

Rolls-Royce Owners' Club of Australia

Ambassador Extraordinary

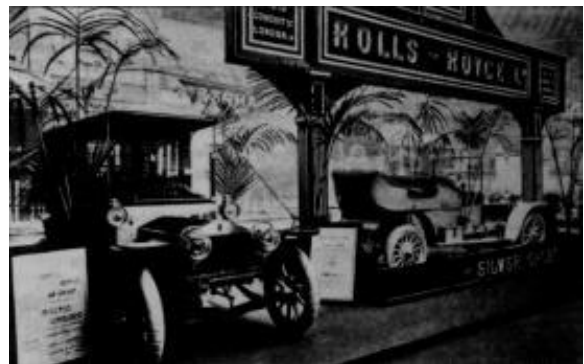
A History of "The Silver Ghost"

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In 1907 The Silver Ghost was built specifically to publicise the new Rolls-Royce 40/50 h.p. six-cylinder model and in doing so established the Rolls-Royce reputation for reliability and engineering excellence. In this article, reproduced from *Queste* with kind permission of Rolls-Royce Motor Cars Ltd, Warren Allport traces the history of the most famous Veteran motor car, which since returning to Rolls-Royce in 1948 continued its ambassadorial role.

The 40/50 models exhibited at the 1906 Olympia Motor Show had attracted much Interest and favourable comment. Managing Director Claude Johnson saw that excellent though the new model was, it needed to be brought to a wider public if the newly floated Rolls-Royce Ltd was to succeed. Proper production of the 40/50 h.p. at Cooke Street, Manchester had not started until early 1907 after all the effort of preparing the first four motor cars for Olympia and the Paris show which followed. The fifth chassis was numbered 60544 - for some reason 60543 was never built.



Claude Johnson selected the 12th chassis, 60551, on the short 135-inch wheelbase as his publicity vehicle and ordered a semi-Roi des Belges open body from Barker & Co. on March 6th, 1907. It was specified that the coachwork would be painted silver and that upholstery would be in green leather. Lamps and other external fittings were to be silver plated. Price of the body was £110-14-0 and the chassis retailed at £950 plus £7-10s for the aluminium dashboard fitted as an alternative to the usual polished teak.

It was a striking ensemble and Claude Johnson, who had an Edwardian penchant for naming cars, called it The Silver Ghost by virtue of its appearance and 'extraordinary stealthiness'.

The name was carried on a special repousse' plaque on the scuttle. Although after the arrival of the 40/50 h.p. New Phantom in 1925 earlier 40/50 h.p. models were known as Silver Ghosts to avoid confusion, there was only one motor car entitled to the name - 60551, registered AX-201.

Factory records preserved by the Sir Henry Royce Memorial Foundation show that the chassis was tested for 80 miles by chief tester Eric Platford and was despatched by "road, Mr Johnson" on April 13th, 1907. Back in London no time was lost in arranging trial runs for the Press and The Autocar of April 20th recorded: "The running of this car at slow speeds is the smoothest thing we have ever experienced, while for silence the motor beneath the bonnet might be a silent sewing machine..." On the day that report appeared the first private customer - William Arkright of Chesterfield - took delivery of a 40/50 h.p., 60544. None of the earlier 40/50 h.p. chassis was sold until 1908.

On May 3rd, 60551 was driven to Bexhill then north to Glasgow, accompanied from Hatfield by a White steam car, both cars being under RAC observation. They went on to cover the tough route proposed for the 1907 Scottish Reliability Trial before returning to London. Between May 3rd and 14th, The Silver Ghost completed 2,000« miles under official observation, recording a best fuel consumption of 23- mpg for one section. On the route north Claude Johnson had driven the 518½ miles to Glasgow using third and fourth gears only. At the conclusion of the trial, performance was measured on Bexhill track - there was a 20mph overall speed limit - with 54.94 mph recorded in the direct third gear, in which 3.4 mph was possible. Such flexibility was important to Edwardian motorists, many of whom were incapable of changing gear on the move. Apart from punctures, adjustments during the twelve days had amounted to only 1 hour 28 minutes.

