

COLUMN
DEREK
WATTS

GHOST FAMILY



“Any customer can have a car painted any colour that he wants, so long as it is black,” said Henry Ford, referring to the Ford Model T. That was back in 1909.

Roll ahead more than a century, and the new Rolls-Royce Black Badge Ghost is available in 44,000 colours so that any customer can have virtually any bespoke hue that they want.

And what do they choose? Signature Black is the overwhelming favourite.

But this is no ordinary paint job. 45 kilos of the darkest black the BMW subsidiary can find is atomised and applied to an electrostatically charged body in white before being oven-dried. Then the car receives two layers of clear coat before being hand-polished by a team of four artisans to produce the marque’s high-gloss piano finish.

I am quoting from the brochure, so don’t ask too many questions, but a re-paint is probably going to cost you as much as a new 5-Series Beemer.

Nothing so crass as price or service costs are ever discussed by Rolls-Royce. In fact their “Post Opulence” products are never sold...they are commissioned. And, apparently, the would-be purchaser’s entire profile, estimated wealth and social standing is placed under the scanner before a transaction takes place.

Yet, Rolls-Royce has announced record breaking sales of around 5,600 beautifully polished vehicles last year. And here’s the kicker – the average age of ownership is a mere 43, and many owners behind the imposing steering wheel are in their twenties!

But don’t be surprised by the choice of the super elite. This is a bold, edgy Ghost (hint of tautology there) that is a very far cry from images of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II wafting into the back of her 1950 Phantom IV along with a couple of well-groomed corgis. Although, you will still find a brolly tucked into the door, picnic tables separated by a refrigerator to keep the Shampers cool, and coach doors opening at the press of a button. The interior is contrasted with a plethora of Infinity badges,

or Lemniscate, including an ethereal glowing version embedded into the illuminated Fascia and surrounded by more than 850 stars.

Reading this, you might see a disconnect with the brief to recreate a Black Badge Ghost that is agile, discreet, highly connected and free of any superfluous design. Alas, this is Rolls-Royce’s new relentless pursuit of minimalism and purity.

Where the human touch does come to the fore is with the driver being able to control the relentless scrolling through screens, which has been reduced to a minimum – something many manufacturers could learn.

The range of quality finishes (with very fancy names) you can choose from for your entirely bespoke interior is impressive, to say the least.

The exterior design is sleek, modern, even menacing, and headlined by the highly polished Spirit of Ecstasy and Pantheon Grille – not simply painted, but endowed with a specific chrome electrolyte deposited on the stainless-steel substrate to achieve a mirror-black chrome finish.

With this attention to detail the 2,000 strong workforce at Goodwood, West Sussex, is kept very busy, which may explain why they may have lost their collective creative



juice with the design of the rump, which is rather bland and flowing in comparison to the angular front end. But the designers make up for it with the truly audacious wheelset design. Complicated stuff, but eventually composed of 44 layers of carbon fibre with the aluminium hub bonded to the rim with titanium fasteners and the famous Floating Hubcap ensuring the Double R monogram remains upright at all times. Not an easy feat.

The twin-turbocharged 6.75-litre V12 propels this two-and-a-half ton work of art to 100km/h in 4.7 seconds. And fear not, a new suite of bold high-temperature brake calliper paint colours has been developed.

After all, this is the most Rock ‘n Roll Rolls of all time.

