



National Motor Museum starts centenary celebrations for World Land Speed record-breaking Sunbeam 350hp

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Author:

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The Museum salutes 100 years since the Sunbeam's record-breaking heyday...

They tell us:

(All words and photographs from The National Motor Museum).

The [National Motor Museum](#) is announcing a series of events to mark the landmark anniversary of Sir Malcolm Campbell's World Land Speed Record in Sunbeam 350hp a century ago.

The summer of centenary events will start with star appearances at [Heveningham Concours](#) and [Bluebird Chelsea](#), building towards Blue Bird's return to Pendine Sands where it became the world's fastest car reaching 150.76mph on July 21st 1925.

National Motor Museum engineers will start up the record-breaker at Pendine to mark the 100th anniversary and aim to take it on to the beach for a static photo opportunity, before putting it on show outside the Museum of Land Speed.

National Motor Museum Trust Chief Executive Jon Murden said: "We are excited to honour such a landmark World Land Speed Record anniversary with a series of events, which will



both celebrate its importance in motoring history and provide more opportunities to see Blue Bird."

Summer events

- See Sunbeam 350hp run again at Heveningham Concours when it appears at the annual show at Heveningham Hall, in Suffolk, on the weekend of June 28th & 29th.
- Join a celebratory event on Wednesday 16th July at Bluebird Chelsea, the renowned restaurant, bar and café which was originally the location of the Bluebird Motor Company. The evening will feature a Champagne reception, three-course dinner, talk by record breaker Don Wales and silent auction – as well as a rare opportunity to see Sunbeam 350hp on display. For tickets and details visit [The Bluebird Legacy: A Century of Speed | D&D London | Online Shop](#).
- Hear the start-up of Sunbeam 350hp and see it on display on Monday 21st July at Pendine in Carmarthenshire, Wales, where it made World Land Speed Record history. More details and timings to follow.

On the road to Pendine

In 2014, completion of the painstaking rebuild of the 1920 Sunbeam's complex V12 engine enabled a crowd of onlookers at [Beaulieu](#) to hear it roar again for the first time in over 50 years.

That led to its triumphant return to Pendine for the 90th anniversary in 2015, when National Motor Museum engineers were permitted to run Sunbeam on the beach for a low-speed reconstruction of its record-breaking run, with Sir Malcolm's grandson Don Wales at the wheel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RkC3DUDoKtK&t=15s>

The non-original Albion 35hp van gearbox which had been added to Sunbeam 350hp before it arrived at Beaulieu was always its Achilles' heel, as it was only designed to handle a tenth of the engine's power and lacked a transmission brake. By 2020, a fundraising campaign helped to replace it with a Bentley C-type gearbox adapted to fit Sunbeam's chassis with custom-made mounts – to better handle its colossal 18 litre engine.



National Motor Museum engineers used experience from the Sunbeam 350hp rebuild to more recently begin work to bring Sunbeam 1000hp back to life. Funds are still needed to complete the full restoration project – to see it run again and take it back to Daytona for the centenary of its record-breaking run in 2027. Find out more and donate at

<https://nationalmotormuseum.org.uk/sunbeam-1000hp-restoration-campaign/>.

Sunbeam 350hp timeline	
1919	Construction starts in Wolverhampton
1920	Sunbeam scheduled to compete in first race but burst tyre causes crash during practice lap. Harry Hawker drives on first LSR attempt on Dec 11 th
1921	Kenelm Lee Guinness drives Sunbeam for first time at Brooklands. Second gear breaks but achieves second place in Long Handicap event
1922	Guinness achieves flying kilometre speed of 133.75mph – new LSR. Malcolm Campbell borrows Sunbeam to compete in Saltburn Speed Trials – but one-way run, so 138mph not officially recognised
1923	Malcolm Campbell purchases Sunbeam and paints it his distinctive colour – the first Blue Bird
1924	Campbell sets new record speed of 146.16mph at Pendine

