

Fancy a spin in the Lamborghini? It's yours for the weekend...

By Catherine Wheatley

BELIEVE it or not, there are some people for whom economising involves renting the new Lamborghini LP560 supercar instead of buying it.

Rather than dropping upwards of £150,000 on a high-performance sports vehicle, wealthy types are opting to join supercar clubs such as *écurie25* and hire cool convertibles for the weekend, according to chief executive Chirag Shah.

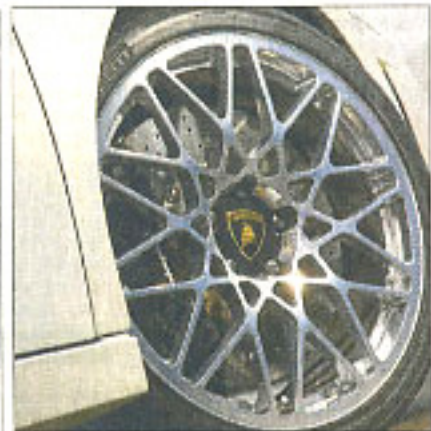
For a joining fee of £1,500 and an annual payment of £5,500, or £550 per month, members receive credits which are used according to the type of car rented, the mileage clocked up and the hire period. Driving to Cornwall on a summer weekend in an Aston Martin

DBS costs more credits than taking a Porsche Boxter for a spin on a Monday in December, for example.

"People still want fun, but whereas once they might have bought a second-hand Maserati, now they will join a supercar club," says Shah.

But the crucial difference between *écurie25* and dozens of similar operations is that Shah is also inviting performance-car owners to loan their vehicles to the club and earn up to £20,000 a year.

In exchange for putting their car on the fleet, owners receive between 25p and £2 per mile depending on the marque, as well as having insurance, garaging, valet services, tax and MoT covered. Owner-members pay a £100 monthly fee and the



Ecurie25 specialises in dream machines

cost of servicing and repairs. "Buying and running these cars is expensive. They are not everyday vehicles so it makes sense for owners to put them to work," says Shah. "We look after cars far better than individual consumers."

When Shah acquired *écurie25* in July 2008 the company owned 18 supercars including a Ferrari 430 Spider and a Bentley GTC. He quickly sold five but since he launched the owners' package last November he has taken a further seven on loan.

"We have more cars and more choice, which makes for a more exciting proposition. We have also halved our fixed costs," Shah says.

Over the past 12 months membership has grown from 95 to 125, in addition to

seven owner-members. *écurie25* has opened two franchises in Yorkshire and Northern Ireland which have together boosted income by around 25pc.

The company has also acquired members from recession-hit rivals, including the Segreave Club and Damon Hill's P1, which have been put into administration. Year-on-year turnover in the year to July was flat at around £1.5m, but revenues have picked up quickly.

Shah plans to sell additional franchises which could boost sales by a further 50pc next year. "We have invested in marketing and an online enquiry and booking system which can be rolled out again at a fraction of the cost," he says. Tough times have failed to dent the dream of a luxury drive, it seems.