

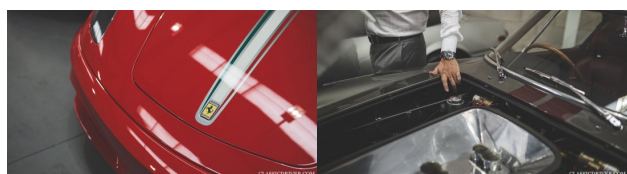
CLASSIC DRIVER

Trading blue-chip collector cars with Tom Hartley Junior

Lead

Trading in some of the most prominent collector cars, Tom Hartley Junior has become a familiar name in the classic car world. We paid him a visit to find out what it's like to operate at the top level of the industry as an independent seller...

After two decades working in his family's business selling high-end cars – the last nine years of which he's spent focusing on classics – Tom Hartley Junior decided to go solo 18 months ago, setting up his own eponymous company. Since then, he's traded cars with mind-boggling values and, through this success, the business has expanded rapidly and will soon relocate into a new, purpose-built showroom. Ahead of the move, we spent an afternoon with Tom and his rather impressive group of cars...

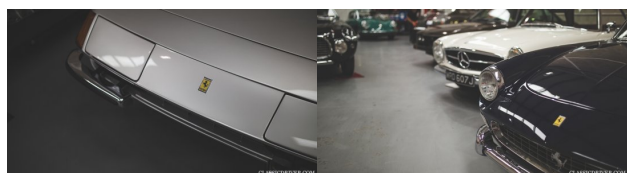


What was your earliest automotive memory?

Probably when the 964-generation 911 first came out. My father bought one of the very first cars in Guards Red and struggled to sell it for quite some time, so he often used it himself – he was a very quick driver. I used to watch him change gear, as I could barely see over the dashboard. This is my first memory of being in a car going fast and, from this point onwards, I was addicted to sports cars far more than luxury cars.

What can customers expect from you that they wouldn't be able to find elsewhere?

I prioritise customer service and quality of product. I won't buy a car with bad provenance, even if it's great value. I only believe in buying the best, whether that's the best Mini or one of the greatest Ferrari sports-racers. I'm always happy to pay more to know I have the right car and, as a result, I believe my stock is continuously the best on the market. I'm also a great believer in people enjoying the experience of spending the quantity of money my cars command. When buying a car from me, I try to ensure that the whole experience – from initially making contact to taking delivery – is unrivalled.



Can you put the feeling of sealing a deal on a €25m car into words?

My business is modelled on selling the most important cars in the world, so it's easy sometimes to get blasé about the prices they're now worth. I love the pure thrill of the deal, making money and doing so while selling something very important and collectable. Yes, you get a buzz when you sell a car for €25,000,000, it's only natural – however, it's all relative and once a deal is done, my mind is focused on the next.

What have you learnt since going it alone?

First, I believe you never stop learning throughout your life. I was in business with my father and then later my brother for a total of 20 years. On my 16th birthday, my father called me and said that whatever deals I do, I had to do off my own bat, without sharing an opinion with him or anyone else. He had faith in my judgment, for which I'm indebted, as making decisions to buy cars with your own money is very different from agreeing to consign a car from a client as most of my competitors do. So, to answer your question, I don't do anything any different from what I've always done; my business is just totally focused on a certain product with an emphasis on great customer service.

After so many years in the industry, what still attracts you to cars?

I love cars; I think I love classic cars even more because of their evocative character and beauty. They have such fascinating stories to tell – I don't read books; however, I love spending hours reading through a car's history file.



Is there anything you look for in particular when taking a car into stock, apart from the usual condition/provenance/mileage/originality ?

I actually only buy cars I personally like, as when you're selling a car that you personally don't like, it inevitably comes across. I think that's why I do so well with Paganis, but would struggle to give a Koenigsegg away.

Which single car from your career do you wish you'd kept?

Some highlights to date that spring to mind are the 250 Testa Rossa chassis 0704, the W125 Grand Prix car I sold for Bernie Ecclestone, and the two great McLaren F1s I bought from a really good friend. However, if you're talking realistically, then I couldn't have afforded to keep the TR or W125. My business is all about buying stock, rather than concentrating on consignment, plus I'm a firm believer in not having seller's remorse: it was the right decision on the day, and I'm certain they'll come back to me at some point in the future.

What do you drive at the weekends?

It all depends on my mood and where I'm going. I'm very lucky that I have lots of cars to choose from, and I like driving different cars – after all, variety is the spice of life.

Photos: Tom Shaxson for Classic Driver © 2016

Gallery

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