

Great Garages

BENTLEY: A CENTURY OF CLASS

written by David M. Brown



1931 8 Litre 'Silentbloc' Saloon

'To build a fast car, a good car, the best in its class.'
–W. O. Bentley

Bentley Motors is 100 in 2019: Auto lovers worldwide are celebrating a century of the marque's elegant, powerful motorcars.

Company founder, engineer, entrepreneur, Walter Owen 'W.O.' Bentley (1888–1971) apprenticed at the Great Northern Railway Locomotive Works in Doncaster, northern England, when he was 16 and still riding a bicycle. In his first job with the National Motor Cab Company, he supervised the service and overhaul of 400 taxis. All the while, he and two brothers successfully raced motorcycles.

In 1912 he and one brother, H.M., bought a small dealership importing the French car, Doriot, Flandrin & Parant (DFP), of Courbevoie, France. During World War I, he designed the Bentley Rotary 1 and 2 fighter aircraft engines, which influenced his later car designs. In January 1919, the brothers opened Bentley Motorcars Ltd., with H.M.J. Ward as the third director. That October, the first Bentley was completed in a workshop near famed Baker Street.

Until the war stopped his racing and car-building, W.O. Bentley successfully raced his DFP cars fitted with these high-performance engines against vehicles with more formidable powertrains.

Following the extraordinary decade of the 1920s, with five Le Mans wins, the struggling Bentley Motors Ltd. failed and was purchased by Rolls Royce to prevent rival Napier from acquiring it.

Although owned for 67 years by a luxury car builder without a racing commitment, Bentley maintained its name and reputation as a quality motorcar. In 1933, the first Rolls-Royce-produced Bentley appeared as the 3 ½ Litre, capable of 90 mph.

Six years later, the Bentley MkV debuted, and in 1946 the MkVI was the first to be built from standard Rolls-Royce components. The R-Type Continental appeared in June 1952. Three years later, the Bentley S Series was powered by a new 4.9-liter version of the 6-cylinder engine and equipped with automatic transmission. In October 1957, the Mulliner-bodied four-door Bentley Continental Flying Spur was released, and, in the final year of the decade, the Bentley S2 was propelled by the new 6.2-liter aluminum V-8.

The Bentley T Series and Rolls-Royce Silver Shadow two-door saloon and drophead models were renamed Corniche in 1971, and nine years later, to begin the decade, the T Series became the Mulsanne, recalling the great Le Mans straightaway. And, in 1985, the Bentley Mulsanne Turbo R established itself as the fastest road-going Bentley. In March 1991, the Bentley Continental R had the first Bentley-dedicated body since the 1954 R-Type Continental.

In March 1996, the 400-bhp Bentley Continental T became the marque's most powerful road car, and two years later the company announced the Bentley Arnage, powered by a BMW V-8 twin-turbocharged engine.

In July of that year, 1998, Volkswagen AG purchased Rolls-Royce Motor Cars, and BMW bought the rights to the Rolls-Royce name. Beginning in 2003, the two companies separated, with BMW owning Rolls-Royce and Volkswagen Bentley.

In June of 2001, Bentley returned to Le Mans, entering two of the new EXP Speed 8s. Andy Wallace, Eric van de Poele and Butch Leitzinger finished third, and the following year a Bentley finished fourth. Bentley was back on the podium.

Off the track, a new Flying Spur debuts at the Pebble Beach

Concours d'Elegance in August, and the electric, autonomous EXP 100 GT concept, was recently revealed at the company headquarters in Crewe, England. As envisioned, the car would attain 60 miles per hour from a standing start in 2.5 seconds and accelerate to a top speed of 186 miles per hour, while delivering a driving range of 435 miles on a single charge.

