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100

A CENTENARY

CELEBRATION



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DB6 MKI 1967

Photography Tim Wallace

Aston
Workshop

Contents



4 Back in black
Return to the place where it all began: Aston Hill in A3



10 Aston Martin family tree
The people who tended, from acorn to oak



12 DB: more than just Bond
Anatomy of the iconic DB4, 5 and 6 range



18 Sir Stirling Moss speaks
Great Briton on the marque's finest racers



22 Perfect fit for a Prince
Vantage tailored for the heir to the throne



28 Top Ten bizarre Astons
From racer to estate, supercar to city car



30 Braving the Vanquish
Why the V12 bruiser is a modern classic

Welcome

Few names in motoring are more evocative than Aston Martin. Not only does it conjure images of generations of cars with a perfect blend of beauty and brawn, but also a fascinating past populated by passionate people. These characters are united by their drive to improve – and often save – the marque they love, many having fallen for it by owning one of its cars.



So it is only right that we should mark 100 years of a firm that has always punched above its weight, carving a place in the motoring aristocracy alongside the likes of Ferrari and Bentley, despite often-meagre resources. Little wonder that, of a mere 60,000 cars built over the past century, an amazing 90% are thought to survive. Long may it continue.

ALASTAIR CLEMENTS

CONTRIBUTORS Tony Baker, James Elliott, David Evans, James Mann, James Page, Martin Port, Steve Sutcliffe, Simon Taylor, Mick Walsh **THANKS TO** Andy Bell, Roger Carey, John Chatley, Neal Garrard, Sir Stirling Moss, Kingsley Riding-Felce, Mike Smith, Markus Tellenbach, Richard Williams



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Let's start at the very beginning...



The first journalist to actually drive the oldest-surviving Aston since its restoration, **James Elliott** takes A3 on a pilgrimage to the marque's roots

PHOTOGRAPHY **TONY BAKER/AMHT**







There is a rich history of naming cars after great competition victories – the Porsche Carrera, Ferrari Mondial and, to a lesser extent, Daytona – but very few actual marques owe their monikers to a win. And only one to a short, moribund hillclimb in a sleepy Buckinghamshire village. Thanks to Lionel Martin's prowess in his Singer specials, and his wife Kate's suggestion that his new car company should be named after his favourite stomping ground on the Hertfordshire border, that is precisely what happened to create one of the most enigmatic and revered brands in motoring.

Today, the Aston Martin name is so much part of the fabric of the automotive world that it seems natural and familiar. A century ago, however, it might have appeared a little perverse that Aston Clinton and its brief burst of hill, with little more challenge than one 30° right on a blind crest and a single sweeping left, would be the foundation for such greatness.

To celebrate the centenary of this British institution, we have returned to its roots. Not the Henniker Place (now Mews)

address where Bamford & Martin established its dealership for hot Singers, but Aston Clinton, where its founder's glory gave birth to a legend. And what could be more suitable to tackle the hill than the oldest Aston Martin in the world, the only survivor of the original prototypes built by unsung chief mechanic Jack Addis?

Each one had a name, of course. First there was 1914's 'Coal Scuttle'. That was followed by 'Bunny', which, through multiple record-breaking at Brooklands after a crash forced its chassis to be shortened, helped garner much-needed publicity. Then, after the interruption of The Great War, came this 1921 car, known as A3. In period it had a nickname, too, but let's just say that if it were in *The Dam Busters*, they would have since edited it out.

A3 was built on a Rubery-Owen frame and powered by a 1486cc monobloc engine designed by Hamilton Victor Robb – derived from his own Coventry-Simplex 1389cc unit, as used in 'Coal Scuttle' – and fuelled by a single sidedraught 'sloper' SU via an Autovac from a tank at the rear.

The reason why this remarkable and historically important car survived is most likely the sleight of hand with which the

REBUILD OF AN ICON

The restoration of A3 is testament to the vast pool of skills in the UK. It was masterminded by Andy Bell at Ecurie Bertelli (www.ecuriebertelli.com), and the specialist is proud that virtually everything was done by craftsmen based within a few miles of his workshop.

The project started in early '07 and had moral issues to overcome, chief among them being what body it should wear, A3 having had several since 1921. The Trust went for a tourer, which was beautifully recreated from old photos without even a buck. The main technical hurdle was the wheels. When acquired, A3 wore spoked rims but the correct 'Sankey' items were specially cast from scratch in aluminium.

The engine was rebuilt by Tim Abbot for Jim Young, Bertelli rebuilt the chassis and a seasoned English ash frame was built to carry all-new panels by Bodylines in Olney.





Floors are old pine, frame ash. Wheel is unnervingly flexible and brakes work on rear wheels only; right-hand 'change has four speeds. Top left: in Brooklands paddock

nascent company recast it and sold it on as a production car. Back then, subsequent sellers wouldn't have been keen to make a big deal of its true, pre-production status and eventually that part of its history was buried beneath the sands of time and swathes of ever more elaborate bodywork.

Until, that is, it came to auction a little more than a decade ago. Initially assumed to simply be a very early Aston with a later 1930s three-seater body, it was only when eagle-eyed Bonhams inspector Stewart Skilbeck spotted the '3' cast into the chassis that its significance was revealed.

After a couple of auctions and a bit of horse-trading, A3 was secured by the Aston Martin Heritage Trust and given a six-figure, three-year restoration (all funded by an enthusiast benefactor). Since then, it has been a halo car for the Trust.

This year it will visit – and be fêted in – all four corners of the globe, but it seems appropriate that its first stop is the hillclimb that bestowed half its name, on a wet, dull winter's day for me to become only the fourth person to take the wheel of this precious machine since that rebuild.

For a car of its era – and in many respects it is as much a veteran as a vintage machine

– it looks quite sophisticated: electric starting, four-speed 'box, even a floor-mounted footbrake to share the burden with the handbrake outside the cockpit.

Its shape and stance, too, are more sporting than you might expect, and this with the least racy of the three bodies it was thought to have worn when it was a works hack-cum-development car.

The cabin is entered via wide running boards. There's cosy seating for two, squabs flat on the wooden floor, passenger seat set back slightly from the driver's so that it can accommodate two grown men, as long as the passenger is able to furl his arm around behind the driver.

The starting procedure is absolutely of the era. Flick the electrics switch sprouting through the pine floorboards, move the dash knob from 'off' to 'magneto' and push the starter button with your foot. Once it has fired, move the dash knob to 'D' for dynamo and you are ready to go.

First is right and back – reverse is even further right and up, but accessed only via pressing a spring-loaded knob – with second directly above it and third back and left, under your knee. The Hele-Shaw multi-plate clutch works well and, as soon

Aston Martin history part 1 From foundation to Feltham

1912 Robert Bamford and Lionel Martin go into partnership as Singer agents on Callow Road, London. Martin competes on Aston Hill in a Singer special

1913 The two form Bamford & Martin Ltd in Henniker Place, London on 15 January

1914 First Aston-Martin built, with 1389cc Coventry-Simplex power. Christened 'Coal Scuttle' (above), it is registered in March 1915

1918 Move to Abingdon Rd, Kensington

1920 Second prototype developed, with 1487cc engine and front-wheel brakes. Count Louis Zborowski begins to invest in the company and Bamford steps away

1921 A3, the third prototype, completed

1922 Prototype 'Bunny' breaks 10 World Records at Brooklands. AM fields two cars at the French Grand Prix on 16 July

1925 Company goes into receivership but is rescued by Lady Charnwood, John Benson, Augustus Cesare 'Bert' Bertelli and Bill Renwick. Renamed Aston Martin Motors, relocates to Feltham, Middx.

Lionel Martin leaves the firm

1926 Renwick & Bertelli moves to Feltham; 1½-litre

is created by 'Bert' and Claude Hill (announced at the 1927 Motor Show), later developed into the International and Le Mans

1932 Bertelli wins the Biennial Cup at Le Mans with Pat Driscoll. Sir Arthur Sutherland becomes the owner of AM

1934 MkII chassis is introduced, and Astons win the Ards TT team prize, leading to the 100mph Ulster of 1935

1935 The Aston Martin Owners' Club is founded at The Grafton Hotel, London

1938 Factory turned over to produce parts for Wellingtons and Mosquitos

1939 Atom prototype takes shape, with spaceframe chassis, IFS, four-speed Cotal gearbox and aerodynamic body

1944 Works hit by a flying bomb and badly damaged

1946 AM goes on sale in *The Times*



Post Vintage

ENGINEERING THE ASTON MARTIN SPIRIT



1961 DB4 Series IV Overdrive

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1951 DB2 Coupe – Enquire

1961 DB4 Series IV – Green / Black

1961 DB4 Series IV – Green / Tan

1965 DB5 Saloon – Red / Tan

1965 DB5 Saloon – Blue / Blue

1970 DB6 MKII - Enquire

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Clockwise: single-carb sidevalve 'four' musters 40bhp, but A3 struggles up hills; charming chassis plate; 'Sankey' wheels recreated in aluminium



as you are off the line, you shove steadily to access second, thereafter staying in the tractable middle two ratios unless you find yourself stationary or on a motorway.

The pedals are mounted on either side of the steering column, the centre throttle on the left with the clutch, but any confusion that you fear this might generate is banished by the fact that you never use the footbrake. It has far less feel and impact on your speed than the handbrake and, particularly on these greasy roads, tends to instantly lock the rear wheels.

Front brakes had been fitted when the car was bought by the Trust but, for authenticity, the original arrangement, with four shoes in each rear drum, was reinstated during the restoration.

