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Special celebration issue

AN INDEPENDENT ASTON MARTIN MAGAZINE

VANTAGE

ISSUE 22 | SUMMER 2018

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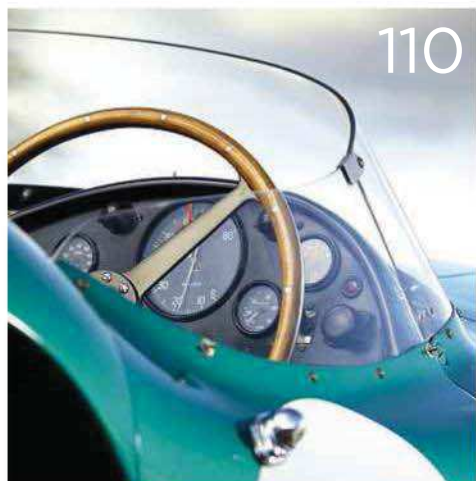
VANTAGE

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Official fuel consumption figures in litres/100km (mpg) for the 2019 MY Aston Martin Vantage V8: urban 14.2 (19.9); extra urban 8.0 (35.3); combined 10.3 (27.4). CO₂ emissions 236g /km. The mpg/fuel economy figures quoted are sourced from official regulated test results obtained through laboratory testing. They are for comparability purposes only and may not reflect your real driving experience, which may vary depending on factors including road conditions, weather, vehicle load and driving style.

Contents

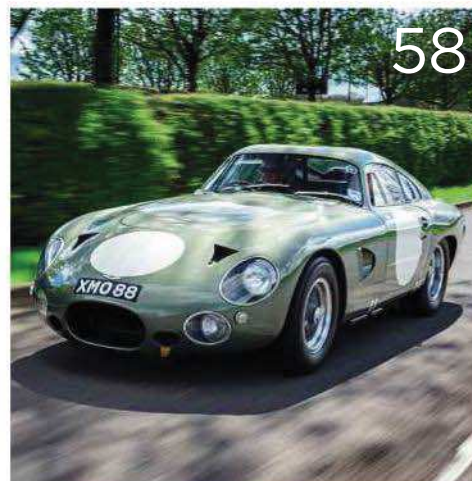
SUMMER 2018



110



128



58

REGULARS

- 10** BULLETIN: NEW V600 REVEALED
The current Vantage is about to check out. But what a way to go...
- 16** NEWS: RETURN OF THE DBS
Two names from Aston's past, DBS and Superleggera, make a comeback
- 21** MOTORSPORT
The old-shape Vantage racers are still fighting on – in spectacular style
- 25** MARKET WATCH
James Bond Astons old and new come to auction. We assess them
- 27** DESIRABLES
Aston Martin's tie-up with TAG Heuer bears fruit. And other goodies
- 31** LETTERS
How a reader saved the DB4 GT prototype from a watery end
- 147** SUBSCRIPTION OFFER
Save some money and have *Vantage* delivered direct to your door
- 149** MODEL LISTINGS
Potted histories and essential data on every roadgoing Aston Martin
- 162** HEROES
John Ogier was the man who kept AM on the racing front line in the '60s



48

FEATURES

- 34** FIRST DRIVE: DB11 AMR
The new DB11 flagship has a mighty 630bhp – and a chassis to match
- 42** 2018 LE MANS PREVIEW
Kicking off our Le Mans celebration, Darren Turner gives us the inside line
- 48** TRACK TEST: THE MUNCHER
RHAM 1, aka The Muncher, has been recreated in iconic 1977 Le Mans form
- 58** PROJECT 215
The fab, '60s Le Mans racer is finally reunited with its original engine
- 70** ROAD TEST: NEW VANTAGE
In its first major test on UK roads, we assess the awesome, all-new Vantage
- 78** COVER STORY: SIX VANTAGES
We compare six great Astons that have all carried the Vantage name
- 110** TRACK TEST: DBR2
Big brother to the Le Mans-winning DBR1 and a great car in its own right
- 120** BUYING GUIDE: DB4
Why the '4' is the greatest DB-era Aston – and how to find a good one
- 128** TRACK TEST: EMKA-ASTON
Last Aston-engined car to lead Le Mans? That'll be the rather wonderful EMKA
- 140** THE SPECIALIST: STEEL WINGS
One of the go-to specialists for US owners of classic Astons. We pay a visit



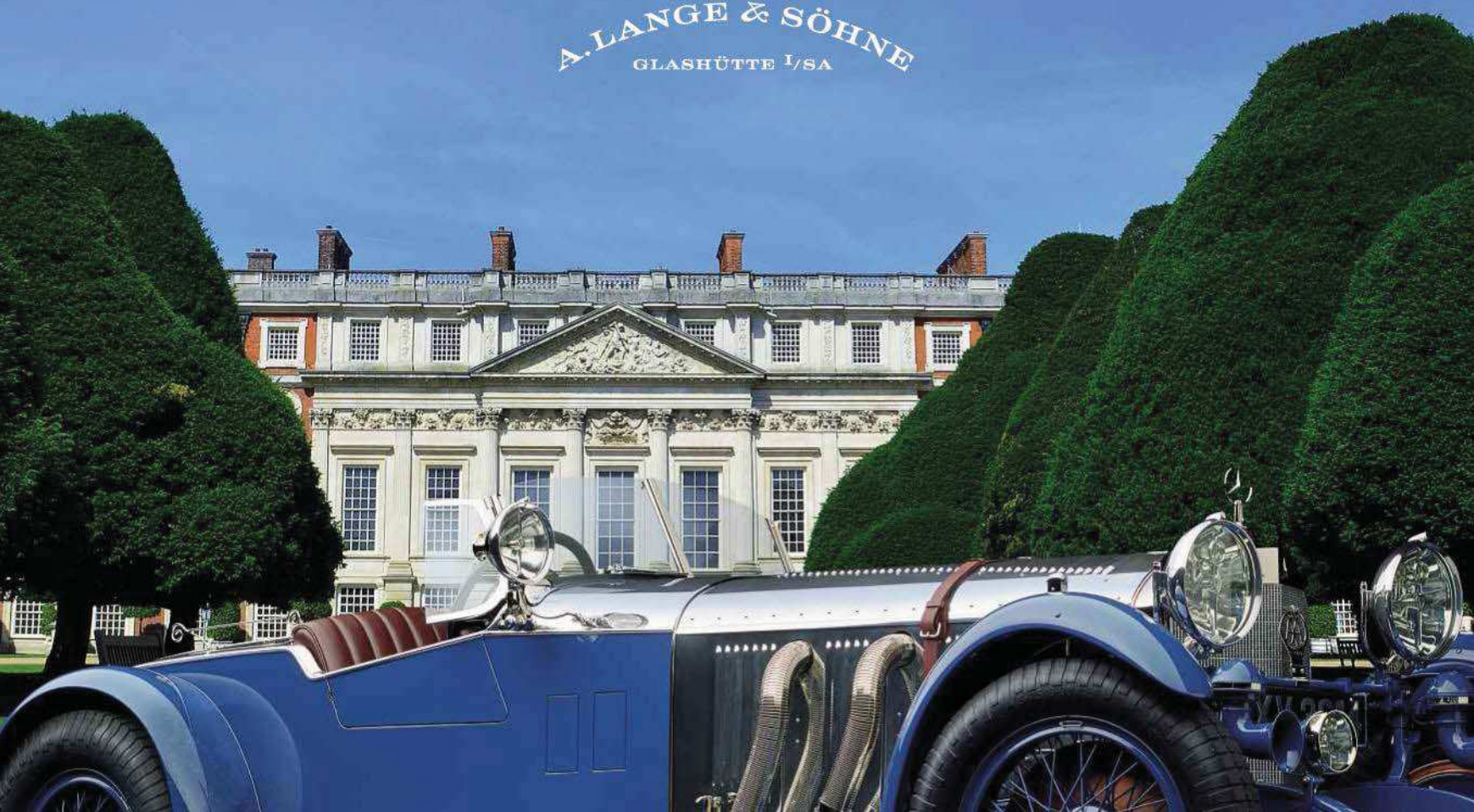
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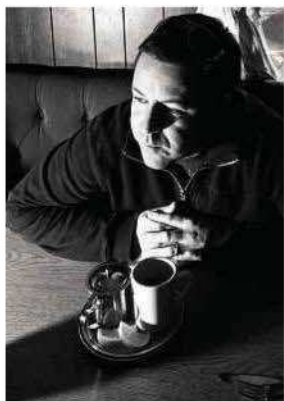
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Viewpoint

Magical history tour



OF THE MANY GREAT NAMES associated with Aston Martin, Vantage is without doubt the most evocative. Since it was first applied to a DB2 in the early 1950s it has outgrown its rather prosaic original application denoting a more powerful engine to assume much greater significance.

As we see from the cover of this issue, Vantage is an unbroken thread that runs through the fabric of the company. We could have included

more examples – the DB7 Vantage, for instance – but in the end we had to draw the line somewhere. We think we've explored the breadth of the Vantage influence and captured the essence of what it means, whether designating a high-performance derivative as it did originally, or giving its moniker to a standalone model. Driving these six generations of Vantage was a fascinating journey to the heart of Aston Martin. Relive it from page 78.

Another cornerstone of Aston Martin is its love affair with the 24 Hours of Le Mans. This issue hits the shelves (or subscribers' doormats!) just a few weeks before this year's great race, so it felt like the appropriate moment to celebrate some of the marque's lesser-known Le Mans efforts. A particular favourite of mine is RHAM 1, aka 'The Muncher' (featured on page 48) – a glorious and aptly nicknamed DBS-based beast of a car featuring cartoonish bodywork and, in its final evolution, a fire-breathing twin-turbocharged version of Tadek Marek's V8.

Funny, then, that Aston Martin Racing's latest Le Mans hopeful should also sport a twin-turbo V8. AMR's all-new Vantage GTE is a long way from the heroic, if somewhat eccentric efforts of The Muncher's creator, plucky privateer Robin Hamilton, but the unlikely pair are united by a very British obsession with this most French of races.

Richard Meaden, editor

The next issue of *Vantage* will be on sale on September 6, 2018. To subscribe, go to dennismags.co.uk/vantage

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Bulletin

News, analysis and events

Return of the V bomber

THE OUTGOING VANTAGE IS GETTING A SPECTACULAR
SEND-OFF IN THE FORM OF A BESPOKE, LIMITED-EDITION
ROAD-RACER. MEET THE NEW V600

WORDS RICHARD MEADEN | IMAGES ASTON MARTIN



V600. IF YOU'RE OLD ENOUGH to remember Aston's late-90s twin-supercharged behemoth, then the hairs on the back of your neck have just prickled on reading that iconic alphanumeric name. The reason for its resurrection? A fitting last hurrah for the 'VH' Vantage.

Commissioned through Gaydon's bespoke skunkworks 'Q by Aston Martin' by a particularly adventurous customer, the 2018 V12 Vantage V600 evokes the spirit of the 1998 V8 Vantage V600 with a celebratory run of seven coupés and seven roadsters to mark the end of the line for the most successful model in Aston Martin's history.

In essence, the V600 is an evolution of the unicorn-like Vantage AMR Pro, which in turn took its inspiration from Aston Martin Racing's V8 Vantage GTE World Endurance Championship racer and 2017 Le Mans GTE Pro class-winner. The Vantage AMR Pro (tested in issue 19) featured enhanced aerodynamics and

beautifully pumped-up bodywork that aped that of the race car, along with a race-tuned engine and sequential manual paddle-shift transmission.

While the V600 shares that car's sense of purpose, it also takes the opportunity to celebrate a truly analogue ethos that places an emphasis on driver engagement and old-school thrills. To this end it is powered by Aston's fabulous 600PS (592bhp) naturally aspirated V12, which in turn is connected to a seven-speed manual transmission with dog-leg first gear. In terms of modern-day machinery it's a throwback, but for purist appeal it is manna from heaven.

