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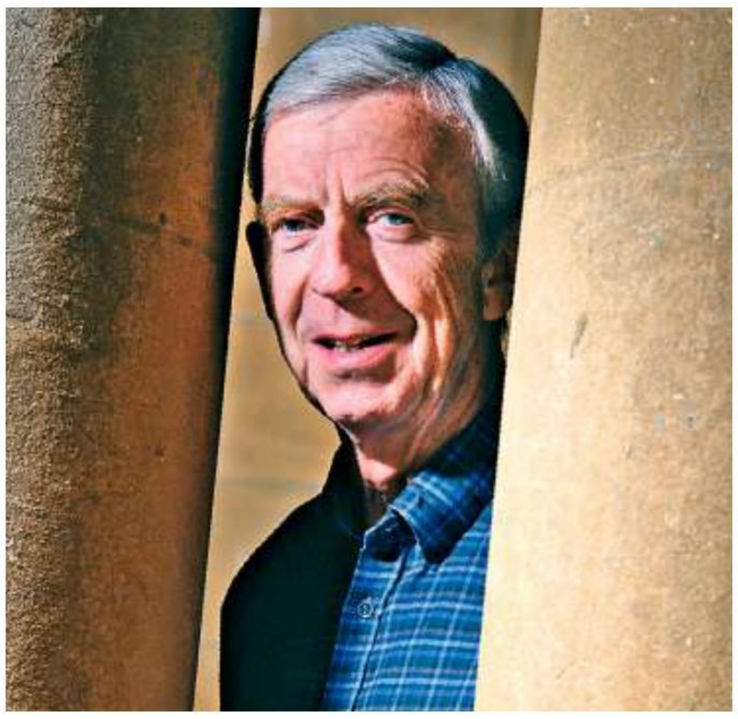


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Foreword

Tony Brooks enjoyed four years as a works Aston Martin driver, part of a successful F1 and sports car racing career



My life would have been very different were it not for my relationship with Aston Martin. I am very pleased to have been invited to write the foreword for this collection of articles about the DB series of Aston Martins, which has provided me with the opportunity to recall how much I owe the marque.

My first race was in my mother's Healey Silverstone in a Goodwood club meeting on March 22, 1952 and my first increase in engine power came when a kind private owner invited me to drive his Frazer Nash Le Mans Replica at Goodwood on May 2, 1953. I raced it through that year and 1954 with sufficient success to attract attention and be invited by Aston Martin for a test drive at Chalgrove aerodrome in Oxfordshire eight days before Christmas 1954. I immediately realised that I had reached a turning point in my racing career and that what I did in the next hour would decide whether I was going to make progress in the racing world or just fall by the wayside as so many had done before me.

The sight of the three green Aston Martin DB3Ss lined up in the pale winter sunshine at Chalgrove remains with me to this day and I spotted three other much better-known drivers aspiring to join the works team. One of the Astons may have been 62 EMU ('Gentleman Racer', p28) and I convinced John Wyer that I justified a place in the team. My first drive for Aston Martin was at Le Mans in 1955 and while I was at the wheel more than 80 spectators were killed by a Mercedes that launched over a protection barrier in front of the pits. Threading my way through the debris of cars and bits was a challenge to my commitment to go serious motor racing.

Family pressures caused John Riseley-Prichard, my Aston Martin co-driver at Le Mans, to retire from the sport and he invited me to drive his Formula 2 Connaught in several events, which led to the works Connaught team inviting me to drive their Formula 1 car in the Syracuse Grand Prix, Sicily, on October 23, 1955. It was the first time that I had sat in an F1 car and to everyone's amazement, mine most of all, I won the race – the first time a Grand Prix had been won by a British car and driver for 31 years.

This success resulted in team invitations that enabled me to win seven F1 Grands Prix and finish runner up in the F1 World Drivers' Championship in 1959. I had four successful years with Aston Martin, winning many races including my last for them, the RAC Tourist Trophy on September 13, 1958, with Stirling Moss. The Aston link was responsible for the above sequence of events but what I most have the marque to thank for is that when racing for Aston Martin at Rouen on July 8, 1956 was when I first met my Italian wife to be, John and 'Tottie' Wyer fostering our relationship through Pina's Italian lessons for 'Tottie', which has resulted in our 58 wonderful years together.

If reading this compilation prompts you to become an owner of a car with true class, you could find it may do very much more for you than you could possibly imagine!

Tony Brooks, July 3, 2017



Tony Brooks heading for a third place finish in the 1955 Goodwood 9 Hours

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Welcome

Phil pursues the special factor that lifts Aston Martin above all rivals, and why the cars of the DB years mean so much to us



Welcome to our celebration of Aston Martin, the DB Years, a special collection of our best road and track tests on the cars built when tractor and gear manufacturer David Brown took the niche sports car maker and turned it into a symbol of international racing and grand touring road car glamour.

From the DB2 prototype – the first to wear the DB moniker – through to the DBS V8, *Classic Cars* has hopped into the driving seats of some of the most important Astons, bringing firsthand impressions of how they drive, and telling their stories with unique insight.

In my 17 years on the magazine I've been lucky to drive everything from a DB2 through to the V8, and every moment behind the wheel has been special in a way that transcends the performance, the styling, the sounds and the smells. If you simply look at the tangibles, there are other cars that did some or even all of them better, but layer in the weight of what Aston Martin means – the track success, silver and small screen glamour, engineering beauty and even the stories of an embattled quest for survival – and the aura is wholly seductive.

My highlight was spending a day driving one of the *Goldfinger* and *Thunderball* DB5s, and, naturally, playing with its machine guns, bullet shield and all of the other gadgets that beguiled me as a schoolboy. Tony Brooks raced the greatest Astons of the Fifties. For him, driving a DBR1 to victory in the 1956 Nürburgring 1000km stands above all.

Whatever Aston Martin means to you, I hope you enjoy the cars as much as we have.



Phil Bell, editor











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Distinctly BRITISH

In 1950 Aston Martin owner David Brown gave his initials to a new dynasty of grand tourers – from DB2 to DB7 we test the landmark cars to find which best encapsulates the DB appeal, and expose the realities of owning them today

Words SIMON CHARLESWORTH Photography MICHAEL BAILIE, LYNDON McNEIL

The quintessential gentleman's sports car. One of the aspirational blue-chip marques. An intrinsic part of the James Bond legend. Winner of Le Mans and the World Sportscar Championship - it could only be the double-barrelled automotive aristocrat, Aston Martin.

As so often with classic car evolution, puzzlement and contradiction are rife. The first Aston Martin christened with those hallowed initials was the DB2, yet it wasn't the first Aston Martin produced under David Brown's stewardship - that marker is claimed by the Aston Martin 2-litre, retrospectively tagged the DB1.

Styled by Frank Feeley, who had previously worked for Lagonda and was rehired by Brown shortly after he bought the company, the 2-litre was largely designed by Claude Hill. It used Hill's two-litre 90bhp four-cylinder engine and chassis, similar to that of the pre-war Atom prototype, but the production car was far more convincing with a decadently long bonnet and slightly Rubinesque *grande routière* body. Its most noteworthy aesthetic legacy was the striking frontal aspect - a 'face' that went on to influence the DB2, DB2/4 and DB2/4 MkII.

The 2-litre was replaced in 1950 by the far more modern-looking DB2. Brown was determined that Aston Martin would move on from its small-capacity, four-cylinder past. Instead the DB2 was powered by a six-cylinder 105bhp engine acquired during Brown's 1947 shopping spree - the 2580cc Lagonda LB6 designed by Willie Watson under the supervision of WO Bentley. Brown clearly took the threats posed by Jaguar's XK120 and emerging Italian GTs seriously.

Again penned by Feeley, the alloy-panel-over-steel-frame DB2 drew inspiration from the designs of Carrozzeria Touring and his own 1949 DB MkII racer. Gone were the chubbiness and decadence of the DB1; instead the DB2 was restrained, delicate and subtle with a far more planted stance. The new car retained Hill's chassis, though he left the company following the cancellation of his four-cylinder engine.

Like many of its contemporaries, the DB2's headroom is rationed and the spartan dashboard is a jumble of timber, dials and switches. This 1953 DB2 also features superb competition bucket seats which, with the wide sill and lack of headroom, make climbing aboard a contortionist's delight.

The first corner comes as a delightful surprise. On radial tyres the steering isn't just perfectly weighted, positive and nicely geared, it has to be approaching the better steering boxes from Alfa Romeo and Porsche. Its chassis is grippy and adjustable and doesn't roll like



Spacious MkIII established the DB family grille-shaped format



Cramped DB2 cockpit confronts you with a jumble of dials and switches



The DB2 (front) paved the way for all future DBs – DB MkIII had a higher roofline, separate bonnet and an engine breathed on by Aston Martin new boy, Tadek Marek

‘You feel so plugged into a DB2 that it makes driving a modern motor feel like you’ve gone into a trance’

a Citroën 2CV, despite blessing my posterior with a friendly ride. The pedals and gearbox may be heavy, but they are tactile and operate with almost Victorian levels of engineered precision. Accelerate up through the David Brown four-speed three-synchro gearbox, savour the gear whine accompanied by the lovely rich tune from the straight-six at 3000rpm, haul on the brakes, feed it through a corner, and you feel so plugged into this enjoyable car that it makes driving a modern motor feel like you’ve gone into a trance.

The DB2’s biggest handicap was the LB6/B engine, with an unsuccessful crankshaft bearing design that Willie Watson had attempted on the disastrous Invicta Black Prince. This was addressed, along with the lack of rear seats and opening hatchback boot, by 1953’s DB2/4. The lines of the Mulliner coupé bodywork - a drophead coupé was also available - may seem compromised to some, but the bonus was that the DB2/4 increased its appeal by being more practical.

It was powered by the DB2’s 125bhp Vantage VB6/E unit until Watson’s new VB6/J became available. At 2992cc, the bores were increased, but to keep the original castings the cylinders were slightly offset in pairs. It was far from perfect but it realised 140bhp and gave Aston an engine for competition in the DB3 and DB3S.

The DB MkIII followed the DB2/4 MkII, produced following Brown’s acquisition of Tickford in Newport Pagnell; Aston production moved there in 1954. Like the MkII it featured a higher roofline and, to reduce bonnet flex and increase refinement, the size of the clamshell bonnet was reduced by separating it from the front wings. Unlike the MkII, the MkIII didn’t suffer from fussy chrome detailing and it also featured a new engine and front disc brakes.

The engine built on the improvements of the unit used in the DB2/4 and the MkII. It retained the same 2922cc capacity but now featured a stiffer cylinder block casting and crankshaft, which was the joint effort of Harold Beach and Tadeusz ‘Tadek’ Marek, who had joined Aston Martin from Austin.

The MkIII’s main advances were in its styling. Outside, it left the aesthetics of the DB2 behind - the front opening bade farewell to the DB1-inspired three-piece grille and aped that of the DB3S racer, while the rear eventually featured ‘cathedral’ rear lamps that neatly terminated the tailfins. Inside, the MkIII has the first instantly recognisable Aston Martin dashboard, establishing a DB tradition by echoing the shape of the grille.

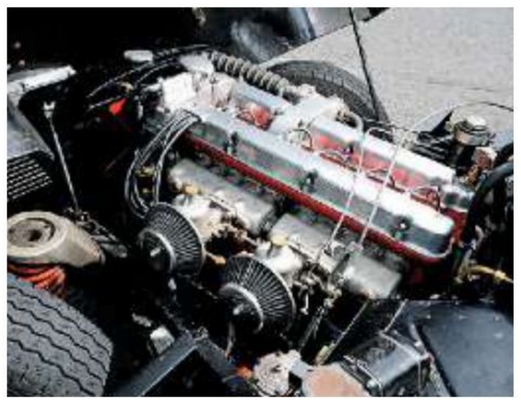
Driving this 1958 MkIII you can feel its increased heft compared with the MkII. Low-speed manoeuvring on the crossply tyres makes you huff and puff, but punt the MkIII through a series of bends and your arms start to throb as the steering loads up and is made even heavier by body roll.

In a straight line the MkIII is polished and stable, surfing along on the DBA engine's elegantly rich exhaust note. On radials it could well be similar to the DB2 and more sophisticated.

The 1958 DB4 represents the first evolutionary jump in the DB line. Its cornerstone was a new six-cylinder engine from Marek, the Design Project 186. Featuring twin-camshafts and an alloy cylinder head, it made it into production as a 3670cc unit with an alloy cylinder block, seven plain-bearing crankshaft and twin SU HD8 carburettors.

The DB4 was revolutionary, featuring new double-wishbone front suspension, rack-and-pinion steering, disc brakes front and rear and a stiffer, heavier chassis. This supported a new lightweight body built on the Superleggera principle (a cage of small-diameter alloy tubes bearing alloy body panels) which Aston Martin made under licence from Touring at Feltham and, later, at Newport Pagnell. The supremely elegant DB4 shape was styled by Anderloni and Frederico Formenti.

Incredibly the MkIII stayed in production for nearly a year after the DB4's launch in case the new car didn't prove popular. Brown needn't have worried – it set a new sales record of 1110 cars, which remained unbroken until the arrival of the DB6.



1953 Aston Martin DB2

Engine 2580cc, in-line six-cylinder, dohc, two SU carburettors **Power and torque** 105bhp @ 5000rpm; 125lb ft @ 3100rpm **Transmission** Four-speed manual, rear-wheel drive **Brakes** Drums front and rear **Suspension** Front: independent, trailing arms, helical coil springs, anti-roll bar, lever-arm dampers. Rear: live axle, parallel trailing arms, helical coil springs, Panhard rod, lever-arm dampers **Steering** Worm-and-roller **Weight** 1112kg (2452lb) **Performance** Top speed: 110mph; 0-60mph: 12.4sec **Fuel consumption** 17mpg **Cost new** £1918 **Values now** £150,000-210,000



1958 Aston Martin DB MkIII

Engine 2922cc, in-line six-cylinder, dohc, two SU carburettors **Power and torque** 162bhp @ 5500rpm; 180lb ft @ 4000rpm **Transmission** Four-speed manual, rear-wheel drive **Brakes** Discs front, drums rear, servo-assisted **Suspension** Front: independent, trailing arms, helical coil springs, anti-roll bar, lever-arm dampers. Rear: live axle, parallel trailing arms, helical coil springs, Panhard rod, lever-arm dampers **Steering** Worm-and-roller **Weight** 1270kg (2800lb) **Performance** Top speed: 120mph; 0-60mph: 9.3sec Fuel consumption 18mpg **Cost new** £3076 **Values now** £167,500-225,000



The DB4 (centre) would normally wear bumpers. DB5 (right) and DB6 show subtle evolution

‘Roll your wrists into the turn and revel in how the DB4 attacks apices with vigour, feeling so adjustable’

Paul Shire’s 1961 Series III underwent fast-road tuning at RS Williams - debumpered with a fettled engine, lowered and with altered suspension geometry and slightly wider radial tyres. The result is the sharpest DB4 I’ve ever driven.

Yes, a DB4 will always feel slightly keener at the front, with greater grip and more alert turn-in compared to a standard Feltham Aston because of its all-alloy engine and double-wishbone suspension, but this car is in a different league. A host of detail differences make it shine - it corners flatter, is impeccably poised, has more grip and lighter and sharper steering than a standard car. Work the four-speed overdrive gearbox, roll your wrists into the corner and revel in how it attacks apices with such vigour, feeling so adjustable it’s as if there is an element of rear-wheel steer.

Replacing both the DB4 Series V and shorterDB4 GT, the DB5 was launched in 1963. Originally planned as the DB4 Series VI, it was 77kg heavier and more refined with a larger 3995cc engine claiming 282bhp - 325bhp in Vantage tune - packing more torque, featuring better twin-servo brakes and, later, a ZF five-speed gearbox as standard. It was also immortalised in *Goldfinger*.

The biggest differences I notice when transferring from the DB4 to Peter Little’s DB5 are a seven-dial dash and the five-speed gearbox which lacks, by the slightest degree, the clarity and precision of the David Brown four-speeder. Other than this point of pedantry, they are incredibly close - think of your favourite music on vinyl versus CD and you get the gist. The DB5’s engine is torquier and the car more relaxing at the expense of a little of the DB4’s sportiness and immediacy.

Exploit its ability and the DB5 is a gem to drive, its beautifully weighted steering cornering with plenty of enthusiasm and well-controlled roll. The twin-servo brakes pull up squarely and evenly. The ride is just what you want of a sporty GT. Then, of course, there is that Aston Martin signature tune flooding into the cabin.

The DB5 was the last true Superleggera Aston because 1965’s DB6 featured a folded steel extension to the rear chassis (instead of tubes), making the car far more rigid than the DB5. It also boasts more rear headroom and a longer wheelbase.

The DB6 may appear visually heavier, but it only weighs 8kg more than its predecessor - and its performance is still impressive. Perhaps it’s because of some sort of subconscious osmosis through the controls, but for the first couple of laps the gearbox remains in fourth and I’m not in any great hurry. The power steering is nicely weighted



1961 Aston Martin DB4

Engine 3670cc, in-line six-cylinder, dohc, two SU carburettors **Power and torque** 240bhp @ 5500rpm; 246lb ft @ 4750rpm **Transmission** Four-speed manual, optional overdrive rear-wheel drive **Brakes** Discs front and rear, servo-assisted **Suspension** Front: independent, wishbones, anti-roll bar, helical coil springs, telescopic dampers. Rear: live axle, parallel trailing arms, Watt linkage, helical coil springs, lever-arm dampers **Steering** Rack-and-pinion **Weight** 1392kg (3070lb) **Performance** Top speed: 141mph; 0-60mph: 8.5sec **Fuel consumption** 16.4mpg **Cost new** £4084 **Values now** £390,000-475,000



1964 Aston Martin DB5

Engine 3995cc, in-line six-cylinder, dohc, three SU carburettors **Power and torque** 282bhp @ 5500rpm; 280lb ft @ 4500rpm **Transmission** Four-speed, optional overdrive, or five-speed manual, or three-speed automatic, rear-wheel drive **Brakes** Discs front and rear, servo-assisted **Suspension** Front: independent, wishbones, anti-roll bar, helical coil springs, telescopic dampers. Rear: live axle, parallel trailing arms, Watt linkage, helical coil springs, lever-arm dampers **Steering** Rack-and-pinion **Weight** 1465kg (3230lb) **Performance** Top speed: 144mph; 0-60mph: 8sec **Fuel consumption** 15mpg **Cost new** £4175 **Values now** £485,000-575,000



1969 Aston Martin DB6 MkI

Engine 3995cc, in-line six-cylinder, dohc, three SU carburettors **Power and torque** 282bhp @ 5500rpm; 280lb ft @ 4500rpm **Transmission** Four-speed, optional overdrive, or five-speed manual, or three-speed automatic, rear-wheel drive **Brakes** Discs front and rear, servo-assisted **Suspension** Front: independent, wishbones, anti-roll bar, helical coil springs, telescopic dampers. Rear: live axle, parallel trailing arms, Watt linkage, helical coil springs, lever-arm dampers **Steering** Rack-and-pinion **Weight** 1465kg (3230lb) **Performance** Top speed: 144mph; 0-60mph: 8sec **Fuel consumption** 15mpg **Cost new** £4175 **Values now** £225,000-300,000



DB4 (here), 5 and 6 share the same darkly sophisticated and understated look



DB5 sadly lacks the ejector passenger seat that made the car such a film icon



DB6's longer wheelbase may have annoyed purists, but opened up much-needed interior space

with a fair amount of feel and connection; unlike many of its era, it doesn't have the lightness and undergeared manner of a spinning roulette wheel, so I sit back and let the torque toil.

Yet the DB6 is more than game when I finally let the twisting tarmac entice me, handling very like the DB5 as the big bassy rumble from the six-cylinder engine is heckled by the whine from the ZF five-speed gearbox. I didn't expect to like the visually compromised DB6, but Brian Smouha's 1969 MkI has convinced me.

The DB6 MkII of 1969 marked the last of the DB4 dynasty. It also shared many components, including wheels, hubs and seats, with the new larger DBS and was offered with optional AE Brico fuel injection.

The DBS was all change for Aston Martin. A blend of crisp Italian Sixties detailing garnished with cues from Detroit muscle cars, the 1967 DBS can almost be described as Turin style via Park Avenue.

It was originally intended to have the new V8 but this was experiencing serious development problems, so the DBS was launched with the DB6's four-litre six-cylinder (Vantage tune became a no-cost option). Beneath its square-cut bodywork Beach's chassis was retained with the rear suspension finally evolving into a de Dion design.

In 1970 Marek overcame the V8's bottom-end frailty problems and the DBS V8 was launched with the engine it should always have had. Yet



DB4GT – dressed to impress

The 1959 DB4GT was the first Aston to feature faired-in headlamps. It might look similar to a DB4 Series IV or V, but the grille is mesh and the bumpers lack overriders. Lighter and with a shorter wheelbase, the GT was also powered by a 240bhp 3.7-litre six-cylinder engine.

The Giugiaro-designed one-off 1961 Bertone Jet was built on the DB4GT chassis number, 0201L, whereas the DB4GT Zagato is a very different and more beautiful car built for the track. Styled by Ercole Spada, the Zagato was used an even more powerful 314bhp, 9.7:1 compression ratio engine.

Two of the most famous Zagatos are 1VEV and 2VEV, driven by greats including Jim Clark and Roy Salvadori.



1971 Aston Martin DBS V8

Engine 5340cc, V8, dohc per bank, fuel injection **Power and torque** 320bhp @ 5000rpm; 360lb ft @ 4500rpm **Transmission** Five-speed manual or three-speed automatic, rear-wheel drive **Brakes** Vented discs front and rear, servo-assisted **Suspension** Front: independent, coil springs, double wishbones, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar. Rear: de Dion axle, coil-springs, radius arms, Watt linkage, lever-arm dampers **Steering** Rack-and-pinion, power-assisted **Weight** 1820kg (3804lb) **Performance** Top speed: 160mpg; 0-60mph: 5.9sec **Fuel consumption** 12.9mpg **Cost new** £7501 **Values now** £80,000-120,000



2000 Aston Martin DB7 Vantage

Engine 5935cc, V12, dohc per bank, fuel injection **Power and torque** 420bhp @ 6000rpm; 400lb ft @ 5000rpm **Transmission** Six-speed manual or five-speed automatic, rear-wheel drive **Brakes** Vented discs front and rear, anti-lock **Suspension** Front and rear: independent, coil springs, double wishbones, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar **Steering** Rack-and-pinion, power-assisted **Weight** 1622kg (3577lb) **Performance** Top speed: 185mph: 0-60mph: 5.2sec **Fuel consumption** 15.1mpg **Cost new** £92,500 **Values now** £25,000-29,000



DBS (left) represented a major styling change for Aston – adopting Jaguar underpinnings was an even more radical step in the DB7



DBS cabin broke with tradition by abandoning the grille-shaped binnacle and introducing a dished steering wheel



DB7 introduced a very differentand more modern-looking cabin, relying for some components on the Ford and Jaguar parts bins

the last true DB - Brown sold the company in 1972 - wasn't the success it could have been. Criticised for a lack of low-end torque, it had a hefty thirst and the Bosch mechanical fuel injection suffered with heat soak from the large alloy V8. As a result in 1973 the injection system was dumped in favour of Weber carburettors.

Inside as out, the cabin breaks with tradition - there's a dished steering wheel and the MkIII-inspired dashboard is no more. Instead, there's much more room, it's darker and the DB6's crowded dials, controls and switchgear have been replaced by Radiomobile rotary knobs and BLMC rocker switches.

Initially both DBS and DBS V8 drive very similarly, with ride/handling bias optimised for comfort in comparison with the DB6 and the power steering positive yet slightly too light. But get used to the greater angles of roll and the DBS V8 does grip.

The engine doesn't overdose on low-down torque, but when it hits 4000rpm it awakens with a bellow that gets progressively louder and angrier. This is where I feel the power - right in the midst of an offbeat V8 jamming session. Charging down the straight, up through the gearbox, which won't be rushed, scrub off speed for the turn and it's surprising how so large a car can hang on with such neutrality.

In the Nineties Jaguar and Aston Martin ended up co-operating as part of Ford's Premier Automotive Group. Victor Gauntlett, who had run Aston since the early Eighties, had dreamt of a new DB4 since the middle of the decade, but such a car didn't materialise until 1994.

Built at Bloxham with input from Tom Walkinshaw Racing and using the XJ-S chassis and floorpan, the DB7 initially had a supercharged 3226cc 335bhp six-cylinder engine. It was a huge



hit despite criticism from purists. These were addressed in 1999 by the Vantage's 420bhp V12, stiffer bodyshell and revised suspension.

The interior of Nick Holland's 2000 DB7 Vantage marks a return to form for the Aston Martin DB. Back is the 2+2 intimacy and sportiness, with the added bonus of an engine note which can only be created by a dozen high-revving pistons.

Dynamically the Vantage is faultless. The power-assisted steering might be a touch numb, but it's superbly weighted and positive. Grip is immense, turn-in instant and roll kept in check. Somehow this car wafts like an XJ yet retains that crucial element of DB involvement. The deep baritone of the 'six and the V8 are replaced by the V12's haunting howl as it heads for the 6500rpm redline.

Knowing that I now have to pick one car that best encapsulates the DB magic, my shortlist comprises DB4, 5 and 6. If you want a raw connection with your car, go for the DB4; if you want a refined, easy, sporting GT, the DB6 is for you; if you want a superb all-rounder, the DB5 can't be beaten.

Me? I have to highlight the DB4. After enjoying Paul Shires' SIII and having endured modern drivers' ill manners for too long, there's something appealing about a classic Aston that has the performance to leave their vulgar aggression far behind. Ungentlemanly? Possibly. Immensely satisfying? Certainly.

***Thanks to**: rswilliams.co.uk, davron.free-online.co.uk, hwmastonmartin.co.uk, astonmartins.com, amoc.org*

'When the DBS hit 4000rpm it awakens with a bellow that gets progressively louder and angrier'



DBR1 XSK 497 finally took Le Mans honours in 1959

Race relations

The DB3 racer made its first appearance on September 15, 1951 at the Ulster TT. It was powered by a 133bhp 2.6-litre VB6 engine with a five-speed David Brown, but was underpowered and heavy.

Willie Watson built a more elegant, more agile and 75kg lighter version of the DB3 to create the DB3S.

It won many national races, but it took its DBR1 successor to gave Aston its much-craved Le Mans win and World Sports Car Championship in 1959. Ted Cutting redesigned the bottom end of the 2.9-litre to create the RB6 engine, which realised nearly 100bhp per litre and could rev to 6500rpm.



Cracking and banging from the rear of an early DB7 Vantage could be down to bolts working loose on the lower wishbone trunnion

Tempted by our line-up? Here's how to find a great example...

Buying essentials for all these cars include a full service history from a recognised specialist, such as RS Williams, Davron or HWM, a road test and report. Don't be tempted by a project DB that looks like a bargain - these cars feature handbuilt engines and hand-crafted alloy bodies that need expert attention.

DB2, DB MkIII

The Watson/Bentley LB6 engine can lose oil pressure because when hot its aluminium circular bearing housings can expand away from the crankshaft.

David Reed of specialist Davron, says, 'When building these engines we fit a new crank, rods and pistons, then they're safe to 7000rpm; we have engines reliably producing 200bhp. Standard engines were susceptible in period, but look after them with regular oil changes and don't rev them above 6000rpm and they will go on for some years.

'The three-litre in the MkIII is a different engine with a better crankshaft and fuel pump, plus the porting and camshafts were a development of the DB3S. But to get the bigger capacity they moved the bore centres in pairs and offset the conrod where it joined the big-end, so it wasn't central. The rods were therefore prone to break if revved above 6000rpm.'

Gearboxes are rugged, but non-synchro first can be chipped by clumsy selection. Also, getting parts for the DB2's Salisbury 3HA rear axle is harder than for the MkIII's 4HA.

Check body and chassis for electrolytic corrosion, which can start on the rear wheelarches and door bottoms. Also the bonnet hinges can rust, which can lead to bonnet flexing and, ultimately, cracked alloy near the top of the wheelarches.

DB4, DB5, DB6, DBS V8

RS Williams boss Richard Williams says, 'Check for leakage of the cylinder liner seals and corrosion of the alloy cylinder block. Examine the bleed holes - six 1/8in holes (four each side on the V8) on the carburettor side of the engine - for leaks, because this is a full engine strip. When we have to strip an engine we convert the cylinder head to unleaded.'

Transmissions are strong and reliable. Most DB4 spring clutches have been replaced by a diaphragm type, and modern synchromesh cones are available for the David Brown gearbox. Most DB5s and all DB6 models came with the ZF five-speed 'box, which is tough but noisy at idle and uses thick oil that makes gear changing hard when cold.

Look for is bubbling paint along the door bottoms caused by electrolytic corrosion. The hardest check is for corrosion in the sill area of the chassis behind the alloy sills - you'll need a borescope or something similar to it to see what's going on inside.





Crankshaft bearings a DB2 (top) weakness. Leaking V8 bleed holes (bottom) mean engine strip

DB7

Richard Zethrin of HWM Aston Martin says, 'Both engines can suffer with water ingress into the fuel system, causing rough running.

'Rust can afflict the front inner wheelarches near the top damper mounting area and the rear mountings of the front subframe. Banging from the front over bumps can be worn front damper bushes or worn suspension bushes and dampers.

'The six-cylinder automatic can make a strange whining noise when changing from first to second gear, but this is not unusual. The Vantage automatic and Touchtronic are strong gearboxes, with no major problems.

'On V12 models listen for cracking and banging coming from the rear; bolts work loose on the lower wishbone trunion on early models. Sometimes the top of the subframe can split - the manual is more prone to this - and the diffential becomes loose.'

