

## DARE TO DREAM LEASE



Edmond Helstab, DreamFleet's passionate president.

**A**re you promiscuous? Do you prefer playing the field? Do you have commitment issues?

If this describes your social life, and it's getting you in trouble, then you better talk to Doctor Phil, or a pharmacist. If this describes your automotive inclinations, then read on, because your ship may just have arrived, in the form of a new Canadian company and idea called DreamFleet.

DreamFleet is the brainchild of its passionate president, Edmond Helstab, who literally grew up around automobiles. In 1952, his father established one of the first Volkswagen franchises in Canada, and over time the operation added Audi and Porsche lines. Edmond's first car was a not-too-shabby 1965 Porsche 356C. Over the years, Edmond was exposed to many facets of operating a dealership, and many different kinds of vehicles.

The family has since sold the business, and Edmond has been working as a successful industrial designer, but one aspect of the dealership ownership experience always stuck with him — the very cool privilege of driving what you want, when you want, with hassle-free convenience.

He figured he was not alone in wanting a more diversified and enriched automobile experience than currently offered by anyone in the traditional leasing industry. People of his ilk lease the cars they want, said Edmond, but often “get itchy” to try other ones and just-introduced models, well before it's time to turn in their current ride. It's no secret that some traditional leasing companies

don't like consumers opting out of their leases mid-stream. They tend to view these drivers as minor felons, and consequently make the transaction as painful as a two-hour actuary exam.

So Edmond figured there was a demand out there for a completely different — and fun — way for people to get in and out of vehicles.

At the launch party, held this past May in Toronto's fashionable Distillery District, Edmond outlined, in a Power Point presentation, the broad points of the DreamFleet concept:

- Operates as a club, with initiation fees from \$500 to \$1,750. Members select the program that best suits their needs and wants;
- A Collection Program allows members to drive a different vehicle every year, or every year and a half;
- A Seasonal Program allows members to drive one vehicle for the summer, and switch to a different one for the winter;
- An Occasional Program allows members to drive a vehicle only when they want it (a convertible, for example, for six months of the year, while they winter in Florida);
- A Release Program allows members to reserve their next exceptional vehicle (new or upcoming);
- Monthly lease rates are only a small premium over standard lease plans;
- Designed primarily for people who view vehicles as more than mere transportation. To these folk, vehicles bring enjoyment and make a statement about who they are.

DreamFleet members are 100 percent responsible for determining which vehicles are in the

club. They put in their requests, and then Edmond goes off to make it work. When a group of vehicles can be matched satisfactorily to a set of drivers, they are presented at an exclusive and swanky launch event. When it comes time to switch their vehicles, they do so at another club event.

For this first go-around, there has been a high preponderance of requests for upscale iron from BMW, Audi, and Mercedes. (Though someone has a hankering to get behind the wheel of a Bentley Continental GT.)

It would seem that the main problem of matching, would be that everyone wants the summer-type cars in summer and the winter-type cars in winter. While that is the case, Edmond says this scenario also presents some benefits. (This guy is nothing if not positive.)

His main tool for sorting out the summer/winter conundrum is pricing — offering a discounted price on the off-season vehicle, and charging a premium for the in-season vehicle. According to Edmond, there's a price out there that makes sense for every situation — it just has to be found. It's that supply and demand thing. As such, a member will “benefit” by being able to lease a very desirable vehicle at a reduced rate (if he takes it off-season). There is also the option of moving a convertible for example, to Florida for the winter, for someone who is staying there for the season.

Edmond estimates he'll ultimately have about 500 to 600 members in the DreamFleet club across Canada. But, like any club, they have to be the “right” people. Boy racer types are not encouraged to join. Membership fees are there in part to sort out the wheat from the chaff, and to ensure there's a clientele that will treat the vehicles with respect.

The club aspect is further enshrined by offering members special access, privileges and social events with other firms catering to the “good life,” such as a boutique winery in Niagara (Tawse), and a travel agency that specializes in exotic-car vacations (DrivenTravel).

Edmond says the concept is very much an “urban play.” A downtown resident with a single parking spot, but with a penchant for different vehicles, would obviously be a prime DreamFleet candidate. As such, the next markets DreamFleet will look at are in Montreal, Calgary and Vancouver.

Edmond, a certified “car guy,” has been thinking about this concept for about 15 years. It's no longer just a dream, but an actual company, with actual customers. Once again he's proven that it pays to dream.

For more information check out the website at [www.dreamfleet.com](http://www.dreamfleet.com). **WW**

**MICHAEL GOETZ**