There are some concessions to modernity, such as three-stage adaptive damping and multi-mode traction and stability control, plus carbon-ceramic brakes and full carbonfibre bodywork.

For Aston Martin's vice president and chief creative officer, Marek Reichman, the V600 is both a celebration of VH Vantage and validation of the company's

focus on bespoke special-series cars: 'This is precisely why we created our "Q by Aston Martin - Commission" service,' he said. 'Our customers can create truly bespoke sports cars by personally collaborating with myself and Aston Martin's design team. The V600 name remains a classic in Aston Martin's heritage and I'm proud to see it adorn the V12 Vantage V600 once again.'

Naturally enough, the customer who commissioned the V12 Vantage V600 - or 'Triple V' as it has been neatly nicknamed - has their order secured, but they have generously allowed a run of a further 13 cars (the total build run is split evenly between coupés and roadsters) to be offered to equally discerning

Main image

V600 will be sold in coupé and convertible forms, albeit in very limited numbers. Muscular bodywork is borrowed from the similarly rare V8-powered AMR Pro. Beneath the bonnet here is a 592bhp naturally aspirated V12, as previously featured in the Vantage GT12





customers. There's no official confirmation of how much the cars will cost and the press release says 'Price on application', but we expect it to be in the same ballpark as the £1 million charged for the Vantage AMR Pro.

That's a colossal amount of money for the ultimate evolution of a car that first went on sale a dozen years ago for comfortably less than a tenth of that sum. But there's no doubt that in years to come the V600 will be seen as a landmark car: the full-stop to a Vantage generation that achieved unprecedented success in the showroom and on the race track. It was also the model that helped Aston Martin weather the recessionary storm of 2007/2008 and emerge stronger, with meaningful financial backing and a bold blueprint that is now guiding the marque securely into its second century.

While it's hard to put the price to one side, in pure driving terms the Vantage AMR Pro was by far the best V8-powered Vantage ever, so the V600 should be truly sensational. So it's rather a shame that, given the obvious investment opportunity such exclusive cars provide, we suspect barely a handful of customers will ever put meaningful miles beneath their cars'

forged aluminium centre-lock wheels.

Then again, the V600 simply wouldn't exist without the original customer's desire to see it built, their up-front financial commitment to make it happen or their generosity in allowing Aston to build a further 13 cars. We're certainly not letting the thought of some disappearing into collections diminish the pleasure of knowing the new V600 exists.

If we can persuade an owner of one of those 14 cars to let us have a go, we'll bring you driving impressions just as soon as we can. If we fail, there's every chance you'll bump into us pressing our nose against the driver's door window when the first car breaks cover, most likely at this year's Goodwood Festival of Speed.

'Price-wise, we expect it to be in the same ballpark as the £1 million charged for the Vantage AMR Pro'

Above and right
Acres of carbonfibre and Alcantara, race-style bucket seats and seven-speed manual gearbox for new car. Original V600 (right) was a very different sort of animal



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DBS returns as Aston flagship

AML ALSO REVIVES SUPERLEGGERA NAME FOR NEW SUPER-GT

WORDS RICHARD MEADEN

IMAGES AML & EVO

THE DBS IS BACK! Or at least it will be by the time you read this, for as we closed for press Aston Martin was poised to release full details and reveal official images of its new flagship, the new DBS Superleggera.

Replacing the Vanquish as Aston's series-production flagship, the DBS follows the marque's familiar super-GT format but promises to take it to new levels, courtesy of a high-output version of the marque's 5.2-litre twin-turbo V12.

Of course we'll miss the magnificent, naturally aspirated 5.9-litre V12 that made the Vanquish S (and the previous DBS, pictured above right) so memorable, but

given that there's talk of 700bhp-plus and tarmac-rucking quantities of torque, the new DBS looks set to be positioned firmly in Ferrari territory – at least in terms of top speed (predicted to be well in excess of 200mph), in-gear acceleration and sheer desirability.

Styling-wise, from the limited images AML has supplied, we know the car is a mix of DB11 and new Vantage – the fulsome curves of the former spliced with the aggressive stance and aerodynamics of the latter. Leaked spy images of disguised prototypes testing at the Nürburgring certainly back this up,

for even with lumpy cladding and strategically placed black tape it looks every inch the refined bruiser.

The revival of the Superleggera name is evocative, as it references the lightweight construction of the DB models of the late-'50s and '60s, though these days it refers to extensive use of composites and bonded aluminium rather than the steel tubes and hand-beaten alloy panels of yore. Just how light the car is remains to be seen (Let's be honest: Astons have always carried a bit of timber...), but it should make a compelling super-GT. We hope to find out in time for the next issue.

New GT3 and GT4 Vantage racers

WORDS RICHARD MEADEN

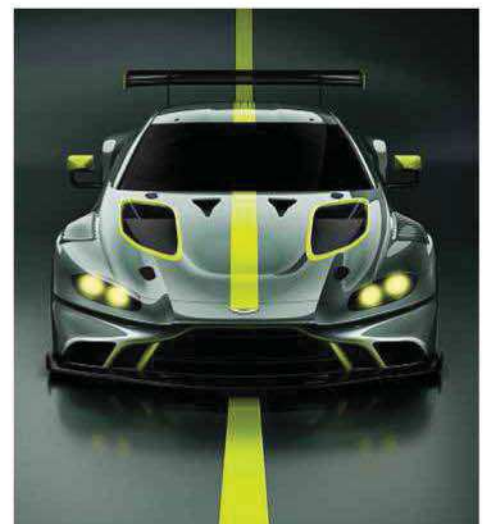
IMAGE AML

WITH ITS ALL-NEW Vantage GTE entering its debut season in the World Endurance Championship, Aston Martin Racing has announced it will be introducing GT3 and GT4 versions for the 2019 season. Designed and built alongside AMR's WEC GTE class challenger at its Banbury headquarters, the new derivatives will replace the ultra-successful V12 Vantage GT3 and V8 Vantage GT4, which currently form the backbone of Aston Martin's customer racing activities around the world.

With the outgoing GT3 and GT4 still capable of winning races a dozen years after the first customer Vantage racing car was purchased, the replacements have big shoes to fill. In total, 42 V12 Vantage GT3s were built. The car proved hugely

popular with customers and has an enviable roll of honour that includes three British GT Championships (2013, '15 and '16), the 2017 Blancpain GT Series Endurance Cup ProAM title, and the Blancpain GT Asian Series. The GT4, of which 124 were built, has a similar pedigree, with British GT Championship wins in 2014 and '15, the North European GT4 ProAm title in 2016 and many class wins and podiums in the Nürburgring VLN series and N24 endurance race.

Both new cars will feature race-modified versions of the AMG-sourced 4-litre V8 twin-turbo. The GT3 will draw heavily on the design and development of the Vantage GTE, while the GT4 stays closer to road specification. Both will be homologated for racing from March 2019.





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HERITAGE



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DB4 GT CUSTOMERS RELIVE SILVERSTONE DEBUT

WORDS PETER TOMALIN

PHOTOGRAPHY MAX EAREY

PRODUCTION of the DB4 GT Continuation model continues apace at Aston Martin Works in Newport Pagnell, and in May a group of some of the earliest customers were able to put their cars through their paces at a Silverstone trackday. It certainly made for a stirring sight, as five owners from around the world were able to drive their cars on the circuit where the very

first DB4 GT made its competition debut in the hands of Stirling Moss in 1959, winning first time out.

Just 25 of the Continuation cars are being hand-built at the old factory site – the first time new cars have been built there since mk1 Vanquish production ended in 2007 – and part of the ownership package is a two-year international programme of exclusive trackdays, of which Silverstone was the first.

The cars follow the originals with millimetric accuracy and have the same mechanical spec but incorporate modern safety measures such as plumbed-in fire-extinguishers and full roll-cages.

The growing band of owners will next drive their cars on June 21 at the Rockingham Motor Speedway, and then on July 27 at Le Mans – where DB4 GTs famously raced in their heyday.



IN BRIEF



STARS OF THE NORTH

The first Great North Classic Car Show, organised by the team at the Aston Workshop, has been declared a resounding success. Highlight of the show was an Aston Martin 'timeline' with exhibits ranging from pre-war models to the latest DB11, but there were also over 200 other classics on show, from Land Rovers to Lamborghinis. Plans are already being made for next year's show: to find out more, subscribe to the GNCCS newsletter at aston.co.uk



LAGONDA SUV CONFIRMED

After dropping jaws at the Geneva motor show with its Vision Concept for a future Lagonda (as featured in *Vantage* issue 21), Aston Martin has released further teaser images (above) and confirmed that a radical, zero-emission Lagonda SUV will go into production. Scheduled to be unveiled in 2021, it will be a super-luxury fully electric four-seater 4x4, featuring next-generation battery technology.



VANQUISHES ROLL

A rolling road day for Newport Pagnell Vanquishes was held at Surrey Rolling Road Ltd in Farnborough in May. Seven cars took part. Best result was recorded by an S model, which made 435bhp at the wheels (equating to 531bhp at the flywheel). An impressive result, considering that Aston itself claimed 520bhp for the S. Even more impressively, the best of the non-S cars made 417bhp at the wheels, meaning 509bhp at the flywheel (Aston quoted 460bhp). That's one very fit Vanquish!

An evening with Aston Martin

VANTAGE'S SISTER TITLE, OCTANE, is hosting a very special, Aston-themed event at London's Sheraton Grand Park Lane hotel on Tuesday, July 17. *An Evening with Aston Martin* is a celebration of all things Aston – past, present and future – and speakers will include current CEO Andy Palmer and chief creative officer Marek Reichman, along with other well-known figures from the Aston world. Compere for the event is Steve Rider.

The evening will include a champagne reception and three-course meal with wine, followed by interviews and questions from the floor. Tickets cost £200 per seat or £1900 per table of ten, but early responders can get a discounted rate of £175 per head or £1600 per table. For more info and to book tickets for what promises to be a memorable event, go to aneveningwithastonmartin.co.uk





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Left and below

New Vantage had its first competitive outing at Spa, but it was the old V8 Vantage GTE (left) that took AMR's first win of the year. Another old soldier, the V12 Vantage GT3, put in another memorable performance, finishing 4th in the gruelling N24 (below)



Aston's warhorses still up for the fight

OLD-SHAPE VANTAGES STAR AT SPA AND THE 'RING

WORDS RICHARD MEADEN

PHOTOGRAPHY NICK DUNGAN/AMR

SATURDAY MAY 5 saw the World Endurance Championship (WEC) kick-off its monster 2018/19 'Super Season' in fine style with the Six Hours of Spa-Francorchamps. In recent years, it has been Silverstone that has hosted the season-opener in April, with Spa's early-May slot serving as a strong second round and the perfect preamble to Le Mans in June. This year's re-shuffled WEC schedule bestowed greater significance on Spa, being the new season-opener and the teams' only competitive outing prior to the greatest endurance race of them all.

For Aston Martin Racing (AMR), Spa was also the competition debut of the all-new turbocharged Vantage GTE in the GTE Pro category, while the venerable naturally aspirated Vantage soldiers-on for one last season in GTE Am. After an exhaustive development programme over the winter, the new Vantage hit the ground running, with all of AMR's drivers enjoying the car's poise and reliability but expecting a tough race, as it always takes a while for the Balance of Performance (BoP) to be refined and establish true

parity between all-new cars such as the Aston and those with a season or two under their tyres, such as the Fords, Porsches and Ferraris.