"Celebrating the 100th anniversary is something truly remarkable, and Bentley is one of the most recognizable ultra-luxury brands in the world," says Beli Merdovic, general manager of Aston Martin, Bentley, Bugatti, Lamborghini, Rolls-Royce, a Penske Automotive Dealership, in Scottsdale. "After spending last 12 years with Bentley," he adds, "I feel blessed to be part of this amazing company and learn so much about Bentley cars."

Bentleys in the Barn

- **1921 Bentley EXP 2** – This is the oldest surviving Bentley, the second made and the first to win a race, at Brooklands that May with Frank Clement driving. This beautifully restored two-door, four-seat tourer is in the heritage collection of the Bentley Company and travels proudly for events, including the 2009 Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance, where the marque was individually honored.



1921 Bentley EXP 2



Frank Clement, Brooklands, March 28, 1921, EXP 2

The *Autocar* enthused about the EXPerimental 2 in March 1919: "Captain WO Bentley MBE, RAF, is engaged on the design of a new sporting model . . . intended to appeal to those enthusiastic motorists who desire a car which, practically speaking, is a true racing car with touring accessories."

Designed by W.O., the two-seat 65-horsepower EXP 2 was built at Bentley's new Cricklewood plant as a two-seater, although it was rebodied in dark red by JH Easter of Chagford Street in March 1921. Carrying the flying 'B' insignia, the chassis alone was at the 1919 London Motor Show without the engine, which was not ready.

From the start, the company used aluminum pistons, an idea W.O. had picked up after seeing an aluminum paperweight at a DFP factory. These reduced stress on bearings and had superior heat dissipation, so the engines performed better and more reliably. He was also influenced by pre-war engine designs in the 1914 Grand Prix Mercedes and the 1913 Coupe de l'Auto Peugeot.

The 3-liter engine has four valves per cylinder, twin spark plugs, twin magnetos, hollow overhead camshaft and extensively incorporates aluminum and magnesium, advanced for a 1920s road-going car. Compared to today's cars, it's light at 1,450 pounds on its pressed steel channel section frame.

Establishing a Bentley signature, the durable engine develops 175 bhp @ 3,500 rpm with significant torque at low rpm and can make a top speed of 79.3 mph at an excellent 22 mpg.

"W.O. designed very robust engines, which were more robust than a lot of other makers' engines," explains Phil Brooks, a

retired curator and archivist who with wife Sue is a long-time Bentley owner from their home in historic Williamsburg, Virginia. Their stable favorite is a 1936 4-1/2-Litre two-seater bodied by Vanden Plas, the first of two built with this body; it has shown at the Pebble Beach and St. John's concours.

Bentley assigned the "EXP" prefix to pre-production models, Brooks says. Built at New Street Mews off Baker Street, the four-seater EXP 1 had coachwork by Harrisons and the first Bentley engine. A car that the company used for testing, it first ran in October 1919 but was later dismantled, with parts repurposed in the EXP 2.

The final one, EXP 3, "The Cab," was W.O.'s personal car, also bodied by Harrisons. The car disappeared about 1932, the W. O. Bentley Memorial Foundation has told Brooks.

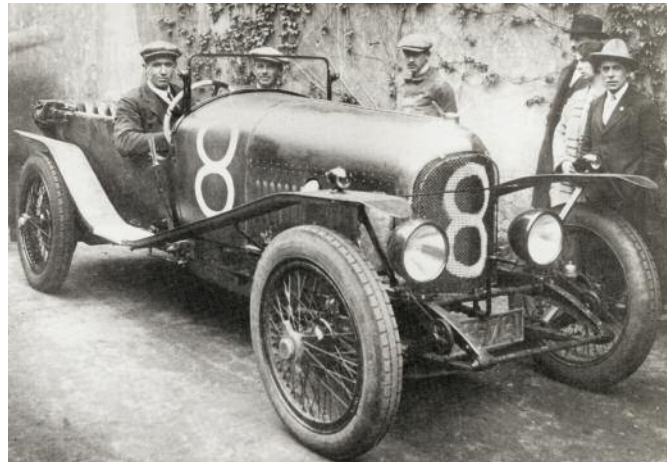
In 1921, the rebodied EXP 2 was the first "works" racing Bentley, participating in the May 1921 Essex Car Club and Whitsun meetings at Brooklands a week later, winning the Junior Sprint Handicap. In 1922, it received two engines, the second, production engine 144.

