

Arie Luyendyk and Matt Williams



Arizona's Premier
Motorsports Experience



Fast Company

Apex Motor Club races to become the Valley's first 'motorsports country club,' bringing million-dollar cars to the city of Maricopa

Text by JIMMY MAGAHERN

The long straightaway on John Wayne Parkway can be tempting for anyone driving a fast car. Stretching across 14 miles of nothing but desert and farmland, the divided four-lane expressway (aka Arizona State Route 347)

practically taunts owners of high-powered autos to put the pedal to the metal and make like aggressive stunt drivers in an Audi commercial.

Of course, there typically aren't a lot of R8 coupes – let alone Ferraris, Lamborghinis, Porsches or McLarens – for the highway patrol to worry about on this dusty stretch of road between Interstate 10 south of Chandler and the first signs of civilization in the small city of Maricopa. But pretty soon, all of that may change.

In March, Scottsdale-based development team Private Motorsports Group opened to its select initial members the first track at Apex Motor Club. The 280-acre private “motorsports country club” is located just north of the railroad tracks along Route 238, which intersects with SR-347 at Maricopa's busiest shopping center, where the Walgreens stares across the street at the CVS.

Craig Jackson, CEO of Barrett-Jackson and one of the founding partners in Private Motorsports Group, predicts a caravan of his high-net-worth clients from the auto auctions will soon be making that trek. He just hopes they can lay off the gas until they make it to the track.

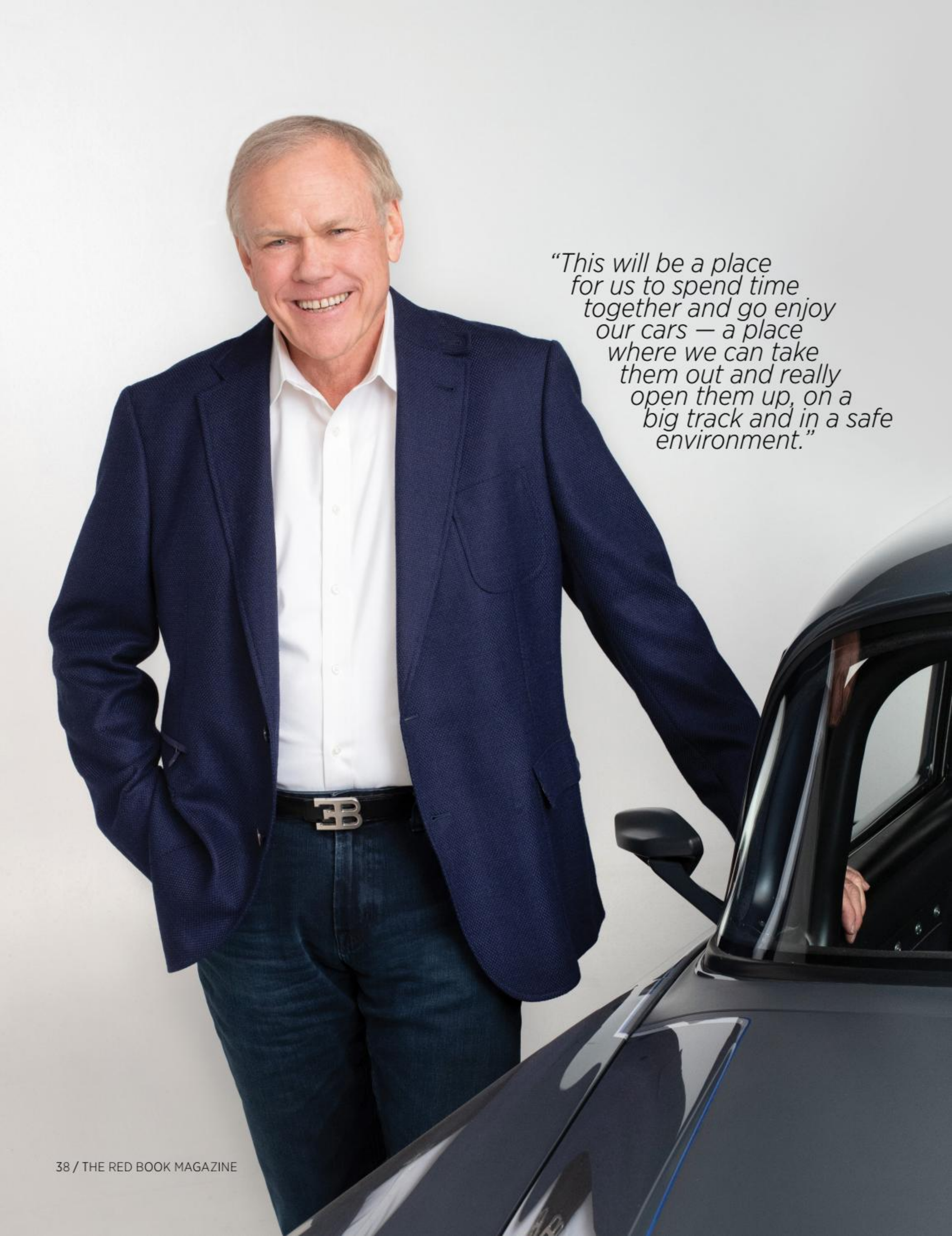
“We have a lot of great car collectors here,” says Jackson, an avid auto collector himself.

