

# T57S Bugatti Atlantic Reappears at Pebble Beach

by Lynch on August 4, 2010



Madam Holtzschuch poses with the T57S in its first iteration at the Juan de Pins Concours on Cap d'Antibes in 1937. Credit: Pierre-Yves Laugier Collection.

**By Michael T. Lynch**

Much of the breathless reportage in the business and popular press of the recent sale of a Type 57SC Bugatti Atlantic focused on its price and the supposed fact that there were only two — some said three — Atlantics built.

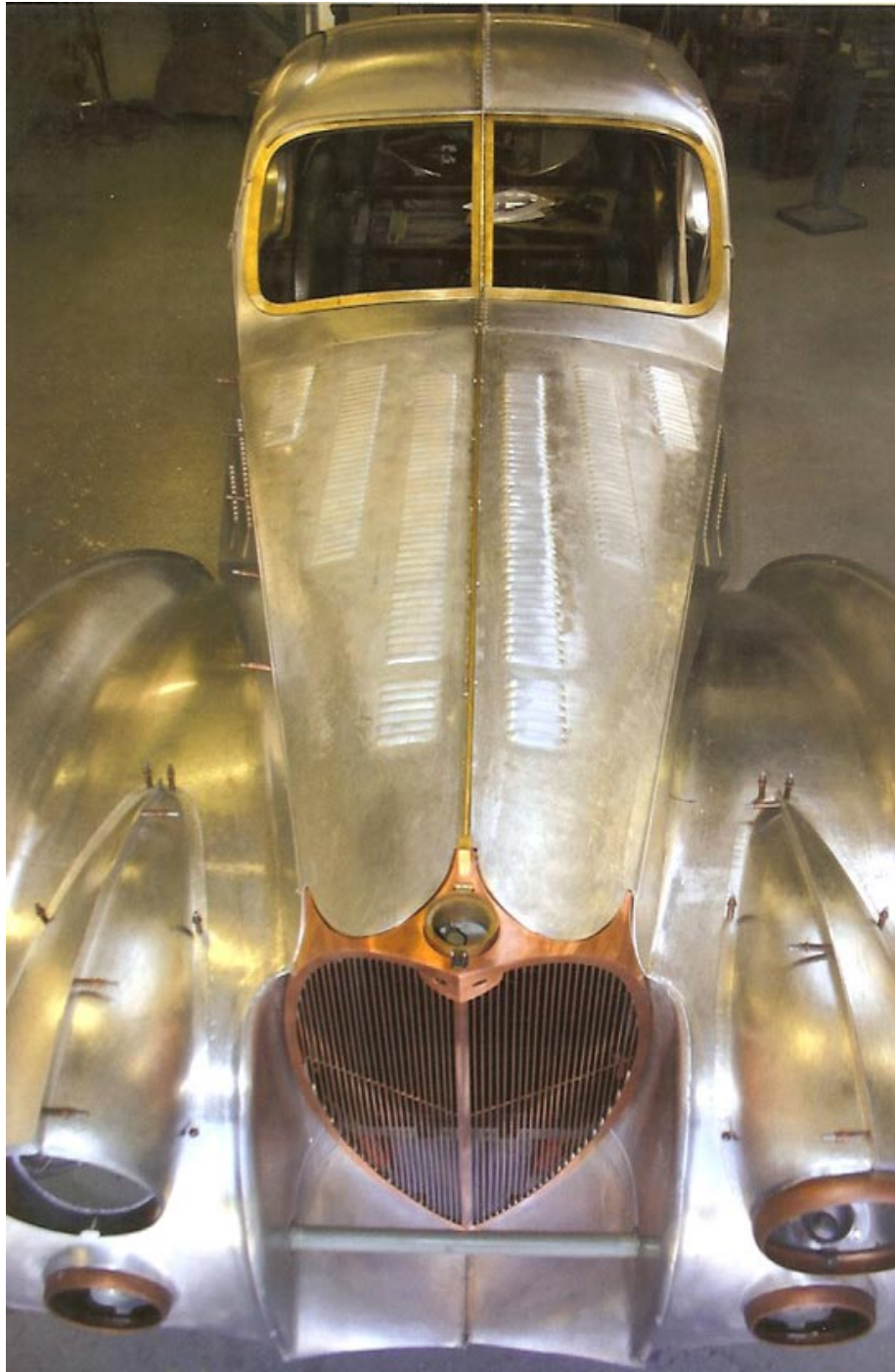
There were actually four cars. An “Aérolithe” prototype was constructed as a show car without accoutrements such as windshield wipers and other details. The Aérolithe T57 57331, was first displayed at the 1935 Paris Salon where it was a star of the show.



