ROLLS-ROYCE | MEDIA INFORMATION

ROLLS-ROYCE ‘MAKERS OF THE MARQUE’:

ERIC PLATFORD

(25 February 1883 - 20 November 1938)

Thursday 27 February 2025, Goodwood, West Sussex

* A brief overview of the life and career of Eric Platford, born 25 February 1883
* Played a fundamental role in testing and developing early Rolls-Royce models
* Racing success strengthened Rolls-Royce’s status as ‘the best car in the world’
* Aero-engine expertise made him a key figure in the first successful transatlantic flight
* Greatly respected by Royce, and the first holder of the official title of Chief Tester

*“Having played a role which was central and fundamental to the marque’s early successes, Eric Platford earned the right to be recognised amongst his better known contemporaries, including Claude Johnson and Ernest Hives. Indeed, through his painstaking testing work and landmark successes in long-distance trials and Grand Prix motor-racing, no one outside the company’s senior ranks did more to secure its reputation as ‘the best car in the world’. Eric Platford was also instrumental in achieving the first transatlantic flight, powered by Rolls-Royce engines. These achievements, along with countless others, cemented his position as a crucial figure in the Rolls-Royce foundation story.”*

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

Eric Platford was born in Manchester on 25 February 1883, one of four brothers. Although his father died just over a year later, Eric enjoyed a full education, leaving school at 17 to take up an apprenticeship with the General Electric Company. This proved to be short-lived, and in 1900 he moved to a similar electrical products firm nearby – Royce Limited. He would spend the rest of his working life with his new employer.

In 1903, Henry Royce started building his first cars and entrusted Platford with testing the engines. He also taught his protégé to drive so he could road-test the chassis; a role he would make his own, and in which he contributed enormously to the development of many early Rolls-Royce models.

The skills that made him such an effective test driver also made Platford a natural choice for the company’s racing exploits. His competitive involvement began as a riding mechanic for Charles Rolls in the 1905 Isle of Man Tourist Trophy race, which they would go on to win in 1906.

In June that year, Platford prepared the 6-cylinder 30 H.P. car that carried the company’s effervescent commercial managing director, Claude Johnson, to victory in the Scottish Motor Trials. The following May, Platford readied the ‘Silver Ghost’ for its dominant performances in the 2,000 Mile Trial, and the Scottish Reliability Trial a month later.

Immediately after these triumphs, Claude Johnson – known to all simply as ‘CJ’ – organised a publicity stunt of his own, in which he and Platford drove the Silver Ghost on a record-breaking run of 15,000 miles non-stop. Platford’s status as Rolls-Royce’s preeminent car preparer, tester and driver was now unassailable, and he was rewarded in 1908 with an official promotion to the newly created role of Chief Tester. For the next four years, he would also oversee the company’s experimental department. In 1912, another of the company’s rising stars, Ernest Hives, took over that role, so Platford could devote himself fully to his true vocations, test-driving and racing.

It was a timely appointment. The 1912 Alpine Trial had seen a rare – and to CJ’s mind, unconscionable – defeat for Rolls-Royce. Platford was duly dispatched to Austria to assess the conditions and recommend improvements to the motor car, to ensure there would be no repeat of this humiliation. On his recommendation, the 1913 team, consisting of four Silver Ghosts, was equipped with a new four-speed gearbox and modified fuel and cooling systems. As well as driving one of them, Platford oversaw the cars’ preparations throughout the event. They went on to claim the top four places in Europe’s most gruelling motoring challenge.

This success came just a week after Platford himself had driven one of Rolls-Royce’s two entrants in the inaugural Spanish Grand Prix. Entering the closing stages, Platford had built a commanding lead and looked certain to win. However, in an early example of the ‘team orders’ still seen in motor-racing, he was instructed to allow his team-mate – and newly appointed Rolls-Royce agent for Spain – Don Carlos de Salamanca, to pass him. Platford obeyed and Don Carlos took the chequered flag in his home race; but another car slipped between them as Platford slowed, dropping him to third place.

These exploits, together with his unstinting loyalty and selflessness, earned Platford the respect of the entire company – and a gold pocket watch from his grateful employers.

During the First World War, Platford took charge of testing Rolls-Royce’s V12 Eagle aero engines. This experience would lead him to perhaps his most enduring personal triumph. In 1919, four teams were preparing to make the first flights across the Atlantic, all of them using Royce’s engines. It would be the ultimate test of his design, so Royce personally sent Platford to the starting point in St. John’s, Newfoundland & Labrador, to supervise the fitting of two Eagle engines to the Vickers Vimy piloted by Captain John Alcock DSO accompanied by navigator Lieutenant Arthur Whitten Brown.

At around 1:45pm on 14 June, Alcock and Brown took off and headed east. After a journey fraught with difficulties, including atrocious weather and the loss of their radio, intercom and heating, they made landfall in County Galway, Ireland, at 8:40am the following day. They were hailed as heroes, and Rolls-Royce engines were thereafter also known as ‘the best in the world’.

On board the aircraft was a letter to Claude Johnson from Platford about his work with the engines. It would be the first transatlantic airmail letter ever delivered by the US Postal Service; it is still kept, together with its franked envelope, in the Sir Henry Royce Memorial Foundation archive. Platford would cross the Atlantic himself numerous times in the years that followed, to oversee testing procedures at the company’s manufacturing plant in Springfield, Massachusetts.

Throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s, Platford was in charge of testing and quality control for both car and aero-engine production at the main Rolls-Royce factory in Derby. As one of the company’s most esteemed and trusted members, he often conducted visiting dignitaries, including royalty from many nations, on tours of the premises.

The relationship between Royce and Platford extended beyond trust into genuine friendship. Although strictly adhering to the prevailing employer-employee protocols, Royce and Platford were nonetheless close friends; indeed, one can see Royce, senior by 20 years, fulfilling the role of the father Platford never knew, and Platford being the son Royce never had. Such was the bond that when Platford married Minnie Hawkins in 1908, Royce gave them the use of his own car for their honeymoon. In 1925, Royce presented Platford with a signed photograph taken at Elmstead, Royce’s home in Sussex; an extremely rare personal gesture of appreciation from an employer at that time.

Eric Platford died suddenly on 20 November 1938, shortly after concluding a meeting at the Air Ministry. He was just 55. His obituary in the Rolls-Royce company magazine *The Spanner* paid tribute to his innate good nature and fine technical skills, and the loyalty and respect he earned from all who worked with him.

Through his driving skills, testing and development expertise and era-defining racing accomplishments, Eric Platford contributed more than anyone outside the ranks of senior management to Rolls-Royce’s early success.

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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. 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 Stewart 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: Rolls-Royce Silver Dawn
* 1950s: Rolls-Royce Silver Cloud
* 1960s: Rolls-Royce Silver Shadow
* 1970s: Rolls-Royce Camargue
* 1980s: Rolls-Royce Phantom VI

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