



By the age of 15, he had his own chauffeur. He's sold more Ferrari F360's than anyone in Britain. He could easily afford a swimming pool in his garden, but instead he has a car showroom. Step up, Tom Hartley. He may just be the best salesman in the business.

Tom Hartley is a tanned mid-sized bundle of beady-eyed energy, a three-button force field in a warm scatter-shot Scottish brogue. Spinning off tangentially, blurring jargon - "supply-and-demanded-cars", "sales pitter-pat" - with a heavy dose of feel good (he says stuff comes "from the heart") and cliché (because he really does claim to have graduated from "the university of life") before nudging this chat back to the deal.



The deal. Always the deal, a rhythm, an ebb-and-flow, a metronome clicking in hard cash, underlining, underpinning, every move Tom Hartley makes. "What I do is not illegal," he smiles. "I provide a service called supply-and-demand."

Because Hartley lives for the deal. "I don't think there's anybody more competitive as a human being - not in sport, or in business..." he says quickly. (How else would he say it?). "I own the best collection of privately owned cars in the country," he grins, as close as he gets to joking: he just doesn't own them for very long. "The word 'broker' doesn't exist to me; you either buy and sell or you don't buy and sell. If I agree to sell it to you, I'll sell it to you because I've got it in stock."



Deals ferment around in alchemical fug of timing, adrenaline, momentum, mathematics, stock control and service, roiling intangibly until pen hits paper. Hartley talks about the "vibes" of the deal, "feeling" the market. And he gets metaphysical over moving metal. "If it means me getting up at 3 am to satisfy one of my customers, I'll do it. I don't need to do it - but I will do it. I'm not very happy when I do lose a deal. It has happened. But I win more than I lose. You can't win them all - you have to lose some to enjoy the one that you win."

You guessed it. Tom sells cars. Premium luxury cars, he calls them, or "supply-and-demanded-cars." Expensive, blue chip metal with a serious waiting list. Want a new Ferrari F360? Go to a Ferrari dealership. Hang around for two years. Or visit Tom for immediate delivery, slightly used. With an additional £30,000 mark-up. He's sold 90 F360's, more than any official sales point in Britain.

In the first eight weeks the new Porsche 911 turbo 4 was on sale in the UK, Hartley moved six, taking a £25,000-per-car premium over the list price. "I have a gut feeling and experience that's taken years to build up. That tells me the supply-and-demand. I get the feed from the customers," he explains. "I get ten guys who want an F360 today. I've got 30 people who want to sell one. I have the contracts. I have the touch of the people who supply and demand."

He has "the touch", alright. I then speculate and take the gamble on the prices that I pay. There's nobody in any supply-and-demanded car that will outbid me in the business. It's like the stock market. I gamble everyday - just now I've got 44 cars in stock. That's £3.5m to £4m-worth of stock we're sitting on. Which is paid for. Last year's turnover was something like £70m."

At 39, Hartley isn't a car buff." I do like cars," he says softly, almost defensively." If I was doing deals in anything other than cars it wouldn't be as enjoyable for me - but I do like doing deals, probably more than a passion of cars. "It goes back to my childhood. My family used to be in the carpet business and, from the age of eight or nine, I used to communicate with customers who came into the shop. I think that was the foundation to my confidence, of being able to relate. Okay, they were buying things of a different value - at that time they were buying a carpet for 25 quid. I was able to hold a conversation and be taken seriously.

"I always wanted to buy and sell cars. My father never kept his car for a long time - that's where my interest in cars came from. He started taking me to car auctions from the age of ten or 11. I overheard a friend of my father's saying he was trying to buy a new Range Rover and he just couldn't get one. I knew someone who had just taken delivery of one: I gave him £250 more than he paid for the car, and I made the same profit putting the deal together." Hartley was just 13. He morphed from school kid to car dealer, kicking tyres through his adolescence.

"I had a knack or an ability to assess valuations. I used to read car magazines and the Sunday Times. I started buying and selling at that age. My mother and father funded me those early days to kick start me: they supported my ambition. By the age of 15 I had my own chauffeur driving me up and down auctions in England."

"I had no school education," he admits. "I went to primary school, then I was educated at the carpet shop and the car auction. Watching and learning how things happen and why they happen: for me, gut feeling and experience was far better than research and training.

"At the age of 11 I used to watch the auctioneer selling a car and the people who were buying. It's amazing how exciting an experience it is. I detected how people reacted when the man hit the hammer down and said 'your'. Some were overjoyed. Some were 'have I done the right thing?'. I learned what the person was feeling at the time. I learned to read the customer."