On the hill the 1486cc sidevalve engine does not perform as well as figures suggest on paper. That unit is an anomaly because the 'A' of A3 should mean 1300cc and 'B' would mean 1500cc, but, realising that it was giving away 200cc in the *voiturette* class, Bamford & Martin decided on the upgrade. "It doesn't really like hills," explains pre-war Aston guru Andy Bell of Ecurie Bertelli. Certainly claims of a 72mph maximum – the Walford speedo reads to 90mph

IN ASTON WE TRUST

In 1998, the 5000-strong Aston Martin Owners' Club took a step to safeguard its unique collection of marque artefacts for future generations by setting up an independent charitable trust. The Aston Martin Heritage Trust is dedicated to 'preserving and enhancing the history of Aston Martin'. Its HQ is a magnificent 15th-century barn in Oxfordshire that houses more than 100,000 documents, images, trophies and artworks. It has a full-time curator and its own car collection comprising the A3, a 1933 Ulster, an '89 Lagonda and the Le Mans prototype AMR1/01. See www.amht.co.uk


– and 45bhp from the single-carburettor motor seem fanciful in this environment.

Nor does it tally with a car that reportedly 'tore up the hill in streaks of smoke, throwing a hail of stones from the wheels' during its first public outing, at nearby Kop Hill in 1922, but the gradient at the bottom of this hill is challenging. Yet, with 3000rpm a reality rather than the 5000rpm

advertised on the dial, if you keep the very short-travel pedal to the floor it slugs away happily enough. It steers incredibly directly via the Marles cam-and-roller system topped by a flexible four-spoke wheel and, thanks to its short 8ft wheelbase, handles surprisingly well for a car of its age.

The drive is smooth despite the extra propshaft – one from engine to 'box, the other from the transmission to the floating rear axle housed in a torque tube. The ride via the 'Sankey' wheels and semi-elliptic springs with Hartford friction dampers on the front and hydraulics on the back is far more forgiving than you would expect.

More evocatively, from the driver's seat you are always glimpsing the top of that nickel-plated radiator, which, while different to those on the cars that put this marque on the map, unmistakably set the template for them. You are always reminded that you are in a very special, very pretty and historically important machine.

Which says it all, really. Bamford and Martin were certainly on to something with their crusade to build high-quality light sporting cars, but it took a certain alchemist called Augustus 'Bert' Bertelli to turn that something into gold. 



Louis Zborowski 1895-1924
 Legendary enthusiast of giant-engined behemoths who turned to Aston Martin to build a competitive sports-racer. Introduced Clive Gallop to Ballot engineer Marcel Gremillon to design a new four-cylinder, 16-valve dohc engine. Count Zborowski raced Astons at Brooklands and abroad, including Sitges, Spain.



Lionel Martin 1878-1945
 A family fortune from Cornish china clay afforded young Martin an Eton and Oxford education. Began competing with a Singer at Aston Clinton, later joined up with Bamford to build a special in 1914 christened after his favourite speed venue and his name. Left the company in 1925 to focus on mining.



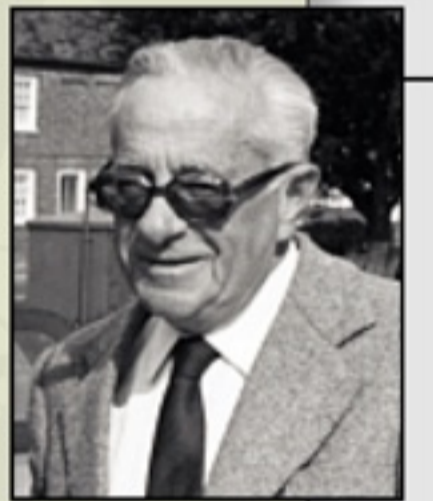
William Renwick 1887-n/a
 The son of a civil engineer, Renwick joined Singer's engineering staff in 1931. Worked in the motor industry before inheriting a fortune, and a dream to build 'the best car in the world' was instigated after a chance meeting with Bertelli in Birmingham. Their first employee was a 17-year-old draughtsman called Claude Hill.



AC 'Bert' Bertelli 1890-1979
 Italian-born designer, engineer and racing driver emigrated to Wales in 1894. After an apprenticeship at Cardiff Ironworks he went to Fiat in Turin. Returned to the UK to design Enfield Alldays 12hp, buying Aston-Martin with Renwick in '26. Developed International, Le Mans and Ulster before leaving in '36.



Tadek Marek 1908-1982
 Polish-born engineer trained in Berlin before moving to the UK in 1940 to join the Polish Army. After engineering work on the Centurion tank and a job at Austin, Marek joined Aston in 1954 and developed key engines including the famous straight-six and V8. Retired to Italy in 1968.



Peter Livanos b.1956
 This Greek shipping tycoon with a passion for great cars and yachting made a major investment in Aston Martin by taking a 75% share from 1983. He also funded the remarkable Aston Martin display at the Monterey historics, Laguna Seca in 1989, including a superb recreation of the 1959 Le Mans pits.



Ian Callum b.1954
 It isn't a great stretch to say that Callum has been responsible for the silhouette of every Aston since 1993, even if the then boss of TWR Design was only given full credit for the DB7 (plus its Vantage and Volante versions) and Vanquish. He also set out the exterior styling of the DB9.



Who's who at Aston Martin?

From Bamford and Martin's first Coventry-Simplex-engined special, through the David Brown years and Victor Gauntlett's V8s to the 'DB' revival of the '90s, Aston has always been about characters. **Mick Walsh** plots the marque's eventful family tree

PHOTOGRAPHY LAT/FORD/JAGUAR/AMHT



Robert Bamford 1883-1942

Born in Lamarsh, Essex to a church family, Bamford turned to engineering after his studies. In 1915 he designed and built the 'Coal Scuttle', the first Aston. Very much the design engineer in the partnership, Bamford left in 1920, after few cars had been built, Martin's wife Kathy taking over as director.

**Lady Charnwood 1876-1942**

After an introduction by her car-mad son John Benson, the struggling firm was sold to Lady Charnwood in 1925 for £2600 but the factory closed again in May '26. Charnwood reorganised and re-established it as Aston Martin Motors in the former Citroën plant at Hanworth Air Park, Feltham. She was also passionate about the arts, and had suffered a carriage accident in 1919 that left her lame.

R Gordon Sutherland 1908-2004

Born into a wealthy shipping family, and given a Bentley for his 21st, Sutherland trained in auto engineering at Chelsea. He worked at Alvis before encouraging his father to buy Aston in '32. As joint MD, with Hill he co-developed the 'Donald Duck', then offered the firm for sale in *The Times* in '46.

**L Prideaux Brune 1894-1987**

Owner and chief exec of the Automobile Service Co saved Aston with investment in 1932, but funds soon dried up and he persuaded Sir Arthur Sutherland to take over. Later ran Morgans at Le Mans and was involved with ERA.

**Claude Hill 1907-1982**

Born in Birmingham, Hill was the first employee at Renwick & Bertelli and helped Bertelli to develop the new 1½-litre engine. Later his relationship with Sutherland led to Hill heading up design of the 2 Litre and revolutionary Atom. Left Aston in 1949 after his DB2 engine was abandoned in favour of the Lagonda 'six'.

**Sir David Brown 1904-1993**

Apprenticed in the family gear firm, the wealthy Brown designed his own engine. Answering Sutherland's advert, he was convinced by a drive in the Atom and did a deal for £20,500 in 1947, soon adding Lagonda for £52,500. Encouraged racing, winning Le Mans in '59, and sold the indebted AML in '72.

**Ted Cutting 1926-2012**

Indoctrinated into cars by his Napier race mechanic uncle, Cutting became an Allard draughtsman after WW2. Joined Aston in '49, redesigning the DB2 chassis and creating the DBR1, DBR4 and Project GTs. Moved to Ford in 1966.

**Harold Beach 1913-2010**

Following his apprenticeship at Barker coachworks, Beach was later involved with Earl Howe and during WW2 designed all-terrain vehicles including Sherman tanks. He joined Aston in 1950, replacing Eberan von Eberhorst as chief designer on the DB4, eventually retiring in '78, after engineering the V8 Volante's soft-top.

**Victor Gauntlett 1942-2003**

After the RAF, moved into petroleum and founded Pace in '72, making millions then putting £500k into Aston in '80, supported by Livanos. Resurrected relations with Zagato; oversaw the Virage, the first new Aston for 20 years. Frustrated by limited resources, in '87 he sold to Ford, staying chairman to '91.

**William Towns 1936-1993**

Having served under design legend David Bache at Rover, Towns arrived at Aston Martin in 1966 – initially as a seat designer. He would go on to become the driving force for styling change at Newport Pagnell with his refreshingly sharp-edged DBS and clean-sheet V8 Lagonda 'wedge', before going freelance in 1977.

**Walter Hayes 1924-2000**

From Fleet St to Ford vice-chair, Hayes was hugely respected and a close associate of Henry Ford II. Despite problems with Ford's previous AC acquisition, Hayes pushed for the takeover. He replaced Gauntlett as chairman in '91 to see through the new DB7.

**Dr Ulrich Bez b.1943**

German engineer Bez has vast experience (BMW, Porsche and Ford) and has been CEO since 2000, leading the brand's revival and move to a new Gaydon HQ. He has also raced Astons at the 'Ring.

**David Richards b.1952**

Studied accountancy before becoming a professional co-driver and winning the '81 WRC with Ari Vatanen. Founded Prodrive in '84 and in '07 led a consortium to purchase Aston from Ford, with Richards as chairman. Prodrive took Aston Martin back to Le Mans in '07 and '08.





Art and soul of Newport Pagnell

David Brown's tenure was defined by the stunning DB4-6. **Simon Taylor** introduces the first family of Aston Martin road cars

PHOTOGRAPHY **JAMES MANN**





SIV DB4 shows larger tail-lamps and later-style grille. 'Dagmar' bumper (top) one of few flourishes. Superb cabin finish and (below left) 3.7-litre twin-cam 'six'

First off, let's get the 007 thing out of the way. As the novelist Ian Fleming originally conceived him, James Bond drove a vintage 'Blower' Bentley. Movie anoraks tell me that the first car that Bond actually drove in a film was a Chevy Bel Air. It wasn't until the series' third flick, *Goldfinger*, that Sean Connery was cast as an Aston Martin DB5 driver. In the latest, *Skyfall*, Daniel Craig is back in another gadget-laden DB5 – as if we cared.

