

Collectors may shift to car condos

Dream Garage envisioned as club for enthusiasts

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By **TERRY BOX** / The Dallas Morning News

Special cars overflow residential garages everywhere these days – and that high-dollar spillage offers an unusual opportunity for a Dallas group.

Jack Griffin, who came up with the Dream Garage concept, owns seven vintage Porsches that he displays in a 3,000-square-foot garage at his Dallas home. Dream Garage USA plans to build "car condos" as an alternative to the rented warehouses and storage sheds where many enthusiasts must store their beloved collections of classics, exotics, hot rods and muscle cars.



TimePiece PR

"We think this concept is unique," said longtime enthusiast and former racer Jack Griffin, who conceived it. "Warehouses are just storage. They're dark, they're dusty. People want more than that now." Dream Garage Dallas, the group's first project, will feature 54 "auto suites" that can each store four vehicles with space left over for a loft or other human amenities, said Mr. Griffin, who's pursuing the project with partner Tres Vista Group of Dallas.

The group expects to start construction this spring and may pursue car condo projects in cities such as Houston, Los Angeles and Miami.

The Dallas car condos will be built on a 3-acre site in the 6100 block of Denton Drive just south of Mockingbird Lane. Each will have a minimum of 1,050 square feet and cost \$230,000.

"I've been active for years in racing, collecting, touring, and this has been on my mind for a long time," said Mr. Griffin, 61, who raced at LeMans, Daytona and Sebring. "We envision a lot more than just a place to store a car. A lot of us view cars as art, and we want to have a place where we can see these rolling galleries."

Besides the condos, the complex will house Autoscope, which specializes in repairs and high-performance work on BMWs, Audis, Porsches and Mercedes-Benzes. The company, which also has a facility in Plano, intends open a new 20,000-square-foot facility at Dream Garage Dallas. American Driver magazine – formerly Texas Driver – and a paintless dent-removal business are also planning offices at the site, Mr. Griffin said.

"For a long time, the car culture in Dallas has needed a place where people can gather – just like boating or equestrian activities have," he said. "We think this could be a gathering place."



BETSY BOCK/Staff Artist

Going national

Rendering by Matt D. Karpenko
The Dream Garage will be built near Love Field, on a 3-acre site in the 6100 block of Denton Drive just south of Mockingbird Lane.

About three months ago, Mr. Griffin – who owns the Griffin Co., a Dallas real-estate and brokerage company – approached Tres Vista with his idea. He said he needed more development resources than he could muster as an individual to take Dream Garages national.



"This is a project that needs a lot of thumbs on it, and they're young and energetic," he said. The \$10 million complex has its financial backing and zoning approvals and should

be completed by the end of 2007, said Jerry W. Mooty Jr., an attorney and partner in Tres Vista.

Demolition of a chocolate factory on the site will begin in late January or early February, he said.

"One thing we got excited about is this is a niche nobody is filling," said Mr. Mooty, 37. "This type of project has the ability to really take off and fill a niche."

Robert Ross, a senior auto editor at the Robb Report and a car collector, said the concept sounds intriguing.

"Even some collectors who have million-dollar cars don't have space to keep their cars at their homes," said Mr. Ross, who is also the creative director of Malibu, Calif.-based CurtCo Media, which publishes the Robb Report. "I'd buy one in a heartbeat if it were available in this market."

In the last decade, the collector car hobby has grown so dramatically that the Barrett-Jackson car auction in January now sells more than \$100 million worth of vehicles. "I think the collector and high-end car world has gotten a lot bigger in the last seven to 10 years – as you can see at Barrett-Jackson or with all the dealers on Lemmon Avenue," Mr. Griffin said.

Sold as shells

The car condos will be sold as shells with air-conditioning, heating and sprinkler systems in place. All will have 18-foot ceilings so the condos can be fitted with human lofts or lifts for additional cars.

Many will be equipped with bathrooms, showers and kitchen or bar facilities, officials said. Dream Garage, which will provide a finish-out allowance and can steer clients to consultants to assist them, also plans to build a club on top of the facility for the owners. "There are so many people in the Park Cities who don't have room for bigger garages," said Mr. Griffin, who owns seven vintage Porsches and a rare '63 Volkswagen Bug that he displays in a 3,000-square-foot garage at his home. "Some of the people in high-rises around there have their \$150,000 Ferraris parked in public areas."

Autoscope, which has been in the Dallas area for 25 years, plans a 20-bay facility at the complex to service the high-end European vehicles housed in the complex as well as drive-in business, said Nerces Mavelian, president of Autoscope Ltd.

But the condos' most fascinating feature will be two dynamometers positioned side-by-side in the facility. Dynamometers measure horsepower, using large floor-mounted rollers that cars drive onto. A big screen on the wall will record readings from both dynos, Mr. Mavelian said.

"It will be a first for Texas and North America," Mr. Mavelian said. "You and a buddy can come here, put your cars on the dyno, and 'race' each other to see who has the most horsepower."

For years, Mr. Mavelian has thought about taking Autoscope national. Through his relationship with Dream Garage, he said, he should be able to do that, opening garages at each car condo project Dream Garage builds as it expands to other cities.

"This was not a tough decision for me," he said. "It's a great symbiotic relationship. This is a living environment – not storage."