On Friday June 21st the Silver Ghost, accompanied by 40/50 h.p. models driven by Charles Rolls and Harry Swindley of The Autocar carrying press representatives, left London for Glasgow and the Scottish Reliability Trial. The first day's run was to Derby, the party proceeding on the following day to Keswick via Manchester, Matlock, Buxton and the Cat and Fiddle Hill, where the famous photograph was taken. Glasgow was reached at 6 p.m. on the Sunday with no mechanical troubles but the inevitable punctures.



On June 24th the Silver Ghost came under the recognisance of the Scottish Automobile Club and was weighed - 3,460 lb unladen. Of the nine other cars in Class VII, only two were less powerful than the Rolls-Royce. The 747-mile route was covered over five days, with about 160 miles a day apart from the final day, when 114 miles were driven. It was no picnic with poorly surfaced mountain roads and some steep climbs, such as the 1-in-7 Rest and Be Thankful on the first day's Glasgow to Perth run. It was on the second day, Perth to Aberdeen, that The Silver Ghost suffered her only involuntary stop since leaving London 629 miles earlier. This probably occurred after Claude Johnson had negotiated the treacherous

Devil's Elbow and just short of the long Calmwell Hill where the road climbs to 2,200 feet. It took a minute for the trouble to be traced to the petrol tap which had shaken itself shut - hardly a major failure. Apart from this incident the Rolls-Royce made non-stop runs each day and gained the gold medal in its class for hill climbing speed, reliability and fuel consumption. The latter was 17.02 mpg.

A lesser man than Claude Johnson would have been content to call it a day but on Monday July 1st he was heading south from Glasgow to London intent on breaking the world record for a 'non-stop' run, which stood at 7,089 miles. 'Non-stop' in that context meant without an involuntary stop on the road, apart from punctures, so routine maintenance and even repairs and replacements were allowed at the end of a day's run. All such attention was duly logged by the ever-present RAC observer - one of four - accompanying The Silver Ghost. The route from Glasgow was Airdrie, Edinburgh, Berwick, Newcastle-on-Tyne, Durham, Darlington, Boroughbridge, Leeds, Bradford, Huddersfield, Manchester, Tarporley, Newport, Watling Street, Coventry and thence by the Holyhead Road (A5) to the RAC clubhouse in Brick Street off Piccadilly. The Glasgow to London distance was 512 miles and this route was reversed for the return journey between the two cities.

On arrival in London on Tuesday July 2nd, Claude Johnson had completed 1,603 miles at the wheel of The Silver Ghost and handed over to Charles Rolls. Later on, the driving was shared by Eric Platford and 'mechanician' Reginald Macready. Running day and night, the miles soon mounted and a week later 4,558 miles had been covered. A Press party met at the Midland Hotel, Manchester on the evening of July 18th to follow the breaking of the record. At midnight Claude Johnson in The Silver Ghost, accompanied by the Press in another 40/50 h.p. driven by Henry Royce, started south to the cheers of the hotel guests. At Mere Royce departed for Knutsford and a works driver took his place, following the dim tall light ahead. Whitchurch was reached with the dawn and approaching Newport the morning mist reduced the motor cars' speed. The sun shone as the world's record for a non-stop run was broken at the crossing of the Wolverhampton and Cannock roads.

The original plan had been to complete 10,000 miles under RAC observation, but the Rolls-Royce continued to run with the regularity of a train, so with the agreement of the club the distance was increased to 15,000 miles. That figure was reached on the night of Thursday August 8th after the Glasgow to London route had been

