

THE VINSON VIEW

Quality maniac and master shopper Nick Vinson on the who, what, when, where and why



HOW CAR-HIRE COMPANIES COULD GIVE US AN EASIER RIDE

Edit the fleet. More depth and fewer choices of model would mean fewer substitutions.

Cut the heinous colours. Limos should come in one colour only: black.

Only lease what you actually have.

Offer more electric or low-emission vehicles, and ditch the diesel, please.

Axe the reselling apps and sites. They add to the problem and create confusion and delays at pick up.

Deal with the rampant staff shortages at smaller locations.

End the conspiracy of the lack of petrol stations near return locations. Make it easy for people to return the car with a full tank if they want to.

Offer a premium meet-and-greet service at airports, and connect it with real-time flight arrivals so no one has to wait.

01 Renting and venting

Why is hiring a car such a bad trip, asks Picky Nicky

One December during Design Miami, architect Patrick McInerney and I drove out to Palm Beach to check out some Edward Durrell Stone and Addison Mizner architecture, visit Tomas Maier's store (now closed) and take lunch at Bice (verdict on the last: stick to Milan). The car we were given from Avis on Collins Avenue was a ghastly blue Ford Mustang with MUSTANG emblazoned on the doors in big black letters. Being spotted parking the hideous thing on Collins Avenue was a credential crush if ever there was one.

Another time, after flying 11.5 hours to Los Angeles, a shortage of cars meant my husband and I had to wait in line for around 80 minutes, only to be told by Mavis from Avis (yes, and her nails were on-brand red) that the car we had ordered was ETA unknown. After rejecting a Jeep (no covered trunk for please-steal-me Vuitton luggage), we took the only other vehicle available: a bright red RAM 1500 pick-up truck. That's almost 6m long, 1.9m tall and so high off the ground it should come with retractable steps. When we finally arrived at the condo where we were staying, our hosts, Masako and Jan, ignored the truck as it pulled up and phoned us to ask if we'd gone to the wrong address. Next day we handed it back.

More hire-car antics happened on a trip via Milan Linate. Masako arrived ahead

and nabbed herself a Maserati Levante when her booked vehicle was unavailable – the first time I heard of a decent upgrade. I flew in with a pair of friends, let's call them the Chans, who had booked an Audi A6 Avant with winter tyres. Also unavailable, it was substituted with an Alfa Romeo Stelvio, which got us to St Moritz OK. But the next morning, after a night in the cold, it stalled at the first incline. Hertz at Linate knew we were headed for the snow, but the car was hardly suitable for the mountains and the diesel was starting to freeze. After hours on the phone with Hertz Switzerland (Italy just hung up), the car was towed away. Since no replacement was available, Mr Chan bossed Hertz into paying for a chauffeur-driven Mercedes to take us all back to Milan.

The car you hire is rarely actually available when you turn up to collect; instead there is stress and delay for everyone. The haggling usually involves a trade-up, and I am convinced there is a bonus scheme for staff to up-sell and get you to spend extra. Substitutions are rife and generally it's something less chic and in an ugly colour that screams 'this is a rental'.

Somebody really needs to step in and offer a global premium car rental service, complete with a meet-and-greet at arrivals to walk you to your discreetly chic car – the one you actually booked. ★



02

Take the train

Until the hire-car sector improves, fly to Zurich then take the scenic Bernina Express train, via Chur, and reach St Moritz in three hours and 20 minutes. sbb.ch



03

Stay in style

With seven art-filled rooms, a charming host and a decent breakfast, the Villa Flor guesthouse in Switzerland's Engadine Valley ticks all the boxes. villafior.ch