

Membership Driven

New clubs cater to the growing requirements of exotic and collector car owners.

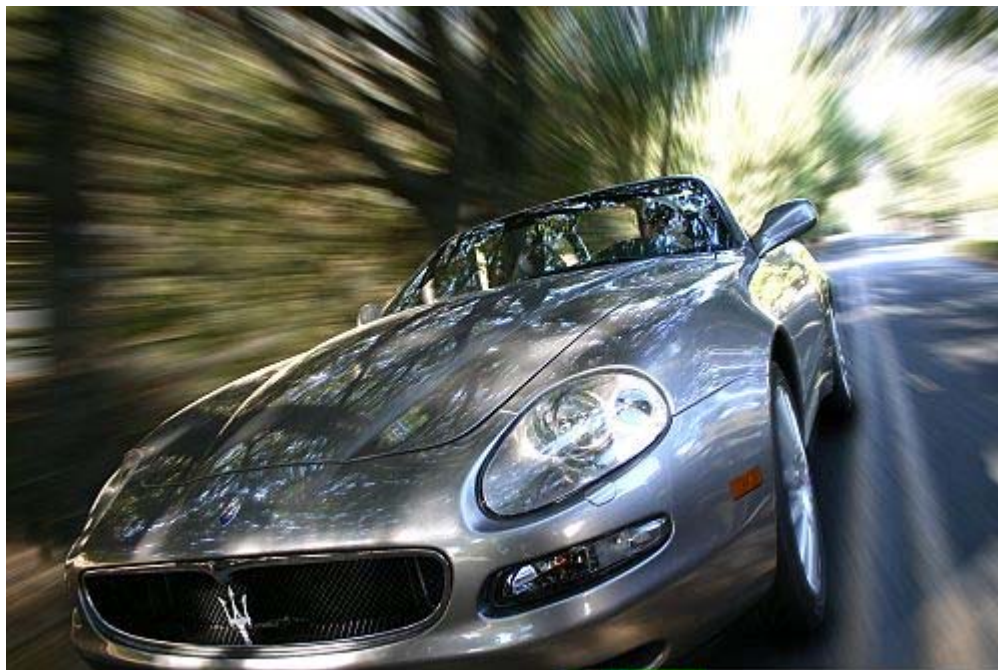
BY MARC K. STENDEL

It finally arrived—that supercar you've always wanted, that big reward to yourself for a job well done. So what is it? A \$270,000 Lamborghini Murciélago LP640? The \$150,000 Ford GT? A cute-as-a-button Lotus Exige for \$50,000? Hey, maybe it's even the \$1.5 million Bugatti Veyron. Or maybe it's all of the above. This much is certain: it looks—they look—great in the driveway.

So now what? What on earth are you going to do with a chrome yellow, 631-horsepower, quarter-million-dollar Lambo capable of 200+ miles per hour? See what a pickle you're in?

Think about it: here's this phenomenal car that has to be fed, watered, and exercised. Every once in the while, it may need to visit the vet—and not just any vet, but a very special one who is highly qualified to doctor on exotic mechanical wildlife that, more often than not, is one-of-a-kind.

Well, you should never underestimate the determination of that loose confraternity of passionate auto aficionados for paving the smoothest way toward indulging their passions. Unbeknownst to hum-drum commuters in their olive-drab Civics and mud-spattered Camrys, there is a thriving, albeit exclusive, "carriage trade" out there that caters only to the loftiest desires of the auto-owning elite.



Red Carpets for Pet Cars

The most exigent requirement for the exotic and classic car collector is housing for the precious pet. Accordingly, there have arisen a number of specialty businesses that style themselves as clubs and provide a range of services to pamper and maintain valuable vehicles.

Among these, the Bridgehampton Motoring Club (www.bridgemc.com) and Collectors Car Garage (www.collectorscargarage.com) provide a wide array of car storage, maintenance, and prep services for enthusiast owners in New York. For a variety of fees ranging from approximately \$1,200 to \$4,800 per month, BMC in the Hamptons and CC Garage in Westchester County can promise owners secure, climate-controlled storage when the cars are not in use, as well as maintenance regimens for keeping cars ready at a moment's notice when it's time to head out for a spin.

A variation on this theme is DreamCar Carriage House (www.dcchusa.com) in Southern Florida. For prices ranging from \$50,000 to \$60,000, car owners can buy so-called "auto-miniums" where, likewise, there is the promise of safe storage and routine maintenance. The current DreamCar site is just west of Lauderdale-by-the-Sea, although plans are already underway to develop similar facilities in Miami, Naples, and Palm Beach.

