

Rolls-Royce launches new Ghost amid virus worries

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The new Rolls-Royce Ghost comes at a purchase price of £222,000

Rolls-Royce launched its eagerly-awaited new "Ghost" model on Tuesday, even as the luxury carmaker's chief warned that coronavirus would impact the automotive market for several years.

The new model, complete with a 6.75-litre twin-turbo V12 engine, minimalist design, and even a branded umbrella, will cost some £222,000 (250,000 euros, \$298,000).

Nevertheless, the lure of a new status symbol car for the super-rich would not be enough to soften the blow of the pandemic in the short-term, the group warned.

"We expect COVID-19 to remain (a difficulty) for some time, until a vaccine is available," said Rolls-Royce Managing Director Torsten Mueller-Oetvoes in a telephone interview with AFP.

"In the medium term, I would say within three years, we should be back to normal, and even better than normal."

Like the rest of the car market, [luxury brands](#) have suffered during the pandemic, and Rolls-Royce is no exception.

"Of course we have been affected," said Mueller-Oetvoes.

"On the one hand, many of our partners around the world, our dealers, have been forced to close", while at the same time "we have seen a large number of potential customers reconsider their purchasing decision", he said.

Rating agency Moody's has forecast a fall of 14 percent in the global [automotive market](#) this year.

A rebound was "likely" in 2021, but Moody's cautions that that depends on how quickly the pandemic reaches its peak.

'Cautiously optimistic'

In the first half of this year, Rolls-Royce's sales fell by 30 percent compared with the same period in 2019, said Mueller-Oetvoes, but pointed out that last year was a "record" year.

However, he noted that Rolls-Royce had not implemented any lay-offs during the [pandemic](#) and remained "cautiously optimistic" for next year.

The launch comes at an interesting time for Rolls-Royce, which has sought in recent years to reposition itself in the [market](#).

"We have massively rejuvenated the brand over the past 10 years and the average age of our customers is 43," said Mueller-Oetvoes.

Founded at the beginning of the 20th century, the emblematic British brand was bought by German car giant BMW in 1998.

And as well as the coronavirus, Rolls-Royce faces another immediate challenge—Brexit.

As fears over a potential "no deal" between Britain and the European Union increase, Mueller-Oetvoes also voiced concern about the prospect of a British exit from the EU without an agreement.

With 600 suppliers worldwide, "my greatest concern is to see a disrupted supply chain," he said.

Despite that, he said Rolls-Royce was "fully prepared" for any eventuality.

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