

The history of Bugatti 44266 ‘blackbird’

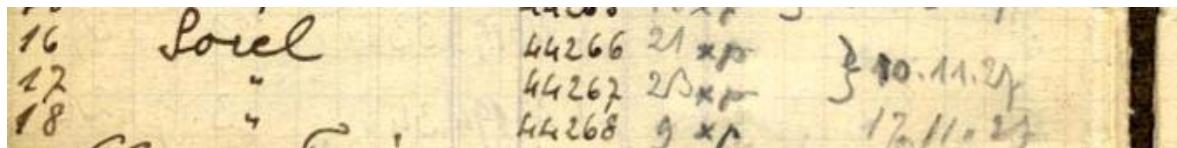
Kees Jansen

Introduction

Very few Bugattis have always been in the same family. Besides the odd exception, most cars have changed ownership several times, and very often the complete provenance is unknown. This, however, does not apply to Bugatti 44266: all owners, as well as the whole history of the car are known. It was a 4-seater cabriolet, modified to a 2-seater boat tail body with full road gear created in the mid-thirties. In total the car has had 17 owners (including car dealers) from new. It has been changed considerably, but this took place in the mid thirties when it was modified for racing. Between 1933 and 1937 the car has had considerable success, with many victories at Bugatti races and rallies in the UK and it has won the best yearly performance of the BOC events twice.

Production, Sale and Body

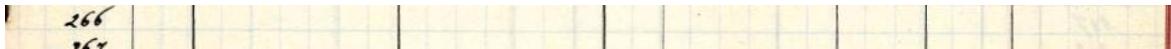
Chassis No. 44266 fitted with engine No.21, was completed in chassis form in September 1927 before being invoiced by the factory to the manager of the Bugatti London's agency Colonel Sorel residing on Brixton road- on Nov 4, 1927 for shipment on Nov 10 in a batch of six rolling chassis: two type 40's and 4 types 44¹. The price of the types 44 rolling chassis was FF 29.920.-².



Page from Carnet nr 2 from Mr Pracht, administrator of the Bugatti factory.
44266 with engine no 21 was in a batch of six cars that went to Sorel in London on Nov 10, 1927, amongst which 44267 and 44268. (Courtesy of Julius Kruta, Bugatti SAS)

40559	4/11	Sorel	London	18.198.50 nov 1927
40558	4/11	"	"	18.198.50 nov 1927
44305	4/11	"	"	29.920.- nov 1927
44268	4/11	"	"	29.920.- nov 1927
44267	4/11	"	"	29.920.- nov 1927
44266	4/11	"	"	29.920.- nov 1927

EB Order book with the batch of 6 Bugattis for London. (Courtesy of Julius Kruta, Bugatti SAS)

