

# CLASSIC DRIVER

## Sampling success in John Rockefeller Jnr's Bentley S1 Drophead

### Lead

During our recent visit to the Frederiksen Collection in Denmark, one car stood out from its 50-odd stablemates: a Bentley S1 Drophead Coupé. We chose to sample this one car not only for its rarity, but also because its first owner was a certain John D. Rockefeller Jnr...

With only five H.J. Mulliner-bodied Bentley S1 Drophead Coupés ever produced in left-hand drive, it's little wonder that they were the preserve of the world's elite. Were you asked to link a specific personage to the latter in the 1950s, a suitable choice would be someone with the surname Rockefeller – indeed, this car was ordered new by John D. Rockefeller Junior through the official [Rolls-Royce](#) agency for the greater New York area.

### A rolling Museum of Modern Art



John Junior, son of business magnate and philanthropist John D. Rockefeller Senior, was a little more flamboyant than his quiet-living father. Shortly after Senior died, Junior razed his father's sombre (yet rather large) Fifth Avenue house – donating the land to his wife Abby to construct the Museum of Modern Art – and moved to a 24-room, 12-bath triplex at 740 Park Avenue, the choicest apartment in what has been referred to as 'the world's richest apartment building'. Here, his neighbours included George Embiricos, Jacqueline Kennedy and close family friend, young socialite Peggy Bedford Bancroft – who once broke the apartment elevator when she used it to transport an elephant to a party upstairs. So, as you can probably imagine, an ultra-rare [Bentley](#) parked at the kerb of the high-flying building would have looked anything but out of place.

### Don't forget the hatbox



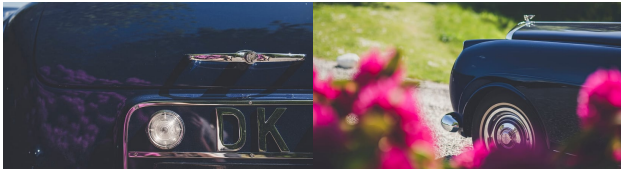
John Junior ordered the Bentley in December 1957, and it was delivered six months later wearing the same blue-over-blue leather colours, complemented by a burl walnut dashboard. Ultimately, he was only able to enjoy it for around two years before his death. However, one can imagine the duties it served during this time; perhaps as a shuttle for the short trip to the Rockefeller Center, or a drive with neighbour Jackie Kennedy and her future President husband to a jazz club on 52nd Street. Considering the idyllic landscape in which we sample the car, though, the fantasy scenario in mind puts John Junior at the wheel of the S1 on a riverside jaunt up to Vermont, riding solo in order to leave the passenger seat free for his trademark top hat.

### Crewe awakening



Due to the limited time we have to browse the staggering [Frederiksen Collection](#) (the majority of which is soon to be auctioned by Bonhams), we only have 15 minutes to step into John Junior's brogues. Even beholding the sight of the gorgeous Bentley is an experience, so the chance to open the weighty door and pull it closed behind you is an honour. The little details inside are so captivating, it takes a few more minutes before we call up the 4.8-litre six-cylinder engine, and pull away with the unmatched, silent effortlessness of a car produced in Crewe during the late 1950s.

## Instilling new habits



One of a number of options specified by Rockefeller was a radio, but we instead choose six-cylinder serenity as we bathe in the Danish sun, imagining the nearby Ebeltoft Bay is the Hudson (and that our bank balance is as healthy as John Junior's). Then, just as we become acclimatised to the reassuringly lazy steering, and brakes that require the forethought of an astute financier, our time with the Drophead S1 comes to an end. We guide it back to the Frederiksen residence, ushering it through the front gates with the delicacy of a ship returning to harbour. Upon disembarking, a newly instinctive glance is cast at the passenger seat, checking for a (non-existent) top hat. Let's hope some of John Junior's business acumen has rubbed off on us, too.

*Photos: Amy Shore for Classic Driver*

## Gallery

































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