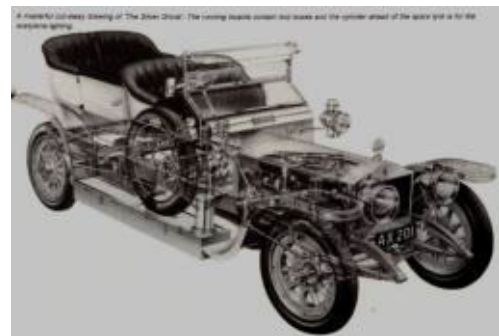


covered 27 times and 14,371 miles were without an involuntary stop - only the petrol tap incident marred the 15,000-mile total. Servicing, repairs and replacements (excluding tyres) over the distance took 40 hours 13 minutes, including 8 hours 28 minutes to grind in the valves after 7,500 miles and 10 hours 5 minutes for the addition of a new fuel tap and a system to enable the pressure in the petrol tank to be maintained either automatically or independently by hand - there was no fuel pump.

After completion of the mileage, which occurred just north of St Albans, AX-201 was driven direct to the RAC garage in London for Rolls-Royce Ltd had announced the intention at the outset for The Silver Ghost to be stripped by the club's engineers and the cost of putting her back into 'as new' condition ascertained. The following day the Trials Committee members were taken on a demonstration run which included some test hills and pronounced the running of the car as 'excellent'. They found: "The car as a whole, and the engine in particular, were exceptionally quiet (especially on the third speed direct drive) and free from vibration."

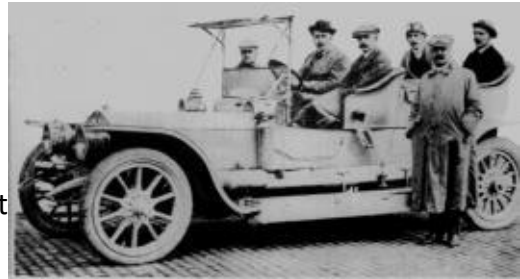
After a thorough technical examination and dismantling no wear measurable by micrometre was found in the engine, gearbox, rear axle or brakes. To bring the car back to 'as new' condition two front wheel pivot pins, one steering rod tie pin, the ball tip of the steering lever, magneto driving joint, fan belt and petrol strainer were replaced. The steering ball joint's sleeve was refitted, and the valves were

reground. "Had the car been in the hands of a private owner no replacements would have been considered necessary," stated the RAC report. Cost of all replacements and servicing during the 15,000 miles and putting AX-201 back to 'as new' condition was just £28-5s-0. The annual running costs of a Rolls-Royce, for 7,500 miles, was calculated at only £46-18-0, excluding tyres.



Though details of this astounding performance and the RAC's findings appeared in the Press in August it was not until November 5th, 1907, that the official signed RAC Certificate of Performance was provided. That was just in time for the certificate, together with the worn parts that were replaced, to be shown on the Rolls-Royce stand at the 1907 Olympia Motor Show alongside The Silver Ghost One of the few items criticised in the RAC report was the rear springing which had been miscalculated. A note on the service records of 60551 in Eric Platford's handwriting reads: "Rather weak when run in Trial. Extra plate fixed in both back springs by R (stronger and better)." However, by then The Silver Ghost was already out of date for the 1908 chassis, also on the stand, was fitted with a completely new rear suspension without the transverse leaf. Only 53 40/50 h.p. models had been produced with the original platform suspension but already Royce, the perfectionist, had incorporated improvements.

Claude Johnson had taken The Silver Ghost on holiday to Cornwall in September 1907 and continued to use her after the motor show. She ferried guests to the opening of the new Derby factory on July 9th, 1908, but that was one of the last occasions on which she served Rolls-Royce. On July 14th she was sold for £750 but the purchaser, Daniel



Hanbury, did not take delivery from Conduit Street until September 2nd, 1908. In the meantime, the chassis was thoroughly overhauled, the silver plating was renewed and a new set of rear wings fitted.

Daniel Hanbury was the second son of Sir Thomas Hanbury and the Rolls-Royce guarantee book records his address as 19 Eaton Square, London and later as Castle Malwood, Lyndhurst, Hampshire. Daniel Hanbury is often confused with his cousin, Arthur Hanbury, who worked for Rolls-Royce.

