

Colour Schemes on Phantom III Bodies - 1936 to 1940 by Steve Stuckey (ACT)



13. *Windovers cabriolet (design 5097), chassis 3CP116. Crown Prince Azam Jah Berar of Hyderabad insisted on a car in mustard and crimson with a red hood. This shows that chrome-plated wheel discs were sometimes used in the 1930s, but very rarely. As the State Car of Portugal from the 1950s to the 1970s the car was (and remains) a much more sedate black!*

2006 marks the 70th anniversary of sales production of the magnificent 7.3-litre, V-12 engined Phantom III. The first production chassis went off test on 22 May 1936 (although there had been eight experimental chassis before that, the first appearing in 1934; two more experimental cars were built in late 1936).

“Any colour so long as it’s black” it is alleged Henry Ford said to those who wanted to buy his incredibly successful Model T Ford. Having a single colour made production of his mass-appeal car cheaper and more efficient, as did his introduction of the assembly line.

Rolls-Royce was not aiming at the mass market, of course, and in any event it was not the Company that determined the colours of its cars. Whilst some coachbuilders and dealers would order chassis to clothe and then hold as stock (especially as sales of the Phantom III declined from late 1938), the decision on design and colour of the coachwork was between the buyer and the company from which he or she purchased the complete car. I know of one black limousine held as stock by Hooper & Co. that was repainted black and dark blue prior to delivery.

In my researching of the Phantom III over many years I have identified original colour schemes for 495 of the 727 production, or 68%. This information is available from the Company sales records, coachbuilder records where they survive, reports of various motor shows, and advertisements for new and used cars until 1945. The scarcity of petrol for a far from fuel-efficient V-12 engine forced many to be sold soon after the war ended. But advertisements for such cars when resold by companies such as Jack Barclay Ltd., Kensington Motors, and H. R. Owen cannot generally be used to assess original car colours, as many were repainted common black to make them more saleable.

When looking at the more luxurious British and European coachbuilt cars in the first two decades of the Twentieth Century, not surprisingly the colour schemes carried forward the tradition of the coaches they replaced, and most of these were not a single colour. It was common before the Depression for luxury cars to be two-tone (or sometimes more). Most sold before the mid-1920s were open, and roof material was generally in a colour other than that of the body panels, although roof colours other than black or tan were rare. In addition, the more angular and complicated style of coachwork design, with its multiple levels and planes, made multi-colour choice easier. Usually one colour was black (to the wings, upper parts, bonnet tops and exposed chassis parts) with the other, lighter colour used on bonnet sides, scuttle sides, doors and rear of the body.

The Depression saw the use of much more restrained colour schemes on luxury cars, primarily because it was not seen to be desirable to display ostentatious possession (although there were notable exceptions!). Black became the most common colour, and



21. *C. R. Abbott saloon, chassis 3AX153. Painted black and cream with a polished aluminium bonnet, and delivered to the Countess Cowley.*



8. *Hooper limousine de ville (design 7421), chassis 3DL74. Painted jewellicent silver (with silver grey leather to the front compartment and silver grey cloth to the rear). The most expensive car at the Earl's Court motor show in 1938.*

23. *Windovers sedanca de ville (design 4938), chassis 3BU98. Painted in black and cream.*





16. *Barker sedanca de ville, chassis 3BU168. The young Lord Fairhaven instructed his car have minimum brightwork: note the black side and head lamps. But shown here to illustrate the very old-fashioned lining to the bonnet panels, sides and tops. The irony is that this staid car was repainted for use as the gold car in the movie "Goldfinger"!*



11. *Barker sedanca de ville, chassis 3AX61. Painted in black cellulose but distinctive by the white moulding down the side and along the trailing edge of the rear doors.*



1. *Hooper limousine (design 7149), chassis 3CM63, for King Farouk of Egypt. Painted in the Royal colours of red and black. An original colour rendition for the King by Barker, owned by the author, shows a car in dark green and black.*

