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A Lamborghini sort of day

Join Damon Hill's P1 Club and you have Ferraris, Aston Martins, Bentleys and Lamborghinis delivered to your door for the weekend. Gerald Ward is an enthusiastic member

THERE WAS huge excitement when a letter arrived addressed to me from a Damon Hill. It turned out that it was from THE Damon Hill, and he was asking me to join his Club. My reaction must have been very similar to that of Mr Pooter when he received the invitation to the Lord Mayor's ball. The Club is called the P1 Club. It consists of only 250 members, who are allowed to borrow any one of 40 of the most exotic cars that money can buy, in return for an annual membership fee.

For somebody like me, such an invitation was very appealing. My love of driving cars probably stems from Sir William Rootes, the great car manufacturer. He was an ardent admirer of my mother when I was still quite a young schoolboy. He used to come round for tea, usually, now I come to think of it, when my father was out, and so as to acquire my mother's full attention, would give me the keys to his Humber Super Snipe or Sunbeam Talbot and suggest I took it for a spin down the drive for half an hour or so. His visits were much looked forward to by me and, I suspect, by my mother too.

The Club works like this: a very pretty girl called Joanne came to see me to decide whether I was suitable. A bit of chat from me about how I had been a second-hand car salesman for several years (well, I owned a garage in Hungerford) seemed to do the trick and



Top Lamborghini Gallardo
Above Damon Hill at a P1 Club raceday
Top right Bentley Continental GT
Right The writer's grandson in a big boy's toy

I was in, having parted with a cheque for £12,500. This represented a one-off joining fee of £2,500 and an annual membership fee of £10,000. Taken against the annual depreciation, maintenance and insurance of these enormously expensive cars it is very good value, but don't tell Damon that.

For this I get an allowance of points (750) and mileage (5,000) for the year. The number of points I use for each booking depends on the car I take, which time of the year and whether it is a midweek or a weekend booking. There is another, more expensive membership category which would give me more points and mileage.

At my level I can reasonably expect 50 to 70 days' driving per year. I can also take a car abroad by special arrangement.

The cars are breathtakingly wonderful. They are divided into five groups, roughly by value, with the more expensive groups using up more points. All current Ferraris, including the 360 Challenge Stradale, the 575M and the 456M GT are available and all current production Porsches, including the 4x4 Cayenne Turbo, which is a cross between a Range Rover and a racing car.

In addition, there are three Bentleys, including the incredibly fast Continental GT; Aston Martins, a Lamborghini, a Maserati, Noble, AC Cobra, Caterham and various others. The cars are changed at least once a year and arrive looking immaculate, inside and out. An Aston Martin DB9 is due to arrive soon, as is the Porsche 997 Carrera S, and even more exciting, the fastest of them all, the amazing Ford GT, of which only 28 will be available in the UK.

The cars can be picked up from P1's HQ near Leatherhead or a garage in the West End of London. Alternatively, for a modest charge, they can be delivered to my home.

There are other excitements available. I can go to a motor racing track in France with Damon and drive Formula 1 cars, or to Goodwood and drive some of the club cars.



Outings are arranged to events such as the Monaco Grand Prix, Le Mans and the Goodwood Festival of Speed, and there are regular meetings in London for a chat and a drink. Damon will also arrange a special deal on hiring a private jet or a yacht in the Mediterranean. My bank manager might have to be consulted before I take up some of these offers but it is always nice to dream.

Amanda, my child bride, is allowed to drive whatever I take out, but is somewhat unenthusiastic. She has been heard to mutter that it would be preferable for me to spend the money replacing her rather ancient car. She may have a point and one that will have to be considered at an appropriate moment.

Luckily I have a keen supporter in the form of my eight-year-old grandson Hugh. When I had the pleasure of his company in one of the Porsches the other day I told him to read the "speed" off the rev counter, and was pleased when he reported to his mother that we had done 200mph up the drive. I also caused amazement on a moor in Cumbria by turning up not in the old diesel estate but a new, gleaming Range Rover borrowed for two days.

Like all good ideas, this one is being replicated in other countries, but I doubt that anyone will do it with the style and flair of Damon and his team. I hope that I will be asked to renew my membership at the end of my year. ■



PI Club membership

Enquiries Joanne Foot, tel 01372 374400.

Website www.piinternational.com.

Membership places released in line with expansion of fleet. There are two types of membership: **Monaco** joining fee £2,500, annual fee £12,500, average driving days 70; **Silverstone** joining fee £2,500, annual fee £10,000, average driving days 50.

Anyone can apply. All applicants are interviewed regarding their insurance history and the variety of cars they have owned and driven. The club is currently taking between five and 10 new members a month. Capacity is 250 and only 35 places remain. When capacity is reached, a waiting list will be started. The club operates only in the UK but

there is potential for expansion abroad. The majority of members are British; a small number of members use the club when they travel to the UK on business. Members have use of the club's Marquis Jet Card.

What the PI cars would cost you

Porsche 4x4 Cayenne Turbo £70,700 (2005 price), 997 Carrera S £65,000, tel 08457 911911.

Bentley Continental GT £112,750, tel 01270 255155.

Aston Martin DB9 £106,000, DB9 Volante £115,000, tel 01908 610620.

Ford GT US\$140,000 (sterling price not available until launched in UK), tel 01277 253000 (head office).

Noble M14 £75,000 (guide price, exact price to be announced), tel 01455 844052.

Caterham: Roadsport SV £16,995, tel 01883 333 700.

Lamborghini Murcielago £170,000, Gallardo £117,000, tel 020 7589 1472.

Maserati Coupé £56,650, tel 01753 878700.

Ferrari 360 Challenge Stradale £135,475, 575 M £156,700 (manual), tel 020 7341 6300 (HR Owen).

AC Cobra 289 V8 £44,950 (carbon fibre), tel 0870 4580966.