



Whatever happened to *Rolls-Royce?*



Photos by J. Barry O'Rourke

By Robert Fendell

Park Avenue in New York is one of the nation's prestige streets. We saw a policeman putting a ticket on a Rolls-Royce Silver Shadow parked there. Nearby the Cadillac 75s and the Continental limousines were double parked unmolested. The policeman even bent down to check what kind of car the Rolls was.

This tells the story. No heads turn when one drives a Silver Shadow down Park Avenue as they used to for the majestic Silver Wraiths and Silver Clouds of yesteryear. In days gone by, only the bravest of the finest would question a special-bodied Phantom.

Another example. If any type keeps close tabs on the symbols of status, a movie starlet does. A little while back, to ballyhoo a film of his, a movie public relations genius suggested we interview a rising sex symbol in the back seat of a Rolls-Royce.

The car was specially equipped with champagne (in an ice box built into the rear of the front seat) automatic cur-

tains — and someone had thoughtfully disconnected the private telephone. Soft music wafted in as if the orchestra were next to the chauffeur behind the glass partition.

The actress, whose measurements are now very famous with GIs in Vietnam, was gathered up straight from her belly-dancing lesson. Leering and smiling, the driver closed the vault-like rear door of the Rolls on us; then the curtains slid silently closed and lights went on... but low. We were in a private world in the middle of New York traffic. Instant one a.m.

The actress snuggled back into the deep leather seat and surveyed the champagne and the surroundings. "Gee," she giggled. "This is some kind of a car. What is it, a Lincoln?"

This new anonymity is undeserved but then maybe that's the way Rolls-Royce wants it. Rolls-Royce is alive and well in Sewickly, Pennsylvania; Lubbock, Texas; Costa Mesa, California; and Hamden, Connecticut, as well as

traditional lairs like Palm Beach, New York and Reno. But there's a difference.

Remember Gene Barry on TV as the millionaire Los Angeles police captain who caught only wealthy murderers? If he ever showed up in a social suspect's driveway with an oriental chauffeur and a Rolls these days, he would stir more amusement than admiration. Chauffeurs are "out," unless they're tax deductible.

Besides, there are new "beautiful people" to Rolls — doctors, lawyers, movie financiers and dress manufacturers. This fact changes the entire concept of the car. How would it look to have one's chauffeur let one out in front of the public welfare clinic — even in the space reserved for doctors' parking?

Hence the understated Rolls, \$19,600 worth of English leather, English engineering and instant, but selective, anonymity which you yourself drive. It is a sign of the new times that, should the treasurer of a labor union pension

The advent of "beautiful people" has wrested the Rolls from the clutches of only the super-rich and has given it a ubiquity that represents a more aware world.

Class is still the proprietary requirement for a Rolls; it simply means that Class covers a greater scope of people, and penetrates into a greater scope of vocations than it did in the past. But now you "drive your own."



Rolls-Royce

fund produce the purchase price of a Silver Shadow, the salesman at Transco Rolls-Royce in North Carolina would welcome him.

This is only part of the concept. The gentlemen at Rolls-Royce offices in New York and London are working to do two things which seem at cross purposes. They want to retain selective anonymity yet they want to expand their market potential slightly, like putting two extra pounds of pressure in a tire.

There are only 2000 Rolls-Royces made annually. This includes Bentley, which is \$200 or so less expensive because you do not get that famous radiator grille with the flying female (The Spirit of Ecstasy, that is) mounted on top. This also includes coupes and convertibles ranging up to \$31,600, dealer preparation costs not included.

People who buy this car want to be noticed only by those who count to them. They drive up to one of the right places and the doorman lights up like a psychedelic neon sign as if it were an

honor just to be able to touch a Rolls.

Arrive at certain—not most—resorts in a Rolls and you have announced that you have gone beyond Eldorado to a plateau where money is only incidental. You could get financing to buy Palm Springs. Yet this same new car at other wildly expensive places isn't even going to impress the driveway sweeper.

This newest Rolls, the Silver Shadow, is only 204 inches long, chopped eighteen inches from its predecessor. It has an aluminum block 380.5 cubic inch V-8 with detachable wet cylinder liners. Two S.U. electric fuel pumps meter the gas through twin S.U. side-draft carburetors.