Because the DB4/5/6 Aston Martins, whatever Bond may have done to their values, are much more important than mere props for a repetitive series of money-spinning macho cinema fantasies. They have to be considered as all-time great grand tourers, things of beauty that epitomise the standing of the marque. Even today they remain a rewarding way to tackle any long, fast journey on challenging

roads. And somehow, just as a Ferrari could only be Italian and a Porsche could only be German – and despite the Italian roots of their elegant styling – these Astons could never be anything but English.

For the first 10 years of David Brown's ownership, Aston Martin's DB road cars – four-cylinder DB1 and six-cylinder DB2, DB2/4 and DB MkIII – were elegant hand-built coupés with style and charisma. But even in final 3-litre form they had difficulty reaching 120mph, and the cheaper, larger-engined XK Jaguars were appreciably quicker. To face this challenge, work began on a bigger Aston as early as 1955, and at the '58 London Motor Show it made its bow. Called the DB4, it created a sensation, and for the Newport Pagnell firm it represented a radical change in philosophy.

The new all-alloy twin-cam straight-six engine, designed by Tadek Marek, was of 3670cc, and in its initial form with twin SU carburettors put out an advertised 240bhp

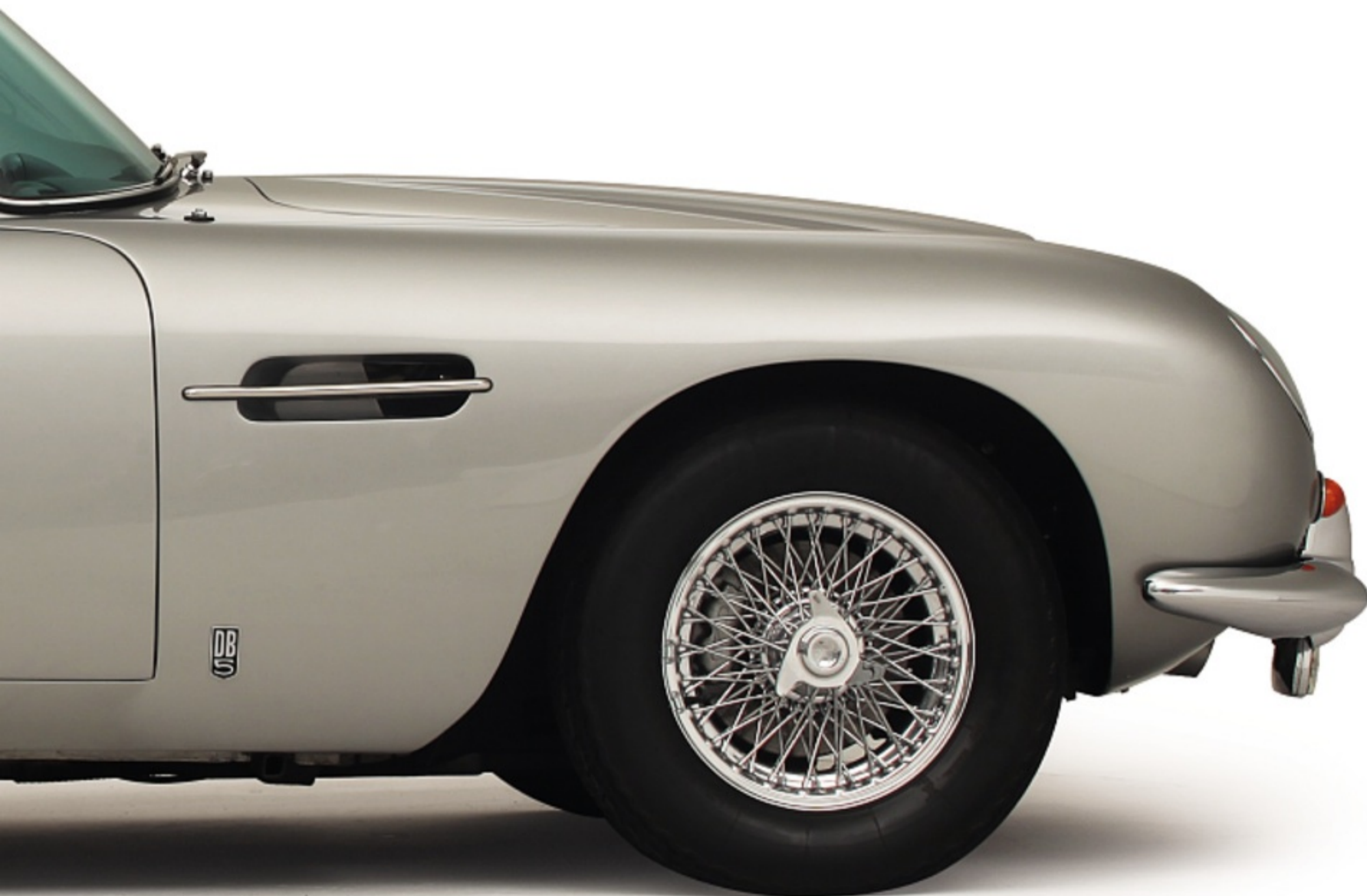
(although power outputs quoted at the time by AM, and others, often exaggerated by up to 15%). Harold Beach's chassis was a sturdy and extremely stiff steel platform, riding on front suspension by unequal-length wishbones and coils, and a live rear axle located by trailing arms and a Watt linkage. Welded to the platform was a superstructure of small-diameter tubes supporting aluminium body panels, a type of construction developed by Italian coach-builder Touring of Milan, which called it *superleggera* or 'super-light'.

Touring's Felice Anderloni was responsible for the breathtakingly beautiful body: one of those rare, utterly simple automotive shapes in which every curve and contour seems to be just as it should be, with a sweeping fastback roof, slender pillars giving a large glass area, and a strong horizontal line from thrust-forward headlights to soberly finned rear wings. It required no decoration or adornment, only



Clockwise, from above:
windcheating profile;
dash binnacle echoes
shape of grille; engine
now out to 4 litres;
classic Silver Birch
beloved by Bond fans





engine reliability problems were addressed with increased sump capacity and an oil cooler, while the originally frameless door windows gained surrounds. The pattern of the radiator grille was given stronger vertical bars, the bonnet hinges were moved from the rear of the panel to the front, and the rear lights went from the original slim units to triple separate round lenses on each side. The bonnet air intake became smaller and neater, and Series V cars had a slightly longer body on the same wheelbase, with a higher roofline, although a change at this point from 16in to 15in wheels meant that the overall height was unchanged.

Gradually more options became available, such as overdrive for the four-speed all-synchro gearbox, a more powerful Vantage engine with three SUs and, towards the end, faired-in headlights under Plexiglas covers. These echoed the lamp treatment on the lightened, short-wheelbase DB4GTs, which were intended for racing customers. Only 94 of those were made and are now hugely valuable – particularly the 19 chassis bodied by Zagato.

In summer '65 the DB4 was replaced by the DB5, combining all the developments

'OPINIONS DIFFER ON WHICH IS PRETTIEST: ORIGINAL DB4 OR STREAMLINED DB5'

of the DB4 with an increased engine capacity of 3995cc, developing 282bhp on triple SUs or, in Vantage form, 314bhp on three twin-choke Webers. A five-speed ZF gearbox was now available as an option, and was fitted to most DB5s; the Borg-Warner automatic is much rarer. Externally, the cowled headlights were standardised.

Although the DB5 was in production for barely two years, it was extremely successful, rolling out of the factory at a rate of up to 10 a week. In all, 886 coupés were built and 123 convertibles, plus a dozen shooting brakes that were finished off by coach-builder Harold Radford. In comparison with the first DB4s, kerb weight had gradually crept up by some 350lb, but the extra power meant that the performance, measured in independent road tests, was still in the 140mph bracket.

Opinions differ as to which is the most beautiful DB Aston: the original DB4, its proud headlights giving it a straining-at-the-leash profile, or the crouching aspect of the more streamlined DB5. The DB6 is something else, its more solid lines lending a quite different visual personality, but



the big bonnet scoop and hot-air exits on the flanks breaking the purity of the shape.

With an 8ft 2in wheelbase and 14ft 9in overall length, it was the first DB Aston with four proper seats, although rear legroom was restricted. Fully equipped and beautifully finished, the DB4 weighed nearly 3000lb, but was a genuine 140mph car, and early in its life it received kudos for being able to accelerate from 0-100mph and back to a dead stop within half a minute

– no mean achievement at the time, and underlining the then-rare fitment of four-wheel disc brakes and servo assistance.

It took a while for production to get into full swing, but in the four years up to June 1963 more than 1000 DB4 coupés were made, plus 70 of the convertible that was introduced in 1961. Throughout the run various specification changes were made, which Aston experts group into five separate variants, Series I to Series V. Early



From top: clearer lights and 'Kamm' tail update the shape; like DB5, triple-SU engine rated at 282bhp (Vantage badges are cosmetic); inviting back seats



there is no doubt that it is the most practical of the three, and the most stable at speed.

Introduced at the London Motor Show in October 1965, the DB6 had been radically rethought to make it a genuine four-seater. The wheelbase was nearly 4in longer, the windscreen slightly further forward and the roof an inch higher, which, together with shorter trailing arms for the rear suspension, all translated into a much more habitable back seat. An upward-curling lip to the bootlid plus a vertical rear panel provided a tail treatment according to the aerodynamic principles of Dr Wunibald Kamm. Although less elegant than its predecessor, at high speed it gave a claimed 30% reduction in lift at the rear wheels. With quarter-bumpers exposing the extra front grille and deeper rear apron, the DB6 looked a more substantial car altogether, but in fact overall weight was virtually unchanged from the DB5. Using the Weber-carburetted Vantage engine, which

was officially quoted at 325bhp, contemporary road tests achieved an impressive 147mph maximum and 0-100 in 15 secs. Power steering was now an option.

