

VOTED MEN'S MAGAZINE  OF THE YEAR

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100
page

fashion
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Starring
Joaquin Phoenix:
The New Brando

WENGER,
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NATALIE
PORTMAN
'I'M A
FREEEAK!'

CHERNOBYL:
THE NEW HOLIDAY
HOT SPOT

PLUS

EXCLUSIVE: The Best Rolls-Royce Ever Built
Hanif Kureishi, PG Wodehouse and
The World's Most Luxurious Apartment

55
CAST-IRON
EXCUSES
How to Talk
Your Way Out
of Anything

THE OFFICE
USA
Mark Lawson
Reviews the
Show Nobody
Has Seen

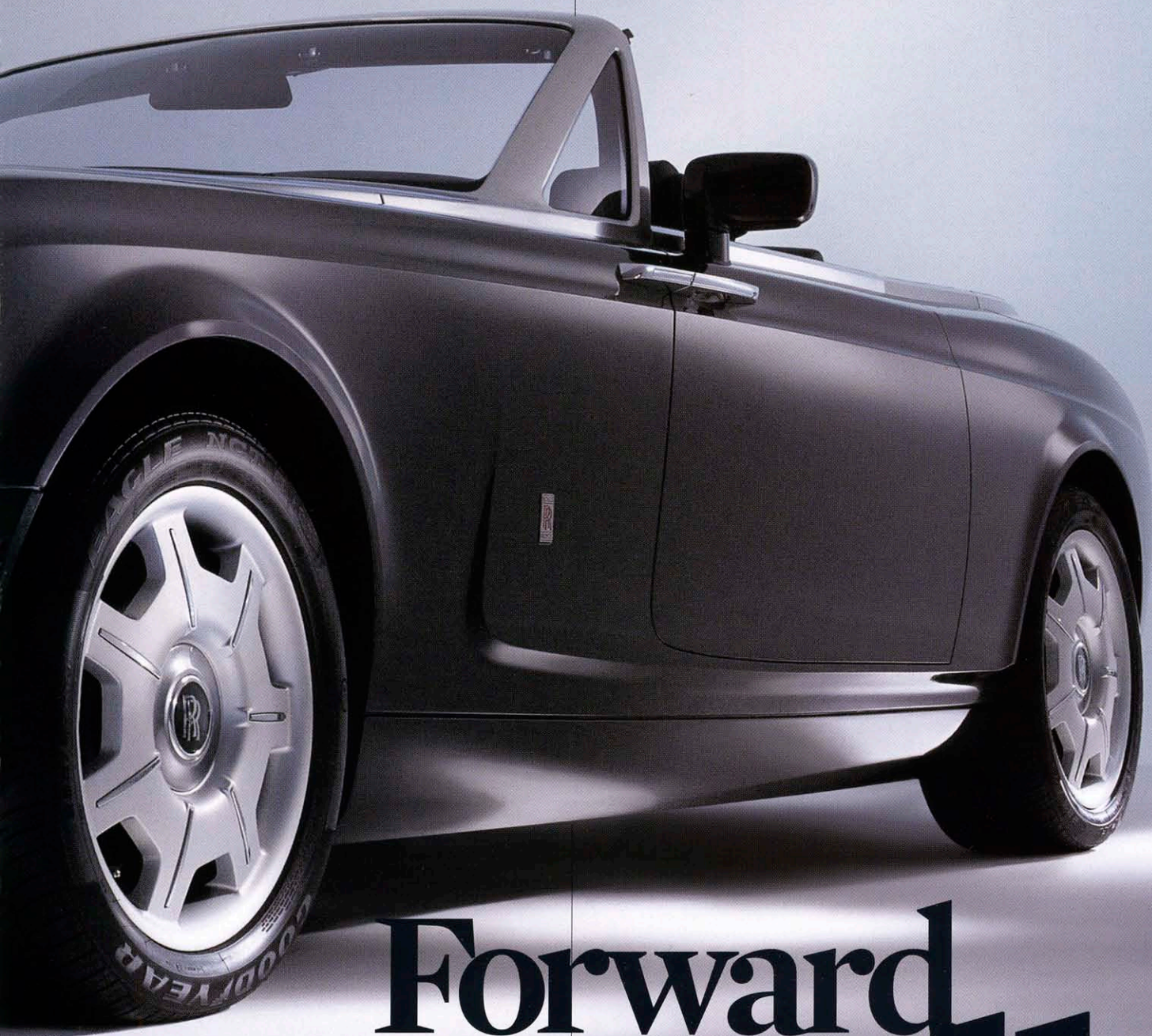


NATALIE PORTMAN
PHOTOGRAPHED
EXCLUSIVELY FOR ESQUIRE
BY ROBERT MAXWELL

Doors of perception: the 100EX's blend of modern and historic features includes Thirties-style rear-hinged "suicide" doors – "coach doors" in Rolls-Royce's more refined terminology



For its centenary year,
Rolls-Royce could have rested on its laurels
as the world's most legendary luxury-car marque. Instead, the company
set about building a legend of the future



