

# Automobiles

Antique and Classic Cars, Automobiles, Vans, Sport Utility Vehicles, Trucks, Tractors, Trailers, Buses, Motorcycles, Motor Homes, Recreational Vehicles

## Membership Has Its Driving Privileges: Sharing Classics From Econoboxes to Exotics

Members of the Classic Car Club in Britain pay about \$5,700 for their first year, entitling them to 750 points that can be used to borrow cars from the club's collection. The number of points deducted depends on several

factors, including the month and day the car is driven, but one important factor is the desirability of the model. For instance, the London club groups its 40-some cars into six "bands," with Band 6 the most desirable. Using a

Ferrari 328 GTBi on a Saturday in July might cost a member 96 points, compared with 12 points on a weekday in December. Here is a sampling of the London club's cars and how they are ranked.



1973 Morris Oxford  
1991 Mini Cooper S 1.3i  
1968 Morris Minor  
1974 BMW 2002



1990 Toyota MR2  
1977 VW Beetle convertible  
1968 Lancia Fulvia  
1961 Austin-Healey Sprite



1979 Fiat 124 Spider  
1959 Sunbeam Alpine  
1967 Jaguar 420G  
1973 MGB roadster



1965 Mercedes-Benz 220 SE  
1972 Triumph Stag  
1968 Daimler 250 V-8  
1990 Jaguar XJ-S



1971 Jensen Interceptor  
1963 Jaguar MkII  
1969 Porsche 911 Cabriolet  
1987 Bentley Eight



1988 Ferrari 328 GTBi  
1974 Jaguar E-Type V-12 roadster  
1985 Ferrari 308 GTSi QV  
1991 Aston Martin Virage

The New York Times

## Old-Car Itch? Here's a Club To Scratch It

By NICK KURCZEWSKI

**O**WNING a vintage car in a big city is like having a pet elephant: the novelty value is undeniable, but where do you keep the beast? And how do you pay the mounting bills for truckloads of hay and barrels of peanuts—or for piston rings?

In Britain, two brothers who are car buffs gave the matter some thought and came up with a solution, a club that lets urban enthusiasts experience the thrills of driving vintage cars without the aggravations of owning, storing, maintaining and insuring them.

A member of the Classic Car Club simply checks out, for a day or a weekend, one of the dozens of classic and sports cars that the club maintains and garages in the city. After a summer Sunday in a raffish MGB, a member can sample an E-Type Jaguar or move on to a Rolls-Royce Mulliner Park Ward—all for a single annual fee.

The concept, which spread from London to five other British cities, is due to cross the Atlantic: a New York City franchise is to open next year. Other branches are planned for Atlanta; Baltimore-Washington; Boston; Los Angeles; and Princeton, N.J. The club is looking at other cities as well.

The club was begun in 1995 by Phil Kavanagh and his brother, David, then in their 20's, who had become frustrated by what they perceived as age discrimination by banks. Often, they said, young people were denied loans to buy the older cars they loved.



Jonathan Player for The New York Times

"We wondered how we could develop a system to allow people to drive cool cars," Phil Kavanagh said in a recent telephone interview from London. "So we put the plan together and developed the points system."

That system is the bedrock of the club's operation, providing an efficient capitalist solution to thorny questions about which members can drive the most desirable cars on the most sought-after dates. Essentially each member receives an equal number of points that he or she can cash in as desired. The best cars and the most popular driving times command a premium.

When the club began, in London, it had three dozen members and 10 cars. After six months as a modest success, a long article

about the club in The Sunday Times prompted a flurry of interest. More publicity followed, and both the membership rolls and the auto fleet multiplied several times over. The London club now has more than 40 cars, about 500 members and a waiting list.

As the club flourished, queries arrived from other British cities. The Kavanaghs (David later left the business) sold franchises for Bath, Birmingham, Edinburgh, Manchester and Woking.

While it is possible to rent classic and exotic cars in Britain, as in the United States, the Classic Car Club offers some advantages, including the camaraderie nurtured through organized driving events, a membership committee and informal monthly get-togethers. A newsletter and a Web site—www.classiccarclub.co.uk—let members know when cars are added to the fleet.

Glen Waddington, features editor of Thoroughbred & Classic Cars, a British enthusi-

Members of the Classic Car Club in London can make a date with one of dozens of classic automobiles. Nick Pipping, left, and Chris Wilkinson check out a Jaguar E-Type.

