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VANTAGE

ISSUE 15 | AUTUMN 2016

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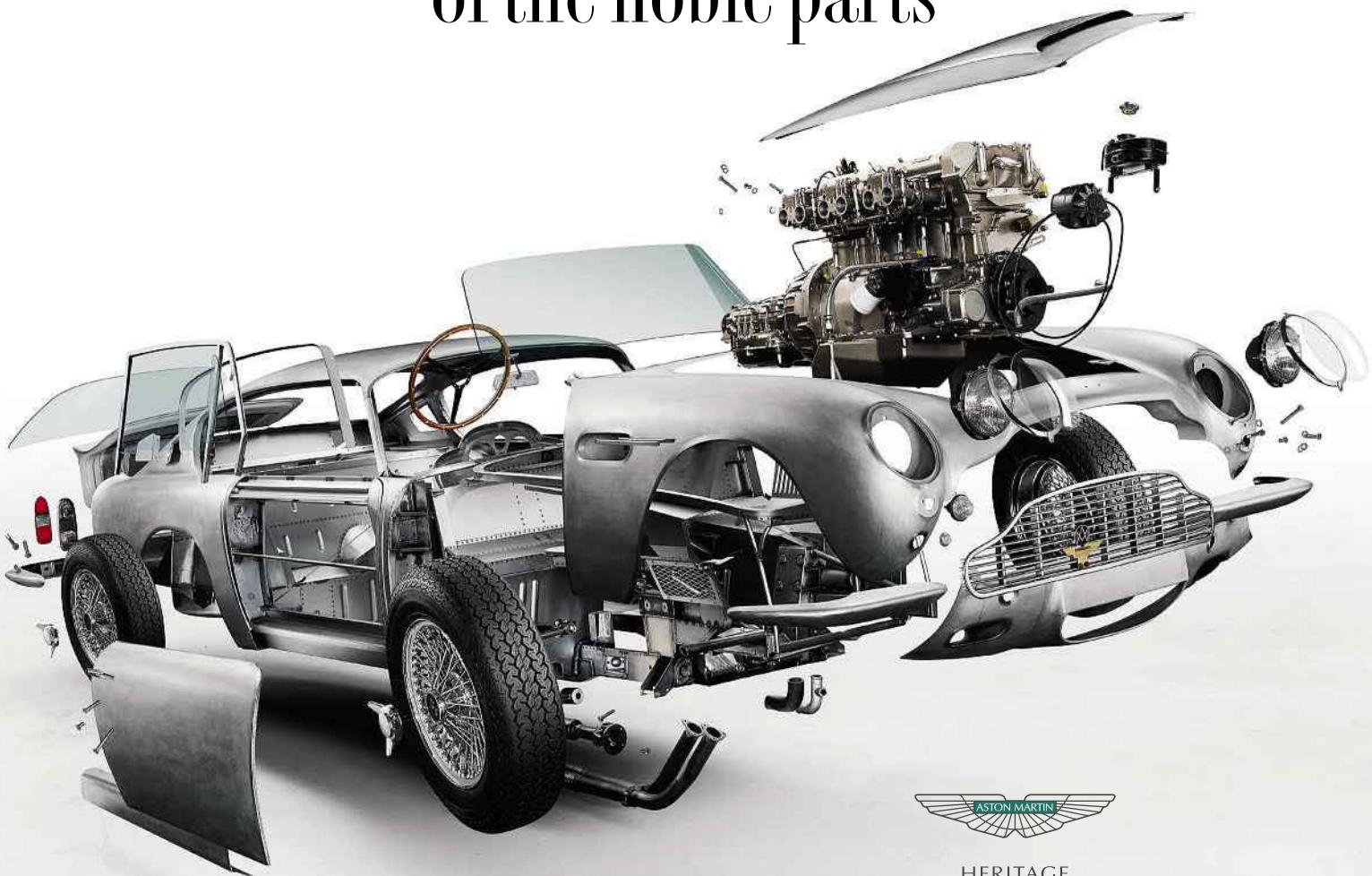
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NOBLEHOUSE
EXCLUSIVE CARS

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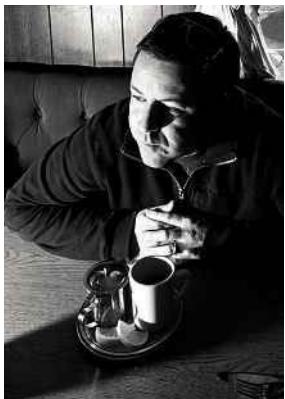
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A selection of some of the fantastic Aston Martins sold by Nicholas Mee & Company so far in 2016.

Viewpoint

Aston's brave new world



SO THE DB11 is the world-beater we all hoped it would be. Of course, this shouldn't have come as too great a shock. Not least because all the sneak peeks and early access to development prototypes suggested Aston Martin was on to a winner. Yet behind the anticipation and cautious optimism lurked the certain knowledge that after such an extended period of stasis with its mainstream models, DB11 had to be good. In truth, it had to be great.

Whether DB11 proves to be a more pivotal car than DB7 or DB9 – models that respectively saved the company from certain extinction and propelled it from quaint maker of hand-built sports cars to global automotive brand – remains to be seen. What's crystal-clear is that DB11 offers something that's not only distinct from – and better than – any other sporting luxury GT currently on sale, but a DB that's different in look, character and intent from its immediate predecessor. By the sounds of the swelling order-bank, those are compelling qualities for serial buyers and conquest customers alike.

None of this success would have been possible without the emotional and very necessary transition from Newport Pagnell's artisanal approach to the fearless modernity of the Gaydon era, yet it's thanks to Andy Palmer's tireless efforts in securing vital investment and a long-term technological partnership with Mercedes-AMG that Aston has been able to regroup and focus once more on the job of making fine automobiles.

What we're seeing now is an invigorated Aston Martin, buoyed with confidence to reinforce its values while shaping a bold new identity. One in which it can embark on projects as divergent as the AM-RB 001 and DBX that will stretch and test where the marque can go. And all because it knows the core models – that's to say DB11 and forthcoming Vantage replacement – are not just exceptional cars, but exceptional Aston Martins.

Richard Meaden, editor

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Bulletin

News, analysis and events

Thank Q for topless GT12

ONE-OFF ROADSTER VERSION OF 600BHP GT12 COUPE IS THE LATEST CREATION FROM THOSE CLEVER CHAPS AT Q BY ASTON MARTIN

WORDS RICHARD MEADEN | **PHOTOGRAPHY** ASTON MARTIN

THERE HAS ALWAYS been something bewitching about the V12 Vantage. Doubtless it has everything to do with squeezing the biggest engine into the smallest model. And, as we know, the GT12 is the maddest, baddest V12 Vantage ever built. So when Q by Aston Martin undertook a very (very) special one-off commission to create a roadster version of the GT12, is it any wonder we all went weak at the knees?

Just to recap, the GT12 coupé was inspired by Aston Martin Racing's V12-engined GT3 racer. It took the already mighty V12 Vantage S and honed it to the

keenest possible edge. Carbonfibre bodywork with bulges in all the right places stretched to conceal wide-track suspension, while an ultra-aggressive aerodynamic package pinned the lighter, more powerful machine to the road.

Beneath the extensively vented bonnet sat a 600bhp 'AM57' version of the 5.9-litre V12 – the most powerful ever fitted to a Vantage. The most vocal, too, thanks to a centre-exit titanium exhaust that saves weight, helps the V12 breathe more freely and gives the GT12 a voice from the gods. A limited run of 100 was built, with a starting price of £250,000,



'Q is now fully geared-up to deliver ambitious whole-car design and engineering projects'



**Left**

GT12 Roadster does without the coupé's huge rear wing and race-car-inspired livery but, with its full battalions of carbonfibre aero addenda, it hardly lacks presence

showmanship for simmering presence, the steely paint, black forged magnesium wheels and glossy unpainted carbonfibre combining to fabulous effect.

To ensure it drives as well as it looks, the GT12 Roadster benefits from re-tuned suspension. And, as with the coupé, it features carbon-ceramic brakes and a seven-speed Sportshift III transmission. There's no word on performance figures, or indeed on price, though it's fair to assume that, as a one-off, the car cost considerably more than the £250k coupé. We'd guess at closer to double that. We'd also guess that budget wasn't an issue for the commissioning client.

When the car was first shown, at the Goodwood Festival of Speed in June, there was talk of one or two more GT12 Roadsters being built, with the full blessing of the original customer. That now seems to be unlikely, so we really are looking at a genuine one-off creation.

With the GT12 Roadster successfully completed, Q by Aston Martin is now fully geared-up to deliver ambitious whole-car design and engineering projects, meaning we can look forward to some more wonderful one-offs in the future. All of which raises the tantalising question: what would you commission?

though many cost closer to £300,000 thanks to heavy take-up of the extensive list of weight-saving options.

Unsurprisingly, the GT12 Roadster borrows heavily from its coupé counterpart. Starting with a V12 Vantage S Roadster, the combined teams of Q by Aston Martin and Aston Martin Advanced Operations worked closely with the customer to create their shared vision of

the ultimate open-top Vantage.

As you'd expect, it's an extremely thorough job, with the cohesion, quality and integrity of a series production car, even though it's the only one. Finished in Hammerhead Silver with a Bitter Chocolate interior, the GT12 Roadster is almost discreet for such a potent machine. Shorn of the GT12 coupé's wild rear wing and racing livery, it trades

Open tops, open chequebooks...

The GT12 Roadster isn't the first special-series Aston convertible. Here are four more to make you yearn for high net worth and sunny days



V12 Vantage Roadster (2012)

Hard to believe it took Aston five years to make the first roadster version of the scintillating V12 Vantage. Harder still that production was limited to just 101 cars. No wonder it sold out before the first car was delivered. And this despite being denied to key markets in the US, China and much of the Middle East. Detail chassis changes, plus that 510bhp V12 and a manual gearbox made it a delight to drive, while the temptation of expert embellishment by Q by Aston Martin maximised customer spend (starting price was £150k) and minimised the likelihood of any two cars being the same.

DB-AR1 (2003)

Designed by Zagato specifically for the sunshine states of California and Florida, the DB-AR1 was a coachbuilt version of the DB7 Vantage Volante and sister design to the DB7 Zagato. Despite no weather protection beyond a windscreens, all 99 DB-AR1s were snapped up by collectors. The vast majority did indeed go to the US, though eight left-hand-drive cars were sold in mainland Europe. A solitary right-hand-drive car sold to a lucky UK customer. Most came with a 420bhp version of the 5.9-litre V12 mated to a Touchtronic auto, but some had the 435bhp 'GT' engine and a six-speed manual 'box.

Vanquish Roadster by Zagato (2004)

First shown to the public in 2004 at the Geneva motor show, this beautiful one-off by Zagato never became a production reality. Though not due to lack of interest, for the combination of unchanged Vanquish front end with a rear treatment similar to that of the DB-AR1 (also designed by Zagato) was very appealing. In the end it was production issues associated with rollover safety and restoring strength to the Vanquish's complex aluminium and carbonfibre structure that stood in its way. The one-off V12 Vanquish Roadster still exists and is in private ownership, but is rarely seen in public.

CC100 Speedster Concept (2013)

Conceived to mark Aston Martin's centenary, just two of these fabulous machines were built. The first example (painted in Alloro Green with yellow accents) was kept by the factory, while the second car (also Alloro Green but with blue accents) is owned by one of Europe's most passionate Aston collectors. Both were based on the V12 Vantage S, complete with the latest-spec AM11 engine and seven-speed Sportshift III paddle-shift transmission. At the time it was the most ambitious project Q by Aston Martin had tackled. It remains one of the most spectacular Aston Martins ever made.

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The end of the Nine

AFTER ALMOST 13 YEARS, A 'LAST OF 9' LIMITED EDITION MARKS THE END OF DB9 PRODUCTION

WORDS RICHARD MEADEN

PHOTOGRAPHY ASTON MARTIN

YOU MIGHT HAVE expected the most successful DB model in Aston Martin's history to have received something of a send-off when it ceased production, but instead it received the most modest of farewells. In fact, the first anyone knew that the last DB9 had rolled off the production line (in July, if you're curious) was news that Q by Aston Martin had built a very special run of 'Last of 9' limited editions. No prizes for guessing how many were built.

This special run of cars comes at the end of a glittering production run of almost 13 years, during which time more than 16,500 examples have been built at Gaydon. Its evolution has been slow and sympathetic, as much due to the intrinsic rightness of the original design as Aston's subsequent slow-down during the recession of the late-noughties.

Ably fulfilling its role as the backbone of the brand, the DB9's job was to strike a fine balance between sporting prowess and effortless luxury. As we discovered in issue 14 when we compared early and late models, this has always resulted in a car that both connected and cosseted the driver. Later post-facelift cars offered greater performance thanks to the considerably more potent 540bhp 'AM11'

V12, but it was the original car that best exemplified the timeless blend of qualities displayed by the finest DB Astons.

All nine of the 'Last of 9' DB9s were built to identical specification; that's to say DB9 GT coupés finished in the rather fetching shade of Cumberland Grey (a true heritage shade and one shared with the Timothy Dalton-era V8 Bond car) with gloss black painted front splitter and rear diffuser, complemented by semi-aniline Bitter Chocolate leather with contrasting gold thread and welt detailing. In addition, 20in diamond-turned ten-spoke alloy wheels, commemorative 'Last of 9' motifs

and discreet Q by Aston Martin badges set this special edition apart without drawing too much attention to itself. Discreet to the end, then. Other extra equipment over the GT includes a reversing camera, Bang & Olufsen audio, and a 'Last of 9' luggage set.

The asking price was £199,900, and our guess is that all nine had names against them long before they were built. They were a mix of left- and right-hand drive and were sold in both Americas as well as Europe and the Asia Pacific market.

What of the DB9 Volante? Well, our sources tell us that it was to remain in production, albeit for only a few months beyond the coupé. Indeed, by the time you read this, the DB9 really could have been consigned to history, paving the way for the DB11 to carry Aston Martin to even greater success.

Above and below

Run of nine final limited-edition DB9s are all painted in Cumberland Grey and trimmed with Bitter Chocolate aniline leather





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Early Astons gather for Bertelli birthday

SOME OF THE OLDEST SURVIVING ASTON MARTINS HELPED MARK 40 YEARS OF ECURIE BERTELLI

WORDS STEPHEN ARCHER PHOTOGRAPHY KARY JIGGLE, EMMA KARWACKI



NOT MANY companies get to celebrate their 40th birthday, but pre-war Aston Martin specialist Ecurie Bertelli did just that in July, the occasion marked by a superb gathering of early Astons from all over the UK and further afield.

No fewer than 67 cars descended on the company's headquarters at Olney in Buckinghamshire to help celebrate the landmark, travelling from as far as Poland, Germany, Austria and Switzerland. Given that Aston Martin built just 599 cars between 1915 and 1939 - and only 450 are still in use - it was a remarkable turn-out.

The cars included such unique early-20s Astons as 'Buzzbox', 'Razor Blade' 'Monoposto' and A3, along with a number of team cars and the first and last Ulsters.

Guests included musician and racer Nick Mason, who came along with daughter Chloe in team cars LM17 and LM18 respectively. Nick was the co-founder of Morntane Engineering - which became Ecurie Bertelli - with the late Derrick Edwards.

Also in attendance was Andy Bell, who has been the company's driving force for most of its 40 years, though in recent times he has shared the running of the business with co-owner and managing director Robert Blakemore.

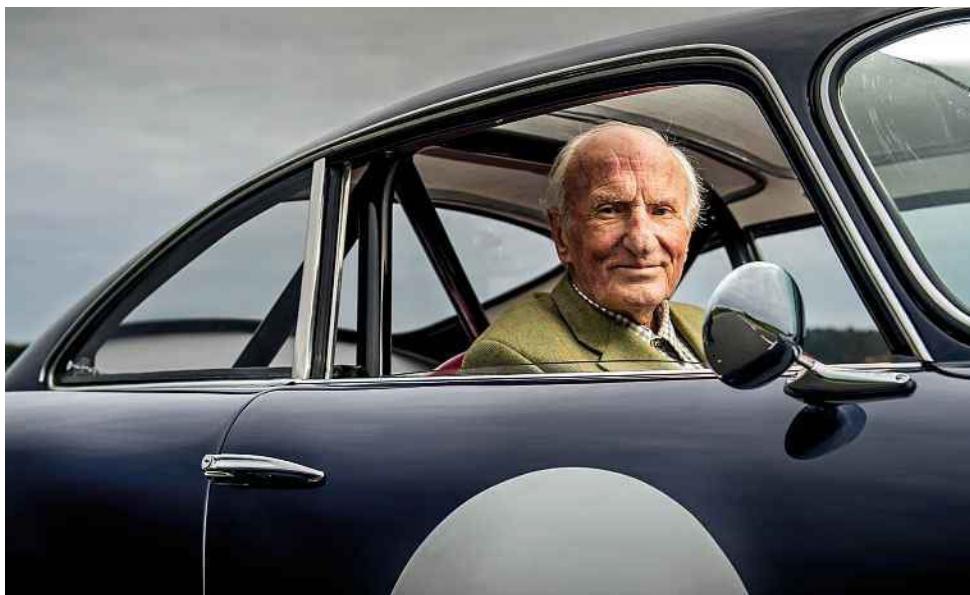
Robert commented: 'We wanted to do something special to celebrate our 40th year and we are absolutely delighted that people have travelled from far and wide to be here with us. It shows that the appetite

for using and enjoying pre-war Aston Martins is still very much alive and well.

'This is the largest gathering of pre-war Aston Martin cars for some considerable time. The diversity of models is perhaps unique.' He added that the company would be considering further gatherings where owners could get together and share their enthusiasm.

Tours of the workshops, showroom and the new engine shop were a popular feature of the day. At lunchtime, most of the cars headed off on a well-organised road rally across Buckinghamshire to Claydon House, a fine National Trust property and the perfect location for a relaxed afternoon in the company of so many fine pre-war Aston Martins.





Jack Sears 1930-2016

BRITISH TOURING CAR CHAMPION AND GT RACING PIONEER, 'GENTLEMAN JACK' SEARS WAS HIGHLY REGARDED BOTH AS A DRIVER AND AS A MAN

WORDS STEPHEN ARCHER

PORTRAIT ANDY MORGAN

IT WAS WITH much sadness that we learned of the death in August of Jack Sears at the age of 86. Having reunited Jack with his ex-Tommy Sopwith DB4 GT just ten months ago (issue 13) the news of his passing was especially affecting.

Jack will forever be known as the first winner of the British Touring Car Championship in 1958, but the manner of his victory was extraordinary, as he told me when we met at Snetterton.

Sears, in an Austin 105, had the same number of points as Tommy Sopwith in his Jaguar at the end of the season. So after the final round it was decreed that the title would be decided by a two-man shootout at Brands Hatch: two five-lap sprints in two identical Riley 1.5s.

'Tommy won the first race, and then we swapped cars in the pouring rain on the start-line for the second race,' Sears recalled last year. 'I won the second, so it

was down to how much by. They added the race times together and I ended up winning the championship by 1.6 seconds.' Jack went on to race Jaguars in the BTCC and won the championship again in 1963 in the huge Ford Galaxie.

Meanwhile, in 1960 his friend and former adversary Tommy Sopwith ran Jack in the Equipe Endeavour DB4 GT, in which he scored many fine wins.

Jack was born into a successful shoe-making family, though in later life he turned to farming in Norfolk. His race debut was in an MG TC in a BARC meeting at Goodwood, and he went on to rally and sprint as well as race, mostly in sports cars. He always cut a very stylish figure at race tracks, and was renowned for his impeccable manners and good humour.

In the 1963 Le Mans 24 Hours he won his class and took 5th overall in a Ferrari 330 LMB shared with fellow Brit Mike Salmon. He also raced AC Cobras for John Willment. Ahead of the 1964 Le Mans 24 Hours, he famously tested the Cobra Daytona Coupé to 185mph on the M1.

His racing career ended at 35, following a serious accident in a Lotus 40 at Silverstone. Later he was a president of the BRDC and gave his name to the trophy for rookie drivers in the BTCC.

A charming and talented man, a true gentleman, he will be greatly missed.



IN BRIEF



LOOKS LIKE A WINNER

The DB11 is already an award-winner, with a top prize in the prestigious Car Design Awards, presented at the Salone dell'Auto Torino in Italy. The DB11 was named Production Car of the Year by a jury of experts from ten international automotive magazines. 'The design team has further evolved Aston Martin's historical design cues and proportions,' read the statement from the jury. 'Once again Aston Martin has blended elegance and power.'



BURGHLEY TRIUMPH

July's 'Festival of Aston Martins' at Burghley House in Lincolnshire proved a huge success, with an astonishing 600 Astons in attendance and more than £46,000 raised for charity. The range of cars attending spanned everything from pre-war classics to the Vulcan trackday supercar. The day also featured a fly-past by the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight, displays by many of the UK's leading Aston specialists and by Aston Martin Lagonda itself, and a charity auction.



ASTON MARTIN AND MEE

Aston Martin specialist Nick Mee will be recalling the buccaneering days of selling Astons in the 1970s and '80s in what promises to be a highly entertaining talk at the London HQ of Nicholas Mee & Co on September 29. Tickets are available on a strictly first-come-first-served basis. The £75 price includes drinks, canapés and a donation to the Aston Martin Heritage Trust. Email info@nicholasmee.co.uk

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WEC circus reaches the 'Ring

MIXED FORTUNES FOR AMR'S WORLD ENDURANCE CHAMPIONSHIP CONTENDERS AT THE NÜRBURGRING

WORDS RICHARD MEADEN

PHOTOGRAPHY DREW GIBSON

THANKS TO the two-part nature of the World Endurance Championship (WEC) season, at the time of going to press there had been only one race since Le Mans in mid-June: the 6 Hours of Nürburgring held at the end of July.

Using the modern Grand Prix circuit that flanks the gnarly old Nordschleife, the 6 Hours of Nürburgring is the home race for the German LMP1 teams of Audi and Porsche - and Toyota, too, as the team is actually based in Cologne - so attracts big crowds. The racing tends to be good, too; the circuit's undulating nature and challenging combination of fast corners and technical twists fostering wheel-to-wheel action, while the Eifel region's notoriously fickle weather adds unpredictability that keeps teams and drivers on their toes.

For Aston Martin Racing, Nürburgring - the fourth round of the WEC season and the last of the year at a European circuit - offered a chance to build on the qualified success of Le Mans, and to try a new trimmed-down GTE-PRO driver line-up. Darren Turner and Richie Stanway were paired in the #97 Vantage and the Danish duo of Nicki Thiim and Marco Sørensen remained in the #95 car, while the GTE-AM crew of Paul Dalla Lana, Pedro Lamy and Mathias Lauda was kept unchanged.

Conditions for qualifying were made tricky by a drying track, but both Aston Martin crews capitalised on their Dunlop intermediate tyres, Thiim and Sørensen both nailing great laps while the track was



Top and above
GTE-PRO car of Thiim and Sørensen showed early pace; Dalla Lana, Lamy and Lauda scored fine AM class win

still wet, then pitting for slicks to allow Thiim to secure an impressive PRO pole position. Turner and Stanaway backed up a strong AMR performance, proving the Vantage GTE's potential by bagging P3 in the PRO class. Meanwhile, in GTE-AM, the #98 car also took P3.

The race - run in fine, dry conditions - delivered on the promise of qualifying. Indeed, such was the pace of the #95 car that a PRO class win looked possible for Thiim and Sørensen, who led the class for the first three-and-a-half hours. Their challenge faded a little in the second half of the race as they were passed by AF Corse's battling pair of Ferrari 488s and a Ford GT, but they leap-frogged the latter to take P3 when the Ford had to serve a late drive-through penalty.

Turner and Stanaway also challenged for the lead early on, but lost too much time in a bizarre pit-stop that required a door-change along with the tyres. With such an intense fight at the front of the class, the #97 car couldn't claw itself back into contention, eventually finishing a distant and disappointing 5th in the PRO class. However it was all smiles for the GTE-AM crew of the #98 Vantage, who took a great class victory thanks to consistently quick driving from Dalla Lana, Lamy and Lauda, combined with canny strategic work from the pit-wall by AMR.

In the next issue, we'll report on AMR's progress in the second half of the WEC season, which starts on September 3 with the Six Hours of Mexico City. For the story of this year's Le Mans effort, turn to p44.

AMR RACE DATES

- September 3** WEC Six Hours of Mexico City
- September 17** WEC Six Hours of COTA
- October 16** WEC Six Hours of Fuji
- November 6** WEC Six Hours of Shanghai
- November 19** WEC Six Hours of Bahrain



Clockwise from left
Superb 'Spa Special' in action at Snetterton; mighty, ex-Robin Hamilton V8 at Le Mans, and winning DB4 GT of Friedrichs/Hadfield at Silverstone



Astons turn up the heat

MAGNIFICENT MACHINERY AND MEMORABLE PERFORMANCES
AT SUN-DRENCHED LE MANS, SNETTERTON AND SILVERSTONE

WORDS STEPHEN ARCHER

PHOTOGRAPHY NICK EDWARDS, DARREN WALSH, SILVERSTONE CLASSIC

YEARS ENDING in even numbers are now the best – and the most hectic – for followers of classic motorsport, with the advent of not just the Monaco Historic but also the fabulous Le Mans Classic. And in between these prestigious events, the UK club racing scene remains buoyant. In June, the AMOC combined with the British GT Championship meeting at Silverstone, using the full Grand Prix circuit, which certainly stretched the legs of the older Astons. The Intermarque race attracted no fewer than four DB4 lightweights, with Nicholas King the first home. Meanwhile the hotly contested Aston Martin GT Challenge was won by Tom Black's GT4 from Chris Kemp's similar car by just half a second after 42 minutes of racing.

The second weekend of July was blessed with hot weather for the bi-annual Le Mans Classic. With 123,000 visitors, the Classic is now a very big deal indeed. The pre-war 'plateau' featured no fewer than five Astons, top finisher being the 2-litre Speed model of Peter Dubsky and Heinz Stamm with an impressive 7th overall.

The Bradley father-and-son team also did well, finishing 21st in their standard Ulster.

Eight Feltham cars graced the '50s plateau and 7th was a hugely impressive finish for Nick Ruddell's DB2 against fierce competition that included a number of Jaguar D-types. The DB4 GTs of Tom Alexander and Ian Dalglish took on the '60s grid and Alexander was set for 2nd until his gearbox expired in the last hour. Meanwhile, the 1970s group saw an appearance by the ex-Robin Hamilton AM V8 driven by Paul Chase-Gardener and Glynn Allen. This was a magnificent sight in its day and looked the part in 2016, too, finishing with an excellent mid-field position. It seems a shame to have to wait two years for the next Le Mans Classic!

In July, the AMOC meeting at Snetterton saw plenty of good, close racing. Intermarque/GT Challenge spoils fell to Chris Kemp's GT4 but only by half a second. The field was a rapid one, with six of these modern GT racing Astons lapping at close to 90mph. The pre-war race/St John Horsfall Trophy featured David

Freeman's 'Spa Special', resplendent with its new body constructed exactly as it was when it was raced by 'Jock' Horsfall in '49.

The Silverstone Classic, like its Le Mans equivalent, has grown into a huge event, with something to please just about everyone. No fewer than eight DB2s, DB3s and DB3Ss took to the '50s grid, Steve Brooks finishing a fine 9th, but a mighty 6th overall were Wolfgang Friedrichs and Simon Hadfield in the former's DB3S. The same pairing, sharing Friedrichs' DB4 GT, went even better in the pre-1963 GT race, winning outright in superb style: a truly great result for this car.

As we went to press, another long weekend of classic action was about to begin at Laguna Seca. With the Goodwood Revival on the horizon and the final round of AMOC racing still to come, there'll be plenty more to look back on next time.

DIARY DATES

September 9-11 Goodwood Revival
October 1 AMOC meeting, Silverstone



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Duxford Concours a soaraway success

2016 SPRING CONCOURS 'THE BEST EVER' AS MEMBERS FLOCK TO IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM

WORDS NIKKI WRIGHT **PHOTOGRAPHY** TONY WRIGHT, DAVID WRIGHT

THE INTERNATIONAL Dinner and Spring Concours held at the Imperial War Museum Duxford in May was 'the best in the Club's history,' according to AMOC deputy chairman and Concours organiser Mark Donoghue. The weekend's events, attended by Club president Viscountess Diana Downe, attracted a record number of members from all over the world – some from as far away as Australia – and more Concours entries than ever before.

The Saturday evening dinner and champagne reception was held under the wings of the British pre-production Concorde. Members were treated to a demonstration of the plane's famous nose-droop by Duxford Aviation Society volunteers and an insightful and humorous

talk by former Concorde Captain John Hutchinson. With an Aston Martin Vulcan parked alongside the famous Avro Vulcan bomber, and a Spitfire and Lancaster all under the same roof of the museum's award-winning AirSpace Exhibition, it was quite a spectacle.

John Hutchinson said he jumped at the chance to speak about Concorde. 'It seemed very appropriate that this event took place in the AirSpace Exhibition, a brilliantly imaginative venue and a memorable evening,' he went on. 'The conversation never stopped for a moment and no one was in a rush to leave!'

Over 100 entries from every production era constituted the Club's biggest and most successful Concours to date, with



From the top

Sunday's Concours followed dinner under the wings of Concorde. Viscountess Downe learns about the judging process from Club chairman John Purser



Left and below

Duxford hangars provided a stunning backdrop for the Concours entries; Roger Carey's class-winning DB2, and Mary Antcliffe and Nigel Dowding with their 1934 MkII, soon to embark on the 6000-mile 'Rally of the Incas' as part of the Movember campaign in aid of Prostate Cancer Research (www.justgiving.com/Mary-Antcliff)



the highest-ever standard of entries.

The highly coveted Elite class was won by Ian Dewsnap with his V12 Vantage. The pre-war class winner was the Second Series of David Hicks, and the Newport Pagnell 6- and 8-cylinder classes were won by Richard Atherton's DB5 and Steve Goodman's V12 Vanquish respectively.

The Bloxham title was clinched by the DB7 V12 Vantage of Richard Aczel, and the Gaydon class winner was Jonathan Lupton with his V8 Vantage. The modern class went to the Vanquish Volante Carbon of Peter Earl, and the Lagonda class to the V8 saloon of Roger Ivett. Peter Earl took the Pride of Ownership title with his Vantage V550, and the Competition class went to Hugh and Carol Beckwith with their DB2/4. 'Entry on the Day' was won by Philip Yea's Vanquish S.

The Aston Martin Heritage Trust's celebration display brought together 20 superb examples of the supercharged Vantage built between 1993 and 2000, with variants including a prototype, V550s, V600s and two stunning examples of the Vantage Volante. The trophy winner was Gordon Wyles, who brought along

chassis number 1 with its unique specification for first owner Wensley Haydon-Baillie. It was displayed alongside Phil Williams's prototype.

AMOC president Viscountess Diana Downe commented: 'The weather was perfect, the displays were amazing, the cars and the top number of entrants we have ever had were fantastic. I'm so pleased that it's becoming such a popular event for our members.'

Organiser Mark Donoghue added: 'Without doubt this Concours has seen the highest standard of entries we have ever seen. When I started organising the Concours ten years ago, we had six or seven cars in the whole event. Now, we have more than that just in the Elite class!'

DIARY DATES

Sept 24 Autumn Concours Dinner

Sept 25 Autumn Concours, Compton Verney, Warwickshire

To purchase tickets (available to members only) contact events@amoc.org

For details of how to join the Club, email hqstaff@amoc.org or visit www.amoc.org



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Carefully does it

CURRENCY FLUCTUATIONS AND A COOLING MARKET
PUT THE BRAKES ON BIDDING AT SOME BIG SALES

WORDS CHRIS BIETZK

PHOTOGRAPHY BONHAMS, TIM SCOTT/RM SOTHEBY'S

IN THE EXPECTATION that you are as tired of hearing about Brexit as we are, we'll keep this bit brief: yes, the UK's surprising decision to leave the EU has had an impact on the classic car trade. At Artcurial's Le Mans sale in July, general manager Matthieu Lamoure lamented the absence of collectors from across the Channel, whose Great British Pounds no longer look very great at all.

The weakness of our currency is certain to have dampened the enthusiasm of Brits who might ordinarily have considered buying from Europe or the US; equally it makes UK-based cars attractive to buyers from other parts of the world. If you think you can quantify the impact of the 'Leave' vote precisely, though, YouGov has got a job for you...

Even before the vote and at a time when most seemed reasonably confident that 'Remain' would prevail, several high-profile European auctions returned underwhelming results. Disentangling the Brexit effect from the more general flattening of the market is tricky indeed.

At Bonhams' Aston Martin Works Sale in May, the ex-Moss/Collins/Hill/Salvadori/David Brown DB3S was supposed to fetch

as much as £7,000,000, but in the event bidding got nowhere near that number (the high offer was £5,000,000) and the car was unsold. While the pre-sale estimate might have been too hopeful, it should be said, too, that for some the DB3/S's recent restoration – one that removed many signs of the car's hard but illustrious past – was a turn-off. Top seller at the Works Sale was the 1963 DB4 Series 5 Vantage Convertible pictured, which made (a slightly below-estimate) £1,009,500.

On the Continent, too, bidders were not easily parted from their money in May, with a rarely-available One-77, valued at €1,750,000-2,250,000 and with only 850km on the clock, failing to find a new owner at Bonhams' Monaco sale.

RM Sotheby's held an auction in the

Principality, too, hammering a one-off 1991 Virage GT Lightweight for €89,600 against an estimate of €150,000-250,000. Auctioneers are forever trying to stoke interest in the relatively unloved Virage with little success (a pair of Virages failed to sell at the Historics at Brooklands event on 11 June), but this surely was the Virage to have: a factory-sanctioned, stripped-down car offering greater speed and better handling than the standard lump. We've never quite warmed to the car's looks, but this was an interesting buy at its eventual price.

The annual Festival of Speed auction featured a handful of good Astons, but again the going was sometimes tough for Bonhams, with several non-sales. The headliner, though, did change hands, the ex-works DB2 prototype selling towards the lower end of its estimate range for £679,100 including premiums.

The winning bidder took home a car with wonderful history (the first David Brown-era factory racing car, with a seventh place at the 24 Hours of Le Mans to its name) but in need of a vast amount of work. Inevitably described as 'unspoilt', it is more accurately 'a shed' – but one deserving of the most careful restoration.



Clockwise from top

Original and complete but needing more than a bit of elbow grease, the 1949 DB2 prototype (more correctly 'Le Mans Fixed-Head Coupé') was one of the stars of Bonhams' Festival of Speed auction; this DB4 Convertible passed the £1 million mark at the Aston Works Sale; the one-off Virage Lightweight sold by RM Sotheby's in Monaco





Coming attractions

ON OPPOSITE SIDES OF THE POND, TWO HISTORICALLY IMPORTANT ASTONS HEAD TO THE BLOCK

WORDS CHRIS BIETZK

PHOTOGRAPHY BONHAMS; MIKE MAEZ/GOODING & CO

WE HAVE BEEN thwarted again in our attempts to bring you the most up-to-date market news, with the annual Monterey Car Week auctions falling squarely between our deadline and our on-sale date. It's almost as if the organisers had more important things to worry about than this column when drawing up the event schedule...

The results will be in by the time this issue of *Vantage* reaches you, then, but it is nonetheless worth highlighting one of the more special Astons set to be offered in California: a 1954 DB2/4 Spider by Bertone.

Snaffled by Gooding & Co ahead of the company's biggest sale of the year, at Pebble Beach, it is one of five Bertone-bodied DB2/4s commissioned by American businessman Stanley Arnolt in 1953, and the only one of its exact type.

Two more DB2/4 chassis were clothed in similar coachwork styled by Franco Scaglione, but both were intended for racing and thus minimalist in the extreme; this car, chassis LML/505, has a 2.9-litre works-spec engine but was also kitted out with an interior boasting all the bells and whistles, for it was built for Arnolt himself.

Arnolt displayed it at the 1954 New York Auto Show, where he was made an offer he couldn't refuse by a Mr Schwaumbacher of Wichita, who became

the first of eight documented owners. The car's most recent custodian undertook a full and correct restoration around 2003, and golly the car looks beautiful for it. A small area of original paint was found along the inner edge of the bonnet and the rest of the car resprayed to match, while the 140bhp straight-six was carefully rebuilt and converted for unleaded fuel. However many non-sales we've seen in recent months, it would be shocker if this car, estimated at \$3,000,000-4,000,000, failed to spark a bidding war.

