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THE THRILL OF DRIVING

SELLING THE DREAM

The UK's American import specialists offer big cars and big passion

ANTHONY COHEN AMERICAN CAR IMPORTS, LONDON

If you were unlucky enough to be no. 29 on the list of confirmed buyers for the UK's 28 official Ford GTs, then try calling this man. He's Anthony Cohen, the bloke behind London-based American Car Imports, and he brings about 200 cars into the UK from the US every year.

Cohen's a real enthusiast. He lived in the States for three years before returning to the UK 15 years ago and setting up ACI, and he still tours the US every eight weeks or so to check up on suppliers. He's also chairman of the American Import Agents Association, which has successfully challenged the Government on aspects of the SVA test and number-plate regulations in Brussels.

A roll-call of Premiership footballers and soap stars have sat in front of Anthony's desk in north London, and it's easy to see why. It's like visiting a giant automotive sweetshop. Anthony can get you absolutely any automobile from America – shipped over here, insured, SVAd, taxed and warranted for the next three years, and that includes the hugely oversubscribed Ford GT.

In fact, one of the first Ford GTs you're likely to see on the road in the UK won't be an official UK car – they won't arrive until next September, nearly six months after ACI's first car lands. The lucky recipient placed the order only six weeks ago, and could have had his car delivered even sooner had he not opted for a tailored spec.

Imported GTs don't come cheap, despite the favourable exchange rate. The Americans have gone GT crazy, and because Ford has told its US dealers to charge whatever price they can get for the car, the \$139,995 guide price is merely a starting point. Available extras include upgraded FM/AM radio/CD (\$4000), forged alloy wheels (\$3500), racing stripes (\$5000), and painted callipers (\$750). Current prices are running at anything between \$280-300,000, depending on the spec. Add to that gas-guzzler tax (\$2100),

local sales tax of around seven per cent, haulage costs to the port in the US, shipping costs (including 'velvet glove' insurance cover), import tax of 10 per cent, UK VAT at 17.5 per cent (both calculated on the shipped, insured price), preparation for the tough new SVA test, road tax and ACI's RAC-backed three-year Europe-wide warranty (with a £10,000 single-claim limit), and you're into serious money.

So you can understand why ACI will end up charging £200,000 to deliver a Ford GT to your door in the UK. In fact, they will only enter into the deal acting as your agent, so you will be expected to cough up lump sums along the way as the process unfolds, the amounts to be paid depending on whether you've chosen a US car, or one that you want to spec yourself. Prices will soften in 2005 when more cars start to come on stream, the slow ramping-up of production having fuelled the current price spiral. Ford had planned to supply 820 cars to the US dealer network by December '04 (including 100 cars to the Ford family and friends!) but production problems have meant that less than half that number have gone out. The plan is for 2200 cars to be built by December 2005, with a similar amount in 2006, depending on future demand. Production will cease in December 2006.

According to Cohen, the last American car to command such massive premiums was the Plymouth Prowler, launched seven years ago. At the time of launch, the sticker price was around \$38,000 but the going rate was \$72,000. Chrysler, like Ford today, was unable to meet demand for the car at the point when interest was red hot.

Fortunately, ACI deals in plenty of less exotic cars than the GT, with current hot favourites including the new V8 Ford Mustang for around £26,000, new model Corvettes available at £46,000, and various pick-up trucks, including the Ford F150, the SLK-roofed Chevrolet SSR, and the wild Dodge Ram SRT-10, with its 500bhp V10 monster engine. Or you might prefer a Boss Hoss motorbike. With a 355bhp V8...

Contact: www.americancarimports.co.uk

Meet Anthony Cohen, a Brit who can't get enough of the brawn and character of US automobiles. His office stocks brochures on every Yank model you can think of, and he's constantly out in the US sourcing new stock. The huge trophy belongs to Cohen himself – he's the current European Drag Racing champion

A NEW FORD GT? SURE,
WHAT COLOUR...?