That year, it was used for practice in the 1922 Isle of Man Tourist Trophy. By 1923, EXP 2 had achieved eleven first and seven second places before being sold to E.R. Foden that September: Secretariat out to pasture.

The *Autocar* reviewed the EXP 2, enthusiastically, by driver/writer SCH 'Sammy' Davis: "For the man who wants a true sporting type of light-bodied car for use on a Continental tour – where speed limits are not meant to be observed – the 3 Litre Bentley is undoubtedly the car par excellence."



Bentley Chassis 141, Le Mans 1923



• **1922 3 Litre (Chassis 141)** – Owned by Peter and Robin Briggs of Perth, Australia, this car started the great story for the marque at Le Mans in 1923 and the playboy backstory of the legendary “Bentley Boys.”

Bentley built this car for John Duff with the racing engine 62 from the EXP 2, setting the Brooklands Double 12-hour record in September 1922 for 24 hours (2,083 miles at 86.69 mph).

Encouraged, he spoke with Bentley’s sales manager AFC Hillstead in 1923 to travel to France for the first Le Mans race, but W.O. was famously reluctant: “I think the whole thing is crazy. Cars aren’t designed to stand that sort of strain for twenty-four hours.”

Although Bentley had raced cars before the Great War, Bentley-badged cars had only been involved with racing in the British Isles for a year, when the first production car was delivered in 1921.

In 1922, a Bentley team of one driver and two “mechanicians” participated in the Indy 500 race in late May, but W. Douglas Hawkes drove to a disappointing 13th, explains Graeme Cocks, coauthor with Clare Hay on the book devoted to this car, *Chassis 141*.

Still, W.O. initiated the French venture, sending probably the first Bentley “team car” with the company’s test driver, Clement, and Duff.

“The Le Mans race turned out to be a great adventure. Duff and Clement were frustrated by the lack of four-wheel brakes. Also, they weren’t prepared for the local conditions, and they lost too much time to win when they holed their petrol tank,” Cocks says, noting that the drivers still set the inaugural lap record at 66.69 mph before retiring in fourth place.

Bentley returned to Le Mans with a factory team in 1924 and won for the first time, with Duff and Clement posting an

average speed of 53.8 mph.

Remarkably, a Bentley won Le Mans again in June 1927, the famous “crash” victory with the 3 Liter, “Old Number Seven” co-driven by Davis and Dr. J. Dudley ‘Benjy’ Benjafield. A 4 ½ Litre had retired prior.

In June 1928, a 4.5 liter, “Old Mother Gun,” won, with Woolf and Rubin driving. A year later in June 1929, the new “Speed Six” Bentleys, with 200-horsepower engines, monopolized the first four places; Barnato and Birkin mounted the podium as the winners. In 1930, Barnato, this time with Glen Kidston in a Speed Six, won again, and another was second.

The Le Mans cars had lightweight bodies, 25-gallon fuel tanks and a reworked suspension. Some cars had a central Marchal headlight for night driving.

Born in China of Canadian parents, and then raised and educated in Canada, Duff was one of the “Bentley Boys,” equally famous for their lavish lifestyles and racing the British marque. He also taught actor Gary Cooper how to fence for the 1928 film, *Beau Geste*. He was Cooper’s stunt double for that classic film, too.

“Chassis 141 was the beginning of the Bentley passion for Le Mans and through that first race, W.O. Bentley began to understand what was required to win what was soon to become the world’s greatest endurance race for motor cars,” Cocks says.

