



WHEELS OF FORTUNE

One day. \$1 million worth of cars.

BY PAULA FELPS

As far as challenges go, it wasn't the hardest one I've had to face: Go forth and enjoy \$1 million worth of cars. In one day.

Obviously, there are a few ways to do this: I could drive 77 Kias — um, thanks anyway — or three Rolls-Royces, provided I could find a dealer who'd let me leave the parking lot. Or I could take the smart route and sign up for a Drive Your Dream Tour.

Based in Texas, Drive Your Dream Tours let drivers enjoy a full day of piloting some of the world's finest cars. The various tours cater to different tastes, but the top-of-the-

line 2,500 HP Tour is about more than just power and speed; it also buys you eight hours with some of the world's most expensive cars. With a Lamborghini Gallardo, Ferrari F430, BMW M6, Bentley Continental GT, and choice of Aston Martin V8 Vantage Roadster or Dodge Viper, it's an enticing and impressive lineup.

Every weekend, the cars lure drivers from across the country to Houston, San Antonio, Dallas, or Austin for a full day of power driving. The carefully mapped tours meander along scenic routes to let you truly enjoy the cars — which means you won't be sitting in traffic or tooling around at 55 mph.

That's not to say you're simply handed the keys and turned loose. Each drive begins with tour manager John Sears reviewing some rules of the road, reminding drivers that the cars you're about to enjoy are a far cry from your family minivan. Participants are divided into two-person teams, giving the first driver roughly 30 minutes at the wheel before switching places with the passenger. At the end of the hour, teams switch cars until each

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CINDY BALDHOFF

participant has been both a driver and a passenger in all five cars.

HITTING THE ROAD

My partner for the day was a young man named Thomas, and we climbed into the bright yellow Ferrari F430 first. This beautiful mid-engined V-8, descended from Ferrari's Gestione Sportiva F1 racing division, enjoys the stiff, low ride of its heritage but is dressed in rich leather for a luxurious setting. Thomas hit the "start" button and, as the engine roared to life, he noted that it felt nothing like firing up his Hyundai. I had the feeling he and his wife would be discussing trade-in values by the end of the day.

We fell in line behind Sears' Porsche Boxster and followed him out of the city. For the next three hours, we were led through winding byways, over hills, and on wide, open stretches of road where we happily — and sometimes nervously — tested our acceleration and cornering skills. As our confidence grew, so did our grins. It wasn't just enjoyable; it was addictive.

With each car came a different sensation. Like the Ferrari, Lamborghini's Gallardo Spyder felt like an elite race car. Sliding into the low-slung, 500-horsepower Lambo, with its V-10 engine and all-wheel drive, the Ferrari suddenly seemed like a gentle starter car in retrospect. The Lambo was a fierce, demanding ride that easily stole the attention on the open road. The sound of its engine being pushed to perform was an absolutely glorious but overwhelming sound. Whereas the Ferrari had me scouring the dial for a high-octane rock station, the Lambo is best enjoyed with the radio turned off. The sound of the engine working its way through the gears proved to be the best soundtrack imaginable.

Inside the Aston Martin, the collision of luxury and sport styling was staggering. Designed to go toe-to-toe with Porsche's 911, the V8 Vantage felt tame and elegant after the pair of aggressive Italian racers. Effortless to control, the combination of a luxury cockpit and high-performance driving machine was both a surprise and a delight. I found myself secretly lusting for such a car in my own garage.

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OTHER TOURS

Maybe the idea of driving \$1 million worth of cars just doesn't get your motor running. Knowing that there are many different factors that appeal to different drivers, DFW Drive Your Dream has created several tours to suit varied interests. Visit Private Clubs Online to find which other cars are available.

SPECTATOR SPORT

By the time we stopped for lunch at a country club, we were all exuberant, and not just because we sensed a good meal was in store. We parked in a line outside the club, and the desolate parking lot seemed to fill up immediately. People poured out from the golf course, from a nearby subdivision, from the club itself. Everyone, it seemed, wanted to get a closer look at these sleek, gorgeous autos.

We were surprised by the ruckus our arrival created, but Sears only laughed. "It happens every time," he said with a smile. "Wait until we stop for gas."

We ate lunch quickly, eager to get back on the road, and politely shooed away the onlookers who were using their cell phones to take pictures of the cars. This time around, the wheel in my hands belonged to a Bentley Continental GT.

I've never actually been inside a cloud before, but I imagine that this is what it must feel like. Luxurious beyond compare, the inte-

rior was easily the most elegant drive of the day. Then I fired up the engine.

