

Rolls-Royce celebrates tenth anniversary of Black Badge: the transformative alter ego

- **Rolls-Royce Motor Cars marks 10 years of Black Badge following its debut in 2016**
- **Black Badge set a bold template for modern super-luxury that echoes across the sector**
- **1928 20 H.P. with black grille and Spirit of Ecstasy archived as early aesthetic precedent for Black Badge**
- **The spirit and attitude of Black Badge trace back to John Lennon's all-black 1964 Phantom V**
- **The current Black Badge portfolio includes Black Badge Spectre, Black Badge Ghost and Black Badge Cullinan**
- **Black Badge has inspired Bespoke commissions across gaming, sneakers and street art**

"From the outset, Black Badge was created to welcome a new generation of clients into Rolls-Royce: individuals who express their success unapologetically and with conviction. By serving them with the care and precision that defines the wider Rolls-Royce experience, we have made the marque relevant to many clients who may never have previously considered it. This has supported the measured and sustained growth of Rolls-Royce Motor Cars over the ten years since Black Badge was introduced. Proof of its success is also evident beyond our own performance: Black Badge has established an aesthetic and experiential template that echoes throughout the luxury sector. I am excited to drive the further evolution of Black Badge in the years ahead."

Chris Brownridge, Chief Executive, Rolls-Royce Motor Cars

From the very beginning, Rolls-Royce has been defined not only by elegance, craftsmanship and superlative engineering, but by individualism, rebellion and a willingness to defy convention. This spirit was embodied by the marque's founders themselves. Although their backgrounds could scarcely have been more different, both Sir Henry Royce and The Hon. Charles Stewart Rolls rejected the limitations of their circumstances in pursuit of greatness.

Henry Royce overcame poverty, illness and a lack of formal education to become one of the world's great engineers, creating what the media describes as 'the best car in the world', and ultimately being knighted for his achievements. Charles Rolls, born an aristocrat and educated at Cambridge University, could have lived a life of privilege. Instead, he chose the danger and discipline of early motor racing and aviation, becoming a pioneer in both. Today, both men would be described as disruptors: visionaries who shaped the world by daring to do things differently.

That same spirit of self-expression and creative defiance has echoed through Rolls-Royce's history ever since. It found its most contemporary and powerful expression in Black Badge, the marque's alter ego.

EARLY PRECEDENT: 1928 ROLLS-ROYCE 20 H.P. BREWSTER BROUGHAM

During the ongoing digitisation of the Rolls-Royce archives, marque historians formally documented a motor car whose daring specification anticipated the Black Badge aesthetic by almost a century.

In 1928, a Rolls-Royce 20 H.P. Brewster Brougham was delivered with a striking and highly unusual addition: its Spirit of Ecstasy and radiator grille were finished in black rather than the traditional bright metal. This treatment would have been exceptional at a time when polished

chromium symbolised modernity and prestige. Yet this client chose a darker, more assertive expression, anticipating by almost a century the codes that would later define Black Badge.

The motor car was commissioned by J. E. Aldred, a founding financier of Rolls-Royce of America, Inc. Configured for his use in New York during the late 1920s, it reflected the tastes of a new, cosmopolitan generation who expressed their success through bold, progressive design. That sensibility extended beyond the motor car: Aldred later commissioned the landmark Aldred Building in Montreal, a striking Art Deco tower defined by geometric forms and rich, dramatic interiors. His decision to specify a black Spirit of Ecstasy and radiator grille was entirely consistent with this confident, urban aesthetic, which continues to shape Black Badge commissions today.

THE FIRST TRUE EXPRESSION: 1964 ROLLS-ROYCE PHANTOM V

While earlier motor cars anticipated elements of this darker aesthetic, the spirit of Black Badge can be traced to a single, remarkable motor car. In 1964, The Beatles released *A Hard Day's Night*, galvanising their status as the most famous band on Earth. That December, John Lennon ordered a new Rolls-Royce Phantom V from R. S. Mead of Maidenhead. He specified that it should be black everywhere, inside and out, including all the brightwork normally finished in chromium or stainless steel. Built by coachbuilders Mulliner Park Ward, his Phantom V was delivered in deep black gloss, including its bumpers and wheel discs. Only the Pantheon grille and Spirit of Ecstasy remained in chrome.

The motor car also featured darkened, reflective Triplex Deeplight glass in the rear doors, quarterlights, backlite and division. Lennon explained why in a 1965 interview with *Rolling Stone*: "It's for when you're coming home late. If it's daylight when you're coming home, it's still dark inside the car. You just shut all the windows, and you're still in the club."

