

Park Ward Standard Saloons

The transitions from the first to the second and from the second to the third style

I am worried that readers might begin to think that I am an anorak. Actually, it is just that the clocks have gone back, and that means a lot to us in Scotland, where the dark winter evenings draw in early, leaving us with lots of time to amuse ourselves before we head to bed!

The above subject is somewhat arcane, and may not be of great interest to many people, but it fills a gap in the analysis of Derby Bentley coachwork set out in our book, Bentley Beauty. So permit me, dear reader, to tie up a loose end or two and pander to my obsessive compulsive side.

The Background

Park Ward was one-third owned by Rolls-Royce by 1933, when the 3½ litre Bentley was launched by Rolls-Royce. While Barker was probably the pre-eminent coachbuilder of bodies for Rolls-Royce chassis from the very beginning of Rolls' production through a tie-up with C S Rolls & Co in 1905, when they were named as preferred suppliers of bodies for Rolls-Royce, this did not extend far into the 1930s. Certainly for the Derby Bentley chassis, Park Ward was the coachbuilder of default, accounting for 45% of the chassis produced. Barker by contrast ceased trading by 1938 and was acquired by Hooper: *sic transit gloria mundi*.

Park Ward offered standard saloon and drophead coupe styles on the chassis. The dropheads remained broadly of the same design (albeit with slightly differing wing, boot and waist swage treatments), throughout the 100 examples on the 3½ litre and 50 examples on the 4¼ litre chassis series. It was a very good design: why change it? Saloons were, on the other hand, split into four types: the first style has a swept tail, with the spare wheel carried on the boot lid. It is very attractive, but boot space was limited. After less than a year, the second style superseded this, and indeed was a development of it: the body remains the same from the front to the line of the rear of the roof above the rear axle. From the rear axle backwards, the line is changed by increasing the size of the boot, the profile of which resembles that of the standard drophead. This second standard saloon design continued from 1934 to early 1936.

Around the time of the introduction of the new 4¼ litre chassis by Rolls-Royce, Park Ward introduced their third standard style, which again was a development of the previous style, but with more radical changes. The horizontal waist line of the first and second styles was replaced by a waistline that dropped over the rear doors and down to the rear bumper along the side of the boot, which itself was more integrated with the passenger cabin with the roof flowing down into the top of the boot. The swage line which ran across the rear of the body above the boot and below the rear window, creating a definition between body and boot in the first and second styles, disappeared. The visual effect is to create a strong sense of the body dropping away to meet the rear bumper, or rising up from that bumper to give a sense of purpose and urge, depending how you look at it! The spare wheel remained on the boot lid, but de luxe versions of this third design had the spare wheel transferred to the offside wing, leaving the boot lid able to be hinged to provide an additional horizontal luggage platform when open. This de luxe configuration led to 25 examples of the

Continental Saloon on the Overdrive chassis, with convex wings, rather than the flowing concave wings on all earlier designs.

The Bentley chassis produced by Rolls-Royce in Derby were numbered in series, with two series to each letter from A to F, for the 3½ litre chassis, then two for each letter from G to L (excluding I) for the 4¼ litre chassis, and then two M series for the 4¼ litre Overdrive chassis. Each series had normally 100 chassis numbers, either odd or even. Thus, the AE series has odd numbers starting with B1 AE, and the AH series has even numbers, starting with B2 AH. The numbers 13 and 113 were not used, to avoid upsetting those customers of a superstitious disposition. The final 3½ litre series were the FB and FC series. The first 4¼ litre series was the GA series. The transition between second and third standard saloon design takes place on chassis from these three series. The transition between the first and second style takes place on the AH and BL series.

Park Ward also numbered their bodies during production. Standard saloons had a C prefix, the first such being C.601 which was mounted on chassis B130 AH and delivered in June 1934, some nine months after body C.602, on chassis B15 AE, the first production delivery in September 1933. It is tempting to conclude that body C.601 was the production prototype for the first style, which was retained for nine months before being mounted on a later chassis and sold to a customer just before the launch of the second design. A similar procedure later becomes again apparent during the transition between the second and third standard styles. This also shows that Rolls-Royce chassis numbers and Park Ward body numbers do not correspond sequentially: take two cars and you will find that a later body number can appear on an earlier chassis number, and vice versa. Chassis arrived at Park Ward in batches from Rolls-Royce and bodies were mounted off the Park Ward production line on the chassis without those chassis being necessarily in ascending order.

The Transition between Style I and Style II

The first standard Park Ward saloon for the new 3½ litre Bentley was body C.602 mounted on chassis B15 AE and guaranteed on 21 September 1933. It was retained by Bentley Motors and used for the launch of the model at the Royal Ascot Hotel on 2 October 1933, with the Earl of March. Then it was used as a Press car.

An analysis of the delivery dates of subsequent examples yields some very interesting facts: no further deliveries were made until Jan 1934, when two cars were delivered, with 8 deliveries in February and 13 deliveries in March of that year. There were 7 cars delivered in April 1934, and 6 in each of May, June and July. But one of those in July has been identified as an example of the Second Style (body C.658 on chassis B29 BL). Then in August, 15 standard saloons were delivered, with a further 12 in September 1934. All these bodies have numbers between C.659 and C.700. Four of them have been positively identified as examples of the second style. The earliest body number so far positively identified as a saloon of the second style is C.653 on B26 BN, delivered in October 1934. C.650 on B6 AH and C.649 on B115 AE were delivered in April and Feb 1934, and so clearly will have been examples of the first style. C.651 on B14 BN was delivered in September 1934. Thus there is a large gap between C.650 and C.651. My working hypothesis is therefore that the second style of body started at C.651, which means that there were only 50 examples of the first style: C.601 to C.650 inclusive. Of these, 14 have been identified as having been rebodied, dismantled or wrecked in Bernard King's tables. Of the remainder, 14 had not been heard of since before 1970. Thus, there may be as few as 22 survivors of the 50 examples.

