



WHEELS FOR RENT

\$2.98 Per Day and Up for Cars, Trucks, Campers and Everything but Skateboards

BY A. R. ROALMAN

SUDDENLY THERE is a new flavor and size to the national passion for renting anything on wheels. Now, if you own a 1959 Rambler with rust spots and would prefer to drive a 1966 Cadillac convertible—you can, for \$17 a day and by shelling out an additional 17¢ for every mile you choose to tool along in luxury.

All you have to do is call up one of the many car rental companies listed in the telephone directory and describe, calmly but firmly, your automotive desire into the mouthpiece. If your credit rating checks out, you can give wheels to your wishes.

There are at least 29 major companies that, at this writing, rent cars and, the way the car rental business is booming, it is likely there will be 50 by the time you get to the phone and dial a number. More than \$500,000,000 was spent by Americans for car rentals

last year, an increase of more than 21% from 1964's figures.

The sudden spurt in car rentals can be traced to the move of the rental companies from their traditional airport bases, where they once huddled in hopes of catching traveling businessmen. Now the rental companies are moving into the suburbs and trying to appeal to housewives and the men who are not used to renting cars either for business or personal use.

Department stores are renting cars. So are some of the big oil companies. Ford Motor Co. recently slipped into the rental business by encouraging its agencies to offer the latest models for rent. (While Ford piously protests that it isn't competing with Avis and the other big rental outfits that buy a fair number of Galaxies and other Ford models during a year, there is no question that Ford is in business to

make some money. And the way to make money in the car rental business is by renting as many cars as possible to as many people as possible.)

Not only is the number of entrants in the car rental business worth noting if you like to have variety and verve in your machines, but there are some other interesting aspects to the rental of wheeled, powered vehicles. For example, you can rent motorcycles, sports cars, camper trucks and camper homes. Nobody is known to be renting skateboards, but with the present boom in the rental of wheels, don't be surprised by anything.

The heavy increase in rental traffic can cause problems for the unsuspecting motorist. It can also produce some problems for the experienced renter, because car rental arrangements are changing so rapidly that most people can't keep up with them. But, if

you're a few steps ahead of the many changes that are taking place in the car rental business, you can find some interesting bargains.

FOR EXAMPLE, it is possible to rent a nice, bright new car for as little as \$3.97 a day. Now, isn't that a bargain, considering that some of the other companies in the business are charging \$9 and \$10 a day for the same car?

But wait. The advertisement that says that you can get a car for \$3.97 a day doesn't mention that the "day" of this rental agency is only 12 hours long, that you pay for all the gasoline and oil the car requires, your insurance is so limited as to be almost useless and the minimum rental by this company is at least \$10, so, even if your bill is less, you must pay the difference between your bill and \$10.

In brief, the advertised daily price is not everything in a car rental. There are too many sharp operators in the business for things to be that simple.

Here are the factors you should take into consideration when you rent a car: 1) Daily rental price. 2) Insurance protection. 3) Drop-off charges. 4) Mileage charges. 5) Pick-up expenses. 6) What happens if your rental car breaks down? 7) Who pays for the gasoline and oil? 8) The cost of accessories. 9) Discounts.

If the car rental business looks confusing, it's because it is. And you haven't seen anything yet. As more companies get into the business, it promises to be even worse.

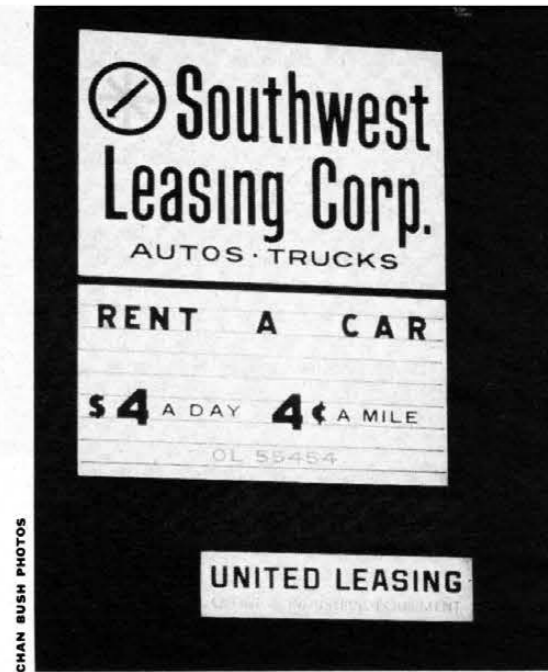
Roughly, you can divide the car rental business into the "big" and the "littles" or "locals," with the bigs claiming they operate nationally and the others specializing in certain areas.