'Don't ever be tempted by a project Aston DB that looks like a bargain'

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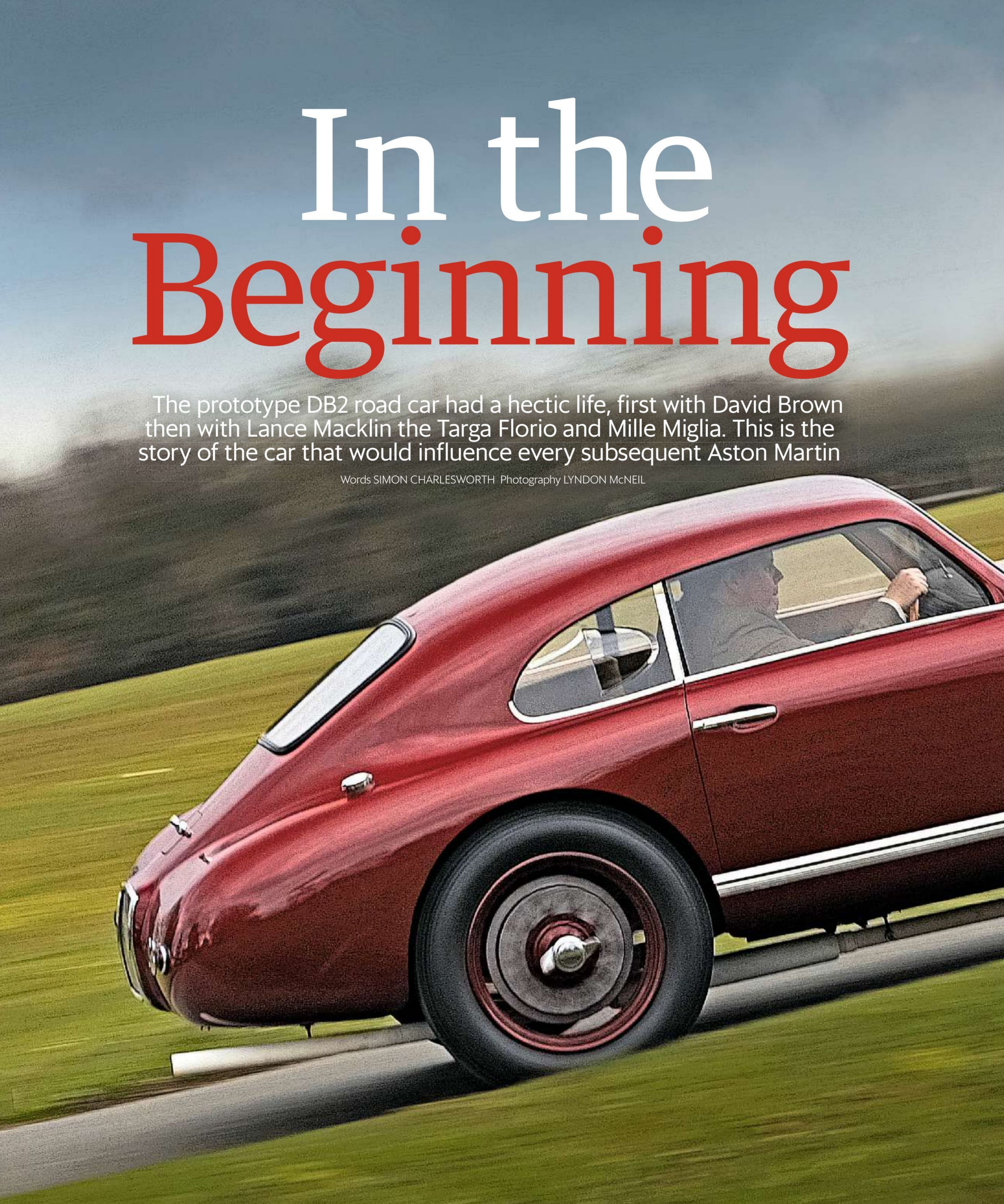
Our sales department has enjoyed a busy and successful start to 2017. Above is a selection of Aston Martins we have sold so far this year.

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In the Beginning

The prototype DB2 road car had a hectic life, first with David Brown then with Lance Macklin the Targa Florio and Mille Miglia. This is the story of the car that would influence every subsequent Aston Martin

Words SIMON CHARLESWORTH Photography LYNDON McNEIL



It is the familiar blended with the unfamiliar. Differences are subtle yet... oh look, it's no good, I can sense you're distracted because I experienced similar thoughts when I first saw those big 18in wheels on an Aston Martin. Cynics might speculate that UMC 272 once appeared on an austerity precursor to *Pimp My Ride*, but the truth is that those 18in wires are original equipment and not down to the over-exuberance of a previous owner with a penchant for trials.

The DB2 represents a pivotal moment in David Brown's ownership of Aston Martin. If the 2 Litre Sports - retrospectively referred to as the DB1 - saw Brown guide Aston Martin out of the primeval pottage, its successor is the next rung up on the evolutionary ladder - when Aston Martin grew legs, quickly mastered walking and deftly learnt to run.

Despite being based on chief engineer Claude Hill's 'Atom' chassis from 1939 and spawning the successful one-off 2 Litre Sports 'Spa Replica' that took Jock Horsfall and Leslie Johnson to victory in the 1948 Spa 24-hour race, the 1948 2 Litre Sports was not a success. it lacked rigidity - 13 of the 14 cars were dropheads - and the long bonnet only covered a 1970cc four-cylinder motor.

After Brown's 1947 acquisition of Aston Martin and Lagonda his influence was quickly felt. Given his fondness for racing horses, polo, flying and motor sports, it was no surprise that Aston Martin embraced the virtues of performance, sportiness and competition under his ownership.

Encouraged by the success of the 2 Litre Sports at Spa, the new DB MkII made its debut at 1949's Le Mans 24-hours. Even though Hill had left the company, the new model used a shortened, strengthened (by Ted Cutting) version of the 2 Litre Sports chassis and 1970cc engine; but this time Hill's legacy sat beneath a two-seater fixed-head coupé of far more modern appearance. Once again styled by the DB1's designer,

Frank Feeley, the DB MkII (as it was then called) represented a huge aesthetic step forward for Aston Martin; Feeley had clearly been taking notes on a recent trip to northern Italy.

Three DB MkIIs took part in the 24-hours: chassis LMA/49/1 (UMC 64) driven by Arthur Jones and Nick Haines (the only car to finish, achieving seventh overall); LMA/49/2 (UMC 65) driven by Pierre Maréchal and Taso Mathieson (which crashed, fatally injuring Maréchal); and LML/49/3 (UMC 66) driven by Leslie Johnson and Charles Brackenbury (which retired after three laps).

At Spa in 1949 Johnson and Brackenbury drove UMC 66 to an impressive third overall and Haines and Lance Macklin finished fifth. Such was the improvement that the 2.5-litre DB MkII, or DB2, got the go-ahead for series production.

The initially disappointing UMC 66 made the biggest impact on Aston Martin's future. David Brown insisted on giving it the Lagonda LB6 six-cylinder engine and it was this decision, effectively ending development of his 1970cc overhead-valve unit, that had sparked Hill's resignation.

UMC 272 is the fourth chassis, LML/49/4, and the first six-cylinder DB2 built to complete road specification. A little confusion surrounds the car's build sheet because two are on file. The more comprehensive of the two contains particulars of non-standard equipment and states 'Le Mans car', but this is probably a reference to it featuring similar bodywork to UMC 66.

Completed in July 1949 just after Spa, the car was first owned by David Brown. Essentially packing almost ideal provenance for a DB2, it represents Aston Martin getting into its gentlemanly stride as a builder of bespoke sporting GTs. Moreover, you can state without any hesitation that UMC 272 represents the Aston Martin DB range's 'big bang' moment.

Its first recorded trip was with Brown to the BRDC International Trophy at Silverstone, where it tackled a lap of honour with Macklin. It was also used for public relations work, Laurence Pomeroy driving it to Paris, Brussels and Le Mans for *The Motor*. It remained with the factory until 1950 when Macklin was invited to compete in the Targa Florio; no works car was available so he bought and entered it as a works-supported entry. Mid-journey he entered the Coppa Inter-Europa at Monza, finishing fourth at an average 85mph behind a works Alfa and two Ferraris and winning the concours d'elégance too.

The Aston was then shipped from Naples to Palermo for the Targa. But after a 3am start in dreadful weather its race ended when Macklin, co-driver John Gordon and UMC 272 plunged into a ravine at speed while chasing Alberto Ascari's Ferrari. Luckily only the car was damaged and a new front was dispatched from England. A month of repair work meant Macklin missed the start of the Mille Miglia in Brescia by five hours, which didn't put him off joining the event mid-course. When Macklin finally got home - after stopping off to visit his mother in Monte Carlo - the repair bill was so big that he had to sell UMC 272 to a John Watkinson to settle the account.

Several owners later (its original service record goes up to number six) it was restored at Aston Martin Works Service in 1992, then spent nearly 20 years in storage hibernation.

A generous ride height, those vast wire wheels and a roofline that's a good 4in lower than that of a production DB2 contrive to give UMC 272 an almost street-rod feel, an effect enhanced by the rather anachronistic metallic maroon paint. Then there's that vast clamshell bonnet, which looks like hybrid of a production DB2 and the car's four-cylinder experimental sisters.



Three-piece grille made way for a single casting in production DB2s

There's a knack to getting in - a standard DB2 is a tight fit for a 6ft 1in driver, so lower the roofline by 4in and and it's like pot-holing. At last I'm in and experiencing a nice scalp massage from the woollen headlining, with rationed legroom dictating a driving position resembling a yogic flyer in mid-bounce. The instrument layout owes a lot to the 2 Litre Sport, and in many ways it makes more sense than the production DB2's central binnacle; the biggest difference is that it wears wood rather than leather. Dotted with white-on-black dials and Bakelite switchgear, it's a beautiful, understated thing. A quick try-out of the floor-hinged pedals and David Brown four-speed gearbox, a twist of the key, a stab of the starter, engage first and I'm off.

> 'You don't gobble up a bend in one lock of the wheel – you nibble at it in segments'

Riding on soft Dunlop Racing rubber it takes a fair few miles before UMC is riding on round wheels. Until then it's shake, rattle and toil. But after this it doesn't take long to come to terms with driving this car and I'm soon relaxed enough to admire the cabin's warm, Forties ambience.

UMC effortlessly duels with black cabs, motorcycle couriers and blinkered cyclists. The cast iron 12in Girling drum brakes need a shove, but their stopping power and feedback are just-so. As for the steering, if only production DB2s had managed to come to such a pleasant compromise between the warring demands of feel and weight.

Ideally I'd be heading for La Sarthe, Sicily or the Mille Miglia circuit, but time is against me. So instead it's only fitting that UMC should take in a few of its old haunts around Middlesex and Surrey. Property developers and councils have foiled any attempt to revisit the car's Feltham factory, so instead I go hunting for suitable rural roads to get a feel for what this car was like in 1949.




Groundbreaking Ferguson R5 4x4

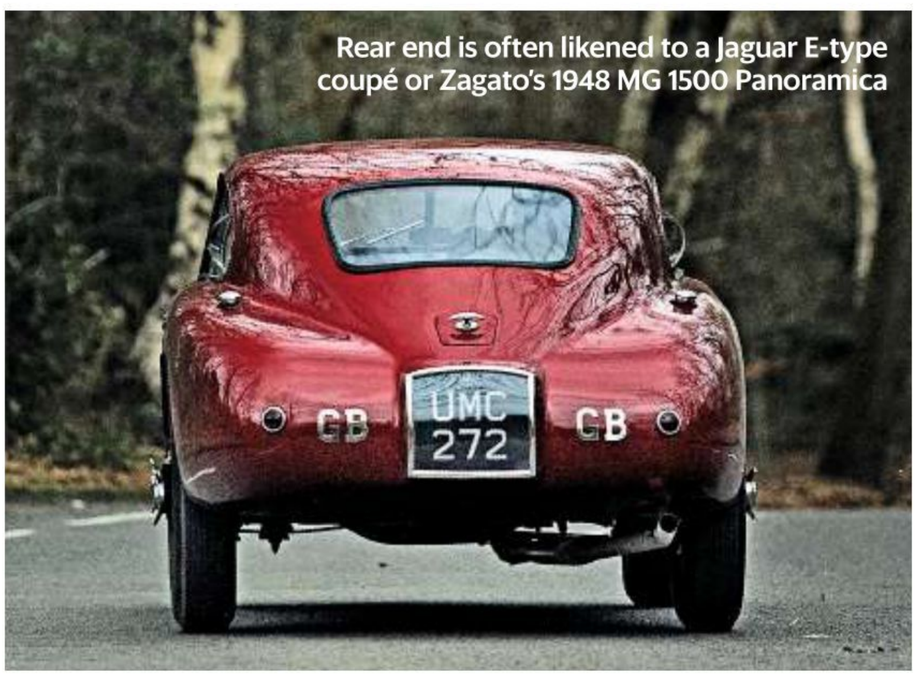
Ferguson: life after Aston Martin

Engineer Claude Hill wasn't alone in falling out with David Brown – Harry Ferguson was another, following a disagreement over tractor sales.

After resigning from Massey-Harris-Ferguson Ltd, he established Harry Ferguson Research Ltd in 1950 with the aim of producing a family car with a four-wheel-drive transmission. This had been inspired by a vehicle nicknamed 'the crab' that had been put together by Freddie Dixon and Tony Rolt, who joined the new company as directors. Dixon soon left, but Hill was hired to work with Rolt as the crab progressed.

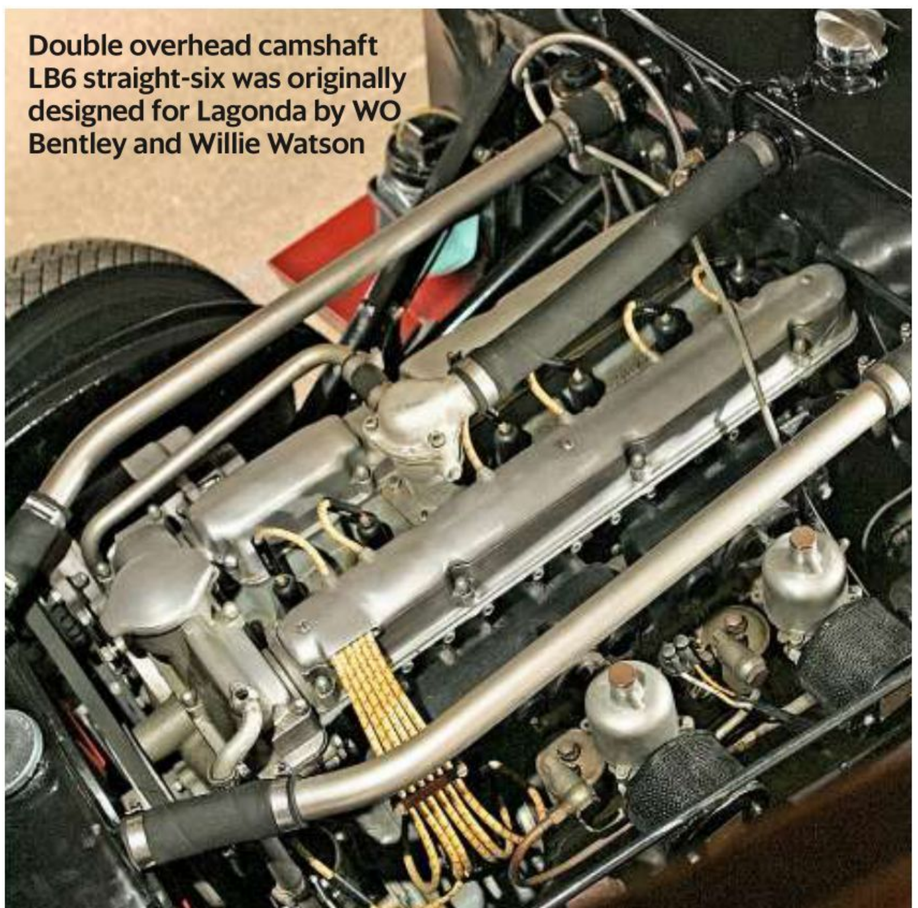
The concept was eventually abandoned and replaced by the first of the R-cars, which culminated in the R5 prototype – a ground-breaking five-door hatchback equipped with four-wheel drive and ABS brakes. Ferguson had hoped that a major manufacturer would be interested in series production, but it wasn't to be. Only Richard Jensen showed an interest in the R5...

Ferguson collapsed and died on October 25 1960 while working on a new 4x4 racing car, 'Project 99', which went on to win the Oulton Park Gold Cup in 1961. Sadly, he never saw a production car use his four-wheel drive and ABS systems, though the technology famously found its way into the Jensen FF and the never-raced 4x4 1964 F1 BRM P67.vw



Rear end is often likened to a Jaguar E-type coupé or Zagato's 1948 MG 1500 Panoramica


Full-width veneered dash owes more to the retrospectively tagged DB1 than the production DB2; cabin is a tight fit for six-footers


Double overhead camshaft LB6 straight-six was originally designed for Lagonda by WO Bentley and Willie Watson

Optional 18in wheels were replaced by wider 16in rims and the roofline was raised by 4in when the DB2 went into production

The steering box is good for its type, but there's a horrible numb void in the middle that only serves to make driving on beaten-up motorways even more edgy thanks to tyres that yearn to go sideways. Yet I'm highly impressed by the LB6's ability to cope with traffic, because I can be lazy and let the torque do the hard work; the docility and flexibility of this engine are considerable, given its age.

In typical Aston style the big Smiths 120mph clockwise speedometer and anti-clockwise tachometer needles mirror one another. The 2.6-litre unit hits its sweet spot at 3000rpm and the deliciously bronchial mild-mannered engine note alters. Losing all decorum, it becomes louder and less inhibited, building up to a goosebump-coaxing oral apogee.

But I promised the car's custodian, Nicholas Mee, that I would treat it with due care and respect, so I reluctantly select top gear; after all, Laurence Pomeroy may have written, 'The six-cylinder Aston Martin DB MkII stands worthily in the pedigree of real motor cars stretching back through the 4.5-litre Bentley to the 30/98 Vauxhall,' but the LB6 wasn't terribly reliable in period. You only have to look at UMC 272's service record to see that it has experienced plenty of engine issues.

UMC is wieldier through bends than a DB2 on wider 16in wheels because the steering doesn't load up as much. However, you have to take into account the sideways effect - haul on lock and the lack of sidewall rigidity means that the racing rubber won't respond like a radial. You don't gobble up a bend in one application of lock in this car - you nibble at it. Inch the steering around the bend, divide it into segments, wait for the tyres to settle, grip and respond, before turning the steering again and repeat until you're finally around.

Work the engine and enjoy the gearbox - it has real gravitas and is well engineered. Understand UMC's dynamics and the sense of satisfaction isn't merely palpable - it's highly effective therapy against the electrically assisted fly-by-wire this, that and the other that seems to plague modern-day machinery.

Did Aston make the right changes when it put the car into production? Yes, given *The Autocar*'s 1950 review of the DB2, 'It is difficult to give too much praise to the handling and performance...' Extra leg and headroom aid comfort, as do the wheels normally found on production DB2s (though early road tests quoted a nine per cent performance improvement using 18in wheels) because stability is boosted considerably. As for the interior, UMC's is far more functionally and aesthetically successful, if not as flexible for left-hand drive as the production DB2's.

UMC 272 is undoubtedly charming and characterful, but I won't remember it purely for that - it's stamped indelibly in my memory because it has given me a rare insight into the development of the first true David Brown Aston Martin.

I'm smitten by the end of my journey. I hope that this won't be the last we see of this car in the UK and that its departure for a new life in Switzerland marks not a fond farewell, but merely *au revoir*.

Thanks to: *legendaryastons.com, nicholasmee.co.uk, astonservicedorset.com), Anne Wright at the Aston Martin Heritage Trust (amht.org.uk)*

1949 Aston Martin DB2 Prototype

Engine 2580cc in-line six-cylinder, dohc, two SU H4 carburettors **Power and torque** 105bhp @ 5000rpm; 125lb ft @ 3100rpm **Transmission** Four-speed manual, rear-wheel drive **Steering** Worm-and-roller **Suspension** Front: independent, trailing arms, coil springs, lever-arm dampers, anti-roll bar. Rear: live axle, parallel trailing arms, coil springs, Panhard rod, lever-arm dampers **Brakes** Drums front and rear **Weight** 1112kg (2452lb) **Performance** Top speed: 110mph; 0-60mph: 12.4sec **Fuel** consumption 17mpg **Cost** new £1915 (production saloon) **Value** now n/a

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DB5 1964

Photography Tim Wallace

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BIRD PULLER

In a homage to the 1963 Alfred Hitchcock thriller *The Birds*, we take an Aston Martin DB2 drophead on a haunting coastline drive

Words ROB SCORAH Photography RORY GAME

There's a seagull looking at me. Now, you might not think that significant, but I'm driving an Aston Martin DB2 drophead up on the Northumbrian coast and I have two concerns. One is that seagull poo and convertibles don't mix. And the other is that, if you think back to Alfred Hitchcock's 1963 film *The Birds*, it was an Aston Martin DB2 drophead that the heroine Tippi Hedren was driving. You've got to ask yourself - was it the Aston that kicked off that whole 'angry birds' thing? It was never made clear; maybe there was some resentment by the seagulls about a posh girl turning up in an equally posh foreign car in their small Californian fishing town?

But I can't accuse a DB2 of being provocatively flash. The model comes from a time when Astons were handsome rather than sexy. The DB2 was and is a Bulldog Drummond of a car; strong-shouldered, square-jawed and understated - very manly, English qualities, but with enough rakishness in its lines to counter the appeal of coachbuilt Italians like the Ferrari 195 Inter, while still offering a more sober take on sports touring than Jaguar's swooping, feminine XK.

But there's something else about a DB2 I can't put my finger on. I'm looking at the mist clinging to the north British coast and thinking again of Hitchcock's enigmatic thriller - with this obscure, then ten years old, 'European' roadster grumbling through that out-of-the-way, clapper-board town.

Compare that with *Goldfinger* and its DB5, made only a few years later. Yes, I know they are different genres, but there was the DB5; centre stage, glamorous verging on flash and a little dangerous. You got the message and felt its impact immediately. On film or in real life, I don't think you'll get the measure of a DB2 or its driver in one glance.

I've been driving for an hour or so and still don't feel like I know it, but it seems the right car for the job - the job being exploring enigmatic and maybe slightly dark places.

Also, I've worked out why the seagulls aren't too interested. *The Birds* car was a later DB2/4 (it had an uprated 2.9-litre engine and folding rear seats). People get angry when the purity of a design is compromised. Maybe birds are the same.

Luckily the car with me today is a very early DB2 drophead coupé, a 2.5-litre but in Vantage spec; we have 20bhp over the standard 105bhp. Underneath, the chassis is still ostensibly Claude Hill's square tube arrangement from the DB1 with central X-frame bracing (though eight inches shorter), but Frank Feeley's body design is far more purposeful and less fussy than the earlier car. Its unadorned sides are high, its windscreen low and there's a lot of bonnet. Not that this translates into legroom when I try to slide behind the wheel - there's no way I'll stretch out in here. My left leg is inclined knee-out toward the wide transmission tunnel, with my ankle sharply angled over the pedal.

Once I've shuffled into position, I notice that the sober theme continues inside; large, centrally mounted dials and identical-looking black Bakelite switches. With a whinny and a blast, the straight-six fires into life, settling to a precise idle that corresponds exactly to the car's no-nonsense bearing.

We're quickly away, no stubborn old war horse truculence or heaving of steering. I'm surprised by how deftly I'm driving it, easily staying with the traffic on dual carriageways. I'd overtake it if I could see anything rearward with the top up. We're also turning quickly when required. And we're stopping.

All this means upgrades. I think a good way to judge these equally acclaimed and maligned entities is - do they detract from the original's character, or am I just driving a Touchtronic DB9 in a duffle coat?

'These days, most of our customers ask for upgrades of one sort or another to make their cars more usable,' says Aston Workshop's general manager Clive Dickenson, though he admits that English buyers are more conservative - especially compared to those from the Far East. Still, I'm not going to argue with a car that can stop and those large front discs make sure of that.

On the other hand I'm usually happy with period gearboxes; there's a satisfaction about getting it right with a little less synchromesh and more double de-clutching, but there have been too many times when I have found Aston 'boxes dreadful - so many corners spoiled, one hand distractedly grappling with a bunch of recalcitrant cogs, some of which appear to be missing. Maybe I'm an Aston philistine, but this five-speed Tremec

1953 Aston Martin DB2 drophead coupé

Engine 2580cc, in-line six-cylinder dohc, two SU H6 carburettors **Power and torque** 105bhp @ 5000rpm; 144lb ft @ 2400rpm (standard) **Transmission** Four-speed manual (standard), rear-wheel drive **Steering** Worm and roller **Suspension** Independent trailing arms, coil springs, anti-roll bar, lever-arm dampers. Rear; live axle, parallel trailing arms, coil springs, Panhard rod, lever-arm dampers **Brakes** Drums front and rear **Weight** 1122kg (2452lb) **Performance** Top speed: 117mph; 0-60mph: 10.7sec **Price new** £2043 **Current values** £400,000-430,000



If you're looking for space in which to stretch out, look elsewhere



Vantage-spec engine adds 20bhp over standard

Tippi Hedren drove one in *The Birds*. We had to make do with Rob Scorah

‘Maybe I’m an Aston philistine, but this five-speed Tremec feels great with its short, positive throw and smooth, definite action’

Subtle modifications help to make this DB2 easier to drive

Adaptable nature means Aston can waft or race

John Gray: the restorer



Restoring a barn find might not be financial suicide but demands serious thought. 'We always take the cars back to a bare chassis,' says Aston Workshop manager John Gray. 'We drill into the chassis rails and send in a camera to check for corrosion. We would most likely replace the (alloy) floorpans, and the rear wheelarches usually need rebuilding.' He also notes that the alloy body clothes a steel frame, separated by cotton insulation, so it's more complex and expensive to sort than later designs. He adds, 'Few people want standard cars, but we aim to make upgrades invisible and reversible.'

The trailing arm front suspension can be a lot of work and it has an alloy cross-member that supports the kingpins and anti-roll bar. With angled and tapered components that have to be accurately positioned and 58 roller bearings per side, getting the setup right can be a long job.

'The engine is also unusual,' says Bob Garside. 'It has large triangular structures that bolt around the crankshaft to hold the shell-type main bearings in place.' This was part of an advanced counterbalanced design. 'But it makes it harder to get clearances and tolerances just right.'



Frank Feeley's styling is the epitome of British cool



Just 102 examples of the DB2 drophead were built

feels great with its short, positive throw and smooth, definite action. It gives the motor great flexibility; relaxed cruising, with the serious pulling power beginning around 1200rpm (the tachometer is a bit noncommittal), and spinning beyond 3400rpm.

I might be left in two minds as to second or third in the tighter country lane bends out behind the coast, but neither leaves the car wanting as I begin to push on through the apexes. My mind is on the DB's pace and the steering - the wheel close, halfway up my thighs. Expect a bit more work on bumpy corners where it might feel skittish or hop a fraction sideways. I might wish for the car's original, bigger steering wheel - the added torque of the bigger circumference gives a more relaxed feel and grip and, as a result (paradoxically), makes the driver less prone to overcorrect. Still, the Aston is grippy in the bends, understeering slightly, but with little body roll. I find I'm driving it like a car that's ten years younger.

'There's little body roll; I find I'm driving it like a car that's ten years younger'

The car's character is more alive now that I've put the top down; the rich, rorty burr of the exhaust, but with little buffeting with the frameless windows up. The wide, virtual bench seats in the front are cosy for a couple. I feel like I can saunter on, one arm across the back or hunker down and hustle the car, snug behind the wheel. But pushing through these mist-filled hollows and crests I discover something strange - I've felt at ease quicker with this Aston's Italian contemporaries. What's that about - rear leaf springs as opposed to coils and semi-trailing arms? Radials instead of these tall crossplys? I feel a slight numbness or lack of connection. It's probably a personal thing; the DB2 was tested by the best of the best. Phil Hill (writing for *Road & Track*) said it handled 'like a dream'. *Motor Sport* borrowed David Brown's DB2 drophead and acclaimed it to be a motoring great.

Maybe it's the electric power steering, the last of the upgrades. Is it set too high? There's a five-position rotary control around here somewhere and I keep feeling for it as I drive, now more mindful of the worm and roller system. It's actually very positive on these B-roads. There's a slight vagueness around the straight ahead but it firms up nicely as the radius tightens. Ah - found the control, hidden in the driver's glovebox. Maximum setting brings something akin to a Seventies Jaguar XJ-S, but with more of a 'handling' car I'm not sure that's a good idea. 'Off' makes me feel like I'm steering the *Golden Hind* on the Manchester Ship Canal - at least at low speeds. 'Before it had that system, my heart used to sink as another roundabout came up,' says Clive. 'Now, it's a car I'd be happy to drive to Goodwood.'

He's right. Set at one or two, it adds just enough assistance to take the tension out of my upper body, while letting me know how much resistance there is in the chassis and tyres. Feel free to practise four-wheel drifts...

Is a DB2 drophead really that kind of car? Yes - remember, unlike later racers, it is a direct relative of the cars that took some very respectable results in early Fifties endurance events. Although the coupé did most of the winning, the drophead is also eligible for events like the Mille Miglia - this car raced in the USA in period - part of the reason why dropheads can command more than £400,000. Some might say that the Astons are just acquiring the values they deserve. Or were they some of the last blue-chip classics whose values held a modicum of common sense? For the price I could have a 'Healey 100 with all the 'M' trimmings and a Bentley Continental (steel) for smart.

But that's missing the point. The DB2's appeal comes from old Aston lore, not modern spin; the values that attracted original buyers before the spy in a bow tie, before Premier League footballers got one, before any notion of a global brand inflated the badge's worth. It was a car you could drive discreetly to the office in your suit, or take for a blast in cavalry twills and a hacking jacket at the weekend. Today, it's a classic you could take to a wedding one weekend and a hillclimb the next. Together, you will never be one-dimensional or the default choice, maybe always something of an enigma. It may take a little longer to really know what this one is about - it's balance of qualities - but the relationship will be deeply satisfying.