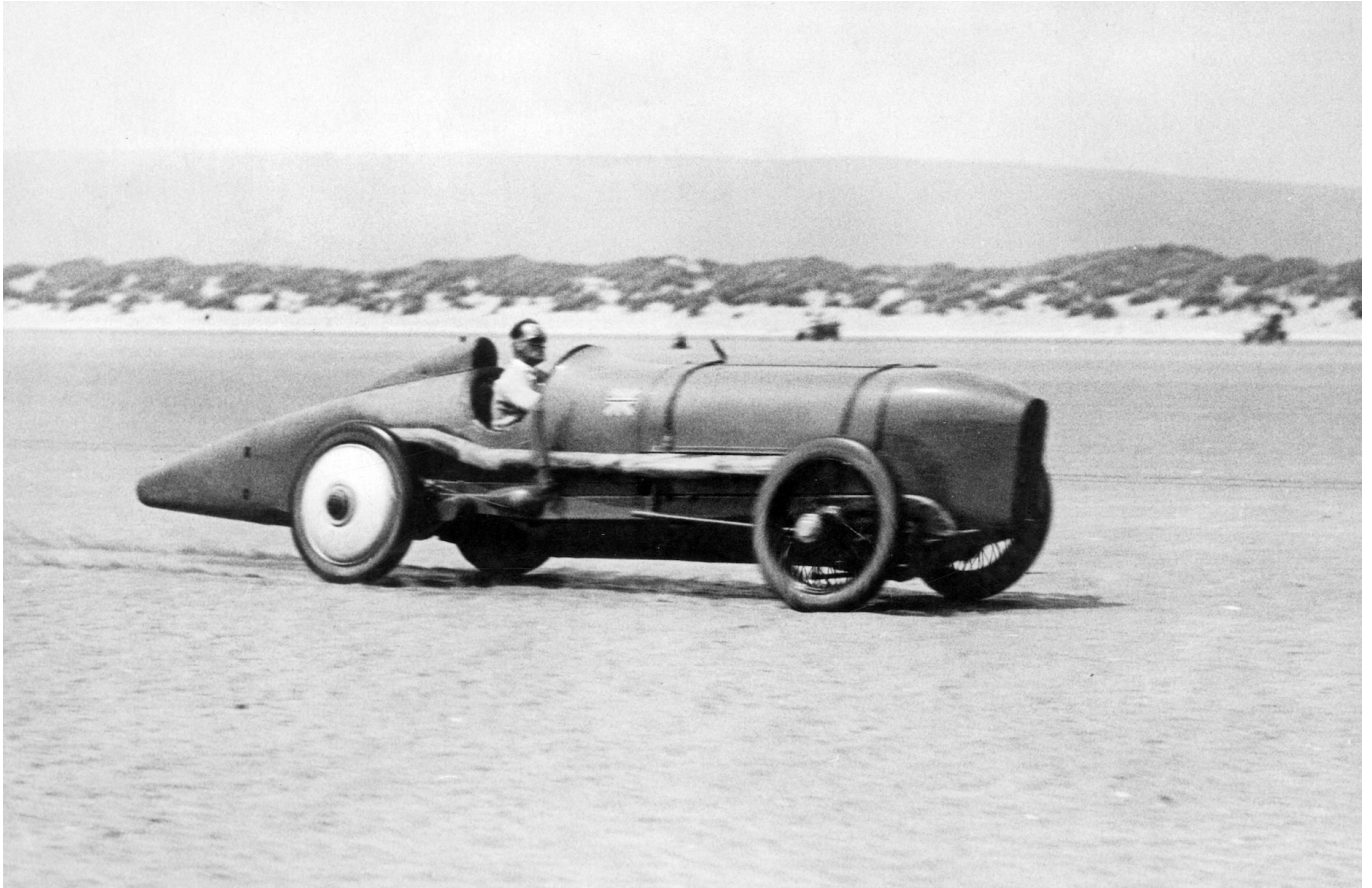


1925	Campbell advertises car for sale at £1,500 but then achieves new record
1957	Sunbeam purchased by Edward, Lord Montagu, after passing through various owners. Restored to working order
1962	Sunbeam's last run, with Lord Montagu and Donald Campbell at Goodwood
1993	Engine seizes in test start-up - piston and con rod shot through engine, making a hole
2014	Sunbeam start-up after mechanical rebuild - with help from Sunbeam Talbot Darracq Register to find parts
2015	Low-speed demonstration run at Pendine for 90 th anniversary of LSR on July 21 st
2020	New replacement gearbox fitted



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Malcolm Campbell at speed in Sunbeam 350hp at Pendine.

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Sunbeam 350hp Pendine.

Sunbeam 350hp Q&A

Was the Sunbeam the first ever Blue Bird?

