



School of Instruction principal Frank Hutton addresses a class of chauffeurs and owners in the classroom at Hythe Road. Before he took up this position he was Hythe Road's official photographer

# DRIVING LESSONS

From the School of Instruction set up at Derby in 1912 through to Goodwood's White Gloves programme, Rolls-Royce has always strived to ensure its chauffeurs meet the same standard as its cars. With thanks to Tom Clarke, Philip Hall and David Seaman



## ‘WBH’ stood for Wore Bowler Hat, in other words a know-it-all.

100 YEARS AGO, many new chauffeurs had progressed from being a groom and had little knowledge of how to handle a motor car. In order to protect the reputation of his products, in 1910 Henry Royce set up a Demonstration Class for the ‘Training of Drivers and Demonstration on Cars, Adjustment & Driving of a Rolls-Royce Car’.

In 1912 this became The Rolls-Royce School of Instruction, located at the works in Derby. After World War One, the school moved to Alvaston, on the outskirts of town, where the company leased a private hotel called The Welcome. This ex-Temperance establishment offered an extensive garage area for cars and overnight accommodation for the chauffeurs.

In 1925, the school moved briefly to the Handley Page works next to RR’s Service Depot, and in April ‘for the greater convenience of Rolls-Royce owners and their drivers’ to Seleng House at Ewell in Surrey. The new premises had separate classrooms dedicated to the Silver Ghost, New Phantom and 20hp. Each was equipped with an engine and sectioned sub-assemblies. Two-week courses ran from 8.30am to 5.15pm on weekdays, and 12.00 noon on Saturday. The cost was £12 including board and lodging. A visiting journalist commented on the comfortable bedrooms with country views and dining room with meals cooked by an experienced chef. “The close relationship of good work to good food is well understood at Rolls-Royce” he wrote. While chauffeurs were trained and accommodated in the house, owners wishing to attend were put up in a nearby hotel.

The syllabus covered the working and maintenance of every aspect of the chassis and much time was given to driving, the hills in the area being considered a ‘distinct advantage from the instructional point of view’. Written and oral examinations took place with a report being sent to each driver’s employer.

Rules were strict at Seleng House: no drinking or gambling was allowed on the premises, but smoking was permitted in the classrooms between 11.00 and 11.30am and between 4.00 and 4.30pm. Pupils were not allowed in the kitchen or kitchen garden, they had to be in by 11.00pm with lights out by 11.30pm.

At the end of the course a ‘school report’ was sent to the employer with copies kept by the company. In his book *The Rolls-Royce Wraith*, Tom Clarke relates how instructors had a code for marking the records of ‘difficult’ pupils: ‘WBH’ stood for ‘Wore Bowler Hat’, in other words, a ‘know-it-all’ type. ‘C’ meant ‘Came from Cornwall’ meaning one who always knew better.

The company received numerous testimonials and the ongoing importance that Rolls-Royce attached to its cars being well driven and maintained is clearly shown by their Visiting Inspectors scheme.

These gentlemen would visit owners, interview the drivers, and inspect and drive their cars. If a driver had performed well over an extended period of time, he was rewarded by the company with £10 in cash – equivalent to a month’s wages in the 1930s. Before making such an award, the company felt obliged to seek the employer’s agreement to do so. The chauffeur also received an individually-numbered sterling silver badge bearing the linked RR logo. In later years a similar Bentley badge became available.

The school moved from Seleng House to the Rolls-Royce Service depot in Cricklewood in north London in the early 1930s, but left in 1938 to allow expansion of the Handley Page aircraft factory to meet the threat of war. At this time it was re-located to Hyde Cottage on Edgware Road, London.

The term ‘cottage’ did not do this building justice. The Victorian house stood in 14 acres of grounds and included four sizeable classrooms dealing separately with the Wraith, Phantom III, 25/30hp and Bentleys.

