

George Brough's 1925 SS 100 Alpine Grand Sport to cross the block

Frame number 801A. Engine number KTOR 37658.

New York fine arts auction house to sell landmark Brough Superior motorcycle

November 29, 2010—For immediate release

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George Brough's prototype Brough Superior SS 100 Alpine Grand Sport is to be sold by New York fine arts auction house Phillips de Pury & Company on December 15th, 2010.

From the collection of Michael FitzSimons, this iconic Alpine Grand Sport is estimated to bring between \$600,000-\$700,000, which would be a world record for a motorcycle at auction.

Brough won the 8-day 1925 Austrian Speed Trials on this very machine, which was prepared by Chief Engineer Harold "Oily" Karlake specifically for high-speed competition in the Austrian Alps. Brough's Alpine Grand Sport was built with large Rexine panniers for overnight gear, two tool bags below them, and tuned for competition at altitude. It features a Bonnkksen time and trip speedometer, and is longer and lower than the standard SS 100.



George Brough achieving fastest time at 'Flying Kilometer' speed trial in Austrian Alps

This bike is extensively documented. Provenance includes a letter from Karlake; Brough's International Travelling Pass issued for the Austrian Trials by the Royal Automobile Club, London, June 8, 1925; and a letter of certification from Mike Leatherdale, Machine Registrar, Brough Superior Club, UK. There are also multiple period photographs of George Brough on the bike, including at speed in the Austrian trials. His success led to the Austrian market becoming the second largest for Brough Superior from 1924 until production ceased in 1940.

Brough kept this Alpine Grand Sport as his own bike for a year. He won the London-to-Edinburgh Trial in May 1925, then lent it to J.P "Neon" Castley who won the London-to-Exeter Trial in December. Brough won the Victory Cup Trial himself on the same bike in March 1926, then sold it to Prince R. Chagla in India. A further owner was Major S. Balakrishnan, also in India. Michael FitzSimons has owned this Alpine Grand Sport for 25 years.



George Brough's 1925 Alpine Grand Sport in 2010

Brough Superiors were described by contemporary journalist H.D. Teague as "The Rolls Royce of motorcycles," but a better comparison might have been W.O. Bentley's thundering Le Mans-winning race cars. Not only is the polished "bulbous nose" gas tank and flyscreen as recognizable as the huge grille of a "blower" Bentley but the 1,000cc V-twin Brough Superior SS 100 was guaranteed to do 100 mph – and that in 1925.

For all its performance, one of the biggest reasons the SS 100 is essential to the serious collector is its most ardent contemporary enthusiast and spokesman, none other than T.E. Lawrence, better known as "Lawrence of Arabia" after his World War I exploits.

Perhaps the most romantic British figure of the 20th century, Lawrence owned seven Brough Superiors, calling them all "Boanerges" (Sons of Thunder) and estimated he had ridden 300,000 miles. Lawrence was awaiting delivery of his eighth Brough Superior – an SS 100 Alpine Grand Sport – when he was killed in a crash in 1935.



George Brough and his AGS, 1925

Lawrence often wrote about motorcycles to such figures as George Bernard Shaw, corresponded regularly with George Brough about his bike's performance, and once outran a Bristol Fighter across Salisbury Plain at over 120 mph. At the time, there was no more daring and dynamic image than Lawrence grinning behind the signature Brough Superior flyscreen, astride the nickel-plated gas tank in gauntlets and an officer's cap. The magic has diminished very little in the intervening 75 years.

Along with George Brough's SS 100, Phillips de Pury & Company's "Design Masters" will feature 56 other important works by pioneering 20th- and 21st-century designers including Carlo Bugatti, Archibald Knox, Emile-Jacques Ruhlmann, Jacques Le Chevallier, Le Corbusier, Charlotte Perriand, Serge Mouille, Philippe Starck, the Campana Brothers, Zaha Hadid, and Marc Newson, among others.

Design Masters will be held December 15th at 2 pm and 6 pm, with the Brough in the latter section of the sale. The venue is at 450 Park Avenue; consignments will be on view there December 9th–14th from 10 am to 6 pm each day. Phillips de Pury & Company's new uptown gallery, was inaugurated November 8 with the company's most successful ever auction of contemporary art, which included Philippe Segalot's Carte Blanche sale, and totaled \$137,028,000.

At present the world record for a motorcycle sale at auction is held by a 1915 Cyclone board track racer, which sold at MidAmerica's Monterey, CA, Auction in 2008 for \$551,000. However, blue chip collectible prices in both the art and automobile world have shown no sign of softening, even in the uncertain current economic climate. Records have fallen regularly in the past year; earlier this November a Chinese vase was sold by Bainbridge in London for a staggering \$83 million. Perhaps the world of fine art is broadening to include industrial art as well.



Above and below: George Brough's AGS in 2010