Inside, the rear suite was trimmed in black Bedford cord cloth with black nylon rugs, while the front featured black leather. It carried electric aerials for a radio and a Perdio Portarma television, along with seven pieces of black fitted luggage. Reports of a record player, fridge, telephone and even a pull-out bed persist, though these may have been later additions.

This motor car, uncompromising in its subversive intent and unapologetically unique, is now regarded as the spiritual progenitor of Black Badge.

A NEW GENERATION

It would take more than half a century and a technological revolution for this aesthetic to re-emerge as the defining expression of rebellion in luxury. In the early 2010s, a new generation of entrepreneurs began approaching Rolls-Royce. They had built their success at a young age, frequently leveraging new technologies and platforms to completely reshape industries. They projected their influence unapologetically, demanding exquisitely crafted products and uncompromising experiences, but with a dynamic edge and a defiant attitude that reflected their lives, their ambitions and their daring. Their taste defined new codes of luxury: darker in aesthetic, more assertive in character and bolder in design.

As the world's pre-eminent super-luxury brand, they were naturally drawn to Rolls-Royce, and celebrated the marque's effortlessly powerful V12 powertrain, commanding design and peerless material palette. Yet, they requested a more disruptive treatment that reflected the personal worlds they were creating: dramatic, expressive and modern.

THE FORMIDABLE ALTER EGO

Crafting an officially sanctioned response to this group was the subject of careful internal debate. It would require the marque to create a dedicated space within the brand for a more daring expression of Rolls-Royce, one that could coexist with its contemporary, classically inspired and globally celebrated identity. The result was Black Badge.

Black Badge motor cars introduced vivid new colours and technical materials, matched by a more powerful, agile and sonorous dynamic character, tailored to self-drivers who wanted to wield the power of a Rolls-Royce themselves, rather than be chauffeured. To signal their commitment to this disruptive group, designers cloaked the marque's most precious assets – the Spirit of Ecstasy figurine, Pantheon grille and double-R 'Badge of Honour' – in black.

Black Badge motor cars were also given a symbol of their own: the mathematical symbol for infinity, marking the birth of a distinct universe within Rolls-Royce. It evokes the seemingly endless surge of power delivered by Black Badge-tuned V12 engines and honours Sir Malcolm Campbell, who piloted the Rolls-Royce-powered Blue Bird K3 hydroplane to a record-breaking 130 mph in the 1930s, carrying the same emblem, and expressing the same audacious spirit.

ENGINEERED DARKNESS

Rolls-Royce designers wished to present this bold new expression of the brand to the world in a signature treatment: one of the motor car industry's darkest blacks. To create it, 45 kg (100 lbs) of paint was atomised and applied to an electrostatically charged body-in-white before being oven-dried. The motor car then received two layers of clear coat before being hand-polished by four craftspeople to produce the marque's signature high-gloss piano finish.

At between three and five hours in duration, this operation was entirely unknown in series production, creating a unique and peerless intensity. This depth of darkness also provided the perfect canvas for a bright, high-contrast, hand-painted Coachline.

To match the dramatic coachwork, the marque's Bespoke Collective of designers, engineers and craftspeople collaborated to develop a process that allows Rolls-Royce hallmarks such as the highly-polished Spirit of Ecstasy and Pantheon grille to be presented in black. Instead of painting these icons, a specific chrome electrolyte was introduced to the traditional chrome plating process that is co-deposited on the stainless-steel substrate, darkening the finish. Its final thickness is just one micrometre – around one hundredth of the width of a human hair. Each of these components was precision-polished by hand to achieve a mirror-black chrome finish before it was fitted to the motor car.

Specially designed Black Badge wheels enhanced the stance and presence of the motor car, signalling a more intense dynamic character. This was enabled through a Bespoke engine tuning that increased the power and torque output from the marque's signature powertrain. Unique transmission and throttle calibrations to better exploit this increased potency were introduced, the chassis was lowered, reinforced and subtly stiffened, and a distinctive exhaust system that announced Black Badge's arrival was fitted.

All V12 Rolls-Royce motor cars are equipped with a discreet 'Low' button on the gear selector stalk, allowing the driver to hold lower gears when required. In Black Badge motor cars, this existing control was recalibrated to access an additional reserve of power, reflecting the subtle and considered manner in which Rolls-Royce engineers approached this more urgent treatment.

