

INVESTMENT VEHICLES When a British radio DJ paid €7.04 million for Lot 328 at the Ferrari Leggenda e Passione event this year, he became the owner of the most expensive car ever sold at auction. Given that the guide price was €3.2 million, you could be forgiven for thinking the auction house would have been the happier party. But the BBC's Chris Evans was perhaps even more ecstatic to have bagged a Ferrari 250 GT SWB California Spyder.

The Spyder, described in the auction notes as being "in wonderful condition", is considered by many Ferrari aficionados as one of the most beautiful cars ever made. It is the thirteenth of just fifty-six built and dates back to 1961. Three years later it was sold to actor James Coburn shortly after he filmed "The Great Escape" – a key factor in why its price was driven so high.

Evans is part of a new breed of investor who is buying such cars as an investment of passion. While his passion is obvious, a lack of specialist knowledge may well point other would-be investors in the direction of Florian L Seidl, president and founding partner of Carficionado, which guides and supports collectors and investors to find the best cars in the market.

Seidl left his family's machinery business to set up Carficionado following his own experiences of inefficiencies in the high-end car business. "The current boom we are experiencing as shown by the Spyder sale is fuelled by people investing in cars as an alternative investment form," he says.

Although some doomsayers believe the market has reached a peak in terms of auction prices, Seidl says the market is stable. "What I am currently telling my clients is that if they are really into something very special then they should go for it," he says.

In particular, Seidl believes there is serious money to be made if you don't focus on the blue chip models and brands. "Cars that are currently undervalued include: the Maserati 3500GT, Mistral and original Ghibli; the BMW M1 and the first series of the M3; the Mercedes 190 2.3-16V; and Porsche 928s," he says.

In common with the art market there has been much talk of car investment funds, but while the art world has begun to embrace such funds car investors will have to wait a while longer. "The idea of a car fund has been heavily discussed in the scene for a couple of years now, says Seidl. "I have personally spoken to a lot of collectors who are very interested [in funds] but the exit scenario is the real problem."

For the moment, therefore, Seidl recommends the more traditional, direct investing route. However if, like Evans, you purchase a car as an investment, make sure you don't actually take it out for a quick spin.

"You can be sure [Evans] will not use it," says Seidl. "The only thing he will do is keep it maintained by keeping the engine, gearbox and rear axle parts moving to prevent it from getting standing problems."

Another strategy worth looking into is provided by an American investor who purchased the entire production line of a limited edition classic. "He waited a couple of years then put each car on the market one by one," says Seidl, who confirms the investor earned "a lot" of money.

For any budding car investor, however, Seidl has a final, sobering message. "Even if you keep a car for ten years and close the garage door you have to expect it to drop in price," he says. When it comes to car investing, knowledge is everything. ●