The DB6 was produced in its original form for almost four years, and no fewer than 1321 coupés were sold. In addition there were 37 convertibles – by then using the Volante name – on the shorter DB5 chassis and 140 DB6-length drop-tops, and this time Harold Radford managed half a dozen station wagon adaptations.

In July '69 came a revised DB6, the Mk2. This used the wider wheels being fitted to the totally different six-cylinder DBS, which was being manufactured alongside the earlier car, and they necessitated slight flares over the wheel openings, an instant Mk2 identifier. Of the 250 coupés and 38 Volantes built to this spec, 46 had Brico fuel injection, which returned improved economy if no greater performance.

The final DB6 rolled out of the Newport






Above: Mk2's lipped arches allow for wider rubber than Mk1 DB6, and quarter-bumpers flank the extra grille. Below: luxurious DB6 is a full four-seater

'THESE WONDERFUL GRAND TOURERS EACH HAVE THEIR OWN CHARACTER'

Pagnell factory in November 1970. By then Aston Martin was concentrating on the four-cam V8 version of the DBS, and Marek's alloy straight-six was nearing the end of its 14-year life. As is always the way, values of six-cylinder cars dropped in the decade after it ceased production, and many tired examples that could be bought cheaply went without proper maintenance and deteriorated further. By the beginning of the '90s the cars were far more appreciated, and many were being properly restored. Even so, good DB6s could still be found for £30-35,000, with DB4s and DB5s about £5000 more and convertibles getting on for double that. Now, 20 years later, a perfect DB5 may cost you £450,000 and a good DB6 Volante even more.

But fine examples of DB4-6 Aston Martins continue in the 21st century to be among the most enjoyable and usable of great classic cars. The glorious trio illustrated on these pages all belong to Markus Tellenbach. His DB4 is a Series IV, displaying the later grille and smaller bonnet scoop, while the wheelarch flares on the DB6 identify it as a Mk2.

Tellenbach, with a nod to Fleming, has a vintage Bentley as well, but believes in using his Astons as much as possible. A Sunday family trip to the pub means a convoy, him in the DB5 and his wife driving the DB6, with their three sons and dog along for the ride. All three make wonderful continental grand tourers, and he has enjoyed them on adventures from home in Surrey to France, Switzerland and Italy, taking in the great Alpine passes such as the St Gotthard and Stelvio. All have their distinct character: the DB4 the most raw and pure, the DB5 the ultimate mix of performance and sophistication, the DB6 with softer suspension and more room.

Any Aston is a car to be taken seriously. Throughout the marque's 100 years there have been many that belong in anyone's list of all-time classics, from 'Green Pea' and 'Razor Blade' to today's One-77. But in terms of visual and engineering elegance, fitness for purpose and sheer driving pleasure, the 4000-plus cars that make up the DB4/5/6 canon are hard to beat. Even James Bond wasn't wrong there. 

Thanks to Markus Tellenbach; RS Williams (01932 868377; www.rswilliams.co.uk)





Moss sliding the DBR1 to victory in the '58 TT. Top right: impressive 1-2-3 finish at Goodwood. Right: pre-Le Mans lunch

Out in front with Aston Martin

Sir Stirling Moss brought the marque many of its greatest victories. **Mick Walsh** listens as he recalls his favourites

PHOTOGRAPHY LAT



No one competed in more great 1950s sports-racing cars than Sir Stirling Moss. Other than the legendary Mercedes-Benz 300SLR, it's the metallic-green Aston Martin beauties for which the maestro holds the most affection. When this sporting superstar won in Germany for the British marque it made national headlines, plus the front cover of *Autosport* back home. The image of Moss in full flight, drifting his favourite DBR1 through Fordwater or Pflanzgarten, is an iconic one in motor-sport history.

"I always enjoyed driving for Aston," says Moss. "John Wyr was a tough team manager but he always encouraged me to have a go, particularly at Le Mans. The cars were strong and safe – I don't recall anyone being killed in one. David Brown never got involved and left it to John, who always chose the best drivers. Tony Brooks above anyone else would be in my dream team."

"Maybe the cars were a little heavy, the engines could have had more power and the gearboxes could have been better, but they always handled superbly. The DB3S and DBR1 were real drivers' cars."



Moss was the master at running starts. Here, his DBR1 takes a clear lead at Le Mans in 1959



DBR1

The undoubted highlights of Moss' career with Aston Martin were heroic wins in the DBR1 at Goodwood and the Nürburgring in 1959. The team's important victory at Le Mans had moved Aston ahead of Ferrari in the World Sports Car Championship, so a full team of three cars was entered for the final race at Goodwood.

"I always criticised the dreadful gearbox in the DBR1," says Moss, "and in TT practice I drove one fitted for the first time with a Maserati transaxle. An amazing situation when you think about it now. The DBR1 was always strong, solid and dependable, with good brakes, but now it was superb. I could take Fordwater flat-out, pulling 6500rpm through the gears. A fabulous car.

"I led for 1¼ hours before changing tyres – we had built-in hydraulic jacks. Roy [Salvadori] took over and maintained the lead but at the next stop fuel spilled on to the exhaust and the whole place seemed to catch alight. The car was pushed away and I took over the Shelby/Fairman Aston."

Just as he had done at the Nürburgring, Moss roared back and by half distance had

caught the leading Porsche but, after another tyre change, the RSK regained the lead: "I had to do it all over again and ended up driving 4 hrs 36 mins of a six-hour race, but winning the championship at home felt special!"

Like the DB3S, the DBR1 was well suited to road circuits such as the Nürburgring, where Moss won two consecutive 1000km events: "I'm very proud of those victories.

'IT WAS THE KIND OF RACE I ENJOYED – ONE ASTON AGAINST A TEAM OF FERRARIS'

In 1958 I won with Jack [Brabham] and knew the DBR1 was perfect for the Nürburgring. So the following year I pestered John Wyer to let me use the spare car for the 1000km. I even offered to pay for everything, including transport. Thankfully, John softened.

"Reg [Parnell] came out as team manager with just one mechanic. We never had a spare engine in those days, even for Le Mans. After 16 laps – with a strong lead and my old track

record broken – I handed over to Jack [Fairman] just as it started to rain. Unfortunately, he got baulked by a slower car and ended up in a ditch. Amazingly, he managed to manhandle the car back on to the road and, just as I was packing up my bag to go home, he arrived back at the pits. I pulled my gear back on as the mechanics lifted a mud-stained Jack from the cockpit, then set off after the Ferraris.

"Our six-minute lead had turned to a 70-second deficit but it was the kind of challenge I enjoyed. I drove as fast I had ever driven the 'Ring and retook the lead on lap 29. Jack took over for a few laps to give me a break but his caution after the earlier off allowed Phil [Hill] to catch us. For the final nine laps, it took me four to catch him and we won by 22 seconds.

"It was the sort of race I revelled in – one Aston alone against an entire team of factory Ferraris. The car ran perfectly but I had driven really hard. I felt shattered, having done more than 40 laps, and it took me longer to recover than when I won the Mille Miglia. I drove Maseratis in the last two Milles but never finished. I reckon the DBR1 would have been perfect for it."



Winning in Salvadori's DB3S at Goodwood, Easter 1956. Below: taking a lucky second place at Le Mans with Peter Collins after losing second gear



DB3S

After Mercedes-Benz withdrew from racing at the end of 1955, Moss switched to Aston Martin for World Sports Car Championship events. "I wanted to dictate my own terms," he explains, "which gave me the freedom to drive for other teams such as Maserati. By coming to the DB3S from the Mercedes 300SLRs, I found it much smaller and lighter. It was much easier to drive. A perfect combination would be the nimbleness of the DB3S with the speed of the Mercedes.

"Although it was not as clean-looking as rival Jaguars, I always considered the DB3S one of the prettiest sports-racing cars of the 1950s. It was a forgiving car that you could throw around, although it had a habit of lifting the inside-rear wheel too easily when cornering really hard. As a result you'd often ease off where other cars might sustain full throttle. But on a winding road circuit such as the Nürburgring or Oulton Park, it would out-handle a D-type any time."

Moss first tested a DB3S at Goodwood in February 1956 and, with John Wyr's encouragement, he signed with the team for the season: "I accepted a signing-on fee of £50, which seems very modest even for the



time. My first DB3S race was the Sebring 12 Hours, where I was paired with Peter Collins. Mike Hawthorn was quickest in practice with the D-type – we were third, but six seconds slower. We were worried about the brakes and tyres, plus the fuel consumption was high, so we weren't that confident. Le Mans-type running starts were a speciality of mine, and I managed to slot into second between Hawthorn and Fangio's Ferrari, lapping three seconds quicker than in practice.

"But once Pete had taken over, the motor failed after 90 mins. The DB3S engines were picky about rev limits and the rev band always seemed restricted. You could run it to the redline in an intermediate gear, change

up and the power just seemed to fade."

Moss raced the DB3S six times, taking two wins and three seconds: "At Rouen we found that the drum-braked car's handling was better than the new disc modification, but my car was not good, juddering and oversteering in fast corners. After a big dice with Castellotti's Ferrari, I was lucky to finish second.

"At Le Mans, the DB3S was no match for the D-type. We lacked power and straight-line speed but I led from the start, leaving the Jaguars to have an accident behind me. In the night, Pete reported that we'd lost second gear, which cost us the race, but the car kept going like a train and we came second."

Moss never enjoyed Le Mans and passed his time in the pits with binoculars, talent-spotting in the crowd. That year he caught sight of a pretty girl in the grandstand: "I waved and eventually sorted passes to get her into the pits." Her name was Katie Molson, who later became his wife.

"My last race in a DB3S was the Daily Herald Trophy at a wet Oulton Park. I liked racing in the wet and, with such forgiving handling, the Aston was too much for the opposition – I took an easy win from Brooks and Salvadori. It had rained so hard there was a debate about calling off the meeting."