Thanks to *Aston Workshop (aston.co.uk), where this car is for sale. No seagulls were upset during the making of this feature.*


62
EMU

GENTLEMAN RACER

A drive in 62 EMU, one of the most famous racing Astons of all time, reveals that myths are based on fact

Words MARK WALTON Photography ROBERT GEORGE

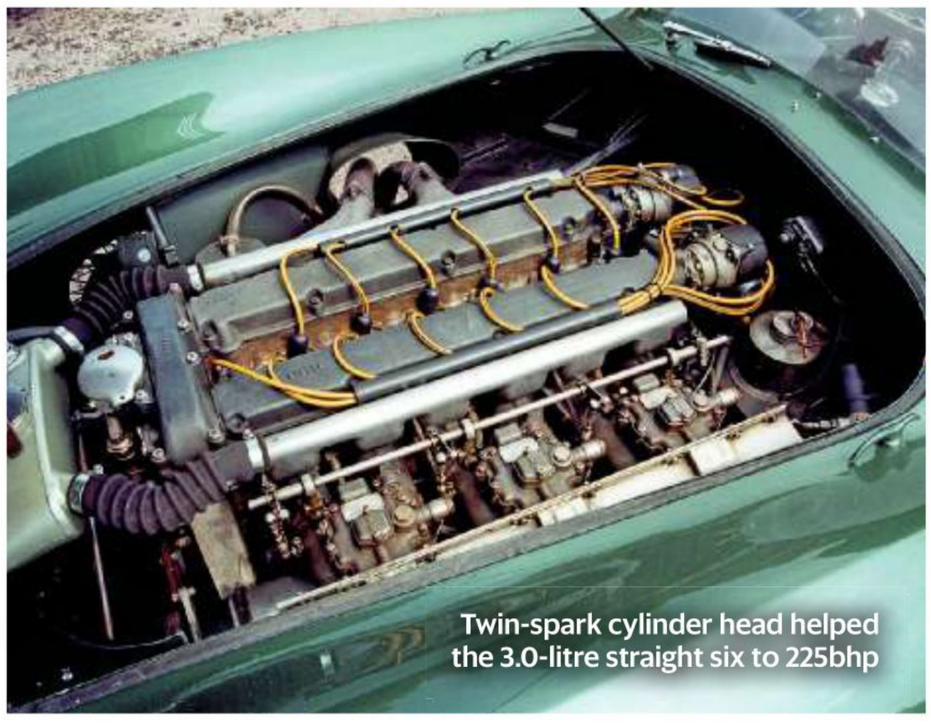
It's like being handed Van Gogh's *Starry Night*. I mean the real thing - brittle canvas, lumpy paint, faded frame, the whole deal - and asked to carry it around for a day. Nightmare. You'd spend all day worrying in case you spilt jam on it or snagged it on something sharp - it'd be a liability. And wouldn't you breathe a sigh of relief when you handed it back, still in one piece?

And the next day it would probably hit you, that you'd been holding it in your hands, a thing so fabulous and famous and admired for generations, something so significant and historical. And you'd probably want to hold it again, I'd imagine.

Driving 62 EMU is like that. This is no ordinary car. Sit behind the wheel of this, one of the most famous and most important Aston Martins in the world, and suddenly all those black and white pictures, all the mythology of great races won and lost, all those pages of history, are vivid and alive. Like a great painting, it goes beyond mere brush strokes on canvas - barrel along between the hedges in third gear, the side exhausts hammering right beneath you, and it's easy to imagine Peter Collins, Roy Salvadori, Stirling Moss or Tony Brooks sitting right here in this very cockpit. This beautifully original cockpit. It's a little bit battered perhaps, cloth-loomed wiring and black switches everywhere, but virtually unchanged since it was raced nearly 50 years ago. All that history rides with you when you drive 62 EMU, and you sense the responsibility you're shouldering - smash a car of this significance, and you become an embarrassing footnote in history.



DB3S comes alive at speed, tempting you to push harder



Twin-spark cylinder head helped the 3.0-litre straight six to 225bhp



'Smash a car of this significance, and you become an embarrassing footnote in history'

What's clear is that 62 EMU is much more than the sum of its parts. Viewed mechanically, the Aston Martin DB3S is impressive, but hardly magical, based as it was on the largely unsuccessful DB3 - David Brown's new racing Aston for 1951, designed by former Auto Union and ERA designer, Professor Robert Eberan Von Eberhorst.

Despite a fantastic name and excellent credentials, the DB3 was slab-sided, overweight, and underpowered. So at the end of 1952, Aston's other engineer and designer, Willie Watson, bypassed Von Eberhorst and proposed a new, smaller, lighter version of the DB3 directly to David Brown and team manager John Wyer. When he got the green light for the 1953 season, Watson's car became known as the DB3S.

So there's nothing mythical about 62 EMU's bare specification, its big ladder-frame chassis or its 3.0-litre straight six, derived from a Lagonda engine that WO Bentley designed during the war; nor its rugged David Brown four-speed gearbox and axle, Borrani wires and Dunlop racing tyres. It weighed 170lb less than the DB3, and it clearly belonged in a different world to the average road-going saloon car, but it was hardly rocket science.

The bodywork, penned by Frank Feeley, is harder to measure in purely mechanical terms - it's beaten from aluminium, and immediately looks more lithe, more athletic than its predecessor, but there's also somethmg indescribably perfect about its curves and proportions. Even though there were many iterations over the next few years, the DB3S is surely one of the most beautiful shapes seen in sports car racing - the wide front arches that flare back like the wake of a Riva speedboat, the muscular shoulders hunched high at the rear, and the way the tiny screen tapers down to the back of the door.

Immerse yourself in its history and 62 EMU comes to life. Chassis DB3S/6 was one of two new cars constructed for the works team for the 1954 season, fitted with the 3.0-litre, twin cam straight six, featuring three Weber 45 DCO carburettors and a new twin-spark cylinder head.

It was originally built, along with chassis 7, as a hard-topped coupé. Both cars appeared for the first time at the

Whitehead brothers brought 62 EMU home second at Le Mans in 1958





British Racing Drivers' Club race at Silverstone in May, where Salvadori drove DB3S/6 to seventh overall and first in class; it then made its first of three appearances at Le Mans in June, driven by Collins and Bira. Here, the coupé's shape proved to be flawed, and Bira crashed at 4.15am because of aerodynamic instability, the first of three major crashes in the car's life.

The car emerged again in 1955 with an open body, fitted with new Girling disc brakes, and now registered with its famous registration number. That year, 62 EMU won at Silverstone, came second at Aintree, second at the tragic Le Mans behind Hawthorn in a Jaguar (and first in the 3.0-litre class) driven by Collins and Frère, and finished third at the Goodwood Nine Hours in the hands of Collins and Brooks. In 1956 it was driven by Moss, Collins and Salvadori on circuits from Sebring to Oulton Park; that year also saw it converted to the new 1956 specification body, as you see it here.

It was then sold by the works to the Whitehead brothers, Peter and Graham, who took it to, among others, the Nürburgring 1000km (where they came sixth), and to Le Mans for its third and final time, in 1958. That year was one of the wettest 24-hours on record - Whitehead described driving the full length of the Mulsanne Straight in third gear because visibility was so poor. Nevertheless, the privateers came second, in their four-year-old ex-works car. Hard to imagine now.

In the end, the car was sold to another privateer, and then it passed through the hands of two collectors before arriving with Hugh Taylor. It has been reported - and subsequently disputed - that DB3S/6 had its chassis written-off three times during its hugely successful competition life - the first at Le Mans 1954, the second at Silverstone in 1956 and the third at a test session there later that year. Chris Nixon - author of *Racing With The David Brown Aston Martins* and *The Aston Martin DB3S* - however, has stated that John Wyer's race reports, which are still in the owners' club archives, show that it began life in 1954 as a saloon, crashed heavily at Le Mans that year and was scrapped. Aston then built two new open cars the following year, one of which was given the original DB3S's chassis number in order to avoid having to pay 40 per cent purchase tax. Wyer's reports stated that 62 EMU again received a new chassis after a crash at Silverstone in 1956.

When we arrive at Hugh's house, 62 EMU is sticking out of the garage, its green and yellow nose in sunlight. It looks stunning in real life, slightly smaller than you might imagine, and in a wonderful, well-used condition - the original and beautifully mellowed interior beckons in a way that a pure museum piece probably could not.

Painted in what looks like Olive Drab and broken up by flashes of worn leather, the cockpit has a businesslike, almost military feel to it. The start procedure, too, feels like you're firing up some old war plane - flick the fuel pump switch, push the big starter button, and as it turns over, pull out two togs to engage the twin coils.

It fires with thunder, buzzing the ear drums with a crisp, sharp-edged bark. Blip the throttle, and the straight six punches the air with ear-splitting revs, revealing a sensitive pedal and very little flywheel effect. Its racing credentials are firmly in place even before I set off.

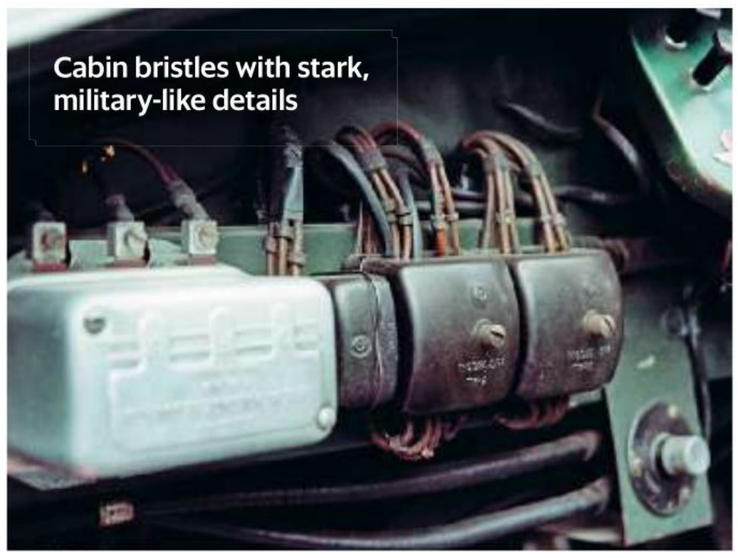
But setting off is not so easy. Not because of the clutch, which needs concentration but at least it's light underfoot; nor because of the heavy steering. No, the problem is that



Aston driver, Rob Flockhart, described the DB3S/6's handling in 1953 as 'completely free from vices'



Patina evokes great sports car battles



Cabin bristles with stark, military-like details



Gearbox by parent company, David Brown

the car is facing the wrong way, and 62 EMU appears to have absolutely no steering lock whatsoever. It takes what feels like an eight-point turn to get it out of the garage, and on each manoeuvre the steering seems only to veer the nose slightly off course, rather than actually turning it round.

All awkwardness is soon shrugged off once I pick up speed. The engine dominates at first - it feels irresistibly strong, blaring out a massive growl. Sitting right on top of that twin exhaust, it's deafening - roaring in my ears to make everything else seem mute by comparison.

It's also startlingly quick. The twin overhead cam 3.0-litre may have been designed as a 2.6-litre Lagonda many years earlier, but David Brown's racing programme had kept it competitive in the DB3S, and even now, almost half a century old, this car can sling me from one end of a straight to another, and overtake modern traffic with ease.

But enjoying the engine is just scratching the surface of the DB3S. Willie Watson's substantial modifications to the DB3 transformed a somewhat leaden performer into a remarkably balanced chassis, perfectly matched to the power available.

I can immediately feel how fluid the chassis is when it's got a bit of speed behind it - it dances through direction changes and slinks off its weight through the bends. Powering out of a grassy apex with the hair-trigger throttle, I can feel the rear end adjusting the angle - not tail sliding (you've got to be kidding), just shifting its centre of gravity and unwinding the lock, feeding itself out of the corner and onto the next straight for full bore second-third-fourth-gear blast.

'The engine dominates at first, blaring out a massive growl. It's deafening'

It is scary driving something as irreplaceable as 62 EMU, but a few hours behind the wheel and the impression is of a well-mannered, well-bred, friendly kind of car. Surrounded by all that history, it's important to resist the temptation to give it back as soon as possible, just so I can hand it back in one piece; opportunities like this are too rare for that.

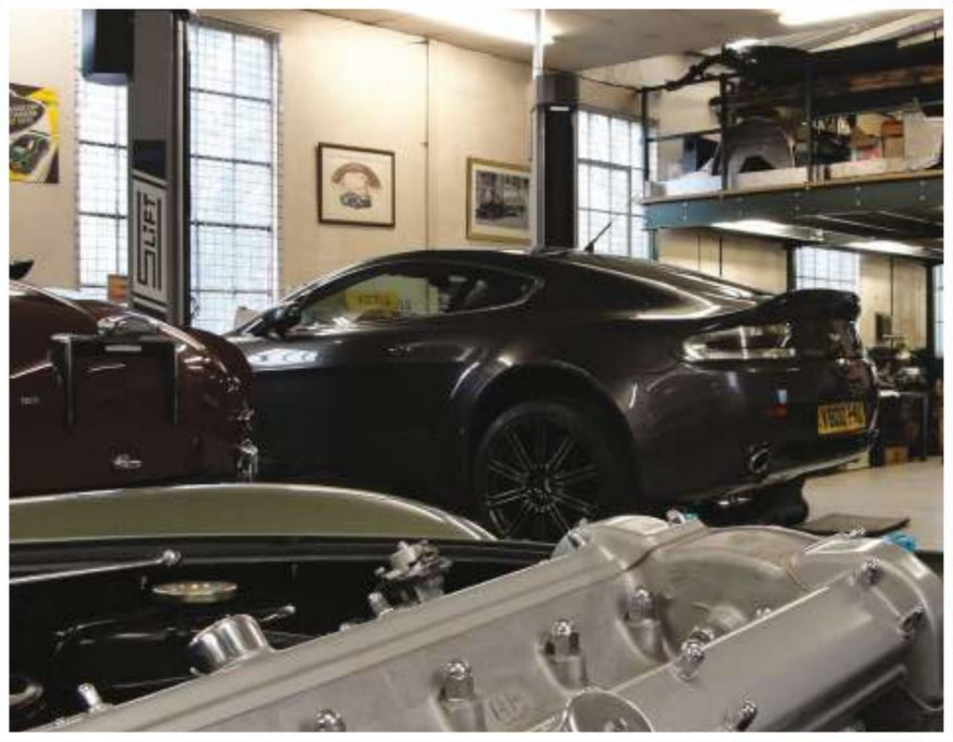
Which is why, 50 years on, it attracts collectors, not just by its roll-call of considerable honours, but because you can get out and really drive the damn thing too - really drive it; it makes me feel like I could come second at Le Mans, even now.

Legends are made out of thin air, you know.

Thanks to: *Hugh Taylor; coys.co.uk*

1954 Aston Martin DB3S/6

Engine 3.0-litre straight six; dohc, three Weber 45 DCO carburettors **Power** 225bhp @ 6000rpm
Transmission David Brown four-speed manual, rear-wheel-drive **Brakes** Discs all round **Suspension** Front: semi-trailing arms. Rear: de Dion axle **Weight** 1962lb (890kg) **Performance** Top speed: 145mph. 0-60mph: 6sec **Cost new** Works car, not for sale



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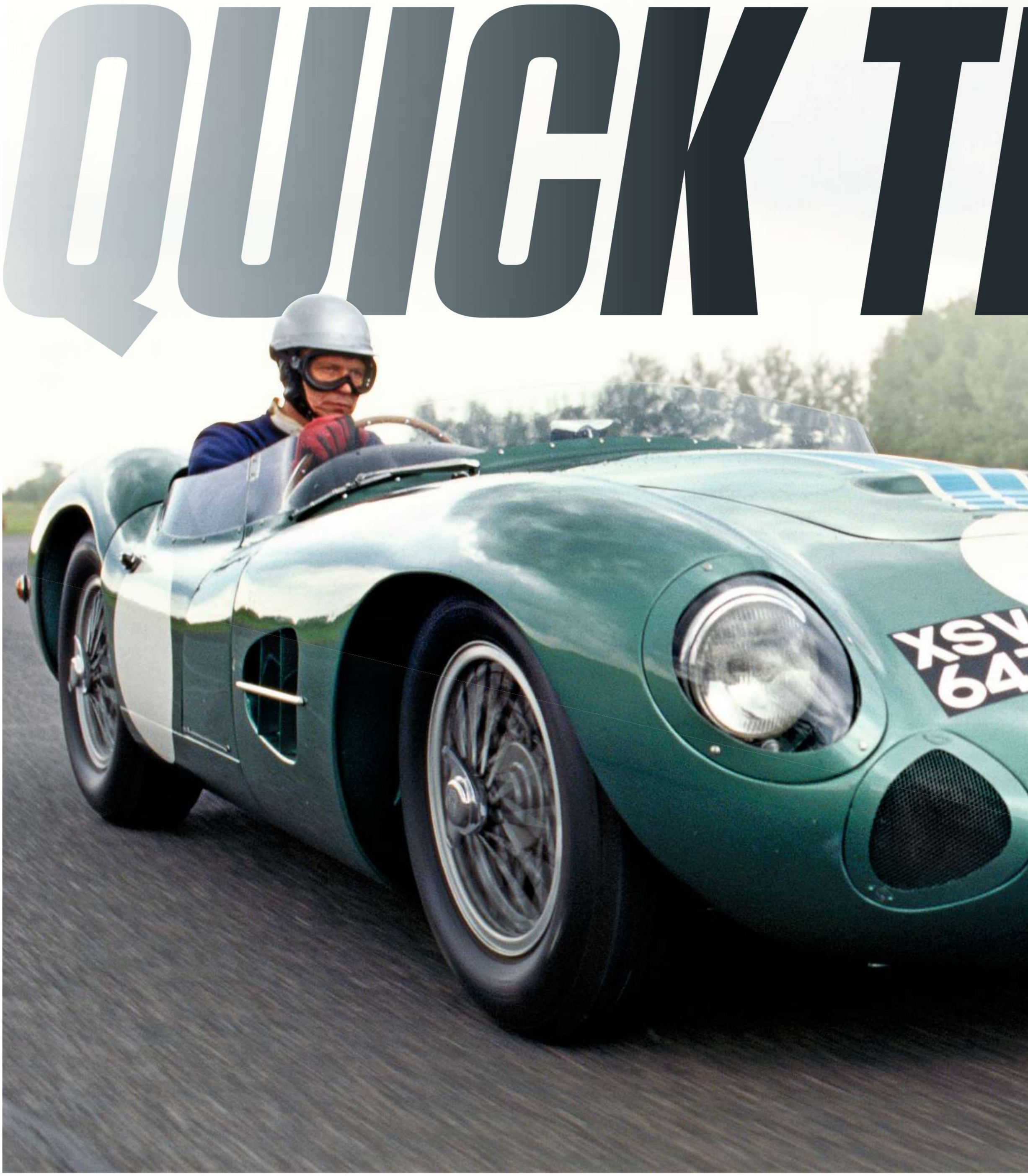
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QUICK TI



THINKING



Aston Martin's magnificent top-secret 1957 racer was a potential Le Mans winner but was sidelined by a lack of time and, later, by rule changes within the sport

Words TONY DRON Photography GRAHAM HARRISON

This car looks right and, when you get in, the cockpit feels right. Generously proportioned and businesslike, everything is set up for comfortable racing, with a big chromium-plated five-speed gear gate in exactly the right place. To avoid the risk of damage to the starter shaft if the engine kicks back, I switch on while the starter is running - the engine then picks up instantly and smoothly with a mighty bark. I'm about to be let loose behind the wheel in the sunshine at Goodwood.

After a couple of slow laps for photography it's obvious that this is not a museum piece - the impression from the controls is of a well-sorted racing car. It charges along the straights with that fabulous engine bellowing away, there isn't a hint of trouble with handling. On the second lap it's almost flat out through Fordwater and, with a car of this performance and age, that's impressive. The design is magnificent and it's clear that Rex Woodgate, who built the car originally and 'sorted' it more recently, really knows what he's up to.

All the signals are good. I'm sitting almost upright but it is comfortable and the small screen protects me from the air stream. The old-fashioned gear change is great too, if I don't rush it. Yes, this car is eager to perform, without doubt one of the greatest cars ever made. It really is that good.

Aston Martin entered the 1957 season with two cars to campaign - the DB3S was still there while the latest DBR1/300 was a pure sports-racing car aimed at World Championship events and, especially, Le Mans. The organisers of the famous French 24hr race had imposed a 2.5-litre limit on the faster cars after the 1955 disaster and the DBR1 was initially built to this limit. The Le Mans authorities then changed their minds again for 1957, allowing bigger engines back, so the DBR1 engine was increased to 2922cc producing, according to the factory records, 246bhp.

In late April, 1957 Aston Martin made a surprise announcement - the 'hitherto secret Model R2/370' would run at Le Mans, powered by a new production engine-based 3.7-litre straight six, 'conservatively' estimated to give over 300bhp. 'The chassis is quite new,' reported *The Motor*, 'built

up of medium-diameter tubes around a sort of box-section backbone. Rear suspension is of the de Dion principle, incorporating the five-speed gearbox and limited-slip differential.'

That wasn't altogether correct though. Tadek Marek had designed an engine for the DB4 road car, due at Earls Court late in 1958, and had been promised that this would not be used in racing. But Ted Cutting recalled General Manager John Wyer's face as he made that promise! 'In fact, within days of the first engine turning over, JW had gone back on his word because DB [David Brown] had asked about its racing potential,' he recounted. The new engine would go racing and they knew exactly how to create a car within the Le Mans rules.

The 'new chassis' shown to the press was, in fact, one of two that had been leaning against a wall ever since the Lagonda V12 sports-racer had been abandoned, following failure at Le Mans in 1955. The redesigned chassis had handled well but the engine disappointed.

Not surprisingly, it wasn't long before sharp eyes spotted the similarity between the DBR2's chassis and that of the Lagonda, which had been quite unlike anything else produced by the Feltham factory. Within weeks the factory was admitting that the new car was a development of the 4.5 litre V12 Lagonda. In fact DBR2/1's chassis was a Lagonda DP166/1 clothed in a new body and given a new chassis number. The suspension on this strong chassis followed established DB3S lines - trailing links and transverse torsion bars at the front and a de Dion axle with torsion bars at the rear. The finished aluminium and magnesium alloy body bore a very strong resemblance to the DBR1 designed by Ted Cutting who, along with body draughtsman Alex Stephens, drew up the DBR2.

As for the transmission, the DBR1 did indeed have a rear-mounted transaxle gearbox and notoriously unreliable it was in its early days, tending to get stuck in gear with the lever in the neutral position. The DBR2, however, was fitted from the start with a more robust gearbox, the David Brown type SC532 from the V12 Lagonda, mounted in the conventional position. It was a DB spiral bevel unit with ZF limited-slip differential incorporated in the back axle in the normal Aston manner.

The top-secret DBR2/1 was assembled by Rex Woodgate and Fred Shattock in the spring of 1957. Later that summer, after Le Mans in fact, they converted the Lagonda DP166/2 in the same way to create DBR2/2 - only these two DBR2s were ever built and they are both magnificently maintained today. You can tell a DBR2 from a DBR1 by the bonnet bulge, the exhaust on the left and the forward-mounted gearbox.

At first the press thought that the new R2 would lead the team at Le Mans and be driven by Roy Salvadori and Tony Brooks, but when the works Astons lined up the following month the top drivers were assigned to the DBR1s and the DBR2 was entrusted to the steady pairing of the Whitehead brothers, Graham and Peter. The DBR2 was seemingly too new and relatively untried for John Wyer's liking.

The Whiteheads felt that they had a potential winner and rumour suggests that they sand-bagged in practice so that they wouldn't be switched out of their secret weapon. It's a delightful yarn, dismissed with a wry, 'unlikely' by Rex Woodgate.

It's worth going into detail, since history is often at risk from revisionist myth-makers. According to official figures, the big Ferraris and Maseratis were pulling around 170mph on the Mulsanne Straight and one D-type was timed at 178mph - the DBR1s were on just 154mph.

The DBR2 should have been faster than the DBR1s on the straight but it was mysteriously unable to better 148.6mph, its drivers lifting off a little on the Mulsanne to avoid burning the valves. Perhaps they convinced themselves that they were concealing the car's potential but it was down on power anyway - full throttle would have made little difference. Tony Brooks, in a DBR1, was the fastest Aston driver in practice, sixth overall and 8.5sec slower than Fangio, quickest in the 4.5-litre Maserati.

In the race, Brooks harried the 400bhp Ferraris and Maseratis, leading briefly on lap 35 before refuelling. Then, passed by the Flockhart/Bueb Jaguar D-type, he stayed in contention until the old gearbox trouble set in. Just after 2am he crashed heavily at Tertre Rouge, distracted with the car stuck in fourth. The Jaguars were taking control, heading for a famous victory in which D-types finished first, second, third, fourth and sixth.

'It could have won Le Mans – it had the potential, but not the luck'



The Aston team had been unable to get the DBR2's engine to deliver full power at speed in a pre-race test at MIRA and it was no different in France. John Wyer's notes, held by the Aston Martin Owners' Club archive, confirm that the Whiteheads had reported 'missing' at high revs in practice - the cylinder head was removed but no fault was found, though a split in the air intake box was mended.

Graham Whitehead got away in second place but was 11th at the end of the Mulsanne Straight on that first lap. Placed seventh after five hours, the Whiteheads dropped to 19th with gearchange trouble and were soon out of it, with perhaps the greatest chance of their careers lost. They felt that DBR2/1 could have won Le Mans, 1957. It had the potential, but not the luck.

Shortly before the race *The Motor* said that Aston Martin was still experimenting with different Weber carburettors on the DBR2. The truth, told later by Ted Cutting, is that it had ordered three twin-choke 48DCO carburettors but when they didn't turn up the team had to use six-single choke DOEs. The fuel supply system, fine on the testbed, was now too complex to fit under the bonnet, so Rex Woodgate built a simpler system and finished it at three o'clock one morning. He tried to start the engine but it just popped on one cylinder and wouldn't run, so he went off to sleep on the problem for a couple of hours.

Returning refreshed, he ran a drill down the five feed pipes attached to the main pipe and the car appeared to run perfectly. Though no one could have known, the project had already gone wrong and there was no time left to discover that fact in testing.

History states that, when the team returned to England, it was discovered that some fuel pipes were too small to deliver enough petrol at sustained full power. Graham Whitehead went into print believing this to be true but Rex Woodgate has a slightly different recollection, 'We did a day's testing after Le Mans and found that the carburettor air intake box was too small. This is what lost DBR2/1 its power at Le Mans. A better air box design cured the problem.'

Whatever the cause, the real problem was lack of time for testing. The car never raced on six carbs again - the twin choke 48DCOs arrived, were enlarged to 50mm as originally planned and fitted complete with new fuel lines and a larger air box.

DBR2/1 is now reunited with an original 4.2-litre engine. Chromium-plated five-speed gear gate is exquisitely wrought.



Full body restoration was completed on DBR2/1 in 1993 by Rex Woodgate

After that missed chance, DBR2/1 was campaigned in 1957 but scored no wins. For 1958 the FIA decided to impose a 3-litre limit on World Championship Sports Car events. Instead, the 3.7-litre engine was bored out to 3.9 litres and Stirling Moss scored the two wins for which DBR2/1 is famous. At Goodwood he won the 21-lap Sussex Trophy race after a battle with Archie Scott-Brown and his works Lister Jaguar. Moss passed Scott-Brown during the race, then his rival's steering broke and Moss won comfortably, setting a new sports car lap record of 1m 33.4 sec.

The following weekend the steering on Scott-Brown's 3.8 litre Lister broke again, this time when leading Moss in the qualifying heat for the 25-lap British Empire Trophy race at Oulton Park. He drove Bruce Halford's slower 3.4 litre Lister Jaguar in the final. Stirling gave one of his demonstration drives to pull away and win from Tony Brooks who was hampered by the failure of fifth gear in DBR2/2. Scott-Brown finished third and yet again Moss set a new outright sports car lap record (1m 50.8sec), though Graham Hill astonished everyone present by equalling that time on the same day in the 1960cc Lotus Mk15.

Later in 1958 the team ran DBR2/1 at Aintree, Silverstone, Spa and as the practice car for the Targa Florio. Soon after the last race the engines were enlarged to 4.2 litres and both DBR2s went to the USA where they were run by Elisha Walker. Rex Woodgate was sent out to maintain them. Although the original 3.7 litre engine in DBR2/1 was progressively englared to 4.2 litres, Rex Woodgate reminds us that new 4.2-litre blocks were fitted in 1959. He certainly fitted various engines into the DBR2s when he was running them but DBR2/1 is now reunited with an original 1959 4.2-litre engine.

George Constantine drove three races in 1958 with DBR2/1, winning at Lime Rock and Marlborough; in a full 1959 season of 12 races, Constantine won at Montgomery, Thompson, Nassau and three times at Lime Rock, plus a class win at Elkhart Lake. Some say that Stirling Moss drove that car again that October at Riverside - in fact, he drove DBR2/2 there but retired with oil pressure trouble.

The Elisha Walker team lost heart after the tragic death of a teenage daughter in a horse-riding accident and in 1960 the DBR2s came back to England to be sold. DBR2/1 was bought by Bill Aston for club racing and then subsequently sold on to RH Dennis who had the one-off 1954 gullwing body from DB3/6 fitted. It was not what you'd call an aesthetic success.

> 'No effort has been spared to keep this car perfect'

Happily the importance of the car was finally later recognised, and it was fully restored in the USA by Stephen Griswold between 1975 and 1979. Assisted by Rex Woodgate, the latter now relates that the original body was traced by Colin Crabbe and sent over to be restored and refitted.

The owners of such cars can be notoriously shy of publicity and rumours about who owned DBR2/1 times are misleading. It does not matter who owns it; the important thing is that such a car is properly looked after. And this classic clearly has been. One owner even acquired the original cylinder block and head which were in the car at Nassau in 1959. It was rebuilt in time for Mike Salmon to drive DBR2/1 at Monterey in 1989.

