

Rolls-Royce Owners' Club of Australia Library

Passing the Course

The Rolls-Royce Motor Cars School of Instruction

By Geoffrey May, 1997

RROCA Member Geoffrey May is one of only a handful of Australians ever to pass the famed Chauffeur's Training Course at the Rolls-Royce School of Instruction. Here Geoff explains how he secured the coveted certificate at the school, which since 1983 has been located at the Crewe factory.

Following a smooth flight, I arrived in London and took a train to Tunbridge Wells where I was picked up by my host Nick Mott and proceeded to Bassett's restaurant in Frant where I would be staying during part of my visit to England.

On Thursday October 10th I made arrangements to visit and inspect the cars of Dutton Foreshaw in Maidstone, Kent, and spent a very interesting time there. Although no Rolls-Royce or Bentley cars were there at the time I was able to view the new Jaguar XK8, the new MG F and other fine motor cars. On our way back to Frant we stopped at Sergeant's of Goudhurst, a Rolls-Royce and Bentley repairer carrying out restoration of the cars as well as servicing. I spent a pleasant two hours there looking over all cars from very early Silver Ghosts right through to the latest model Bentley Continental Rs. They have a large range of restored Derby Bentleys as well as providing storage of Rolls-Royce and Bentley motor cars for customers.



Sergeant's Goudhurst Service Station in Kent, the author at right beside an early 2025 (GMOB2) with Weymann fabric saloon coachwork by H.J. Mulliner.

A Rolls-Royce day in London

On Friday October 11th I was in London and visited the Jack Barclay showrooms in Berkeley Square, and met with the representative of Rolls-Royce, Emer Poynton, who was down to meet me at the same time. That was for a period of 1 1½ hours. I inspected the full range of motor cars at Barclay's including their beautifully restored Phantom III, a very original

Phantom VI and some stunning Bentleys including the latest Azure in a light blue with magnolia upholstery and beautiful birds eye woodwork to the interior. Quite a stunning motor car.

Following lunch at Harrod's I visited the showroom of H.R. Owen in South Kensington and then The Chelsea Workshop in Chelsea. I saw some interesting Rolls-Royce equipment there - a locking device for the hubcaps which would be about £100 for the set plus fitting - though it would require sizeable orders for them to send them to Australia. The other interesting devices: a cap to protect the retractable Spirit of Ecstasy of late Silver Spirit/Silver Spur models - basically the mascot drops into the radiator shell and then the stainless-steel device is placed over the top of the radiator cap outlet and is locked off with a Yale lock. (An enterprising RROC(A) member has fabricated his own. An article about it will appear soon. - Ed.)

The School of Instruction

Monday October 14th was the first day of the chauffeur training course at the Rolls-Royce motor car factory at Crewe in Cheshire. This began with a basic introduction to Rolls-Royce motor cars, basic history of the Company, the objectives of the course were discussed and then we went through some safety precautions and the current motor cars' technical features, controls and functions and what to look after daily, weekly, etc. A quite involved way of checking the transmission fluid and power steering fluid as well as brake fluid.

The cars that we will be working with are 1997 Model Year cars. They are absolutely brand new, one being the Rolls-Royce Silver Dawn the other a Bentley Turbo R.



Students and staff of the Rolls-Royce Motor Cars Ltd School of Instruction, Crewe, October 1996. From left to right they are: Michael Watkins, Nick Mortimer, Geoffrey May, Kevin Waterhouse, Mark Taylor (Instructor), Nick Watson, Debbie Sylvester (Secretary), David Hamson (Instructor).

Some homework is required as the testing later in the week will include questions on the Highway Code which means a great deal of study over the next few nights to learn the British version. This is an integral and important part of obtaining the chauffeur's certificate.

