

A car for the day or an outfit for a special occasion doesn't have to break the bank

THE housing slump is encouraging increasing numbers to rent instead. But it's not just your home you can rent. You can now hire a range of life's luxuries — and some necessities — whether it be a handbag, car or television. ROSANNA SPERO looks at what's available.

CARS

WITH the rapidly increasing cost of running a car, it can make sense to hire one instead, especially if you are only going to use it occasionally.

There are two types of car club: those that let you hire a runaround such as a VW Golf or Citroen Picasso for as little as half an hour; or those that will rent a top-end car, such as a Bentley, Aston Martin or Ferrari, for days or weeks at a time.

For city-dwellers, car clubs such as City Car Club, Zipcar, WhizzGo and Streetcar offer a low-cost alternative to owning. Membership is typically £49.50 a year. City Car Club has a £75 one-off joining fee.

You then either pay as you drive — from just £4.75 an hour or less than £50 for a day — or pay a monthly fee, giving you a set number of driving hours.

The benefit is that there are none of the associated costs of running a car — depreciation, insurance, maintenance. Even a certain amount of petrol is included.

But you do have to fit the club's insurance conditions. Zipcar, for example, will not cover anyone who has had two or more accidents or driving fines in the past three years.

Check the level of insurance — whether it is fully comprehensive (this is best), whether breakdown cover is included, whether you are liable for the Congestion Charge in London and the excess — the first part of any claim you have to pay. This is usually £500.

According to the RAC Cost Of Motoring Survey, the annual cost of running a Citroen C2, a typical size car used by car clubs, is £3,459 (£66 a week). This takes into account the finance costs, depreciation, insurance, fuel and maintenance costs. A Toyota Prius — also used by several clubs — would cost £6,288 (£120 a week).

This compares, for example, with £74.25 for a weekend's use of a hybrid car in London through City Car Club, and £67.50 to hire a standard car for the weekend in Norwich.

At the top end of the scale, car clubs such as Marques II, P1 and Ecurie25 let you drive more luxurious cars without the high cost of ownership.

You will be charged a joining fee and annual fee, which buys you a number of points each year. The cost of hiring, using the points, is based on which car and when you want it.

Ecurie25, for example, charges a £1,500 joining fee and £9,995 a year; while P1 has a joining fee of £2,500 and two levels of membership, £12,500 or £14,500 a year, which give between 50 and 70 driving days a year and up to 6,000 miles, depending on the level chosen.

Flora Heathcote, marketing director of Ecurie25, says: 'Many of our members have owned high-performance cars before but don't want the costs associated with owning them.'

An Aston Martin Vantage Roadster, worth £105,000 new, could be hired almost once a week under its points system. But check the insurance details. Ecurie25 has a standard excess of £3,000 to £5,000 — depending on the car — for major damage or theft.

You are expected to pay the full cost of any minor bumps or scrapes. But you can pay £625 a year and have the excess halved.

HANDBAGS

IF YOU'RE after the perfect designer handbag but don't want to splash out on buying one, you could hire one instead.

For example, Fashion Hire (www.fashion-hire.co.uk) charges from £60 a year for membership, plus between £20 and £120 a month a bag, depending on the

style. Or you can choose silver or gold membership, costing £90 or £135 respectively, which come with either one or two bags a month.

Rival firm www.be-a-fashionista.co.uk charges from £29.95 to £99.95 a month, depending on how new the model is. The most fashionable bags have a monthly charge on top.

Another supplier, www.handbagsfromheaven.co.uk, offers membership at £9.99 a month, plus a rental charge on bags. Alternatively, bags can be hired as required at a higher charge. For example, a Chloe Paddington bag costs £78 a month to rent, but would cost £792 to buy; while the

Jimmy Choo Rock bag would again cost £78 a month to hire, but £995 to buy.

However, losing or damaging the bag could be expensive. Fashion Hire expects you to claim on your insurance if you lose or badly damage one of its bags (it offers insurance for light wear and tear). Be A Fashionista will charge from £150 up to market value for lost or damaged handbags.

