

Badge of a Participant of the All-Union Automobile and Motorcycle Rally of 1925.

Sterling silver, enamels. Measures 39.0 mm in height (from the handle of the sickle to the top of the banner); 30.2 mm in width; weighs 8.0 g without screw plate, 10.1 g with the screw plate. The artwork features a sports car and the early Soviet State emblem showing seven ribbons representing the current number of republics in the Soviet Union. The inscription on the red banner is "All-Union Auto Motor Rally". The reverse shows sterling silver hallmark "88" with Kokoshnik and Greek character Delta designating and Cyrillic BXTM ("VKhTM") maker mark. Exquisitely well-made piece, quality wise fully in tradition of Russian pre-revolutionary workmanship.

The badge is in very fine to excellent condition, extremely rare for any Soviet award of its vintage. The red enamel on the banner shows beautiful luster and appears practically perfect to the unaided eye. There is a tiny chip in the upper left corner, a few minuscule contact marks elsewhere, and very light amount of rubbing, but all of this is essentially unnoticeable without magnification. The red enameled stripes on the USSR national emblem also appear intact to the naked eye, although they have a few microscopic chips and flakes visible under a 10x loupe.

The details of the artwork are exceptionally well preserved and crisp, essentially pristine. There is very attractive even patina to silver on both sides. The screw post is full length, over 11 mm, and includes original silver wing nut showing a "VKhTM" maker mark and "Kokoshnik" assay inspection hallmark. To summarize, this badge is a truly spectacular piece deserving a very special place in the advanced collection of early Soviet awards.

The badge was issued exclusively to the participants of the Automobile and Motorcycle Rally of 1925. The race was the second such event in the Soviet Union and the first held on a grand scale, with hundreds of participating cars, trucks and motorcycles from a number of countries including Germany and USA. The full route of the race went south from Leningrad to Moscow, continued through southern Russian provinces and on via the mountains of the Caucasus to Tiflis (Tbilisi), and then went all the way back to Leningrad (the trucks and motorcycles had a much shorter route and easier terrain to traverse). The event was touted in Soviet press as the biggest in the world to date both in terms of the length of its route and number of participants.

The purpose of the race was first and foremost propaganda. It boosted enthusiasm in motor vehicles among Soviet youth and must have awestruck the spectators in the backward rural areas along the route (some of whom probably had not seen an automobile before). Among other things, the race was to demonstrate to the world satisfactory quality of Soviet roads and smooth functioning of Soviet administration. Indeed, government-supplied trucks with fuel, lubricants and extra tires accompanied the participating vehicles all the way; while local authorities apparently did adequate job in providing the drivers and their support teams with shelter, victuals and everything else they needed. Yet another important purpose of the All-Union Rally of 1925 was to encourage competition among foreign car makers attracted to the emerging lucrative Soviet market in the wake of the Russian Civil War.

There were some accidents: press reported for example that Mercedes cars blew their tires on a number of occasions (this was attributed to poor quality of German rubber rather than bad Russian roads), two peasant women were badly hurt after carelessly getting on the road ahead of the speeding vehicles, and some cars inevitably ended up in a ditch due to mud created by many sudden downpours. Nevertheless, the race was deemed a great success overall. The German team driving a Mercedes was declared a winner in the passenger car category, while the team of one of the only Russian-made vehicles - an AMO-F-15 copied from an Italian FIAT 15 Ter - took the prize in the truck race.

As a side note, the 1925 rally apparently served as an inspiration for an episode described in the satirical novel *The Little Golden Calf* by Ilf and Petrov. On the occasion, a team of swindlers jumps onto the route of the race in their decrepit old car; for the next couple of days, they manage to stay ahead of the legitimate participants milking local authorities for money and food, and basking in the spotlight. The 1931 novel remains immensely popular in Russia to this day, and the mentioning of the slogan "Let's Strike with an Automotive Rally Upon the Lack of Roads and Sloppiness" will certainly bring a smile to the face of anyone who read it or saw one of its film adaptations.

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