



THE PRN

INTERVIEW

With Robert Herjavec – Entrepreneur, Fine Car Collector, Ferrari Challenge Rookie of Year and star of CBC Television's *Dragons' Den*



_By Lee Bailie _Photography by Giancarlo Pawelec / AutoMotoFoto.net

Robert Herjavec has a garage that, by any measure, is a dream for any automotive aficionado or anyone who just loves fast, expensive and rare automobiles. Frankly, being in his garage is like being spending time in the exotic section at the Canadian International Auto Show.

Well known for starring as one of the dragons on CBC Television's *Dragons Den*, Herjavec also heads The Herjavec Group, one of Canada's leading and fastest growing IT security and infrastructure integration firms.

Herjavec is also a racer, and competed in the Ferrari Challenge for the first time in 2011. He finished ninth in the final drivers' standings in the 458 Challenge class and was recently named Rookie of the Year.

Herjavec was kind enough to allow us into the garage of his Toronto home for a wide-ranging conversation about his passion for fast cars, racing and one of the stranger business proposals he's seen during his time on *Dragons' Den*.

PRN – People collect a lot of things, so why did you gravitate towards exotic cars?

Robert Herjavec – That's a great point. If you walk around this area, you'll see a lot of expensive homes and you'll see the extensions of peoples' passions. I know a guy down the street that has a \$30 million art collection. Not my thing – my kids draw better art. I just love cars, ever since we came to Canada. The famous story I always tell, which is true – and you can see the car outside [white Cadillac] – was I'm with my Dad and we're walking down the street and see a Cadillac go by, and I hit my Dad and I say, 'what's that?', and he says, 'don't worry about that – only rich people drive Cadillacs', and that was it. It was something I couldn't have and as I got older I just realized that I love to drive.

PRN – What was your first 'nice' car?

RH- My first exotic was an Acura NSX. Fantastic car.

PRN- How long did you have it for?

RH- So here's the problem with loving performance and

great cars – there's always something better. I loved that car [NSX]. When I got it I was like, 'I'm never selling this car. I'm keeping it forever!' and then I bought a 1986 Ferrari Testarossa because it was so much faster. That was my first really high-end car, and I bought it and kept it for a few years and then I was like 'this thing's so slow, it's so heavy', so I sold it. It was the car I drove my son home from the hospital in so it has a special meaning.

My son turned 18 this year and I was thinking 'what am I going to buy for him?' I was going to buy him a Rolex and he said 'old people wear Rolexes'. So I went out and hired a detective agency and we tracked down the Testarossa. The problem was I couldn't knock on the door because it's me, so we hired an actor who bought the car and we brought it home. Unfortunately, the previous owner had done all this non-car loving stuff to it. He replaced the interior and it was all black, put these fancy wheels on it and I was so disappointed. But we bought it anyway, and then the guy says, 'well, if you want the original interior, which is kind of crappy, it's under the cover.' So we took it and we're having the car completely redone now.



 Racing is all about belief and putting your fear aside and breaking through a mental barrier.



but I still didn't think I was fast. I was like, 'I could've done that better'.

PRN- We can't let you go without asking about Dragons' Den, the runaway hit show now in its sixth season on CBC Television. Okay, you've seen a lot of proposals trotted out over the years, so let's hear about one that stands out.

RH- Years ago, I forget which one, this guy comes on and he's wearing leather chaps and looks like this heavy duty biker. I'll always remember this because we immediately judged him - he's such a loser. But he starts speaking and he's so eloquent.

I really believe I wake up every day wanting to do a little bit better than the day before, **and racing is like that.**

PRN- Do you have a favourite (past or present)?

RH- I loved the Testarossa because it was really the first one. I'll never forget how long it took me to save the money to buy that car and what a big deal it was. It was so nice because it meant so much to me that the guy that I bought it from - he's not around anymore, he used to run the old Ferrari dealership - he shut down the dealership, took out a bottle of wine and we had a bottle of wine on the floor. It was so special because it was such a great feeling. It's so great when you have a goal and you get there, so that car will always stand out for me.

But more recently I always say that my favourite car is the newest one. So right now, my favourite car is that one [points to the red Ferrari in the corner].

PRN- Tell us a little about 'that one'.

RH- This is the 599 GTO, fastest production Ferrari ever made and that sounds fast, but when you drive it, it's really friggin' fast! It's cool. I've only had it for a couple of weeks and driven it three times. It's awesome.

PRN- We understand that the purchase experience with this car was a little out of the ordinary. Explain.

