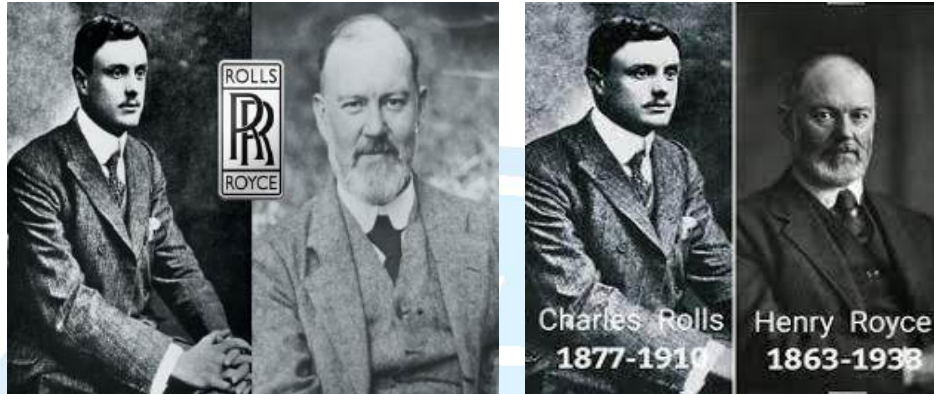


Bob Adby's Roller.

Another of the many classic cars in our club is Bob Adby's magnificently presented **1935 Rolls-Royce 20/25, Chassis No. GXK 5**, complete with its own original "Gregorys"!



The name Rolls-Royce is derived from a business relationship which developed between The Hon. Charles Stewart Rolls and Frederick Henry Royce in 1904. The personal relationship between the men did not last all that long even though the name lives on today.

C.S. Rolls was an aristocrat of wealthy background, a born adventurer who took up motor cycle racing, motor racing, ballooning and powered flying in turn. He was a pioneer motorist and aviator in England at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. He attended the World's Car Rally in Paris in 1894, two years before horseless carriages were even allowed on British roads!

In 1903 he started his own business, C.S. Rolls & Co, dealing in imported motor cars, and shortly after acquired premises in Conduit St. London and these subsequently became the London offices of Rolls-Royce Ltd. He had a strong desire to see and be part of the development and marketing of a world class British designed and produced motor car. This came about through his association with Frederick Henry Royce in 1904.

Rolls was the first aviator to complete a double, or each way crossing of the English Channel. He was also the first Englishman to die in a crash whilst piloting a plane. This occurred at an air show in Bournemouth in 1910. He was just 33 years of age. A statue now stands to his honour at his native Monmouth.

While Rolls was the flamboyant marketing guru Royce was the engineering brains behind what came to be regarded as the finest car in the world. He came from much more lowly beginnings, born in 1863 the son of a miller. By the age of 10 he worked as a newspaper boy at Clapham Junction to help support his family as his father had passed away the year before. At 14 he was apprenticed to the Great Northern Railway at the company's Peterborough workshops. He was later fortunate enough to obtain a job with a pioneer electric light company in London and studied the relatively new science of electricity at night. At 19 he was sent to Liverpool as a technical expert for the Lancashire Maxim and Western Electric Company and two years later he started his own business in Manchester, F.H. Royce, making electric light fittings and domestic electric bells. The firm progressed to manufacturing

electric motors, dynamos and switch gear to ultimately design and produce heavy duty electric cranes used in docks, railway yards, factories and mines all over Britain.

In 1903 Royce bought a Decauville motor car but soon decided he could build a much better car himself. History records that the first 10 horsepower (about half as powerful as a modern ride on lawnmower) Royce car was driven out of the Royce Ltd factory at Manchester by Royce himself on 1 April 1904. Even though subsequent events would prove this was no April Fools' Day joke it is interesting that the run was recorded as 31 March. The vehicle was driven to Royce's home at Knutsford some 15 miles away, not bad for a first run! The freedom from noise and vibration achieved by Royce, as well as the ability to throttle down to a quiet tick-over, broke new ground for a two-cylinder motorcar. After producing two more vehicles, this prototype was handed over to C.S. Rolls for his use as a London demonstrator. Royce's business partner at the time, A.E. Claremont, arranged for Rolls and Royce to meet though Rolls lacked enthusiasm as he was not fond of two cylinder cars. Rolls did however have a very strong desire to have his name emblazoned on a quality British manufactured motor vehicle. On their first meeting, Rolls was suitably impressed with Royce and the fine quality of his firm's products. The two entered into an agreement in December 1904 and Rolls would sell the entire motor car output of Royce Ltd, the vehicles being marketed henceforth as Rolls-Royce.

Rolls-Royce proceeded to manufacture cars of the highest quality money could buy and by 1906 were producing the famous 40/50 horsepower which quickly established itself as the ultimate in luxury motoring and reliability. The twelfth of these vehicles produced was fitted with a handsome touring body by Barker & Co. with aluminium paint and silver-plated lamps and fittings..... the vehicle earned the name "The Silver Ghost" and was exhibited at the 1907 London Motor Show.

