



Imperial War Museum Duxford (152)

Wed, 14th Oct 2015, Imperial War Museum Duxford

Lot 33

Estimate: £120000 - £150000 + Fees

1956 AC Ace Bristol

Registration No: 124 XUX

Chassis No: BEX235

Mot Expiry: Exempt

- Ford 289ci V8 powered for c.40 years

Introduced in October 1953, the AC Ace was essentially a reworked version of 'LOY 500' the handsome John Tojeiro designed sports racer with which motor trader Cliff Davis had notched up six wins and four seconds that season. Lured into collaboration with the Thames Ditton manufacturer by the promise of a £5 per car royalty fee, Tojeiro ensured that the new model's ladder-framed tubular chassis enjoyed the same handling prowess as its competition forebear by equipping it with all-round independent transverse-leaf suspension. Styled after 'LOY 500' (itself modelled on the Carrozzeria Touring clad Ferrari 166 MM Barchettas), the Ace was arguably even more handsome. Initially powered by AC's own 1991cc OHC engine, the availability from February 1956 onwards of another straight-six in the guise of Bristol's tuneable 1971cc unit gave the aluminium-bodied sports car a welcome boost in both sales and performance. Upgraded with optional Girling front disc brakes in 1957, Ace Bristols achieved considerable success at Le Mans (1957: 2nd i/c, 1958: 2nd i/c, 1959: 1st i/c) as well as dominating the Sports Car Club of America's production championship for classes E (1957-1959), D (1960) and C (1961).

According to the letter on file from Club Registrar Tony Bancroft, this particular left-hand drive example - chassis number BEX235 - was despatched from Thames Ditton on 7th December 1956 and delivered to Jack Fernandez in Caracas, Venezuela. As well as being the Venezuelan AC importer, Fernandez was a keen racer and competed with several early Bristol-engined Aces, similar to the one offered here, in both South and North American events. No mean driver, he is known to have taken part in the Sebring 12 hours among other high profile meetings. Although there is no documentary evidence to confirm the supposition, being such an early car it is possible that Fernandez campaigned BEX235 and indeed one American website lists it as having been raced in Venezuela for two years. Competition success obviously gave Mr. Fernandez a great deal of favourable publicity which resulted in Venezuela becoming the third biggest export market for Ace-Bristols, behind only the USA and France and well ahead of anywhere else.

The two-seater eventually ended up in North America and by the 1970s - perhaps earlier - had been fitted with its current, 1965 date-stamped Ford 289 cu in (4.7 litre) V8 engine and T10 gearbox. Pleasingly, the history file contains photographs of the car taken in the early 1980s appearing largely as it does today. By 1991 BEX235 belonged to the US firm Southern Classics and thereafter it passed through the hands

of Ron Leonard, well known marque aficionado and proprietor of the AC Exchange in Colorado, and Peter Fisher, while its last American custodian was Tony Carpenter of Marietta, Georgia. The V8 conversion was carried out without any major changes to the body or chassis. Although the car's original chassis plate has been lost at some time, the chassis number stampings remain clearly visible on the bonnet, boot hinges and both door hinges and tally with the letter of authenticity from Tony Bancroft, official registrar of the AC Owners Club.

Upon its return to the UK, the car benefited from a suspension overhaul including new Spax shock absorbers, kingpins and bushes plus the fitment of a rack and pinion steering conversion supplied by well known Club member Ben Yates (which had been developed in conjunction with John Tojeiro). Drawn to the re-engined Ace's obvious performance potential not to mention its similarity to an early / prototype Shelby Cobra, the vendor acquired BEX235 for his Scottish collection during late 2009. Despatched to Ian Nuthall of IN Racing not long thereafter, a thorough check over resulted in '124 XUX' receiving replacement propshaft bearings and new Black leather upholstery. Sporting a set of desirable Marchal 'Fantastic' spotlamps and 'Le Mans-style' nose cowl, this tempting AC is offered for sale with the aforementioned letter of authenticity, V5C Registration Document and sundry paperwork.