

Making a Faster Getaway

If you haven't been to an airport recently, you might be in for a surprise. But hurry or you might miss it. Last year, Avis and Hertz rolled out new programs to make returning cars at airport locations easier. Instead of the normal process of having to remove luggage from the trunk, closing out your rental contract, and boarding a shuttle to the airline departures terminal, now you can drive to the airport rental return location, close out your contract and for a small fee a company driver will bring you in your rental directly to your terminal. Contrary to what Hertz service's name implies, no rental car company, except Thrifty in Columbus, allows renters to drop off cars at airport curbside.

Demand for these programs, available only in the US, has been spotty so far, possibly because of the lack of publicity. Among airport managers, its downright unpopular. They complain about increased traffic congestion and decreased air quality. Hertz has cut its initial 36 locations offering the streamlined service down to currently 20 out of its possible 156 major US airport locations.

Dollar and National don't have formal programs, but don't charge fees either. National will, on request, drive any of its Emerald Elite card holders to the airport without charge. Bon Voyage!

<i>Company</i>	Avis	Hertz	National	Thrifty	Alamo	Budget	Dollar
<i>800#</i>	331-1212	654-3131	328-4567	367-2277	327-9633	527-0700	800-4000
<i>US Fleet Size '000</i>	200	250	120	45	165	215	16
<i>Preferred Mfg</i>	GM	Ford	GM	Chrysler	GM	Ford	Chrysler
<i>Service Name</i>	Valet Return	Curbside Return	Not Named	Valet Service	No Program	No Program	Not Named
<i>Available Since</i>	9/94	11/94	12/87	NA	NA	NA	NA
<i>Card Required</i>	none	Hertz Gold	Emerald Elite	none	NA	NA	none
<i>Fee</i>	\$5-12	\$4-10	Free	Free	NA	NA	Free
<i>Airport Coverage</i>	26/?	20/498	300+	Columbus OH	NA	NA	NA