In 1908 Cecil Hanbury, Daniel's brother, acquired a 40150 h.p. which was fitted with a hood and a more curved scuttle and in 1913 60551 was similarly altered. The same year a CAV dynamo was fitted to provide electric lighting. Both electrics and hood were removed in 1949, but the altered windscreen remains. In Daniel Hanbury's ownership AX-201 was maintained by Rolls-Royce who incorporated later modifications, such as the higher lift camshaft to give more power in 1911.

A feature of The Silver Ghost's Barker body, presumably for easier servicing during the 1907 trials, was that it incorporated the patent Windham detachable rear section, enabling the rear seat to be removed. In the Hanbury ownership AX-201 was often in this guise with a huge box fitted instead of the rear seat, replaced only for touring. That was extensive both in the U.K. and abroad as the family had a villa in Italy and visited Switzerland for winter sports. On such occasions two Rolls-Royce motor cars were used, AX-201 heavily laden with luggage and spare tyres. Such overloading caused frequent broken springs on the rough roads of the day. In 1925 the continual pounding took its toll and when touring in Italy the chassis was cracked. Temporary repairs were made by plating, and in 1930 the works at Derby re-plated the cracks, but AX-201 was little used after 1925.

In 1945 Rolls-Royce was approached for help in supplying parts to put The Silver Ghost back on the road but before the requirements were ascertained Daniel Hanbury died, on July 21st, 1948. The Silver Ghost was bequeathed to his son-in-law Air Marshall Sir Alec Coryton, who part exchanged her with Rolls-Royce for the 1939 Bentley Mk V H.J. Mulliner saloon, B30AW, which was then being used by Dr F. Llewellyn Smith, general manager of the Rolls-Royce Motor Car Division.

So AX-201 was collected by lorry from Castle Malwood on October 27th, 1948, and taken to the Rolls-Royce London service depot at Hythe Road. There some cosmetic and mechanical work was carried out. At the suggestion of the late Stanley Sears, coachbuilders H.E. Griffin of Haywards Heath were entrusted with coachwork repairs and repainting in 1949, including removal of the hood and supplying the plain steel number plates now carried. Major work on the engine was carried out by Hythe Road in 1950 and in 1951 Hooper & Co. undertook a complete re-paint and re trim.

Once The Silver Ghost was presentable again, Publicity appearances commenced. One of the first was at the 1952 Brussels Motor Show where her appearance in a special display in the annexe to the main hall attracted considerable interest. Unfortunately, while being towed from the show major damage to the front of the chassis occurred.

For the next decade AX-201 was used mainly for dealer displays, exceptions being the 20 Ghost Club's celebrations of 50 years of Rolls-Royce in 1954 and the Brooklands track 50th anniversary in 1957. In October 1961 the 50th anniversary of the famous London to Edinburgh top gear run, by chassis 1701, was repeated for the BBC.

Filming of Those Magnificent Men in Their Flying Machines took up to 23 days of AX-201's time in 1964, the same year as the first great Rolls-Royce and Bentley Pageant at Goodwood at which she also had an important role. In 1967 highlights included the second pageant at Goodwood and the Manchester to Blackpool run. The decade ended with a trip to America on the maiden voyage of the QE2. In the U.S.A. some 1,200 miles were covered in a few weeks and Dennis Miller-Williams returned just in time to make a top gear Glasgow-London run for the BBC.

When AX-201 appeared in the BBC Television series The Edwardians in 1972 there was a new plaque next to the chassis plate stating: 'The Property of Rolls Royce Motors Ltd'. The omission of the hyphen signified the rapidity with which this valuable asset was claimed for the Motor Car Division following the crash of Rolls-Royce Ltd in 1971.

Entry into the Common Market was celebrated by a Drive into Europe - to Brussels - with British Veteran and Vintage cars in January 1973, followed by the Rolls-Royce Enthusiasts' Club's major Austrian Alpine Rally in June.

In 1976 AX-201 was again overseas, in the Isle of Man, to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the Tourist Trophy win. The history of Rolls-Royce was traced in the major Birth of a Legend exhibition at the National Motor Museum from October 1976 to January 1977. The Silver Ghost took pride of place there.