His Scottsdale estate famously features a multimillion-dollar circular garage he calls “The Rotunda,” where \$2 million Bugattis butt noses with '65 Shelby Mustangs and '61 Chevy Impalas on plush terrazzo flooring.

“This will be a place for us to spend time together and go enjoy our cars,” he says. “You know, a place where we can take them out and really open them up, on a big track and in a safe environment. That's really what it's all about.”

“The guys with the high-end cars all know there's no way they can take those cars out on the city streets and drive them to their full potential,” says Arie Luyendyk, the 65-year-old Netherlands-born auto racer and two-time Indianapolis 500 winner known as “The Flying Dutchman.” Luyendyk serves as one of Apex's advisors and, along with Canadian IndyCar racer Paul Tracy, an on-call trainer. “So they need a place where they can take their cars and do whatever they wish.”

Luyendyk had input into the design of the tracks (there will eventually be two: the 2.27-mile track that opened in March and a planned 2.15-mile track designed to include numerous high-speed sections and elevation changes) and says driver safety was a major concern. “There's a pretty good straightaway on the track, about an eighth of a mile long, where the cars can get some decent speeds going,” he says. “But then they come to what we call a bus stop [a serpentine series of curves designed to slow traffic] because you don't want to arrive at a corner doing 150 miles per hour and have the brakes maybe give you a problem.”

A full-page photograph of a middle-aged man with short, light-colored hair, smiling at the camera. He is wearing a dark blue textured blazer over a white button-down shirt, tucked into dark blue jeans with a black belt featuring a large silver 'EB' buckle. He is standing next to a dark-colored car, with his left hand resting on the roofline and his right hand in his pocket. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

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Joining the club won't come cheap. Memberships range from an initiation fee of \$18,000 and annual dues of \$4,000 for 20 track days per year, up to a \$75,000 initiation fee and \$10,000 in annual dues for unlimited track days. Luyendyk anticipates that a good share of the folks who shell out such fees may have more money than actual track experience. "These are people with expensive cars who just want to go as fast as they can," he says. "They want to tell their friends that they got up to 140 or something, you know?"

Matt Williams, the club's vice president, insists members will be a bit more knowledgeable behind the wheel than that. To get to the Apex Motor Club from Phoenix, members must first drive past the Bob Bondurant School of High-Performance Driving, which, up until now, has been the best place to burn rubber in an 840-horsepower Dodge Challenger SRT Demon.

"The Bondurant School is kind of a gateway drug, if you will, for car guys," Williams says. "That's where you go to learn skills and hone skills. We are where you go after you arrive at those skills."

Nevertheless, Luyendyk, whose son, Arie Jr., also races cars (and, notoriously, starred in the 2018 season of the ABC-TV dating competition *The Bachelor*), appears to view his advisory role similar to that of a resort golf instructor. "I'll coach them on the basic stuff they need to