Silver Shadow comes with three brake systems, torque converter automatic transmission, and air conditioning system adjustable to give different temperatures at feet and face, self-leveling suspension and all sorts of power equipment.

It is the first Rolls ever to have a unitized body. Doors, trunk lid and

hood are aluminum alloy; the rest welded steel. It is also the first Rolls since 1904 to have such a small radiator grille—which is part of the understated personal Rolls-Royce theme.

Rolls-Royce, the corporation, makes piles of money selling jet airplane engines. That doesn't affect the price of the labor put into the Silver Shadow. Like two weeks to make sure the convertible top will always fit perfectly. Or incredible care in matching wood trim, even to recording the log number or controlling moisture content.

The car will do 0 to 60 in twelve seconds with ease and is surprisingly comfortable over the twistiest road. But that's not what Rolls is really selling.

Do you want to know why you should brace the Bank of America for a \$19,000 auto loan?

"Rolls-Royce is more than a car," said the man from the home office, "it is a work of art. We advertise with success in *Metropolitan Opera News* and *Art in America* because those people who ap-

preciate art can appreciate Rolls-Royce.

"There are people like this all over the country so we now have 44 dealers," the man said proudly. (Chevy has 6600). "They're often selling some other car but they're the finest dealers in their area."

Thus it is usually unnecessary to fly in a mechanic from England to fix a blown fuse in the middle of Massillon, Ohio. Konner Chevrolet or Qua Buick can take care of any problems in Ohio just as Chuck Coker Pontiac protects the Oklahoma territory and Max Griffith Olds takes care of Kansas and part of Missouri.

We put on our \$25 necktie and trundled down to the local Rolls dealer to see how the GM boys make a little money on the work of art. We were very impressed by the versatility of the salesman who had just been busy trying to sell a muscle car to a little old man in a T-shirt.

The idea for the Rolls customer is not to examine the Silver Shadow. Merely stand quietly next to it until the sales-

man notices the \$25 tie and the imported shukka boots (\$4 in Italy but \$75 in the States).

This salesman never mentioned such mundane things as performance. He mentioned the electric drive selector. ("You never use the palm of your hand to shift. Just a mere touch of your fingertips," he said.)

Or the seams on the leather upholstery. ("You will note, sir, they are turned inward so they can't be felt if a lady passenger is wearing a thin dress. The leather is made only from the top layer of the hides of pedigreed British steers.")

Discreetly he pointed out that for the nominal sum of \$12.50, we could obtain a Rolls-Royce Owner's Manual. The \$12.50 is refundable (less six percent) when the Rolls-Royce is purchased.

The Silver Shadow has carpets edged in leather, twin lighted vanity mirrors in the rear compartment, door and dashboard trim of French or Circassian walnut, all sorts of warning lamps and

paint tested in the jungles of farthest Malaya... by the batch.

However, for all its Circassian walnut and Malaya-proof paint, one matter bothered us. The question almost blew our cover. Even an intellectual's car is subject to depreciation and the laws of economics? Not so.

The salesman chided us gently that we had forgotten that this is not a car, it is a work of art. Works of art get more valuable as they age. A 1907 Silver Ghost with 500,000 miles on it, which the company recently rescued from service as a hay wagon, is now priceless.

The salesman drew himself to his full six foot height and faced in the general direction of the Tower of London, a copy of the *Wall Street Journal* in one hand and the *Hollywood Reporter* in the other. Then he intoned the credo of the Flying Lady (who continues to exist despite Federal Safety Standards):

"Other cars may come and go, but," he said firmly, "a Rolls-Royce is forever." /MT



(Clockwise, from right) The insistence by Rolls-Royce that their car is a "work of art," shows. Carpets are edged in leather, door and dashboard trim is in French or Circassian walnut, and entire car reflects fastidious concentration on executing a very proper Men's-Club-Modern motif inside and out. Fold-down writing trays on back of both seats are commonplace. Seams on the leather upholstery are turned inward so a lady wearing a thin dress can't feel them. Seats are of top layer of pedigreed hides.



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