Rolls-Royce would continue to develop the finest vehicles in the world but the 40/50 horsepower (all now referred to as Silver Ghosts) was a very large vehicle. In 1922 a smaller Rolls-Royce with a 20 horsepower 3 litre engine was produced. By the late 1920's these cars were considered underpowered and in 1929 were fitted with a larger capacity 3.7 litre engine and marketed as the 20/25 power model. In 1936 the engine was again increased to 4,257 cc to produce the 25/30 hp model. Rolls-Royce also continued to improve its larger capacity vehicles at the same time through the Phantom 1, 11 and 111 models..... these vehicles are nowadays the prize of only very wealthy collectors!

Although I could be disowned by RR aficionados, a number of American auto manufacturers produced vehicles of similar or just as good a quality as RR in the 1920's and early 30's. Packard, Cadillac, Cord, Pierce-Arrow and Deisenberg/Duesenberg were just stunning machines, the latter being of such quality that it gave us the phrase "It's a Doisy/Duesy" which still marks quality to this day.



A couple of Duesys here...Clark Gable had a fascination for this make.

In the period up to World War 2 when buying a Rolls Royce you acquired the chassis, engine and front section of the vehicle back to the firewall or bulkhead. You then chose the vehicle's body style from a myriad of private coach body building firms operating in the UK. Firms such as Barker, Park Ward, H.J. Mulliner, Freestone and Webb, Thrupp and Maberly, James Young, Rippon Bros., Vanden Plas etc. had continued in operation from the earliest days of horse drawn vehicles and now produced wooden- framed motorcar bodies.



The choice of body style was enormous from limousine, saloon, cabriolet, coupe, landaulette, sedanca de ville etc. The choice of body style and fittings was just a matter of how much one wished to spend. What it did mean, in today's terms, is that almost no two vehicles are the same and each is unique with its very own history. In the case of prewar Rolls and Bentleys the production records have been retained and highly prized by the various "Marque" clubs around the world.

The Rolls-Royce in my possession is a 1935 20/25 model with a Sports Saloon body by H.J. Mulliner. Personally, being born in 1948, I am a little fed up with being asked if I have owned it since new! While not in "Concours" condition the vehicle is more than presentable and attracts lots of attention on any run. It is on "Conditional Historic Vehicle" registration and can only be used on designated Club events and for very limited private purposes. While the interior woodwork is spectacular, previous restorations have not done justice to what was most likely the standard of the original coachwork delivered on the vehicle.



Driving the car is not an easy task.... the blind spots are enormous, the rear-vision mirror is the size of two matchboxes and the gearbox only has synchromesh between 3rd and 4th gear. The driver must master matching the engine and gearbox speeds to achieve a smooth gear change.

Starting the vehicle also presents a challenge..... one must set the ignition timing, the fuel mixture and the manual choke and idle speeds prior to pushing the separate starter button! After firing up each of the aforementioned items needs to be reset for running..... often I think locking the vehicle is a waste of time as most people look absolutely perplexed at what it takes to getting it running. A nice touch is the vehicle's clock; not electric, but a manual windup one with a handsome kernelled knob under the dashboard. There are a number of other idiosyncrasies related to the period of its manufacture.



For air conditioning one needs only to loosen the windscreen and push forward to open it and allow as much air as one wants to enter the vehicle. The radiator has shutters which are thermostatically controlled and provide for optimum water and engine cooling. High beam is activated through changing the angle of the headlight reflectors rather than by way of dual bulbs or filaments. The vehicle has a comprehensive and beautifully finished tool kit set into the boot lid. This is a reflection of early period motoring when one was expected to have the knowledge to keep the vehicle on the road one's self.



The 20/25 carries the chassis number G XK5. This is of paramount importance as every Rolls-Royce and Bentley car is recognised and its history recorded by way of its chassis number.



The vehicle was delivered out of the factory on 18/11/1935, purchased by Colonel Sydney Earnest. Smith CBE. Col. Smith was born at Farnham, Surrey, in April 1881 and passed away on 11 June 1943. He was an English pioneer aviator and soldier. When the Bristol Aeroplane Company was founded by Sir George White Smith, his nephew Ernest was appointed manager. On 22 November 1910, flying a Bristol Boxkite at Brooklands, Smith was awarded the 33rd aviators certificate by the Royal Aero Club (only one month before the death of C.S. Rolls). Smith reportedly went to Australia to promote the use of aircraft on sheep stations. During WW1 Smith was attached to the Royal Flying Corps and later retired from the RAF with the rank of Colonel. Post WW1 he was a director of the Imperial Tramways Company and general manager of the Bristol Tramways and Carriage Company until he retired in 1935, at which point one can assume he placed an order for G XK5. Smith was also a director of the Bristol Aeroplane Company until his death in 1943. He had two daughters and a son, who was unfortunately killed by enemy action in 1940.



The vehicle has spent a large part of its life in Alberta, Canada before being imported into Australia in 2012. I acquired it from Melbourne in that year and while not having undertaken any substantial long distance journeys I do use it on many local runs and events. It had been restored in Canada some time prior to my purchase but obviously by a handyman rather than a professional mechanic or body builder. The vehicle was all sky blue and the aluminium guards were out of shape and obviously patched up with filler.

Under my auspices, the bottom half of the vehicle has had the body panels rectified, has been repainted, had steering rectified, and a new clutch and tail shaft fitted.



GXK 5 takes its time getting from A to B but it does it in a style few other cars can match plus it brings a smile to the faces of an enormous number of fellow road users! That makes any difficulties in driving such a vehicle well worthwhile.

Bob Adby

Reference: Wikipedia

The Rolls-Royce 20/25 H.P.

By Tom C Clarke