

Driving a dream Luxury wheels for all seasons

If you've ever dreamed of driving two radically different vehicles, but can only afford one, a solution has arrived.

A new program called DreamFleet allows motorists to drive a convertible in the summer and an SUV in the winter or make other swaps to provide a variety of vehicles over the term of a lease. "You can choose the ideal vehicle for the season," said Edmond Helstab, founder and president of DreamFleet. The service also allows snowbirds who winter in Florida to lease a vehicle for only six months, instead of paying for a full year.

As the son of a Volkswagen dealer, Helstab grew up driving various vehicles off his family's lot. "I drove what I wanted when I wanted," he recalls. The idea lingered with him and he's tried to capture that free-wheeling spirit with DreamFleet.

STAR LINEUP

Some of the cars in the DreamFleet lineup include a Mercedes-Benz CL55AMG, a BMW M3 convertible, a BMW 650i, an Audi A4 and Lexus RX350. DreamFleet's collection will expand according to the tastes of its members. The firm claims that virtually any make or model of vehicle is available. Special pricing terms are offered with dealers representing Acura, Audi, BMW, Jaguar, Land Rover, Lexus, Mercedes-Benz, Mini, Smart, Volkswagen and Volvo.

The club is designed to appeal to luxury brand enthusiasts and Helstab said most members are opting to lease cars in the \$60,000 to \$100,000 range. "This is a very select group of people, kind of a creme de la creme," said Helstab. "They have money, they like cars and they like changing cars regularly."

DreamFleet is operating in the greater Toronto area, as well as Ottawa, although Helstab hopes to eventually expand it to Montreal, Vancouver and Calgary.

MEMBERSHIP FEE

Motorists will pay a membership fee ranging \$500 to \$1,750 to join DreamFleet (after an introductory price special of \$300 or \$1,000 expires). Members then are charged a premium of \$60 to \$100 a month, on top of their regular lease payments.

The club already has about 20 members and Helstab hopes to expand it to 50 by the end of the year. He admits that DreamFleet is a niche concept and won't put a huge dent in the business of mass-market leasing companies. Yet he believes it serves an important segment of motorists whose needs have been largely overlooked.

"Consumers should not be forced to fit in the same vehicle for years, particularly as the seasons change or their lifestyle needs evolve," said Helstab.