ROLLS-ROYCE | MEDIA INFORMATION

MODELS OF THE MARQUE – THE 1920s:

ROLLS-ROYCE 20 H.P. THE ‘TWENTY’

Wednesday 3 July, Goodwood, West Sussex

* A brief history of the Rolls-Royce 20 H.P. – known as the ‘Twenty’ – launched in 1922
* A transformative motor car for the marque, it was the first Rolls-Royce ever designed expressly to be owner-driven rather than chauffeured
* Third in a series celebrating landmark models from each decade of the marque’s history, from its foundational years in the 1900s to the contemporary Goodwood era
* Year-long retrospective marks the 120th anniversary of the first meeting between Henry Royce and The Hon. Charles Stewart Rolls in 1904

*“The legendary 20 H.P., known simply as the ‘Twenty’, was launched on 6 October 1922. Designed by Henry Royce, it ranks among the most important and transformational models ever produced by the marque. Its technology was highly advanced for the time and set the mechanical template for generations of Rolls-Royce motor cars that followed it. Smaller, lighter and less complex than its predecessors, it was also the first Rolls-Royce specifically intended for owners to drive themselves, rather than chauffeured use, reflecting the changed world in which Rolls-Royce found itself operating after 1918. More than a century later, its influence can still be seen in contemporary automotive engineering and design, including the models we build at Goodwood today – a remarkable motor car with an extraordinary legacy.”*

**Andrew Ball, Head of Corporate Relations and Heritage, Rolls-Royce Motor Cars**

A CHANGED WORLD

Even before the Armistice was signed in 1918, Henry Royce was preparing for what he knew would be a very different post-war world. He reasoned that, given the likely difficulty of recruiting, retaining or affording a mechanic or chauffeur as they had done previously, some customers would no longer be able or willing to run the marque’s most popular pre-1914 model, the 40/50 H.P. ‘Silver Ghost’. He needed to create a motor car that was simpler to maintain – and, even more importantly, that the owner could more easily drive themselves. At the same time, Royce knew these discerning clients would expect and accept nothing less than the Rolls-Royce standards of excellence they were accustomed to – and neither would he.

THE ‘TWENTY’

On 6 October 1922, Rolls-Royce unveiled its new ‘small horsepower’ motor car, the 20 H.P., the first Rolls-Royce ever designed expressly to be owner-driven rather than chauffeured. It was immediately obvious that the ‘Twenty’, as it quickly became known, represented a huge technical leap forward. Its straight-six cylinder, 3.1-litre engine was less than half the size of the Silver Ghost’s 7.5-litre unit: however, the new model also weighed around 30% less. This meant the performance gap between them was far less than the raw numbers might suggest. Indeed, with its light controls and more advanced steering, braking and suspension systems, the ‘Twenty’ made the Silver Ghost seem rather outdated, although the larger model remained significantly ahead of its direct competitors.

The ‘Twenty’ quickly became a firm favourite both with established Rolls-Royce owners and those new customers for whom, as Royce had predicted, purchase price and ongoing running costs were more important considerations than they had been a few years earlier.

In letters to the motoring press, one happy owner praised it as ‘a charming piece of mechanism’ while another declared, ‘I have never handled anything as sweet-running’. A company advertisement quoted an expert assessment of the car as ‘everything a motorist can want… motoring with a high degree of refinement and its simplicity of construction will delight the driver’. After taking delivery of his car, a contented customer wrote to the company from his home in France declaring: ‘I drove my 20 H.P. here from Liverpool and am very satisfied with the running of the engine, not having to change gear between Liverpool and Versailles’.

WEIGHTY ISSUES

Like all Rolls-Royce models of the era, the ‘Twenty’ was produced as a ‘rolling chassis’, on which owners commissioned bespoke bodywork from an independent coachbuilder. Royce had always intended that it should primarily be an owner-driver car and hoped coachbuilders and customers alike would embrace this by keeping their creations as svelte and lightweight as possible.

However, he was unable to change the habits of a lifetime among some customers. Many owners persisted in specifying their preferred style of solid, formal coachwork that was both heavier and produced greater wind resistance. To Royce’s understandable irritation, these massive, overbuilt bodies inevitably compromised performance.

