

A Vendre en France

by David Howard

Aguttes Auction, Lyon 8th November

My TGV journey down to Lyon was delayed by some half an hour as we collided with what *Le Chef de Train* described as a large animal. One trusts that at 180mph it felt very little pain, and at least did not derail us.

I am always pleasantly surprised by the warm welcome given to me at Aguttes by Louis-Maxence Palisson, which on this occasion included an invitation to a reception on the Friday evening in the ancient station offices, a beautifully preserved example of France's rich railway history. The station building itself, inscribed 'Chemin de Fer Paris-Lyon-Méditerranée', was built between 1905 and 1908 and closed to the public in 1983, when it was classified as a *Monument Historique*.

As usual, on the day of the sale there loomed the distinct possibility of being locked out until five minutes before kick off. Using every orthopedic excuse I could muster – some true, some invented – I persuaded the young gateman to let me enter half an hour in advance. It is always interesting to be the only one in the audience, as staff busy themselves with last-minute preparations and adjustments to the sound system.

None of that would really upset the punters if allowed in, but French habit still dictates a lock out.

The sale started with more Dinky toys than I have ever seen assembled on one occasion: 55 lots in all with five or six cars to a lot, all in mint condition and mostly boxed, which I gather nicely doubles their value. As a child I tended to dispose very quickly of the box and give the Dinky a quick, usually violent test drive – what a foolish judge of market trends I was, even in those days.

Two hundred endless lots of automobilia, auctioned at a good clip by M Palisson, culminated with four fairly useless pieces of Ferrari bodywork and the bonnet of Niki Lauda's 1975 Ferrari F1 312T. This lot fetched a horrifying €4960 (\$3865) with premium – surely reasonable grounds for divorce from the misguided gentleman who stumbled home with it to decorate his living room.

There followed a rare and unusual selection of scaled-down but fully operational Ferraris. Powered by Honda or similar engines, these gifts for the child who has everything ranged in price from €4005 (\$3123) inclusive of premium right up to €28,774 (\$22,443) for a mini Ferrari Testarossa. The mind boggles.

I was intrigued to watch the bidding erupt over a 1910 Peugeot



Restoration project 1910 Peugeot motorcycle sold for 10 times its estimate

Paris-Nice two-cylinder motorcycle and sidecar. Even though it was in decidedly barn fresh condition and required months, if not years, of restoration, the bidding overshot the €1000/3000 estimate to a final price of €22,320 (\$17,409). A 1952 Vespa scooter was more reasonable at €3720 (\$2901).

I am glad to say this auction contained more cars of our era than I have been used to in recent months. The first to come under Aguttes's hammer was a very agreeable looking 1960 MGA 1600 coupé. I am actually a big fan of these fixed-head MGs and consider their body line to be as attractive as any car of the 1960s.

This one, in cream with wire wheels and an excellent light walnut dashboard, sold for €26,400 (\$20,592). A 1937 Renault Celtaquatre cabriolet was finished in dark blue with yellow wheels and had a strong look of the Ford V8 dropheads of the same period: €31,800 (\$24,800) was over estimate.

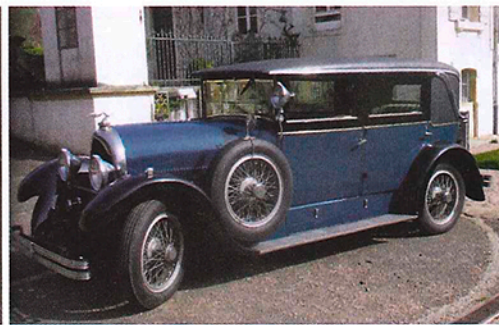
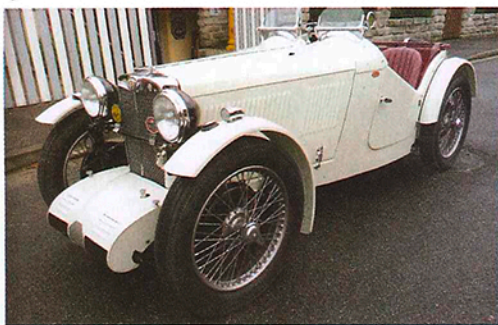
The 1936 Daimler which followed was described in the catalogue as 'so British, so Royal', so I asked M Palisson during the reception what early history they had of the car. Unfortunately, there was none. Imported from Belgium, this 15 LQ 3-20 limousine had been beautifully restored in dark red but I felt, due to its comparatively small proportions, it was more likely to have been a funeral follower than a conveyance of Royalty. The €18,000 (\$14,040) hammer price was insufficient for the owner and probably didn't cover the cost of restoration.

A 1949 Delahaye 148L coupé with coachwork by Letourneur et Marchand had been restored from the chassis up and probably deserved the final bid totaling €127,200 (\$99,216). A very delectable Jaguar XK140 coupé of 1956 vintage was eye-catching in pale blue with chrome wire wheels. Unfortunately, and somewhat surprisingly, the bidding stopped well short of reserve at €45,000 (\$35,100).