24. *Barker saloon with division, chassis 3AX87. Delivered to the Nawab of Bahawalpur in his colours of silver and black, and repainted these colours by Hooper in the 1950s, as were his Mark V Jaguar and Bentley 4¼ -litre.*



where multi- (usually two) tones were used, the second colour was also more commonly dark, whether it be blue, green or maroon. Coachbuilders' designs became more integrated, and panels and boots flowed into each other much more; this became even more so as coachbuilders attempted aerodynamic designs. Two-toning such cars became increasingly difficult. In addition, there were far fewer open cars, so roof colours had to be more integral to the main part of the body.

As sales of luxury cars fell during the Depression, manufacturers and coachbuilders made much of the individuality of their designs, and supplemented this by stressing colours in both catalogues and in showroom cars. Whilst I will be covering advertising of Phantom IIIs in detail in a later article, it is worth reflecting on the colours shown in three period catalogues I have: the July 1936 and October 1937 Phantom III catalogues, and the October 1937 H. R. Owen catalogue. The former two show drawings of cars in grey (saloon), bright red (saloon), dark green (saloon with division), black, and brown and black (limousines), black and cream, and green and black (sedanca de villes), black with grey hood (drophead sedanca coupe), maroon with tan hood (cabriolet), charcoal grey (landaulette), and cream (drophead coupe). The superb Owen catalogue of Gurney Nutting cars shows splendid drawings of four Phantom IIIs: a black sedanca coupe with grey hood, a deep red and black sedanca de ville, a dark green and black saloon and a dark blue and grey sedanca. In addition there are a white and black Bentley 2-door saloon and a cream and black Bentley sedanca coupé.

The English coachwork magazine *Automobile Engineer* reported from the 1937 Earl's Court motor show that 31.5% of cars on display were black and/or dark blue, and that bright blue cars were more popular than they had previously been. Whilst most cars with 'picking out' lines had them in white, cream or fawn, gold lines were more common (and went well with blue). They also reported on the number of body styles on display: 172 cars were 4-door, 6-light; 127 cars were 4-door, 4-light; 79 cars were 2-door, 2-light; 55 cars were 2-door, 4-light; and 33 cars were open.

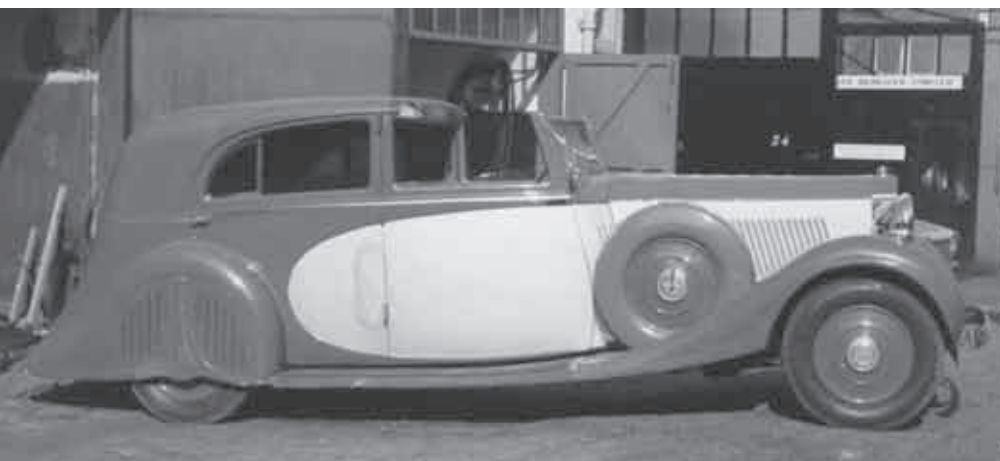
The introduction of chrome-plate and later stainless steel to body decoration allowed otherwise fairly bland car colourings to be lifted where an owner wanted this. Many large cars in the second half of the 1930s featured chrome strips to the waistline of their coachwork, either fine strips or, increasingly, broader ones with arrow head shapes to the rear, around the C pillar. Sometimes, chrome flashes to bonnets and sides, as well as to wings and spats, gave an Art Deco feel. Some Hooper cars – erroneously attributed to influence from the French designer Saoutchik – featured this to great effect. Equally, some owners insisted on staid, very discreet cars. The 40-year-old Baron Fairhaven wanted a black car, with no picking out lines other than very archaic lines to the bonnet panels, as well as black-painted headlamps and side lamps.

