

HISPANO SUIZA T49

"Weymann" Sport Saloon by H.J. Mulliner - 1927

Sensation of the 1919 Paris Show, the HISPANO SUIZA H6 featured a light yet rigid four-wheel-braked chassis that matched its state-of-the-art power unit for innovation. Indeed, so good were its servo-assisted brakes that Rolls-Royce acquired the rights to build the design under licence.

The H6 combined performance with flexibility, comfort with good handling, and safety with reliability in a manner which enabled Hispano-Suiza to compete successfully with Rolls-Royce, Bentley, Bugatti, Isotta Fraschini and the United States' luxury marques.

This success led to the introduction of two smaller but closely related Mark Birkigt designs based on his H6, which were earmarked for production at Hispano's factory in Barcelona. These were the four-cylinder 2.5-litre T48 and six-cylinder 3.8-litre T49. Chassis layout followed that of the Paris-built H6, featuring semi-elliptic springing all round and torque-tube drive, as did that of the overhead-camshaft engines, which delivered 60 and 90bhp respectively. These two 'T' series models were in production from 1924 until 1933.

Barcelona chassis number '7874' carries Weymann-type saloon coachwork. This type of body construction took its name from its inventor - Charles Terres Weymann - a Frenchman whose background in aviation led to him using a lightweight wooden framework for motor bodies, which was held together by steel plates and covered with fabric. The principal advantage of the Weymann system was its inherent flexibility, which meant that it was free of the squeaks, creaks and rattles that hitherto had affected all traditional coachbuilt bodies. It was an immediate success; as well as making bodies at its factories in France and (later) England, Weymann licensed production to numerous independent coachbuilders, the saloon body of this car being the work of H.J. Mulliner, one of this country's finest. The Barker-patented dipping Marchal headlights are another particularly noteworthy feature.

The car's first owner Colonel Guy Geddes, (born in Burma, he was the hero of Gallipoli battle) purchased it from Albemarle Motors, London in 1927. His initials are still etched on the doors. On his death in 1958 it passed via the trade to one Mike Slay, who acquired the car in 1959 and after initial use placed it in storage. While in Mike Slay's ownership, '7874' was inspected by Hispano-Suiza authority George

Briand, who wrote: 'I have examined the car and found it in very good condition... my records show also that throughout its life this car has been thoroughly serviced.' (This letter proves that 62 years ago proper preservation of "old" cars was already rare and appreciated).

Its next owner, Clive Sherriff, recalled the circumstances of his acquisition for The Hispano Society's newsletter in April 1991. Slay told that the T49 had been laid up after the Autovac failed, but although he never got around to fixing it had employed someone to turn the engine over once a week and polish the car. It took Clive Sheriff a few months to get it running again, much of his time being consumed by a painstaking reconstruction of the complicated silencer to original pattern. During the re-commissioning, the chassis, engine and brakes were found to be in remarkably good order, confirming George Brand's observations. Rarely do cars of the quality of this remarkably original 'time warp' Hispano Suiza are discovered unmolested.

Marque specialist Derek Brown recalls seeing this car in the 1980s in Reading and has remarked on its exceptionally original and unmolested condition: matching chassis, engine and body numbers, and even the original interior and the original owner manual. It is doubtful whether any of the other surviving T49s, believed to number a dozen or so, are as original as '7874'.

(This Hispano Suiza never left the UK until recently, when current owner Marco Gastaldi proudly began a "promoting preservation" mission, showing it in America, where the car was greatly appreciated and awarded in Pebble Beach, in Middle East, now in Villa d'Este: the educational tour will continue with an even greater incitement, after this important praise by FIVA.)