Forward Rolls

Words by John Arlidge Photographs by Tim Kent

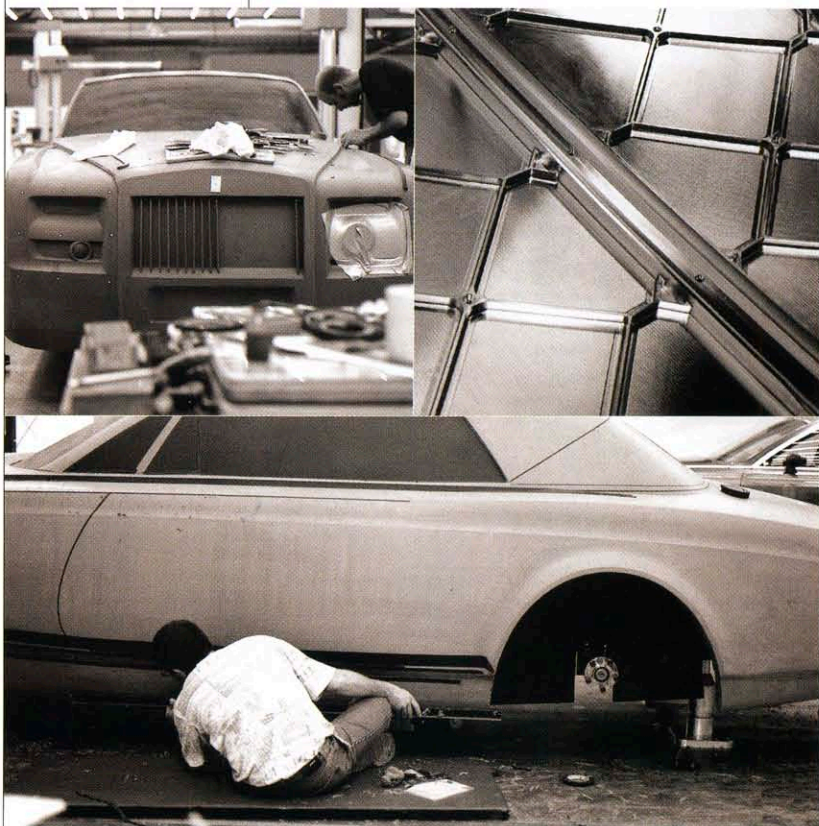
Updating a motoring icon is a precarious business. All too often you lose the charm of the old, while the thrill of the new quickly fades. Ask anyone who was momentarily seduced by the dull pastiche of the VW Beetle or the Ford Thunderbird. But just occasionally someone gets it right. BMW, fresh from recreating Britain's best-loved small car, the Mini, is doing the same for its best-loved big car, the Rolls-Royce.

When the massive new Phantom eased onto the streets last year, its Panzerish proportions and giant neo-classical grille re-established Rolls as *the* luxury-motoring marque. While VW manicured Bentley into a sterile hunk of international luxury and Mercedes tried to convince us that a stretched S-Class with a fancy name was the last word in style, the Phantom reminded us that, a century after Henry Rolls met Charles Royce in the lobby of the Midland Hotel in Manchester, Rolls-Royce still ruled the posh side of the street.

