WHITE PAPER

MARKET OPPORTUNITY

Financing vehicle rental fleets serving the U.S. gig economy

Unlocking an underserved fleet finance market



Kevin Egolf
Head of Capital Solutions
Zeti North America

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Key takeaways

- Vehicle ownership is increasingly shifting from individual drivers to specialized rental companies serving the gig economy. An estimated 15–20% of U.S. rideshare drivers already rent their vehicles, creating a $16 billion niche asset market.
- New vehicle rental companies are emerging to serve the gig economy due to a differentiated offering relative to traditional rental car companies.
- These specialized vehicle rental companies do not have the same credit risk factors as traditional rental car companies.
- Many of the credit risk factors relevant to these specialized vehicle rental companies can be mitigated with software platforms like ZetiOS, which has already been used to finance approximately 1,000 EVs.
- There is a large and growing asset finance opportunity to serve these specialized vehicle rental companies.

01 Executive summary

The U.S. rideshare and delivery economy has gone through several iterations since adoption by American consumers. The latest development, the emergence of vehicle rental companies built specifically to serve rideshare and last-mile delivery drivers, is largely invisible to Transportation Network Company (TNC) platform users, but represents an emerging fleet capital deployment opportunity.

The demand side of this market is well known. Uber, Lyft, DoorDash and Instacart together completed roughly 18 billion transactions globally in 2025.[1] U.S.-only volumes are estimated at 6 to 7 billion completed rides, food deliveries and grocery drops per year,[2] roughly 18 million every day. Every one of those transactions requires a vehicle.

MARKET SIZING

Estimated US platform volume, 2025

PLATFORM	REPORTED 2025 VOLUME	ZETI ASSUMPTION	US ESTIMATE
Lyft	950M rides (U.S. + Canada)	~90%+ U.S.	~0.85-0.9B
Instacart	340M orders (U.S. + Canada)	Nearly 100% U.S.	~0.3B
DoorDash	3.2B orders (global)	60–65% U.S.	~2.0-2.1B
Uber	13.6B trips (global)	20–30% U.S.	~2.7-4.1B
Total			~5.9-7.4B

1 Company-reported full-year 2025 volumes.

2 Zeti estimate based on applying a U.S. market share to each major TNC.

A meaningful and growing share of those vehicles are not owned by the people driving them. Based on our conversations with rental companies serving rideshare drivers and their reported growth trends, we estimate that 15–20% of U.S. rideshare drivers today are renting their vehicles.[3] Beyond that, we believe additional drivers would enter the rideshare workforce if appropriate rental options were more readily available. This reflects a broader shift in which the vehicle is increasingly viewed as a business input rather than simply a household purchase. This trend is consistent with how the European and Asian gig driver economies are developing.

The economics behind the shift from vehicle ownership to rental are straightforward. Full-time drivers put over 40,000 miles a year on a vehicle.[4] That is three to four times what a typical private vehicle sees. Dedicated rental operators bundle commercial insurance, routine maintenance and unlimited mileage into a flat weekly rate, and in doing so they move the depreciation burden off the driver's balance sheet and onto an institution built to manage and carry it.

Zeti conservatively estimates the financing market opportunity for rideshare vehicle rental companies is over $16 billion.

RIDESHARE RENTAL FINANCING MARKET SIZE	
Active U.S. rideshare drivers	**4.2 million**[5]
Estimated proportion renting	**15%**
Implied rental vehicles	**0.6 million**
Average vehicle acquisition cost	**$25,000**
Asset-finance opportunity	**$16 billion**

These rideshare-focused rental companies need capital and are being underserved by the broader capital markets. Capital providers are missing this opportunity largely because of risk factors that are either misunderstood or that were genuine years ago but are now manageable with technology.