TELEVISIONS

IT SOUNDS like a throwback to the Sixties, but it is still possible to rent a TV. Although you can buy a

TV or DVD player for less than £100 these days, it can cost thousands of pounds to buy a state-of-the-art system.

Renting lets you change the screen as new technology becomes available and have access to a free repair or replacement service for just £3 a month.

Firms such as Boxclever, Martin Dawes and www.rentaldealz.co.uk let you choose from a range of deals, from stand-alone TVs to full home cinema rental.

Check the insurance — whether you have to tell your insurer or buy cover with the package. Also check the length of the contract you must sign. Boxclever, for example,

has an 18-month contract and only customers of 12 months' standing can hire a new TV. New customers can hire only reconditioned ones.

Check the value, too. Martin Dawes charges £42.99 a month to rent a Samsung LE32R87, but it is on sale online from Dixons (www.dixons.co.uk) for £419.99.

APPLIANCES

ON THE more mundane side, you can rent fridges, freezers, washing machines and tumble-dryers from companies such as Boxclever, Martin Dawes and Dial-a-TV. Again, there is a free repair

or replacement service. Prices depend on the make and model, and some offer a rent-to-own price as well.

For example, Dial-a-TV lets you rent a Hotpoint 1400 washing machine for £4.60 a week (minimum 12-month contract) or rent-to-own for £5.06 a week.

You have to sign up for 17 months and the machine becomes yours after between 36 and 48 months, depending on whether it was new or refurbished.

You can upgrade and take out a new deal after 12 months.

A similar Hotpoint 1400 washing machine costs about £300, so beware — your £300 washing machine could end up costing you more than £1,000 if you have to pay for 48 months.

With these firms, the more appliances you rent, the cheaper the price.

WEDDING DAY

IF YOU want the marriage to last for ever but not the dress, then why not hire your wedding outfit?

For example, Moira Brown Bridal will rent a wedding dress plus the accessories for £100 to £225, with a £50 to £75 refundable deposit. The company is based near Glasgow, but dresses can be posted throughout the UK.

House of Couture and New Beginnings, both in Essex, let you hire a wedding dress for half its sale value if new, or less if it has been worn. You can also hire outfits for the bride's mother and bridesmaids. Enchanted Evenings hires out dresses for about half their sale price.

Grooms, too, can hire their wedding outfits. The Hire Society rents out a full morning suit with top hat and gloves for about £100 — against the equivalent purchase price of about £400.

Moss Bros Hire's morning suit rental prices start at £79 — £94 with top hat — or dinner jackets and highland outfits from £75.

EVENING WEAR AND JEWELLERY

IF YOU'VE got a school ball or work function, you can hire an evening dress.

London-based One Night Stand hires dresses from £85 to £195. You can also rent gloves, wraps and matching jewellery for £10-plus.

Essex-based Ruby Slippers hires out evening dresses and accessories, too. Its dresses cost between £75 and £95 to hire, but £200 to £350 to buy. Tiaras and jewellery cost £10 to hire.

Nothing makes an outfit like the accessories, so why not hire your diamonds with your frock? D.A. Jewellery charges from £30 to £250 for three days' hire of pieces worth up to £7,000. You need to tell your insurer what you're hiring as it becomes your responsibility while you have it.

Miss Adela hires Mexican silver jewellery. A silver Caotica bracelet costs £164.90 to buy, but £40 to hire for a week.

You need to give a refundable deposit — in this case £50 — and you lose this if the item is damaged on return. If it is lost or stolen, you are liable for the full retail price.

WHAT ELSE IS FOR HIRE?

ART LAB rents out paintings for £15 a month for a picture worth up to £500. For £550 a month you can have up to 20 pieces of art worth up to £25,000.

You need to tell your insurer that you are renting the art, and will be expected to claim off this if a picture is stolen or damaged.



LIVING THE HIRE LIFE