There were four other chaps on this course with me: the first is Kevin Waterhouse. Kevin is a chauffeur for a psychiatrist in Eastbourne, south of London, and in Kevin's charge is a 1987 Silver Spur. Michael Watkins is a chauffeur for an Asian businessman and Michael's charge is a 1992 Turbo RL. Nick Mortimer is a chauffeur with a casino in central London next to the London Hilton. Nick normally drives a Bentley Turbo RL. Nick Watson is a chauffeur from the north of Scotland and looks after his father's cars. His father is a Rolls-Royce trained

mechanic, and Nick is doing the course to improve his future prospects. The name of our trainer is Dave Harrison. Dave started with Rolls-Royce over 35 years ago and worked on the Silver Cloud III model and is now an instructor with the School of Instruction.

The second day of our chauffeur's course consisted of a study of tyres and wheels and the legal tread depth for replacement; the removal of the wheel for checking of the tyre; how to change if a puncture occurs; the items of equipment required to be carried in the boot of the car to change a tyre. These include rubber gloves to keep the hands clean, a spare wheel of course which has been checked every 4 months and is obviously a legal spare wheel, the jack which is lubricated and of course in working order, the reflective warning triangle if it is available, a piece of old carpet to kneel on, a torch (preferably a square one so it doesn't roll away), of course wet weather gear - an umbrella or something like that - and a wrench to remove and refit the wheels.

The other areas we discussed were chauffeur deportment and the uniform which would require a working suit with two pairs of trousers, a new suit for the extra special occasions when the chauffeur really needs to shine, and some shoe polish should be kept in car, as well as a lighter, tissues, etc. While the car is waiting for its owner the chauffeur should place any rubbish in the boot and report that to the owner on his return and the car should be kept locked if left for any length of time. We learnt how to correctly exit the car and how to help people out of the car as well as into the car. One of the important things is when carrying ladies or assisting them into the car, to avert your gaze. A question should be asked if three passengers are approaching, in which area they wish to be seated. and to lead them to the car. For passengers entering or exiting from the off side of the car, i.e. the driver's side, the chauffeur must open the door and stand at the edge of the door and hold his arm out to direct the person away from any oncoming traffic.

We then discussed and went through care of the motor vehicle which included washing the car, using the 1, 2, 3 sponge and pail situation. Sponge number 1 to clean the roof down to the door handle body line. The second sponge used from door handle to just above the sill strip and the third used for sills wheels, wheel arches etc. Of course, when the third sponge becomes really gritty and filthy it is to be thrown away, then sponge 2 becomes number 3 and sponge 1 becomes number 2 and a new sponge is purchased.

Polishing: it is highly recommended that the car is washed and left overnight to completely dry. A good quality cheesecloth should be used moistened. Apply the polish in a light circular motion in small areas up to say the coach-line (never along the coach-line) near the edges of the car and then wipe straight lines near these edges etc. then return to that small area again and run along in straight lines. This stops the swirl effect. The polish should be left to dry for a few moments and then polished off with a soft cloth. For the cleaning of the stainless steel, it is recommended that nothing but a mild detergent and a chamois is used. If the stainless steel is still marked, then ammonia can be used in the wash to help. A very handy hint was a very light film of baby oil be applied to the front of the car to protect the

paintwork from bugs. When it comes in to be washed, because it has the baby oil on there the bugs are easily washed off. Sheepskin rugs are recommended to be dry cleaned, and a very good thing to remove marks when cleaning the leather is to use a hand cleaning product called 'Swarfega' - if anyone knows where this can be obtained in Australia could you contact me please?!

Tuesday had been a very interesting and informative day and led then into Wednesday which was the skid-pan day, to test the vehicle off-site. We were taught to zigzag and to park the car correctly, and also the skid-pan testing which was learning how to control the car in understeer and oversteer situations - a most exhilarating and exhausting day.

Parking lesson. On the left the Rolls-Royce Silver Dawn with student driving, on the right the Bentley Turbo R — both 1997 models.



This was held on an old airfield site about 25 miles (40 km) from the factory using in this instance a 10-year-old Bentley Turbo R. The results for myself were 91% on both manoeuvrability and the skid-pan testing. And no scratches or dents!