DB2

Moss regarded his first 'works' drive for Aston Martin – a newly launched DB2 in the 1950 Daily Express Rally – as a "crumpet tour". Co-driving with Lance Macklin, he recalls the Feltham-built coupé – powered by the WO Bentley-designed Lagonda twin-cam straight-six – with affection: "It was my idea. I was only 21 and we borrowed the Aston from the factory. It was a lovely looking Grand Touring car, which made all the right noises for two young chaps posing in an event that didn't mean much.

"The engine was rather highly strung and didn't like being thrashed. It was also rather heavy but still handled well. The car was quick for its day and, for us, the rally developed into an open-road

'IT WAS A LOVELY GT THAT MADE ALL THE RIGHT NOISES FOR TWO YOUNG CHAPS POSING'

contest in which we competed to see how many hours of sleep we could get at each control before the rest of the entry arrived. We cleared all the road sections but made ourselves very unpopular with the organisers and other entrants – particularly when we drove up the wrong side of the road past a huge traffic jam in Wales. In the end the organisers had the last laugh, though, because we messed up the final driving test.

"Lance was 10 years older than me, a sophisticated bloke and a quick driver. We spent lots of time together and were good friends. In a way he was my mentor."

DB4GT

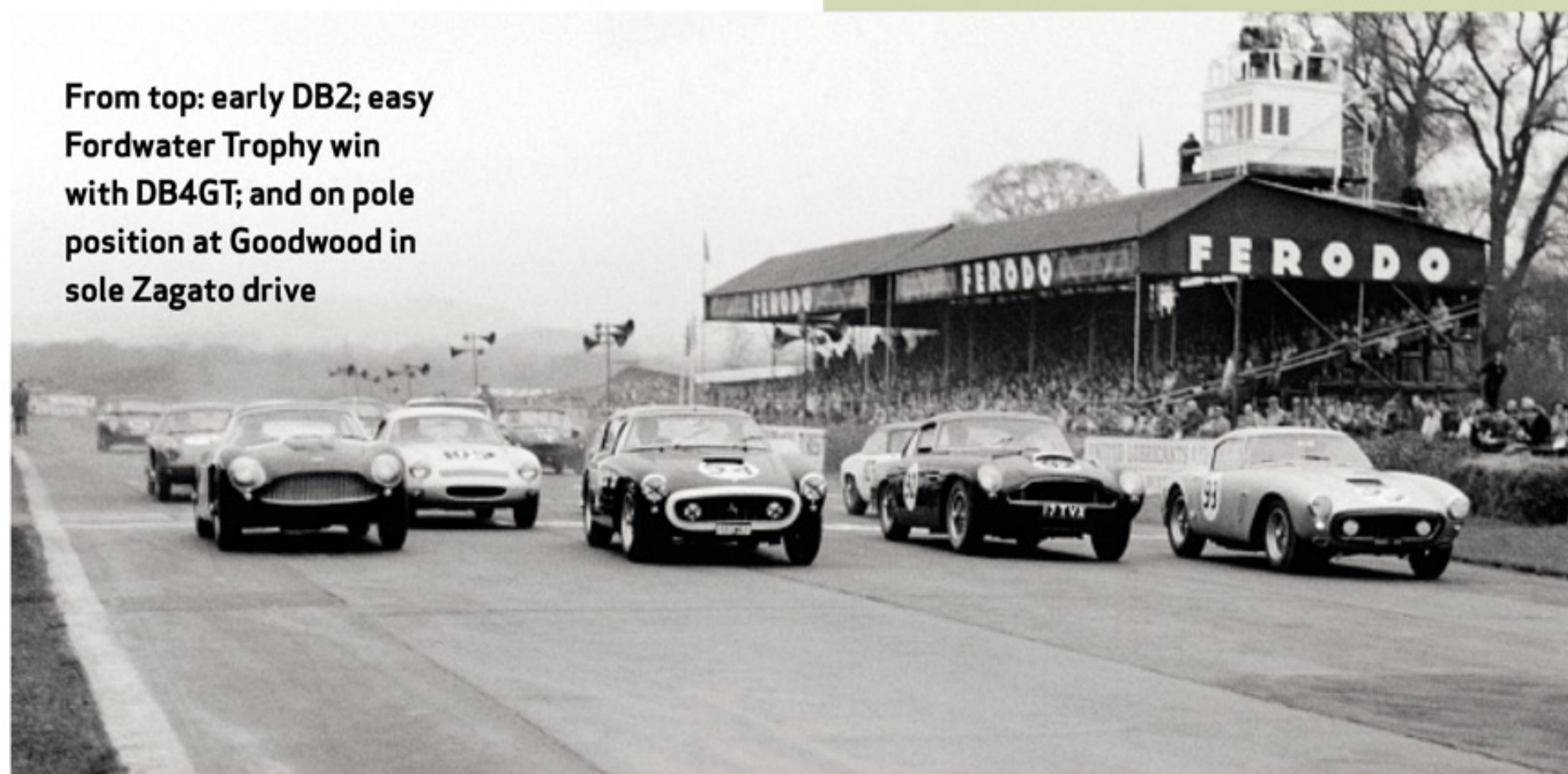
Four months before the DB4GT was officially launched at the Earls Court Motor Show in October 1959, Moss gave the new model its debut in a GT race at the Daily Express Trophy meeting: "I'd had a frustrating day, retiring the BRM P25 and being pipped in the DBR1 by Roy Salvadori's Cooper-Maserati, so winning with the new Aston was a consolation. It was an easy victory – I took pole and set fastest lap – and beating Roy in John Coombs' 3.4 got Jaguar a little wound up because there were questions over the Aston's eligibility.

"Most closed Astons feel a little agricultural, but the DB4GT was really well balanced with plenty of power. The road cars were never ergonomically very clever because you'd bang your knuckles just opening the quarterlight, and the gearbox was slow."

Moss drove the DB4GT on three other occasions, including two races in November 1959 at the Bahamas Speed Week: "I always enjoyed my visits to the Bahamas, where I won the Nassau Trophy in a DBR2 and drove a DB4GT for a Puerto Rican owner – Frank de Arellano. After winning my heat, I was forced to retire in the Governor's Trophy final after the brakes failed. I drove against the Jaguar saloons again in the Goodwood Fordwater Trophy and comfortably saw off Roy and Jack Sears. Four races and three wins was an impressive average – even if the DB4GT was in a different class."



From top: early DB2; easy Fordwater Trophy win with DB4GT; and on pole position at Goodwood in sole Zagato drive



DB4GT ZAGATO

After his success with the DB4GT, it was a natural step for Moss to race the new Zagato-bodied lightweight: "Fresh back from Sebring in '61, I was entered in the Fordwater Trophy GT race on Easter Monday at Goodwood with the first DB4GT Zagato, run by Essex Racing. I'd had a bad experience at Le Mans with the awful Maserati 450S Coupé, which was hurriedly built by Zagato, but the Aston was a proper car."

On paper, the Zagato looked good – at 2580lb, it was 150lb lighter than the

'THE ZAGATO WAS QUITE HIGHLY STRUNG AND FELT TWITCHY AROUND GOODWOOD'

DB4GT and, with a higher-compression engine, produced 314bhp – but it was no match for the Ferrari 250GT SWB: "Taking on Mike Parkes and the Equipe Endeavour Ferrari was always going to be a tall order. I took pole position because it was wet in practice but started badly due to the poor gearbox. My diary notes that the car was 'lousy', with bad axle tramp. I eventually finished third behind winner Parkes and Innes [Ireland], who beat me to second in a regular DB4GT. The Zagato felt twitchy around Goodwood. It was very much a strong man's GT car."

Moss was typically busy that day, entering four races and winning two – the Lavant Cup in Rob Walker's new Cooper-Climax and the Sussex Trophy in a Lotus 19: "I never worked out, but all of that racing kept me fit."



By Royal appointment

The heir to the throne so loves Astons
that he had a model named after him.
Alastair Clements drives a rare Volante

PHOTOGRAPHY TONY BAKER/AMHT/REX





Neat raked tail and badged vents betray Vantage spec, but full bodykit is gone. Wheelarches subtly flared like Charles' DB6 Mk2

In recent years, Charles Philip Arthur George Windsor – Prince Charles to you and me – has made no secret of his passion for Aston Martin. It became very public after newlyweds Wills and Kate trundled down the Mall in daddy's DB6 Mk2, and it emerged that the Queen and Duke had gifted the Vantage-spec Volante to the longest-serving heir apparent in British history for his 21st birthday. But it is rather less well known that the Prince was also responsible for a limited-production model, a car that became known internally and to collectors as the 'Prince of Wales'. The car you see here.

Kingsley Riding-Felce, today MD of Aston Martin Works, was UK sales manager in 1978 when he first became responsible for looking after Charles' beloved DB6. "He isn't a concours man – he used the car a lot and by 1980 he had done plenty of miles so we restored it," recalls Riding-Felce. "He's a brilliant owner – he loves his cars, he is sympathetic to them and is a very good driver, having been taught by Jackie Stewart.

"Then in 1986 he went to the Middle East and visited the Emir of Bahrain, Sheikh Isa bin Salman Al-Khalifa. It was the Prince's birthday, so the Emir requested that he be allowed to purchase an Aston Martin as a gift for his friend." On the Prince's return, Riding-Felce was dispatched to Clarence House to discuss

options, with the heir asking the Newport Pagnell works to match the British Racing Green of his Bentley – a yellower hue than the firm's own BRG – with Mushroom hide, green carpets and a manual gearbox – "he won't buy anything else".

So far, so good. Except that the Prince would, of course, want another Volante, because he prefers to drive to the polo field with the roof down. And he would want the mighty 400bhp Vantage version of the V8 – who wouldn't? The only problem was that the new Vantage Volante looked as if it had ram-raided a car-accessories store and made off with every spoiler on the shelves. For a man with such strong views on aesthetics, the bodykit must have appeared as a monstrous carbuncle on the face of a much-loved friend...