The Bentley's twin-turbo, 12-cylinder engine felt like a jet fighter plane — or, at least, what I suspect a jet fighter plane feels like. With 552 horses and a top speed of 198 mph, the Continental had everything one dreams of in a car — good looks, great handling, plenty of power.

With our tanks running low, we pulled into a convenience store and lined the cars up for refueling. As Sears had promised, customers from inside the store swarmed us. What should have been a quick pit stop turned into a leisurely break as onlookers oohed and aahed over the cars — and took more pictures. As they told us how beautiful the cars were, we couldn't help but agree. I was beginning to realize how difficult it would be to jump back inside my daily driver.

END OF THE ROAD

My final ride of the day was the BMW M6 — easily the car I was most familiar with. Having come of age in the '80s, I had already logged a few hours inside this brand. But, oh, what a difference a couple of decades makes.

The 500-horsepower M6, with an impatient 5.0 liter V-10, is an impressive, aggressive little driving machine. Marrying BMW's sleek style with absolute power, it was sheer driving pleasure. The M6 was a great little performer, and it's truly designed to make you rediscover the joy of driving.

By the time we returned to our starting point, we were a changed group. The grins that had built throughout the day were impossible to wipe away, although they dimmed significantly as we turned the keys back in.

I climbed back into my waiting car to drive home, certain that I reeked of that new-car smell. It seemed best to come clean immediately, so I patted the dash and confessed my unfaithfulness. I admitted spending the day in the company of five very sexy, seductive cars. I begged my car's forgiveness.

But I forgot to mention that I'd do it again in a heartbeat.

Paula Felps is a freelance writer who never met a speed limit she couldn't beat.



TEAM BUILDING AT 4800 RPMS

First came the ropes courses. Then came the succession of innovative corporate outings designed to boost morale and build teams beyond the office setting. Offering everything from golf challenges to rock climbing to paintball battles, those adventures soon seemed passé. So now, many companies are just telling employees to hit the road.

"Driving high-performance, exotic automobiles automatically gives people an emotional high," says Rich Shoen, an executive coach and leadership development expert. "That is important in making the team-building exercise stand out as a memorable event in their lives. People who spend a day in the cars come away with a tremendous feeling of having done something new and unique."

Shoen has teamed up with Texas-based DFW Elite Auto Rental to create Elite Team Building, a new spin on corporate team

building that asks employees to accomplish specific goals in high-end autos. Based on the philosophy that the co-workers who drive together will thrive together, the day may include anything from a scavenger hunt on a challenging driving course to exercises designed to build communication skills.

It's a trend that's beginning to catch on nationwide. At the Bondurant Racing School in Phoenix, participants have access to some 200 vehicles ranging from go-karts to Corvettes. Programs are tailored to suit the group's needs, but always require the employees to learn to work together on specific tasks.

"It's a great alternative to standard team-building events, and the best part is they learn something that they will use every day," says Mike McGovern, chief instructor at Bondurant. "They leave here as better drivers, but they've also had a lot of fun."

— Paula Felps ♦♦



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"There are a lot of people out there who love cars and want to drive something different, but don't necessarily want to buy them," says Ron Sturgeon, a noted car collector and creator of the Drive Your Dream program. "This is a way for people to be able to get behind the wheels of several different cars during a single day and enjoy them on the open road."

The tours have become popular as corporate incentives, bachelor party alternatives, or as a special birthday or anniversary gift. The wide range of options is designed to suit all interests; tours are updated or changed periodically to meet demand or accommodate new cars.

"We've looked at the different reasons people buy certain cars, and then created packages to give them access to similar cars," Sturgeon explains. "There are a lot of different motivations for driving certain cars."

In addition to the 2,500 Horsepower Tour, the company's current roster of tours includes:

- **2,000 Horsepower Tour:** This high-powered road trip puts you in the seat of five high-profile cars with a total of 2,000 horsepower. During the course of a single day, participants drive a Ferrari 360 F1, Lamborghini Gallardo, Dodge Viper, Corvette Z06, and Porsche 911 Cabriolet.

- **Couple's Tour:** What's better than lunch at a five-star restaurant? Driving to it in a Aston Martin DB7 Vantage, Mercedes SL500 Convertible, Porsche 911 Cabriolet, Land Rover Range Rover, and a Mercedes S550 Sedan.

- **Every Mile a Memory Tour:** The unforgettable lineup features a 2005 Ck6 Corvette, Aston Martin DB7 Vantage, Mercedes SLK55, Lotus Elise, and Ferrari F355 Spider.

For more information, visit www.dfw-driveyourdream.com.