ROLLS-ROYCE | MEDIA INFORMATION

ROLLS-ROYCE PHANTOM:

100 YEARS OF PERFECTION

Tuesday 14 January 2025, Goodwood, West Sussex

* Rolls-Royce Motor Cars celebrates the 100th anniversary of Phantom in 2025
* The marque’s pinnacle product and its most famous nameplate*,* now in its eighth generation
* An unparalleled motoring experience, uncompromised by other considerations
* The ultimate blank canvas for exquisite Bespoke commissions

*“One hundred years ago, Rolls-Royce launched the first motor car to bear what would become the most evocative and enduring nameplate in its history: Phantom. Through eight generations, Phantom’s fundamental role as the pinnacle Rolls-Royce motor car has always been the same: to be the most magnificent, desirable and above all, effortless motor car in the world – the very best of the best. In many respects, the history of Phantom is the history of Rolls-Royce: always moving with the times and its clients’ needs and requirements, transcending fleeting trends and providing the setting for the most remarkable executions of craft and artistry, all while resolutely refusing to compromise its core engineering and design principles. We’re proud to continue this tradition of excellence, elegance and serenity into the next 100 years.”*

**Chris Brownridge, Chief Executive, Rolls-Royce Motor Cars**

In 2025, Rolls-Royce Motor Cars marks the centenary of the launch of the first Phantom. Throughout its long history, the Phantom nameplate has been reserved for the pinnacle model in the marque’s portfolio – the very apex of excellence.

Each iteration, up to and including the eighth generation currently being handcrafted at the Home of Rolls-Royce at Goodwood, has seen advances in design, engineering, materials and technology. Today, Phantom is the ultimate blank canvas for Bespoke commissions, where clients can bring their most elaborate, imaginative and personal visions to life. Inspiration for Bespoke commissions is everywhere, and Phantom’s scale, elegance, presence and adaptability enable it to be whatever its owner wishes it to be. Recent inspirations include haute couture (Phantom Syntopia), famous films (Phantom Goldfinger), Chinese culture (Phantom Extended ‘Year of the Dragon’) and the marque’s own Spirit of Ecstasy Mascot (Phantom Scintilla).

Phantom has always had the same fundamental aim: to provide the most magnificent, desirable and, above all, effortless motor car in the world – the very best of the best. At the start of Phantom’s anniversary year, Rolls-Royce reveals the fascinating story behind its pinnacle product, and how it earned – and maintained – that reputation through a century of constant, often profound change.

**A NEW BEGINNING**

Rolls-Royce first earned the accolade of ‘the best car in the world’ with the 40/50 H.P., universally known as the Silver Ghost, launched in 1906. The key to its legendary reputation was Henry Royce’s principle of constant improvement to its underlying engineering, which he conducted on an almost chassis-by-chassis basis.

By 1921, Royce realised the Silver Ghost’s design was reaching the point where no further developments would be possible without compromising either smoothness or reliability – both by now essential elements of the Rolls-Royce character and legend. He therefore began work on its replacement.

*“Rolls-Royce Ltd beg to announce that, after prolonged tests, they can now demonstrate and accept orders for a new 40/50 H.P. chassis. The 40/50 H.P. chassis hitherto manufactured by them will be sold as before… The original chassis of this type was the famous Silver Ghost, and to prevent confusion such chassis will be known as the Silver Ghost model, whereas the new chassis will be known as the New Phantom.”*

**Original Advertisement from The Times Newspaper, Saturday 2 May 1925**

Despite being couched in terms that today seem rather quaint and stilted, this advertisement made history. It was the first public acceptance by Rolls-Royce that the outgoing model would be called Silver Ghost officially, rather than as a byname. More significantly, it was the first recorded use of the Phantom name.

**THE GAME OF THE NAME**

Although there is no specific documentary evidence, it seems safe to assume that the Phantom name was coined by Rolls-Royce’s energetic and ever-inventive Commercial Managing Director, Claude Johnson. It was he who recognised that naming the company’s products could act as a sales device, and it was his fertile imagination that produced the inspired sobriquet ‘Silver Ghost’ for the otherwise prosaically titled 40/50 H.P. in 1907. That same year, he christened another 40/50 H.P. ‘Green Phantom’, before bestowing the rather more evocative ‘Silver Phantom’ on two examples in 1909.

