

Driver's Delight

As Candice Huckeba stepped out of the radiant silver Jaguar F-Type V8S, she quickly glanced over at her boyfriend, Hollywood actor Erik Valdez, and said, "Sold. This is my next car."

Huckeba was among more than 300 VIPs who were invited to the exclusive Rusnak Driver's Challenge at the Santa Anita Race Track in Arcadia on Saturday November 7. The event enabled auto enthusiasts from around Southern California – and beyond -- to drive a marquee selection of exquisite luxury vehicles from the Rusnak Auto Group, one of the nation's most renowned automotive

By Rick Weinberg, California Business Journal

organizations, on a test track featuring a number of challenging twists and turns.

The dazzling array of stunning vehicles included Jaguar, Land Rover, Porsche, Maserati, Audi, Mercedes, BMW and Volvo. Lines of car aficionados lined the perimeter of the track, their eyes bulging, their jaws dropping at the sight, sound and smells of the elegant race cars, sedans and SUVs.

"We have an amazing portfolio and lineup of vehicles and we figured, 'Wouldn't it be nice to extend an invitation to our custom-



Hollywood actor Erik Valdez and girlfriend Candice Huckeba, an on-air personality for Radio Disney



Rusnak Auto Group's Driver's Challenge 'wowed' VIP guests with its dazzling lineup of luxury vehicles on a magnificent sun-splashed Southern California day.

ers to drive our cars and experience first-hand the thrill they provide,” says Victoria Rusnak, CEO and President. “Not many dealerships offer this opportunity in the luxury segment.”

Most people never drive their vehicles at even 50% of their ability or capability – most drive their vehicles simply as a commuter car.

“That’s what makes an event like this so



Coby McLaughlin (L) and Erik Valdez (R)

special,” says Vadim Fedorovsky of Jaguar Land Rover Anaheim Hills. “For many people, this is their only chance to experience the full capabilities of high-line cars like this.”

The crowd was simply blown away by the performance and style of the vehicles on this glorious sun-splashed California day -- and the ultimate star of the show was easily the Jaguar F-Type V8S.

“I’m speechless,” Huckleba first said after



she drove the vehicle. Then, the on-air Disney Radio host couldn’t contain herself, talking incessantly about the sleekness and uniqueness of the car.

“I love it the second it started up,” she says. “The sound of the engine was intoxicating. I feel like I’m speechless but I can’t stop thinking or talking about it,” she adds with a laugh. “It’s an incredible mix of luxury and performance – and I mean *performance*. Wow. I was blown away. And the luxury of it – *forget about it*,” she adds, mimicking the famous New York-style phrase.

“I absolutely loved everything about it. It’s my next car without a doubt. The second I got into it, started it up and drove it for a few seconds, I was sold.”

Her 2013 Mercedes Benz 250 SLK will soon be on a Rusnak pre-owned car lot, replaced by the F-Type ... which is certainly alright with her boyfriend.

“I love the car,” says Valdez, who has appeared in Graceland, New Girl, General Hospital, CSI: Miami and Numb3rs, to name a few. “I love what Jaguar has done with it. It’s dynamic. To me, it’s the first modern Jaguar that truly captures the essence of the old Jaguars. There’s really

nothing you can compare to it.”

Even Valdez’s close buddy, fellow actor Coby McLaughlin, was “blown away” by the Jag’s performance and style.

“Amazing – absolutely amazing,” says McLaughlin, who stars on *Parenthood* and *Graceland*. “There’s nothing not to love about it.”

Andrew Pappas of Jaguar Land Rover Anaheim Hills was on site to answer any questions about the F-Type as well as the Jaguar XF and XJ. He was quite busy most of the day, being peppered left and right from enthusiastic and inquisitive event attendees.

“This is the ‘most fun’ car that’s here today,” Pappas tells a guest. “It’s the ‘stiffest’ car here, meaning the stiffest suspension, and the most precision.”

The pulse-quickenning F-Type V8S has off-the-chart levels of dynamic capability and control. With its 5.0 liter supercharged V8 engine, it produces 495 horsepower, accelerating from 0-60 mph in just 4.2 seconds. It is a pure sports car in the full sense of the term. It combines effortless and exhilarating performance, quick response and precise, agile handling with everyday refinement and usability.

Lonnie Limon, an advertising executive from Dallas who was in L.A. to produce a commercial with Sprint, couldn’t stop talking about his experience in the Jaguar.

“It exceeded all my expectations,” says



Limon, the head of Inspire, a Texas-based ad agency. “I was hesitant at first ... then I heard the roar of the engine. And when I stepped on the accelerator, my head snapped back. It was like a plane taking off. That’s the car I want to drive. I felt like ‘a million’ driving that thing.”



Erik Valdez has appeared in Graceland, New Girl, General Hospital, CSI: Miami and Numb3rs.

While Pappas handled queries about Jaguars, Fedorovsky took on car enthusiasts for the Land Rover Sport and Range Rover Evoque, which dominated the SUV class of vehicles on this magnifi-

cent California day.

"It's the best experience I've ever had in a SUV," says Erin Shields, an environment scientist from Whittier, Calif. who test drove the Evoque. "It's not SUV or truck-like at all. It drives almost like a sports car. The handling reminds me of Porsche – it has a solid, planted feel. I never expected a SUV to handle this well."

Fedorovsky smiles and nods as Shields describes her Land Rover experience. He's not surprised. Few people know Land Rover better than Fedorovsky.

"There's nothing else on the road like the Evoque," he says. "It's totally unlike a small SUV."

Built like an aircraft, the 240-hp turbo-charged 2.0-liter Evoque has a rare combination of steel and aluminum, making it 800 pounds lighter than its predecessor.

"It's like a rolling spa treatment," LA's Andrea Pullman says with a laugh.

"It's amazingly cozy for a SUV and it drives much more like a car," adds Erik Huley of Beverly Hills. "It feels like it's a car that's been lifted. And it's easily the best looking SUV out here."

Land Rover's Sport is equally as amazing as the Evoque. It too switched to the all-aluminum unitized body, losing 800 pounds of mass while gaining an eight-speed automatic transmission, independent suspension, massive ventilated four-wheel disc brakes, and electric-



assisted rack-and-pinion steering.

Like the Evoque, the Sport got people's adrenaline flowing.

"Awesome," says Jeff Pierce, owner of Thirst, a LA talent agency. "Smooth, powerful, stylish, superior. I can definitely see myself driving it – *today*."

Huley agrees, but the Jag, he adds, "can't be beat today. It's easily the best car out here."

"Totally," adds Tim Sargeant of Walnut, Calif. "The Jaguar is the [bleep]. "Easily the best ride of the day. The sound of it is intoxicating. The steering is incredible. Jaguar has done an amazing job re-branding itself. It has not only caught up to all the brands in its class, to me they've surpassed it."

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