RH- It's a very limited edition model. Ferrari has this thing where they make a car, they expose it to the world and then God help you if you can actually get one. But if you drive in the Ferrari Challenge you get to the front of the line. Remo [Ferri] who owns the Ferrari dealership called the President of Ferrari and said we should get a car for this guy and they did. I couldn't pick the colour, couldn't pick the interior. I didn't know, and I didn't want to know after a while. Then I came home one day and it showed up. [Herjavec competed in the Ferrari Challenge this year and was recently named Rookie of the Year- Ed.]

PRN- And we noticed it's a different colour of red. It's not the usual Ferrari red.

RH- That's interesting, and what's also interesting

is the price delta between the list price and all the options. So when I got that I said, 'there must be a mistake, because I didn't buy two Ferraris', and they said, 'no, no, no those are the prices for the options.' This is a very special red. I think it's called the Rosso red. It's a \$30,000 option which sounds crazy, but it's beautiful - very deep.

PRN- Is there a car (or brand) out there that's on your 'wanted' list to become the next addition to your collection?

RH- I always have a list in my mind, this rotating list - a top ten. I probably have five of the ten cars that I want, but I'm very fluid with it because I realize that once I get them there'll probably be something else I want.

PRN- We understand that garage space is also a factor.

RH- The worst thing about it is why does my wife get a spot? I mean, I don't have enough spots! [laughs] When we moved into this house, the house is so big that I put all of my cars in and she couldn't park inside, so she parked outside. One day she comes home, it's pouring rain and she says, 'we're in a 50,000 square foot house and I can't park inside the garage!' I said, 'what's the problem?' So I had to give her a spot. [laughs]. The garage limits the amount that we can keep here, and then we have some at other locations.

PRN- In addition to being an avid car collector, you're also a racer. You competed in the Ferrari Challenge this year at events like the Honda Indy Toronto. Tell us about that experience.

RH- I love the Toronto Indy, and I'm not just saying that because Charlie Johnstone [the event's Vice-President and General Manager] is a friend of mine. Here's what I love about the Toronto Indy - it scares the crap out of you. Racing is all about belief and putting your fear aside and breaking through a mental barrier. It's funny, people always think rac-



ing is about rah, rah, rah excitement, but it's really about self-control and discipline. Corner one at the Toronto Indy, you go through it and you're like, 'there's no way I can go at that speed and make it'. I remember the first time I went around the corner I think I was doing 60 or 70 miles per hour, and I was like 'wow! I'm on fire!' and I get back to the pits and the guys are like, 'we understand why you were slow - cold tires'. But after a while you forget the walls are there. Racing is about pushing yourself and the car to a limit that you logically don't think is possible. When you show up at the Toronto Indy, you think 'I cannot go this fast next to a wall this close' and by the end of the weekend, the walls don't exist and all your barriers cease to exist. It's an incredible feeling. It's all about discipline.

PRN- You hear a lot about drivers needing to 'hit their marks', and not just during pit stops, but throughout the entire lap in order to maximize speed. Talk about that from your perspective in Ferrari Challenge.


RH- We break out the weekend. When we first show up, it's about comfort. Then it's about points in the corner, and then by qualifying it needs to all flow together. To go fast it has to be seamless, and I'm not that fast - I'm getting faster - but it has to be seamless.

PRN- We often hear drivers like Honda Indy Toronto winner and two-time IZOD IndyCar Series runner-up Will Power, talk about the pursuit of a 'perfect' lap, where everything comes together. It's a constant challenge to put it all together when it matters most.

RH- Another thing I love about racing is there are so many analogies to life. The question people often ask me is, 'what's the key to success?' So I always say, 'when I become successful, I'll let you know.' People always laugh and say 'ha-ha, isn't that cute?', but I'm really serious about it. I really believe I can do better, I really believe I can do more. I really believe I wake up every day wanting to do a little bit better than the day before, and racing is like that. I've never done a lap and said, 'oh my God that was perfect, I rock! I'm coming in, it can't get better than that.' At Lime Rock, I actually set one of the fastest laps. I think I was number two for the whole series in qualifying at one point,



Photo by Ramesh Bayney

He says, 'Hi dragons, I'm the Ass Man.' That was the name of his company, and he was the Ass Man. So he had a website, where he travels the world and goes up to women in exotic locations and says, 'Hi, you have a beautiful behind, may I take a picture?' No nudity, it wasn't porn - just as they are. So he mixed this in with a travel site - while in Barcelona eat here, and then pictures of women's behinds. So we're thinking 'this is nuts, he's gotta be making no money.' He had something like 30,000 subscribers, he was making a fortune. He was the real deal. He said, 'you know I come from Newfoundland. My Dad's never held a job, my brother is on unemployment, I don't know who my Mom is'. Such a hard life, but he did it. 

 For more photos of Robert Herjavec's stellar garage, go to www.prnmag.com/herjavec