This is a rendering of the original Aérolithe coupe displayed at the 1935 Paris Salon. No color pictures exist but this may reflect the color, as Jean Bugatti referred to the project as Crème de Menthe.

The first production version of what we call an Atlantic was T57 57374 now in the Mullin Automotive Museum, an Aéro coupe. It won Best of Show at Pebble Beach in 2003. The second, 57453/57454 was also an Aéro. It has been missing for well over half a century. In the course of its life, the serial number was changed by one digit. It was on a list of cars to be shipped to Bordeaux in 1941. Whether it arrived or not, we do not know. The third car, 57473, was called an Atlantic. It was so named after the failure of a 1936 French airmail flight that went down in the south Atlantic and took the life of famed aviator, Jean Mermoz and his crew. The final car was 57591, the 1990 Pebble Beach-winning Atlantic owned by Ralph Lauren.

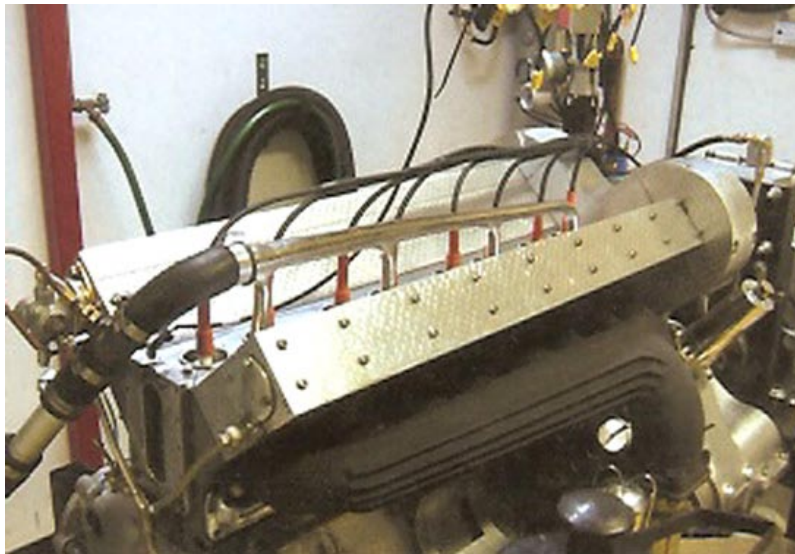
Those fortunate enough to spend the day on the lawn at the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance this year will be able to enjoy the third car (57473) now owned by a Spanish industrialist who has a Bugatti Royale among his other Molsheim creations.



The Atlantic in Paul Russell's atelier. Notice the use of brass for framing and surrounds.  
Credit: Paul Russell

The third car was delivered to Jacques and Yvonne Holtzschuch late in 1936. In 1937, the Holtzschuchs entered the car in a concours at the French resort of Juan les Pins, where a photo was taken of Madam Holtzschuch standing with the car. It was black with a beige pigskin interior. The next photos that provide important history were taken when the Bugatti appeared in a race at Nice in 1951, now in French racing blue. The car had not only been repainted, but restyled as well, inside and out.

The noted auto historian, Christian Huet, has opined that the styling changes were made by none other than the firm of Figoni and Falaschi of Paris, perhaps the most famous French coachbuilder of the 1930s. His conclusions were based on the sun ray wood pattern in the door cappings, similar to those seen on Figoni and Falaschi Talbot-Lagos. The seats were also in the Figoni style. The dash was metal rather than the expected Bugatti wood. While no job sheet exists in the Figoni records, these were not kept on work that involved customizing, as opposed to complete coachwork for a bare chassis. This type of task was not uncommon for Figoni who was running a body shop performing a full gamut of services from fixing dents to creating some of the most stunning shapes in the history of automobiles.