Day four of the course was involved in advance driving in road rules and chauffeur's deportment. We started off with the sports-sprung Bentley Turbo R with a combination of very narrow country road driving, open road driving at the national speed limit and busy town traffic. In the afternoon we changed over to the current model Rolls-Royce Silver Dawn on which the springing is different, suspension is different, and a different driving style must be adopted. A much more complex combination of accelerator and brake control. Generally, a very good day. We're quite exhausted.

Following the great amount of stress involved in the short (two days) time I had in which to learn the Highway Code, the results of this part of the test resulted in an 80% pass for myself. This result was certainly applauded by the instructors as this is the British Highway Code, something that was given to me on Monday afternoon to learn and of course by Thursday morning with only a couple of nights of study they were more than happy with the results. Personally, I felt that the result was just O.K.

Tomorrow is the final day with full written test and our total results to see whether it is a pass or a pass with credit. I am arranging to take photographs of the other four participants plus our two instructors and certainly a feeling of camaraderie is very strong among us all and I will certainly be in contact with these people in the future. In general, a great bunch of fellows (chaps, as they say in England) and looking forward to the next day.

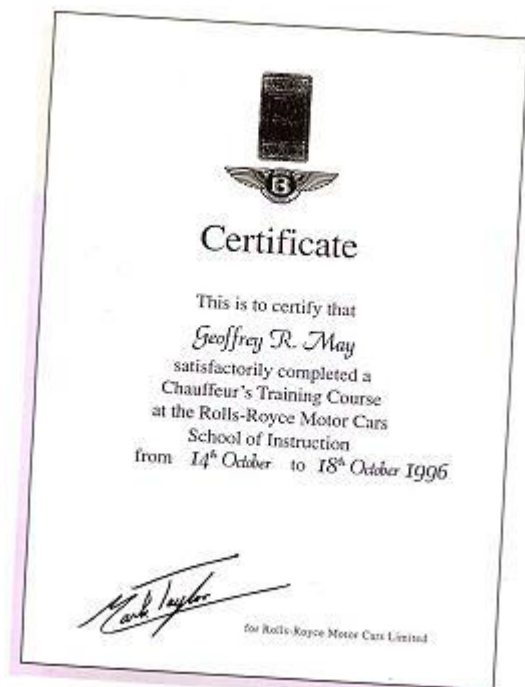
The final day of the Rolls-Royce School of Instruction chauffeur's course involved the written examination of the week's work. This resulted for me in a pass on the course. We then had a quick half-hour tour of the factory having a look at where the grille shells are made, the trimming shop where the leather interior is trimmed, an inspection testing of the cars in factory including the testing of the new Park Ward limousine. We then exchanged names and addresses, had a photo taken and were free to leave. I travelled to Delph near Manchester where I stayed with some friends for the weekend.

Factory Tour

On Monday October 21st I was met at Crewe station by a Bentley Turbo RL driven by Debbie Sylvester. Debbie is the secretary at the School of Instruction whom I met earlier the previous week whilst doing the course. We proceeded to the factory in Pym's Lane where I was met by Ian Rimmer and Jim Cadman who took me to the Johnson Room where we had coffee and morning tea and watched a short video on the history of Rolls-Royce and the Company. Then Jim took me to the factory floor for the tour.

Our first area was the bond store where I saw approximately 60 Rolls-Royce and Bentley cars awaiting shipment to different parts of the world. We then went to the engine section where the Rolls-Royce and Bentley engines are constructed. These are still all fitted by hand and balanced at different parts of the construction process. The construction includes five processes with quality control checks all the way through. It is understood that every engine is bench tested but every 100th engine is fully run and completely pulled down for inspection. This still happens.

From the engine assembly area, we went to probably the most famous area of the Rolls-Royce factory and that is the radiator grille assembly area. The Bentley grilles are now available in no fewer than 48 different combinations - painted, chromed, painted and chromed, etc, etc. We then went around to the construction of the Rolls-Royce radiator shell where I met Dennis Jones who is quite well known on the company promotional video about constructions of the radiator shell. Dennis explained the work by hand of the construction of the stainless-steel shell including the final mark where his famous Double-D insignia appears on the backing plate of each radiator that he constructs. Each person who constructs a radiator has a similar set of dies with which he stamps his initials.