The largest are, in alphabetical order, Avis, Budget-Car, Hertz and National. Airways is coming up strong on the outside and the Ford people likely will be heard from more frequently in days ahead.

Even among the established Big



CHAN BUSH PHOTOS



Four, there are differences, according to the intensive research I've done. Avis claims to try harder and it truly seems to. Budget-Car claims to charge less than the others, and it does. Hertz claims to float men down from the sky into the driver's seat of a car, and it

doesn't. (What it really is doing is battling hard to stay in the No. 1 spot it now holds in the car rental business.) National claims it gives away S&H Green Stamps, and it does, but it gives the impression of doing a lot of fitful coughing and wheezing in the



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process, perhaps drifting back a little in the rental car parade.

Now that you have separated the sheep from the goats, don't ignore the goats, because some of the lesser-known companies may offer you some interesting bargains. To compare, consider the nine points listed:

Daily rental price—This can vary from a low of \$2.98 to \$17.00 a day. What you must determine is how long the day of the rental company is and what kind of car you are getting. For example, if one company is only offering a Volkswagen for the \$2.98 and you get a Lincoln Continental for the \$17, the disparity may not be as wide as it might have appeared at first glance.

Insurance protection is getting to be the big joker in the car rental business. The larger companies generally offer you \$100,000 and \$300,000 (\$100,000 maximum payment for injuries you are responsible for to any person; \$300,000 maximum for any one accident). They also provide \$25,000 coverage for damage you might do to other property, such as another car or a house into which you might slam. Normally, their policies include a \$100 deductible for damages to the rented car, but for \$1 a day more, you can get full payment for all damages in case of an accident.

But then there are some other insurance policies on rented cars that have some fine print in them. You are not insured, say some, if you drive the rented car out of the state. Or if you let a teen-ager (licensed or not) drive the car. Check these items before you rent, because you could be flirting with disaster if you rent a car covered by a bare-bones insurance policy, especially if you don't own your own car or

don't carry an insurance policy on it. (Normally, insurance on your car protects you when you are driving any car, even a rented one, but don't take my word for it. Check with your agent, because insurance policies differ.)

Drop-off charges can vary from a flat fee of \$5 to an 8¢ per mile charge to return the car to where it was rented. Thus, if you rent a car in Los Angeles and drive it to Spokane, you might have to pay 8¢ a mile as a drop-off (more accurately, a "return") charge.

You can avoid this charge if you are lucky enough to find in Los Angeles a car that just a few days or weeks before had been rented by someone in Spokane and driven to Los Angeles. The car rental companies will be glad to have you drive the car to its home base without charging you a drop-off charge. Then they won't have to truck the car back or arrange for a paid driver to take it back. Ask about drop-off charges if you aren't planning to return the car to the same place from which you rented it.

Mileage charges range from an attractive zero cents per mile to, for a sports or luxury car, about 17¢. But companies that don't charge for mileage recorded on the odometer also don't pay for gasoline and oil, which the mileage-charge people generally do. (For purposes of comparison shopping—is it better to buy gasoline and oil and avoid the mileage charge or is it better to pay the mileage fee and get so-called free gas and oil? Figure that gas and oil runs about 2¢ a mile. Make your estimate from there.)

Pickups—If you live a few miles from a car rental garage and call to rent a car, ask if you will be picked up free of charge or if you must pay for

delivery. Some companies charge, others don't. Those that don't cost you more money to rent from, because you have to pay a cab fare for the trips to and from the rental garage or in some other way get there.

Breakdowns—If your rental car fails in some small town, you could end up paying a fair chunk of cash from your pocket. You might have to pay for a long-distance phone call to the rental agency, the cost of arranging for another car, overnight motel accommodations and meals during your delay. Before you rent a car find out from your rental agency if it pays such costs or you do. It could make a lot of difference in dollars if the transmission goes crunch or your gear-shift lever breaks off in your hand.

Gasoline and oil were covered in Mileage, so let's go on to accessories: Generally, such items as tire chains, roof racks, ski-carrying racks, etc., are yours without extra charge but, again, check before you rent.