Qualifying reflected this, with the striking, acid-green cars slotting into P8 and P10 in the Pro class, the #97 car driven by Jonny Adam and AMR newcomers Alex Lynn and Maxime Martin bettering the #95 car of Nicki Thiim, Marco Sørensen and Darren Turner. Meanwhile, in GTE Am, the faithful V8 Vantage GTE of reigning class world champions Paul Dalla Lana, Pedro Lamy and Mat Lauda qualified in P2, just 0.002 seconds from pole.

Come the race, the GTE Pro crews struggled for straight-line speed but drove flawlessly to accrue much valuable data and improve the balance of the car throughout the race. Never running more than 15sec apart for the entire six hours, the #97 car came home in a solid P6 with the #95 car just behind it in P7. It was a more dramatic story in GTE Am, with the Dalla Lana/Lamy/Lauda car battling tooth and nail for the win with the Vantage of

AMR customer team TF Sport. At the flag, the reigning champs took the victory with TF Sport a very close second.

The following weekend saw AMR head to Germany for the annual mayhem that is the Nürburgring 24 Hours. This was something of a swansong for the venerable V12 Vantage GT3, which is in its seventh and final season of top-flight competition. A sensational qualifying performance from Nicki Thiim put the V12 Vantage (which he shared with WEC teammates Marco Sørensen, Darren Turner and Maxime Martin) on P5 in a huge and hugely competitive field.

Typically challenging conditions shaped the race, with warm, dry weather ceding to torrential rain and dense fog that would eventually see the race temporarily halted for safety reasons with just 3.5 hours remaining, at which point the #007 Vantage was running P3.

Having been put back to P4 at the re-start with a little over an hour left, AMR driver Maxime Martin regained third position, but as conditions deteriorated he fell back into the clutches of the chasing car. A late splash-and-dash pit stop ended #007's bid for a place on the podium, but P4 is still AMR's best-ever finish in this most gruelling of endurance races.

DIARY DATES

FIA World Endurance Championship

June 16-17 24 Hours of Le Mans

August 19 Six Hours of Silverstone

October 21 Six Hours of Fuji

November 18 Six Hours of Shanghai

Classic action hots up

...BUT ONLY AFTER A DISTINCTLY CHILLY SEASON-OPENER

WORDS STEPHEN ARCHER

PHOTOGRAPHY GOODWOOD, NICK EDWARDS, PHIL JONES, MATT SAYLE



DAFFODILS AND SNOW... The Arctic reached Sussex and made for a glacial rather than glorious 76th Goodwood Members Meeting in the middle of March. One of the longest and coldest winters was thankfully broken in style this year by many sunny events, but not before this now-established season-opener saw freezing temperatures; at one stage even the track was being salted to drive away the ice. Conditions were not too bad for the Moss Trophy, which saw two DB4 GTs take on hordes of E-types and Italian cars. Honour was upheld with Wolfgang Friedrichs/Simon Hadfield coming home 6th from Tom Alexander/Adrian Willmott despite the Friedrichs GT having a huge spin on the treacherous track.

The first weekend of May saw the Donington Historic Festival basking in welcome sunshine for a full programme of racing. Alan Middleton has not owned the ex-Dick Seaman Speed Model 'Red Dragon' long but he has certainly got the hang of it and stormed home to 2nd in class and 12th overall in the pre-war race, leading home the superbly original Ulster of Edward Bradley, second in his class.

DB4 GTs seem to be making the news these days and one, the only Aston in the pre-1963 GT race, certainly made its mark at Donington with overall victory going to Wolfgang Friedrichs/Simon Hadfield, who dominated the race after climbing from 12th after pit-stops. It was a great drive.

A select gathering headed to Oulton Park in early May for the AMOC meeting, and more would have been there had it not been for a clash with other events, such as Monaco. Lightweight DB4s still provide great entertainment and can now be viewed as classics of the track in their own right. The rapid Nicholas King saw off a challenge from the similar car of Melling and Minshaw as they finished 5th and 6th in the long running Intermarque series.

In the pre-1963 Equipe race, David Reed, husband of new AMOC chairman Anne Reed, was an excellent 4th overall from 10th on the grid. The Reeds' daughter, Hannah, took the family's DB2 out in the '50s sports car race. The longest race of the meeting was the GT Challenge, where the Aston class was won by the GT4 of McKinley and Hill from Tom Black's similar model after a race-long tussle, with Robin

Clockwise from above left

Start of Moss Trophy at Goodwood, two DB4 GTs in pursuit of leading E-type; Intermarque action at Oulton; David Ozanne's 2-litre Speed Model takes on Bentleys at Donington; and Friedrichs' DB3S, also at Donington

Marriott third of the GT4 Astons. Given that this is 'club racing', an average speed of 85mph around Oulton is quite a pace.

The same weekend as the AMOC's foray to Cheshire saw the bi-annual Monaco Historic Grand Prix weekend, an extraordinary event that is without doubt far more entertaining than the modern-day GP. The cars look spectacular and the drivers heroic; this is a must-see event. In the sports car race, Wolfgang Friedrichs was 11th overall in his DB3S, with Arlette Muller from Switzerland 21st in the ex-Angela Brown DB3.

DIARY DATES

June 23 AMOC Brands Hatch

July 12-15 Goodwood Festival of Speed

July 20-22 Silverstone Classic

July 6-8 Le Mans Classic

July 29 AMOC Donington Park

September 1 AMOC Snetterton



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Official fuel consumption figures in litres/100km (mpg) for the 2019 MY Aston Martin Vantage V8: urban 14.2 (19.9); extra urban 8.0 (35.3); combined 10.3 (27.4). CO₂ emissions 236g/ km. The mpg/fuel economy figures quoted are sourced from official regulated test results obtained through laboratory testing. They are for comparability purposes only and may not reflect your real driving experience, which may vary depending on factors including road conditions, weather, vehicle load and driving style.



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1964 DB5 VANTAGE SALOON

Silver Birch with Black hide. Benefiting from a significant overhaul in excess of £100,000 since 2016, this example is presented in outstanding condition and comes with an extensive service history. Supplied with 1-year Aston Martin Warranty.

£869,000



1979 AMV8 VOLANTE

Original Windsor Red with Burgundy piped Magnolia hide colour specification. One of 849 examples. Equipped with a 5.3 litre 432bhp V8 and a power operated hood. Automatic. 47,513 miles. Supplied with 1-year Aston Martin Warranty..

£225,000



1996 V8 VANTAGE V600

Mendip Blue with Silver Grey interior. The last Vantage to be upgraded to V600 specification by Aston Martin Works and includes a superb replacement Supercharger boost gauge from a WW2 Spitfire. Supplied with 1-year Aston Martin Warranty.

£335,000



2004 V12 VANQUISH (LHD)

Tungsten Silver Metallic with Charcoal interior. Only 10,000km. A German specification left-hand drive example in immaculate show condition. A 2016 Aston Martin Owner's Club Concours class winner. Supplied with 1-year Aston Martin Warranty.

£125,000



2013 V12 VANTAGE ROADSTER

Morning Frost White with Spicy Red interior. Optional features include Aston Martin Works V12 Front Grille, red-tinted carbon fibre exterior, carbon interior fascia trim pack, and reversing camera. 6-speed manual. 15,000 miles.

£135,000



2015 RAPIDE S

Storm Black with Onyx Black interior. Features include twin-screen rear entertainment system, heated front and rear seats, front and rear parking sensors, and Bang and Olufsen BeoSound Audio. 8-speed Touchtronic III Automatic. 13,500 miles.

£84,950



2015 VANQUISH COUPE

Onyx Black with Obsidian Black interior. Features include launch control, reversing camera, alarm upgrade, Shadow Bronze Jewellery Pack and heated and ventilated front seats. 8-speed Touchtronic III Automatic. 12,050 miles.

£133,950



2017 VANTAGE GT8

Volcano Red with Pure Black Alcantara interior. 500 miles. Features include optional lightweight carbon fibre seats, carbon fibre front splitter and diffuser, Track Mode, alarm upgrade and exposed carbon fibre valances. Sportshift II 7-speed transmission.

£225,000

RESTORATIONS

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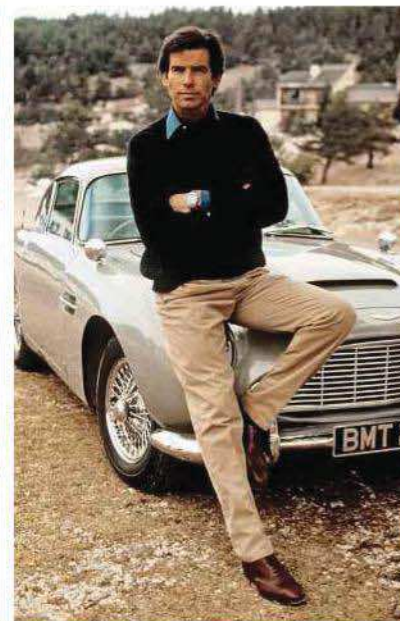
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Above and below
DB5 chassis 1885/R, wearing the plate used on all three DB5s pressed into action during the filming of *Goldeneye*; this Centenary Edition Vanquish was sold for charity by the current James Bond, Daniel Craig, raising \$468,500

Film star for sale

ONE OF JAMES BOND'S FAMOUS COMPANY CARS HEADS TO THE AUCTION BLOCK IN JULY

WORDS CHRIS BIETZK | PHOTOGRAPHY BONHAMS, ALAMY, CHRISTIE'S

DESPITE OUR BEST efforts to convert them, most people have little interest in cars. A friend (whose family comes from the Swiss Alpine village of Wengen, where there are no cars at all) recently disclosed that he has great difficulty remembering the difference between Aston Martin and Austin.

In truth, the only Aston the general public *really* knows or cares about is the one driven by a certain morally flexible Secret Service agent. That being the case, you can expect to read plenty about Aston Martin in the national press over the next few weeks, for one of 007's famous M16 pool cars is heading to auction, and it is, in this correspondent's view, the most desirable of the whole lot: the *Goldeneye* DB5.

More accurately, chassis 1885/R is one of three Silver Birch DB5s used in the production of Bond's 17th adventure, and specifically for the sequence in which 007 dices with a Ferrari F355 driven by man-eating baddie Xenia Onatopp.

The 1965 car was hastily refreshed ahead of filming by the folk at Stratton Motor Company, and then comprehensively restored by the same people afterwards, before being sold through Christie's in 2001 for £157,750. It was bought at that juncture by businessman Max Reid, on a whim, and it is not hard to understand why he found 1885/R irresistible. It is a fine example of its type, to be sure, but more significantly it is the quintessential Bond car as driven by the best Bond, in the best Bond film.

No other entry in the series blends the serious and the silly so deftly, and Pierce Brosnan, the artist formerly known as Remington Steele, finds here a perfect middle ground between Connery's hard-nut Bond and Moore's arch creation. *Goldeneye* has the right M, the right Q, some wonderful minor characters, and a villain with a real edge, as well as some fantastic set-pieces. It is a treasure – just like 1885/R, which will be offered by Bonhams at the Festival of Speed sale on July 13 with an estimate of £1.2-1.6 million.

It would sit nicely in the garage with another 'Bond' car that was auctioned in April: the 2014 Centenary Edition Vanquish formerly owned by the man who currently wears 007's suit, Daniel Craig.

Numbered 007 of 100, naturally, it features several unique touches courtesy of Marek Reichman and Craig himself. The pair settled on a Midnight Blue exterior with black accents, and a matching leather interior. It was sold by Christie's in aid of education charity The Opportunity Network and raised \$468,500, which no doubt made Craig feel better about parting with a car that he admits he will miss.

Max Reid will surely miss 1885/R, too, and we hope its next owner shows it generously and often, as Reid has done. If you want to make sure you get a good look at it before it is sold – and in the metal rather than in the newspapers – it will be on display at Bonhams' Aston Martin sale in Reading on June 2.