Says Riding-Felce: "The Vantage we made was fantastic, but too flash. I knew he wouldn't want it. So, with the engineering team, we set out to build a car that would meet his requirements." The wheelarches were flared to accommodate the Vantage's wider rubber, the grille reverted to mesh, a tail spoiler was integrated into the bodywork, the side skirts made way for polished finishers, plus a unique – and functional – front spoiler was styled to look as close as possible to that of the standard car.

Yet far more than mere cosmetics, this car was about the details, those special thoughtful touches that would make the Prince know that it had been built just for



Charles and Lady Diana in DB6 at the polo in 1982...



...and, er, at the polo in 1988 driving his V8 Vantage



Harry enjoys a ride in his dad's 6.3-litre Virage, 1998

him. “While we’d had his DB6 in for servicing, I’d noticed that he kept a jar in the glovebox full of sugar lumps for his polo horses,” says Riding-Felce. “We wanted to make his V8 a bit more personal, so we put in a large central box with racks for his cassettes, then made a special mounting for a jar that we trimmed in leather with ‘HRH’ on the top, and filled with sugar lumps. He also liked to have somewhere to put his sunglasses and he didn’t smoke so we took out the ashtray and raised the centre console to make a storage cubby for them, with the switches recessed in front. We knew that he liked the wheel in his DB6, so fitted a Nardi wood-rim item with black spokes, and matched the timber of the dashboard and the gearknob to it.”

Once MI5 had stashed its obligatory communications gear in the boot, chassis 15581 could be delivered – personally, by Riding-Felce – to Sandringham on 17 July 1987: “He took delivery and was delighted with the car, coming to visit the factory soon after [February 1988] when we presented him with a miniature version for William and Harry.” This ‘Volante Junior’ was a twin for Charles’ car – except that the

jar in the centre console was filled with Smarties rather than sugar lumps.

That could have been the end of the story, an indulgent sideline for a very special customer, but such a desirable machine was unlikely to go unnoticed – even in-house. “When Victor Gauntlett saw it, he loved the spec and ordered one for himself in Balmoral Green with Tan hide,” recalls Riding-Felce. “Kent Monk wrote on the production sheet ‘Build to PoW spec’ and that’s how it became known. Another gentleman who knew the Prince then saw the V8 and asked us to build him one, and it went from there. It was a great car, a real wolf in sheep’s clothing.”

Eight years and 46,000 miles later, the Prince decided to replace the Vantage with a Virage Volante, in the same colour combination and with a 6.3-litre engine upgrade, auctioning the older car to raise £115,000 for The Prince’s Charities Foundation. Opinions vary on the total number of ‘official’ PoWs that were (unofficially) produced, and there have been plenty of imitators, but factory records confirm the total at 26. Chassis 15737 is one of the more original survivors, in the definitive colour

Aston Martin history part 2 David Brown and Newport Pagnell

1947 Engineering supremo David Brown buys AM, adding Lagonda a few months later to form Aston Martin Lagonda

1948 2 Litre Sports (DB1) wins at Spa

1949 DB2 arrives.

Evolves into DB2/4

and DB MkIII. Team

boss John Wyer

joins AM; DB3 and

DB3S racers follow

1954 Brown buys

Tickford Motor

Bodies in Newport Pagnell. Production

begins to migrate to Buckinghamshire

1958 140mph DB4 launched, with Tadek

Marek’s 3.7-litre ‘six’, chassis by Harold

Beach and Superleggera body by Touring

1959 AM enters Grand Prix racing with

outdated and unsuccessful DBR4, but

DBR1 wins Le Mans and seals WSCC

1960 Short-wheelbase, 314bhp twin-plug

DB4GT introduced for racing, ultimately

evolving into the streamlined ‘Project’

cars. AM begins association with Zagato

and the DB4GTZ is launched in 1961

1963 4-litre DB5 replaces 4. A year later,

Sean Connery drives DB5 in *Goldfinger*,

the first of many

AM ‘Bond cars’.

Radford builds 12

shooting brakes

1965 Kamm-tail

DB6 replaces the

DB5; Mk2 follows

in ‘69; convertible

version introduces the ‘Volante’ name

1967 William Towns-styled DBS brings a

fresh look and de Dion rear suspension

1969 Tadek Marek’s 5340cc V8 arrives

in the DBS V8. Evolves into the V8 S2 in

1972, with high-performance Vantage

(from ‘77), Volante (‘78), Zagato (‘84) and

a limited run of four-door Lagondas

1972 David Brown sells AM and

Company Developments takes control

1975 Firm is sold by the Receiver to

Peter Sprague and George Minden

1976 Towns’ ‘wedge’ Lagonda launched

1980 AM bought by Tim Hearley’s CH

Industrial and Victor Gauntlett’s Pace

Petroleum

1984 Automotive

Industrial briefly

takes over AM,

before Gauntlett

and Peter Livanos

swiftly buy it back



Pram-style hood marring V8’s thrusting profile, but discreet sill finishers and bumpers add a delicacy absent on most Vantages



Mighty quad-Weber V8 (this one built by Mike Beach)



Nardi wheel replaces the standard car’s two-spoke



Longstone CLASSIC TYRES



Uncle Chris' Aston 'jigsaw' Ulster and the slightly more together DB5 and DB2/4 Mk3

www.longstone.com
Tel: +44(0)1302 711123

V8 VANTAGE VOLANTE 'PoW'

Sold/number built 1987-'89/26

Construction tubular steel chassis, steel superstructure with aluminium panels

Engine all-alloy, dohc-per-bank 5340cc V8, four Weber 48IDF carburettors

Max power 400bhp @ 6000rpm

Max torque not quoted

Transmission five-speed ZF manual, driving rear wheels via LSD

Suspension: front double wishbones, coil springs, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar **rear** de Dion axle with trailing arms, Watt linkage, coil springs, telescopic dampers

Steering Adwest power-assisted rack and pinion

Brakes discs, with servo

Wheels & tyres 16in alloys & 255/50 VR16s

Length 15ft 3¹/₄in (4655mm)

Width 6ft (1829mm)

Height 4ft 6in (1371mm)

Wheelbase 8ft 7³/₄in (2635mm)

Weight 4009lb (1818kg)

0-60mph 5.4 secs **0-100mph** 12.2 secs

Top speed 160mph **Mpg** 13.4

Price new £93,500 (1987)

Price now £180,000

combination of Balmoral with Tan, and looks perfectly at home parked outside the Royal Automobile Club's Woodcote Park, which also celebrates its centenary in 2013. Australia-based Brit Mike Smith has owned A1 AVV for a decade: "My brother-in-law had one in the mid-'90s; I remember going for a drive and thinking 'this is the car'. I was on the lookout after that but it took a few years to find one – and to find the money. Then, in 2003, I was on leave in the UK and my brother-in-law called to tell me that it was for sale with Nicholas Mee. I went over, and the rest is history."

Smith also owns a DB4, a V600 and a new Virage Volante, but the 'PoW' is his favourite: "It's a brilliant thing. I love the balance between power, understatement and presence. I take it to the south of France a couple of times a year and it's perfect on those roads. I could never see myself getting rid of it – my brother-in-law did and he still regrets it!"


See a PoW at rest, even in a car park as well-heeled as this private members' golf club, and you can see the appeal. It isn't pretty – the anachronistic hood stowage and cartoon-like bonnet hump put paid to

that – but it is handsome in a musclebound way. In 1987 it must have been a welcome dash of subtlety in a sea of '80s excess – not that any Volante is exactly a shrinking violet. Certainly not when you start it up, that's for sure. Once the 5340cc V8 is warm it needs a good few churns on the starter before it erupts with a thunderous cackle, vibrating menacingly at idle.

It's a car that takes time to get under your skin, however. As we pull out of RS Williams' workshops into commuterville Cobham's rush hour, the 65lb ft of effort the clutch pedal requires soon gets wearing, the dogleg ZF 'box seems laboured and the firmly sprung Vantage pogos around on the rutted streets – heightening the nervousness brought on by this car's sheer bulk. Pick up speed, though, and it starts to make a lot more sense. It never quite sheds that sense of scale, but it does feel remarkably wieldy, with fine balance and enough suppleness to avoid it being upset by mid-corner bumps and lumps.

You might expect dragster pace – and it's certainly quick – but it's far more refined and grown-up than that, with great gobs of power throughout the rev range, building as an ocean swell rather than with any sudden surge. The gearbox smooths out with revs, slicing through its five ratios with a meaty mechanical precision. And all the while there's that truly glorious noise, a rich timbre that's all engine unlike today's exhaust-tuned Astons, which sound blood-curdling enough but lack the hearty authenticity of Tadek Marek's deep-lunged quad-cam unit. It seems only right that the vast power bulge to accommodate its four Weber carbs and airbox should so dominate the view ahead.

From within, this is a very special place to be. Yes, you might spot the odd bit of borrowed switchgear, but it feels carefully put together and comfortable, with its deeply padded leather chairs and extra headrest pillows. It's easy to picture yourself twirling the tactile Nardi three-spoke to point that prow south, and carrying on until you hit Cannes. On the *autoroute* it'll burble along at the legal limit registering barely 2500rpm, with dollops of effortless overtaking pace at the ready.

This car might not turn you into a Prince, any more than kissing a frog will. Yet in catering to the discreet tastes of one man, Aston Martin not only demonstrated its ability to create bespoke jewels, but also built the most desirable V8 in the model's two-decade production run. 

Thanks to RS Williams (01932 868377; www.rswilliams.co.uk); Royal Automobile Club (www.royalautomobileclub.co.uk)



Bespoke front spoiler for 'PoW' cars, and face does without Vantage blanking plate. Creases above grille hint at DB predecessors



Raised centre console allows for sunglasses store



Clear hood switches; wheelarch lips cover 16in rims





TOP TEN ECCENTRIC ASTONS

Not all of the marque's products are suitable for stylish secret agents. **James Page** throws the spotlight on the weird and wonderful instead

PHOTOGRAPHY LAT/ASTON MARTIN/BONHAMS

These days, Aston Martin makes much of its status as a 'cool' brand, with an ethos of 'power, beauty and soul'. Not all of the models that have carried the famous badge have lived up to all three of those qualities, however. Some haven't lived up to any of them. In the era of separate chassis, of course, Aston's hands were somewhat tied – if an owner wanted to fit a different body, then so be it. The same applied if they wanted to go motor racing.

