

Rarities

Two very special cars from the extensive collection of Nitin Dossa

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1949 Bentley MK VI



Standard Motor Company is not a famous brand, yet two great brands – Jensen and Jaguar – started off by making cars based upon Standard chassis and mechanicals. Founded in Coventry, England in 1903, the Standard name was last used in Britain in 1963, but it lasted in India as a brand till 1987! Sir Charles Friswell, chairman of Standard Motor, worked hard at raising its profile by supplying 70 cars for King George V and his entourage for the 1911 Delhi Durbar.

However, it was not till the 1950s when the brand was launched as a part of a technical collaboration with Standard Motors Products of India that it became well known here. This Madras-based carmaker outlived Standard in the UK, making at first the Standard Herald, then the Gazel, and eventually the Rover SD1, badged as the Standard 2000.

Essentially a coachbuilding outfit, New Avon Body Co Ltd made a few cars that were badged as Standard Avons. Not



THE PRESIDENT OF THE WESTERN India Automobile Association (WIAA) from 1997 to 1999, Nitin Dossa, has been the Executive Chairman of the WIAA since 2003, a post he still holds. But deep down he's an 'old car' guy. It's the classic car movement that he is most passionate about, and, of course, he also collects them. Like several other Indian collectors, Dossa is partial to big American iron and he has several of them, including a rare Hudson seven-seater convertible from 1933 and a two-door fastback coupé version of the '46 Packard Clipper Deluxe. Plus, another Packard, three Cadillacs, a '52 Chrysler Windsor, a '23 Wolseley and a 1912 Rugby. We have photographed two of his cars that are quite special: a Bentley from 1949 and a very rare Standard Avon from 1933.

The last Maharaja of Mysore, Jaya-

chamaraja Wodeyar was a very keen car guy. And the marque that was his favourite was clearly Bentley – he bought at least six of them between 1946 and 1954. Dossa's Bentley Mk VI Drophead Coupé is one of them. Acquired in 1949, the car features an elegant Park Ward coachwork for a drophead coupé. Chassis # B438CF was ordered with several special features such as an oil bath, air cleaner, extra kit of tools and spares, spare wheel carrier, Lucas rack-type wipers and large motifs to the headlamps, side lamps and boot handle. The colour that the Maharaja chose was a dark blue with blue-coloured hide.

Unveiled in May 1946, Bentley's Mk VI, and its stablemate, the Rolls-Royce Silver Wraith, were developed as mainstays of Rolls-Royce Limited's range of models in the post-war scenario. The Bentley was

the better selling but the drophead coupé was quite rare: between 1948 and 1949 just 51 were made, and Dossa's car is one of them. Powered by the 4257cc in-line six the Mk VI used the new B60, twin SU carburettor. Riding on a 3.05-metre wheelbase, the 1.8-tonne Mk VI drophead coupé was capable of 145kph.

Of course, Dossa is not out to prove the car's top speed, not after a costly and extensive restoration that took the best part of five years. Purchased in 1995 from the Bharatpur royal family, who had been gifted the car by the Maharaja of Mysore, it was in a water-logged garage for many years and restoring it was quite a job. But it was worth it as at the 2008 Cartier Concours d'Elegance event, Dossa's Bentley Mk VI drophead coupé won the trophy for best 'resurrection'!





many were made yet a surprising number of them have 'surfaced' in India recently. Nitin Dossa's Standard Avon 16hp two-four Seater Open Sports is from 1933.

Founded in 1919, Avon first built car bodies for Standard in the late 1920s. Standard bodied most of their cars at the time with saloon bodies. In 1929, Captain John Black joined Standard Motor and one of the first things he did was to encourage the supply of chassis to external coachbuilders such as Jensen, Avon and Swallow (which would later become Jaguar). Standard saw a sports-bodied Austin 7 that the young Jensen brothers, Alan and Richard had made. They therefore commissioned the brothers to design a range of 'sporting bodies' to be built by Avon on Standard chassis. The first was the 16hp in 1929.

According to Standard Motor club chairman, Phil Homer, the Jensens were probably freelance designers working independently off Avon. After they left, Avon commissioned 'The Motor' magazine's technical editor, Charles Beauvais, to design cars for them. The cars were

badged as Standard Avons. Beauvais's work is characterised by the tear-drop shaped front and rear wings that you see on Dossa's Avon.

Based on the Standard Sixteen, Dossa's car is powered by a side-valve, 2054cc straight-six. Max power generated was 41bhp at 3400rpm. The engine, chassis, gearbox, running gear, suspension, axles, steering and wheels were all standard Standard, as they were delivered as rolling chassis to the Avon works in Warwick, which was about 35km from Canley, Coventry where the Standards were built.

It is interesting to note that SS cars adopted exactly the same approach in the early 1930s by purchasing the 16hp and 20hp chassis and running gear from Standard and putting their own bodies on them. The two operations - SS and Avon - had nothing to do with each other and were competitors in the market. SS went on to become Jaguar, eventually buying out the obsolete Standard tooling to continue making Jaguar cars.

Avon went bankrupt in 1937, when the

company was unable to pay the monthly bill for chassis and Standard cut off supplies and foreclosed. It became Avon Motor Bodies Ltd; then in 1973, Avon Special Products was formed to produce convertibles and conversion kits for Jaguar, Range Rover and Triumph. In 1979, Ladbroke's bought the company and it continued making Volvo limousines until the company stopped trading on May 31, 1995. Incidentally, Standard, along with Triumph as a marque, is currently owned by BMW; amusingly enough, when the Tata Indica was to be sold by MG Rover in the UK, they had toyed with the idea of launching it as a Standard!

According to Avon expert Peter Lee (who has two of them), there are another nine surviving Beauvais-designed Avons across Australia, Italy, Holland, Ireland and England, (of a total of 20 16hp Avons - Beauvais and 'non-Beauvais' designed - that are extant around the world) making Dossa's car rather special. ▲

- with inputs from Phil Homer, Peter Lee & Julian Williamson