The use of 'natural' breaks in a car's bodywork such as mouldings and metal strips made the use of two-toning much more practicable. It is very rare to see an original colour-scheme using more than a single colour on one panel where there is not a metal strip or clearly visible moulding separating the colours. We will all accept that the choice of body colour and trim is probably the single most contentious issue when restoring a car. But, many people repainting their cars do not seem to appreciate what prompted car design and colour decades ago. Using a second colour where there is no natural break inbuilt to the design and construction of the body just jars the view. Sorry to those who do this, but it just isn't right and must cause many eminent 1930s designers to spin in their graves. Similarly, those who paint their pre-War cars colours that are readily available (and acceptable) on modern cars are just not representing the look of their cars as they were designed. Again, sorry, but whoever painted current owner Stephe Boddice's very formal Mayfair limousine de ville, 3CP196, Porsche fuchsia pink needed their head read; thankfully Stephe has had the car repainted sober – and authentic – black and very deep maroon. Whilst there were some Phantom IIIs that were red, I have not seen black and white photos that would indicate that they were what seems to be the currently relatively popular lipstick red. Rolls-Royce historian Jack Triplett in the US quotes a source saying that Lady Doverdale in the 1930s said of bright red: "How unspeakably vulgar".

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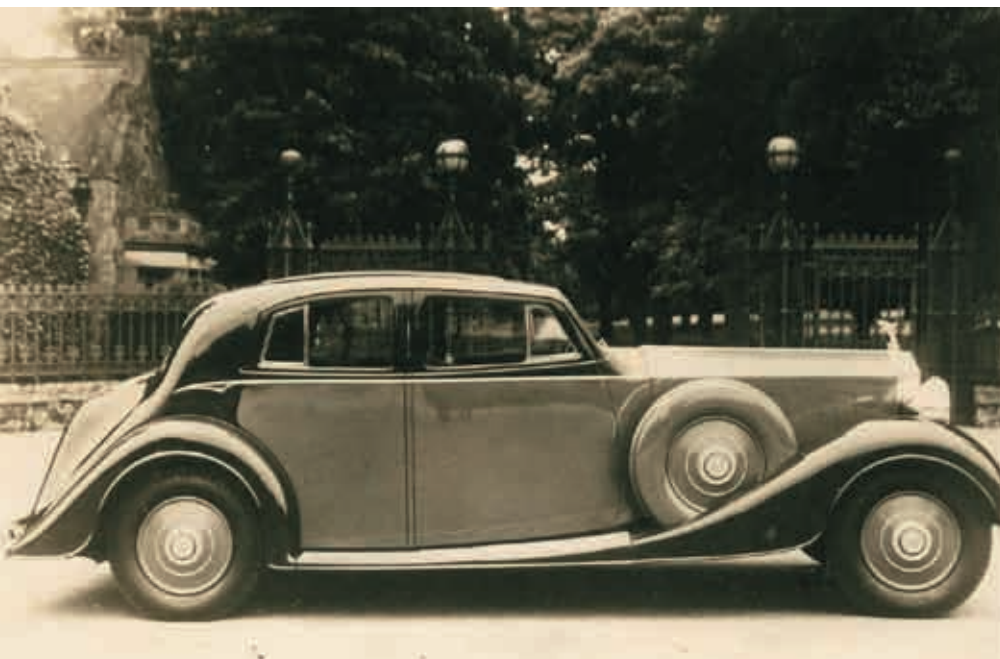


9. Barker saloon with division, chassis 3CP10. A Rolls-Royce Trials car and subject of many advertisements for the Company from 1938 to 1940. The Company's advertising committee anguished over showing a car painted cream. This photograph was taken in January 1938.



