Fast, flexible Flexcar serves OSU

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Almost 400 students and faculty have signed up with a car-sharing company designed to give students an alternative to driving a car to campus, a company spokesman said.

Beginning this quarter, Flexcar partnered up with OSU and is allowing members to rent from a fleet of 20 cars, starting at only $5 an hour.

"Ideally this will allow people to use alternate modes of transportation," said Sarah Blouch, director of Transportation and Parking Services.

Although bus service is available to all OSU students, Blouch acknowledged the benefits a personal car can provide.

"What if you have a doctor's appointment between classes or you just have to run to the grocery store? These are the kind of things Flexcar can really help with," Blouch said.

"This response has prompted Flexcar to consider expanding and adding more cars to their OSU collection," Williams said.

What makes a company like Flexcar unique is the idea of car-sharing. Instead of holding cars at a central location, Flexcar has 20 cars parked in easy-access locations around OSU's campus. Members share access to all these cars, which include sports cars, hybrids, and even a pickup truck and minivan.

Reservations are made online or over the phone, after which the driver pays the $5 hourly rate that covers gas, insurance and 150 miles (20 cents per mile thereafter). When done with the car, the driver simply returns it to its original parking place.

According to Flexcar's Web site, cost for members consists of an hourly usage fee, starting at $5 an hour, and an annual membership fee, around $35. Flexcar covers almost all other costs, although there are exceptions. For example, a fee will be added if the inside of the car is dirty beyond use.

"Flexcar has been offering car-sharing on select campuses since 2002, even though only people 21 and older could use it," Williams said. "In 2006, however, we introduced our "Flexcar for Undergrads" program, which expanded the service to 18-21-year-olds. With this in place, we began seeing a lot more interest from campuses around the country."

These campuses include, among others, USC, the University of Florida, the University of Maryland and the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

"We want to see as many students, faculty, and staff as possible using the vehicles instead of bringing their own cars to campus," Williams said.

"This reduces congestion, pollution, and helps save everybody some money."

Where to find Flexcars around campus

Reserved 24 Hours

Tow Away Zone

877-FLEXCAR
HOURLY CAR-RENTAL SERVICES

Zipcar stops, Hertz goes at OSU

By Kathy Lynn Gray
THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Zipcar is being unseated at Ohio State University, but that won’t spell the end of car-sharing on campus.

The nation’s largest provider of hourly rental cars pulls out of OSU on Monday. But a more familiar name, Hertz, will take its place about mid-January.

The switch is the latest twist in university efforts to encourage staff members and students to share vehicles so parking spots are freed up and state-owned cars are used less often. OSU departments park about 600 state cars on the main OSU campus during the day for job-related use.

“That’s a lot of cars taking up a lot of spaces,” said Sarah Blouch, OSU director of transportation and parking. “We think there could be a financial savings for departments if they don’t have to pay for a state car that sits unused much of the time.”

Car-sharing started at OSU in August 2007 with Flexcar, based in Washington, D.C. The company scattered 20 vehicles across campus and set up an hourly rental program. Flexcar members reserved rental times online and used a member card to gain access to the vehicles.

Flexcar merged with Zipcar a few months later. Under the Zipcar name, the company continued to operate car-sharing at OSU.

But the concept didn’t catch on as quickly as Zipcar and OSU would have liked. Zipcar cut the vehicle fleet to seven, and that reduced usage, Blouch said, because OSU employees didn’t want to walk several blocks to a rental car. They’re used to having state cars right outside their doors, she said.

The hourly rental fee of $9 to $11, depending on vehicle type, covers the cost of insurance and gas.

“To get people to try it, we’ll have to park them close,” Blouch said. “We’re still dedicated to doing it. It makes a lot of sense.”

Hertz will have 12 vehicles on campus and will operate much like Zipcar. The hourly rental fee members or departments pay, $9 to $11 depending on the vehicle, will cover insurance and gasoline. Membership will be free at first, then will cost about $35 annually, Blouch said.

Anyone 18 or older with a good driving record can join. That includes community members. Hertz is new to car-sharing. Its program, Connect by Hertz, started this month in Manhattan, Paris, London and Park Ridge, N.J.

Mark P. Fissora, Hertz chairman and chief executive officer, said in a news release that the company will aggressively expand its car-sharing, which he says will save users thousands of dollars in vehicle-ownership costs.

Zipcar has operated for eight years and has 3,500 cars at more than 100 universities, as well as in a number of urban areas.

On the OSU change, Zipcar issued a statement saying: “We are proud of having launched car-sharing service at OSU and for delivering outstanding service and value to the students, faculty and staff and the local community.”

The company will refund fees for any OSU member who paid after Sept. 1, according to an e-mail sent to members.

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