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Click and collect: why Kiwi car enthusiasts are buying niche models online

BY DRIVEN - 03/07/2021

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Photos / Supplied

Buying online, sight unseen, is simply a way of life in 2021. Even when we're buying brand-new cars.

But used vehicles? While New Zealanders are known for a love of tyre-kicking and test-driving, there's a growing market of purchasers who are perfectly comfortable clicking Buy Now on a used car located overseas and having it shipped to NZ.

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That's the business model for Autoport, a company that has over 9000 used vehicles on its website (and on DRIVEN.co.nz) – but virtually none of them on the ground in NZ. Japan and the UK are its two main portals.

The model is growing: the company is confident of breaking through the 10,000 mark by the end of this year.

It's all about choice – especially for the enthusiast, says Autoport co-founder David Paviour: "The number one thing that [traditional] dealers have over us is that they have cars sitting right here to look at. But we thought if we could offer a huge range, we could have some cars that were well priced and also some that dealers would never bring in - rare and difficult-to-get models."

As you might imagine, there's an interesting back story to be told. Paviour and business partner Hamish Lusk created Autobase in 1999, one of the first internet-based selling platforms for car dealers. Ultimately, it powered TradeMe Motors.

When Autobase was later sold to TradeMe, Paviour and Lusk kept the wholesale side of the business and applied their expertise in the sourcing and shipping of used vehicles from Japan to New Zealand for dealers.

The wholesale business had potential on paper, but Paviour admits it was "lumpy and inconsistent", and the market was difficult to penetrate.

"We'd done all this work, had good relationships in Japan and a good grasp about how to get cars to NZ. We thought: why don't we offer these cars to the general public? And that was the beginning of Autoport.nz."

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The buying process is not a whole lot more complicated than buying any other consumer durable online. Potential purchasers are asked to register with Autoport, so that their email and mobile contacts can be verified.

There's often a one-to-one discussion about particular vehicles, including overall condition and features, between Autoport and the potential purchaser. There might be more to cover around finance or a trade-in (Autoport can facilitate both). But once the buyer is happy, they click Buy Now on the website and the export/import process starts.

Once the car is on the ground in NZ, there's a five-day money-back guarantee for vehicles up to \$50,000 if the car doesn't match the description. On non-performance models, there's also a 12-month mechanical breakdown policy. All cars are delivered at an on-the-road price, registered and with a full tank of fuel.



Wait time is about eight weeks "in an ideal world" says Paviour, although shipping schedules are a real challenge for any company at the moment. But as a general guide, it's up to two weeks in Japan to get a car inspected twice (normal procedure for Autoport), three weeks on the water and another couple in NZ for preparation before it can be driven away.

Paviour agrees there's been more buyer interest and confidence in this type of used-vehicle buying in the wake of Covid-19.

"It was a big step for us, but there are people who never really purchased online and have since [Covid-19] discovered there's all this interesting stuff available. There's definitely been a move for people to shop online as much as they can. It's just more comfortable for a lot of people."



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