No effort has been spared to keep this car perfect and it has been attended to over the years by many of the leading Aston specialists. Everything bar the body was rebuilt by Rex Woodgate and his son, Chris, prior to Monterey. In 1991 and 1992 Ray Mallock raced it in a few major historic races, and he wiped the floor with everybody else.

In 1992-93 the body was restored to its original specification. It is a glorious machine that has been used properly and treated with respect.

Ray Mallock sums it up, 'The car was just tremendously enjoyable - one test session was enough to get it to my liking. It really is beautifully controllable, so well balanced that it's easy to put it on opposite lock at 130mph and drive through a corner with a smile on your face.' Yes.

Aston DBR2/1

Engine type Straight six, light alloy, DOHC, three twin-choke Weber 50DCO (six single-choke Weber 48DOE for first race only) **Capacity** 3670cc (1957); 3910cc (1958); 4164cc (late 1958) **Power** 287bhp (1957)-332bhp (4.2-litre)
Transmission Forward-mounted SC532 five-speed manual, rear-wheel drive; DB final drive with ZF limited-slip differential **Chassis** Multi-tube backbone **Suspension** Front: independent by trailing arms and torsion bars. Rear de Dion axle with trailing arms and torsion bars **Brakes** Girling disc brakes all round **Wheelbase/Track** ft 9in/4ft 5in **Weight** 1960lb (889kg)

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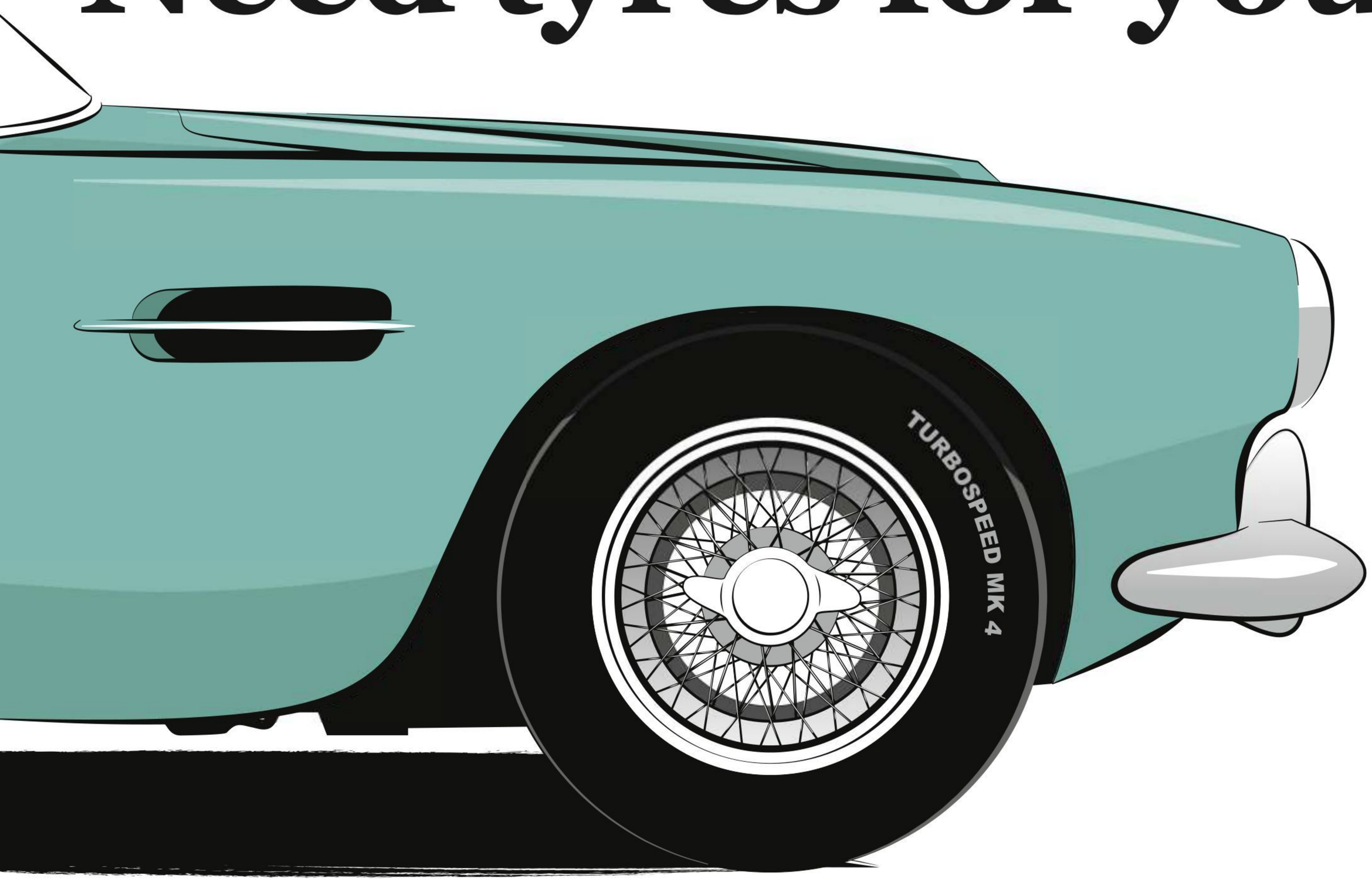
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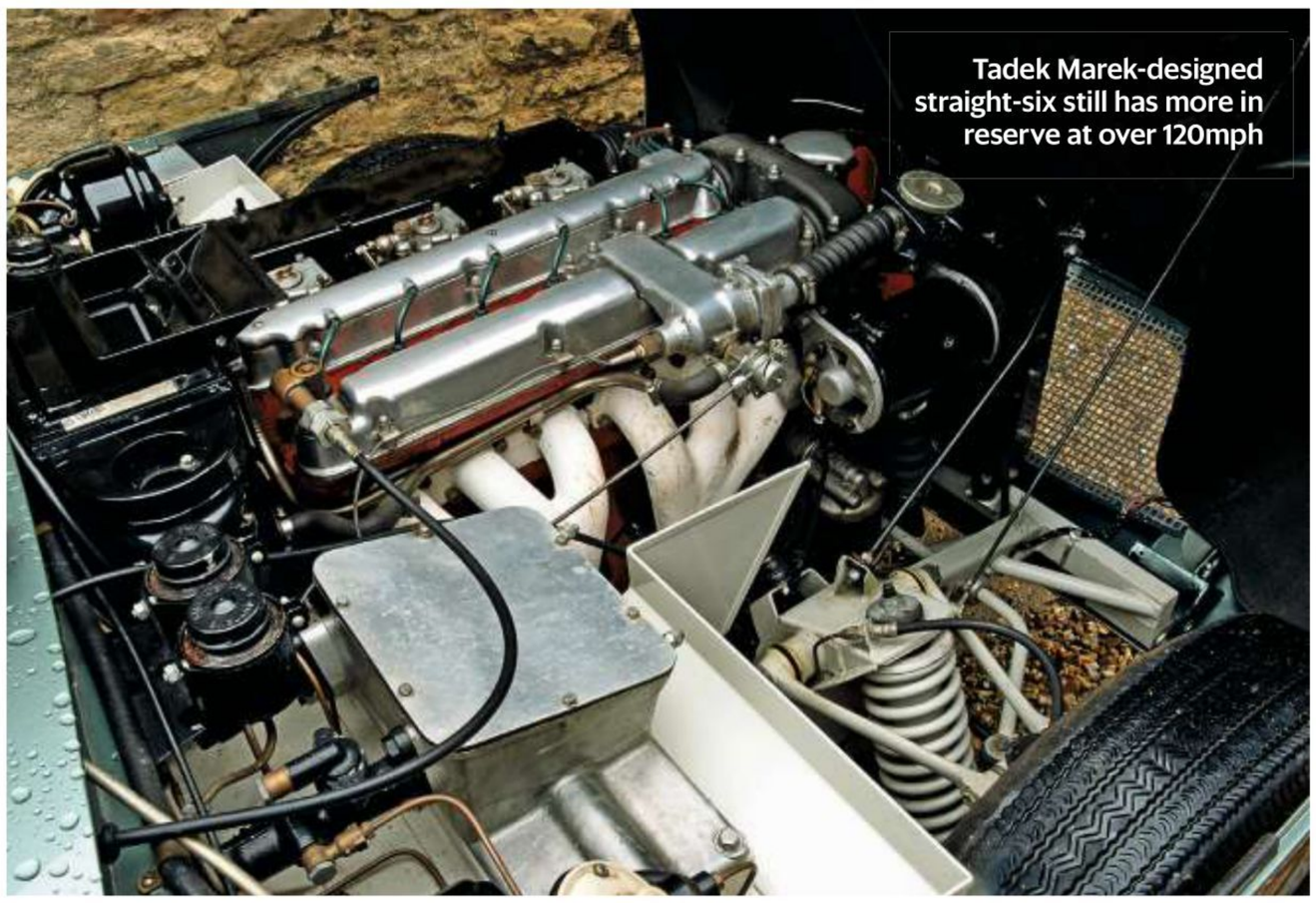
This Aston Martin prototype reveals how the DB4 could have turned out. How it survived is even more remarkable

Words PAUL CHUDECKI Photography MALCOLM GRIFFITHS





Driving position is rather upright, but exquisite details abound, including a folding rear seat



Tadek Marek-designed straight-six still has more in reserve at over 120mph



Prototypes usually face a grisly fate once they've served their propose for testing or publicity. Most have disappeared in a shower of angle grinder sparks or the blaze of a cutting torch because the manufacturer needed the spare parts, or just didn't want the public to be reminded of an embarrassing development blind alley. Project DP114 is one of the few to have made a lucky escape. The reason? Because Aston Martin boss David Brown thought it would make fine transport for his wife. Even the factory build sheet survives, which lists the model type as DB4, with the words 'prototype abandoned' handwritten next to it. Maybe that should read 'prototype spared'.

Launched in October 1958, the Aston Martin DB4 remains an icon in the world of truly exotic grand tourers. Forget Maserati and Ferrari - here at last was a drop-dead gorgeous British machine that could live with the best of them in every performance parameter. The seeds of its birth, however, date back as far as 1952, when the original DB2 was nearing the end of production. Four years later the first running prototype, Development Project (DP) 114, was up and running.

There would, of course, be subsequent prototypes, with later ones bearing a much closer visual resemblance to the car that we all know. But it was specifically Project 114 that marked the all-important transition from old-school style and development to a new younger and more thrusting design approach for Aston Martin. It would be a giant step from the by-then ageing DB MkIII - the ultimate evolution of the DB2 - to that stunning all-new DB4.

Construction of the first DB4 prototype chassis, using a new, Harold Beach-designed perimeter frame, was underway by summer 1954. Polish designer Tadek Marek began design work on its new 3670cc, aluminium straight-six, twin-cam engine in August 1955, while attention was being paid to the aluminium body structure intended for production. This was designed in-house by Frank Feeley, almost certainly with some input from hands-on chairman David Brown. Legendary Aston Martin team and then general manager John Wyer later recorded, 'It is axiomatic that the design of a successful car should be one third engine, one third body and one third chassis. Undue emphasis on any one of these departments leads to an unbalanced entity. In the interests of performance, and therefore weight, the body panels must be aluminium.'

By early 1956, however, Aston Martin Lagonda management was having second thoughts about the styling and began studies in conjunction with Italian design salons Touring of Milan and Pininfarina, to produce an alternative, with the former ultimately getting the contract.

Wyer went on, 'To provide the necessary rigidity the aluminium panels must be mounted on a steel framework. The acknowledged expert in this form of strong and very light construction was Superleggera Touring. Apart from the body construction, which was entirely its design and is now built under licence, and the styling, which was a combined operation, my discussions with Touring



[Aston Martin DP114 prototype]

'It's striking, but hardly beautiful. The rear three quarter view is best, even pretty'

convinced me at a very early date that the only sound basis for a car of this type was a platform chassis frame.'

So, despite 10,000 miles of testing, it was this thinking that eventually sounded the death knell for Aston's perimeter chassis and DP114. DP114/1 had progressed no further than a running chassis with a makeshift steel body, presumably designed to replicate the proposed weight of the production model. This car is DP114/2. Although its chassis and coachwork would never make it into production, it was the first completed prototype, up and running by 1956.

Its chassis used the rear end of a DB 2/4 MkII/DB MkIII but with a new Watt linkage-located de Dion axle providing a 15 per cent reduction in unsprung weight over the old car's live axle set-up. It was pure DB4 at the front with rack-and-pinion steering, but it still had drum brakes. During 1957 DP114 would be fitted with disc brakes all round, which were standard on all but the first 100 DB MkIIIs.

The engine was originally named DBA Engine Development project unit (subsequently known internally as the DB4 engine), coded DP164. This was a development of the DB MkIII's LB6 twin-overhead camshaft straight six, which was designed by Willie Watson for Lagonda during World War Two and first saw service in the DB2 in 2.6-litre form.

As for the all-aluminium body, it would remain a one-off, as did most of the car, including the engine specification - although its output gradually increased over the ensuing years. Only the rack-and-pinion steering and front suspension were carried over to the production DB4, while the de Dion axle did not appear on a road-going Aston Martin until the DBS of 1967.

Those who test-drove the car found it to be satisfactory, with better roadholding than the DB MkIII, although its straight line performance came in for criticism, no doubt thanks to approximately 300lb of extra weight compared to the MkII/III.

With the now-familiar Touring design being fitted to subsequent DB4 prototypes and DP114 having fulfilled its arduous testing duties, David Brown acquired it from the company on August 23, 1957 for his wife's personal use. By now it was commonly referred to as the 'Walls Ice Cream Van', thanks to its unusual colour scheme of white with a blue roof, which was identical to that of the 'Stop me and buy one' tricycles used by Walls in the Fifties and Sixties. Sold to its first private owner in 1962, it remained in the same livery for years until repainted yellow with blue stripes in the Eighties by then-owner Jim Murray. Having obtained FIA papers for the car as a prototype GT, he used it in historic rallies, including a class win on the 1989 Pirelli Marathon.

After this DP114 again changed hands and was returned to Aston Martin Works Service, where it was stripped back to its bare chassis

1956 Aston Martin DP114

Engine 2922cc, in-line six-cylinder, dohc, triple Weber 45DCOE carburetors **Power and torque** Circa 200bhp @ 5500rpm; 220lb ft @ 4000rpm (est) **Transmission** Four-speed manual, rear-wheel drive **Brakes** Discs front and rear, servo-assisted **Steering** Rack-and-pinion **Suspension** Front: independent, double wishbones, coil springs, anti-roll bar, telescopic dampers. Rear: de Dion axle, Watts linkage, trailing arms, torsion bars, hydraulic lever-arm dampers **Weight** Circa 2900lb (1315kg) **Performance** Top speed: 125mph+ (est); 0-60mph: 9.0sec (est) **Cost new** N/A



DP114's traditional Aston grille had yet to find the graceful form of the production car

'The de Dion rear slides easily in the wet, but gives plenty of warning before breaking away gracefully'

and subjected to a five-year rebuild using original drawings retrieved from the engineering department. It appeared at the Louis Vuitton Concours d'Elegance and Silverstone before being bought by haulier David Bailey in 1997.

The roads nearby provide a perfect backdrop in which to sample 4 MMC. It's a striking car to look at, although you would hardly describe it as beautiful. The rear three-quarter view is its best, even pretty. The front end, with its gaping mouth, is less fetching but does its best to blend in with the rest of the design.

Slip inside and the generous glass area and unobtrusive rear window pillars provide good rear three-quarter vision. There are lots of delightful details, such as the neat chrome catches that allow me to swivel the quarter lights through 180 degrees to direct air at the driver or passenger. Ahead there's a leather-covered wheel, with elegant stalks for lights and indicators each side - the one to the right houses a push-button for the horn in its tip. With its high-geared window winders and the twin blue-tinted sun visors, the cabin oozes style.

The dashboard is painted metallic grey, complementing the black hide interior trim and grey cloth for the headlining and glovebox interior. There's a 160mph speedometer and a 7000rpm tachometer red-lined at 6000rpm, and to their left a quartet of small gauges for oil pressure, fuel, amps and water temperature. It's all very simple and neat with touches like the fly-off handbrake to my left and a chrome lever next to the rear seat armrest, which operates an external flap to reveal a chrome Monza fuel filler cap.

The driving position is quite upright and the wheel positioned low and close to my legs, but it's comfortable with ample headroom. In the back there is only sufficient headroom for the vertically challenged, though, usefully, the seat back unbolts at each end and drops flat to allow long objects to be carried in the boot. The tall gearlever for the David Brown gearbox moves smoothly and solidly and steering is light and direct, though it could do with more feel. But the ride on the 6.70x15 Avon Turbospeeds is smooth and quiet.

The de Dion rear end slides easily on some wet, undulating roads on our test route but gives plenty of warning before breaking away gracefully enough for me to counter it with a twist of the responsive steering. And while there is body roll, the Aston holds the road with tenacity, belying its vintage and 2900lb weight. The 3.0-litre six, producing around 200bhp via triple Weber 45 DCOE carburettors, has torquey and spirited performance. It will hit 60mph from rest in around nine seconds and feels like it has more to give at an indicated 120mph. Braking from such speed requires a serious push on the pedal but servo-assisted discs front and rear slow the car with reassuring force. Generally restrained and happy to waft along at modest speed, 4 MMC is always willing to get up and go when the occasion demands.

The DB4 that finally emerged was beautiful and capable of 140mph in standard guise. It couldn't have come at a better time for Aston Martin. In 1959 the company was enjoying a lot of success in sports car racing and the DB4's first full year of production coincided with the DBR1 winning both Le Mans and the World Sportscar Championship. But it was crying out for a new road-going model to top up the company coffers and breathe new life into its image. That image needed to be complemented by a truly modern machine that would help see the company into - and through - the next decade.

The swinging Sixties saw the DB4 evolve into the DB5 - essentially a DB4 Series V with a 4.0 rather than a 3.7-litre engine and subtle cosmetic changes - and millions world-wide saw it as the car of choice for one Commander James Bond. Indeed, millions wanted one.

Thanks to: *David Bailey, Kingsley Riding-Felce and Desmond J Smail*

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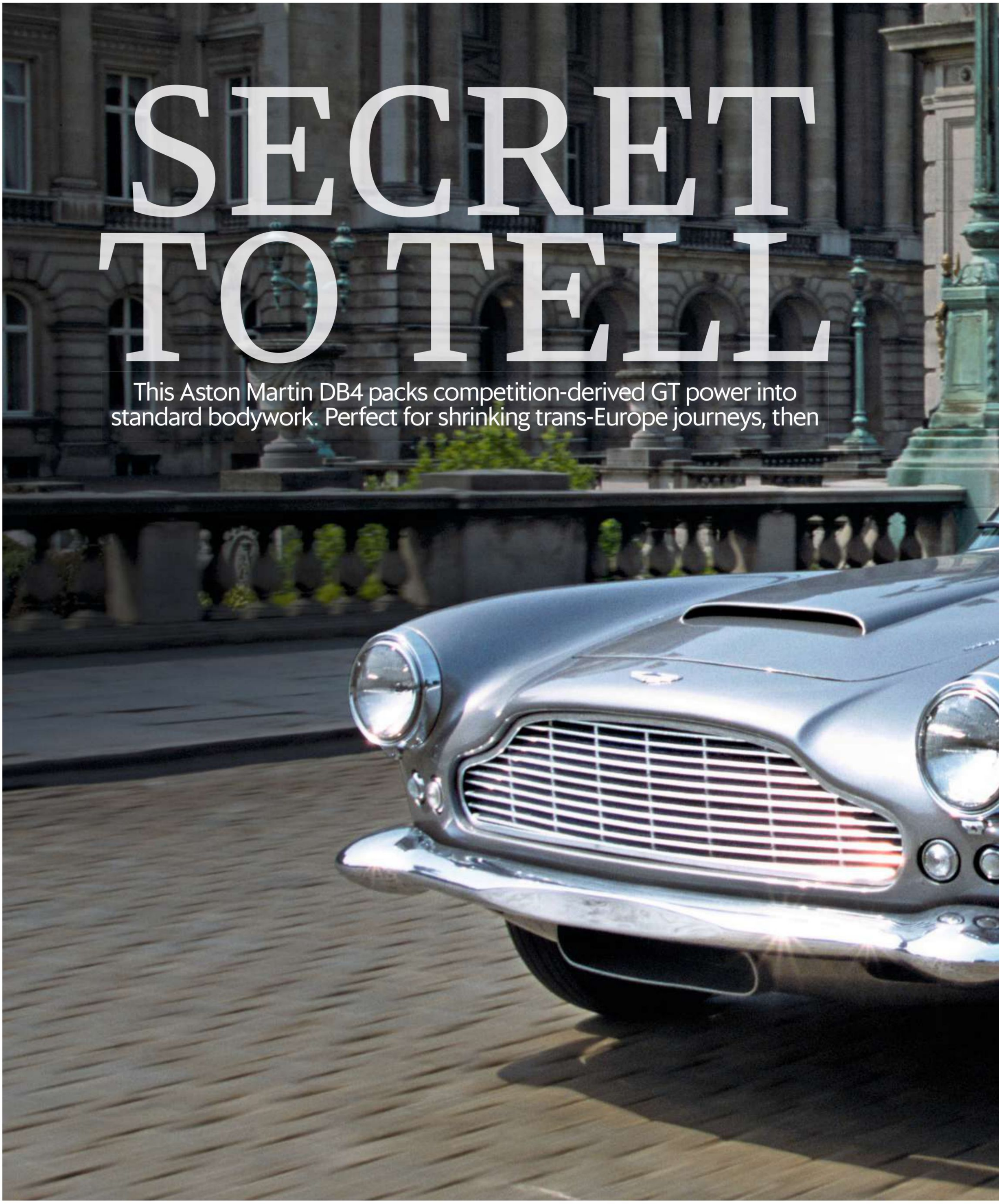
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SECRET TO TELL

This Aston Martin DB4 packs competition-derived GT power into standard bodywork. Perfect for shrinking trans-Europe journeys, then





DB4 hides its secret well – you'd never know that it's one of just eight GT-engined regular DB4s made

'I collected DB4 GT chassis numbers' said Don Rose almost sheepishly as we pawed the flanks of his silver Aston Martin DB4 on a stop in an obscure Belgian back road. It seemed an odd pastime for a man who works in the music industry, where presumably, most earthly temptations have been put before him. I mean, chassis number compilation, even of a wonderful car like the DB4 GT, isn't really up there in the leisure pursuit stakes with sniffing cocaine out of a groupie's cleavage.

The thing is, Sixties Aston Martins do this to people. They reduce grown men to enthusiastic schoolboys, turn worldly business tycoons into train spotters caught like rabbits in the full-beam glare of the glamour, rarity and hand-built mythology of Britain's most fêted marque.

These are cars that evoke strong passions. A whole generation of young males had the cars' image burned into their brains when they first saw *Goldfinger*, so the name and the shape gets the testosterone flowing almost like the memory of a first kiss.

When you're little you don't know the names of the different DB Series. I can still remember gazing at my copy of the *Ladybird Book of Cars*, opened at the picture of a DB6, convinced that it was 'James Bond's car' and defending its honour against a Maserati Mistral that was depicted in the same book.

Later, when you know a bit more, it's the DB5 that you want because it's the one that's in the film. Further on, when you finally have to accept the fact that you're not actually going to be James Bond when you grow up, you realise that the one to have is actually the DB4 GT because it's the fastest, the rarest and the one that Aston Martin actually raced. What you don't know - unless you spend far too much of your time looking at car books, that is - is that Aston Martin made

'Symphonic on command, its crescendo of induction roar could bring a tear to the eye of the most jaded driver'



This six-cylinder twin-plug GT engine powered Britain's fastest production car in the early Sixties

just a handful of standard wheelbase DB4s powered by the hugely exciting GT engine.

Visually it would be hard not to like them; particularly the elegant purity of the DB4. Fifties Astons look quaint and dumpy now, the Seventies cars vulgar and pumped-up, but the Sixties models embraced Italian style to superb effect. Aston tinkered with Touring's shape of course (and finally buggered it up with the crop-tail DB6) but the original car is a masterful piece of work, so lithe and slim yet eager and powerful looking. No subsequent Aston, for me, has recaptured the beauty of these cars. If the DB4 is Savile Row then the DB7 is track-suit bottoms and Nike trainers.

Encounter a DB4 and you can sense the handbuilt feel in the tight shut lines, the attention to detail and the crafty use of parts bin components in such a way that you don't really notice them. Astons were not afflicted with the Morris Marina doorhandle syndrome that so many other low-volume cars suffered from. Then there's the locks with the tiny keys, the cool touch of the wood-rimmed wheel, the rifle bolt action of the gear change and, of course, the muscular urge from a six-cylinder engine that flicks all the right emotional switches.

Aston Martin built 1070 of its DB4 'saloons' (of which 70 were convertibles) between October 1958 and June 1963. The first car designed entirely under the management of David Brown, its aluminium engine was beset with engine problems. When the oil got really hot at sustained high speeds, the clearances in the bearings could grow to three times their normal size. The different rates of expansion of aluminium hadn't been reckoned with and it transpired that the oil pump simply couldn't deliver the volume of oil required. Aston's straightforward cure involved upping the sump capacity and fitting an oil cooler.

1961 GT-engined Aston Martin DB4

Engine 3670cc, in-line six-cylinder, dohc, twin-spark, triple Weber carburettors
Power and torque 314bhp at 6000rpm; 278lb ft at 5400rpm **Transmission** Four-speed manual with overdrive, rear-wheel drive **Brakes** Discs all round, servo-assisted
Suspension Front: independent, double wishbones, coil springs, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar. Rear: live axle, coil springs, parallel trailing links, Watt linkage, lever-arm dampers **Weight** 2884lb(1308kg) **Performance** Top speed: 153mph; 0-60mph: 6.1 sec (*The Autocar*, 1962) **Cost new** £4169

No body modifications needed to accommodate the GT engine

‘It’s masterful – if the DB4 is Savile Row, then the DB7 is track-suit bottoms and Nike trainers’

The car was refined over five different unofficial series defined by dates and chassis numbers. And concurrent with production of the short-chassis GT, you could order your standard wheelbase DB4 with the GT’s big-valve, high compression, 12-plug, dual ignition, triple-Webered engine. Power went up from 240bhp to 302bhp at 6000rpm. These cars had the larger, twin-plate clutch and the Powr-lok rear end that was fitted to all the GT-engined DB4s as part of the GT power train package. Just eight standard wheelbase DB4s were built with the GT engine - two Series four cars and six Series five cars. This example - chassis number DB4/861/L - is one of them. It was ordered with the GT gauge package, which included an oil temperature gauge and desirable overdrive for the wide ratio four-speed David Brown gearbox.

Rose has got the Aston bug bad, ‘It started with James Bond. I always wanted a DB5. I reached a point in my life where I could afford one but I realised that the DB4 was more sporting. I found one in America in 1992 with a 4-litre DB5 engine so it was a nice combination. I do sprints and hill climbs and a bit of circuit racing. Working in Britain for two years, I had a little time on my hands and have found myself with three DB4s - the standard car, a GT and this car. I’ve got to sell at least one of them.’

What’s next, a convertible? ‘No, they always looked a little chopped to me. If I was going to have an Aston convertible it would be a DB6 Volante because it was more of a cruising car than a sports car anyway.’

Rose doesn’t know much of the car’s early American history. only that it was restored in the States by Robert and Jon Clerk of Performance Tuning and fitted with a Harvey Bailey handling kit.

Anyway, enough history. The thing is, we are in Belgium, our mission to get the DB4 - which Rose has never actually driven before - back to the Calais ferry and over the water to England. The car awaits us at GTM, an exotic car specialist in a suburb of Brussels. The



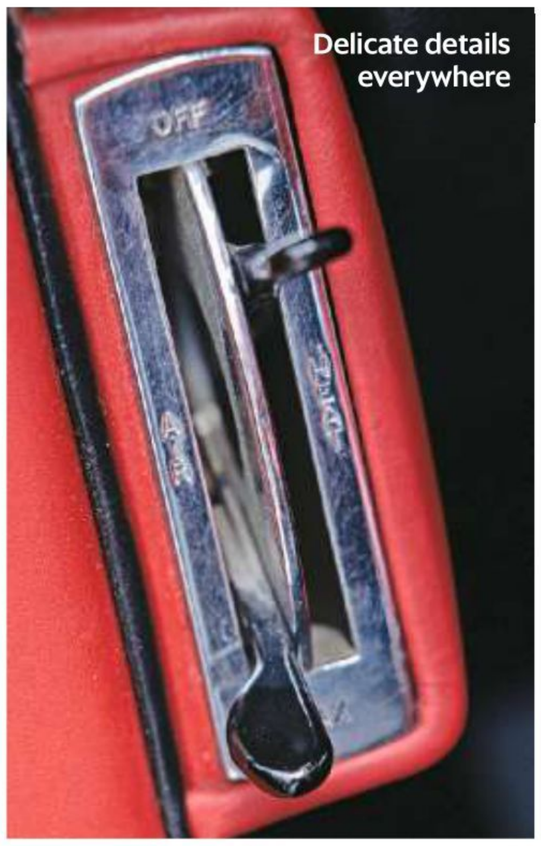
DB4 interior's attention to detail gives that hand-built feel and the wood-rimmed steering wheel keeps your hands cool when the car gets hot

bill is settled (new starter motor and battery), we talk cars with the proprietor for a while, then set forth.

Running through the post-morning rush hour traffic the Aston behaves well. The revs hunt a little at the 1000rpm idle, the ride is firm and jiggly over every ripple and ridge in the road and the clutch is testing my thigh muscles. But you couldn't call it a difficult car to drive. The David Brown gearbox gets a bad press but if anything it is more positive than the subsequent ZF five-speeder, and the overdrive on this car makes it equally versatile.

We intend to find some more interesting roads back to the coast but to get things rolling we head for the E40 and let the Aston wind out to 100mph in direct drive before popping into overdrive. It sounds wonderful and feels very strong. In straight GT form, don't forget, this engine powered Britain's fastest production car of the early Sixties - good for 153mph; 0-60mph in 6.1 seconds. Famously it could accelerate to 100mph and stop again in 20 seconds dead.

