



Typical participating motor cars at a self-help session. Those cars in the front row are, from left to right: Phil Sproston's 1968 Silver Shadow Panelcraft estate car (SRH4032), John Begg's 1980 Silver Shadow II (SRH40497) and the author's 1973 Corniche Convertible (DRH14434).

Does our Club meet your needs? If not, why, and what should you do about it?

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In 1995 my wife inherited her father's 1973 Corniche (DRH14434) and we joined the New South Wales Branch shortly afterwards partly due to my need to access assistance in repairing and renovating this car as it had not been in regular use for a considerable period of time. I had previously been a member of the MG Car Club (Newcastle, N.S.W.) and I had benefited from the support and expertise of other members whilst maintaining my first car.

When we attended our first Club meeting, I made some enquiries and was surprised to learn that there was no active technical support for owners of Silver Shadows and later models. I subsequently struck out on my own using the Workshop Manual and the valued assistance of the Spare Parts and Service personnel from York Motors (then N.S.W. R-R/Bentley Dealer) who gave me the additional information and techniques needed for

the work I was undertaking. During this time, I did not participate to any extent in Club activities other than attending the occasional monthly meeting as a passive observer.

Later, I became aware of the fact that a number of R-R/Bentley owners in the A.C.T. had formed an informal group dedicated to promoting self-care maintenance, repair and preservation of their vehicles and this concept particularly appealed to me as a means of supporting Club members wishing to take an active rôle in looking after their cars. A plea for help from Guy Cox (then Editor of *London & Derby*, the N.S.W. Branch newsletter) regarding repairs to the clock in his Silver Shadow provided the catalyst for John Begg (Silver Shadow Registrar) and myself to "test the waters" with a trial run of a "service get-together" for owners of Silver Shadow and derivative models as these members seemed to have the greatest need for and interest in this concept. We received (and continue to receive) unstinting support and assistance from Branch members George Shores and Bill Coburn for this in-

augural session which was organised as an activity of the then newly-established Silver Shadow, Bentley T and Derivatives Register within the Club. A large number of owners attended this session together with several owners of later models who were given 'honorary Shadow status' for the day! A number of repeat sessions have been held and ongoing modifications are being made to the format as we gain experience and receive comments from the participants. The major change has been to open up the sessions to all members of the Branch regardless of car model to allow them the opportunity to safely check their vehicles using proper lifting and support facilities. The last session held in November 2002 saw a wide range of cars attending, ranging from a 1953 Bentley R-type to the later models. We hope the next session in March 2003 will see our first pre-1939 car attending.

The purpose of these sessions is to provide members with the opportunity to learn more about the care, maintenance and construction of their vehicles regardless of whether they intend



All models are welcome at self-help days. Post-war models predominate at present, though that could change a little in the future.

doing this work themselves or entrusting it to a professional. The sessions are conducted on the basis that any work being undertaken is at the sole discretion and responsibility of the owner after they seek comments from those in attendance. We are not experts or appropriately qualified technicians and owners needing specialist assistance are referred to the relevant professional service organisations that are capable of being responsible for the work required.

Whilst our more experienced members are prepared to undertake more complex work, the majority of owners seek information on preventative maintenance and system checks that can be undertaken at home without requiring specialist tools or experience together with details of the servicing schedules that apply to their vehicle.

The time available at each session specifically precludes time-consuming major repairs. A significant benefit from the sessions held to date has been a greater understanding and acceptance by owners of the importance of regular servicing (and driving) to keep their cars in the best possible condition and minimise long-term operating costs. Whilst there appeared to be some initial apprehension amongst some professional service providers about possible loss of business as a consequence of the Self-Help sessions, their subsequent experience appears to have been the reverse as owners become more understanding of the service costs and reasons for the various tasks involved and other work has eventuated as a result of repairs being advised after inspection of the vehicle at the Self-Help sessions.

Andrew Gibson explains engine care techniques.



We now have professionals offering the use of their premises for our sessions and being actively involved in discussing servicing/repair techniques and skills on a voluntary basis.

Technical Sessions for the Silver Wraith, Silver Dawn & Bentley Mk VI/R-type and the Silver Shadow, Bentley T & Derivatives Registers were held at the 2002 Federal Rally in Coffs Harbour and these were video recorded courtesy of the Sir Henry Royce Foundation for future reference.

