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AUTOMOTIVE *LUXURY*

Gets Highly Personal

By David Fluhrer

IN A WORLD WHERE THE COFFEE YOU DRINK TO THE NEWS YOU READ IS NOW A DEEPLY PERSONAL CHOICE, IT WAS INEVITABLE THAT LUXURY AUTOMAKERS WOULD SPUR YOU TO PERSONALIZE YOUR CAR DOWN TO THE SMALLEST DETAIL. AND WHY NOT?

For years, critics have complained that modern rides look alike. Country club valets scratch their heads among a sea of standard-issue luxury sedans differentiated largely with the press of a key fob. Well-heeled trendsetters yearn to satisfy a craving for automotive self-expression, as in other facets of life.

“Luxury is no longer just about high quality, performance and design but is evolving towards the search for exclusivity, which is expressed by means of customization,” says Lamborghini CEO Stefano Domenicali.

And the manufacturers are happy to oblige. At the pinnacle, designers for Rolls-Royce’s Bespoke and Black Badge, and Bentley’s Mulliner can create a car fit for a maharajah or even a hip-hop mogul. Imagine a hand-painted silk interior, a custom fly-fishing compartment or emeralds set in a dashboard of the rarest woods. One undisclosed buyer spent years conceiving his unique Rolls “Sweptail” coupe unveiled in Italy last May at a reported \$13 million. “This customer came to the House of Rolls-Royce with an idea, shared in



the creative process where we advised him on his cloth, and then we tailored the cloth to him,” says Director of Design Giles Taylor.

The market broadens with the exclusive programs from Audi and Porsche, BMW’s Individual, Jaguar Land Rover’s SVO and Mercedes-Benz’s Designo offerings. All will attempt to satisfy every desire with the finest custom paints, leathers and interior finishes not available on standard models. “We have had everything from matching the label color of a customer’s favorite single malt to matching a lipstick color,” says Audi’s Mark Dahncke. “We have seen it all.”

Gabe Haim, general sales manager at Westbury’s Rallye BMW, says 5 percent of customers order cars via the Individual program. “The paint process is a much more in-depth paint process,” he says. “The leather is a much higher-quality leather. They’re gorgeous.” His special-order buyers can even request paint colors from other brands, such as Ferrari’s Rosso Corsa or Lamborghini’s Grigio Telesto.

Bespoke supercars come from Ferrari’s Atelier, Tailor-Made and One-Off programs, as well as Aston Martin’s Q and Lamborghini’s Ad Personam. Choose a Lambo, and you’ll whisk yourself to the Sant’Agata Bolognese headquarters at Italy’s epicenter of sexy sports cars and »



Top and lower left: Rolls Bespoke ‘Serenity’ interior features hand-painted silk. Bespoke ‘Sweptail’ Rolls cost reported \$13 million Photo credit: Rolls-Royce Motor Cars. **Opposite page and Above:** Lamborghini Ad Personam studio at Sant’Agata Bolognese. Photo Credit: Automobili Lamborghini.



fine cuisine. After a factory tour, you'll sit with studio designers to scope out your Aventador or Huracán—and perhaps some matching luggage or apparel.

For American brands, personalization is still a toe-in-the-water affair. Lincoln's Black Label recommends a tailored design package after an in-home consultation on tastes and preferences. Cadillac brings "off-the-menu" touches, such as factory-sanctioned sport exhausts or special blacked-out trim, wheels and grilles. "Maybe 10 to 15 percent of our customers ask for this, and that would be mostly on our flagship, the Escalade," says General Manager Anthony Ciuffo of North Bay Cadillac in Great Neck. But he cautions few buyers would wait extra weeks for anything more.

The wait was months or more during the first heyday of luxury customization in the early 20th century. The Hollywood elite and other wealthy patrons instructed leading manufacturers to ship engines and chassis to independent coachbuilders in the U.S. or Europe, where skilled artisans mated them to elegant bodies and interiors. The practice declined sharply during the Great Depression, as Americans downplayed their wealth and designers retreated or went belly-up.

Today's top-end customizers are roaring back, this time in factory guise. Just walk through the showroom doors, and describe the car that's truly *you*. For dealers and designers alike, your wish is their command. *LL*

David Fluhrer writes Newsday's weekly classic car column and publishes inthedriveway.com, an automotive website.

Clockwise from above: Bentley Bentayga SUV's Mulliner custom fly-fishing compartment. Photo credit: Bentley Motors Limited. Audi A8 Exclusive concept features Poltrona Frau Italian leather. Photo credit: Audi AG. BMW Individual trim by South African artist Esther Mahlangu. Photo credit: BMW AG. Bentley Mulliner Continental GT custom Breitling 'Jet Team' edition. Photo credit: Bentley Motors Limited.