

# Scientist's passion for exotic vehicles leads to auto-repair shop where luxury is a given

- By [Jonathan Devin](#)
- Memphis Commercial Appeal



Photo by [Brandon Dill](#)

The Arlington Imports team, (from left) general manager Amy Wiseman, co-owner and mechanic Frank Sarantidis and founder Dr. Divyen Patel specialize in repair and maintenance of high-end autos from names like Bentley and Rolls Royce

Who says luxury died in the recession? A luxury car owner found he could make good business by keeping Ferrari-owners off the highway -- for service calls that is.

Dr. Divyen Patel, a former scientist at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital and owner of a genetic research company, owns a Ferrari 456 MGTA, a Bentley formerly-owned by Sugar Ray Leonard, and a Mercedes (for daily driving).

Exotic cars, he said, are his passion, but there was just one problem -- no one in town or anywhere nearby was certified to service and repair them.

At one point his Ferrari came up for its 12,000-mile service, so he shipped it to a dealership in St. Louis. When it came back the check engine light was on. Back to St. Louis it went. Then back to Memphis again. The light still came on.

"You get fed up with sending your cars to St. Louis where they keep it over three months and then still after an exorbitant bill they still don't get it right," said Patel, who is originally from England.

"The quality of service was really poor. Once they realized they messed up, they stopped answering calls."

Then another light went off. Last year, Patel's friend Frank Sarantidis of Palm Beach, Fla., who was already certified to work on many brands of exotic cars, approached him about doing work on his cars and Patel proposed opening their own shop.

In April 2010 they opened Arlington Imports, which now services three to five exotic cars -- Rolls Royce, Ferrari, Lamborghini, and the like -- and 10 to 20 high-end imports like Mercedes and BMW.

"We want the people with these exotics never to have to leave town," said Patel.

Patel said he knew that exotic car owners expect a certain level of comfort and security in their repair shop, so he made his waiting area look like a living room with a full kitchen and photographic art of exotic cars.

As master mechanic, Sarantidis is the only one who touches the exotic cars, though another full-time mechanic and part-timers were hired to work on non-exotics.

For marketing, Patel invited various car clubs to hold workshops at his shop to help spread the word.

Steve Toarmina saw their ad in a magazine and couldn't wait to try them out. He'd had the same problem as Patel.

Oil changes for his Rolls Royce Phantom cost around \$4,500 and involved a covered trailer driving to Memphis and delivering the car to a dealership in Houston.

"I was really excited to be able to get my oil changed here," said Toarmina.

Toarmina keeps his Phantom in a temperature-controlled garage under video surveillance, so he wasn't about to leave his car just anywhere, though.

"I went down there and looked at their shop before I ever took my car there," said Toarmina. "I met with them and they kept my car inside every night. I was very comfortable with them.

"The detailing they did on my car was unbelievable. It looked like a mirror finish when I picked it up. When I sent it to Houston I had it detailed there too and it never came back 30 percent of what (Patel) did."

Patel said that despite a massive investment on the front end, the business started turning a profit after only three months.

He's already gotten some business from Jackson, Tenn., and wants to increase his coverage into Mississippi and Arkansas.

He now runs his research company, Genome Exploration, remotely from an office at the shop three or four days a week. Partly, he admits, because he loves looking at the cars that come in.

"It's surprising just how many cars there are out here that are exotic," said Patel. "We want to take those guys and make them feel comfortable. They can come and see their car, meet the mechanic, shake hands and know they're leaving their car in trusty hands."

**Arlington Imports**

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