4. Barker sedan de ville, chassis 3BU76. Painted in cream and blue and delivered to the Maharajah of Jaipur. Now owned by the estate of the Hon. Colin Clark; navy blue now replaces the cream side panels.

20. Arthur Mulliner saloon with division, chassis 3BT139. Painted in grey and dark blue, the car illustrates the unusual use of the door edge to delineate a colour changes, a practice much more common now and almost always wrong!



Colour
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19. Windovers limousine (design 5324), chassis 3... advertisements, and painted in chocolate brown over gr... Tunbridge Wells in Kent.



10. Barker landaulette, chassis 3AX97. Painted in... landaulette hood. Sir John Latta had an exact duplicate

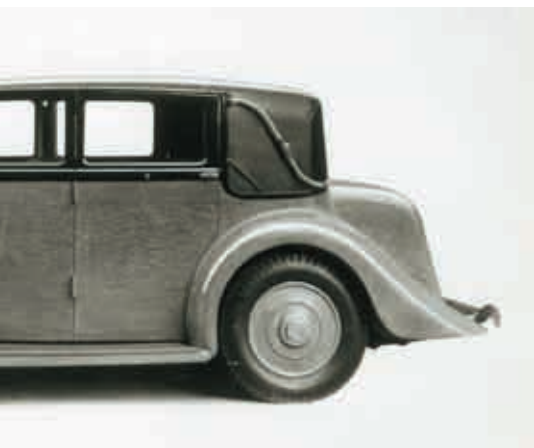
3. Park Ward saloon with division, chassis 3CP... Jack Barclay's personal Trials car until sold to King Ca



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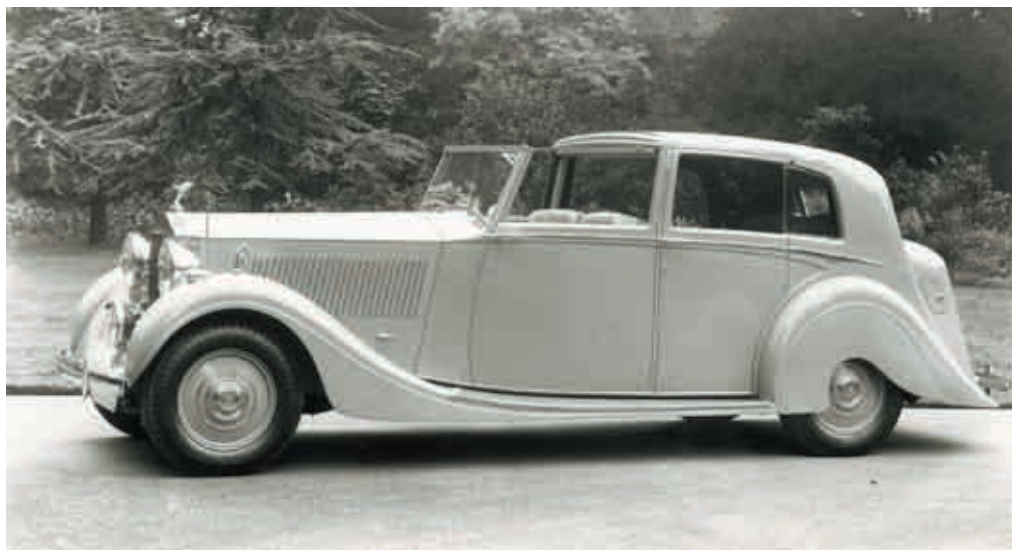


CM153. A car shown in a series of Company
reys. A photo taken in 1938 at Bayham Abbey, near