Similarly enthusiastic paddle-waving should be seen at Bonhams' Goodwood Revival sale on September 10, at which the ex-works 1936 Speed Model known as 'Red Dragon' will cross the block. Raced in the Mille Miglia, the 24 Hours of Le Mans, the Spa 24 Hours and the Ulster TT, it acquired its nickname after World War Two, when gentleman driver Dudley Folland, born in Carmarthenshire, modified its bodywork and decorated it with the Welsh dragon.

Maintained regardless of cost by the current owner, it has competed in top-drawer historic meetings including the Le Mans Classic, the modern-day Mille Miglia and the Grand Prix de Monaco Historique. Guaranteed entry to those events and many more is expected to set somebody back at least £1,600,000.



From top

The bodywork of 'Red Dragon' was altered by former owner Dudley Folland to resemble that of the Ferrari 166 Spider Corsa; this Bertone-bodied DB2/4 Spider is one of a kind – and priced accordingly at \$3,000,000-4,000,000

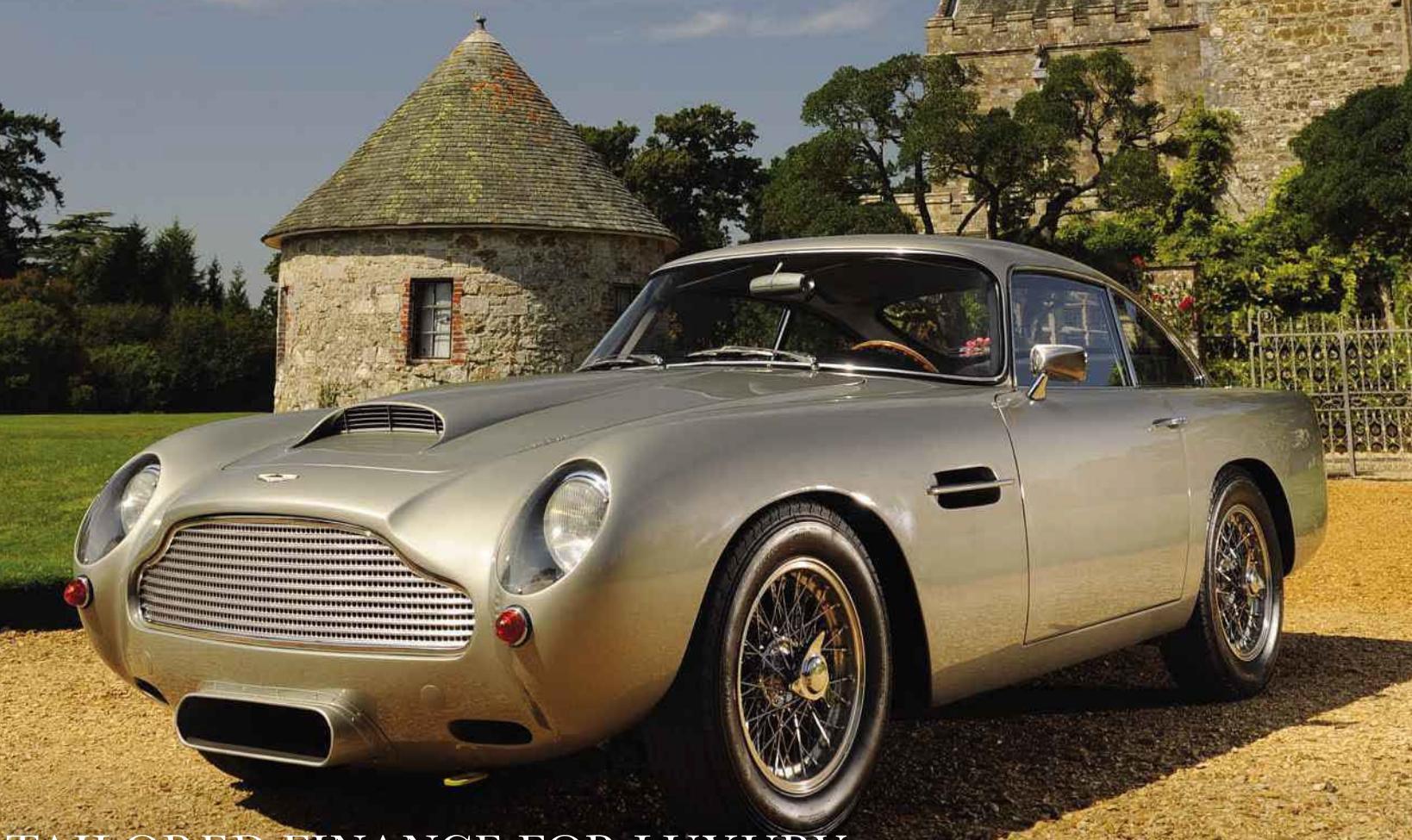


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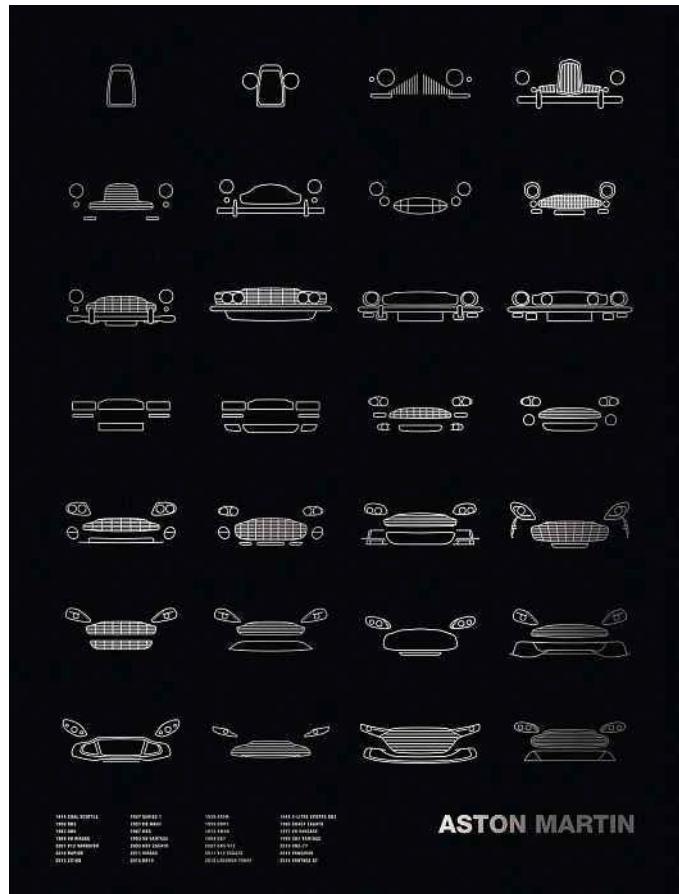
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C A P I T A L

Desirables

Aston-related objects of desire, including a poster to test your memory for faces...



Aston Martin Auto Icon poster

\$30 | shop.nomodesign.com

Beginning with Coal Scuttle, this poster shows the changing face of Aston Martin through the years, with each landmark model's grille and headlamp arrangement rendered as a neat line drawing.



Vulcan luggage set by Caracalla 1947

caracalla1947.com

Crafted from the finest Italian leather, Caracalla's new luggage set will run you a cool £1.8 million – but at that price it does come with an 820bhp Aston Martin thrown in for free... The set is currently available through Aston Martin to Vulcan buyers only, but a range of equally fabulous bags is available to all via Caracalla's website.



The Filmography of Cars by Calm The Ham

\$59 | calmtheham.com

More than 100 of the silver screen's four-wheeled actors are featured in this delightful book by New York graphic design shop Calm The Ham. Inevitably a few of our more obscure favourites are omitted for want of space but, as you can see, the biggest stars are all present...



DB5 print by Geoff Bolam

\$400 | geoffbolam.com

Artist Geoff Bolam eschews canvas in favour of aluminium, printing his works onto sheets of the stuff before etching and polishing particular areas to create an effect as eye-catching as his subjects.

**Junghans
Meister Driver
Chronoscope**

£1790 | junghans.de

German watchmaker Junghans was producing clocks for cars as early as 1908, and drew on the designs of classic dash dials for its new Meister Driver Chronoscope, a handsome, automatic, 40.8mm stainless-steel nod to the motoring past.



Desirables is compiled by Chris Bietzk. If you'd like to have an item considered for inclusion, email eds@vantagemag.co.uk

- V8 & V12 VANTAGE
- DB9 & VIRAGE
- VANQUISH
- RAPIDE
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Main pic and below

Simon Draper's DB4 GT Zagato today and (below) as it originally appeared. Note the different nose shapes



Poor form, chaps!

Really enjoyed issue 14 and your coverage of Aston Martins in movies and on television. But honestly, how could you omit Bertie Wooster's 1928 1.5-litre International, KW 4597? The car figured prominently in the 1990s series, *Jeeves and Wooster*.

Jeff LaVigne, Tucson AZ, USA

DB heaven

I wanted to congratulate the whole team on a quartet of fabulous pieces on the DB4 GT (issue 13).

I have been a proud and deliriously happy owner of a silver DB4 Series 1 (DB4/153/R) since 1995. She's an all-year, all-weather chariot: we've done myriad rallies, enjoyed holidays to France, recently I did five laps of Goodwood at full tilt (mind-blowing)... we even left our wedding in her. Now two children fit in the back (for now, anyway).

In all we've covered 55,000 miles together, so naturally I was intrigued to read about my baby's more punchy sister the 4 GT. I really felt I was in the cars with you. Heaven!

Nick Lumsden



Cut off its nose?

Thanks for a great magazine. My reason for writing is to encourage Simon Draper not to cut the nose off his DB4 GT Zagato! [In issue 13, Aston collector Draper told Vantage he was considering having the front of the car returned to its original shape, even though it has had its present nose ever since a racing accident at Goodwood in 1963.]

For me it is part of its racing history and makes it more special. I understand the argument for returning the nose to its original shape, but it would be a replica part with no historical value.

There was a similar example of cutting the nose off a car: the Ferrari 375 MM chassis 0320AM from 1953 had open headlights originally and raced at Le Mans in

1953 like that, but was sent back to the factory before the Carrera Mexico race in 1953, together with the three sister cars, to have a longer nose and covered headlights, designed for better aerodynamics and a higher top speed.

Many years later, a specialist cut the nose away and it had a replica Le Mans nose fitted. The new nose never raced at Le Mans - nor in the Carrera Mexico!

I own a DB4, chassis 264/R, in the original 3.7-litre spec. I also own Ferrari 275 GTB chassis 6785, the 1966 Monza 1000km GT winner. This car suffered a number of accidents in period,

one when the truck it was loaded in overturned on the way to a race in Belgium in 1968! It's important to me that, while it was repaired in period, it remains unrestored.

It also had an accident at Monza in May 1966 and another at Rally Solitude-Lyon-Charbonnières in 1967. The rear body is still today 5cm out of line after that accident!

Ulf Randers, Sweden



The forgotten Aston?

Congratulations on a very interesting magazine, which is going from strength to strength with each edition. But I am amazed that you continue to delude the public and yourself that the Aston Martin Cygnet was never produced by not including it in your model listings. This model is not only holding its value but some are on the increase.

Going back to the concept, it was produced to help keep the company trading in the future and we all know you cannot keep producing cars pouring out high emissions. Even Aston Martin acknowledges that, by moving towards electric cars.

I cannot understand why Vantage has not featured this stunning little car. Is it just a case of snobbery and not living in the

real world? You are doing any owners of this car an injustice; after all, they did support Aston Martin in the first place with their much-needed money.

Tony Skipper, Northants

Should the Cygnet be listed in Vantage? Clearly the editorial team is yet to be convinced, but we'd be interested to hear the views of other readers. All comments welcome - Ed.



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AERO WORSHIP

The new, track-inspired GT8 is the ultimate evolution of the current V8 Vantage. Is it as wild as it looks?

WORDS RICHARD MEADEN

PHOTOGRAPHY ANDY MORGAN







If there's a genre of car guaranteed to get the juices flowing, it's the hardcore road-racer. Fierce, focused and simmering with aggression, a track-ready road car is catnip to those of us who are suckers for cars with a wilder side.

Of course, Aston Martin is no stranger to this breed. Indeed there's a compelling argument that says the DB4 GT and its Zagato-penned evolution remain the finest and most covetable examples of all. In more recent years, too, Aston has dabbled with harder, faster versions of its series production cars – models like the N400, N420 and N430 Vantage, to name a few.

These cars were in part informed by the marque's competition efforts at the Nürburgring and the close-to-production GT4 racer that those activities spawned. But Aston Martin has always stopped short of topping its sports car range with a full production model in the mould of, say, Porsche's 911 GT3, preferring instead to create 'special series' cars such as last year's run of 100 spectacular Vantage GT12s. With the Vantage range entering its dotage and clear parallels between the eight-cylinder models and Aston Martin Racing's current Vantage GTE World Endurance Championship cars, it was a logical – and welcome – step to use the same recipe to create the GT8. One hundred and fifty of them, to be precise, with a starting price of £165,000.

You can immediately see where the extra money goes. Clad in a gladiatorial battledress of carbonfibre panels, sculpted and chiselled for maximum aerodynamic and aesthetic effect, it's more Marvel superhero than regular V8 Vantage. The lightest and most

powerful eight-cylinder Vantage ever, the GT8 is the product of a design and engineering team let off the leash.

Still there's only so much that can be done with the old V8 motor, so power is up, but by just 10bhp, to a respectable 440bhp. However, weight is down by as much as 100kg (to 1510kg) depending on how many lightweight options are fitted. One can only assume if you've been tempted by the GT8 you'll be keen to strip it back to the bare bones with cost-option magnesium wheels, polycarbonate rear glazing, carbonfibre roof and titanium exhaust. If you've done that you'll probably go for the optional – and more extreme – Aero Pack, which adds a high-rise rear wing and larger front splitter to further squeeze the GT8's Michelin Pilot Sport Cup 2 tyres into the tarmac. And if you do that, you might as well go the full Darren Turner and specify it with one of the motorsport-inspired 'Halo' paint schemes, complete with bright flashes of contrast colours, just like AMR's racers.

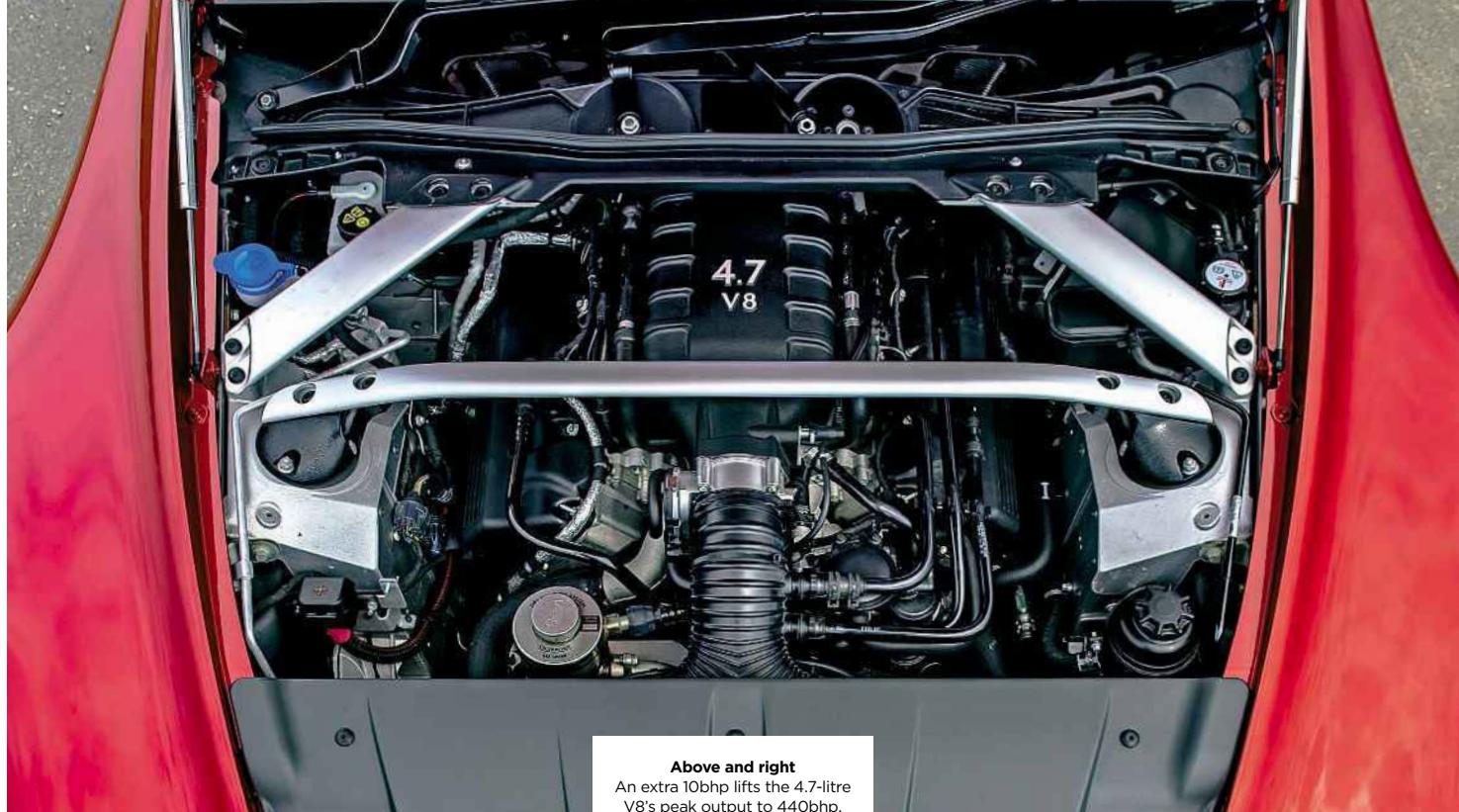
Open the (carbonfibre-clad) driver's door and you find yourself in a very serious driving environment. Swathes of beautiful, satin-finish, moulded carbonfibre form the door panels, with more carbon flowing through the centre console. Slot in the key, push, hear the starter spin, then flinch as the V8 bursts into life. Modern Astons like to holler, but the GT8 is on another level. Raucous and unapologetic, it's the Noise Abatement Society's nemesis, especially if you start it in Sport mode.

The GT8 comes with a choice of manual or Sportshift II paddle-shift transmission, the former offering six forward gears, the latter seven more closely-stacked ratios. Offering a manual gearbox in a modern road-racer might seem anathema but, as the Vantage has



Above and below
New GT8 is in truth only a distant relative of the current V8-engined GTE race car (below left), but optional splitter and rear wing underline the family connections





Above and right
An extra 10bhp lifts the 4.7-litre V8's peak output to 440bhp.
Torque feels a little thin – an issue that will be solved by the next generation of turbo V8s.
Cabin continues road-racer vibe





Vantage GT8 manual

ENGINE V8, 4735cc **MAX POWER** 440bhp @ 7300rpm **MAX TORQUE** 361lb ft @ 5000rpm **TRANSMISSION** Six-speed manual, rear drive, limited-slip diff
SUSPENSION Front and rear: double wishbones, coil springs, dampers, anti-roll bar **BRAKES** Vented discs, 380mm front, 330mm rear, ABS, EBD
WHEELS 9.5 x 19in front, 10.5 x 19in rear **TYRES** 255/35 ZR19 front, 295/30 ZR19 rear, Michelin Pilot Sport Cup 2 **WEIGHT** 1510kg (see text)
POWER TO WEIGHT 296bhp/ton (based on 1510kg) **0-60MPH** 4.4sec (claimed) **TOP SPEED** 190mph (claimed) **PRICE** From £165,000 (see text)

matured, so it has become one of the last bastions of a more analogue driving experience. Hydraulic power steering offers detailed feel and a meaty weight, while fixed-rate suspension (re-tuned to suit the GT8's track intentions while retaining some low-speed civility) means you have no opportunity to adjust the damping according to the road conditions. This is a car you have to commit to.

Our test car is a manual, which pleases me as I love the added sense of connection a stick and clutch pedal bring. The clutch has quite a long travel, and the rearward-set gear lever forces you to reach behind you slightly when slotting from second to third, but, although it's been a while since I've driven a manual Vantage, muscle memory soon kicks in. The first sweetly-timed heel-and-toe downshift confirms that cars that rely on driver input can still deliver a unique satisfaction.

If the GT12 was more about the fire and brimstone of its incendiary V12, the GT8 is more focused on dynamic prowess. Weight reduction plays its part, but so too does weight distribution. Shoehorning a dozen cylinders into the Vantage engine bay was

always a compelling recipe, but it comes with the penalty of placing unwanted weight over the front axle. With its V8 tucked well behind the axle line for a true front-mid-engined layout, the GT8 has an immediacy and responsiveness that the GT12 lacks.

Grip is plentiful, but not at the expense of feel. So, while the GT8 feels well within itself at sane speeds, it's always communicative. It works on real roads, too, yielding just enough to work with the road rather than fighting it.

Outright grip and traction are exceptional, as is the overall balance of the car. The front end has near-miraculous bite, but the rear has the grip to support such an immediate rate of response, so it never feels unsettled or skittish. The steering is nicely judged – quick-witted, not too jumpy – so you instinctively apply the correct amount of lock rather than making small adjustments after your initial input. With confidence, you learn to trust in the GT8's innate poise, carrying a little more speed into the corner and squeezing the throttle a little earlier and more insistently until each cornering phase melds into one seamless, intoxicating bear-hug of lateral g.

'CLAD IN A
BATTLEDRESS OF
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PANELS, IT'S MORE
MARVEL SUPERHERO
THAN REGULAR
V8 VANTAGE'







Much like the chassis, the engine thrives on commitment. Which is just as well because, unless you're prepared to rev the conrods out of it, the levels of straight-line performance are not commensurate with a car carrying a price tag approaching £200k with all the options. Bluntly, the V8 lacks torque in the low and mid-range. Always has, so although the GT8's reduced weight does help, you really need to have the tacho needle sweeping beyond 5000rpm for the car to really hit its stride, and preferably in the final 1500rpm before the 7500rpm limiter cuts-in.

Consequently if you tend to get your kicks between the corners you'll feel a bit short-changed by the GT8. It simply doesn't have the firepower to compete against cars like Porsche's 991 GT3 or torque-rich turbocharged machines such as Ferrari's 488 and McLaren's 650S and 675LT. For that you need the GT12. However, if you delight in the more cerebral satisfaction of cornering, few things are finer than threading a GT8 along a challenging road.

As a driver's car, the GT8 is a qualified success. Dynamically it's the brightest and sharpest Vantage there has ever been. If Aston had the time, budget and inclination to really go to town on the V8 engine, it would be a truly formidable machine, mating much more of what makes the GT12 such an adrenalin rush with sweeter and far superior handling. It would certainly be fascinating to see how the two compare on a circuit.

Of course, none of this really matters, for all 150 GT8s were snapped up before the first car was delivered. And this despite the car not being sold in the US. That speaks volumes for the appeal of Aston's special series cars, and the appeal of Aston road-racers in particular. The GT8 may not have the direct racing pedigree of a DB4 GT – unfortunately today's GT racers mean those days are long gone – but it's a beautifully wrought and terrifically exciting car in which to go hunting corners. **V**

Le Mans 2016

There's no endurance race quite like Le Mans. No other generates so much anticipation, demands so much effort or feels like such a rollercoaster ride of emotions. Aston Martin Racing (AMR) has experienced the highs and lows more than most, but this year proved to be strangely uneventful.

The V8-powered Vantage GTE – the car that inspired the Vantage GT8 – faced stiff



opposition from the Chevrolet Corvettes and Porsche 911s, but the greater threat lay in the new turbocharged Ferrari 488 and Ford GT entries, the latter tilting at a class victory to mark the 50th anniversary of the GT40's 1966 win. Whenever new cars appear, it takes time for the Balance of Performance (the mechanism by which cars are hobbled or helped) to be adjusted, and before the race Porsche made an impassioned plea for changes to be made to BoP to give non-turbo GTE teams a chance against the rampant Ferrari and Ford entries.

Come 3pm on Sunday afternoon the world had witnessed a remarkable race. One in which Toyota was cruelly denied a historic maiden victory on the very last lap, and one where Ford triumphed over Ferrari in the GTE class. Sadly it was also one where the non-turbo GTE cars had limited chance of success.

This didn't deter the AMR crews, in particular the #95 crew of Darren Turner, Nicki Thiim and Marco Sørensen, who fought for a podium position through the night, before dropping to an eventual 5th position in GTE PRO after a puncture in the 20th hour. They were followed home by the #97 car of Richie Stanaway, Fernando Rees and Johnny Adam. In the GTE AM class, hopes were high but, despite leading the class well into the night, the #98 GTE of Paul Dalla Lana, Pedro Lamy and Mathias Lauda suffered a mechanical failure that forced their retirement heartbreakingly close to the finish.

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THE POWER AND THE GLORY...

The Rev Adam Gompertz is a former car designer, now a curate, with a God-given gift for illustration. Classic Astons are a particular source of inspiration

WORDS RICHARD MEADEN | ILLUSTRATIONS ADAM GOMPERTZ



'WHEN I WAS VERY young I drew anything, but from the age of four or five it was pretty much cars and nothing else. I think my parents despaired of me a little. They are both quite arty, so we'd go for sketching

days. While they were painting the scenery, I'd wander off and start sketching in the car park!'

This is Adam Gompertz, life-long doodler, car nut, Coventry University design graduate, former professional car and yacht designer and the man responsible for the deft pen-and-pastel illustrations that accompany this feature.

'REVS Art', the name of his Facebook page, is clearly a play on words. What's less obvious is

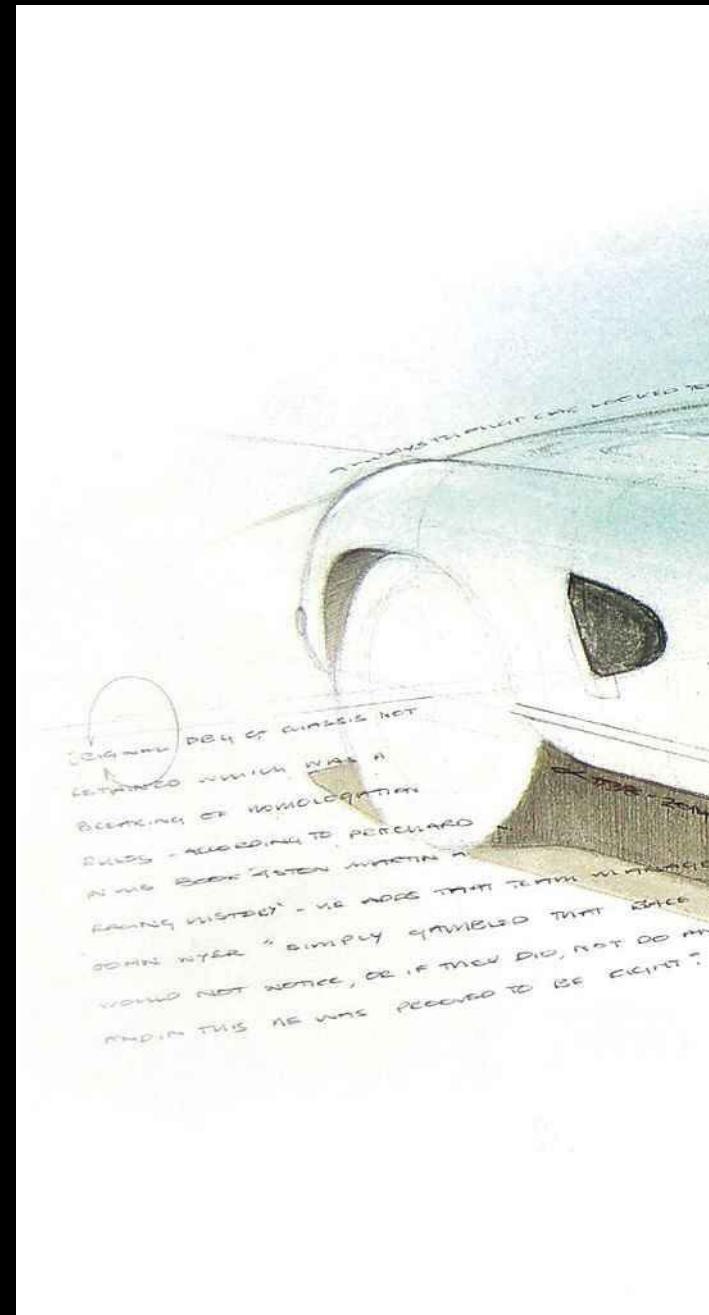
that it relates as much to Reverend Gompertz's life as a Church of England curate as the high-octane subject matter he loves to draw in his spare time. It's a rather unlikely combination, but a higher calling and a God-given gift for illustration clearly sit well with the 43-year-old clergyman. Indeed, the two apparently very different facets of his life provide equal inspiration, as he explains:

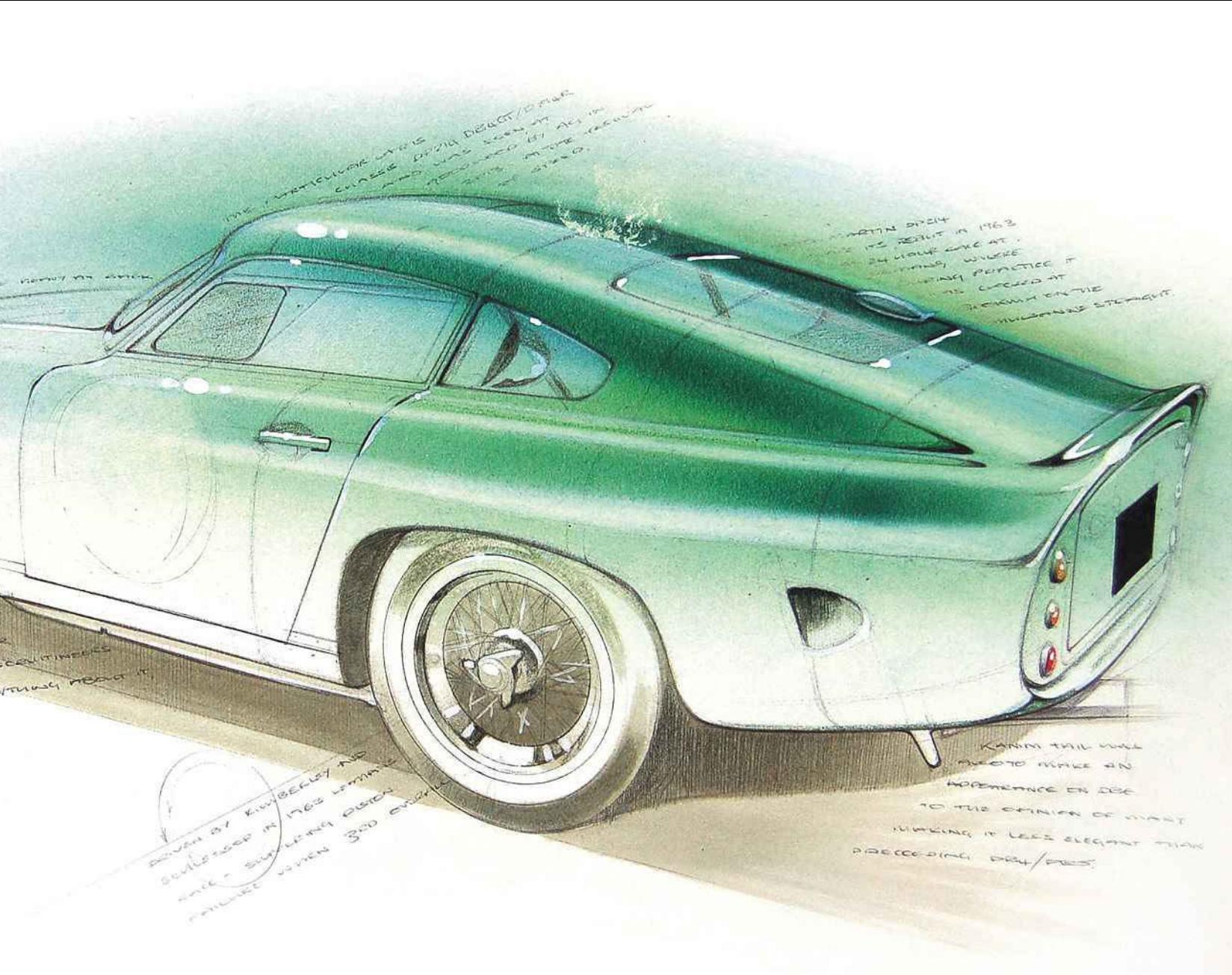
'When you put a piece of white plastic around your throat, it draws reactions from people. Of course, I do have people cross the street to avoid me, but I also have people open up to me and talk about things they wouldn't share with anyone else. I've found classic cars offer great common ground on which to meet people who don't otherwise engage with the church.'

'In my first church, near Lichfield, I could see

it was a prosperous area so I naturally thought: "Hmm, I bet there are some nice cars around here! We should do a car show." So I went to my vicar, who bravely allowed me to develop this crazy classic car show idea. It helped that some of the people in our church had some nice old cars, but I still think my colleagues thought I was a bit mad.'

'Anyway, the show happened and we got 28 cars along, including a Bugatti Type 35, various Astons and Ferraris and even a mint Hillman Avenger estate! It was a great day, not least because I think people understood we were opening up and saying: "We want to invest in you and the community and share passions that you have." Funnily enough my previous career as a car designer seemed to make a big difference, as people could see someone who





was passionate about God, but also genuinely passionate about cars. It proved that the two aren't mutually exclusive. This was the start of the REVS project – my attempt at using a shared love of classic cars to make connections between people of faith, little faith or no faith. REVS Art is a natural extension of that.'

