ROLLS-ROYCE | MEDIA INFORMATION

A DEFINING MOMENT:

ROLLS-ROYCE MARKS ALPINE TRIAL’S 110th ANNIVERSARY

14 June 2023, Goodwood, West Sussex

* Rolls-Royce Motor Cars marks the 110th anniversary of its successes in the Alpine Trial in 1913
* Original trial event spanned eight days and 2,600 kilometres
* Marque’s dominance of event cast Silver Ghost’s reputation as 'the best car in the world'
* Rolls-Royce looks back on the characters, cars and conditions that made automotive history

*“At the Home of Rolls-Royce at Goodwood, we design and hand-build what many call ‘the best car in the world’. That title was first bestowed on Rolls-Royce 110 years ago, following the Silver Ghost’s total domination of the daunting Alpine Trial in 1913. As custodians of this unique legacy, we proudly uphold the exceptional design and engineering excellence that made those early Rolls-Royces so successful. These exquisite examples of our founders’ art are a true inspiration; thanks to the skilled care and attention today’s proud owners lavish on these astonishing motor cars, we are still able to experience and enjoy their remarkable attributes. The Silver Ghost’s unequalled marriage of performance, strength, reliability, technological innovation, driver engagement and comfort provides a template for everything we do more than a century later.”***Torsten Müller-Ötvös, Chief Executive Officer, Rolls-Royce Motor Cars**

Rolls-Royce Motor Cars marks the 110th anniversary of its success in the Alpine Trial in 1913 – an event whose significance in Rolls-Royce’s legend cannot be overstated. It was this challenge, held over eight days and 2,600km, that established Rolls-Royce's reputation as ‘the best car in the world’ – a crown it retains to this day. Rolls-Royce looks back on the characters, cars and conditions that helped make automotive history.

**A DAUNTING CHALLENGE – AND UNMISSABLE OPPORTUNITY**

From its foundation in 1904, Rolls-Royce immediately earned an enviable reputation for quality and reliability. This was cemented in a faultless performance by the new 40/50 hp, or Silver Ghost as it came to be known, in the 1907 Scottish Reliability Trials, followed by a peerless demonstration at the famous 1911 London to Edinburgh Top Gear Trial and Brooklands 100mph Run.

These endeavours earned Rolls-Royce the soubriquet ‘the best British car’. However, for energetic, ambitious managing director Claude Johnson, who described himself as the hyphen in Rolls-Royce, this was merely the beginning. He wanted to conquer the European market and knew that success in a high-profile continental event was the key. The 1913 Alpine Trial would provide precisely the opportunity he was looking for.

**PERFECTLY PREPARED**

Johnson personally selected a Rolls-Royce Works Team, with Eric Platford – one of the company’s most trusted employees and former mechanic to Charles Stewart Rolls himself – as manager. The specially prepared Silver Ghosts would be driven by Curt Friese, the marque’s representative in Austria, experienced Alpine driver Jock Sinclair, and EW Hives, a senior member of the Experimental Department at Derby and the first man to drive the Silver Ghost at 101mph.

Johnson also invited an enthusiastic privateer Silver Ghost owner, James Radley, to act as the team’s pacesetter.

The Works cars were meticulously prepared for the hazards of a springtime crossing of the Alps. Then as now, these included extreme temperatures, high altitudes, punishing gradients and vertiginous descents – but all without the benefit of the modern road surfaces of today.

The most significant technical modifications to the Silver Ghosts included a new four-speed gearbox with a special low gear, strengthened chassis and suspension, a larger main fuel tank together with a reserve, and a new starting system that could get the engine running in under a minute even in freezing temperatures.

After a successful reconnaissance mission in May – in which the cars overcame appalling conditions with perfect composure – the team travelled to Vienna for the start of the Alpine Trial on 22 June 1913.

**DAY 1 (260 MILES, MAXIMUM ELEVATION 4,000 FT)**

As the most powerful vehicles taking part, the Silver Ghosts were sent off first, led as planned by James Radley. Starting at 5.00am, Radley crossed the first day’s finish line in a little over eight hours, followed 45 minutes later by the rest of the Works Team. No other cars came near to matching their pace, and even this relatively straightforward stage saw the event’s first retirements.

**DAY 2 (262 MILES, MAXIMUM ELEVATION 5,700 FT)**

The second day saw the competitors tackle the oldest road over the Alps, the Tauren Pass, which rose 2,900 ft in just 12 miles with a maximum gradient of 27.9%. Compounded by atrocious weather and road conditions, the task proved impossible for many. The Silver Ghosts, however, sailed over at half-throttle, with Radley averaging 25mph and never falling below 17mph, even on the steepest slopes.

**DAY 3 (246 MILES)**

On a much easier, largely level run finishing at the shores of Lake Garda, the Rolls-Royce team led from the start, with Radley complaining about the slow pace set by the officials’ car in front.

