

# FEATURES

## Charge of the high rollers

*Dominic Tobin* Published: 20 February 2011

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Even Rolls-Royce is embracing the push towards all-electric cars (Handout)

It's a company whose models have come to epitomise petrol-guzzling excess, but now even Rolls-Royce is embracing the push towards all-electric cars. Next month it will unveil its first electric concept car, a 20ft-long leviathan that weighs nearly three tons and, if it goes into production, could cost around £300,000.

The 102EX, due to make its debut at the Geneva motor show, is based on the existing Phantom limousine and will be the first car in the company's 107-year history to be powered by anything other than an internal combustion engine.

A charging point is fitted where the fuel filler cap would normally be, and the car will also have a wireless charging system so drivers can park over a special charging bay to top up the batteries without the need to plug anything in.

Despite rising fuel costs, it is unlikely that Rolls's millionaire customers, who include Lord Sugar and the singer Christina Aguilera, are feeling the pinch on the forecourt quite yet — even with average fuel consumption of just over 17mpg. Instead, the firm says it is looking to the future when hydrocarbon fuels will become even scarcer.

The project has been deemed so important to Rolls-Royce that the 102EX will be shipped to existing Phantom owners in Europe, Asia, the Middle East and America for them to evaluate the car's performance. If customers like the limousine, an all-electric version of the next Phantom could be available by 2016.

Nigel Wonnacott, a Rolls-Royce spokesman, said the technology suited the car well because customers expected a lack of engine noise and not to have to change gear. The electric Phantom's estimated 100-mile range might be less of a problem than it seems, because many Rolls owners are thought to commute only short distances between meetings in the same city.

The feature that may provoke most concern among traditionalists is the Spirit of Ecstasy that has adorned the bonnet of every Roller made since the 1920s. On the electric version, it glows. This has meant replacing the stainless steel figure (sterling silver and gold are optional extras) with a version made of Makrolon, a tough type of — whisper it — plastic.