History repeats for Tom Hartley. Today, Tom Junior is MD. He's 17, been slugging it out in the premium luxury trenches since he was 12. (School? Don't ask). Twelve-year-old Carl and Priscilla, 18, also work for this business based deep in the Derbyshire countryside. Hartley could afford to have a swimming pool in the grounds of his neat, modern bungalow. Instead, he has an immaculate car showroom. Tom? Relax? Be serious. He's never off-duty.

"I still work seven days a week: not because I need to, because I want to," he admits. "I never have been a nine to five person. I've dedicated my life to my business. I do get a thrill out of it. I'm not so much into the business for the money, more so the satisfaction."

Hartley grasped his niche when Range Rover took off in the early seventies. Then came Jaguar XJ40. "I'm outside the Hilton in Park Lane on the day after XJ40 had been launched. Saw the car. I walked up to the owner, got talking. 'Do you want to sell it?' He wasn't aware that I was about to pay him five grand more than he paid for it. I took the car home. He took a bank draft home. I was 22; it was no big deal to me. My best customers for Jaguar at the time were Jaguar main dealers - paying me £5,000 to £7,000 over the list price to resell a car they had not had, apart from a demonstrator.

"I've been involved with cars costing as much as £1m. In my early days I've stopped people on the street, walked them up to them in restaurants and bars, to buy their cars." Hartley thrives on the complexity of car commerce. "I've taken everything in part-exchange," he says. "Houses. Boats. A couple of years ago I swapped a Rolls Royce for a £100,000 diamond. "I sold a Ferrari F50 and a Bentley Azure to a guy in the South of France - and he had a helicopter which I knew nothing about. Take me out of cars and I really don't know anything about anything else...So I did my research. And did the deal. I took in an apartment block in southern Spain, which I sold on.

"If a customer walks into a Porsche dealer and wants to part exchange a boat against a car, the salesman would need to go to the toilet...He'd have to call a sales meeting. Or just say 'we don't sell boats'. For me everything in life has a price. If a customer says to me 'I want to sell my car but I want to keep the engine ' I'd buy the car..."

He can recite individuals models sold, their colours inside and out, specifications, tiny details etched into almost 30 years of deal-making - and, inevitably, the pounds-and-pence of profit-and-loss. Yes, loss. "In 1979 I got involved in some Aston Martin Volante convertibles. This was at the time when the luxury premium market was starting with me. I lost £10,000 on one car. That was painful.

"It was also the best thing that's ever happened to me. Because it taught me not to get complacent with success. And to understand that I lost my own money, money I had to work for. A few deals like that could put in a lot of

trouble. When you're playing with your own money it's a different thing: when you're playing with someone else's money - which I've never done - it's not so painful."

The world doesn't yet run at Hartley speed. Pace, wanting to buy the right and buy fast, he admits, is his weakness. "I had a customer phone me up this week, selling an F360 Ferrari. He said: 'Listen, Mr. Hartley, if you don't mind me saying something. A friend of mine spoke to you two weeks ago and he felt intimidated by your approach and your attitude. But I'm totally the opposite. That turns me on. I like someone who says something and wants to do it now...'

"If I want to buy, I'll buy. I have the same attitude to people coming to the showroom. If one of my sales-people walked and started giving the pitter-pat about how many miles to the gallon the car does, he'd be sacked. The man who is spending this sort of money doesn't want to hear that. He doesn't want to be sold. If he likes the car, he'll buy it."

Hartley craves regularity in his world. Buy. Sell. Deal. Profit. Simple. Doesn't always work that way, sometimes customers change their minds" Everybody wants to buy a good F360. When you get down to it, of the 100 people who want to buy it, there are three people with the money in their pocket to do it."

The next recession will wipe Tom Hartley out. He's at the zenith of the unnecessary goods-and-services sector, appealing to the vanity of the IPO, the pay packet of the Premiership, the get-rich-quick who want to go-fast-now. Wrong. There are two strands of Hartley's business. Supply-and-demanded cars. And other, less sought-after luxury models that don't attract a premium, which he can sell as low-mileage used for less than a franchised dealer. Today, this means most Bentley models: tomorrow, who knows? Tom Hartley. But he's not saying.

"To me or my bank statement it doesn't matter if it's a premium price car or not," he explains. "It could be a Ferrari F360 for thirty grand over or a Bentley Continental R for thirty grand less. Dealt his way out of a downturn. "When the crash came and Testarossas went from being £200,000 to £90,000 business didn't change for me."

Tom Hartley looks up, takes a breath, and contains all that energy for a second. "I just started paying £70,000 for them - I did the same number of deals. I just sold them at a different price."



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