

THE BOOKIE AND THE PUNTER

Sol Green was the bookmaker and Hugh Denison was the punter. Both owned Rolls-Royces. Both had horse studs. Both had horses that won Melbourne Cups. And then there was the bet.

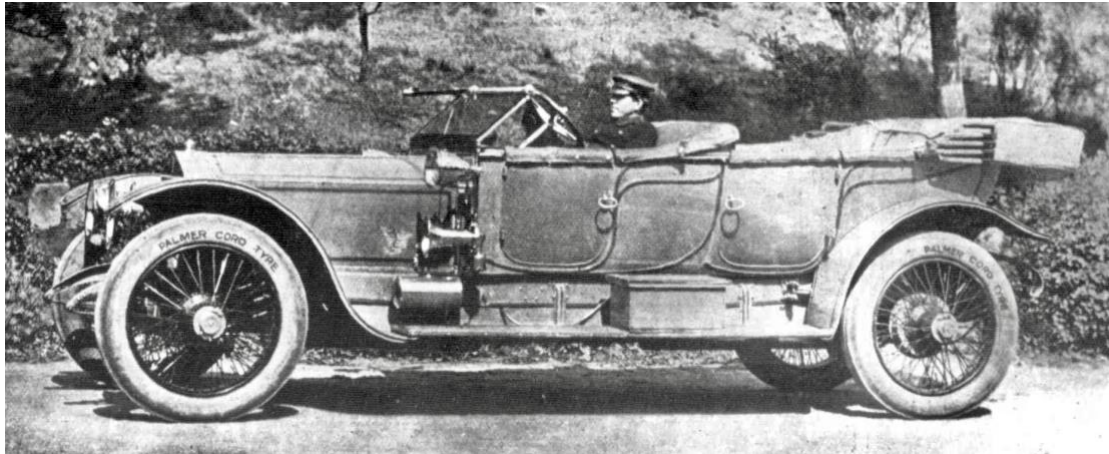


The bookie, Sol Green.



The punter, Hugh Denison.

Green owned four Rolls-Royces; 1912 Silver Ghost, chassis 1853E, with a magnificent tourer body by the Melbourne firm of Kellow Motor Co.; 1921 Silver Ghost, chassis 142LG with brass fittings and a California-top tourer thought to be by the Melbourne Motor Body & Assembling Co.; 1924 Silver Ghost, chassis 58TM, with brass radiator, mascot, wheel caps and reserve oil tank and a tourer by the Melbourne Motor Body & Assembling Co. or the Melbourne firm of Waring Bros., possibly with some gold-plated fittings; and, 1925 Phantom I, chassis 78MC, with brass fittings, an English allweather by Windovers with bumpers, levers, hub nuts and interior fittings gold plated. With all that polished brass and gold-plating it is not surprising that Green was well known for arriving at racecourses in a gold Rolls-Royce.

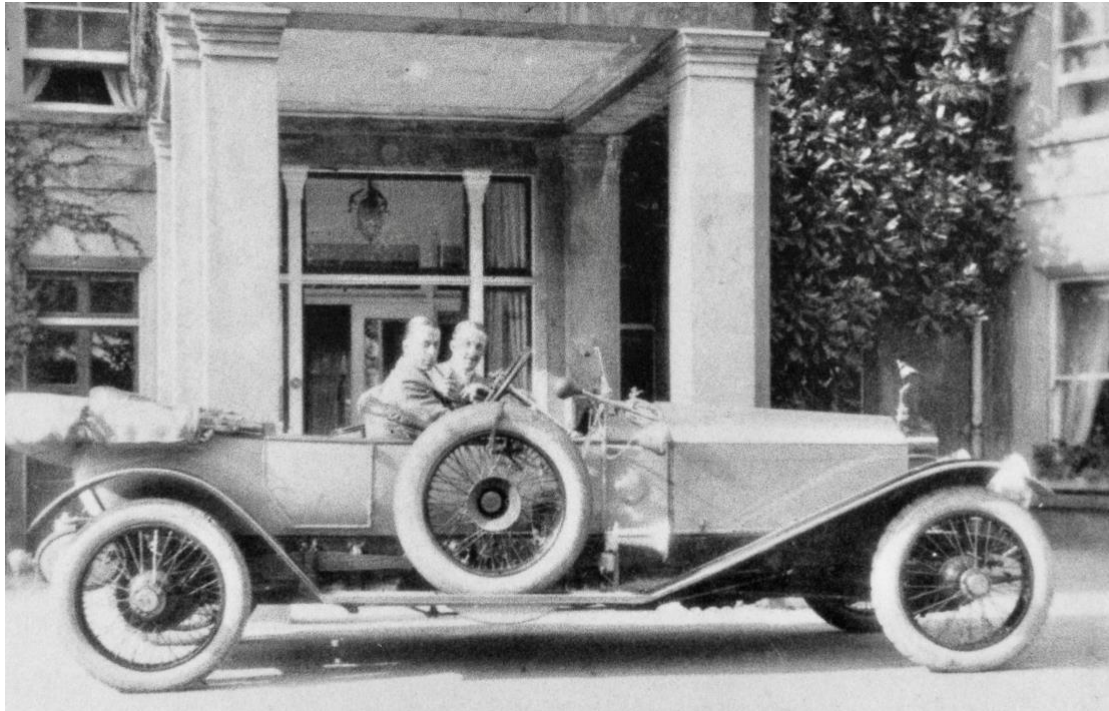


Green's 1912 Silver Ghost, 1853E, with a magnificent tourer body by the Melbourne firm of Kellow Motor Co. [Punch (Melbourne) 15 May 1913]

Green's first Rolls-Royce, the 1912 Silver Ghost, was exhibited at the 1912 Melbourne Motor Show. 'The Age' reported on 3 September 1912, "The star car of the exhibition, Mr. Sol. Green's Rolls-Royce, has a body built completely in C. B. Kellow's factory, which in every way reflects great credit on the local mechanics who created it so magnificently." The report added, "The general public seems to have no idea that motor bodies can be made here as quickly and as well as anywhere else."

