

The Story of “Jam Roll”

The Boy Scout Rolls-Royce

By Gil Fuqua (TN)

Photos by the author except where noted

It's odd to think of Boy Scouts and Rolls-Royce having a common bond but they did, in 1929. That's when Scouts from across the world came to Arrowe Park, just outside Liverpool, England, for the World Jamboree. It was a gathering of some 50,000 Scouts from 42 nations to celebrate the 21st birthday of Scouting and to recognize the founder of the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, Robert Stephenson Smyth Baden-Powell (1857–1941). The Scouts presented a brand-new Rolls-Royce and caravan (house trailer) to Baden-Powell (B-P) at the Jamboree to recognize his leadership in founding the Scouting movement. A baronet from 1922 (Sir Robert Baden-Powell), he was created a baron in 1929 with the title 1st Baron of Gilwell. Gilwell Park is the original Scout training base founded by B-P and is located to the north of London on the edge of Epping Forest.

B-P's children were quick to nickname the Rolls-Royce “Jam Roll,” so called for its presentation at the Jamboree. The caravan was called “Eccles.” Eccles was the manufacturer of the caravan; but, coincidentally, Eccles is a type of cake in England. The children no doubt delighted in the subtle humor of having Jam Roll towing a cake.

Jam Roll is a 20hp Rolls-Royce (GVO-40), one of the last 20hp chassis to be made. It remained in the Baden-Powell family until 1945. GVO-40 is still on the road in the UK with its present owner, Ben Grew. The caravan was donated to Gilwell Park in 1938 and is on display there today.

The gift of the Rolls-Royce and caravan to B-P was the idea of the President of the Danish Boy Scout Association. Long before the Jamboree, he wrote to the Scouting organizations

in each of the countries to be represented at the Jamboree and suggested that each Scout contribute a penny, or the equivalent in their country's currency, to fund a gift for B-P. The Scouts' contributions funded not only the purchase of the Rolls-Royce and caravan, but an illuminated scroll with the names of all the participating countries, a check for £2,800, and an oil portrait of B-P in his Scout uniform. The source of funding also accounts for GVO-40 being referred to as “Penny Jam Roll.”

Jam Roll has a limousine body made by Page & Hunt. It is one of only a few bodies made by this British coachbuilder on a Rolls-Royce chassis. Page & Hunt's works were located in Wrecclesham, near Farnham, Surrey, B-P's hometown, and may have accounted for their selection as the coachbuilder. GVO-40 was the last Rolls-Royce bodied by Page & Hunt before it voluntarily liquidated in September 1929 as a result of the Depression. Edward Dixon Abbott, Page & Hunt's “London salesman and specialised coachwork manager,” took over the company's premises and assets and formed the company of E.D. Abbott Ltd. Abbott went on to provide coachwork for a number of Bentley and Rolls-Royce chassis.

One unique feature to GVO-40 was the mascot. Rather than the typical Flying Lady that tops a Rolls-Royce radiator, GVO-40 had a custom-designed mascot that incorporates the Scout's fleur-de-lis badge and the motto “Be Prepared.”

GVO-40 was clearly placed as a rush order with Rolls-Royce and was marked “URGENT 6/8 weeks” on the chassis card. The order was placed on June 21, 1929, and the completed

chassis was delivered to Page & Hunt on July 19. The chassis card further notes, “If this car is not completed by the date of the Jamboree - R.R. to loan a car for one day for this occasion.” GVO-40 was presented to B-P at the Jamboree on August 10, 1929, only 50 days after the order was received by Rolls-Royce.

Tom Clarke provides further insight into Rolls-Royce's quick delivery of GVO-40 on such short notice. “The usual way to solve problems like this was to reallocate chassis. Thus, if another dealer had a chassis ready on his allocation then a switch would be made, with approval. That's the reason you often see RR records with chassis numbers crossed out, or with different bodywork details with new body type superimposed.” He further points out that since it was the Depression, RR may have had a chassis ready anyway. Since B-P was a friend of the late C.S. Rolls, there was probably added impetus for Rolls-Royce to accommodate the order on short notice.

Jam Roll was clearly used by B-P's family for regular transportation. In a letter from Eileen K. Wade, B-P's long-time secretary, she recounts a family trip in Jam Roll and the problems with tires of the era. “We were on our way to Buckingham Palace where B-P was to receive one of his honours from the King. On top of the Hog's Back¹ a tyre went bust. Court, the chauffeur, changed the wheel while we sat by the roadside. A few miles on, another tyre went pop. That was the end. We all sat waiting for a lift but no cars were on the road! At last a motor-cyclist with a side-car picked him up and whizzed him to London leaving the rest of us to follow. Arriving at Buck Pal² Gate, B.P. said ‘Am I late?’ ‘No,’ said the gate keeper. ‘The corpse can't be too late for the funeral!’”

Despite the problems with the tires, B-P and his family clearly liked Jam Roll. His daughter, Betty Clay, was “really delighted” to have a reunion with GVO-40 when



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Jam Roll, a 1929 Rolls-Royce 20hp (GVO-40), was presented to Robert Baden-Powell, founder of the Boy Scouts, at the World Jamboree in 1929. B-P is on the podium, second from right, with walking staff.



Jam Roll in 2001 at the RREC Annual Rally in Towcester, England (inset). Period photograph of Jam Roll. The man pictured is speculated to be Court, B-P's chauffeur.

visited by Ben Grew in 1993. In a thank you letter after the visit, she wrote, "There's no doubt it is cared-for now just as lavishly as it was then—and with more respect! I don't believe you would allow it to be filled with grubby dogs and camping gear! apart from equally-grubby and careless children."

B-P obviously liked the 20hp chassis since he bought a second 20hp, a 1923 or 1924 model, registration XP4317. No current record exists of the second car. As Mrs. Clay noted, "Sad to think it was probably broken up, such a good strong reliable car, but no doubt the WAR meant that many such cars were either put-up

on blocks for the duration (like Jam Roll) or got rid of because of petrol-rationing, etc."

Since Lady B-P sold Jam Roll in 1945, it has passed through the hands of nine additional owners. Ben Grew bought Jam Roll in 1986 when it had about 53,000 miles on the odometer. Since then, he has averaged about 2,000 miles a year, including several tours of over 1,000 miles each.

Endnotes (translations courtesy of Ben Grew)

- 1 The "Hog's Back" is a road in Surrey near B-P's home that runs along the crest of a hill—hence the name.
- 2 "Buck Pal" is Buckingham Palace



Lledo, an English manufacturer of diecast models, produced "Jam Roll" in 1/50 scale. Introduced in 1992, Lledo donated 50 pence for every model sold to the "'92 Promise Scout Appeal" for the benefit of the Scout Association in the UK. Note that, unlike the real GVO-40 of 1929, the model car has the earlier-style horizontal radiator shutters. Springfield cars and the Derby Phantoms I all had vertical shutters from the very first one in 1925; the 20hp caught up in 1928.



Jam Roll was presented with a custom-designed mascot that incorporates the Boy Scout fleur-de-lis and Scout motto "Be Prepared." The mascot is visible in the photo of Jam Roll on presentation day.