It's a warmish day so Rose keeps both windows rolled down to try and counter the heat soak from the engine. It is hardly a quiet car, even with the windows up, because of wind noise from around the doors.



Delicate details everywhere



Stacked tail lights survived into the following DB5

DB4 may be a consummate GT cruiser, but it demands driver focus in the corners to get the best out of it

‘The gear change is robust and satisfying and the engine responds well to a casually blipped throttle’

The smell inside is one of leather mixed with the hint of oil. The seats, generously sized, seem a little prosaic in shape for something so quick and don’t even pretend to keep you in your place through corners.

The four discs wipe off speed nicely when the drivers of the modern cars ahead in the fast lane start to get too close and nervously brake.

We peel off the E40 in search of more atmospheric roads and some lunch. It’s the long way round but the boat doesn’t leave ’ till ten o’clock this evening, so there’s plenty of time to play; to sample the lunging acceleration that pushes you deep into the seats to well beyond 100mph in third gear; to hear the engine work. Symphonic on command, it delivers a noise that rumbles up somewhere between the legs, a crescendo of induction roar and complex valve gear that suggests expensiveness and could almost bring a tear to the eye of even the most jaded driver at 6000rpm.

The gear change is pleasingly robust and satisfying, hitting home with a positive action. Somehow the little lever seems to make a direct connection to the shafts and gears below rather than giving the sensation of stirring 16 bits of rubber. It responds well to a casually blipped throttle, something I find myself doing at every given opportunity in any case.

We’re making better time than we expected so we decide to go for an earlier boat. It’s a good excuse to push the DB4 even harder. It’s responsive to throttle openings - or the lack of them - in corners. Drive it timidly on a trailing right foot and it feels a bit ponderous, unresponsive, front-heavy. Drive it through the curve with the power on, moving the weight front-to-rear, and it comes alive especially when, like this one, it is fitted with original-style Avon crossply tyres that allow generous side-slip so you can act the goat coming of roundabouts. Seats that were a little more figure-hugging would make the car that much easier to drive quickly.

Steering that feels a bit lifeless at low speeds seems suddenly alive and informative now. Even if the solid rear axle thuds and tramps a little where a good independent set-up would simply smoother a bump, it doesn’t misbehave.

As we wait for the ferry to start loading, Rose still can’t decide which of his three DB4s to keep. ‘It’s one of those car-guy quandaries. This is a really rare unique thing and just unrepeatable for me, that’s what I’d have to face. But I’m so happy with my other car...’

It’s a nice problem to have.

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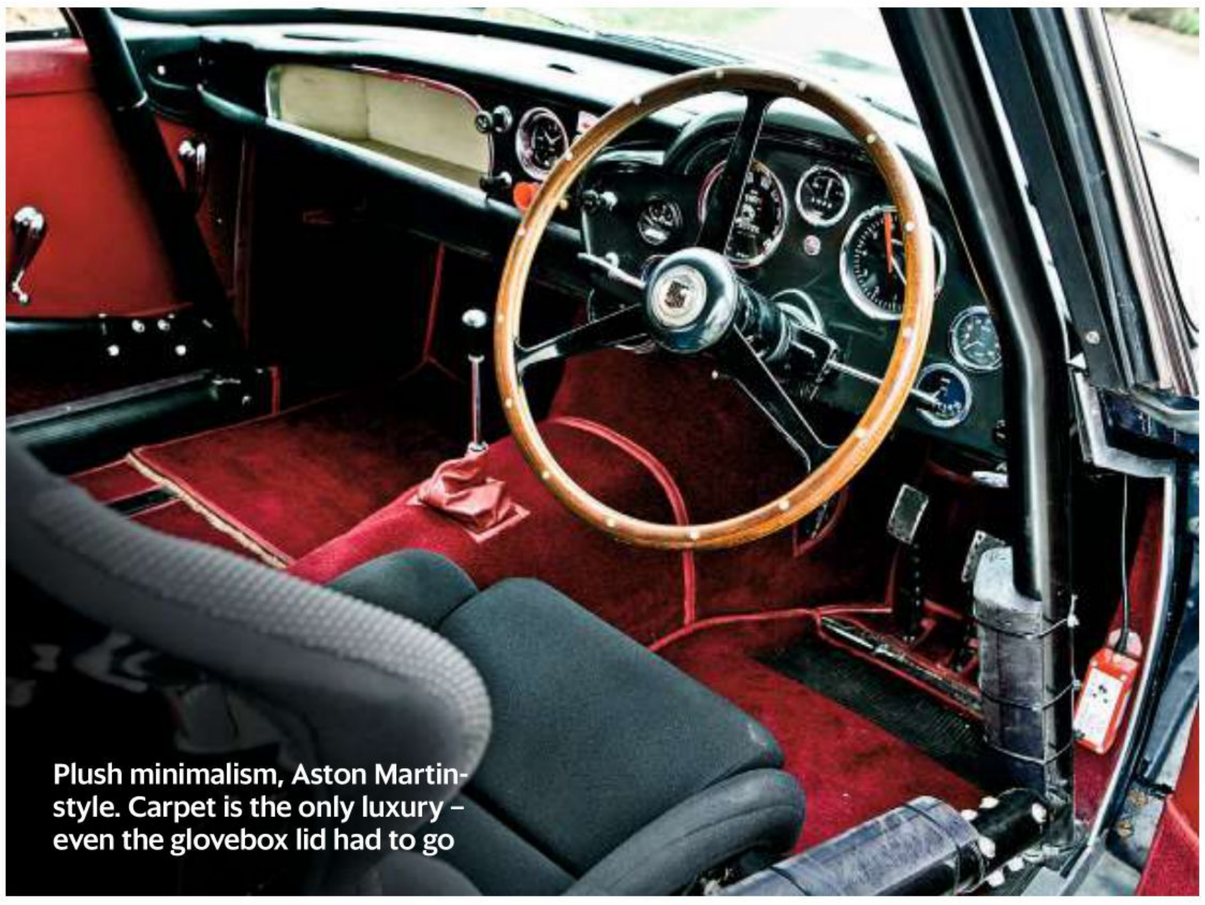

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A STIRLING ENDEAVOUR

Stirling Moss won with this DB4 GT Lightweight on its racing debut in 1960. Experience the mighty Equipe Endeavour Aston Martin as it takes you back to the early days of British GT racing

Words MIKE GOODBUN Photography LYNDON MCNEIL

In GT format, the 3670cc straight-six is fed by three Weber 45DCOE carburettors and gained six more spark plugs plus a second distributor



Plush minimalism, Aston Martin-style. Carpet is the only luxury – even the glovebox lid had to go



Bumpers were soon removed to make the Lightweight lighter still

Goodwood, Easter Monday, 1960 - the immaculate and deafeningly loud Aston DB4 GT leads the field round for the ten-lap Fordwater Trophy, the final race of the day and the third for Moss. Already beaten, twice, by Innes Ireland's new Lotus-Climax single-seaters, the record crowd's favourite finally has the machinery to notch up another win.

A trio of Jaguar Mk2 3.8s for Roy Salvadori, Jack Sears and Sir Gawaine Baillie are the closest match in this closed-car race, but prove little opposition from the start as pole position man Moss disappears into the distance and finishes the 431st race of his career more than 20 seconds ahead of Salvadori's increasingly sideways Coombs Mk2. Win number 167 for Moss, and the first outright win for a production DB4 GT.

Winning was work for Stirling, who was hired by Equipe Endeavour's Tommy Sopwith to do just that. Sopwith says, 'I thought he was the best driver, so did a deal with Ken Gregory [Moss's manager] - I knew what he was worth, and he was the best.'

The box-fresh DB4 had been delivered to the circuit by Aston competitions manager Reg Parnell just in time for practice the previous day. Chassis number DB4GT/0124/R, originally registered LGL 400 (Sopwith's cars always had a 400 plate), was the first of five special Lightweight models featuring aluminium floor, bulkhead and engine bay panels, drilled sill and door panels, no heater, radio or glovebox lid and only one of the two bonnet stays. At Goodwood 0124/R ran with front and rear bumpers, but they soon went too. The savings added up to around 140kg - equivalent to a surplus DB engine.

Sopwith was one of the people who instigated the DB4 GT, a 130mm shorter wheelbase version of the DB4 with faired-in headlamps, thinner 18-gauge aluminium alloy body panels, no rear seats and a tweaked version of the Tadek Marek-designed all-alloy 3670cc twin-cam straight-six. Each cylinder gained an extra spark plug, necessitating two distributors, while a trio of Weber 45DCOE carburettors fed the fuel/air mix. With competition-spec Girling disc brakes the DB4 GT could do 0-100-0mph in 20sec, as Parnell proved at MIRA with the factory Lightweight demonstrator 40 MT. Sopwith says, 'Everyone recognised a short wheelbase was needed and I'd known Reg forever, so I got the first Lightweight. It was by far the quickest car I ever had up my father's front drive.'

The 70 standard DB4 GTs weighed 1270kg, around 60kg less than the regular DB4, but the Lightweights were homologated at a svelte 1128kg to put them on fighting terms with Ferrari's 1100kg, three-litre V12-powered 250 GT SWB Berlinetta. Both cars put out around 250bhp - this despite Aston's 302bhp claim - and in reality the Lightweight spec made little difference.

Moss had already won the first major Grand Touring car race in Britain with the prototype DB4 GT (DP199/1) at Silverstone in May 1959, and won a heat (but retired in the final) at the Bahamas Speed Week that December with a production version. He recalls, 'The Ferrari was more nimble and although not necessarily easier to drive, it was a nicer car to drive. The Aston was a bit of a bulky machine, but a nicely balanced car with a reasonable amount of power and fairly good brakes. It was a pretty solid car - I think it would probably take more of a hammering. Someone like Innes Ireland would probably have preferred this to the Ferrari; you could do extraordinary things with it, but whether it was any quicker or not is doubtful.'

History suggests that the Ferrari was the superior machine; in August 1960 alone Moss won the RAC Tourist Trophy at Goodwood with the Rob Walker 250 SWB, beating two other DB4 GT Lightweights of Essex Racing Stable - Roy Salvadori in second, Innes Ireland third. And for the RedEx Trophy race at Brands Hatch the following weekend, Moss and the 250 beat Jack Sears in the Equipe Endeavour DB4 GT's final race.

Sears was the DB4's regular pilot in 1960, dovetailing drives with Equipe Endeavour's Jaguar Mk2. He says, 'I first tested the DB4 GT on the Silverstone Grand Prix circuit and at that moment it was the fastest car I'd ever driven, much quicker than the Jaguar 3.8. I was slightly in awe of it, but once I'd made friends with it I found it a very interesting car to drive. It handled well, didn't roll a lot, and you could get it into a good four-wheel drift and produce good lap times. If you didn't get the thing drifting you weren't going fast enough - it was a very good car and I was fast enough to get the best out of it.'

Sears gave the blue DB4, now bumperless and with Equipe Endeavour's white grille band, its second comfortable victory at the BARC International 200 meeting at Aintree. *Autosport* reported, 'It was easy for Jack Sears, who soon established a clear lead, lapping around 2min 15sec, to the horror of Tommy Sopwith, who almost did his nut in the pits, giving his various slow-down signals.' Sears won easily again at Oulton Park the next weekend, despite the bonnet lifting under braking.

Then came Silverstone and the *Daily Express* Trophy meeting, where Sears and the DB4 lined up alongside more serious Appendix C cars such as Roy Salvadori in John Coombs' Cooper Monaco, Tony Marsh in the Cooper-Maserati, the Jaguar D-types of Ron Flockhart, Mike Salmon and Peter Sargent, plus Jim Clark in the Border Reivers Aston DBR1 and Bruce McLaren in Ecurie Ecosse's Cooper. 'It was a daunting event for me,' says Sears. 'They were so much faster, most of the time I was looking in the mirror, but Tommy wanted to be seen and for me to get experience with the car.'

The Autocar was impressed by Sears' drive, 'Farther back, Sears was doing extremely well... Each lap he would pass Sargent's three-litre D-type Jaguar on braking into Stowe - only to be repassed as they came down Hangar straight.'

TOMMY SOPWITH – LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON

Equipe Endeavour's Tommy Sopwith is the son of aviation pioneer Sir Thomas Octave Murdoch Sopwith, who created the World War One Sopwith Camel biplane, founded Hawker (later Hawker Siddeley) and twice challenged for the America's Cup yachting title. It was Tommy's father's J-class yachts that gave the race team its name: Endeavour almost won the Cup in 1934.

Thomas Edward Brodie Sopwith was born in 1932 and educated at Stowe School near Silverstone, before joining Armstrong-Siddeley as an apprentice. He ended up heading its experimental department.

He began racing in 1954 and almost won the inaugural British Saloon Car Championship in '58 with a Jaguar MkI; tied on points with Jack Sears (Austin Westminster), he lost out in a title-deciding shoot-out.

Sopwith retired from driving after the death of his close friend Mike Hawthorn in January 1959 and focused on running his team, employing drivers such as Jack Sears, Stirling Moss, Graham Hill, Ivor Bueb, Sir Gawaine Baillie and Mike Parkes to pilot the cream of Sixties racing machines from Jaguar Mk2s to Ferrari's 250 GTO. Sopwith jokes, 'I wound up with more drivers than cars!'

It was Equipe Endeavour that gave Jaguar's E-type its first race victory, with Hill at Oulton Park in April 1961.



Sopwith (right) was pipped to the first BSCC title by Jack Sears (left)



Suspension and engine work has shaved 11sec a lap since the Aston first raced at Goodwood in 1960

'It doesn't do 5/10ths – it's just not interested. You have to drive it like you're racing it'

Sears won at Snetterton in May but other drives meant that it was August Bank Holiday Monday before he raced the Aston again. Brands Hatch had just completed its Grand Prix circuit extension and 60,000-plus spectators flocked to the venue for the Silver City Trophy F1 meeting - the first event using the new layout.

The ten-lap BRSCC Wrotham Trophy for GT cars was the first race on the bill and Sears' 1min 57.8sec lap put him on pole. The Aston pulled out a 16sec lead over Mike Parkes' Lotus Elite by lap five, before backing off to maintain the gap to the finish. This DB4 then, was the first car ever to win a race on the Brands Hatch GP circuit.

Aston Martin announced the DB4 GT Zagato in October 1960, but Equipe Endeavour switched to Ferrari in top-line GT events, joining forces with Colonel Ronnie Hoare's Maranello Concessionaires team for 1961 and '62 with a 250 SWB, then 250 GTO. This DB4 then led a quieter life of sprints and hillclimbs in the Sixties and Seventies until Pink Floyd manager Steve O'Rourke bought it around 1977.

With race preparation expert Colin Blower's help, Aston Engineering improved the DB4's damping, traction, braking and reliability and rebuilt the straight-six, liberating more horsepower - an estimated 335-340bhp. At Goodwood in 2008 the DB4 lapped in 1min 31sec; Moss's best in 1960 was 1min 42.8sec.

Finally, it's my turn. Not on a circuit, but a bumpy, damper-testing, public road. There's no cooling fan, the 12 spark plugs oil-up easily, we've had to tape over the oil cooler so the lubricant doesn't aerate, and even Aston Engineering's David Jack, who is more used to piloting 300bhp-plus Sixties Astons than me, is finding more slip than grip from the cold Dunlop Racing crossplies. Gulp.

Today, there's a padded rollcage to negotiate before squeezing in to a supportive Recaro but I'm still struck by how minimal the red-carpeted single-seat interior is. The broad wood-rim three-spoke wheel, as twirled by Moss, Sears, Attwood and Co, dominates the view ahead, while the gearlever appears delicate and pipette-like to its left.

The bassy straight-six rips into life on the key, filling the Perspex-glazed cabin with satisfying notes and a fresh burst of unleaded vapour. Into first, and a cautious lift of the short-travel racing clutch gets it rolling on little more than tickover. But then I discover that the DB4 doesn't do 5/10ths - from rest to 3000rpm, it's just not interested. You have to drive it like you're racing it.

The transmission gently whines as the DB motor yowls up the rev range. From 3250rpm it'll sing a cultured scream to 7000rpm, but 6000rpm is enough before I grab the next ratio. The four-speed gearbox has a short, crisp and intimate action but won't tolerate lazy, wrongly timed, shifts. I must heel-and-toe on down-changes, but getting them right delivers an intensely satisfying high-speed drive.

The crossplies and stiff springing have the DB4 dancing over the road surface in a controlled and fluid manner. And with a near-solid but communicative brake pedal acting on four discs, married to light and direct rack-and-pinion steering responses, I can confidently commit to attacking the most unfamiliar of corners at a decent turn of speed.

I don't want to get out, but when I do I feel genuinely wired.

Thanks to: *hexagon-bmw.co.uk; astonengineering.co.uk; astonmartin.com*

1960 Aston Martin DB4 GT Lightweight

Engine 3670cc, in-line six-cylinder, dohc, two spark plugs per cylinder, three Weber 45 DCOE sidedraught carburettors **Power** 302bhp @ 6000rpm (orig – c340bhp now) **Transmission** Four-speed close-ratio manual, rear-wheel drive, limited-slip differential **Steering** Rack-and-pinion **Suspension** Front: independent, double wishbones, coil springs, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar. Rear: live axle, trailing arms, coil springs, lever arm dampers, Watts linkage **Brakes** Discs front and rear **Weight** 1170kg (2580lb) **Performance** Top speed: 150mph; 0-60mph: 5sec (est) **Fuel consumption** 15mpg (est) **Price new** £4530 (road car)

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1972 V8 – CONCOURS RESTO' £235,000



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ASTOUNDING ASTON

Racing since Le Mans 1961, and the ultimate DB4 GT Zagato, 2 VEV is everyone's favourite Aston. We drive it on track

Words MALCOLM McKAY Photography COLIN BURNHAM

[Aston Martin DB4GT Zagato]

Approaching the legendary 2 VEV - most purposeful, longest and lowest of the DB4 GT Zagatos - the first thing that strikes me is the quality of the restoration. The car really is superb - paint, trim, instruments; everything. Climbing in, I have to watch my head as I have to duck, but once in, there's enough room for a big six footer. The hip-hugging seats feel comfortable and adjust easily, and drilled pedals sprout from the floor, reminding me that this is a racer foremost; they're perfectly placed for heel-and-toeing, too. With the engine cold, I have to pump the accelerator a couple of times to prime the three big twin-choke Weber carburettors, but if it's hot I just turn the key and touch the throttle - the car fires instantly, settling to a lumpy, noisy idle. Here's the first surprise - the quality of the restoration distracts me from the fact that this is really a pared-down racing machine. It could go straight back on the track and win, so it's not surprising that noise is paramount.

Slow-speed manoeuvring is not its forte, but given a few revs and judicious use of the heavy clutch, it's quite tractable, only the big Webers spitting in fury at being asked to go slowly. The four-speed gearbox changes well but can baulk badly at parking speeds - *Autocar* found the same in 1962. Get it rolling, and the car grumbles and growls noisily out into traffic. Come to a stretch of open road, however, press the throttle and you get the most enormous kick in the back - with a bellow, the car leaps forward, snarling and roaring up through the revs, making the most wonderful noises. And that's only using half

'With a bellow, the car leaps forward, snarling and roaring up through the revs'

throttle! The car is still running-in after its rebuild, but the work is superb and its performance so few miles after completion a great credit to the skill of the restoration team under Kingsley Riding-Felce at Aston Martin.

Even in the dry, accelerating out of a corner or roundabout requires restraint. The power comes in so instantly and effectively, whatever the revs, that the car just leaps forward like a scalded cat.

The ride is firm and can be jarring, but there is more compliance than you might expect with a race car and the chassis certainly feels taut, taking bends most impressively. Cornering levels on big Dunlop racing tyres are very good indeed in the dry, camber and direction changes doing little to unsettle a car that shows almost no inclination to roll. The power can always be relied upon to kick the tail out if I want to, but the short wheelbase - and the car's racing history - reveal that it can catch out even skilled drivers with a sudden rear-end breakaway if I overstep the mark - so out of respect I avoid pushing my luck too far.




Race fuel cell occupies most of the boot area

Troublesome loose bootlid cost both Jim Clark and Innes Ireland time during races in the early Sixties





Longer body is significantly different from the other 18 DB4 GT Zagatos

Braking is disconcerting at first, the pedal needing an almighty shove to get any serious retardation. Given that shove, they do work well, but I have an uncomfortable feeling that the car could get up to 100mph in less time than it would take to stop from that speed, certainly without putting extreme strain on the seat back.

The dashboard is comprehensive, everything works perfectly and you get plenty of information - water and oil temperatures, oil pressure, amps. There seem to be no teething troubles with this restoration. I will remember the stunning acceleration for a long, long time to come - sheer grunt right through the range.

When Aston Martin launched the DB4 in August 1958 it had produced a Grand Tourer *par excellence*, but there was no doubt that the capacious body was going to be too heavy to be competitive in GT racing. Less than a year later a short-wheelbase two-seat coupé with faired-in headlights hit the tracks - the DB4 GT. It saved almost 200lb on the standard body, but was still heavier than rivals from Ferrari et.al.

The ultimate answer came at the Earls Court Show in 1960. The Zagato stand featured special-bodied coupés on Alfa Romeo, Bristol and Aston Martin DB4GT. Just 19 DB4 GT Zagatos were to be built (until the RS Williams-built Sanction II and III runs of four and two recreations respectively in the Nineties) and they hit the racing scene in 1961, but again, Aston was just a whisker behind the opposition. The new, light and smooth Zagatos were just not quite fast enough to notch up more than the occasional win. But they were awesome, civilised machines.

'The nose had been crushed beyond redemption'

At its launch, the DB4 GT Zagato cost £3600; with the necessary addition of purchase tax, it was £5101. Aston records reveal that that included a 50 per cent profit margin on the 1,600,000 lire that Zagato charged for the body. By the time *Autocar* got hold of a Zagato for road test in April 1962, the price had gone up to a considerable £3750/£5469 - and that was competing against the Jaguar E-type fhc at £1550/£2132. For the money, you got a maximum speed of 153.5mph and 0-60mph in six seconds.

The comprehensive accident which befell 2 VEV in 1993 necessitated a total strip and reconstruction. Throughout the job, the priority was always to retain the integrity with which it was built, to use as many original parts as possible and to use the original methods, such as gas welding throughout. That said, it is undoubtedly in finer condition now than it ever was; throughout its early years, what was always paramount was to get the car bolted together and out on to the race track as quickly as possible.

Much more than just accident repair was needed, because the car was beginning to show the strains of 30 years of racing. Every component was taken down and checked; Aston Martin's restoration shop operates a locker for each car, in which each component removed on stripdown is cleaned and stored.

Kingsley Riding-Felce recalls that the most testing part of the restoration was the recreation of the front end. The bonnet and its frame were saved, but the nose and scoops had been crushed beyond redemption. Reference was made to all the photographs that could be found, and to anyone who remembered the car from the past. As the nose was built up, regular clinics were held with top Aston personnel, the owners and others from the car's past, all with the intention of getting it as near as possible to the unique shape that was 2 VEV.

Wherever possible, the very thin original Zagato panels, still bearing the evidence of Italian panelbeaters, hammers, were reused, but the body also required fabrication of some panels that had sustained little damage in the accident, including the offside rear wing, lower valance and rear light clusters; offside door frame bottom and skin; and rear inner wheelarches.

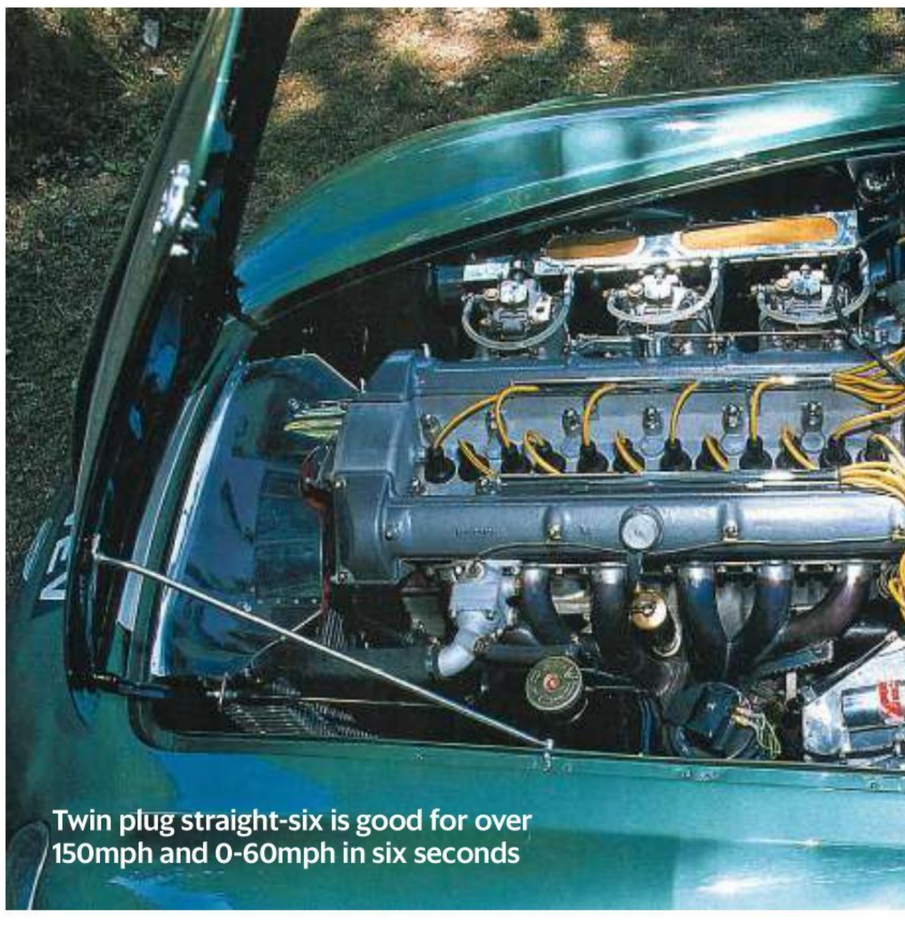
The rear chassis and all components were stripped, repaired as necessary and repainted. The dashboard and instruments were reconditioned, the seats dismantled and retrimmed and all trim re-covered; Aston even sourced special lightweight black carpet to the original pattern. All Perspex windows were remade.

The engine received extensive attention. New liners and 3.8 pistons were fitted, and because the crankshaft was found to be cracked at a main bearing journal, a new crank was needed. The competition cylinder head was fully reconditioned with unleaded specification valve seat inserts and the combustion chambers matched. The front timing case required repair because it was damaged in the accident.

Kingsley recalls that there was great enthusiasm from his team working on the car, and a sense of awe and privilege to be working on such a famous Aston Martin; they genuinely did not want to let it go when it was finally finished.

That level of dedication really shows.





Twin plug straight-six is good for over 150mph and 0-60mph in six seconds



Carpeted and trimmed interior looks deceptively civilised for a race car



DB7's lineage is clear to see in 2 VEV

2 VEV – inspiration behind the DB7

Aston freely admits that the DB7 was inspired by 2 VEV. Smooth, sweet yet deceptively quick, it resembles its older brother in performance in the same way as it apes its style – by adding sophistication. Sophistication costs, of course, in weight terms; the soundproofing, plush leather seats, electric everything, air conditioning and emissions equipment make it much heavier than the Zagato. It's so quiet that you have to keep a close eye on the speedometer, because it can be hustled along a extremely high speeds while retaining that calm aura. In fact, that calmness won't go away.

Throw the car into a bend absurdly fast and you can distantly hear the front tyres squealing with understeer; add power and the rears gently join in as the car settles into a neutral power slide; but inside, apart from the g forces, all is calm and unruffled. I can see why hooligan motoring scribes have tried to say that it's not a real sports car, but they're wrong. In some ways it's just too damn good for ultimate fun, but it's a car that you could live with for years, that would deliver you across continents calm and unruffled, in the minimum of time.

I'd have one!





Offside rear wing, lower valance and lights largly survived the huge 1993 crash



2 VEV emerged from major repairs following a huge crash in 1962 with a lower, flatter roof, longer nose and tail and fatter rear arches

A long track record: it's been all go since Le Mans, '61

2 VEV, chassis 0183/R, hit the road on May 19, 1961, registered to John Ogier's Essex Racing Stable who would run it at Le Mans in June alongside 1 VEV. The drivers were Australians Lex Davison and Bib Stilwell. Much factory support was provided but the race was a disaster - both cars dropped out after a few hours because of slack cylinder head nuts; they had run 15th and 17th before trouble struck, well behind the lighter open DBR1s. A French Zagato lasted to the final hour in ninth place, but it was the heaviest car in the race.

2 VEV tackled the 51-mile GT race at Aintree in July. Lex Davison fought a great battle with Jack Sears' E-type, taking him on the last lap to record the car's only win in its early years.

August saw Jim Clark contest the TT at Goodwood in 2 VEV, against strong opposition from Moss and Parkes in Ferrari 250GTs and Roy Salvadori in 1 VEV. Pit stops were a feature of the race, Clark's first being to have the bootlid shut. A later stop for four wheels and fuel took 65.4sec, an interesting comparison with sub-10-second fuel and tyre Grand Prix stops in the Nineties. Salvadori and Clark took third and fourth places.

Innes Ireland took the wheel at Snetterton on September 30 for the 25-lap Molyslip Trophy race. He held second but was black-flagged - for an open bootlid again. He fought back to third despite a shunt and a spin.

The Paris 1000km in October saw Maggs and Whitmore achieve a disappointing ninth.

In April 1962 2 VEV was a guinea pig for Aston at Le Mans practice, using the 3995cc engine planned for the works development coupé, DP212. Some rapid laps were achieved - with 162mph on the Mulsanne straight - but the car did not take part in the race. Its lap times had persuaded David Brown and John Wyer to enter DP 212. Instead 2 VEV was loaned, via Aston, to Equipe Nationale Beige for Lucien Bianchi to drive at the Grand Prix

'Clark's first pitstop was to have the boot shut'

of Spa for GT cars on May 20. He made a brave start, shot straight into the lead, but overdid it and totalled the Zagato. The remains went back to the works and a major reconstruction ensued. In just five weeks, the car was rebuilt with a new chassis, new body and many other new parts. The bulk of the cost - £2254 - was borne by an insurance company that took weeks to agree the scrap value of the battery.

