

As Seen in  
April 2007 **TwinCities**  
**BUSINESS**



Bruno Silikowski is the driving force behind the Auto MotorPlex Minneapolis. One of his models is the Autobahn Country Club outside Chicago, shown in the inset photos at left.

MAIN PHOTOGRAPH  
by CRAIG BARES

# A Different Kind of Driving Range

Former management consultant **Bruno Silikowski** is building a “country club” for owners of **vintage, classic, and high-performance cars in Chanhassen**. It will be a place to talk wheels, hang out, and—perhaps some day—take your car out for a high-speed spin.

by John Gilbert



⇒ At your typical country club, the drives that members care about are tee shots down the fairways. But for Twin Cities-area owners of vintage, classic, or high-performance cars, the term “country club” will soon take on a different meaning. A *louder* meaning.

In April, ground is scheduled to be broken for the Auto MotorPlex Minneapolis in Chanhassen. Think of the MotorPlex as a private club for upscale gearheads. It will be a place not only to store and maintain your Porsche 911, '66 Ford Mustang, or other high-style auto, but also a club where you can hang out with fellow cool-car enthusiasts. In time, the Auto MotorPlex Minneapolis could also include a track where car owners can let their vehicles open up at speeds much greater than a rural freeway allows—and without those pesky highway patrolmen lurking near overpasses.

The driving force behind the MotorPlex, which is scheduled to have its grand opening in October, is Bruno Silikowski, a former management consultant whose love of fast cars inspired him to start the club. He's not charting new territory—similar facilities have opened up across the country. But for Minnesota owners of Ferraris and other high-performance cars, the MotorPlex could provide room to zoom.

### Car Driven

⇒ Silikowski has been a car guy since his teen years in Cleveland, where he frequently entered autocross competitions. He earned undergraduate and master's engineering degrees from Ohio State University—his goal, not surprisingly, was to work for an automaker. Instead, a chance meeting led to a job with the Cleveland office of Andersen Consulting (now Accenture). There he worked on large-scale corporate-change, supply-chain management, and company-turn-around projects—all the while acquiring a variety of sports cars.

He was eventually lured away from Andersen Consulting by a client, which started him on a career track in corporate management. One of his employers was a motorsports company, which gave him the chance to visit a number of automakers in the U.S. and Germany. During a trip to the Porsche factory, Silikowski was invited to meet with the Porsche Cup team owner and to drive a Porsche 911 on the famed Nurburgring Nordschleife race-track—nicknamed “the green hell” because of its wicked twists and turns.

About 10 years ago, a recruiter offered Silikowski the chance to run a manufacturing and supply-chain practice for a major consulting company—which turned

out to be an Andersen subsidiary in the Twin Cities. Silikowski agreed to return to Andersen, moving with his family to Plymouth.

His new house had a four-car garage, but even that wasn't big enough to accommodate Silikowski's three sports cars, motorcycle, and boat (not to mention the family's minivan and SUV). As he hunted around for a storage location, a friend suggested the idea of building a motor-sports park like that being built in Joliet, a city about 50 miles southwest of downtown Chicago.

That facility, the Autobahn Country Club, which opened in April 2005, is the brainchild of Mark Basso. As a kid growing up in Illinois, Basso often played at his father's golf club—but soon found that he was more interested in driving the golf carts than in golfing. As a grownup, he saw a market for a facility where owners of fast cars could safely (and legally) drive them at interstate-exceeding speeds. “We presold the concept with very limited funds and realized if we built it they would come,” says Mike Keck, Autobahn's marketing and communications director. “And they have.”

The idea took off fast. Most of the Autobahn's 300 memberships were snapped up just a few months after the facility's opening, and the club earned ink in the *Wall Street Journal*, *Forbes*, and *Car and Driver*. The Autobahn Country Club isn't the first facility of its kind—the former Virginia International Raceway in Alton, Virginia, which reopened as a driving “resort” in 2000, is considered the originator of the concept. But the Autobahn is a model of a

different kind—a private car club that is close to a major metropolitan area and a critical mass of upscale car owners. The 350-acre Autobahn includes 3.56 miles of road-course track. Since the Autobahn's opening, several similar facilities have been built across the country, and more are in development.

Silikowski says he “laughed about the idea” of opening his own motorsports place at first. “Then I thought about it for a couple of years,” he recalls. “About three years ago, I formed an entity to explore it.” One of his moves was hiring the Autobahn owners as consultants.

A key piece of the business plan fell into place as Silikowski hunted for a suitable site for the MotorPlex. (He ended up buying a 40-acre plot on Audubon Road in Chanhassen, just south of Highway 5.) He inquired about some land owned by an old business acquaintance, Ron Offutt, the Fargo-based entrepreneur whose holdings include large potato farms and numerous John Deere dealerships. Offutt's investment group liked the “private garage-condo” concept and became a 50-percent financial partner in the MotorPlex venture.

### Garage Logic

⇒The MotorPlex will consist of a clubhouse and an outdoor courtyard nestled among a dozen storage buildings, which will house approximately 175 1,000-square-

foot car-condo units. (The units can be configured based on customer specifications.) So far, Silikowski says, more than a dozen applicants have signed up to own one of the condos. Each member will get room for storing and tuning his or her vehicles. The facility also will include wash-down bays. In addition, there will



be mechanics available for basic maintenance needs, and a concierge service to handle shipped parts and equipment.

The clubhouse, which has been designed to resemble a European carriage house, will be available for casual gatherings as well as special events, such as auto-club meetings and car shows. There also will be room for auto dealership vehicle displays. “We want it to be a place to hang out for every car person and group,” Silikowski says. “The clubhouse will be a destination location, a place to hang out with people with like interests. There will be small nooks for intimate private discussions with friends, and large enough areas for Porsche Club meetings, for example. We intend to rent the facility to car clubs, corporations, and other groups. It will be business friendly, with Wi-Fi hook-ups and presenta-

tion monitors.”

All told, Silikowski says, the MotorPlex “will be a perfect place for people to get together to watch a Formula 1 race, or a friendly place where people can work on their cars, or get together and smoke a good cigar.” The Motorplex won't sell liquor or include a restaurant, he adds, “but we will have food catered, and we will rent lockers so members can use it as their own private bottle club.”

The first MotorPlex building is scheduled to be completed in early August, with the clubhouse ready sometime later in the year. The

only thing missing from the MotorPlex's current business plan is a road-racing circuit like the Chicago-area Autobahn's, but stay tuned. Silikowski may build such a track in the future at a different location. If the MotorPlex succeeds, he could take the idea to Florida and other locations.

But for now, there's one thing to say: Minnesota gearheads, you may start your engines. **TCB**

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