

THE  TIMES

LUX

GRAND
DESIGNS

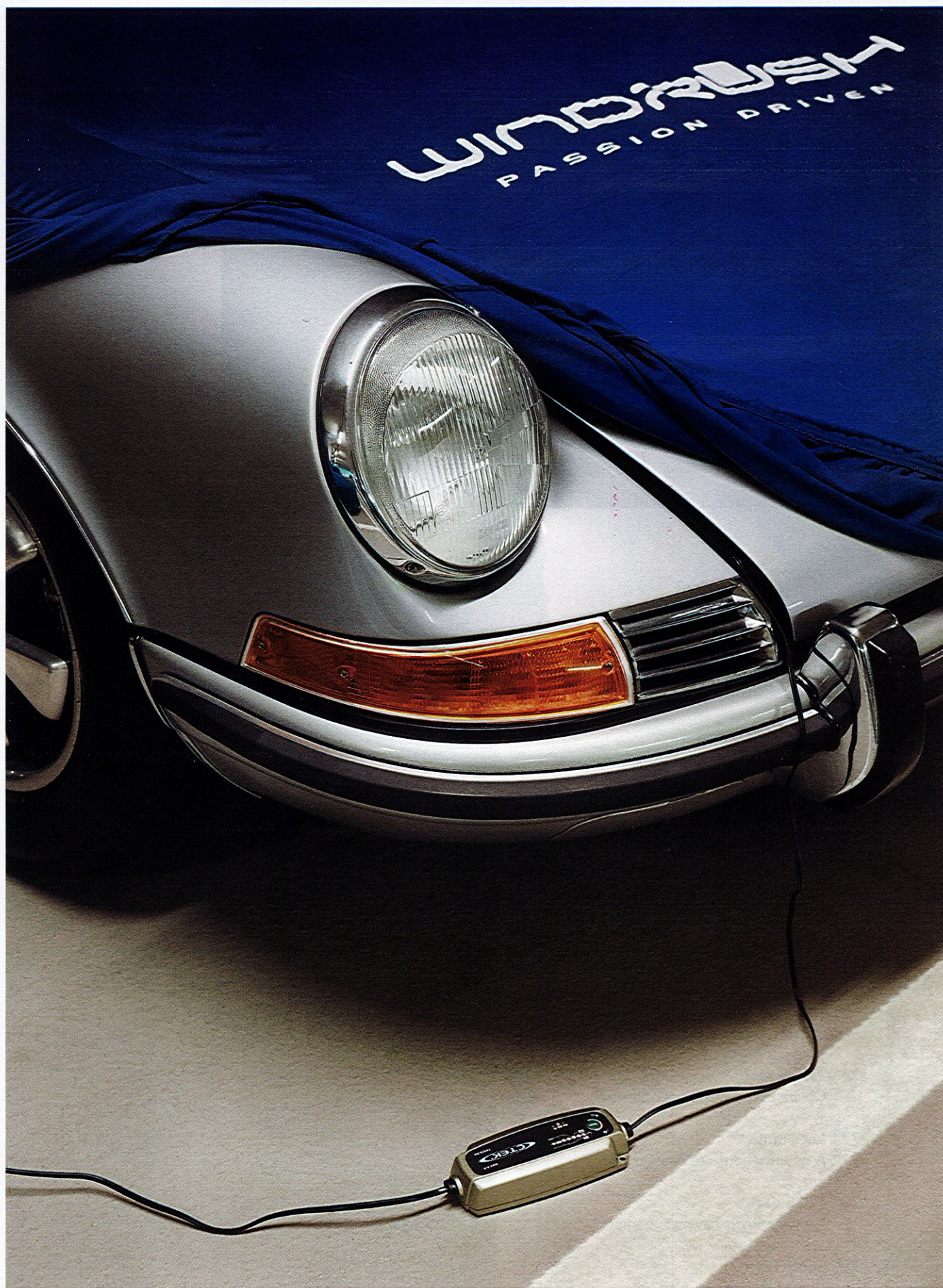




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By Oliver Katibi Stalmans

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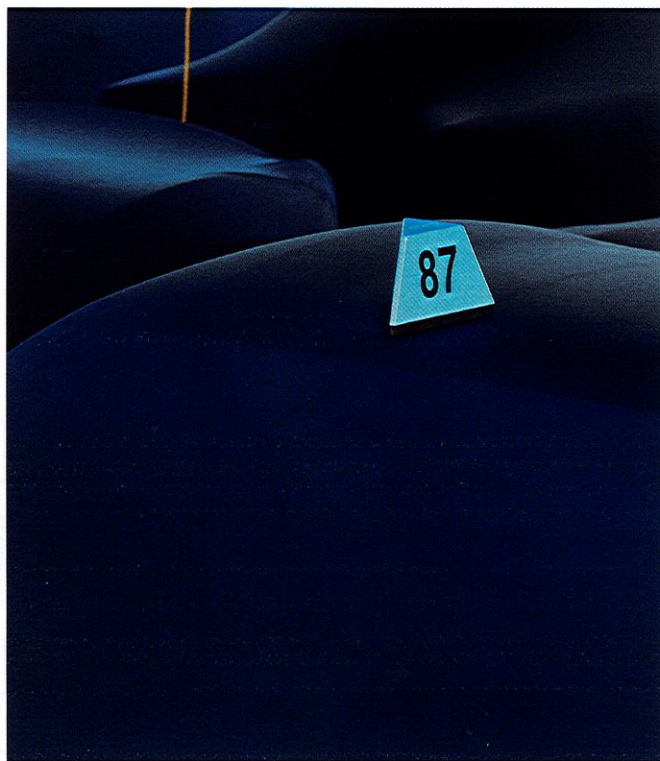


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HOT WHEELS

A Ferrari 488 sits in the collection area, with a Bugatti Chiron visible behind the door. Opposite: each car is covered and numbered; a classic Aston Martin DBS



The most pampered motors in the world

These cars live in a high-security basement, are buffed with exotic oils and come out only for the grandest occasions. By *David Green*

SOMEWHERE UNDER THE streets of Holland Park, west London, there is a deep and shiny treasure chamber of automotive pleasures. There is no signage, no obvious way of getting in. Even if I told you the address you would have a hard job working out how to drive out of there, never mind how to get in. This is Windrush supercar storage, also known as the bat cave by the time-poor, space-poor yet clearly not poor car owners who use it.

From the outside the only thing that suggests something interesting beyond is the high-tech keypad on an otherwise ordinary door. The entry system is, in fact, the same as the one used at the Fort Knox bullion depository, which houses the US gold reserves. The backlit numbers can only be read if you are directly facing the keypad, so anyone observing from a distance would be unable to steal your code. (Any attempt would be pointless, anyway, because the numbers are scrambled after every entry and the code resets every couple of days.)

Inside are rows of blue car shapes, the contours of the covers hinting tantalisingly at what might be beneath. Is that a McLaren P1? That's surely a Bugatti Chiron... No, that can't be a Ferrari Boxer, can it? In all there are 150 vehicles in this London vault and a further 200 at its second site in the Cotswolds.

Windrush was created by Tim Earnshaw, an autophile who used to work in hospitality and

logistics – in Formula 1 with Ferrari and in MotoGP with Ducati. He is nicknamed the Supercar Butler and he is prepared to do anything (within the bounds of the law) for your beloved car. “For our clients, the answer is always yes and anything is possible,” he says. “When you entrust your car to us we take that trust very seriously.”

