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P1 INTERNATIONAL SUPERCAR CLUB



■ FOCUS ON: PETER BLOOMFIELD ■ WORLD F1 FROM QATAR & PORTUGAL

P1 INTERNATIONAL SUPERCAR CLUB

Over the last few years, events have been organised for wealthy participants to race their exotic machinery across different continents. Groups of well-healed "celebutantes" turn up in the newest and fastest cars, surrounded by paparazzi and star-struck bystanders. They then set off on a playboy's point to point, whether it is across the US, Europe or even around the world. **Words by Sam Petyan**

THE SUPER-SENSIBLE OPTION



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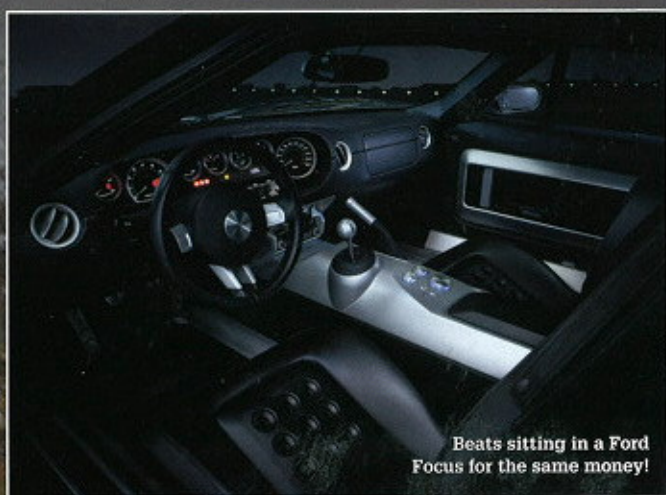
recently went to a promotional party for "Bladerun", which seeks to fulfill the need of wealthy powerboat enthusiasts to take part in a similar escapade on water. The problem is that I neither have a fast car, nor a fast boat; and as such feel somewhat out-of-my-depth. This got me thinking about how, as a mere mortal, I can quench my thirst for supercars, without having to be super-wealthy?

The rise of the rich-kid-rally has been paralleled by the formation of supercar clubs. For a nominal yearly fee, you have access to a group of very special cars, which you can drive at your convenience, without the pains of ownership. I say "pains", because frankly owning a supercar is painful. Take, for the sake of argument, the Ferrari F430. I've got £155,000 burning a hole in my pocket, so I go to my local dealership and buy one. Within the first year, after just 2750 miles, the car has

depreciated around £32,000 (ouch); don't forget insurance (£5000), servicing (£2200), tyres, brakes, storage, valeting, road-tax (£6000) - and you'd be forgiven for starting to go off the metallic artwork on your driveway. So, at the end of year one, you're in for £45,200.

Alternatively, you could join a supercar club such as the original, P1 International, who I recently visited. Based in Leatherhead and Cheshire, they enable you and your partner access to some of the most sought after machinery around. For less than £15,000 a year, you can have about 6000 miles in a Mercedes McLaren SLR, or a 599GTB, Lamborghini Murcielago LP640, or Porsche 911 turbo...the list goes on. Not to mention the fact that the cars available aren't tired, thrashed and sorry looking shadows of their former-selves, but typically low mileage, less than a few months old thoroughbreds.

All the pains of ownership are taken from you. You choose



Beats sitting in a Ford Focus for the same money!

which car you'd like, and when you'd like it. It gets delivered to you in perfect condition, clean, checked, and safe. If it goes wrong, hand it back. If you don't like that particular model, there are over 50 other cars to choose from. The fact is; that if you're a hardworking member of society, you're not going to get the chance to drive your car that often. So why would you take on the costs of ownership for the sake of a few thousand miles per year, when you can drive a different supercar each time which will never cost you more than your subscription?