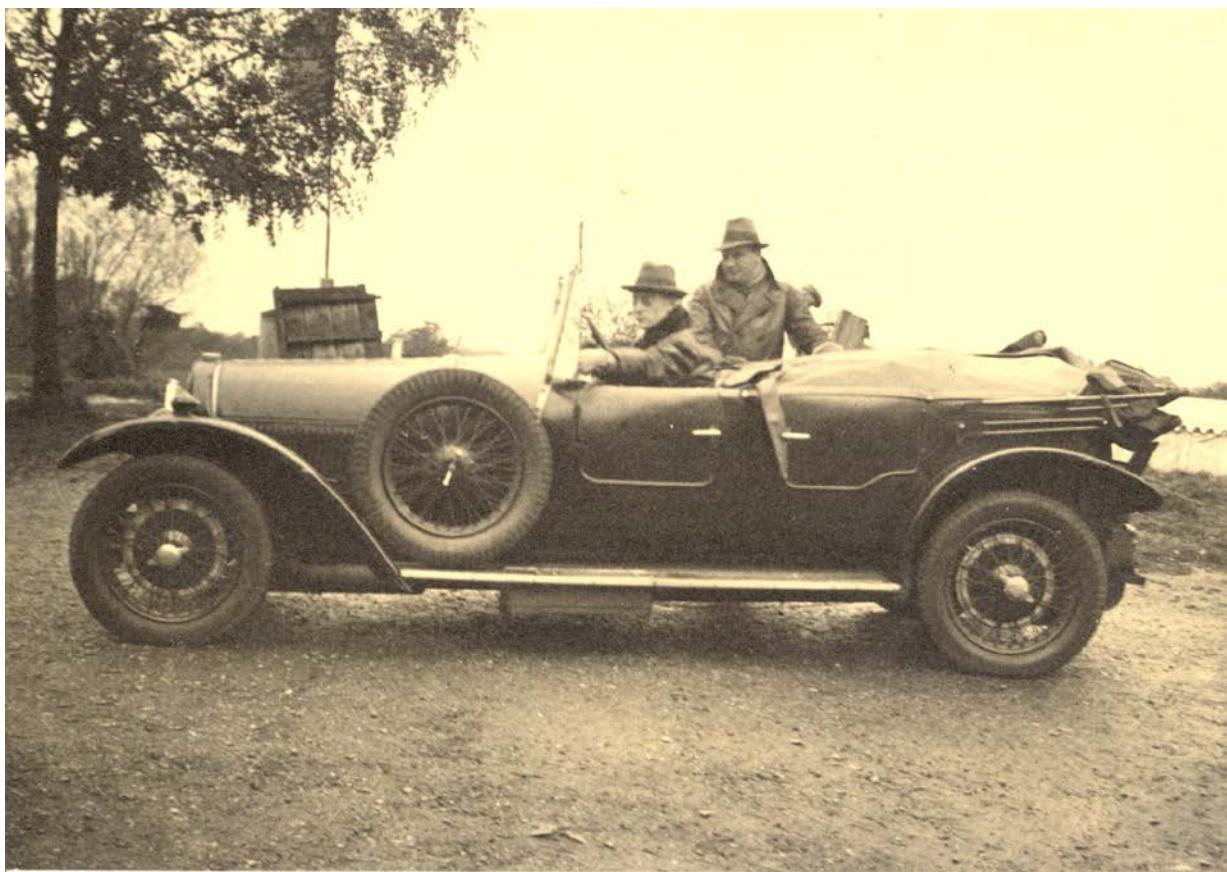


Carrosserie book. Entries are empty until 44427. Only few types 44 got a denomination in this book; most were delivered as rolling chassis to a local coachbuilder. (Courtesy Julius Kruta (Bugatti SAS)



In the Factory Engine book: 44266 got no 21. From the same page it can be read that engine no 3 is not used ('Essai'), here not shown. (Courtesy of Julius Kruta, Bugatti SAS)

The English coach building company, Harrington's of Brighton then built the body for 44266 as well as for 44267, which was an all black four-door, four-seater cabriolet with a fabric body.



The original Harrington of Brighton four-seater cabriolet with a fabric body on chassis 44266 before the transition (Photo courtesy of Moyra James-Bear)

Maurice Sowman (1927- 1931)

The car was bought by Maurice Sowman in London, and its first license plate, **UV 28** was issued by the London city council in June 1929. During the 19 months between the delivery of the chassis and the completed car being road registered it could have been used as the agency's demonstrator before 44787 took over that duty. During the following two years he used it regularly and covered about 17.000 miles (almost 28.000 km), after which he sold the car to Colonel G.M. Giles.

Colonel Geoffrey Giles (1931)

The famous Bugattist Colonel Geoffrey M. Giles- the chairman of the Bugatti Owners Club- bought this car in 1931. It was his eighth Bugatti. He had the habit of naming all his cars; this one he called '*Blackbird*'. He owned it for a short time: he bought it on July 18, 1931, and sold it on Sept 2, 1931 to Kenneth Bear, having driven 1293 Miles on it meanwhile³. He sold it as he wanted to downsize: he also had two other 3 litres and a 2.3 litre Bugatti.



At the BOC Lewes Speed Trial with Kenneth Bear on June 11, 1932 which was won by a Delage in 22.7 seconds; here still as a 4 seater (Photo WJ Brunell, courtesy of Moyra James- Bear)

Kenneth Bear (1931- 1938)

Kenneth Wilfried Bear was just 24 years of age, when he bought the car second-hand in 1931. He made his living in an insurance company with Lionel Sage & Co (now Marsh Brokers Ltd) specialising in the aviation insurance business that he had entered as an office boy at the age of 19; he was appointed director at the age of 25 and chairman at 30 years. He also became an underwriting member (a so called 'name') at Lloyd's of



Pic: The chassis is shortened 19 inch; the rear doors have been removed, here pictured at the BOC Chalfont St Giles Hillclimb in 1934 where it became the fastest sports car (Photo W.J. Brunell courtesy of Moyra James-Bear)

London at the age of 36- in those days a certified guarantee of a good income. He also was a keen rugby player and tennis player and he also owned and flew his private airplane.

Kenneth Bear in full swing after having shortened the car but before having changed the tail. Date unknown. (Courtesy of the Bugatti Trust)





Pic: Kenneth Bear did not really like the looks of the rear end of his car after he had shortened the chassis as can be seen here, so he had it modified to a boat tail style body as can be seen later. (Photo courtesy of the Bugatti Trust D1319-27)

He had clearly caught the 'Bugitis' virus- an incurable disease that would ultimately kill him.

44266 was his fourth Bugatti, and Bear was co-founder of the Bugatti Owners Club (BOC); member # 6. He was a very enthusiastic organizer and participant of Bugatti rallies and a serious contender during races and sprints.



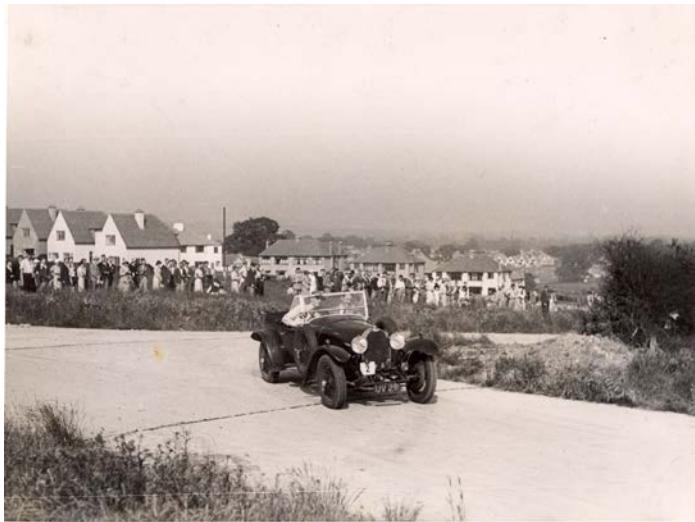
Especially for speed trials, hill climbs and rallies he embarked on a project to make this car much faster: He bought two new cylinder blocks from the Bugatti factory in Molsheim in order to increase the size of the engine from 2997 to 3257 cc, and new 'specialoid' pistons were fitted increasing the compression ratio with which he gained 10 Hp to 100 hp.