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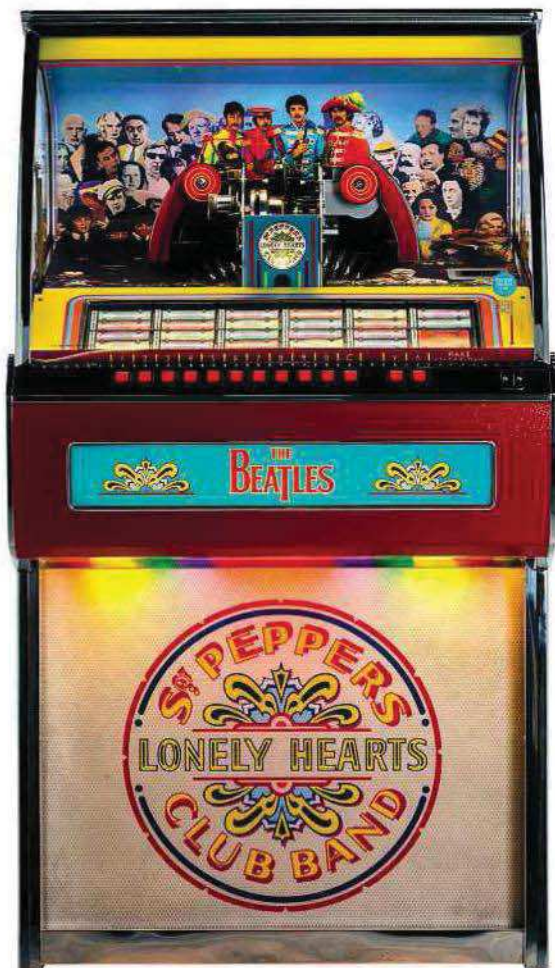


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Desirables

Aston-related objects of desire, including a scratch-built model of DBR1/2



Sgt Pepper's jukebox by Sound Leisure

£8995 | soundleisure.com

Bluetooth connectivity means it will play all your digital music, but it would be a crime (not to mention a spectacular waste of money) not to fill this jukebox with Beatles 45s. The sound of 'the act you've known for all these years', booming out of the wonderfully designed cabinet, is guaranteed to raise a smile.



1:8-scale DBR1/2 model by Javan Smith

EPOA | pullmangallery.com

At the 1957 1000km Nürburgring, Ferraris, Porsches, Maseratis and Jaguars were all bested by the DBR1 of Tony Brooks and Noel Cunningham-Reid, which has been carefully recreated in resin and alloy by master maker of miniatures, Javan Smith.



MotorMemo log book

€39 | motormemo.com

With pre-printed pages for information relating to history and maintenance, this is a useful little book that, if filled in diligently, will eventually contain a complete record of your car's life.



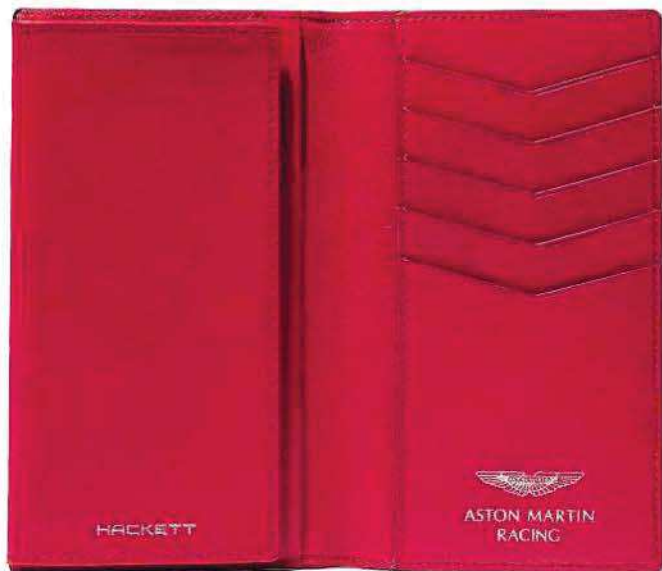
1:6-scale Live And Let Die figures by Big Chief Studios

£229.99 each | bigchiefstudios.co.uk

These are the latest James Bond collectibles from Big Chief Studios, all three hugely impressive in their accuracy. Really, though, 007 and Dr Quinn, Medicine Woman aren't nearly as fun as Baron Samedi, who comes complete with his brilliantly silly radio flute.

Desirables

More Aston-related goodies, including a special-edition smartwatch from TAG Heuer



Hackett Aston Martin Racing wallet

£105 | hackett.com

There is nothing more inelegant than an overstuffed, misshapen wallet, and our tendency to hoard receipts means we're fans of the roomy coat bifold – and we especially like this colourful, AMR-branded number made by Hackett in red and navy leather.

1:43-scale DB5 Shooting Brake by Matrix

£91.95 | grandprixmodels.com

This reminds us of one of the coolest cars we have encountered in recent years: Pierre Lagrange's 1966 DB5 shooting brake, with grey tweed interior courtesy of Huntsman. The model is missing the bespoke seat covers, of course, but for ninety quid you can't expect Savile Row tailoring.



TAG Heuer Connected Modular 45 Aston Martin Red Bull Racing Special Edition

£1600 | tagheuer.com

There's barely space here for that name, let alone to list all the functions of this Android- and iOS-compatible smartwatch, but the real selling point is that it feels typically TAG – which is to say like a proper watch rather than a mere electronic gadget.



The Mille Miglia 1953 by Keith Woodcock

£79 | historiccarart.net

In 1953, the Mille Miglia was a round of the new World Sportscar Championship, meaning that Uncle Tom Cobley and all entered the great road race. But, of the many foreign entrants, only Aston Martin offered any resistance to the Italian teams. This print by Keith Woodcock captures the plucky DB3 of Reg Parnell and Louis Klementaski on the way to fifth place overall.



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

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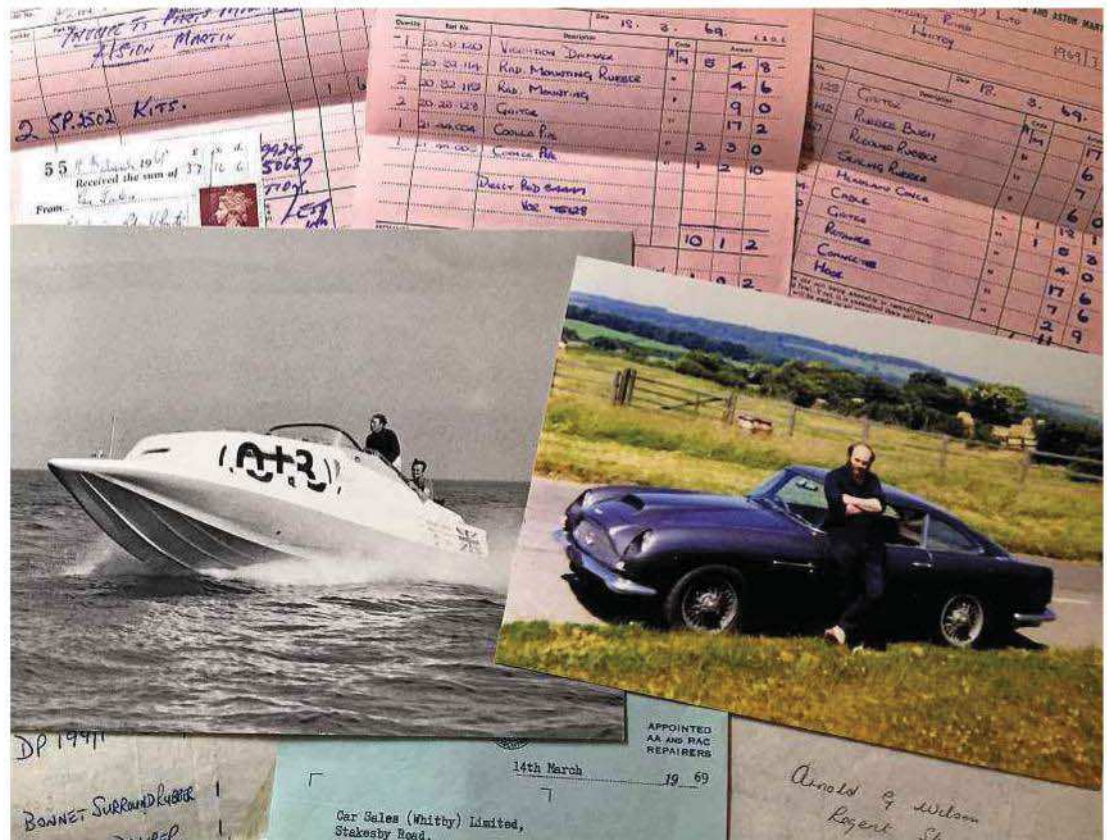
The day I saved DP199 from a watery fate!

Your readers are probably familiar with the DB4 GT prototype, DP199, which sold at auction last year for \$6.77m. I'd like to take you back to a much earlier period in the car's life, when I became its owner for the princely sum of £350!

Fifty years ago, in 1968, racer Mike Salmon advertised a couple of Astons for sale. One of them was DP199, which Mike had bought from its first private owner, the Hon Gerald Lascelles, a cousin of the Queen, a few years earlier. The asking price was £2000, which was quite a lot at the time.

A friend of mine, Dave Milburn, whose father owned a large transport firm on Teesside, saw the ad and suggested to his father that the Aston would make a rather nice birthday present for him. No sooner said, the car was his, and I remember him turning up with it at the local powerboat club, where we were both members. I also recall being blown away by the sheer beauty of the car.

I'd owned a couple of DB2s, the Alpine Rally entry PUM 6 and the ex-team car VMF 65, both of which I had sold a few years earlier when raising funds to start my own business in the motor trade, and I asked my mate,



should he ever wish to part with the DB4 GT, to give me first refusal. He agreed.

Months went by, and then I got a phone call from him out of the blue, asking if I wished to buy the Aston. Only its condition wasn't quite as I'd last seen it...

One of the drivers at his dad's trucking company had attempted to start the car to move it, the car had backfired, caught light under the bonnet and been seriously damaged. So much so that the insurance company had written it off, paid the firm out, and given them the remains.

What was almost as bad was that another member of the powerboat club was interested in buying the remains so that he could put the engine into a boat! But, said Dave, as I had always wanted the car, it was mine for £350 - if I could give an immediate answer. I said I was on my way with my trailer!

So in 1969 I became the owner of DP199, though still unaware that it had been the works prototype, and started restoring it, with all the parts coming from Arnold Wilson's in Leeds. I was very fortunate to have working for me a very highly skilled craftsman who could undertake

the remaking of the front wings that had melted in the fire as the front tyres burned. In his previous life, Bill had undertaken all the experimental panelwork for the Blackburn Aircraft Company at Brough in East Yorkshire during WW2, and to him nothing was impossible with metal.

It didn't seem a big deal at the time. Back in the early 1970s, it was just another job for a country garage that was keen on the breed. No way was mega money involved and, after the work was all done and I had enjoyed beating the hell out of the car on the deserted moorland roads of North Yorkshire, it was sold to Chris Dorman Stewart, who was a well-connected classic car dealer, for six hundred and fifty quid. So my charge for preserving a piece of Aston Martin history for posterity could not be said to be excessive!

David Starling, Waikanae Beach, New Zealand



DP199 as it is today and, above, when it was owned by David Starling. Powerboat-owning chum had designs on the engine...



Paul Harner

Precious metal

Hearing that 2 VEV is going to auction at the Bonhams sale on July 13 stirred mixed emotions. Naturally I'm curious as to its final sale price and I truly hope it beats the British record auction price set last year by the Ecurie Ecosse D-type. However, it does concern me that this beautiful car will end up being hidden away in private collection after the sale.