In early motoring, tyre failures were common and often resulted in injuries, and at times fatalities. The 'Referee' reported about this hazard on 7 April 1915, "A few weeks ago Mr. Sol Green's big Rolls-Royce [1912 Silver Ghost, 1853E] was turned over through a tyre burst, when motoring to Sorrento, in Victoria. The moment the tyre failed, the car got out of control, and, striking a bank, turned completely over. The occupants escaped without serious injury, due possibly to the speed being only 15 miles an hour at the time."

A novel feature in Green's Phantom I attracted interest from a number of newspapers in November 1925, "Mr Sol. Green, the well-known bookmaker, has bought a luxurious new model seven-seater Phantom cabriolet Rolls-Royce for £4,000 (\$333,000 in 2019 money). Built into the back compartment of the car is a five-valve wireless set with loud speaker. This is the first private Victorian car to be equipped with a built-in wireless set. Most motorists in N.S.W. who are radio fans simply carry their sets with them using a tiny folding loop aerial." A prediction was then ventured, "Built in sets, it may be expected, will soon be quite normal equipment for modern cars – providing entertainment while the car is travelling." Another paper couldn't resist adding, "Punters, really this is very kind of you."



Denison's 1912 Silver Ghost, 2104, a sporting Barker torpedo on a London-to-Edinburgh chassis. [Courtesy Ian Irwin]

Denison owned 1912 Silver Ghost, 2104, a sporting Barker torpedo on a London-to-Edinburgh chassis. It made news when the 'Mudgee Guardian' reported on 2 October 1913, "Mr. H. R. Denison, of Eumaralla, was in town on Saturday, in his magnificent Rolls-Royce car. This beautiful piece of mechanism is the first of its kind to be seen up this way. It was the subject of much admiring comment. Rolls-Royce cars cost close upon £2000 apiece. Mr. Denison's is one of the few in this State."

Solomon Green (1868-1948), bookmaker and philanthropist, was born in London and at 15 set off for Australia. His first attempt at bookmaking in 1887 was unsuccessful. However, a new start in 1891 was followed by huge success. Profits from his bookmaking were invested in pastoral property and in city and suburban real estate. Green also bred racehorses at his Shipley stud, near Warrnambool. His horses won several of Australia's major races. When his racehorse Comedy King won the Melbourne Cup in 1910, he donated £500 (\$70,000 in 2019 money) to local charities. He gave constantly to Melbourne's public hospitals and in 1947 his donation of £40,000, (\$2.8 million in 2019 money), to the Royal Melbourne Hospital was typical of his generous spirit. Many hospitals and charities benefited from provisions in his will, valued in Victoria for probate at £481,721, (\$30 million in 2019 money).

Sir Hugh Robert Denison (1865-1940) was born with the family name of Dixon. He changed his name by deed poll to avoid confusion with his uncle and namesake, Sir Hugh Dixon, a staunch Methodist who disapproved of his nephew's association with horse racing. Denison served in the South Australian parliament and business interests included the tobacco and paper industries. He then moved to news media and founded and chaired the

powerful Macquarie Broadcasting Services in 1938. On the international scene he was NSW Commissioner at the 1924 Wembley Exhibition in England and from 1926 to 1928 served as Australian Commissioner in the US. He owned the property Guntawang from 1908-1918 at Gulgong, NSW and during this time it was renamed Eumaralla. His racehorse Poseidon won in 1906/7 the VRC Derby and AJC Derby, the VRC St Ledger and the AJC St Leger, the Caulfield Cup and the 1906 Melbourne Cup – a record unequalled. Denison left an estate valued for probate at £203,602, (\$17.6 million in 2019 money).

It was perhaps inevitable that Green and Denison would have a monumental clash in the betting-ring. Costa Rolfe in 'Winners of the Melbourne Cup: Stories that Stopped a Nation' gave this account of the famous bet, "A cigar-smoking, gold-plated Rolls-Royce driving bookie named Sol Green With a booming voice that dominated the betting-ring and an iron nerve that saw him never refuse a wager, Green soon established himself as the nation's greatest bookmaker Having once been spectacularly stung by punter Sir Hugh Denison, who had invested heavily on the Poseidon-Apologue Cups double of 1907, Green showed not only the true measure of his wealth but also a touch of class, casually handing over a cheque for £100,000 before wishing Denison all the best." \$15.2 million in 2019 money!

Author: David Neely is an Honorary Life Member of the RROCA, George Sevenoaks Medal (NSW), SHRF Historical Consultant, co-author with Tom Clarke of 'Rolls-Royce and Bentley in the Sunburnt Country', author of 'In the Rear-View Mirror – a History of the Rolls-Royce Owners' Club, former editor of PRÆCLARVM and regular contributor of articles. He has owned a 1926 Phantom I, 1929 Phantom II, 1957 Bentley S1, 1963 Silver Cloud III and currently has a 1985 Silver Spirit [2020].