The engine to be used in the Atlantic is dyno tested. Credit: Paul Russell

After passing through several owners, the car was purchased by René Chatard, the owner of a well-known Paris women's boutique named Fashionable. Already the owner of three Bugattis, Chatard registered this one in the name of his mistress, Mademoiselle Marguerite Schneider, perhaps to hide its existence from his wife and daughter. By the turn of the year 1955, it had been painted grey. On August 22nd of that year, Chatard was travelling on the D44 near Gien in central France at 22:45 Hours with a young woman named Jeanine Vacheron. The Bugatti was struck by a train, and both perished. This led to a decade-long lawsuit, the residual of which was that the car was awarded to Mlle. Schneider. She sold it almost immediately to a junkyard in Gien.



Every piece of the original body that could be used was placed around a new ash frame.  
Credit: Paul Russell

In 1965, Paul André Berson, who found the car and knew what it was, took possession. He began a long restoration, stripping many damaged parts from the car and finding replacements or having them made. In 1977, the restoration completed, Berson sold the car to well-known collector, Nicholas Seydoux. Seydoux later had André Lecoq re-restore the car.

Meanwhile, Berson had retained the dashboard, trim pieces, the engine block and various other parts that he had removed from the T57S and began to construct a replica based on them. Thankfully, the present owner bought both the Seydoux car and the replica package and the various parts were reunited at Paul Russell and Company in Essex, Massachusetts.

Russell and the owner made the decision to restore the car to its post-Figoni and Falaschi configuration, using as many original parts and panels as possible. The workmanship Paul has exhibited on this project shows why he has such a stellar record at Pebble – two Best of Shows, five class wins, Most Elegant Sports Car (twice), Most Elegant Convertible, and the coveted FIVA Award.

The dashboard recovered from Berson offered valuable clues, including the leatherette covering, allowing the interior to be returned to its original color. The original instrument cluster also assisted accuracy as the dash in the Seydoux car had a wood fascia as on a factory-bodied Atlantic.

The Bugatti 57S will be entered for display only, as its complicated history does not allow it to fit into the existing Pebble Beach judging system. The Pebble Beach organizers are to be complimented for recognizing the importance of this automotive artifact and allowing the public to see the results of this serious attempt to preserve as much of the Bugatti's continuous history as possible.

VeloceToday will feature a further piece on this car the Thursday after the Monterey Automobile Festival week. It will include pictures of the car on the show field at the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance.

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## As We Promised–Bugatti Atlantic Update

by Lynch on August 18, 2010



The Atlantic on the road during the Pebble Tour. It attracted as much attention there as it did on Ocean Avenue and on the lawn at Pebble Beach. Whatever one thinks about its provenance, this is one impressive piece of machinery. Credit: Dale LaFollette

**Photos and Captions by Michael T. Lynch unless otherwise noted.**



Two weeks ago we shared some information on the Bugatti Type 57S Atlantic 57473 and brought you some pictures of the car under restoration. The public debut of the completed car was during the Monterey Automobile Festival Week. Here it is seen on Ocean Avenue in Carmel last Thursday during the lunch stop on the Pebble Beach Tour. Among the faces in the admiring crowd are VeloceToday supporters and noted motorcycle collectors, Bob and Shelley Peters, at the very left of the frame. Credit: Michael T. Lynch



With Stillwater Cover and Pescadero Point in the background, the Bugatti Atlantic wows the spectators at the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance. Credit: Michael T. Lynch



The rear three-quarter view shows the effects of the Figoni and Falaschi restyling.  
Credit: Michael T. Lynch



The interior of the Atlantic is a cross between Bugatti and Talbot-Lago practice. It took me back to 1949, when I first thought of sitting in such a car after reading the following quote from Ken Purdy's *Kings of the Road*, 'Let us consider the fabulous Bugatti, prince of motors. Imagine a string-straight, poplar-lined Route Nationale in France on a summer's day. That growing dot in the middle distance is a sky-blue Bugatti coupé, rasping down from Paris to Nice at 110 miles an hour...' Credit: Michael T. Lynch