But the company sometimes had offbeat moments all of its own, producing gloriously bizarre models that might not have won any beauty contests but nevertheless showed an interest in looking to the future and pushing the boundaries. So, while you can read about the fabled DB line and reflect on the company's motor-racing glory elsewhere, let's take a moment to celebrate the less well-known and slightly more leftfield Astons.



1 ARNOLT SPIDER

Stanley Harold 'Wacky' Arnolt first met Nuccio Bertone at the 1952 Turin Motor Show. The relationship began with the Arnolt-MG but, in 1954, three Spiders were created on Aston's DB2/4 chassis using the standard suspension and 2922cc 'six'. The car pictured is chassis LML 505, which made its debut at that year's New York Motor Show. It shares much with another Franco Scaglione design that Arnolt commissioned from

Bertone – the Arnolt-Bristol. **Anorak fact** Two Dropheads were also built before Aston stopped supplying chassis



2 DBS ESTATE

A number of Astons have been made into shooting brakes over the years. Harold Radford's conversions on the DB5 and DB6 were perhaps the most elegant, certainly more so than Aston's own Virage. FLM Panelcraft built three DB6 estates, as well as this one-off DBS version. It was ordered new in 1971 via London dealership HR Owen by a Scottish laird who wanted something suitably aristocratic to use on fishing trips. To that end, it featured split rear seats to accommodate the fishing gear, a roof-rack and even a leaping salmon mascot, which is sadly long gone.

Anorak fact The rear side glass was bespoke, but a Hillman Hunter tailgate was used



3 ATOM

First mooted in 1939 and developed alongside Aston's wartime work, the Atom was a complete departure for the firm. The 'skeleton frame' construction did away with a conventional chassis and was covered with aluminium panels to give a modern, streamlined shape. It was originally fitted with a 1950cc overhead-camshaft 'four' but this was replaced by a 1970cc version in 1944. The Atom was an important car for Aston Martin: it was used by David Brown in 1946, and the story goes that its qualities convinced him to buy the marque.

Anorak fact Much of the Atom's development was done by a pacifist mechanic who refused to work on the 'weapons of aggression' that the factory was then producing

4 BULLDOG

This utterly bonkers machine was more of a testbed than a concept – *Autocar* even evaluated it at MIRA – but it sadly remained a one-off. Work on the Bulldog began in early 1978 under the direction of Mike Loasby (who would later leave to join De Lorean) and William Towns. The car used aluminium panels on a backbone chassis, the latter meaning that there was no need for sills – lift the gullwing doors and the entire lower section of the car raises with them.

Power came from a mid-mounted, twin-turbocharged 5.3-litre V8 that was claimed to give almost 600bhp, while the interior was an intriguing blend of leather and liquid-crystal displays. And it might look as though it should have pop-up headlamps, but instead its front panel dropped to reveal a menacing line of five halogen units behind.

Anorak fact Towns had apparently wanted the instruments to be arranged above the windscreen, but was overruled



5 RHAM/1

Independent specialist Robin Hamilton started off with a standard DBS V8 that was gradually modified beyond all recognition – enough that its chassis number was changed to RHAM/1. The factory helped with access to facilities so that the engine and bodywork upgrades could be tested, but a lack of money meant that Hamilton's goal of racing at Le Mans remained out of reach. In 1977, however, an injection of sponsorship enabled the team to finally head to La Sarthe, where the car finished 17th overall. It returned two years

later, but the engine failed in the early stages of the race.

Anorak fact In 1980, RHAM/1 was used to set a new Land Speed Record for towing a caravan, at 124mph



6 DB3/6

Some 'interesting' bodies have been fitted to DB3s over the years, but surely none has suffered in quite the same way as chassis DB3/6. In the mid-1950s, its engine was commandeered for use in a DB2, but it received a most acceptable replacement in the form of a Jaguar C-type unit. It later gained a two-tone fixed-head body with ungainly chrome (above), but obviously that wasn't absurd enough because it was further altered with the addition of gullwing doors and a third, centrally positioned headlamp.

Anorak fact The rolling chassis for DB3/6 (less bodywork) was sold by Christie's for £185,000 in 1989. The remains were then restored into their original DB3 form

7 OGLE SOTHEBY SPECIAL

Created in time for the 1972 Montreal Motor Show, the Sotheby Special was bankrolled by the Wills cigarette firm and named after its latest brand. Beneath its Ogle-designed glassfibre skin lay a standard DBS V8, but there were extreme design flourishes everywhere – especially at the rear. The 22 lights included indicators that lit up sequentially from the centre outwards. The harder you pressed the middle pedal, the more brake lights lit up – all six each side indicated an emergency stop. Inside, there was a primitive head-up display.

A second car was built (apparently to a much higher standard than the first) for Mary Agate, a 60-year-old widow. To celebrate the car's completion, she hired Silverstone circuit so that she could put it through its paces.

Anorak fact The original car was resprayed in cigarette livery and presented to Graham Hill – Wills sponsored his fledgling Grand Prix team



8 'DONALD DUCK'

Aston was clearly in experimental mood in the late 1930s, and before the Atom came this ungainly effort, developed by Claude Hill and Gordon Sutherland. It was based on the first 2 Litre saloon, which had been shown at the 1936 Earls Court Motor Show. The body was removed and a new frame was mounted on the chassis. The square section of that structure meant that contours were limited, and its awkward lines led to its nickname. It was quick, though, reaching 90mph over half a mile at Brooklands.

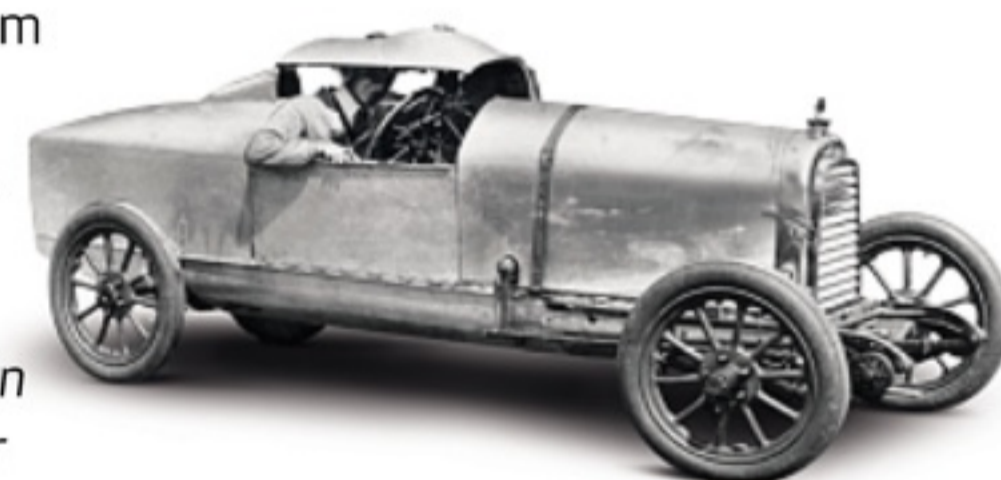
Anorak fact The car featured a form of through-flow ventilation via an opening rear window and air intakes on the roof



9 'RAZOR BLADE'

This single-seater was created to wrestle from AC the one-hour light-car record of 101.39mph, and beneath the aluminium bodywork was a 1½-litre twin-overhead-camshaft engine. Drivers of Adrian Newey's claustrophobic early F1 designs would no doubt have sympathised with 'Sammy' Davis as he set off at Brooklands in 1923 on the ultimately unsuccessful attempt – the Aston was only 47cm across at its widest point.

Anorak fact The car was initially known as the Oyster



10 CYGNET

Aston folk can bleat on all they like about how the bespoke interior uses the same number of hides as can be found in a DB9, or how it shares only a roof panel with the Toyota iQ on which it is based. Fact is, the Cygnet is a £30,000 1.3-litre supermini, produced to cut the firm's average emissions. It may not be the worst car to wear the badge, but there is surely a very good case for it being the least credible.

Anorak fact You can also buy matching Cygnet gloves for £230







Brave new world

The Vanquish blended craftsmanship with audacious, cutting-edge technology. **Steve Sutcliffe** gets a culture shock

PHOTOGRAPHY **TONY BAKER/AMHT**



If ever there was a car that separates the values and ideas of the old car company that was Aston Martin from the more ambitious, less traditional, infinitely more contemporary 'brand' that Aston has become today, it's the Vanquish. Not the new 2012 edition, but the original Ian Callum-designed car of 2001.

In 1998, when the V8 Virage was still Aston's most exotic creation and the workforce at Newport Pagnell was still crafting its cars together lovingly by hand, the Project Vantage Concept must have seemed like a machine from outer space. When it made its audacious debut at that year's North American Auto Show in Detroit, you could almost feel the traditionalists shudder. Because here was an Aston that was constructed mostly from aluminium and carbon composites, and which had not a hand-built V8 beneath its bonnet but a V12 whose origins could be traced indirectly to Ford Motor Co.

Worse still, it featured a paddle-shift gearbox and an electronic fly-by-wire throttle system, neither of which had been seen (or wanted) in an Aston previously.

But when the Vanquish eventually landed as a full production car three years later, Aston Martin's fans – even the more

stubbornly antiquated among them – were a very long way indeed from being displeased. Despite its 21st-century design and engineering ethos, it was instantly regarded as The Real Thing.

It was a true-blue, big hairy Aston and, flappy-paddle gearshift aside, it became the very obvious successor to the original V8 Vantage – the biggest and hairiest Aston of them all – pretty much overnight.

