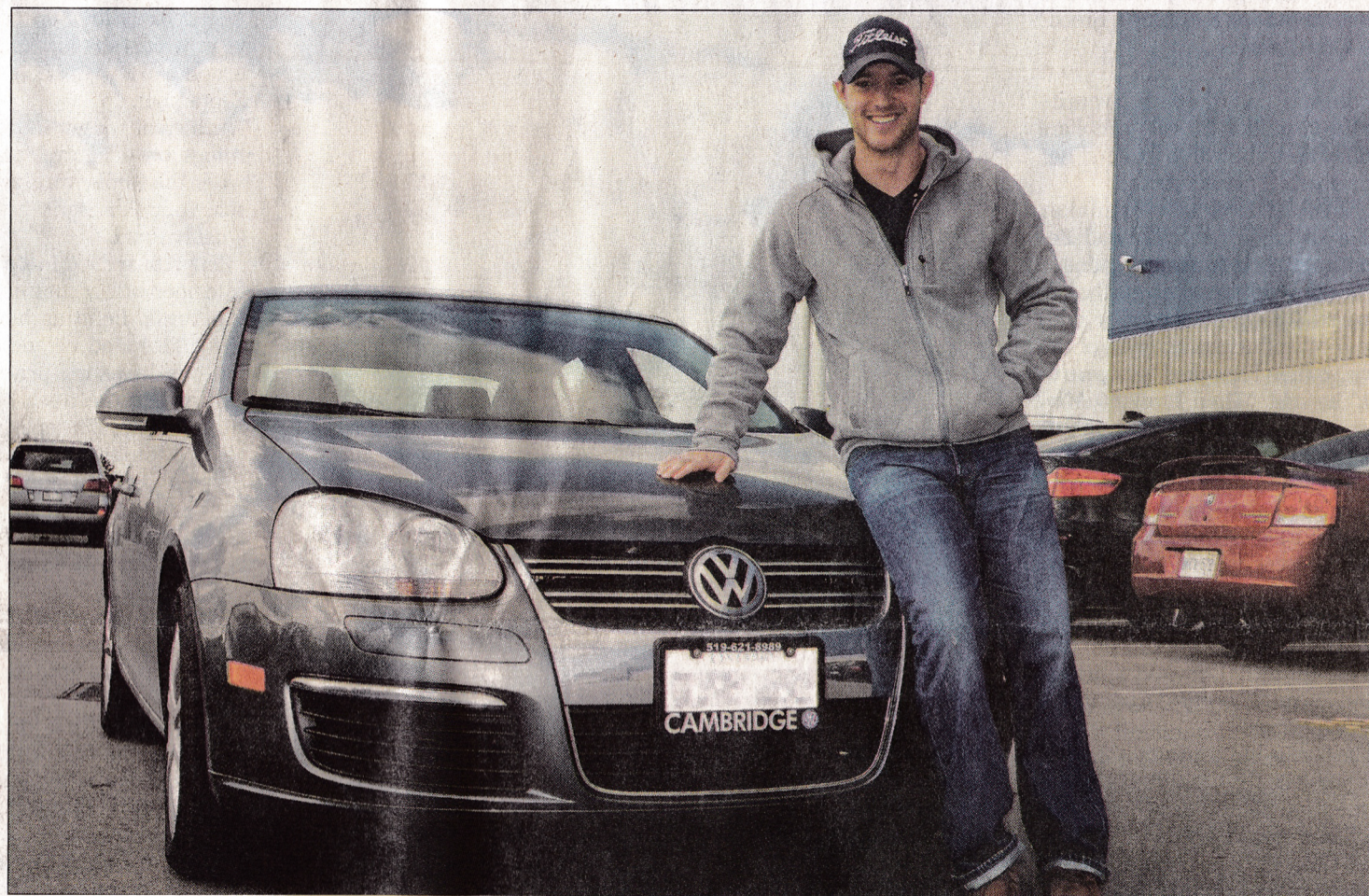


A little bit of flash, and a whole lot of SUVs in team's parking lot

Leafs enjoy the rides



TANNIS TOOHEY/TORONTO STAR

While awaiting delivery of another Land Rover Defender, Tim Brent has been tooling around town in his practical Volkswagen Jetta.

MARK ZWOLINSKI
SPORTS REPORTER

The Maple Leafs' parking lot doesn't necessarily qualify as an all-out terminal for dream rides and star cars.

While there are certainly some exotics poking out among the rows, the majority for these hockey players fall into the SUV and luxury classes. For the most part, BMWs, the odd Lexus and Mercedes, all sit alongside various GMCs. Most of these vehicles would pale in comparison if they were placed, say, in the New York Yankees parking lot.

Utility and comfort are the operating words for these Leafs. Just a little bit of flash, too.

Here's a look at what the local hockey heroes hit the road with:

THE SUV GANG

Jean-Sebastien Giguere, like a lot of the Leafs, is a family man. His salary says he can buy a Lamborghini, but his sensibility says something different.

"I guess I could buy my dream car, but something that gets me from point A to point B is fine with me," said

Giguere, who drives a Lexus RX 400 hybrid SUV.

Giguere's car is one of 14 sport utility vehicles being driven by Leaf players.

"My first car was a 2002 Yukon Denali and I still drive it," Leafs/Marlies centre Mike Zigomanis said.



PAUL HUNTER/TORONTO STAR

Kris Versteeg is the picture of cool with his black Audi R8 outside the Leafs' practice facility. His teammates have been known to ask for a lift.

"I lend it out to my sister once in a while, but it's my first car and I'll never get rid of it."

That doesn't mean there isn't a little bit of car envy.

"Steege (Kris Versteeg) has a sick car (Audi R8)," smiles Tyler Bozak, who has a BMW X6, "and I asked him for a ride . . . but I'm not a huge car guy, so I stuck with an SUV."

Francois Beauchemin gets behind the wheel of a Toyota Tundra pickup, and it's a bit "fly" since it's the chrome edition, while Brett Lebda drives a Range Rover Sport.

"I got this car because I wanted a car and I wanted an SUV, and this kind of gives you the best of both," said Lebda. "It's good in the winter too."

THE CAR GUYS

The top car guy on the Leafs? That's Versteeg in terms of flash. But Dion Phaneuf has to wear the crown when his entire car collection is taken into consideration.

Phaneuf is definitely among the SUV gang on the Leafs. He's also been seen in a Maserati Gran Turismo, though. His collection — he won't reveal how many he's got — has a bit of everything, and he's one of the few Leafs who appreciates good old 1960s and '70s American muscle. John Mitchell and Clarke MacArthur are the others into the classic rides.

"I like cars," Phaneuf said. "I've got a few. I like taking care of them actually. I like detailing them."

But even Phaneuf is no Teemu Selanne when it comes to collecting. The Anaheim Duck once built up a collection of 23 cars he kept alongside a mansion he owned outside of Anaheim — a set-up to make Jay Leno proud.

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