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Driving desires

New exotic car club offers opportunity to get behind the wheel of some of the world's finest automobiles

Andrew Petrozzi

BC's economic prosperity and rising international profile are fuelling an increasing demand for luxury items of all shapes and sizes – ranging from expensive jewelry and designer furniture to lavish condominiums and exotic automobiles.

Restaurateur and entrepreneur Harvey Sanghera, 36, is preparing to launch B.C.'s first premier car club, Empire One, to satiate a desire among Vancouverites to drive some of the world's finest luxury vehicles.

Before deciding to emigrate to Canada, Sanghera's wife had suggested he join an exotic car club in the U.K. as a means of saving himself the hassle and cost of constantly buying and selling vehicles. But Sanghera found that, after his arrival in B.C., that no such car clubs existed. So he decided to start his own.

Empire One will feature 10 cars when it is scheduled to launch in late May or early June, according to Sanghera. Empire One members, of whom Sanghera is accepting 40 to start, will have access to some remarkable vehicles, including a 2008 Bentley Continental GT Speed, a Ferrari F430 Spyder and a Lamborghini Gallardo Supperleggera, as well as a Porsche 911 Turbo, two Maseratis and an Aston Martin.

"I am passionate about cars. If it was strictly business, I would be a bit worried, because I would have to try and pick up the cheapest vehicle at the right time and I'd have to wait. But because I love the vehicles, I equally, as much as the members, want to get a chance to drive them. The way I am operating [Empire] is partly business and partly personal," he said.

Members will pay a one-time membership fee of \$7,500 and an annual fee of \$32,998. Members will have the option to make monthly payments of \$2,995. Fees include the delivery and pickup of the vehicles at a member's home or workplace and all insurance, maintenance and storage costs. The business model is similar to time sharing.

"It is an opportunity for people who don't wish to invest all their money in these vehicles. It gives them an opportunity to try a diverse range of vehicles and fulfil their dreams and not have the burdens of ownership."

Members are given 1,200 points annually to use to book certain vehicles for specified periods of time. For example, a Bentley or Lamborghini will run 24 points daily for weekdays, jumping to 44 points per day on weekends. Less extravagant vehicles such as a BMW M3 or a Nissan Skyline GTR would cost 10 points daily during the week. Vehicles can be booked up to 30 days in advance for up to seven days in a row. Members will receive on average between 55 and 70 days annually in Empire One vehicles.

Potential members have ranged from senior financial executives and realtors to those involved in the construction industry, according to Sanghera, who owns the Mahek Restaurant in Surrey and whose U.K. business interests included grocery wholesaling, nightclub ownership and an ongoing property development business.

"We have had a lot of inquiries, but we have been very selective in who we approach. There are a lot of people out here with a lot of money, but they don't understand the value of that money. We want people who understand the value of money. Somebody who has worked hard and understands it is hard to earn. We want them to look after our vehicles as if they were their own," said Sanghera, who is personally purchasing Empire One's vehicles.

He anticipates that as the club becomes more established, luxury vehicle manufacturers and importers will make their cars available to Empire One in order to give them greater exposure that ultimately could translate into an increase in sales, according to Sanghera, who plans to offer corporate memberships in the future, as well.

Robert Rons, the sales executive with Lamborghini Vancouver, said he is going to take a wait and see approach when it comes to the impact Empire One could have on the sale of Lamborghinis.

"We don't offer a scenario where someone can take a car for a week and try one. If it inspires someone enough to want to come and buy a car from us, it only takes one and it is worthwhile for us," he said. "I think it is a good idea, and I think Harvey is the right person to drive that forward." •

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