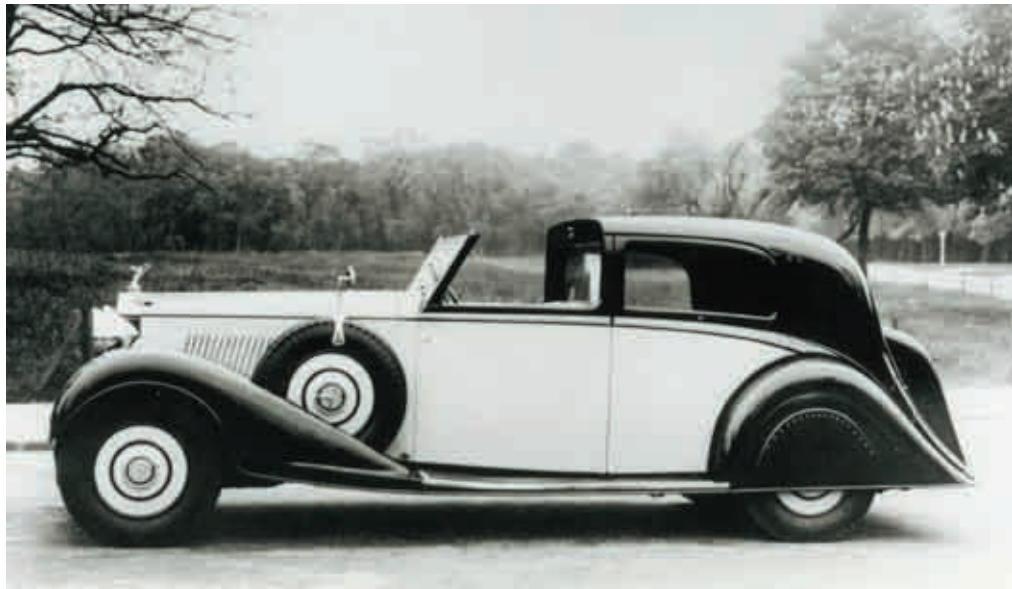


in faux woodgrain with black uppers and black
of this body on 3CP110.

34. Painted in jewellicent faux grey over navy blue.
Carol II of Romania. A car sadly missing in action.



2. H. J. Mulliner limousine de ville (design 6282), chassis 3DL158. Painted in light blue and
delivered to the Prince Regent in Thailand. Now repainted in cream and in the care of the Crown Prince
of Thailand.



28. A French car – a Kellner sedanca de ville, chassis 3AZ206. Owned by la Princesse de
Faucigny-Lucinge in Paris, and painted cream and grey.

15. Hooper saloon with division (design 6898), chassis 3BT85. Finished in very dark blue but
distinguished by the use of Art Deco chrome flashes.



The great RREC photographer Colin Hughes wrote a series of articles (RREC Bulletin numbers 165-167, and The Flying Lady pages 3764, 3846 and 3891) discussing pre-War colour schemes, interiors, 'proper' break lines and the hazards of two-toning pre-War cars. Anyone deciding on how to restore a car's exterior and interior colours should read those articles.

All that said, one should never say never, and I know of Phantom IIIs that were primrose, mustard yellow and maroon, orange and black, bright green or bright light blue; some are illustrated in this article. There were cars – a very few – with cream canework paint to the rear doors, large cars in light colours (unusual in the late 1930s), cars that had polished aluminium bonnets, or chrome-plated wheel discs. But, fully 256 of the 495 cars I know original colour schemes for were just black (or 52%) whilst most of the rest had a sober combination of black and another dark colour.

