ROLLS-ROYCE | MEDIA INFORMATION

MODELS OF THE MARQUE – THE 1960s:

THE ROLLS-ROYCE SILVER SHADOW

Wednesday 6 November, Goodwood, West Sussex

* A brief history of the Rolls-Royce Silver Shadow, launched in 1965
* At launch, the most technically advanced motor car in the world
* First Rolls-Royce to be offered only as a complete motor car, representing a decisive shift to monocoque construction
* Today, Silver Shadows can still be seen wafting along Rodeo Drive, Champs-Élysées, Sheikh Zayed Road, New Bond Street and other prestigious haunts in the world’s great cities
* Seventh in a series celebrating landmark models from the marque’s history
* Part of a year-long retrospective in honour of the 120th anniversary of the first meeting between Henry Royce and The Hon. Charles Stewart Rolls in 1904

*“Silver Shadow is a pivotal model in the Rolls-Royce story. It marked a decisive shift away from traditional rolling chassis and coachbuilding to monocoque construction, and was the first Rolls-Royce to be offered only as a complete motor car. At the time of its launch in 1965, Silver Shadow was the most technically advanced motor car in the world, and its underlying design was enormously influential on Rolls-Royce models that followed it. Created by the legendary John Blatchley, it was originally intended to have a 10-year lifespan: in the end, it underpinned models including Silver Spirit and Corniche right up until the late 1990s. Sixty years on, it has become a true modern classic, fondly remembered by those who knew it at the time, and increasingly popular with a new generation of Rolls-Royce enthusiasts, owners and collectors.”*

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

In February 1954, senior engineers at Rolls-Royce were already thinking about the replacement for Silver Cloud – even though Silver Cloud itself was still being finalised and would not actually be launched until the following year.

The reason was simple; times were changing, and the company could foresee that, in the future, owners would want motor cars that were more compact overall, but not to the point of sacrificing interior space. This was extremely difficult to achieve using the traditional technique of mounting coachbuilt bodywork on a rolling chassis; the construction method used for every Rolls-Royce motor car since 1906. The engineers knew that the answer lay in monocoque construction, where the body and floorpan are integrated into a single ‘unibody’, with the suspension and other mechanical components carried on the front and rear subframes.

Work on the new design began in earnest in 1958, with two experimental models: one with a 126-inch (317.5cm) wheelbase, of which only three were built, and another 6.5 inches (16.51cm) shorter. They soon realised that the smaller version was the way forward and it entered full development under the codename ‘SY’. It was this shorter-wheelbase version that would become the new model, named Silver Shadow, which made its debut in 1965.

Silver Shadow’s broad concept and detailed design were the work of chief styling engineer John Blatchley, who had joined Rolls-Royce in 1940 from coachbuilder Gurney Nutting. His unenviable brief was to produce an up-to-the-minute design that could also remain in production for up to 10 years, to recoup the high tooling costs associated with monocoque construction.

His task was complicated further by the fact that Silver Shadow was, by some distance, the most technically advanced car in the world at that time. Indeed, it ranked alongside the Silver Ghost and Phantom III – and Ghost in the modern era – as the most radical advance in design in any single Rolls-Royce model.

Although the engine and its Hydramatic four-speed automatic gearbox were carried over from the preceding Silver Cloud III, practically everything else about Silver Shadow was new. The most obvious innovation was the three-box bodyshell which, despite being much smaller, offered increased interior passenger space, a larger fuel tank and greater luggage capacity than Silver Cloud.

Comfort, handling and quietness were also substantially enhanced. This was due to the monocoque body’s higher torsional rigidity, and the Vibrashock mountings that isolated the subframes from the bodyshell, reducing noise, vibration and harshness transmitted from the road surface. Other ‘firsts’ included four-wheel disc brakes, hydraulically operated, self-levelling independent rear suspension, and electrically operated gear-change selector and front-seat adjustment.

The designers understood that there would still be a market for a ‘sportier’ version of Silver Shadow. However, since they were not prepared to deviate from the monocoque form that gave the bodyshell its strength and structural integrity, they could not leave this to the few remaining independent coachbuilders. Their solution was to use their own in-house coachbuilders, Mulliner Park Ward Ltd, to assemble and finish bodyshells specially prepared by the suppliers, Pressed Steel Company Ltd. The resulting fixed-head two-door saloon and drophead coupé models were introduced to the public in 1966.

Further technical changes followed in 1968, when the four-speed Hydramatic gearbox was superseded by the three-speed GM400 with a torque convertor. At the same time, the suspension, which had proved admirably suited to American roads, was stiffened slightly to better reflect European conditions, in what owners everywhere judged a pleasingly excellent solution.

The Belgian author and motoring journalist Paul Frère (1917–2008), who also won the 24 Hours of Le Mans, described one memorable drive in a Silver Shadow. “I did the trip from Brussels to Monaco in one day. It felt strange speeding down the Autoroute at 110 mph with no noise coming from the engine or road, and the air conditioning keeping the temperature inside the car perfect. On reaching Monte Carlo, one impression of the Silver Shadow was dominant. I was fresh, relaxed and not in the least bit tired – a remarkable tribute to a car after having driven 700 miles.”

In 1969, Rolls-Royce began offering Silver Shadow in long-wheelbase form, with and without divisions, and mostly with a smaller rear window. These were created by Mulliner Park Ward, who simply cut the standard bodyshells in half and lengthened them by 4.5 inches (11.43cm) to increase rear passenger legroom.

1971 marked a key juncture for Rolls-Royce. Its motor car and aero engine activities were split into two separate entities, a distinction that remains to this day, with Rolls-Royce Motor Cars a wholly-owned subsidiary of BMW Group, and entirely unrelated to Rolls-Royce plc. In what were economically uncertain times, the automotive division made a bold move by announcing improved Mulliner Park Ward motor cars, still based on the original SY design, under the name Corniche. Their final iteration, Corniche Series IV, ceased production in 1995.

By 1977, Silver Shadow had evolved sufficiently to warrant its formal redesignation as Silver Shadow II. This was more of a ‘driver’s car’, with revised suspension settings, rack-and-pinion steering and a cleaner, more efficient exhaust system. All occupants benefitted from improved ergonomics and an advanced split-level air conditioning system, with controls housed in a completely new fascia. These Series II motor cars were easily identified by their large-section black polycarbonate bumpers required by regulators in the United States; outside the US, Silver Shadow II sported a full-width front spoiler – which Rolls-Royce termed an ‘anti-lift panel’ – for added straight-line stability at speed. As Series II cars, the long-wheelbase Mulliner Park Ward variants were designated Silver Wraith II.

Silver Shadow was finally replaced in 1980 by Silver Spirit – essentially the same SY floorpan and mechanics with restyled bodywork – which remained in production until 1997. The SY design had thus proved so enduringly successful, it served Rolls-Royce for more than three times the 10-year lifespan originally anticipated for it. While precise figures are impossible to come by, it is generally accepted that some 37,000 Silver Shadows and Corniches were built, making it the most successful design in the company’s history prior to the contemporary Goodwood era. Even today, nearly 60 years on, Silver Shadows can still be seen wafting along Rodeo Drive, Champs-Élysées, Sheikh Zayed Road, New Bond Street and other prestigious haunts in the world’s great cities.

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FURTHER INFORMATION

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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. 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’
* 1930s: Rolls-Royce Phantom III
* 1940s: Silver Dawn
* 1950s: Silver Cloud
* 1960s: Silver Shadow

Watch this space for more…

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