On July 15 the car was in action at Clermont Ferrand, sporting a lower, flatter roof, longer nose and tail and wider rear wheel arches. Great efforts had been made to get it as light as possible. Tony Maggs took the car to seventh place, but the cylinder block cracked, so it was back to Aston for a new one.

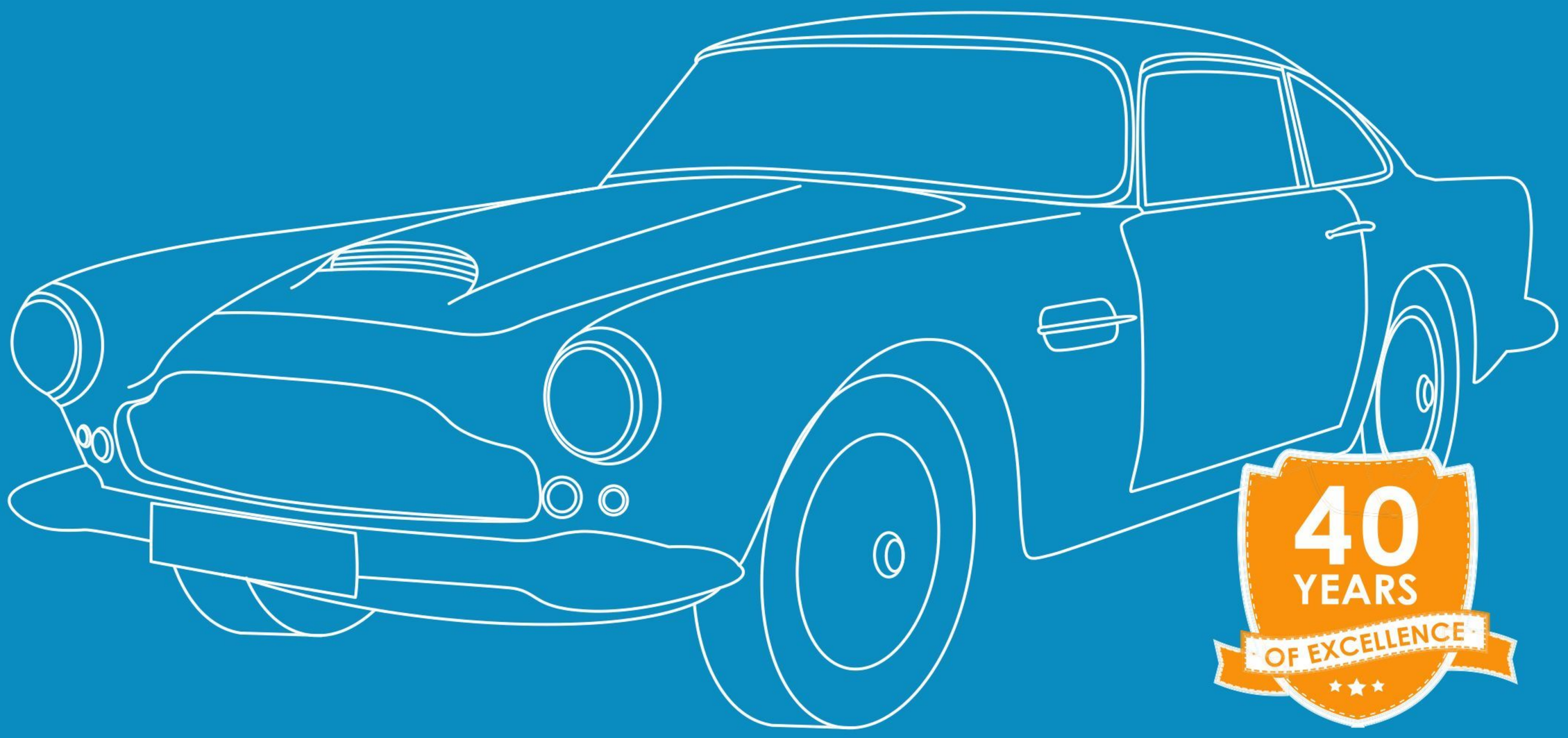
For the TT at Goodwood, 2 VEV was back with Jim Clark who held a strong 4th until leader John Surtees in a Ferrari 250 GTO came up to lap him for the second time. Clark spun, taking Surtees with him. A further £1000 was spent on the second rebuild in three months!

October 21 saw the Paris 1000km again; Jim Clark fought his way up to second but soon after Whitmore took over the car failed and Surtees' Ferrari took second.

After this, 2 VEV was relegated to minor events, remaining in Ogier's hands until 1964, when it passed to Alexander Roch of Bertram Cowen Ltd. He returned the car to Aston for thorough fettling before entering the Paris 1000km, driven by Andrew Hedges and John Turner; it ran well until third gear failed. In 1965 Roch sold the car to Anthony Whyte of Whyte & McKay whisky, who was collecting cars associated with Jim Clark.

In 1969, a year after Clark's death, Nick Cussons bought 2 VEV and raced it for three seasons; then in 1971 Toni St John Hart bought the car for her husband, Roger. He ran in club races, sprints and hill climbs, winning masses of trophies in the Seventies. Occasional appearances in the Eighties were halted by Roger's premature death. Shocked by this death, Toni put the car into a Christie's auction held in Monaco in May 1990. To her relief, it failed to sell and before long had the car back in action, driven by Nick Cussons. He won the European FIA Classic Car Championship with 2 VEV in 1992 but car was crashed on the Isle of Man in 1993.

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THE REAL BOND ASTON DB5

Of the two Aston Martin DB5s used in *Goldfinger* and *Thunderball* one vanished in 1997 and the other broke cover in 2010 after years in hiding. We take it on a mission to explore the reality behind the Bond movie aura

Words PHIL BELL Photography CHARLIE MAGEE

[James Bond Aston Martin DB5]



Bullet shield saved Bond from baddies, but doesn't do much for streamlining

Towering mesh fencing topped with barbed wire keeps prying eyes out of the woods beyond; the only way in is past the guards on the gate. We exchange a few words and the red and white barrier rises with a metallic clank. Inside the test facility I'm due to be issued with a piece of special equipment.

Skulking in the shadow of the control tower is an Aston Martin that looks deceptively like any other DB5. Even the number plate, FMP 7B, would hide its identity from anyone without access to privileged information.

But draw closer and the clues reveal themselves: a detachable panel set into the roof on the passenger side, a 1in strip of metal across the surface of the bootlid, a small-bore pipe poking out menacingly alongside the twin exhausts; round the front, the number plate set into a deep chrome plinth. Ejector seat, bullet shield, smoke gun and revolving number plates lie behind them - just some of the devices that helped secret agent James Bond to deal with assorted villains in the Goldfinger and *Thunderball* films, and guaranteed that actor Sean Connery would forever have to share his fame with a motor car. Never before had a film prop made such an impact, driving more than seven million small boys to demand Corgi toy versions and countless grown-up boys to splash out on real DB5s ever since.

Bond's Aston also inspired a number of replicas, including two commissioned by film company Eon Productions for promotional tours of America after the 1965 release of *Goldfinger*. In a plot fit for a spy thriller there were two DB5s playing one part in the films - the more expensive, gadget-laden effects car for close-up work (chassis DP 216/1), and this, the road car (chassis DB5/1486/R) acting as a stunt double for risky action sequences. The film cars also took part in the tour schedule and all four eventually went to private buyers.

You might think that the cars deserved a quiet retirement, but instead they became embroiled in a second round of publicity seeking, identity confusion and legal wrangles. The plot took its most dramatic twist when the original effects car disappeared one night in 1997 from a locked, alarmed and guarded hangar at an airport in Boca Raton, Florida. Replica DB5/2017/R ended up in the Dutch National Motor Museum and DB5/2008/R most recently changed hands in 2006, selling at auction to a mystery buyer for $2.1million.

So FMP 7B is the only survivor from the films. On screen it was lightly disguised as the effects car with BMT 216A number plates and a GB oval screwed to its rump, but otherwise it was a stock 1964 DB5, albeit with the more powerful Vantage engine. The replica gadgets were added by Aston Martin for *Thunderball*.

It's a privilege just to see this car, which has been locked away in one man's private Bond lair for decades and only let out on a few occasions. Like Sean Connery, it looks at ease in its Cold War surroundings. The subtle Silver Birch paintwork is a nod to the Battleship Grey Bentley that Bond drove in Ian Fleming's books, and the shape, styled by Frederico Formenti of Milan coachbuilder Touring, is distinguished and confident without being showy.



Let's face it – this is where every schoolboy wanted to sit after seeing *Goldfinger*

'I thumb a switch and the bullet shield whirs up noisily from the bootlid, filling the rearview mirror'

Slip inside and the odometer shows just 30,709 miles, but the grey seats look like they've seen 60,000 miles of trouser wear, the natural warm brown leather tones glowing through myriad creases in the black hides like lines on a character actor's face. Most of them were earned post-filming, but the fact that the process was started by Connery, assorted Bond girls and stuntmen really does transport you back to memorable scenes from the films.

Despite the DB5's dashing Italianate shape there's plenty of room for secret agents of all sizes. The slim woodrim steering wheel is typical equipment for a GT car of the period and behind it you're greeted with Aston Martin's signature dashboard, the glittering array of chrome instruments and switches rounded up in a dark metallic grey binnacle shaped like the radiator grille.

Twist the ignition key and Tadek Marek's twin-cam straight-six spins eagerly into life, its deeply throbbing idle sounding impatient for action. The DB5 gained an extra silencer box to make it more civilised than the DB4, but this one has been relieved of some baffling for a dash of extra aural drama – just the sort of larger-than-life effect that excites a film audience. With as little as 3500rpm on the tachometer the rounded burble is subsumed by a sharp, blatting rasp that trails the car like pursuing gunfire and cuts deep into the silent woods. Lazy gearchanges will give swift progress, but for pursuing a beautiful woman over Alpine passes hold out for 5500rpm, where you'd find the full 314bhp in this more powerful Vantage version – if it still had its original Weber carburettors. Even on the standard-issue SUs you get enough confident thrust from 3000rpm upwards to dispatch slower traffic with ease. You've a fine accomplice in the five-speed ZF gearbox, an option that was standard by the time this car was built in 1964. The 1963 effects car still used the David Brown four-speeder with overdrive.

The lever feels delicate in my palm but demands a solid push, particularly when the gearbox is still cold. Firm springing helps the lever across to the third and fourth plane and fifth is a closer step off to the right. Most British gearbox makers blanched at the Aston's 260lb ft of torque, which is how the car ended up with the same German five-speeder used in the Maserati 5000GT.

Feeling your way through the ZF it's easy to flip the hinged gearknob lid inadvertently, revealing a little red button. Pressing it is irresistible and it's hard not to flinch, though nothing happens. But it evokes one of the most talked about scenes in *Goldfinger*, when Bond propels gun-wielding henchman Santos Wong out of the car on an ejector seat. In reality lightweight dummies of both seat and henchman were ejected skywards by a tube of compressed air, and the roof panel lifts



Revolving number plate sometimes needs a little manual assistance



This DB5 is a Vantage but wears three SU carburettors instead of its original Webers



Patina courtesy of various Bond girls, movie stuntmen and subsequent owner, Sean Connery

‘With as little as 3500rpm on the tachometer, a sharp, blatting rasp trails the car like pursuing gunfire’

out manually. So you can forget settling a domestic argument with one deft press of that button.

With visions of being chased through Black Park Woods near Pinewood Studios by a gaggle of Mercedes, you want to press on through the bends. At first all seems normal as the DB5 leans gently into its cornering stance, rear squatting under power and front tyres starting to scrub wide before the rears join in with chorus of softly howling rubber. It’s all very predictable and the steering keeps up a direct conversation between my hands, the front wheels and back again with an oiled fluidity.

It reaches drift point at lower speeds than a gadget-free car thanks to a 136kg burden of special effects designed by Ken Adam and made real by John Stears and his team at Eon Productions with help from Aston Martin. These days film producers construct a series of cars to simulate gadgets in various states of deployment, but Adam wanted his ideas to be concealed on the car, ready for action at the push of a button.

Pull the leather tab on the driver’s door and a panel drops down to reveal a telephone handset, but a call to MI6’s base is impossible because the cord is connected to nothing more than fresh air inside the door. Below it, in the footwell a pair of levers opens the nearside rear reflector that hides the tyre-shredding nail ejector.

For following Auric Goldfinger’s bugged Rolls Royce Phantom III Bond had a radar scanner hidden behind the radio speaker grille. In the film this was ‘powered’ out of the way by an off-camera lever, but this one is lifted by a chrome tab to reveal a static map of the Home Counties. Then a pair of green lights illuminates, accompanied by a rhythmic beep and a whirring scanner visible inside the wing mirror. Delight turns to hilarity when I notice the white flashing light in the middle of the map is uncannily close to my location.

You’ll soon want to switch off the beeping distraction to concentrate on keeping this overweight DB5 on the road and watching out for assailants. If any approach from the rear you’ve got it covered. Open the armrest lid and you’ll find a panel bristling with switches, each labelled with a deadly function: Oil, Nails, Smoke, Machine Guns, Plates, Bullet-Screen and more.

That last effect has to be one of the car’s most memorable gadgets. I thumb a chrome tumbler switch and the bullet shield whirs up noisily from the bootlid, filling the rearview mirror in an instant. In deference to other test facility users I won’t try the oil spray or nail ejector, both of which use pressurised nitrogen to fling their contents into the path of deadly pursuers from chambers behind hinged rear light reflectors. We’re fresh out of Brocks B4 smoke canisters, too. Pity.



Machine guns would be useful for dealing with lane hoggers



Gearknob-mounted passenger ejector seat button is a constant temptation



Weapons controls hidden beneath the centre armrest



Bootful of plumbing needed to operate the various gadgets

Extending overriders, underseat weapons tray and rotating number plates were never used to save Bond's life, but on Britain's speed camera-infested roads today the plates could certainly save his licence to drive. Rotate the knob and the electromagnetic mechanism spins the plates to give JB 007 for Switzerland, FMP 7B for Britain and 007 JB for France. They don't always land in the right positions, so you may have to jump out to assist manually, which I don't remember Q mentioning during his famous 'Now pay attention' speech. If you were paying attention you'll remember that both film cars wore BMT 216A for most of the scenes, but with LU 6789 and 4711-EA-62 available on the effects car.

So that just leaves those deadly extendable wheel spinners that projected like the blades on Boadicea's chariot and carved down the side of Tilly Masterson's Ford Mustang. As a way of picking up attractive women it was pretty brutal even by the male chauvinistic standards of the Sixties, but none of the switches seems to do the trick anyway. In fact, fitting them calls for a more cumbersome technique, thus - heave open the bootlid against the weight of bullet shield, its electric window winder mechanism and rotating number plate. Marvel at sinister tangle of hydraulic piping and compressed gas cylinders filling much of the space and retrieve copper mallet and tyre slasher parts. Wield hammer to knock off roadwheel spinner, fit replacement with large threaded hole at the centre, screw in extended tyre-slashing spinner and tighten all the above with mallet. Return to car chase, slash Mustang tyres, chat up pretty girl assassin. Of course, Bond also had the luxury of allowing the whole extending, slashing and retracting episode to be handled in the special effects studio at Pinewood. So that's why he always looked so suave.

Removing the roof panel too allow your unfortunate passenger to be ejected is another trick that you have to perform manually at the roadside. Hold down the switch marked M-GUNS and you'll hear a heavy click as two retaining pins release the rear edge of the panel. Now you can lift it clear with a flourish, perhaps humming part of the Bond theme as you do so. '*Dada, da-daa, da dadaa*'...

Promoting Bond

The effects car's ability to create publicity prompted a promotional tour, so Aston general manager Steve Heggie called 25-year-old salesman Mike Ashley into his office. 'He told me I'd got the job of nursing the car around and looking after it,' recalls Ashley.

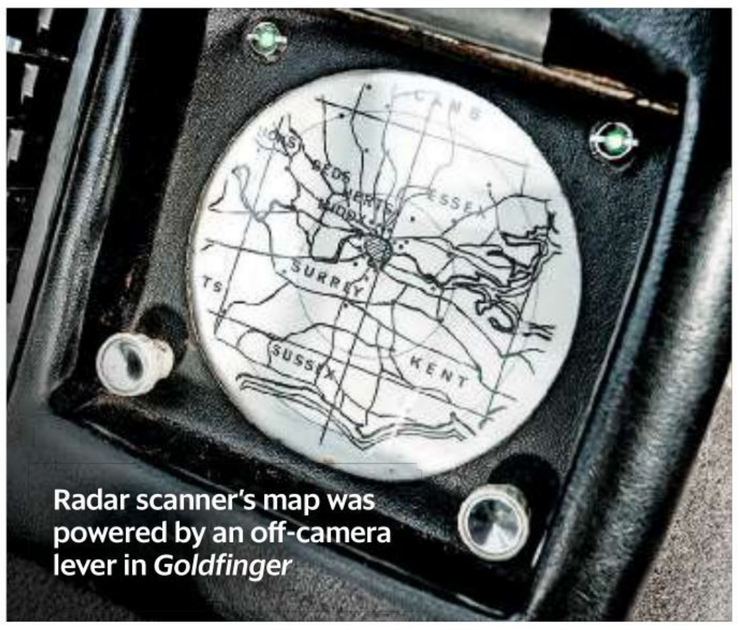
Dean Martin's producer, Greg Garrison, suggested a trip to Los Angeles where he'd help them get some publicity. 'My boss Jim Stirling wanted me on the cargo plane with the car, but customers weren't allowed. Animal handlers were, so he sorted me out with a caged bird and an animal handler's suit.'

As the tour progressed Ashley's lifestyle became more Bond-like. For the Paris premiere he and Sean Connery drove the car down the Champs Elysées to the Cinema Marignan. Afterwards there was dinner at the restaurant next door. 'I met these two beautiful models and offered them a ride back to the hotel in my car. I was photographed leaving the restaurant with one on each arm. I thought I was the luckiest guy in the world.'

Even near-disasters gained the tour some good publicity, like the time when he flew the car into Miami and sat inside it ready to make a dramatic getaway from the aircraft for the press. 'I don't know how, but turning on the ignition activated the smoke canister. There was thick black smoke everywhere – everyone thought that I'd blown up the car and the plane.'



Try telling your mother-in-law that it's a slightly offset sunroof. Then offer to take her for a spin...



Radar scanner's map was powered by an off-camera lever in *Goldfinger*


Hotline to MI6 is hidden in one of the doors...pity it's not connected

If you have the surveillance instincts of a secret agent you've probably spotted that some of the gadgets on this car look or work differently from those in *Goldfinger*, such as a smaller ejector hatch and different controls in the armrest console. Most were operated hydraulically on the effects car but all the gadgets fitted later to FMP 7B were electrically powered, except for the extending overriders.

Here the machine guns are harmless but on the effects car the barrels used an inbuilt spark plug to ignite a mixture of acetylene and oxygen for a realistic bang.

That car had started life as a Dubonnet Red DB4 Vantage Series V, modified with the new 3995cc version of the twin-cam straight-six to become the DB5 prototype. I mentioned that with its gadgets and new Silver Birch respray it was meant to do the close up work with the road car standing in for the risky action, but filming with animals, small children and exotic cars is never straightforward. When the road car's gearbox broke in Switzerland it was only fit for static roles, including the one where Tilly Masterson attempts to shoot Auric Goldfinger, leaving the effects car to handle the subsequent chase and most of the later scenes around the Auric Enterprises factory complex, though the road car was used for the panning shots and security barrier scene.

The road car's most prominent appearances came when it shared duties in the opening sequence of *Thunderball* and in the later car chase with the Ford Fairlane, but FMP 7B was also used as a sound double, according to Sixties Aston Martin salesman Mike Ashley, 'I did all the sound effects with that car because it had the Weber carburettors and the louder exhaust. We stripped out all the carpets and the passenger seat, loaded up sound recording equipment and I had a wonderful day at Silverstone letting it all hang out.' The car was used again as a sound double in *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*.

Identifying features? Apart from the lack of gadgets it doesn't have side repeaters on the front wings and in *Thunderball* its front overriders sit close to the number plate plinth; the effects car's are only just inset from the radiator grille. Also, the plinth on the effects car has squarer ends while that on the road car has more rounded ends. Bet you wish you'd never asked.

Despite relatively little screen time the cars turned Aston Martin into a household name, as recalled by Works Service manager Dudley Gershon in his book *Aston Martin, 1963-1972*, 'As soon as the film was shown a massive wave of publicity hit us, all of a sudden every ten-year-old boy knew the name Aston Martin. If we had been able to produce 50 DB5s per week we could have sold them.'

Instead the Newport Pagnell factory averaged 40 per month, but that was a four-fold increase over the DB4's production rate. I've often heard that Aston Martin was reluctant to let Eon use a DB5, and according to Bond historian Dave Worrall it took two attempts to persuade David Brown; but Ashley remembers things differently, 'As I understand it Cubby Broccoli and Harry Salzman were turned down by Rolls-Royce so they approached David Brown. He said yes right away and contacted [general manager] Steve Heggie to say he wanted the car in the movie. Of course Steve realised it could help our sales in America.'

The gadget-laden DB5s ended up back at Newport Pagnell where BMT 216A was returned to standard before all four cars were sold. Last to go was FMP 7B, bought for $12k by a Philadelphia radio station owner.

Since then it's been shown at the 1981 New York Auto Show and 1993 Meadowbrook Concours. But in 2009 Bond fanatic and serial Aston owner Don Rose persuaded Lee to let him see the car, 'I told him, "You should know I also work for RM Auctions, but this is a personal thing.' After Rose had looked over the DB5 Lee asked what the car might be worth. 'When I suggested upwards of $5million he realised he was way under-insured, then he just looked at me and said "My [charitable] foundation could really use that sort of money."'

So Lee decided to sell. It did the rounds in the UK and embarked on a world tour that culminated in RM's Battersea Park auction on October 27, 2010 at which banker Harry Yeaggy paid £2.7 million for it.

I hope, for the sake of every overgrown schoolkid of the Sixties and since that this piece of our history remains preserved exactly as it is.

Thanks to: *rmauctions.com, bondbooks.biz*

1964 Aston Martin DB5

Engine 3995cc, in-line six-cylinder, dohc, three SU HD8 carburettors **Power and Torque** 282bhp @ 5500rpm; 288lb ft @ 3850rpm (std DB5) **Transmission** Five-speed manual, rear-wheel drive **Steering** Rack-and-pinion **Suspension** Front: independent, wishbones, coil springs, anti-roll bar, telescopic dampers. Rear: live axle, parallel trailing arms, coil springs, Watt linkage, lever-arm dampers **Brakes** Discs front and rear, twin servos **Weight** 1502kg +136kg (3311lb + 300lb) **Performance** Top speed: 143mph; 0-60mph: 8.1sec (std DB5) **Fuel Consumption** 14.7mpg (std DB5) **Weapons** Two front-facing Browning machine guns, rear-facing nail dispenser and oil spray, wheel-mounted tyre slashers, front and rear extendable bumper rams **Defence Sysytems** Rear bullet shield, passenger ejector seat, revolving number plates, Brocks B4 smoke canister **Surveilance Equipment** Radar scanner, radio telephone **Cost New** £4248 (plus £36k for gadgets)

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GET BACK

Paul McCartney's 1966 Aston Martin DB6 goes back to where he once belonged – Liverpool. Roll up for the mystery tour

Words PHIL BELL Photography MICHAEL BAILIE

Reflections of a tunnel's overhead lighting stream towards me along the high points of the Aston's bonnet bulge and wingtops, there's a distant sound of the twincam straight six's droning rasp bouncing off the concrete walls, and inside, a Sixties Philips cassette deck is doing its best to fill the cabin with the languid melody of *Hey Jude*. Speeding towards Liverpool in the Aston Martin DB6 that Paul McCartney bought new in 1966, I wonder what it must have felt like for a young man of 23 who had - in his words - a lower middle class upbringing, to be touring the world, besieged by screaming fans, living life to the full at the heart of affluent London, and owning a car like this. At a time when any lower middle class family would have been delighted to scrape together £670 for a new Ford Cortina, nearly £5000 for the Aston was a fortune. Unless you happened to sing, play bass and write the songs that made the Beatles the most successful band of all time. And by 1966 the Beatles had had plenty of time to get used to their superstar status - John Lennon was infamously quoted as saying in a 1966 interview, 'We're more popular than Jesus now' - so expensive cars could easily have been merely accessories for a rockstar lifestyle.

But this car meant more than that to McCartney; he kept it for six years and drove it everywhere, including on a holiday to France. In the book *Paul McCartney: Many Years From Now*, by friend and business partner Barry Miles, he recalls watching his car being unloaded from the cargo plane in France, 'It was great to see your car come out, and also I was pretty proud of that car. It was a great motor for a young guy to have. Pretty impressive.'

The importance of this car in Beatles folklore runs even deeper than that. During 1968 McCartney went to visit John Lennon's wife, Cynthia, and son Julian when the marriage was breaking up. Driving out from London to their Weybridge home he started to sing the words 'Hey Jules' to himself, making up a song to cheer up the five-year-old boy. With a change of lyric to *Hey Jude*, the song would become the most successful Beatles single, selling five million copies in the first six months, and seven million by the time McCartney sold the Aston in 1972. The story goes that he first captured the song on the Philips cassette deck hung beneath the dashboard on the passenger side of the car. Unlike more modern machines, this one has a record button and a DIN socket for a microphone, and the ambience inside the DB6 is calm enough to make it possible. He wouldn't have been able to hear himself think, let alone sing, in the Mini Cooper with which the DB6 shared garage space. The tape that's playing *Hey Jude* to me now through the original push-button Radiomobile radio was put into the car as a finishing touch to a meticulous 12-month restoration in the Aston Martin Works Service workshops.

As my palms guide the slim wooden rim of the steering wheel towards Liverpool, making small intuitive corrections as the front wheels react to ruts in the road surface, the tape helps me get a little closer to the car's former life, saving me from having to sing 'naa naa

'The story goes that McCartney first captured the words to *Hey Jude* on the cassette deck in this car'



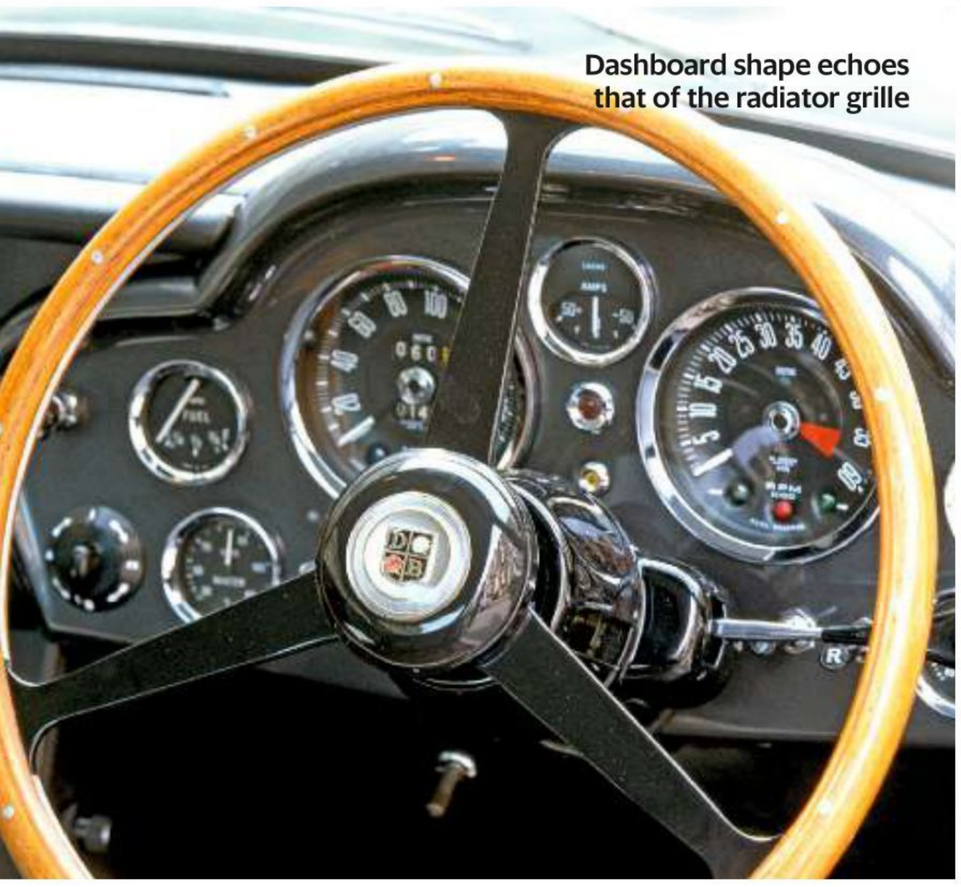
Aston looks at home outside the Liverpool Institute where McCartney studied



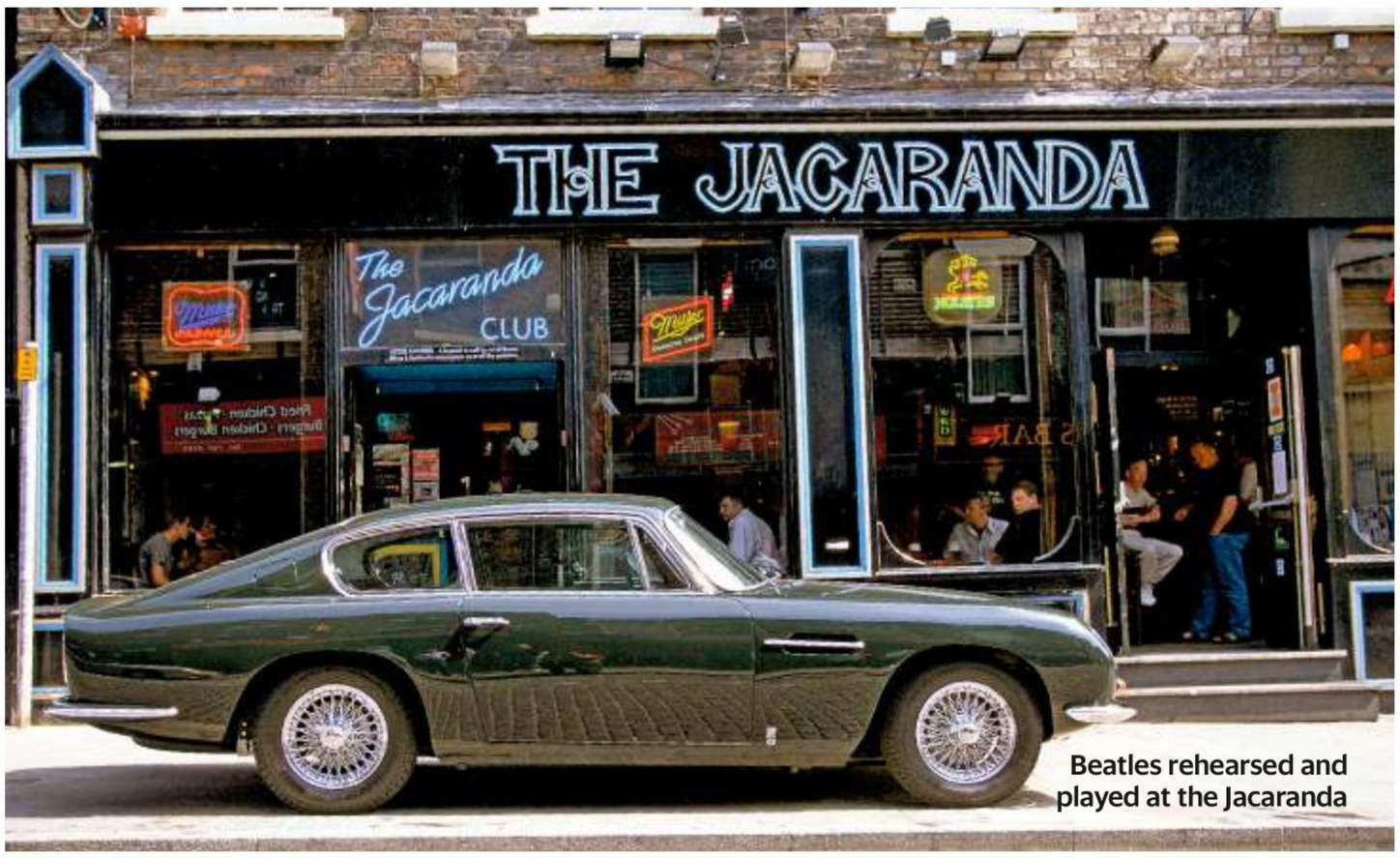
McCartney is said to have recorded *Hey Jude* on this cassette recorder







Dashboard shape echoes that of the radiator grille



Beatles rehearsed and played at the Jacaranda



'McCartney's Aston was at the heart of a bizarre conspiracy theory involving a fatal crash'

naa, na-na-naa naa' out loud. I'm happy to drive the man's car, but best leave the singing to him.