Like most of us, Gompertz doesn't restrict his love of cars to just one marque, but Aston Martin made the biggest impression in childhood. Geography and serendipity would subsequently ensure that it continued to be a major influence throughout his adolescence and into adult life. It's a bond he feels to this day:

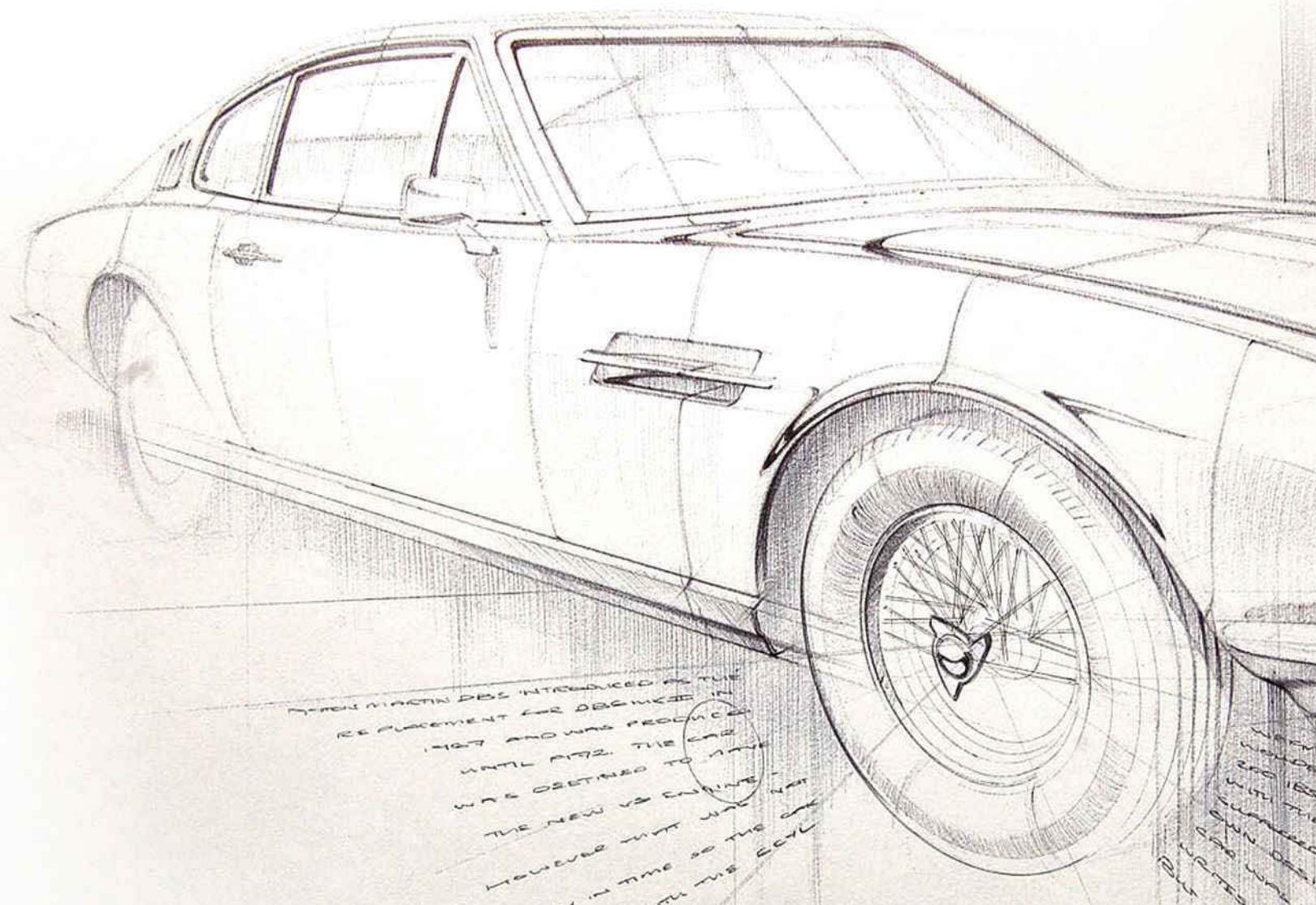
'A family friend worked at an Aston dealer in Cambridge. One day he brought over a Towns V8 – pre-Oscar India, I think. Seeing it on the vicarage drive was quite a moment. That was it

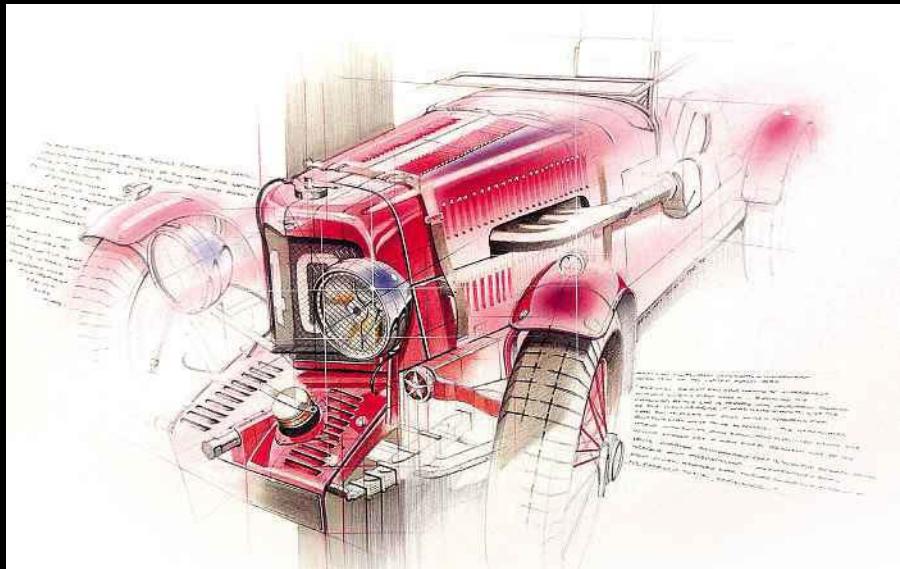
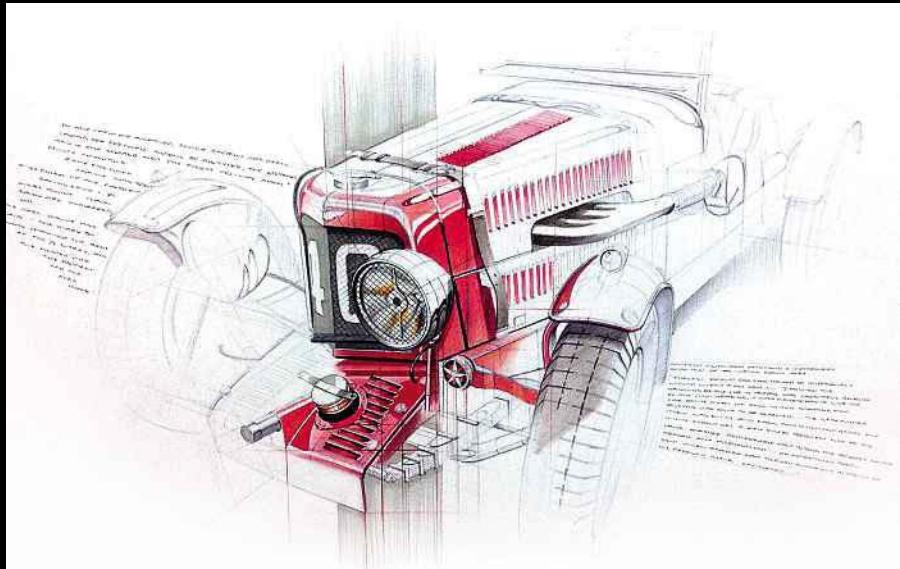
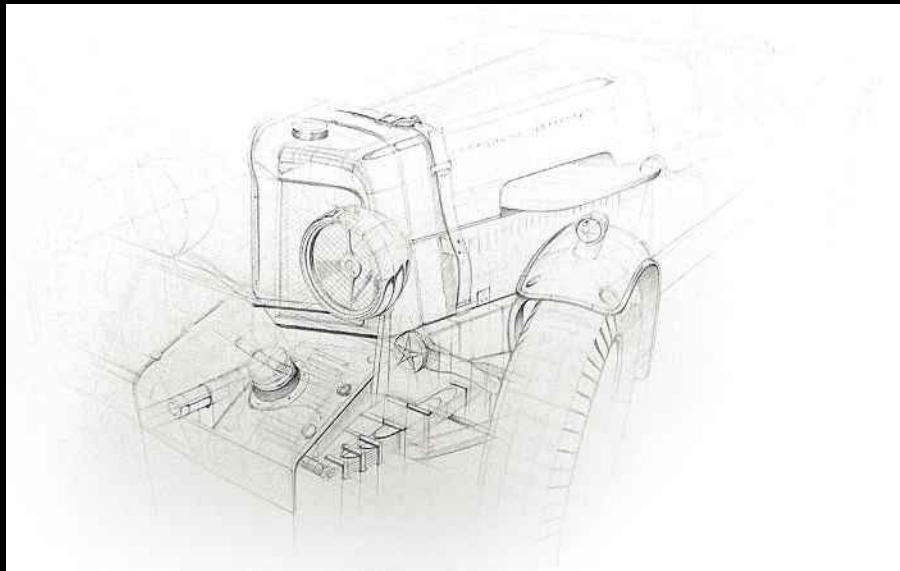
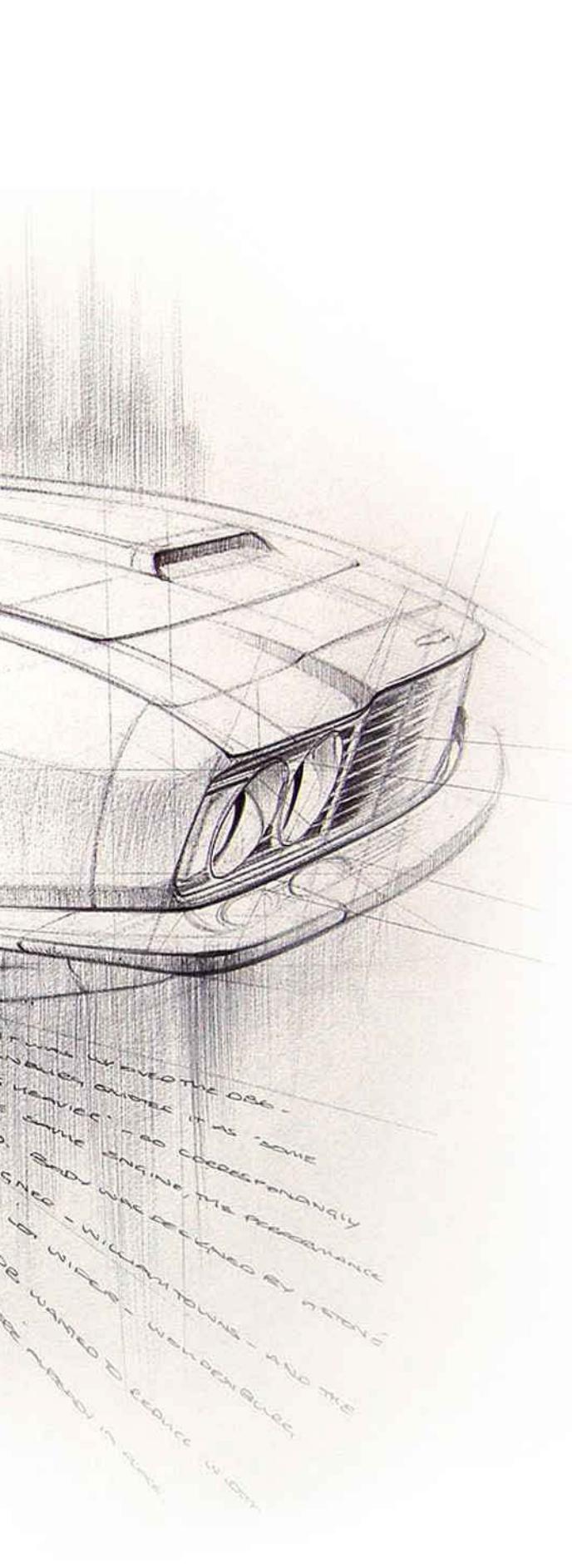
for me. He took us all out in it and I was amazed. When we got back, I asked him, as kids tend to do: "What's the fastest car in the world?" He got out this little brown book by Roger Stowers [the Aston archivist], in which was a picture of a V8 Vantage looking very aristocratic. He pointed to it and said: "That's the fastest-accelerating road car." To have ridden in one Aston and to know that another was the fastest thing on four wheels was magical stuff for my young mind.'

'I lived only 20 miles or so from Newport Pagnell, so I'd often try and get there just to have a look through the gates. I bumped into Victor Gauntlett once, literally in the middle of Tickford Street. For my A-level design project, I designed a junior Aston. Roger Stowers was a huge help. He shared a staggering amount of knowledge and images with me. Many years

Above and left

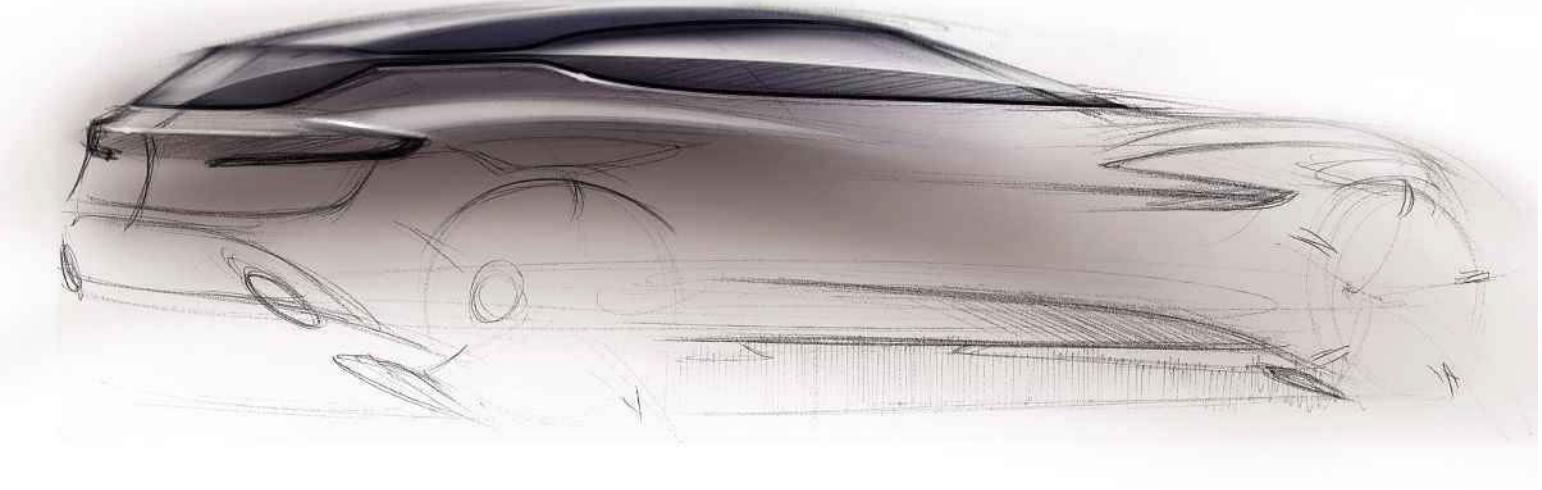
Superb study of DP214 Le Mans racer shows the best of the Rev Gompertz's work, combining great technical ability with a wonderful 'feel' for the subject and its place in history. The man himself loves many marques but confesses that Aston Martin holds a special place in his heart





From the top

Ulster study takes shape. Most pieces start with a basic sketch in biro before Gompertz starts to add colour with a designer's ink marker pen. Final layers of colour are applied in chalk pastel mixed with talcum powder. Annotations are an echo of the work of legendary automotive artist Bob Freeman, who Gompertz happily admits was a major influence. One of the Reverend's techniques is to fade off certain areas, so the viewer's imagination takes over



later, I spent a year or so working at Desmond Smail's. I recall a very spirited passenger ride with Des at Silverstone in a customer's highly modified DB4. Being in that car as Des hustled it through the corners was vaguely religious!

'Funnily enough, since joining the church in 2011, I've found great sermon material in old Aston Martins and the qualities that define them. They are hand-made, the product of great love and skill. There's a permanence and an inherent value about them, a sense of being created, not merely assembled. I think that's why people are so drawn to own and cherish them. The process of restoration is a powerful thing, in people or machines. In my line of work I like to believe there are no lost causes. Everyone is worth saving. It's much the same with barn-find Astons! So many of my most cherished car memories can be traced to Aston Martin. I think that's why I enjoy drawing them so much.'

Ah yes, the artwork. Like many car illustrators of a certain age, Gompertz names the work of the late, great Bob Freeman as a major influence. But where Freeman's style had a very technical, almost draughtsman-like quality, design-savvy Gompertz has a technically literate, but a softer and more fluid, painterly feel. The results are distinctive and beautiful, a real treat to the eye.

'Sharing my art is part of the creative person I believe God made me,' says Gompertz. 'I enjoy getting to know people through commissions. I also love to hear stories about their experience of ownership and the history of the car. Something especially applicable to Astons...'

'For me, sketching a car is the next best thing to driving one. I try to capture the essence of whatever car I'm sketching, but I also try not to pick an obvious angle. I like to spend time looking at a car and take lots of photos, but I don't want to create a photo-real drawing. I prefer the flow and creativity of design sketches. They have a special energy and freedom.'

'I draw mainly in biro. It's what designers tend to use because it gives a better, more even line quality. I have a biro of choice, which is [assume geeky adenoidal voice] the medium Bic biro Cristal Grip. You learn over time that you can get various shades and strengths out of a biro. You can create some really quite light, soft shading if you're sympathetic to the pen and paper. You can even smudge the shading with your finger to soften it further.'

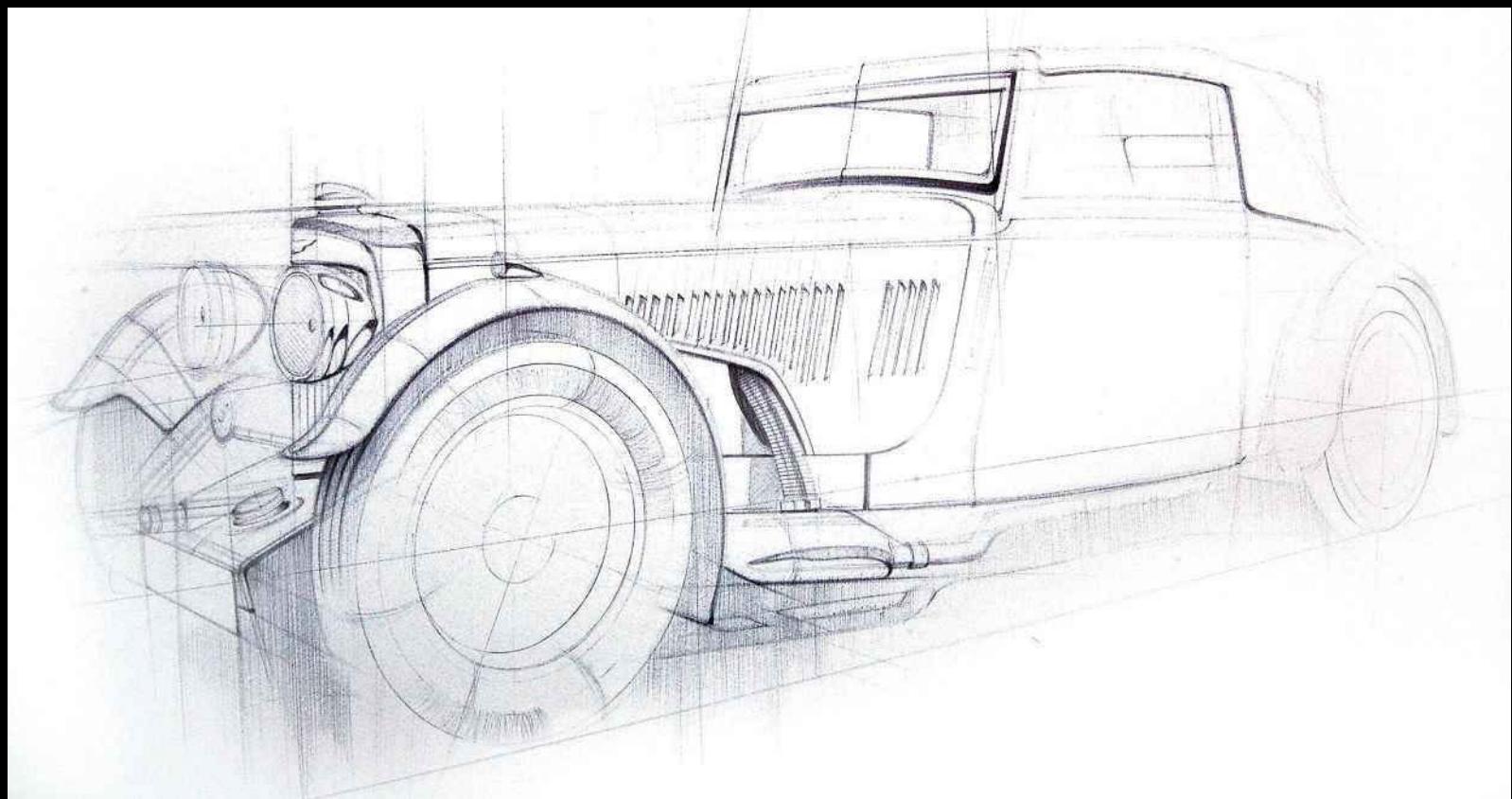
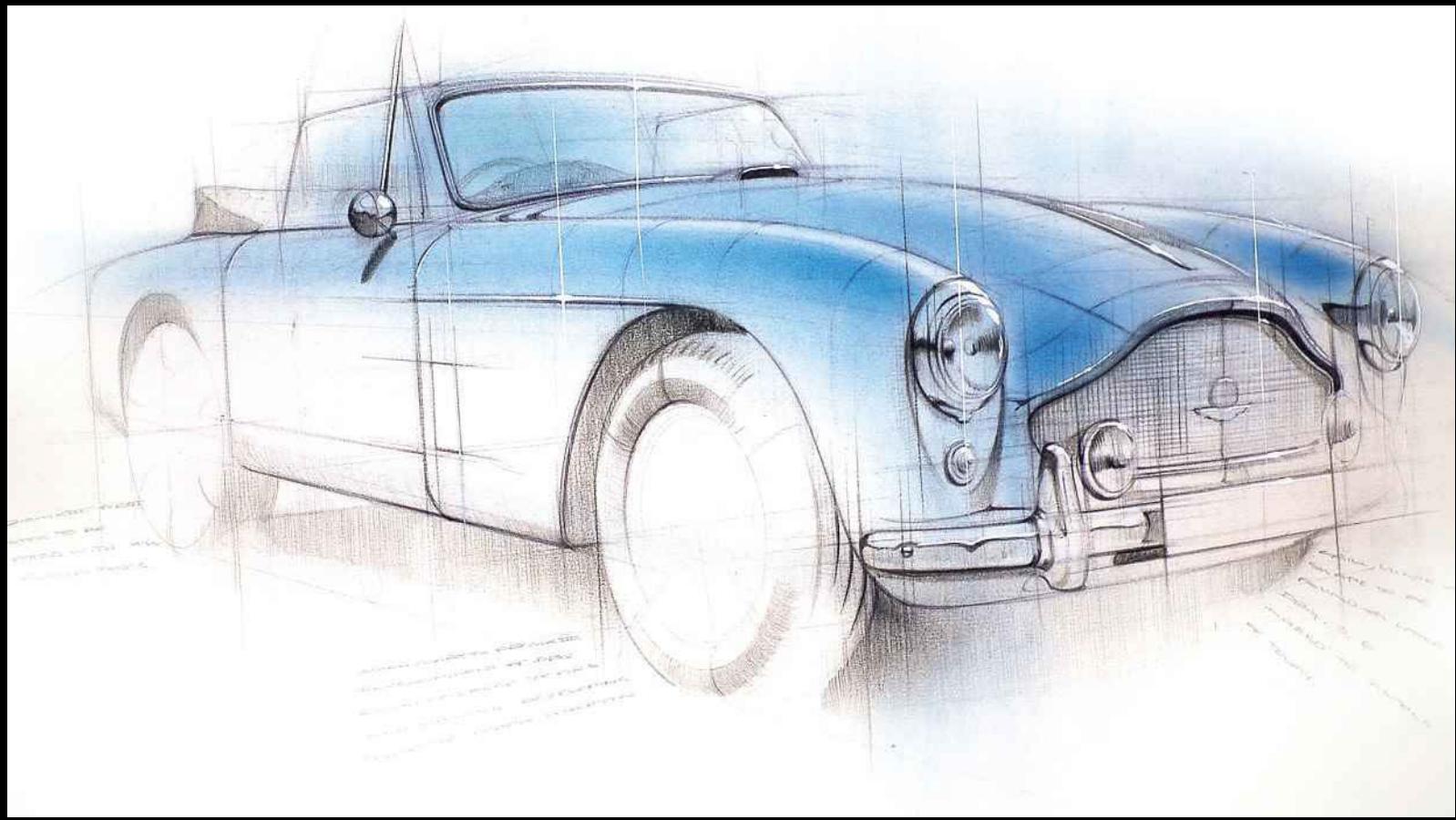
'Once I've sketched out a shape and firmed-up the lines, I start to darken the areas that I want to create in more detailed form, but other areas I'll fade off and leave to the imagination. When I've got the shape, I add form lines to emphasise the surfacing. These do a job a bit like the ribs of a wooden buck. I think bucks have a stunning beauty, so these lines are really nice to leave in my sketches for they bring three dimensions to a two-dimensional work.'

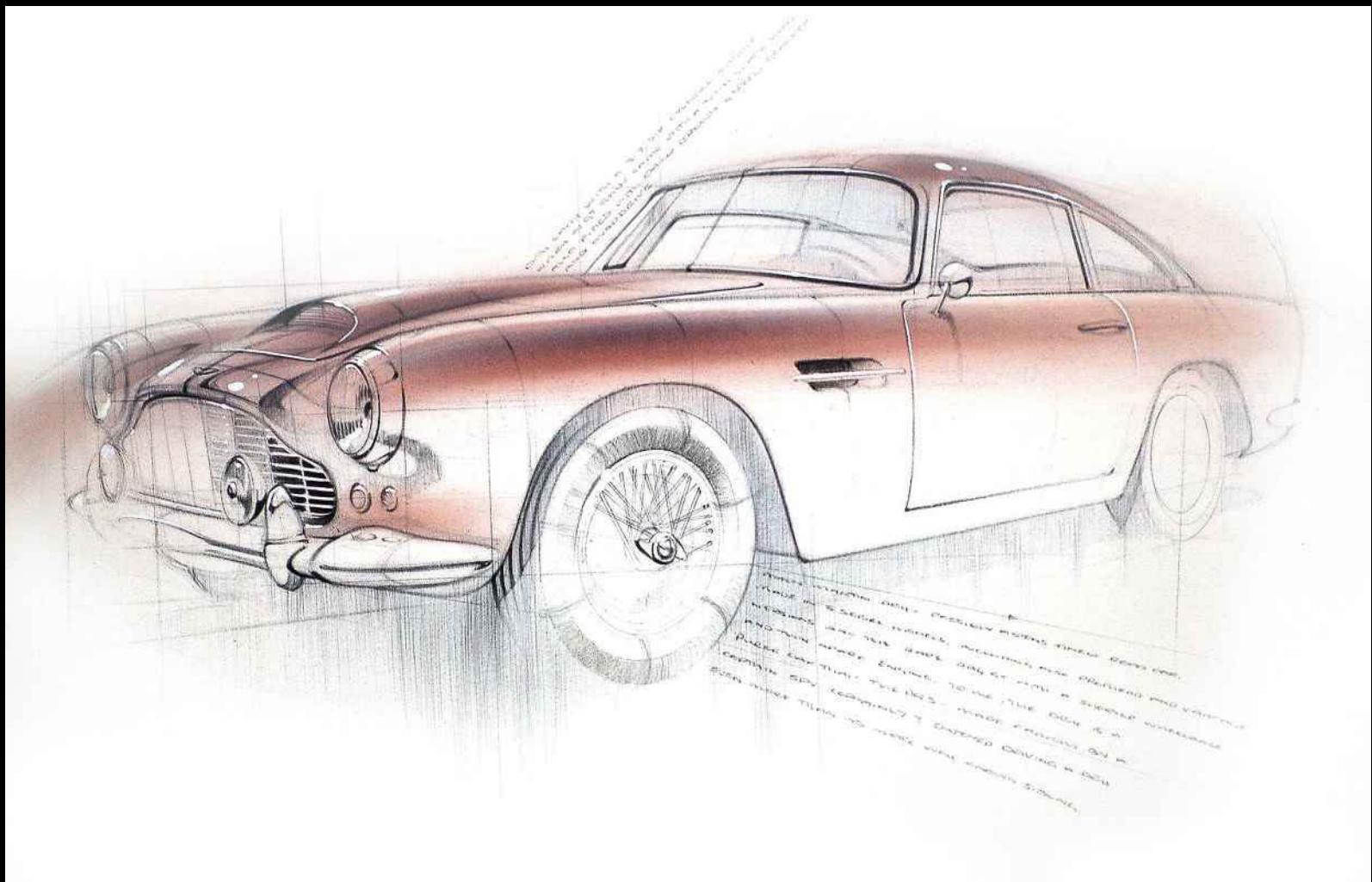
'When I'm happy with the sketch, I add some colour with a regular designer's ink marker pen to make key areas of the body stand out. They're quite wet so you can create a water colour effect if you want to. Finally I take chalk pastel and scrape and grind it up with a knife until I have a

I'VE FOUND GREAT SERMON MATERIAL IN OLD ASTON MARTINS'

Above and right

Concept sketch for a DB1 Shooting Brake: Gompertz had embarked on a career as a car and yacht designer before he had his calling to the church. DB MkIII (above right) and Bertelli-era MkII (below) are typical of the commissions he now undertakes alongside his work as a curate





pile of dust. I add some talcum powder to soften the pastel, mix it together and use a cotton wool ball to apply the pastel colour to the areas I want to bring out. Then I use an eraser to put detail highlights into the pastel. I work layer by layer, using spray fixative between each pastel and building up the intensity of colour.'

At the moment, REVS Art is very much a part-time enterprise for Rev Gompertz. Like all artists, he draws because he loves it, but as interest in his work grows he has started to accept commissions. However, he sees the art – and the wider REVS project – as long-term means to both promote the church and serve the classic car community.

'That car show in Lichfield, and my subsequent involvement with the HOPE Classic Car Rally, has shown how compatible the church and classic car communities can be. My greatest wish would be to one day take over an old service station or garage, and completely revamp it to create a hospitable community for car clubs and petrolheads.'

'It's inspired by places like The Bike Shed or the Ace Cafe in London. We wouldn't be there to

preach at people. I know that can be very off-putting. I suppose I'm thinking how the church can serve the classic car community in a progressive and engaging way. I hope the fact that I love cars would give it an integrity and an honesty enthusiasts would appreciate. We'd run REVS as a cafe, but it would also be a rest space and a community hub, with a Christian community at the centre of it providing hospitality: church in a new way.'

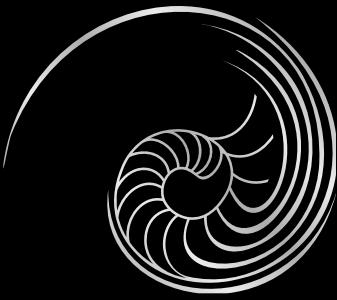
Gompertz is a fascinating character. Complex, yet disarmingly straightforward. Intriguing. Inspiring. Warm. Unique. Just like his art, in fact. And a car fanatic, just like you or me.

'This might sound slightly odd to some people, but a brilliant journey in a wonderful old car can definitely make me feel closer to God. If that old car happened to be an Aston Martin I'm not sure it could get any better.'

Amen to that.

To learn more about REVS Art, contact Adam Gompertz via revseventandart@gmail.com, follow him on Twitter @revseventandart or search for REVS Art on Facebook. 

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ONE VISION

The ultimate supercar, designed by an F1 genius and wearing the Aston Martin wings... That's the dream. Here's what we know so far about the extraordinary AM-RB 001

WORDS RICHARD MEADEN | PHOTOGRAPHY CHARLIE MAGEE





Flight of fantasy, or deliverable dream? It would be very easy to dismiss the AM-RB 001 as the former, were it not for the fact that this remarkable, convention-challenging hypercar is the brainchild of Adrian Newey. As the world's most successful – and therefore revered – designer of Grand Prix racing cars, Newey wields immense power. Both creatively and financially, for his name carries unique gravitas in the world of fast cars. Put succinctly, if Aston Martin is The Brand, Newey is most definitely The Man.

This much is clear when we arrive at Gaydon for the unveiling of a full-scale model of the car. It's appropriate for an Aston Martin quite unlike any other that the event itself is equally fresh and unconventional. Outside the main building, a DJ is playing a set from a booth perched in a

converted truck. Aston Martin employees, VIP guests and the world's road car and motorsport media mingle around a barbecue. This informal vibe is the Red Bull effect, but it's also indicative of Aston Martin's growing confidence that it can shun the stuffy press-call.

All the stops have been pulled out. Inside, on a large spotlit stage positioned in the midst of Gaydon's cathedral-like production hall, the great and the good are assembled in front of a huge crowd. Representing Aston Martin are CEO Andy Palmer and director of design Marek Reichman. To their left stands Adrian Newey (appearing super laid-back in jeans and trainers) and sharply-suited Red Bull Racing team principle Christian Horner. Between them, Martin Brundle serves as the consummate compère. So far, so slick.

An explosion of noise heralds the arrival of F1 driver Daniel Ricciardo, who scorches into the





building in his Red Bull Grand Prix car, parks neatly by the stage and hops out to join the rest. Meanwhile the AM-RB 001 broods beneath its silken cover, waiting for its moment of glory.

You know you're dealing with something special when it's the details you *don't* know that are as compelling – perhaps even more so – than those you do. What we do know is that this is very much Newey's car. His vision of the ultimate supercar, much as the McLaren F1 was for fellow genius race-car designer Gordon Murray. It's fascinating to see the dynamic between Newey and the others, for it's rare – unheard of, actually – for car companies (or race teams) to be so comfortable in taking a step back, but to a man they are clearly in his thrall.

The coup for Aston Martin and therefore Andy Palmer is that Newey's car will be an Aston. Both through choice – Newey is a fan of the brand and has owned Astons prior to this project – and through a long-standing relationship between Palmer and Red Bull that goes back to Palmer's time at Nissan and Infiniti. What's in it for Red Bull? Well, apart from being associated with one of the coolest, most well-known and – in recent times – most dynamic car companies on the planet, the AM-RB 001 is the perfect showcase for the race team's engineering consultancy offshoot, Red Bull Advanced Technologies.

So, what about the car? Well, as you'd expect, it borrows heavily from Newey's unrivalled experience in creating ultra-fast race-cars, but also from his love of racing historic cars such as his Ford GT40. This said, he insists the AM-RB 001 will be no race-track refugee. According to Newey and Reichman, it accommodates two full-size male occupants, though there's no room for luggage. At 1900mm wide, it's narrower than the current breed of hypercar. Likewise its 4000mm length makes it comfortably shorter than a Cayman-sized sports car and it stands a little over a metre high, lower even than the legendary GT40.

The materials that will be used in its construction are suitably exotic. Indeed there is no steel component anywhere in the car. Carbonfibre will be used extensively, in thicknesses dictated by F1 standards of design and construction for immense strength and rigidity, but only where it's needed.

It's all in aid of achieving a power-to-weight ratio of 1:1. That's to say 1bhp for every 1kg of weight. No one is saying what the weight will be, or indeed the power output of the still-secret engine (more on which in a moment), but the smart money is on a car weighing as close to 1000kg as is possible, meaning the car will need as close to 1000bhp as possible.

The bulk of this will come from a naturally

'The smart money is on a car weighing as close to 1000kg as is possible... and with close to 1000bhp'

Above and left
AM-RB 001's dramatic shape is the result of a genuine collaboration between Red Bull's Adrian Newey and Aston Martin's Marek Reichman; the dark grey parts of the body are Newey's, the lighter parts Reichman's



'It's a truly extraordinary shape – and the really dramatic stuff sits underneath the car'

**Left**

Despite the narrowness of the teardrop-shaped canopy, Newey and Reichman promise that the cockpit will accommodate two full-size male occupants, although there will be no luggage-carrying capacity

aspirated V12 of completely bespoke design and rumoured to be the work of Cosworth. It will be supplemented by a Kinetic Energy Recovery System (KERS) much like that developed for recent F1 cars, which will add around 100bhp and a very useful slug of torque to boost the low- and mid-range acceleration. The electric motors will also be used as a means of reversing the car, for Newey is so obsessed with paring any unnecessary weight from the car that the gearbox (another clean-sheet design) will have only forward gears.

The powertrain will be without compromise, as Newey explains: 'It's a bespoke V12, a start-from-scratch engine. It'll be high-revving with a very high specific output per litre.'

'The transmission that we then mate it to is one of the key areas of research. I look at the current trend for double-clutch gearboxes and they're monsters. You're talking about a gearbox that weighs 150kg-plus. It's tremendously bulky, and that is not something that sits with the concept of the car. We're busily researching how we do the transmission as we speak.'

Newey's true genius lies in his ability to pluck remarkable levels of downforce and aerodynamic efficiency literally from thin air. That's why the AM-RB 001 has such a dramatic, almost alien shape. Helpfully the clay show car is dark grey and green – the grey bits are essentially Newey's, the green bits Reichman's. It's a truly extraordinary shape, and the really dramatic stuff sits underneath the car – vast, canyon-sized venturi tunnels channelling air either side of the teardrop-shaped cockpit and feeding a gargantuan rear diffuser. It looks like it'll suck the tarmac off the road.

For Reichman it's been a unique and extraordinary experience, but one that's perfectly aligned with Aston's design ethos: 'As soon as we met with Adrian, his desire was to force and push the air to the underside, and our desire was to have the air generate beautiful forms, so there was a connection.'

'A simpler surface enables Adrian to generate and direct the air where he wants it. If we came up with an incredibly elaborate piece of design, it would potentially disrupt his aerodynamic vision. So it really is a desire to be as pure and simple and as close to nature as possible. And that's his thinking, too. He talks about nature when he talks about the engineering, about aerodynamics in terms of the golden section'



and proportion. Those principles mean we're not like anyone else. We didn't look at anything else. We came at it from the science of performance and the beauty of Aston Martin.'

The functional beauty of the AM-RB 001's top surfaces belies an enormously aggressive underbody that will generate huge levels of downforce. So much, in fact, that the suspension system – again, secret for now – is expected to feature active technology to combat the vertical loadings and enable a combination of low-speed pliancy and high-speed control.

And that's key to Newey's assertion that the AM-RB 001 will be enjoyable on the road: 'I want it to be capable of extreme performance, but if you want to use it to go to the shops then it'll be a comfortable place to be. That means it really has to be a car of two characters. That's what we're trying to put into it, the technology that allows it to be docile and comfortable, but if you want to take it on track or drive it very fast, it clearly has the performance to do that as well. If it feels like an LMP car on the road, then as far as I'm concerned we'll have failed.'