**DAY 4 (192 MILES, MAXIMUM ELEVATION 7,400FT)**

Stage four took the teams over the Dolomites and included the Trial’s highest point, the Pordoi Pass. Rain soon turned to heavy snow, but the Rolls-Royce team were undaunted and took the first four places on the day.

**DAY 5 (205 MILES, MAXIMUM ELEVATION 3,500 FT)**

Despite freezing conditions, the Works Team again led from start to finish on a long drive through southern Austria via steep, rugged and copiously hair-pinned roads including the Wurzen and Perdils passes to the port city of Trieste.

**DAY 6 (242 MILES, MAXIMUM ELEVATION 3,500 FT)**

After a rest day in Trieste, the teams took on the steepest pass of the entire event – the Loibl, which gained 2,300 ft in just three miles – en route to the final overnight stop in Klagenfurt, where the Rolls-Royce team completed another clean sweep. Radley reduced the record time for the ascent from six-and-a-half minutes to just five, delighting onlookers by taking a drink as he rounded the final hairpin.

**DAY 7 (260 MILES, MAXIMUM ELEVATION 5,000FT)**

Between Klagenfurt and the finish in Vienna lay the notorious Stubalpe Pass. The road included 125 gullies that drained water across the road and could only be negotiated at walking pace. As usual, the Silver Ghosts were untroubled and led onto the fast, final stretch to Vienna, where Radley hit 70mph on three occasions.

However, as they passed through the village of Guntramsdorf, Jock Sinclair’s Silver Ghost was struck by a speeding car driven by a non-competitor and forced into a telegraph pole. After repairing the near-side front wheel and tyre, Sinclair limped into Vienna in his one functioning (third) gear. It was the first and only time the team failed to take the first four positions in the event.

**UNDISPUTED CHAMPIONS**

Of the 46 starters, only 31 reached Vienna. The Rolls-Royce cars’ outstanding speed, strength and reliability made them the event’s unrivalled stars. This earned their drivers the most prestigious individual prizes, presented by Archduke Leopold Salvator of Austria. Radley received a special prize from the city of Trieste.

The marque’s exceptional performance drew universal praise and admiration across the automotive world. Of perhaps even greater importance to Claude Johnson, this success translated into European sales that quickly grew to match those in the UK.

Although the Alpine Trials continued until 1973, Rolls-Royce never again entered a Works Team; there was no need. The title of ‘the best car in the world’ had been won – and would never be relinquished.

**A LASTING LEGACY**

The Silver Ghost remains arguably the most famous Rolls-Royce ever made. That so many examples remain not only in perfect working order, but able to undertake the same extraordinary endeavours they did over a century ago is a testament to their proud owners’ care and attention. These devoted enthusiasts play a central role in conserving and celebrating this priceless automotive heritage, and are an inspiration to all who know and love historic Rolls-Royce motor cars.

But masterpieces like those participating in the anniversary reenactment also represent part of a larger legacy. Around 80% of all Rolls-Royce motor cars ever made are still in existence and in active service – a lasting, tangible monument to our founders’ skill, vision, technical expertise and relentless pursuit of perfection.

As their successors, the team at the contemporary Home of Rolls-Royce at Goodwood, which marks its own 20th anniversary in 2023, are the fortunate custodians of that indelible legacy. Every motor car hand-built at Goodwood today upholds the standards for performance, strength, reliability, comfort, driver experience and engineering excellence first established by the Silver Ghost, and recognised and respected around the world ever since.

- ENDS -

## FURTHER INFORMATION

You can find all our press releases and press kits, as well as a wide selection of high resolution, downloadable photographs and video footage at our media website, [PressClub](https://www.press.rolls-roycemotorcars.com/rolls-royce-motor-cars-pressclub).

You can also follow marque on social media: [LinkedIn](https://www.linkedin.com/company/rolls-royce-motor-cars/); [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/user/RollsRoyceMotorCars); [Twitter](https://twitter.com/rollsroycecars); [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/rollsroycecars/); and [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/rollsroycemotorcars).

EDITORS’ NOTES

Rolls-Royce Motor Cars is a true luxury house, creating the world’s most recognised, revered and desirable handcrafted Bespoke products for its international clientele.

The company employs more than 2,500 people at the Home of Rolls-Royce at Goodwood, West Sussex. This comprises both its global headquarters and Centre of Luxury Manufacturing Excellence – the only place in the world where Rolls-Royce motor cars are designed, engineered and meticulously built by hand. Its continuous investment in its facilities, products and people has resulted in a series of ‘record years’ for global sales, peaking in 2022 with over 6,000 motor cars sold worldwide.

Rolls-Royce Motor Cars is a wholly owned subsidiary of the BMW Group and is a completely separate, unrelated company from Rolls-Royce plc, the manufacturer of aircraft engines and propulsion systems.

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