

COMMERCE

## Rolls-Royce falls just short of sales record despite China slowdown

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*Rolls-Royce Spirit of Ecstasy*

By FORREST CARDAMENIS

British automakers Rolls-Royce Motor Cars had its second-best sales year in its 112-year history in 2015, owing to strong performance in the United States and Middle East.

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The high-end automaker delivered 3,785 vehicles in 2015, falling a bit short of 2014's 4,063 due largely to lackluster sales in China. Rolls-Royce is in no hurry to overcompensate for slowing growth in China and will instead continue to maximize reach digitally and optimize bespoke sales.

"It was another record year for us in North America. We had a very good year, and it was a very strong year globally," said Gerry Spahn, head of communications, [Rolls-Royce Motor Cars North America](#). "We also had a record in bespoke sales, and bespoke value is more important than just selling volume."

A new record

Rolls-Royce sales set new records in Asia Pacific with a 13 percent increase. The growth was spurred in large part by a 73 percent jump in South Korea and 7 percent in Japan.

Records were also set in the Middle East and North America, with a 21 percent increase in Qatar and 7 percent jump in the United States. Sales in the brand's native UK also increased, by 2 percent.



*Rolls-Royce Wraith*

Also showing signs of growth are Taiwan, Indonesia, Malaysia and Kazakhstan, all emerging markets that Rolls-Royce may see big gains from in future years, especially as an early presence may give the brand an advantage over other automakers.

However, the economic situation in China showed itself in Rolls-Royce's sales, which dropped more than 50 percent compared to last year. Although such a large drop may look like cause for panic, it could just as well be a result of psychological worries among the country's high-end clientele.

"We do not vary our marketing efforts by short-term changes in the market, so it is not as if there is any knee-jerk or short-term reaction," Mr. Span said. "It is a long-term commitment, and we will continue our marketing efforts in China and in all other regions."



*Rolls-Royce Ghost*

North America and the U.S. were the largest region and market for Rolls-Royce, beating out the Middle East and United Arab Emirates, but the Middle East just edged out North America in bespoke models. Rolls-Royce's bespoke deliveries have helped it carve out a large chunk of the market in the region.

"[Rolls-Royce Middle East] continues to deliver cars that are absolutely unique for their owners because that is what their owners are looking for," Mr. Spahn said. "They want their own personal Rolls-Royce unlike any other Rolls-Royce and we've been able to do that for them consistently, and that's what has driven consistent growth."



*Rolls-Royce Dawn*

Rolls-Royce did not have any new products in 2015, but the success of the online reveal of the upcoming Dawn gives reasons for high hopes for 2016. The Dawn broke records for pre-orders and attracted a younger and more social set of consumers, positioning the market for strong 2016 sales and continued long-term success.

The brand's success is evident through other metrics as well. Just 350 employees built the first Phantom model in 2003; Rolls-Royce now employs 1,600 manufacturers.

## New horizons

An embrace of digital marketing may have also played a role in Rolls-Royce's success near the end of 2015 and will continue to do so moving forward.

In September, Rolls-Royce rolled into the next generation with its all-new Dawn convertible model.

For the first time, the BMW-owned brand unveiled a new model online, eschewing many of the regular festivities. While it was unveiled physically at the Frankfurt Motor Show, streaming the release online allows the Dawn Rolls-Royce convertible to reach a younger, active audience ([see story](#)).

Other automakers have also set their sights on the Middle East with bespoke models.

For example, British automaker McLaren is looking to jump on the Middle Eastern market with a bespoke model inspired by the region's loyal consumer base.

On Nov. 11, McLaren Automotive debuted the 650S Spider Al Sahara 79, created by McLaren Special Operations exclusively for the region. The Middle East is poised for significant growth in the future, and entering now with exclusive products is a step toward winning over the region's affluent consumers ([see story](#)).

Going forward, Rolls-Royce intends to expand its digital presence, but not at the cost of its more direct marketing tactics.

"We'll continue to reach out to owners and our prospective owners, particularly the younger more active owners, using digital," Mr. Spahn said. "But also we're going to continue with our personal marketing outreach. In terms of raising awareness digital is great but small one-on-one interaction is going to be very important as well. We try to reach consumers on both ends."

## Final Take

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