

COMMERCE

Rolls-Royce gives itself a makeover with assertive Black Badge series

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Rolls-Royce Black Badge insignia

By FORREST CARDAMENIS

British automaker Rolls-Royce Motor Cars is showing its dark side to attract risk takers and self-empowered, self-confident youth.

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"Black Badge," a darker, more confident and more powerful Rolls-Royce, will take shape in a permanent Bespoke series targeting goal-oriented and self-made young affluents. The new series is a significant makeover for Rolls-Royce, but is being implemented in response to a changing consumer base and habits.

"We position ourselves on the values and desires of our clients," said Gerry Spahn, head of communications for **Rolls-Royce Motor Cars NA**, Woodcliff Lake, New Jersey. "We do our core attributes that are endemic to every Rolls-Royce Motor Car, but our client and owner-base has changed significantly over the past five years.

"We have a younger owner-base and the predominant source of their wealth is self-made is self-made, so we have a new personality specifically with this segment of our owners," he said. "They are aggressive, they are confident, they live their own life, and we are not defining their life, we are giving them a permanent bespoke specification that fits the life they have already created."

Brave new customer

Black Badge takes inspiration from driven, eccentric figures, namely Sir Malcolm Campbell, aviator Howard Hughes, Keith Moon, Yves Saint Laurent, Muhammed Ali, and of course brand co-founder Charles Rolls. Rolls-Royce draws a line from those individuals to today's self-made young consumers, who live life on the edge and have a "work hard, play hard" mentality.



Rolls-Royce Black Badge Ghost

Over the past five years, Rolls-Royce has seen its average consumer drop to 45 years of age, and an increasing percentage of them have created their own wealth. With such demographic changes in the clientele come attitudinal changes, which Rolls-Royce is addressing.

Some of these clients have been making changes to the Ghost and Wraith models on their own, by painting the body or grille or by modifying performance. Alterations could hurt the brand image if they are poorly executed, but they speak to what consumers want.

Accordingly, Rolls-Royce is taking the changes into its own hands to assure client desires are addressed without sacrificing the brand's engineering and design prowess.



Black Badge Ghost interior

Both the Spirit of Ecstasy and the double R logo are being changed, although not for the first time. The Flying Lady has changed posture several times throughout her history and the double R logo was once red-on-silver, with today's black-on-silver being initiated to better match the color choice of high-profile customers, including the Prince of Wales. For the Black Badge Ghost and Wraith, the colors of the double R badge will reverse, while chrome surfaces, including the Flying Lady, will now be black.

Performance changes accompany the new design and are also suited to young, self-made consumer segment. Ghost Black Badge has moved from 563 to 603 hp and from 780Nm of torque to 840Nm.

Wraith, meanwhile, has 70Nm more of torque and a new transmission, increasing the 0-60mph of what was already the brand's fastest model by approximately 0.2 seconds and improving handling.



Rolls-Royce Black Badge Wraith 400

Safety modifications, including improved brakes, have also been made, as safety and a smooth ride are defining Rolls-Royce values more so than speed. The engineering demonstrates that Rolls-Royce can expand its brand offerings without discarding its established values that have resonated with a different consumer segment.

Almost all brands are trying to appeal to young affluence, but tailoring offerings based on how consumers interact with the brand's products shows that Rolls-Royce is especially responsive and willing to take radical steps to meet the demonstrated desires.



Black Badge Wraith interior

By extension, the Black Badge series is currently limited to the Wraith and Ghost, as there are no indications that such modifications are in demand for the Phantom. The latest Dawn, meanwhile, is still new and made with these consumers in mind and the brand will make adjustments to future models as deemed necessary.

Youth in revolt

This is not the first Rolls-Royce initiative to be taken with the changing consumer base in mind.

Last September, the British automaker 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 the traditional car show and other regular festivities. Unveiled at the Frankfurt Motor Show but streamed online, the Dawn Rolls-Royce convertible targets a younger, active audience ([see story](#)).

Other automakers have also made changes with their latest models with the habits of young consumers in mind.

For example, Italian automaker Ferrari is offering consumers the pleasures of its brand anywhere, anytime with a new vehicle.

The Ferrari GTC4Lusso, debuting at the Geneva International Motor Show, aims to position the brand better for younger viewers, who tend to drive their vehicles more. As consumer habits have shifted, automakers defined by sports and racing cars have been especially pressed to adapt ([see story](#)).

Despite the strong competition, however, Rolls-Royce is focusing not on standing out but on serving its clientele.

"It's not about how it relates to competitors," Mr. Spahn said. "It's about how it relates to our owners."

"What our competitors do in terms of branding, specifications, packaging or whatever else isn't important on Black Badge," he said. "Black Badge is relevant to what our owners are doing."