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## COLUMN ONE

### Chasing Exotic Cars Is Their Pursuit

A youthful crew of enthusiasts stalk the Westside, filming high-end autos. After the Ferrari crash in Malibu, CNN called.

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Spyder Dobrofsky, his younger brother and four friends tumbled out of his mother's Ford Explorer on a recent Sunday morning in Beverly Hills, sprinting down Rodeo Drive with video cameras in hand.

They were on a reconnaissance mission, and it didn't take them long to find what they were looking for.

"Oh, Turbo! Porsche 911 Turbo!" said Spyder, 14, lifting his camera to film the sports car.

Then another boy shouted from behind, "Bentley! Bentley! Flying Spur!"

Before they could capture the four-door luxury sedan, another member of the team spotted a dark gray Aston Martin Vanquish heading east on Little Santa Monica Boulevard. The gangly boys in baggy T-shirts and matching buzz cuts ran to follow the \$240,000 car and found it parked on Rodeo Drive outside an eyeglass store.

They surrounded the vehicle, each boy holding a camera small enough to fit in his palm. In total silence, they paced around the automobile, bending down to catch the car's grille, its rims, the lights and even the winged emblem on the hood signifying the famed British automobile maker.

At that moment, the car's owner — a young man in dark sunglasses and a white polo shirt, clutching a set of keys — came across the scene. After a quick double take, Jacob Abikzer, 31, smiled, and the boys continued their filming as if he wasn't there.

"They remind me of myself when I was their age," Abikzer said.

Spyder and his young cohorts have become leading chroniclers of the Westside's exotic car world. Here, the finest European sports cars — Ferraris, Lamborghinis and Porsches — can be found in abundance, thanks to a critical mass of celebrity, glitz and free-spending men in the throes of midlife crises. Some of them cost over \$1 million and require down payments of around \$400,000, and that's only if you're lucky enough to make it to the top of a waiting list.

For most car watchers, the hobby is about snapping a few photos with their cellphone cameras. But Spyder and his friends shoot videos and post them on car-watching websites like <http://www.exoticspotter.com> and <http://www.streetfire.net> where enthusiasts offer their latest sighting of a \$1.4-million Bugatti Veyron.

Until recently, the exploits of Spyder and his crew were only known within the world of car-spotters, where they have many admirers.

But then in February, Swedish businessman Bo Stefan Eriksson crashed a rare Ferrari Enzo on Pacific Coast Highway in Malibu, making international headlines.

Spyder became part of the story. He had videotaped Eriksson and other parts of his exotic car collection weeks before the crash. And he and the crew were in Beverly Hills in April when police pulled over Eriksson's wife in a rare Mercedes and confiscated the vehicle. His footage suddenly became hot property.

"CNN and others called and asked for Spyder," recalls his mother, Tippi Dobrofsky. "And I said, 'This is his mom.' They were like, 'His mom?'"

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It started with a video game, Sega GT, a racing simulator in which gamers can get behind such cars as an Alfa Romeo or a Lotus. The boys learned to appreciate the exotics from there. Then they'd sit on Spyder's porch in the Dobrofskys' cozy one-story Santa Monica home and shoot digital photos of the fancy cars going by. At first, a Corvette would suffice. But in this neighborhood, even Bentleys are a dime a dozen.

Now, "we only film it if it's worth over \$200,000," said Spyder's 9-year-old brother, Dash.

Spyder remembers the first time he caught one of his favorite cars, a Porsche Carrera GT, a 600-horsepower monster of a two-door sports car that costs around half a million dollars. "Last summer. It was nighttime," he said like he'd seen the love of his life.

He and Dash knew they were hooked when the family was driving across the Golden Gate Bridge during a vacation and saw a rare Porsche going the other way. They demanded that their parents exit on the other side of the freeway and go back across the bridge in hopes of catching the exotic (they turned around, but never found the Porsche).

With Paul Bogosian and another longtime friend, Brandon Nelson, the brothers will climb trees on San Vicente Boulevard in Brentwood to film cars from above.

They'll study a driver's routine and ride their bicycles to a different location the following days to capture the same car from a different angle. They once waited four hours for a Porsche Carrera GT to appear at Montana Avenue and 14th Street.

"We'll be in math class and I'll laugh because we hear a car go by and Spyder will turn around and say, 'S430,' " Mercedes-Benz, said Paul, 14, a member of Spy-der's crew, which calls itself and a website the group's designed, "Car-parazzi."

Tippi Dobrofsky and her husband, Neal, quickly came to embrace their sons' passion — in large part because it was something that they and their sons could do together.

"It's an absolute obsession, but it's good," Tippi said, before joking, "Other kids could be into other weird stuff — like fencing. You can't stop them from liking stuff. It's not drugs. It's nothing bad."