Now that the marque has reconnected with its past and sales of the £250,000 behemoth are rising, what's next? For most car-makers, the answer would be more of the same – more Palladian-style country houses on wheels. But BMW asked the Phantom's exterior designer, Marek Djordjevic, to come up with the opposite: an ultra-modern convertible. Although the 100EX – named in accordance with Rolls-Royce's proud history of experimental cars – is a one-off concept, it is likely to form the basis of next year's Corniche. Seen here in its first studio pictures, it could be the finest car ever to bear the Spirit of Ecstasy mascot and, therefore, the best luxury car ever.

Djordjevic, a 35-year-old Serb who lives in LA but is a confirmed Anglophile, has cast off the formality of the Phantom in favour of a sporty, contemporary aesthetic. The grille curves gently back into the bonnet – the first time Rolls-Royce has softened its Pantheon-style nose. The wraparound LED and xenon headlamps are *I, Robot*-modern. From the side, the lines are high and muscular while the undercut scoops hard into the steel flank, creating a shark-like profile. "Future Rolls-Royces will target the modern gentleman-racer," says Djordjevic, who cut his teeth designing concept sportscars at the BMW-owned California design studio, Designworks.

In the cabin, the Phantom's walnut and cream leather is replaced by purple-black calfskin, offset with burnt-orange inserts. An aircraft-style ring of brushed aluminium runs from the giant windscreen surround to the rear, and the fascia is topped off with titanium. But the interior still retains the traditional Rolls romance. Finished in pinstriped blonde teak and mahogany, the doors and the dashboard are a blend of Savile Row suit and



The 100EX is a remarkable blend of performance and romance. It sneers at convention and recklessly sacrifices practicality for style



Masterwork in progress: top (clockwise from top left), a clay prototype; the hexagonal-framed underside of the bonnet; on the workshop floor. Above, the nautical-style teak decking extends to the boot interior, which can also fold out into a picnic table. Below, the car's distinctive lines in sketch form

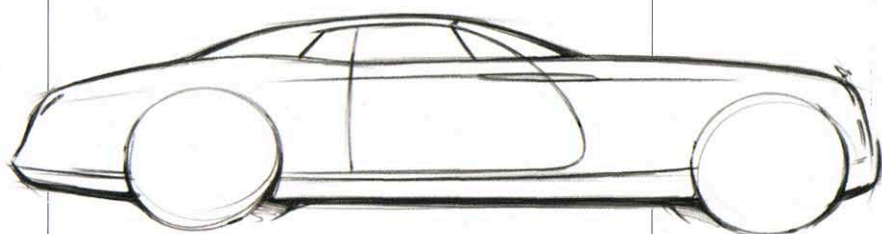
handcrafted yacht, and the roof is fabric rather than metal because, says Djordjevic, "Rolls-Royce convertible drivers want to hear the raindrops drumming on cloth, not pinging off steel."

It may look radical, but the 100EX, which cost £4m to build, retains the technical excellence and craftsmanship that earned Rolls-Royce its reputation as the finest car-maker in the world. The windscreen surround is milled out of a single 2.5-tonne block of aluminium alloy, while the top of the swooping bonnet is brushed by a single craftsman for almost a month until it is thread-perfect. Beneath the hood, the 64-valve, nine-litre V16 engine delivers 0-60mph in around five seconds.

The overall result is a remarkable blend of craftsmanship, romance, performance and grace. Above all, the 100EX has great personality. At almost 2m wide and more than 5.5m long, but with just two back-hinged "suicide" doors, it sneers at convention and recklessly sacrifices practicality for style. It even dispenses with the usual plutocrat's perks – plasma TVs, windows that turn opaque at the touch of a button – in favour of a boot that splits in two and turns into a picnic table.

