

**DRIVING OUT ON A LUXURY PICNIC, THE ROLLS-ROYCE PHANTOM GOBBLES UP BUMPS. ON A VISIT TO THE BESPOKE PLANT, SUNDAY MID DAY FINDS OUT HOW EACH AUTOMOBILE IS CUSTOM-MADE AND WHY THE ROLLS-ROYCE ISN'T JUST A CAR**

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"It can't be done" is never heard at the Rolls-Royce Motor Car plant in Goodwood. Here you'll find people passionate about the motorcar, building them by hand and customising them to the tastes of their future owners.

The maxim followed here is that it will be done, and done to perfection. That's why a tailor's tape measure is also kept handy.

"We used it to measure an inside leg," said Clive Woolmer, head of Rolls-Royce's Bespoke Business.

While in England, I drove to the RRMCC plant in West Sussex to learn more about their Bespoke programme and spend a day with a Rolls-Royce Phantom. Naturally, I was as thrilled as a little boy locked in a chocolate factory.

The simple tape measure epitomises the Bespoke programme wherein the super-luxurious Rolls-Royce Phantom is made in accordance with a customer's specifications or requirements. Though the Phantom has an extensive options list, the Bespoke programme allows customers to create a car that is completely personal by specifying features not usually available.

Gavin Hartley, manager Bespoke interior design, explained that the tape measure was used when a customer requested foot rests in his Phantom. "Just clapping on standard footrests is never an option," Hartley emphasised, "The customer's inside leg was measured and shoe-size noted so that foot rests could be fabricated and perfectly positioned."



The famous crest of the Rolls-Royce Phantom



Pulling off at a meadow for a once-in-a-lifetime picnic

# PHANTOM WHO ROLLS

Inside the spotless plant there's no hum of robots. On the assembly line technicians put the car together by hand which takes a minimum of two months. The only robots employed are in the paint shop since it ensures an even and perfect application.

But robots cannot replace Mark Court who painstakingly hand paints the coachline — the six-meter pinstripe down the side of the car — using brushes made of ox and squirrel hair. The three-hour process requires enormous concentration. Mark, who's also painted pub signs in his career, learnt the coachlining technique over six months. He also paints special artwork requested by customers, such as a coat of arms.

Walking through the works I realised that Rolls-Royce firmly believes that there

is no substitute for the trained eye and the sensitivity of finger tips.

In the woodworks department, skilled technicians work to shape the 42 wood parts required for each Phantom using the latest woodworking technology and traditional handcraft skills.

In the leather area 60 people work selecting the best quality hides, checking them for defects and then stitching them together using computer assisted sewing equipment.

Within the Bespoke programme the interior trim and seat shapes can differ so each of leather part is sewn individually to ensure a perfect fit. Fitting the leather is a highly skilled job, facilitated using fully adjustable servo assisted and custom-built jigs.

A Rolls-Royce isn't shopped, it's commissioned.

Woolmer explained that customers often visit the factory to have a chat with Hartley about customising their car. Hartley invites them to relax in the plush Bespoke lounge. There, through photographs, stunning visual displays and sometimes with the help of quick sketches, he makes suggestions and explains how their ideas for accessories and unique design elements can be implemented. A Phantom is also parked in the lounge for quick reference.

"Most customers love the sense of involvement in customising the car," Woolmer says.

And the degree of customisation is large. From coolers specially fashioned for



The plush interiors (above); and motifs, designs and leather colour can all be customised (right)

the shape of the bottle of your preferred brand to cigar humidors custom made to perfectly contain your preferred smoke, it can all be done.

Other design details that can make your Rolls unique are personal monograms stitched in the upholstery and etched on champagne glasses, unique motifs on the wood trim and chic leather luggage that goes with the leather of the car. The possibilities are endless.

Much like the torque, I realised when at the wheel — it seemed incessant. There was enough power to warrant just a gentle caress of the accelerator pedal. Seventy five percent of the torque is available when the engine is ticking at a thousand times a minute. This makes the Rolls speed along in a stately unhurried way. On cobbled

village roads I actually tried writing while being driven and I could effortlessly. All bumps were gobbled by the suspension.

I had the Rolls to enjoy for almost a day. After driving it to my heart's content on country roads and the motorway, we pulled off onto a meadow near the Weald and Downland Open Air Museum. The refreshments in the cooler were now chilled. The sandwiches bought from the museum's café were made from flour milled on site and local farm produce.

The lower flap of the Phantom's boot opens to form a bench capable of 150 kilogrammes and it made the perfect picnic table. Afterwards under the shade of a sprawling old oak tree, we sat like English lords on the rear seats and watched *The Bourne Ultimatum* on our individual TV

**FAMOUS ROLLS ROYCE OWNERS**

The British Royal Family, Michael Jackson (owned three, one for each of his children), Freddie Mercury, Sylvester Stallone, Elvis Presley, John Lennon, David Beckham, P Diddy, Bridget Bardot, Donald Trump, Simon Cowell



From start to finish, a Rolls Royce takes about a couple of months to roll out



Mark Court — coachline and crest painter for the company



Wendy Craig (right), the sewing supervisor, with the threads used in a Rolls-Royce (above)



sized LCD screens.

The Phantom features the very best in audiovisual technology. The Lexicon system employs 15 speakers and a nine-channel amplifier to deliver 420 watts of sound. Two subwoofers are housed within 16-litre resonance chambers in the space created by the Phantom's double floor, while a combination of 100 mm mid-range and 25 mm tweeter arrays located all around the car result in an acoustic 'sweet spot' that encompasses the whole interior.

It felt like being in the West Sussex

multiplex. The movie's Moscow car chase seemed to be happening inside the car.

Of course, all this comes at a price that resembles a phone number. But what you get is the ultimate in automotive luxury, designed just for you. And that makes a very powerful statement.

**A Rolls-Royce is put together by technicians. The only robots employed are in the paint shop since it ensures an even and perfect application.**