

Taking the wheel

Luxury car clubs are reshaping the supercar ownership model, offering exclusive memberships and plans for enthusiasts who want access to rare high-performance vehicles – and plenty of them

WORDS JONATHAN WELLS

SUPERCAR ENTHUSIASTS ONCE dreamed of ownership. Increasingly, however, their aspirations are shifting toward membership – entry to car clubs that gives them access to new models, limited editions and communities of like-minded auto aficionados. And the trend is accelerating, with these luxury clubs introducing yet more flexible plans that allow members to change cars as often as most motorists change gears.

Commodity broker Craig Williams founded Auto Vivendi in 2005. “It’s a little like a gym membership,” he says of the service. Once a new member is accepted, they are required to prove their skills on a 120-mile supercar driving day, “including a country gastropub lunch!” says Williams. “We also have a clubhouse in St John’s Wood.” Then, depending on a member’s chosen plan, they will be granted between 20 and 365 days of use per year, allowing them to book a range of supercars and SUVs, delivered to the door from hubs in London and Manchester.

The club’s fleet is only used around 30 per cent of the time, which ensures a wealth of choice for members – even on the busiest summer weekends. Auto Vivendi also adds roughly 25 new cars to its collection every year. In any given year, the average value of the fleet is over £8.5m, and the current collection includes a Lamborghini Huracán Sterrato, a McLaren Artura and a Dodge Viper. “Typically, we’ll buy every production car from the main supercar manufacturers, and often ask members for their thoughts on the colours and specifications,” says Williams. Auto Vivendi also carries a number of ‘wildcards’ – exotic classics and rare finds. Think a Pininfarina-designed Ferrari F355 or a racer-inspired Porsche 356 Speedster.

Elsewhere in London, certain clubs cater exclusively to those with this fondness for nostalgia. Classic Car Club, for example, provides access to models including an early E-Type and a 1975 Aston Martin V8. The club also has a sister location, in Manhattan, and such global chapters make sense – especially for the high-flying jet-setter for whom a regular hire car just won’t do. Happily, these clubs are spread far and wide, from The Collection Paris to the Hong Kong Super Car Club. And each offers its own spin on the car-sharing concept. Royal London Club has Rolls-Royce Phantoms and Bentley Continentals,

but membership also pays for priority restaurant reservations, special hotel rates and luxury retail discounts. And The 12 Club offers its dozen annual members access to a dozen supercars, which are switched between them monthly. Its founder Benjamin Fortuin grew up around high-performance cars (his grandfather was a rally driver) and the business began life as a case study for his master’s degree. “But,” he explains, “the concept truly took shape when I recognised a shift in consumer behaviour. The desire for exclusivity and third spaces – where people can engage and connect – has surged in recent years.” Each annual cycle begins with a dinner and overnight stay at Cliveden House, where all the members meet and receive their first set of keys. “Then, in a month, I come round, pick up the Bentley and drop off an Aston,” says Fortuin. “The month after that, I’ll drop off a McLaren.”

Fortuin’s fleet is, as you would expect, carefully curated. A Ferrari California and McLaren 540C feature in the line-up. “And,” says Fortuin, “it was non-negotiable to have Aston Martins, Lamborghinis, Porsches and Bentleys. These aren’t just cars – they’re icons. And we own them, which means we’ll eventually sell them on. So it was crucial to choose vehicles that hold their value and won’t just sit in a garage with constant reliability issues.”

Similarly to Auto Vivendi, Fortuin listens to his members when it comes to choosing cars. “But we also ask them to trust us,” he adds. “One of the most exciting aspects of The 12 Club is the opportunity to drive cars you may not initially have considered.”

Fortuin also highlights how car clubs give enthusiasts the opportunity to experiment with multiple motoring brands, offering a ‘try before you buy’ experience for those considering investing in a single supercar. By getting a feel for several unique marques, members gain a deeper understanding of what suits their personal tastes, making the decision to purchase or lease a specific car, from a specific brand, much more informed.

Of course, many members own a supercar already... or even several. For them, Auto Vivendi’s Williams says, the benefit of membership is to simply broaden their horizons – and have fun. “There’s no longer a need to buy one of everything, because club memberships basically allow you to do that.” □



From left A legendary line-up – Lamborghini Huracán Tecnica and Reveulto, Ferrari 296 GTB, McLaren 750S Spider and Rolls-Royce Spectre – at the London Heliport, one of Auto Vivendi’s Club Hub locations; top An array of supercars are put through their paces during Auto Vivendi’s Drive Tour through the Dalmatian mountains