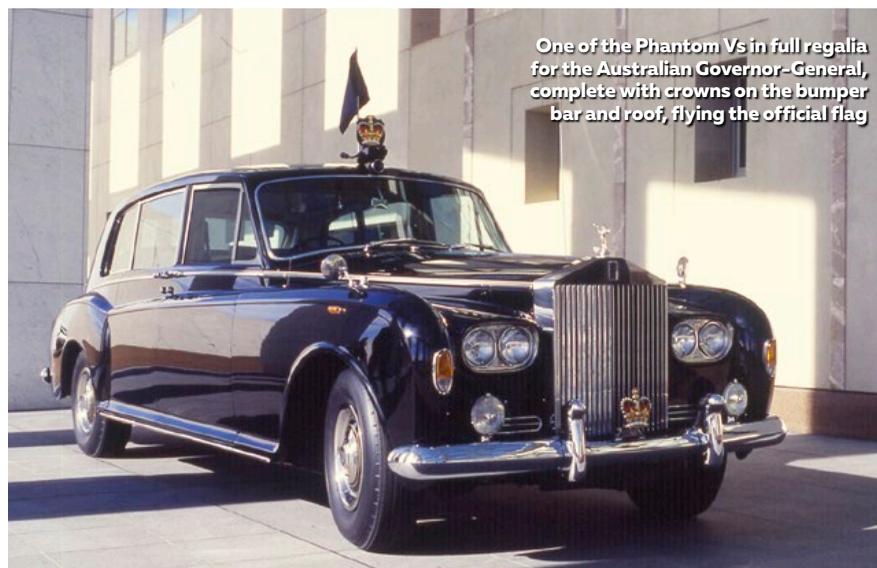




ROYAL CONNECTIONS

Any Phantom V is a very special motor car, although the two described here are particularly significant thanks to their official duties in Australia – and their fascinating careers ever since

WORDS: DAVID NEELY PHOTOGRAPHY: VARIOUS



One of the Phantom Vs in full regalia for the Australian Governor-General, complete with crowns on the bumper bar and roof, flying the official flag

The Sir Henry Royce Foundation of Australia has a Rolls-Royce Phantom V with a remarkable history, which I'll detail here in three separate sections. Act I: It provided luxurious transport for the Australian Governor-General, visiting royalty and heads of state. Act II: It completed the Peking to Paris Motor Challenge. Act III: Now in the Foundation's collection, it has toured every state in Australia, attending numerous events of the Rolls-Royce Owners' Club of Australia. As a prologue to Act I, the Australian Government places an order with Rolls-Royce. In Act I, Scene I, the main character appears: 1967 Phantom V, chassis number 5VF159, a Mulliner Park Ward seven-seater limousine. The car was delivered in December 1967 and issued with a Commonwealth of

Australia registration number, ZSF-571. These number plates were used when the car was not on royal duty. Commonwealth drivers were trained in ceremonial driving and protocol procedures, and were required to replace the registration plates with painted crowns on a shield fixed to the front and rear bumper bars when the Governor-General and members of the Royal Family were in the vehicle. Facsimiles of the original plates are now on the car for its normal road registration.

Instructions for drivers of Rolls-Royce cars are not new. Handbooks issued to owners of Rolls-Royce Silver Ghosts from about 1911 provided advice as to how they should instruct their drivers. When 5VF159 was on royal duty, its Commonwealth driver followed strict procedures, including a particular drill for his cap: "When the royal person/s approach the car, the driver will sit at attention with cap on. As soon as the door opener opens the door for the entry of the royal person/s into the car, the driver will remove his cap with his right hand and hold it by the peak across his left breast. When the detective or equerry travelling on the front seat next to the driver has taken his seat, the driver will place his cap on his head and drive off."

In Act II, the drama reaches breathtaking heights. In Act II, Scene I, 5VF159 is 5000 metres (16,000 feet) above sea level on the Tibetan Plateau in the People's Republic of China, taking part in the 1997 Peking to Paris Motor Challenge. John Matheson and Jeanne Eve, members of the Rolls-Royce Owners' Club of Australia, had entered



Chassis number 5VF159, photographed in Victoria during a visit to Australia by the King of Nepal in 1971 [National Archives of Australia]

"In Act I, Scene I, the main character appears: a 1967 Phantom V, chassis number 5VF159"

the car, which they had purchased from the Australian Government in 1993. Inspired by a 1907 epic race from Peking to Paris, the event of 10,000 miles in 45 days was for vintage and classic cars. Jeanne Eve, who is a trustee of the Sir Henry Royce Foundation, wrote about their experiences in her book, *Rallying in a Royal Rolls-Royce*, in which she recalled "being stranded on the Tibetan Plateau in freezing conditions, avoiding collisions with Baluchi truck drivers, exercising restraint with stone-throwing boys in Iran and driving in

dust storms". The team raised money for the Australian Epilepsy Association.