Pics: Left 44266 with difficulties during the Lewes speed trial, October 21, 1933. Called 'ten push power tourer', pushed by bystanders. In spite of this Kenneth Bear had a first place in class B. Here it still is a four seater (Bugantics, 1933; 2: 2:8)



He also reduced the weight by shortening the chassis 19 Inch (50 cm) and removing the rear doors thereby making the car 600 Lbs lighter. The car became considerably faster by these modifications: It had a documented acceleration from 0- 60 Mph in 9.45 seconds, and a top speed of over 95 Miles per hour, figures almost identical to the supercharged 8 cylinder type 43. At its first race after the shortening, at the BOC Chalfont St Giles Hillclimb in 1934 it became the fastest sports car.

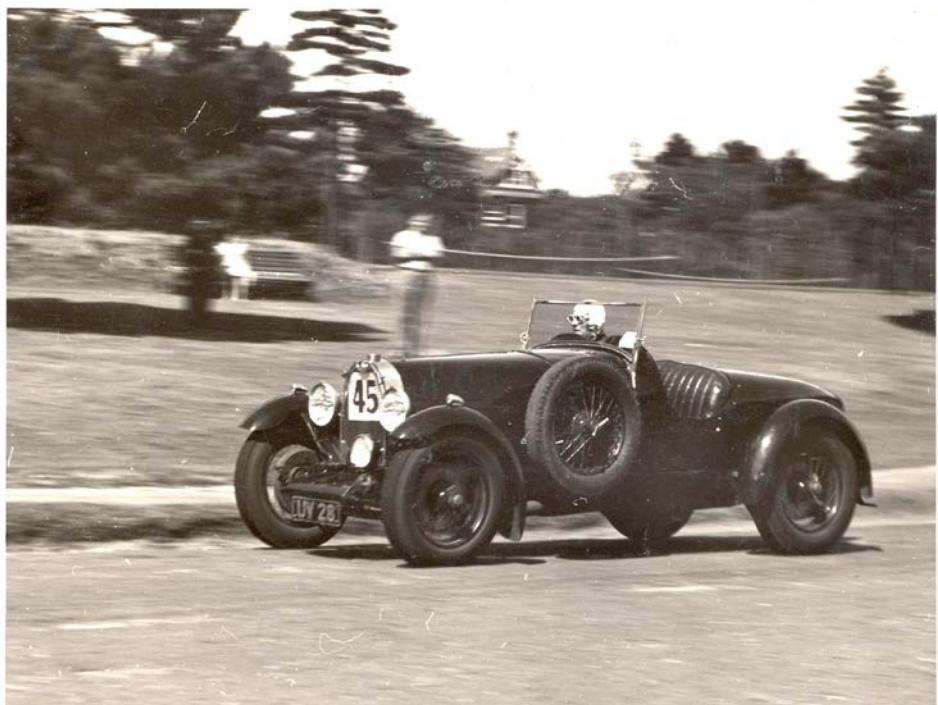


In addition he changed the rear end to a boat tail in order to decrease air resistance and changed the ratio of the rear differential from 12 x 50 to 14x 54 (4,2:1 to 3,85:1)⁴.

BOC Hillclimb Joel Park in Northwood 193: The fastest in the super sports car class and winner of the Victor Ludorum award 1935 and 1936. (Bugantics)

All these modifications were performed with the aim to acquire the *Victor Ludorum Award*, the best aggregate performance over the

season of the Bugatti Owners Club. This had never been done before and never done afterwards with one single car: the other winners had used different cars for different purposes.



Kenneth Bear in one of his sprints after the shortening of the car and the modification of the tail (Photo Louis Klemantaski, courtesy of Moyra James- Bear)



The car after all the modifications had been done. It has basically been unchanged since then. Date unknown (Photo Courtesy of The Bugatti Trust)

With this car he enjoyed a number of victories, such as the *Monte Honiton Carlo Rally* in 1933, indeed twice the *Victor Ludorum Challenge Cup* of the BOC (the best aggregate performance for the year) in 1935 and 1936, the *Chalfont and Joel Park Hill climbs*,

Lewes speed trial and many others. He used it for rally's, hillclimbs and speed trials until 1938 at Prescott.

The years 1935 and 1936 were his best; the car had a good karma for him, in spite of the absence of a compressor. With this configuration he experienced one victory after the other. For instance during the Monte Honiton- Carlo Rally on May 17, 1935, he had beaten two blown 43's and a 55 on his way to victory.