The Transition between Style II and Style III

I have so far found positive evidence of only one second series body on a 4¼ litre chassis, namely body C.949 on B3 GA (being previously chassis B83 FC and renumbered), the first 4¼ litre chassis to receive a Park Ward saloon body (B2 GA, the renumbered chassis B99 FC, having received a Park Ward standard drophead body, A.198). B3 GA was delivered in April 1936 and was tested in the Autocar issue of 8 May 1936. There were only two 4¼ litre chassis with earlier, March 1936, delivery dates: B16 GA and B24 GA, with bodies C.970 and C.986 respectively. B16 GA was delivered to a Cyril A Nicholson and is unlikely to have survived. B24 GA was delivered to Raymond Mays of ERA fame, who was the recipient of several Derby Bentleys which were then illustrated in the 'On the Road' publications in various locations on Mays' travels worldwide to racing circuits. B24 GA has the new third style of saloon body. For reasons which will become apparent shortly, I think B16 GA, with a body number earlier than C.976, the likely first third style body, will have had the only other second style saloon body on a 4¼ litre chassis.

Evidence from observations of actual bodies shows that there were several of the third style of saloon body mounted on 3½ litre chassis from the FC series: notably B91 FC with body number C.1019, and B97 FC with body number C.979, both delivered in June 1936. Thus, we know that body C.949 (on B3 GA) is of the second style, and body C.979 is of the third style. The transition appears to have occurred in between these body numbers. Aided by Bernard King's tables, I learn that body number C.976 has a note in the Park Ward body book "drop moulding from here on". Given that the third style of saloon body can be characterised as having a drop moulding, and that this body number lies between C.949 and C.979, I am driven to the conclusion that this body, mounted on chassis B146 FB, and delivered in April 1936, is most likely to be the first numbered body of the new style, although not the first such example to appear. I am strengthened in this view when I compare the history of body C.601, being the first standard saloon body but mounted on a much later AH series chassis and delivered in June 1934, just before the switch in July/August 1934 to the second style.

In order to confirm this theory, it will be necessary to track down the surrounding body numbers of Derby Bentley bodies and ascertain the style of those bodies. The relevant chassis numbers are as follows:

| Chassis No. | Body No. | Comment |
|----------------|--------------|---|
| B27 FC | C.969 | delivered Jan 36. In USA in 1991 |
| B16 GA | C.970 | delivered Mar 36. Non-survivor? |
| B102 FB | C.971 | delivered Jan 36. In UK 1999 |
| B95 FC | C.972 | delivered Apr 36. In UK in 1994 |
| B123 FC | C.974 | delivered Feb 36. Subsequently rebodied |
| B146 FB | C.976 | delivered Apr 36. Likely first body of third standard style |
| B6 FB | C.977 | delivered Dec 35 Dismantled in the 1960s |
| B57 FC | C.978 | delivered May 1936. In USA in 1993 |
| B97 FC | C.979 | delivered Jun 1936. Third standard style. Sold by Real Car Co. 2008 |
| B93 FC | C.980 | delivered Feb 1936 to R Stanley Ballantine. In PA, USA 2001, owned by John M Todorczuk. |
| B87 FC | C.981 | delivered Mar 36. Non-survivor? |
| B36 GA | C.982 | delivered Apr 36. Rebodied with a T&M 3 position drophead ex B143 CW |
| B80 GA | C.983 | delivered Apr 36. Third standard style, illustrated in OTR 9 |

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|---------|-------|---|
| B116 GA | C.984 | delivered May 36. Non-survivor? |
| B50 GA | C.985 | delivered Apr 36. Non-survivor? |
| B24 GA | C.986 | delivered Mar 36 to Raymond Mays. Third style |
| B148 GA | C.987 | delivered May 36. Non-survivor? |
| B56 GA | C.988 | delivered Apr 36. In South Africa 1999 |
| B142 GA | C.989 | delivered May 36. Non-survivor? |
| B46 GA | C.990 | delivered May 36. Rebodyed with H J Mulliner saloon in 1948 |

Maddenly, I can find no reference to bodies C.973 and C.975 in the information at present available to me. I would not wish to trespass further on the reader's patience with this analysis. Suffice to say, if any readers are able to contribute further evidence either in support of, or to destroy, my hypothesis set out above, I would be most happy to hear from them. Evidence of the body style of B95 FC, B57 FC and B93 FC would be particularly telling. However, my current conclusion has to be that C.975 was the last body of the second style which thus spanned body numbers C.651 to C.975. Bodies C.977 and C.980 were the first of the third style to appear in Dec 1935 and Feb 1936, but with deliveries really taking off in May 1936. Thus there were around 325 examples of the second style produced between July 1934 and April 1936, compared with 50 examples of the first style in the first seven months of 1934.

As a postscript, B34 GA with body C.1026 is believed by Bernard King (to whom I am greatly indebted for the information contained in the tables of his book "The Derby Built Bentleys", No 4 in his Complete Classics series) to be the first Park Ward saloon with an all steel body. Delivered in April 1936, it shows how Park Ward was introducing not only a new standard saloon body style but also a whole new method of construction at the same time, coincidental with the introduction of the 4¼ litre chassis by Rolls-Royce, their important minority shareholder. Spring of 1936 was a time of considerable change, with Edward VIII having ascended to the throne after the death of George V on 20 January 1936, and with the Berlin Olympics in near prospect. But surely the changes being introduced by Park Ward were in their own context just as significant.

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