

# The New York Times

## Automobiles

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### Old-Car Itch? Here's a Club To Scratch It

By NICK KURCZEWSKI

**O**WNING a vintage car in a big city is like having a pet elephant: the novelty value is undeniable, but where do you keep the beast? And how do you pay the mounting bills for truckloads of hay and barrels of peanuts — or for piston rings?

In Britain, two brothers who are car buffs gave the matter some thought and came up with a solution, a club that lets urban enthusiasts experience the thrills of driving vintage cars without the aggravations of owning, storing, maintaining and insuring them.

A member of the Classic Car Club simply checks out, for a day or a weekend, one of the dozens of classic and sports cars that the club maintains and garages in the city. After a summer Sunday in a raffish MGB, a member can sample an E-Type Jaguar or move on to a Rolls-Royce Mulliner Park Ward — all for a single annual fee.

The concept, which spread from London to five other British cities, is due to cross the Atlantic; a New York City franchise is to open next year. Other branches are planned for Atlanta; Baltimore-Washington; Boston; Los Angeles; and Princeton, N.J. The club is looking at other cities as well.

The club was begun in 1995 by Phil Kava-



Jonathan Player for The New York Times

nagh and his brother, David, then in their 20's, who had become frustrated by what they perceived as age discrimination by banks. Often, they said, young people were denied loans to buy the older cars they loved.

"We wondered how we could develop a system to allow people to drive cool cars," Phil Kavanagh said in a recent telephone interview from London. "So we put the plan together and developed the points system."

That system is the bedrock of the club's operation, providing an efficient capitalist solution to thorny questions about which members can drive the most desirable cars on the most sought-after dates. Essentially, each member receives an equal number of points that he or she can cash in as desired. The best cars and the most popular driving times command a premium.

When the club began, in London, it had three dozen members and 10 cars. After six months as a modest success, a long article

about the club in *The Sunday Times* prompted a flurry of interest. More publicity followed, and both the membership rolls and the auto fleet multiplied several times over. The London club now has more than 40 cars, about 500 members and a waiting list.

As the club flourished, queries arrived from other British cities. The Kavanaghs (David later left the business) sold franchises for Bath, Birmingham, Edinburgh, Manchester and Woking.

While it is possible to rent classic and exotic cars in Britain, as in the United States, the Classic Car Club offers some advantages, including the camaraderie nurtured through organized driving events, a membership committee and informal monthly get-togethers. A newsletter and a Web site — [www.classiccarclub.co.uk](http://www.classiccarclub.co.uk) — let members know when cars are added to the fleet.

Glen Waddington, features editor of *Thoroughbred & Classic Cars*, a British enthusi-

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Members of the Classic Car Club in London can make a date with one of dozens of classic automobiles. Nick Pipping, left, and Chris Wilkinson check out a Jaguar E-Type.