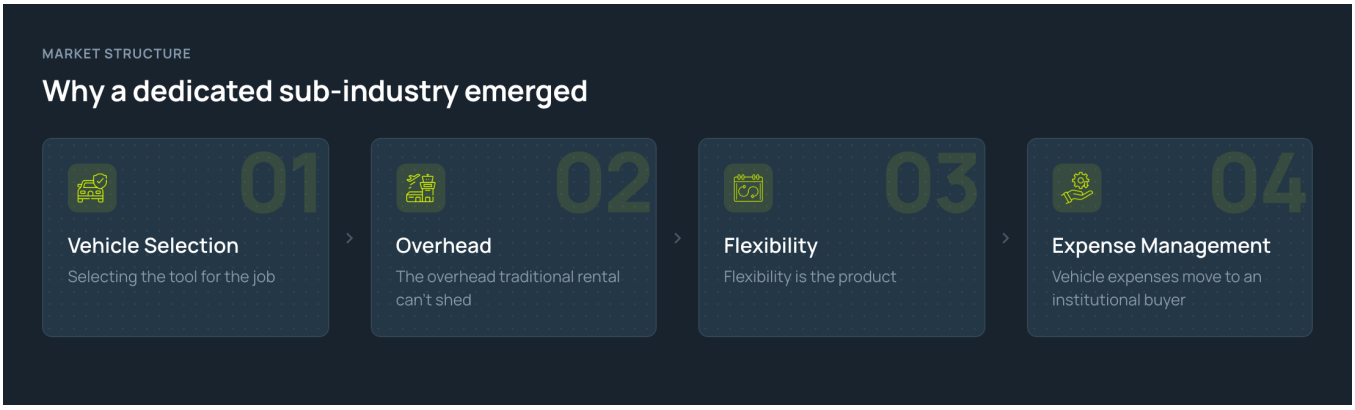
3 Estimate based on Zeti North America's direct conversations with over 15 vehicle rental companies serving the gig economy over the past twelve months, discussing fleet size, growth trends and rental demand, assessed against historically reported benchmarks.

4 HR&A Advisors, Rideshare Driver Net Earnings Study (prepared for Uber), November 2025.

5 Zeti estimate based on 1,400 trips per year per driver and the conservative Zeti estimate of 6 billion U.S. trips per year. Trips per year per driver based on Uber reported 13,567 million trips in the 2025 annual reports and 9.7 million drivers in a March 2026 Uber employee LinkedIn post.

02 Why a dedicated sub-industry emerged

Four structural factors are pulling the asset away from the driver and toward specialized rental companies. Traditional vehicle rental companies have tried to fill the void with limited success.



Selecting the tool for the job

The ideal rideshare vehicle is a fuel-efficient mid-size sedan (Tesla Model 3, Toyota Prius, Hyundai Elantra, Honda Accord, etc.). A driver's two largest expenses are fuel and depreciation, and managing those two costs is how full-time drivers maximize take-home pay.

While many of these sedans are popular vehicles, only the Toyota Camry is a top-10 vehicle in the U.S.[6] These are not the models that Americans want to own as primary vehicles. Personal buyers gravitate to pickups, SUVs and crossovers. Cars make up less than 20% of new vehicles purchased in the U.S.[7] The vehicle that makes a driver the most money is not the vehicle that the driver wants to use on the weekend or for their family, if they even own a vehicle.

Traditional rental companies cannot solve this cleanly either. They carry a broad set of segments to serve a mix of business and leisure travelers: compacts for budget solo business trips, premium for executive business transport and three-row SUVs for family vacations. Much of that fleet has limited use for rideshare drivers, too small for comfort, too expensive to be economic, or too big for fuel efficiency.

6 Kelley Blue Book: The 25 Best-Selling Cars in 2025.

7 Experian, Q2 2026 State of the Automotive Finance Market.

Moreover, the TNCs are pushing drivers into zero-emission vehicles with extra incentives. This combined with the developing used EV market is creating very favorable economics. When a rental operator buys a lightly used EV, the steepest part of the depreciation curve has already been absorbed by the first owner as there are limited to no fleet discounts on EVs. And supply is arriving. Americans bought 378,140 used EVs in 2025, up 35% year over year, more than the United States sold in new battery electric vehicles in any year prior to 2021[8] and the pipeline is growing. High lease penetration on new EV sales is creating a direct funnel into the used EV market. For a buyer of lightly used sedans (Tesla Model 3 specifically), there is a favorable multi-year supply window.



The overhead traditional rental cannot shed

The major rental companies offer rideshare programs, but these companies were built for a high-turnover business model, which is reflected in their cost structure.

Traditional rental companies have positioned themselves in high-traffic corridors, including airports, dense urban cores and heavily trafficked arterials, and absorb an associated high occupancy expense. Rental location is much less important for rideshare drivers and they are not willing to pay for that convenience.

The same is true of their staffing and systems, which are built for high turnover. The average U.S. rental runs about 4.8 days.[9] Rideshare drivers may sign a weekly agreement, but their renewal rates are very high, and continual renewal produces effective rental periods measured in months. One operator recently told us their average rental period, with renewals, was close to a month. Another operator has shared multiple stories about active renters they have worked with for over a year. That customer does not need airport counters, shuttle buses, or the staffing model that supports a five-day cycle.



