



ROLLIN' ON IN

Henry Broughton takes Rolls-Royce's most recent masterpiece, the Wraith, for a spin

Rolls-Royce has to be one of the most evocative names in the world. The name is synonymous with excellence, as in “The Rolls-Royce of . . . (insert word to compare to the finest of anything) and many will know that it is not just a manufacturer of superlative motor cars, aspired to by many and driven by few. Indeed the Spitfire and P-51 Mustang of World War II were powered by the fearsome R-R Merlin engine and the Concorde of the late lamented supersonic passenger era by the R-R Olympus. For me the link is more personal as probably the most famous Rolls-Royce in the world, the 1937 Phantom III Sedan de Ville used by Goldfinger in the James Bond movie, was in fact commissioned by my great uncle and remained his daily transport for 30 years.

Thus it was with very high expectations and not a little excitement that I accepted an invitation to head down to a small corner of Lord March's historic Goodwood estate in the South of England to receive a full tour of Rolls-Royce's state-of-the-art factory and to obtain the keys to the most powerful car in the company's 110 year history, the new 2-door \$500,000 Wraith.

After a very comprehensive private tour conducted by David Deane—himself a keen visitor to the Hamptons when not at Goodwood—which showcased an utterly modern working environment resounding only to the gentle hubbub of very talented craftsmen going diligently about their work, aided by robots only when absolutely necessary, the moment of

truth arrived. I saw through the window a black fastback coupe gliding majestically to the front doors of the facility. Could the Wraith possibly be even better looking than in the photographs?

The answer to this is absolutely in the affirmative. Every inch of it is purposeful and even somewhat menacing as would befit a four seat gentleman's Grand Tourer with a 6.6-liter twin-turbocharged V12 producing 624bhp lurking under the hood. The recessed grill, slightly angled Spirit of Ecstasy (which has for the past 102 years adorned the front of every Rolls-Royce) and very steeply raked glasshouse are utterly beguiling. I cannot wait to be on my way.

I climb aboard through the front opening coach door and am immediately inside a very special place indeed. The seats are well padded, supremely comfortable and covered in a quality of leather that even designers of haute couture clothing would struggle to match, whilst the woodwork and instruments will make the owners of the most super of the world's Super yachts feel instantly at home. The roof lining is dotted with 1,340 tiny LED's handwoven in to the leather. There are 360 degree cameras showing their images through the sat-nav and an infra-red heads-up display is discreetly projected on to the screen in front of me. It is a juxtaposition of Georgian drawing room and techie heaven.

I push the starter button and the V12 roars purposefully but not obnoxiously in to life before settling into an almost silent idle. I head away from HQ all the time acclimatizing myself to the car and decide

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to pick a route that would best mimic a journey back from the Hamptons to NYC. On the backroads the Wraith glides effortlessly as a Roller should. The brilliant Satellite Aided Transmission (SAT) reads the road ahead and decides which is the best of the eight gears to be in and allows this vast car to feel poised and utterly controllable. As confidence builds I realize that I can hustle the 18ft long, 2.4 ton behemoth very delicately through the corners and I am beginning to relish the wonderful feeling that is pointing the Spirit of Ecstasy with gusto down the road.

Happily the suspension completely absorbs any ripples and bumps in the road surface whilst not preventing the steering from providing a useful amount of feedback (particularly useful for Long Island as in Britain) and before long I am on sweeping main roads. A car in front travelling too slowly enables me to see what this beast can really do. I indicate and plant my right foot. There is an almost imperceptible pause as Thor, the Norse God of Thunder, clears his throat. The rear of the car hunkers down. Thor starts to shout and then, as the revs rise, to bellow and the Spirit of Ecstasy and I are flung towards the horizon at an almost Cosmic rate. It is utterly addictive—the closest I think I will ever come to being on a twin-turbocharged magic carpet.

I reach London all too soon and head in to Mayfair. As I park outside my office I cannot help but notice that many of the people who look at the car are smiling just as much as I am. It is truly a magnificent machine. Rolls-Royce have said that it is a car that "we believe our great founding forefather and adventurer The Honorable Charles Rolls would have driven today were he alive." I would have liked to have met him. ♦

In Good Company

It is no surprise that there are plenty of notable Rolls Royce owners . . . Here are a few:



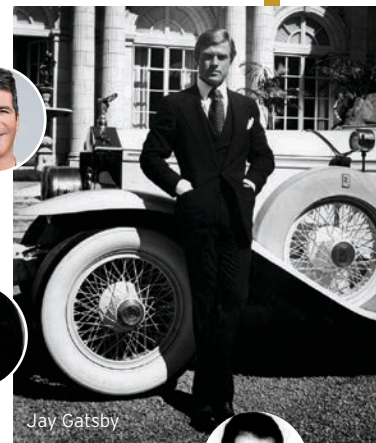
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