At the Shelsley-Walsh meeting on June 21, 1937 it was the fastest unsupercharged car. However in June 1938 he crashed the car heavily at the BOC Hill climb where he made 59 seconds but ended in a crash, damaging both the front and rear axle. As a result, in the same year 1938 he placed the engine temporarily in the 44 Bear special with which he enjoyed further successes. After the season he placed the engine back in the



original car and sold it to Albert Raven in 1938. His mechanic was Mr Stafford East

At a JCC (Junior Car Club) driving test in Brooklands in 1938 (Photo Louis Klemantaski, courtesy of Moyra James-Bear)



Fig: Kenneth Bear in 59121, this time with the 4 wheels on the rear, a feature specific for Bear, which he also had on the Bear Special and on 55155 (Photo courtesy of Moyra James- Bear)

Kenneth Bear himself aspired towards an increase in power: amongst others he drove the 50 regulation Le Mans tourer, (50143), with which he had a various successes. He

won at Craigantlet in 1946, had the fastest time of the day at the Val de Terres hill climb in 1947. He wanted to go into serious racing, especially as he found the war had deprived him of his prime years in racing and he wanted more or less 'to catch up', so he bought the even more powerful 59 (59121). With this he became fifth on the R.A.C. Hill Climb Championship and won the Castle Trophy Race on the Isle of Man in 1948.

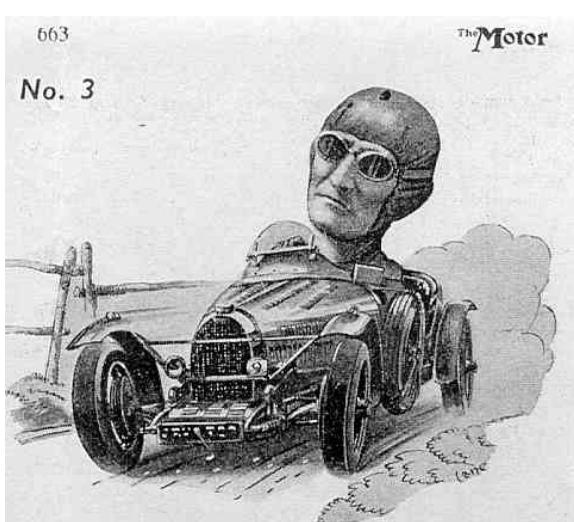
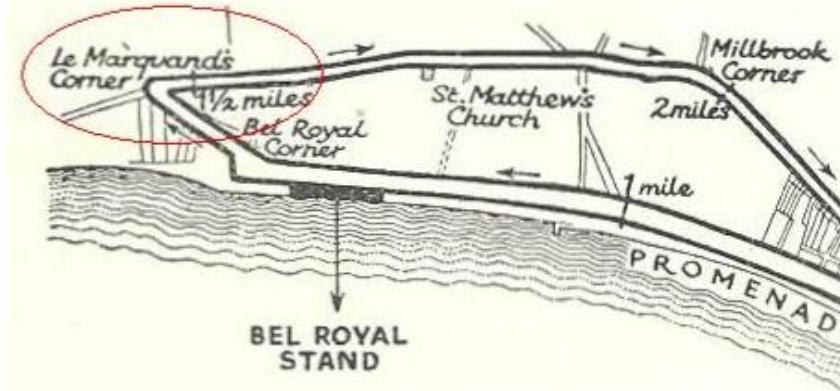


Fig: Sketch of Kenneth Bear in Bugatti 51155 in 'The Motor' in January 1948, shortly before his accidental death in another Bugatti: 59121(The Motor)

However this car became his ultimate fate: during the practice run for the *Jersey International Road Race*, on the 27th of April 1949- at the age of 43- he had a fatal accident, in the same car that had killed the 26 year old Earl of Grafton eleven years earlier. Two years earlier he had already experienced a serious accident and his wife had begged him not to race anymore for the sake of his two children, but he was hooked on it and he could not give it up.



The track of the Jersey International Road race in 1949

Approaching *Le Marquand's Corner* his brakes failed. When Bear passed the main straight along the promenade his mechanic Stafford East saw that one of the brake lines was trailing behind having separated at the brake compensation gear arrangement. At first Bear tried to steer towards the escape lane, but as he saw the crowd illegally packed there behind the

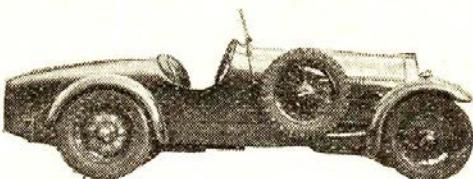
barrier he tried to swing the car towards St Aubin. That failed; he crashed into a wall and into a first aid post killing two officials: a doctor on duty at the post, Dr F.J. O'Dowd and a police sergeant Frank Dutot. He had not broken anything; he never lost his conscience and was taken to hospital. He even stepped out of the ambulance himself and walked to the entrance. However a short time afterwards in hospital he suddenly lost his conscience and died instantaneously, suggesting an epidural haematoma or an intracranial bleeding. He left behind a wife and two daughters Patricia and Moyra, aged 12 and 10. The accident also had grave financial consequences for the family: the ensuing lawsuits drained the family resources and his wife had to accept living in poverty.

