

ARIZONA DRIVER

THE ENTHUSIAST'S GUIDE TO LIFE BEHIND THE WHEEL

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Rolls-Royce
Cullinan
Black Badge

VEHICLES • EQUIPMENT • TECHNOLOGY • PEOPLE • EVENTS • DESTINATIONS • ATTRACTIONS



BEAST OF KINGS

BY JOE SAGE

There is endless detail in the nuts and bolts, paints and hides, and features and finishes of a Cullinan Black Badge (see two sidebars), and these are all quite significant. The details do often shed light on overall substance, in ways both subtle and quite dramatic. But for the driver of this very special Rolls-Royce, it's equally about perceptions and the new dimensions driving this glorious machine will bring to experiencing the world around you.

If we learn nothing else from driving something different every week, it's that what a vehicle gets out of its own attributes varies, too. A checklist of inclusions does not guarantee success. From power to comfort to ride, the Cullinan's spec sheet is certainly already strong, but the assemblage, in your hands and on the road, is *>mwah<* perfection.

In standard terms, Cullinan is a simple slab-side two-box design. Rolls-Royce, however, calls it a three-box (the term normally used for a hood-

cabin-trunk sedan layout) because the rear cargo area is isolated from the interior by a glass partition, "creating an inner ecosystem for the occupants." The more time you spend with it, the less simple, boxy or slab-sided it turns out to be, from subtle though substantial changes in curvature throughout the whole surface of the vehicle, to its chiseled multi-dimensional architecture up front.

Rolls-Royce has long been immediately recognizable by its big, bold grille. These have shown up in many brands over the past decade or two, but Rolls still holds the crown—better integrated and more appropriate than the trend in general, and surely remaining the most distinctive.

Vehicles today are all well-built and fully featured to the point that differences among luxury, premium and mainstream models are often quite narrow. Not so in a Rolls-Royce. As soon as you see it, approach it, enter it and settle in, you know

everything about it is different—even before you consider its hand-built, handcrafted nature and the dozens, hundreds and thousands of extra steps taken in each and every part and process.

Many an enticing scenario sprang to mind for our week with this regal utility: some serious four-wheeling, perhaps heading to the Glamis dunes or one of Arizona's off-highway vehicle parks. We'd already driven the Cullinan on a challenging engineered off-road course last fall, at the Texas Truck Rodeo. And make no mistake: this ride fit for royalty can handle anything you throw at it.

But our schedule was tight—it was busy Barrett-Jackson week, meaning we'd be dashing out the door, into and out of the vehicle many times every day. This does provide good seat time—in the same neighborhood where a lot of Rolls-Royce owners live and drive, to and from their private jets or checking out their commercial properties.

Sitting in the Cullinan with the engine off, we could practically hear our own heart beat. We did not have a pin with us, but could certainly have heard one drop. Every manufacturer works to get

everything as smooth and quiet as feasible, but Rolls-Royce is surely the benchmark. It takes great time, money and skill to achieve these levels.

The difference in its drive experience kicks in straight away, as well—so smooth, so powerful, so quiet (its well-orchestrated drivetrain soundtrack aside), Cullinan impresses mightily, immediately. It just flat-out feels so good.

While it's big, Cullinan is engineered to not be such a handful. Steering is tops, far more responsive and accurate than you'd expect from a three-ton rig. The turning circle benefits from four-wheel steering, as well as sophisticated suspension that also uses stereoscopic cameras to gauge road conditions ahead and adjust accordingly. Even staying in town with this wilderness-capable beast, we gave it a thorough workout—in demanding lane maneuvers, tight S-curves, deep rain troughs, and combinations of all of the above—and handling proved to be superb and sure-footed on all. Far from being ungainly, this big machine is one of the most accurate to maneuver that we've ever had, of any size. Even on something as simple as a 90-degree surface street corner, handling is just painlessly and easily precise, noticeably different.

As big as this king-size SUV is (really no bigger than the full-size pickups so many of us drive), you may feel you need to wait a little longer to pull out into traffic from a side road, that kind of thing. But you don't need to—it's so powerful, and its handling is so accurate, you can precision-drive it. The



size quotient is not a handful, as much as a part of the serene and regal nature of the Cullinan. You pass through the world quite differently in this.

Cullinan is a dream to drive. Many owners of this vehicle may have a driver. If so, it's certainly a good fit—you can stretch out in living-room-size luxury. But you most definitely don't need one—a driving enthusiast will have a ball in this.

