

STARTING OUT A business born on a Cotswolds farm has grown into one serving the ultra-rich and world famous in London, reports Will Humphries



Supercars jostle for space alongside classics such as this 1970 Jensen Interceptor in Windrush's top secret underground "Batcave" somewhere in west London

Working Life Business

'Can you swap my Ferrari?'

Tim Earnshaw describes the small team who run Windrush as "car butlers" for their wealthy clients, which means they often have to do more than simply look after vehicles in the company's storage area (Will Humphries writes).

Often they will get a call from someone who has had a boozy lunch and needs their car to be picked up, or they fancy swapping their Porsche for their Ferrari after work or for the weekend.

For example, a restaurateur drove his wife to Reims,

northeastern France, in his Ferrari 575 for a wedding anniversary. When the car developed problems, he called Windrush at 3pm and asked if it could swap it for his Porsche 993 Turbo.

"It was down with him on our transporter by midnight and our guy was having breakfast with him the next morning," Mr Earnshaw said. "It might sound elitist, but it could've been any car." It was, he said, someone on his anniversary saying: "Please can you help me."

The secret vault where the rich conceal their four-wheeled art

Deep beneath a secret location in west London is a secure vault where the rich and famous store some of the world's rarest and most valuable cars. The privacy and security of this facility, hidden away from prying eyes, is making it an increasingly popular option amongst the well-heeled as car theft rises and moped gangs target the wealthy in "snatch and grab" raids.

Tim Earnshaw started Windrush Car Storage in a barn on his parents' farm in the Cotswolds in 2004 and since 2015 he has been running London's most secure car park and concierge service. The secrecy surrounding the climate-controlled location and the rarity of the vehicles within it explain its "Batcave" nickname, with rock and pop stars, television and sports personalities and members of foreign royal families entrusting it with their "babies".

Moreover, it seems to be something of a growth market. "We are the only restricted access, climate-controlled secure storage in London, but more people are starting to follow in our footsteps," Mr Earnshaw, 37, who used to work in Formula One hospitality for Ferrari, said during a tour of the facility. "If you have paid a lot of money for a car, you are normally aware that you are driving around in something that looks like a target. [Owners] often don't want to show off their wealth or to be identifiable by the car they have parked outside their home, if they even have space to."

Car theft rates in England and Wales rose by 56 per cent last year, according to data from the Office of National Statistics. The Metropolitan Police received 22,025 crime reports linked to scooters, mopeds and motorcycles in the 12 months to May, a 50 per cent surge



compared with the same period a year earlier.

Windrush's growth has been aided further by the growing popularity of classic cars and limited edition hypercars as investment options, since cars don't attract capital gains tax if you make a profit on their sale, unlike more traditional investments. Owners want to keep their investments secure, while the insurance for such cars in London can be expensive unless it can be shown that they are stored securely.

According to Mr Earnshaw, who declined to reveal the combined value of the vehicles under his watch, half of the cars he stores are used regularly, while the others might be used only once or twice a year, when international clients are in London.

As well as keeping "time poor" customers' cars secure, the company also offers a full concierge service as part of its £98 a week-plus-VAT fee. When cars are returned to the underground facility, they are cleaned and trickle-charged and the

'It's like art curation. These are often rare pieces which it just so happens you can drive'

Tim Earnshaw, above in his own classic Morgan

company can arrange a service and MOTs on behalf of owners. The building is climate-controlled and dehumidified to preserve the cars and to prevent condensation. Even the smallest touches, such as making sure that the clocks in the car are correctly set for when the car is picked up, are thought of.

The company is running at 90 per cent capacity in its London facility, which can accommodate 140 cars, while its Cotswold storage location can take 200 cars. Mr Earnshaw ran the company in his spare time for five years, before finally handing in his notice in 2009. He got the idea for the venture while wondering how to preserve a re-creation of a Morgan that he had made while at school. He is projecting annual sales of £1.2 million this year.

With cars that can cost upwards of a £1 million, owners are keen to avoid them being "keyed" by jealous passers-by, damaged by careless parking, scratched by wandering cats or spoilt by passing pigeons. Foxes, too, are a problem, apparently. One client moved his multimillion-pound vehicle into storage after a fox nibbled on the carbon-fibre rear spoiler and caused damage worth £20,000.

While some cars simply have sentimental value — one customer has used the service to store a Mini Metro, in contrast with the usual array of Aston Martins, Porsches, Ferraris, Bentleys and McLarens — they also look after some of the world's rarest vehicles.

"There are limited edition cars where there are perhaps only ten or twenty in the whole world ever made and we probably have more than one in here, which is quite something. I suppose it's like art curation. These are often rare pieces, which it just so happens you can drive."



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