



FLY, DRIVE, **RACE**, DRIVE, DINE

THE PERIPATETIC LIFE OF A CEO CAN BE HECTIC, BUT VICTOR'S CLEVER PRIVATE-JET CHARTER SYSTEM MAKES IT EASY – NOT TO MENTION MORE COST EFFECTIVE. ALEX DOAK MEETS VICTOR'S CEO CLIVE JACKSON ON A NOSTALGIC TRIP TO SILVERSTONE AND A GASTRONOMIC VISIT TO A VINEYARD

Let it be known, it really isn't Clive Jackson's style to live the lifestyle that many of his customers and contemporaries enjoy. He really isn't all private jets, back seats of limousines, fine gastronomy and V8 track cars (though he has just bought himself an SLS). However, sometimes it does pay to dip a toe into a world that he's partly responsible for transforming. And if it happens to afford an excuse to celebrate 15 years since last racing professionally with a few laps of Silverstone in a Ferrari, well, so be it.

Clive has certainly come a long way since 1998, when his fledgling digital media agency Global Beach was producing a racing game for Hewlett-Packard called 'JetSpeed'. To promote the game, he ran a Ferrari 355 team in the Goodyear Maranello Ferrari Challenge series for a year, "even managing to make money," he says, "which is rare in motorsport."

Unfortunately, his driver was badly injured prior to the Silverstone leg, and Clive was obliged to step up to the plate. "I managed to squeeze three days of race training around my work commitments, in a class of 17-year-old rookies, all of whom fell over laughing when a thirty-something turned up in his overalls with absolutely no experience."

Yet, despite squeezing in just three days' training, Clive came from the back of the grid in qualifying to manage fifth in the race. And thankfully for him, 15 years later, he can still squeeze into his old overalls too – neatly tucked under his arm, helmet bag beneath the other, as he steps out of a Phenom 100 four-seater at Oxford Airport.

It happens to be one of the 390 aircraft on Victor's books, available to the online platform's 4,000-odd members around the globe, and Clive has decided to make the most of a particularly economical 'empty positioning flight' back from Paris to meet us today.

Jets aside, there's another particularly hot bit of metal awaiting his arrival, which immediately brings an infectious grin to Clive's face. H.R. Owen have laid on a brand-new Bentley Flying Spur to whisk us to Silverstone – an appropriate means of conveyance given its track-worthy performance (how many other 2.5-tonne limos can go beyond 200mph?) and boardroom-worthy back seats, where Clive makes the most of the car's wi-fi connectivity to answer a few emails. The Flying Spur even makes for a handy camera car, which in turn makes for a rare spectacle: a race-liveried Ferrari F430 steaming down the start/finish straight, nose to nose with a Bentley twice its size, photographer hanging out of the rear window...

With memories of driving the same stretch of tarmac in a 355 fondly rekindled, Clive reluctantly hands the F430 back to Silverstone's in-situ track-day team, slips back out of his overalls, and into the back seat of the Flying Spur. Autumn really is closing in, and it's a relief to escape the squalling rain and bitter winds of the track, cocooning ourselves in a serene bubble of double-glazing, veneer and fragrant hide. It's an hour's drive down the A34 to Sir Peter Michael's The Vineyard at Stockcross for lunch, and we wouldn't want to be sat anywhere else.



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"Sir Peter was one of the very first Victor members," Clive reveals, "and having met recently at a Finnish embassy function, I'm proud to say we're now acquaintances. "He really is one of Britain's great entrepreneurs as well as one of California's best vintners. When he launched Quantel Paintbox across the States – the industry-standard television graphics package – that was something I aspired to."

Aspire he did, but unlike so many fledgling entrepreneurs, Clive actually followed through, with pure determination, vision and single-mindedness.

"He's still a teenager, really," reveals Sir Peter wryly over a sublime late lunch at The Vineyard. "He reminds me of myself when I was younger, before I became the world-weary cynic I am today! Clive has managed that unique thing of retaining a keen enthusiasm, while growing his business acumen.

"He also manages to combine technology and business very cleverly."

Clive's first and ongoing venture, Global Beach, was founded in 1993 after presciently identifying the impending opportunities presented by personal computing and the web. "I took a three-month sabbatical," he recalls, "which turned into eighteen months. I taught myself the basics of programming and, like everything I do, made damned sure I was good at it. After all, I had a wife and family to support, so it had to work no matter what."

"By the end, I had in my hands, on a 1.4MB floppy disk, the world's first interactive digital presentation in three languages."

It was his showreel of sorts, and it got him his first commission within 10 days. Soon after, Unilever had signed up Global Beach to produce a new digital training programme for their global staff and Clive Jackson was most definitely in business.

He went on to set up nine more businesses – including Autotorq.com, which has become the industry-standard means for car dealer networks and marques to link up their new and used programmes online – before his latest and potentially greatest venture, Victor, presented itself fully formed in a proper light-bulb moment. Fittingly, it was during a flight:

"The last BMI flight from Mallorca to London, in fact, before the service was to be axed by BMI's new owners Lufthansa," Clive recounts. "All of us in business class were having a moan as many of us have holiday homes out there, and we were about to be confined to budget airlines!

"One guy said we should form a pressure group and go to Lufthansa. Another asked if I'd considered flying privately. But when he told me the cost – about £9,500 for a single – I couldn't believe it. He then said: "Well it's a £9,500 return if you fly back on the same day, because the aircraft has to be 'repositioned' back at base."



"I couldn't believe there were these empty flights happening all the time. Combined with another guy's suggestion that we all club together on a single jet, the Victor concept suddenly dawned on me: the means of buying empty seats on pre-chartered flights, or empty legs, in their entirety. All priced with total transparency, without the traditionally unregulated commission policies of many other jet brokers."

Clive stepped off that fateful flight from Mallorca with seven business cards in his hand, "two of which have become shareholders in Victor!

"In fact, 75 per cent of our shareholders were originally customers of ours. And, as with anything, if you manage to get your customers to buy into your company, it's the ultimate endorsement."

The second, 'series A' funding for Victor is already well underway – "our target's £5 million to fund the expansion of the business" – and a big announcement is afoot. But for now, it's time for Clive to wrap up his unlikely day of playing CEO and get back to his day job of actually being CEO. But only after he's enjoyed his lift back to London HQ in the back of the Flying Spur of course...