Naturally the performance will be otherworldly, though it's not being designed to chase numbers in the manner of a car like the Bugatti Chiron. There is also the prospect of a track-only version (Aston is saying there will be 99 road cars and 24 track cars) that will be able to lap a circuit such as Silverstone at a similar pace to today's LMP1 Le Mans prototypes. Newey backs this up by stating the track car will be capable of generating 4.5 G of cornering force. Whether the owners are capable of driving it to those prodigious limits remains to be seen, but, as with any hypercar, the AM-RB 001 is as much about bragging rights as anything else.

How much? Well, literally, if you have to ask, you can't afford it, for Aston Martin will be no more precise than stating it will be somewhere between £2 million and £3 million. But then what's a million quid between friends? Despite this magnificent vagueness, the company has had around 400 serious enquires. A number of those who have already been accepted have ordered examples of both the road car and the track version. Clearly otherworldly performance and otherworldly wealth go hand-in-hand.

Deliveries are due to start in 2018, but before then a vast amount of work remains to be done. It's a hugely ambitious project for any road car brand – Aston included – but one that's firmly within the scope of a front-running F1 team. The result promises to be mind-blowing. **V**

Above and right

Rear view is perhaps the most sensational of all, showing the gargantuan rear diffuser that will help suck the AM-RB 001 to the tarmac. Structure and bodywork will be almost entirely carbonfibre





*Desmond
J. Smail*



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TEAM SPIRIT

LM14 is a genuine works ‘team car’, one of three entered for the 1934 Le Mans and the only one to retain its original lightweight chassis. We drive it on the Prescott hill

WORDS JOHN SIMISTER | PHOTOGRAPHY TIM ANDREW



You know how this works. We, the motoring press, get to drive fabulous cars with wonderful stories to tell, and we tell you those stories. But how do we get to drive the cars?

Sometimes we seek them out and persuade the owner to let us loose. Sometimes a specialist in the model concerned offers us a drive, providing a story for us and promotion for his business. Sometimes an auction house puts us behind the wheel of a car shortly to go under the hammer, perhaps for a very large sum containing as many as seven digits, and our story can publicise the process.

But, just occasionally, there is no unspoken deal involved, no hint of someone else's hefty bottom line. It happens simply because a very enthusiastic and very generous owner wants the world to know about his magnificent machine. This is how I come to be driving Aston Martin LM14.

It's a four-owner car, 76,590 miles on the clock. The last time it changed hands in a monetary deal was in 1938, for £200, four years after it was entered in the Le Mans 24 Hours as a factory team car. It has the look of an Aston Martin Ulster, and indeed it modelled for the first Ulster sales brochure, but the Ulsters didn't exist as a model when LM14 was finished in May 1934. So it's a retrospective Ulster, albeit with a radiator 3in taller than a 'proper' Ulster's and a flatter bonnet-line to match.

It was one of three new works team cars built for the 1934 Le Mans race, continuing the LM series of works racers that began with LM1 in 1929 and ended with LM23 in 1937. The other two were LM11 and LM12, there being no LM13 on the grounds of superstition. All had chassis

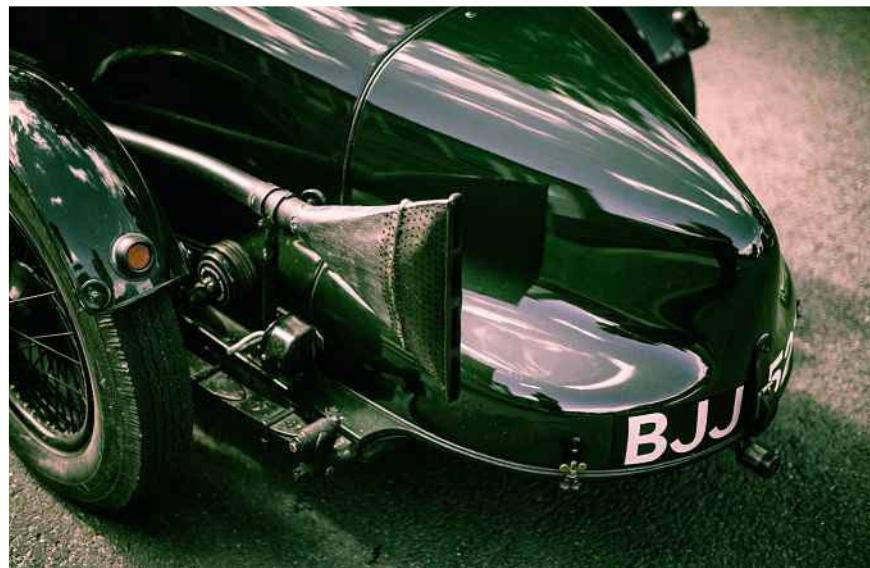
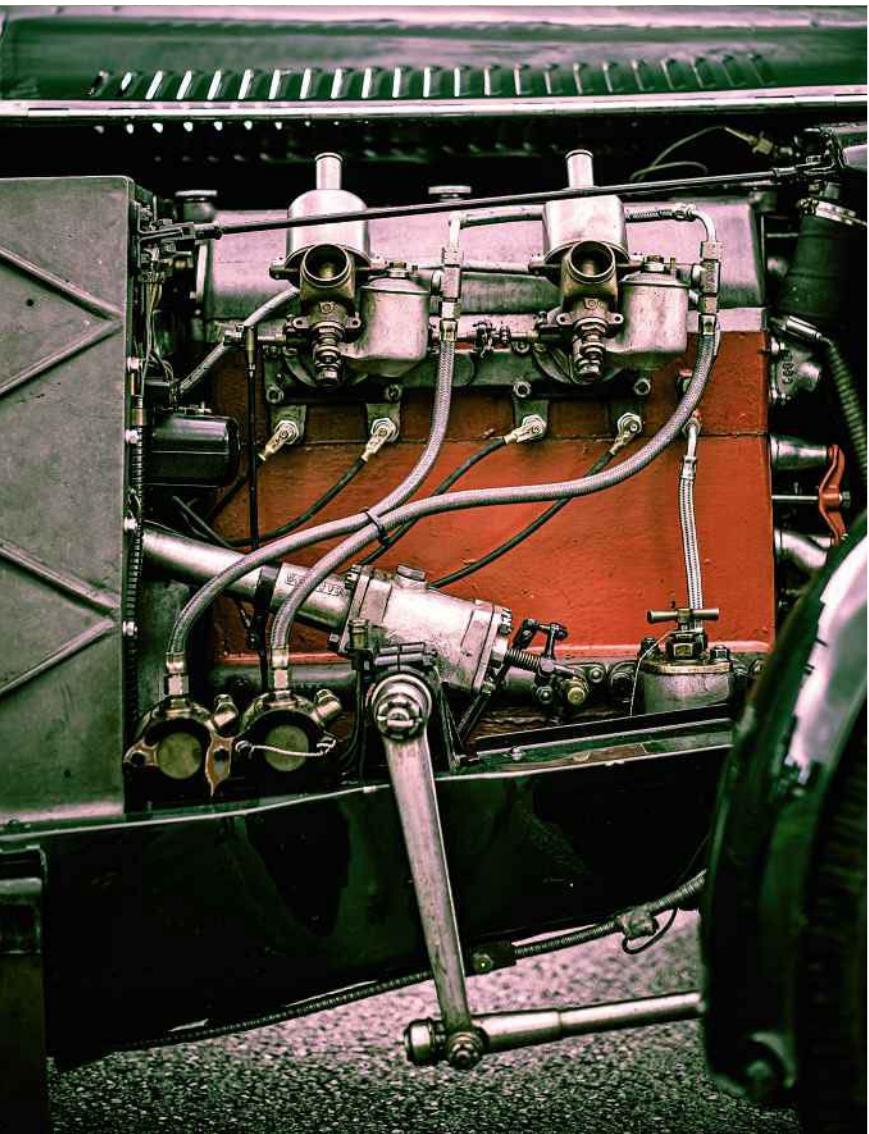
frames drilled with large holes to make them lighter, and elegant, low-slung bodywork with the spare wheel enclosed horizontally under the tapering tail's opening lid. Mechanically they were in 'second series' guise, with an underslung chassis and a reverse-gate gearbox in unit with the 1.5-litre, overhead-camshaft engine.

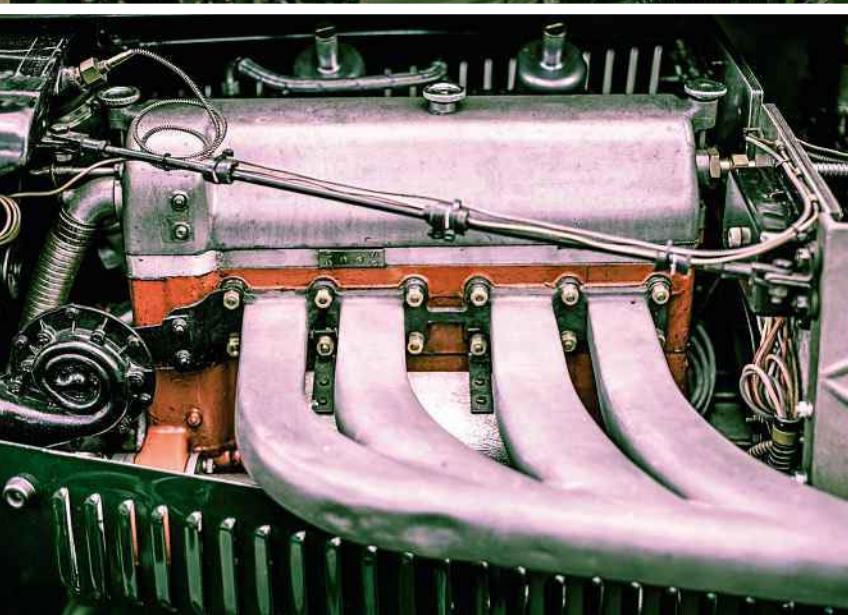
And now history takes two paths. The view until 2011, as set out in Inman Hunter's epic tome on pre-war Aston Martins, is that LM14 was the lightest of the three 1934 team cars, as its magnesium camshaft cover, brake drums and unusual cast side panels for the scuttle suggest, and that it was driven at Le Mans by engineering boss 'Bert' Bertelli and co-driver Penn-Hughes. But later research, as mentioned in Alan Archer's equally epic car-by-car guide to all the Aston Martin Ulsters, reveals that actually LM14 ran at Le Mans with racing number 23, not 21 as thought. That it wore the wrong registration number, BMG 309 rather than the BMG 310 with which it was actually registered, stirred the confusion.

This means that it was actually driven by Mort Morris-Goodall, who later co-founded the Aston Martin Owners' Club, and Jim Elwes. The Bertelli/Penn-Hughes car was LM12, and LM11 was driven by T S Fotheringham and John Appleton. All three cars set off from Feltham to Le Mans (driven there under their own power, of course) with high hopes, and it was LM14 that shone the most brightly.

Above and opposite

LM14 just before the 1934 Le Mans 24Hours. Ignore the numberplate - they were often swapped around in those more relaxed times. LM14 continued racing after it was sold by the factory and looks at home at Prescott today





Left

LM14 (foreground) at the workshops of pre-war Aston experts Jim and Bruce Young. Below, from the left: Jim, LM14 owner Charles Trevelyan, Bruce Young and our man Simister, who later enjoys himself on the Prescott hill

It was running at ninth place after the first hour, and during the night it worked its way up to second, holding that spot for 72 laps. By 10am, though, it was all over. LM14 threw a connecting rod, having suffered low oil pressure caused by aluminium powder circulating in the oil. That powder came from the timing case, milled away by a loosened dog drive for the dynamo. The same fate had already befallen LM12, and LM11 was also gone. So ended Le Mans 1934.

Back at Feltham, LM11 and LM12 were rebuilt onto new, undrilled chassis frames to suit the regulations for the Ulster TT race whose name they would later bear, under their new identities of LM15 and LM16. LM14, however, remained as was – and thus is not only the oldest ‘Ulster’ but also the only one with a drilled chassis. Not to mention the most fantastic, continuous history.

WE HAVE GATHERED at the workshops and former farm of father and son Jim and Bruce Young, Worcestershire-based experts in pre-war Astons and keepers of the pre-war register. They look after LM14 for owner Charles Trevelyan, who is also a Bugatti buff – to the extent of being a Bugatti Trustee at the owners’ club headquarters at the nearby Prescott Hillclimb.

Bruce is talking me through some of the other ancient Aston Martins in his care, illustrating the evolution of the pre-war cars. Oldest is Bruce’s own 1929 International three-seater, in white and registered MY 2514. ‘This was Mort Morris-Goodall’s first Aston Martin,’ he explains. ‘Mort used it a lot, racing at Brooklands and so on. Only about six were built with this body, three of them team cars. LM1 and LM2 had a round tail like this.’

These first-series cars have a narrower chassis with outboard extensions to carry the rear springs, an open clutch driving a separate gearbox and a worm-drive rear axle, and rod-actuated brakes. The Youngs’ next car, a long-chassis International registered in 1930 as GF 6979 to Lord Howard de Walden, was originally a Harrison-bodied coupé with a single-carburettor engine. So, what happened? ‘It lost its body around 1958. We got it as pile of bits. So this is our own body, something we dreamt up. It looks like a stretched team car.’

And here’s an early second-series car from 1932, a ‘Competition Two-Seater’ registered APG 410 and one of only two made. The first owner was Richard Shuttleworth, of the vintage aircraft collection. And now Charles has arrived in LM14, and is attempting to exit the cabin as decorously as possible. I’m surrounded by people with potent enthusiasm for the pre-war Aston Martin breed. They are in it for the love, and the love alone.

HOW CHARLES CAME by LM14 is a tale of coincidence, loyalty and good fortune. We need to return to 1934 for the next part, specifically September 19 when Flight Lieutenant John Greaves bought LM14, now repaired and painted black instead of the original green, via the George Hartwell dealership in Oxford. Three days later he entered it in a

Brooklands race meeting and finished the race despite torrential rain. Next he sorted out its registration, the original number having seemingly become detached from the car. Henceforth it would be BJJ 527, the number it wears to this day.

Greaves was an enthusiastic modifier, and some of his notes survive. He continued to race LM14, fitting a longer-legged rear axle ratio and, for 1935, a Zoller supercharger. The hole in the bonnet that this necessitated can still be seen, covered with an aluminium plate. It completed one race in this form, finishing sixth at the Derby Motor Club’s handicap race at Donington, but it disgraced itself at Brooklands and the Zoller was removed.

In 1937, ever busier in the RAF having become a squadron leader, Greaves sold LM14. In April it appeared for sale at Winter Garden Garages of High Holborn, London, priced at £295, but no-one was tempted. Over a year later it still hadn’t sold, despite regular advertisements in *The Autocar*, so Lance Prideaux-Brune, proprietor of the garage, taxed it again. He had meanwhile given up his Aston Martin agency in favour of Morgan, and his sales manager, Geoffrey White, raced a Morgan-Climax at Le Mans in June 1938, sharing with a car-mad young woman called Prudence Fawcett.

Prudence wanted to buy LM14, and after Prideaux-Brune agreed to an extended test, she drove it to her family in Derby to show them, only to be met with intense disapproval at her un-ladylike antics. So she didn’t buy the Aston, side-stepping into a couple of Alfa Romeos, which she imported from Italy, and Prideaux-Brune finally sold LM14 to Aston Martin enthusiast Lt Col Raymond Patrick Johnson-Ferguson in July 1938.

Brooklands driving tests were the Lt Col’s favoured motorsport, and he won numerous awards. In January 1939 the Aston gained Hartford ‘Telecontrol’ dampers with adjustment from the cockpit, and just as the Second World War was starting it got a speedometer and a new coat of paint, this time in grey. Something more fateful happened in April, though; Johnson-Ferguson was best man at his friend Leslie Trevelyan’s wedding and took the groom to church in LM14. His bride? Prudence Fawcett, past borrower of LM14, whose love of fast cars had bowled Leslie over. ‘It was an amazing co-incidence,’ says Charles. Now you see how their son got his automotive genes.

Johnson-Ferguson kept LM14 until his death in September 1997, bringing it out to play from time to time,

‘I’M SURROUNDED BY PEOPLE WITH POTENT ENTHUSIASM FOR THE PRE-WAR ASTON BREED’



never restoring it, just maintaining it as required including periodic engine rebuilds and, in the 1980s, a return to the original dark green. Towards the end of his life he entrusted it to Charles' care, knowing LM14 would be in appreciative hands. And when Johnson-Ferguson died, he left LM14 to Charles in his will.

That was some bequest, and you sense that, 19 years on, Charles still can't quite believe it. This might be why he is so happy to share LM14's pleasures. We're about to head to Prescott: 'You don't want me in there with you, telling you what to do. You'll be fine. Just drive it and enjoy it.'

SO I DO JUST THAT. LM14 had quite a rebuild during 1998 and 1999, administered by Ecurie Bertelli and retaining as much originality as possible. That includes all the body, apart from the corroded scuttle. 'I had it rewired,' Charles reports, 'and it had a new crankshaft, rods and pistons, which it probably didn't need. I also had it painted again.' Since then, he has been using the car regularly and allowing it to continue its gentle patination.

Which means there's a homely, worn-in feel to LM14 that tells so much more of a story than a freshly rebuilt car, all its outer surfaces renewed, can tell. The bucket-back seats are scuffed, because you can't help but scuff them as you climb over the sides of the doorless cockpit and attempt to squeeze legs under and around the steering wheel with its four slightly loose spokes, a giant advance/re retard lever emerging from its centre.

It's cosy in here. You sit low, behind an aero screen (the full windscreen is folded flat), short, rubber-knobbed gearlever a hand-width away, handbrake outside the cockpit.

Above and opposite

From the pressurised radiator cap to the external handbrake to the row of metal toggle switches on the dash, LM14 is wonderfully original and dripping with character. Long gearing means it's not ideal for hillclimbing, but then it was built for a much bigger stage...

Almost dead-ahead is a giant oil-pressure gauge, its face faded except for the slender area behind the needle's rest position. Below the main dials are pressure gauges for the adjustable-pressure Telecontrol friction dampers: one for the fronts, one for the rears. They are stuck at their readings because the adjusters have seized. 'It needs a bit of going through,' Charles admits.

There's a row of metal toggle switches to the left. Flick down three: Magneto, Main (fuel pump, of two) and Dynamo. Then press the starter button, to be met with the eager *blat-whirr* typical of this engine. Into gear: there's no synchromesh, obviously, and the gate is a mirror image of the usual pattern, a transposition that goes nicely with the throttle pedal's position between clutch and brake.

I try to reprogram my brain, and hope it sticks. Actually, it soon becomes quite natural, like driving a car with left-hand drive. I know this basic mechanical cocktail quite well, having driven a friend's 1933 Aston Le Mans several times; Bruce Young knows that car too, and reckons LM14 won't feel as lively on account of its long-legged rear axle ratio.

He's right. You can hold on to first gear for a long time, but in a synchro-less car that can call for patience when selecting second, as you wait for the input shaft to slow





down. Sometimes an upward double-declutch helps, as here; time the revs-drop right before finishing the shift, and it can be pleasingly smooth and silent.

With practice and sympathy this proves a sweet, snickety gearbox, particularly when double-declutching down into first gear as is often required; it's a lot more forgiving than the earlier 'box as fitted to LM3, reported on in these pages back in issue 12. And if you let the engine rev freely beyond 3000rpm, the point at which it comes alive, you can hustle LM14 along well. Third gear's bag-of-bolts cacophony seems standard in pre-war Astons, but in fourth this is a great cruiser.

As for the engine, it makes around 85bhp from the fuel and air mix supplied by its unusual semi-downdraught SU carburettors with their bronze bodies, a rare sight today. It responds keenly to my right foot, exhaust burbling happily through the exposed manifold with its rectangular-section pipes and the same dent it has worn since the 1930s, and meeting the air through a flared-and-flattened Brooklands tailpipe.

Like other pre-war Astons, this one jiggles along over bumps but always goes where it's pointed. Yes, the scuttle and steering wheel wobble around a bit, and the rear suspension is bouncy (blame the stuck Telecontrols), but the feel through both the steering and my backside tells me exactly what is happening. A car like this is transparent in its intentions, so you always know how to get the best from it. It's driving as a partnership, a joint enterprise.

Specification

CONSTRUCTION	Drilled steel ladder chassis, aluminium body panels on wood frame
ENGINE	In-line 4-cyl, 1488cc, sohc, twin SU semi-downdraught carburettors
MAX POWER	c85bhp
MAX TORQUE	n/a
TRANSMISSION	Four-speed non-sychromesh manual, rear-wheel drive
SUSPENSION	Solid axles front and rear, leaf springs, Hartford friction dampers
STEERING	Worm and castor
BRAKES	Aluminium finned drums front and rear, rod and cable-actuated
WHEELS	18in wire-spoked
TYRES	5.25/5.50-18 crossply
WEIGHT	890kg
TOP SPEED	110mph

At Prescott, the brakes – rod rear, cable front, all-drum obviously – do wilt after a sequence of runs for the camera, but they never grab or pull unevenly. The water doesn't boil; the vast oil supply for the dry-sump lubrication system gets barely warm. This feels a tough, durable machine, and were it not for that dynamo drive I could have been driving a second-place Le Mans scorer.

Looking at the twin fuel fillers (not quite matching – they never did), the early pressurised radiator cap, the giant oil filler in the front apron, I can almost imagine myself in the Le Mans pits, 82 years ago. I hope I'm as fit as LM14 when I'm as old as that.

With thanks to Charles Trevelyan, Jim and Bruce Young, and the Bugatti Owners' Club. V

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BIG BROTHER'S LITTLE BROTHER

Everyone remembers the DBR9, the awesome, DB9-based GT1 car and twice class winner at Le Mans. The DBRS9 was its GT3 sibling, aimed at the privateer racer. Ten years after its debut, we drive chassis no.1

WORDS STEPHEN ARCHER | PHOTOGRAPHY TIM ANDREW





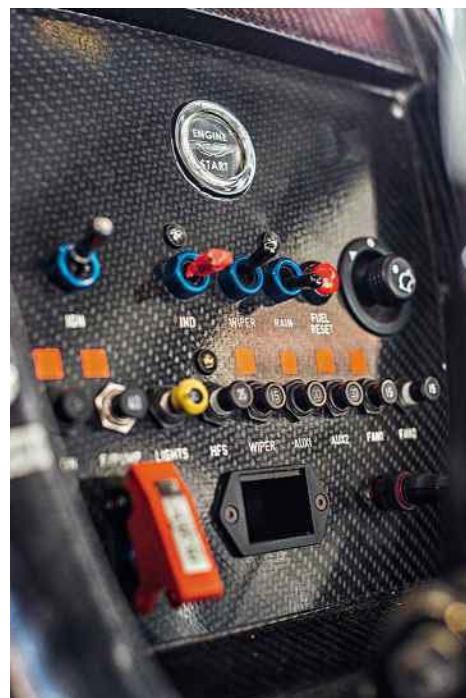
PICTURE-PERFECT CLOUDS scudded across the Northamptonshire countryside and the fields exuded a vivid green, the likes of which had not been seen for weeks. This was to be a day of heightened senses. The destination was Donington Park for a rendezvous with a very special type of DB9 – the first of the DBRS9 line of privateer racing cars. As an unabashed fan of the ‘gentleman’s racer’, I’d been looking forward to this day for a very long time.

On paper at least, the DBRS9 was a close relative of the regular DB9 road car, certainly much closer than the fire-breathing DBR9. Which is why I’m driving to the circuit in a DB9 GT, the final incarnation of the DB9 line, the ‘last of the many’ going to meet the ‘first of the few’. It should be a fascinating comparison.

But hang on. Isn’t the DB9 supposed to be the ‘grand tourer’ of the Aston range? From where I’m sitting, the GT feels seriously quick and properly sporting, an impression backed up by the stats: 540bhp, 0-60mph in 4.4sec and a maximum speed of 183mph. What’s more, with huge carbon-ceramic disc brakes, it stops every bit as dramatically as it goes. And the thought occurs: just how much faster or, for that matter, *different* can the racing car be compared to such a highly accomplished machine?

So what, exactly, was the DBRS9? It was certainly an important car for Aston Martin, since – along with the DBR9 – it marked Aston’s return to front-line endurance racing after a gap of almost a quarter of a century. While the DBR9 was a full-on GT1 car, first racing in 2005 and going on to two famous Le Mans class wins, the DBRS9 was built for customers to race in the new-for-2006 GT3 category, gentlemen drivers with a mixture of ‘pro’ and ‘am’.

This particular DBRS9 is rather special – it’s chassis DBRS9/1 and was used to announce the model to the UK press at the Autosport Show in 2006. The names on the side were those of racer-turned-telecoms tycoon Tom Alexander



DBRS9

CONSTRUCTION Bonded aluminium chassis with carbonfibre body panels (roof aluminium)

ENGINE V12, 5935cc

MAX POWER 550bhp @ 6750rpm

MAX TORQUE 457lb ft @ 5750rpm

TRANSMISSION Six-speed sequential, rear-wheel drive, limited-slip differential

SUSPENSION Front and rear:

Rose-jointed double wishbones, coil springs, two-way adjustable Koni dampers, anti-roll bar

BRAKES Vented carbon-ceramic discs, 380mm front with six-piston Brembo calipers, 313mm rear with four-piston Brembo calipers

WHEELS Forged aluminium,

12.5 x 18in front, 13 x 18in rear

TYRES 29/65-18 front, 31/71-18 rear

WEIGHT 1288kg

POWER TO WEIGHT 434bhp/ton

0-60MPH sub 4.0sec (est)

0-100MPH sub 9.0sec (est)

TOP SPEED c175mph (est)

PRICE WHEN NEW c£205,000

and racer-turned-TV presenter Tiff Needell, and the pair would co-drive the car in its debut season. In fact, Tom still owns it today and it has been raced every year, bar one, ever since.

The plan was for your scribe to share the car with Tom on a general test day. However, thirty minutes before I arrive at Donington, he calls to say that he’s poorly and still in Somerset. ‘Will you be all right on your own? The team is ready and waiting for you...’

I’d asked him not to go to too much trouble for our shoot, but I arrive to see the impressive 22GT Racing truck parked behind the garage, inside which the team has installed its own walls, floor and mini kitchen. Was this a track test or a pit improvement show? Tom’s three mechanics, led by the very capable Nathan

Clockwise from left

Our man Archer prepares for his stint; betrays some consternation on being told there's no rev-counter, and eases his way in with some gentle laps alongside the DB9 GT that delivered him to Donington. This DBRS9 was the very first built







'IF THE DB9 OOZES REFINED STYLE, THEN THIS HAS A PRESENCE BORDERING ON THE INTIMIDATING'

Harrison are milling around, and in the middle of the garage, poised on its air-jacks, is the DBRS9.

If the DB9 oozes refined style, then this has a presence bordering on the intimidating. The graceful aluminium haunches of the road car morphed on the DBRS9 into broad carbonfibre arches to accommodate wheels 12.5 and 13in wide, front and rear respectively (for comparison, the contemporary DB9's wheels were 8.5 and 9in wide). The front end has a carbon splitter that looks like part of a nuclear submarine; the rear wing, on the other hand, appears to have aeronautical origins. The roof is aluminium but the rest of the bodywork is carbonfibre: the carbon doors just lift off and can be supported with a little finger.

The chassis structure is essentially the same as on the road car. The suspension, too, has a lot of carry-over parts, though the springs and dampers are obviously a lot stiffer and the damping fully adjustable. The racer is a hell of a lot lighter though. Despite the addition of a very substantial steel roll-cage, the DBRS9 weighs around 500kg less than its roadgoing counterpart. So even though the output of the road car has grown over the years, so much so that peak power of the GT is within touching distance of the DBRS9 (540bhp plays 550), the GT's power-to-weight ratio of 307bhp per ton is put into stark perspective by the RS9's 434bhp per ton. The effects of which I'm about to discover.

One of the first things you notice when you've squeezed through the cage and dropped into the wing-backed



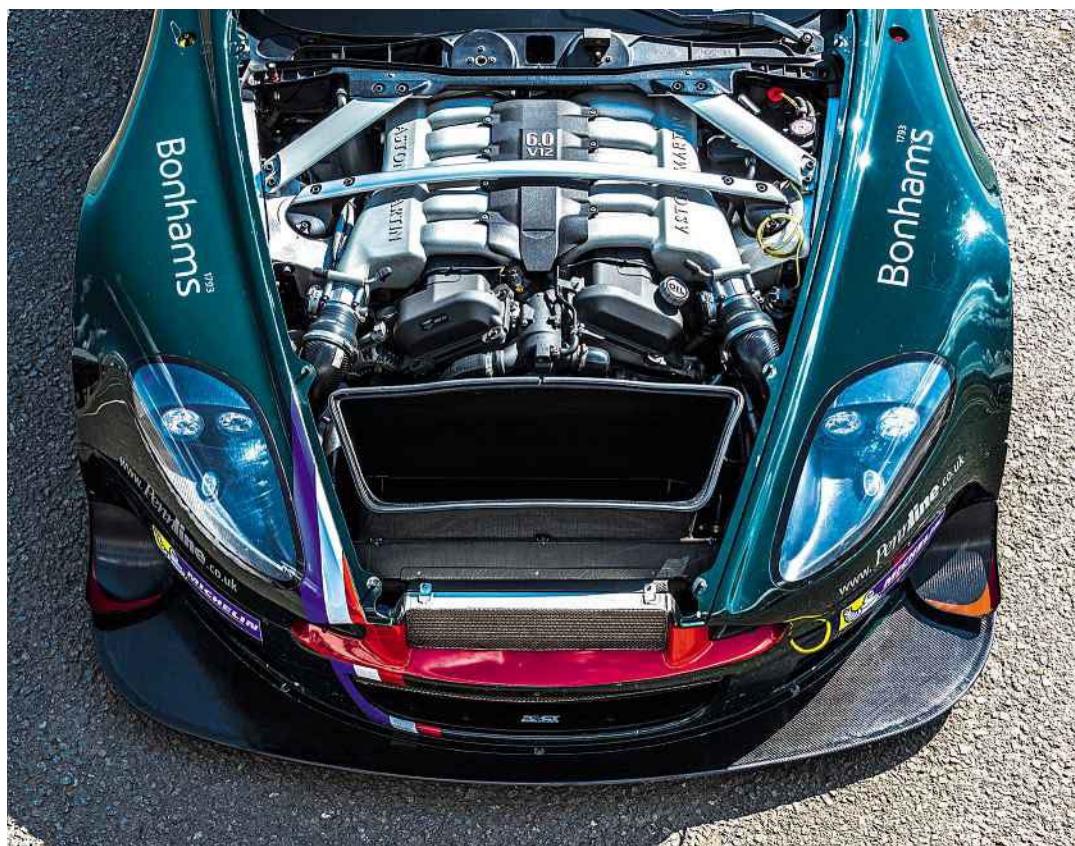
Right and below

Stripping out the interior, along with adding carbonfibre body panels and replacing the rear and side glass with polycarbonate, allowed the DBRS9 to shed almost 500kg compared with the DB9 donor. End-of-the-line DB9 GT has almost as much power as racer, but RS9 has far superior power-to-weight



DB9 GT

ENGINE V12, 5935cc **MAX POWER** 540bhp @ 6500rpm **MAX TORQUE** 457lb ft @ 5500rpm **TRANSMISSION** Six-speed Touchtronic II automatic **SUSPENSION** Front and rear: double wishbones, coil springs, adaptive dampers, anti-roll bar **BRAKES** Vented carbon-ceramic discs, 398mm front, 360mm rear, ABS, EBD **WHEELS** 8.5 x 20in front, 11 x 20in rear **TYRES** 245/35 ZR20 front, 295/30 ZR20 rear **WEIGHT** 1785kg **POWER TO WEIGHT** 307bhp/ton **0-60MPH** 4.4sec (claimed) **TOP SPEED** 183mph **PRICE** £140,000





A gentleman's racer

The DBRS9, announced by Aston Martin Racing at Le Mans in 2005, was the less sophisticated sibling to the DBR9, a more affordable car aimed at privateer racing teams. Its engine was tuned to 550bhp, which was 50 less than the DBR9, and it had considerably less aero. The bodies and chassis were essentially the same but the DBRS9 weighed 1288kg where the DBR9 was 1100kg. Other differences included steel rather than carbon-ceramic brakes. Inevitably, lessons from the DBR9 were carried over into the DBRS9 from an early stage in its life. This car, DBRS9/1, was typical in that it changed to centre-lock wheels and benefited from engine and aero upgrades and a switch from the manual gearbox to a Quaife sequential 'box.'

DBRS9/1, owned from new by Tom Alexander, is probably the best known of all of the 28 cars built. Between 2006 and 2009 it was campaigned first by Barwell Motorsport and then 22GT Racing. Tom's original co-driver was Tiff Needell but he has since shared the car with Adrian Willmott and Michael Bentwood. DBRS9/1 ran in the European GT3 Championship in 2006, then British GTs from 2007 to 2009, with many podium results.

carbon-shelled seat is the gearlever. When new, this DBRS9 had an H-pattern six-speed manual gearbox but it was soon upgraded to the six-speed sequential option. Where the DB9 GT has delicate paddles behind the steering wheel, the racer has a lever that would not look out of place in a railway signal box. Unsurprisingly, it requires a rather more robust approach. 'Move the lever like you mean it,' advises Nathan. 'You can't break it, so go for it!'

We run through a cockpit drill that feels more like a briefing for combat. Oil pressure? 'Top right on setting one on the LCD display,' says Nathan. Rev-counter? 'It doesn't have one.' Excuse me? 'There are six shift-lights. The last is red – best change before that one and use your ears.' Is it a racing clutch? 'Yes, but once it's warm you just flat-shift.'

What I am being told, quite calmly, is that I should keep the throttle hard down, watch the shift-lights and pull back (hard) on the lever until the next corner beckons. For down-changes, the clutch is needed but any double-declutch rev-matching is done for you by the electronics. This is helpful because at Donington the most serious flat up-shifting is followed by a series of attention-grabbingly tight corners and chicanes. I can feel my heart-rate rising.

Heading out initially at a modest pace for the car-to-car photography is a help. It enables some acclimatisation to a racing seat clearly designed for a skinny matador – and the most wonderful but ear-splitting V12 cacophony in this virtually un-silenced car. There is little rearward vision by conventional means, so a rear-facing camera with a TV screen on the dash do the job. Photography over, Nathan takes the car out to check that all is well and everything is up to temperature.

Harness pulled down tightly, surrounded by the web of steel tubing, there's a feeling of being strapped in at the mercy of the machine, but the controls are nice and light (the steering is power-assisted), the clutch is easy and the big V12 is perfectly happy at a 35mph trickle along the pit-lane. Initially it all seems very friendly, even comforting.

The marshal waves the car onto the track. Floor it now? No, let's just ease into this. Slowly down to Redgate – a Lola nips inside – pull the giant lever and the dash reads 'gear 2'. The ratios are close, the torque immense. Use the clutch on the first few up-changes – into 3rd, *click*, 4th, *click* – and the Aston flows nicely through Craner Curves. The Old Hairpin looms but, staying in 4th, we round it with ease. With



'THE SOUND IS IMMENSE, MORE LIKE 120 CYLINDERS GIVING THEIR ALL'

this amount of torque, the DBRS9 would have been pretty effective with four gears!

For five laps, car and driver get to know each other. So it's easy on the brakes to start with, but when they're warm and you start to lean on them, the feel is not unlike that of the DB9 GT's carbon discs. Of course, when combined with slick tyres and light weight, the stopping power is extraordinary. Then a quick pit-stop to check all is well with Nathan and that all the numbers and lights are as they should be. They are. Trickle down the pit-lane again and, when the light goes green, it's flat down to Redgate this time. The turn-in grip is fabulous and, in a flash, the top Craner Curve is imminent, by which time the car is in 4th...

The DBRS9 will take these legendary turns without a lift, though not for the writer on this short test! Down into 3rd and the Aston is through the Old Hairpin as if some unknown law of physics is holding it on line, the handling balance perfectly neutral.

Out of Coppice, and with the right foot hard down, pull the giant lever on the rev-light's cue. The sound is immense, more like 120 cylinders giving their all. Hit the brakes and the straps dig

into your shoulders; 3rd though the left-right chicane and then flat-shift down to the Grand Prix hairpin. The Aston is doing everything with astonishing ease. By the eighth lap, it's starting to move around under you, gentle slides caught almost instinctively. This hugely strong and capable racing machine now feels strapped on rather than the driver strapped in. It's saying 'keep pushing, keep pushing, there's more to come'. And there is. But it's also a demanding beast, requiring great concentration and physical effort. A long stint on a hot day would be hard but very rewarding work.