Over time, the parents — both screenwriters — became less like chaperons and more like co-conspirators. They found that the hunt for exotic cars brought the family closer together.

For Neal, the hours spent driving the kids around in search of exotics is particularly gratifying because his own father was a traveling salesman who saw his family only on weekends.

"I promised myself that I would not be an absent parent," he said. "I feel really good about all the time I've spent with the boys."

They said they've tried to provide their kids with a normal middle-class upbringing in an area filled with the superrich. The Dobrofskys said the children's love of exotics is fine as long as they don't forget they'll probably never be able to afford one of their own.

Dash often asks why his parents couldn't trade in his dad's SUV for an exotic car.

"I had to tell him we'd need to sell the car, the house and forgo his college education to get one," said Neal, 58.

Tippi and Neal have made car-spotting part of their routine. They drop off the kids on Montana, or San Vicente or Wilshire, head over to Jamba Juice and Noah's bagels for refreshments and then deliver the food and drinks to the film crew. They've gotten used to having the family's regular dinners at the Souplantation in Brentwood interrupted when the kids bolt out at the sight of an exotic car.

The Dobrofskys use their family cellphone plan to call each other if they get split up on a car-spotting foray. During their missions, Neal is usually wearing a cellphone earpiece, constantly checking in on his sons and alerting them to an oncoming exotic.

"I'm their key grip," quipped Neal.

But even the Dobrofskys sometimes find themselves asking whether they've gone too far.

Tippi said she gets a little self-conscious when alarmed friends call to say they've just seen the boys running down Montana Avenue or lurking in the traffic median along San Vicente Boulevard.

"The [fathers] get it a lot. The moms, they think it's a little crazy," she said.

Tippi was on Montana Avenue getting a cup of frozen yogurt last Tuesday night when she noticed a rare Ferrari Challenge Stradale parked in front of a restaurant.

She agonized over whether to ignore it or call the boys to come out even though it was close to bedtime.

She made the call, and together they staked out the restaurant until the Ferrari's owner emerged so they could film him revving up the car.

"I thought, 'This is sick. What am I doing here on a Tuesday night?' " Tippi said.

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On Rodeo Drive that Sunday, Neal was on the lookout for new exotics as Spyder and his friends wrapped up filming the Aston Martin.

Minutes later, the boys saw a red Ferrari Spider 355 — a low-to-the-ground convertible that goes from 0-60 mph in just over four seconds — turn

left onto Dayton Way from Rodeo Drive.

The crew sprang into action again and, as they usually do in these situations, sprinted to the object of their desires in hopes that the driver was parking or stopped at a light.

The driver of the Ferrari, a man wearing sunglasses and a black baseball cap tilted ever so slightly to the side seemed agitated by the scrutiny. So he extended his middle finger at them with the same hand he was using to hold a cellphone to his ear.

"I asked him to floor it and he said 'No,' " said Brandon Nelson, 14.

They continued to pound the Beverly Hills pavement, lurking around the Prada store, Barneys and Harry Winston's. Their persistence paid off about an hour later when a yellow Lamborghini Gallardo Spyder convertible came into view.

This was special, because the team had never filmed the rare Italian sports car.

"That was a special edition," Dash told his dad as the Lamborghini crossed Rodeo Drive.

The "Lambo" swung around again, and again. The boys whooped and hollered, hoping the driver would pull over. Instead, he stuck out his tongue, revved the engine and shattered the speed limit.

Moments later, Dash's camera ran out of batteries. This was a relief to Tippi, whose patience was being stretched watching her charges weave in and out of the streets

"That's our saving grace. The batteries only have two hours," she said before treating everyone to lunch at Baja Fresh.

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For the Dobrofskys, the most striking thing about their sons' pursuit is how few people seem concerned when they see a group of boys running down the street with cameras in hand.

Some passersby seem to write them off as paparazzi chasing a starlet. And for the most part, the exotic-car owners seem more flattered than annoyed by the attention.

"It's like an endorsement of their purchase in a way," Neal said.

The crew now has footage of hundreds of exotic automobiles — some parked at a meter, others peeling out on a city street. After each excursion, they return to Spyder's bedroom — which is covered in posters of professional basketball and baseball players — and edit their moving images and maybe add a song over it by a group like Limp Bizkit.

They had been sending the clips to car-spotting websites, but they've been keeping their work for themselves of late for their own website, <http://www.car-parazzi.com> .

"If they put the same amount of time in school, they'd be geniuses," said Tippi, who thinks Spyder should brace himself for the likelihood that his first car will be a Toyota Corolla.

Spyder is not so sure what the future holds. He does know one thing.

"I just want to have one," he said of the cars he so passionately pursues. "If worse comes to worse, I'll be a valet guy out here."

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