In fifth gear the engine is pulling just 3500rpm as it propels the car west-bound at an easy 90mph. The rich, rounded drone from the exhaust is more urgent and the wind eddys softly around the screen surround and quarterlights, but you could talk without raised voices. It's a relaxing place to be, a sanctuary from the intense touring and recording schedules that had seen the band release six albums between 1963 and 1965. The interior colour scheme, from the headlining down to the carpets, is black on black. Only the glittering array of chrome-bezelled gauges and switches packed into the metallic black-painted instrument panel relieves the sombre atmosphere.

For all of its hefty price tag and exclusivity, the Aston was a discreet choice for a young rockstar able to enjoy his fame and wealth to the full. Even though the DB6 was new for 1965 it was an evolution of a Fifties design, looking dated with its rounded curves and live rear axle alongside cars like Lamborghini's mid-engined Miura. Though the DB4 had been thoroughly modern at its 1958 launch, most of the improvements that created the DB5 and then DB6 were aimed at making the car more refined and practical. The DB5 brought a quieter four-silencer exhaust system, Sundym glass, electric windows and Girling disc brakes. Armstrong Selectaride rear dampers were an option and a five-speed ZF gearbox replaced the David Brown four-speeder mid-production. All of this contributed to a 250lb weight gain.

The DB6 was heavier again - this time just 17lb - but more importantly the wheelbase was lengthened by 3.75 inches and the roofline extended and then swept downwards to a kicked up Kamm tail. As well as improving rear passenger room, these changes improved high-speed stability by reducing aerodynamic lift by 60lb and moving the aerodynamic centre of pressure backwards.

Tadek Marek's twin-cam straight six had grown from 3670cc to 3995cc for the DB5 and the 325bhp Vantage option, with its triple Weber carburettors, was standardised for the heavier DB6. However, this car was ordered with the non-Vantage triple SU setup which would have suited McCartney's London lifestyle, flitting from his new home in St John's Wood and around the avant-garde world of jazz musicians, artists and other cultural experiences that would increasingly influence



McCartney brought the DB6 to Liverpool several times, but it was a more familiar sight in trendy parts of London



Sombre all-black interior would have provided a welcome respite from McCartney's hectic lifestyle

his song-writing. It was a no-cost option that gave better flexibility than the Webers in urban conditions, at a cost of 40bhp.

McCartney attributed both the choice of car (and the electric curtains in his house) to the influence of James Bond movies. Flip down the speaker grille in the centre console and you'll find a modern CD player hidden behind, pre-loaded with a compilation of Bond theme tunes. I smile at the connection, but can't bring myself to use it - this is a DB6 in Goodwood Green, not a Silver Birch DB5. Nothing could be more evocative than listening to that old Philips cassette player as the route suddenly plunges into Liverpool and through a one-way system determined to keep cars away from the pedestrianised area now called the Cavern Quarter, which is packed with Beatles landmarks.

The Cavern Club you'll find there today is a clone, circa 1984, because the original warehouse building was pulled down in the Seventies, but nearby Rushworths Music House and the shop that was Hessy's Music Store where they bought instruments both survive. The building that was Beatles manager Brian Epstein's NEMS record store is still there as well, albeit as an Anne Summers shop. It's all a smart, modern shopping area now, smattered with Beatles tributes and statues to give the tourists something to photograph.

Nosing the Aston through the city streets I'm conscious of the weight of the car - in spite of the large wheel it's an effort to aim through the tighter turns and the tall 6.7in-wide Dunlops begin to scrub if you push your luck. It lightens as the flow picks up and the turns get wider, allowing me to thread my way through traffic accurately and with more confidence, using fingertip pressure to guide the slim chrome gearlever through the gate with a positive click-clack two-step movement.

McCartney must have found the standard triple Webers complete with 325bhp extremely tempting when this car was new but I'm certain that they would be fluffing and popping by now, making unnecessarily hard work of the journey. Here in real world driving conditions the SUs prove the point, allowing the engine to pull smoothly from as little as 1500rpm in third or fourth - it doesn't seem to matter - delivering a willing squirt of acceleration to place the car into that transitory gap in the traffic flow or escape another autograph hunter who's spotted you at the lights.

1966 Aston Martin DB6

Engine 3995cc, in-line six-cylinder, DOHC, three SU HD8 carbs **Power and torque** 282bhp @ 5500rpm; 280lb ft @ 4500rpm **Transmission** Five-speed manual, rear-wheel drive **Brakes** Discs front and rear **Steering** Rack-and-pinion **Suspension** Front: independent, wishbones, coil springs, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar. Rear: live axle, trailing arms, coils springs, Watt linkage, Armstrong Selectaride lever-arm dampers **Performance** 0-60mph: 8.2sec (est). Top speed: 148mph (est) **Weight** 3250lb (1476kg) **Cost** new £4998 **Value now** N/A



Few people today recognise the significance of this car's once-famous registration number



Chippy was referred to in the hit *Penny Lane*. Best fish and chips in Liverpool, according to a local taxi driver

With my anonymous mug behind the wheel I'm aware of how little attention the car seems to be attracting. The one-way system spills out onto the Albert Dock, with its trendy warehouse apartments, newly cobbled walkways and smart shops transforming the banks of the Mersey. Liverpool has come a long way from the gritty, depressed city that produced the Beatles, but a DB6 would still turn heads in Kensington, and this one belonged to Liverpool's most famous son. Still, it's been a long time since a picture of this car was last in the papers, and music fans would have paid more attention to McCartney's hippy-dude droopy moustache and Sixties-chic outfit than the LLO 840D registration.

Certainly it was well known enough to appear at the heart of a bizarre conspiracy theory started by a caller to a Detroit radio station in 1969. He claimed that in November 1966 McCartney had left the Abbey Road recording studios in the Aston after an argument with the Beatles and had crashed fatally on his way home, and cited countless pieces of 'evidence' revealed on album covers and in the music to support his theory. He reckoned that Paul McCartney had been replaced by doppelgänger William Campbell, discovered in a look-a-like contest. There's a similar theory that Sean Connery died in a DB5 while filming a Bond movie. And you thought that the debates over the provenance of some historic cars were scary.

Leaving the Mersey behind I head uphill into the rabbit warren of narrow streets to the south of the city centre in search of the backstreet clubs where the Beatles played some of their earliest gigs. Squeezing the Aston down bustling Slater Street I find The Jacaranda - which was owned by their first manager, Allan Williams - and a mob of admirers for the car. Perched on the pavement outside the club today, the DB6 draws praise from everyone who passes. They're wowed by its glassy-perfect paintwork and sparkling chrome, and once they've done a quick walkaround to check out the badges, excited that it's an Aston. 'Great car mate,' they say. 'Used to be Paul McCartney's,' I reply. 'Really? Sound.'

'There's something about this car and its former owner that draws respect, not jealousy'

There's something about this car and its former owner that draws respect rather than bitter jealousy. It looks expensively desirable, but does without the exaggerated proportions of contemporary sports cars. Its rounded snout with that distinctive grille is proud without being arrogant, the bonnet

is no longer than it needs to be to house the engine and the roofline that sweeps down to the upturned tail is functional, not extravagant. Although the DB6 lost some of the purity of the original DB4, it wears its extra length and rear passenger accommodation well. It's around those rear side windows that the redesign starts to look unresolved, the truncated shape of the glass exaggerating the tail-heavy shape. The DB6 was supposed to be a stopgap model, but delays with its William Towns-designed replacement meant that nearly 1700 were built before the DBS V8 finally replaced it, making it the most successful Aston Martin until the DB7 came along in the Nineties.

The DB6 was such a part of McCartney's life that he still owned it when the Beatles split in 1970 - finally selling it to estate agent Nicholas Defries in 1972. The car has since been extensively restored by Aston Martin Lagonda in the Works Service workshops.

Back in 1968 McCartney had the car repainted before driving it for another four years. Most people in his position would surely have traded it in for a new one. Maybe he felt a sense of loyalty to the car that had been the vehicle for his most successful song. Or perhaps he enjoyed the reassuring calm of the cabin and the measured tone of the engine when everything else in his life was changing so fast.

Thanks to: *Keith Riddington and Peter Panarisi at Aston Martin Lagonda; Ross Monteith at Stratstone of Wilmslow; Liverpool Maritime Museum; Richard Ellis*

CARS OF THE BEATLES



John Lennon's Mercedes-Benz 600
Lennon owned this Pullman limousine in 1970, selling it to George Harrison in 1973. He crashed an Austin Maxi in 1970, and erected it in his garden.



John Lennon's Rolls-Royce
Lennon's 1965 Rolls-Royce Phantom V was black when he bought it. Having it painted by gypsy artists in 1967 created outrage.



Ringo Starr's Mini Cooper
Each Beatle had a modified Mini Cooper in the Sixties, but the best known is Ringo's. He owned from 1967-'69 and Radford converted it into a hatchback to carry his drums.



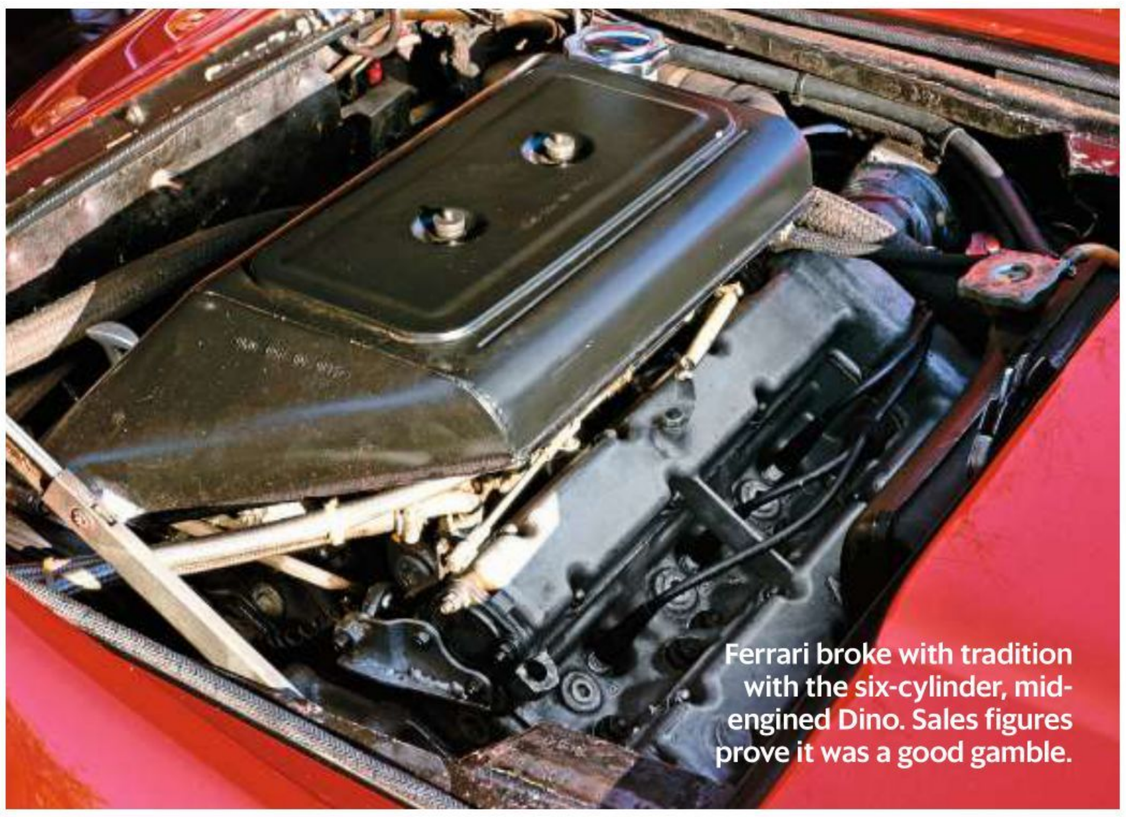
George Harrison's E-type
This 1964 Jaguar E-type was Gunmetal Metalic when George Harrison owned it in 1964, but it's now black. At various times he owned a Ford Anglia, Austin 1100 and a Ferrari 275 GTB.

THE ART OF PERSUASION

A svelte mid-engined Italian and a brawny front-engined English GT, pitted against each other by equally contrasting TV playboys *The Persuaders!* Which one convinces you?

Words GRAEME HURST Photography LYNDON McNEIL

We get just a little caught up in that competitive playboy spirit


Ferrari broke with tradition with the six-cylinder, mid-engined Dino. Sales figures prove it was a good gamble.


Aston's six-cylinder engine was rumoured to be more co-operative than the later V8 for TV work

Front or mid-engined - which handles better? It was a battle played out each week in the early Seventies in the TV show *The Persuaders!*, with this very Aston DBS and a Dino 246 just like the one we have to play with today. Ferrari and Aston Martin - two iconic brands in sports car history, each uniquely synonomous with their native country's automotive culture. In the late Sixties, each embarked on very different approaches to sports car design.

The Dino was launched in 1967, and although never officially badged as a Ferrari, it was the company's first mid-engined production model. It features a beautifully sculpted body and a transversely-mounted Fiat-built V6 engine, the latter being a radical departure for Enzo Ferrari, who viewed anything with less than 12 cylinders with disdain. The DBS, on the other hand, introduced in the same year, was more an evolution of a trusted, orthodox layout that served the Touring-styled DB series so successfully for a decade. Although the outgoing DB6's chassis was fundamentally right, Aston Martin felt it needed a new look, a more technically advanced engine and revised rear suspension. With Touring out of the car design picture, it tasked William Towns with the styling. Aston's engine genius Tadek Marek designed a new four-cam alloy V8, but development was delayed and the DBS took to the streets with the DB6's straight-six. In short, Aston capitalised on its heritage, while Ferrari broke with tradition. It was a gamble that clearly paid off - the Dino was hugely successful, selling more than 3800 cars in seven years. Aston, however, continued as a low-volume maker of expensive cars, enduring a tenuous existence until a buy-out by Ford in 1994.

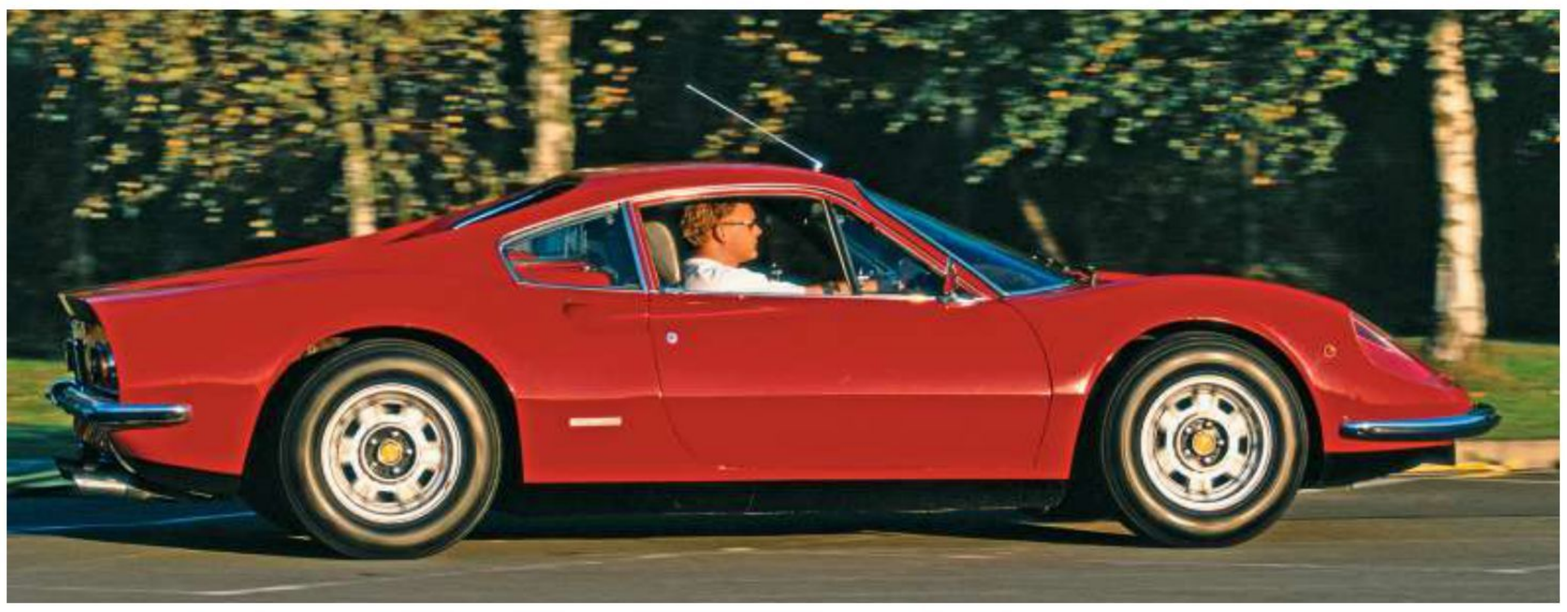
When new, the two cars represented exciting and contrasting automotive experiences. Their cultural symbolism led to starring roles with equally contrasting characters in the Seventies television



1970 Aston Martin DBS

Engine 3995cc, in-line six-cylinder, dohc, triple SU carburettors **Power and torque** 282bhp @ 5500rpm, 290lb ft @ 4500rpm **Transmission** Five-speed manual, rear-wheel drive **Steering** Rack-and-pinion, power-assisted **Suspension** Front: independent, double wishbones, coil springs, telescopic dampers. Rear: de Dion axle, radius arms, Watt linkage, coil springs, adjustable lever-arm dampers. **Brakes** Vented discs front and rear **Weight** 1589kg (3496lb) **Performance** Top speed: 142mph; 0-60mph: 8.6sec **Cost new** £5800 **Values now** £75,000-110,000





1972 Ferrari Dino 246 GT

Engine 2418cc, V6, dohc per bank, triple Weber 40DCN carburettors **Power and torque** 195bhp @ 7600rpm; 165lb ft @ 5500rpm **Transmission** Five-speed manual transaxle, rear-wheel drive **Steering** Rack-and-pinion **Suspension** Front and rear: double wishbones, coil springs, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bars **Brakes** Vented discs front and rear **Weight** 1183kg (2603lb) **Performance** Top speed: 148mph: 0-60mph: 7.1 sec **Cost new** £5485 **Values now** £180,000-275,000

‘The former James Bond star was impressed with the Aston Martin DBS, telling journalists in 1971, ‘As a bird-catcher, it’s a riot’

series *The Persuaders!* In the programme, two playboy heroes were blackmailed by a retired judge into bringing the elusive underworld to justice. The top-of-the-range Aston was fittingly the choice for Lord Brett Sinclair, a dashing young aristocrat, played by Roger Moore. The Dino was given to Sinclair’s unlikely partner Danny Wilde (played by Tony Curtis), a rags-to-riches working class Bronx boy.

The Bahama Yellow DBS featured here is the original car from the television series. Although badged a DBS V8, it’s actually a six-cylinder-car, with V8 wheels in place of the usual wires. Carl Seagar, the Aston Martin mechanic who maintained the car for the six months it was on location, says, ‘Aston had only just brought out the V8 and simply could not keep up with demand.’

The whereabouts of the original Dino from *The Persuaders!* are unknown, but this 1972 example is identical, apart from the lack of knock-off wheels. The sensuous shape was styled by Pininfarina and is widely regarded as the styling house’s finest work.

The first 150 Dinos were actually 206s, the smaller two-litre version with an all-aluminium body. The 246 GT (introduced in 1969) and targa-roofed GTS models (introduced in 1972) are 60mm longer, but the 206GT is more easily spotted by its exposed fuel filler cap.

When it comes to shape, the DBS is surely the curvaceous Dino’s antithesis. From the front, the Aston appears wide and brutish, but move your eyes along its flanks and its crisply-edged lines evolve into an elegant coupé with a tightly-drawn rear. The avant-garde design lasted for two decades, only ending with the introduction of the Virage in 1988. Actor Moore was impressed with its ability to attract the opposite sex, telling *Car* in 1971, ‘As a bird-catcher, It’s a riot.’

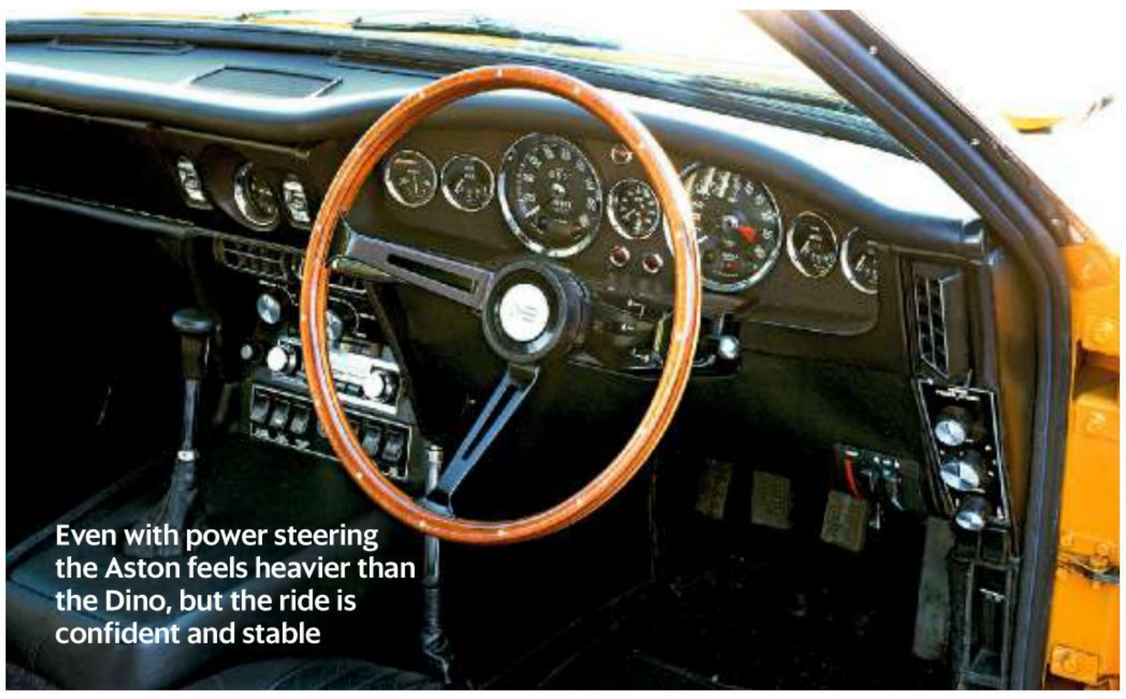
Styling considerations aside, these cars offer very different driving experiences, thanks to their layouts. Suspension expert Rhoddy Harvey-Bailey explains, ‘On paper, the mid-engined layout looks the better of the two because the weight distribution is more even. You also get inherently good turn-in with little to no roll, thanks to the lower inertia of the lighter front.’ But Harvey-Bailey says that it can be very different in practice, ‘A lot will depend on how the car is set up. Although the suspension of a front-engined car has to work harder to cope with the change in inertia, it will typically have better traction at the rear.’ Once a mid-engined car is into a corner, the shift in weight bias to the rear can actually work against it, inducing oversteer, he adds.

The design of the suspension will also affect the experience, ‘With the DBS, its de Dion rear axle gives exceptionally good roadholding and it will take a really good independent suspension to improve on it.’ As will the weight and wheelbase dimensions. The Aston is more than 400kg heavier, while the petite Dino’s wheelbase is 321mm shorter. A shorter wheelbase gives an increased polar moment of inertia, says Harvey-Bailey. That’s essentially a measure of a car’s ability to change direction, although a car with a high polar movement will have a greater tendency to spin if the move is too sharp.

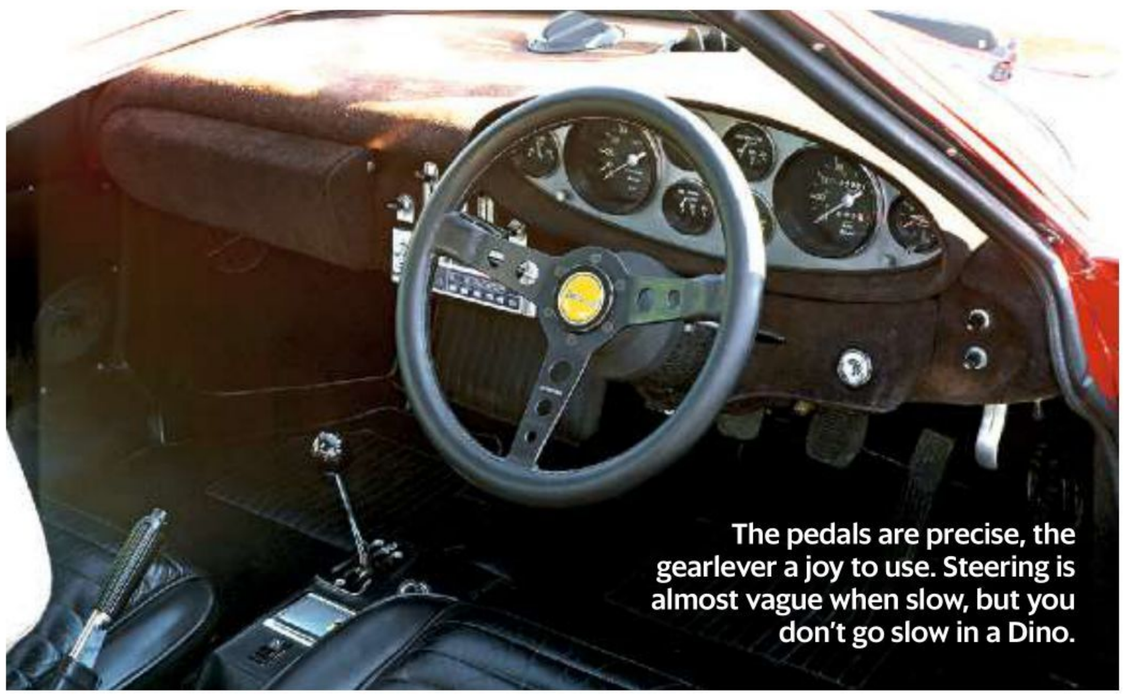
You only have to look at Overture, the first episode of *The Persuaders!*, to get a feel for what he’s talking about. In the opening scene, Sinclair and Wilde dice along the Grand Corniche, on their way to a mystery rendezvous at Monte Carlo’s Hotel de Paris. Pulling away from the lights, the Dino surges ahead, but the Aston, hunched down under full acceleration, ultimately outruns it.



Suave Brit or sexy Italian? Both are wearing TV make-up – the Aston's V8 badge doesn't match its six-cylinder engine and the Dino never officially had a Ferrari badge



Even with power steering the Aston feels heavier than the Dino, but the ride is confident and stable



The pedals are precise, the gearlever a joy to use. Steering is almost vague when slow, but you don't go slow in a Dino.