STRIPPED BACK

Scene I in Act III is set in a mechanic's garage, where the special equipment installed for the Peking to Paris Motor Challenge is dismantled. 5VF159 had been equipped with three plates for undercarriage protection, raised suspension, a trip meter, an extra fuel tank, an extra passenger horn, enhanced headlights, extra radiator fans and radial tyres. The two oxygen tanks set behind the driver's seat for coping with high altitudes were removed, and the two occasional seats were reinstalled. The damage from stones pelted at the car by youths in Iran necessitated panel-beating and a respray in the original black.

In the final scene of Act III, John Matheson and Jeanne Eve donate 5VF159 to the Sir Henry Royce Foundation of Australia in 2002. It now resides in New South Wales, under the care of the Rolls-Royce Owners' Club, and is regularly driven to motor events and public display days as part of Australia's proud motoring heritage.

As the curtain falls on the heroic saga of 5VF159, there is an amazing sequel. In 1967, the Australian Government in fact ordered two Phantom Vs, both with identical Mulliner Park Ward coachwork »



The second Phantom V (chassis 5VF155) was also used for the 1971 visit of the King of Nepal, shown here in Canberra [National Archives of Australia]

FEATURE CAR
ROLLS-ROYCE PHANTOM V



Chassis number 5VF155 returned briefly to royal service when it conveyed HM The Queen and HRH Prince Philip during their visit to Melbourne in 2000



Australian motorsport legend, Sir Jack Brabham, arrived with Lady Brabham in 5VF159 for the 2007 Rolls-Royce Owners' Club of Australia's Federal Rally



Chassis number 5VF159 was donated to the Sir Henry Royce Foundation in 2002 after competing in the Peking to Paris five years earlier



Jeanne Eve and John Matheson with 5VF159, ready in Sydney for the 1997 Peking to Paris Motor Challenge

– and the second Phantom V is now also with the Foundation, thanks to Ian Tonkin, a member of the Victoria Branch of the Rolls-Royce Owners' Club, donating it in 2017. Chassis number 5VF155 was delivered in November 1967 and had the Commonwealth registration ZSF-570. During Ian Tonkin's ownership, the car briefly re-enacted its own history, conveying HM The Queen and HRH Prince Philip during their visit to Melbourne in 2000. It now resides in the Foundation's Queensland Archive and, like 5VF159, has facsimiles of the Commonwealth registration plates for normal road use.

The Phantom Vs, while resplendent in their traditional coachwork, were not armour-plated, and it was this that ultimately became a factor in their retirement from government service. In the late 1970s, security became an issue when dissidents detonated a bomb at a Sydney hotel hosting a



A Tibetan shrine at the top of the Feng Huo mountains, where 5VF159 was 5000 metres above sea level on the Tibetan Plateau

“The Australian Government ordered two Phantom Vs, both with identical Mulliner Park Ward coachwork”

Commonwealth Heads of Government Regional Meeting. Consequently, the Australian Government acquired two 1978 Mercedes 450 SEL saloons that had been built with more effective protection. The Phantom Vs were eventually sold by government auction in 1993.

The Sir Henry Royce Foundation of Australia, which looks after both Phantom Vs, was established in 1996 and has its archives in Victoria and Queensland. Russell Rolls, chairman of the trustees, explains: “The Foundation is a not-for-profit registered charity, similar to the Sir Henry Royce Memorial Foundation in the UK. Our principle objective is to preserve and promulgate the engineering ethos of Sir Henry Royce in an Australian context. We have a substantial archive of historical documentation relating to Rolls-Royce and Bentley motor vehicles in Australia. In particular, we have extensive sales and service histories from several of the old Rolls-Royce and Bentley sales agents. We are highly regarded by several of Australia's pre-eminent museums, having Rolls-Royce aircraft engines on permanent loan from the Australian War Memorial and Museums Victoria.” Further information about the foundation can be found at www.henryroycefoundation.com. ■



The historically important Phantom Vs are both in the safe hands of the Sir Henry Royce Foundation

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Neely lives in Sydney and has owned Rolls-Royces dating from the 1920s (Phantoms I and II) through to the 1980s (Silver Spirits). He is the co-author of *Rolls-Royce & Bentley in the Sunburnt Country – The First Fifty Years in Australia*, as well as the author of *Rolls-Royce & Bentley in the Rear-View Mirror – A history of the Rolls-Royce Owners' Club of Australia*. Both books were published by The Sir Henry Royce Foundation, of which he is a former trustee and currently its historical consultant. He edited the national magazine of the Rolls-Royce Owners' Club from 2004 to 2009 and is an honorary life member of the club.