

For those who want to avoid the inconvenience and commitment of total ownership, fast cars, planes and now boats can be owned in part. The basic proposition is always the same: all the utility and pizzazz of bespoke living is available as and when required – at a fraction of the hassle that would come with owning them outright.

For a growing number of businessmen and women who don't keep cars in London, or who have young children and want a break from the sensible family saloon, a prepaid card scheme, launched two years ago by the innovative London firm *écurie25*, provides just the solution. Currently with a stable of 13 supercars, the company offers its 100 members a beefy £1.3 million-worth of motoring muscle, including a Bentley Continental, a Lamborghini Murcielago, a Ferrari F430 Spider, an Aston Martin Vantage, a Porsche Cayman and a TVR Sagaris.

Everyone pays a £750 joining fee and there are three point-buying options. Thereafter, for £8,450 a year, top-option owners have up to 5000 miles and typically 36 days in the year to play with the supercar of their choice. The lowest option, £4,750, gives 2,000 miles and half the points of the top option. Different cars at different times consume different quantities of points.

Based in the City of London, with plans for more vehicles and West End premises (closer to where most of the hedge funds live), *écurie25* can also deliver vehicles further afield. 'We have shipped a Lamborghini Murcielago over to Monaco for someone,' says Heathcote. Another member is such an avid user that he went through four of the top option deals in a single year.

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Cars can be advance-booked, but club members receive Friday SMS and email messages, telling them what sleek supercars are still available for the weekend – a perfect set up if you fancy a short-notice bit of play after a hard week at work. The economics of this sort of motoring stack up well, too. 'The annual cost of actually owning, servicing and running a Lamborghini for 5,000 miles works out at £30,000, so we think we offer outstanding value,' says Heathcote.

Something for the WEEKEND?

Fractional ownership gives you all the advantages of owning a stable of super cars without any of the hassle.

Fractional ownership of luxury transport offers all the pleasure of possession and use at a fraction of the inconvenience and cost of outright ownership. **Nigel Ash** looks at some of the options.

Planes are perfect candidates for fractional ownership, as their upkeep can be time consuming and expensive.

Flights of fancy

If you are planning on travelling a little further afield, fractional plane ownership may be for you. The four largest fractional aircraft operators, Warren Buffett's NetJets, the market leader, followed by Flexjet (part of planemakers Bombardier), Flight Options (Ratheon) and Cessna's CitationShares, saw their operations boom in the mid-1990s as companies looked to exploit flexible air transport without the considerable overheads of their own corporate jet.

Some individuals also bought into these deals, which were typically for an eighth or a 16th of an aircraft plus a monthly service charge

Until fractional ownership, the only alternative to the serious business of buying, maintaining, crewing and operating your own aircraft was the air charter business. A handful of suppliers offered their planes to anyone who booked them. Regular customers might enjoy some precedence, but there were no guarantees. Service levels tended towards the rough and ready and VIP treatment was something of an extra.

With what is essentially a taxi service, the problem with ad hoc air chartering is the same as it is with cabs the world over: you can never find one when you really need it. Meanwhile, the problem for charterers

has always been that, unlike the fractional sellers, they could not fund their investment in new aircraft up-front.

The arrival of the advance-purchase charter flight card gives the charterers cash flow and

THE ADVANCE-PURCHASE FLIGHT CARD GIVES CHARTERERS CASH FLOW AND INVESTMENT CAPITAL.

and operating costs. Unfortunately, a slump in aircraft values five years ago, coupled with higher running charges and less-than-anticipated usage, caused many corporate fractional flyers to pull out.

Private individuals comprise less than 10% of fractional flying, but, as one analyst points out, there is the occasional ambiguity. For example, company owners have been known to charge the aircraft fraction to the company, while themselves being the main users – a classic case of combining business with pleasure.

investment capital. However, in return they can offer their cardholders guaranteed access to the aircraft and journeys of their choice.

AirPartner has developed the JetCard with four price options covering six-seater (€123,000) to 14-seater jets (€426,000) which provide a minimum of 25 prepaid flights. There is also a standard hourly rate, ranging from €4,920 to €17,040, calculated from takeoff to landing with six minutes taxiing time at either end. JetCard holders face no other expense and get a 15% discount if making a round trip. Concierge and

limo services are extra but are no longer exceptional items.

Generally, no more than 24 hours' notice is needed to get JetCard customers in the air. This guaranteed service, however, is only available in Europe, the US, Mexico and the Caribbean. AirPartner speaks of bespoke arrangements for the rest of the world.

Floating fun

Yacht ownership is perhaps the greatest status symbol there is, but a market survey last year showed that superyacht owners spend, on average, only two weeks a year onboard their vessels. This is leading some in the industry to question whether the hassle of owning and maintaining the asset is worth it for the fleeting pleasure it offers.

Indeed, if what one Dutch yacht broker tells me is correct, and super-wealthy boaters tend to tire of their floating palaces almost as quickly as they do of their highly paid crews, fractional ownership seems a fine way to build in change while controlling costs.

The concept is currently taking off in Miami, with pioneers such as American Yacht Share selling eighth shares in six vessels and charging monthly management fees in return for 60 days' use of one or other of the boats.

For any of these services, of course, it is worth making sure you are getting good value. As one wealth manager warns, 'There has sometimes been a tendency for providers of these services to load charges, perhaps on the basis that big hitters will not notice. This has been particularly true of the aviation market, where corporate customers have sometimes been less than careful about unadvertised costs.'

But probably the main overhead for headache-free hedonism is careful planning. All you need to know is which fractionally owned service you want and when you want it, and then sit back and enjoy the freedom of the roads, or skies, or seas... ■



Unless you go sailing regularly, the effort of mooring and maintaining a boat easily outweighs the benefits.

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