Returning the DB9 GT to Newport Pagnell, it certainly doesn't feel too slow or too soft after the physical experience of the DBRS9. It just feels as though it's doing a lot with little effort, a welcome calm competence after the extreme, howling, visceral DBRS9. What a great Jekyll-and-Hyde double act. Ten years on, both remain superb engineering achievements. **V**

With thanks to Tom Alexander and the team from 22GT Racing: Nathan Harrison, Jamie Leech and Nigel Kemp. Thanks also to Felix Archer, Aston Martin Works and finally to Donington Park.

Tom Alexander



Perhaps better known for his high-flying career in telecoms, Tom is a seasoned racer who started out in karts in the 1970s and was a regular member of the British karting team. That team's livery with its three-colour stripes is mirrored on the DBRS9 today. A professional driver until the age of 21, he then went into telecoms, where success allowed him to indulge his lifelong passion for Aston Martin.

The opportunity to be part of the marque's return to racing was too good to miss, hence the acquisition of the DBRS9. 'Probably my best moment with the car was driving it flat in 5th through the Porsche Curves at the Le Mans centenary race in 2012,' he says. 'The lowlight was catching fire at Donington in 2008!'

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THE GRAND TOUR

The DB11 is Aston Martin's all-new GT car. What better way to put its credentials to the test than on an epic road trip across Europe?

WORDS DAVID VIVIAN | PHOTOGRAPHY MAX EAREY



THE UPLIFTINGLY-NAMED A1, Italy's sun-baked 'spinal' autostrada that runs the 754km from Naples in the south, via Tuscany, to the Emilian plains and Milan in the north, is a tedious thing this Friday afternoon, a perfect storm of stifling mid-summer heat and arterial atrophy. For as far as photographer Max Earey's lens can see, thousands of barely moving vehicles map out our temporally locked future in orderly parallel lines that dissolve to a hazy ripple on the horizon. We're trapped in a slowly shunting train of metal longer even than those I remember making as a kid during my monthly stock-take of scuffed and flaking Corgi toys. And you know how memories have a tendency to exaggerate.

An old boss of mine once wrote a line about a moment in time at the wheel of a fast car on a road not so very far from here. 'It had the unreal quality of a dream.' So it is now. But given our self-imposed 48-hour timetable, our Florence-to-Calais-via-the-Swiss-Alps sight-seeing itinerary and, perhaps most urgently, the need for some speed, it's a dream I'd rather not be in.

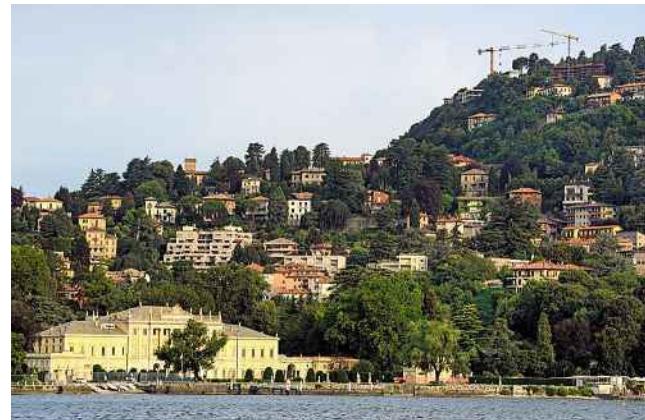
I've had better days on this road. Like the time *evo* magazine decided to base its Car of The Year battle in Tuscany. It was 2002, and a small group of us flew into Bologna, where a couple of the contenders were waiting. One was a Lamborghini Murciélagos more fiercely orange than the setting sun, the other a Pagani

Zonda C12S with exposed carbon bodywork so dark and cool it seemed to absorb the enriched glow of the Lambo parked next to it. Better still, it was chaperoned by Signor Pagani himself.

Your editor Mr Meaden appropriated the Murciélagos keys with the routine certainty of a factory worker punching a time card. Seizing my chance before anyone noticed, I hitched a ride with Horacio in the C12S. The inevitable pre-bout stare-down that ensued on the A1 heading south – surreptitious, stealthy but studded with moments-of-truth drama – ignited a mood and scintillated the senses. This stuff can't help but sear itself into your memory, the better to taunt you at a later date.

There'll be time enough, I reassure myself. There had better be. I know the DB11 is Aston's all-purpose GT for the unfolding post-DB9, Andy Palmer-led era, a bolide with the 'ballistic' concealed beneath layers of distracting beauty and, these days, part-Mercedes-sourced sophistication. Traffic moving with the speed of bacteria on a petri dish that would probably have cooked the clutch of a first-generation paddle-shift Vanquish in a final spasm of convulsive lunges is simply accommodated by the micro-managed smoothness of the DB11's eight-speed ZF auto. And I know I can't readily recall feeling cosier or more at ease in a double-glazed cabin that cosseted with quite such material good





taste, not to mention the fine (by any standard) control ergonomics of the steering wheel with the engine map options and adaptive damper settings at my thumb-tips. Or, come to that, being more grateful for the company of seriously chilled yet minutely adjustable air-conditioning capable, should my bottom require it, of releasing a gentle breeze from the depths of my seat's shapely squab. But, although I shouldn't complain, I am kind of curious to find out what this 5.2-litre, twin-turbo V12's 600bhp and 516 lb ft actually feel and sound like: live, loud and unplugged.

I look across to my right and exchange glances with an elderly couple in an old and elegantly battered Volkswagen Beetle, affecting an ironic, pursed-lip 'this is great' half smile. They stare back with something approximating the doomed expression of the cross-eyed dog sitting on a park bench that met the gaze of an already suicidal Colin Farrell in the film *In Bruges*. Nothing to do but suck it up and wait it out.

A little more than two hours later, we cruise into Como near the Italian-Swiss border, at no point having exceeding 60mph but feeling like people who've been released from solitary confinement enjoying the sun streaming through the Aston's windscreen for the first time. I've barely asked anything of the DB11 since our journey began in Florence but, gradually, more of its GT assets have contributed to the swelling sense of wellbeing as the final miles of the day roll by.

Good from the beginning has been the directness and about-centre weighting and feel of the all-electric steering. Foremost, it

helps lend the chassis a sense of great natural stability but combines it with the kind of directional agility that allows smooth, measured lane-changing with the merest roll of the wrists. The preservation, more or less intact, of Aston's magnificently belligerent V12 bellow, despite what you'd expect to be the muffling influence of twin turbos, is also something to rejoice, though it only really lets rip in 'valves open', Sport+ engine mode, so far deployed gratuitously to shatter the traffic-clogged peace while accelerating away from autostrada toll kiosks.

Returned to the relative decorum of the 'touring' mode as the DB11 weaves down the long hill that leads into the centre of town, the upper-register sonority of its exhaust note on a light throttle doesn't immediately grab the attention of locals out for an evening stroll. Yet those who turn to chart its approach mostly stop and stare as it burbles past. As we catch tantalising glimpses of Lake Como between the buildings, Max remarks on the suspension's forgiving way with these less than perfectly smooth hill roads – on the softest of the three selectable damper settings, anyway.

At the bottom of the hill, we turn into a narrow, heavily shaded street that looks more ancient than anything we've seen so far and, according to the satnav, should lead us to our hotel for the night, apparently at the heart of Como's softly illuminated, elegantly stylish restaurant district. I congratulate Max on his choice of establishment and can almost hear the frothy whoosh of beer hitting clean glass when it suddenly becomes clear that the Hotel Cruise is nowhere to be seen...



'THERE'S A
SENSE OF
GREAT NATURAL
STABILITY
COMBINED
WITH AGILITY'

Left and above

After hours stuck in traffic, our man finally gets to put the DB11 through its paces on some alpine passes. Electric steering offers good feel, the new V12 engine (opposite) a stirring soundtrack despite the presumed muffling effects of turbocharging



Above and right
DB11 offers three dynamic modes, GT, Sport and Sport+, which govern damping, traction control and torque-vectoring. It's very impressive, as are sights and sounds of Gotthard Pass

It would be easy to blame the satnav, with its large, colourful touchscreen, fat address book and air of high-tech infallibility, but the fault turns out to be that of the booking agent who supplied the wrong but nonetheless attractive old-town address that we'll revisit in the morning to open the photographic innings. Meanwhile Max resorts to his iPhone and Google Maps which, after a few false starts, imparts the actual route to our overnight accommodation on the edge of an industrial estate five miles out of town. It has a large car park overlooked by a nondescript outdoor seating area with tables and umbrellas. It also has a fine selection of very cold beers.

THE DB11, of course, is the car that replaces the DB9, the DB10's short life having been spent in the hands of stunt drivers pretending to be Daniel Craig on the set of the James Bond movie *Spectre*. By making the wheelbase 65mm longer than the DB9's, Aston has been able to mount the engine further back in the chassis. Front and rear track widths have also increased, by 75mm and 43mm respectively, and, overall, the car is 28mm wider.

Max, who's been one of the resident snappers for the duration of the car's international media launch near Florence, says reactions to the car's styling, which takes numerous design and aero cues from both the One-77 and the Vulcan, have been surprisingly mixed, with some disliking the contrastingly-coloured roof (if optioned), others thinking the rear end treatment overly fussy. I can imagine some colours work better than others but, yet again, even in the anonymous surroundings of the Hotel Cruise's enormous car park, I'm stunned by how gorgeous our Madagascan Orange example (with black roof) looks as we walk towards it, despite the light coating of small bugs.

Here's a thing. Neither the Murciélagos nor the Zonda C12S from the A1 good times playbook had a V12 engine as potent as the Aston's. But then, with outputs of 600bhp and 516lb ft, the DB11's new twin-turbo, all-alloy, quad-cam, 48-valve, 5.2-litre powerplant is the brawnliest ever to go into a series-production Aston Martin – and certainly among the more frugal. So far, we've averaged 27mpg, which is pretty remarkable for a car capable of accelerating to 60mph in 3.7sec and on to 200mph. In part it's down to the 'intelligent' deactivation of one of the V12's cylinder banks (it depends on load but you can't tell) and the more usual stop-start function. The powertrain is completed by ZF's reliably excellent eight-speed auto, a mechanical limited-slip diff and active torque-vectoring that uses the brakes to trim cornering lines.

Not yet, though. Back again within the high walls of an old town that has barely yawned into action, the maze of pavement cafés, little squares and pretty lanes – some lined with shops, others empty and tranquil – provide Max's Nikon with a few atmospheric backdrops. Despite its width and an expanse of bonnet that droops out of view, the DB11 is easy to place and thread through the narrow byways, windows down to hear the exhaust blare with a touch of reverb. I hope the shopkeepers, café owners and residents appreciate it, because finding our way out takes some time, most of the exits back on to the main drag being blocked off with sympathetically sculpted concrete bollards, presumably to keep cars out.

There is one passage that leads to escape, though, and soon we're heading for a picturesque corner of the 30-mile long lake that bears the town's name and which, with the sun ascending in



'THE ROAD
THAT SOARS
PAST LUGANO
ALLOWS THE
ASTON TO FILL
ITS LUNGS'





**Above and right**

Breaking the journey with a photocall beside the atmospheric old grandstands of the Reims Grand Prix circuit. DB11 didn't miss a beat despite occasionally alarming ambient temperatures!

a cloudless sky, could hardly look more serene or beautiful. Alas, it's hard to find anywhere on the narrow road that hugs it to stand back and sigh. After a few breathe-in moments with on-coming trucks and tourist coaches, we decide to try our luck in the grounds of the grand old Ville d'Este, the reassuringly expensive hotel Alfred Hitchcock called his second home. The DB11 gets us past gatehouse security, no questions asked, but the manicured gardens aren't really what we're looking for so, doubtless to the bemusement of the man who respectfully waved us in, we leave again, heading for Switzerland and even cleaner mountain air.

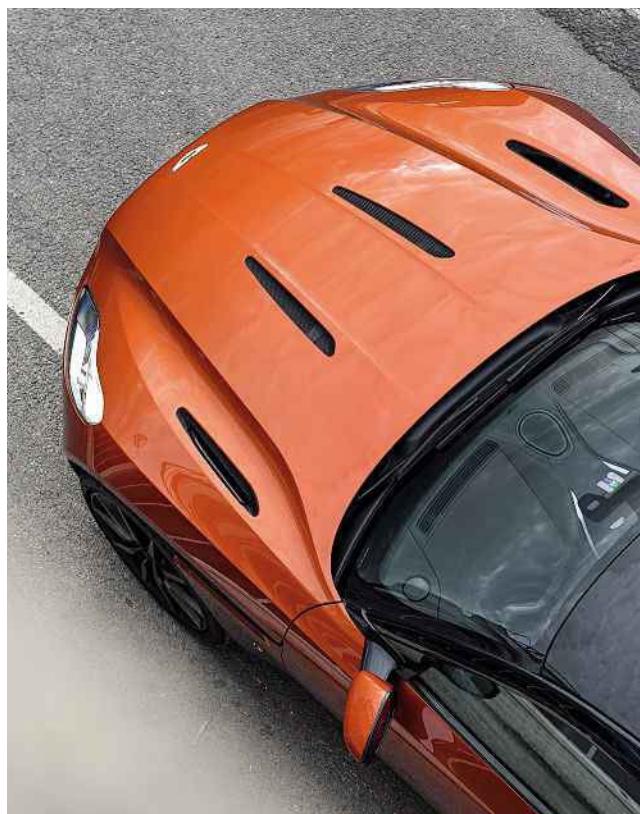
THE AIM is to make the world-famous St Gotthard Pass for a late-morning coffee and, finally, conduct a more telling exploration of the DB11's motive minerals and dynamic chops. The road that soars past Lugano and its equally enchanting lake is allowing the Aston to fill its lungs. It's good to finally feel the torque-dense delivery of the engine firing on all twelve and the added layers of urgency, gearshift speed and angry sonic support introduced by the Sport and Sport+ powertrain settings. If the throttle doesn't quite have the razor-edged responses associated with the best unforced induction, neither would you guess the engine was turbocharged. And it feels moderately savage on half throttle.

Visually, with its extraordinary road on stilts, stunning mountain vistas and clear views of the old cobbled pass that tucks down to the valley floor with all the geometric order of a



Specification

ENGINE V12, 5204cc, twin-turbo
MAX POWER 600bhp @ 6500rpm
MAX TORQUE 516lb ft @ 1500-5000rpm
TRANSMISSION Eight-speed automatic with paddle-shift, rear-wheel drive, limited-slip differential, torque-vectoring
SUSPENSION Front: double wishbones, coil springs, telescopic adaptive dampers, anti-roll bar. Rear: multi-link, coil springs, telescopic adaptive dampers, anti-roll bar
STEERING Rack-and-pinion, electrically power-assisted
BRAKES Vented discs, 400mm front, 360mm rear, ABS, EBD
WHEELS 9 x 20in front, 11 x 20in rear
TYRES 255/45 front 295/35 rear, Bridgestone S007
WEIGHT 1770kg (dry)
POWER TO WEIGHT 344bhp/ton (dry weight)
0-60MPH 3.7sec (claimed)
TOP SPEED 200mph (claimed)
PRICE £154,900



chimpanzee using a squeezable ketchup bottle to paint a picture of a squiggly line, St Gotthard is perfect and would have it all were it not for the tourists, cyclists and bikers who, this time of year, understandably like to visit and mess around. We bag our beauty shots and do our best to fill the odd gaps in the traffic with sound and fury but, ultimately, it's futile and frustrating.

This was anticipated. There is a fall-back position. The less well known Susten Pass about 20 minutes' drive away isn't quite as majestic but the roads are both faster and more challenging, which is what makes it a favourite with the hardcore biking fraternity. They'll be there *en masse* but the speeds will be higher and the margins for error tighter, especially if bike v car egos take hold. We know we'll have to choose our moments and be prepared to run with the Yamahas and Ducatis. But, if anywhere, it's here that the DB11 will finally get to cut loose and show its sharper side.

It quickly becomes clear that the Susten isn't going to be easy for the DB11. It feels a little too wide, a mite too heavy. But it's also clear that, with the adaptive dampers optimally set to Sport, its chassis can summon greater precision and resolve than the superseded DB9's, supplementing high levels of grip with faster responses and more acute direction-changing abilities than any 'GT' Aston has ever had. That feeling of rock-solid stability yet swift, incisive turn-in never leaves it and permits late braking and a slicing cut towards the apex none of the bikes, however powerful, can live with. And this despite a fairly mushy pedal suggesting



Above, from the top
If there's a bad angle on the DB11, we've yet to find it. Soaking up the ambience in Reims before the final leg of the journey

our car's iron discs (no carbon-ceramic option) received plenty of punishment from repeating waves of launch journos.

It's more even on the straights, the bigger bikes' fiercer initial acceleration balanced out by the greater amount of time the DB11 can stay on it. And a little finesse. Mighty and loud as the fully lit, Sport+ mapped V12 is on the straights, it doesn't pay to hang on to the final few hundred revs, instead finding a full-throttle rhythm to let the paddle-shift punch successive gears back into the heart of the torque band. The pattern is becoming almost routine when, towards the bottom of one particularly frenetic descent, everything goes a bit JB (that's Jason Bourne, not James Bond), a sudden influx of cyclists, dangerously parked cars and a tourist coach we thought we'd seen the last of necessitating a rapid, semi-braked slalom only ever executed successfully on pure nervous energy and in a car with impeccable reactions. That the manoeuvre concludes with nothing more grating than a heart-felt 'phew' tells me what I need to know. No, it doesn't feel entirely natural. You wouldn't get up early on a Sunday morning to find a deserted road on which to repeat the process. But the DB11 has skills.

Perhaps its best move, though, resides not in any specific ability but in finally closing the virtuous circle suggested by the notionally ideal GT. A car it's simply a pleasure to spend time in, whether autobahn cruising at 130mph or crawling in a jam. A car with a powertrain that can switch from serene to savage in a heartbeat. A car that does suave and sexy but, rather like a Bond franchise that has had to adapt to hotter competition, is truly tasty in a fight.

For the run to our hotel in Reims that evening we choose a more even pace that has the miles melting away in hushed reverie, the only interruption being a mutually voiced reminder to visit what remains of the old Reims racing circuit at Gueux the next morning for one last photo homage. It's a warm Saturday night in town and everyone's sitting outside, filling the endless restaurants, cafés and bars on the Place Drouet d'Erlon with chat and laughter, but mostly laughter. Over a perhaps too predictable pizza and beer, Max and I raise a glass to motors, mountains and going home. **V**



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DRIVE | LYNX VIRAGE TURBO





V B O M B E R

The DB11 isn't the first turbocharged Aston Martin. Back in the 1990s, Lynx created this absurdly powerful Virage 7.0 turbo. We drive it

WORDS JETHRO BOVINGDON | PHOTOGRAPHY MATTHEW HOWELL



We've all thought it. It's why cars get more powerful with every generation. It's why tyres have grown to almost absurd dimensions and why manufacturers now talk about 'downforce' on road cars without a hint of irony. All because we can't help but think: 'I wish it was just a little bit faster.'

The Virage sitting in dappled shade under a canopy of trees in the New Forest is what happens when that wish is coupled with almost limitless funds and a very strange definition of 'little'. Not that you'd guess. The Virage shape is ageing well and this original, narrow-bodied car has a slim, clean aesthetic that's surprisingly restrained. The 18in wheels are a subtle hint that all is not completely standard, especially if you notice the grooved brake discs and Alcon calipers lurking behind the flat spokes.

Those in the know might wonder if this particular Virage has been treated to a chassis upgrade and maybe the RS Williams 7-litre conversion. It has. Few would guess it's also been fitted with a massive turbocharger and produces a reported 720bhp and 1146lb ft. This is the mysterious, almost mythical Lynx Virage and its new owner, Pat Fallon, uses it as his everyday car. 'I think it's fast enough,' he says, as he hands me the key. The smile he flashes suggests that may be an understatement.

Pat is benefiting from the vision (not to mention considerable financial investment) of this car's second owner, an impossibly wealthy philanthropist who loved the idea of an understated GT car with effortless and never-ending performance. Something that could outperform the twin-supercharged Vantage but didn't shout about its potential. Hastings-based Lynx – who

already looked after some of his other cars, including a turbocharged Ferrari F50 and a 740bhp E-type that they'd built for him – were commissioned to deliver this vision and in combination with turbocharging experts BBR-GTi they set about creating something extraordinary.

The history file with the car is incredible and eye-watering. In 1999 the Virage was sent to RS Williams for that 7-litre conversion, a handling kit, new Pirelli tyres and a rebuilt differential with stronger mounts to improve durability. The bill was £61,295.80. However, that figure paled into insignificance once the real work started with Lynx in 2000. Andrew Parkinson, who headed-up special projects at Lynx at the time, takes up the story:

'It started with a fax,' he tells me. 'I was due to take this very hot 911 that he had back to his place in Sloane Square and was working out the trains to get back to Hastings. Then this fax arrived stating very simply that he wanted to turbocharge an Aston Martin Virage. I didn't even know he had a Virage...'

The hand-written fax is still in Pat's possession and amounts to a list of bullet points asking for various things. Point 1 is simply 'complete soundproofing'. Then it goes on to request strengthening for the engine mounts and a Vantage-style torque-tube. The third line reads, 'with the help of BBR or other specialists, installation of single intercooled turbo, for low-end torque.' The sign off is brilliantly casual. 'First of all, MOT and tax disk [sic].' This simple document was the trigger for what would become a monumental engineering challenge.

'The engine was removed and went to BBR,' says Andrew. 'Ken Brittain was a brilliant, brilliant engineer and devised the system with this huge turbocharger. It was supplied by an American company and effectively custom-built. His feeling was that the engine had been stroked too

Above and right

At a quick glance, it's just a regular Virage – which is exactly what the original owner intended. Interior, too, is virtually standard end-of-line Virage: in fact this car was one of the final nine built by the factory and sold as Limited Editions (hence the different grille and the carbonfibre trim). Jaguar 'J-gate' gear-shifter one of the few clues that underneath it's anything but standard





'It's not quite whisper-quiet, but the smooth, breathy sound at idle is more Rolls-Royce than Aston Martin'





Opposite, from top left

Horn-like component is the turbo wastegate; drainpipe-size exhaust feeds single Garrett turbo; larger, 18in wheels, made specially by Compomotive, were necessitated by huge, grooved front discs with six-pot calipers. Above: oil cooler for differential visible through rear valance; a further oil-cooler was added for the gearbox, and no fewer than six electric fans aid under-bonnet cooling

far, really. With a 6-litre engine we'd have managed the same torque but much more horsepower. But the customer was adamant it had to be this engine, as well as insisting we didn't fit the Vantage bodywork.'

The list of works completed by BBR-GTi runs to many sheets and the resulting torque meant a new auto gearbox was required. A four-speed BorgWarner from a Bentley Turbo R was sent to transmission experts G Whitehouse Autos in Birmingham, strengthened and fitted with a bespoke torque converter to ensure durability. 'The controller allowed for paddle-shifters,' explains Andrew, 'but the owner requested the Jaguar J-gate system instead.'

From here were a million cooling issues and a complete teardown of the chassis. The Vantage's de Dion rear end was fitted, along with Andrew's own diff mounts to help control the torque and prevent tramping. Lynx spent the final months just making the thing handle. 'I couldn't give it back to him with the standard set-up,' recalls Andrew. 'It felt soft and heavy, all wrong. We had the dampers revalved, the spring-rates doubled at the rear, new bushes... it was really extensive. In the end the car felt light, so I knew we'd got it just right.'

I feel a great sense of responsibility when I finally slide behind the peculiar two-spoke steering wheel with its chevron motif. Not just because this is Pat's pride and joy, but also because this car has always existed in the shadows, its specification subject to rumour and conjecture, its performance imagined to be other-worldly. What if it's a bit

of a let-down? What if those 720bhp have galloped away over the years, never to be seen again? What if the infamous Lynx Virage is a bit, well, rubbish?

As with all Virages, the seating position feels too high but the extended steering boss (fitted by RS Williams) at least means the wheel's within easy reach. The view ahead feels almost panoramic with those slim pillars. The intimidation factor starts to melt away. What's new is the Jaguar-sourced 'J-gate' gear selector. Pull the selector back for Reverse, Neutral and then into Drive. Once in D you can push the lever away from you to a kind of manual override mode: push fully forward in this parallel plane and you get 2nd, pull back for 3rd and then back again to get into D. Even more unexpected is the noise. Or rather the lack of it. Perhaps we'll hear the sighs, whooshes and whistles of the turbo later, but at idle the conversion simply smothers the big V8's natural timbre. It's not quite whisper-quiet, but the smooth, breathy sound is more Rolls-Royce than Aston Martin.

That luxurious feel continues once on the move, but now it's underscored with some real athleticism. If you've driven a Virage – even a pretty fit one – you may have just spat your coffee over the magazine. Apologies. You wouldn't usually associate the big coupé with genuine agility. But this Lynx car is different. It feels taut, well-controlled and much lighter than you might expect. The steering has a smooth, responsive feel, as if all the slack has been chased away with stiffer bushing, and the front end



Lynx Virage Turbo

ENGINE V8, 7003cc, turbocharged **MAX POWER** 720bhp @ 4500rpm **MAX TORQUE** 1146lb ft @ 3000rpm (see text)

TRANSMISSION Four-speed automatic, rear-wheel drive, electronic traction control **SUSPENSION** Front: double wishbones, coil springs,

Koni telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar. Rear: de Dion tube, trailing arms and bespoke links, coil springs, Koni telescopic dampers

STEERING Rack-and-pinion, power-assisted **BRAKES** Front: 376mm vented, grooved discs. Rear: 325mm vented discs. ABS **WHEELS** 9 x 18in

TYRES 255/45 ZR18 Pirelli P Zero **WEIGHT** 2096kg **POWER TO WEIGHT** 349bhp/ton **0-60MPH** 5.0sec (est) **TOP SPEED** 175mph (limited)

changes direction with real enthusiasm. For a car weighing 2096kg, it's pretty impressive. Only over big undulations does the floating sensation I'd expected suddenly reappear, betraying that mass, and sharp compressions need treating with care to avoid expensive-sounding scrapes and graunches emanating from the underside of the car. Even so, the Lynx scythes through the forest with surprising control, something approaching agility and on a wave of furious torque.

Ah, the engine. Does it feel the full 720bhp? Can it possibly have the mountainous torque seen on the original dyno sheet, peaking at 1146lb ft at 3000rpm but barely letting up from 2000 to 5500rpm? With the full 0.8-bar of boost, the turbo whistles, bellows and chuffs as the revs build. The pull isn't neck-snapping; instead it feels as insistent as a bear hug as this giant car piles on momentum. It's tidal, unstoppable and slightly eery.

However... eleven hundred and forty six lb ft? No. I can't tally that number with the experience. Until it goes back on the dyno we can't be sure, but I do know that this car wears modest 255-section rear P Zeros. Not some super-trick Trofeo R tyre made of Blu-Tac infused with superglue, just the old faithful P Zeros that are merely okay by today's standards. Exerting 1146lb ft on these tyres – even with 998kg sitting directly above them, as a corner-weight document in that fat history file suggests – would vaporise them instantly. Instead the Lynx Virage is hooked-up and secure. From a standstill, it will take every millimetre of throttle travel without lighting up the tyres. Exiting a second-gear corner, you might get a momentary fizz of wheelspin before traction control tempers the flood of torque, but nothing drastic, nothing scary. I'm trying to imagine a Bugatti Veyron, which has 922lb ft, running rear-drive only and early-noughties traction control. The thought is amusing and terrifying in equal measure.

In some respects that might sound disappointing but, in fact, it fits the brief given to Lynx and certainly makes for an enjoyable, accessible experience that is entirely usable. The very opposite of a car that's chased numbers for the sake of having big numbers. I can well understand how Pat drives it every day, at least when work doesn't take him overseas. I can understand, too, his obvious infatuation with the car. It has a fantastic story, an incredible history file full of receipts to make your drop jaw and notes about the progress of its arduous but clearly incredibly exciting creation. It also seems to enhance the Virage's character without eroding its core Aston Martin qualities. The Lynx Virage is big, refined, long-legged and luxurious, but it also has an ability to entertain when the driver goes looking for something more.

Skimming across the roads near the New Forest, that turbo whistling, the 7-litre V8's howl cleaned-up but still unmistakable and the chassis tied down much more effectively than you'd dare believe, it feels unstoppable. The brakes, thankfully, dare to say different, and although they don't have the relentless performance of a modern set-up – say a Vanquish with ceramics – they stand up manfully to the weight and the speeds this car can generate. Overall, what's most impressive is how this mad creation feels cohesive and fully-formed. Pat will continue to hone and refine each and every element in the coming months and years, but fundamentally this feels like a well-sorted machine, a car that could well have rolled out of Newport Pagnell in this very specification. I get it.

The only thing I don't understand is why you'd pour all that money, time and inspiration into such a car and then let it out of your sight. 'The joy for the owner was in the project itself,' says Andrew Parkinson. 'He rarely drove the cars. Any of them.' To be the beneficiary of such fabulously lavish eccentricity, Pat's a lucky man. **V**

Above

Lynx, best-known for its D-type Jaguar recreations, spent months reworking and refining the chassis, not only to handle the extra power but to endow the big Aston with true agility. It was time well spent. Given that the monster weighs over 2000kg, it feels remarkably athletic

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Two DB4GT's in restoration - 2016

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TELLING IT LIKE IT WAS

Bill Bannard saw all sides of Aston Martin, starting as a fitter in 1963 and rising to a director by the 1980s. Here he recalls those tumultuous times

WORDS PETER TOMALIN | PORTRAITS AMY SHORE

YOU'D LIKE BILL BANNARD. One of the unsung heroes of Aston Martin, he helped keep the company going through some of its darkest hours. Not without putting the odd nose out of joint – you wouldn't want to get on the wrong side of Bill. But once you've won his trust he's great company and, best of all, he tells a cracking story.

Now in his late 70s and still sharp as a blade, his flat in the Leicestershire town of Market Harborough is a treasure trove of Aston artefacts, although, as a lad growing up in Northampton, steam engines were his first love. 'Dad was an engine driver on the Great Central, and it was my absolute 150 per cent intention to go on the foot-plate,' he says. 'Unfortunately my eyesight wasn't good enough...'

So in 1954, straight from school at age 15, he became an apprentice mechanic at a local car dealership, followed by National Service in Germany, working on Conqueror tanks. 'They were bastards to work on,' he grimaces. 'The first set of plugs took me about two and a half days. But the experience toughened me up. If I made my mind up to do something, that was that. Don't get in my way...'

Back home, he was headhunted in 1963 by garage owner and Jaguar racer Dick Protheroe. They didn't hit it off. 'I did the first couple of jobs, then Dick came along and started fiddling with the carbs I'd just set up. I said I wasn't happy and, on the Wednesday after I started on the Monday, I told him I wanted to leave and gave him a week's notice. He threw me out there and then! I had nothing to go to. We had our first daughter and we'd just taken on a mortgage. I was either brave or very foolish.'

'Blow me, that same week in the local newspaper, Aston Martin were advertising for staff because they were about to close Feltham and move the remaining facilities – mainly servicing – to Newport Pagnell. I went for an interview

and they offered me a job in Experimental – what now would be R&D – though at that stage Experimental was still at Feltham. So every day they ran a bus from Newport at 6.30am, which I caught along with about 35 others.'

'Most of the old Feltham workforce had gone but there were a few left. One old boy, Dickie Spence, a fabricator, was over 70. I was in awe of them, how skilled they were. One of the few jobs I felt able to do was to saw – literally saw – the prototype DB4 in half because it was being lengthened to make the DB6 chassis. With a hand saw! Big old chunks of box section steel, with a bare blade.'

Six months later, Aston Martin had fitted out the new Experimental shop at Newport Pagnell – in the building known as Olympia – so visits to Feltham dried up. Bill was now working directly under chief engineer Tadek Marek.

'Taddy Marek, Harold Beach and Bert Thickpenny, the body man, were my three heroes,' he says. 'Taddy was a wonderful man. In some respects a bit what I'd call harum-scarum. He'd be bombing down the motorway and he'd be steering with his thumbs on the spokes and puffing on his fag. I remember we were coming back from MIRA one day, doing a test on a DB5, and we were doing about 120 and he declared "I heff never been so slow on ze motorway!"

'He often used to bring Harold in, because Harold lived at Pinner, and you knew if they'd had a hairy ride because Harold would get out of the car looking white as a sheet!'

Bill himself was soon on test-driving duties, often in the DB6 prototype. 'It handled very well but it got a bit ragged when the shock absorbers went off. Once, as I came round one particular corner, an Aston manager was coming the other way and I was very sideways at the time – all under control, of course! Anyway, he went and reported me to Taddy for dangerous driving. So Taddy called me in, asked



me to explain myself. He wouldn't ask me to slow down, because that was the job. All he said was: "Don't let the buggers catch you. Oh, and don't upset the police because I go home in that car sometimes!"'

The first tests of the new V8 engine were in NPP 7D – a DB6 chassis with a DB5 body and the V8 squeezed under the bonnet. 'It was a real mongrel,' laughs Bill. 'I drove it day in and day out – 500 miles a day. It was still on Avon Turbospeeds on wire wheels, so it was a bit of an animal. I could get through a set in 3000 miles – if I was careful.'

He also got to drive one of the Bond DB5s. 'When the cars were released from filming, I went down to fetch one of them, the car with the gadgets. Took it back to Newport, where it stood while we wondered what to do with it. Then someone decided it would be good to get some PR from it. I did ITV News and BBC *Blue Peter*. I do remember being well looked-after in the bar afterwards and I may have taken a rather eccentric route back to the factory!'

Bill was also involved in DBS development. 'I had the pleasure of building the first chassis, WKX 2E,' he says. 'We were doing huge mileages in shakedown testing. It was between Scotch Corner and Penrith I nearly killed myself... The car could be in the air for considerable distances if there wasn't too much traffic about and on one very undulating road we wore the bottom of the silencers away and the fumes were coming into the car. I was very poorly. How I ever got the bloody thing back I don't know.'

When the V8 made it into the DBS it was originally on downdraught Webers. 'The bonnet was fibreglass because we needed a hump for these bloody great carbs. There was one visit to the Road Research Laboratory at Harmondsworth to get tyre data for Avon, and the car cut out on one of the stop tests. When it eventually restarted there was a rather nasty fire, which burnt the fuel supply so the fuel was just feeding the fire. We used 28 fire-extinguishers on it. Then the RRL's fire engine arrived and damped it down, but by that time it was a bit of a mess.'

'I was utterly gutted. I'd gone out in the best Aston we'd got, and come back in a Volkswagen, courtesy of the Avon man. I spent about three weeks cleaning it up so it could be rebuilt. Horrible, dirty job. So I paid my penalty...'

His next project was the vented disc brakes for the DBS V8. 'The disc came from Girling and we developed it to what we needed. It was, I believe, the first UK production car to have ventilated discs. But it cost me the job...'

'Dudley Gershon [then director of engineering] took the car off me to take photos for marketing and I said bugger this, taking cars away when I'm only half way through testing an installation. You can do the other...'

So, in September 1969, Bill stomped off to work for DAF at the Dutch company's UK import centre, which by

**'NPP 7D WAS AN ANIMAL.
I COULD GET THROUGH A
SET OF TYRES IN 3000
MILES – IF I WAS CAREFUL'**

From the top

Outside the race shop at Feltham, 1963; that's Bill fourth from left. DP214 racer was used as a testbed by engineers; NPP 7D – a DB6 chassis with a DB5 body – was first road car to have the V8 engine installed; Bill did many of the test miles; a Bond DB5 on PR duties.

Opposite Bill today with Virage model. By the late '80s he was a director of AML and often frustrated by the lack of funds.

Below Early CAD rendering of the Virage body, and one of William Towns's proposals for the instrumentation



'THE LAGONDA OPENED DOORS. WITHOUT IT, ASTON WOULDN'T HAVE SURVIVED'

spooky coincidence occupied the old Aston buildings at Feltham. He started as service inspector, helping set up the dealer network, but quickly rose to general manager.

Aston Martin, meanwhile, was entering troubled times, culminating in the closure of the factory in 1974. In early 1975, Bill got a call from an old colleague, Mike Loasby.

'Mike rang me to say there were moves afoot to restart Aston and would I like to work for him as he was going to be chief engineer. I said: "Don't be silly, why would I want to do that?!" Within three months there was a banking crisis, DAF was sold to Volvo and I lost my job. So I went back to Mr Loasby and asked: "What's on offer?"'