The description of a colour ('red', or 'green' or 'blue', for example) can hide a multitude of shades, of course. What's the difference between Royal blue and Navy blue? Was Hooper's dark blue the same as Barker's, or H. J. Mulliner's? David Watts, writing on the US RROC's techtalk email list on 5 January 2005, recalls a 1978 chat with Osmond Rivers of Hooper & Co. Rivers said that in the 1930s Hooper had a Colour Room, an office with 4-inch squares of paint samples. There were 1500 such samples, including six shades of black! Rivers told of how some customers could still not find a colour they liked, so one was mixed especially for them. I cannot imagine being confronted with 1500 different colours and not being able to make a choice! Colin Hughes recalls staff from Park Ward telling him that if a colour chosen was particularly unusual, they made the customer sign to say this was the colour they had chosen, presumably meaning the customer paid for a repaint if they rejected the completed car!

Highlighting through the use of fine coach lines also allowed a certain degree of individuality to coachwork colouring, and almost without exception led the eye along the flowing lines of a body, but also towards the colouring of the upholstery. Combinations I know of are as follows:

- Black cars with white lines (61), gold (20), silver (17), red (12), cream (4), red and silver (4), grey, fawn, gold and red, orange and silver, blue (2 of each), blue and white, blue and yellow, green, green and cream, orange and gold (1 each).
- Blue cars with silver lines (4), silver and blue, silver and red, orange, white, grey (1 each).
- Blue and black cars with white lines (7), red (5), yellow (5), blue and white, blue and yellow, cream, gold (1 each)
- Red cars with green lines, maroon, red and gold, orange and gold, orange and red, gold (1 each).
- Grey cars with blue lines (3), white (3), red, red and silver, silver, blue and silver, black (1 each).
- Green cars with silver lines (2), black, silver and black, green and black, red, orange (1 each)
- Green and black cars with green lines, black, yellow (1 each)
- Brown and black cars with blue and gold lines, and fawn (1 each)
- Red and black cars with gold lines (3), gold and orange, yellow, red, white (1 each).
- Brown cars with gold and orange, and fawn lines (1 each).
- A cream car with green lines, and a black and cream car with cream lines.

Interiors of luxury cars such as Rolls-Royce allowed original owners to express their individuality and needs. They could be creative, usually more so than with exteriors, and they could do it and still not be blatantly ostentatious. The colourings used in the interiors – front and rear upholstery, woodwork, carpets and headlinings – are a matter for as much contention for restorers. Enough, indeed, for a future article.

(Information on the sources for the photographs is available from the author - Editor.)

Celebrating 70 Years
Rolls-Royce
Phantom III
1936 - 2006



14. H. J. Mulliner sedan coupé (design 5904B), chassis 3BT103. Primrose yellow was the colour chosen by Apsley George Benet Cherry-Garrard (1886-1959), companion to Scott in the Antarctic 1910-13, and commander of a squadron of armoured cars during World War I.



25. Barker tourer, chassis 3AZ74. Painted in cream over black (with black bonnet tops) with a grey hood. Miss E. W. Thomson's next Phantom III 3DL126, currently owned by Paul Hesse, was in very dark maroon over black.