Johnson clearly understood the power of names like Phantom, Wraith and Ghost to convey the products’ supernatural quietness and ethereal grace; [**all have graced Rolls-Royce motor cars in the modern era for precisely the same reason**](https://www.press.rolls-roycemotorcars.com/rolls-royce-motor-cars-pressclub/article/detail/T0404548EN/a-spirit-of-bold-innovation:-the-extraordinary-history-of-the-spectre-name?language=en). How different history would have been had one of his more fanciful efforts – The Dreadnought, The Cookie, Yellow Bird, The Elusive Pimpernel – been adopted instead.

**THE BASIS FOR GREATNESS**

*The Times* advertisement also assured readers the New Phantom would retain the “sweet running qualities always associated with Rolls-Royce products”. At this time, Rolls-Royce supplied only rolling chassis, with the form, styling and appointment of the motor car itself in the hands of independent coachbuilders, who created bespoke bodywork to the owner’s specification. Rolls-Royce offered the New Phantom in long-wheelbase form, suitable for formal saloon and limousine designs, and with a shorter wheelbase ideal for owner-driver motor cars with closed, open and ‘sportier’ coachwork.

Then as now, Phantom’s generous proportions enabled owners to specify almost any detail or indulgence they wished. Some clients asked for concealable writing desks or swivelling occasional seats in their long-wheelbase limousines, while owner-drivers are known to have requested safes, dedicated spaces to stow golf clubs and even, in one famous instance, a secret compartment in which to carry diamonds.

On 8 May 1925, *The Autocar* magazine published its review of the new model. “Few are the firms engaged in the manufacture of motor cars who enjoy quite such a reputation as Rolls-Royce Ltd,” it enthused. “Almost the conjoined names have become the household word for luxury, and every novelist worthy of the name imparts a distinguished air to any character by crediting him or her with the possession of one of the firm’s cars.” With Phantom, Rolls-Royce had clearly succeeded in not only maintaining, but furthering the qualities established and made famous by the Silver Ghost.

**ONWARDS AND UPWARDS**

Though undoubtedly gratifying, such encomiums did not distract Henry Royce. The design of the original New Phantom had closely followed that of its predecessor, Silver Ghost – so closely, in fact, that some modern enthusiasts refer to it as a ‘Super Ghost’. Over the next four years, Royce continued to refine his design until, in 1929, *The Times* carried a fresh advertisement announcing the arrival of Phantom II. The advertisement listed all the engineering improvements and upgraded components that justified its designation as an entirely new model.

**VIVE LA DIFFÉRENCE**

Somewhat ironically, the only person who remained unimpressed was Royce himself, who insisted that even the short-wheelbase Phantom II was irritatingly oversized for his personal use. He therefore instructed his design team to develop a more compact, sporting Phantom II variant which he could enjoy driving across France to his winter home at Le Canadel on the Côte d’Azur.

The designers dutifully produced a close-coupled car, 26EX – ‘EX’ standing for ‘Experimental’ – on an adapted short Phantom II chassis. Records show that neither the Rolls-Royce sales department nor the factory were keen on the concept; indeed, had it not been intended as Royce’s personal transport, it might not have been built at all.

As it transpired, a highly successful continental sales tour demonstrated there was, in fact, great demand for a car capable of high-speed touring over long distances on the smooth, straight roads of Europe. Rolls-Royce successfully met this demand with the now highly prized Phantom II Continental – perhaps the only pre-Goodwood Phantom variant in which weight, wind resistance and other performance-related factors were afforded equal consideration with out-and-out passenger comfort.

**A NEW POWER RISING**

By the time of Royce’s death in 1933, the company was already only too aware that luxury car customers were seeking models that offered more power without sacrificing comfort or excellence. American competitors including Cadillac, Lincoln and Packard were responding with straight-8, V12 and even V16-cylinder engines, which were rapidly eclipsing the large-horsepower, in-line six-cylinder units that had served Rolls-Royce so well for so long.

Given this commercial pressure and the company’s proven experience in designing and building aero-engines, it was inevitable that the next Phantom would have a V12 engine. In accordance with tradition, Phantom III’s arrival in 1936 was announced in *The Times*, which informed the public that “many outstanding features distinguish this car from its famous predecessor the Phantom II”.

