

Shifting Gears

[Really Regal Road Running in a Rolls Royce](#)

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By Roger Witherspoon

The empty New England highway was dry, the speedometer was in triple digits, the passing landscape was a dreamy, flowing, green kaleidoscope and the warm fall sun radiated off the brushed steel hood of the Rolls Royce as the miles flew by.

There may have been bumps in the road, but a Coupe with self-leveling air springs has the feel of riding a soft leather cushion on a fast moving cloud. There may have been a strain at 105 miles an hour when going around a wide turn. But since the edges of the leather seats sense gravitational forces and expand or contract to counter the pull you really don't notice these, either.

The roof folded neatly into the back, between the trunk and the rear seat. Yet the aerodynamics of the car were sleek enough that it was easy to hear Miles Davis' sax blowing from the CD player instead of the roar of the passing wind. And though, at three tons, this is a big, heavy vehicle, the convertible, two-door, Rolls Royce Phantom Drophead Coupe still jumps from 0 – 60 miles per hour in just 5.7 seconds and can cruise at a license-losing 150.



Rolls Royce, the ultimate upscale division of BMW, bills the half million dollar Drophead Coup as one of the finest touring cars – though nothing manmade is perfect. If there are drawbacks, it lies in the meld between the technologically oriented BMW and the traditionalist Rolls Royce. In an effort to modernize the vehicle, BMW added the computerized control system updated from its high-end, 750 series of luxury cars. At the tap of a finger at the end of the console, a mahogany drawer folds out revealing a single round control knob which governs the entertainment, climate, navigation and communications systems. Some of that works well. Some it is cumbersome and none of it is intuitive.

The navigation system is relatively rudimentary by the standards of a \$30,000 Ford Sync or \$50,000 Lexus RX 350. It is lacking in detail, particularly the names of upcoming streets, for example, and does not list upcoming turns and their direction – features which are pretty standard these days. The entertainment system on the other hand, with 15, 420-watt, Logic-7 speakers, has excellent sound quality, but there is only a single in-dash CD instead of a six-disc changer. There are, however, modern connections for iPods and MP3 players. And the Drophead comes with XM satellite and HD radio, as well as an easy to use, Bluetooth cell phone connection.



But as a defining symbol of craftsmanship and luxury, the Rolls Royce still sets a standard for the high end, luxury line. The trim around the top of the doors and the rear is teak, the kind of wood one would find on the decks of private yachts. The wide teak deck behind the rear seats covers the storage space for the retractable roof. The wood on the console and doors is polished mahogany offset by thick, cream colored leather interrupted by chrome dials. The grain in the mahogany panels is bookend matched, something you find in high end, hand-crafted furniture. The entire craft has the feel of a small, pricy, well maintained, hand-crafted yacht.

On the outside, there is the characteristic, distinct steel hood and the traditional, Flying Lady hood ornament which disappears under the hood when the engine is off. Underneath that brushed steel is a 6.75-liter, V-12 engine which cranks out 453 horsepower and delivers 531 pound/feet of torque through the six-speed, electronically controlled transmission. The high

torque is what makes the Coupe so responsive. It also drinks a lot of gas. The EPA mileage estimates are just 18 miles per gallon in highway driving and 11 MPG in the city. The test car averaged just under 12 MPG in mixed driving. But then, this is not a car you buy to be eco-friendly: It comes with a \$3,000 gas guzzler tax.

The most distinct feature from the Drophead Coup's flowing side profile is the long, front-opening "suicide doors," so-called because if you open one while driving the wind will instantly whip it back and pull you out of the car. But in normal use, the rear-hinged door provides easy access to the wide, comfortable back seats, which really are intended to be used and have enough leg room for folks living well north of six feet. The doors are long and heavy and are, therefore, power driven – they close at the touch of a button.

In the back, the Coupe has a double trunk: raising the floor board reveals bins which are capable of holding two small suit cases, leaving plenty of room for larger ones and golf bags in the main storage area. There are separate climate controls and air outlets for the front and back sections of the car which are so effective, you can actually have the heat and air conditioning going at the same time with little interference.



And when driving at night, there is soft, blue lighting under the seats, instruments and storage areas.

The Rolls Royce vehicles have long had an image of being designed for those who have money, like expensive, exquisite things, and don't like to drive. The driving experience was reserved for the chauffeur.

But the modern Rolls Royce fleet, under the auspices of BMW, was designed with the philosophy that if you pay a half million dollars for a car, you ought to enjoy the driving experience. The Drophead Coupe, a beautiful, exquisite, detailed, powerful, high-performing, convertible sports sedan is at the top of their line.



2010 Rolls Royce Phantom Drophead Coupe

MSRP: **\$471,500**

Gas Guzzler Tax: **\$ 3,000**

EPA Mileage: **11 MPG City** **18 MPG Highway**

As Tested Mileage: **11.9 MPG Mixed**

Performance / Safety:

0 – 60 MPH **5.7 Seconds**

Top Speed **149 MPH**

6.75-Liter, aluminum alloy, 48-valve, V-12 engine producing 453 horsepower and 531 pound/feet of torque; 6-speed, electronically controlled automatic transmission; double wishbone front suspension; multi-link rear suspension with self-leveling air springs; run-flat high performance tires; power assisted, ventilated, 4-wheel anti-lock disc brakes; stability, traction, and cornering brake control; head-thorax airbag in each seat; spring-loaded, pop-up rollover protection; engine immobilizer; heated windshield; bi-xenon headlamps with auto-leveling and power washers; chrome 21-inch wheels.

Interior / Comfort:

AM/FM/XM satellite and HD radio; single disc CD player; MP3, USB-port, and iPod

connection; 420-watt, 9-channel Logic-7 audio system with 15 speakers; navigation system with 6.5-inch monitor; front and rear cameras; Bluetooth cell phone connection; full leather interior – seats, dash, and sides; teak wood rear deck and brushed steel hood; power closing doors; power tilt and telescope leather steering wheel; power retractable cashmere lined roof; lambs wool floor mats.