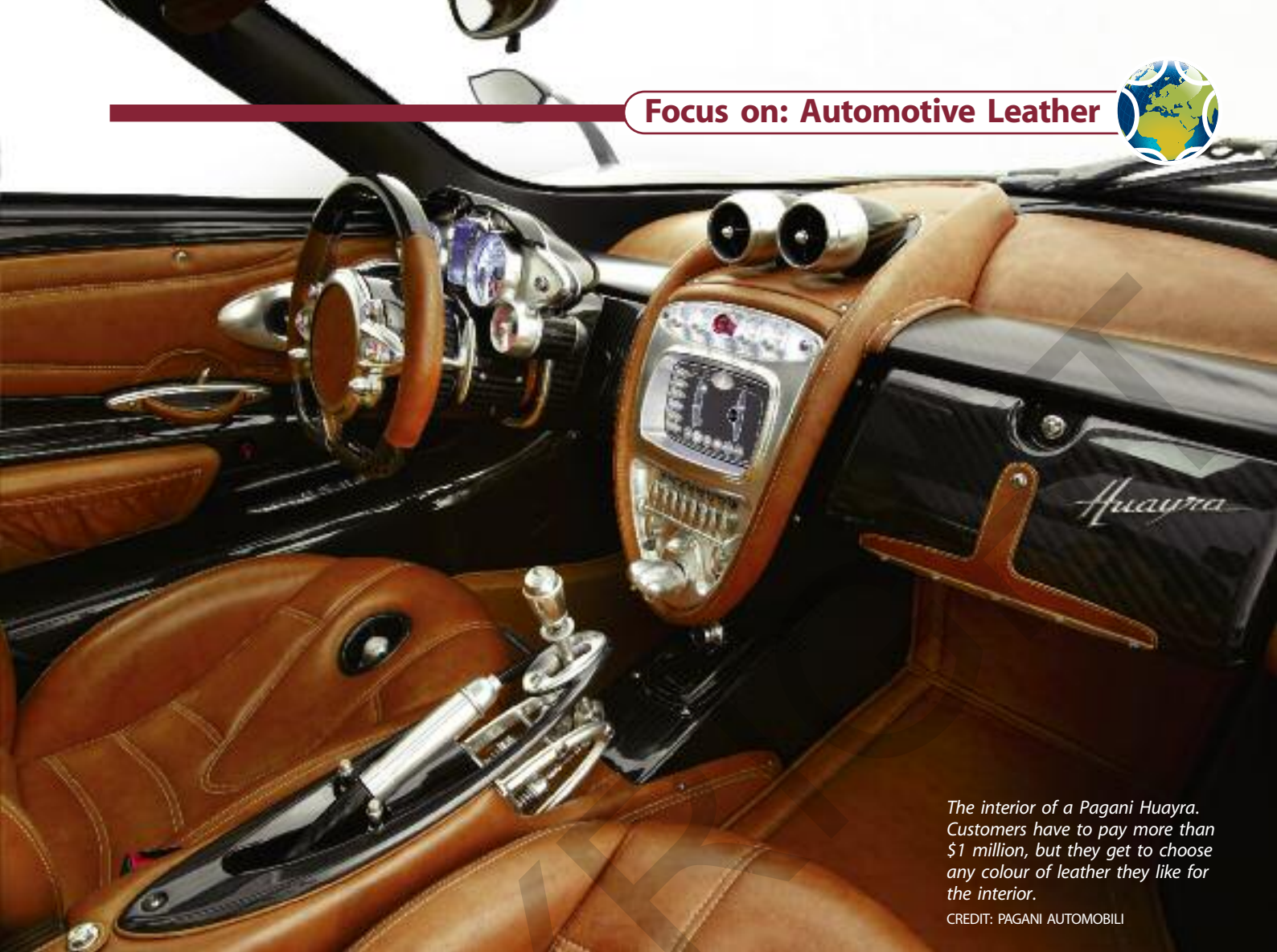




The interior of a Pagani Huayra. Customers have to pay more than \$1 million, but they get to choose any colour of leather they like for the interior.

CREDIT: PAGANI AUTOMOBILI

A bold decision pays off

Arzignano-based tanning company Gruppo Dani made no automotive leather until 2009. Now customers in the automotive industry consume 50% of all the leather the group produces.

Since the 1970s, Giancarlo Dani has been running the tanning business his father set up not long after World War II and is a veteran of the leather industry in Italy, particularly in the tanning cluster around Arzignano in the province of Vicenza. Modest and quietly spoken, he is less well known outside Italy than his commitment to innovation and pioneering work on sustainability deserve. On home soil, at least, he is a highly respected industry leader.

His reputation did not spare him one or two strange looks, though, when he decided to add automotive leather to Gruppo Dani's product portfolio, which until then had been dominated by furniture upholstery, leathersgoods and footwear. This happened in 2009, in the depths of the downturn from which Italy is still struggling to emerge.

Today, 50% of Gruppo Dani output is for automotive. Much of the automotive leather that Dani makes goes into steering-wheel covers but there have been more singular projects, not least with Modena-based luxury car company Pagani. It only makes 40 cars a year, meaning customers often have quite a long wait before being able to take delivery of the sports car of their dreams, and a Pagani does not come cheap (the 2016

Huayra is quoted at \$1.4 million per car). For this, though, customers can include all sorts of personalised details in their orders, including a favourite colour for the leather in the interior. "We always try our best to find a solution," the Gruppo Dani chief executive explains, "and we regard Pagani as a friend."

The group was able to set up Dani Automotive and run it as a separate operation, with its own wet end producing wet white rather than wet blue for retanning and finishing (one of the requirements of Pagani and other automotive companies) because it acquired the premises of another Arzignano tannery that had gone out of business. Giancarlo Dani has turned its fortunes around. Dani Automotive has since taken similar steps, setting up a cutting and sewing operation in Slovenia, taking over the business of a former partner, Prevent. And more recently still, it has set up a new automotive tannery in Tunisia, which now has the capacity to process 2,000 hides a week.

From this, it's easy to understand why Giancarlo Dani should have no regrets about the decision he took in 2009. "I love leather, and it makes me happy to think of leather making a difference in a car," he says. 🌐