

GENTLY BENTLEY

The Honorable Henry Broughton is back behind the wheel, this time in a Bentley Mulsanne.

Bentley has been making some of the world's fastest, most luxurious and most beautiful motor cars for the better part of a century, and when driving one you are making a very distinct statement to the outside world: "I have made it, I have exquisite taste, but I don't need to shout about it (too loudly)."

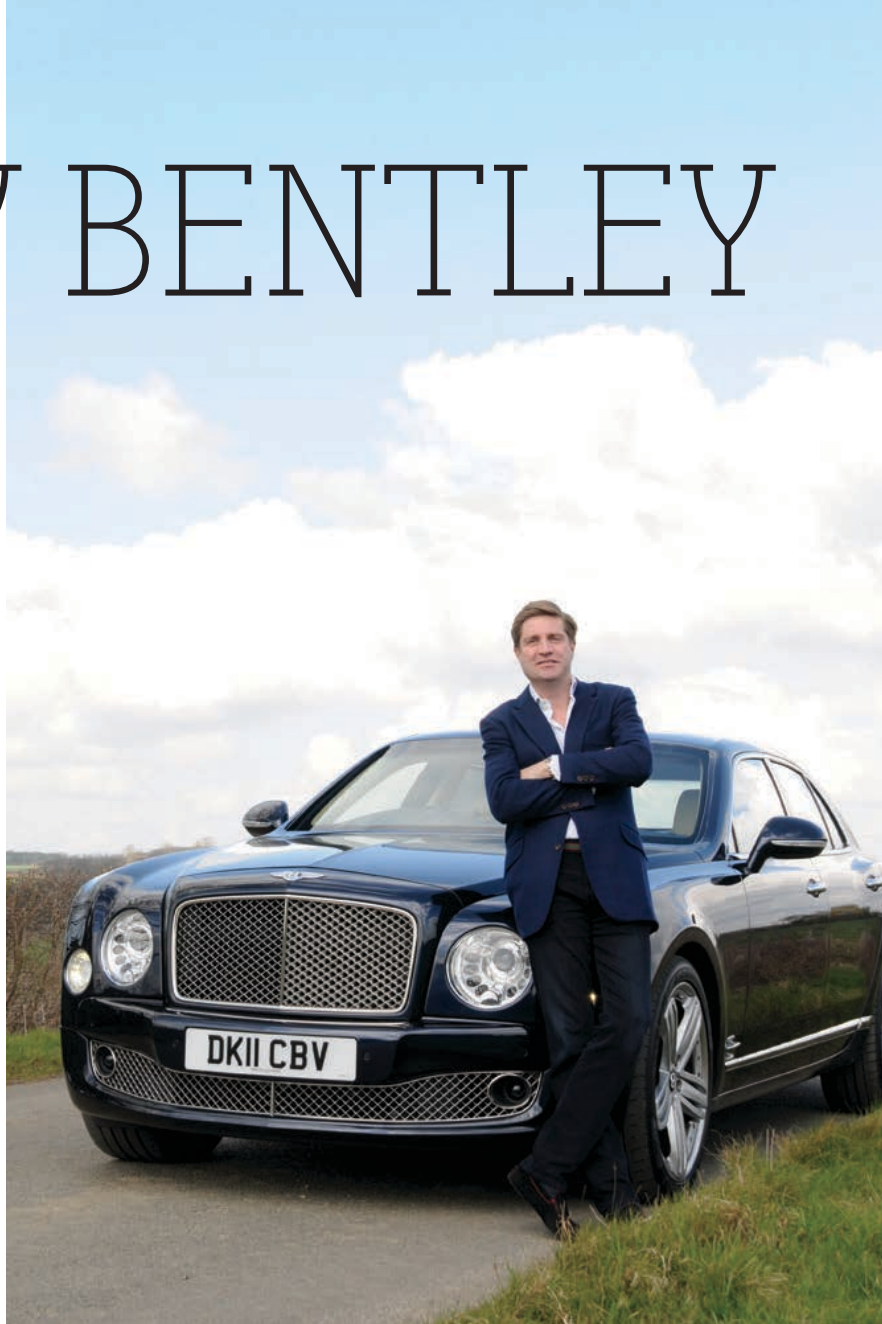
The story begins in 1919, when Walter Owen Bentley, always known as W.O., founded the car company bearing his name with his brother. A trained engineer, he had already designed aero engines for the Royal Flying Corps, and it was a combination of his skill and of the times that propelled Bentley into the spotlight.

For this was the Roaring Twenties, the era of Jay Gatsby, the Charleston and flapper dresses. It was also the era when motor racing really gained popularity, and W.O. set out to build his brand and reputation not through advertising but through success on the track. In 1924 a Bentley won the second running of the now very famous 24 Hours of Le Mans, which gained him the attention of a group of very wealthy and dashing young men who wished to race his cars.

