

■ **SEATTLE SURROUNDINGS:** Eli Darland maximizes his three-vehicle fleet with a combination of superior service and sound.



Boomin' Box Limousines

Entrepreneur and night club promoter offers hipster clients high-tech entertainment experience

By Martin Romjue

S EATTLE — Eli Darland gained years of experience on Seattle's night club circuit, promoting DJs and special events. His limousine company now puts that club experience on wheels.

As owner and founder of Rare Form Limousine Inc., based in Bellevue, Wash., Darland mixes it up as a maestro of sound and entertainment in his three company-owned vehicles. Darland has invested thousands of dollars in top-quality audio, visual, and navigation equipment for his SUV and Town Car stretches, and an SUV.

Darland strips out the factory-built communication and entertainment equipment, opting to sub in advanced stereos, speakers, iPods, navigation systems, XM satellite radio, and DVD players. The DVD players are hooked into the sound systems, and the chauffeurs are able to play a selection of movies per the client's request. The advanced systems help create what Darland calls that "clean, clear, crisp concert sound."

"The nightclub people like loud house music, hip-hop music," Darland said. "They want an experience they can't afford in their car, and they'll pool their money together to go out and have that

experience in a Rare Form Limousine."

Darland grew his limousine business out of his nightclub promotion company, Rare Form Productions Inc. The company did regular event promotions for clubs in downtown Seattle and Belltown, bringing in crowds for DJ-led parties and events and what Darland calls "Las Vegas-style mash-ups."

Darland and a business partner devised the concept after seeing a boat out on Lake Washington called Rare Form. Darland, who had his production company, then called Eli Enterprises Inc., named a DJ room at a club Rare Form. That moniker was transferred to the evening event at the club, and then later to Darland's company.

Darland faced some financing barriers when he tried to enter the limousine business, so he leveraged the corporate credit of Rare Form Productions Inc. to start a new company and qualify for the loans he needed for his first two limousines. He bought an SUV stretch built by Krystal Enterprises Inc. of Brea, Calif., the leading limousine builder in the world, and then later a white Krystal Town Car stretch. While Darland drew a healthy party and nightclub clientele for his SUV stretch, he noticed that the requests for the stretch Town Car limousine outnumbered those for the SUV stretch about 5 to 1.

"From my experience now, it's hard to get 10-13 people to agree on the same thing," Darland said.

"It's easier for two, three, or four people or couples to split the cost than get a whole group to agree on a limousine."

Darland still sees the SUV stretch as his flagship, however. The Ford Excursion costs about the same to rent as the Town Car limousine, and proves to be a robust road warrior with its 10-cylinder engine, dependable power, and stability in handling up to 13 passengers without tilts. In addition to clubbers, the two limousines enable Darland to get wedding clients and wine tourists. His third vehicle, a Ford Expedition XL, appeals to corporate clients. Darland plans to eventually buy some Town Car sedans, but for now he farms his sedan business out to affiliates.

As of July 31, Rare Form Limousine Inc. revenues were up 75% on a monthly basis year over year. Darland said his company averages about 40 runs per month. He was able to land one of five spots for limousine vendors at a major Seattle wedding show recently. He also has marketed his services as a preferred transportation provider with Woodinville Wine Country, the group that represents King County area wineries.

Darland's immediate goal is to find the right economies of scale so he doesn't have to handle all the reservations and dispatching himself. He is wired 24/7 with a two-line cell phone, with most of his calls coming in from about 8:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. Darland also doubles as chauffeur when needed.

As part of running an economical business, Darland emphasizes the need to keep vehicles immaculate. "You don't have to turn cars over often; the only reason is if the body style goes out of date," Darland said. "There's no need to turn that car over if you keep it maintained well." **LCT**



RARE FORM HIGH-TECH BRANDS

- **Chauffeur head unit:** Kenwood touch screen with navigation powered by Garmin and Navtec with XM Real-Time NavTraffic.
- **Passenger head unit:** Alpine
- **Speakers and subwoofers:** Boston Acoustics
- **Amplifiers:** Alpine or Boston Acoustics (depending on vehicle)

▼ **INFO**
RARE FORM LIMOUSINE INC.

LOCATION: Bellevue, Wash.
TERRITORY: Seattle-Tacoma region
OWNER: Eli Darland
YEARS IN BUSINESS: 2.5
FLEET SIZE: 3 (Ford Excursion stretch SUV, Lincoln Town Car stretch 100" limousine, and Ford Expedition EL)
CHAUFFEURS: 2
OFFICE STAFF: 1
REVENUES: \$105,000, estimated 2008
PHONE: (206) 790-3045
WEBSITE: www.rareformlimo.com
