

Sunbeam Start-up – National Motor Museum, Beaulieu

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350bhp Sunbeam being fired-up again

Sir Malcolm Campbell's land speed record breaking 350hp Sunbeam has been fired up in anger in the New Forest for the first time in over 50 years following a major eight-year mechanical rebuild. BY CHRIS ADAMSON

The first car to exceed 150mph it was also the first vehicle to carry the famous Bluebird



name and over its life set numerous speed records.

Prior to this week's start-up at the National Motor Museum the last time it has been seen running in public was at the British Automobile Racing Club Festival of Motoring at Goodwood on the 14 July 1962 when its owner Lord Montagu took it on a three-lap demonstration run and Donald Campbell did a lap d'Honneur.

During a test fire-up at the museum in 1993 disaster struck when a blocked oil way in the engine caused it to seize and 'throw a rod'. Examination showed that the con rod had come through the side of the crank case, scoring the crank shaft and damaging three pistons and valves.

It was in 2006 that it was decided to re-build the Sunbeam - it has taken museum staff and volunteers a total of 2,000 man hours to put it back into running order - retaining about 80 per cent of its original components.

As part of the engine rebuild, the crank case metal was stitched, the crank shaft re-ground and polished and the damaged cylinder bore re-lined. Damaged con rods, pistons, valves, springs, gudgeon pins and white metal bearings were replaced with new and the main bearing re-metalled and line-bored. The rear axle was taken apart and cleaned and the chassis and running gear renovated.

Doug Hill, the National Motor Museum's Chief Engineer said: "This project has been a long-running labour of love for the whole team and such has been their passion that many have dedicated hours of their own time to get the job done. There is huge satisfaction in seeing it finally completed.

"However, there is more that we still want to do and our next objective is to research the design of the original gearbox - all original drawings and records were lost when the Sunbeam factory was bombed during WWII - so that we can restore the car to the full 1920s specification."



Although most associated with Malcolm Campbell, the car was originally the brainchild of Sunbeam's chief engineer and racing team manager, Louis Coatalen, and was constructed at the company's works in Wolverhampton during 1919 and early 1920.

Power came from an 18.322 litre hybrid of Sunbeam's Manitou and Arab aero engines featuring 12 cylinders and three valves per cylinder.

In its early life several drivers took the wheel, with varying success, including Kenelm Lee Guinness who at Brooklands in 1922 set a speed record of 133.75mph. However, it was also involved in a tragedy at the Danish Speed Trials when a tyre came off a rear wheel and killed a young boy spectator.

Malcolm Campbell purchased the car in 1924 and re-painted it in his distinctive blue colour scheme and in September that year achieved a new record speed of 146.16mph at Pendine Sands in South Wales, raising it the following year to 150.76mph.



Preparing the Sunbeam for its record run at Pendine in 1925



Malcolm Campbell driving the Sunbeam to over 150mph at Pendine in 1925

Campbell sold the car soon after; it then passed through a number of owners and is recorded as being driven by band leader, Billy Cotton, at the Southport Speed Trials in 1936. For a time the car's location was unknown, then in 1942 it was unearthed in Lancashire by Harold Pratley who bought it in 1944.

In 1957 the Sunbeam was purchased by Lord Montagu, restored to working order and put on display in the Montagu Motor Museum. When not on display, it was taken to various venues in the UK and Europe and in 1960 accompanied Lord Montagu as a static display on his Motoring Thro' the Years lecture tour of South Africa.

In 1972 it moved into the newly created National Motor Museum where it has been on permanent display ever since. It will be one of the star exhibits in the National Motor Museum's For Britain & For The Hell Of It exhibition - the story of British land speed records which is due to open for Easter 2014.



Preparing the Sunbeam to run again



Restoration team member Tim Egerton with the Sunbeam



Sunbeam cockpit



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