Flexibility is the product

Dedicated operators mostly offer weekly and monthly terms with some having daily options for drivers with a strong track record. The rental terms are designed to match the varied demand. Some drivers want a vehicle only on days off from another job. Some are driving between jobs and go week to week. Some drive full-time but still do not want to hold a depreciating asset through a week or a month they might skip. Retirees may value the ability to work only when they want or need to. A growing trend, more common in Europe and made possible by connected assets and technology such as ZetiOS, is pay-per-mile financing. The driver pays only for the actual usage of the vehicle, providing the ultimate flexibility regardless of the rental period.

8 Cox Automotive, EV Market Monitor, December 2025.

9 GlobalData, average rental length, U.S. car rental segment.

Ownership does not make sense when the entire premise of gig work is flexibility. A prepaid rental product creates flexibility that cannot be matched by ownership.

VEHICLE RENTAL COMPARISON

OPERATING CHARACTERISTIC	TRADITIONAL RENTAL	SPECIALIST GIG RENTAL
Customer profile	Short-term business or leisure travel	**Ongoing access to a vehicle for income generating work**
Pricing structure	Predominantly daily	**Focus on weekly and monthly**
Renewal options	Financial penalties for not returning the vehicle	**Automatic renewals**
Location model	Airports, city centers and high-traffic sites	**Low cost, single location per metropolitan area**
Vehicle selection	Broad mix serving multiple journey types	**Efficient vehicles selected around driver economics**
Asset monitoring	Often periodic or fragmented	**Can be connected to live utilization and location data**
Cleaning	At company location between each customer rental	**Regularly performed by driver / renter**
Operating priority	Availability across multiple customer segments, convenience and customer service	**Vehicle uptime, utilization and driver retention**



Vehicle expenses move to an institutional buyer

Depreciation, the cost of the vehicle, is a driver's largest expense. An individual purchasing a car is going to purchase at retail pricing paying a premium above the cost a dealer pays to acquire the vehicle. Rental companies can place factory orders and receive OEM discounts or buy directly at wholesale prices when sourcing used vehicles. The basis of the depreciation is lower for a rental vehicle company compared to an individual owner.

After depreciation and fuel, insurance and maintenance are a driver's next largest expenses, when they own the vehicle. When insurance and maintenance sit with an institutional owner, they get managed like any other business expense: bid out, bought in volume, negotiated. An individual driver pays retail for oil changes, tires and minor damage repair, paying the service provider's margin on top of all the direct costs. A rental company does not. They can manage simple maintenance in-house and outsource other items under volume discounts. On the insurance side, an individual pays a significant premium to carry high-mileage insurance coverage, whereas a multi-asset owner spreads that cost across the fleet. The cash cost of insuring and maintaining the same vehicle is simply lower under institutional ownership.

These savings are indirectly passed to the driver via a lower rental rate, which means the driver is the ultimate net beneficiary.

03 Myths and perceived risks

Several widely held beliefs about this sector create perceived risk without real credit exposure. These perceived risks deter capital providers from entering this market segment.

“Renters do not take care of the vehicle”

Everyone remembers their last personal rental, sand tracked in from the beach, luggage thrown across the back seat, snow and mud on the floor mats, to-go cups and food wrappers jammed into the cup holders.

The rideshare use case is very different. These drivers are rated on the cleanliness of their vehicle, so they are directly incentivized to keep it clean, odor-free and presentable. Their income, tips and trips, depend on the condition of the vehicle. Top-scoring drivers are prioritized with top volume customers, which could lead to higher income through additional trips and tipping. And because most of their miles are driven with paying passengers who expect a smooth, safe ride, the vehicle sees less stress than it would under the driving habits of the average American motorist. The wear patterns that make traditional rental fleets expensive to maintain are largely absent with gig renters.

“The end customer will not pay”

Consumer credit experts can debate the creditworthiness of gig drivers at length. For these rideshare rental companies, it does not matter. They are not extending credit or taking any credit risk with their renters.

These operators run on a prepaid basis and use vehicle immobilization technology. An effective operator in this segment has hard, fast, unambiguous rules about immobilization and does not allow unpaid receivable balances to accumulate. Operators we work with do not let vehicles go unpaid for more than two days before immobilizing the vehicle. This only happens at renewal, as initial rentals are always prepaid.

“EV residual values are too uncertain”

Many rental companies serving rideshare drivers exclusively offer EVs or have a significant percentage of EV assets. As such, this perceived EV risk often becomes a credit barrier.

While several years ago EV residual values did create a credit risk, that is no longer the case.