### FROM DERBY TO CREWE VIA ALVESTON, EWELL, CRICKLEWOOD, EDGEWARE ROAD AND HYTHE ROAD

### THE MANY HOMES OF THE SCHOOL OF INSTRUCTION

1912

The School of Instruction is set up and located at the works in Derby. Its first car was 1907 40/50 chassis 60583



1925

After a brief spell at the Handley Page works in London, the school relocates to Seleng House at Ewell, Surrey with classrooms for the Silver Ghost, New Phantom and 20hp

1910

Henry Royce inaugurates a Demonstration Class for the ‘Training of Drivers and Demonstration on Cars, Adjustment and Driving of a Rolls-Royce Car’



1918

The school moves to Alvaston, where the company leases The Welcome, a private hotel. Gaslight provides illumination and the lecturers use a magic lantern but there was extensive garaging and accommodation



# 'C' meant Came from Cornwall - one who always knew better

There was garaging for four cars in a separate building that had a workshop on the top floor.

Courses at Hyde Cottage came under the charge of W E Maddocks who had joined the school during its days at The Welcome, assisted by three instructors recruited from the works at Derby. Tuition lasted for two weeks during which pupils were taken through the chassis in detail, illustrated with sectioned models. A whole day was devoted to a driving lecture with emphasis on gear changing. Examples of each current model were on hand but apparently Silver Ghost drivers were still putting in an appearance.

Rolls-Royce's in-house magazine *The Spanner* wrote of Hyde Cottage in 1939: 'No catering is done on the premises, there being excellent cafés for all tastes in the vicinity, where chauffeurs proceed at lunch time to grapple with steak and chips and the intricacies of the Phantom III ignition timing.'

After World War Two, the school of Instruction was re-established in purpose built accommodation at the London Service Centre in Hythe Road. The well-equipped classrooms remained, printed notes were now issued and the driving syllabus was updated.

When a journalist from *The Autocar* attended in 1950 he reported that 'the pupil will spend his time (and a lot of it is spent on the road) in the company of drivers and instructors of wide and varying experience. He will thread the varied conditions of the northern extensions of London, heavy traffic and light, roundabouts and crowded industrial suburbs. Smoothness is the theme of the school. The technique of gear changing remains important, and it is taught with the assistance of some earlier cars, lacking the comfort of synchromesh. Experience of this driving, before developments in gearbox design made things so much simpler, is apt to come as a shock to the motorist of the present generation.'

## MOTOR SPORT EDITOR BILL BODDY ON THE DRIVING ELEMENT OF THE COURSE IN 1967

'A welcome break from lectures was provided by an instructional drive in a Silver Shadow.

'The lecturer conducted this, first installing me in the front passenger seat and then walking anti-clockwise round the car to attain the driving seat. He explained to the three trainee chauffeurs in the back that this isn't done in case the governor may dislike his chauffeur's face but in order to see that all doors and the luggage boot are properly closed and the rear of the car unobstructed before moving off.

'After this it was a question of smooth traffic negotiation, dive-free braking and dignified progression, sitting fully upright behind the wheel, hands low on the rim, feeding the wheel round so that gloves did not give the impression that the unformed driver was indulging in Brands Hatch driving. Very impressive, but I am afraid I found it boring.'

Bill Boddy later reported in *Motor Sport* in 1967 that the school at Hythe Road could accommodate up to 42 students at one time with six courses available. Driving instruction was given on a Silver Cloud II and a LWB Silver Wraith, with maintenance training on a Silver Shadow and Silver Cloud III chassis.

There was a B81 V8 and B60 six-cylinder engine for maintenance instruction and a six-cylinder Bentley engine for tappet-setting exercises. Although there was a degree of practical work, for which the school provided overalls, the message was to leave dismantling of major components to RR. The idea was that the chauffeur should be aware of where the major components were situated, how they worked, and how simple maintenance should be carried out.

The course was delivered by three instructors led by the principal, Frank Hutton. It comprised 70%



1938

Expansion of the Handley Page aircraft factory necessitates a move to Hyde Cottage, Edgware Road, London



1983

The school is incorporated into the works at Crewe where assessment includes skid pan driving - seen here in pre-production Silver Spur ACH01006

1930s

New premises are found at the Rolls-Royce Service Depot in Cricklewood in north London adjacent to Handley Page



1946

Following World War Two the school relocates to the London Service Centre in Hythe Road and the driving syllabus changes to reflect modern conditions



## A five-day automatic gearbox course was offered for training on

maintenance and 30% driving tuition and usually lasted for five days, with one day devoted to driving, although a 10-day option was available. It was a bespoke arrangement with many variations, for instance maintenance instruction only, or a five-day automatic gearbox course offering training on recent models that many chauffeurs were not used to driving.