### AROUND THE BLOCK

## Topless, but Not Toothless



**TESTED:** 2005 Mini Cooper S convertible  
**WHAT IS IT?** A drop-top version of BMW's stylish and sporty small car.

**HOW MUCH?** \$24,950; as tested, \$28,170.

**WHAT'S UNDER THE HOOD?** Supercharged 1.6-liter in-line 4.

**HOW THIRSTY?** E.P.A. rating: 25 m.p.g. town, 32 highway; 24.5 m.p.g. observed.

**WHAT ELSE IS THIS MUCH FUN?** Honda S2000, Lotus Elise, Mazda Miata.

**EVERY** once in a while, I encounter a car so fun to drive that it demands I do stupid things, as if the remote clicker unlocks not only the doors, but also my inner adolescent. Before my rational side can intervene, I am

throwing the car around corners, traveling at illegal speeds and shirking responsibilities to take impromptu drives.

If you think this sounds more like ad copy than criticism, I would agree—but the convertible Mini Cooper S is really that good. Blasting around in this little rocketship, with its exceptionally firm suspension, immediate steering and lack of rooftop encumbrance is in the same category of fun as piloting a Mazda Miata or a Lotus Elise, two of the most exceptional sports cars on the market.

BMW also offers a drop-top version of the standard Mini Cooper, which sells for \$3,450 less but lacks the punch of the S's supercharged 168-horsepower engine.

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## A Club Scratches the Old-Car Itch

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ast magazine, is familiar with the club and has met many members. "It's not purely a car rental company or entirely an owners' club," he said, but a clever combination. Joining the club, he added, is "certainly less of a risk than investing in one classic and finding out you don't like it."

Membership begins with a character reference and a review of the applicant's driving record. In Britain, the annual membership charge is £2,600 plus a £300 initiation fee, or a total of about \$5,700. The annual charge covers vehicle maintenance and storage, insurance, emergency road service and unlimited mileage.

With a basic membership, the member starts the year with 750 points that he or she can trade for time in cars. The amount of points deducted depends on a variety of factors, including the value of the car and the month, day of the week and number of days the car is used. The cars are ranked on desirability and grouped into six "bands," from the likes of a Morris Minor in Band 1 to valuable Ferraris in Band 6.

The system works this way: A Band 6 car like a Ferrari 348 costs 6 points. Driving it on a Saturday would multiply the cost by 4 points, to 24. Checking out the car in a high-demand month like July would multiply that amount by another 4 points, for a total deduction of 96 points. Driving the same 6-point car on a

weekday (multiplied by 1) in December (multiplied by 2) would cost only 12 points.

Mr. Kavanagh says the system encourages members to try a variety of cars, and they confirm this, Nick Pipping, who joined five years ago, said, "You discover all sorts of cars you never thought about."

Mr. Pipping, a 45-year-old executive with a London employment firm, said that although he could have afforded to buy a classic, he could not make up his mind about what to get. "Personally I prefer this," he said.

While many members in London are professional men aged 30 to 45, the clubs are becoming more diverse. "We have retired couples, we have gay couples and quite a lot of single women are getting into the club now," Mr. Kavanagh said. A few celebrities have joined, including Jamie Oliver, television's Naked Chef. (His Islington restaurant, Fifteen, is across the street from the London club.)

Can the London camaraderie survive a move across the Atlantic? Chris Braun, a protégé of Mr. Kavanagh who owns the rights to establish clubs in North America, says it will.

Still, the intricacies of setting up American operations were more daunting than the club imagined. Each state's rules pose challenges and increase the paperwork.

The New York franchise is held by Zac Moseley, known for designing the lighting in hip New York clubs and restaurants, who was intrigued by a program about the club that he saw on a flight to London. Other investors in New York are Mr. Braun and Michael Prichinello of the Modern Message public relations firm.

Branches are free to buy anything they wish, but Mr. Kavanagh offers advice, including a list of "must have cars": Porsche 911, Series III Jaguar E-Type, Ferrari 308 and 328.

Mr. Kavanagh and Mr. Braun agree that the American market offers a chance to match a branch's cars to regional preferences. The New York City club could have some sporty city cars like the original Mini Cooper. Other clubs might favor 1960's muscle machines.

Mr. Kavanagh plans to encourage the American branches to offer options like the "City Car Club" that has proved popular in London. For an extra fee, members have access to a separate fleet of sporty modern cars like the Porsche Boxster and Subaru WRX. As in Britain, membership in one branch would entitle a member to use club cars in other cities, though the necessary points would be bought separately.

While the basic structure will not change, membership charges haven't been set; because of American insurance costs, fees are likely to be slightly higher than in Britain.