When Rolls met Royce in 1904, the two men agreed their cars "should be like no others". The 100EX may be big but it is no corporate giant. Should it ever go into production, perhaps as the Corniche, it will mark "the triumph of a few men and women doing the best engineering and design job they can", says Djordjevic. Or – to use words BMW wouldn't let him say – while Bentley and Mercedes take great pains to be modern and bespoke, the Rolls-Royce 100EX doesn't have to try. ☺

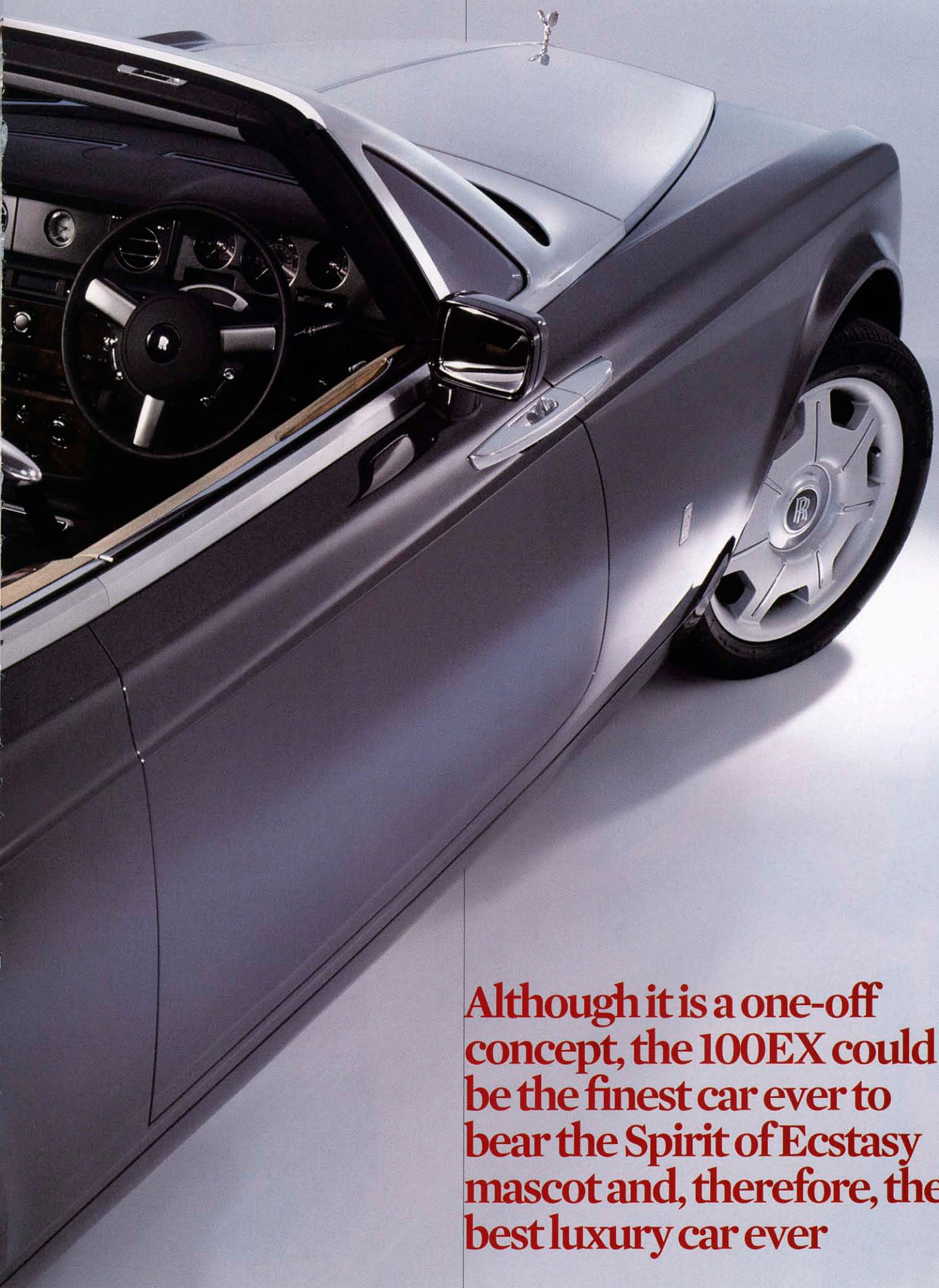
Enquiries: www.rollsroycemotorcars.com/100EX



Roller coaster: a nautical theme runs through the 100EX from its bleached teak decking to the two-tone bodywork. "The overall impression is intended to be of an elegant motor yacht at speed," says Marek Djordjevic, the car's Exterior Designer







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