The philosophy behind this new activity for the Club is based on my perceived need to promote the availability of technical information and assistance for owners of Rolls-Royce and Bentley cars. The national Registers for the various post-WW2 R-R/Bentley models, especially the Silver Shadow and Silver Wraith/Dawn Registers, are proving to be extremely popular with owners who are actively maintaining their vehicles and who are happy to objectively discuss their vehicles and their experiences with prospective/new owners. This practice is important to ensure informed purchase decisions are made and that a new owner has access to advice and help should problems subsequently arise with their car — this ensures the new owner remains confident about their purchase rather than becoming disillusioned, selling the car and then spending the rest of their life telling everyone about the “rotten Rolls-Royce/Bentley” they once owned.

I am particularly concerned with the number of ‘horror stories’ (particularly about Shadows) that repeatedly appear in the various R-R/Bentley web forums and other motoring publications. The practice of certain R-R/Bentley owners who are not willing to talk factually and objectively about the merits and difficulties of their cars or who spout ‘tales of woe’ to denigrate models other than their own is particularly repugnant to me. Whilst I am responsible for a Silver Shadow derivative car, I am not biased against other models and appreciate them for what they represent and the way in which they satisfy the individual preferences of their owners. I advise owners denigrating or being dismissive about models other than their own to be aware that considera-

tions involving which model best suits the future owner's driving style, personal needs and preferences will ultimately determine the purchase rather than advice that they are certain to have problems with a particular model. One lesson in life that I have experienced many times and passed on to those prepared to listen is that 'people never remember they had a problem; they just remember how well it was fixed'. We have a responsibility to ensure that owners who are having problems and seeking help receive that help regardless of whether they are Club members or not to protect the image and reputation of the brand and to ensure potential future owners only hear 'good news' about owning a Rolls-Royce or Bentley car regardless of model, especially the fact that help and advice is readily available when needed. This helps maintain the desirability [and consequently resale value] of our vehicles as well as preserving the special 'mystique' that our vehicles possess in the eyes of the general public. I always include an invitation to join the Club whenever I reply to a request for help from a new owner/non-member.

I am not a trained mechanic but have self-taught repair and maintenance abilities developed over time. It is surprising what you can do on Silver Shadow and derivative vehicles with a little common sense, workshop manuals and help from other owners who work on their cars. I have no hesitation in doing work that I believe is within my capabilities (or if I get in too deep, I can call on the experts to help out when needed and take over when things are back to the point where I can complete the job with my equipment and ability). An interesting benefit from the Self-Help sessions has been that inactive Club members have started to become more involved in Club activities to the point where they are taking on responsibility for organising activities and their rekindled enthusiasm has become contagious within the Club proper much to the delight of our long-standing older members. Of more relevance is the fact that many of these members are younger by a decade or more than the existing active members (our youngest owner is in his late twenties). This involvement will ensure the future of

our Club by enlarging the number of active members, by providing future replacements for existing office-bearers, by supporting the Club activities relevant to them and by encouraging non-members to join the Club to enjoy the benefits available from membership.

We also have an expanding group of members in N.S.W. who are ready and willing to take on the task of servicing the more complex R-R/Bentley models after the Silver Shadow and this is a very positive sign for the future of both the Club and the vehicles under our care especially if parts availability becomes more difficult following the split of the marques — I have no doubt that within 10-15 years we will be having to manufacture our own parts for the Shadows and later models and we need to start to collect the information, technology, parts and drawings to allow this to happen as well as information on substitute parts that may be used to replace original R-R parts. I know that I will be able to help achieve this from a practical perspective given my professional background, experience and interest in car preservation for regular on-road use (I do not like the static museum display alternative one little bit!).

During my recent visit to the U.K. I was given a technical publication for new members issued by the MG Car Club and was very impressed with the content and advice in this publication. I would like to see the worldwide Rolls-Royce/Bentley Clubs combine to

produce a similar publication for our members especially as most of the information required has already been published in Club journals and/or posted in the various Club websites. There is currently considerable activity involving various members of the U.K., U.S. and N.Z. Clubs and myself regarding the possible establishment of an International Technical Archive to collect, store and provide access to all technical information relating to Rolls-Royce and Bentley cars. There appears to be substantial support for this archive; however a considerable amount of work will be required before it becomes a reality.

I hope this article explains the reasons for my membership and involvement in our Club and gives an appreciation of the potential benefits that can be achieved from facilitating care, maintenance, preservation, restoration and, above all, driving our cars. The Club that I joined was not meeting my expectations. However, circumstances arose which encouraged me to participate in the creation of new activities that met my expectations and motivated me (and others) to become a more active member. If our Club is not meeting your needs, look for an opportunity to create and participate in activities that meet your expectations. Above all, do not complain about it and do nothing. Constructive discussion followed by appropriate action and leadership will help make our Club a better place for all members.

Doug Brown (seated) looks on as his 1974 Silver Shadow (SRH17894) receives new rear springs. Talking to Doug is believed to be Vegan Khacharourian.

