

Rolls-Royce Ghost



A little over two years ago, at the Paris motor show, Rolls-Royce unveiled the Ghost: a 'small', modern Rolls for the modern man, the man who is as eager to sit behind the wheel as he is to sometimes take a back seat and let someone else do the driving.

So, in the spirit of the 'can do', 'we're all in it together' 2011 Britain, I've just covered a couple of hundred miles in one.

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And, were I behind the typically thin-rimmed classic Rolls-Royce steering wheel, I would be speaking from a position of 'authority' – the endearing term the Goodwood-based company uses to describe its cars' ability to offer the driver a slightly elevated view of the road ahead.

'Superiority', clearly, would be pushing things a little too far.

Compared with the imposing Phantom saloon, the Ghost is both more powerful (563bhp at 5250rpm vs. 453bhp at 5350rpm) and lighter (by nearly 200kg). The extra oomph comes courtesy of a twin-turbocharged, 6592cc V12 – the Phantom is normally aspirated.



With the memories of a sublime weekend spent in [the remarkable Phantom Drophead](#), where the only sound audible was the grinding of bystanders' teeth, and the world passed by as if floating on a dandelion seed, I was sort of expecting a little less of the traditional Rolls' virtues, and a little more 'German limousine'. The Ghost does, after all, share many components with the latest 7-Series.

Which is sort of what you get, when you drive it? However, that is probably being slightly unfair to both the far more expensive Drophead and the more affordable (ours was £235,000 'on the road' in the UK with extras) Ghost.

Nothing in the world can quite match a Phantom for both presence and sybaritic comfort. The performance (in the two-door, at any rate) is an unexpected bonus. With the Ghost, the on-paper performance requires some distinctly un-Rolls-like pedal-mashing.



While strange, ethereal forces might power the bigger Rolls, it's clear that the work of Man has crafted the Ghost. If the Phantom sips ambrosia, its less expensive sibling can be found alongside pump 8 at Corley Services.

But enough of this, let's look at the Ghost afresh. Its attractive lines belie the generous (5399mm x 1948mm) area of Tarmac it occupies. The doors open wide (rearwards, for back-seat passengers, and to a remarkable 83 degrees) and the traditional, 'flat' door linings and simple dash evoke the timeless styling of all post-War Rolls-Royces.



For those slightly apprehensive of the acreage they'll be conducting, on the move, it does feel quite large. But with Lane Departure Warning activated, any deviation from centre is met with a slight vibration on the steering wheel and low-speed maneuvering is aided by the most brilliant all-round camera system. Keeping an eye on the central TV display, you can steer the big car into the most unlikely spaces and use the system for negotiating underground car parks with fiendishly tight turning spaces and ever-present pillars. Very impressive indeed.

As is the Head-up Display which, okay, has been around a fair while in far lesser cars, but suits the driving position and sense of imperiousness of the Ghost. Road-speed, navigation instructions and relevant warnings are beamed in orange to a spot hovering just above the radiator grille, directly in the driver's line of sight.

The activation of this, lane-assist and sundry other functions come courtesy of Rolls-Royce's raid on the symphony orchestra. For, in addition to the well-known 'organ-stop' ventilation controls, the car also comes with 'violin-key switches' and the fascia of this example was 'Piano Black'.

And the side mirrors could be compared to a giant pair of cymbals, threatening to slap the driver and his front-seat passenger around the ears. Regulations dictate that the size of the mirrors is in proportion to that of the car, so the largish Ghost has the most enormous, elephant ears imaginable, which take up some 10% of the side-window area.

Issues of size aside, it's a very easy car to drive, and superbly comfortable: just the thing for a long journey with quite magnificent accommodation for rear-seat passengers and surprisingly supportive, extra-thick slabs of the finest hide for those in the front.



It's also very fast. Now, whether that's appropriate for a Rolls-Royce, I'll let you be the judge. Fully depress the throttle, though, and the car accelerates in a mostly unseemly fashion. The company quotes a 0-60mph time of just 4.7 seconds, with a top speed of 155mph. UK motorway speeds are effortless, yet the Ghost lacks the killer, 'bye-bye' ability to reduce following cars to mere specks in the mirror, as found in a Bentley.



Such performance has to be treated with respect, and while the superb ride from the 'intelligent', four-corner air suspension system is wondrous, for this writer's taste there is just a little too much 'waft' and 'float'. And there's no adjustment available in the cockpit - the suspension can be raised or lowered simply to negotiate uncertain terrain or to allow passengers easier access. At speed, it settles on an optimum height, with individual load-calculations computed every 2.5 milliseconds.

More electronics control the 8-speed ZF transmission, which intruded on occasions, slow-speed shifts resulting in an occasional tremor in the cabin.



Am I being a touch critical? Possibly, yet such is the reputation of Rolls-Royce that nothing short of complete excellence is expected. The company has succeeded in making the most wonderful saloon to be used every day.