Today, in a world where many modern cars handle with similar predictability, the differences between these two are even more startling. Even with power steering and a large, thin wood-rimmed wheel, the DBS feels far heavier, but more surefooted than the Dino. The floor-mounted pedals amplify the effect, requiring a firm shove, and you need a strong, deft hand for the heavy ZF five-speed gearbox.

The Dino is the opposite, with light, precise pedals and a delicious-to-use gated gearlever, with characteristic dog-leg first gear. Where it really surprises is how the driving experience evolves. At low speed, the steering is heavy and almost vague. But floor the throttle and things immediately tighten up. As the tachometer spins around, the engine makes a scintillating growl and the steering feels instantly precise and light. It takes only a twitch of the wheel to enter a corner and the car feels totally balanced the whole way through. But with just 195bhp, you sense it doesn't really have the power to highlight the mid-engined layout's shortcomings.

Under acceleration, the Aston lacks the Dino's sudden sharpness and there's a brief lag in turn-in at speed, but once into the corner, the car's wide stance and tyres keep things feeling controlled. Accelerate out and you feel the tractive advantage of the front-engined layout as the rear wheels power it through.

The Dino, to quote Harvey-Bailey, feels 'the more pointable of the two', but a well-sorted DBS ultimately gives you the confidence to prove your point when persuading your mates down the pub.

Thanks to *Mike Sanders, Pare Ferme (01784 470002, parc-terme.co.uk), Rhoddy Harvey-Bailey, Jaz Wiseman, itc-classics.com)*

Buying and owning an Aston Martin DBS



Lifelong *The Persuaders!* fan Mike Sanders bought this original film car in 1994, following enquiries through the programme's appreciation society. Says Sanders, 'After 25 years of wear and tear, it needed cosmetic attention.' That turned into a complete restoration by Aston Martin's Works Service department. The DBS was reunited with Roger Moore and its original registration which, thanks to a continuity glitch, can be glimpsed at the end of the The Gold Napoleon episode.

Prices for DBSs vary, ranging from £32,500 for an automatic in need of body and mechanical attention to £140,000 for a manual Vantage in top condition.

Running costs can be reasonable, but these cars can be extremely expensive to restore, especially given their increasing desirability.

Sanders concurs, admitting with a rueful grin, 'Buying the car turned out to be just the deposit!'

Buying and owning a Ferrari Dino



'The Dino's a lot easier to drive than many people often imagine,' says Moir. 'It's as happy trundling around town as it is stretching its legs out on the motorway.'

Body condition is critical, says specialist Roger Collingwood, 'Corrosion is any Sixities Ferrari's biggest enemy, but new Dinos actually started to rust while they were sitting in the showrooms.'

The curvaceous nature of its panels – and the cost of replacements – makes body restoration expensive and engines typically last no more than 50,000-60,000 miles between rebuilds, although some parts are shared with the Fiat Dino.

Prices have positively exploded in the last ten years or so. Back in 2006, you could have bagged a 246 GT for less than £80,000, but prices today range from £275,000 for a top condition 246 GT to £475,000 for a concours 206 GT.

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ASTON MARTIN



It's normal, when considering Aston Martin cars, to separate the post-war six-cylinder cars from the V8s that eventually succeeded them. It seemed more logical to us, however, to consider the DBS and the DBSV8 together, and not just because it takes some knowledge to tell them apart by their appearance. The fact is that they were built alongside each other for some years, so customers had to choose between them then. Furthermore, together they represent a major transition period in Aston Martin's history.

Back in the mid-Sixties, Aston Martin had already enjoyed many decades at the top of the automotive tree in terms of reputation and success. The 1959 win at Le Mans was still fresh in the minds of enthusiasts and the fact that James Bond drove an Aston Martin had brought unbelievable worldwide fame to this specialist manufacturer in Newport Pagnell. Apparently just a bit of fun, the James Bond link was far more important than is generally realised but it was the incredible tenacity and flair of those who worked there that really saw Aston Martin through many a dark year. Fading fame in the movies and a grand past in motor racing would not have been enough to carry the marque through the Seventies. At the factory in the mid-Sixties it had worked out, to the chagrin of some traditionalists, that to survive after the DB6 it would have to make bigger and more luxurious cars - more power and torque would be needed, as its traditional straight-six engine was approaching the end of its development. It was vitally important to get the new model right; more so than anybody realised at the time, because tough days for the entire motor industry were just around the corner.

A special two-seater version of the DB6, with a fast hatchback body by Touring, appeared at the 1966 Paris Motor Show and was said to be intended for serious production, but it proved to

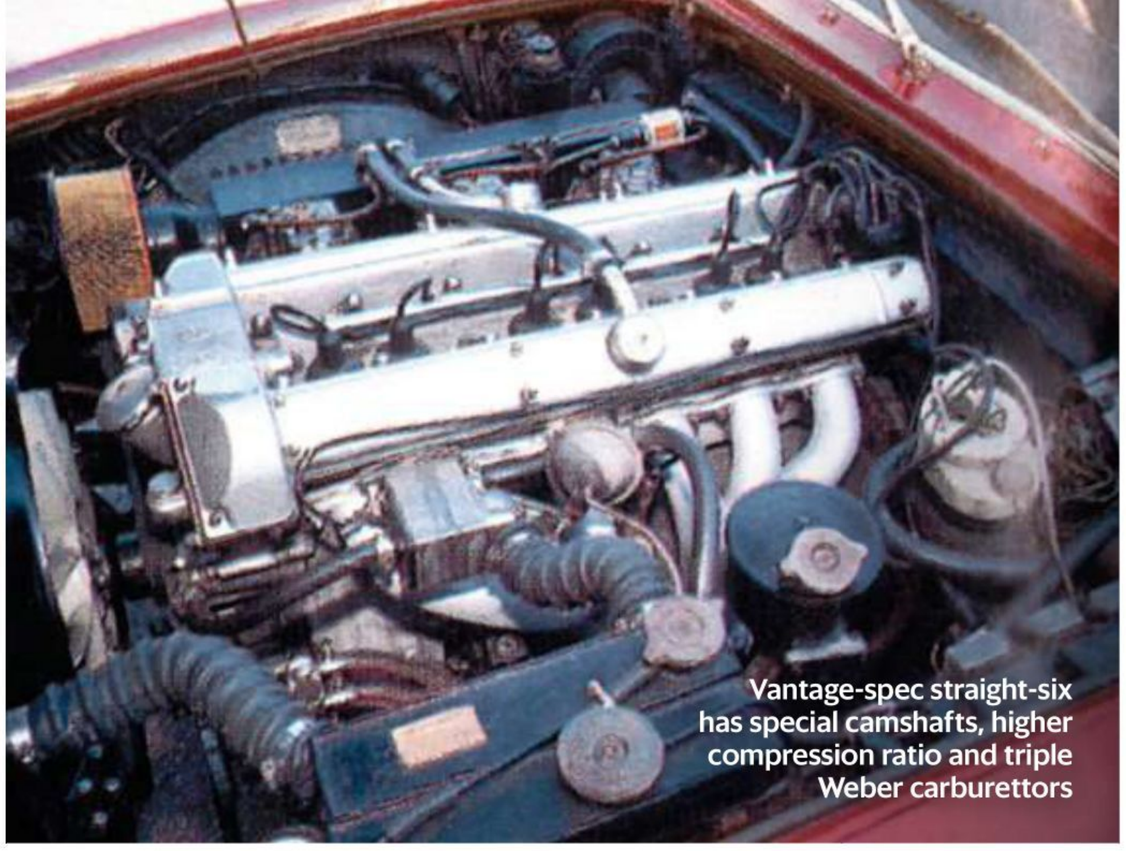
DBS & DBS V8

Aston Martin overcame all manner of adversity to produce a car for the Seventies – the DBS V8 remains one of the great classics of all time, says Tony Dron

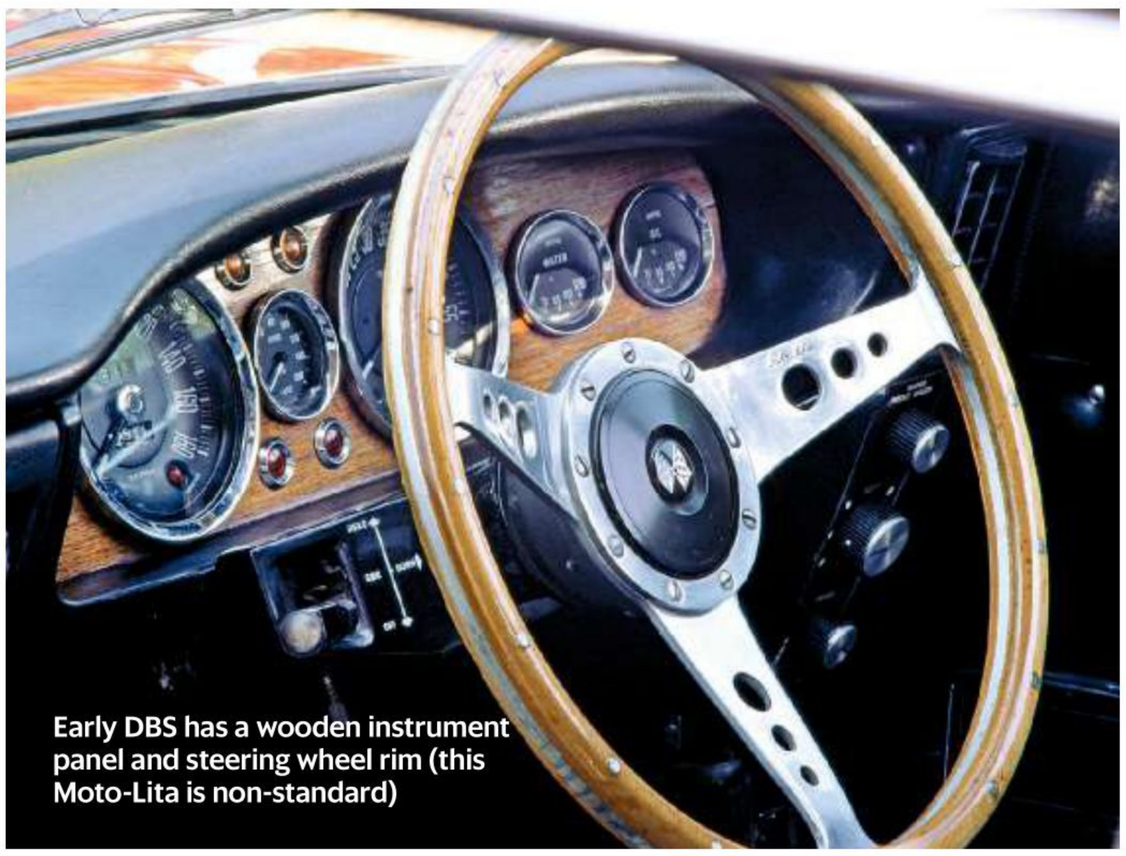


be a false trail. Aston Martin's future was staked on a wider four-seater, which appeared in interim form as the production DBS in 1967. It took a further two years to develop the new V8 engine originally intended for it. The mighty DBS V8 set a pattern for Aston Martin that has continued to this day. The DB7 represents the first real departure from an enduring theme laid down nearly 30 years ago when Sir David Brown still owned the company.

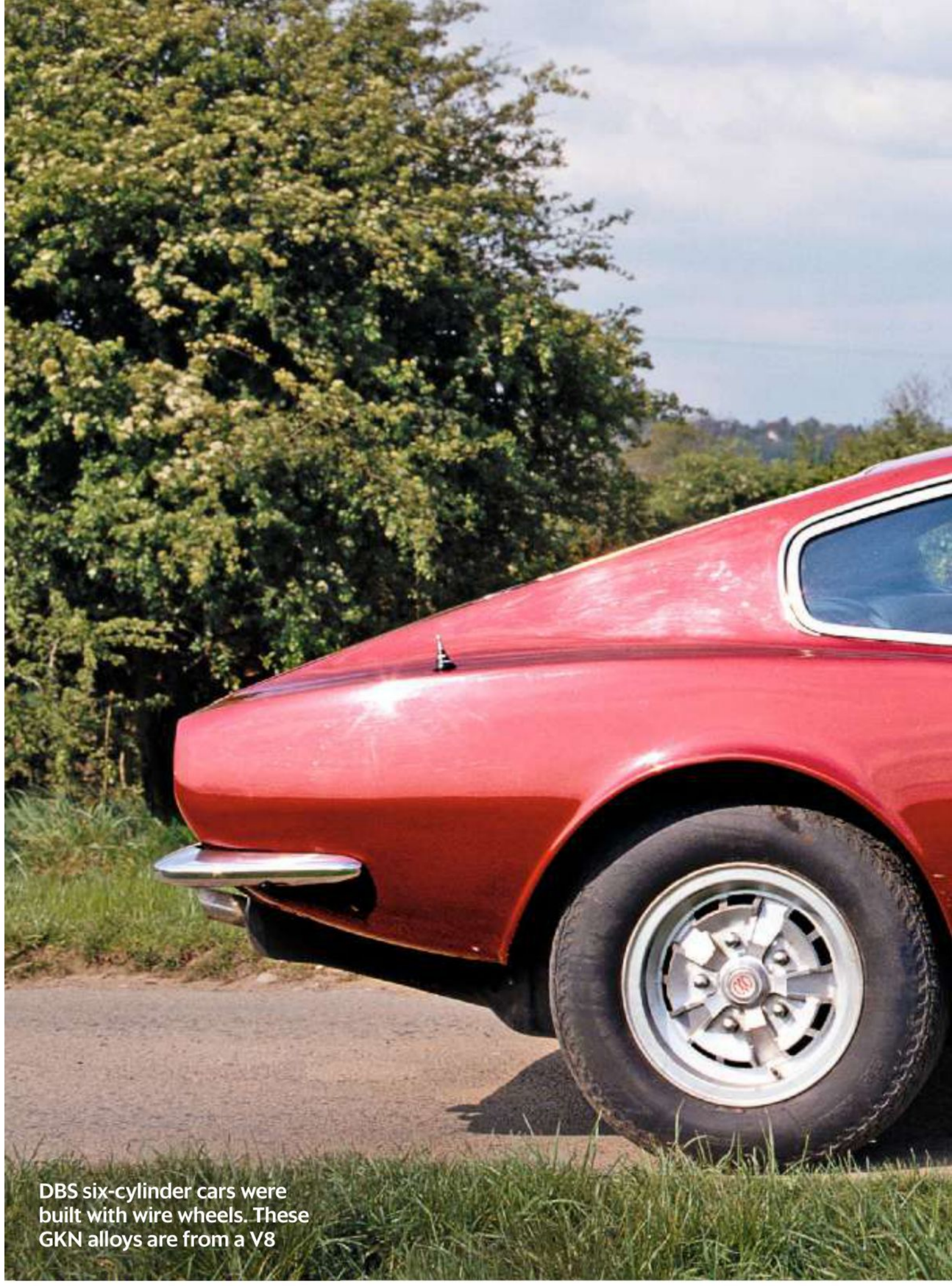
Perhaps the most outstanding of its many virtues has always been the superb power steering of the DBS range - while it took all the unnecessary effort out of turning the wheel, it would be easy not to spot it unless you had been told that the system was power-assisted. Back in the late Sixties, Aston Martin was way ahead of the rest in this department. As well as that, all the major controls were excellent and the driving position was near-perfect. A DBS or DBS V8 may be rather too wide for rushing around the lanes, yet on the open road, with fast bends, these are truly magnificent machines. But it's worth noting that *Motor* got an overall fuel consumption figure of 10.9mpg in the 1968 DBS Vantage Road Test. Even at a steady 65mph, its most economical cruising speed, it could manage only 18mpg, so the realistic range between tank fillings is unlikely to exceed 250 miles. Take a gulp and read on - that DBS recorded better braking figures in the wet than many cars could manage on a dry road in those days. The handling of these Astons really is something to enthuse about, too. This is what *Motor*'s testers said in 1968, 'A lot of our mileage was on wet roads but this didn't spoil our enjoyment of the car at all... the high cornering powers are reduced but the car's poise, balance and control are so good that you can flip the back end out and hold it there on a long corner with superb precision, balancing the power-provoked wayward tail with the steering. It is not a technique that every owner will want to indulge in, or one that can be practised very often, as a



Vantage-spec straight-six has special camshafts, higher compression ratio and triple Weber carburettors



Early DBS has a wooden instrument panel and steering wheel rim (this Moto-Lita is non-standard)



DBS six-cylinder cars were built with wire wheels. These GKN alloys are from a V8

'The DBS outperformed such rivals as the Jaguar E-type 2+2, Porsche 911 and Lotus Elan +2 in a *Motor* road-test'

sideways DBS occupies a lot of road. But to be able to drive like this in a car of such power is a cogent measure of its roadability.'

If you believe everything that's been written in books since those days, it would be easy to be persuaded that the DBS was a lethargic performer yet, looking at *Motor*'s Road Test Summary in the same issue in which the original DBS Vantage test was printed, the plain fact is that the Aston outperformed such rivals as the Jaguar E-type 2+2, Porsche 911 and Lotus Elan +2. Only two cars listed there had recorded a higher top speed and even then not by much - they were the 7-litre Chevrolet Corvette Stingray and, yes, the old DB6 Vantage. That's the point - for sure, the DBS was slower than the DB6 but to dub it sluggish is ludicrous. The standard engine, mated to an automatic gearbox, was probably no ball of fire but a Vantage with manual transmission remains a different story. Slow it ain't, not with 0-60mph in 7.1 seconds, 0-100mph in 18 and a top speed of 141.5mph - these were fair figures, recorded by *Motor* when the car was new.

To confirm my contrary notion about the performance of the DBS, I was lucky enough to get behind the wheel of Tom Heesom's DBS Vantage while it was in for some work at Richard Williams' company in Cobham. I can understand why some prefer a DB6, or a 5 or a 4; I can also understand entirely the appeal of the V8 in the bigger body of the DBS for which it was designed, but the original DBS does have termendous charm. Despite its bulk it feels light, responsive and very controllable, the straight six makes a marvellous sound, the brakes have superb feel; in short, to use a saying from a later age, it is extraordinarily user-friendly. It must be admitted that the shape was still not perfected: see an early DBS on the motorway, even at 70mph, and you will notice a nose-up stance thanks to aerodynamic lift. When the DBS V8 came the package was completed, including a new front spoiler that kept the DBS range at the right ride height when cruising fast. The V8 was the engine that had been designed for the new generation of bigger, more luxurious Aston Martins. It had been a long time coming but it restored true supercar performance to the marque - 0-60mph in 5.9 seconds, 0-100mph in 13.8 seconds, a genuine top speed of 160.1mph (I was in that car during the test so I know it was true) Here was a car that left the DB6, and all lesser cars, standing.

Despite being a little heavier than the DBS (34.5cwt against 33.8cwt as measured by *Motor*), the DBSV8 was significantly better on fuel consumption - back in 1971 our figure over 1000 miles in England was 14.7mpg. OK, you still need to be rich to drive one but that's a whole lot better than the 10.9mpg of the DBS. The dog-leg first gear and a surprising paucity of torque



at very low revs made driving these early V8s in traffic slightly harder work than it should have been, but any enthusiast soon forgot about that trifling problem. One fact must be stressed - when it comes down to it, the experts all say that once you have driven a DBS V8, you won't want to go back to a DBS. The extra response from the V8 is undeniably rather addictive.

Strictly speaking, the car that was designed was the DBS V8 - the DBS was launched a little earlier with the old six-cylinder engine because the V8 wasn't ready for production. The design objective for the new model was to satisfy the perceived demands of future customers for a bigger, more luxurious Aston Martin without any sacrifice in performance or handling. There has never been any doubt that this was achieved. For a small company to get such a major project right is the hallmark of a true thoroughbred manufacturer. To the outside world Aston Martin had simply produced its grandest tourer yet but the process of getting to that point had involved some compromise, some agonising but ultimately successful engineering development and the odd false start.

A 'DBS' was displayed at the Paris Show in 1966. *Motor*'s team returned from France and wrote about 'Aston Martin's new lightweight two-seater coupé DBS with Superleggera Touring bodywork, claimed to do nearly 170mph. The engine is 2.5in lower and 8.5in further back in a modified DB6 chassis and has allowed a much lower roofline and consequently less weight and better aerodynamics. The 4-litre Vantage engine has been boosted to 325bhp (net) at 5750rpm to make it one of the fastest production cars in the world - serious production is Aston Martin's aim. It is strictly a two-seater with a lift-up fastback tailgate opening on to a vast luggage platform beneath which lies a tool tray and petrol tank. A "champagne" locker behind the front seat is paired with the battery locker on the other side. A highly sophisticated ventilation system inside gives four separate sources of air besides open (electric) windows. It will cost approximately £6450 yet Aston Martin were certainly not short of customers.'

There seems no reason to doubt that Aston Martin did indeed aim for serious production with this car but only two prototypes were built, for motor show purposes - significantly, they were fitted with de Dion rear suspension rather than the live axle

Motor's opinions of the DBS

1968: 'In the flesh it is a remarkably clean piece of styling, designed at home too... as much a comfortable town carriage as a driver's car... it feels a larger car than the DB6 ... a little slower than the DB6... That one can treat 33cwt of Aston with most of one's Mini-minded abandon is quite a tribute...'

Original DBS Vantage Road Test, 1968: 'S for "superb". Connoisseur's four-seater GT devoid of fundamental faults; great performance and handling despite immense'weight; luxurious ride and front seating; small boot; rather noisy; defects in heating and switchgear ... expensive to run.'

Of the DBS V8 in 1971: ' ... few of us would not be seduced by the tremendous performance and generally impeccable road manners had we the £7501 needed ... savage acceleration always on tap ... able to cruise at 130-150mph without any fuss, strain or drama .. . Our enthusiasm for the handling and road holding of the original DBS was so lyrical as to leave little room for further praise ... Nevertheless such praise is due.'



‘The early foray with the Lola Aston-Martins at Le Mans exposed basic weaknesses in the original V8 design’

traditionally used in production Aston Martins. Through its racing activities, the company had gained extensive experience of the de Dion arrangement - at last it was coming to the road cars, including the true production DBS. The unequal-length wishbone front suspension was derived from that of the DB4.

It does seem strange that they should have tested the water with this exotic Touring two-seater when those in charge at Newport Pagnell would appear to have concluded already that what they needed was a larger four-seater. The AMOC Register states that only limited production was ever envisaged but any plans to put the Touring ‘DBS’ into production were killed by international economic problems and the fact that Touring itself was tottering financially.

Back in England, the irrepressible talent of new recruit William Towns was coming to the fore at the factory and it was his design for a larger model that would be adopted. The plan was to devise a much larger car but offer a shorter version of it, still with four seats, as the ultimate sporting Aston Martin. In the end it was this shorter version that would appear in the metal as the production DBS and DBS V8.

Like the DB6, the DBS had a fabricated sheet-steel platform chassis but this was 4.5in wider and 1in longer than that of the DB6. The method of construction was strong but heavier than the Italian Superleggera system. Externally, the aluminium body was 6in wider than that of the DB6 but a little lower and shorter. One legend states that the DBS was only made that wide because a mistake was made in the tooling and they were unable to correct it, but the story hardly has the ring of truth.

The DBS went into production in late 1967, to almost universal acclaim. Some observers, for reasons that I have never understood, questioned the use of twin headlights; a few more noted that it was a bit slower han a DB6 but nobody could deny that it was an outstandingly beautiful, modern car. Most would agree that this judgement has stood the test of time.

Meanwhile, work continued in secret on the redesign of the lightweight V8 engine, following its very public failures at Le Mans in 1967. Investigation revealed that the internal weaknesses were even more serious than had been feared at first - it took another couple of years to get it right for production. But get it right Aston Martin did - this oversquare (100mm bore/85mm stroke) 90°, 5340cc, fuel-injected V8 was reliable and it gave the DBS chassis and body the performance intended in the original design. Its power output was quite justifiably not proclaimed in those days of dishonest gross figure hype by rival manufacturers but it was almost certainly up to 340bhp.



Front spoiler and GKN alloys should distinguish a V8, but many a DBS/6 had them fitted



Ventilation on later V8 models was an improvement over the earlier DBS



Original 1969-1972 DBS V8 has Bosch injection; later models used Weber carburettors

Other differences in design and specification between the DBS and DBS V8 included a revised five-speed gearbox, different spring rates, plus bigger, ventilated disc brakes and the factory's own design of cast alloy wheels in place of the DBS's wire wheels. As mentioned earlier, the deeper front spoiler came in with the DBS V8, too, correcting the nose-up attitude of the car at speed.

A let-down was the ventilation system - if those 1966 Touring show cars really did have 'a highly sophisticated ventilation system inside' it certainly did not reach the early DBS and DBS V8 production models. It wasn't until 1972 when the revised version with two headlights appeared that this was put right.

The commitment of the factory and its recognised distributors to its older cars, plus the existence of many first-class specialists who work solely on Aston Martins, means that parts availability and access to service are superb. If looked after properly, a sound DBS or DBS V8 should give many thousands of miles of trouble-free motoring. The straight-six engine is renowned for its strength and reliability and, by the time the V8 went into production, it, too, had been developed into a sound unit. That early foray to Le Mans with the Lola-Aston Martins may have seemed a disaster at the time but it proved the value of racing by exposing basic weaknesses in the original V8 design. The serious rethink that followed the debacle resulted in a production engine that immediately gained a good reputation for staying together while delivering excellent performance.

But what about specific points to look out for? The optional AE Brico fuel injection was underdeveloped. According to specialist Richard Williams, 'It was basically an excellent system and, with what we know today, you could make it brilliant now. But most of those cars were converted to carburettors years ago.'

What about the reputation for front suspension wishbone ball joints coming apart when worn? Williams says that this is not a problem, because any driver would have to be stupid and insensitive enough to endure 5000 miles of serious clonking before it failed. 'They don't come adrift without warning,' he says.

A reputation for electrical problems is not entirely undeserved - the alternators were underspecified and there were other faults, such as failure of the wiring harness into the doors, as a result of fatigue. There are simple answers to these problems and they will have been applied to a well-maintained car long ago.

Best of the literature on the DBS

The first book to get is the *Register*, the Aston Martin Owners' Club's invaluable reference book, available to members. This gives reliable basic information on all models. For a fuller story try the two relevant volumes in the MRP Collector's Guide Series: *The Aston Martin and Lagonda, Vol 1: Six-cylinder DB models*, by Andrew Whyte and *The Aston Martin and Lagonda, Vol 2: V8 models from 1970* by Paul Chudecki.

Another book I like is the late Wilson McComb's *Aston Martin V8s*: this was published by Osprey in 1981 but a few copies are available from specialist booksellers.

A useful reference is Paul Woudenberg's *Illustrated Aston Martin Buyer's Guide*, a US softback from Motorbooks International. Frankly based on the Register but with added information from the author, it contains many black and white photographs.

More specialised information can be found in books by Michael Bowler, such as *Aston Martin V8* (Cadogan Publications). Perhaps the best road test compilation is *Road & Track on Aston Martin 1962-1990* from Brooklands Books.



Shallow rear window means marginal visibility, but the road ahead matters more

How many made?

Model	Numbers
DBS (1967-72)	790
DBS V8 (1970-72)	405
Total	1195

These figures, which include a couple of prototypes and one development car, have been verified by the Aston Martin Owners' Club, which is famous for its meticulous attention to detail in such matters as production figures and specifications. The Aston Martin Register, published by the Club and issued to members, is one of the most remarkable publications of its kind.

One DBS was built as an estate (the modifications were carried out outside the factory by FLM Panelcraft); all the rest were saloons. All DBS V8s were called saloons.

The DBSV8 was the start of the long series of V8-powered Aston Martins that continued until 2000.

Two prototype cars, with bodywork by Touring of Milan, were shown at Paris and Earls Court in 1966: they are not included in the production figures given above. The designation 'DBS' was given to them – then, because of the expectation they had created in the marketplace, it was carried over to the new model that was launched in 1967.

But for this, it's entirely possible that the production DBS might have been given the possibly more appropriate DB7 model name, long before the 1994 DB7 finally appeared.

'For a small company to get such a major project right is the hallmark of a thoroughbred manufacturer'

On the subject of doors. they were heavy and the stop links on the early models were not strong enough; again, a simple modification exists to correct that.

The early V8 was notorious for poor hot starting but addition of a hot start button, greater fuel pressure and changes to the collector pot and breather cured it. When new, the V8 had a reputation for eating spark plugs but with modern alternatives that's a thing of the past.

After some years the engine mountings of both models are likely to start cracking. They should be replaced with more durable modern fittings.

Any car still on the Armstrong Selectaride system is likely to need sorting out fairly regularly in that area. It can be done but most examples have been converted to Koni telescopic dampers at some time.

Aston Martins today are much better built than the cars of the financially troubled early Seventies - little things like doorlock mechanisms were not very well sorted out in those days, so steady improvement for the older cars is therefore recommended. A restored car should emerge rather better than it was when new and a well-maintained example will have had the various necessary improvements carried out on it over the years.

In short, there are no real problems. Some DIY work can be carried out but most owners will prefer to rely on experts who have acquired all the necessary knowledge. For example, don't fiddle with the metering unit on a fuel-injected car unless you really know what you're doing, because there is a risk of damage. It all comes down to being able to afford to buy and maintain it properly. You will need to be fairly wealthy to pay the fuel bills, too.

There are some things you can check first yourself, such as searching for corrosion in likely spots such as sills and wheelarches. Go through the service history carefully to see that the car has been properly cared for; these documents will also tell you who has had it in recently.

Look at the general condition of the car. On a V8, leakage around the base of the cylinders is the mark of O-ring failure and a smoky exhaust suggests valve guide wear. These are not desperately serious problems but they can be revealing indicators of the overall level of care that has been given to the car.

If you have trouble finding a good early car, you could consider a later example. The Aston Martin Vantage of 1972 was a revised DBS, available until mid- 1973, when six-cylinder production came to an end.

Last and certainly not least, we often make a point of stressing to potential buyers of a model that it's worth joining the relevant club before acquiring a car - a few pounds spent on a subscription and a bit of time getting to know existing owners might save you a fortune. It would be madness to own an old Aston Martin and not belong to the club.

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