Albert Raven (1938- 1939)

Further to 44266: Next there was some confusion as far as ownership is concerned. According to various sources- one of which being Kenneth Bear's mechanic, E.A.

1 BUG. 44266/4

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Stafford- East- he sold the car to Albert Raven for £ 50.-, an enthusiastic BOC member as well. The confusion arose as Albert Raven later also acquired the 37 single-seater with a 44 engine with which Kenneth Bear had also been racing. Albert Raven sold it to Bugatti Agent Jack Lemon Burton's where it was for sale for £175.- in April 1939⁵

Advertisement by Jack Lemon Burton in 'The Motor' on April 25, 1939, page 56.

The purported top speed of 105 Mph is a bit overenthusiastic: in tests it had been clocked at 95 Mph max.

John Wyer (1940- 1945)



The car was sold to the young John Wyer in 1940. John Wyer later rose to fame, first to become the Aston Martin racing team manager, subsequently head of JW Automotive, dominating Le Mans for years, leading the Ford GT 40 to victories at the 24 hours of Le Mans from 1966 to 1969 and afterwards doing the same with the Gulf Porsche Racing team with the Porsche 917 in the early seventies. However during the war severe restrictions were in place, such as a ban on car racing.

John Wyer in later years during one of the races



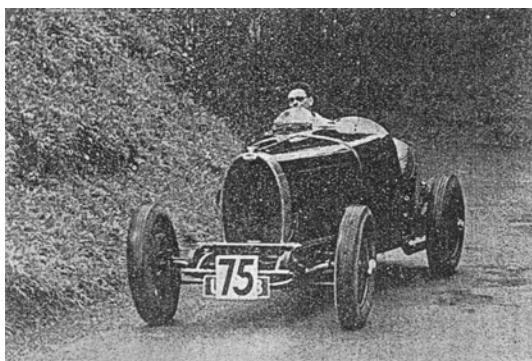
The Ford GT40 made famous by John Wyer, the first Ford ever winning Le Mans



The Porsche 917 in the Gulf Porsche racing team

Peter Clark (1945- 1949)

Just after the war, in 1945, John Wyer exchanged the car for a H.R.G. that he later sold for £ 550. -. The new owner Peter Clark was an amateur racer, who started driving rallies again. He made a presentation at the *Shelsley Walsh Hill Climb*, on the 21st of



June 1947. During the practice run he made an excellent 46.13 seconds, but during the race as a result of the rain it was 49.15 sec. The car still had its original license plate UV 28, and still had its original black colour.

Pic: Peter Clark leaving the Esses in Bugatti 44266 at the Shelsley Walsh Meeting of June 1947 (Motor Sport, 1948; Feb p 33) (Photo by Guy Griffiths)

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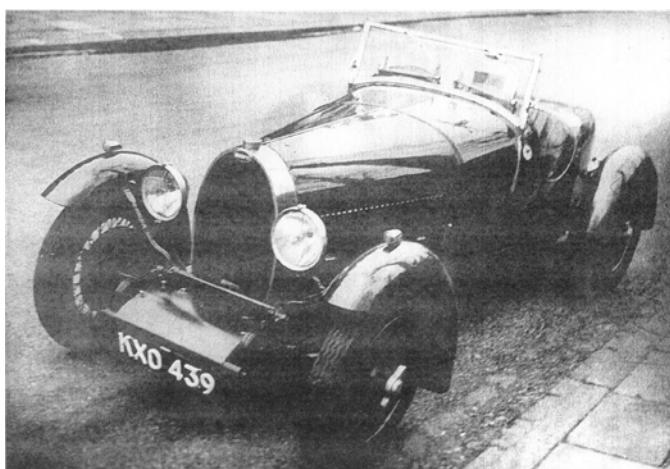
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Photo.
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Pic: Advertisement of Monaco of Watford around 1949 (location unknown)

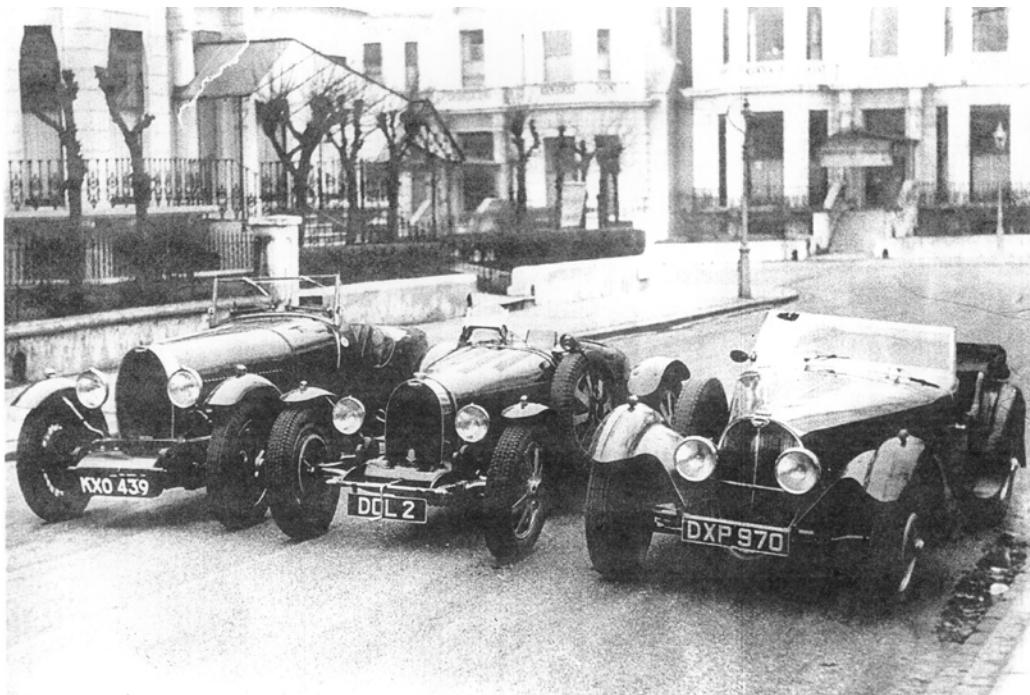
Hutton (1949- 1954)



