

Market News

TURNED OUT NICE AGAIN



1954 Rolls-Royce Silver Dawn formerly owned by music hall veteran and screen star George Formby

BY MARK BRANAGAN

It was an offer that no one with a passion for motoring or show business could refuse: a classic Rolls Royce, with only 44,000 miles on the clock; previous owner: George Formby.

Little wonder then that the singing star's 1954 Rolls-Royce Silver Dawn was snapped up last weekend for just below its £65,000 price tag.

Classic car dealers in Malton, North Yorkshire, were delighted with the deal by a West Yorkshire businessman, which allowed them to turn down rival bids from Florida and Moscow.

The George Formby Society was also pleased that the car was staying in Britain rather than being shipped overseas to join others from the string of luxury cars owned by the speed-loving singer.

Formby – who died 50 years ago this year – and his wife Beryl owned no fewer than 28 Rolls-Royces and Bentleys, plus a number of other top-of-the-range cars and motorbikes.

In 1954, he had set his heart on a shell grey sports saloon, one of the first to be fitted with an automatic gearbox and with indicators as a special feature. It was delivered to his home at the time, Beryldene (George named all of his homes after his wife) on the promenade at Lytham St Anne's in Lancashire in September of that year.

But George, who had acquired his first Roller in 1937, soon tired of his pride and joy – he had also purchased a preferred Bentley R Series in 1954. He sold the Silver Dawn in May 1955.

For more than 50 years after that, the car was in the ownership of Cecil Silver, of Classic House, Old Street, London, before coming back onto the market in 2008. It changed hands between dealers before finally being sold by the Classic And Sportscar Centre at West Knapton, near Malton, over the weekend.

In a strange way, the car had come full circle. George Formby – real name George Hoy Booth – had been apprenticed as a jockey at Botterills in Malton before setting out on the road to stardom. Formby's father, James, who also performed under the name George Formby, was taken ill in panto in Newcastle and died a few days later. Recalled from Malton, George Jr decided never to return and, ten days later, made his theatrical debut under the family stage name.

George Formby Society archivist Neil Forshaw said George's first Rolls-Royce ended up in Dallas and another was sold to a buyer in Switzerland. He says: "George liked speed. When he was making the film *No Limit* on the Isle of Man in 1935 he did his own stunts and drove the director Monty Banks, Gracie Fields' husband, mad. It is not a bad price for the car when you think one of George's ukuleles sold for £72,000 last year."

Company boss James Szklir said they could not name the buyer: "But we are more than happy with the deal. Normally it can take months to sell a car like that."



One CCW staffer commented that George would have had to clean a lot of windows to buy his R-R