Discounts of up to 20% are available to employees of large companies that rent a lot of cars in a year's time, even if the employee is not renting the car for business purposes. However, this 20% discount drops to 10% in some Canadian provinces and zero per cent in others where all kinds of discounts are banned. If you rent a car through a travel agent and expect a 20% discount because you happen to have a large company credit card, forget it. Travel agents get 10% of the normal discount. You get the other half. Ministers get a straight 20% discount in all states—no strings attached.

So much for car rentals. If it's confusing and you have some doubts about getting mixed up in such a strange assortment of fact and fiction, consider Hondas and other light motorcycles. The business of renting Honda-type machines started in Los Angeles and San Francisco, spread to Fort Lauderdale and Miami, moved up the

East Coast, just now is happening in Chicago and likely will be common throughout the United States soon.

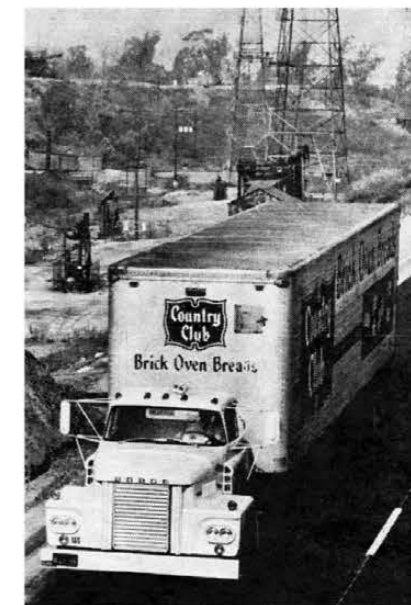
A TYPICAL small motorbike rental costs something like this: \$5 for the first two hours, plus \$1 for \$50-deductible insurance and \$2 for each additional hour, with the rental agency paying for the gasoline. During the week, the daily rental charge is \$10, but it slips up to \$15 a day for weekend days. You generally get \$50,000 and \$100,000 liability insurance with the motorcycle rental agreement.

Or would you prefer to rent one of the big Dodge homes on wheels, the long, wide affairs that have beds, toilet facilities, a kitchen of sorts and a powerful engine plus a steering wheel inside? Clark Equipment Co. also rents this sort of outfit and the going price is \$175 a week (\$25 a day, with a minimum of four days) plus 10¢ a mile (gasoline not included, and gasoline for these buggies runs closer to 3¢ or 4¢ a mile than the 2¢ quoted for automobiles).

Going overseas? You can rent a lot of different cars from Europe-By-Car, Auto-Europe, Hertz and even Kinney. (Don't be misled by the word "Europe" in some of the names. They also rent in Japan, Australia and other non-European spots.) Rates are slightly less, because you normally have a fairly wide selection of European- or Japanese-made small cars available to you.

Trucks in most shapes and sizes are available, ranging from a half-ton pickup for \$1.50 an hour or \$8 a day (plus 10¢ a mile) to a giant tractor rig capable of hauling 72,000 lb. that rents for \$7 an hour or \$35 a day (plus 19¢ a mile).

Rental truck utility extends from delivery of a refrigerator across town to transcontinental heavy hauling. And rental costs will prove considerably less than commercial rates if one is willing



to throw in a little muscle.

A lot of the car rental companies are getting sensitive about renting sports cars, because they have found that some gearboxes get filled with broken gear teeth by people not used to special shifting characteristics of

sports cars. So agencies insist that you be checked out first.

But if you do check out and have the cash, lo and behold, you can take off in the car of your dreams. Varrooom. Varrooom. Hi, gals. Pretty snappy rig, what? ■



Look Before You Lease!

How about leasing? Ford and Avis are making themselves heard more frequently in this field, which traditionally has appealed to large corporations that would rather lease their car needs than sink several hundred thousand dollars into a capital investment in mobile iron. Generally, this kind of an arrangement still checks out as a fairly expensive proposition for the average person, and the only people to whom it appeals are those in fairly high tax brackets who can deduct

the substantial leasing costs from their income tax returns as business expenses. You have to sign a 2-3 year lease. But even at the end of the lease agreement you may not be entirely free of leasing charges. The car still must be sold, either by you or by the leasing agency. If the agency can't get a certain amount for it—it's specified in your contract—you'll have to cough up the difference. Check out all the financial details carefully before entering a lease agreement.