Chief among these was the new engine, with 12 cylinders “giving greater engine smoothness, flexibility, silence and acceleration” – all key requirements for Rolls-Royce’s fabled effortless progress. The new V12 engine was also more compact than the old straight-6, allowing a shorter bonnet and larger passenger compartment. Most importantly, however, it delivered the increased power customers demanded – 165 H.P. against the 120 H.P. of Phantom II, rising to 180 H.P. in later cars.

Comfort was further improved with independent front wheel suspension. “This is particularly noticeable in the back seats under all road conditions and is further enhanced by remarkable road holding qualities and stability on corners even at high speeds”, the advertisement noted, while Phantom III’s new chassis frame allowed for wider, more comfortable back seats.

And it wasn’t just passengers who benefited. As the advertisement pointed out, Phantom III made life more relaxing for owner-drivers and chauffeurs, too, explaining: “A modification in the position of the change-speed [gear lever] and brake levers gives easy entrance to the driver’s seat from the offside… the steering is lighter in operation, has a larger steering lock and the car is more easily manoeuvred by reason of the shorter wheelbase.”

Phantom III was suited to all manner of coachwork styles, and both owner-driver and chauffeured use. And while it was never able to beat its American rivals on price, such was Rolls-Royce’s reputation that it remained the only choice for those who wanted to experience the greatest possible comfort and be seen to be driving the very best.

**A CHANGING WORLD**

The Phantom name had graced the very best of the best cars in the world for some 14 years when war broke out in 1939. Rolls-Royce ceased all motor car production, and when peace returned in 1945, the company found itself in an entirely different world – but one it had anticipated and prepared for.

Rolls-Royce had correctly foreseen that under post-war austerity, it would need to make its motor cars less complex, easier to service, much less expensive to produce and able to use common parts. At the same time, it was adamant that there would be no reduction in quality.

Its solution was the Rationalised Range, which debuted in 1946 with Silver Wraith. Its new straight-6-cylinder engine was a backward step from the V12 engine of Phantom III, but relevant in straitened times. There seemed to be no place in the modern world for Phantom.

**A ROYAL INTERVENTION**

The Phantom story might well have ended there, but for two serendipitous events.

As part of the ongoing development process for the Rationalised Range, engineers produced four experimental EX cars on a 229.5-inch chassis with a straight-8 engine. One of these, fitted with a Park Ward & Co. limousine body, was officially named *Silver Phantom* (and unofficially known as *Big Bertha*). A smaller, lighter saloon version, known as the *Scalded Cat*, followed.

At the same time, the Royal Household was seeking to replace its ageing fleet of Daimlers – the marque it had favoured since the motor car was invented – but was unhappy with the range then on offer.

In 1950, Rolls-Royce was asked to supply a formal limousine for Royal duties. The company had long been keen to usurp Daimler in the Royal Mews, and gladly produced a ‘one-off’ straight-8 long-chassis limousine with coachwork by H. J. Mulliner. During manufacture, the car was given the codename *Maharajah*, and remains in active service at the Royal Mews under that name to this day.

When requests for similar motor cars followed from other Royalty and Heads of State, Rolls-Royce was happy to oblige. The company decided it would be fitting that for such prestigious cars to resurrect the Phantom name. Over the next seven years, the marque produced just 18 examples of Phantom IV, including a second motor car for the Royal Mews, a landaulette named *Jubilee,* delivered in 1954.

**THE LAST HURRAH**

The pinnacle Rolls-Royce experience became somewhat more widely available once again in 1959 with the launch of Phantom V – a splendid limousine fitted with coachwork by both the marque’s in-house coachbuilder, Park Ward & Co., and other independent companies, including James Young Ltd and H. J. Mulliner & Co. (Rolls-Royce would go on to acquire the latter, merging it with their own coachbuilder to form Mulliner Park Ward). Two motor cars, known as *Canberra I* and *Canberra II*, were built for Royal service, featuring transparent Perspex cupolas over the rear compartments and concealed lighting to better view the occupants on formal occasions.

After 13 years and 832 examples, Phantom V had received enough technical upgrades to be designated as Phantom VI. As with all its forebears, this new iteration prioritised comfort, with separate air conditioning systems for the front and rear compartments. Most of the 374 examples were limousines with coachwork by in-house Mulliner Park Ward Ltd., or James Young Ltd.: the last Phantom VI, a landaulette, was delivered to the Sultan of Brunei in 1993.