'Mike said I could be engineering foreman, but I wasn't going to move anywhere without having "manager" in my title, even if I was the only one there! So I went back as works manager in September 1975 and in early '76 became engineering manager – once we'd got Engineering back up and running and there was actually something to manage!'

Things had changed a lot in the intervening years, and little of it for the better. 'I went into Olympia. It was a shitheap,' Bill recalls. 'The roof on the drawing office had collapsed and they'd been just dumping stuff in there...'

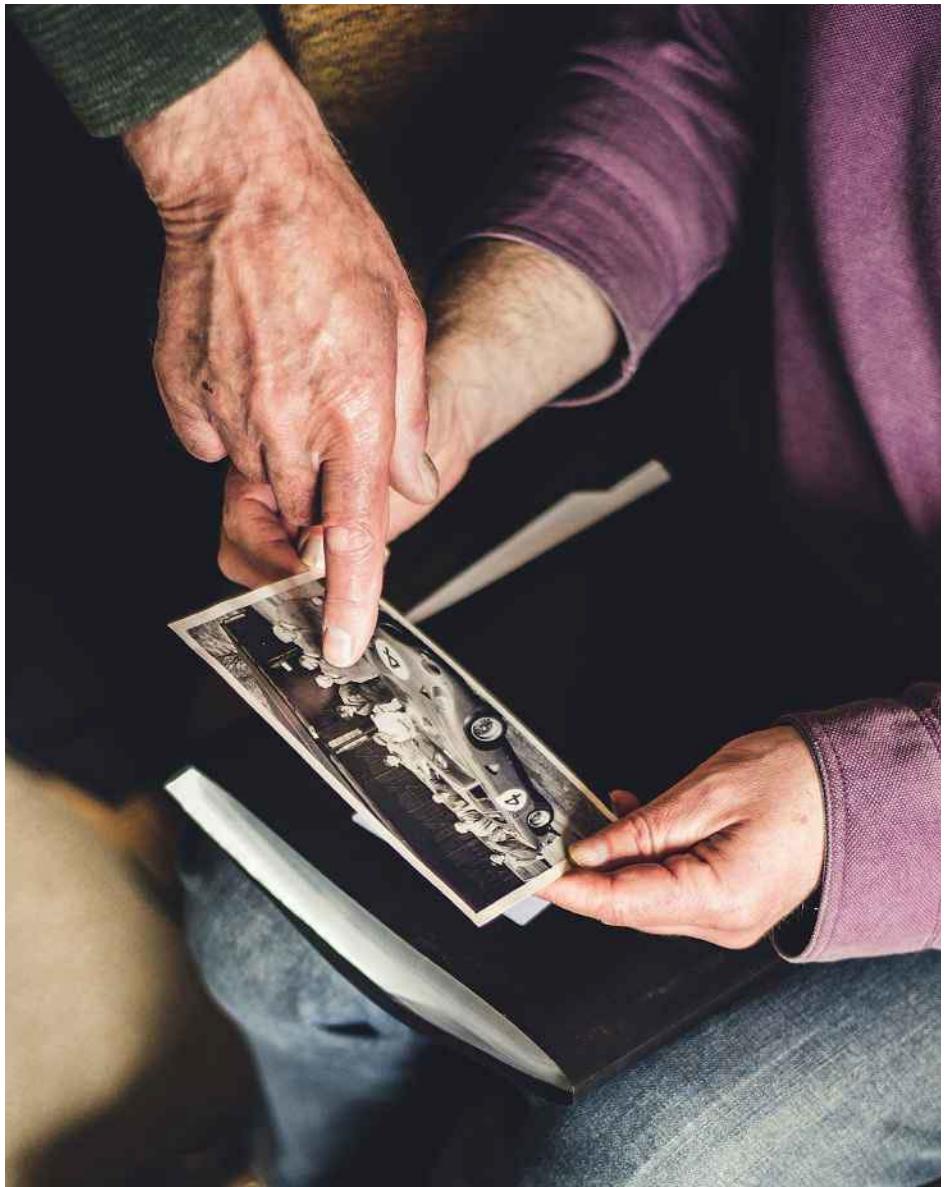
'I worked right through the winter of '75-'76 with no heat, sometimes no light, sorting out as much as I could, clearing the place out, repairing the fabric of the building so we could run a proper engineering business.'

By summer '76, Engineering was up and running again. 'To start with it was fire-fighting: any problems that came up in Production and any improvements we could make without a big development programme. Putting Konis on the V8 was a good example – one of Mike's masterstrokes.'

The Towns Lagonda gave the company a vital boost. 'It was the right car at the right time,' says Bill. 'It opened doors to suppliers who previously wouldn't give us the time of day. Without it, Aston wouldn't have survived.'

Another highlight of the late-'70s was developing the Vantage with Mike Loasby. By the end of 1979, though, everything had changed again. 'There was a financial crisis, cars weren't selling, it was the next meltdown.' With managing director John Symonds hospitalised by a road accident, Bill was made acting MD – just in time to oversee a wave of redundancies and push through a pay award.

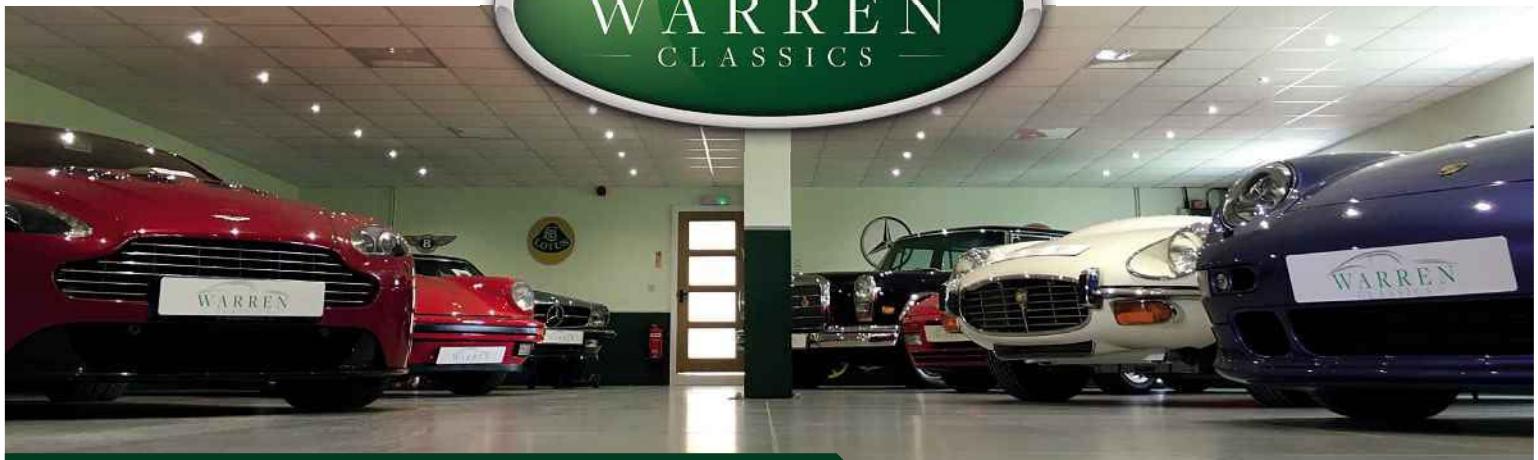
'We were fighting over pennies,' he sighs. 'I was out of my depth, but all I knew was I couldn't let the buggers win. It was "we do this, or we die". At one meeting one of the troublesome panel-beaters started shouting about going to the press, calling me a shitbag for harming their wages, and I said: "Right. Come with me. We'll go to a phone. You can phone them now, and when you've finished, I'll tell them what's *actually* happening, and how you bastards are trying to kill the company." We got the deal.'



Clockwise from right
Larking around with an early prototype of the V8 with engine-builder Ted Fenwick; a teabreak at Olympia; HRH Prince Charles on one of several visits to Newport Pagnell; that's Bill, by now engineering manager, on the left



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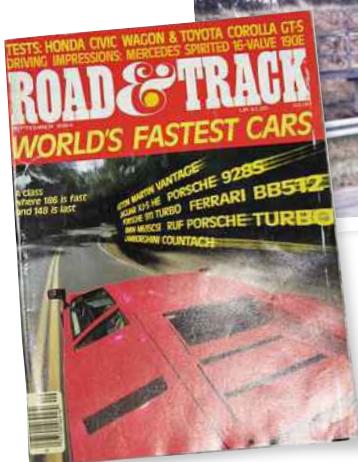
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Above and right

In 1984 Aston was invited by *Road & Track* magazine to take part in its World's Fastest Cars top speed shootout at the VW test track. Bill and engine man Arthur Wilson took the Aston Martin Sales demonstrator, with the engine rebuilt to freer-breathing South African spec. Former F1 world champion Phil Hill did the runs and hit 282kph (176mph). 'I was pretty bloody happy with that,' says Bill

He wasn't sorry when Symonds returned and he could go back to running Service. At the same time he was made a director of the company. 'I was very proud,' he says. 'It was a nice marker for a guy who started on the shop floor.'

Brighter days were ahead. The company's fortunes took an upturn after Victor Gauntlett appeared on the scene in the early '80s, and Bill enjoyed a close working relationship with the new boss. 'Victor once introduced me to someone: "This is Bill, he's my number two at Newport and he's the only person who's ever given me a bollocking for giving him a rise!" He'd offered a pay rise that I thought was bigger than it needed to be to keep the workforce happy...'

A high point of the Gauntlett era was the V8 Zagato. 'The go-faster brigade in Service always hankered after building a lightweight car,' says Bill, 'so we pulled a chassis out of Production and worked out what we could do. The servos were stuck right out at the front and I wanted them within the wheelbase; we moved the battery too, and produced this chassis with all these thoughts incorporated.'

The late '80s were a good time for Aston. The Zagatos were a success; the V8 line had reached the pinnacle of its development and the Lagonda was still selling steadily, though having up to six different models on the production line presented its own logistical headaches, as Bill, by now production director, was all too aware.

Moreover, Aston needed a brand new car. 'We'd reached the zenith of the V8,' he says. 'It was the practical things, like tooling becoming worn-out and obsolete. Also we needed anti-lock brakes, four-valve heads – the new industry standards. Things had moved on.'

'We were talking to people like Cosworth about possible collaboration and the plan was to use Jaguar's XJ40 floorpan, but that didn't work out and we eventually decided to do it in-house and in a ridiculously short time. In 18 months we developed a whole car.'

Inevitably there were compromises. The new rear suspension with its A-frame layout and lightweight de Dion axle suffered from lack of development. 'I'm enormously proud of what was achieved, but I'm not proud of the car,' is Bill's neat summation.

The crunch for him, though, came after the Ford takeover and the start of another recession in the early '90s.

'In mid-1991 I was told by Ford to scrap everything on the production line because the orders had dried up. I wouldn't do it. I was desperate to keep people at work. And that was when I came up with the Shooting Brake to use up chassis.' The Virage Shooting Brake was Bill's last AM project and he was able to recruit Mike Loasby to work on it: old colleagues reunited again at Newport Pagnell.

'Walter [Hayes] threw me out in '92. "I'll have to let you go," he said. I'd been expecting it ever since I joined. To a certain extent I was relieved, because I no longer had to carry the weight of Aston, as I saw it, on my shoulders.'

'I counted seven different owners in 15 years. And we never had the sort of investment that Ferrari or Porsche had. But I'm not making excuses for what we didn't do. I'm immensely proud of what we *did* do against that sort of background and what resources we had.'

'Carroll Shelby once described the factory as a "bunch of blacksmiths' shops run by a load of country bumpkins", or words to that effect. A bit harsh, though the buildings were pretty terrible! But look at the cars we built – and sold all over the world. Not too bad for a load of bumpkins!' 



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AS GOOD AS IT GETS

If the DB5 is the iconic '60s Aston, then a rare Convertible in Vantage specification is as desirable as they come. And this example is one of the very best there is

WORDS PAUL CHUDECKI | PHOTOGRAPHY JAMES LIPMAN





THIS WOULD never have happened in Biarritz. It's late spring on the south coast of England, we're winding our way through the Pevensey Levels towards Normans Bay, and it's snowing. Actual flakes, drifting lazily across the Aston's flowing coachwork. It's at times like this that it pays to have a good imagination. So I imagine myself transported back to 1960s, when Biarritz could still trump Monte Carlo as the preferred haunt of film stars and aristocrats, speeding along the Bay of Biscay, glamorous companion at my side, pulling up outside the Hôtel du Palais in late-afternoon sunshine, a couple of swift Martinis and on to the casino before a night on the town...

The DB5 Vantage Convertible is very much that sort of car. Its power to seduce – and inspire such flights of fancy – is undimmed, even here on the ramshackle shoreline of Normans Bay, a stone's throw from Bexhill-on-Sea (the venue, incidentally, of Britain's first ever motor race, back in 1902). Its value today is, of course, enormous. Even when it was new you'd have needed the wherewithal that went with a Biarritz lifestyle to have afforded this most fabulous of mid-'60s Astons. The £3910 list price (when the average house price in the UK was around £3400) represented an additional £260 premium over the DB5 saloon, and that was before taxes. How much the latter would have been when chassis DB5/2121/L was purchased by Peru-based Mrs Virginia T Espinose and delivered to her Lima home in November 1965 is not known (though it had been registered in London on January 1 1965 as DGY 334C, perhaps as a means of avoiding or reducing Peruvian import duties).

What is certain is that with its original Dubonnet Rosso coachwork, fawn hood and matching interior, set off by Ace 'Silver Peak' numberplates and Avon Turbospeed GT Whitewall tyres and equipped with a 314bhp Vantage engine (originally on triple SU carburettors) it would have looked – and sounded – superb, whatever its surroundings.

Of course, the DB5 Convertible closely followed the template laid down by its DB4 Convertible predecessor, itself arguably Aston's then prettiest car to date. The complexities of cutting off the DB4's roof and compensating for the resultant loss of rigidity were all undertaken in-house rather than by designer Touring. Strengthening was added beneath the rear seat pan and the recess for the folded hood, and also in the sills. There were other, subtle differences: the Convertible had a more upright windscreen, making it one inch taller than the saloon's.

The DB5 also inherited the Series 5 DB4's three-inch-longer wheelbase, so the open version of the DB5 was to all intents and purposes physically identical to the final DB4 Convertible. The change to faired-in headlamps added an extra dash of glamour, although in fact two '4 Convertibles shared the same frontal treatment, such was the way the models evolved in those days, and the '4's handsome steel hardtop continued as an option. The big differences for the '5, of course, were the 4-litre rather than 3.7-litre engine and five-speed ZF in place of the four-speed DB gearbox.

By the time DB5 production ended, 123 Convertibles had been sold (against 70 open DB4s). In addition, 37 unused chassis formed the basis of the Short Chassis Volante – Volante replacing Convertible to denote drophead models – these differing from the '5 Convertible in having the split bumpers, reshaped oil-cooler intake, one-piece rear lights, interior and 325bhp Vantage engine option of the DB6.

It may not, incidentally, be as famous on the silver screen as its illustrious saloon stablemate but, nonetheless, '5 Convertibles appeared in several



DRIVE | DB5 VANTAGE CONVERTIBLE

**'MOTIONLESS, IT IS JUST AS
MUCH OF A JOY TO BEHOLD
AS IT IS ON THE MOVE'**







Above and opposite

DB5 Vantage Convertible looks sublime on the move and feels wonderfully composed at speed. Straight-six engine has had an RS Williams conversion to 4.7 litres, topped off with a trio of Weber 40 DCOEs where originally it had triple SUs. Peak power recorded on the dyno was 318bhp. Steering wheel is on the left, as original, but the car has been repainted in Black Pearl metallic where it was originally Dubonnet Rosso

films, including archetypal '60s British comedies *The Sandwich Man* and *Doctor in Clover*, Brit crime caper/thriller *Kaleidoscope* and Italian thriller *A Doppia Faccia*, as well as in The Beach Boys' *Little Honda* promo. Perhaps aptly, much-loved British character/comedy actress Beryl Reid was among the famous names to own a DB5 Convertible from new. And though Prince Charles may be the only member of the royal family to own a drop-top '60s Aston with his DB6 Volante, Newport Pagnell also produced a one-off child-size DB5 Convertible, complete with 007 gadgetry, which was presented to a six-year-old Prince Andrew (a further example was also made for the Shah of Iran's son, Reza).

Of the full-size examples, just 39 were left-hand drive, and with only 65 of the total 1021 DB5s produced being fitted with the Vantage engine, that makes chassis 2121 a pretty rare catch. A fact clearly not lost on its owners. Although it's unknown how long Mrs Espinose kept the car, in 1973 it entered lengthy ownership with the Whitman Ball family in Pennsylvania (during which it had the registration WWB2; around this time it is also believed to have been at least partially restored). In their hands the Aston took numerous first and many podium places at the AMOC's annual Lime Rock Concours d'Elegance between 1973 and 1990; it also took second place at the Club's Mid Fall Tour Concours d'Elegance in 1988, and many podium positions in AMOC sprints and driving tests.

A second long period of ownership followed in July 1993 with Johan Kahm in Stamford, Connecticut, from whom Putnam Leasing Company Inc., also in Stamford, acquired the Aston in September 2005. Purchased two months later by its current European owner, the DB5 was then fully restored inside and out by RS Williams between January 2006 and May 2007, the only modifications from original being RSW's splendid 4.7-litre engine conversion and the body repainted in Black Pearl, now complemented by a black hood and grey trim, topped off by six-inch-wide Borrani wires (an original Factory option) with 215/70 R15 Avons.

As a matter of course, incidentally, part of the restoration included welding strengthening plates to the underside of the fuel filler apertures; the Convertible's hood recess, on both DB4s and DB5s, had dictated fitting two eight-gallon fuel tanks (against one 19-gallon tank in the saloon) within the rear wings with dedicated fillers each side, and with their proximity to the rear cabin surround and the boot hinges it is not uncommon for this to cause cracking to the rear three-quarter panel.

In recognition of its now superb condition, the car was awarded first prize in the Aston Martin Postwar Road Cars Class at the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance the following August, and today it remains in immaculate condition. With the hood up – being late April means frequent showers – inside it feels somehow cosier than its roofed sibling, despite

the soft-top's increased rear leg- and headroom. Everything is familiarly to hand with Aston's trademark dashboard and cockpit layout, and a nice detail is the original fitment Motorola radio, complete with the words 'Aston Martin' discreetly visible in the waveband window behind the tuning bar – which somehow adds to the feeling of being behind the wheel of a very special motor car. Cosseted in the comfort of the Connolly-clad seat, feeding the tactile wood-rim wheel through your hands, and with that lovely Touring body pointing the way, there's an inherent sense of ability and purpose as the open road beckons.

Heading down the A3 from Cobham towards East Sussex, an immediate impression is of how smoothly and comfortably this Aston drives, attributes just as evident on fast and twisting cross-country A-roads. The relatively firm suspension soaks up changing surfaces and potholed roads with aplomb – there is no hint of scuttle shake, ne'er a rattle nor squeak – while the effortless torque of the 4760cc six complements the whole experience. Maximum power is 318bhp at 5500rpm and peak torque 346lb ft at 4000rpm, but with plenty of low-down urge and still 265lb ft and 303bhp at the 6000rpm red line, the big-bore, easy-revving twin-cam combines superb flexibility with rapid performance throughout.

In fifth gear, 90mph (or rather 145kph on this car's speedo) equates to 3500rpm, and 50mph to 2000rpm. In fact the 4.7 pulls cleanly in fifth from just 1800rpm. All of which makes this drop-top '5 an effortless and relaxing car to drive over long distances, its ample cruising ability allied to instant

accelerative response when needed. If you want to push on and stretch all the gears on more demanding roads, the chassis accommodates: wet or dry, the positive steering provides accurate turn-in and the rear reassuring levels of grip, to which the slightly-wider-than-standard Avons no doubt contribute; the brakes, too, are well up to the demands of such use. Perhaps surprisingly, there's little wind noise at speed (until the speedometer needle nears 150kph), which is a credit to the perfect fit of the hood. In a word, the car drives *beautifully*, and always feels stable regardless of speed or conditions.

As we parked on Normans Bay's pebble-dashed shore for Lipman's static shots, more than half a dozen people stopped to ask if they could take pictures, all having at once recognised our beach beauty as an Aston Martin. Motionless, and from any angle, it is just as much of a joy to behold as it is on the move, and it is also one of those rare cars that look as good with the hood up as down. Today it remains one of the most desirable of all DB5s, which inevitably makes it the most expensive. At its Retromobile auction in February 2015, Bonhams established a new world record price for a Convertible of £1,430,715, and that was a less-rare standard-tune car.

The film *Kaleidoscope* was also notable for Jane Birkin's film debut, playing a character called, very aptly, 'Exquisite Thing' – a description perfectly fitting for this equally covetable DB5 Convertible. 

With thanks to the owner, and to RS Williams.

Specification

ENGINE In-line 6-cyl, 3995cc (this car converted to 4760cc) **MAX POWER** 318bhp for 4.0 (this car 314bhp @ 5500rpm)
MAX TORQUE 288lb ft for 4.0 (this car 346lb ft @ 4000rpm) **GEARBOX** Five-speed manual **SUSPENSION** Front: double wishbones, coil springs, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar. Rear: live axle, trailing arms, Watt's linkage, lever-arm dampers **STEERING** Rack-and-pinion
BRAKES Solid discs **WHEELS** 6 x 15in **TYRES** 215/70 R15 Avon radials **WEIGHT** c1500kg **POWER TO WEIGHT** c215bhp/ton
0-60MPH c6.0sec (ths car) **TOP SPEED** c150mph (this car) **PRICE NEW** £4562 (£83,500 in today's money) **VALUE TODAY** £1.65 million



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Aston Martin V8 Vantage

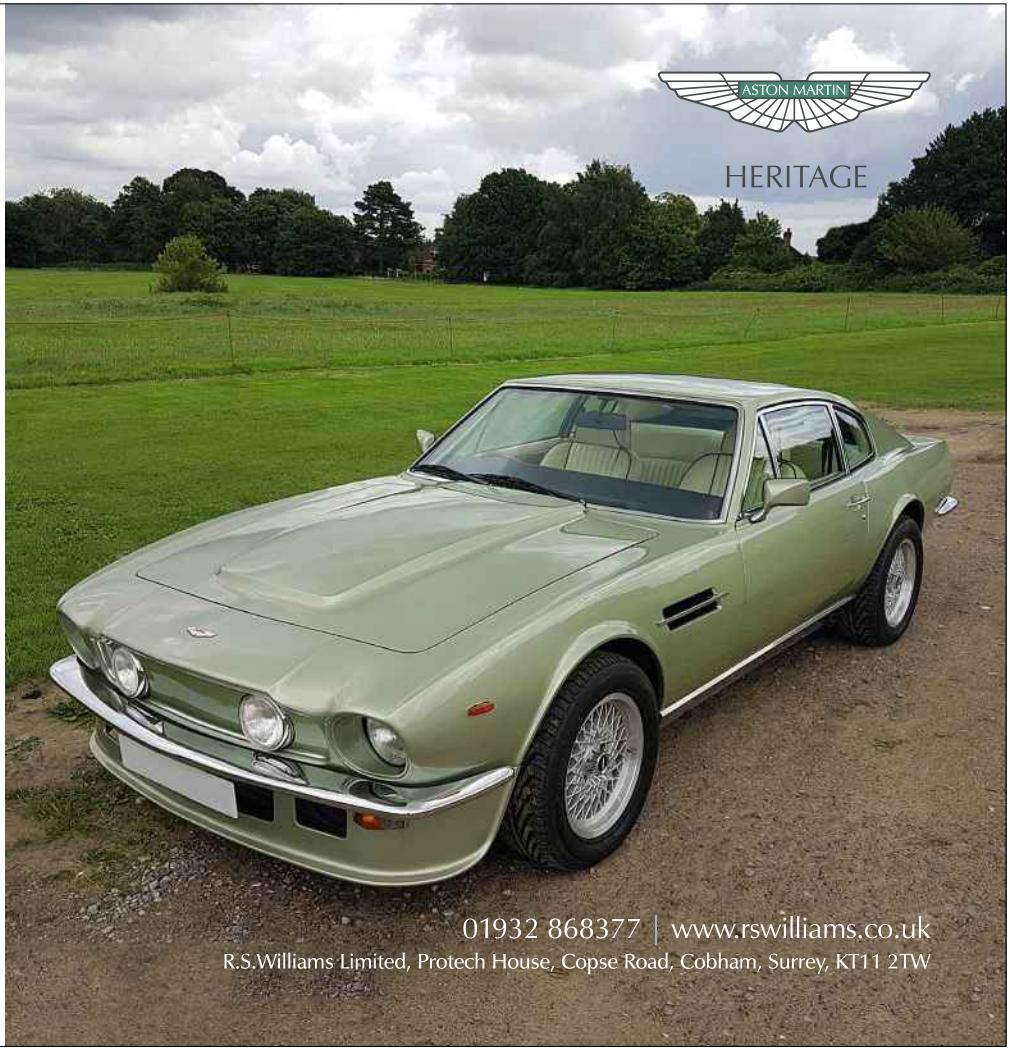
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History tends to repeat itself

DB4 (1958-1963)



STANDARD MODEL

Quantity Built:- 1,040
Current Value:- £300K

DB4 GT (1959-1963)



HIGH PERFORMANCE DERIVATIVE

Quantity Built:- 76 (> 8% of A)
Current Value:- £2.5M (+850% of A)

DB4 GT ZAGATO (1960-1963)



ULTRA PERFORMANCE ITALIAN COACHBUILT DERIVATIVE

Quantity Built:- 19 (> 2% of A)
Current Value:- £5M (+1,600% of A)

V8 Vantage (1977-1989)



STANDARD MODEL

Quantity Built:- 1,978 (\approx x2 of A)
Current Value:- £150K (\approx 1% of A)

V8 VANTAGE (1977-1989)



HIGH PERFORMANCE DERIVATIVE

Quantity Built:- 372 (> 20% of B)
Current Value:- £375K+ (+250% of B)

V8 VANTAGE ZAGATO (1986-1988)



ULTRA PERFORMANCE

LIMITED EDITION DERIVATIVE
Quantity Built:- 51 (\approx 2% of B)
Current Value:- you do the maths

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THE INSIDE LINE

The cars – and the drivers – are the stars, but there's so much more to an AMOC race meeting. We go behind the scenes

WORDS PETER TOMALIN | PHOTOGRAPHY ALEX TAPLEY



Above and left
Drivers sign on. One of the most successful in recent times has been Tom Black (left), whose V8 Vantage GT4 is generally at the sharp end of the GT Challenge grid.
Far right, from the top
Removing gravel from sticky slicks; crowds gather at the end of the Intermarque race; and senior clerk of the course Nick Turner, whose job it is to see fair – and safe – racing



The fact that you're reading this magazine suggests you're a car enthusiast, so there's a good chance you'll have attended a race meeting or two. But have you ever stopped to consider what goes into making such an event happen: the planning, the logistics, the supporting cast? I'll be honest, beyond noticing the marshals in their boiler suits and being dimly aware of drivers' briefings, I haven't. Until now.

It's late July and I'm on my way to Snetterton in Norfolk to look behind the scenes of an Aston Martin Owners Club race meeting. It's Friday, the day before race day, so the ideal opportunity to chat to everyone from drivers to mechanics to marshals to medics before battle commences. And not forgetting the clerk of the course. Not someone you want to get on the wrong side of...

The first thing that strikes me is just how good Snetterton is looking these days; how clear the signposting, how clipped the verges on the approach roads, how smart the café – and how clean the loos. For someone who attended race meetings in the '70s, this is a major revelation.

The clue to the transformation is the MSV branding on everything from the signposts to the café menu; Snetterton these days comes under the umbrella of Jonathan Palmer's Motorsport Vision group, and Dr Palmer is a well-known stickler for the sort of detail that transforms a once slightly down-at-heel circuit like Snetterton – or 'Snetterton 300' as it is today – into an international-class venue.

This meeting is a joint production between MSV Racing and Aston Club Racing Ltd – the company set up to run motorsport for AMOC. Our guide is Roger Bennington, Stratton Motor

Company boss, sometime racer, but today the owner of the rather grand title of race director. He's Aston Club Racing's main man at Snett.

His opposite number in the crisply pressed, MSVR-branded shirt is senior clerk of the course Nick Turner. It's mid-morning and the two are deep in conversation in the air-conditioned comfort of Stratton's extremely impressive race support truck. It seems there's a hitch. The Vulcan that they thought would be doing demo laps is now for static display only, so they need to plug a hole in the programme. The solution: an extra parade lap for AMOC members.

That's fairly typical of the sort of glitch that can arise on the day. The planning, of course, has been going on for weeks, and that's largely Roger's role. Once the drivers have been signed on, overall responsibility for the running of the meeting passes to Nick. A project manager for

**This page, from top left**

Modern diagnostics for a classic racer; DB4 pilot George Miller; GT3 Vantage gets a shakedown for the Snetterton round of the British GT Championship; race director Roger Bennington.

Opposite page, from the top

Action from the Intermarque/GT Challenge race; marshals Steve Pearce and Andrew Postlethwaite; inside Race Control, and commentators Peter Snowdon and Alistair Douglas in full flow



Vodafone by profession, as with all the other officials, marshals and medics, he's here as an unpaid volunteer. A well-qualified one, mind – holder of an international licence, a few weeks earlier he was senior-clerking Formula E.

'My role,' he tells me, 'is to make sure the meeting runs smoothly and safely and that the regulations are complied with. AMOC's members have paid a lot of money to be here, and I want everyone going home saying this is the best-run meeting they've ever attended.'

On race day, he'll arrive at the circuit at 6.30am. First job is to check that the track is manned adequately with marshals – a minimum of two per post – and medical crews, and that incident vehicles, fire units and rescue units are in place. Along with the race stewards, he'll also inspect the circuit; meanwhile the cars are scrutineered and noise-checked.

He then holds a series of driver briefings – one for each session: 'Each race has different regulations, pit-stop criteria, and so on. I also remind them what we're expecting in terms of driving standards.' Anarchic bunch, these Aston Club Racing drivers, I imagine...

Nick plays that one with a straight bat: 'AMOC meetings are super. Great machinery, close racing, and the drivers are gentlemen. Of course, when the helmet goes on, things do happen... A lot of them are very successful businessmen, and they don't like being asked to come in front of a clerk of the course...' I'll bet.

Greenock-born Tom Black is one of those successful businessman, coming to racing at the relatively ripe age of 48. The launch of the V8 Vantage N24 'gentleman's racer' in 2007 was the catalyst for him. 'I never fancied racing a classic, but here was a modern Aston that people like me could go racing in,' he explains.

And he's proved rather good at this racing lark. With his N24 having been gradually uprated to GT4 spec, he's a front-runner in the Aston Martin GT Challenge: already this year he's had two 2nd s and a 1st and been the first Aston home each time (the GT Challenge shares the grid with the Intermarque Championship, which includes Ferraris, Porsches and BMWs and, slightly incongruously, a DB4).

'The car's well-suited to Snetterton,' says Tom, 'particularly the new 300 circuit. It's got







plenty of grunt so you can get good speed on the straights. Not so good on the tight, twiddly bits, because it's a little bit heavier than some, but it more than holds its own.

'Endurance racing, six hours or more, is its real forte – this car has done three 24-hour races. That's very demanding, psychologically as well as physically. Being woken at 3am and being told to get in the car and drive at 150mph – that's a real wake-up call! If you can get your head around that, then you're a proper racer.'

In longer races, Tom partners with Chris Kemp, but today's race is just an hour, so Chris is driving his own Vantage. 'With power steering they're not physically too demanding,' says Tom. 'The only problem, being front-engined, is the heat. For longer races we'll wear cold-suits, which are piped with cold water.' They might be wishing they'd brought the suits with them today... it's only mid-morning, and already the sun is blazing down.

Marshals, too, feel the heat. I find Steve Pearce and Andrew Postlethwaite manning the pitlane exit. 'This is a pretty good post,' shouts Andrew above the wail of race engines and the shriek of straight-cut gears. 'You can walk around, and there's some shelter from the sun – with some of the posts you're pretty exposed.'

Both are fairly recent recruits to marshalling. Andrew's in his first year; Steve's been doing it for three. And unpaid, of course – although, at MSV circuits, marshals do get a free breakfast,

and a drink in the bar at the end of the day. Everyone we speak to tells us the marshals are the unsung heroes of a race meeting. Many turn out every weekend; if they didn't, it simply wouldn't happen. What attracted them to it? 'I just love motorsport!' shouts Steve.

Over in the pit garages, Aston Engineering's Paul Smith is busy under the bonnet of a DB4. 'The engine wasn't running too well, so we've been looking at the carbs, but after a bit of a thrash it seems to be better!' he grins. 'We've also had some brake issues – it's quite hard on brakes here.' He'll spend about ten weekends a year spannering on customers' cars. 'We were at Le Mans a couple of weeks ago; next week is the Silverstone Classic, which is a biggie for us.'

Paul talks us through his Snetterton weekend. 'Arrived yesterday evening, set everything up, then test day today, racing tomorrow, with scrutineering at 8, qualifying at 11, and the race at 4. Then pack everything up and back to Derby.' Which is 150 miles away. Race weekends are pretty full-on for the support crews.

The DB4 belongs to George Miller, who's partnering with Les Goble for the Innes Ireland Cup race. George has had the car since 2002, highlights including class wins in the Spa Six Hours. 'We love Spa,' he says. 'Snetterton's a bit different, a bit more technical. We don't get into top very much.' He'd like to race more, but business commitments on the other side of the world restrict his time in Europe.

Our next stop is the medical centre, where full-time paramedic Barry Hart shows us the impressive treatment room. 'If needed, it can take two seriously injured drivers,' he tells us. 'The most serious cases would be transferred by air ambulance to the local trauma centre, which in Snetterton's case is Cambridge.'

For most races there'll be a team of two doctors and two or three paramedics on duty. On standby are a race rescue vehicle, which carries fire-fighting equipment and tools for cutting drivers from their cars if needed, a medical car and three ambulances, which are dotted around the circuit. Here's hoping they all have a quiet day tomorrow.

RACE DAY. Drivers arrive around 8, qualifying starts at 9, then there may be time to grab some breakfast before the first race – today it's the GT Challenge/Intermarque – starts just after noon. By then the sun is beating down: GT winner Chris Kemp reports it's mid-40s inside the car.

Roger Bennington has been here since 7. Not only does he have to think on his feet, ideally he'd be in at least two places at once, which is why he can often be spotted zipping through the paddock on his Stratton-liveried scooter, shuttling between Race Control, Aston Club Racing hospitality, and the Stratton-supported cars and drivers. And now he's beckoning me to join him in his V8 Vantage to lead out the first parade lap of the day.



'By noon the sun is beating down. GT Challenge winner Chris Kemp reports it's mid-40s inside the car'



Clockwise from right

George Miller/Les Goble DB4 battles for Innes Ireland Cup; Aston Engineering's Paul Smith fine-tuning the 4's Weber carbs; Peter Dubsky pauses in the pitlane in his special-bodied 15/98; David and Anne Reed's DB2; paramedic Barry Hart in the medical centre, and an encounter with a familiar face in the paddock: Vantage GT4 pilot (and sometime baker) Paul Hollywood was getting in some testing for Snetterton round of British GTs

Nick Edwards

Snetterton and AMOC go way back. In fact the first ever motorsport event here, on October 27, 1951, was an AMOC sprint. These days the circuit is a fine blend of new, spectator-friendly complexes and old favourites like Bomb Hole and Coram. The Aston fraternity loves racing here, but circuit hire doesn't come cheap. 'It costs £50,000-60,000 for a meeting like this, and it's tricky breaking even,' admits Roger. 'Entrants pay £500-600 per race. We'd like it to be less, but you need more cars.' Today's grids are reasonably healthy, but Aston Club Racing would welcome more entries.

Meanwhile, up in the commentary box, high above the start straight, Peter Snowdon and Alistair Douglas are in full flow. Both are clearly in thrall to motorsport: Peter races and instructs as well as commentating; Alistair first took up the mic in the mid-'70s when he was a teenager, following in his father's footsteps; now his own son, Duncan, is starting out.

'Before each meeting I refer to notes from previous years,' says Alistair. 'Anything I don't know I try to research – if a car has an interesting history, for example – and if it's a championship I check the current standings.' Peter admits he would rather be racing, but, like everyone else we meet, he just loves the whole scene and being part of it. 'We're enthusiasts who happen to have microphones,' he says. And the trickiest bit? 'Filling in time. Red flags are bad news.'