In 1949 the firm Monaco of Watford sold the car to a Mr Hutton. He decided (to take advantage of the new flat road tax rate) to apply for a new registration, which then became KXO 439.

Around 1950 the car was serviced by Jack Lemon Burton, who later moved to Lonsdale Road. The car seems to have been sold through a London Garage called 'Speed Models' of dealer Brian Finglass in Pembridge Mews at Notting Hill Gate in London.

44266 in 1950 with its new license plate. It also still has the new Lucas 1130 indicator lights, possibly obligatory due to the new registration.



Three Bugattis in a row, nicely depicting the evolution in styles: Left 44266, in the middle a 35B (4963), which now for all intents and purposes does not exist anymore (although the license plate is on another 35) and on the right a 57 SC (57512) with a Corsica body, outside the premises of the garage of Brian Finglass, 'Speed Models' in Notting Hill Gate in London. The 57 has gone to the USA, the coach has been removed temporarily, but has recently been reunited during a restoration in California in 1995.

The United States: Goodwin, Callender, Moser and Leavitt (1954- 1979)

The car had been exported to Goodwin in the US. From around 1962 to 1968 it was in the possession of Rawley S Callender, Santa Barbara, California. In Oct 1968 the car was bought by Bob Paul Moser, living 3250 Breamar Road, Santa Barbara, California. He had work done on the body and the car repainted after which he put it up for sale



again for \$ 6500.-. From 1970 to 1979 the owner was John Leavitt in New York. According to the registrar of the American Bugatti Club, Sandy Leith, none of these were members of the American Bugatti Club, and it is said that the car has not or hardly been driven during that time. I have not been able to get any information from these owners so far.

On Nov 11, 1968 for repair with Ben Moser in Burbank, California (Photo Randy Ena)

Dan Marguiles (1979): Back to the UK

The classic car trader Dan Marguiles imported the car again into the United Kingdom, and advertised it amongst others in the '*Thoroughbred and Classic Cars*' issue in October 1979. The car had become light blue by then.

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1927 Bugatti Type 44, chassis and engine number 44266. Fitted attractive G.P. style body with full road equipment. Engine modified to Type 49 specification.

1936 Rolls Royce 20/25 chassis number GPK 63 "Top Hat" saloon by Freestone & Webb. Actual car featured in "Those Elegant Rolls Royces".

1926 Rolls Royce 20 Drophead Coupé by Southern Motors.

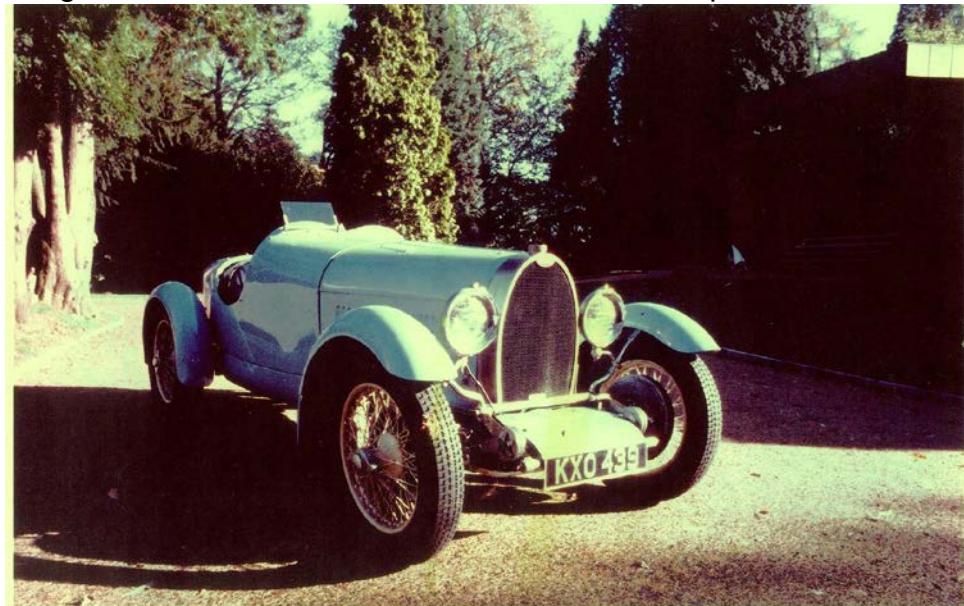
1928 Brooklands two seater.
1928 Lee Francis two seater with dickey.
1928 Bentley 3 Litre Van den Plas Speed model.
1938 Rolls Royce 25/30 sports saloon by Thrupp & Maberley.
1923 Stanley Steamer T735 Tourer.
1930 Alfa Romeo 1750 James Young drophead coupé.
1936 Bentley 3½ Litre sports saloon by Mann & Egerton.
1929 MG 18/80 four seater tourer.
1928 Bugatti Type 40 2/3 seater.