While owning an exotic car is a romantic dream, the reality of it – the flat batteries, the flat tyres and the film of dirt – often takes the joy out of it. That's where Earnshaw comes in. Once you have enrolled, your car passes beyond the key-coded entrance and rolls into an antechamber – one door locking behind before the next door opens. This space doubles as the collection point for your car.

Once the vehicle is safely inside it is taken into the main storage area where work begins. First it is subjected to a 360-degree examination and photographed from every conceivable angle. Then it is washed with lambswool mitts (never a sponge), dried with single-use microfibre towels and even blow-dried if the paint is deemed too soft or too precious to touch.

Its final external treatment in the car spa is a polishing, using a grade-one carnauba wax from Brazil that costs £1,000 for a 200ml pot, before the car is submitted for its internal examination. Here the battery and fluids are checked – and not just to see if they are at the right level. Specialist tools such

as refractometers are used to check the optimum concentration of the antifreeze and the washer fluid. (Earnshaw can get quite irritated if the pH balance is a bit off. “Are we geeky? Errrm, yes!”)

Only after imbalances are corrected is the car cloaked in its protective sheath and slipped into a dehumidified slot where it then lives, for a cost of £225 a month in the Cotswolds or £425 in London.

Unless, that is, you need the team to take care of some other detail. Can't be bothered with the MOT or tax? Don't worry, this can all be taken care of. Or maybe you just want to pimp your ride. Then Earnshaw will call in his best detailers, who will give the car a thorough makeover. (Extreme valeting, he says, can take anything up to 100 man-hours.)

Although anyone can drop in on a whim to pick up their car, Earnshaw suggests giving a couple of hours' notice so that it can be fully prepped and ready. Of course, if even this is a little too taxing, one of Windrush's qualified drivers can drop off the car – or collect it and bring it back to the bat cave. In some instances clients have requested use of their car for a West End premiere – but only to the end of the red carpet, after which a Windrush driver whisked it off home.

What the Supercar Butler provides, then, is the ultimate date night for you and your favourite car – with him as your chaperone.