

**Really Regal Roding  
In a Rolls-Royce Phantom**

**By Roger Witherspoon**



It was really hot, really humid, and the two State Troopers were probably really bored as they rode their motorcycles in tandem at just about the 65 mile an hour speed limit on the New Jersey Turnpike.

One glanced in his rear view mirror, turned his head for a confirmation glance, then spoke to his partner who, in turn, also turned to look. They then motioned me to follow and, like a Presidential procession, we headed down the Turnpike, pushing 90 miles an hour as motorists moved aside and wondered who the dignitaries were in the escorted Rolls-Royce Phantom.

The escort disappeared ten minutes later when we hit the inevitable Turnpike traffic jam, but it was nice while it lasted – my first police escort without a traffic ticket at the end. Life is like that when you are behind the wheel of a Rolls-Royce – people smile, wave, give thumbs up and treat you as if you were, well, somebody special. Which, in fact, is how you feel when you fly along the roadways in a powerful, finely tuned, perfectly crafted, elegantly appointed, intricately designed, nearly perfect driving machine.

The Phantom, the first Rolls-Royce built under the auspices of BMW, melds the best of the German engineering with the stately, refined, high performing tradition of the British aerospace company that spawned it 100 years ago. BMW had to start from scratch in designing the Phantom, using the styling traditions of the past, with its current engineering practices. Like any marriage, the mesh of cultures was, at times, rocky.

The Germans entered a tough, select market. Historically, Rolls-Royce has dominated the market for cars costing more than \$300,000. In this case, BMW's

designers were designing a \$400,000 Rolls destined to compete head to head with the stately, high performing, \$330,000 Bentley Arnage, and the \$400,000 Mercedes Maybach. That would not be easy. Bentleys traditionally were meant to be driven, were designed for power, performance and luxury and easily dusted most sports cars – including Beamers – on any road. And the Maybach melded Mercedes’ racing tradition with the most luxurious, technologically proficient they have ever crafted while the Rolls’ image usually involved moneyed owners lounging in comfort while being sedately driven by chauffeurs.

The designers of the Phantom aimed straight at the strengths of both these high priced cars. And when you fly along at 140 miles an hour with the world a quiet, serene blur blowing by, the uneven highway turned into a silk road by air coiled springs it is easy to conclude the Phantom hit it mark.



The face of the Phantom is the traditional, large, unmistakable Rolls-Royce grill graceful crowned with the Flying Lady. In this incarnation, however, the hood ornament recedes into the hood when the engine is turned off. Traditionally, Rolls-Royces were big cars whose wheels were usually in line with the shoulders of passengers in regular motor cars. The Phantom follows that pattern, with 21-inch aluminum wheels on a welded aluminum frame that is four inches wider and four feet longer than the Hummer H3, and three feet longer than the H2. The height gives you the view usually reserved for SUVs, though in the Phantom you are definitely driving a high performing sedan.

A machine this big couldn't wear the Rolls Royce logo if it couldn't move. Under the Flying Lady's skirts is a 48-valve, direct fuel injected, V-12 aluminum alloy engine cranking out 453 horsepower and capable of pushing its 6,700 pounds from 0 to 60 miles an hour in 5.7 seconds.

In another nod to the past, the heavy rear doors of the Phantom open from the center, and there are power buttons which either the rear passengers or driver can use to close them. These doors are wide and the silver knobs in the middle are the butts of silver handles of long umbrellas.

The trunk of this long car is in two parts: a regular, deep trunk capable of holding four full golf bags, and a sunken trunk underneath which can be used for storing about a week's worth of luggage. The lower trunk can also be customized – at least one customer had it converted into a rolling, cooled, wine cellar, and another wanted a safe.



Inside, the Phantom is plush. The dash, center console and doors are framed in oak wood. The custom leather seats are soft, wide, and heated if desired. The individual climate settings allow each passenger to choose separate temperatures for their feet and the rest of the body.