In the mid-1990s, I had the pleasure of chatting with owner Roger St John Hart at one of the Newport Pagnell open days. His enthusiasm for the car was palpable, and, even as the car was being loaded onto the trailer, he was still happy to chat about the story of this wonderful Aston Martin. It was a privilege to be so close to such an iconic car. I have also had the pleasure of seeing the car at the centennial celebrations and other AMOC events.

So I would like to thank the St John Hart family and I truly hope the next lucky owner will be as

generous with their precious asset as the last custodians have been.

Richard Taylor, Tonbridge, Kent

International rescue

Further to Alaric Coombs' letter in the last edition on having 'the wrong Bertelli' in your model listings, I wonder if you would consider using a photo of my car (below) to illustrate the First Series/International entry.



Every time I look at that page, I am disappointed at the picture of the saloon car, as to me it does not do justice to the style that Enrico 'Harry' Bertelli gave to his creations. My car, I think, gives a better feel for the great design of the cars in those days.

It's the 41st International and the 105th Aston ever built, and was first registered in June 1930. It was originally clothed in the standard four-seater open body, made by Bertelli for the chassis built next door in the Feltham works by his younger brother, Augustus Cesare 'Bert' Bertelli. Two years later, it was rebodied as a two-seater, again by E Bertelli Ltd.

Many years – and owners – later, it was involved in a road accident and was only just saved from being scrapped by a family friend. It was the early '60s and I was a student at the time, but knowing that I had stripped and rebuilt a 1930 Austin 7, they thought I should take it on. I had never even heard of Aston Martin cars and

thought it would be far too complicated, but I was eventually persuaded and bought it for the princely sum of £27-10-0d, which was a lot for a 19-year-old then! I managed to fix it up and get it running, and I had to admit I was pretty impressed with the performance. That was 56 years ago, and I have been the Aston's owner ever since!

A great magazine – keep up the good work.

Roger M Martin, Lenzie, Glasgow



Charlie Magee

Bravo Victor

Your report on the ex-Rowan Atkinson V8 Zagato (issue 21) mentions that the Zagato was fitted with deformable glassfibre-clad polyurethane foam bumpers. I recall these were described as 'pop back' bumpers at the time. When Victor Gauntlett was challenged about their effectiveness, he replied that if the bumper was ever damaged, the owner could 'pop back' to Works and they would fit a new one!

Jonathan Moorhouse, Low Poptleton, York

Missing plate

I was very interested to read the article on the road-legal conversion of the Vulcan (issue 21) but couldn't help noticing that even though the conversion cost a quoted £295,000 (plus taxes!) they couldn't run to a front number plate. I accept that a big white rectangle would ruin the aesthetics, but I was under the impression that a front number plate was a legal requirement in the UK. I would love to remove the front plate from my Vantage, but have been told by more than one MOT station that it would fail its test without it. Was the plate removed just for the photo shoot, I wonder...

Brilliant magazine despite this!
Chris Borrison



*In comparison to a non-specifically additivated fuel, tests performed in September 2013. The results may vary with the type of vehicle. More information on total.fr

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A photograph of an Aston Martin DB11 V12 AMR driving on a road, with a blurred background of trees and foliage. The car is dark grey with yellow racing stripes. The license plate reads 'VI2 AMR'.

EARNING ITS STRIPES...

The V12-engined DB11 has been given a shot of extra power and attitude for this AMR reboot

WORDS KYLE FORTUNE | PHOTOGRAPHY MAX EAREY



We fought over that half millimetre,' admits DB11 AMR chief engineer Matt Becker. He's referring to the diameter of the front anti-roll bar and it underlines the obsessive lengths to which Becker and his team have gone to create the DB11 AMR.

That half-millimetre is less than the distance a second hand covers each time it ticks on a watch-face, and it's crucial, argued the dynamics team. 'It allows the front to work better,' says Becker, and, when combined with a host of other chassis changes, he continues, is transformative. That's vital because the AMR is the new DB11 flagship, replacing the standard V12 model, its 5.2-litre twin-turbo 12-cylinder gaining 30bhp in the process for a 630bhp output.

The AMR badge is loaded with the promise of greater performance, allied to sharper dynamic ability. The numbers qualify that, the second hand travelling 0.2sec less to record a 3.5sec 0-60mph time, while the top speed is now 208mph – up by 8mph. Enough, then. Yet it's not the raw figures that define the AMR, but its chassis. Every element of it has been examined, Becker and his team having learned from the development of the DB11 V8, applied those

lessons and further improved on them as part of the model's ongoing evolution.

The wheels, then, are the same 20 inches in diameter as those of the car the AMR replaces, but, being forged, are 3.5kg lighter at each corner. The spring-rates remain identical, too, but the damping rate has been increased by around 10 per cent, while the subframe bushes are stiffer and the engine-mounts have been tweaked – all to allow the DB11 to feel more cohesively sporting as a whole.

The results are palpable. While you could never accuse the V12 of being blunt, the AMR elevates the DB11's athleticism to a level that belies its scale, adding to its already sizeable breadth of ability. It retains the ability to dispatch huge distances with sagacious ease, but there's incentive now to search for more challenging roads. There, the AMR revels where the V12 before would have started running out

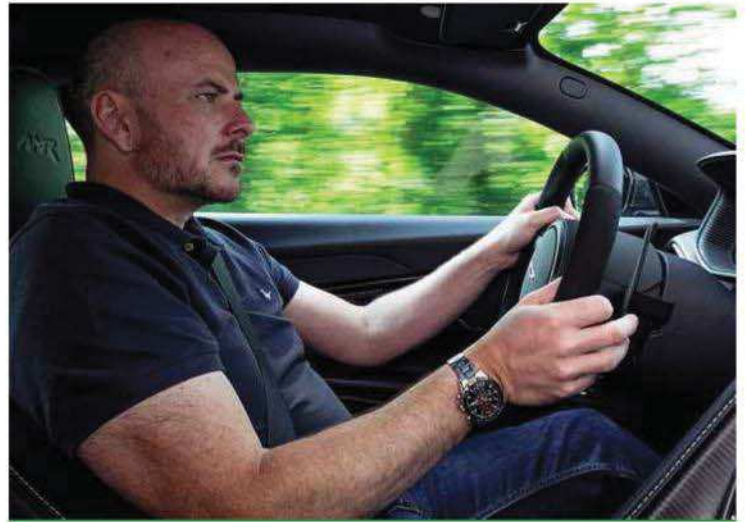
of ideas. It's nowhere more obvious than with the feeling of extra precision it has gained, particularly relating to its front axle.

There's a new accuracy to the DB11's nose, the steering weighting is beautifully judged, the response immediate and faithful. There is some feel there, even if it does lack the finely nuanced clarity of the best steering systems out there. Put that one down to the diametrically conflicting goals of the AMR's grand turismo effortlessness and comfort and those of sports car engagement. On feel, at least, the GT side wins out, but it's not entirely without some concessions to the AMR's sharper rhetoric.

That difficult balance is exhibited, too, in the ride quality. There's a clear connection to the road that's more apparent than in the outgoing V12, the AMR gaining finer wheel and body control. Tauter and more sophisticated, there's real encouragement to exploit its greater ability, the DB11 AMR exhibiting a new-found eagerness to please, with a corresponding increase in speed across the ground. That's derived not from the 5.2-litre V12 engine's substantial, any-gear output, even if it's impossible to resist running it up to its 7000rpm red line on occasion, but the chassis' ability to control and manage it. Indeed, the AMR reveals

Above and right

Aston Martin's chassis engineers have been all through the DB11, incorporating lessons learned from the more agile V8-engined model, with the result that the V12 DB11 now corners with real keenness and a stronger sense of connection with the road. Livery of this car is for AMR Signature Edition. Top right: our man finds the changes very much to his liking. Engine is basically unchanged but Aston has liberated an extra 30bhp, taking the peak to a mighty 630bhp



'It retains the ability to dispatch huge distances, but there's incentive now to search for more challenging roads'



Specification

ENGINE V12, 5204cc, twin-turbo **MAX POWER** 630bhp @ 6500rpm **MAX TORQUE** 516lb ft @ 1500-5000rpm
TRANSMISSION Eight-speed automatic with paddleshift, 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 255/40 front 295/35 rear, Bridgestone S007 **WEIGHT** 1870kg **POWER TO WEIGHT** 342bhp/ton
0-60MPH 3.5sec (claimed) **TOP SPEED** 208mph (claimed) **PRICE** £174,995



a surprisingly playful nature, the steering's precision matched by a rear end that's even more planted and faithful in its responses.

That's evident even when the 516lb ft of torque (that figure unchanged from the previous V12) is testing the traction of the Bridgestone S007 tyres, the electronic stability and traction systems having been recalibrated to be less intrusive, reducing the torque reduction and allowing the AMR to better demonstrate the cumulative effect of those chassis changes. Switch the electronic stability system to Track mode and there's a degree of easily managed, exploitable slip at the rear on exiting a bend, the AMR communicating its limits clearly enough to allow the occasional spot of oversteering indulgence.

The revisions to the engine and gearbox obviously play their part in this DB11's exuberance. The 5.2-litre V12's immediacy has always been part of the car's appeal, and here it's even more readily accessed by the eight-speed paddle-shifted transmission. The semi-auto has had its calibration tweaked for greater speed, though the paddles are still a touch short

when you're reaching for another ratio while still winding off lock when exiting a bend. The engine's voice is more apparent, too, the exhaust gloriously vocal, with crackling overrun, the occasional pop and flutter evident from within the cabin, but without sounding too raucously anti-social to bystanders.

There is, as previously, the ability to tailor the engine and chassis responses, with GT, Sport and Sport Plus modes available independently for both the powertrain and suspension. The Sport modes increase the engine's voice and sharpen its responses; likewise, the suspension can be tautened to suit your mood and the road you're on. With the AMR's increased enthusiasm, that's more useful than ever, though the means by which to select them is somewhat convoluted. Turn off a main road and onto more interesting tarmac and the need to toggle through the choices is a frustratingly slow process. A configurable button, where a pre-selected choice of driver preferences – Sport Plus on engine and transmission, Sport on chassis, and Track mode on the stability system on this particular road, if you're asking – would

be hugely beneficial, better allowing an AMR to more quickly transform from easy, cossetting GT to something approaching its smaller, more overtly sporting siblings.

Perhaps that's asking too much of the AMR. After all, it does, for now, have the unenviable task of heading the range and straddling the difficult divide between supercar and GT car before it's given a reprieve by the forthcoming DBS. What it does undeniably, though, is move the DB11 game on substantially, creating the car that the DB11 should arguably have been from the off. And if you're concerned that the conspicuous colour scheme isn't quite your thing, the Stirling Green and lime livery, and the equally striking Dark Knight interior of this car, are just for the limited-run (100 globally) £201,995 AMR Signature Edition, one of the 'Designer Specifications' on offer.

That's a question of individual preference. What is undeniable is that elsewhere it's the tiny, near immeasurable changes that have been crucial in creating a more cohesive, appealing DB11 driving experience. Becker was right to fight for those fractions of millimetres. **V**



2003 V12 Vanquish

Finished in Mendip Blue with Pacific Blue and parchment hide interior. Chrome exterior door release, Violet chrome fascia console, heated front screen, powerfold exterior mirrors, rear parking sensors, premium stereo system, satellite navigation. 5 owners, service history, 39,000 miles.

£82,500



1965 Aston Martin DB5

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PREVIEW | LE MANS 2018



24-HOUR FEVER

On June 16, Aston Martin resumes its often-torrid affair with Le Mans. We look at the build-up and assess the new Vantage GTE with three-times winner Darren Turner

WORDS RICHARD MEADEN

PHOTOGRAPHY NICK DUNGAN/DREW GIBSON



THE LE MANS 24 HOURS had been central to Aston Martin's racing DNA long before the DBR1 took its historic victory in 1959. And Astons have competed in the world's best-known endurance race in every decade since, sometimes as factory-backed entries, sometimes in the hands of plucky privateers. We celebrate several of them in this special issue of *Vantage*.

