

AUTOMOTIVE

Salon Priv partners with Bentley, Lamborghini to offer public test-drive opportunity

August 1, 2016



Lamborghini Spyder

By FORREST CARDAMENIS

British luxury and supercar show Salon Priv is pivoting back toward the public with a test-drive program.

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Salon Priv, now in its eleventh year, opened its doors to the public last year for the first time since its inception and now touts itself as the only event to offer test drives to the public. Offering consumer interaction of that level establishes the event as a cut above the rest while presenting brands with a straightforward opportunity to win customers.

"Salon Priv strives to combine all elements of the lifestyle that owning and buying some of the most important luxury cars offers," said David Bagley, co-founder of Salon Priv. "It makes sense that we put our guests in the driving seat during the event, especially when you consider the location at Blenheim Palace and the manufacturers' cars on display.

"The majority of, if not all other events, are public with an element in some cases of private hospitality; we are private with a parallel public element," he said. "The Test Drive opportunity is a new initiative created as a result of the relocation to Blenheim Palace and the excellent local road infrastructure available.

"With a number of the UK's key premium retailers operating Test Drive events during the year from Blenheim Palace, it's a tried and tested formula and one that we hope will enrich the exhibitor and guest experience as well as further commercialize the opportunity for the clients. Salon Priv is now firmly established not only as the UK's leading boutique' automotive event but equally a fixture on the exclusive social calendar.

"The atmosphere is intimate, relaxing and without the crowds normally associated with public' event. It's luxurious, glamorous and exciting with continual activities taking place throughout the day such as parades, test drives and UK debut unveilings of some of the most amazing and sought-after cars."

Test drivers

The "See It, Test It, Drive It" experience is in partnership with handpicked luxury automakers and will be available Sept. 1-3. This year, it includes vehicles from Bentley, BMW, Lamborghini, Lexus and Tesla, among others.

Lamborghini will make its Huracn, LP 580-2 and LP610-4 Spyder available to interested consumers. For a brand as

exclusive as Lamborghini, the program will offer a chance to expose new consumers to the brand in a venue that does not compromise the exclusivity it relies on.

Lamborghini Huracan



Lamborghini Huracan

Among its other vehicles, Bentley will be present with its Bentayga, the brand's flagship SUV. The wait list for the Bentayga already exceeds a full year, meaning Salon Priv has a virtual exclusive on allowing consumers to experience the vehicle for themselves.

In a statement, Mark Hudson, head of business at Bentley Birmingham, said, "Putting customers behind the wheel at a prestigious event like Salon Priv is an amazing opportunity for guests to experience a Bentley first hand. The fact that we've also been able to include the world's most luxurious production off-roader, the Bentayga, into the test-drive line-up with other Bentley models means the response, so far, has been incredible."



Other vehicles available through the program include the BMW i8, a plug-in supercar, and Tesla's Model S, Overfinch's Autobiography SUV and Abarth's 124 Spider two-seater roadster and redesigned 595 hatchbacks.

The informal setting allows dealerships a rare opportunity to explore the virtue of each vehicle alongside enthusiastic consumers. Pre-qualification tickets cost 295, approximately \$389, and include full hospitality and pre-approved test-drive requests.

While other events include racetracks or limited tests, Salon Priv's open road testing and new slant toward the public provides a compelling point of differentiation. Last year, 6,000 people attended on a no-hospitality public ticket, which has been brought back this year at the price of 14.90, or just shy of \$20 at current exchange.

"We have long wanted to incorporate a Saturday/public day; whilst we are an exclusive event, we are not elitist and believe that everyone should have the opportunity to see these amazing cars," Mr. Bagley said. "However, not all visitors wish to pay 295 for a ticket, so now with the flexibility and additional space that we have at Blenheim, we've been able to create two parallel events on the Saturday catering for those that wish to dine and those that don't.

"With all of the cars (new & old) parading through the grounds on the Saturday, even if visitors decide to purchase the 14.90 Blenheim ticket that allows them access to the Pirelli Competition, they will still get to see the cars from within Salon Priv during these parades meaning, that those wishing to relax and dine have their privacy and those there for the cars will be equally satisfied."

Unrivaled access

In addition to the pull offered by the test drive program, 10 British brands from the fashion and automotive space have worked together to create a limited-edition electric vehicle set to be unveiled at Salon Priv.

Morgan Motor Company's Morgan UK 1909 Edition EV3 will be launched in conjunction with department store Selfridges and nine iconic British brands, including the automaker. Given the event's prominence in the luxury automotive industry, British automaker Morgan Motor Company has chosen Salon Priv as the appropriate platform to debut its limited-edition project.

Only 19 of the bespoke Morgan UK 1909 Edition EV3 will be available for purchase. Each model includes a bespoke driving kit from British designers such as Alexander McQueen, Dents and Belstaff ([see story](#)).



Morgan EV3

Automakers frequently tie test-drives to larger events to attract an audience that might otherwise pass on the opportunity.

For example, Italian automaker Maserati demonstrated the snow-friendly properties of its Q4 all-wheel drive system with a limited engagement in Aspen, CO.

From Feb. 11- 20, consumers were able to test-drive the brand's all-wheel drive sedans, the Quattroporte and the Ghibli, in the mountainous ski town from a number of local resorts. While automakers may tout their vehicles' handling in snowy conditions, nothing is as convincing for a potential customer as experiencing a feature in action ([see story](#)).

"You won't find this engagement with luxury brands anywhere else," Salon Priv's Mr. Bagley said. "So far the take-up for test-drives has been amazing, as a large percentage of guests already confirmed for the event have reserved cars to drive.

"I am sure that this initiative will deliver sales leads for our manufacturer partners, and our guests will enjoy the experience," he said. "The fact that the majority of our brands have been with us for a number of years, and some from the very first year, says everything. It has become a must-attend event for the upper premium automotive sector of course some brands are absent, but the majority are there, and those that aren't this year will be in 2017.

"We offer them an environment and service that their customers are accustomed to and appreciate and they trust us to ensure that everything runs smoothly. Our high entry price coupled with the fact that all of our clients and sponsors entertain their key customers ensures that from a networking/prospecting perspective, the event is unrivaled, certainly in the U.K."