

The author and
a first love, 1976

Dawn After the Clouds and Shadows

Where the mind goes, the man follows. For one writer, the relationship with Rolls Royce all began with a small recollection... Words RICHARD WEBB

FROM THE MIST of childhood memories, I recall being influenced on so many levels by how a car 'spoke' to me: from the way it looked to the way it smelled and even its sheer personality. For me, few cars have presence like a Rolls-Royce – because of its mystique, its heritage, the tales of famous owners and, of course, the craftsmanship associated with it.

I got the Rolls-Royce bug early. 'If Richard had as much passion for his school work as he did for cars, he'd actually amount to something', was an oft-repeated school-report lamentation. Then, when I was seven, a kindly uncle bequeathed to me a small collection of Dinky Toys and Corgi Toys die-cast model cars. It spurred me on to amass a vast collection over the next few years.

My most cherished model was a Rolls-Royce Silver Shadow Mulliner Park Ward Coupé. It was March 1970, and Corgi Toys had just invented its Golden Jacks 'Take-Off Wheels' system, which enabled me to take off – and promptly lose – the wheels. That Silver Shadow 'broke the seal'. I've been enchanted by the Spirit of Ecstasy ever since.

My fascination with all things Rolls-Royce took a turn when I was on holiday in Plettenberg Bay in December 1976. I spotted a Rolls-Royce Silver Cloud Series I, parked like one noble-born among lesser mechanical 'beings' at the then swanky new Beacon Isle Resort.

The wealthy owner spotted me peering through the window of his car. 'What'll she do, Mister?' I mumbled, fully expecting a clip around my ear for

leaving grubby fingerprints all over his pristine Roller. Yet the encounter ended better than I could have imagined, with my first ever ride in a real Rolls-Royce. Stepping into the Cloud was a sensuous experience, mixing sight with smell to create the most evocative and emotional automotive anchors that linger still.

These days, new cars just don't smell right. Wood and leather are pleasant – leather and plastic less so. Scents often bring back memories but they can also set the mood for new experiences, like the one offered to me by South African-born head of global communications for Rolls-Royce Motor Cars, the urbane Richard Carter.

This dolce vita moment was the global media launch of the new Dawn

at Delaire Graff Estate outside Stellenbosch in the Cape Winelands. One of only three convertible Rolls-Royce models introduced over the past 50 years, it is based on the Wraith, with major revisions to the power train and chassis. In line with the plummeting age of Rolls-Royce customers, this youthful Dawn promises a seductive encounter without dismissing any of the brand's heritage.

Alex Innes, Rolls-Royce bespoke design director, told me more about this hedonic 6.6-litre twin-turbocharged V12 dream car. 'It's a playful, more daring car,' he said as he walked me around this beguilingly visceral shape. 'The signature monolithic grille is softened and the body moulding toward the rear gently swells, akin to a lady's hip, dare I say.' He's not wrong, you know.

The road beckoned, however, and it was time to get driving. On entry it was obvious I was about to experience something extraordinary. With my eyes closed, I took a deep breath and was instantly transported by that hypnotising smell of wood and leather – all of a sudden it was 1976 again. □

Orders are now being taken by Pedro Carneiro at Daytona on 011 301 7000.



The Dawn begins a new age of open-top, superluxury motoring as a vivid, more differentiated offering

PHOTOGRAPHY: SUPPLIED

NEED TO KNOW

Price: about R10,5 million, subject to prevailing exchange rate

Combined economy:
14,2 litres/100km

0 to 100km/h:
4,9 whisperingly quiet seconds

Top speed: 250km/h

Engine: 6 592cc Twin-turbo V12

Power: 420kW

Torque: 780Nm

Transmission: satellite-aided eight-speed auto

CO₂ emissions: 330g/km