

AUTOMOTIVE

Rolls-Royce Motor Cars is first British automaker to resume production with ongoing lockdown

May 4, 2020



The Rolls-Royce Motor Cars factory and headquarters in Goodwood, England. Image courtesy of Rolls-Royce Motor Cars

By LUXURY DAILY NEWS SERVICE

British automaker Rolls-Royce Motor Cars has resumed production at its manufacturing plant in Goodwood, England to coincide with an important anniversary in the marque's history: the meeting of founders Charles Stewart Rolls and Henry Royce.

Subscribe to **Luxury Daily**
Plus: Just released
State of Luxury 2019 **Save \$246 ▶**

The resumption of production at the Rolls-Royce plant comes at the same time that rival **Bentley Motors announced a series of 250 measures** to ensure the safety of staff as they return to their Crewe, England factory. Both automakers have weathered wars, pandemics, depression, recessions, political upheavals and ownership changes.

"We are living through historic times," said Torsten Müller-Ötvös, CEO of Rolls-Royce Motor Cars, in a statement.

"Our primary focus is, of course, on safely resuming production at The Home of Rolls-Royce in Goodwood, West Sussex, but in marking this amazing anniversary, we are taking a moment to reflect on what 117 years have taught us," he said.

Rolls-Royce becomes the first automaker in the United Kingdom to resume production after implementing a raft of safety measures to protect employees from the COVID-19 coronavirus.



The Hon. Charles Stewart Rolls. Photograph taken from an album of prints compiled by English motorist, motor car manufacturer and aviator Charles Stewart Rolls (1877-1910). Rolls was a keen driver and was well known in the motoring world, having competed in many races of the time. After gaining a BA and an MA in engineering at Cambridge, Rolls established a successful business assembling and selling imported French cars from showrooms in London. He went on to found Rolls-Royce Ltd with Frederick Henry Royce (1863-1933) in 1906, creating one of the world's most famous marques. Rolls was also the first to make a non-stop double crossing of the English Channel by plane, but in 1910 he was killed when his airplane crashed at the Boumemouth Air Show. (Photo by SSPL/Getty Images)

Kicking tires

It was on May 4, 1904 that Rolls met Royce at the Midland Hotel in Manchester. So remarkable was the meeting that it led Rolls to declare of Royce, "I have met the greatest engineer in the world."

Rolls, an aristocrat, was an accomplished driver and experienced in selling imported cars in the United Kingdom. Royce was a perfectionist engineer. A third executive, Claude Johnson, was Rolls' business partner who stepped in as managing director of the fledgling Rolls-Royce.

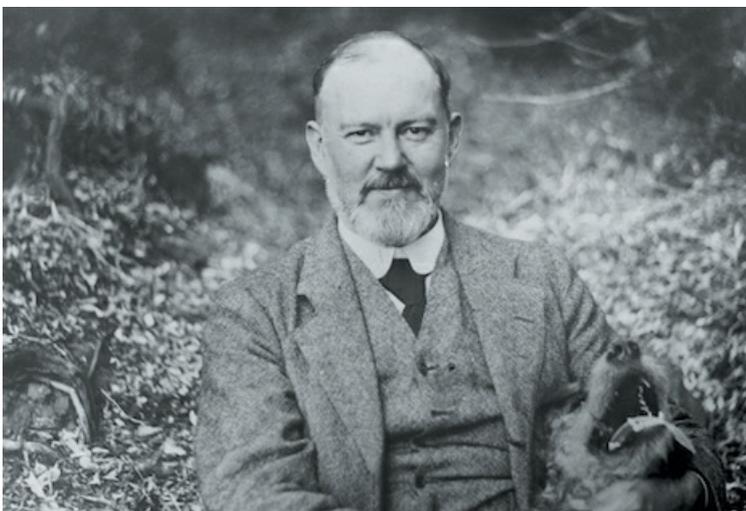
Since its founding in 1906, Rolls-Royce and its luxury vehicles have weathered the Spanish Flu of 1918 that killed an estimated 100 million worldwide, ranking as the worst pandemic of the 20th century.

The brand survived the Great Depression of the 1930s that wiped out fortunes and devastated the world economy.

Add to that the two world wars that again leveled countries, empires and wealth on an unprecedented scale, with intermittent political and economic shocks.

Rolls-Royce Motor Cars emerged as a standalone brand after airplane engine maker Vickers plc sold off its Bentley car brand to Germany's Volkswagen and licensed the Rolls-Royce name to BMW Group, another Teutonic automaker.