From there we went past the area where the body meets the engine, and other mechanical fitting out occurs. The whole body is turned on its side on a special jig that enables the men to install all the underbody parts - suspension, exhaust, hydraulic and fuel lines. etc. We had a very close inspection of the area that is involved in the upholstery which includes the cutting of carpets to size. A large area there. Also, the leatherwork where the seats are upholstered as well as door panels, roof lining, etc. It is still very much a craftsman job.

From the upholstery section Jim then took me to the area where all the interior woodwork is made. The veneers are selected, cut to size, the cross-banding is matched, every piece of timber is mirror matched so that if you run a centre line down the car one side will reflect the other side. Real craftsman work, once again very labour intensive and each piece must be hand lacquered and polished with final buffing to give the magnificent finish that we see in all Rolls-Royce or Bentley motor cars. There are some variations on the usual walnut. Birdseye maple for example, but these are mostly used for Mulliner Park Ward special built cars. I referred earlier to a Bentley Azure that I saw with this birdseye maple woodwork inside and it is absolutely magnificent. Other timbers are done in the same way. They are all beautifully handmade, once again as mentioned before very, very labour intensive. The custom of having a build chassis card and building book remains to this day and follows each step of the process. The engine has its engine build card, and this is then matched up with the other chassis cards when the engine is matched up with the body. Each person who completes a process initials the relative section as the car moves on.

We inspected the newest area of the factory which is the bump and shake test bed which simulates road conditions at various speeds. It is computer controlled and allows the operator to find any rattles or squeaks. It also computer controls the setting of the springs and suspension and obviates the need for the car to be actually road-tested as each car used to be. Each car is still road-tested but not to the extent that it used to be thanks to the installation of this new facility.

From that area we walked past the 'Monsoon' wash area where the car is given a very heavy dousing of water to check for leaks. It is obvious a new model is going to be released before too long and as a result there are some areas of the factory that were off limits including the whole of Mulliner Park Ward, although I was able to see the current work of this department through their showroom.

From there we went to the car painting area. This is where the clean steel bodies are deep cleaned then prepared for painting. As well as Rolls-Royce and Bentley bodies on the line there is also the Aston Martin DB7 which Rolls-Royce have the contract for painting. So quite a lengthy, involved system of preparing the car for its final painting. Needless to say, the quality is seen in the result of each final car as it comes off the production line to go into the bond store.

On various parts of the tour there were large blue security screens in place. This was evident in the main works area and in Mulliner Park Ward. This I was told is because some of the work on special cars for the Sultan of Brunei is being carried out. Whilst I was at the School of Instruction the previous week a magnificent James Young Phantom V was brought over to the school to allow instructor David Harrison to assist with a door closing situation. With David's experience in the Phantom and Silver Cloud era he was able to recommend the correct setting for the door. This was a beautifully restored, magnificent Phantom V being prepared, as I said, for the Sultan of Brunei.

Following a very delicious lunch in the Brooklands Restaurant at the factory I went back to the School of Instruction with Jim to renew the acquaintances of last week and pick up my luggage for my return to Crewe station. The superb Bentley Turbo R demonstrator with Debbie Sylvester again at the wheel took me back to the station.

A most enjoyable three-and-a-half-hour tour of the Rolls-Royce factory at Pym's Lane, Crewe. It is quite obvious that this tour could have extended to a full day, but 3 1/2 hours walking around listening and watching certainly is tiring.

I thoroughly enjoyed my trip to England and wish to especially thank everyone at Rolls-Royce Motor Cars Ltd, Jack Barclay Ltd, Nick and Carey of Bassett's, and Timothy Hurford Clark at Premier Magazines, all of whom showed a great deal of hospitality.