1927 Bugatti Type 44, chassis and engine number 44266. Fitted attractive G.P. style body with full road equipment. Engine modified to Type 49 specification.

*Advertisement of Dan Margulies in '*Thoroughbred and Classic Cars*' (Oct 1979, pag 85). The car is now light blue*

Eric Stewart (1979- 1982)

The advertisement attracted the attention of the British pop-musician Eric Stewart, who bought it for around £ 20.000. Eric Stewart was representative of '*The British Invasion*'

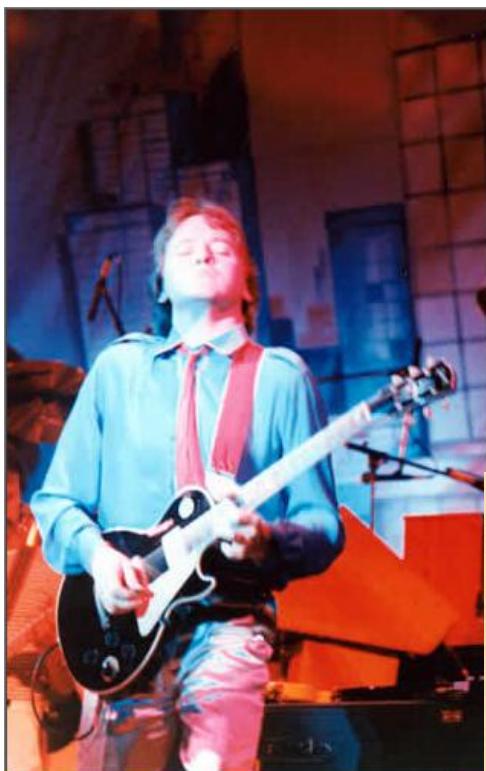


in pop music, and he was a member of the pop group '*Wayne Fontana and the Mindbenders*' as a guitarist in the sixties. After this he was co-founder of the group '*10cc*'.

When bought by Eric Stewart it was what was called 'Bugatti' blue (Photo Courtesy of Eric Stewart)

In the year he bought the car, 1979 he experienced a severe car crash- with another car- which did not keep him from ordering a complete nuts-and-bolts, frame-up

restoration in 1980 at Bassett Down Ltd, Swindon, Wiltshire, UK, by Nigel Arnold Foster. The car stayed there for 18 months, from June 1980 to December 1981, and in total more than 2100 professional hours were spent. However care was taken to keep everything original as is evidenced by the bills that specify in great detail the work that had been done.



Eric Stewart during the 'ten out of ten' tour by 10CC

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Advertisement of Nigel Arnold Foster of Basset Down Ltd in Classic and Thoroughbred Cars 1979

Everything was restored except the engine. After the restoration he never drove the Bugatti 44, as he was able to buy a supercharged 35C, which was much faster. With the latter car he regularly participated in various antique car races.

Fuad and Julian Majzub (1982-1999)

Fuad Majzub, a very wealthy refugee from Persia (now Iran), added Bugatti 44266 to his British stock in 1982 for £ 20.000.- from Eric Stuart. He used the plate 441 BGP- probably from one of his numerous other cars, and it was still blue. However on the day he bought the car and drove it home, the engine seized as a result of a big-end failure, so that he was forced to have it revised. This was done at *Brineton Engineering*, which spent 230 professional hours for a complete engine revision. However the engine (upper and lower crankcase, cylinder blocks and so on) was kept in its original condition. Afterwards he probably never drove it anymore. After his decease on 28 Jan

1995, the complete collection went to his son Julian, who had the car being sprayed black again and had the upholstery being renewed by the '*Horne recovery service*'. He sold the car via the Bugatti specialist Ivan Dutton on Nov 23, 1999 to Bert Janssens

Bert Janssens (1999- 2001)

The next owner was the Belgian Bert Janssens. He is a descendant from the family that made fame with '*t IJsboerke*'. They make Ice for the local market that beat '*Ben and Jerry's*' and '*Haagen-Dazs*'. His father Staf Janssens started the business in 1935 with a little ice car and a bicycle, and his imperia based on house-to-house delivery grew to a staff of 340 employees.



*Picture: The Godfather of '*t IJsboerke*'-
Staf Janssens with his first ice car and his
mode of transportation)*

After his death his two sons ran the company, but during a downfall in profits it was taken over by the NPM (Nationale Portefeuille Maatschappij) of the Wallonian financier '*Frère*' in 1997.