First, the light-duty EV market has matured. Tesla, in particular, has become far more conscious of how its vehicle pricing actions ripple through residual values, and the overall market volatility that drove the worst of the 2023 declines has moderated. In further support, electric and plug-in hybrid vehicles were approximately 10% of new U.S. car sales in 2025[10] and growth trends are moderating, reflecting a stabilized marketplace.

Second, and more tellingly, used EVs and used gas vehicles now transact at nearly the same price. In the first quarter of 2026, the average used EV sold for $34,821 against $33,487 for the average used gas vehicle, a gap of roughly $1,300, down from more than $10,000 in early 2023.[11] This used pricing convergence demonstrates stability in the marketplace.

Third, many rental operators are focused on buying lightly used EVs. Historically, used vehicles carried extra risks as downtime and maintenance increase with miles, but that is not true with EVs. Buying used EVs allows operators to be positioned on the correct side of the depreciation curve. Faster early depreciation is a cost to the first owner and a benefit to the second.

While residual uncertainty remains a live issue in the nascent medium- and heavy-duty segments, light-duty is mature and established.

AVERAGE USED EV, Q1 2026	AVERAGE USED GAS VEHICLE, Q1 2026
$34,821	**$33,487**

10 International Energy Agency, Global EV Outlook 2026.

11 Cox Automotive, Q1 2026 Industry Insights and Sales Forecast.

04 How ZetiOS mitigates real risk factors

There are legitimate credit considerations when providing capital for a rideshare rental fleet. Zeti's asset finance technology platform, ZetiOS, was built to address asset finance risks for rental fleets and other asset finance opportunities.

Asset repossession

Capital providers are rightly cautious about financing car rental companies as a category because the collateral moves and is not housed overnight at a company location. Locating and recovering a vehicle that could be anywhere in a metro area used to be slow, expensive and uncertain.

In the old world, that was a legitimate risk factor. It no longer carries the same weight. GPS tracking and vehicle immobilization technology have collapsed both the cost and the timeline of recovery. ZetiOS provides real-time location data on every connected asset. In a repossession scenario, a repo partner can be engaged, the vehicle located and obtained, and an auction initiated very quickly. This significantly increases recovery value of the asset and the overall recovery rate as assets are obtained and sold quickly.

High and variable utilization

Rideshare drivers are frequently high-mileage users, but usage varies substantially from driver to driver and month to month. Full-time drivers in three markets studied averaged 800 to 915 miles a week; across all drivers the average was closer to 390 to 440.[12] A single financing structure sized for the average will be wrong for most of the fleet.

The old solution was to set the financing duration to match the highest-mileage use case, protecting against depreciation risk by assuming the worst. That is safe, but it prices out the operator whose fleet is not being driven as hard.

With ZetiOS, lenders can implement and automate utilization-based (pay-per-mile) financing, or a fixed structure with utilization-based overages. This lets repayment track the actual depreciation curve of the asset. When a vehicle is driven more, it pays down faster, matching the asset depreciation. Note that this is not a departure from traditional term structures, but rather an enhancement. Our financial partners use two structural features that let a credit committee underwrite on familiar metrics: a floor utilization rate, so that an asset used below the floor still pays at the floor rate, and a fixed total repayment amount over the life of the financing regardless of utilization. Together, these guarantee a minimum return and a known maximum duration. If utilization runs above the floor, the financing repays faster and the lender's IRR improves, with no increase in total exposure. The lender benefits from receiving capital earlier and takes no additional risk to get it. As of today, ZetiOS has been used to finance approximately 1,000 EVs through this pay-per-mile, utilization-based structure.

12 HR&A Advisors, Rideshare Driver Net Earnings Study (prepared for Uber), November 2025.

Performance visibility

Maintaining high utilization is the leading performance indicator for any rental business. Historically, lenders have had no visibility into ongoing performance or have received utilization reports well in arrears. In other words, they learned about a problem only after it had created a payment issue.

