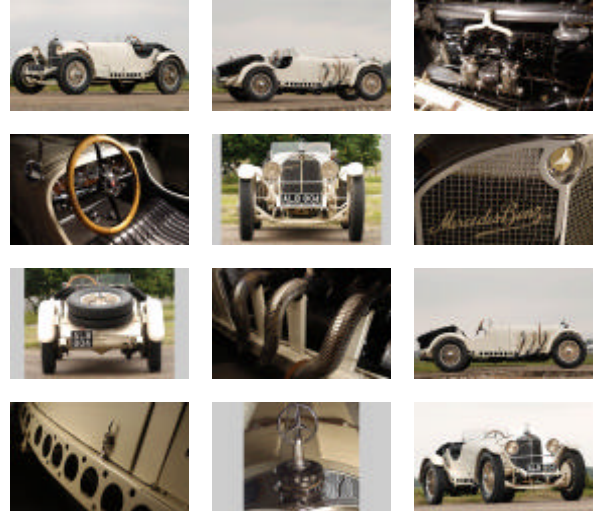




AUTOMOBILES OF LONDON - WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 31, 2007

[Email to a Friend] [Print]

## 1931 Mercedes-Benz Type SSKL Replica



LOT: 240

Estimate:  
£750,000-£1,000,000

Chassis No. 36357

!grb  
V5 Registration Documents  
Current MOT Test Certificate

Estimate: €1,089,000 - €1,452,000  
Estimate: \$1,500,000 - \$2,000,000

Engine No. 66533 (Original Type S)  
UK Registration No. ALB 804

From the Collection of Mr. Bernie Ecclestone

### Specifications:

180bhp, 6,740cc overhead camshaft six-cylinder engine with alloy block and cast iron cylinder head, Roots type supercharger, four-speed gearbox, semi-elliptical springs and beam axle front suspension, semi-elliptical springs and torque tube live axle rear suspension, four-wheel drum brakes with centre lock Rudge wire wheels. Wheelbase 116.1in. (2,950mm).

### The SSKL

During the late 1920s, the SSK had established itself as one of the greatest racing sports cars of all time. Its combination of outstanding power, short chassis, and excellent roadholding made it a legendary performer at both hill-climbs and road courses. No car is impossible to defeat, but the Mercedes-Benz SSK came as close as any to achieving such exalted status.

Nothing lasts forever, and unfortunately, the effects of the Great Depression were being felt, even at Mercedes-Benz; the company decided to curtail its racing efforts in an effort to stem the tide of red ink. A new plan was needed, but dropping the programme entirely was not an option, as Caracciola, and his SSK, had become something of a national hero.

The decision was made for Caracciola to form his own team, and for the factory to sell him an SSK at a special price – but not just any SSK, a very special one. A deal was struck and work began. The first priority was to lighten the car, so the engineers attacked the chassis with drills, beginning with large ones in the chassis side rails, and ending with tiny ones on the pedal shafts. The result was more than 250 lbs in weight savings, and a new model name – SSKL, 'L' for 'Leicht'.

With less weight and continued evolution of the chassis, the SSKL continued to dominate, and in fact other SSKs were returned to the factory to be updated to SSKL specifications. Ultimately, most experts believe just five were built: sadly, none survives today.

The ease with which an SSK – or a modified S or SS – could be converted to SSKL specifications has resulted in a number of 'new' SSKLs, such as the example offered here. The lack of surviving original cars created a powerful incentive for enthusiasts to re-enact the legend.

### Provenance

The example offered here was ordered as a Type S on commission number 37585. It was delivered to Georg Zettritz in Berlin on 18 May 1928 with chassis number 35325 and engine number 66533. The original Sportswagen coachworks had number 920203.

Little else is known of its pre-war or early post-war history, but in the 1950s the car was imported to America by a returning serviceman based in Michigan. In 1964 the Type S was bought by Mercedes-Benz enthusiast Raymond Jones from a Mr Hindre of Detroit, Michigan.

Jones was well known for his work in converting various S and SS models into SSK and SSKL replicas. As a result, although the components of the car today are generally all original S series Mercedes-Benz components, some are from the original car ordered on commission number 37585, while others are from Jones's stock of S series parts from other cars.

The chassis of the subject car is not numbered, although it is a genuine S Type chassis. It is not uncommon for the factory to produce chassis without numbers, and numerous examples exist today. Consequently, there is no way to be certain whether the chassis in this case is original to this car or not. Another car claims the same chassis number. RM has not examined this second car, and although a chassis change seems unlikely, it cannot be denied that it is possible.

In any event, there is no doubt that Jones performed the chassis modifications, drilling and shortening the Type S chassis to SSKL specifications according to factory drawings that he received from the Mercedes Archive. He also installed the necessary mechanical and chassis parts to update the car to SSK/SSKL specifications, such as the pressure fuel system with split valve cover and air pump, finned blower tube and oil sump. Upon completion, Jones sold the new SSKL to legendary General Motors design chief Bill Mitchell.