On May 7th, 1977, The Silver Ghost was reviewed by Her Majesty The Queen in the Quadrangle of Windsor Castle as part of the Rolls-Royce Silver Jubilee Tribute. From the castle the long procession drove the entire length of the Long Walk and then on to Ascot Racecourse.

The 75th anniversary of Rolls-Royce in 1979 was marked by several appearances including the Geneva Motor Show in March and dealer displays on the continent. The huge Duxford Wheel and wing pageant in September was followed by a tribute to Sir Henry Royce at West Wittering.

In 1982 The Silver Ghost was 75 years old and among the June celebrations was a run from Glasgow via Edinburgh, Leeds, Manchester and Crewe to the RAC in London. It was carried out in very wet weather with no mechanical problems in the 550 miles. In October the Post Office issued a special Silver Ghost stamp and AX-201 carried the first day covers in London and conveyed first day covers from the factory to the Crewe sorting office. In between the two events was a trip to the U.S.A., with appearances in New York, Chicago, Boston, San Francisco and Los Angeles, culminating in a starring role at the Rolls-Royce Owners' Club's National Meet in Florida.

On July 3rd, 1983, 75 years to the day after transporting guests to the opening of the Derby factory, The Silver Ghost was back at Derby to transport Lord Montagu to the unveiling of a plaque on the spot in Number One Shop where Henry Royce's office had been situated.

Early in 1984 came a first visit to Australia, with an appearance at Melbourne's motor show followed by visits to Brisbane, Sydney, Adelaide and Perth. Back in the U.K., there was the second Rolls-Royce pageant at Duxford in June.

The major event of 1986 was a first visit to Canada where, as well as dealer displays and Rolls-Royce club events, AX-201 was exhibited in a glass showcase outside the British Pavilion at Expo '86 in Vancouver.

The Silver Ghost's proudest moment came on July 24th, 1987, when she transported Her Majesty The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh during a visit to the factory at Crewe. That made national television news reports.

A busy year lay ahead in 1986, starting with a visit to Japan for the opening of the new showroom of Comes & Co. in Tokyo in March. In May Rest and Be Thankful was climbed at the start of the Rolls-Royce Enthusiasts' Club Scottish Tour to celebrate the gold medal in the 1907 trial. Continental dealer appearances were followed by a part in the floodlit cavalcade at Blenheim Palace for the Rolls-Royce U.K. dealers' summer ball. On September 21st the Duke of Kent rode in AX-201 to open the new headquarters of Rolls-Royce Motor Cars International at St. Prex, Switzerland.

There were two other events in 1988 that had a special significance for The Silver Ghost: the opening of new premises of authorised coachwork repairers S.C. Gordon of Luton on June 16th and service dealers P.& A. Wood at Great Easton on September 11th. These two firms were to be entrusted with repairing the ravages of time on this famous motor car so that her publicity work could continue into the 21st century.

Among the work that was to take AX-201 off the road for some 18 months was a complete re-paint and re-trim, renewal of the silver plating and attention to the coachwork where necessary. On the mechanical side the opportunity was taken to deal permanently with the cracked chassis, subject to temporary repairs since 1925, by welding in an additional channel section inside the frame and rectifying other damage dating back to the 1952 accident. At the same time the engineering department and laboratory at Crewe addressed the problem of cracking and metal fatigue in the aluminium crankcase. Their expertise enabled permanent repairs to be made without welding and without having to cast a new crankcase. With such a valuable historic motor car the aim has been to repair and refurbish existing parts rather than replacing them.

The Silver Ghost is back on the road again, renewed for the years ahead. A Charity Tour from John O'Groats to Land's End was completed in August 1990, followed by taking centre stage on the Rolls-Royce stand at the 1990 British Motor Show at Birmingham. For this old campaigner the limelight is nothing new - after all she starred on the Rolls-Royce stand at the 1907 motor show as "The Best Six-cylinder Car in the World".