The more recent 2008 financial meltdown was another test, though nothing as severe as the current COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic that originated in the Chinese city of Wuhan in the Hubei province.



Rolls-Royce Motor Cars cofounder Sir Henry Royce. Image courtesy of Rolls-Royce Motor Cars

Home run

Working from home is a new experience for the current generation of Rolls-Royce Motor Cars employees.

Now under BMW ownership and separated from the airplane engine business under the same name, the auto brand has seen some of its best work executed at home.

The by-now knighted Sir Henry Royce produced some of his most influential designs at the private studio he kept at his home, Elmstead, in West Wittering, only eight miles from the current Rolls-Royce Motor Cars factory and global headquarters.

Royce preferred the quiet and solitude of his home office to the bustle of the factory. Indeed, he sketched with his walking stick the initial design for the R-series aero engine in the sand one day while walking on the nearby beach.

An upgrade of that design, called the Merlin, would be the engine that powered the legendary Supermarine Spitfire fighter plane.

Another engine design was born at his home studio that has an important spot in global aviation history.

Per the company, in 1919, Sir Henry's Eagle VIII powered the first transatlantic flight from St John's, Newfoundland to County Galway in Ireland, by British adventurers Captain John Alcock and Lieutenant Arthur Brown.

Rolls-Royce Motor Cars last year marked the centenary of this flight and the engine that powered it by producing 50 units of the Rolls-Royce Wraith Eagle VIII Collection Car.



Rolls-Royce Cullinan SUV flanked by other offerings from the carmaker, with the infinity sign in the background. Image credit: Rolls-Royce Motor Cars

In top gear

Most luxury automakers indeed, luxury brands across key sectors including Rolls-Royce and Bentley entered the COVID-19 lockdown period after reporting banner sales in 2019 and even the first two months of this year.

Bentley posted a 5 percent growth to deliver 11,006 cars, while Rolls-Royce registered a 25 percent increase to 5,152 vehicles sold.

This was Bentley's seventh consecutive year with sales crossing 10,000 cars and Rolls-Royce's highest annual revenue recorded in its 116-year history.

For Rolls-Royce, the 2019 numbers were a balancing act between record sales to 50 countries via 135 dealerships and maintaining exclusivity.

"This performance is of an altogether different magnitude to any previous year's sales success," Mr. Miller said in January in a statement.

"While we celebrate these remarkable results we are conscious of our key promise to our customers, to keep our brand rare and exclusive," he said.

"We are pleased and proud to have delivered growth of 25 percent in 2019," he said.

"Worldwide demand last year for our Cullinan SUV has driven this success and is expected to stabilize in 2020."

North America was the No. 1 market, accounting for roughly one-third of worldwide sales, followed by China and Europe including the United Kingdom. Sales were strong in Russia, Singapore, Japan, Australia, Qatar and South Korea.

Two new dealerships opened last year with Rolls-Royce Motor Cars Brisbane and Rolls-Royce Motor Cars Shanghai Pudong.

The company said development of the new Rolls-Royce Motor Cars flagship dealership on London's Berkeley Street more than twice the size of the previous location is ongoing and set for an opening later this year.

There was strong demand for all Rolls-Royce models, with Phantom leading the charge, along with the Dawn and Wraith marques.

The new Cullinan SUV generated the most advance orders and fastest post-launch sales growth of any Rolls-Royce model in the company's history.

Last year, Cullinan joined the edgy Black Badge family side by side with Ghost, Dawn and Wraith variants.

Rolls-Royce also bid farewell to its Ghost model, in production since 2009. It was the largest-selling Rolls-Royce in the company's entire history and provided the revenue base for the brand to produce more models and invest in global scale.

The Ghost's successor was due to launch mid-2020 after five years in development, with delivery in the fourth quarter. It is not clear if the company will maintain the schedules, given the time lost over the lockdown.

LEADERSHIP AT Rolls-Royce is stoic.

"As a company, we can draw strength from the knowledge that although Rolls-Royce has faced uncertainty many times over the years, it has emerged more resilient and confident, with its fundamental principles unaltered," Mr. Mller-tvs said.

"Our present challenges may be unprecedented, but as we look to the future, I am confident there is no company in the world better prepared to overcome them."

Rolls-Royce Phantom: Rules Rewritten

© 2020 Napean LLC. All rights reserved.

Luxury Daily is published each business day. Thank you for reading us. Your [feedback](#) is welcome.