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# STILL TRYING HARDER

*Driving in the Philippines can be fun and adventurous; but being chauffeured is convenient and more practical for travellers on a tight schedule*

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Avis operates the largest limousine fleet in the country

A collection of over 7,000 islands measuring a total length of around 1,500 kilometres, the Philippine archipelago covers a similar amount of the earth to Sweden. But while the latter has 165,000 kilometres of paved roads for a population of less than 10 million, the Philippines has just 40,000 kilometres of paved roads for a population of more than 90 million—a familiar situation in most developing nations. However, the Philippines offers some exciting tourist destinations that remain largely unexplored; likewise, the economy is poised to be one of the bright spots in a bearish world market.

A challenge and opportunity indeed for G&S Transport Corporation (G&STC) which, since 1972, has operated the Philippine licence of Avis Rent A Car International. “For many years,” says Rafael V. Lucila Jr., the company’s president and CEO, “we operated as a conventional self-driven rent-a-car company. But over the years, greater affluence means more Filipinos are driving and the roads have just gotten busier and more crowded. For motorists, especially in Metro Manila, driving in the Philippines can be a daunting task, not to mention the difficulty of finding a parking space. Not surprisingly, therefore, 80 per cent of our business is now chauffeur-driven. For the less crowded regions, however, self-drive offers the opportunity to discover the countryside. Avis has rental locations in these favourite destinations, offering motorists the convenience of GPS navigation.”

It’s been a bit of a rollercoaster ride for



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Renowned for providing only the best for its clients, CATS Motors, Inc., the Philippine General Distributor of Mercedes-Benz Passenger Cars, has partnered with Avis Philippines to provide Shangri-La's five-star hotels with the most luxurious limousine service of all—a fleet of Mercedes-Benz S-Class sedans.

Though the exclusive use of the S-Class isn't a new development for Shangri-La, the recent acquisition of S 400 BlueHybrid sedans is. That's because the S 400 BlueHybrid sedans don't just offer guests the exceptional comfort of the world's most luxurious sedan, but the seamless integration of breakthrough technology and green innovations in one car. Mercedes-Benz made international automotive news when it launched the S 400 BlueHybrid. A luxurious S-Class, it takes luxury to the ecological level.

It is the first to succeed in adapting a lithium-ion battery in a passenger car. Compared with its nickel-metal hydride counterparts, it has higher ampere-hour efficiency, longer service life and a vehicle climate control system that regulates temperature ensuring optimal performance. The S 400 BlueHybrid consumes only 7.9 litres of gas per 100 kilometres and has low carbon emissions of 190 grams per kilometre while still staying powerful at 299 horsepower with 375 newton metre torque, and fast at 0 to 100 kilometres per hour in 7.3 seconds. Since the time of Al Gore's award-winning documentary, An Inconvenient Truth, more and more businesses are realising that going green is the wave of the future.

Going green doesn't mean sacrificing luxury, efficiency, technological advances or even profit. The S 400 BlueHybrid is, in fact, a living testament to that. Its low carbon emissions and fuel efficiency is actually a result of the breakthrough use of lithium-ion as its battery. Since Avis Philippines has acquired these units, it has been able to save up to 50 per cent on its previous fuel expenses, proving that going green isn't just a smart choice for the environment, but for business as well. Sharing the same passion for sustainable business management, Shangri-La has partnered with Avis to procure Mercedes-Benz S 400 BlueHybrid sedans. With this business venture, Shangri-La's limousine service is now the first hybrid limousine fleet in the country.

It's this kind of passion for quality, service and innovative-thinking that brought together Shangri-La Hotels, Avis Philippines and CATS Motors.

It's this kind of partnership that stands as a paradigm for successful and sustainable business opportunities in the hope that others will follow suit.

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Avis. In the early years, being the first and foremost global brand in the country, Avis Philippines had a jumpstart on international inbound travel through Manila International Airport. With the growing economy, more players entered the car rental industry; and added pressure came in the early 1990s when the US scaled down operations and shut two key military installations that provided bread and butter for many sectors in the Philippine economy.

Since then, Avis has taken a different tack and has increasingly targeted the corporate sector, without losing focus on leisure travel. For business clients who have touch points all over the Philippines, Avis offers transport solutions that bring people to and from airports and business destinations. Anyone staying at the country's five-star hotels is a potential customer and Lucila and his team work hard to establish good relations with the best hotels and the most important businesses with offices in the country. "A typical Avis customer," he says, "will be here for two or three days, travel to a series

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**40,000 KM**

Total length of paved roads  
in the Philippines



80 per cent of Avis' business is now chauffeur-driven



of business meetings and want to see the city when the working day is over. Our aim is to give them the most enjoyable driving experience possible during their stay.”