Because of the success in 1923 and the win the following year, Bentley sold 700-plus cars in two years, and the Bentley name was established. The 3 Litre, in fact, would remain in production in various configurations until 1929, with 1,622 produced.

In 1931, a sixth win at Le Mans was not to be. With bankruptcy and court battles, the company became part of Rolls-Royce in November 1931. Bentley was gone from Le Mans for 71 years.



Peter Briggs with his 1922 3 Liter (Chassis 141)



• **1929 4 1/2 Litre Le Mans-style Tourer** — Marque savior, three-times consecutive Le Mans winner, 1928–30, and ruler-of-the-pack Bentley Boy, Captain Woolf 'Babe' Barnato owned this car as well as another 4 1/2 Litre, YH 3196, which he co-drove with Bernard Rubin to notch the 1928 Le Mans win.

In October 2018, this one was sold for \$1.1 million by Simon Hope's H&H Auctions, based in Warrington, Cheshire, England.

Chassis NX3457 was built with engine and C-type gearbox, NX3459 and 6545, respectively, according to Clare Hay's "Bentley The Vintage Years 1919 – 1931." The NX-series engines debuted a new type of more durable conrod design, and a sister car, chassis NX3451, was built to "Le Mans" specification for William Berkley 'Bummer' Scott, who raced it in 1929.

Extensively restored during the 1960s, chassis NX3457 was refurbished in the 1980s, including a new Vanden Plas-style "Le Mans" body by H&H Coachworks of Henley, Oxfordshire.

"The best driver we ever had and, I consider, the best British driver of his day. One who never made a mistake and always obeyed orders . . . He won Le Mans three times running, an achievement no one else has equaled," W.O. said.

"He was a formidable man, behind a glass of whisky, behind a driving wheel, and behind a boardroom table. He enjoyed

himself with Bentley Motors, enjoyed the racing and the status it brought him in the public eye. In spite of 1931, and the bankruptcy, 'Babe' and I never quarreled."

Barnato's father became a billionaire in today's money when he sold the Kimberley Central Diamond Mining Company to Cecil Rhodes' De Beers firm in 1889.

Woolf was born September 27, 1895, at Spencer House, 27 St. James Place, London, and educated at Charterhouse School and Cambridge University. He became a captain in the Royal Field Artillery during World War I, fighting at Passchendaele, July to November 1917, among other battles.

He was a sportsman, and his 1,000-acre Ardenrun Hall in Surrey estate included a golf course, pub and cricket nets. A friend of Ettore Bugatti, Barnato bought his first Bentley in 1925 and set records at Monthéry in September 1925 aboard a Bentley 3 Litre.

He invested that year in the company, saving it from almost certain failure. He became chairman in 1926 (with W.O. managing director) and financed the company's 1927, 1928, 1929 and 1930 Le Mans 24-hour victories.

For the fast, perhaps faster, life outside the boardroom, he kept a flat in London at 50 Grosvenor Square in Mayfair where fellow Bentley Boys, including Rubin, whose father was an