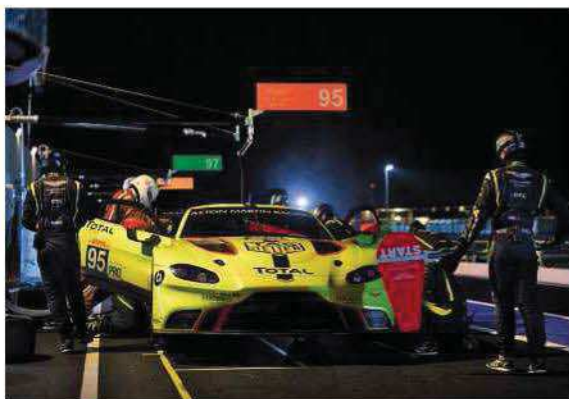
While not an especially happy hunting ground for the British marque – the '59 triumph remains its only outright win – in recent times it has become a regular challenger for class wins in the GT categories, thanks to the unstinting efforts of the Aston Martin Racing team.

This year is a big one for AMR, as not only is the crack Banbury-based squad looking to defend last year's GTE Pro class win, but it's the first Le Mans 24 Hours for its all-new Vantage GTE racer. Keen to know more, we spoke with AMR's longest-serving driver and three-times Le Mans class winner, Darren Turner, for the inside scoop on the team's preparations.

The World Endurance Championship's GT category (for road-based race cars, as opposed to the pure prototypes) is enjoying a renaissance, with Aston joined in battle by BMW, Chevrolet, Ferrari, Ford and Porsche, meaning the competition is fiercer than ever. With so much at stake, it's no wonder that AMR's 2018 Le Mans efforts have been subject to the most intensive – and extensive – development programme in the team's history.

One regular feature of the WEC is the so-called Prologue, when the teams gather for a pre-season test. In the recent past it hasn't been compulsory for teams to field all of their cars, but this year that was the case, with the full WEC circus converging on Le Castellet's Paul Ricard circuit in the south of France.

For AMR, it was the perfect opportunity to add meaningful mileage to its new cars and driver line-up, as Turner explains: 'This year's Prologue was the first time everyone had to bring multiple cars and be out there using the time as a serious test. We took full advantage of the



'WE HAD A FEW NIGGLES, BUT ONCE THEY WERE SORTED WE RAN FOR 28 HOURS STRAIGHT'



track time, and were one of the few teams to run all through the night. At times I was one of the only cars out during the night, which was a bit weird as I kept wondering where everyone else was!

The team had already done a 30-hour test late last year at Navarra in Spain, very early in the new car's development. 'Actually we didn't expect to run for so long,' continues Turner. 'But the car didn't develop any serious problems so we just kept going.'

'Ricard gave us a better opportunity to prepare for Le Mans because we've got to know the car a bit more and the circuit has some similarities. It's been re-surfaced ahead of the French Grand Prix, so the grip levels really put some serious loadings through the suspension. It was hot, too, so we ran the car at higher temperatures, and the long Mistral straight puts the engine under more strain. It was a proper workout for the car.'

'We had a few niggles – system bugs to root out, basically – but once they were sorted we ran for 28 hours straight. You go testing to induce issues. That's the point. You're

trying to get ahead of the game and avoid any nasty surprises when you get to Le Mans. Working with a new car means it's evolving all the time, so there are always new components or electronics that need durability sign-off.'

'Testing is a strange balance of objectives. You want to get plenty of running, but you want to find the car's weaknesses so you can make it stronger. Our engineers told us all to drive absolutely flat-out: hit every kerb you'd normally hit; hammer the brakes like you're on a qualifying lap; push as hard as you can without firing the thing off.'

'The car ran like a train and felt just as good at the end as it did at the beginning. I'm not sure us drivers could say the same. The car might not have broken, but we were shot by the end! In terms of getting the pre-season job done, Prologue was perfect.'

SO HOW DOES the new car compare to its predecessors? 'The outgoing Vantage GTE car had a longer development phase, as it started life at the tail-end of the GT2 era,' says Turner. 'Before that, the GT1 DBR9 was a clean-sheet car

Above and right
Pre-season 'Prologue' test at Paul Ricard gave the AMR team the chance to put the new car through its paces in similar conditions to those that they will find at Le Mans, including running through the night. Driver linchpin Darren Turner (above left) said it was the best preparation the team has ever had pre-Le Mans



A hat-trick of GT class wins



2007 DBR9

Aston Martin Racing was formed in 2004 by Prodrive's David Richards to run the marque's racing activities, with the WEC - and Le Mans in particular - their main focus. Their weapon was the DB9-based DBR9, and in 2007 they scored a memorable GT1 class win, with Darren Turner, David Brabham and Rickard Rydell driving 009.



2008 DBR9

A sister DBR9 - also wearing 009 but now in the iconic Gulf colours - would deliver a second GT1 class win the following year, Turner this time sharing the driving with Brabham and Antonio Garcia. DBR9s would carry on racing until the end of the GT1 category in 2011, but would never quite scale the heights of 2007 and 2008 again.



2017 VANTAGE GTE

The racing version of the V8 Vantage appeared first as the Vantage GT2 in 2008, aimed at the FIA GT Championship, various other series and, of course, Le Mans. For 2012 the car was redeveloped as the Vantage GTE, and it finally delivered at Le Mans in 2017 with a thrillingly close GTE Pro class win for Turner, Jonny Adam and Daniel Serra.



and had a very good build-up, but still nothing like this.'

And how do they compare, for him? 'I've said it many times before that if I could have one car from my career so far, it would be a DBR9. The way it looked, the way it sounded and the way it went were all fabulous. And DBR9s took me to two LM class wins, so I'm hugely fond of it for all those reasons.

'The old Vantage GTE took a while to hit its stride, but has now become a proper warhorse. Last year's LM win was typical of that car: fight to the end and never give up.

'The new Vantage GTE is easily the best-developed car that AMR has ever built. That began with the more complete alignment between the road and race product from the very first design and engineering stages. This put us ahead of the game, enabling us to complete massive amounts of testing – circa 30,000kms and counting.'

How does he think racing at Le Mans today compares with previous eras? 'In the '50s and '60s, cars weren't pushed that hard at Le Mans. I never used to understand why guys like Moss said they didn't enjoy racing there, but then he explained to me that they were pacing the car to try and make the end. As a racing driver you don't want to spend 24 hours driving at seven or eight tenths. Now, more than ever, it's a flat-out race from flag to flag. Much more Sir Stirling's style!

A lot of that is made possible by advances in design and materials technology, and the sheer weight of engineering know-how the teams possess. The car's electronic control systems help, too, and the paddle-shift transmission is a big help in avoiding over-revs and missed gears.

'The DBR9 had a push-pull sequential 'box, but you still had to heel-and-toe on the downshifts, so there was still a chance to make a mistake. Now the cars are easier to operate, but that puts more pressure on the drivers to push as hard as they can the whole time. It's pretty intense and only ramps-up as the race progresses.'

And what of the dreaded Balance of Performance, the complex and now automated method of levelling the

playing field and ensuring close racing? The nature of Le Mans means it has its own BoP compared with the rest of the WEC season, and it's unclear at this stage how it could affect the Aston's chances.

According to Turner, there are some areas of the BoP that need tweaking, but there's cause for considerable optimism in the new car's potential: 'Spa was the first time the new car has raced, so we went expecting it was going to be a hard race due to BoP. Our straight-line speed was our biggest problem, but we made the most of the situation and maximised what we had. I don't know what will happen with the starting BoP for Le Mans. Based on Spa, we hope some manual adjustment will be permitted to put us in the performance window with the other cars. We'll just have to wait and see on that.

'What we do know is the new car seems ultra-reliable and felt very good in the race at Spa. All the drivers said it was the best car we've ever had around there. Le Mans is always a bit of a lottery, but we have great confidence in ourselves and in the car. We're in good, good shape.' **V**

Specification

ENGINE V8, 3982cc, twin-turbo **MAX POWER** >530bhp **MAX TORQUE** >516lb ft **TRANSMISSION** Xtrac six-speed sequential gearbox, rear-wheel drive, limited-slip diff, traction control **SUSPENSION** Front and rear: double wishbones, coil springs, Ohlins five-way adjustable dampers, anti-roll bar **STEERING** Rack-and-pinion, electro-hydraulic power-assisted **BRAKES** Alcon vented discs front and rear, six-pot calipers front, four-pot rear, adjustable bias **WHEELS** 12.5 x 18in front, 13 x 18in rear, magnesium alloy **TYRES** 30/68 front, 31/71 rear, Michelin **WEIGHT** 1245kg (dry) **POWER TO WEIGHT** c430bhp/ton

How to keep up with the action



THIS YEAR'S LE MANS 24 HOURS starts at 4pm on June 16. For an excellent live stream of the race, visit lemans.org, while for witty, informed commentary, head to radiogram.com. Another great source of updates is the official Aston Martin Racing Twitter feed, @AMR_Official. Look out for the new Vantage in the GTE Pro category and the old-shape Vantage in GTE Am. For added fever, there's a special 45-minute Aston Martin Festival race, which takes place as part of the LM24 build-up on the Saturday morning.



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- ▶ Full rebuild in 2012 by RS Williams
- ▶ Matching numbers car
- ▶ Some race history
- ▶ Comprehensive history file

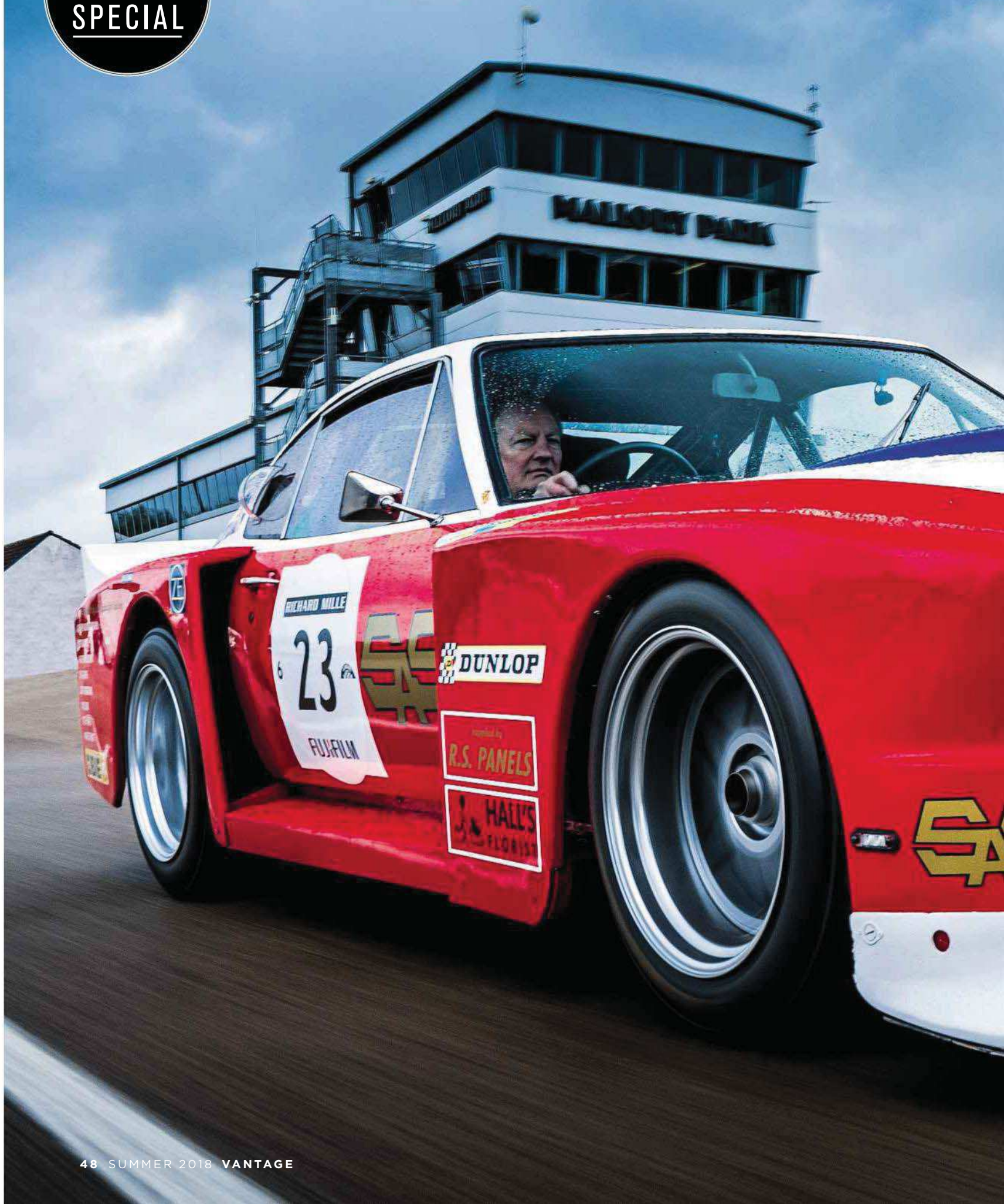


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FEATURE CAR | RHAM 1 RECREATION