'THERE'S A UNIQUE ATMOSPHERE INSIDE – A DELICIOUS SMELL OF LEATHER WITH A WHIFF OF OILY HEAT'

It was quick, too. Very quick. Although its kerb weight was still an inexplicably hefty 1835kg (more than 4000lb!), power from the 5925cc V12 was a rousing 460bhp at 6500rpm, with torque rated officially at 400lb ft at 5000rpm. This was sufficient to send the Vanquish to 60mph from rest in a mere 4.4 secs, to 100mph in 10.5 secs, and on to a claimed top speed just four miles per hour shy of the magic 200mph.

Yet it was the car's styling and the noise it made that elevated the Vanquish to a position whereby it could look its equivalent Ferrari of the day squarely in the eye, and then simply wait for the Prancing Horse to blink. Callum wanted his creation to look powerful and strong, as well as elegant, and in the event he went to town and provided the car with a quite extraordinary level of road presence, never replicated in an Aston before or since.

And as for the noise, it didn't matter one iota that the V12's engineering roots emanated from a design from across the pond. It sounded utterly fantastic, largely as a result of a natty engineering solution that kept various flaps in its exhaust system closed in order to satisfy the noise police, which would then open at higher revs to allow the Vanquish to release its full fury.

Since then, of course, every supercar maker worth its salt has developed a system similar to that of the Vanquish. But even today, the sound of this car's V12 under load, beyond 3000rpm, remains as distinctive a noise as anything that Ferrari (or Aston Martin) has produced since. It was also the reason why I could hear the Vanquish long before I could see it when it arrived on location for our photoshoot – because it's a noise you don't ever forget.



Menacing face gives the Vanquish huge presence, yet there are also nods to the past. Light panels clothe the complex bonded-aluminium structure

Currently on offer with marque specialist Nicholas Mee, this particular example has been uprated to something approaching Vanquish S specification by the fitment of bigger brakes, Yokohama tyres and various other modifications. It's done 20,000 miles and is priced at £65,000, which is at the top end of the scale; there are plenty for sale on or around the £50k mark.

But it's a genuinely immaculate example and, bearing in mind that the original list price was an eye-watering £158,000 – and that Aston made just 2593 of them between 2001 and '07 – the idea of the Vanquish becoming an investment in the future is probably not that far-fetched. Not when you consider that it was a last-of-an-era moment as far as Newport Pagnell was concerned, before Aston's Gaydon factory became the new company HQ.

Climb inside and there's a unique atmosphere, a delicious smell of leather mixed with a whiff of oily heat. The driving position is low-slung and laid-back, the dials white and vaguely antique in their appearance. On the centre console sits a bank of switches for the air-conditioning and so on that are lifted straight out of a Jaguar XK8 – as are the doorhandles, the column stalks and much of the rest of the switchgear. It's a curious, though not unbeguilding, mixture

of modern, not so modern and downright odd components, all of which meet to produce one unmistakable interior.

Yet any faults there may be inside the Vanquish are largely obliterated the moment you thumb the big red button in the centre of the dash marked 'engine start'. Once the mildly embarrassing burst of revs dies away, the V12 settles to a smooth but still rousing idle. One prod on the accelerator sends a wave of energy through the body that manifests itself in a lovely rocking motion, almost as if the car is lifting a cheek gracefully, as one might in church.

Select first gear by pulling back the right-hand paddle and there's a faint mechanical click felt at the fingertips, alongside a distant clunk as the gear goes in. No clutch is required, instead you just open the throttle smoothly and you're away, a slight judder from the transmission confirming that this is indeed an electrically automated manual gearbox, and not just a regular automatic with paddles.

On the move the Vanquish feels instantly alive, and very obviously front-engined/rear-wheel drive. Its steering is heavy but direct, the ride firm but somehow soothing at the same time. Even at low speed and low revs, the engine and exhaust dominate the experience. Everything the Vanquish does,

ASTON MARTIN VANQUISH

Sold/number built 2001-'07/2593

Construction aluminium body panels clothing an extruded-aluminium and carbonfibre punt

Engine all-alloy, dohc-per-bank 5925cc V12, sequential fuel injection

Max power 460bhp @ 6500rpm

Max torque 400lb ft @ 5000rpm

Transmission six-speed automated manual with paddle-shift operation, driving rear wheels

Suspension double wishbones, coil springs, telescopic dampers and anti-roll bar f/r

Steering power-assisted rack and pinion

Brakes 14in (355mm) front, 13in (330mm) rear ventilated discs, with servo and anti-lock

Wheels & tyres 9Jx19in & 255/40 ZR19 (f), 10Jx19in & 285/40 ZR19 (r)

Length 15ft 3³/₄in (4665mm)

Width 6ft 6³/₄in (1998mm)

Height 4ft 4in (1318mm)

Wheelbase 8ft 10in (2690mm)

Weight 4045lb (1835kg)

0-60mph 4.4 secs

0-100mph 10.5 secs

Top speed 196mph **Mpg** 12.6

Price new £158,000

Price now from £50,000



Clockwise, from main: cabin is a mish-mash of old and new; soulful V12 dominates its character; spidery alloys; proud build plaque; muscular profile



in fact, all of its energy, seems to flow from a point halfway down its long bonnet. Even the way it loads up mid-corner and gives you so much feel from the rear end is determined by the engine being mounted as far back as possible but still in front of the driver, just where it should be in a GT car.

And when you do eventually put your foot down, or throw it towards a corner with some gusto, it really does deliver. This car feels every inch as rapid as I remembered in a straight line, and in corners I am genuinely surprised by how fast and composed it still seems, even alongside its 2012 namesake, which just so happens to be here on the day in question.


The only true downside to the Vanquish as a car to own, rather than merely drive, is the same one that blighted it from the word go. Cost. The simple truth is that it was expensive to buy in the first place, is still expensive to buy today, and will be expensive to run tomorrow and beyond.

Being realistic about running costs, Mee estimates that to do 6000 miles in one will cost approximately £5000 – assuming that nothing major goes wrong or needs replacing in the meantime. If a clutch goes – and after 25-30,000 miles they generally do – that's another £5400. Replacement discs and pads cost £2500 and last 7-15,000 miles

depending on use. A set of plugs and coils is £2050 and ideally worth looking at annually, while a major service (£2100) is required every 15,000 miles or so, with a minor (£1000) every 6000 miles.

What there does not appear to be, however, is a great long list of items that regularly go wrong. The V12 engine Mee describes as “bulletproof”. Beyond the clutch of the paddle-shift 'box, which needs to be reset electronically by specialists in order to avoid wear, there are no obvious skeletons in the closet. As long as you're realistic about the knowledge that running a Vanquish is not something that can be done on the cheap, there's no reason why buyers should come unstuck.

Indeed, it's hard to see the Vanquish becoming anything other than a classic in the long run, a car that will cross that magic line and begin to go back up again in value. And at that point it will warrant even more respect than it commands today.

But even as it stands, this car is special, very special actually. Not least because it represents the end of an era – as well as the beginning of another – as far as Aston Martin, the company, is concerned. 

Thanks to Nicholas Mee & Company: 020 8741 8822; www.nicholasmee.co.uk

Aston Martin history part 3 Ford, Bloxham and beyond

1987 Ford Motor Co takes a 75% share of AM and later becomes sole owner

1989 AMR1 racer takes AM back to Le Mans. Virage, styled by John Heffernan and Ken Greenly,

replaces ageing V8 range. Volante follows in a year, 6.3-litre version in '92; restyled and renamed V8 in '96

1991 Walter Hayes succeeds Gauntlett as chairman. Four 'Sanction II' DB4GT Zagatos go on sale

1993 Ian Callum-designed DB7 unveiled at Geneva Salon, with supercharged Jaguar-derived 'six'. Twin-supercharged 550bhp Vantage range-topper arrives

1994 DB7 goes on sale, with production from a new factory in Bloxham, Oxon. Developed with Volante from 1996, V12 Vantage from '99, plus Zagato-styled coupé and DB AR1 roadster

2000 Dr Ulrich Bez made chairman/CEO
2001 V12 Vanquish launched, developed from Callum's Project Vantage concept of '98; 460bhp V12 uprated to 520bhp for 2004 Vanquish S

2003 AM opens new headquarters in Gaydon (below)

2003 DB9 goes into production, using the new 'VH' architecture

2004 Engine plant opens in Cologne
2005 DBR9 racer launched; achieves class wins at Le Mans in 2007 and '08.

'Entry level' V8 Vantage goes on sale (later available as a Roadster, a turnkey racer, and with V12 power)

2007 DBS name revived. AM returns to independence, Ford selling to Investment Dar and Adeem Investment consortium led by incoming chairman David Richards

2009 Rapide name returns for a four-door, this time badged AM not Lagonda

2011 V12 Zagato unveiled, plus 750bhp, 220mph One-77 hypercar, new Virage and rebranded Toyota iQ – the Cygnet – to bring down the firm's emissions

2012 Vanquish returns as flagship. Investindustrial buys 37.5% stake in Aston Martin



Clockwise: engine is set well back to aid handling; personal touch; retro vent



Species: Siberian (Amur) Tiger

Average length/weight:

male 12ft/700lbs, female 10ft/500lbs

Home range: Mainly the Amur-Ussuri region of Siberia along the Russian coast

Estimated population: 500

rare breeds are worth saving



Species: Aston martin DB5

Average length/weight: 180in/3233lbs

Home range: Mainly UK and Europe but small families have been spotted in all parts of the world

Estimated population: 850

Species: Aston martin Vanquish

Average length/weight: 183in/4133lbs

Home range: UK / Europe / USA

with small prides throughout the world

Estimated population: 2800

keeping the legend alive



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36 East Street, Olney
Bucks MK46 4AP

T 01234 713083

F 01234 240104

E info@djsmail.co.uk

W djsmail.co.uk



**London's finest independent
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1 Silver Road, Westfield Village
London W12 7SG

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