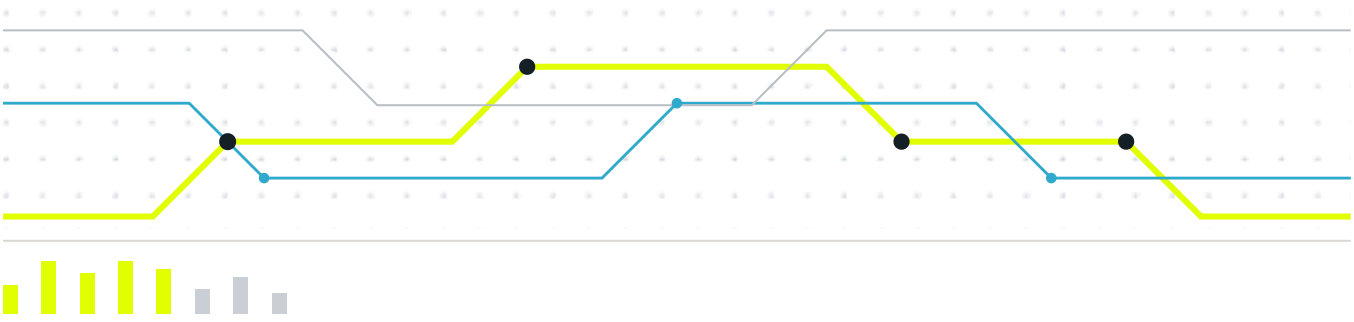
ZetiOS provides real-time utilization tracking. A lender can see a performance dip as it develops and work with the borrower before the dip impacts the repayment. Often the right response is disposing of an underused asset and reducing the financing payment accordingly, getting ahead of a macroeconomic shift or an isolated regional slowdown rather than reacting to it. The difference between a quarterly report and a live feed can be the difference between a workout and a modest finance adjustment.

05 Conclusion

The rideshare rental sector has the characteristics capital providers want: durable end market demand, an operator that is a business rather than a consumer, assets purchased below the steepest part of the depreciation curve, prepaid revenue, and enforcement technology already embedded in the operating model. What has held capital back is a mix of misconceptions about how these vehicles are used and legitimate concerns about collateral control and utilization that were relevant before connected asset data became readily available.

The promising news is that this is not a leap into the unknown. ZetiOS is operational and connected to more than 4,000 assets, and we have several capital partners using our system to create alternative financing options for their customers today. The key is connecting directly to the asset to pull real-time, accurate, reliable utilization and location data, then automating the payment mechanics that sit on top of it.

This is a large, growing and genuinely underserved market. The operators serving it are ready. The capital should follow.



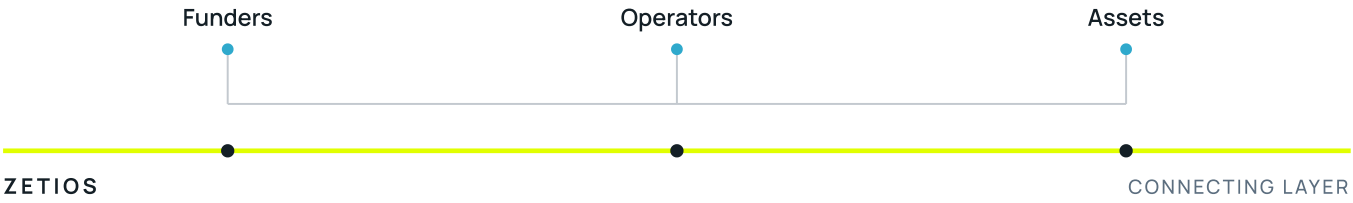
06 ABOUT ZETI

Connected asset finance, built around live data

Zeti is a fintech company that connects live data across the entire lifecycle of hard assets from the day they're financed to the day they're decommissioned. That connection is what the financing we structure is built on: real-time visibility into performance, usage, condition and value, instead of assumptions made at the point of sale.

ZetiOS is the software that makes this possible. It brings funders, operators and asset suppliers into one connected platform, giving each party the information they need to manage assets, monitor performance and make better-informed decisions throughout the financing term.

The technology is asset agnostic. As long as reliable data can be collected from an asset, ZetiOS can connect its operational performance with the financing built around it.



4,000+	60%	20%
Connected assets	Reduction in manual administration	Improvement in financial returns

Figures reflect Zeti's platform experience and reported customer outcomes. Results may vary by portfolio and financing structure.

Explore the opportunity

To discuss financing opportunities within the rideshare and gig-driver rental market, contact:

Kevin Egolf
Head of Capital Solutions
Zeti North America
kevin.egolf@zeti.group

zeti.group

07 Contributors

Jon Stafford, CMA, CAFM
CCO · Zeti

Dan Saunders
CEO & Founder · Zeti

Dan Grossman
Strategic Advisor

Frans Mahieu
Marketing Consultant

08 Sources

1 Company-reported full-year 2025 volumes.

2 Zeti estimate based on applying a U.S. market share to each major TNC.

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12 HR&A Advisors, Rideshare Driver Net Earnings Study (prepared for Uber), November 2025.

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