

Rolls-Royce Owners' Club of Australia Library

Me and my Shadow

By Brian Price, 1996

A passion for classic cars, boats and aeroplanes has always been high on the list of my family's leisure activities. The greatest pleasure is to use them as they were intended.

In fact, my wife Helen has two sporting 'firsts'. She is the first South Australian woman to sail in the Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race (in 1973) and to compete in the Great Australian Tiger Moth Air Race (as my co-pilot), on two occasions.



Although I have owned a variety of cars over the years, such as an Austin 7, an MG L2 Magna, an Alvis Speed 20, a Riley, a few Jaguars, BMWs and a Bentley S3, no one car has generated as much interest as my Rolls-Royce Silver Shadow CRH 1344.

It nearly began its life as Crewe Order No. R6390 issued on 3.3.1966 for Rolls-Royce concessionaires H.A. Fox & Co. of London. The order was issued on behalf of LA. Shollin Esq., but was cancelled and re-issued as Order No. R6391 for Mr Peter Sellers, the film star and member of the famous Goons. A deposit of £8 15 was paid on 26.3.1966.

The order was for a Rolls-Royce Silver Shadow, H.J. Mulliner, Park Ward two door saloon, chassis CRH1344, painted Regal Red with beige leather upholstery. One cannot help but imagine what happened to the original order and whether Peter Sellers used his influence to obtain an earlier delivery of this new and very desirable model. Much of the detail about this car has been gleaned from factory cards and other documents acquired by Robert McDermott, who kindly passed them on to me and I am very grateful for his help with this research. Construction of engine No. 1344 had already begun. It was due for test on 1.3.1966 and was scheduled to be installed in the front sub-frame on 8.3.1966.

Unfortunately, the gearbox was tested without any oil having been added and had to be replaced (!! - Ed). Subframe assembly was completed on 9.4.1966 and the first preliminary check was on 13.4.1966. The first road test was conducted on 23.6.1966. Further work was required, and the car was again tested on 27.6.1966. Final work was performed on

30.6.1966, including replacing a rear axle to remedy a bad whine in the differential! Crewe invoiced H.A. Fox & Co. Ltd on 7.7.1966, when the car was finally completed and registered to Mr Peter Sellers. Among the extras ordered was a special console under the instrument board to house a radio telephone, Craig Reproducer and other items.

My wife Helen was visiting London in July 1966 and saw Peter Sellers taking delivery of the Rolls from H.A. Fox in Old Bond Street. She approached Sellers, told him that she was a fan from Australia and asked him for his autograph, which he was happy to give. How amazing that twenty-one years later this car came into our family. In his book *Scunthorpe Revisited*, Spike Milligan describes how he received a late-night call from Sellers, who was desperately trying to find the source of a squeak in the boot of his new Rolls-Royce. Dutifully, Milligan headed to the rescue. Sellers, in pyjamas, persuaded his friend to climb into the car boot with a piece of chalk and a torch while the Rolls was driven around the district. Milligan climbed in and drove off with Sellers. Suddenly the car stopped, and Milligan heard crunching footsteps and mumbled conversation. The police had seen Sellers driving erratically to make the boot squeak. The lid was jerked open "to find an unshaven tousled-haired man in the boot in his pyjamas on his knees drawing little white crosses on the floor. The policeman shone his torch full in my face. 'Oh', he said, 'It's you'." The documentary film on the life of Peter Sellers shows him driving a 1969 Silver Shadow H.J. Mulliner, Park Ward drophead coupe so we presume that he sold

CRH1344 around April 1969, as a mod SY/N6 was carried out at Hythe Road on 16.4.1969 and the car was sold to a Mr L.L. Brown of Consolidated Factory Holdings Limited and registered as LBB 2. While in Mr Brown's hands the car had an accident which resulted in repairs being carried out at Crewe between 19.11.1969 and 13.2.1970. The radiator shell sustained damage and was replaced with a service

replacement at the cost of £45. Other repairs were made to the front left-hand wing. The bill to the insurer included the cost of £19 "to replace a Blackwell tubeless tyre cover fitted as the spare to the car incoming which was damaged by the damaged wing".

Two catastrophes occurred in the early 1970s. The engine was seriously damaged when it ran out of water. At the same time a mysterious fire happened under the bonnet, which is considered quite likely to have been deliberately lit. The car was sold by the insurance company, H.P. Motor Policies at Lloyds of London, 48 Fenchurch Street London EC3, as a write-off and the wreck was imported into Australia by a Mr. Donald Aarons, an antique dealer, who did nothing with it.