26. Barker limousine, chassis 3AX45. Painted in an unusual combination of black and bright yellow.

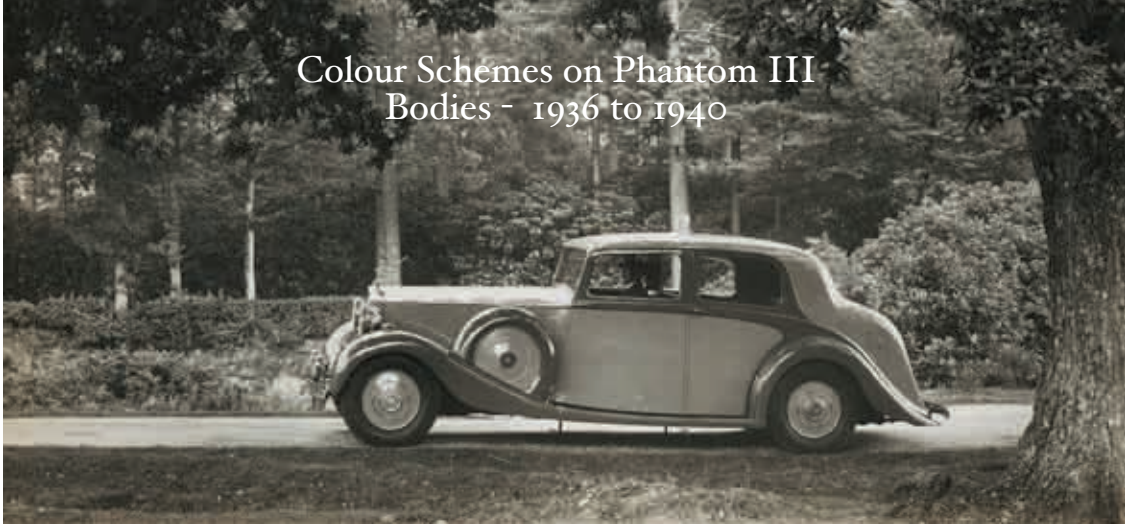


16. Barker sedan de ville, chassis 3BU168. The young Lord Fairhaven instructed his car have minimum brightwork: note the black side and head lamps. But shown here to illustrate the very old-fashioned lining to the bonnet panels, sides and tops. The irony is that this staid car was repainted for use as the gold car in the movie "Goldfinger"!

5. Barker drophead coupé, chassis 3AX177. Painted in silver blue with a blue mohair hood.



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18. Hooper saloon with division (design 6542), chassis 3AZ36. A Company Trials car, 1936-1937, painted in two shades of grey. But hand-tinted colour advertisements of the car sometimes showed it as light grey and red.



22. Hooper fixed-head coupé (design 7289), chassis 3CM173. Painted in cream and grey



6. Vanden Plas drophead coupé (design 1379), chassis 3CP134. Painted in green over black with dark grey hood.



17. Park Ward drophead coupé (drawing 13704), chassis 3DL200. The whole body was finished in polished aluminium, with a grey mohair hood. Delivered as a British gift to King Zahir Shah of Afghanistan and destroyed by the Taliban in Kabul in the late 1990s.



27. Barker saloon with division, chassis 3AZ210. Painted in black with a grey bonnet for Commodore Louis D Beaumont, an American living in the south of France. Now housed by Jorge Fernandez in Sydney.

7. Freestone & Webb drophead sedanca coupé (design 1774, one of two), chassis 3AZ174. Painted in green with sage wings and fawn hood. This photograph was taken in London in 1955.



12. Hooper sedanca de ville (design 6778), chassis 3BT151. Painted in black with intricate canework to the rear doors in cream.



Steve Stuckey's analysis of the original exterior colours on Rolls-Royce Phantom IIIs.

| | | | | | |
|------------------------|-----|--------------------------|----|----------------------|-----|
| Black | 256 | Grey & cream | 1 | Fawn & black | 6 |
| Dark blue | 22 | Dark green | 9 | Cream | 3 |
| Blue & black | 36 | Green & black | 16 | Cream & black | 16 |
| Light blue | 5 | Light green | 6 | Yellow & black | 2 |
| Light blue & black | 2 | Dark green & light green | 2 | Mustard yellow & red | 1 |
| Dark blue & light blue | 1 | Red | 8 | Primrose yellow | 1 |
| Blue & silver | 2 | Dark red & black | 18 | Orange & black | 1 |
| Blue & cream | 2 | Dark red & light red | 1 | Silver | 1 |
| Grey | 23 | Red & cream | 1 | Silver & black | 3 |
| Grey & black | 15 | Brown | 5 | Silver & grey | 1 |
| Dark grey & light grey | 12 | Brown & black | 4 | Polished aluminium | 1 |
| Grey & blue | 7 | Brown & fawn | 1 | Woodgrain & black | 2 |
| Grey & brown | 1 | Fawn | 1 | TOTAL | 495 |