



# Hire Purpose

A late-model Camaro doesn't have to be a long-term relationship...  
though you will end up wishing it was

Words: Dave Smith Photography: Dave Smith, Darren Rapley



**H**ire cars. They're not interesting. In fact, blandness is one of the common factors among hire cars. A fleet of mid-range, anonymous sedans in unspectacular colours and trim. It doesn't have to be this way. Over the past few years, there have been several companies around the UK who rent out classic cars for self-drive hire. More recently, some of the more adventurous have added some American cars to the fleet; usually an early Mustang or two, or perhaps a C3 Corvette, but nothing late-model or lairy.

Now there's American Car Hire Ltd.

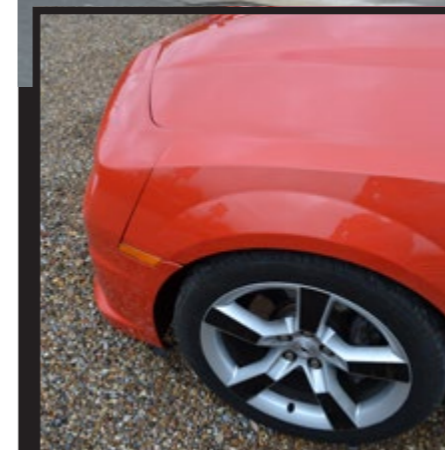
From that name, you may be able to guess what they do. Based near Wick in Essex, these guys have four late-model Camaros on their fleet, and all four are available for self-drive hire. They invited us along to sample the merchandise, and who are we to argue?

So, before dawn one day in early November, Lyndsey and myself set out for darkest Essex. It was foggy and damp, but this soon gave way to a grim, grey, misty, drizzly arsehole of a day completely unsuited for anything other than staring at through a pub window. Hardly the sort of day to

get adventurous with muscle cars. However, Paul and Darren made us very welcome, and showed us around the fleet.

The range starts with a Camaro LS, handsome in dark blue with white stripes, and a crisp V6 with auto transmission. It's a cruiser, ideal for someone looking to test their aptitude for left-hand drive or cruise under the radar. Next is another LS, but this one is dressed up as Bumblebee from the Transformers movies. It's another V6 auto, but has a rorty Flowmaster exhaust, Lambo-style doors and Transformers badging. There's no flying under the radar in this, but it is unsurprisingly booked solid around Prom season. Next is the latest addition, an Inferno Orange SS, largely stock with V8, six-speed manual and plenty of presence. This is the one to have if you're thinking of buying one and want an extended test drive, the full Camaro experience. Then there's the bad-ass, a mounted ZL1-based machine with blown V8, six-speed, lowered and uprated suspension and all the toys. This is the one that has been used as the course Safety Car at Brands Hatch for Speedfest, and is the one to have if you really want to frighten yourself.

The company started early in 2015. Boss Darren had brought a couple of Camaros over to sell, and had the self-drive hire idea purely because nobody else does it! The company insurer hunted high and low to find an underwriter, and eventually found →



## A Dream Come True

ACM star **Lyndsey Godfrey** gets her first taste of American muscle from the driver's seat.

After a three hour drive down to Essex in the pouring rain and fog soaked motorways, I'm afraid my excitement had dulled with the weather. Then I pulled into Hire a Camaro's premises and there, sitting outside ready and waiting for us, were four of the most amazing machines I have laid my eyes on for quite some time. Standing out from the rest was my personal favourite. What film-obsessed car fanatic would not dream about driving Bumblebee from the Transformers franchise? After having a chat with Darren, the owner, and Paul who looks after the everyday hiring of these bad boys, I was finally handed the keys to yellow-and-black mean machine.

With a 3.6-litre V6, 336bhp, left-hand rear wheel drive, automatic, with full black leather interior and scissor doors, I turned the key and it roared into life, along with a CD playing the Transformers

theme tune. I was in heaven! The handling was amazing and being as I drive a manual, not having to worry about changing gears was great. I could just sit back, enjoy the ride and put my foot down! Well only so far, as the number of speed cameras around Essex is phenomenal. At one point waiting at a roundabout, a car passed with a child of about six years old in the passenger seat, his face went up the window and I could see him pointing and yelling happily to his mother. I think I made his day - he had seen Bumblebee!

All too soon it was time to return our first two cars in exchange for the V8s. To be fair, I was having so much fun driving Bumblebee, that I did not really want to change, but change we did and boy, oh boy, I was glad I got to experience the Orange Inferno. WOW, is all I can really say. On turning the key the car came alive, the power that emanated from this machine

made the whole car shudder at just a slight touch of the throttle. I knew this was going to be fun! This was a 6.2-litre V8 with 425bhp, manual transmission and left-hand drive. We decided to take these beasts to Southend, and who wouldn't enjoy the feel of these unrestricted machines beneath you, with their unbeatable style and the all red leather interior.

Everywhere we drove, people stopped, stared and took photos. The drive was amazing, gears just slipped up and down with ease and the ride itself was so comfortable that you forgot about everything else and just enjoyed the ride. Girls (and boys), if you want to feel the experience of driving a real car and not just watch them on TV, believe me this is the place to go. Unlimited mileage, and the only self-drive Camaro experience in the UK - The perfect present!

someone though it was definitely not cheap. Hirers have taken the cars all over the UK, including up to Leeds and Birmingham for weddings, and another chap rented the SS for a week just to see how he and his other half got on with it before they went out and bought one for themselves. Another couple took from way up north took the train to Essex, picked the Camaro up, then spent the weekend in London touring the sights and took the train home again; they made a big weekend of it. So far the company has had plenty of responsible drivers and only one bad one. I bet most mainstream car hire businesses wish they could claim the same.

First off, we took out the V6s. These are excellent daily-drivable cruisers, and you can get comfortable in them within minutes. I drove the dark blue one, which is as stealthy as a Camaro gets in the UK, and lets you work out some of the handful of cons you'll find with one, such as the massive blind spot over your right shoulder. After this, you can start to enjoy the sprightly performance. Not so much in the Bumblebee, which has a magnetic attraction to camera-phones!

After that, we took out the V8s. Now these are proper Camaros, not limited or idiot-proofed. The blower one has well in excess of 500bhp at its disposal, so getting behind the wheel on a cool, damp day in speed-camera-infested Essex is a test of your resolve and strength of character. Loss of traction action is just the slightest tickle of the throttle away, and as the car is still stickered-up for Pace Car duty, 'inconspicuous' is not in its lexicon, so you could end up meeting many respectable members of the community if you're not careful - policemen, magistrates, doctors, surgeons, etc. If you think you can handle proper, lairy, rear-drive



American muscle, then this is the place to see if you're right.

Despite the forest of speed cameras and some truly patience-testing traffic, this brutal machine is a pussycat, keeping cool and not requiring the left leg of a weightlifter to control the clutch, but when the road does open up ... woah. Wheelspin in first is to be expected, but it was followed by more wheelspin in second, third, and I bottled it in fourth. As much as my heart wanted to keep the tyres smoking, my brain and my sphincter ganged up on it, which at least made sure that the car was returned in the same shape as it was taken. Or, in fact, returned at all. I could quite happily have kept that supercharged sweetheart forever.

The Camaros are hired out for

periods starting at 24 hours and going up to a week at a time. Are you thinking of buying one? Take an extended test drive. Are you looking for a Christmas present for the muscle car fan who has everything? Gift vouchers are available; what could be better? Need a special car for a special occasion? You can rent one of these Camaros for a very reasonable price, probably cheaper than you could book a limo. It's definitely worth looking into, because there's nothing here not to like.

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