CLASSIC DRIVER
WWW.CLASSICDRIVER.COM

features

04/10/2011

Tom Hartley: A family affair

What do you call a man with not only a Bugatti Veyron Grand Sport *Sang Blanc*, but also a Veyron Super Sport *Sang Noir*? Tom Hartley. And that could be either Tom Snr. or Tom Jnr. – with the latter, now joined by brother Carl, very much at the heart of the family business.

The 'Tom Hartley' brand, started in the early 1970s by Tom Snr. and synonymous with sourcing hard-to-get luxury and performance cars, is now a partnership of father and two sons that sells some 450 cars a year. Have a glance at the impressive (immaculate, too – I've seen them in the showroom) stock online and you soon understand this figure equates to a very big business for the Derbyshire-based company.

Indeed, on a recent visit to the company, Tom Hartley Jnr. was confident that they are one of the biggest specialist dealers in the world.

"Take a shopping list of, say, a Porsche 911 Turbo, a Rolls-Royce Phantom – we always have a couple in stock – a Bugatti Veyron and a Ferrari 250GT SWB," he said. "Now, if you are selling, we can offer immediate payment for all four, and if you are looking to add to your collection, maybe having moved to the UK or just looking for a 'one-stop' solution dealing with a company who really cares, we can assist."

The inclusion of a classic Ferrari in this is a relatively new development. There's no denying the Hartley clan is keen on turning a profit. The younger Tom, who cut his teeth on trading cars when just out of short trousers, is first and foremost a car enthusiast. He genuinely *loves* nice cars and has driven them all. And, after all, it's likely that a buyer of a modern supercar will share that passion – and vice-versa, so a Jaguar D-type owner will want an AMG Mercedes, Porsche Cayenne or Rolls-Royce Ghost as a daily driver.

Inevitably, the conversation turns to current trends in the market. As the world's most well-known dealer in long-lead-time supercars (it could offer the Ferrari 430 Spider in advance of most official agents, for example), Tom Hartley always tries to stay one step ahead. In stock – and they really do mean sitting in the showroom – at the time of writing were a Ferrari 458 Italia and a McLaren MP4-12C.

And while Woking's latest may carry a 'P.O.R.' sticker, all the other cars are priced – and quite often competitively so. The company has always enjoyed a good relationship with the manufacturers, by the way, and all stock (modern and classic) is serviced up to date by either main dealers or the best specialists.

Speaking of the collectors' car, Tom Jnr. favours blue-chip models with particular emphasis on Ferrari.

"Take an F40 or a 288GTO," he explained, "they drive like new cars yet will appreciate like classics. Or the alloy-bodied, six-carb 1965 Ferrari 275 GTB we have in stock right now – it looks beautiful and is exciting to drive.

"Other cars I would tip would be a Mercedes-Benz 300 SL 'Gullwing' or Roadster, or the 280 SE 3.5 Cabriolet. Any of these are instantly recognisable classics; older cars yet with immediate appeal to a 'modern' buyer."

And those buyers will probably be making the second biggest purchase of their lives – a fact Tom Jnr. never forgets.

"We've always been here. We can offer a private, discreet service - clients like that. We always own the stock outright, and we'll always make an offer on a car: something you'll not always see in the main dealer network."

So, with two generations of Hartley, including two Toms, looking after customers, the Midlands-based dynasty is set for another four decades of service, that's for certain. And with Tom Jnr.'s wife expecting a brother or sister for four-year-old Olivia early next year, it could well be another 'Tom' (or 'Thomasina') that will join them.

You can view all Tom Hartley's cars in the Classic Driver Marketplace, or visit www.tomhartley.com.

Text: Steve Wakefield
Photos: Classic Driver