The 20 or so of these young men who raced for W.O. became known as the "Bentley Boys" and included the heir to the Kimberley diamond fortune, Woolf "Babe" Barnato; ex-naval officer and adventurer Glen Kidston; international playboy and banker Baron André d'Erlanger; and Sir Henry "Tim" Birkin. Their high-living antics provided the sort of glamour that people craved, which even Hollywood would have struggled to match at the time. W.O. summed them up when he said, "When they were not yachting in the Mediterranean, skiing in Switzerland or just playing in Cannes or Le Touquet or Paris, the parties were often held in Grosvenor Square, the southeast side of which was known to every London bobby and taxi driver as "Bentley Corner."

Behind this Edwardian image of hedonism and derring-do, W.O.'s motto was "To build a good car, a fast car, the best in class." This proved to be true: the "Boys" won Le Mans every year from 1927 to 1930. Within eleven years Bentley and his team had created one of the most glamorous brands the world had ever seen. Unfortunately, the Great Depression had its way, and the company was bought by Rolls-Royce in 1931 (admittedly not a bad parent to have), only unmerging in 2002.

However, the die had been cast. In the world of fiction James Bond drives Bentleys (in the Ian Fleming novels, but not in the films), while in the real world figures as diverse as Robert Downey Jr., Da-



vid Beckham and Queen Elizabeth II are fans. Acting royalty, soccer royalty, plain old royalty: that tells you all you need to know.

The Mulsanne sits waiting for me outside the Port of Missing Men, my cousin's home in Southampton. First impressions: this thing is vast, at more than 18 feet long and 7 feet wide, vast in an Atlantic ocean liner kind of way. However, all that size is partially hidden by the stunning lines, perfect dark blue livery and chrome details. It just doesn't get much more sophisticated than this.

It has been years since I have been to the Montauk Point Light, so I think a trip there to show my fiancée one of the most iconic structures on the whole of Long Island in this most iconic of British motor cars will fit the bill nicely. Climb aboard (you sit very high in a Mulsanne), sink into the acres of cream leather, marvel at the beauty of the wooden dash and press the starter button. A lovely V8 burble comes from the 6.75-liter unit, barely audible at idle, but I get the distinct impression that will change when unleashing some of its 505 horses.

I am entirely correct as I head over to Bridgehampton on the back roads. I don't know how it could possibly happen, but this car has seemingly shrunk around me, and I can really chuck it in to the

MELANIE BROUGHTON

YOUR HAIR OFFICIALLY OFF YOUR TO-DO LIST

Unlimited Blowout & Touch-Up
Memberships starting at \$99.

NYC & Miami - 3 Upper East Side Locations
glamandgo.com

Glam & Go
THE EXPRESS STYLING BAR

BISTRO
CHAT NOIR.COM



COMPLIMENTARY GLASS OF CHAMPAGNE
WITH A MAIN COURSE WHEN YOU
MENTION AVENUE.

RESERVE AT 212.794.2428

22 EAST 66 STREET,
BETWEEN 5TH AND MADISON AVE.
NEW YORK NY 10065



HAMPTON DRIVE

corners. The handling and poise is astonishing and the engine is an aural delight, the faint whistling of the turbochargers providing the treble over the bass of that big V8. Too soon we are on the 27 heading through East Hampton, but the car comes into its own for the second time: the comfort of the ride on the highway makes you feel as if you are floating across the pitted road surface, the sound deadening and allowing you to hear the proverbial pin drop.

We reach the lighthouse, and I know that I have fallen totally in love with this car. At more than \$300,000 it could never be described as being all things to all men, but it does what it sets out to do with pace, grace and space. W.O. would have been very proud. ♦

Bentley: By the Numbers

Cruising through Bentley's most iconic—and expensive—moments

1919: The year H. M. and W. O. Bentley founded their now-iconic motor company.

6: The number of times Bentley swept the 24 Hours of Le Mans, the world's oldest active sports car race.

1931: The year Bentley was acquired by Rolls-Royce.

3: The types of models currently available for purchase. The brand's newest car, the Bentayga, is due for release in 2016.



7,003: The number of vehicles sold in 2011, the last year for which data is available.

12: The number of months Woolf Barnato owned a Bentley before deciding to own the company itself.

205,825: The average cost in dollars of the Bentley Continental, the brand's most popular model.

17: The number of "Bentley Boys," the notorious and ultra exclusive group of motorists famous for their winning racing team and their passion for the legendary cars.

7,900,000: Dollars spent at auction of the most expensive Bentley—and priciest British car, period—ever sold.