Supercar clubs also understand that you may not need a 200mph car to visit your family 300 miles away, or go skiing. That's why they have cars like the Range Rover Sport, or the Audi Q7, which incidentally, use up fewer points than the rarer stuff. The way the system works is that each member has an allocation of points. Some cars use more points than others, and playing the system means that you could enjoy around 100 days

a year in one of the fleet; most people however end up using the service for around 50-80 days a year. Now I don't know whether you're anything like me, but I don't get the chance to use my car that often- and the prospect of getting into something special on the relatively odd occasion I need to use my car, makes the whole idea very appealing.

Whilst visiting P1 International in Leatherhead, I was introduced to the fleet, and my goodness it was a schoolboy's dream. A silver Ferrari 599GTB, which had been delivered before the official UK press release, sat next to a similarly coloured Mercedes McLaren SLR. Four or five brand new Porsche 911s awaited the first turn of their tyres, while a vivid yellow Caterham SV tempted those who like their driving experience a little more raw. Towards the back, nestled somewhat anonymously was an achingly beautiful Jaguar Mk2, which seemed like the perfect car to go to the pub in- cool, but >



FOR LESS THAN £15,000 A YEAR, YOU CAN HAVE ABOUT 6000 MILES IN A LAMBORGHINI MURCIELAGO

not flashy. Walking around with the MD, Michael Breen, I was told how the Jag had frequently embarrassed modern cars with its pace, and how P1 never keep their 911s for longer than 4 months, sorry everyone, that beautiful Jaguar Mk2 is in fact Michael Breen's own car and not in the P1 fleet. The cars were all perfect, as each car comes back to the fold; it gets a proper valet and a full check before being delivered to its next master or mistress.

So what is the profile of a typical supercar club member? They're usually male, in their mid 30s to late 40s. They tend to be successful and usually own, or have owned, supercars in the past. While I was there, however, I did notice some guys turn up who were in their 20s, which was both interesting and gut-wrenchingly annoying at the same time. All new members are required to complete a driving course, which is hardly unfair; given they're offering you up to £350,000 worth of car to drive, and you're going to have to drive it. The club also offers away-days at race tracks around the UK and Europe, so if you've ever toyed with the idea of taking your toy to the track; why not take someone else's? This April, the club's members drove from Leatherhead via Reims to a luxury chalet in Verbier. Just imagine the resonant wail from a Modena-made V8 as you weave up the mountains with the hood down!

There are alternatives to joining a club. One option of course, is to hire the car of your dreams. If you've got a school reunion and fancy giving them all something to talk about, why not turn up in something bright and outrageous? [No, not a Jimmy Saville tracksuit, I was thinking something automotive]. All makes and models are available to rent for short periods of time, but there are drawbacks. A weekend in a Lamborghini Murcielago Roadster will probably cost around £4200, but the "insurance excess" is the real killer, one hire company quoting £10,000 - so be sure to drive carefully. This hefty levy, plus the 300 mile weekend limit means that the deal isn't half as good as the supercar club option. You may also be disappointed if you're not the right age. P1 allow members from the age of 25, but most car hire companies won't entertain anyone younger than 30.

Although slightly tangential, you could also choose to take part in a driving day. These usually take place on a race track, or off-road course. The benefits are obvious, it allows you to drive a selection of cars quickly- something which you should not consider on the roads. The problem is, that there's no practical element, you can't go anywhere you need/would like to go, and there's certainly no posing potential. The costs can also rack up, expect to pay upwards of £750 for a day with a decent amount of involvement.

For me, there seems to be only one way to have it all without total bankruptcy. Having been given the tour of the headquarters of P1, I was handed the keys to an Italian goddess, a bright red F430. Unfortunately they were soon taken from me, as the car was on its way to a client. The fallback options weren't too shabby, either an Aston Martin V8 Vantage, Porsche 911 4S, or a brand new Maserati GranTurismo in Grigio Granito with bright red leather. I climbed onto the sanguine seats, and for 40 minutes, experienced the joy of lack of ownership.

Drive it, enjoy it, give it back, choose another.

• Thanks to P1 International www.p1international.com

ABOVE: Nothing announces your arrival like a Giallo Orion Murcielago
BELOW: The view everyone else gets to see

