

From the Sir Henry Royce Foundation Archives
Amy Johnson and Rolls-Royce
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When in Adelaide recently I was browsing through one of my mother's old scrapbooks covering the period from 1920 to 1950. Amongst the eclectic collection of newspaper cuttings I found the attached colored picture featuring a Rolls-Royce Silver Ghost carrying Amy Johnson around the Geelong Racecourse in front of a huge crowd of admirers. The color picture appeared in *The Australasian Pictorial* on Saturday 28th June 1930.

My colleague, Richard Knight, at the Foundation Archive spent some time trying to identify the car and suggests it is probably 65LK, a 1923 short chassis Silver Ghost. He noted its resemblance to his own 1923 Silver Ghost 97LK which carries a Waring Bros tourer on a long wheelbase chassis. According to Tom Clarke and David Neely's well researched book, *Rolls-Royce and Bentley in the Sunburnt Country*, 65LK has had a long history of Victorian owners. It was imported to Victoria by Dalgety & Co for Frank S Austin of 'Mount Widderin', near Skipton, in the Western District of Victoria. Frank S Austin was a great nephew of Thomas Austin who is well known for having released 24 rabbits, five hares and 72 partridges into his property 'Barwon Park' in order to 'introduce a touch of home'. The Austin family owned many large pastoral properties in Victoria and elsewhere.

According to Clarke and Neely. 65LK was fitted with a tourer body by Waring Bros of Melbourne and delivered to the owner in May 1924. It is also thought that the car was exhibited at the All British Motor Show in Melbourne in July 1924. At the time this photograph was taken 65LK was still owned by the Austin family. It is reported that it was sold in 1934 and rebodied by Martin & King as a saloon for use as a service car. Subsequent owners were: Parker Bros, Stuart Rau, Miles Maxwell and Maurice Gradman. It was damaged in an accident and was rebodied as a tourer and passed through a number of other owners until sold by Robert McDermott to Bryan Harper (a Foundation Archive volunteer) in 1994. It is currently owned by David Bailie of Castlemaine.

Can any reader help to confirm that the car pictured is in fact 65LK?

For those interested in aeronautical history, Amy Johnson (pictured) became interested in flying in 1928-29 when she joined the London Aeroplane Club. She became obsessed with flying and determined to prove that women could be as competent as men in the air. She was the first British-trained woman to qualify as a ground engineer. To prove her capabil-



above: The color picture that appeared in *The Australasian Pictorial* on Saturday 28th June 1930, showing Amy Johnson riding in a Silver Ghost at Geelong on June 18th.

below: Amy Johnson with her Gypsy Moth on the day she left England, 5th May, 1930.

ity she set her objective to fly solo from England to Australia. With support from her father and oil tycoon Lord Wakefield she bought a used de Havilland Gypsy Moth (G-AAAH) and set off alone from Croydon on 5th May 1930 and landed in Darwin on 24th May covering a distance of approximately 17,500km. She was the first woman to fly solo to Australia and following her arrival she toured Australia.

Amy married Scottish aviator, Jim Molison in 1932 and together they competed in several intercontinental flights including the England to Australia air race in 1934 in a DH Comet. They divorced in 1938 and at the outbreak of World War II Amy joined the Air Transport Authority ferrying aircraft from factories to RAF air bases.

On 5th January 1941 Amy was delivering an Airspeed AS.10 Oxford Mk.II. For reasons not known, at approximately 3:30 p.m., Amy bailed out of the plane and parachuted into the Thames Estuary more than 70 miles off-course. The airplane crashed into the river and sank.

Amy Johnson's parachute was seen by the crew of *HMS Haslemere*. They attempted to rescue her and in the process, the ship's captain, Lieutenant Commander Walter Fletcher, Royal Navy, dove into the water. In the cold temperatures and

rough water, Fletcher died. For his effort to rescue Johnson, he was awarded the Albert Medal, posthumously. Amy Johnson is presumed to have drowned. Her body was not recovered.

Her flight remains a government secret and a later report claims that she failed to respond to calls for identification and was shot down as an enemy aircraft.

