

<http://www.greenwichtime.com/news/local/scn-gt-cars4oct16,0,6342099.story?coll=green-news-local-headlines>

No better place than Greenwich for those who drive the best

By Neil Vigdor
Staff Writer

October 16, 2005

Donald Trump would be proud.

Greenwich is one Ferrari short of 100, according to the town's motor vehicle registry, which also includes 47 Bentleys, 44 Aston Martins, 38 Rolls-Royces and a mere 18 Maseratis.

Already boasting the lowest motor vehicle taxes in the state, Greenwich is about to make it even more enticing to register an automobile in town, especially the luxury kind, thanks to an upcoming revaluation of all property. The last time the town conducted a revaluation in 2001, motor vehicle taxes dropped by 50 percent.

"A lot of people in Greenwich do not appreciate the fact that our taxes are a lot less," said Malcolm Pray Jr., an auto magnate who owns one of the 38 Rolls-Royces.

Less may be a bit of an understatement.

An owner of a \$100,000 car would owe about \$806 in motor vehicle taxes for the current year in Greenwich. Compare that to \$2,493 in Stamford, \$1,765 in Norwalk, \$1,491 in Westport and \$1,736 in Fairfield.

A \$100,000 benchmark is rather pedestrian for many of the approximately 67,000 cars registered in Greenwich, however. Of the top-50 most expensive cars registered in town, all are worth more than \$124,250.

"They're probably paying less for these cars than some people are paying for Hondas in Norwalk and Stamford," said Ali Karimi, who works in the assessor's office as a personal property appraiser.

And then there's clothing designer Tommy Hilfiger, who owns a 2003 Ferrari Enzo listed for \$665,000 on the town's motor vehicle registry. Hilfiger could not be reached for comment about the prized car, which town officials said appreciates in value, unlike most cars, because so few of them were sold.

"Greenwich is just kind of in a world of its own," said Karimi, who consulted with the dealer who sold Hilfiger the car to ensure the town recorded its accurate value.

In most cases, assessment officials rely on National Automobile Dealers Association-published appraisal guides to check the values of cars.

"Do you want to check Pintos? I'll tell you we'll find zero," Karimi said of the town's motor vehicle registry.

Then there is the issue of registrations. To be able to register a car in town, the owner must have a Greenwich address, which is kept on file with the state Department of Motor Vehicles. But, as Karimi noted, vehicle owners often try to take advantage of the town's low taxes on autos by registering their cars at their place of business.

"Technically, if they're bringing the car out of Greenwich at night and keeping it in another town, it should be assessed in that other town," said Karimi, whose responsibilities include checking for illegally registered cars.

Greenwich does make some exceptions for owners who want to register their vehicles in town but own property straddling the border with Stamford, including Jerry Porricelli.

A Hillcrest Park Road resident whose property straddles the line but whose home is located in Stamford, Porricelli has been allowed to register his three cars -- an Audi, a Cadillac and a Mercedes -- in Greenwich. He could not be reached for comment about the arrangement, which Greenwich officials said their Stamford counterparts were aware of and have chosen not to pursue because of the time and money involved in tracking cars kept at border properties.

While Greenwich boasts the lowest motor vehicle taxes in the state, neighboring New York State does not collect personal property tax on cars at all.

Pray, who keeps about 35 vehicles from his extensive car collection less than a mile over the border at his youth center in Banksville, N.Y., said the availability of land, not taxes, influenced him to open the facility in 2001.

Similarly, Pray said owners of luxury cars and other expensive toys pay little attention to taxes on them.

"It's no different than buying yachts," he said.

At Miller Motor Cars Inc., which sells Ferraris, Rolls-Royces, Bentleys, Aston Martins and Maseratis at its Greenwich showroom, owner and president Richard Koppelman agreed.

Customers never ask about where they can pay the least motor vehicle taxes, according to Koppelman, who was not surprised by the number of expensive cars on the town's motor vehicle registry.

"If Greenwich isn't going to have them, who would?" Koppelman asked.

Copyright © 2005, Southern Connecticut Newspapers, Inc.