Whoever's driving, those in the back will benefit from a wide variety of amenities, from our sample's optional picnic tables, to wine glass holders

(cont'd)

SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY	.....	Goodwood plant, W Sussex UK
STRUCTURE	.....	aluminum spaceframe
ENGINE	.....	6.75L twin-turbocharged 48v V12
HP/TORQUE	.....	600 hp / 664 lb-ft
DRIVETRAIN	.....	permanent AWD
TRANSMISSION	.....	satellite aided 8-spd auto
ZERO-TO-60 / TOP SPEED	.....	4.9 sec / 155 mph
SUSPENSION	.....	F: dbl-wishbone front axle; R: 5-link rear axle; F/R: self-leveling air suspension, electronically controlled dampers, electrically actuated anti-roll bars; stereo camera adjusts to suit the road ahead.
STEERING	.....	four-wheel steering
BRAKES	.....	uprated braking system, bite point raised, pedal travel decreased, marque's first ever colored brake caliper w high gloss paint specifically developed to withstand elevated temperatures
WHEELS	.....	22" forged alloy
TIRES	.....	F: 255/45 R22 XL; R: 285/40 R22 XL Continental ContiSport Contact
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	.....	210.55 / 129.72 in
TURNING CIRCLE	.....	*(indep sources) 45.28 ft
HEADROOM (F/R)	.....	*(indep sources) ≤ 42 / 40.4 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	.....	*(indep sources) ≤ 43 / ≤ 43 in
CARGO CAPACITY	.....	21.6 cu.ft
GROUND CLEARANCE	.....	no info
TOW CAPACITY	.....	*(indep sources) 7275 lb
WEIGHT	.....	6069 lb
FUEL	.....	engineered for 95 oct / 91 oct min
FUEL CAPACITY	.....	23.8 gal
MPG	.....	12/20/14 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE	.....	\$388,000
DRIVER'S PACKAGE	.....	23,825
EXTERIOR COLOR: GALILEO BLUE	.....	15,400
WHEEL CENTERS YELLOW PINSTRIPE	.....	2,475
SINGLE COACHLINE	.....	1,850
DARK EXTERIOR PACKAGE	.....	3,900
EXTENDED VENEER CENTER LINE	.....	3,525
HEATED PASSENGER SURROUND	.....	2,625
CONTRAST SEAT PIPING FORGE YELLOW	.....	4,375
INSTRUMENT PANEL W TOP STITCH	.....	850
SHOOTING STAR HEADLINER	.....	7,800
PICNIC TABLES	.....	5,325
DESTINATION CHARGE	.....	2,750
GAS GUZZLER TAX	.....	2,600

TOTAL.....\$465,300

*Some independently sourced information may be non-US, not Black Badge and/or not as with AWD.

Best Ultra Luxury SUV
—Golden Steering Awards

Prestigious Luxury SUV of the Year
—ArabWheels Awards

Rolls-Royce reports record first quarter sales, up 62 percent—total is the highest in their 116-year history



to your own climate system vents. Rear seating is available in either lounge or individual layout, and seatbacks can fold down to accommodate long items, while remaining higher than the cargo area floor to keep cargo from shifting forward.

We made long and detailed notes on the many features and controls of the Cullinan. In a nutshell, the vehicle is extremely fully outfitted, and while some elements are highly special or unique to the brand, all the fundamentals are here and covered well. It is chock full of attention-absorbing details, but it's the grand experience you're really in the game for. This is a lovely craft, in which you most definitely feel like the master of your own domain.

And the rest of the world plays along, to a degree that surprised us. We thought people might have a snooty response, but they love this vehicle. Among the auction crowd and in the surrounding area, people continuously came up to the car, to take photos, just chat, or enthusiastically tell us about the day that will come when one of these will be theirs. They tell you how much they already love it, and they know their stuff. We made many new friends in the Cullinan. It's really a phenomenon, atypical of most any other luxury vehicle.

Even with the flag people at our event, highly authoritarian when we showed up in a more routine vehicle, Cullinan's commanding presence simply triggered a parting of the seas. Everyone is deferential to it, as though just generally in awe.