Phantom VI was the final body-on-chassis model Rolls-Royce ever produced, and its discontinuation effectively ended the tradition of coachbuilding until it was revived at Goodwood in 2017 with ‘Sweptail’.

**PHANTOM REBORN**

When the marque was relaunched at the new Home of Rolls-Royce at Goodwood, a ‘Phantom-type’ model quickly emerged as the natural and obvious choice for its inaugural motor car. The design concept, for which legendary Rolls-Royce designer John Blatchley was consulted and of which he approved, included signature elements inherited from previous generations. These included a long wheelbase with the front wheels well to the fore and a minimal front overhang of the bodywork, a long bonnet comprised of a massive expanse of metal along the side, and a rising sweep of the door edge towards the front windscreen pillars.

Rolls-Royce Motor Cars’ first Design Director of the Goodwood era, Ian Cameron, formed a specific team to create the interior design for the much-anticipated new model. Their remit was to express the ambience of past Phantoms and the traditional high-quality materials of coachbuilding – leather, wood, deep-pile carpeting – in a totally up-to-date way.

At one minute past midnight, on 1 January 2003, the first Phantom VII was handed over to its new owner. Unlike every Phantom that had gone before, it was built entirely in-house by Rolls-Royce Motor Cars, with spaceframe bodywork to a single design rather than coachbuilt. In one important sense, however, it retained a link with its heritage, in that every motor car was hand-built by a team of skilled craftspeople. Furthermore, the marque’s Bespoke programme meant Phantom was effectively a blank canvas on which patrons could realise their own visions and desires.

**THE EVOLUTION CONTINUES**

Over its 13-year lifespan, Phantom VII cemented Rolls-Royce as the world’s pre-eminent super luxury motor manufacturer, and its own place as the marque’s pinnacle product. But just like their predecessors, Rolls-Royce’s designers and engineers understood that perfection is a moving target: that Phantom was never ‘finished’.

In 2017, Rolls-Royce presented Phantom VIII. This was the first Rolls-Royce to be built on the Architecture of Luxury, an advance on the all-aluminium spaceframe used on Phantom VII, and designed to underpin every future motor car produced at Goodwood.

Phantom VIII was specifically designed to be the ultimate canvas for Bespoke commissions. With this in mind, it is the only Rolls-Royce model to feature the Gallery – an uninterrupted swathe of glass that runs the full width of the fascia, behind which the client can display a commissioned work of art or design.

This singular focus has made Phantom the subject of some of the most technically ambitious and challenging Bespoke projects ever undertaken by the marque’s designers, engineers and specialist craftspeople. Commissions such as Phantom Syntopia, Phantom Oribe, Phantom Koa and Phantom ‘Inspired by Cinque Terre’ all incorporate features, materials and engineering innovations never seen before in a Rolls-Royce or any other motor car. Each is a unique, one-of-one creation that will never be repeated, echoing the very first Phantoms that were individually hand-built for their commissioning owners.

**THE ESSENCE OF PHANTOM**

For 100 years, the Phantom name has occupied a unique position in the Rolls-Royce product family and story. While the standards of quality, engineering and design are consistent across all Rolls-Royce motor cars, Phantom has always been the grandest, most impressive and, above all, most effortless motor car being built in series production by the marque at any given moment.

Through all its eight generations, Phantom has never been compromised by existing engineering orthodoxy, fleeting trends or development costs. From Henry Royce’s original New Phantom to today’s Phantom VIII, the essential purpose behind Phantom has always remained the same: to build the motor car that offers owner-drivers and passengers alike the most comfortable, satisfying experience available in the world at that moment in time – the unassailable pinnacle of luxury and motoring excellence.

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TECHNICAL INFORMATION

* Phantom Series II: NEDC combined: CO2 emissions: 345 g/km; Fuel consumption: 18.7 mpg / 15.1 l/100km. WLTP combined: CO2 emissions: 351-362 g/km; Fuel consumption: 17.7-18.2 mpg / 15.5-16.0 l/100km.
* Phantom Extended Series II: NEDC combined: CO2 emissions: 345 g/km; Fuel consumption: 18.7 mpg / 15.1 l/100km. WLTP combined: CO2 emissions: 353-365 g/km; Fuel consumption: 17.4-18.1 mpg / 15.6-16.2 l/100km.

Further information: [**https://bit.ly/3XtQW7q**](https://bit.ly/3XtQW7q)

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 the 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.

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