RETURN OF THE MUNCHER

Flying the flag for Aston and Britain at Le Mans in the late 1970s was the extraordinary RHAM 1, aka The Muncher. Now it's been recreated in its 1977 form - and we witnessed its first outing

WORDS PAUL CHUDECKI | PHOTOGRAPHY TIM ANDREW





As it crossed the finishing line at the end of the 1977 Le Mans 24 Hours, it was entirely apt that the company colours of the Aston Martin's title sponsor were red, white and blue. For the British bulldog – and very much the underdog on the tightest of shoestring budgets among the 55 entrants – it was a brilliant result that defied all the naysayers' expectations. Even more so, given that it had failed to qualify for the race, only getting a last-minute reprieve after another car was disqualified.

As *Autosport* reported: 'Of the other British entrants, the Robin Hamilton team was the only one to come away from the Sarthe with a real sense of achievement, for the Aston Martin droned on and on and never once looked like failing to finish.' *Motor Sport* went further: 'In 17th place out of the 21 finishers, the Aston Martin V8 entered by Robin Hamilton for Dave Preece, Mike Salmon and himself upset almost every prediction by keeping going to the finish. And that, after all, is what Le Mans is really all about.' Indeed it is, and in the Queen's Silver Jubilee year, with British streets decked with bunting, this remarkable, privately entered Aston was flying the flag.



So how did it come to be? Rewind to 1971, and Hamilton, an engineering apprentice at Rolls-Royce's aero engines division, had taken voluntary redundancy and established a garage, Robin Hamilton Motors, in Tutbury, Staffordshire. Joined by fellow ex-Rolls-Royce apprentice David Jacks (later the founder of Aston Engineering), they decided to specialise in Astons. By 1973, having relocated to nearby Fauld, Robin Hamilton Motors had become an Aston Martin service agent with a staff of eight.

Hamilton always had racing aspirations, and in April the following year he gave his DBS V8 road car, chassis DBS/10038/RC, its competition debut at the AMOC's Curborough sprint. He was hooked. Gradually, the DBS V8 was developed, gaining an AM V8 single-headlight front end to make a visual connection to the current model. With over 400bhp and uprated brakes and suspension, it became a favourite on the club racing scene. Aston Martin began to take notice, and the car benefited from a free fortnight on AML's engine test-bed and an AML-funded MIRA wind tunnel session. The factory also assisted in homologating the car with both the RAC and FIA.

Long-distance racing was the target, with Le Mans the bullseye, but plans to enter the 1976 race came to nought

due to insufficient sponsorship, prompting fears that Hamilton's dream of running at Le Mans was dead. However, by late 1976 some succour was found through security/anti-riot equipment company SAS Group. In the meantime, DBS/10038/RC had become so modified – redesigned front bulkhead, very substantial roll-cage, huge Lockheed discs with 'fist-type' calipers, specially made 19in magnesium wheels, 15in wide at the rear – that Hamilton gave it a new chassis designation, RHAM 1.

The Aston by then sported a large rear spoiler to reduce high-speed lift – the wind tunnel tests also indicated that it would increase top speed by 10mph through reduced drag. The 5.3-litre V8, fitted with forged Cosworth pistons, Nimonic valves and four Weber 50 IDA downdraught carburettors, produced 520bhp at 6750rpm and 400lb ft of torque, still transmitted by the original ZF gearbox. Top speed was estimated at 190mph.

Silverstone's Six Hours provided RHAM 1's race debut, Dave Preece co-driving with Robin. Having qualified eighth, the Aston ran well until rear brake heat caused differential oil seal failure (a diff cooler was later fitted), leading to much lost time; it finished, but unclassified. Nonetheless, RHAM 1's potential was clear.

Above and opposite

RHAM 1 recreation arrives at Mallory Park for testing in preparation for Le Mans Classic. Bottom left: Robin Hamilton (on the left), whose dream it was to take Aston back to Le Mans in the '70s, with Paul Chase-Gardener, who not only commissioned this recreation of Hamilton's 1977 car, but also owns RHAM 1 in its final, much-modified, twin-turbo form

Below and right

About to tiptoe out onto a damp Mallory Park for the first run since completion by Aston Engineering, whose boss, David Jacks, worked on RHAM 1 with Hamilton in the '70s



And so to the big day, with Le Mans veteran Mike Salmon as third driver. With the project still short of cash, some further sponsorship had come from AMOC members, their names inscribed on the Aston's rear. Entered in the Grand Touring Prototype class, RHAM 1 qualified midfield in initial – wet – practice, recording 188mph along Mulsanne. Dry practice was less kind, with the Aston – the heaviest entry by 280kg – last on the time sheets. And it looked like game over when it was decreed there would be 55 rather than 60 starters by eliminating the slowest in each class – until another car was disqualified and RHAM 1 was reinstated on the grid.

At two hours the Aston's progress was highly promising, having gained 23 places, until cracked discs dictated a long stop for replacements. From that point on, using the brakes minimally and relying more on engine braking, RHAM 1 ran without problem, completing the 24 Hours not only in 17th place but also third in class. It was a hugely popular result as Robin himself took the thundering Aston across the sacred finishing line to fulfil his dream – a superb testimony of the tiny team's ability, and mud well and truly in the eyes of the doubters.

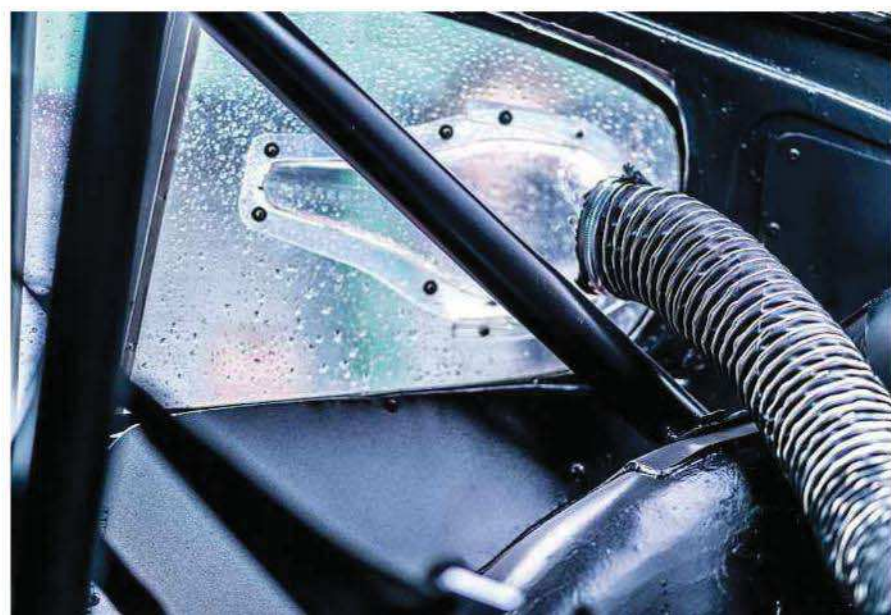
'On the run up to it, none of us appreciated quite what we were trying to do,' recalls David Jack. 'We just knew what we were doing and what we had to achieve. So '77 was a very fond year. We were over the moon, we were thrilled, but we were really tired because we hardly got any sleep – in a Bedford minibus in the paddock, four big blokes, and the other three had never been away from home or wives, so I had to do the cooking as well! It was great. The end result made us all very happy.'

Two years later, RHAM 1 would race again at Le Mans but by then in much-modified form, with a low roofline, streamlined body, a twin-turbo, 800bhp, fuel-injected engine, larger brakes and other modifications. It was a monster, whose appetite for brake discs earned it the nickname The Muncher. But that story is for another time.





**‘IT WAS A HUGE POPULAR RESULT AS ROBIN
TOOK THE THUNDERING ASTON ACROSS THE LINE’**



RHAM memories



Opposite, from the top
DBS V8's debut at Curborough;
remodelled as AM V8 for club racing;
MIRA wind tunnel lessons applied,
and on its way to a Le Mans finish

By late 1979, Robin's attentions had switched to a new project: design and development of what would become 1981's Group C Nimrod-Aston. And in 1984, when he closed his business, RHAM 1, still in its twin-turbo 1979 form, was sold to a private collector. Along with the car went three huge crates of parts...

After passing through several hands, RHAM 1 came up for sale again in 2013 and was snapped up by lifelong Aston addict Paul Chase-Gardener, who owns and races a variety of Historic cars. 'And in the cratefuls of stuff were all the bits and pieces from 1977,' says Paul, recalling his delight at the discovery. 'There was the engine, the brakes, the wheels, tyres, axle, bits of gearbox, bits of drivetrain, driveshafts, hubs, everything – all the bits and pieces that had been changed. The IDAs were still on the engine from 1977. But there were no parts of the previous body.'

