

## A place to put the Bentley or Rolls when it's in the way

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Out in Richmond Hill, Ont., somewhere amidst the strip malls packed full of Chinese soup kitchens and Korean BBQ houses, there lies a discreet, unmarked, privately owned indoor parking lot filled with so many Porsches, Ferraris, Lamborghinis, Mercedes-Benzes, and other collectibles that the owner of the place uses a Cadillac Sedan de Ville as his mobile barricade, leaving it parked just inside the cargo bay doors before he slips away home each night.

“How do you like that,” says Gary Shapiro, pointing out the pale blue Caddy he keeps on site as a 2,000 kilo doorstop, a likely unnecessary but still comforting complement to his recording security cameras, periphery breach alarm systems, patrolling security guards and hefty insurance policy.

The affable Mr. Shapiro is not some wannabe Prince Jeffri of Brunei, but rather a businessman and one-time car salesman with a fine idea – or at any rate, the good sense to borrow a sound idea from other entrepreneurs in places like London and L.A., who have done this before.

His company is called Auto Vault. For a reasonable fee, his staff keeps wealthy people’s cars stored and safe for them, when weather, taste or whim finds them more at home driving something else in their fleet, and its sister vehicles are just getting in the way. “I noticed that the people who came in to look at the new Bentley or Rolls or Aston never said ‘if only I had the money...’” Shapiro recounts of how he settled on this business plan while working as a salesman at Toronto’s posh Grand Touring Automobiles. “They all had the money. Money was never the problem. The question that always came up was, ‘But where am I going to put it?’”

And this is a good question, for in these busy cluttered times, who really has enough room in the garage to squeeze in a new Aston Martin alongside the Bentley and the Range Rovers? I know I don’t.

Enter Auto Vault Canada, which, for a modest \$269 a month, will send someone by to take an unwanted car off your hands, remove it to an undisclosed location in the suburbs, keep it clean, safe and dry, maintain its fluid levels and battery charge, ensure the car gets its necessary exercise, and run the thing back your way when you really need it. A more basic service is provided for \$199 per month. Either way you go, an additional fee will see to it that the car is detailed before it returns home.

Mr. Shapiro launched the business in October 2004 and already some 400 customers from the Toronto area have bought into some level of the service.

"Customers keep telling me, 'I'm so happy to have my garage back,' " Shapiro explains. And Shapiro knows, too, there is a certain contentment that comes with knowing your pricey vehicle is being taken care of.

There is an unusual 1995 Rolls Royce saloon called the Flying Spur, which as a sort of hot-rod take on the long wheelbase Silver Spur saloon tricked out with a Bentley blower V8.

The rest of the fleet runs the gamut from a fleet of recent vintage Porsche 911's, a batch of new CO6 Corvettes from a local dealer, A BMW Z8 Alpina with an automatic transmission, an AMG-tuned Mercedes G55, and a replicar Auburn Boatail Speedster built over a contemporary Chevrolet Caprice. There is a Caprice here from the '50's, too, and even a pick-up truck sent out by a customer who at the last minute decided to keep the Bentley home instead.

More my speed is an excellent example of that classic British four-wheel-drive muscle car, the Jensen Interceptor III, this one a stunning black roadster from 1975. So too the 1963 Austin Healey which the owner drove over from Oakville in October with the top down, sporting a cap with earflaps. And I suppose I could also spend some happy time in the Aston Martin DB-7 Vantage, despite its peculiar bespoke options of an off two-tone interior, mesh grilles and chunky rims.

Mr. Shapiro hopes to soon expand the business, with a new downtown building, maybe, and a jockey service for customers who drive their collector cars on weekends, and would just as well have them stored away safely over the working week, to be returned freshly detailed and ready to go Friday night. And why not?