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1938 Bugatti Type 57SC *Atlantic Coupé*

Story by Roger Thiedeman

Rarely, if ever, are the words 'beautiful' and 'bizarre' used in a single sentence to describe the same thing. Yet that is how Hugh Conway – the respected Bugatti historian, owner, and prolific author on the subject – labeled the sensational, eye-catching Bugatti Type 57SC Atlantic coupé. Not to be confused with the Atalante coupé body built on the same chassis, only three Type 57SC Atlantics (including the Aerolithe prototype) are believed to have been manufactured between 1937 and 1938, ranking the type among the most coveted Bugattis in the world today, as reflected by the astronomical, credibility-defying prices commanded on the rare occasions when one of them changes hands. Hardly surprising, though, for what

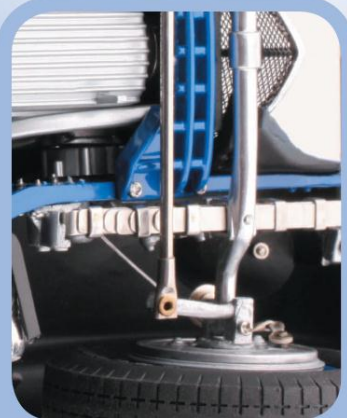
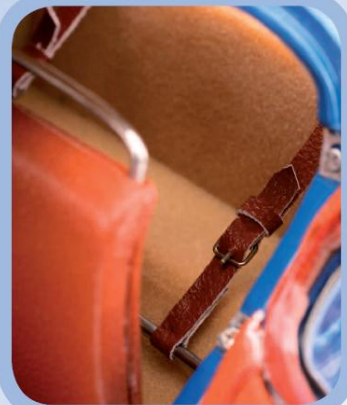
is considered the ultimate Bugatti built, and arguably the world's first supercar.

The 57SC is the supercharged, short-chassis version of the Bugatti Type 57, itself the logical development of Ettore Bugatti's phenomenally successful Type 35, 51, and 59 racing cars, and Type 44 and 49 touring/sports cars. The letter 'S' in the '57SC' type designation stands for 'surbaissé', or 'lowered' – to denote the lower chassis than that of the basic Type 57 – while 'C' is for 'compresseur': the Roots twin-rotor supercharger, or 'blower', fitted to the 57C and 57SC models' in-line eight-cylinder engines.

In common with all Type 57 variants, the 57SC had a 201ci double overhead camshaft motor with 2.83 x 3.94in bore/

stroke. However, the latter's 'blown' engine delivered a lusty 200bhp, compared to the 135 'horses' of the normally-aspirated Type 57. A two-plate clutch was interposed between engine and integral four-speed, constant-mesh (non-synchromesh) gearbox, while a tail shaft with fabric couplings, and torque rod, transmitted the drive to the spiral bevel rear axle. An unusual feature of the lowered S and SC chassis saw the back axle tubes routed through a large hole at the rear of each chassis side member. Suspension was by semi- and reversed quarter-elliptic leaf springs at front and rear, respectively.

But the Type 57SC's mechanical specifications are rendered mundane by the breathtaking bodywork of the Atlantic



coupe. Its sensuous, alluring form was designed by Ettore Bugatti's son Jean, who constantly strove to emulate and perpetuate the mechanical artistry of his father, and the creative genius of both his sculptor-uncle Rembrandt Bugatti and grandfather Carlo Bugatti, the latter a talented furniture designer, artisan, and free thinker of his day. Originally conceived to combine the technical properties of the magnesium/aluminum alloy Electron with bold, artistic expression, the Atlantic coupe featured raised, flanged spines, or 'fins', along the body's centerline, from scuttle to tail, and atop the front and rear fenders. This was in anticipation of difficulties with welding magnesium alloys, in which case rivets would be used to join the fins. Eventually, even though aluminum was used instead of Electron on the Atlantic, the riveted seams were retained. The result was a spectacular car that, according to one commentator, screamed: 'I am a Bugatti! I am beautiful!

Buy me! Want me!'

And you too will want to buy CMC's magnificent 1:18 replica of the 1938 Bugatti Type 57SC Atlantic coupe. Interestingly, the German model manufacturer is releasing two versions of the same car (chassis #57591): one (item #M-083), in Dark Sapphire Blue as delivered new, registered EXK 6, to Richard B. Pope of Ascot, England – who had the Roots blower retrofitted in 1939, thus upgrading the car from 57S to 57SC specification and making it the fourth and final 57SC Atlantic; the other model (item #M-085, in a limited edition of 5,000 units) has black paintwork, as the automobile exists today in the collection of US fashion designer and classic car connoisseur Ralph Lauren, who has owned it since 1988.