Do you really need a half-million-dollar SUV? This level of comfort is comforting, this level of power is potent, even the level of stature can no doubt be intoxicating—even if you underutilize it, as we surely did in what was ultimately a limited timeframe. But potential is as important as anything. After all, very wealthy people don't really use all their money, either, but it's very nice to know they have it all there on tap. (A person of lesser means may get the same feeling from a fridge stocked with a week's worth of food and a few treats.) When you have a car like this, you may or may not ever use it all, either, but it's very nice to know you have it all there on tap.

A vehicle like this is definitely a personality projector, as a lot of vehicles are, but this one is all the moreso due to its size and presence. Being humble, we thought we might feel awkward in the Cullinan, but warmed right up to our role. It takes very little time to get used to its size, shape and stature. It didn't hurt that it was so well received by an adoring public. In no time, we felt like a million bucks—or maybe that'd be a billion today.

Ultimately, it's four wheels and a seat, to invoke Steve Martin in *Planes, Trains*. The same could be said, and perhaps has been, about any number of lustworthy vehicles you've coveted. But you know it's more—a lot more. The Rolls-Royce Cullinan is



everything automotive, masterfully scaled up.

This is a grand vehicle with a grand stature, suitable for a grand position in a grand world. It defines upscale. Cullinan is king of the beasts, and a beast fit for kings. It belongs on a big sweeping driveway at Buckingham Palace, but once you get a taste for it, you may know it belongs in yours.

In this golden age of automotive, and consumer and lifestyle goods in general, it's harder than ever for a product in a familiar category to truly stand out. But this is Rolls-Royce's niche and its forte.

How do they, and seemingly only they, do it? Certain words kept springing to mind. Magic carpet. Silk. Silky smooth magic carpet ride. Cullinan is truly striking. It demonstrates when the absence of something becomes something: you just don't really realize how much background noise and effort there usually always is, until it's gone.

Rolls-Royce representatives told us a few years back that it is very common for a potential buyer to be just about all in on a purchase, but to still hesitate because they need permission—from themselves. That permission should be easy enough to secure. After most of a week behind the wheel, we are confident that anyone, once they have this itch, will wake up with it every day until they scratch it. And why not? It's arguably not even a rationalization process, just a scaled-up normal purchase decision. After our own week with this vehicle, we can easily imagine giving ourselves the necessary permission. If you get the bug and have the means, you are likely to have a harder time talking yourself out of it than into it.

Meet Rolls-Royce Cullinan, a vehicle whose reputation and image precede it more than we had ever imagined. Nothing else comes close, and that goes well beyond any marketing slogan anybody has ever thrown out there. ■

BLACK BADGE SERIES

A Rolls-Royce Permanent Bespoke Series.

BLACK BADGE EXTERIOR

- Multiple layers of paint and lacquer meticulously applied and hand-polished for up to five hours, the most comprehensive process ever for a solid paint color, for extra depth and intensity and the perfect canvas for a contrasting Coachline.
- Darkened Spirit of Ecstasy mascot in high gloss black chrome; other Rolls-Royce badges inverted to silver-on-black. Chrome surfaces darkened (front grille surround, side frame finishers, trunk handle and trim, lower air inlet and exhausts), while vertical grille bars remain polished, reflecting the blackened surfaces that surround them.
- Exclusive all-new 22-inch dark forged alloy wheels, accompanied by the marque's first ever colored brake calipers.

BLACK BADGE CABIN

- Carbon-fiber finish in repeating geometric shapes with a 3D effect, each leaf finished with six coats of lacquer, cured for 72 hours, then hand-polished to a mirror finish.
- Starlight Headliner (its Cullinan debut) in black leather with 1344 individual fiber optic cables, with a new feature: eight brilliant white shooting stars.
- A bold new leather color, Forge Yellow.

BLACK BADGE ENGINEERING

- Proprietary all-aluminum sub-structure architecture for extraordinary body stiffness.
- All-wheel drive and four-wheel steering: both front and rear steered axles work together to adjust levels of engagement depending on throttle and steering inputs.
- An extra 29 bhp (600 bhp) and an additional 37 lb-ft of torque (664 lb-ft).
- "Low" button on the shift unlocks a full suite of technologies including new Black Badge audible exhaust, for a deep rumble of the 6.75-liter twin-turbocharged V12.
- More aggressive "Intuitive Throttle" shifts.
- Changes to suspension components and settings for balanced dynamic, refined ride.
- Raised braking bite point and decreased pedal travel, and redesigned brake discs for consistency at elevated temperatures.