

MOTORING



A DIAMOND ON WHEELS

Guilherme Marques

TEST DRIVE || Driving a Rolls-Royce is not like driving any other car on the planet. They are something else. Like Tina would say: simply the best.

I remember sitting at a kind of auditorium at the Rolls-Royce factory in Goodwood, England, waiting for the then CEO, Torsten Müller-Ötvös, to come in and talk to members of the press, who were invited to a factory tour that day.

This was 2016 and the Cullinan, the car you see in the pictures, had not been launched yet, but everyone knew such a car was coming.

At the Q&A, someone inevitably asked when the Rolls-Royce SUV was coming out. Mr. Müller-Ötvös smiled and said: "Rolls-Royce will never build an SUV. An SUV is, by definition, an *Utility* vehicle - and there is no such positioning for one of those in RR today."

As we all grinned at the least unexpected answer in the history of answers, I thought to myself that Torsten Müller-Ötvös was in a difficult spot. The Cullinan was something RR had to do - but it had to get absolutely right. No margin for error.

Fast forward seven years and there I am, in Norway, -10°C degrees outside.

I am nice and warm inside a Cullinan, outside a beautiful hotel where we would be spending the night. I drove it around for four hours in all

conditions possible: snowy, very snowy and I-can-barely-see-in-front-of-me snowy.

The Cullinan felt some times like a luxury lounge in a 7-star hotel, other times like a private jet. I was only missing the stewardesses asking me if I wanted *Veuve Clicquot* or *Moët & Chandon* with my caviar.

What it never felt like was utilitarian. Something useful. A tool for a job. The Cullinan is above all that. And I mean high, high above.

Confession time. When I saw the launch pictures, I



really didn't like this high-riding Rolls-Royce. It looked too big, too ungainly. Then, the first time I saw one, I didn't know what to think. It seemed different from those 2D images. Not beautiful, but also not exactly what I had seen in them.

There was something majestic about it, something regal - as if it was built for royalty, to be driven on special occasions, not something for everyday life and urban traffic.

What was most interesting about the Cullinan, though, way before I ever drove one, was that it was a car that made me think, it made me care about what it could be, what it actually was and how people perceived it.

I cannot say that about many cars in the last 10 years. Although I drive and write about many different cars, I care about them

less and less, as electric and hybrid propulsion takes over. The car I fell in love with when I was a child no longer exists.

When that first drive finally arrived, I had a lot of questions in my head surrounding the Cullinan - and they were not about how much it costs, believe me. I could never afford one and neither can most people. What mattered to me was what it really was, intrinsically - could it deliver on the promise of being a Rolls-Royce?

The Cullinan is built on RR's Architecture of Luxury platform, an all-aluminium spaceframe with 48v systems underneath. The engine is a 6.75 litre V12, mated to an eight-speed ZF automatic gearbox, delivering drive to all four wheels with a 50:50 split.

Power is rated at 571hp and torque at 850Nm (600hp

and 900Nm for the Black Badge version), giving the Cullinan that effortless approach to moving that is so unique to a Rolls-Royce.

Customers usually arrive at the factory by helicopter, and they can personalize their car up to the last detail. Colours? The standard catalogue has 44,000. But you can have a colour developed from scratch only for you if that is your wish. And that's only the beginning. Through the Bespoke Collective programme, anything you may conceive can be produced, installed, adapted. There are no limits. Every Rolls-Royce is unique.

The Cullinan I (once again) drove two weeks ago, now here in Portugal, was a Black Badge version in Salamanca Blue. At 5.34m long, 2m wide and 1.82m tall, it was a sight to behold. It weighed in at 2734kg. On

the road, it was never going to feel like the last word in agility. But it did feel like the last word in luxury. In engineering. In majesty.

Optional extras included stuff like a Dark Chrome Spirit of Ecstasy up front, Shooting Star Headliner, Viewing suite in Charles Blue, Lambswool Footmats or Technical Carbon Treadplate Surround. Not your usual 'leather interior', is it?

The price? Well, you were waiting for this one, weren't you? €603,485.59. Yes, you read that right. It's a different world, the Rolls-Royce world. But it's a magnificent one and I am very glad it exists and that it keeps pushing the boundaries of the possible and, at the same time, the somewhat intangible concept of luxury.

I loved driving the Cullinan again. For a few hours, I felt like a king.



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