Inside, new materials were developed that reflected Black Badge motor cars' enhanced dynamism, drawing on technical palettes from the world of aerospace. Rolls-Royce artisans explored surfaces including carbon fibre through an entirely new lens, celebrating its intricate weave as a source of beauty rather than function. It was interlaced with fine threads of aluminium just 0.014 mm in diameter, then finished with six coats of lacquer, cured for 72 hours and hand-polished to a deep lustre.

Mirror-finished metal surfaces were also darkened in line with the Black Badge aesthetic. Interior brightwork, including the marque's distinctive 'eyeball' air vents and Bespoke Audio speaker frets, was treated using a technique called Physical Vapour Deposition, one of the few metal-colouring processes that ensures parts will not discolour or tarnish over time, or with repeated use.

When clients experienced the motor cars for the first time, their response was emphatic: Rolls-Royce had perfectly captured the spirit these individuals wished to project by applying its uncompromising approach to craft to a bold new aesthetic philosophy.

THE BLACK BADGE CANON

The Black Badge legend was established in 2016 with the debut of Black Badge Wraith and Black Badge Ghost at the Geneva Motor Show. The dynamic intent of Black Badge was confirmed almost immediately. At the Goodwood Festival of Speed that same year, a Black Badge Wraith was driven up the rain-soaked hill by racing driver Justin Law and recorded one of the fastest timed runs ever achieved by a Rolls-Royce motor car, placing it among the five quickest road cars of the weekend. In doing so, it outpaced several purpose-built mid-engined sports cars, demonstrating that Black Badge delivered not only visual intensity but genuine dynamic substance.

Black Badge Ghost and Black Badge Wraith were followed by Black Badge Dawn in 2017 and Black Badge Cullinan in 2019. While Black Badge motor cars were often presented in a signature dark treatment, many clients drawn to the marque's alter ego chose to express it in vividly individual ways. They commissioned notably vibrant exterior hues, either selecting from Rolls-Royce's prêt-à-porter palette of more than 44,000 colours or creating entirely new Bespoke finishes of their own. Inspirations included a vivid lime green recalling the Australian green tree frog, a luminous red inspired by the blossoms of the 'Ōhi'a lehua, and a deep, iridescent purple drawn from the exotic butterfly *Rhetus perianther*.

As the Black Badge universe grew, so too did the experiences that surrounded it. Black Badge ownership came to encompass gatherings and moments that echoed the bold, disruptive spirit of the motor cars themselves, from private night-time driving experiences on closed airport runways and immersive takeovers of underground music venues to highly choreographed handovers staged in dramatic industrial settings.

This culminated in the launch of [**Black Badge Spectre**](#), with a highly exclusive fleet of clandestine motor cars. Following the launch of Spectre, clients made clear that they were eagerly anticipating its Black Badge counterpart. In response, Rolls-Royce granted a select group early access to these specially commissioned motor cars, ahead of the official reveal in 2025, on the strict condition that their ownership would remain secret – an unprecedented gesture that reflected both the confidence of the marque and the discreet, rebellious spirit of these clients. Their unequivocally positive response to Black Badge Spectre, and the motor car's daring

treatment that had been developed in their image, provided strong validation of the most powerful Rolls-Royce in history.

A DECADE OF INFLUENCE

In the decade since it was created, the disruptive clients for whom Black Badge was conceived have embraced Bespoke with the same conviction that first drew them to Rolls-Royce. They have worked directly with the marque's designers, engineers and artisans to translate their own unique codes of collecting and connoisseurship into Black Badge motor cars, creating commissions that draw on influences far beyond the traditional luxury canon. These range from vintage video-game culture and collectable sneakers to graffiti art, land-speed records, influential nightclubs, and even the digital economy.

Notable examples of these landmark private collections and private commissions include [**Black Badge Adamas**](#) (2018); [**Black Badge 'Neon Nights' paint trilogy**](#) (2020); [**Black Badge Landspeed**](#) (2021); [**Black Badge Wraith Black Arrow**](#) (2023); [**Black Badge Cullinan 'Blue Shadow'**](#) (2023); [**Black Badge Ghost Éclipse**](#) (2023); and [**Black Badge Ghost Gamer**](#) (2025). This spirit has also extended into the marque's collectables, with the Cameo desktop sculpture and Rolls-Royce luggage now available in the same subversive treatment.

As Black Badge enters its second decade, the template it has set echoes across the super-luxury sector. Demand continues to grow for ever more expressive interpretations of Black Badge around the world. Rolls-Royce will respond with an expanding portfolio that further intensifies the Black Badge experience for those who continue to shape luxury on their own terms.