Not long afterwards, Mitchell sold the car to Bob Morgan of East Orange, New Jersey. Within a year or so, Morgan sold the SSKL to noted collector Richard Payne of Seal Cove, Maine. In 1976 Payne sold the car to another collector who kept the car for 2 years before consigning it to a Coys auction in 1979.

At the auction, or shortly thereafter, the car was sold to Mr Hayashi, a noted Japanese collector, who acquired a number of other S, SS, and SSK models, finally selling three cars to Bernie Ecclestone for his growing and highly regarded collection – an SS Tourer, an SSK, and this SSKL.

It is difficult to imagine today, but by the late 1950s and early 1960s, there was little demand for these big old Mercedes-Benz cars. Collectors were far more interested in the earliest cars, particularly the large horsepower chain drive cars of the first 10–15 years of the 20th century.

As a result, when Ray Jones bought the S from Hindre, the sales price was just \$200 – and in fact, the conversion to SSKL configuration was done at the request of Bill Mitchell. Neither felt he was doing anything untoward, and indeed, it is likely that they and others like them were saving cars from being parted out, or worse, scrapped.

The quality of Jones's workmanship was good, certainly by the standards of the day, and the plentiful supply of original parts means that this Mercedes-Benz is, although certainly not an original SSKL, correct in most details and constructed primarily from original Mercedes-Benz parts.

#### Originality

The nature of SSKL or SSK replicas is such that it is important to attempt to determine, as far as possible, the degree of originality of a given car. Consequently, RM Auctions has conducted a thorough examination of the example offered here, and consulted with a variety of marque experts, in order to provide as complete and accurate a presentation of facts as possible. This information is intended to assist bidders in conducting their own inspection, and making their own determinations in all matters before bidding on this, or any other lot. As always, auction lots are sold on an as-found basis, and bidders are responsible for making their own evaluations of originality, condition, and provenance.

Upon examination and paint removal by RM staff, it was determined that the frame is an original S Type that has been shortened just forward of the rear axle kick-up by cutting and welding together the front and rear sections of an S frame, and with holes drilled to lighten it for an SSKL appearance. The front axle is a Mercedes-Benz S Type, as expected on an S chassis. The rear axle is SS Type, such as would also have been fitted to an SSK or SSKL. The brakes on each axle correspond to the axle. The shock absorbers are original Houdaille S shock absorbers with SSK covers installed to create the look of the factory finned units. The wheels are standard S series Mercedes-Benz 20in. lock ring wire wheels.

The engine is an original S Type engine. Although it is not numbered, examination of its components and their engineering numbers have confirmed that it is, in fact, engine number 66533. It has been fitted with the more desirable split cam covers, and the pressure fuel system normally installed on an SSK or SSKL. The supercharger is a standard 15 fin blower, as was used on both SS and SSK models. The magneto generator, water pump, and ignition system are all original and correct and the starter is correct and original. Correct style original Bosch ZR6 Magnetos are fitted. The radiator is a correct SSK or SSKL unit.

The transmission is a correct S Type transmission, and the torque tube has been shortened to fit the shorter chassis. The steering gear column gearbox, draglink and set-up is all correct original Mercedes S or SS left-drive set-up, as would have been used on an SSK or SSKL.

The body is an SSK/SSKL type, probably constructed in the mid-1960s by Ray Jones, including the spare oil tank cover and filler cap, which would be correct for an SSKL. The wings were probably fabricated with the body, and they are correct in style and type to the original. The windscreen, while similar in appearance, is not an original Mercedes-Benz SSK or SSKL piece. The body hardware is generally of the correct type, although the headlights fitted to the car are an earlier Bosch light. The dash and its gauges are all correct for SSK and SSKL, other than the water temperature gauge, which is an incorrect Jaeger unit.

#### Condition

The Mercedes Benz off-white racing white paintwork is older, but quite presentable. The interior, crafted from black leather, appears to be original to the body. The engine bay, chassis, and mechanical components appear to have been cleaned and maintained properly, although the cosmetics are no longer concours quality, as would be expected given the age of the restoration.

The vendor advises that the sump has been off and the bottom end checked and cleaned carefully. Furthermore, work has been done to the fuel system, which now works as expected. (It is the proper pressurized system, which is required to support sustained high speeds.) The vendor reports that the car has been driven recently, and is reported to start, run, and drive very well.

#### Summary

Although the example offered here is properly referred to as a replica, in as much as no originals survive, it is also important to note that it must certainly be among the finest of its kind.

Constructed nearly 50 years ago, and comprising almost exclusively original Mercedes-Benz parts, it is perhaps as close as one may come

today to possessing one of these staggeringly high-performance sports cars.

It is interesting to note that when Bill Mitchell commissioned Ray Jones to build this car for him, it was just 35 years old. Consequently, the SSKL offered here has a longer history in its current form than its original configuration, and that, combined with a roster of keepers that includes Mitchell, Payne, Hayashi, and now Bernie Ecclestone, gives this car a provenance that is unmatched by any number of other, more 'original' cars.

It is not possible to own an original SSKL. Consequently, the acquisition of this, perhaps the finest of the SSKL replicas extant, will serve to fill a deserving niche in any important collection.

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