



Imperial War Museum Duxford (197)

Wed, 8th Sep 2021

Lot 112

Estimate: £250000 - £300000 + Fees

1946 Delahaye Type 135M Cabriolet Coachwork by Graber

Registration No: VXS 968

Chassis No: 800269

MOT: Exempt

- Believed to be one of just two such examples made (and sister car to chassis 800320 which has been pictured in various marque histories)
- Exhibited at the world famous Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance in 2017
- Supplied new to Switzerland and resident there until the late 1990s after which it underwent an extensive restoration
- A true Grande Routiere that would grace any collection

Delahaye's most famous model – the Type 135 – was introduced at the October 1935 Paris Salon. Notably stiffer and lower slung than those of its predecessors, the newcomer's chassis featured box-section side rails, two substantial cross members, welded-in floor panels and a steel transmission tunnel. The independent front suspension comprised a lower transverse leaf spring and upper wishbones allied to longitudinal torque arms, while the live rear axle was supported by semi-elliptic leaf springs mounted outside the main chassis rails. Large cable-operated drum brakes (housing Bendix self-wrapping shoes) were complemented by high geared worm and nut steering. Initially powered by a 3.2 litre OHV straight-six engine, the Type 135's obvious competition potential was amply demonstrated by Lucy Schell's Works-supported Ecurie Bleue machines. Outright wins at the Coupe d'Automne, Mont Ventoux hillclimb (1936), Donington 12-hours (1937) and Le Mans 24-hours (1938) not to mention near misses on the Mille Miglia, RAC Tourist Trophy and Spa 24-hours all cemented Delahaye's position among France's premier marques. Indeed, Rob Walker's Type 135 Speciale outlasted and outran Alfa Romeo 8C 2900 and Talbot T150SS opposition at the 1939 Whit Monday Brooklands meeting to claim the title of 'Britain's Fastest Road Car'. Available from 1936 until the company's closure eighteen years later, the Type 135M boasted a 3.6 litre engine and could be optioned with triple carburettors and a Cotal electromagnetic four-speed gearbox. Lacking its own coachbuilding facilities, Delahaye entrusted Type 135 chassis to the cream of France's ateliers including: [Figoni & Falaschi](#); [Letourneur et Marchand](#); Alphonse Guilloché; Marcel Pourtout; Frères Dubois; Jacques Saoutchik; Marius Franay; Henri Chapron; Faget-Varnay and Antem; the result being some of the most flamboyant bodywork ever seen.

Delahaye put the Type 135M back into production after World War Two but found that the market for 'Grande Routiere' cars had all but collapsed. Thought to be one of just two examples to wear this particular style of Cabriolet coachwork by Graber of Switzerland, chassis 800269 was supplied new to Lucerne. Illustrated in the books *Delahaye: La Belle Carrosserie Française* and *Delahaye: Le Grand Livre*, the sister car – chassis 800320 - was offered for sale with a guide price of \$450,000 - \$650,000 during 2017. Conscious of the masterpieces that their French rivals had created on the same chassis, Graber came up with a particularly elegant and confident design which lets its complex panel curvature 'do

the talking' rather than relying on flashy chrome accents. Migrating to Bern in 1956, chassis 800269 moved to Thun two years later where it would remain in single ownership until 1998. The subject of a high quality, detailed restoration thereafter which saw it mechanically gone through, the Delahaye was also treated to a sympathetic bodywork refurbishment, interior re-trim and fitted with a new hood. Many of the original fittings such as the Cream steering wheel and O.S. instruments were carefully renovated. Utilised by its previous keeper for a number of rallies, the four-seater has been cosmetically enhanced since entering the current ownership such that it was invited to attend the world-famous Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance in 2017.

Upgraded with a more powerful Type 12S 103 engine at some stage (rumoured to have been installed by the factory) that sports three inlet and six exhaust ports plus triple Solex carburettors, the Type 135M is said to be 'more than capable of keeping up with modern traffic'. Equipped with Cotal's ingenious electromagnetic four-speed gearbox, it offers a rewarding and engaging driving experience. Part of a significant private collection in recent years, this magnificent Graber-bodied Delahaye is seemingly ready for further concours duties or touring. They say that 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder', well to our eyes at least 'VXS 968' is one hell of a looker!