
1933 Rolls-Royce 20/25 H.P.

Lot sold	USD 136 740 - 177 762 GBP 100 000 - 130 000 (listed)	Drive	LHD
Year of manufacture	1933	Condition	Used
Chassis number	GEX28	Location	
Number of seats	2	Fuel type	Petrol
Drivetrain	2wd	Exterior colour	Other
Lot number	216		

Description

1933 Rolls-Royce 20/25hp Owen Sedanca Three-Position Drophead Coupé

Coachwork by Gurney Nutting

Registration no. AGJ 539

Chassis no. GEX28

"This model was introduced to meet requests for a smaller, less expensive car in keeping with the trend after the First World War towards smaller cars for a wider market. Construction was simplified - but standards of workmanship were not compromised." - Edward Eves, Rolls-Royce, 75 Years of Motoring Excellence.

Changing times after WWI eventually forced the abandonment of Rolls-Royce's 'one model' policy, an all-new 20hp car joining the existing 40/50hp Silver Ghost in 1922. The 'Twenty' reflected Henry Royce's interest in contemporary trends within the American automobile industry, incorporating unitary construction of the engine and gearbox, the latter featuring the modern innovation of a central ball change, together with a 'Hotchkiss drive' rear axle. The engine, Rolls-Royce's first with overhead valves, was a six-cylinder unit displacing 3,127cc. Favourably received as the Twenty was, its three-speed transmission's central gearchange was not to everyone's taste, and when four-wheel, servo-assisted brakes were introduced in 1925, a four-speed gearbox with right-hand, gated change replaced the original three-speeder.

The Twenty's introduction enabled its makers to cater for the increasingly important owner-driver market that appreciated the quality of Rolls-Royce engineering but did not need a car as large as a 40/50hp Ghost or Phantom. The car proved eminently suited to town use yet could cope admirably with Continental touring when called upon. Its successor, the 20/25hp, introduced in 1929, updated the concept with significant improvements, featuring an enlarged (from 3.1 to 3.7 litres) and more powerful version of the Twenty's six-cylinder overhead-valve engine. The latter's increased power allowed the bespoke coachbuilders greater freedom in their efforts to satisfy a discerning clientele that demanded ever larger and more opulent designs. Produced concurrently with the Phantom II, the 20/25 benefited from many of the larger model's improvements, such as synchromesh gears and centralised chassis lubrication, becoming the best-selling Rolls-Royce of the inter-war period.

The Rolls-Royce 20/25hp was, of course, an exclusively coachbuilt automobile, and most of the great British coachbuilding firms offered designs, many of them unique, on the 20/25hp chassis. Some of the most widely admired were the work of J Gurney Nutting, a company associated with quality marques - Bentley in particular - from its earliest days and a supreme practitioner of the coachbuilding craft in the late 1930s. Founded in Croydon, Surrey in 1919, Gurney Nutting had bodied its first Bentley before moving to London's fashionable Chelsea district in 1924, and within a few years was established as the Cricklewood firm's foremost supplier of bodies after Vanden Plas.

Gurney Nutting's work had a sporting flavour from the outset and succeeded in attracting the attention of society's upper echelons; the Prince of Wales and Duke of York were clients, and the firm gained its Royal Warrant in the early 1930s. Daimler and Rolls-Royce had been added to the Gurney Nutting portfolio in the mid-1920s, and the fruitful association with the latter continued into the succeeding decade.

By general consent, Gurney Nutting's stunning drophead coupés - developed for fashionable retailers, H R Owen - are among the most handsome and best proportioned ever to grace the Rolls-Royce 20/25 chassis. The car offered here, chassis number 'GEX28', is one of these remarkable dropheads, differing slightly from the others by virtue of its extended bonnet, an original feature that enhances the already elegant proportions and further accentuates its resemblance to a Phantom II. 'GEX28' was off test on 10th February 1933 and sold new to a Captain Gladstone. The car's original registration was 'AGJ 539', which it retains. 'GEX28' is featured in Lawrence Dalton's *Those Elegant Rolls-Royce* (1967, page 88).

'GEX28' has spent a large part of its post-WWII life in the USA, a not unusual fate among Rolls-Royces of its generation, and for over 40 years formed part of a private collection in California. Since returning to the UK the car has benefited from considerable upgrading, including refinishing to an excellent standard in Embassy Black, together with a new top in the correct duck material, and new carpets. The seats have been reupholstered in light caramel leather at some time in the last few years and still present beautifully. Said to be very pleasant to drive, with a smooth and powerful engine, this unique 20/25 drophead possesses all the qualities that make this one of the most desirable models of its decade.

Bonhams 1793

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