Ever the pragmatist, Royce knew there was only one way to improve the weight-to-performance ratio. In 1929, the ‘Twenty’ was replaced by the 20/25 H.P., powered by an enlarged capacity engine, followed in 1935 by the 25/30 H.P. with a 4.25-litre powerplant. The ‘small horsepower’ era finally came to an end with the Wraith of 1938. These later iterations, all direct developments of the ‘Twenty’, add further lustre to its record and reputation.

A LASTING INFLUENCE

The ‘Twenty’ had a profound influence on Rolls-Royce long after production ceased in 1929, by which time no fewer than 2,940 examples had been built. In particular, the straight six-cylinder engine – with detachable cylinder head and overhead valves – would provide the template for Rolls-Royce engines for years to come. Open the bonnet of any six-cylinder Rolls-Royce right up to the Silver Cloud model (1955-9) and their shared heritage is clear to see, albeit with many internal improvements. And when the by-then venerable Silver Ghost was replaced with the new Phantom in 1925, its engine also adopted the essential ‘Twenty’ pattern.

- ENDS -

FURTHER INFORMATION

You can find all our press releases and press kits, as well as a wide selection of high resolution, downloadable photographs and video footage at our media website, [PressClub](https://www.press.rolls-roycemotorcars.com/rolls-royce-motor-cars-pressclub).

You can also follow marque on social media: [LinkedIn](https://www.linkedin.com/company/rolls-royce-motor-cars/); [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/user/RollsRoyceMotorCars); [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/rollsroycecars/); and [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/rollsroycemotorcars).

EDITORS’ NOTES

Rolls-Royce Motor Cars is a true luxury house, creating the world’s most recognised, revered and desirable handcrafted Bespoke products for its international clientele.

There are over 2,500 people working at the Home of Rolls-Royce at Goodwood, West Sussex. This comprises both its global headquarters and Centre of Luxury Manufacturing Excellence – the only place in the world where Rolls-Royce motor cars are designed, engineered and meticulously built by hand. Its continuous investment in its facilities, products and people has resulted in a series of ‘record years’ for global sales, peaking in 2023 with over 6,000 motor cars sold worldwide. An [independent study](https://www.press.rolls-roycemotorcars.com/rolls-royce-motor-cars-pressclub/article/detail/T0414618EN/%C2%A34bn-for-uk-plc%E2%80%99:-rolls-royce-motor-cars-%E2%80%93-the-great-british-success-story) by the London School of Economics & Political Science confirms that since the company first launched at Goodwood in 2003, it has contributed more than £4 billion to the UK economy and adds more than £500 million in economic value every year.

Rolls-Royce Motor Cars is a wholly owned subsidiary of the BMW Group and is a completely separate, unrelated company from Rolls-Royce plc, the manufacturer of aircraft engines and propulsion systems.

120TH ANNIVERSARY

In 2024, Rolls-Royce marks the 120th anniversary of the first meeting between its founders, Henry (later Sir Henry) Royce and The Hon. Charles Stewart Rolls on 4 May 1904. The meeting, at The Midland Hotel in Manchester, was arranged by a mutual friend, Henry Edmunds. Rolls agreed to sell all the cars Royce could make and the rest is, literally, history. Together, Royce and Rolls created what was soon dubbed ‘the best car in the world’ and gave their names to a dynasty of motor cars that continues to define superluxury motoring across the world.

The Rolls-Royce ‘Makers of the Marque’ series:

* Henry Edmunds, born 19 March 1853
* Sir Henry Royce, born 27 March 1863
* Eleanor Thornton, born 15 April 1880
* Ernest Hives, born 21 April 1886
* Lord John Walter Edward Douglas-Scott-Montagu, born 10 June 1866
* The Hon. Charles Rolls, born 27 August 1877
* Claude Johnson, born 24 October 1864
* Charles Sykes, born 18 December 1875
* Eric Platford, born 25 February 1883

The Rolls-Royce ‘Models of the Marque’ series:

* 1900s: Royce 10 H.P. / Rolls-Royce 10 H.P.
* 1910s: Rolls-Royce 40/50 H.P. ‘Silver Ghost’
* 1920s: Rolls-Royce 20 H.P. the ‘Twenty’

Watch this space for more…

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