At the basis of Avis’ focus on excellence are four action principles that G&STC works hard to instil in its 400-plus drivers and employees. “Primarily,” says Lucila, “we put care for our customers above everything else. Next, we try to ensure attention to detail in every conceivable respect. Then we want to get everything right the first time and finally, we motivate our staff to go the extra mile to maintain a distinction between ourselves and every other car rental company in the country. We invest in our people through our in-house training school and performance-based compensation system.”

In essence, added Lucila, these principles are the legacy of the founder, Domingo M. Guevara Sr., a self-made man and a foremost Filipino entrepreneur. Starting as a young radio mechanic in the early 1930s, he pioneered the all-Filipino manufacturing and distribution of affordable home appliances under the Radiowealth brand; and later, he ventured into the assembly and manufacture of Volkswagen automobiles. DMG, as he was fondly called, was one of the framers of the



Avis executives receiving 40th anniversary recognition

1970 Philippine Constitution; and with great foresight he established G&STC in 1972 to carry the Avis brand in the country. The DMG heritage lives in the 10 companies of the Guevent Group under the flagship Guevent Investment Development Corporation.

Not surprisingly, when dealing with corporate customers who are used to the highest levels of pampering, Avis does get complaints. Lucila believes the most important

aspect of customer complaints is how genuine problems are dealt with notwithstanding the nuisance and self-serving ones. Any feedback with real merit is a cause for concern, and steps must be taken to ensure it will not happen again.

As well as self-drive and chauffeur driven cars, Avis Philippines offers worry-free, flexible leasing options of three months or more catering to customers’ specific requirements, such as projects and temporary assignment of executives. Businesses can outsource running their own fleet since Avis has a fleet management division covering the full spectrum of needs from vehicle

**400**

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**Approximate fleet size of G&STC**

acquisition, registration and insurance to periodic servicing, scheduling and dispatch, chauffeur service, accident claim processing and repairs, and vehicle disposal. Avis Philippines is also the preferred transport provider to international

and domestic special events that require large numbers of various vehicles for a short period of time shuttling participants around with clockwork precision.

Until now, by far the majority of business for Avis has been in-bound. But with a growing economy and more investment in priority areas such as energy, mining, communications, construction and

**“WE MOTIVATE OUR STAFF TO GO THE EXTRA MILE TO MAINTAIN A DISTINCTION BETWEEN OURSELVES AND EVERY OTHER CAR RENTAL COMPANY IN THE COUNTRY”**





Avis can take tourists past the end of the paved roads

**“IN 2008 WE OPENED A DOMESTIC 24/7 CALL CENTRE WHICH CAN NOW HANDLE ALL ENQUIRIES FOR BOTH INBOUND AND OUTGOING BUSINESS”**

infrastructure development, a growing sector of the population travel overseas, needing car hire at the other end. “As part of the Avis group,” says Lucila, “we can satisfy their car hire needs, anywhere in the world. In 2008 we opened a domestic 24/7 call centre which can now handle all enquiries for both inbound and outgoing business, giving us a more integrated connection

with the rest of the world.”

Such outbound business is still very small but Avis Philippines is now well-placed to take full advantage of any growth that occurs. In the meantime, in line with the government’s intention of encouraging greater development in other parts of the country, Avis is looking actively for growth outside Manila.

When G&STC started operations in 1972, it had six cars and one station in the capital. Today, the fleet stands at around 400 vehicles based in 16 strategic rental locations and a number of five-star hotel concessions throughout the country, many of them providing a round-the-clock service. Last year, revenue reached nearly US\$8 million, making it the leading rental company with a 20 per cent share of the market. To mark its 40th anniversary, G&STC introduced the first hybrid limousine service in the country. In 10 years’ time, coinciding with its 50th anniversary, Lucila wants Avis Philippines to be billing five times that amount—more of it being generated by activity out in the regions.

Lucila is aware that the highest level of government is formulating the right policies for development but implementation must be on fast-track through national and local agencies to have significant impact on the ground. With a tourist-friendly people, a few more roads would be more fun. In the meantime, Avis Philippines is ready to provide a luxurious ride in a Mercedes Benz S-400 to take you on your next business appointment, or in a Toyota SUV capable of taking tourists past the end of the paved roads. **BE**

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