

CLASSIC DRIVER

[Aga Khan's Rolls-Royce Phantom IV Sedan de Ville confirmed for Gooding sale](#)



There is no such thing as an 'ordinary' Phantom IV; after all, just 18 chassis were built and they were sold new only to royalty and heads of state. Yet even among the extraordinary, some examples are more, er, startling than others - and none more so than the 1952 Sedan de Ville custom-built for the Aga Khan III. This is the very car that Gooding is offering for sale at its Pebble Beach auction on 20-21 August 2011.

It's hard to know where to start when describing this elaborate Rolls-Royce. It's not just the unique Hooper coachwork, although this is the only Phantom IV that wears the formal, Sedan de Ville body style, with its long, flowing front wings and articulating rear-wheel covers (that open "in a most unorthodox fashion" to grant full access to the rear wheel).

No, what really raises the eyebrows is the bespoke detailing. So numerous were the requests and last-minute additions that chassis 4AF20 took more than two years to build - and as a result, Gooding tells, the final, total cost of the car was "discreetly omitted from the factory records". Bear in mind, however, that General Franco paid around \$42,000 for his far-less-extravagant Phantom IV limousine.



To mention just a few of these requests... there are large front doors that had to open as wide as possible to “provide easy entrance for His Highness” – who was fond of riding in the driver’s compartment. In the rear, where three passengers on the main seat can be joined by two guests ensconced in the very comfortable, forward-facing ‘H-pattern’ occasional seats, there are removable shutters for increased privacy, plus an electrically operated shade for the rear window. All the windows, in fact, are electrically operated (with a manual override for emergencies).

In the rear seat armrest are nestled an adjustable mirror, silver brush and comb, two glass jars and a sterling silver compact, all – of course – engraved with the Aga Khan’s royal crest. And thank goodness for the telescopic ashtrays, lighters and two small tables, without which no journey could truly be called comfortable.



Should the rear passengers wish to communicate with the chauffeur, they would thankfully be able to use the hand-held microphone; or perhaps dictate a few letters using the built-in Dictaphone. And when it's time to break for lunch, the polished French burr walnut cabinet doors open to reveal – thanks to the automatic illumination – a full picnic set, with two thermos flasks, two sandwich boxes, four plates and one nest of four silver beakers with gilt interior.

Even before the car was finished, Her Highness the Begum Omm-e-Habibah was able to review these accoutrements, thanks to a series of detailed renderings from Hooper. Presumably the car warranted the royal family's full approval because it stayed in the Aga Khan's possession for the rest of his life, and was only sold by his widow after his death.

In short, what the Aga Khan commissioned, reckons the auction house, was a car for continental motoring that "combined the comfort of a drawing room with the luxuries of his royal household". If that sounds exactly the sort of transport you require, and you have the wherewithal to cope with the \$850,000–\$1,100,000 estimate, then make Gooding's Pebble Beach auction a firm fixture in your diary.

For further information, see www.goodingco.com.

Text: *Charis Whitcombe*

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