

CLASSIC DRIVER

Talking to the Driver with Katie Forrest and 'Nellie' the Rolls-Royce

Lead

In the second episode of our Talk to the Driver series of films for A. Lange & Söhne, we took a ride with Concours of Elegance Club Trophy winner Katie Forrest and her wonderful 1912 Rolls-Royce Silver Ghost, which is affectionately known as Nellie...

In our Talk to the Driver video series, A. Lange & Söhne's CEO Wilhelm Schmid meets young, influential, and charismatic personalities who represent the next generation of both the classic car and mechanical watch worlds. Our first episode featured [Duccio Lopresto and his family's Concorso d'Eleganza Best of Show-winning Alfa Romeo Giulietta SS Prototipo](#).



Katie Forrest and her 1912 Rolls-Royce Silver Ghost star in episode two. At the 2017 Concours of Elegance at Hampton Court Palace, 'Nellie', as the 106-year-old Rolls is affectionately known, claimed the Club Trophy, granting her access to this year's main concours that was, incidentally, sponsored by A. Lange & Söhne for the first time.

There's only one question on everybody's lips when we meet Katie for the first time: why the name Nellie? "The car became known as Nellie because when she became a part of our family, she'd come from India and was big and grey and looked like an elephant!" Indeed, the Silver Ghost was ordered new by Rolls-Royce Bombay in 1912 with a raft of unique features to demonstrate the versatility and luxury of the marque's cars in India, a market it was yet to break into. It was even officially christened the 'Taj Mahal'.



"She's got a tropical electrical system to deal with the heat, is higher off the ground to cope with the terrain, and has chain-mail mudguards to stop errant oxen hooves from flicking up and striking the well-to-do passengers inside," Katie explains. Nellie was promptly bought by the Maharaja of Nabha, with whom she remained until the early 1990s when Katie's father acquired her after a two-year search for the right Silver Ghost with which to tackle a special Alpine rally.

"When he found her, it was love at first sight," recalls Katie. "She certainly wasn't in the state she's in now - she'd been shut away for decades and had been painted a sort of battleship grey by the RAF, who commandeered her briefly during World War 1." Perhaps unsurprisingly, Katie spent a vast amount of her childhood in the back of the Rolls-Royce with her sister, travelling all across England, Europe, and even Australia. In fact, since joining the family, Nellie's travelled in excess of 75,000 miles.



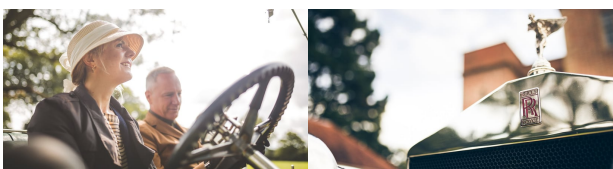
It wasn't until years later that an understandably anxious Katie drove Nellie for the first time. After an all too brief crash course, she joined her father for a 2,000-mile tour around France. Katie was hooked. "You need to understand it mechanically and then you can drive it better," she says. "It's entirely different to a modern car - there's no power steering, two different braking systems, and no synchromesh gearbox." Katie's even begun revising from the period user manual, which was originally intended for the chauffeur in order to keep the car on the road.

It's at this point, while Katie tinkers with various mechanical bits and bobs to wake Nellie from her slumber, that the parallels between the century-old car and the stunning [A. Lange & Söhne 1815 Annual Calendar](#) affixed to her wrist become apparent. Aesthetically, the manually wound timepiece - which features analogue displays for the day, date, and month, and a moon-phase indicator that will remain accurate for 122 years - actually shares much in common with the pocket watch mounted on the Rolls-Royce's dash, such as the railway-track minute scale. "There's a great link between mechanical watches and Rolls-Royces in general," Katie comments. "It's all in the attention to detail and the strive for mechanical perfection, especially in the sense of gears and balance."



"My eyes were on stalks as I walked around the Lange factory for the first time - it was mind-blowing. Everyone person has a specific job in order to get every single little detail right. And I guarantee it would have been the same case at the Rolls-Royce factory 100 years ago. I think it's the passion of the people that contribute to the longevity of what they're making. That's what makes it timeless the object it is. And they'll go on forever because people want them to go on forever."

It's important to keep old cars and mechanical watches going, and Katie is flying the flag for the next generation in that respect. Nellie's story is an unrepeatable one, hence why we're so grateful to Katie and her family for continuing to show the 'big grey elephant' and allowing people to appreciate her.



And we're clearly not alone. At the [2018 Concours of Elegance at Hampton Court](#), sponsored by A. Lange & Söhne, Katie and Nellie won the RAC Spirit of Motoring Award. "My mum and I cried," Katie concludes. "We know how special she is, so it was very special for her to be recognised in that way."

Gallery

Includes video

Has video

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