

## DRIVE

# Breaking British bonds

By **ERIC HISS**

Rolls-Royce and Bentley have finally discovered what they were missing: Sibling rivalry.

When the Depression diminished the demand for Bentleys, Rolls acquired the four-time Le Mans winner. For the next 70 years, Rolls blurred the lines, making two brands that were essentially identical except for their grilles and hood ornaments.

Now, after some maneuvering that would make Michael Schumacher proud, BMW has taken control of Rolls, and Volkswagen is Bentley's benefactor.

Both brands have kept their British legacies intact, with the blue-blood style and engineering that have long characterized the motor cars. And each now faces the challenge of proving itself the premier British marque.

"The majority of the Rolls Phantom is built in a German plant, including interior and much of the fitting," says Bentley rep John Crawford. "It arrives at the English factory in Goodwood with major components in place; it can essentially be driven in as a rolling shell."

As for Rolls, it simply doesn't consider the Bentley to be its competition. "When you're designing a vehicle that costs over \$300,000, obviously it's more than a car," says Marek Djordjevic, Rolls-Royce's chief stylist, exterior design. "It transcends the basic function of transportation."

While Rolls makes only one model, Bentley has three on the market and a convertible due next spring. *V Life Weekend* took a drive in the Rolls-Royce Phantom and Bentley Continental Flying Spur, both for 2006.



## 2006 Rolls-Royce Phantom

**ESSENCE:** Large and in charge

**MODERN HERITAGE:** Stately features like its long, patrician hood, sweeping roofline and power-closing rear coach doors, with advances such the responsive aluminum space frame

**POWER:** A 6.75 liter, V12 engine powers the vehicle from 0 to 60 mph in 5.7 seconds.

**INNER LIFE:** Eerily silent on the road, the 7.1 surround-sound Lexicon system notwithstanding. Six choices of wood veneer, lambswool rugs and leather finishing available in a wide palette of colors. Bankers' black umbrellas emerge from door panels at the push of a button and synchronized wheel centers keep the famous interlinked RR symbol upright on the hubcaps while driving.

**NATURAL HABITAT:** The manicured lanes of London's Belgravia; stateside, it's Beverly Hills and San Marino. However, it's been tested on treks along Namibia's Skeleton Coast and the Australian Outback.

**COMPETITION:** Maybach 62

**CREDITS:** "Goldfinger," "The Great Gatsby," "Arthur"

**THE PRICE:** \$330,000



## 2006 Bentley Continental Flying Spur

**ESSENCE:** Le Mans

**MODERN HERITAGE:** Four-door luxury that harkens back to its namesake, a speedy grand touring sedan of the 1950s

**POWER:** Its 552-horsepower, six-liter, twin turbo-charged 12-cylinder engine translates into the fastest four-door production vehicle on the road, with speeds that top out just over 195 mph.

**INNER LIFE:** Unbleached, mirror-matched (both sides identical) burr walnut wood veneers; premium leather upholstery hand-stitched in a two-tone configuration. Air-cooled and heated seats.

**NATURAL HABITAT:** Can maintain British reserve in stop-and-go urban settings, but this is a motor car for open roads like empty stretches of PCH or Central California's Highway 35.

**COMPETITION:** Mercedes-Benz S65 AMG, BMW 760i

**CREDITS:** "The Avengers" TV series, Bond's ride in the James Bond books (Ian Fleming was a Bentley man).

**THE PRICE:** \$165,000