

Favorite Cars

For a town that is easier on its pedestrians than it is on cars, Manhattan harbors a surprising number of closet (or perhaps garage) car buffs and collectors. In the rag trade, for example, Ralph Lauren and Tommy Hilfinger have serious collections. Among developers Peter S. Kalikow and Sheldon Solow use some of the sub-basement garages in buildings they control to store cars that they have acquired. Others like Kaufmann Fund executive Larry Auriana have built huge, museum-like garages on their suburban estates to house the cars they love.

While most high profile personalities have more than one significant car, the most likely to be owned is the S-Class Mercedes Benz. Henry Kissinger, Woody Allen, Michael Douglas, Whitney Houston, Alan Alda, Yoko Ono and other actors use S500s. Fashion mavins, Ralph Lauren, Calvin Klein, and Oscar De La Renta also have S500s while Donna Karan gets by in an E320. Musicians Paul Simon and Marvin Hamlisch tool around in SL600s. Chevy Chase and Matthew Modine favor the more practical, albeit slower and capacious, E320 wagon. Bill Cosby and Ralph Lauren also have examples of significant classic Mercedes Benz models like the famous 300SL “gullwing” sports car and 7.1 liter supercharged SSK by renowned Mercedes chief designer Ferdinand Porsche.

Mike Tyson buys \$125,000 Mercedes SL600 sports cars like other people buy disposable razors. He buys them, uses them, and gives some of them away as gifts. He is also partial to Hummers and has bought half a dozen, again some as gifts. Andre Agassi, Arnold Schwarzenegger, and NY Rangers Adam Graves are also Hummer owners although not as generous with them as Tyson. One car he hasn't mass consumed is his quarter of a million dollar Lamborghini Diablo VT. He, Dennis Rodman, and Dione Sanders, not a shrinking violet in the whole athletic bunch, all picked up DiabloVTs last year.

The Range Rover, car star of the Robert Altman movie about Hollywood “The Player,” does not appear to have garnered the same loyalty on the East Coast as among the players on the Left Coast. LA celebrity Dom haulers include Jack Nickolson, Barry Manilow, Tom Cruise, Bruce Willis, Don Johnson, Michael J. Fox, Rod Stewart, Kenny Rogers, Patrick Swayze, Michael and Janet Jackson, Cher, Jane Fonda, and Peter Falk. In New York by contrast, the favorite sport utility vehicle for both real estate magnates Donald Trump and Peter Kalikow are their Jeep Grand Cherokees.

When it comes to large cars, Oprah Winfrey and Sheldon Solow share a taste for the open top \$330,000 Bentley Azure while Face/Off star Nicholas Cage tools around in his equally expensive Bentley Turbo RT. Lou Gerstner, IBM's CEO has stolen a party spotlight by arriving in his fly yellow Porsche. Of course he and his wife stepped out wearing matching yellow racing jumpsuits.

But in our straw poll, when asked for favorite sedan, sports car and sports utility vehicle, our respondents did not always come up with the usual suspects. Nicola Bulgari, the jeweler, whose flagship store reopens later this month prefers the Buick Park Avenue Ultra, the Corvette C-5, and the Dodge Durango. His choices might be surprising but for the fact that he owns the largest

collection of General Motors cars in Europe. In addition to rare Corvettes and other Chevys, he has over 30 Buicks in his garages in Rome, Pennsylvania, and upstate NY.

Jim Glickenhous, General Partner at Glickenhous & Co. institutional money managers, also is partial to American brands. Value for dollar, his preferences are the Chrysler Concorde, the Chevy Corvette C-5, and the Dodge Durango. Of course were money no object, he would stay with the Durango and move to a BMW 750iL and a half a million dollar Ferrari F50.

Lawrence Auriana, Co-manager of the \$6 billion Kaufmann Mutual Fund is building a 32 bay, 5,000 square foot garage while refurbishing his Greenwich estate to house his collection of post-War Italian automobiles. For sedan, he likes his “comfortable and reliable” two-door Ferrari 456 GT. His sports car pick is his Lamborghini VT which with it AWD gives him added confidence driving in the rain. For sports utility vehicle he is buying a Lamborghini LM002, a V12 brute favored by the late publisher Malcolm Forbes and Libyan leader Mohamar Khadaffeh.

As an advertising executive who has managed a number of high profile car accounts, Arthur Einstein Jr. collects Buicks and Franklins. His favorite sedan is the new, all-aluminum Audi A8 with Tiptronic transmission although he also likes the Ultra and the Ford Taurus SHO. For him, the Porche 911 handles best of any sports car. With it he can “nip through curves as well as on his BMW motorcycles.” As for SUVs, his view is that owners who don’t need off road performance pay a big price in ride, handling, and gas mileage. He would rather drive a Audi Quattro wagon. However, practicality for towing his cars dictates that he get himself a Chevy Tahoe or Suburban whose proportions he likes.

A well known, independently wealthy local racer and collector, whose Ferraris fill a garage the size of an aircraft hanger, is even more vocal on the subject of sports utilities calling them completely “useless, dangerous, and ridiculous gas hogs, dangerous in the hands of most everyone who drives them.” He finds the Ford Contour SVT “the most interesting sedan made in America and the best value in a sedan.” Its performance and rigid structure, in his view, make it superior to a \$25,000 more expensive BMW M5. His favorite sports car is the new V8 powered Ferrari 355 F1 with Formula One-style gearing and shift paddles on the steering column.

Surprisingly, none of our respondents favored the Lexus’ sedan, sports coupe or sports utility as the one in it class that they’d prefer. David J. Pecker, President and CEO of HFM, collects Corvettes. But his current favorites are the Mercedes S600, the Porsche Boxster, and the Lincoln Navigator. Peter Kalikow collects mainly Ferraris. For him, the best sedan is the BMW 750iL, the best sports car, the automatic transmission Ferrari 456GTA, and as mentioned he owns and likes the Jeep Grand Cherokee. Trump who only owns eleven cars and doesn’t consider himself a car buff, mostly prefers limos. He does have a Lincoln Town Car, a Lamborghini Diablo VT, and a Jeep.

Paul Russell, the hyper-finicky car restorer that transformed Ralph Lauren’s 1938 Bugatti Type 57SC Atlantic into the 1990 Best of Show winner at Pebble Beach, likes the new Audi A4 Quattro sports sedan with its radical 5 valve per cylinder engine. Among contemporary sports cars he favors the Porsche Turbo; and for SUVs while he is not a fan, he believes that the new Mercedes M-class will significantly change the market.

As for me, my choices coincide exactly with one very successful racer and business executive I know. For sedan, I favor the Mercedes S600, with its smooth and powerful V12 engine, as the epitome of an understated, high performance large sedan. For sports car, the honors go the Porsche Turbo, at \$105,000 inexpensive for a supercar. After 33 years of evolution, the Porsche body is one of the classically elegant and most recognizable of body styles. The Turbo is both faster than almost any other production car and reliable enough to be driven every day. For SUV, the new Mercedes will tear that class apart.

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