The rear seat in the test Phantom is a slightly curved love seat so the rear passengers can easily see each other. A wide armrest folds down from the center of the

seat, and the cavity behind it can be converted into a holder for chilled glasses. As an option, one can order wide bucket seats, and the center console between them would hold a chill box as well as controls for the DVD or TV. The basic, \$390,000 Phantom, lacks a DVD system with screens in the back of the front headrests. But it does have broadcast VHF and UHF TV, which can be seen on the LCD screen used for the satellite navigation system.

Sound in the Phantom emanates from 17 Lexicon speakers and a 420-watt amplifier which can play music from the AM/FM/Sirius Satellite radio, or the CD system.



The navigation system, temperature controls, and entertainment system can all be run by voice – a bit of modern technology which ran up against the Rolls-Royce upper crust image. It seems that the navigation system, as is standard, has a woman's voice because studies have found that neither men nor women mind taking directions from a woman.

But the helpful voice controlling the system functioned more like a house butler, and the inclination was to make it a generic gentleman. "The system uses only about 50 words in various combinations," said Bob Austin, American manager for the Phantom, "and the BMW engineers said the technology exists to use a variety of voices.

"The idea was to hire actresses like Gwyneth Paltrow or actors to say the words, and owners could have them as their personal assistants. But it just didn't seem to fit the Rolls-Royce image."

Too bad. Several women randomly asked said they would love to have Denzel Washington at their beck and call. And my daughter's crowd at Florida State thought the butler's polite "may I help you" would sound better if Jay-Z belted out "Yo! What's up!" and replaced "please repeat that" with the inelegant "holler back, y'all!"

The Phantom draws a crowd wherever it goes; people regularly asked if they could touch it or look inside. And sometimes, in its elegance, in its symbol of the finer side of American life, it touches a chord. Like that of the elderly black man, with stooped shoulders and an artificial foot slowly pulling a hand cart of groceries from the supermarket.

I offered him a ride – something I frequently do for the elderly – and he gratefully accepted. I helped him into the rear seat, put his cart into the spacious trunk and slowly drove about a mile to his residence, and took his cart to his front door.

He stared thoughtfully at the glittering, silver Rolls-Royce and said “I never had the kind of life that would let me near one of those things. I’m awfully proud to see you behind the wheel.”

That was, by far, the best ride of all.



### **2007 Rolls-Royce Phantom**

<b>MSRP:</b>		<b>\$390,500</b>
<b>EPA Mileage:</b>	<b>13 MPG City</b>	<b>19 MPG Highway</b>
<b>Gas Guzzler Tax:</b>		<b>\$3,000</b>

#### **Performance/ Safety:**

<b>Top Speed:</b>	<b>149 MPH</b>
<b>0 - 60 MPH</b>	<b>5.7 Seconds</b>
<b>0 - 100 MPH</b>	<b>5.9 Seconds</b>
<b>0 – ¼ Mile</b>	<b>14.3 Seconds</b>

6.75-Liter, direct fuel injected V-12 aluminum alloy engine producing 453 horsepower and 531 pound-feet of torque; 6-speed automatic transmission; double-wishbone front suspension; multi-link rear suspension with self leveling springs; power-assisted, ventilated 4-wheel disc brakes with anti-lock braking and dynamic brake, cornering, stability and traction control; heated windshield, front, side, and rear windows; xenon headlamps with auto-leveling and power washers; 21-inch aluminum wheels; front and rear camera system.

#### **Interior/ Comfort:**

Leather interior with natural grain hides on seats and doors; oak wood veneer; wood picnic tables; power tilt and slide sun roof; power tilt and telescope, leather wrapped steering wheel, with fingertip controls; voice activated telephone, cruise control, entertainment, and navigation; satellite navigation system; Bluetooth telephone communications; AM/FM/ Sirius satellite radio with Lexicon Logic 7 audio system with 420-watt, 9-channel amplifier, 15 speakers, 2-floor-mounted subwoofers; single in-dash CD player and 6-disc CD changer; broadcast TV; power assisted rear doors and trunk; integrated umbrella in rear doors; automatic climate control with 6 climate zones; retracting hood ornament.