

THE
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Beautiful and damned

TROUBLED
CHANTEUSE
PEARL LOWE TALKS
ABOUT SINGING
SWINGING AND
WHY SHE'S LEAVING
LONDON. EXCLUSIVE
INTERVIEW BY
BARBARA ELLEN

Silver service

The pinnacle of Italian motoring and the peak of French cooking. Driving to the Waterside Inn in a Ferrari makes for a perfect lunch, says **Martin Love**



Olivier Creze has one of the most frustrating jobs in Britain; not since Tantalus has a mortal had to deal

with as much temptation on a daily basis. You see, Olivier is the parking attendant at the Waterside Inn, the Roux brothers' multi-starred gastrodome on the banks of the Thames, and he spends his days driving Porsches, Maseratis, Lamborghinis, Bentleys, Astons...

at an average speed of about 4mph. Today, Olivier is lucky enough to be parking my Ferrari 575M Maranello, top speed 203mph – he may use its immense 5.7-litre V12 engine to break the 5mph barrier. Of course, when I say 'my', I'm using the word in its loosest sense. The Ferrari has been loaned to me by P1 – a performance-car club for members started by Damon Hill in 1996. And, like all the best things in life, it goes back on Monday. Until then, though, I'm living a parallel life. A life which I am so immediately at one with that I have begun to suspect I have been the victim of some cruel mix-up at birth which has denied me my rightful heritage. But then, wouldn't everyone be happy with a £200 lunch at the stunning Waterside Inn and a beautiful £156,700 car? I'd better explain...

There's an old motoring adage. If you are going to buy a Ferrari, don't buy a red one – because everyone will know it's your first. To update the maxim, I'd say you'd be better off not buying one at all. Instead, sign up to a car club. No one wants the hassle and expense of maintenance, storage and insurance, yet we all want to sample the perfection of



Fast car, slow food: Olivier Creze keeps an eye on P1's Ferrari 575M outside the Waterside Inn

a car that looks like Sophia Loren and handles like Jake LaMotta. And this is where P1 steps in.

P1 members pay a fee to gain points to be exchanged for one of its 45 or so supercars. Top flight models (Lamborghini Murcielago, Aston Martin Vanquish, Ferrari F430, Ford GT) and popular dates will deplete your store of credits quicker than a less elite car on a rainy weekday. It's worth noting that at P1 a 'less elite car' is something like a Lotus Exige S2, Noble M400 or AC Cobra.

It's not cheap – there's a joining fee of £2,500 and then an annual sub of £11,750. But for that you get between 50 and 70 driving days depending on how you play your points. P1's argument is that the depreciation alone on any one car in its fleet is likely to be more than

the cost of annual membership. On top of that, you get to drive any/all of the cars you fancy. Had I the 12 grand to play with, I'd join for one year and tick off all dream cars I've ever wanted to get my hands on.

At the moment there're about 230 members on P1's books – of whom just two are women. One of the men, luckily for me, is Michel Roux, who graciously, invited me to lunch over at his place by the river...

A few hours and nine sublime courses later, we stumble out of the Waterside into the sunshine. Olivier hands me my keys. Then, as I fire up the Ferrari's colossal engine, he leans into the window and says: 'And now for ze pudding...' **OM**

For more information on P1: 01372 374 400; www.p1international.com. For the Waterside Inn: 01628 620 691; www.waterside-inn.co.uk

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Braking news It's not often you get to combine driving with giving. But from 16-19 June, you can race from Brands Hatch to Le Mans to raise money for Great Ormond Street. It'll be the drive of a child's life... Visit www.gosh.org