

DiCAP'S

FISHERS



Meet Leonardo DiCaprio
– triple-A-list movie star,
green campaigner and
car company investor...

DiCap relaxes in the scenery shop of a Hollywood studio set

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Reclining on a low, dark blue sofa in a penthouse overlooking Manhattan's jagged skyline, triple-A-list actor, millionaire and eco-warrior Leonardo DiCaprio smoothes his hair and exhales deeply as he remembers his first-ever car memory.

"Oh boy..." he says.

DiCaprio is studying the script for his next big Scorsese blockbuster, *The Wolf of Wall Street*, but

has agreed to talk to *TopGear* – and only *TopGear* – about his latest real-life role as an auto-industry investor. A few weeks ago he took a financial interest in luxury car company Fisker Automotive, and we want to know why. But before we get to that, first we want to know a bit more about Leo's car history.

Like pretty much everyone else in the world, it starts modestly. "My father used to distribute underground comics in Los Angeles using two really beat-up station wagons," he says, remembering. "One he nicknamed the Blue Whale, because it was just a horrible used piece of junk, and the other one was called the Pus Mobile. I used to sit in the back and read comic books and graphic novels all day long while we commuted throughout Los Angeles."

When the young DiCaprio wasn't reading his dad's greaser-brand comics in the back of those knackered estate cars, he could usually be found under the hatch of his mum's silver Datsun 210. "We used to go everywhere in that car. I used to hang out in the hatchback trunk area as that was like my own little campground. I think she also had a Ford Pinto at one time, which is the eternal joke of horrible cars, right?"

Right. The energetic-sounding small Ford is remembered more for its ability to burn up its occupants than the road, thanks to a poorly positioned fuel tank. But the experience of that clearly didn't put him off the Blue Oval's products. DiCaprio's first car



Fisker Karma – the car of choice for eco-aware celebs

was a Sixties Ford Mustang fitted with the classic Windsor 351 (5.8-litre) engine. It made an instant impression.

"It was incredibly fast, and I could smoke anyone on the road," he says. "The problem was it didn't have power steering and the engine would just shut off. So there I was, 16 years old, with my learner's permit driving on the freeway, trying to manoeuvre around giant trucks and get to the side of the road with no engine and no power steering..."

The fourth time it happened, DiCaprio realised he was using up his lives far too quickly, and the car had to go. Luckily, that wasn't too hard to arrange as it transpired that the car wasn't legally his anyway. "It belonged to one of dad's friends and had just been loaned to me as part of some comic-book trade. I thought it was my car until the guy came back and took it from me. Which thankfully he did because it probably saved my life."

Despite staring death in the face a few times, the experience didn't slow DiCaprio down. He says his passengers would probably say he drives too fast, and blames his mother – "an insane driver" – who taught him. And it didn't do much to put him off classic cars, either. Two attributes, as well as his top-drawer acting chops, which made him the perfect fit for the lead role of Jay Gatsby in Baz Luhrmann's soon to be released remake of *The Great Gatsby*.

But I start to have my doubts about Leo's car knowledge when he starts talking about how much fun it was powering the large, yellow Duesenberg around the Australian set of the film. Duesenberg? I don't know much about F. Scott Fitzgerald's

work, but if I know one thing for sure, Jay Gatsby didn't drive a Duesenberg. His car was big and yellow, but it was also definitely a Rolls-Royce Phantom I.

Deciding not to interrupt him, I make a note to check the film credits of the new movie later and carry on. But I have to tell you now he was right. The new film does feature a Duesenberg clone in the place of the old Rolls – to the massive consternation of classic-car buffs and literary historians the world over – so I take it all back and DiCaprio's score is unblemished. Luhrmann's, however, has dropped to zero.

When he's not powering around in murderously fast, classic car clones, DiCaprio says he likes to drive himself, not be driven, wherever he may be going. ➤

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"MY SIXTIES MUSTANG WAS INCREDIBLY FAST – I COULD SMOKE ANYONE ON THE ROAD"



Speed and environmental salve in one handy package

Leonardo DiCaprio & Fisker

“LEO’S GREEN CREDENTIALS WERE SHOWN BY HIS ARRIVAL AT THE OSCARS IN A PRIUS”



A rarity: an A-list movie star with a conscience



Fisker: now funded in part by Leonardo DiCaprio



And, surprisingly perhaps, he's not that choosy about what he drives when he's not at home. Instead of having one of his favourite cars shipped to him for the six-hour trip to Vermont the previous weekend, Leo rented a truck, just like anyone else would.

He also breaks the movie-star mould by not having a huge car collection at his home in LA. "I have my Fisker, obviously, and I have a Lexus hybrid, but I don't own anything else," he says. "Ever since I learned about hybrid vehicles, that's all I've really owned." He has a few motorbikes, he says, but nothing more.

The reason for this lack of extra driveway bling, is, of course, DiCaprio's desire to help the planet. Something that first stirred in him when then US vice president Al Gore invited him to the White House and gave him an environmental 101 talk. "That was the defining moment," he says. "That's when I wanted to know more about what I can do, how I can get more involved."

From that moment in the late Nineties, DiCaprio has been on a mission to do as much environmental work as possible. From helping tigers, elephants and sharks to growing coffee for good causes, taking part in Live Earth and working with big sustainability organisations like Global Green, he's leveraged his fame in front of the camera to bring attention and cash to the causes and companies that he believes are doing good, environmentally responsible work.

The first the general public knew about his green credentials was Leo's appearance at the Oscars at the wheel of a Toyota Prius. "I'm photographed constantly by paparazzi when I leave my home so it was just a responsible thing to do as an environmentalist. I really believe in endorsing new, progressive technologies that are trying to make a difference."

Little did he know that his appearance at the Oscars was the main reason Henrik Fisker started the company. "No... really?" he says incredulously, looking at Henrik sitting next to him. "Yeah," says Henrik. "I saw you getting out of the Prius, and I thought

there's got to be a market for an environmentally friendly car which goes beyond the Prius. That was my first inspiration."

"Wow," says Leo, looking genuinely surprised and pleased. "I had no idea. That is cool." And it is. Here's an activist actor trying to get a message across, who finds out his actions are the reason for the creation of a car company he likes and respects so much he has just invested in it. It could almost be a script for a film.

So what drew DiCaprio to Fisker in the first place? "I started trying hybrids, which were fantastic. But you can say that there are lots of vehicles out there that get equal or better mileage. Then I bought two electric vehicles, which I found I never wanted to drive. I was afraid of being stranded on the Pacific Coast Highway and standing at a restaurant for six hours while my vehicle's plugged in.

"So the idea of this extended-range Fisker, which has the ability to be electric for a full day if you're not doing a road trip, but also allows you to take a spontaneous road trip if you decide to..." And the looks must have helped. "Oh yes, it's fantastic-looking. It drives like a sports car. It's amazing. It was a natural progression. I wanted to be part of the company and invest in it."

But, other than hoping to make a financial return on his investment, and have Fisker help to raise awareness of his Foundation, is there anything else he is hoping to achieve with the partnership? "I think the only thing would be to make cars that are lower in cost. And that's coming soon with the Atlantic [Fisker's upcoming smaller car]. Because you want everyone to be able to drive a vehicle like this."

With his investment and high-profile backing, DiCaprio will help move that vision closer to reality. Just don't expect him to devise a Beckham-style special edition Fisker. As great an actor as he is, being a car designer is one role Leo won't be auditioning for anytime soon. "I don't think I could be a better designer than he is," he says, pointing at Henrik. "So, for now, there are no plans."

For now... **TF**