

Rolls-Royce 17EX, a Fabulous Destiny by Gautam Sen

Synthesis, Paris, 2012 (US distributor: eNetFusion spbajaj@enetfusion.com, Europe: www.chapters.co.uk, India: www.media-star.co.in). 124 p., 145 color & b/w photos, hardcover. ISBN: 978-93-5087-272-7. £40/\$49.95

(English and German) Author Gautam Sen is an Indian automotive writer and editor of *Auto India* (India's best-selling car magazine) and he has a soft spot for the cars of the maharajahs in particular and cars of exception in general. He already published several books (see www.gautamsen.com).

There are cars in the histories of all marques that are absolute milestones. In the case of Rolls-Royce, Silver Ghost AX201 and the experimental Phantom I 17EX were the first two of a string of chassis that all contributed to establish the reputation of the name.

In the late 1920s, luxury cars were offered from both sides of the Atlantic, and various competition cars were winning races and customers on the Continent. Therefore, to keep up with the competition, Henry Royce felt it appropriate to jazz up the Phantom I, successor to the famed Silver Ghost but with not quite the same performance—the 100 mph mark was a mythical barrier for some cars! As a consequence, a lightweight streamlined style of body was tested on three experimental chassis (hence the EX tag in the chassis number). The design had been created by Ivan Evernden and all cars received almost identical bodies by different coachmakers to enable undisputable comparisons and tests.

This book is the monograph of one of them, 17EX, from conception to 2012. The book is lavishly illustrated with period photos in which we can see the car in India where it was sold to after the tests. Its full history is known, which is quite rare. First in India from 1929 to 1976, then in various European countries, including Holland when it was owned by Spyker's CEO Victor Müller until it was adopted by Austrian Alexander Schaufler in 2009. Schaufler is not one of those speculators who buy cars and then forget about them until they need the money. He is a true enthusiast who entered 17EX in the toughest mountain rallies and who continues to maintain it to the highest standard so as to use it as much as he can. Austria is not nearly as flat as Holland—rather more like Kashmir I should say. It is worth mentioning this because I know very few people who risk similarly priced cars on open roads, especially when there's always one side overlooking a precipice!

Many of the modern photos are by Makarand Baokar, the official photographer at *Auto India* and they often spread across two pages, i.e. 47 x 32 cm. They're a real treat to the eye because he's one of the world's best automotive

photographers. If you are looking for ideas on how to photograph cars, you've come to the right place.

In the second chapter, all three experimental cars (15EX, 16EX, 17EX) are discussed at length and their respective differences analyzed, down to their shades of blue.

The next chapter describes the kingdom of Kashmir in the 19th century, with a particular spotlight on Rajah Hari Singh. That's where 17EX spent its early days, in the Royal Mews and roaring up over the various passes surrounding Srinagar. It's a good idea to elaborate on the personalities who owned the car as well as on the region where it was used. This is all part of the essential aspects of what cars are about: wheels in contact with a specific road surface and a pair of hands grabbing the steering wheel. Change the road surface (region) and the person at the wheel and you will end up with a different automobile and a different story!

As so many cars, 17EX soon passed from the Kashmir Royal stables into new hands, specifically the Mitters, a Calcutta family that had a superb collection of five motorcars in the same league as the Rolls-Royce. They are the subject of

the next chapter, as well as the rest of the Indian spell, ending with famous collector Protap Roy of Bombay, without whom 17EX may well have been lost and scrapped.

The car was fully restored to the last nut and bolt. Photos of the reframing and reskinning attest to the thorough and terribly expensive job that was carried out and followed by a complete mechanical rebuild. I reckon this car is today as good as it was when it left the factory and possibly better because all the flaws and shortcomings that developed over the past 80 years have been addressed and corrected. So much enthusiasm and passion was deservedly rewarded with a prize at Pebble Beach in 2012.

When the history of a single car spreads over 124 pages, you can be certain no stone was left unturned. The fabulous history of this car will fascinate you whether you are a Rolls-Royce nut or simply a car lover, just like you could be fascinated by the history of La Joconde. Hopefully this book will prompt owners of similarly exceptional cars to commission writers/historians to embark on more monographs of this kind; they are important not just for readers like us but too for posterity.

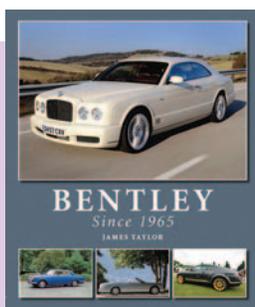
—André Blaize

New and Noteworthy

There are also three recent Bentley books to be aware of. They all happen to be by the same author:

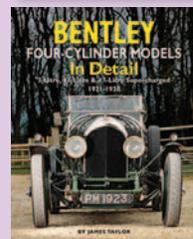
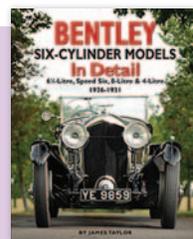
Bentley Since 1965 by James Taylor (Crowood 2012), 192 p., hardcover. \$39.95. ISBN: 9781847973719.

The story of the revival of the Bentley marque and the technical developments that shaped the company's latter-day history. Begins with the T series and goes to the current Continental. Details engine and chassis developments. Includes technical details and specs, special editions and one-off models. Also covers the Speed8 racer and Le Mans. **ED**



Bentley Six-Cylinder Models In Detail: 6½L, Speed Six, 8L, 4L 1926–1931 by James Taylor (Herridge 2012), 176 p., 150 color & 150 b/w illos, hardcover. \$64.95. ISBN: 9781906133429.

Begins with an account of the company's performance and its problems during the later years of the 1920s. Detailed examina-



tion of the models, with extracts from contemporary reports and road tests, summary of production changes and modifications, competition history, coachwork. **ED**

Bentley Four-Cylinder Models in Detail: 3L, 4L, 4½L Supercharged 1921–1930 by James Taylor (Herridge 2012), 160 p., hardcover. \$64.95. ISBN: 9781906133306.

Same approach as above but about different models. Taylor has written several books in the series, so you know what to expect. **ED**