

STORY AND
PHOTOS BY
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MY FIRST CLASSIC CAR

WHILE MOST OWNERS GIVE THEIR CARS NAMES OR REFER TO THEM BY YEAR MAKE AND MODEL, ROLLS-ROYCE OWNERS REFER TO THEIR CARS BY THEIR CHASSIS NUMBER. MY 1929 SPRINGFIELD PHANTOM I FLEETWOOD CONVERTIBLE COUPE WOULD BE KNOWN BY ROLLS-ROYCE AFICIONADOS AS **S317LR.**



RECORDS INDICATE S317LR (the “S” for Springfield, Massachusetts indicating American production) was purchased in New York on September 29, 1929 by one Mrs. John Welz. Not much is known about Mrs. Welz other than she and her husband John were friends of Charles Fisher, then President of the Cadillac Motor Division of General Motors Corporation. Mr. Fisher had many society friends and was greatly dismayed when the luxury cars they acquired were not Cadillacs.

The solution to this dilemma was simple: offer them a Fleetwood body.

In 1929 Mrs. Welz had S317LR bodied with a Brewster Lonsdale body, an enclosed four-door limousine. No one is exactly sure how events progressed, but one can guess. During the Great Depression many formerly wealthy people could not afford new cars, so they had

their current cars rebodied with more modern coachwork. Other people who had managed to preserve their wealth had both a summer and a winter body for their car. During the winter one can speculate that the Welz’s had the Lonsdale body on the car and during the spring and summer, the Lonsdale body was removed and the Fleetwood convertible coupe body that Mr. Fisher made available to them was installed.

There is little information about the ownership of S317LR between the Welz’s acquisition and 1962 when the car was again sold. However, it appears that once removed, the Lonsdale body was never again mated with S317LR. Such a combination of Rolls-Royce and Fleetwood bodies was limited to only three cars, making S317LR a rare Proper Motor Car, indeed.

During the following five decades the car was sold seven times until its current owner acquired it in 2002 at the Bonhams Auction at Quail Lodge. S317LR was one of two Springfield Phantoms available at that auction and not being able to decide between S317LR and a second 1927 Rolls-Royce town car, both were acquired, the 1927 being sold several years later.

The S317LR remained parked in its owner’s collection for several years before any serious work was done to the car. In 2005, S317LR was treated to a sympathetic restoration and exhibited at several local concours events often winning an award or two. In 2015 while detailing S317LR the rumble seat door handle came loose and >>>

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fell on the rear deck resulting in a slight dent in the sheet metal. This could not be tolerated and the S317LR was taken in for some very minor repair work.

No sooner did S317LR find its way to the restoration shop did the most dreaded words in car repair were uttered, "well, while you are at it can you fix . . .". The engine was running hot and it was decided that the radiator should be re-cored. That required that the radiator shell be removed which resulted in that part being re-plated. The aluminum pans surrounding the engine looked pretty scruffy and were restored. One thing led to another and before long the car had been disassembled to its frame. The color of the car was changed from black to dark blue and the interior replaced with elegant dark maroon leather.

At the same time the 2017 Pebble Beach Concours application was received. S317LR was entered. The good news was that the Rolls-Royce made it through the Tour d'Elegance. The not so great news was that it did not receive a class award. In late September we fired up S317LR and drove it to the Langham Hotel in nearby Pasadena for a black tie event. The car stunned the guests and best of all, we got to the event and back home without any hiccups.

For years people have asked me which of my cars is my favorite. Without hurting the feelings of my other cars that may read this article, it has been and still is my Springfield Phantom I, aka S317LR.

Pictured from top: > The most obvious change to Rolls-Royce Springfield, Massachusetts production was the switch to left-hand drive. > An inline six-cylinder engine powered all Rolls-Royce large horsepower cars from the Silver Ghost through Phantom I and Phantom II production. > The rumble seat can accommodate two additional passengers, provided the don't object to al fresco touring.