CRH1344. These extremely handsome two-door cars were styled by John Blatchley's Rolls-Royce Styling Department at Crewe, the final shape being devised by Blatchley's assistant Bill Allen (see *Meeting the Masters*, p.267.1). The two-door saloon, introduced in March 1966, was followed in September 1967 by a drophead coupe version. With technical improvements, both models were marketed as the 'Corniche' from March 1971.



Robert McDermott bought the car in late '76 but a few years passed before he began restoration. The vehicle was not driveable and the engine, in addition to its previous damage, had suffered badly from corrosion. Robert obtained an engine from a 2800 series Silver Shadow that had done negligible mileage, but which had been rolled over. He rebuilt the original engine using all valves, over-head gear, cylinder liners, pistons, con-rods, crankshaft and accessories from the new engine, at the same time de-glazing the bores and fitting new rings and valve guides. He replaced all parts that were likely to have been affected by heat. The original crankcase was used to preserve originality.

To overcome a weakness of the early Shadows, the rear differential subframe was reinforced top and bottom and the metalastic mountings were modified each end with through bolts and spacers.

The front height control hydraulic ram system was blocked off at this time. (The factory had dropped this feature on new cars in May 1969). The body was stripped to bare metal and restored to concours standard. The original instruments were fitted to a new dash. The front end was overhauled, and all the latest mods were carried out to the rear axle. New carpets were made, the headlining was dry cleaned, all wood repolished, and a new windscreen was fitted. The car was rewired together with a new engine loom. All rubbers were renewed and factory air-conditioning was installed. An enormous amount of detailed restoration to preserve originality was carried out. Much of the work was carried out by Robert himself and he has said that he would never personally undertake such a project on a post-war car again.



RH1344. The early Silver Shadow. H.J. Mulliner. Park Ward two-door cars had a particularly handsome fascia, which shared the standard saloon's layout but with the centre panel raised slightly above the surrounding area and specially selected veneers and pale crossbanding.

During the restoration, a Mr Fred Ulver of Melbourne bought the car in the autumn of 1984 as an unfinished project and had to wait another year until 25th August 1985 when he eventually took delivery. The car left McDermott's virtually as a new car. The mileage at this time was 63,119 miles, but with an engine of very low mileage. The restoration of the car was begun at McDermott's Rose Street, Fitzroy, premises in 1980. I used to visit Robert at weekends in search of a good Bentley S3, which was eventually acquired from him. During this time, I witnessed the restoration of CRH1344

until its completion in 1985. I had always thought that it was a unique car, particularly in terms of its history, low mileage, the quality of the restoration and overall handsome appearance. However, the owner would definitely not part with it.

In 1987 I called to say farewell to Robert as I had just retired and was leaving Melbourne to live full-time again in Adelaide. The Rolls was parked in the workshop which was then in South Melbourne, and I remarked to Robert that I still considered it to be the best early Silver Shadow anywhere. He informed me that the car would soon be for sale as the owner's

driving licence would not be renewed because of his poor eyesight. I bought the car on 27.7.87 with the speedo reading 65,277 miles. Some service work was performed, and we took delivery on 13.8.1987.

The Victorian registration RR-055 was retained by the former owner and on 27.8.1987 it was registered in South Australia as UEZ-696. The Silver Shadow was designed with the American market in mind, and the accent was on a soft ride rather than for sports car handling. New rear springs were fitted about twenty per cent stiffer than the originals. A much thicker front anti-sway bar has noticeably improved the steering on tight corners. These modifications have not affected the comfort but have made the car much more sure-footed at speed. On the dynamometer, the car proved to be running too rich. All carburettor adjustments were checked and it was discovered that fitting leaner needles than standard gave more power, a crisper engine, better economy and cleaner sparking plugs. We now enjoy a

very beautiful Rolls-Royce, thirty years of age, but which looks and drives like a new car, with an engine that has only done a nominal mileage. It is the effortless power of this big V-8 engine, the ability to manipulate the 4-speed automatic transmission to

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REPORT ON TEST OF COMPLETE CAR

Date of test 23. 6. 86
Owner Peter Sellers
Retailer A. A. Fox

Chassis No. G41 134
Coachbuilder R.M.R.

Type of body and seating capacity 2 Door Saloon

The routine inspection (L.E.I.) and road test for 60

Engine: Quietness, general running and power V8

Passengers 5

Gearbox 5

Lock V8 9

produce, nearly always, as the handbook says, "imperceptible gear changes" and the convenience of power steering, electric seats and windows together with the solidity that only seems to come with older cars, that are its real charms. This view was reinforced by the car winning the Concours d'Elegance Trophy of the R.R.O.C.A. (S.A. Branch) two years in succession, the only occasions on which it has been entered.

Photographs from the Author