Fees at this time ranged from £3. 3s. for a day's instruction in maintenance to £20 for the full course. This included morning tea and coffee, mid-day meals and lecture notes and diagrams.

In 1983 the school returned to the works, this time at the Rolls-Royce Motors factory in Crewe. Nuggets of period guidance from the *Rolls-Royce and Bentley Chauffeurs Handbook* from this era include:

- Set a good example by always using your seatbelt and ask passengers if they wish to avail themselves of this protective restraint.
- Ensure your driving position is correct and that your mirrors are adjusted correctly. Nothing is likely to unsettle a passenger more than a driver adjusting a mirror or seat after he has moved off.

### CHAUFFEUR DAVID TAYLOR TOOK THE COURSE AT CREWE IN 1990

"There were five or six of us on the course which lasted for four-and-a-half days, ending at lunchtime on Friday. I particularly enjoyed the notice inside the doors warning pedestrians to 'Beware, silent motor cars'.

"Part of the instruction involved a demonstration of how to polish a car. We then had to do the job ourselves to see how easy it was to go through the soft paint.

"Another part entailed taking to the skid pan in a Silver Spur with worn tyres. The instructor sat next to me as we sped across the oily surface and timed the run with a stopwatch.

"But it wasn't all about speed: before leaving the factory on the advanced test you were allowed a margin for error of only 10% above the factory speed limit of 10mph - go over 11mph and you failed."



# recent models that many chauffeurs were not used to driving

- Know the time and selection of radio programmes.
- Leather gloves must be worn when driving. Ensure that your cap is worn at all times.
- Do not sound your horn needlessly or aggressively.
- On derestricted roads a chauffeur must enquire the speed the passenger wishes to be maintained.
- Do not stop or overtake other vehicles on a bend.
- Never smoke within half an hour of picking up passengers.
- Do not drive with your arm on the window sill.
- Do not enter into conversation unless addressed by the passenger; your reply should be brief but courteous. Further conversation should not be continued unless encouraged by the passenger.
- When meeting passengers at a railway station, wait on the platform to assist with luggage. Unloading luggage at a hotel is the chauffeur's responsibility.
- Be the first to alight and walk around the back of the car to reach to the other side. This also applies to starting off to ensure that all doors are closed.
- Give priority to lady passengers and assist them to alight if necessary.

## TAKE-AWAY POINTS FROM THE GOODWOOD ROLLS-ROYCE WHITE GLOVES PROGRAMME OF THE 2000s

- Introduce yourself to all passengers with a handshake, including the children, and address each as 'sir' or 'madam'.
- Secure any luggage in the boot before granting passengers access to the vehicle to ensure no valuable possessions go astray.
- When opening the coach doors of a Phantom, slip your hand behind the handle and give a slight tug, thus preventing fingerprints.
- The 'principal' passenger should generally be seated diagonally across from the driver, with the secondary client behind the driver.
- Close the door gently until you hear a slight click, at which point the power door closer silently seals the cabin.
- Make eye contact in the rear view mirror, first with the principal, then with the secondary passenger before pulling away. After that, tilt the mirror up and do not look at the passengers again.
- Keep a light grip on the wheel at either the nine-and-three position or eight-and-four.
- When pulling up behind another vehicle be sure to leave 'tyres and tarmac' visible between you and the car in front.
- Smoothness is paramount. Passengers should be able to sip champagne in comfort, regardless of the conditions.



Left: George Fairweather demonstrates the 'correct way' to change gear  
 Above and right: technical instruction at Hythe Road  
 Far right: students are shown how to engage timing gears at the front of the engine. On the right is head of the The Technical Office, Bernard Jordan, whose job was to pass on to Crewe anything unusual found during the course of routine servicing or repairs and to disseminate information from Crewe to the relevant departments in Hythe Road

