



## Fleet dreams

**Thinking of a Porsche? Mercedes? Maserati? Why choose just one? Through Edmond Helstab's new luxury auto club, you can have them all.**

You loved your car when you drove it off the lot, but your lease isn't up for another 18 months and you're ready for a change. You spend half the year in Florida and you only need a vehicle for a few months while you're home in Canada. You love driving your SUV in the winter, but wouldn't it be nice to have a little convertible for the warm weather? You dream of driving a Porsche or Mercedes-Benz or Maserati, or all three ...

DreamFleet could be for you.

Edmund Helstab, the Ottawa man behind this "automobile lifestyle club," says he wants to cater to the ardent automobilist's desire for the freedom to choose the premium vehicle of his or her dreams. Choose and change to suit your needs. A different car for a different season. A Jaguar or a Land Rover, a Lexus or a Smart, a Mini, a Volvo, an Audi.

Mr. Helstab's DreamFleet concept, officially launched in Toronto at the end of May, has attracted a couple of dozen members so far. For a membership fee of at least \$500 and an additional leasing cost on top of what a normal 36-month lease for such a vehicle would cost, a DreamFleet participant can eliminate the hassles of leasing, switch vehicles at pre-arranged times, and even meet other members at social events at wineries and golf clubs.

## **Program expected to take off**

That's partly what attracted 56-year-old Jean McKen of Toronto.

"It's not just the car. It's got a club feel to it ... meeting other people who have a similar interest in cars, and perhaps even networking a bit." But mostly Ms. McKen was smitten with the idea of "somebody else looking after all the headaches of acquiring a car. "I just tell Edmund what I want and he shows up with the car and the keys."

As a music technology consultant who makes the rounds of schools in and around Toronto, sometimes an hour's drive away, Ms. McKen really only needs a car for six months of the year. "I'm looking at the Audi A3," she says. "I'm not in the income bracket where I can go out there and buy an expensive car, and I don't want to go out on a limb financially. This is perfect for me. The Audi A3 is a beautiful car, spacious but not big, and it's got the feel of a sports car."

For Mr. Helstab, 50, a graduate of Carleton University, the luxury auto club concept grew out of a lifelong passion for cars. Growing up literally above his family's Volkswagen dealership, Mr. Helstab had access to demonstrators and company vehicles he could drive on a whim. "I was very much into the German car genre," Mr. Helstab confesses. "Mostly the Porsches, and Audi had some very interesting cars." His first car was a classic 1965 Porsche 356C. Today he and his family drive a Honda Odyssey minivan, a Honda Accord and a convertible Saab.

"The notion of having the flexibility to drive a variety of cars has stuck with me. Ten or 15 years ago, I had a scheme to do something like (DreamFleet) that would be affordable." When Mr. Helstab was laid off from Nortel a year and a half ago, he revisited the concept. While he searched for another position with a corporation, he kept thinking how he might bring his luxury auto club idea to fruition. "I got more and more possessed by the idea. I ended up getting deeper and deeper into it. I became totally absorbed."

While the concept itself is straightforward, he found the realities of dealing with the established automotive industry challenging. He negotiated with four dealer groups, covering some 10 brands of automobiles, dealt with marketing and public relations consultants, branding experts and a copywriter, and set up a website ([www.dreamfleet.com](http://www.dreamfleet.com)).

He expects his program to take off by October as he is able to match up subscribers with the cars of their dreams. "We're in the startup phase now. It takes time. And while the bulk of the operation is in the Toronto area, where our associated dealers are, we have three members in Ottawa so far and there is a very strong demand out of Montreal."