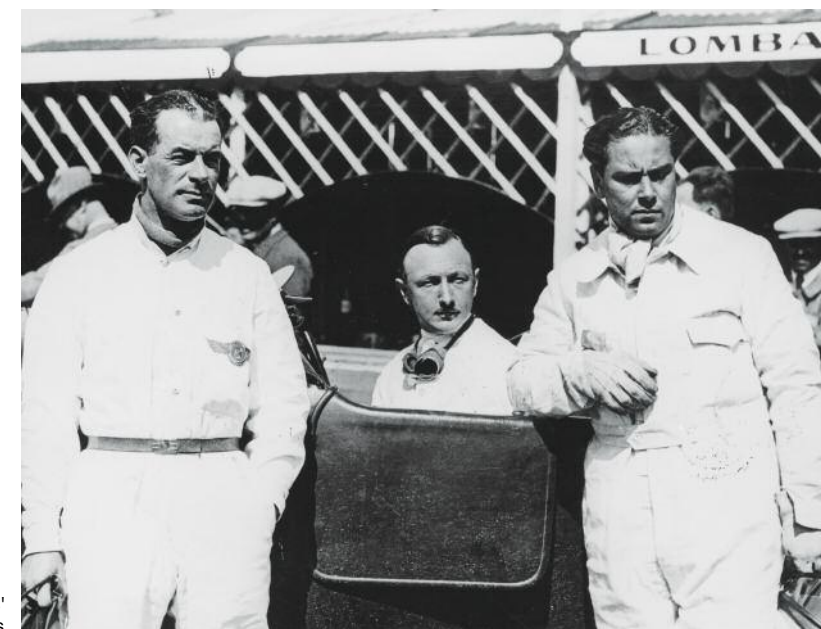


1929 4 1/2 Litre Le Mans-style Tourer

Australian pearling baron, Henry 'Tim' Birkin, from a lace-manufacturing business, and Glen Kidston, also had places.

"The term 'Bentley Boys' was coined to sum up their playboy reputation which often made it to the gossip columns of London newspapers," [Graeme] Cocks notes. "The Bentley company was always cash-strapped, and having wealthy drivers in the team was a good way to reduce the overall cost of motor racing."

Their parties became legendary. So was Barnato's famously racing the Blue Train on a return trip from the popular Cote d'Azur in March 1930 in a four-door Weymann fabric saloon by H J Mulliner delivered to Barnato in June 1929, Hay writes.



Woolf 'Babe' Barnato (Right) with fellow 'Bentley Boys' Frank Clement and Tim Birkin. Photo H&H Classics



1931 8 Litre 'Silentbloc' Saloon

• **1931 8 Litre 'Silentbloc' Saloon** — A sporting saloon motor car rather than a racer or tourer, chassis YX 5113, Engine no. YX 5115, is the 88th of the 100 8 Litres produced before the July 11, 1931, receivership, explains Colin Dougherty, the caretaker of the car for The Sol Collection.

When this penultimate 8 Litre sold in October 1931, Bentley Motors had already been liquidated and acquired by Rolls-Royce. The newly formed Bentley Motors Ltd. was a wholly-owned subsidiary of Rolls-Royce Ltd, he explains.

"The motor car, as ordered, combined the best virtues of the sports model and the town carriage," he adds. He notes that it was one of the 25 8-Litres produced in 1931 with the 12-foot "short chassis" wheelbase and is one of three delivered as a Silentbloc saloon by Vanden Plas (Body #1745) and the only one remaining. In three years, 35 8 Litre "short

chassis" cars were produced: 1930, 3; 1931, 25; and 1932, 7, Dougherty notes.

Vanden Plas had fitted the Weymann developed Silentbloc system of insulating the aluminum body from the chassis using rubber bushings, which, as with many contemporary bushings, consisted of twin steel tubes with the space between filled with rubber.

Also, he adds, YX 5113 represents one of the very few remaining short-chassis 8 Litres fitted with its original factory coachwork, designed for an owner-driver.

Debuting at the 1930 London Motor Show, this was the largest-engined car made in England, with its SOHC Inline 6-cylinder and a matched pair of SU H08s carburetors, developing 200 bhp at 3,500 rpm.



1931 Bentley, George Clayton Greene, the owner from 1962 thru 2018. Photo DAS Sport Archives

Bentley had already won two consecutive Le Mans races, in 1929 and 1930, with the Speed Six. Bentley made some minor changes to these engine designs for the 100 motor cars produced as the 8 Litre, Dougherty explains.

Always considering the importance of reducing weight while maintaining race-winning reliability in the endurance events, W.O. Bentley cast the block with integral cylinder head, crankcase/sump, gearbox case and steering box in Elektron, a new magnesium alloy much lighter than aluminum.

