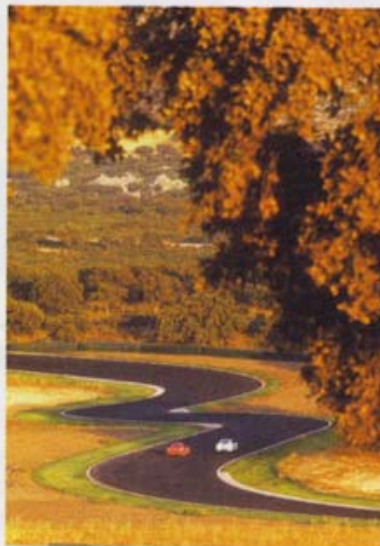


# A Country Club for Car Guys

AT THE RECENT LAUNCH OF the world's first high-octane hotel near Malaga in Spain, former F1 and Superbike champs Damon Hill and Carl Fogarty were blindfolded then driven through a hidden valley to a place where a motto of "trees with tarmac, relaxation with exhilaration, ying with yang" is meant to indulge the passion of rich petrolheads for speed and exclusivity.

Dutchman Klaas Zwart says the cloak-and-dagger act is designed to further the image of exclusivity at Race Resort Ascari, an \$80 million complex in the once bandit-run hinterland of the Costa del Sol. Zwart envisions the five-star palace as an oasis where the rich and famous can race their toys while their wives and girlfriends lounge by the pool. The resort's three-mile track, built to FIA standards, is for those who own a supercar, or who want to drive one very, very fast. In addition, there is a clubhouse and plans for a cinema on the premises as well.

"We want the right sort of people here," says Zwart, whose idea



is a sort of Neverland for car nuts. At \$800 a night, that shouldn't be a problem, as the smell of the black American Express cards in the lobby should be enough to scare the riffraff off.

Zwart will provide a stable of cars for his celebrity guests, from his own 200-mph Ascari KZ1 to a Michael Schumacher F1 Benetton from the 1990s. Indulging in such machinery could take the rate up to \$20,000 a day, not a problem for

the people Zwart is courting, who include European royalty and rock stars. For those not entirely confident in their driving abilities, there will also be a race academy on site.

A racer of historic F1 cars, Zwart knows his traction control from his torsion bars, and has encompassed some of his favorite bends into the design of his track. The Eau Rouge is there, as is the Paddock Hill Bend.

"Driving an F1 car is better than anything I can imagine," grins Zwart. "I don't understand why more people don't do it."

The hotel, not yet completed, is in the heart of the Sierra de Las Nieves, which was recently declared a Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO. Race Resort Ascari claims it will leave the landscape and flora and fauna intact, and will plant new trees.

This is the way to go, Zwart says. "Where else are people going to be able to drive their supercars the way they should be driven?" he asks. If nothing else, Race Resort Ascari will give Zwart a place to play with his toys. —JEREMY HART

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For details on this vehicle expo visit [autoshowusa.com/sandiego](http://autoshowusa.com/sandiego).

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## LONDON CABS IN THE USA

### FOR HAPLESS CITIZENS

Stateside, catching a cab usually means cramming into the back seat of crumbling Caprices or rickety Crown Vics.

London Taxis of North America is looking to change all that. After three years in development, the company—with the full backing of London Taxis International in Coventry, England—has begun delivery of the famous cabs in all their beloved black and boxy glory to cities across the United States.

"We have 120 cabs pre-sold," says CEO Larry Smith. "We are looking to import 600 vehicles next year and up to 3000 by 2005."

That might sound like a lofty goal, but a tour of company

headquarters in Sudbury, Massachusetts, proves London Taxis of North America is the real deal. Dozens of cabs are lined up, along with vast amounts of spare parts, all waiting to be unleashed upon North American roads. London cabs are already on duty in Boston, Chicago, Detroit, New York, San Francisco, Toronto and Washington, D.C.

The cabs are converted to left-hand drive at the international plant in England. Smith says Ford Motor Co. has partnered with London Taxis of North America to provide engine modifications to meet emissions standards in all 50 states.

The 2.4-liter Ford turbodiesel under the hood is a torquey lump,

but what truly amazes is the cab's turning radius. It can turn on a dime, and give you change back. The back seat offers acres of room, along with a jump seat, built-in wheelchair ramp, intercom, separate temperature controls and numerous grab handles.

Quality doesn't come cheap, even in a cab. Standard London

cabs start around \$40,000; figure an average service life of 500,000 miles-plus, though, and a London black cab is a solid long-term investment.

Brace yourself, America, for a British invasion of the four-wheeled variety in the near future.

—NICK KURCZEWSKI