Just Half the Equation

It's one thing to find a special parking space for a rare exotic car. But what are you going to do when it's time to unleash 500+ horsepower upon an unsuspecting world? There is no shortage of stylin'-and-profilin' boulevard cruisers out there, of course, who think nothing of reining in a bright red Italian prancing horse to a paltry 15 miles-an-hour while scoping out chicks along Rodeo Drive or South Beach. But there comes a time to set those ponies free, and the freeway is not a good place for trying to outrun a firing squad of radar guns at buck-'n'-a-half speeds.

Racetracks are one possible outlet for one's Ferrari-fueled fantasies. Tracks as widely spaced as Road Atlanta in Georgia, Willow Springs Raceway in Southern California, BeaveRun Motorsports Complex in Pennsylvania, and Virginia International Raceway outside Washington, D.C.—just to name a few—all offer different track-day events at varying times.

But these are primarily racetracks, with full competition schedules during the prime driving season, so supercar access can be limited and random. By contrast, at least three purpose-built facilities are recently opened or nearing completion that boast private, closed-circuit road courses for members only. Organized much like country clubs, with an initiation fee and monthly dues, these track clubs provide an ideal road-course environment for exploiting every capability of car and driver. Autobahn Country Club opened in April 2005 outside Chicago in Joliet, Illinois (www.autobahncountryclub.net). Near the Poconos town of Eldred Springs, Pennsylvania, the Alpine Motorsports Club is scheduled to open in 2007 (www.alpinesignature.com). And, in the White Mountains outside Tamworth, New Hampshire, plans are well underway for the 3.3-mile, 18-corner Valley Motorsports Park (www.clubmotorsports.com).



High-Rent District

Each of the track clubs incorporates some form of clubhouse facility for members and guests, and plans exist for Valley Motorsports Park to provide limited "Garage-mahal" overnight accommodations for a few owners and their cars. Alas, to date, owners are most often faced with garaging their supercars at one location and flogging them at a road track somewhere else.

Unless, that is, you dispense with ownership altogether and join a car-share club. Usually structured around an annual fee plus usage costs, car-share members pay to have access to a broad stable of cars. In the case of Manhattan's Classic Car Club (www.classiccarclub.com), these can range from a 1989 Ferrari 328GTS to a 2006 Corvette Z06 or from a 2007 Parnelli Jones Mustang to a 1969 Dodge Super Bee. Based in London, CCC's New York stable is well populated with Brit cars like Jaguar, Rolls-Royce, Aston Martin, Lotus, and even a Land Rover HSE Sport. West Coasters can indulge in similar pseudo-ownership at Club Sportiva in San Francisco



(www.clubsportiva.com), whereas the Scottsdale, Arizona, contingent can seek out the Van Horssen Group (www.vanhorssegroup.com). Outside Chicago, there's Exotic Car Share in Palatine, Illinois (www.exoticcarshare.com).



Much like a credit card rewards program, car-share members buy points that are then spent on cars rated for their popularity and potency. That 260-hp Ferrari 328GTS, for example, eats up a lot more points than its '77 MG-B stablemate with a white-knuckle output of 62.5 hp. Not content to rent but unwilling or unable to own outright? Well, the Exotic Car Share folks offer a fractional-share program (www.curvyroad.com) that assembles syndicates of co-owners whose pooled funds buy, store, and maintain a supercar that is available by reservation for four to eight weeks per year.

Considering what's involved in the care and feeding of an exotic supercar, it seems there's a reason they call it "horsepower." Because it's not enough just to buy the darn thing; you've got to stable it, groom it, and exercise it to boot. In many more ways than have ever existed before, however, the resources are now available for maintaining supercars in their potent prime all the time. **ET**

Photo Captions

Picture 1: Collectors Car Garage's purpose-built facilities were designed by professionals to provide the ultimate in collector car guardianship

Picture 2: Club Sportiva's Maserati Spyder features a big V-8, a six-speed manual, Skyhook sport suspension, and a sumptuously handcrafted leather cockpit.

Picture 3: Designed by world-renowned track designer Alan Wilson, Alpine Motorsports Club's road course climbs over 200 feet along the lower plateaus of Eastern Pennsylvania, before plunging back down to the clubhouse, activities center, and paddock areas.

Picture 4: The Van Horssen Group's \$7.5 million fleet of luxury automobiles is housed in a sleek, ultra-modern hangar at Scottsdale Municipal Airport

Picture 5: A 325-acre cornfield in Joliet, Illinois, was converted into a 3.56-mile road course for the Autobahn Country Club.