A sturdy, quiet 4-speed “F” manual transmission completed the powerplant. Everything rested on a frame that provided for a low center of gravity, improving roadability and quiet. Steering and braking were also improvements for the 8 Litres.

“I have wanted to produce a dead-silent 100-mph car, and now I think we have done it,” W. O. Bentley said.

Formerly in the William B. Ruger Jr. and Larz Anderson collections, this car was docketed at the 2018 Bonhams Quail Lodge Auction but did not sell. The current owner later acquired it from the estate of George Clayton Greene, of Concord, Massachusetts, who had purchased the car from a museum in September 1962. Greene kept it fastidiously for nearly 56 years.

The original owner, J.A. Player of Wratton Manor, near Nottingham, was part of the family of cigarette and tobacco

tycoons. The company later was associated with Lotus through “John Player Special” livery. In four years, from 1931 through 1935, Player traveled 23,667 miles.

“Player specified the car built as an owner-driver, in a two-tone color scheme, complete with sporting bucket front seats, no divider, and the still intact smoker’s companion with lighter in the center of the screen,” Dougherty explains, adding that it has the original numbered owner’s manual and tools, including the bronze wheel hammer with matching number stamp.

In December of 1930, The *Autocar* recorded a top speed of 101.12mph in W. O.’s personal saloon-bodied 8 Litre for the half-mile, making this the fastest production Bentley until 1953, with the introduction of the R-Type Continental in 1953.

“The 8 Litre is an engineering marvel, W.O. Bentley’s last motor car designed for Bentley Motors and the finest sporting saloon/tourer of the day,” Dougherty says.

Recently, YX5113 successfully covered nearly 1,000 miles on the Quad States Challenge in honor of Bentley’s Centenary. Dougherty adds; “What an amazing group of enthusiasts enjoying their vintage Bentleys on a spirited drive over the twisty roads of the Great Smoky Mountains.”

Nine decades ago, the magazine raved, too: “Motoring in its very highest form.”



1955 R Type Continental Fastback



Raymond Montague Burton with 1955 R. Type. Photo Courtesy Bruce Male



• **1955 R Type Continental Fastback (‘The Full Monty’)** – Powered by the 4.9-liter D-Series engine, the R-Type Continental was the first four-seat sports coupé capable of 120 mph.

This one, Chassis # BC.58.D, is owned by well-known Bentleyite, Bruce M. Male, a North Shore Boston resident. His has a synchromesh gearbox, door armrests, a divided bench seat in the front with center armrests, two standard and two high-frequency horns, a recess in the left-hand door providing space for picnic equipment, Le Mans type headlights, fog lamps, radio and a special average speed meter.

“The original owner ordered bespoke luggage for the boot and remains with the car along with a beautifully fitted tool kit and handbook,” Male says.

“After my experience with an S1 Continental, I ‘lusted’ after an R Type Continental, to me the ‘ultimate British icon’ of the finest cars because of its smooth and powerful drivability,” he recalls.

He and his wife, Leslie, traveled to London and joined Bentley-savvy friend, Gregor Fisker, to drive a half-dozen R Types. He liked this one most, but its Regal Red livery he did not prefer. He repainted it the original Circassian Blue and did a mechanical restoration.

The original English gentleman owner, R. Montague Burton, adds his story to the car. A clothier, he opened “Burton and Burton,” stores, offering made-to-order suits at working men’s

prices, for example, a five guinea suit for fifty-five shillings, Male explains.

“If you purchased a complete suit, vest, shirt and tie, then you would have bought ‘the Full Monty,’ that is, a complete Burton and Burton outfit. That kind of sealed the deal for me since it was an unusual piece of provenance,” he says.

The R Type gave Bentley a new “look” and performance with its 120-mph capability. “I also think that the design represents a ‘timeless’ aspect to a motorcar that continues to be admired for generations and years to come. The current GT models are evidence of this timeless style and its success,” explains Male, who also cherishes a contemporary GT in his garage.