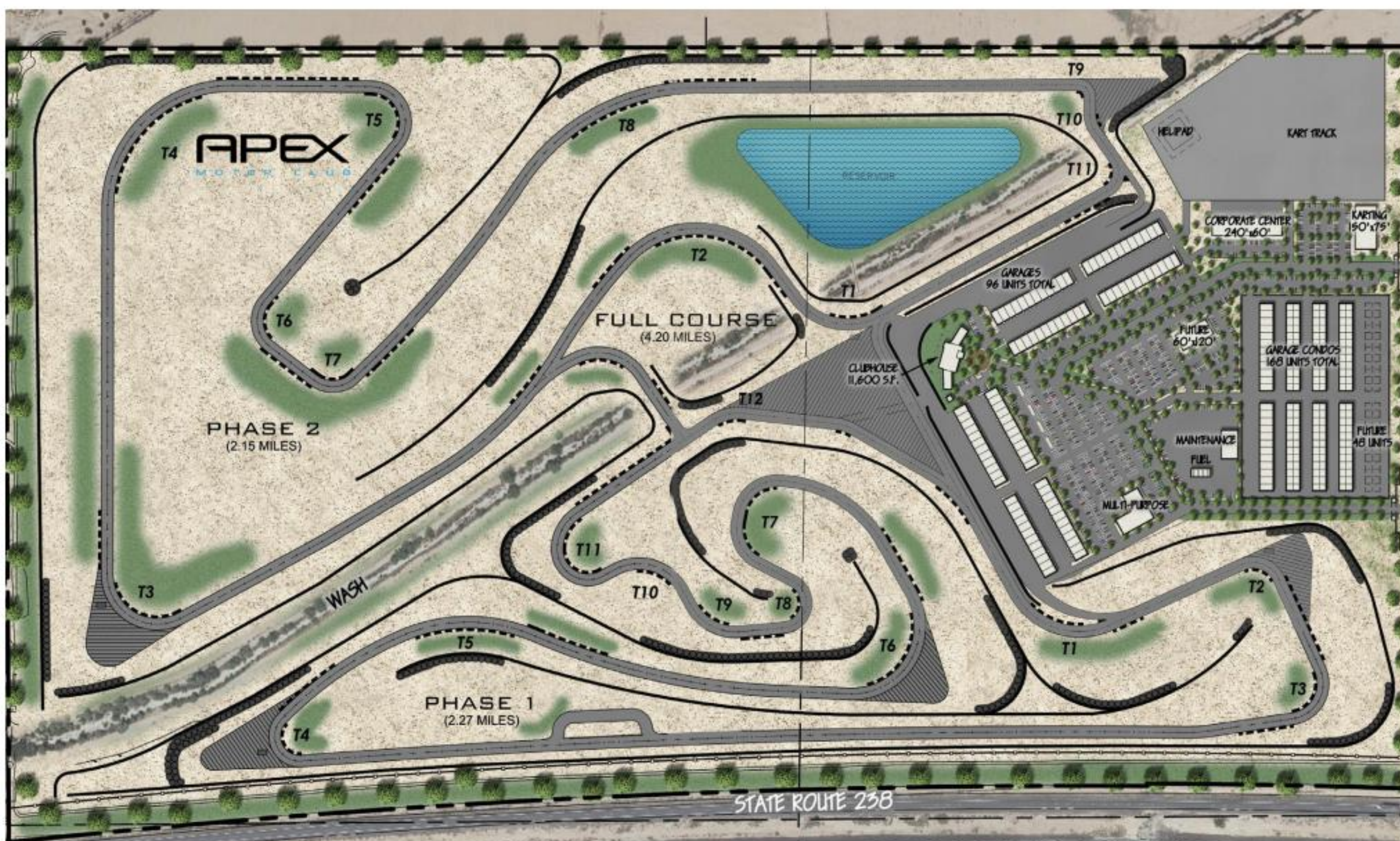
know to become smoother drivers," says the Scottsdale resident. "It's basically a country club for rich guys with cars."

"We have a handful of women who are members as well," counters Williams, who, together with partners Jason Plotke and Jim Beatty, first approached Christian Price, Maricopa mayor, about the \$33 million project around three years ago. "We also have members who are in their mid- to late-20s all the way up to their early 80s," he adds, stressing that the initial group includes vintage race car aficionados, exotic car fans and even competitive racers.

Williams says that when the project is finally completed (the group estimates about three more years of construction), Apex Motor Club will be an entertainment destination for the entire family, complete with restaurants, lounges, a fitness center and even a three-eighths-mile go-kart track, for the kids. "We imagine it being a family location, where wives are getting their nails done while their husbands are racing cars and their children are playing in go-karts," Williams said at a 2017 Maricopa Chamber of Commerce breakfast. "We think it has the opportunity to be wildly successful."

His comment no doubt elicited eye rolls from the aspiring Danica Patrick successors who would inevitably sign on as those first female members.

PREVIOUS PAGE: Craig Jackson, CEO of Barrett-Jackson and one of the founding partners in Private Motorsports Group.
ABOVE: Rendering of Apex Motor Club in Maricopa



Rendering of the completed track, Phase 1, and the planned Phase 2 track

As such, Apex joins a growing list of exclusive developments that provide

a country club-like experience, only with race cars instead of golf carts. Private car clubs like Monticello Motor Club in New York, located about a two-hour drive from Manhattan, and the Thermal Club in California, about 30 minutes from Palm Springs, offer fine dining, spas and kids activity centers in addition to some pretty gnarly tracks. Like those industry leaders, Apex will also rent large garage condos (nicknamed “Garage Mahals” for their frequent elaborateness) to members desiring to store their cars at the track.

Apex’s difference, says Williams, will be its relative proximity to the Greater Phoenix area, roughly a 30-minute drive from Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport. “We wanted to commoditize it like a local golf course, where somebody could come in and drive for 20 or 30 minutes and be back to the office in time for lunch or meetings,” he says. “Car culture is so abundant here in Phoenix that having a place

like this makes a lot of sense.”

While Maricopa’s mayor has been bullish on the project (in public meetings, Price highlighted the jobs that will be created), not all residents have been as supportive. In 2017, former Arizona Attorney General Grant Woods filed a lawsuit on behalf of a Maricopa homeowner who objected to the “noise, odors, dust, gas and smoke” the facility would generate, in addition to increased traffic. The Arizona Supreme Court ultimately dismissed the suit.

Jackson, who says he’s already bought some of the garage condos to house the racier vehicles in his personal collection, credits Williams, Plotke and Beatty for “pushing this thing over the finish line.”

“I’m going to keep some of my race cars out there,” he says. “So all I’ll have to do is just drive out there, hop in my race cars and play with them and do things that I wouldn’t legally be allowed to do with them out on the streets.”

He lets loose with the boisterous laugh well known to devoted attendees of his famed auto auctions. “I can’t wait!” ♦