No red flags so far today... Just below the comm box, in Race Control, a team of officials,

observers and radio operators is observing the action on track on a bank of screens, senior clerk Nick Turner quietly overseeing proceedings, occasionally writing notes on an A4 pad.

'Someone is in permanent contact with all the marshals' posts,' says Nick. 'Although there are cameras around the circuit, the marshals are still our eyes and ears. If they radio-in and say: "Turn 5, car in dangerous position," we can check it out on the screen and make a call on what to do. It may be dealt with under flags, or a "live snatch" – pulling the car out of the gravel into a safe position – or if it's more serious we deploy the safety car.'

Another official is checking that drivers aren't exceeding track limits (i.e. cutting corners). MSV circuits have sensors built into the surface to alert Race Control, then it's a matter of judgement as to whether it was a deliberate attempt to steal an advantage. Other driver misdemeanours can range from failing to observe a flag to causing an avoidable accident; sanctions available include a 10sec drive-through penalty, points on the driver's race licence and, ultimately, exclusion from a meeting.

'I have one golden rule,' says Nick. 'I never know who's driving a car, or where he is in the race or in a championship. That way you'll be even-handed and never be influenced.'

Nick's as good as his word when he penalises a Lotus for being too quick out of the pits after a mandatory pitstop – by two tenths of a second. Turns out the driver was leading the race. And,

despite a valiant effort to make up the 10sec penalty, he narrowly fails to regain the lead at the flag. He seems to take it pretty well, though.

Not all are quite so philosophical. 'Some do get hot under the collar,' says Nick. 'You have to stay calm, try to diffuse it. Tell them you're busy running the session but you'll be looking into it. One thing I won't tolerate is abuse of marshals. And of course if a driver takes his helmet off and throws it on the ground, then we have to inspect it, and, if we think it's damaged, we can tear the sticker off it...'

I can't help thinking Nick must often be deeply unpopular. Why on earth does he do it? 'You take it on the chin,' he says. 'It's a fantastic sport and we're all here because we enjoy it.'

Safety of drivers, marshals and spectators is, of course, paramount in all of this. 'If there's an incident, we'll take as long as we need to make sure everyone's OK and the circuit has been made safe,' he says. 'Whatever happens, at 18.27 we have to wave the final chequered flag because racing has to cease under the terms of the hire of the circuit.'

Radios are returned; clerks and stewards get together for a debrief; drivers who have been penalised have a further half-hour to lodge an appeal. Then everyone heads to the bar for that complimentary drink. From what I've seen, that's a drink very well earned.

The next AMOC race meeting is at Silverstone on October 1. Full details at amocracing.org 





Photos by Nick Edwards



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BEST OF BREED

The DB MkIII was the ultimate evolution of the 'Feltham' Aston. Today, it's also a tempting alternative to its DB4 successor

WORDS PETER TOMALIN | PHOTOGRAPHY MATTHEW HOWELL





THERE ARE PLENTY of reasons why you might be drawn to a DB MkIII. The DB name, for starters: the line of road cars that started with the DB2 in 1950 was the first enduring legacy of the David Brown era, and the MkIII – launched in 1957 – was the fastest and most refined of these 'Feltham cars'.

It's practical, too, with its occasional rear seats and hatchback tail, and it's a proper sports car, with racing in its bloodline (DB2s appeared several times at Le Mans). Fact is, in the late '50s the MkIII was every bit as desirable as the DB4 that everyone goes gaga for today, and yet you can pick one up now for half the cost of a comparable '4. The fact it's not so 'obvious' makes it cool, too. But the main reason for coveting a MkIII has to be the way it looks.

Handsome thing, isn't it? The earlier DB2 and 2/4 always had good proportions, but if we're honest their rather rudimentary grilles did look rather as though they'd been bashed out by the local blacksmith. For the MkIII, stylist Frank Feeley adopted the sculpted aperture that he'd designed for the DB3S racer, and it was just what the road car needed. No more dodgy British dentistry; the Aston mouth was now a perfect blend of beauty and aggression.

That same signature shape was echoed inside with the new instrument binnacle, which finally placed all the instruments directly in front of the driver, rather than ranged across the centre of the dash in a lump of timber as they had been in the DB2 and 2/4 Mk I and II. There were also bucket seats in place of the previous benches.

The Willie Watson-designed 'LB6' straight-six engine had already grown from 2.6 to 2.9 litres in 1954, and now for the MkIII it was further developed, making it both stronger and more powerful. Peak power in standard tune on twin SUUs was quoted as 162bhp at 5500rpm, with the option of a triple-carb Special Series engine, for which Aston Martin claimed 180bhp. The MkIII saw the standard fitment of front disc brakes (though in fact a few of the final 2/4 MkIIs also had them), while the David Brown four-speed gearbox could be supplemented with the option of a Laycock de Normanville overdrive.

So the MkIII brought the DB2/4 up to date, and in fact it would stay in production well into 1959, overlapping with the DB4 by several months. There were drop-head and fixed-head coupé versions, but the vast majority of the 550-odd built were saloons (or, rather, hatchbacks) like the one pictured here.

Speaking of which, if you've been drooling over the photos and contemplating a call to the sales team at Aston Martin Works, I have to tell you that you're already too late. In between Matt Howell taking the pics and me writing these words, this rather lovely MkIII was

'YOU CAN'T BE TIMID WITH IT. YOU REALLY HAVE TO DRIVE IT, GRAB IT BY THE SCRUFF OF THE NECK'

snapped up by London-based Dr Jon Davies and his wife Meg. And very happy with it they are, too, as Jon told me:

'I'd always thought the MkIII was a stunning looking car, and couldn't really understand why they'd been so overlooked – well, comparatively so. It's that bit prettier than a 2/4, and to me it sits in a little niche of its own, before 4, 5 and 6.

'I knew Works had this car, so we went along to take a look, and we just couldn't take our eyes off it. We had a quick chat and pretty much decided then and there that we weren't going to leave without buying it!'

It's Jon and Meg's first 'classic' performance car. I'd had a split-screen VW camper van as a student, and I've owned a number of modern performance cars – TVRs, a 3200GT Maserati and most recently a Ferrari F430 – but nothing like this. My dad owns a DB9, so there's a love of Aston in the family. A DB4 or 5 would be fantastic, but we'd have to do a lot of rummaging behind the sofa to afford one! A MkIII was within budget, and this was such a superb example, we just couldn't resist it.'

The car they bought is a pretty much standard-spec saloon, registered in November 1958, with the twin exhaust option, which was reckoned to liberate a few extra horses. It has had only a handful of owners – one had it for over 20 years, another for around ten. It was stripped and repainted (in period-correct but non-original Peacock Blue) in around 2000; the engine rebuilt by Four Ashes Garage a few years ago. The interior, trimmed in black leather, is largely original and has a lovely, nicely worn-in feel.

'When we saw it, it had only just arrived at Works. When we decided to have it, they then went to town on it. And I have to say, I was blown away by the standard of preparation. They just took the car to a whole new level.'

'I'm loving driving it. It's completely analogue – there's no hint of assistance – and it's the best feeling ever. You can't be timid with it; you really have to drive it, grab it by the scruff of the neck. It loves corners – but you have to do it the old-fashioned way... plan it, settle the car into the corner, then drive through it... wonderful! And you feel *everything*. The brakes are pretty decent, too. Maybe not by modern standards, but they're disc brakes and they work well enough. It's comfortable on long journeys, too. We're now using the car whenever we can and planning some European trips.'

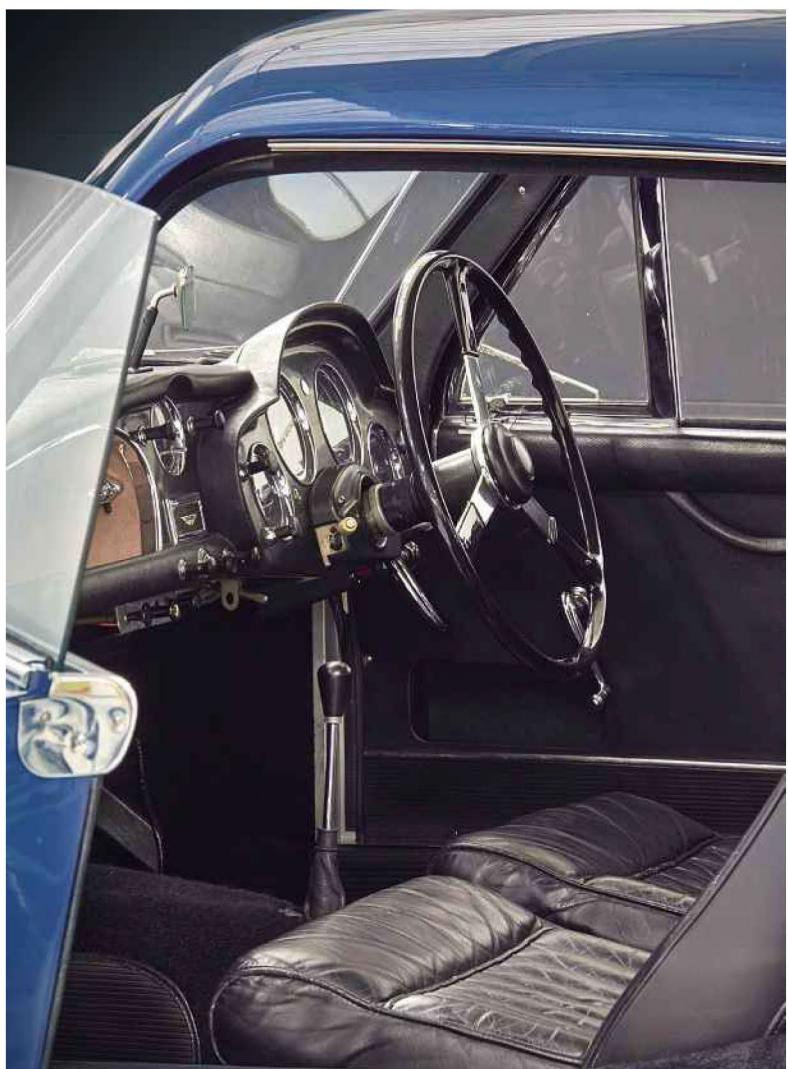
If you, too, are drawn to the MkIII, what do you need to know? Well, prices for tidy, driveable saloons start at around £150,000, while a really good, original car – or a properly restored one – is now £250,000 and upwards, with the very best fetching over £300,000, though that's still only half of what a DB4 or 5 in the same condition might command.

A cosmetic 'restoration' should put you on your guard. As Nigel Woodward, manager of Heritage Operations at Works, explains, a full body restoration is a painstaking process, with many differences between individual cars, and a mixture of steel, aluminium and even wood being used in their construction. 'It's very much a traditional, coachbuilt car,' says Nigel. 'In fact, when you close the door it should sound rather



Right and opposite

Forward-hinging 'clamshell' bonnet affords excellent access to the LB6 engine, though restoration specialists say it's a devil of a job to achieve perfect shutlines when it's closed. Bodies were originally made at the Tickford coachworks: although the early David Brown Aston are generally known as Feltham cars, in fact production had transferred to Newport Pagnell by the time of the MkIII's launch in '57



DB2/4 MkIII

ENGINE In-line 6-cylinder, 2922cc **MAX POWER** 162bhp @ 5500rpm (180bhp in Special Series tune)
MAX TORQUE 180lb ft @ 4000rpm **TRANSMISSION** Four-speed manual, rear-wheel drive **SUSPENSION**
Front: independent, trailing links, coil springs, lever arm dampers. Rear: live axle, parallel trailing arms, Panhard rod, coil springs, lever-arm dampers **STEERING** Worm-and-roller, unassisted **BRAKES** Discs front (305mm), drums rear **WHEELS** 6 x 16in, wire-spoke, front and rear **TYRES** 185 HR16 front and rear
WEIGHT 1300kg (est) **POWER TO WEIGHT** 127bhp/ton **0-60MPH** 9.3sec **TOP SPEED** 120mph
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like closing the door of a railway carriage!'

Whereas, from DB4 onwards, Aston Martin adopted a platform-type chassis, the MkIII still retained an old-style ladder-type chassis in hefty square-section steel. The outer body is all aluminium, the rear section forming a virtual monocoque that's bolted to the chassis.

The biggest challenge for the restorer is the huge 'clamshell' bonnet. 'It's quite a complex assembly,' says Nigel, 'and because the chassis are hand-made and quite variable, a lot of shimming and general jiggery pokery goes on to get it to shut cleanly with nice, even gaps.' Most of the top specialists charge £200,000 and upwards (Works considerably upwards) for a full restoration, which is why it pays to have any prospective purchase thoroughly inspected.

The LB6 engine has shown two major weaknesses over the years. Cylinder head gasket sealing can be problematic – it's a wet-liner engine and over time the liner seals tend to deteriorate. Then there are the 'cheeses' – the four circular pieces of cast aluminium that carry the crankshaft main bearings in the block. The aluminum distorts with heat, and the oil tubes that locate the cheeses in the block leak, causing a loss of oil pressure. The good news is that a

number of specialists, including Four Ashes, Rex Woodgate and Aston Engineering, have developed fixes over the years, and with suitable upgrades both the LB6 engine and DB gearbox are generally reliable today, more than capable of standing up to the enthusiastic driving for which the Feltham cars were conceived.

A number of other, modern enhancements are also available – electric power steering takes the sweat out of low-speed manoeuvres, a modern alternator can be fitted within the old dynamo body to boost the electrics, a high-capacity radiator reduces the danger of overheating, and for high-speed cruising an overdrive conversion is available for cars that didn't have it from new (though in fact most MkIIIs did).

There is one further reason why you might be drawn to a MkIII. The day after I'd chatted to Jon Davies, he emailed me. 'I'm afraid I have a confession to make,' he wrote. 'You asked why I had a soft spot for the MkIII. Well, it has more than a little to do with it featuring in *Goldfinger* (the book, that is). Didn't know if I should tell you, but what the heck. Typical bloke!'

Yep, this was the original Bond Aston, chosen by 007 as his MI6 'pool car' in preference to a Jaguar 3.4. Smart chap, that Bond. **V**

What the road testers said at the time

'BEFORE TESTING the Aston Martin DB2/4 Mark III, the staff at *Road & Track* was equally divided between those who liked the car and those who were rather cool towards it. At the conclusion of the test, those who were cool toward it were enthusiastic believers and those who liked it before were overcome. But what does the car have to excite this usually blasé group into feelings of rapture over a purely mechanical, albeit beautiful, object?

Its appearance is a good place to start. An old engineering axiom, "What looks right, is right", sums up the effect the car has on enthusiasts the world over. Its graceful lines suggest a sleek, lithe vehicle, suitable for a race or a trip across town. In the words of a British writer, it is "a very sporting car that you can drive in a dinner jacket".

We found it to be not only one of the most desirable cars we've driven but one of the easiest to get accustomed to. The engine starts easily and after a brief warm-up is ready to go. The hydraulically actuated clutch takes hold instantly with extreme smoothness. It is one of the few (in British cars) we've found adequate in stock form and which did not slip during acceleration tests.

The ride is stiff, just as it is with most good-handling sports cars, and somewhat rough for town. The fun increases in direct proportion to the pace. Even after the first few curves are taken at speeds that would be much too fast in most cars, the passenger is as much at ease as the driver.

The car does handle superbly. The road holding is of a degree usually attributed to cars with four-wheel independent suspension. It has to be felt to be believed. Steering appeared to be about as close to neutral as one could want, but extremely fast cornering produced just the slightest bit of oversteer.

It was with a great deal of regret that we returned the car. The substantial price is the only reason there isn't an Aston Martin (or, more likely, several) attached to the *Road & Track* staff.' – *Road & Track*, December 1958



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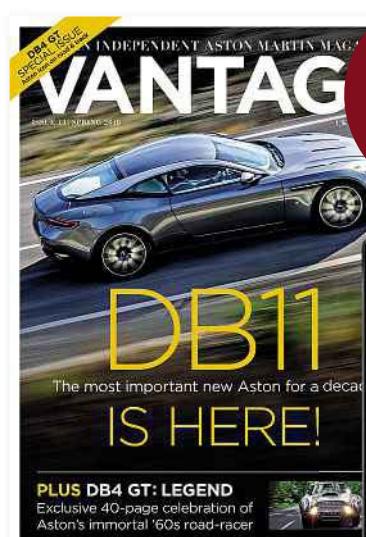
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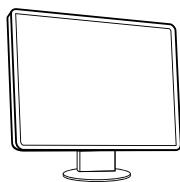
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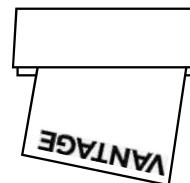
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Bodylines and SprayTec are two separate companies with a uniquely close relationship. Together, they create Aston-shaped works of automotive art

WORDS PETER TOMALIN | PHOTOGRAPHY AMY SHORE



'YOU'LL NOT FIND IT quite as shiny and clean in here as some of the places you've visited...' Bodylines boss Alan Pointer is leading us into the first of the two adjoining units that are the heart of his company. 'It's a proper workshop,' he chuckles. 'Dirty, noisy and dusty.'

He's not wrong about the noise. Later, when I play back the recording of our chat, whole chunks of conversation are drowned out by a chorus of hammering, filing and grinding. Especially hammering. 'Noise is money for us,' he grins. And, presumably, where's there's muck there's brass. When we retreat to his office, I can't help noticing that several of the chairs have seen better days, their foam innards poking through worn plastic trim...

Of course, this is the way most Aston specialists – indeed most of the car restoration industry – used to be. And the lack of marbled floors and gleaming bench-tops matters not one jot. Not to Alan, his team, or his customers. The

din and the dust are simply the inevitable by-products of a process that begins with a tired and often rotten bodyshell and ends with a work of art in steel and aluminium. It's almost a kind of alchemy.

Not every chassis and body panel here is from an Aston. You'll also find Ferraris, Bugattis and other exotics being refurbished or – in some cases – recreated. On the day of our visit, the shells of two late-'50s Ferrari California Spiders are being restored, combined value of the finished articles: probably somewhere north of £30 million. But while it's not all Astons, it's certainly true that over the last 30 years the company has become especially renowned in Aston circles.

Bodylines is based on a small industrial estate on the edge of Olney, Bucks. In fact the area is something of an epicentre for Aston Martin specialists. Aston Works is only a few miles down the road, and around Olney you'll also

find Desmond Smail and Ecurie Bertelli. None of this happened by accident, of course. Bodylines isn't alone in employing ex-factory workers who still live locally, and this small cluster of companies naturally support each other. But Alan has customers from all over the UK and often further afield. Some of them are private individuals; many are other Aston specialists who choose to farm their bodywork out.

When Bodylines has done its bit, the completed shells make the journey to SprayTec, half an hour away on the outskirts of Wellingborough, for finishing and painting. In many cases SprayTec manages the complete restoration, refitting the shells with refurbished mechanicals and fresh trim. The end results are simply stunning – and often concours-winning – but then the naked aluminium panels taking shape here at Bodylines are things of beauty in their own right. And all fashioned almost exclusively by hand, just as they would have been back in the '50s and '60s when the cars were originally built.

In the centre of the shop, a DB5 front end is taking shape. It's basically the whole of the front of the car: nose, wings, scuttle, all formed into one section from many smaller pieces – around 15 of them – cut from sheets of 1.5mm gauge aluminium, curved and stretched by English wheel, shaped over a buck, welded together one piece at a time, then planished and filed into one seamless whole. 'We've made hundreds of these over the years, for DB4s, 5s and 6s,' says Alan. 'The nose is prone to damage and corrosion – don't forget that aluminium corrodes. It also goes brittle with age, and it can be very tricky to weld new aluminium to old. So it makes sense to do the whole thing.'

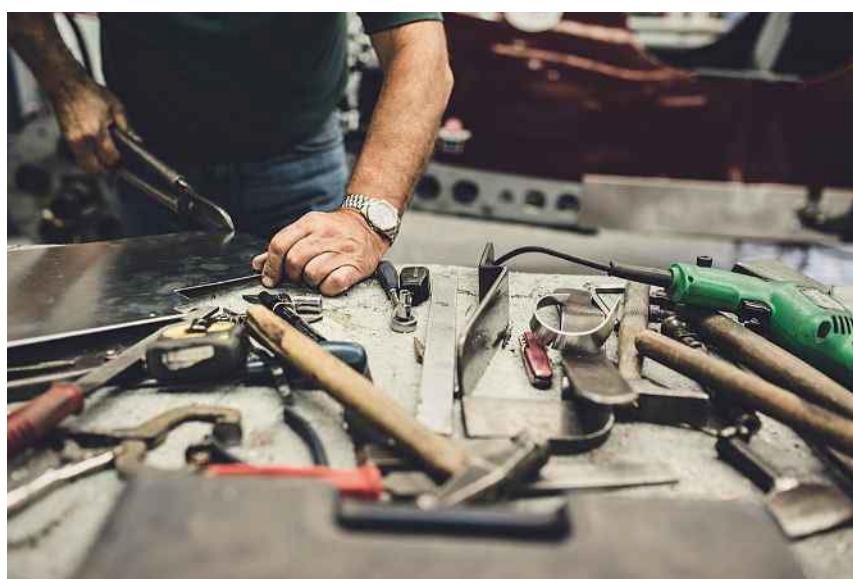
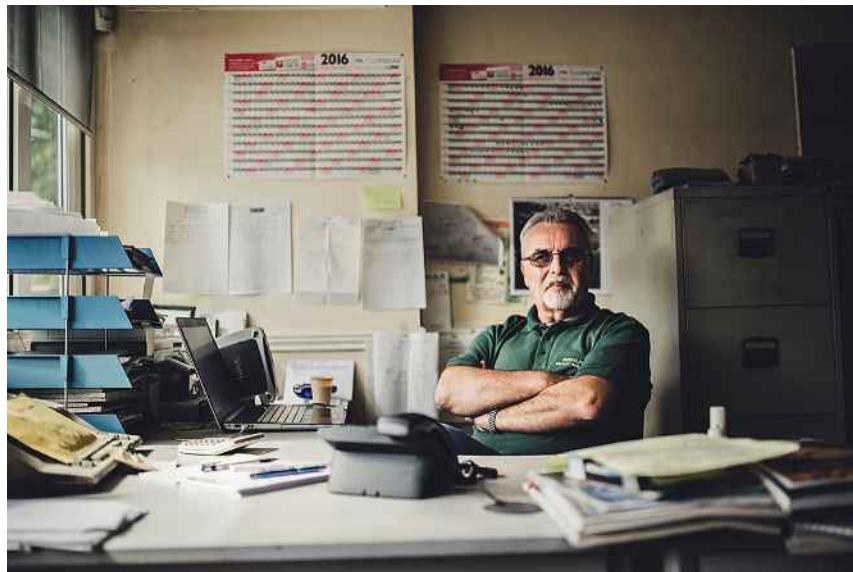
But what about maintaining the originality of the cars? 'We'll save what we can,' says Alan, 'but in the areas that suffer serious corrosion – say the bottom sections of the wheelarches – what we won't do is put patches in. That's why the cars are here – because they have been patched previously. Do the job properly and it gives the car integrity.'

Cars arrive completely stripped of mechanical parts and trim, then the body comes off and the chassis is sandblasted. 'It's the only way,' says Alan. 'Some owners who thought their cars just needed a bit of bodywork are horrified when they see what's really underneath.'

'It's because of how they were built. They were never intended to still be here in 2016 – and if it hadn't been for the values increasing, most of them wouldn't be! The cars that leave SprayTec now are *miles* better than when they left the factory. Where they were built for the short term, now they're being restored for the long term.'

He points to the bonnet aperture on a DB5 shell. 'This is aluminium clenched around steel, and when it was built they put a cloth tape between the two, which was water-absorbent so actually it just speeded up the electrolytic process! Now at least we put waterproof tape in.'

'Panels would get a lick of red oxide. Today the chassis is powder-coated before the body goes on, and because it's





electro-statically applied, it gets in every nook and cranny. The powder coating is rock-hard; if you make a mistake you literally have to grind it off.'

Fitting the refurbished outer panels back onto the steel floorpan and tubular skeleton is a key part of the process. 'Being hand-made, the cars are very variable,' Alan continues. 'Between two cars you can get almost an inch of difference in some of the dimensions. But if you start modifying things, when you go to the next stage, say fitting the windscreen, things don't fit.'

'The truth is, technically they weren't very good, but you've got to bear in mind the blokes in the factory were making them on piecework. Which gives us problems, because the values have shot up so much that some of today's owners have incredibly high expectations. They like the line down the side of the car to be beautiful, perfect. They were never like that when they left the factory. I know because I was there!'

Alan started as an apprentice at Aston Martin in 1973, aged 17, following his father, who had worked there for 36 years as an electrician. 'Ever since I could walk it was always Aston Martin,' he says. 'In the mid-'90s we restored the Le Mans-winning DBR1 for the then owner, and I told him that my father had a picture of me, aged three, sitting in that car in 1959 when it returned from Le Mans.'

When the factory closed in 1974, Alan and some of the other apprentices were taken on by Rolls-Royce in London to finish their apprenticeships. 'I was very lucky and got put with an old panel-beater. We were working on Phantoms. Incredibly hard things to make – the front

'BETWEEN TWO CARS, YOU CAN GET ALMOST AN INCH OF DIFFERENCE'



Opposite, top left
Bodylines boss Alan Pointer. He and most of the team are ex-factory panel-beaters. The machines, the tools and the techniques they use to shape the steel and aluminium haven't changed since the 1960s



'PEOPLE WERE SAYING WE'D RUN OUT OF CARS TO RESTORE 20 YEARS AGO!'

Above
Feeding aluminium through the jaws of an Eckold stretching and shrinking machine. Bodylines also uses four English wheels, each more than 50 years old.

Opposite Completed shells go to SprayTec for finishing and painting.

Bottom right SprayTec boss Adrian George

wings were about 6ft long. As a raw 18-year-old it was pretty daunting. But he taught me everything.'

Alan returned to Newport Pagnell in 1978 but finally left in 1983 and, after a spell working for Shapercraft in Northampton, set up Bodylines in 1987. Highlights over the years have included working on both the first- and second-placed DBR1s from the 1959 Le Mans, several DB3Ss and five of the original DB4 GT Zagatos ('plus six or seven Zagato replicas!').

Bodylines also worked with designer Marc Newson, creating some of his stunning aluminium furniture – as many as 60 or 70 pieces over 20 years – and Newson's stunning 'Kelvin 40' concept plane (all well worth Googling if you're not familiar with them). The Newson chairs were another collaboration with SprayTec, who painted the inside surfaces of these amazing pieces.

The cost of a Bodylines body restoration alone can vary from around £40,000 up to as much as £90,000, depending on what the team uncover. 'An average job will be around mid-50s and take up to six months,' says Alan, who usually has between eight and twelve projects on the go, with a waiting list of at least six months. I'm just amazed that Aston keep being found. 'Ah, but people were saying we'd run out of cars 20 years ago!' he laughs.

IT'S TIME FOR US TO MAKE the same journey that the completed bodyshells make, 30 minutes across country to another industrial estate, this one on the edge of Wellingborough, home to SprayTec. Waiting to meet us is boss Adrian George. He and Alan first met around 30 years ago when Adrian was working for another local restoration specialist, GTC Engineering. When Adrian set up on his own, Bodylines started giving him their paintwork, and in return SprayTec started putting bodywork Alan's way. They haven't looked back.

These days SprayTec carries out many full restorations, and on the day of our visit there's a fine array of '60s and '70s Astons at various stages of the process. A DB5 is in 'dry build': doorframes, headlights, bumpers and other external trim fitted to the prepped shell to make sure everything sits perfectly before it goes into the adjacent paintshop. Further along, a Short Chassis Volante, eye-catching in fresh Caribbean Pearl metallic, is being reunited with trim and mechanicals.

A very original-looking DB4 has just arrived. 'This is perfect for restoration,' says Adrian. 'It's been patched as it's gone along but never restored as such. It's got all the right bits in the right places, which is all you need.'

'It'll be stripped down to the last nut and bolt. We take the body off, sandblast the chassis, then Alan does the chassis work. If it was in a really bad way we have the chassis back and do a chassis dry fit with engine, gearbox and suspension, because you don't want to mess it about afterwards. Then it's returned to Alan, blasted again, powder-coated, then the aluminium body goes on, then it's back to us for the body dry build. If necessary it'll go back to Alan for more work.'

'When we're happy, it goes to the paintshop. From bare metal, the aluminium is chemically cleaned, abraded, etch-primered, then high-build primer is baked on. Then the real hard work starts with the shaping, using blocks of various sizes, which we've made ourselves. It's all aimed at getting the surface as flat as possible, the lines as seamless as possible from one panel to the next.'

He points out the line that runs along the top of the front wing, meets the shoulder of the door then flows through to the rear wing. 'If that flow doesn't happen, it looks like any old DB, but if it flows through it makes for a cracking-looking car. It's all the difference between a cosmetic paintjob and a proper restoration.'

Back to the preparation process. 'If necessary we'll apply a stopper, which is a paste version of the high-build primer. Two high-builds and dry-blocks and you'll get the car about right. After that we'll do a wet-prime to fill in any marks left by this process, which we'll wet-flat, then the car goes into colour.' Phew.

I'm slightly surprised to hear that each car gets just three coats of colour, followed by three coats of lacquer. 'The days of applying 20 coats of paint are long gone,' says Adrian. 'Using high-build primer, it's just not needed.'

'You'll spend 300-odd hours preparing a car, and the





Left and below

DB5 on ramp nears the end of a full restoration; DB4s, 5s and 6s still make up the bulk of Bodylines' and SprayTec's workload, though more DBSs and V8s are starting to appear – that's a DBS wiring loom going in (below)

paint itself takes just half a day. After that it's baked again, then flattened again and machine-polished, just as you would with furniture, to get the final finish.'

Over the years, SprayTec has built up a library of the original colours. 'We can match pretty much everything,' says Adrian. 'To be honest, most people stick to the classic Aston colours, so Silver Birch, Caribbean Pearl, Dubonnet... all of which were in fact stolen from Rolls-Royce!'

'I do wish people were braver with the colours! Black Pearl has become hugely popular – people have seen how good it looks, so more are going for it. Fact is, though, Silver Birch adds value to a DB5. Everyone wants to be James Bond...'

Adrian himself did a four-year apprenticeship in the bodyshop of a local Ford dealership – 'I've always been a painter boy!' he laughs – then worked at GTC for nine years. 'We were doing quite a few Astons, including some real iconic cars like the Bertone Jet and DP199 [the DB4 GT prototype]. So I sort of fell into Astons. I think they always gave me a bit more of a buzz.'

'It was there I met Alan, and in 1992 I decided to go it alone, at first in a smaller, rented place at Earls Barton. We were mostly paint to start with, with just one or two restorations, then it grew and grew and I bought this place about 13 years ago. It was one of the best things I ever did. Now 80 per cent of the cars here are our own complete restorations, and the rest are for about half a dozen other top specialists.' A full restoration by SprayTec takes a couple of years and the cost is usually between £200,000 and £250,000.

'Out of all the Astons ever made, I reckon only around 20 per cent have been restored properly,' says Adrian. 'You'll see cars come up for auction and they'll say the car has been restored three times over the last 15 years! The cars I'm restoring now, I'm not going to worry about.'

And where does he stand on originality? 'It's important to keep as much of the original car as you can. But it's also important to have a clear conscience. You're kidding yourself to think most of the car is salvageable after 50 years. And I don't want customers going out in cars with headlights that might as well have candles in, so I'm going to recommend upgraded electrics, and our cars are lined with heat-proofing. There are amazing materials out there now to make the cars so much better and more useable. You wouldn't buy a lovely old cottage and not fit central heating. It's still the same house, just much nicer to use.'

The results speak for themselves. Thirteen years on the trot, SprayTec had class winners in the AMOC concours, right up to 2013. 'I decided to give someone else a chance,' grins Adrian. 'I reckoned I'd done my bit.' 

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Sports/Super Sports 1920-1925



SPECIFICATION

Engine 1.5-litre in-line 4
Power 55bhp
Torque n/a
0-60mph n/a
Top speed 90mph

Although the first 'Aston Martin' had been created in 1915, the Great War meant production didn't actually start until 1920. And because the early years were all about motorsport, it wasn't until 1923 that cars went on sale to the general public. The Sports was advanced for its time, with four-wheel brakes and a fully floating rear axle, and in Super Sports form it got a twin-cam, 16-valve four with a lusty 55bhp. Business was tough, though, and after around 60 cars had been sold, the company went into receivership in 1925.

Second Series/New International/Le Mans 1932-1934



SPECIFICATION

Engine 1495cc, in-line 4
Power 70bhp
Torque n/a
0-60mph n/a
Top speed 85mph

Price reductions, made possible by out-sourcing more components, and continuing motorsport success at Le Mans and elsewhere helped lift sales of what are now known as the Second Series cars. Particularly well received was the Le Mans model introduced in 1932. Its high-compression engine pushed power up from 60 to 70bhp. Tourers and saloons were still built but were overshadowed by the sports cars – more than 100 examples were sold of the Le Mans alone. There was also a (much rarer) four-seater version.

Ulster 1934-1936

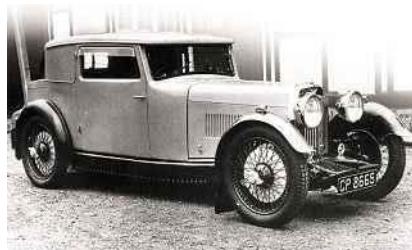


SPECIFICATION

Engine 1495cc, in-line 4
Power 85bhp
Torque n/a
0-60mph n/a
Top speed 100mph

Most revered of all the early Astons, the Ulster was named in celebration of the Works racers' success in the 1934 Tourist Trophy and was effectively a replica of those factory cars. With power now up to 85bhp from the latest version of the 1.5-litre ohc four, it was enough for Aston to guarantee a 100mph top speed. These cars are distinguished by their sleek body and boat-shaped tail, which houses a horizontally mounted spare wheel. Twenty-one Ulsters were built, all of which are believed to have survived.

First Series/International 1927-1932



SPECIFICATION

Engine 1495cc, in-line 4
Power 56bhp
Torque n/a
0-60mph n/a
Top speed 80mph

With new financial backers, a new factory in Feltham and a new ohc 1.5-litre engine, the era of 'Bertelli' Astons began in 1927. There were sports and competition models, and also a tourer and a saloon (pictured), while 1929 saw the introduction of the low-slung, dry-sumped International model, based on the company's widely successful racing cars of the day. The International was fast and refined but the price was high and sales remained slow. In all, 129 'First Series' cars were produced.

Third Series (MkII) 1934-1936



SPECIFICATION

Engine 1495cc, in-line 4
Power 73bhp
Torque n/a
0-60mph n/a
Top speed 85mph

The MkII was a development of the Second Series, intended to be a more useable yet faster version. A new balanced crankshaft assembly and a few other minor mods to the 1.5-litre engine saw peak power rise to 73bhp, though the top speed for the two-seater remained at 85mph. Short- and long-chassis versions were available with a number of different bodies, including tourer, two-door saloon and drophead coupe. A short chassis with lightweight body was adopted as the Works car and ultimately became the Ulster.

2-litre Speed/Type C 1936-1940



SPECIFICATION

Engine 1949cc, in-line 4
Power 110bhp
Torque n/a
0-60mph n/a
Top speed 95mph

To broaden the appeal of its range, in 1936 Aston introduced a 2-litre engine, based on the 1.5 but with increased bore and stroke and domed pistons. The Speed model was created for the 1936 Le Mans, though in the event the race was cancelled. Some 25 were eventually sold. In 1938 it was decided that eight leftover Speed chassis should be used to create a more 'modern-looking' Aston. The resulting Type C, with rather bulbous bodywork, didn't go down well with enthusiasts and the last one sold at Christmas 1940.

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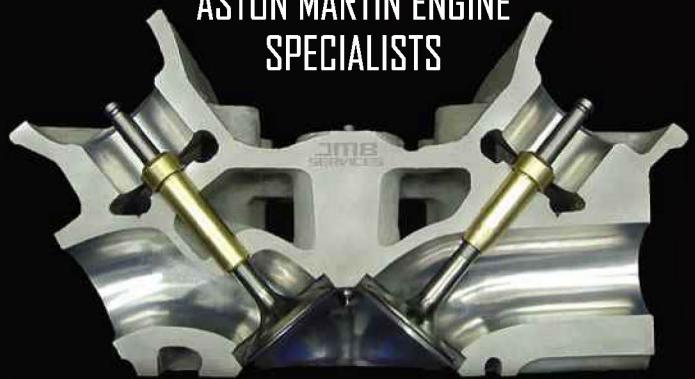
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ALL THE ROAD CARS 1930s-1950s

15/98 1937-1939



SPECIFICATION

Engine 1949cc, in-line 4
Power 98bhp
Torque n/a
0-60mph n/a
Top speed 85mph

Using the new 2-litre engine in wet-sump form, the 15/98 range (15 from the RAC rating, 98 the peak bhp) included saloons and tourers, but they were heavy and hence slow (slow-selling, too: a planned run of 100 cars was slashed to 50). Better was an attractive short-chassis roadster (pictured). There was also a unique 'monoposto' streamlined single-seater designed to go for the 2-litre outer circuit record at Brooklands. The outbreak of war meant it was put into extended storage before its potential was realised.

