

# CLASSIC DRIVER

## New Rolls-Royce Phantom - reaction from Bob Gathercole



**In response to the question 'What do you think of the new Rolls Royce?' in one word it can only accurately be answered as *VeryInteresting*. I am sure the ingenuity and might of BMW will have ensured that technically and the build quality will be all that is expected of such a new car carrying the famous name Rolls Royce. Only time will tell if the BMW engineers and designers have found that magical formula of producing the World's finest motor car, which historically has always been its main attraction. Somehow I doubt it, as today it has even greater competition than its predecessors. Will it encapsulate the expected traditional Rolls Royce values.**

I know that Ian Cameron who headed up the design team was certainly the obvious choice for this most important project of designing this brand new car and his credentials of the past are World renowned. He is a designer of traditional values and has obviously studied the past Heritage of Rolls Royce products and tried to update them into the 21st Century. My first impressions are that he has overall succeeded, firstly the car looks different

to any other of its type, therefore will be instantly recognisable and everything is on a grand scale.

Firstly by calling the new car Phantom gives confidence that the design team appreciate the all important past Heritage. The pre-war Phantom models were the trend setters of their time and in fact were evolutionary models following on from the most famous of all Rolls Royce models the 40/50 model known as the Silver Ghost, which was without doubt in its day the 'Best Car in the World' of which the Company has lived on that reputation ever since.

My knowledge of the new car is the same as anyone else's at present, having only read about it in the popular press over the last few days since its World launch at the Detroit Motor Show. First impressions are that it is very large, nearly six metres long and two metres wide with those enormous 19 inch wheels, which should provide superb and comfortable road holding. A very large rear C pillar area and the re-introduction of rear Coach doors that are hinged at the rear (always known as suicide doors) which I think is still the perfect and most elegant way to enter the rear compartment of such a limousine. A great idea and from what I have read the rear doors automatically lock as soon as the car moves away. The side elevation is reminiscent of some of the superb 50's period coach built Silver Wraiths and the rear boot area exudes an elegance of design. The roof line is elegantly proportioned to cleverly diminish to the eye the obvious overall size of the car. I wonder whether the famous Everflex roof will re-appear as an option as the design would seem to benefit such a treatment. But I am not convinced about the front elevation, the famous Rolls Royce radiator has to be retained but seems to be almost an overstatement in size and therefore looks too heavy. The headlight treatment is in my view completely wrong and would look more in keeping if it had a curved twin headlight design similar to the present Bentley Arnage. One can't help remembering the ill-fated Pininfarina designed Camarque when you look at the photographs. It is all very well commenting on photographs only, perhaps it looks better on the road and suffers from the film stars nightmare of not being photogenic. One glaring admission is the total lack of chromium front and rear bumpers or at least chromium cappings. The front and rear ends look unfinished. One understands the car is technically very advanced and full of all the latest gizmo's and the newly revised V12 BMW engine provides more than adequate power with its six speed automatic gearbox providing a 150mph top speed and a staggering 0-60 time of 5.7 seconds.

One big advantage that Ian Cameron and his design team had compared with the past is that this new car was going to be a Rolls Royce and not a Bentley as well. He could therefore start with an almost clean sheet of paper and not allow a secondary product to influence him. This car bears no parentage to the past Silver Seraph and as such is a brave move for its future. Whether the traditional Rolls Royce owner will accept it, only time will tell. The hefty price tag was obviously influenced by the Maybach price as you could not have a Rolls Royce cheaper than a Daimler Chrysler product. My own views are that the Maybach will have little effect on the potential sales of this new car, but the Company needs to closely watch Cadillac with its awesome looking new V16 prototype. One thought that occurs to me is that by using the name Phantom, which is traditionally correct, what will happen if the Company wishes to produce a future Royal/State limousine as per the past Phantom VI, what will they then call that car. Sorry Volkswagen you have totally demised the name Phantom by using it for your grosser W12 Passat. Rolls Royce Motors should have registered the model name and then sold it to BMW as with the Radiator and the Flying Lady. As we know Bentley have now produced a Royal State Limousine which our Queen Elizabeth has exclusively used during her Jubilee Celebrations and once expects to see more of those models joining the Royal Household.

As a motoring historian and a passionate Bentley enthusiast, one was grieved at the possible loss of

England's most famous car Marques but it has seemingly now worked out that for their respective futures Volkswagen are without doubt the ideal custodians of the famous Bentley Marque and have already proved that they will take this famous name to new heights and bring back its sporting heritage for which it was always World renowned. The new Bentley GT Coupe is certainly going to be one of the great cars of all time. If the founder Mr W O Bentley is looking down on what's happening he must have a permanent smile on his face. The Marques Bentley and Rolls Royce were never ideal bed-fellows and tragically since 1931 Bentley was really only known as a poor mans Rolls Royce. But now, thank goodness no longer and it is going to be the best owner-driver luxury car of all time and is very much a total British product still being built at Crewe. What the real future of Rolls Royce is only time will tell. BMW are certainly a great Motor Manufacturer but the recent bad experience with the Rover Group seems to suggest that they are not as good looking after non-BMW products. Their decision to build a final assembly plant at Goodwood is totally illogical, it could not be further away from the main component suppliers, which are based in the Midlands and they had a great opportunity which is now lost, of taking the car back to its birthplace, that being Derby. I think Rolls Royce owners and enthusiasts would have respected this decision more than the one for going to a Stately Home, which is almost out in the wilderness.

I am sure the car will succeed but I doubt whether it will become an icon in the Company's illustrious History and with its price tag and strong competition from other Companies one doubts its long term commercial viability. Its all a matter of confidence building and at present the Volkswagen Bentley Marque has proven to the World that its product has a great future. BMW has a lot of work to do to gain a similar respect.

*Bob Gathercole*

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