



■ ALL AREAS OF RANCHO VALENCIA RESORT & SPA ARE DESIGNED WITH ELEGANCE AND COMFORT IN MIND.

LAP OF LUXURY

Hopping into the driver's seat of a Porsche is one of the upscale amenity options for guests at Rancho Valencia Resort & Spa. BY ROBERT KAUFMAN

"BABY YOU CAN DRIVE MY CAR, YES, I'M GONNA BE A STAR."

I was living the California dream driving down the Pacific Coast Highway north of San Diego in my dark gray Porsche 911 Carrera with the top down and couldn't shake the lyrics of that Lennon/McCartney tune. Fortunately, there were no other passengers. Not because of my defective vocals but because I didn't need any further distraction in a car for which I had just signed away my financial empire. You see, the car wasn't mine – it was simply a temporary amenity provided to me as a guest at Rancho Valencia Resort & Spa.

For roughly four hours, I was offered the luxury of exchanging my 6-year old Japanese ride for this German-engineered marvel for the drive to my appointment at the

Callaway Performance Center (also part of my package with Rancho Valencia) in Carlsbad. Securely planted in the driver's seat, it was a toss-up whether to be more nervous about road testing a \$100,000-plus car or having all my swing flaws detected with high-speed cameras.

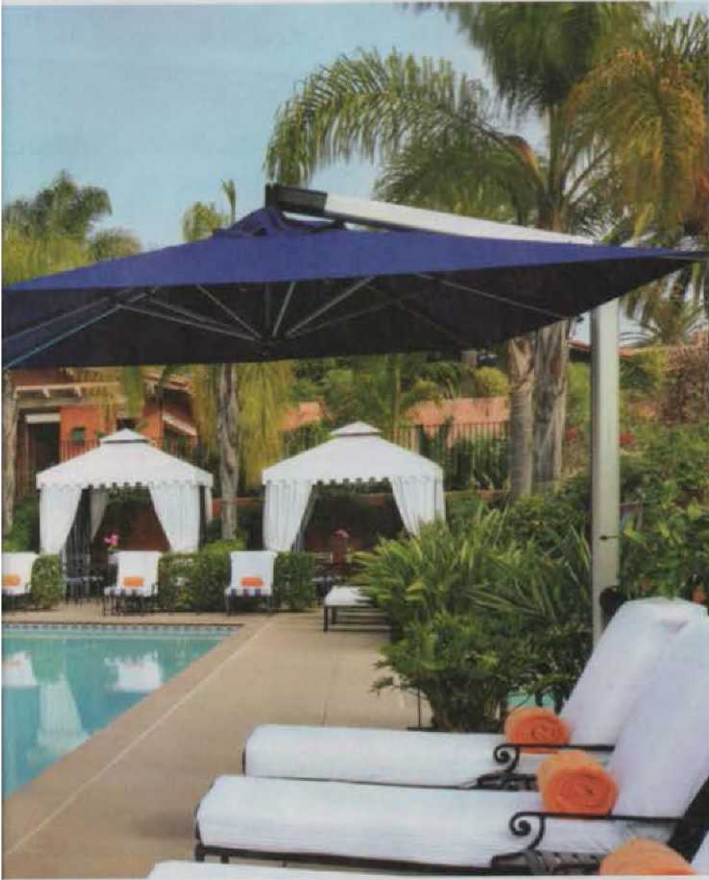
Let's just say that at the end of the day I could still live with a blemished golf swing.

Upon re-entering Rancho Valencia through the guarded gate – funny how I wasn't stopped this time – and returned the car unscathed, a sigh of relief was heard as I returned to the serene confines of the luxury retreat and its 45

canyon acres of gardens, olive groves and trails in the upscale neighborhood of Rancho Santa Fe.

This hidden gem of a property awoke from hibernation in October 2012, following a 10-month, \$30 million renovation and now you too can soak it all up just as Bill Gates, President Clinton or Michael Jordan have done. Well, maybe not exactly the same, since they probably had the key to the exclusive 5,000-square-foot Hacienda with three bedrooms, full kitchen and large backyard with private pool as opposed to non-celebs and the standard 1,000-square-foot, casita-

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styled rooms that include private patio, fireplace, custom furnishings, walk-in closet and soaking tub.

But regardless of living quarters and who you are, every guest receives the same VIP pampering at Rancho Valencia and I can attest to the fact that any resort staff member you come in contact with during your stay will greet you by name – even if it’s the first time they’ve laid eyes on you.

“The product is incredible and I am looking forward to fostering in new development and growth,” said newly appointed general manager David Shipman, who arrived after an 18-year stint at a resort in Napa Valley. “With the amenity package we have here, we are really trying to be a one-stop shop to avoid extra resort fees for our guests. Items such as fresh-squeezed orange juice and morning papers outside your front door, free Wi-Fi, the in-room snack bar, fitness center including complimentary yoga or Pilates classes, bikes or use of the three Porsches. There’s also a strong sense of privacy that really fits with the Relais & Chateaux mantra of creating environments that are calm in character.”

Part of the secluded atmosphere also includes the absence of wayward golf balls banking off your casita or carts motoring past the patio outside The

Pony Room while sipping one of the 100 varieties of tequila in stock. While this rejuvenated resort embodies most of what there is to savor about the Southern California lifestyle, there are no golf holes within its boundaries. But that hasn’t prevented Rancho Valencia from realizing the value of the game for their guests and having access to courses in the golf-rich region.

“Due to our locale, there’s tremendous potential in partnering with great golf courses,” Shipman said. “Already, we have developed relationships with Del Mar Country Club and The Farms adjacent to the resort and with our new leisure sales manager and one-time golf pro, Mark Phillips, we’re developing new partnerships along with stay-and-play packages that may focus more on couples golf due to the clientele attracted to our destination.”

With golf off property, anchoring down within the resort environs where you can be as active – or not – as desired, will never be an unpleasant alternative, however. I’m still daydreaming about my 90-minute detoxifying body massage and algae wrap.

For my brief time at Rancho Valencia Resort & Spa, I was indeed a star! **SG**



For more information, visit ranchovalencia.com.