pitted against a 1958 Vanwall Grand Prix car—amazingly, the Rolls-Royce out-accelerated the racing car. In the 1990s, the Rolls-Royce made its way Stateside and, in 2000, it was sold to a well-known Florida collector.

In 2007, this car was acquired by its current owner, who has since embarked upon a mechanical overhaul. When the car was first constructed, the tremendous torque and power caused transmission and clutch issues, so during the mechanical overhaul, the transmission was converted to a Jaguar unit with high-strength gears. In addition, the Merlin engine was tested and tuned.

In 2008, following its meticulous rebuild, the Rolls-Royce was invited to the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance, where it was displayed alongside a number of 20-plus-liter automobiles, earning the Rolls-Royce a class award. The Merlin remains in exceptional condition. Beyond its remarkable engine bay, one of the most evocative aspects of this car is its overwhelming instrument panel, which would not look out of place in a Spitfire airplane.

Unlike other examples of aero-engined automobiles, this Rolls-Royce stands apart in its impressive presentation and loyalty to original details. This Merlin-powered Phantom II is ready to draw crowds wherever it goes, and its new owner should be capable of experiencing the unbelievable feeling of piloting a WWII-era fighter plane down the road.

SCM Analysis

This car sold for \$451,000, including buyer's premium, at Gooding's Scottsdale Auction in Scottsdale, Arizona, on January 22, 2010.

With its Spitfire motor and a host of auction appearances under its belt, it's tempting to call this car a frequent flier. Christie's sold it at Beaulieu back in July 1969 for \$13,956 as a normal saloon (SCM #7326). RM sold it post-Merlin transplant at Monterey in '99 for \$605,000 (SCM# 22226) and again in Florida at its Al Wiseman Collection auction in 2007, this time for \$412,500 (SCM# 47743).

Young oligarchs and sheikhs cruising the boulevards of Moscow and Dubai in their bling'd-up Veyrons may think they have a monopoly on 1,000 horsepower, but younger kids in a rather more demanding profession—RAF pilots—took it for granted 70 years ago. Often they were piloting one of history's great fighter aircraft, no fewer than 27 liters of Rolls-Royce Merlin engine stretching out past the gunsight in front of them and anything up to 2,000 horsepower at their bidding.

England, home of the eccentric

In fact, the Merlin didn't just power Spitfires, Hurricanes, and Lancaster bombers, it saw service in

Details

Years produced: 1931 (modified in 1987)
 Number produced: 1
 Original list price: n/a
 SCM Valuation: \$451,000 on this day
 Tune-up cost: n/a
 Distributor caps: n/a (magneto)
 Chassis #: Plate on firewall
 Engine #: Engine block on left side
 Club: Rolls-Royce Owners' Club
 191 Hempt Road
 Mechanicsburg, PA 17055
 Experimental Aircraft Association
 EAA Aviation Center, PO Box 3086
 Oshkosh, WI 54903-3086
 More: www.rroc.org; www.eaa.org
 Alternatives: Any proper motor car with 20 more liters than necessary
 SCM Investment Grade: B

Comps



1939 Lagonda Rapide V12 Tulipwood
 Lot 584, s/n 14095
 Condition 1-
 Sold at \$451,000
 RM, Monterey, CA, 8/17/2007
 SCM# 46259



1927 Rolls-Royce P1/Hispano-Suiza V8
 Lot 449, s/n S90PM
 Condition 2+
 Sold at \$133,500
 Bonhams, Brookline, MA, 9/26/2009
 SCM# 142643



1934 Duesenberg SJ Boattail rebody
 Lot 2251, s/n 2159
 Condition 2
 Sold at \$660,000
 RM, Marshall, TX, 4/20/2007
 SCM# 44873