“I love and appreciate the aesthetics of a car, its lines, its provenance, its rarity and the distinctive place it has in automotive design and history. I feel the need to preserve this in every classic car I own and drive,” he adds.

The first collector car Male acquired was in 1990: a 1962 Rolls-Royce drophead he regularly drives. “I caught the ‘bug’ then and started collecting a wide variety of classic and exotic cars and racing many of them via the VSCCA, the Shell Ferrari Historics in Europe and 18 Mille Miglias in Italy,” he says.

The bug guided him and his ‘55 R Type to the 2018 Amelia Island Concours, where it took “Best of Class” and, most recently, the prestigious award for “Best Postwar Closed Car” at the Elegance of Hershey. “Full Monties,” both.



2020 Flying Spur



• **2020 Flying Spur** – “Spur: Anything that urges to action.” The third generation of the Bentley four-door grand tourer officially debuts at the Pebble Beach Concours d’Elegance August 18.

“Inspired by its predecessor, the S1 Continental Flying Spur from 1958, the new Flying Spur is power and luxury in total harmony, engineered to surpass all other grand tourers in the automotive industry today,” says Jon Simons, the company’s Product Marketing manager. “It is a car which perfectly captures the Bentley Spirit.”

Handcrafted at the Crewe factory in Great Britain with advanced technologies, the Flying Spur incorporates a new platform, with an aluminum and composite chassis on an extended wheelbase.

Powering the new car is an enhanced 6-liter twin-turbocharged

W12 connected to an 8-speed ZF dual-clutch transmission. “Faster gearshifts are achieved by pre-selecting the next gear, shortening the interruption of torque to the wheels and so improving performance,” the company says.

The turbocharged straight-injection engine produces 626 bhp and 664 lb/ft. of torque, delivering the car to 60 mph from start in a brisk 3.7 seconds. “Where speed limits are not meant to be observed,” you’ll stop accelerating at 207 mph in sixth gear. The two overdrive gears are for touring comfort and fuel efficiency.

The “W” signifies that the engine is shorter than comparable V-12s, which benefits weight distribution, thus handling, and increases cabin capacity.

Responsiveness is maximized with the all-wheel-drive system which delivers torque to the rear and front axles, depending



Bentley Motors celebrated its 100th birthday by unveiling its vision of the future of luxury mobility, the Bentley EXP 100 GT

on weather conditions and wheel slip. Torque is also distributed through the Drive Dynamic Mode, Comfort and Bentley modes; in Sport, a higher torque is allocated to the rear wheels for greater driving spirit.

Among the other new technologies is Electronic All Wheel Steering. For example, at high speed, the rear and front wheels steer in the same direction, improving stability and confidence in overtaking and land-changing. And the Bentley Dynamic Ride System is an on-demand system managing the stiffness of the anti-roll bar, keeping the car level under varying conditions.

Driver Assistance programs include Traffic Assist, City Assist and Blind Spot Warning, and a Top View Camera provides contextual perspective.

Appointments are at the highest level, with options up to the Mulliner personalization for custom additions to your design. Even the rear cabin is blueprinted for luxury. The new Touch

Screen Remote provides control of blinds, the rear seat massage and rear climate control and Moodlighting, whatever you might need that for.

The standard audio system will keep any orchestra member happy, with 10 speakers and 650 watts, a Bang & Olufsen unit dials that up to 16 and 1,500 for concertmasters, and the standing-ovation Naim Audio 19-speaker and 2,200-watt configuration will have you singing in your leather seat — and singing praise for the 100th-anniversary of W.O.’s “fast car, a good car.”

“The new Flying Spur is Bentley then, now and in the future,” Simons notes, “challenging convention, perfecting tradition, driving performance, pioneering innovation — and defining Grand Touring since 1919.”

If you or someone you know has a GreatGarages and would like it to be considered for an upcoming issue, please email us at info@highline-autos.com.