As usual, and this time with the choice of the whole hall, I had settled myself right at the back, giving a better opportunity to view the bidding. I was surprised, unlike at an English auction, how the general public were allowed to drift in without a catalogue and a certain amount of noise was emanating from small children at the main

Below left Handsome and rare 1937 Renault Celtaquatre was a lot of car for the money: £24,800 **Below right** This 1956 Jaguar XK140 failed to reach its reserve figure **Bottom left** Somewhat staid 1939 Hotchkiss PN sold for £27,144 **Bottom right** You would never guess that underneath this pretty *barquette* body by Barou lurks Peugeot 203 running gear. It sold post-sale





Left This MG J2 was not Aguttes's usual fare. It had an optimistic estimate and did not sell **Centre** Neither did this 1939 Singer Le Mans, which was equally out of place **Right** Commodious 1928 Lorraine-Dietrich B3/6 saloon appealed to our correspondent and sold under-estimate for £32,760

entrance. I was reminded of a certain auctioneer on the Island of Alderney who, surmising a similar situation, said "Madam, if you fail to silence that infant I shall include it in the next lot."

A 1939 Hotchkiss PN two-door saloon was finished in Champagne gold with red leather. A rare machine, it sold for €34,800 (£27,144). The 1957 Peugeot 203 Barbier Chambas was a weird attempt by Peugeot commissioner Paul Barbier and his friend André Chambas to create their own sports car on the Peugeot 203 chassis. A heavily modified tubular affair with coachwork by Barou of Tournan, and obviously not a commercial success, this one failed to impress the bidders and fell short of reserve at €39,000 (£32,506). It sold after the auction for €45,000 (£35,100).

The MG J2, complete with supercharger and in splendid condition, was too highly estimated. Sorry, but no J2 is

worth €60/70,000 even with a Phoenix crank and Cosworth pistons. Here, €50,500 (£42,000) was the top bid, and a realistic one at that. Equally attractive to look at, a very pretty pale blue 1939 Singer Le Mans in concours condition was again probably too highly estimated at €43/48,000. The failed bid of €38,500 (£33,076) I would think was the right money for a really good Singer Le Mans.

A 1954 Bentley R-Type had been completely restored in traditional black with cream Connolly hide and Wilton carpets; you can't get more British than that, apart from the left-hand drive. It went down very well with bidders, with a final bid of €33,600 (£26,208).

It is, perhaps, a trifle disappointing that in nearly all the catalogue descriptions of cars entered at these sales there is very little, if any, mechanical condition touched upon. You really are buying completely blind, unless some arrangements are made with the

auctioneer to start and test the car prior to the sale – a rare occurrence. So it was with the beautiful and flowerily described 1928 Lorraine-Dietrich B3/6, an elegant saloon in blue with chauffeur partition. The successful bidder paid €42,000 (£32,760), well under estimate. I wonder if anyone told him it jumps out of second gear?

Perhaps the most impressive car of the day, a 1932 Delage D8 landaulet by Henri Binder of Paris, was quite magnificent – enormous and beautifully finished in claret with black wings. I was struck immediately by the estimate of €250/300,000; surely no one was going to bid that heavily, despite the obvious grandeur of the motor car. I was proved quite right. The top bid was €180,000 (£140,000), way under estimate. A shame, really, as it deserved to go to a good home. Or was the owner merely testing the water?

I rather liked the 1913 Clément

Bayard 4M cabriolet. A nice compact and quite usable Edwardian in blue, with its large brass radiator positioned behind the coal scuttle bonnet and straps coming down each side of the hood, this car was sensibly estimated and sold for a reasonable €19,200 (£14,976).

The second Clément Bayard, an AC2 Double Phaeton, was undoubtedly my car of the auction. For many years the property of the Clément Bayard family, this highly original old car had been in store for many years and wore its Oily Rag uniform with great dignity. I was asked to look at this one for a colleague in England and the first thing I was able to advise him, on my mobile telephone from a bus stop in Lyon, was that it was definitely a 1905 car and not '04. That doesn't matter much over here and it didn't bother him. With its marvellous unpolished lamps and radiator and faded red leather on the *Roi des Belges* coachwork, this car exuded charm. The estimate was wide, €50/100,000, and the bidding spirited. Isn't it weird how these barn fresh motor cars inspire such intense interest? The car was eventually sold for €72,000 (£56,160) on the internet – to my friend in England, I'm glad to say.

The next vehicle was a third Clément Bayard, described as a 1911 CBII *Maraichère*, which literally means a van for a market gardener. This one had also belonged to the family and was obviously too infirm to be moved from their home. It was sold, unseen, for €4800 (£3744) – a brave restoration.

The final car of our era was the inevitable Mercedes 190SL, a very well turned out 1959 example in cream with red leather. It sold for a mid-estimate €96,000 (£74,880). Aguttes had some interesting cars in their sale; they moved on 22 out of 34 vehicles offered (that does not include the scale Ferraris, which all sold well). These prices include buyer's premium and tax of 20 per cent, and the pound was worth 1.27 euros at the time of the auction.

Below left Imposing 1932 Delage D8 landaulet by Henri Binder had a high estimate and did not sell **Below right** The first of three Clément Bayards offered in the sale was this 1913 4M cabriolet **Bottom left** Oily Rag AC2 Double Phaeton was our correspondent's car of the sale **Bottom right** This 1911 CBII *Maraichère* looked like it could be a rewarding project