Dominating the frontal aspect are the separate Scintilla headlamps, which distinguish EXK 6 from the other three 57SC Atlantics which had theirs partially

and variously faired into the front fenders. Another feature that complements the Atlantic's aerodynamic styling is the handsome V-shaped radiator, with divided grille topped by the iconic Bugatti badge and flip-open filler cap. Great care must be taken when unlatching and latching the tiny spring-loaded catches to open and shut the two centrally-hinged hood halves, each with finely-meshed cooling vents. But all that fiddly finger-and-tweezer work is worth the effort, because under the hood awaits yet another example of CMC's masterful miniaturization.

Faithfully capturing the work of art that was every Bugatti engine, the 1:18 replica has all the important components that invite a leisurely study of what made the 57SC tick. Starting with the near (left) side, the left camshaft bank takes pride of place with, at its rear, the casing for the camshaft drive mechanism. Immediately below is the ribbed exhaust manifold and,

directly behind it, the oil filler cap and neck which leads to the rectangular oil tank, visible from below, just behind the left front wheel. Other mechanical components on this side are the water pump, generator, and oil pump drive, while along the top of the engine runs the water gallery to the radiator header tank.

On the right side of the engine things look even more interesting. It starts with the other camshaft bank and, emerging from the dash-mounted Scintilla-Vertex magneto, the yellow-and-red cloth-braided ignition leads that are channeled into the aft end of a conduit. From this long tube, itself mounted on top of the camshaft housing, the individual plug wires lead to each of the eight sparking plugs mounted in the center of the engine block. Directly beneath the camshaft is the inlet manifold, below which sits the carburetor and Roots blower, complete with drive shaft to the latter. Fine copper wires replicate the

Similarly, detaching the rear wheels affords a closer look at the quarter-elliptic spring assembly, along with brake drums, cables, and shock absorber linkages.

However, not much more can be seen underneath because of a sheet-metal ventilated undertray extending from just aft of the engine block almost to the extremity of the tail. But what can be seen below is yet another example of whimsical yet functional Bugatti art: six, slender pipes branching out from the main exhaust down-pipe and collector box, then extending backward neatly, side-by-side and straight as a die, through a slim, box-shaped muffler to emerge like the tubes of a pipes-of-Pan flute at the left rear of the car.

Of course, the magic of the Atlantic coupé is its aesthetically-pleasing, wind-cheating body that allowed the car to reach a maximum speed of around 125mph. Words are inadequate to describe the beauty that flowed from Jean Bugatti's



star attraction inside is the wood-trimmed dashboard with all switches, levers, buttons, knobs, handles and other controls



fuel lines to the carburetor, as well as to the French AC fuel pump driven by the right-hand camshaft (which also drives the magneto). This half of the engine bay also accommodates the steering column, box, and linkages.

Still on matters mechanical, inspection of the engine's underside reveals the ribbed dry sump, as well as other components. For example: front end of the chassis frame; tubular axle in two, collared halves (to permit limited axle twist); and semi-elliptic springs. Removal of the delicately-spoked front wheels with Dunlop Cord tires – after turning the two-eared knock-off hubcaps anti-clockwise (quite easy to accomplish) – permits an uncluttered view of the large-diameter, finned brake drums with their actuating rods and suitably thin brake cables, and the unusual, movable de Ram pump-action shock absorbers with friction dampers.

drawing board, so let the accompanying photos do justice instead. Suffice it to say that CMC has captured those lines magnificently, from stem to stern, through to the circular removable spare wheel cover (much easier to detach and replace than those hood catches) adjacent to the screw-on/off fuel filler cap. Also observe how the signature flanges on the rear fenders wrap all the way around, following the contours of the tail in a smooth, unbroken line.

Now open those curvaceous doors, with their kidney-shaped windows, to enter a veritable wonderland. First note how the tops of the doors curve into the roof for easy entry and exit. Then check out the working fold-down sun visors. See how the seat-backs pivot forward to allow access to the rear luggage compartment (the Atlantic accommodates only two persons) with its leather straps and buckles to secure loose items of baggage. But the

daintily replicated as only CMC can. Even the numerals on the glass-encased Jaeger speedometer and tachometer, and smaller dials, can be read – if you are so inclined and have a good magnifying glass. A thin-rimmed wooden steering wheel with four spokes, cranked-back stick shift, and stubby parking brake lever complete the cornucopia of hardware inside the Atlantic cockpit. It should be mentioned, however, that the model received for review was a pre-production sample, which probably explains the absence of gas, brake, and clutch pedals on the cockpit floor.

OK, so Ralph Lauren has the 1:1 version of this 'bizarrely beautiful' – or 'beautifully bizarre'? – pre-WW2 supercar. But why should he have all the fun? You too can get in on the action by ordering one of these CMC models for delivery upon release later this year. Blue or black, take your pick – or, better still, buy both!