

PALM SPRINGS



The McLaren MP4-12C

TOO FAST, TOO LUXURIOUS

Aiming to become the most innovative hotel brand in the world, one desert resort offers the ultimate driving experience to its guests **By Lydia Mack**

Just when you thought you'd golfed every course and sunned yourself by every pool in Palm Springs, La Quinta Resort & Club is kicking things into high gear to prove once and for all that Coachella Valley is more than a bunch of sleepy desert towns. The luxury resort's latest offering is the Waldorf Astoria Driving Experience, and it puts guests behind the wheel of the world's sexiest sports cars—the Ferrari 458 Italia, the McLaren MP4-12C and the Porsche GT3.

Yes, you read that right. On this one-of-a-kind excursion, guests get to drive not one but three of the world's hottest sets of wheels—an experience guaranteed to make you feel more baller than James Bond, even if it is only for a day.

How did the property know how to make your behind-the-wheel dreams come true? Just a little bit of listening to its customers, according to **Thomas Soule**, the property's marketing manager. "A big part of Waldorf Astoria Hotels & Resorts' mission is to become the fastest growing and most innovative luxury hotel brand in the world," he says. "In order to become the most innovative, we needed to listen to what luxury consumers were asking for and enhance our guest experience to meet those needs. What we saw was a shift away from luxury goods to luxury experiences."

So less buying cool stuff and more *doing* cool stuff. And as the name suggests, it truly is an experience. "We offer our guests an engaging and exclusive activity that extends off-property," Soule says. "It creates a memorable moment."

And while that moment comes at a price tag of a cool \$1,000, guests get to live out their ultimate driving dreams, which would cost a lot more if one rented each car individually. "Guests who embark on one of our driving experiences will get to experience three of the world's most alluring

super cars while driving through a mapped-out route from La Quinta Resort into some of the Coachella Valley's most scenic roads," he says. "From the beautiful vistas in and around the greater Palm Springs area to the serene open desert, the natural beauty of the drive adds to the unforgettable experience."

Guests choose from morning, midday or afternoon drives, with each time of day offering different advantages. Not an early riser? No problem. Soule promises you won't miss out by taking a later drive, because "there is no best time to take this drive." Different sessions offer a different experience, meaning you won't have to rush through your morning coffee. "The morning session is the perfect time to capture the scenic beauty at first light, while the afternoon session chases the sun as it sets."

If all that horsepower sounds a little scary for those of us who aren't professional race car drivers, don't worry. The property doesn't hand off the keys to \$240,000 cars without going over a few things first. "The experience kicks-off with a briefing led by our professional driving director, who will then present each super car and provide some basic handling details for each," Soule says. "The tour then leaves the property and includes stops throughout the Greater Palm Springs Area, where guests will then rotate to another car until the tour returns back to the resort."

So what exactly is it like to get behind the wheel of these bad boys? "Many guests report a sense of exhilaration when they get behind the wheel of these cars for the first time," he says. "They're cars that most people will never have the opportunity to drive, so the stunning vistas and gorgeous desert views are icing on the cake to a unique and truly unforgettable experience."

Fast cars and stunning views? Sign us up. ■

The Waldorf Astoria Driving Experience is available for reservations for just two more weekends this year: Nov. 13-15 and Dec. 4-6. To book, call (760) 564-4111