

SHARING ECONOMY

Car & Away: the Airbnb for airport parking

Would you let a stranger borrow your car — for a fee — while you were on holiday? A new firm is persuading us to do just that

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If your car fits the criteria, you could earn up to £160 a week

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It's that visceral fear we get every time we hand over our keys to the airport valet parking: what if, rather than being taken off to a secure site, our trusty family car ends up being used to pull doughnuts around the nearest town-centre car park?

It seems remarkable, then, that a new company, Car & Away, is persuading travellers to give up their wheels as part of a new sharing economy initiative. The incentive? Extra holiday spending money.

Here's how it works: owners register their vehicle at gatwickparking.com, choosing the Rent & Earn option and providing holiday dates and vehicle details. Not just any old banger, mind: your car has to be less than nine years old, with fully comprehensive insurance, a valid MOT and fewer than 100,000 miles on the clock.

You need to be flying out of Gatwick, the only airport at which Car & Away operates. Drop-off is a five-minute walk from the South Terminal check-in.

A valet collects your pride and joy, then takes it off for a wash, and thence to the airport's CCTV-monitored facility. If it's hired while you're away, your earnings (minus 40% commission) are deposited in your account. These can be up to £160 a week, depending on the vehicle. (Smarter cars command a premium.) If used, your car will be cleaned once again, the tank will be topped up and it will be returned to where you dropped it off.

If there are no takers, you simply pay the flat-rate parking fee of £30 for every six days and, again, pick it up where you dropped it off. "I was intrigued by the growth of Airbnb," says Andy Hibbert, CEO and founder of Car & Away. "Then I went on a trip to America and had a terrible rental experience. I remember looking out of the window of the airport at a sea of parked cars and wondering why we can't share cars like we share houses."



The incentive? Extra holiday spending money
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As part of his company's scheme, vehicles are covered by RAC breakdown and Allianz insurance in the event of dings and dents. About a third of cars don't make it out of the garage.

Car & Away has been running since December and has just welcomed its 500th customer. "Many people see it as a good way to earn extra cash," Hibbert says. "It's just a vehicle, they're

not hugely attached and they're happy to do something smart with it.

“We don't just attract millennials — our customers are aged from 25 to 60. One couple came over from Ireland for a wedding recently, and they'd always wanted to drive an Audi TT convertible. We gave them that experience.”

Like the cars, renters must fulfil a number of requirements. They need to have held a licence for a minimum of two years and have three points or fewer, and they must be aged 25 or over. Vehicles are tracked in case they get stuck somewhere, so the company can see how they're being driven; really rag it and your driver rating will plummet. “We want to have a trustworthy community,” says Hibbert, who expects to expand to three more airports in the next year.

So, if we had been flying into Gatwick last week, what could we have got our hands on at short notice? Three options, as it turns out: a Skoda Yeti, an Audi A3 or a VW Golf. We managed to track down the owner of the Yeti, Roger Phillips, from his holiday home in Puglia. “My first thought was ‘Oh, heavens’, but after looking further into this scheme, it seemed like a good idea,” he says. “Long-term parking was £80, this was £30, and it gave us the option of getting some money back — and having the car valeted.”

Bernadette McEntee, a 40-year-old PA from Birmingham, came to Car & Away due to frustration at the high cost of airport parking. Her car wasn't borrowed in the end, but she's still a firm advocate. “It was cheaper than the other options and I didn't have to take a shuttle bus, which was great after a long flight,” she says. “My car was returned with a full tank of petrol and was the cleanest it's been since I bought it. I think every airport should do this.”

For more information, visit [gatwickparking.com/our-car-parks/parking-options/rent-earn/](https://www.gatwickparking.com/our-car-parks/parking-options/rent-earn/)