Bert received a large sum of money, under stipulation that he would refrain from ice making for a number of years. Part of his newly acquired wealth was first spent on racehorses, then on vintage cars, amongst which a number of Bugattis. He used 44266 to visit meeting such as the August 2000 meeting at Prescott.

Bert had the car made roadworthy by Ivan Dutton and acquired FIVA and FIA papers for it. The registration now had become SL 9983, a special plate licences for pre-1931 cars in 1999. Bert Janssens has not kept the car for long: 2 years later he sold all his Bugattis again.



Fig: 44266 in June 1999 at Ivan Dutton's premises (second from the right). On the wheel is Bert's friend Frans Thijs who comes to have a look at the car with Bert Janssens



Pic: 44266 (left) next to a 43 during the August 2000 Meeting at Prescott, England.

Kees Jansen (2001- present)

In November 2001 the car was bought by the present owner, who participated in the Mille Miglia with it in 2002, in the Bugatti group sponsored by Bugatti SAS, with his friend Marco Franken and became third from the Dutch contingent (no 122 over all)



Pic: start of the Mille Miglia 2002 team Jansen- Franken

He tried to beat this score during the Mille Miglia in 2008, however this time with his wife Kathleen Tucker. The ride was great; the car performed flawless but the classification was less, somewhere in the rear. The third time it participated in the Mille Miglia was in 2012 when again it performed perfectly, and the position was somewhat better about halfway



Pic: In full speed during the Mille Miglia 2002 (Photo: Auto Week, 2002; 13; 22: 38)



Pic: in the Mille Miglia 2008 (Photo Haase)



Pic: in the Mille Miglia 2012 (Photo Fabian Gallucci)

Table: Rallies and races in the UK in the nineteen-thirties with 44266 in its modified form

Date	Rally		Location	Position	Marks	Time
1932	BOC Hillclimb		Chalfont			
June 11 1932	BOC Speed trials	# 1	Lewes			
30-03-1933	Monte-Honiton Carlo Rally		Honiton	1	1669 (second 871)	62.7 sec
21-10-1933	Lewes speed trial		Lewes	1 class B (Touring over 1500 cc)		31.2
1933	Victor Ludorum challenge cup		Yearly performance	2	63	
24-11-1934	Night trial		?	2		68,2 s
1934	BOC Hillclimb	#26	Chalfont	1		
1935	Opening rally					
31-03-1935	Monte Honiton Carlo Rally		Honiton	1	624	
1935	Chalfont Hill climb		Chalfont	1 class sports cars		28,6
1935	Joel Park			1 Unlimited sports		
1935	BOC Hillclimb	# 2	Joel Park Northwood	1		
07-09-1935	Lewes speed trial		Lewes	4 Sports over 1500 cc		
13-10-1935	Welsh trial		Bala (Wales)	3		
1935	Victor Ludorum Challenge cup		Yearly Performance	1	78 pt (no 2 58 p)	
05-04-1936	Opening Rally		Wansford			
17-05-1936	Monte Honiton Carlo Rally					
20-06-1936	Hill climb					
12-07-1936	Ghymkana		Ghymkana	1		
15-08-1936	Lewes speed trial		Lewes	2 racing cars over 3000 cc		
25-10-1936	Welsh trial		Lake Vrynnwy	2		

1936	<i>Victor Ludorum Challenge cup</i>		<i>Yearly performance</i>	1	81 (no 2 49 pt)	
May 1937	KSCC Speed trial	# 11	Lewes			22,7 sec
July 1937	Poole park speed trials	# 41	Poole Park	1 sports cars over 3200 cc		25,44 sec
July 1937	Walter Martin Cup		Poole Park	winner		25,34 sec
10-07-1937	Donington		Donington	2		
July 1937	Speed trial		Poole	1 super sports car class irrespective of capacity & Walker Martin Cup		25,34 sec
May 8, 1937	Kent & Sussex Car Club Speed trial		Lewes			22,7 sec
11-09-1937	Speed trial	# 34	Shelsley Walsh	Fastest unsupercharged car in 3 l class		45,47 sec
20-11-1937	Night trial			1 second class		
1937	<i>Victor Ludorum Challenge cup</i>		<i>Yearly performance</i>	8	33	
March 1938	Junior Car Club driving test	# 114	Brooklands			
May 1938	Midland Automobile Club		Shelsley walsh	1 st Class B		
June 1938	Hillclimb	# 57	Shelsley Walsh	1 st in class 3 l unsupercharged		47 sec
1938	BOC trial		Welsh trial	2 nd in class		
1938	Poole speed trial			2 nd supersports class		
June 1938	Hillclimb	# 15	Prescott		<i>Rain, crashed in practice</i>	59 sec

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References

¹ Pracht, Carnets de livraison de l-usine, 1927, book 2: p 1

² Pracht, EB Livre de livraisons 1927, p 29

³ Giles GM *Bugatti Cars I have owned- VII*, Bugantics Nov 1936, Vol 5, no 6, pp 12-18 (p 16)

⁴ Bear KW *Bugatti Types I have owned- I*, Bugantics Jan 1936, Vol 5, No 1, pp 16- 21

⁵ Advertisement in 'The Motor' 25 April 1939, page 56.