

PASSIONS

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The Rolls-Royce Cullinan: Equally at home in Malibu and Manitoba.



A DIAMOND TAKES THE ROUGH

The Rolls-Royce of yesteryear was built to sparkle on the circular driveways of great estates, chauffeur at the ready. The marque's new SUV is built to change that. **By Jaclyn Trop**

"IT'S THE FIRST ROLLS-ROYCE that looks better dirty," says the brand's CEO, Torsten Müller-Ötvös, as he overlooks a small fleet of the marque's first SUV model, dubbed Cullinan—the three vehicles suitably caked in mud and dust from a daylong romp around Grand Teton National Park in Wyoming. "It's a remarkable departure for the brand."

Cullinan, named for the largest gem-quality rough diamond ever found, nominally starts at \$325,000, but no Rolls-Royce is delivered in its base form: One can add tens if not hundreds of thousands of dollars to the price

in bespoke paint, leather, woodwork, or custom cabinetry.

That's all in the service of distinguishing it from luxury SUV segment leader Range Rover, whose offerings have grown increasingly grand in recent years but can't touch the opulence of its rival from Goodwood. If anyone was going to be the "Rolls-Royce of SUVs," it was going to be Rolls-Royce.

While Cullinan will no doubt find its way into the valet lots of Beverly Hills and Bahrain, it's built for much more.

"For the first time, Rolls-Royce is using words like practical, functional, and versatile," Müller-Ötvös says. "You can put the family in, take your dogs, go fly-fishing—whatever you want. It can be even dirty for a couple of days—no problem."

Cullinan's performance credentials are bolstered by its 563-horsepower, twin-turbo V12 engine from parent company BMW and an "off-road" button that helps the car glide over rough terrain as the suspension works double time beneath.

Rolls-Royce is a latecomer to the highly profitable luxury SUV market. One by one, manufacturers that specialized for the better part of a century in premium sports cars and chauffeured saloons have bowed to recent pressure to keep customers who want taller vehicles from defecting to rival brands.

Their efforts have been rewarded. The Bentley Bentayga, Lamborghini Urus, and Maserati Levante have vaulted to bestseller status within their respective brands. Aston Martin expects its DBX crossover to help double the brand's global sales once it arrives later this year. Consumer interest is unlikely to flag. Tall cars have long since graduated from the new normal to the norm.

Rolls-Royce, which sells just 4,000 cars each year, is expecting similar results. Still, the stakes for introducing an SUV are high, says spokesman Richard Carter. "If you sell

Sure you want to call shotgun? Whether you're driving or a passenger, there's no inferior seat in Cullinan.

4,000 cars per year, and you get it wrong, you can very quickly sell 1,000 a year."

For his part, Müller-Ötvös says he is not interested in sales volume. "The last thing I want to talk about is volume," he notes. "Volume is the contradiction of luxury. It's the last thing customers want to hear. I don't want to see a Rolls-Royce on every street corner."

He does not like to discuss the competition, either, asserting instead that there is plenty of room in the market. "It's not so much that our competition is with other cars," he says, adding that customers are likelier to weigh the purchase of a new Rolls-Royce against that of a boat or a piece of art. "If they want both, they buy both."

When creating Cullinan, the Rolls-Royce design team asked themselves: Is there any history whatsoever that would allow us to make an SUV? They soon realized they could draw inspiration from the high running boards of the WWI-era Silver Ghost and the designer wardrobe trunks strapped to the rear of 1920s Phantoms.

They emerged with a boxy, angular design featuring short overhangs that hint at off-road robustness and a commanding perch. Unfussy enough for an owner to flip down the rear seats to toss in a riding tack or shotgun cases, yet with the precision in craftsmanship expected of a Rolls.

Already, Rolls-Royce is seeing the car resonate with customers new to the brand, including women and millennials. And while orders are rising in Rolls-Royce's biggest North American markets—California and Florida—the ruggedness and four-wheel drive is prompting an uptick in orders from Canada, New England, and the Rockies. Says Müller-Ötvös: "It is opening new garages for us." ■

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