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Q&A: Rolls-Royce's Ian Cameron

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By Gary Witzenburg

Ian Cameron has been Rolls Royce Design Director since the legendary brand was purchased by BMW in 1998. Before that, the 15-year BMW-Group veteran worked on the Range Rover and before that on the curvilinear Z8 roadster.

How does this Drophead Coupe's design differ from the four-door Phantom's?

IC: We know the customer for this car will be quite different. The Phantom is a much more formal sort of beast. With this car, the message of performance is much more clear. I think the design, the form, the streamlining, the way the grille is integrated into the body and the subtle haunches over the rear wheels separate it from the Phantom. This all suggests that you will enjoy the elements of this car in a unique Rolls Royce way. Rolls Royce has always had an open car in its model line, and it's very nice to have that back.



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Do these two cars represent the design vision for future Rolls Royce cars?

IC: This is certainly one part of the future of Rolls Royce, but not the only one. We have announced a smaller car that will be a different set of products, but it will be a Rolls Royce.

Will it share cues and form language with these?

IC: It will share certain cues. It will share the way we approach the use and the finish of materials, for example, using materials in their most natural forms. There's a visual tactility in this, and it takes time to hand-finish wooden parts, to impregnate leather rather than just paint it. This all adds to the pleasure of having a Rolls Royce.



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Heritage plays a critically important role in the design of any Rolls Royce.

IC: Absolutely. The coach doors, for example. This is the most elegant way to get in and out of a car, and it is true to the coachbuilders of the '30s. Also, in the materials we've used, we've been inspired by Americas Cup J-Class yachts of the 1930s. That was the closest you could get to the elements of speed and performance, and Rolls Royce has always been interested in delivering performance and driving enjoyment. Also the whole way this car is tuned. This is the Phantom platform, but we've taken 10 inches out of the wheelbase to improve its agility, and the suspension geometry has been changed to optimize its handling.

How important are aerodynamics in a Rolls Royce design?

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IC: Of course, we always spend time on that for many reasons. The car has to be silent, and it has to be efficient. We have to optimize the way the air separates from the body to minimize turbulence and manage the way the body handles moisture. This car, with its raked front end, is significantly more aerodynamic than the Phantom. We've also got to be very careful with lift. You can't have too much difference between the lift the front and rear axles. For all those reasons, these cars are superb to drive.

What is the top priority in designing any Rolls Royce?

IC: Someone once said that if we deliver a true Rolls Royce, it ought to make time stand still. Time is a very, very important factor. It takes time to do anything competently, so you can't rush the design or the build of a Rolls Royce. I think you must produce a quality that is timeless, and you should have the time of your life when you buy one of these cars. Typically, the customer who buys a Rolls Royce is celebrating something. They're fulfilling a dream, an aspiration, or making a statement about success. If you don't achieve a sense of occasion with these cars, then you've failed. Also, because Rolls Royce owners typically have a four, five or six-car garage, they're not buying compromise. They want a specific car for a specific use. To achieve that, you've got to be very clear with your goals.



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How do you feel about the responsibility of being the Rolls Royce designer?

IC: It is something that keeps you awake at night, because the challenge and the excitement of trying to produce the best car in the world is very humbling. At least that makes the job very clear.

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