



EMPIRE ONE

Luxury club, on wheels

Empire One Premier Car Club gets drivers into top-end cars and on road

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It sounds like a wild cat has arrived outside of the Now newspaper office. The hum of the engine mimics a tiger's low growl, or perhaps a sound closer to its purr. The silver paint glistens as the rain drips off the hood. As I slide into the deep, roomy leather seat of its interior I find myself imagining a scene out of a James Bond movie. I can vividly picture it flying through the air in slow motion, me gripping the bottom of the seat with white knuckled hands.

It's an Audi R8 and I'm about to get a ride around town, courtesy of Surrey's own Harvey Sanghera, founder and owner of Western Canada's first and largest luxury car club.

You can experience this too. All you need is a membership with Empire One Premier Car Club. For a membership fee of \$7,500 and an annual charge of \$33,000 the club's members can drive one or all vehicles in Sanghera's high-end car fleet for 55 to 70 days out of the year.

Sanghera's love for cars goes back as far as he can remember.

"As a newborn, the car smell got to me," he says, and he's been hooked ever since.

He has worked hard to get where he is today, he explains. As a young boy in England, he lived under bad conditions. His family didn't spend money on going out, clothes or even birthdays.



CREDIT: Amy Reid/For the Now
Harvey Sanghera, founder of the Empire One car club, poses with one of the group's luxury vehicles - the Audi R8.

While he was attending university, studying business and accounting, he was at home or working if he wasn't at school, not out partying with his fellow students.

After post-secondary, he dabbled in various areas of business in England. He owned a nightclub and was in property sales for a number of years, among other ventures.

Sanghera thought of the idea for the car club company when he moved to Canada a few years ago. Being a lover of high-end cars, he wanted to purchase one, but his wife said no. As he hunted for a car club to join as an alternative to purchasing, he was surprised to discover that there were none in the area. That's when the light bulb went off.

People were telling him that there was no market for a business like this. They would tell him that people would either want to buy a vehicle or rent one for a day.

"But I had to do it," he says. "If someone else did and succeeded, well, I couldn't let that happen.

"Canadian audiences are very weary of new businesses," he says, chuckling. "People don't understand the concept."

Sanghera says the last year has been about educating people. His concept: for well-off people in the community to have the opportunity to drive cars that, normally, they would never be able to drive in their lifetime.

With the business one year into its existence, things are really starting to get going.

"There were times when I went, 'Oh my God. Have I done the right thing here?'"

He says the recession has actually worked in his favour: wealthy people are coming to him instead of renewing leases on extremely costly vehicles. They pay the membership fees and have access to a whole fleet of luxury vehicles, not just one.

Though business is taking off, he always has and always will be picky about his clients.

"If I don't like someone, I'll say no," he says, and he has done just that.

"I want the same kind of people to be in the car as me," he adds, meaning they need to share his love for the automobiles. Plus, he adds, all it takes is one wrong client to ruin the reputation of the business.

For him, sharing his passion for vehicles is what it's all about.

"It's seeing that smile, and my client's saying 'you're the man'." Perhaps for the same reason, he tries to drop all the vehicles off himself.

This entrepreneur doesn't stick to just one thing. Sanghera and his wife also own an

Indian restaurant in Surrey called Mahek.

When the couple was out on an anniversary date, he told her he would buy her anything, she just had to name it - a diamond ring, necklace, anything at all.

She stopped, looked around and said, "Why don't you buy me this restaurant?" He laughed, but after they went home that night he began to think about it and thought, why not?

That is his take on life: follow your heart and you'll seldom go wrong. He says on their ventures he and his wife learn as they go along. The restaurant business and the car club world were new to both of them, but they dove into it, were open to learning and are now living their dreams.

Well, he is driving his dreams, which he made the company's motto: "Drive your dreams."

The Empire One fleet will be featured in the Vancouver International Auto Show, coming up March 31 to April 5 at B.C. Place Stadium.

The show will allow visitors to learn about the company and will feature two of the car club's most desired vehicles: an Aston Martin V8 Vantage Roadster and a Lamborghini Gallardo Superleggera.

At the show last year, the company was just getting on its feet. Many passersby were asking what they had, and at the time, all they had were a lot of plans. This year, that has changed and Sanghera is excited to be back at the show to talk to all the people he saw last year and show what he now has to offer his clientele.

His favourite car: "The Lamborghini of course!" he exclaims, grinning from ear to ear. "It's probably akin to being in the ring with Mike Tyson. The noise, the drama, it's just immense.

"When else are you going to experience that?"

For more information, visit Empireone.ca.