Yes and Malcolm Campbell painted it his distinctive colour.

Who originally built the Sunbeam?

Designed by Louis Coatalen.

Was it built specially for Malcolm Campbell?



No, he borrowed then bought it.

Was a world record set in 1924 and then 1925?

Yes, both are world records.

When was the Sunbeam's last run out and why did it need restoring?

After the Sunbeam was last run at the BARC Festival of Motoring at Goodwood on July 15, 1962 by Lord Montagu with Donald Campbell, it was during a test start-up in 1993 that disaster struck. The engine seized and the piston and con rod shot through the engine making a hole.

It sat with the hole in the engine for 15 years. The initial strip-out was carried out then new parts were found on the Sunbeam Talbot Darracq Register and the long, slow process began to restore it.

Where was the vehicle after 1925 and until it went on show at Beaulieu, and what was it doing?

It had a chequered history and was found in a derelict condition in the Midlands after the war.

Apparently, Campbell sold it to a Ralph Aspden in 1925. He was something of a car collector/enthusiast who did a short piece in Motor Sport in 1958 about cars he'd owned. He even ran the Sunbeam on the road a couple of times to get used to it. He made one or two modifications to try and make it easier to drive - clutch etc.

Band leader (and racing driver) Bill Cotton drove it at Southport Speed Trials on 5th September 1936 (presumably on loan) and achieved 121.5mph over the 1 kilometre, earning himself a '100 Gold Badge'.



Aspden says he then sold it to Jack Field.

Heal says that during the war the car “suffered various vicissitudes” and was then rescued by Harold Pratley and cared for until Lord Montagu acquired it in 1957.

Has the restoration work been done on-site at Beaulieu?

Yes, by expert National Motor Museum engineers.

Apart from the thrown con rod, what other damage was there to the engine, and which parts needed replacing?

Scored the crank shaft – con rod came out through the side of the crank case, damaging three pistons and bending three valves. On top of normal engine rebuild work, had to have the crank case metal stitched, the crank shaft re-ground and polished, new con rods and pistons, damaged cylinder bore relined, new valves, springs, gudgeon pins and all new white metal bearings. Main bearing re-metalled and line-bored.

Apart from the work on the engine, rear axle, chassis, running gear and gearbox, how much of the rest of the car has been worked on?

The car was re-painted and at around the same time, the wheels were rebuilt.

What did restoring the car to full 1920s spec involve?

Fabrication of exhaust system and recreation of gearbox (original totally missing).

Were there design records to help with the restoration?

All original drawings/records were destroyed during Sunbeam factory bombing in WWI, so a lot of research and engineers’ knowledge and expertise were needed.



What kind of engine is it (size, cylinders etc), what HP does it produce, what kind of gearbox, length, width, height etc?

Hybrid Sunbeam Manitou and Arab aero engine (special engine built for this car by Sunbeam).

18,322cc, V12, 350hp. Length 22', height 4' 6", width 5' 8", weight 1ton 11cwt.

Back axle - solid with no differential.

What was it known as?

Sir Malcolm Campbell's cars were called 'Blue Bird', while Donald's were 'Bluebird'.

How was the Sunbeam started?

Starting handle.

How does its engine/exhaust note sound?

Roar akin to a Rolls-Royce Merlin engine.

More information:

Beaulieu

Land Speed Record breakers Sunbeam 350hp and 1000hp can usually be seen on a visit to Beaulieu. A ticket includes entry to the [National Motor Museum](#) and its new exhibition [Icons of Formula 1](#), as well as [Palace House](#) and its newly opened private wing rooms, recently opened [We Had One Of Those](#) featuring popular cars from the 1960s to the noughties, adventure playground [Little Beaulieu](#), 13th century [Beaulieu Abbey](#), the [Secret Army Exhibition](#), unlimited rides on the tree-top monorail and beautiful grounds and gardens. For



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tickets and details see www.beaulieu.co.uk or call 01590 612345.

National Motor Museum

The National Motor Museum is an Accredited Museum and all of its collections have been designated by Arts Council England as being of national and international importance. Its internationally-acclaimed collection of more than 1.9 million items is cared for by the **National Motor Museum Trust** and includes historically important vehicles, motoring artefacts, film footage, images, documents and books. After marking the museum's 50th anniversary in 2022, work has started on ambitious plans to upgrade facilities and open up even more of its collections to visitors.