

Join the Club



THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO drive down your motoring costs. You could buy a more fuel-efficient car, seek out a lower insurance premium, or even do your own servicing to save money. But there's a much more radical alternative – get rid of your car altogether.

Many people own a car that they use only occasionally, particularly if they live in town and have access to public transport on their doorstep. Some might use their car just for the odd trip to visit relatives in another part of the country, or when shopping for items too bulky to be carried on the bus. Others have a second car that for most of the week sits unused on the driveway.

The truth is that a car costs money to run, even when it's not being used. As well as road tax and insurance, MOT, servicing and repair, there's the hidden burden of depreciation. Add up all these expenses and a typical family car costs over £5000 a year to run.

But how can you dispense with your car if there are occasions when public transport just isn't a viable alternative? The answer for a growing number of people is the car users club. A car club of this kind lets you share access to a car with a group of other people. After handing over a small membership fee, you pay for the car only when you need to use it.

There are currently around 40 car users clubs in the UK, with a total of 10,000 members. Largest is CityCarClub, which has cars in Edinburgh, London, Bath, Bristol, Brighton & Hove, Lichfield, Huddersfield, Poole and Portsmouth.

The potential cost savings from joining such a club are attractive:



Car users clubs have dedicated parking spaces, so there's no need to hunt for a place to park
Photo: Carplus Trust

according to Carplus, a charity that promotes responsible car use, if your annual mileage is under 6000, then joining a car club could save you up to £1500 a year.

But financial savings aren't the only benefit – car clubs have strong environmental advantages over owning a car too. Research shows that once the link between car use and car ownership is broken people make changes in their travel behaviour. They use public transport more, and are more likely to walk or cycle. In the UK, drivers who give up their car to join a car club increase their use of non-car transport by 40%.

Some car clubs emphasise their environmental credentials

by running alternative fuel cars. CityCarClub includes bi-fuel lpg/petrol Vauxhall Astras on its fleet in Bristol, and City-Wheels in Swansea has an electric Smart car.

Car users clubs are popular with town planners who see them as a way to reduce urban congestion. Typically each car operated by a car club replaces six private cars, so fewer parking spaces are needed. Planners take advantage of this by encouraging housing developers to promote the use of a car club instead of providing parking spaces for residents. In Portsmouth, Berkeley Homes were granted permission for a 300-unit car-free development on the condition that residents had access to a car club.



Photo: ecurie25

Giving up your car sounds a drastic step to take. But a growing number of motorists are attracted by the financial and environmental benefits of joining a car users club instead of owning their own vehicle



How car use clubs work

When a club member needs to use a car they make a booking over the telephone or internet. Cars are located in designated parking bays. Streetcar, which runs cars in London, Brighton and Southampton, says that if one car is unavailable then another should be within five or ten minutes walking distance – it has, for instance, some 130 parking spots situated throughout the capital.

Once they have located their car, the member opens it using a smart card, enters a PIN number and is then free to drive away. The cost is calculated on an hourly rate, plus a fuel charge per mile. A typical charge at CityCarClub is £3.95 per hour plus 17 pence per mile for fuel. The total

cost is worked out automatically and members are sent a monthly bill.

Car club membership isn't restricted to private motorists – businesses may also make useful savings. Streetcar says it would save a company over £1750 compared with the cost of reimbursing an employee who uses their private car to drive from Leeds to London on business once a fortnight.

Drivers do need to have a

respectable driving record to join a car club. CityCarClub stipulates that drivers over 25 must have six or less points on their licence and not more than one accident in the last three years, while a 21-year-old is required to have a clean licence. There are few restrictions on how the car must be used, with business as well as private use permitted, though if you own a brace of Labradors you are out of luck – pets are not allowed in the car. 🐕

CONTACTS

Carplus	www.carplus.org.uk	Tel: 0113 234 9299
CityCarClub	www.citycarclub.co.uk	Tel: 0845 330 1234
écurie25	www.ecurie25.co.uk	Tel: 0207 1592543
Parc Ferme	www.parc-ferme.co.uk	Tel: 01784 470002
Streetcar	www.streetcar.co.uk	Tel: 0845 6448475

a supercar

Have you ever dreamt of owning a classic Jaguar E-type, or a state-of-the-art supercar like a Ferrari F430? For most of us such thoughts are destined to stay in the imagination, for a very good reason – money. It's not so much the 15mpg fuel costs or swingeing insurance premiums, which are at least predictable, but the thought of the hideous bills looming if – and when – that highly-strung machinery breaks down.

But there is a way to enjoy supercar motoring while letting someone else take the risks of ownership and maintenance. Supercar clubs give you access to the most coveted machinery for the payment of an annual fee. And best of all, you're not limited to a single car, but can ring the changes at will – a Ferrari this weekend, a Porsche the next.

At écurie25, for instance, (founder and MD Erik Fairbairn is an IAM member) members currently have 11 cars and some 4150bhp at their disposal. The stable of exotica includes a Lamborghini Murcielago, Bentley Continental GT, Ferrari F430 Spider, Porsche 911 Turbo and TVR Sagaris. In

return for their annual fee, members receive 600 points to trade for time in any supercar they choose. The cost in points of a car varies depending on the model and when it is required, with winter weekdays working out much cheaper than summer weekends. Typically, though, écurie25 says that a member can expect to enjoy 35 driving days in return for their annual fee.

Driving a 500bhp supercar demands skill and responsibility. Écurie25 – whose founder Erik Fairbairn is an IAM member – recognises this by making a day's driver training compulsory for members under the age of 30. All members need to have held a full UK driving licence for five years and have incurred a maximum of two minor traffic offences or one minor insurance claim within the last three years.

Membership of a supercar club like écurie25 isn't cheap – the annual fee is £7950, plus a one-off joining fee of £750. But compare this with the cost of fixing an engine meltdown in your own Ferrari, and it starts to look good value.

If you'd rather get behind the wheel of the type of car that you lusted after in your youth, then a classic car club such as Parc Ferme might be the answer. Its fleet includes such mouthwatering machinery as a 1972 Ferrari Dino, a 1953 MG TD, and a 1960 Jaguar Mk2.

Again, the annual membership fee buys an allocation of points which can be spent on various cars throughout the year. Cars can be borrowed for up to seven days at a time, and full AA breakdown/recovery service is included. The Brooklands membership package gives around 36 days driving for £2450 – and throws in a family ticket to the Brooklands Motor Museum in Surrey.

Photo: Parc Ferme