DB2 1950-1953



SPECIFICATION

Engine 2580cc, in-line 6
Power 105bhp
Torque n/a
0-60mph 12.4sec
Top speed 116mph

The DB2 was the first officially to wear the initials of Aston's new owner, David Brown. It also featured the marque's first six-cylinder engine - in fact a Lagonda unit designed under WO Bentley and picked up when Brown acquired Lagonda shortly after bagging Aston. This 2.6-litre twin-cam was initially temperamental, but once sorted it endowed the sleek, Frank Feeley-designed DB2 with impressive performance, especially in 125bhp Vantage form from 1951. A total of 411 DB2s were built, including 102 dropheads.

DB MkIII 1957-1959



SPECIFICATION

Engine 2922cc, in-line 6
Power 162bhp @ 5500rpm
Torque n/a
0-60mph 9.3sec
Top speed 120mph

The MkIII (note: not DB3) was effectively the third series of the DB2/4, but Aston dropped the 2/4 nomenclature for its 1957-1959 range of coupes, dropheads and fixed-heads. The lines were smoother and more purposeful, the grille previewing decades of Astons to come, and even in its lowliest tune the Willie Watson six was now making well over 150bhp (up to 190bhp on triple Webers). The MkIII actually overlapped with the introduction of the DB4 by several months, and total production of all three variants hit 551.

2-litre Sports (DB1) 1948-1950



SPECIFICATION

Engine 1949cc, in-line 4
Power 90bhp
Torque n/a
0-60mph n/a
Top speed 93mph

Retrospectively known as the DB1, the 2-litre Sports was the first Aston Martin to appear after the Second World War and the first under the ownership of wealthy industrialist David Brown. It was based largely on a pre-war prototype known as the Atom, and it featured refinements such as all-round coil spring suspension as well as a new 2-litre pushrod four-cylinder engine designed by Claude Hill. Lacklustre performance, largely a result of the heavy bodywork, and a high price meant only 16 examples were sold.

DB2/4 1953-1957



SPECIFICATION

Engine 2922cc, in-line 6
Power 140bhp
Torque n/a
0-60mph 10.5sec
Top speed 120mph

The '4' tacked onto the end of the DB2's title denotes the addition of two extra seats. The 2+2 seating was made more habitable by a higher rear roofline, and there was a handy 'hatchback' opening rear window. The extra weight slightly took the edge off the performance, so Aston boosted capacity to 2.9 litres in 1954, taking power to 140bhp. The mkII of 1955 incorporated a rear-end restyle, and there was also a rare 'notchback' hardtop version of the drophead. Around 750 DB2/4s were produced in total.

DB4/DB4 GT 1958-1963



SPECIFICATION

Engine 3670cc, in-line 6
Power 240bhp @ 5500rpm
Torque 240lb ft @ 4250rpm
0-60mph 9.0sec
Top speed 140mph

The definitive Aston shape was born with the DB4, the work of Italian design house Touring, its 'superleggera' aluminium bodywork being wrapped around a steel platform. The DB4 also introduced a new, Tadek Marek-designed all-alloy twin-cam straight-six, originally in 240bhp 3.7-litre form. In all there were five series of DB4s, each adding subtle refinements to the original formula. Vantage versions had 266bhp, and the short-wheelbase track-biased GT a formidable 302bhp. Total production: 1210.

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ALL THE ROAD CARS 1960s-1970s

DB4 GT Zagato 1960-1963



SPECIFICATION

Engine 3670cc, in-line 6
Power 314bhp @ 6000rpm
Torque 278lb ft @ 5400rpm
0-60mph 6.1sec
Top speed 154mph

The rarest, most beautiful of all post-war Astons. With the shortened chassis and highly tuned engine of the DB4 GT (but with an even higher compression ratio), and clothed in even lighter aluminium bodywork of quite exquisite proportions (the work of a young Ercole Spada), Zagatos today command vast sums at auction. Incredible to tell, then, that the original planned run of 25 was reduced to 20 because of lack of take-up. The unused chassis numbers were eventually recycled in the '90s as the 'Sanction' cars.

DB5/DB5 Volante 1963-1966



SPECIFICATION

Engine 3995cc, in-line 6
Power 282bhp @ 5500rpm
Torque 288lb ft @ 3850rpm
0-60mph 8.0sec
Top speed 145mph

Really another evolution of the DB4 (it would have been Series 6), the DB5 is now revered in its own right – and famous above all other Astons – wholly because of its role in the James Bond film franchise. In looks it was virtually identical to the DB4 Series 5 Vantage; the main change was the 4-litre engine and the option of a five-speed gearbox, which soon became standard. Regular DB5s had 282bhp, Vantage versions 314bhp, and there were now disc brakes on all four wheels. Total production reached 1023.

DBS/DBS V8 1967-1972



SPECIFICATION

Engine 3995cc, in-line 6
Power 282bhp @ 5500rpm
Torque 288lb ft @ 3850rpm
0-60mph 8.4sec
Top speed 140mph

The DBS ushered in a whole new look for Aston, its modern lines the work of Englishman William Towns. It was also supposed to introduce Tadek Marek's all-new 5.3-litre V8 engine, but that wasn't ready in time, so the DBS was launched with the familiar straight-six from the DB6 (the two models ran concurrently for three years). The 310bhp V8 was finally available from 1970, but the six-cylinder continued until 1972 as the entry-level Aston. Some 787 six-cylinder DBSs were produced, and 402 V8s. Buying guide, *Vantage* issue 2.

Lagonda Rapide 1961-1964



SPECIFICATION

Engine 3995cc, in-line 6
Power 236bhp @ 5000rpm
Torque 265lb ft @ 4000rpm
0-60mph 9.0sec
Top speed 130mph

David Brown had bought Lagonda in 1947, shortly after buying Aston Martin. He wanted it chiefly for its Bentley-designed straight-six engine, but production of the pre-DB Lagonda models continued until 1958. The Lagonda name then vanished for several years, but in 1961 it reappeared on a new four-door saloon based on the DB4 but with the 4-litre engine that would soon power the new DB5. The Rapide (an old Lagonda model name) was fast and capable but the front styling was awkward and only 55 were sold in four years.

DB6/DB6 Volante 1965-1971



SPECIFICATION

Engine 3995cc, in-line 6
Power 282bhp @ 5500rpm
Torque 288lb ft @ 3850rpm
0-60mph 8.4sec
Top speed 150mph

A longer wheelbase and extended roofline – ending in the distinctive cut-off 'Kamm' tail – made the DB6 a decent four-seater, while its slightly heavier build, softer ride and the options of an automatic gearbox and air-conditioning showed that the DB line was moving into GT territory. The base engine was carried over from the DB5, though the Vantage now produced a claimed 325bhp. The Mk2, which arrived in July 1969, had flared wheelarches over its wider wheels. Total DB6 production: 1967.

AM V8/V8 Volante 1972-1990



SPECIFICATION

Engine 5340cc, V8
Power 310bhp @ 5500rpm
Torque 360lb ft @ 3500rpm
0-60mph 5.7sec
Top speed 155mph

If the '60s were Aston's golden era, the '70s saw the glow fade with frequent financial crises. David Brown had sold up, so the big coupe became the AM V8, its convertible sibling the V8 Volante and the troublesome fuel injection system was dropped in favour of four Weber carburettors. Early cars had around 310bhp, but emissions regs saw that figure diminish through the decade. The company's lack of cash meant the V8 would soldier on for almost 20 years, in which time 4021 were built. Volante buying guide, *Vantage* issue 4.



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ALL THE ROAD CARS 1970s-1990s

Lagonda saloon 1974-1976



SPECIFICATION

Engine 5340cc, V8
Power 280bhp @ 5500rpm
Torque 301lb ft @ 3500rpm
0-60mph 6.2sec
Top speed 149mph

Based on the AM V8 but with a stretched wheelbase, the 1974 Lagonda saloon was the first car since the 1961 Rapide to wear the Lagonda badge, and it was not a success. Most of the blame can be attached to the 1974 oil crisis, which seriously limited the appeal of any V8-powered supersaloon, let alone one that would rarely see mpg in double figures. In fact the Lagonda was an impressive and capable machine, but during the two years of production just seven were sold (though another was later assembled from parts).

Lagonda 1978-1990



SPECIFICATION

Engine 5340cc, V8
Power 280bhp @ 5500rpm
Torque 301lb ft @ 3000rpm
0-60mph 8.8sec
Top speed 143mph

One of the most extraordinary cars ever to reach production, the William Towns-designed Lagonda caused a sensation when it was unveiled in 1976. Its advanced but troublesome electronics delayed production for almost two years, and the price was stratospherically high (£50,000 in 1980), but it eventually found a market in the Middle East and stayed in production for more than a decade, during which 645 were sold. Under the bonnet was the familiar V8, its performance somewhat blunted by the two-ton kerbweight.

V8 Vantage/Vantage Volante 1977-1989



SPECIFICATION

Engine 5340cc, V8
Power 375bhp @ 5500rpm
Torque n/a
0-60mph 5.3sec
Top speed 170mph

Often described as 'Britain's first supercar', the Vantage of 1977 was based on the AMV8 but was now a model-line in its own right. With a 375bhp version of the 5.3-litre V8 (later 405bhp) and a top speed of 170mph, it was pitched head-to-head with the Ferrari Boxer and Lamborghini Countach for the title of world's fastest car. Distinguished by its blanked-off grille and bonnet scoop, deep air dam and bootlid spoiler, it certainly looked the part. By the time production ended in 1989, 534 had been built, 192 of them Volantes.

V8 Zagato/Zagato Volante 1986-1989



SPECIFICATION

Engine 5340cc, V8
Power 432bhp @ 6250rpm
Torque 400lb ft @ 5000rpm
0-60mph 4.8sec
Top speed 186mph

Resurrecting the partnership with Italian design house Zagato in the mid-'80s was a masterstroke by Aston's then-boss Victor Gauntlett, especially when all 50 coupes were immediately snapped up at £87,000 a pop (37 convertibles were also built). The '80s Zagato couldn't match the beauty of the '60s original, but its performance was sensational. Based on the V8 Vantage but with even more power and considerably lighter, it broke 5sec from 0-60mph and was verified at 185.8mph, making it the fastest Aston yet.

Pocket Buying Guide Lagonda



WHAT TO PAY

It's still possible to find presentable, driveable cars for around £50,000, but restoration can be fearsomely expensive, so tread carefully. At the 2015 Bonhams Works sale, an excellent, low-mileage car made £87,000. The very best Series 4 cars (these later models tend to be better-sorted, though the smoothed-over lines lost some of the original's purity) can fetch £100,000-plus.

NEED TO KNOW

Mechanically virtually identical to the classic Aston V8, so

parts are widely available and servicing is reasonably straightforward. Bodywork and electrics are more problematic. Unless you're prepared to spend well into six figures on a full restoration, it's crucial you establish that the body is sound. The sills are the main weakpoint and a major job to repair properly. Check the door gaps – it's a long chassis, and if any of the doors don't close cleanly, it's a sure sign of problems underneath.

The Lagonda's electrical systems are notoriously troublesome – particularly the electronic dash. In fact there

were several variations. The first cars had crude (by today's standards) LED displays. There was then a slightly more robust second-generation of LEDs, and after that came the CRTs (a trio of cathode ray tubes – like miniature versions of old-fashioned TV sets). Finally the Series 4 cars got rather more reliable VF (vacuum fluorescent) gauges.

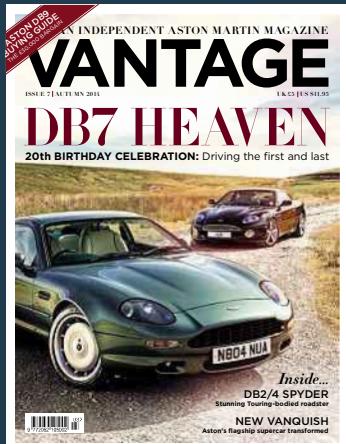
Experts have found fixes for most of the glitches, but some owners simply have traditional analogue dials fitted instead. It's probably the sensible option – but then who buys a Lagonda to be sensible?

IN A NUTSHELL

Still probably the most divisive car ever produced by Aston Martin, the Lagonda wedge caused a sensation in the late-70s and still turns heads today. More a luxury cruiser than a sporting machine, its stock has begun to rise again in recent years.

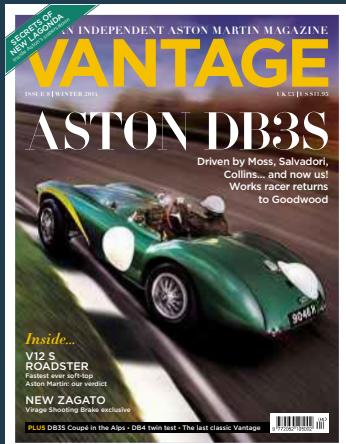
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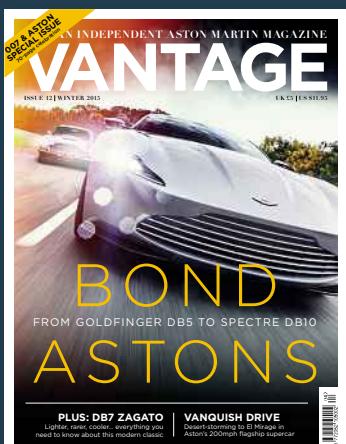
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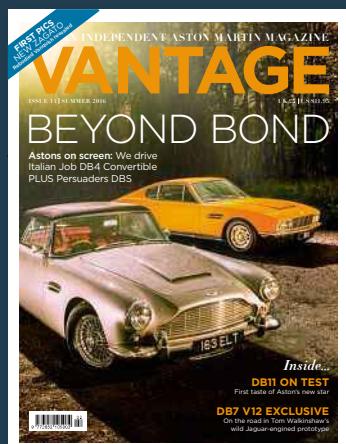
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ALL THE ROAD CARS 1990s-2000s

Virage/Virage Volante 1989-1996



SPECIFICATION

Engine 5340cc, V8
Power 330bhp @ 6000rpm
Torque 350lb ft @ 3700rpm
0-60mph 6.0sec
Top speed 155mph

By the mid-'80s the AM V8 and its Vantage big brother were living on borrowed time, and, under the direction of Victor Gauntlett, Aston began work on a replacement. The Virage was largely still based on the V8, but its new body (by John Heffernan and Ken Greenley), an updated 32-valve fuel-injected V8 and other refinements were enough to give Aston new impetus. In 1992 came the Volante version, and also a Works-developed 500bhp 6.3 monster with widened bodywork. Sales of all variants reached 1050.

V8 Coupé/V8 Volante 1996-1999



SPECIFICATION

Engine 5340cc, V8
Power 349bhp @ 6000rpm
Torque 369lb ft @ 3700rpm
0-60mph 5.9sec
Top speed 155mph+

With the Virage running out of steam in the mid-1990s, Aston Martin relaunched the model as the V8 Coupé – basically a Virage with revised bodywork inspired by the new twin-supercharged Vantage model, including its faired-in headlamps and four round tail-lights. Power was slightly up, the acceleration slightly sharper and the top speed was quoted, not terribly helpfully, as 'over 155mph'. An improvement in almost every way over the Virage, sales were, however, glacially slow. Just 101 Coupés and 63 Volantes were sold.

DB7 V12 Vantage/Vantage Volante 1999-2003



SPECIFICATION

Engine 5935cc, V12
Power 420bhp @ 6000rpm
Torque 400lb ft @ 5000rpm
0-60mph 4.9sec
Top speed 185mph

The DB7 was given a major fillip in 1999 with the launch of the Vantage model, its styling beefed up by Ian Callum and with the first appearance of a brand-new 5.9-litre V12 engine that would go on to power the next generation of flagship Aston Martins. With reworked suspension too, the Vantage was a significant step on from the six-cylinder DB7 but cost just a few thousand pounds more – it was no surprise that sales of the standard car dried up and it was quickly phased out. The desirable run-out Vantage GT had 435bhp.

Vantage (supercharged) 1993-2000



SPECIFICATION (V600)

Engine 5340cc, V8, twin s/c
Power 600bhp @ 6200rpm
Torque 600lb ft @ 4400rpm
0-60mph 4.6sec
Top speed 190mph+

The wide-bodied 6.3-litre V8 had shown the appetite for a faster Virage, and in 1993 came the full-house Vantage version, extensively restyled (only roof and doors were carried over) with a twin-supercharged version of the 5.3-litre engine providing 550bhp and 550lb ft – at the time the most powerful production engine in the world. In 1998 came the V600, with an additional 50bhp – enough to propel this near-two-ton monster to a reported 200mph. A final run of 40 'Le Mans' special editions brought total production to 279.

DB7/DB7 Volante 1994-1999



SPECIFICATION

Engine 3228cc, in-line 6, s/c
Power 335bhp @ 5750rpm
Torque 361lb ft @ 3000rpm
0-60mph 5.8sec
Top speed 157mph

Aston couldn't survive building handfuls of handbuilt supercars; a more affordable model was needed. Ford, who had bought a majority share in AML in 1987, knew this and in 1994 launched the Ian Callum-styled DB7 – evoking memories of the 1960s DB cars – with a supercharged 3.2-litre straight-six and a steel monocoque that had its origins at Jaguar (Ford-owned at the time). A Volante followed in 1996. DB7 sales eventually topped 7000, making it then by far the most numerous Aston. Buying guide, *Vantage* issue 3.

Vanquish/Vanquish S 2001-2007



SPECIFICATION

Engine 5935cc, V12
Power 460bhp @ 6500rpm
Torque 400lb ft @ 5000rpm
0-60mph 4.5sec
Top speed 190mph

While DB7s were rolling out of a new factory at Bloxham, back at Newport Pagnell an all-new flagship model was in development. Launched in summer 2001, the Callum-penned Vanquish had a 460bhp version of the V12 and a bonded aluminium platform that would be developed for all subsequent Astons. Its automated paddleshift manual gearbox was criticised initially for its slow responses. This was improved, as was the handling, for the 520bhp Vanquish S launched in 2004. A total of 2578 Vanquishes were sold.

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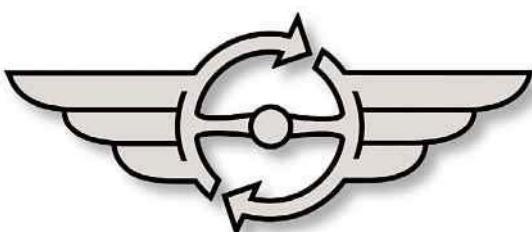
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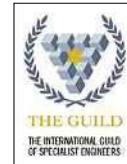
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ALL THE ROAD CARS 2005-present

DB7 Zagato/DB-AR1 2003-2004



SPECIFICATION

Engine 5935cc, V12
Power 435bhp @ 6000rpm
Torque 410lb ft @ 5000rpm
0-60mph 4.8sec
Top speed 185mph

Like previous Aston/Zagato collaborations, the DB7 Zagato used a shortened chassis, lighter bodywork and familiar Zagato design cues (like the 'double-bubble' roof). It also had an uprated engine, in this case the Vantage's V12 tuned to 435bhp. The production run was limited to 99 cars, all of which were snapped up. The DB-AR1 was a Zagato-designed, somewhat impractical 'speedster' version of the DB7 (it didn't even have a hood) aimed specifically at the west coast of America, where most of the 99 examples still reside.

V8 Vantage/V8 Vantage Roadster 2005-present



SPECIFICATION (4.3)

Engine 4281cc, V8
Power 380bhp @ 7000rpm
Torque 302lb ft @ 5000rpm
0-60mph 4.8sec
Top speed 175mph

Aston's answer to Porsche's 911 and originally conceived as a mid-engined car. Compact and more overtly sporting than the DB9, the Callum/Fisker-styled V8 Vantage has overtaken the DB9 to become the biggest seller yet, with more than 16,000 so far finding homes. Its Jaguar-derived quad-cam V8, originally 4.3 (4.7 litres and 420bhp from 2008) gives brisk performance and an extrovert soundtrack – best enjoyed in the Roadster, which arrived in 2007. The 'S', with 430bhp, arrived in 2011. Buying guide, *Vantage* issue 1.

V12 Vantage/V12 Vantage Roadster 2009-present



SPECIFICATION

Engine 5935cc, V12
Power 510bhp @ 6500rpm
Torque 420lb ft @ 5750rpm
0-60mph 4.1sec
Top speed 190mph

The notion of shoehorning Aston's 5.9-litre V12 into the compact V8 Vantage was always amusing, and when Aston turned the concept into reality in 2009 it produced one of the finest drivers' cars in its history. Distinguished by its rows of (functional) bonnet vents, the V12V builds on the V8 Vantage's agility and adds another dimension of performance and desirability. The Roadster arrived in late 2012. Best of all, though, is the 565bhp 'S' launched in 2013. With a top speed of 205mph, it's the fastest series-production Aston ever.

DB9/DB9 Volante 2004-2016



SPECIFICATION

Engine 5935cc, V12
Power 470bhp @ 6000rpm
Torque 443lb ft @ 5000rpm
0-60mph 4.6sec
Top speed 190mph

The DB9 was effectively the successor to the highly successful DB7 Vantage, with the latest version of the 5.9-litre V12, a Touchtronic auto option, and the first appearance of the largely aluminium 'VH' platform, all clothed in another gorgeous Ian Callum body, refined by his successor, Henrik Fisker. It was also the first Aston to be built at Gaydon. Volante arrived in 2005, and in 2008 power grew to 470bhp. For 2013 the car was given a major visual and mechanical refresh, now with 510bhp. End-of-line GT version had 540bhp.

DBS/DBS Volante 2007-2012



SPECIFICATION

Engine 5935cc, V12
Power 510bhp @ 6500rpm
Torque 420lb ft @ 5750rpm
0-60mph 4.2sec
Top speed 191mph

Resurrecting a name last seen in the late '60s, the DB9-derived DBS replaced the early-noughties Vanquish as the flagship production car in 2007 and gained huge cachet when it was adopted as 007's company car when Daniel Craig assumed the tuxedo for *Casino Royale*. With power ramped up to 510bhp, aggressive styling, harder-edged dynamics and a manual gearbox, the DBS was Mr Hyde to the DB9's Dr Jekyll. A Volante appeared in 2009. At the end of 2012, the DBS was replaced by the new Vanquish.

Rapide 2009-2012



SPECIFICATION

Engine 5935cc, V12
Power 470bhp @ 6000rpm
Torque 443lb ft @ 5000rpm
0-60mph 5.0sec
Top speed 184mph

With Porsche enjoying considerable success with its Panamera saloon and new markets opening up for luxury cars, it was only a matter of time before Aston spun-off a four-seater saloon from its VH platform. The Rapide went into production in late 2009, initially at Magna Steyr in Austria. Despite (or perhaps because of) its sports car-like dynamics, sales haven't been as strong as Aston would have hoped, and production moved to Gaydon in late 2012. Relaunched as the Rapide S for 2013 with a deeper new front grille and 550bhp.



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ALL THE ROAD CARS 2010-present

One-77 2010-2012



SPECIFICATION

Engine 731cc, V12
Power 750bhp @ 7600rpm
Torque 553lb ft @ 6000rpm
0-60mph 3.6sec
Top speed 220mph+

Aston's answer to the Bugatti Veyron and Pagani Zonda hypercars was the One-77, a no-expense-spared, handbuilt, all-carbonfibre rocketship with the world's most powerful naturally aspirated engine (some have recorded an astonishing 772bhp) and an equally gobsmacking £1.15m price-tag. Strictly limited to 77 examples, the last was delivered in August 2012, though Aston retains one for PR work. The few who have been lucky enough to experience the One-77 describe it as challenging, rewarding and utterly thrilling.

V12 Zagato 2012-2013



SPECIFICATION

Engine 5935cc, V12
Power 510bhp @ 6500rpm
Torque 420lb ft @ 5750rpm
0-60mph 4.1sec
Top speed 190mph

The V12 Zagato is the most recent Aston to feature the badge of the famous Italian styling house – though in fact this particular Zagato was styled by Aston's own Marek Reichman. It was another strictly limited edition: in this case just 101 were made. Based on the V12 Vantage, the Zagato was rebodied in carbonfibre and aluminium, though the mechanical package was virtually unchanged. Still, since the V12 Vantage was already one of the finest drivers' Astons of all time, that was hardly a concern – even at £396,000 a pop.

Rapide S 2013-present



SPECIFICATION (2015MY)

Engine 5935cc, V12
Power 550bhp @ 6750rpm
Torque 457lb ft @ 5500rpm
0-60mph 4.8sec
Top speed 190mph

The Rapide S, launched in January 2013, represented a significant evolution of Aston Martin's four-door sports car. A more aggressive grille and headlight treatment gave it considerably more road presence, while, under the bonnet, variable valve timing and a new management system lifted the power of the V12 from 470 to 550bhp, dropping the 0-60mph time to just 4.8sec. In late 2014, the S was given an extensive refresh, which included the introduction of an eight-speed gearbox and a host of detail refinements.

Virage 2011-2012



SPECIFICATION

Engine 5935cc, V12
Power 490bhp @ 6500rpm
Torque 420lb ft @ 5750rpm
0-60mph 4.5sec
Top speed 186mph

Bringing back a name from the 1990s, the 2011 Virage slotted into the range between the DB9 and the DBS – and even avid Aston fans wondered if it wasn't a variant too far. The idea was to sell a more aggressive car than the DB9 (but one that wasn't as extreme as the DBS). All the panels except the roof were subtly restyled, while the V12 gained an extra 20bhp, though the overall feel was still very much GT. Sales were slow, and when the thoroughly revised DB9 was launched for 2013MY, the Virage was quietly dropped.

Vanquish/Vanquish Volante 2012-present



SPECIFICATION (2015MY)

Engine 5935cc, V12
Power 568bhp @ 6650rpm
Torque 465lb ft @ 5500rpm
0-60mph 3.6sec
Top speed 201mph

The original Vanquish was a landmark car – in many ways the first of the modern Astons with its largely aluminium underpinnings – and it was a brave move to resurrect the name for the current flagship. If the new car isn't quite the same game-changer, the combination of aggressively shaped carbonfibre bodywork, 568bhp from a reworked V12, adaptive damping and carbon-ceramic brakes is still an intoxicating one. A Volante arrived in late 2013, and in late 2014 both versions got a refresh that included an eight-speed gearbox.

DB11 2016-present



SPECIFICATION

Engine 5204cc, biturbo V12
Power 600bhp @ 6500rpm
Torque 516lb ft @ 1500rpm
0-60mph 3.7sec
Top speed 200mph

The first all-new production car of the Andy Palmer era, the DB11 is the most important new Aston Martin since the launch of the DB9 – the car it replaces – more than a decade ago. With a brand new, highly efficient twin-turbo 5.2-litre V12, a raft of new electronic systems courtesy of technology partner Daimler, and innovative aerodynamic features, it's the standard-bearer for Aston's so-called Second Century Plan. In character, it's a consummate GT car, but also a dazzlingly quick one. Aston's future looks very bright indeed.

HEROES: ST JOHN HORSFALL

HIS FEARLESS DRIVING AT THE WHEEL OF VARIOUS RACING ASTONS WAS JUST ONE OF 'JOCK' HORSFALL'S QUALIFICATIONS FOR HERO STATUS

WORDS JOHN SIMISTER **PHOTOGRAPH** ASTON MARTIN HERITAGE TRUST

Racing driver, secret agent, Aston fancier... St John Ratcliffe Stewart Horsfall, known to most as Jock, could almost have been a James Bond with a racing licence. And he even knew Bond author Ian Fleming, when the two of them were involved in a remarkable wartime counter-intelligence stunt.

We'll get to that – but first, what is the Aston Martin connection that makes Horsfall a Hero? It's strong enough for the Aston Martin Owners Club to have held the St John Horsfall Memorial Trophy race at Silverstone every year since 1950, marking the talents of a fearless racing driver, majoring on Aston Martins apart from his final, fateful race in Silverstone's 1949 International Trophy.

As well as racing them, Horsfall engineered them after returning to civilian life post-war. He worked with Claude Hill on the first DB models, and raced (with Leslie Johnson) the prototype DB1. Not just any race; this was the 1948 Spa 24 Hours, which they won.

Horsfall was born near Norwich in 1910, and grew up in Suffolk. He had five older brothers, no sisters and a mother who much enjoyed driving; she was the driver for Sir Eric Holt-Wilson, of military intelligence, during the First World War. Young St John (pronounced sin-jun) wanted above all to race cars, and the route he chose was to be an apprentice test driver at Ford's factory at Trafford Park, Manchester. Thus trained, he became instead a stockbroker, which helped fund the Aston Martin International he bought in 1934.

This he raced at Brooklands. He also tried a faster Ulster at Phoenix Park in 1936, and in 1937 bought a 2-litre Speed Model, a black machine that had been tuned by Freddie Dixon of Riley fame. In this he won the 1938 Leinster Trophy race, came second in that year's Donington TT, and scored a couple of other Brooklands victories. Horsfall also raced an ERA with Tony Rolt – and then war intervened.

By then, Sir Eric Holt-Wilson was MI5's deputy director, and he knew all about Horsfall and his gung-ho approach to driving. So Horsfall was duly recruited to drive MI5 and MI6 agents, double agents and captured spies to wherever they needed to be, as fast as possible. As well as his speed, he was known for his discretion so he could be trusted not to divulge the large amount of highly sensitive information that would come his way.



Left
Horsfall in reflective mood. When racing, he favoured a shirt and tie, with either a bomber jacket or a sleeveless sweater. Despite being short-sighted, he never wore spectacles

Other MI5 work included getting port officials drunk to see what they might reveal, and producing disinformation to feed to the Germans via double agents – including downgrading the specifications of American warplanes, which itself involved spying on the Americans to get the data to downgrade. But his most famous disinformation role was as part of Operation Mincemeat, as related in Ben Macintyre's eponymous book.

In 1943, Allied forces were preparing to invade the 'soft underbelly of Europe', Italy. The obvious route was via Sicily, and the Germans knew this. So, to increase the chances of a successful Sicilian invasion, the Germans needed to think that the Allies were actually planning a two-pronged attack on Sardinia and Greece. To this end, the body of one Major William Martin would be washed up on the Spanish coast, the pockets of his uniform containing details of the notional attacks which the neutral, but unofficially pro-Nazi, Spanish officials would pass on to Germany.

A suitable dead body was found (actually that of a vagrant, Glyndwr Michael, his lungs conveniently fluid-filled from the pneumonia that killed him). The body, packed with dry ice, had to be delivered from Hackney Mortuary in London to Greenock Dock in Scotland, where it would be transferred via a launch to a submarine for deposition near Spain.

The vehicle for this delivery, to be carried out at night with masks on the headlights, was a Fordson van with a tuned V8 and, allegedly, a top speed beyond 100mph. 'At the wheel,'

Macintyre writes, 'was a small man with a neat moustache, wearing civilian clothes. His name was St John 'Jock' Horsfall, an MI5 chauffeur who also happened to be one of the most famous racing drivers in the country.'

Horsfall didn't know the details and purpose of his cargo beyond its role in tricking the Germans, but his liking for practical jokes (wiring a magneto to a toilet seat, and firing an impulse through his cousin Kath as she performed, being one) ensured he and his 30cwt Fordson, peacetime transporter for his Aston, performed his task with relish.

En route, Horsfall and his three passengers, only two of them alive, nearly came to grief twice. The first involved a near miss with a tram stop after Horsfall became convulsed with giggles, brought on by passing a cinema showing a spy film. The second resulted from the combination of darkness, his short-sightedness and an unseen roundabout, straight over which the Fordson roared.

Anyway the mission was accomplished and Mincemeat made mincemeat of German intelligence, exactly as hoped. Then, back in civilian life, Horsfall resumed his racing. After his 1948 Spa success he entered the 1949 event in his black Speed Model, finishing fourth after driving the entire 24 hours himself. Then, on August 20, he entered the International Trophy in an ERA tuned far beyond its chassis' ability.

On lap 13, the ERA hit a straw bale and overturned, breaking Jock's neck. He died instantly. War hero, racing hero... no wonder the AMOC honours him every year. **V**

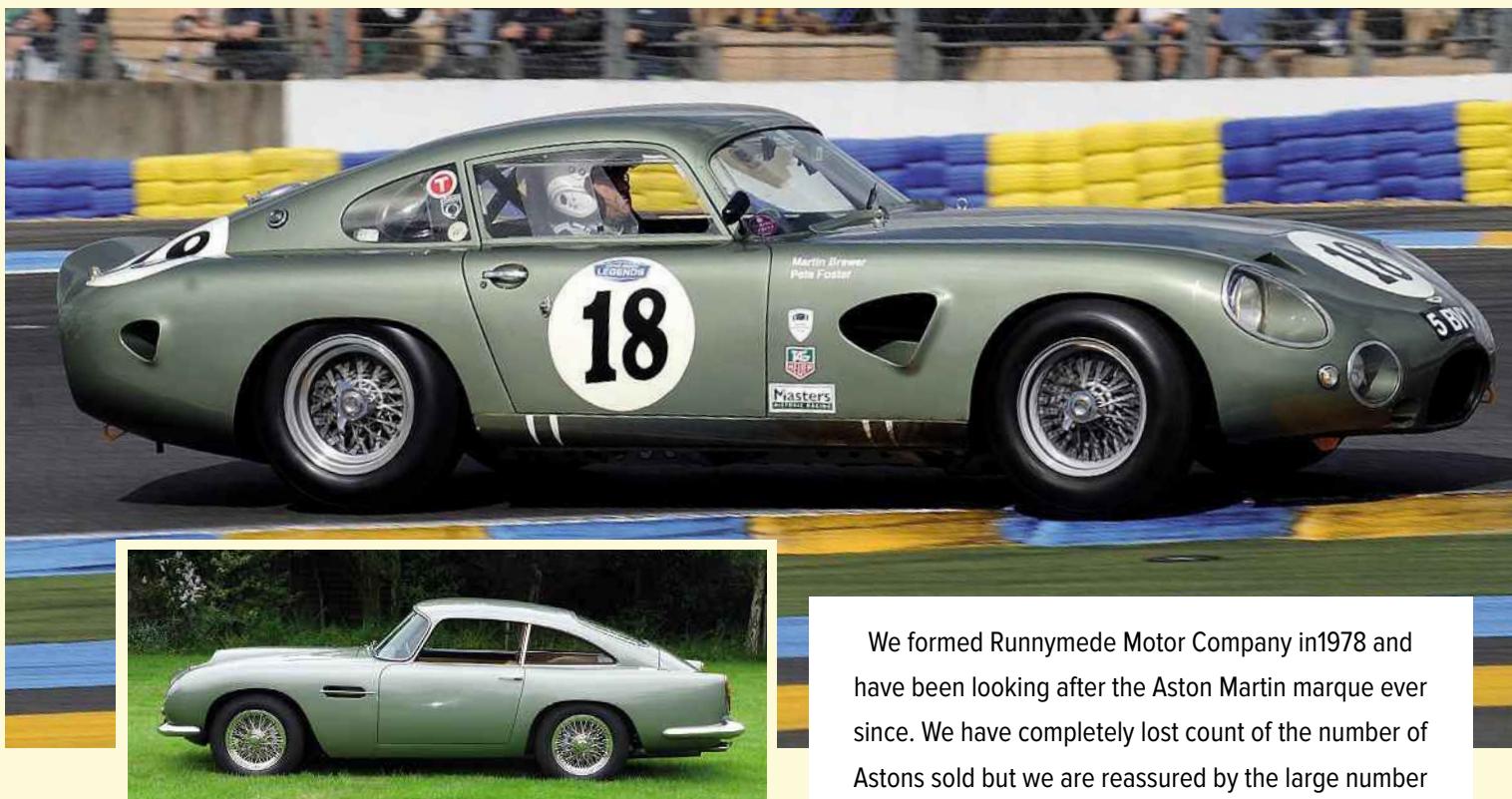
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