



Simply the best: of all his cars Rhodes preferred the Ferrari, even if it proved too costly to keep

# I like my rubber burnt

**G**ary Rhodes used to have six cars, including a Lotus and a Ferrari, but times are tight "and the insurance got too ridiculous". Now he has only a Porsche 911 Carrera, a Jaguar XKR, a Bentley Turbo R and a Mitsubishi Shogun. And the money he saves on premiums goes towards membership of P1, Damon Hill's private club for people who like to drive the world's fastest supercars.

The former Formula One world champion's stable sits in a hangar in Leatherhead, Surrey, waiting for someone like Rhodes to rent them for the weekend. "I took along my eldest son — he's 13, likes to go karting, and knows everything about engines," says Rhodes. "Damon was revving up a Lamborghini and my son said, 'Daddy, my willy's gone all funny.' I said, 'Son, you're not alone'."

Rhodes's addiction to cars started early, even though he didn't pass his driving test, at the third attempt, until he was 25. A "hand-painted chocolate brown" Mini was the newly mobile chef's first car. "I saw it in this bloke's garden every morning, so I knocked on the door and said, 'Thinking of selling it?' He wanted £200, but it was great. I felt like a rally driver off the telly because in a Mini 50mph feels like 90."

Promotion to head chef at a Michelin-starred restaurant in Taunton finally persuaded Rhodes to trade up. "My car dreams came alive with an Opel Manta coupé. It was my answer to the [Aston Martin] DB6, but I don't think I was fooling anybody." The Opel was all-white, including the spoiler and the bumpers, but this was the 1980s after all.

Even though he has driven cars in every hue Rhodes prefers "classic colours", especially navy blue. They also attract less attention, which is something Rhodes has been aware of

## ME AND MY MOTORS

### GARY RHODES

ever since someone ran a key down his Jaguar XJS in a supermarket car park.

"I don't know what's wrong with people in this country; in France or Italy people admire you for driving a good car. It's jealousy, pure and simple." It's this jealousy that is making Rhodes think twice about buying his dream car, the new Ferrari Enzo. "I would be heartbroken if my Enzo got scratched in the car park!"

The Ferrari Testarossa is his favourite among the cars he has owned. "I ordered a Ferrari 550

Maranello but there was a two-year waiting list. So I said to my wife, 'I should buy a Testarossa till my Maranello arrives if I'm really going to get to know Ferrari.' When I sold it back it was like losing a member of the family, but in two years I put only 700 miles on the clock and it always had a dead battery."

He claims he isn't flash, but Rhodes's cars all have personalised numberplates. He owns 22GR (nice, because his birthday is on the 22nd) and bought YJR1 for his wife (Yolande)

## ON HIS CD CHANGER

**Stevie Wonder** I have a four-CD collection. I reckon *Songs in the Key of Life* is one of the greatest albums of all time. I also have *Characters*, because that's the only album with *Free*, my favourite Stevie Wonder track of all time. Stevie's voice on *Characters* reminds me of the throaty noise of a Ferrari

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Jennifer Rhodes. "I was extra happy because it was quite cheap to buy; I suppose there aren't that many people with a Christian name beginning with Y, and I really like a bargain."

Rhodes has had run-ins with the traffic police and has twice accumulated nine points on his licence. "A camera once caught me going through a red light and I've been done for speeding. I was doing 93mph and the police pulled me over. There was nothing on the road but they said it made no difference."

His love of speed does get him into trouble. "My wife calls it 'Rhodes rage'. I've had people jumping out at me, fists flying but I try to keep calm. Once I pulled in front of this bloke in a souped-up [BMW] 3-series. I really apologised, twice, but he kept on shouting. I said, 'For the third time, I'm apologising.' He said, 'Good job mate,' and drove off."

Such behaviour makes him mad, but not as mad as he gets about aggressive urban cyclists. "I hate the way they try to fit in the eight-inch gap between your car and the pavement. I'll tell you what else makes me mad: the way they go through red lights."

It's the survival of the fittest on London's streets, he says. "Everywhere you look they are widening the pavements. It's hell driving into London: they want to force us onto the trains but the trains are filthy. It makes me see red."

Even so, Rhodes tries not to let such frustrations spoil his day, especially when he's driving through the Kent countryside. "I love Kent on a sunny day in late September when you can really smell the apples and pears. Sorry to relate everything to food but that's when I like to think 'Come on, let's drive' — I just drop a gear and give it some."

Richard Johnson