

1938 ROLLS-ROYCE LIMOUSINE

1938 Rolls-Royce Limousine Sedan, "Wraith"

Previous owner(s): Before 1977 owner was a doctor in Kansas City; owners from Omaha, 1977 – 1992; Bernie and Janice Taulborg Collection

Number made: 1. This car was a special order and the only one made in this configuration by the Hooper Body Works. A total of 491 Wraiths were made in 1938 – 1939; few made it to the United States.

Engine, etc.: 6 cylinders, overhead valves; 4.3 liters, 259.8 cu. in.; 126 base horse power; manual synchromesh on top three (of 4) gears; 4,480 lbs. (approximately – weight is for different coach work on the same model).

Special note, items in the pictures: Small round handle on the front of back seat raises a shade over back window with the help of the small motor and chains shown in the trunk. Set of tools fits into a drawer under front seat. Gold woven "ropes" by back windows are called "door assists". They are there to help get out of the car. The hood ornament is named "Spirit of Ecstasy".

The Wraith was an entirely new model which brought the design of the "baby-Rolls-Royce" model into line with its larger counterpart, the Phantom III. It was introduced on October 4, 1938 and first shown at the Earls Court Show and the Paris Salon the same month.

The name "Wraith" may have been selected as a similar-type name to the experimental Phantom III, "Spectre", or from the 1909 Silver Ghost called "The Wraith". "Wraith" was used as a code word for a new straight eight being secretly developed in 1934. (p. 4)

The Wraith had a brand new welded chassis, a new light-alloy six-cylinder engine and far greater performance than previous models. It had independent front suspension and the new engine had a crossflow head. Use of independent front-wheel springing represented an advance that gave better

steering, road holding, and a better ride. The "ease with which the wheel can be spun...gave the illusion of disembodied floating". (inside front cover)

Though it was a scaled-down version of the Phantom III, many regarded the Wraith as the most enjoyable Rolls-Royce of all. Contemporary press reports spoke glowingly of its extreme silence. The *Autocar* said "It seems of little consequence what the precise maximum speed figure is when such astonishingly easy and completely effortless running is available at say, 75 mph. Speedometer readings between 80 and 84 were reached on two or three occasions and considerably more was shown on a definitely favorable stretch of road."

The coach work and chassis were priced separately. The Wraith's chassis was priced the same as the Model 20 produced twenty years earlier. (Classic Car Collection has a 1925 Model 20 Rolls.)

The new Wraith immediately attracted a repeat order from Mrs. K. Tennant who was visiting England from Australia in 1938. She cabled home for the money and a new Wraith was supplied to her in Australia later that year. It supplemented her 1923 Silver Ghost. It was reported that when she cabled from London to her family for the purchase price, the reply was that, for the price, she could buy a Buick each year for the rest of her life. (Buick was becoming popular in Britain and was regularly compared to a Rolls-Royce.) Mrs. Tennant's faith was unwavering and she retorted "This one will do for the rest of my life!". The car seemed to have been trouble free, though Rolls-Royce did have an approved mechanic in Adelaide, Australia. (p 160)

Sales figures for Rolls-Royce of stock cars in Oct. 1938 were double that of all 1937 models. The beginning of World War II took a toll on U. K. sales and inducements were made to encourage direct and retailer sales. One tradition that bought in sales for Rolls-Royce was rewarding chauffeurs who were instrumental in securing a sale by their employers. (p. 45)

The outbreak of World War II resulted in Rolls-Royce ceasing production of cars and switching to manufacturing the Merlin aero engine.

Sources:

The Rolls-Royce "Wraith". Tom C. Clarke. (London: John M. Fasal). 1986. 245 pgs. (Classic Car Collection files; source of page numbers cited above)

<http://www.conceptcarz.com/vehicle/z15236/Rolls-Royce-Wraith.aspx>

http://uniquecarsandparts.com/heritage_rolls_royce.htm (Early history)

<https://www.rolls-roycemotorcars.com/en-GB/the-spirit-of-ecstasy.html> (Story of how hood ornament, "Spirit of Ecstasy", originated.)