

# Buyer's Guide

## Shadow

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At any given moment, there are between five and ten Silver Shadows for sale on Internet auctions and dozens more with shiny paint jobs at dealers around the country. But lurking under that shiny paint job can be a nightmare of epic proportions. But a Shadow in good condition and with its service up-to-date is one of the best cars on the road. It was 30 years ahead of its time in 1965 and today is one of the most enjoyable cars to drive. The cars were the first Rolls-Royce models to incorporate unit construction, hydraulic ride control, climate control and a host of other advanced features. The standard saloons were available in a regular and long-wheelbase configuration, with the LWB having about 4 extra inches added to the rear passenger compartment. The Shadow Drophead became the Corniche in the late 1960's and a very small number of Corniche coupes (two-door fixed-roof cars) were built through the production life of the car. The Shadows also evolved the Silver Wraith II before being replaced by the Spirit/Spur line in 1980.

Buying a Silver Shadow is easy. Anyone with \$5,000 in their pocket can buy a great looking Silver Shadow. They will then spend the next 5 years trying to unload it before it bankrupts them. But even for perfect cars, the prices are amazingly low. Discounting the \$5,000 - \$15,000 clunkers – and that's what they are – a superlative Silver Shadow still costs far less than a mid-sized Japanese sedan. But purchase price is not everything. In the case of the Shadow, the costs are not so much in acquiring the car as they are in maintaining it and keeping its systems working. The Silver Shadow and its Bentley T counterpart are highly complex (its service manual is more than 2000 pages long in four binders) and it can be very expensive to maintain. Problems that would cost \$5 and \$10 to fix on other cars cost \$50 and \$100 on a Shadow. The conversations on service lately (partly on Shadow, but also on a certain Spur that keeps coming up) raise some interesting points that I want to take a second to address. We should keep it in mind as we consider our cars and, like it or not, some of these are things we have to live with.

The Rolls-Royce was never intended as a budget car. It is high-quality, highly-complex, supremely well-built and everything else that we regard as making it special. While in its early days it was marketed as inexpensive to run, it was always marketed at a group of people who would buy for longevity and, to some degree, exclusivity. Remember, when the Ghost was new, all cars were marketed to the wealthy. Rolls just continued to target that niche longer than other car makers. Today, it has shifted much more to exclusivity. Like it or not, our hobby cars -- once regarded by many as silly old clunkers or jalopies -- have evolved into an exclusive luxury item for those few who can afford it.

As such, we owners should not expect that our cars are going to deliver us Rolls-Royce performance on a Ford Escort service budget. You would not expect a fine, precision mechanical wrist watch to last with the same maintenance as a throw-away Timex... why expect it from your car. Let's also look at what it takes to keep up the maintenance on a properly maintained car on a long-term basis...My Shadow has cost me, in 5 years, about \$2500 in maintenance. It has always had all its factory service, as intended and maintenance is kept up with. That's \$500 per year to maintain a Shadow to perfect specs. Now what makes that easier is the fact that I bought a car that was premium priced to begin with because it had all its maintenance and was in perfect condition. It has never failed to proceed. It rides like a new car (because it is maintained like a new car) and is more car dollar per dollar than anything you can find on new car lots. I consider it a bargain. Try and maintain a 25 year-old Ford for \$500 per year. Much less enjoy its world-class ride and performance. (I would add that I do some work myself and this has saved a couple of trips to the dealer). This is not unusual. Several folks I know up here who are very committed to the maintenance of their cars spend similar amounts.

Now look at the budget \$9K Shadow that someone buys from eBay. Or maybe the \$15K Shadow from Kruse. Or the high-mileage car with spotty maintenance but a shiny-pretty paint job that was traded in at a local dealer. It probably needed between \$5 and \$15k of remedial maintenance and repair the moment its hapless new owner brought it home. The previous

owner did not keep up the maintenance or fix things when they went wrong. Why? Because he found that maintenance was more expensive than it used to be on his Town Car and he just didn't give a hoot. He was driving a Rolls, and didn't care a whit whether it worked right, just that it had a RR grille and got him good parking at the local steak house. Before long, the car becomes unreliable and the accumulated maintenance he has failed to do adds up to thousands and he dumps it on some sucker who only sees a shiny paint job.

If the car is lucky, (and we are unlucky) it gets into the hands of one of us -- an enthusiast. We want it to work perfectly. We want to use the right parts. We want everything like new. But we often get sticker shock at the cost of putting this rolling disaster into good condition. Suddenly, we are saddled with paying all at once those dozens of maintenance items that a new car buyer would ignore and pay the bill or an "intermediate" owner would ignore and never get fixed. It's a quandary, but raises the entire issue of Shadow reliability, cost to maintain, etc. There is a very old saying (may have been coined by Cal West) that "The only thing more expensive than maintaining a Shadow is not maintaining a Shadow." But nobody ever pointed out that the cost of NOT maintaining one is many, many times the cost of maintaining one! And if you get stuck with a bad one, it can sour the whole experience -- as folks have pointed out.

So if there is a point to all this... it's buy carefully when you acquire a Shadow (or Spirit or Spur or Mulsanne or Turbo-R.). Spend as much as you can afford up front to buy the best car possible. Be totally insistent that all maintenance has been performed on the car from new. Take an expert with you to evaluate the car. Buy from a reputable Rolls-Royce authorized dealer. Don't jump behind the wheel of something you find at auction or that is sitting on the lot of the local BMW dealer because they took it in trade. Buy from a fellow club member if you can (the folks I know who own pre-war cars and also have modern cars are absolute bears for maintaining their modern cars perfectly). Buying a car that an enthusiast who has owned from new is a great way to get a reliable and well-maintained car.