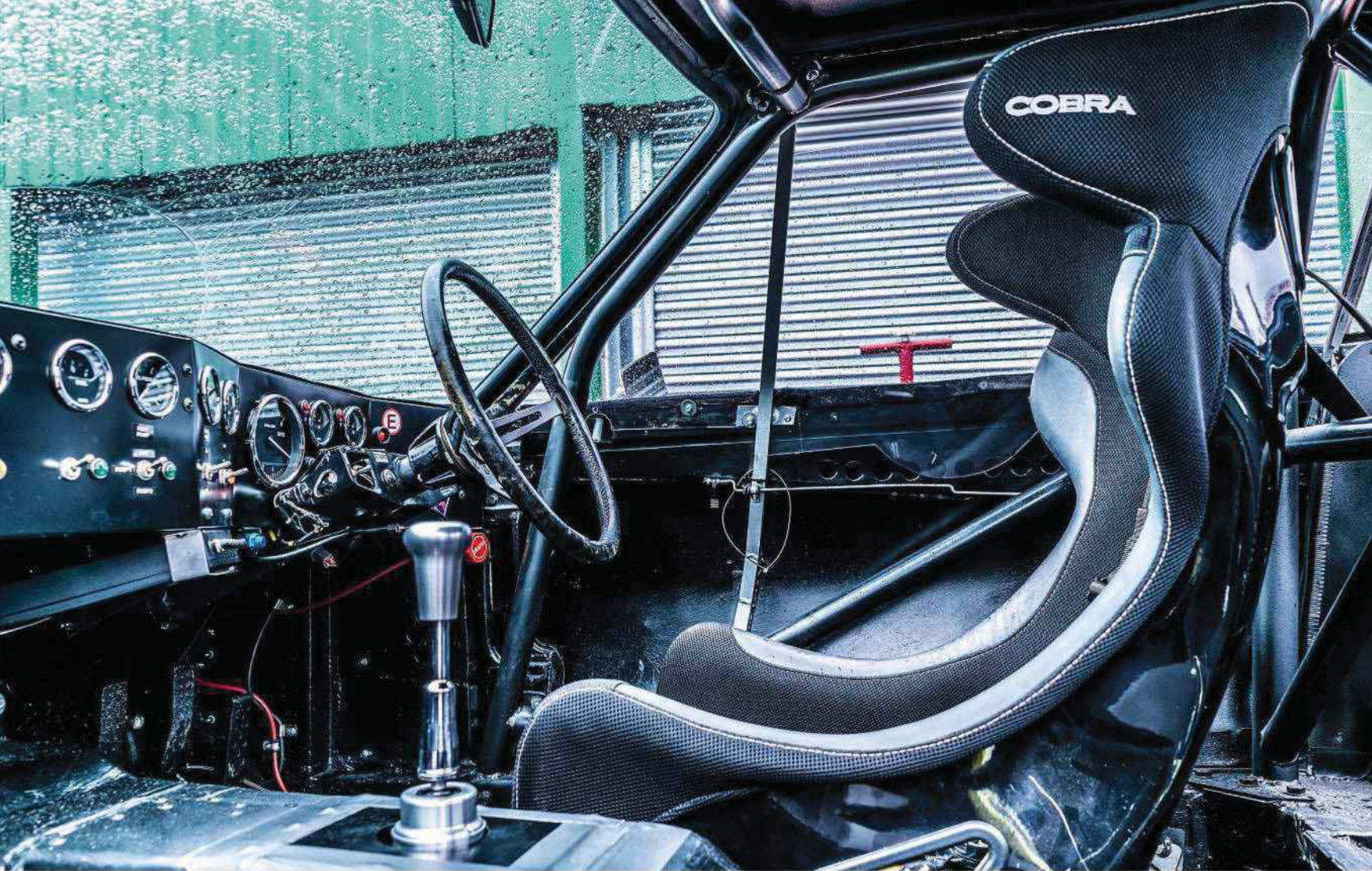
Paul was determined to recreate RHAM 1 in 1977 guise. 'It had to be for all the right reasons,' he says. 'I had the opportunity and I thought, Le Mans, Aston Martin, the real deal, a fantastic bit of privateering – none of this Works bollocks, a truly heroic effort. For me, the 1977 car is the hero of the piece.'

Two years ago, Paul commissioned a 'silhouette' car, which saw body specialists Leaping Cats recreating the unique 1977 glassfibre panels around a 1973 V8 club racer with a fuel-injected engine, American gearbox and modern brakes. But then he decided to do the job properly and incorporate all the original mechanical parts. That way he would have a recreation more authentic than any normal 'replica' while still preserving RHAM 1 in its final form.

And naturally he chose David Jacks at Aston Engineering to complete the project. 'I'd always maintained, strangely enough,' says David, 'that somebody ought to buy the '79, put it in the back of the barn as a piece of history and recreate the '77 car, because that would be a lot of fun. I've been saying it for 25 years to anybody who'd listen!'

Paul also got in touch with Robin, who supplied many period photographs to help ensure exact replication. Robin even donated the car's original steering wheel. 'I followed the story of the original car, the '77 car that became the '79 car,' says Robin. 'I was offered that car many, many years ago and I couldn't afford it, and I watched it going around, and it ended up with Paul. And I went down to see it and he was very keen to build a replica – he didn't want to

**'ROBIN SUPPLIED
PERIOD PHOTOS
AND EVEN DONATED
THE CAR'S ORIGINAL
STEERING WHEEL'**





RHAM 1 (1977-spec recreation)

ENGINE V8, 5340cc, four Weber 50 IDA carburetors **MAX POWER** 501bhp @ 6275rpm **MAX TORQUE** 433lb ft @ 5100rpm
TRANSMISSION Five-speed manual, rear-wheel drive, limited-slip differential **SUSPENSION** Front: double wishbones, coil springs, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar. Rear: de Dion tube, trailing arms and Watt's linkage, coil springs, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar
STEERING Rack-and-pinion **BRAKES** Vented discs, 320mm front and rear **WHEELS** 13 x 18in front and rear, magnesium alloy
WEIGHT 1325kg **POWER TO WEIGHT** 385bhp/ton **0-60MPH** n/a **TOP SPEED** 175mph (with current axle ratio)

convert it back to '77 spec. And I've been watching it very closely for the last two years.

'It's certainly been a trip down memory lane and it's made me go through all the old files. The bodywork's been modelled on the old photographs and the mechanical spec's been based on the old technical papers we had, so it's got as good a provenance as a replica can have. And I know Dave feels the same as I do. There are times when we look at it and you almost have to say, 'Wake up, you're dreaming!' because it actually looks the part.'

'The gearbox is a ZF, exactly as in period, the brakes, too,' says David. Due to the unavailability of 19in rubber, RHAM 1's reincarnation uses recreated 18in rather than 19in wheels, the wheelarches filled in slightly to get the car as visually close as possible to the original.

At Mallory Park for the Aston's first shakedown in late May, Robin is here to see the car run, while Historic racer Simon Hadfield will do the driving and highlight any set-up changes that are needed before the car appears in its first race at – where else? – the Le Mans Classic in July.

After several laps with slicks on a damp track, Simon gives his verdict. 'It's difficult to be too precise because my only concern is not to fall off, as it's so slippery and horrible,' he says, 'but I'm impressed. It speaks to you. If you get a bit sideways, it tells you it's going sideways,

Above
Mission accomplished, as the car sails through its first shakedown test. Next stop, Le Mans

and you can correct it fairly easily. There's plenty of communication. That's a sign of a good car. The gearbox is fantastic, the steering's nicely weighted, the brakes are good, there's plenty of feel. When you look at the build and the specification, you think, really, do you *need* all that? Well, actually, you do, and it all works together.'

Simon reckons the engine lacks some driveability, the power coming in strongly at around 4700rpm when you would expect a large engine in a relatively lightweight car to pull from around 3500. 'It comes on power early but you really feel a step-change at 4/7 and it really does get after itself after that. So, the engine can be better.

'It was the last hurrah of the amateurs taking a car and modifying it to go to Le Mans, and you can kind of feel that. It's a cool thing, it just needs more time to be robust.'

It's been quite a day. Not only does the car look fantastic and wonderfully authentic, with only a few bonnet/rear logos yet to be applied, but it has run without problems straight out of the box. The only glitch: some of the brand new centre-lock wheel nuts refusing to budge during a tyre change, resulting in three broken socket bars and sadly precluding not only me but also Robin from driving.

Further test sessions will follow, and then it will be off to Le Mans. 'That's what I did it for,' says Paul, 'and I shall be an absolute basketcase if it finishes!' **V**



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POWER SWITCH



DP215 was the fastest of Aston's iconic Project Cars. Now, after many years, it has finally been reunited with its original engine – and we're about to hitch a ride

WORDS JOHN SIMISTER | PHOTOGRAPHY TIM ANDREW

IN 1963, THE LAST FULLY-WORKS, Newport Pagnell-built Aston Martin sports-racing car proved also to be the fastest. It was officially timed at 198.6mph along the Mulsanne Straight at Le Mans, and designer Ted Cutting reckoned it must have broken the 200mph barrier shortly afterwards because it was still accelerating at the timing point.

Phil Hill was driving, and had led away from the start, but sadly he, his co-driver Lucien Bianchi and Aston Martin Design Project 215 didn't get to finish the race. The rear-mounted CG537 transaxle, a type used in the 1959 Le Mans-winning DBR1 but asked to transmit more torque and run at higher speeds, broke after just three hours. The two DP214 Astons, similar-looking but not quite as sophisticated, not least because they lacked their successor's independent rear suspension, also retired. What a way to end an era, you might think, bitter-sweet with those retirements but with a speed record for a front-engined, six-cylinder car that would surely stand forever.

One of the reasons for DP215's pace was its low frontal area and wind-cleaving shape. Another was its engine, the ultimate development of the Tadek Marek straight-six design, with a dry sump so it could sit low, a stiffer block with cross-bolted main bearings, and magnesium castings for the camshaft covers, front covers and distributor housings. Power was measured in Aston's

engine shop at 326bhp at 5800rpm, with twin torque peaks of 312lb ft and 310lb ft at 4500 and 5500rpm respectively.

Just two of these engines were built, the other – of 4.2 rather than 4.0 litres – finding its way, unlikely as it may seem, into a Cooper-Aston Martin Indianapolis car. It was driven by Pedro Rodriguez, who apparently much enjoyed its copious torque, and later found its way into an unsuspecting DB6.

After Le Mans, DP215 raced at the Reims 12 Hours, only to retire again with transmission trouble, this time in the hands of Jo Schlesser. And that was it for its works-entered races, although after conversion to a conventional front-mounted gearbox – a five-speed David Brown S532 – it was still used for testing. Maybe it would have become, as intended, a testbed for Marek's new V8 engine for which it had originally been designed, but a crash in 1965 on the M1, involving a van that pulled out into its speedy path, put paid to that idea. Aston Martin cobbled DP215 back together, using the spare body that it had conveniently created when making the original one, and sold it to Malcolm Calvert as a running car containing a DB6 engine and gearbox. It has undergone much work since, as we shall see. The engine went to well-known sportscar and Historic racer Colin Crabbe, who by then owned the surviving DP214, and it has stayed with DP214 through its ownership changes. Until now.



WE HAVE ASSEMBLED at historic Aston Martin specialist Rex J Woodgate, based at Silverstone. Rex has retired, so son Chris and his happy team have the pleasure of servicing, repairing and refurbishing Aston Martins from the 1950s and 1960s, the more motorsport-flavoured the better. DP215 is here. So are its owners, father-and-son historic racers Neil and Nigel Corner, both now retired, both quick and successful in times past.

DP215 has been in the Woodgate operating theatre because it has just regained the engine originally built for it, the engine that powered it to 200mph (or so) at Le Mans in 1963. And, today, the Corners have come to collect it. They are clearly thrilled; the joy of a boy with a new toy is never far below the surface, however grown-up we think we have become. And, 53 years after its heart was ripped from its skeleton, DP215 is properly proper again.

Can we have a trial run? We certainly can. First, though, how did DP215 get to where it is now? And how did the Corners manage to close the circle of continuity?

They summarise DP215's post-factory biog as follows. The next owner after Malcolm Calvert was Nigel Dawes, who bought DP215 in 1978 and commissioned a proper restoration by top specialists with the help and deep knowledge of Ted Cutting. 'Everything is correct,' announced Cutting after the work was completed, 'apart from the engine and transmission.' Dawes then managed to acquire the Cooper-Aston Indy engine, and had a new dry-sump lubrication system built for it to the original design.

During Dawes' ownership, DP215 lived a life of demonstrations

Above and right
DP215 was Aston Martin's answer to Ferrari's GTO. Owners Nigel and Neil Corner about to drive it for the first time since its engine transplant. The cockpit where American ace Phil Hill sat and reached those record speeds on the Mulsanne in 1963

and concours appearances. But the pace hotted up after rock-band manager Tony Smith bought it in 1996, with several competitive outings – including its last race, the 2000 Goodwood TT, finishing 15th – up to the point at which the Corners swapped a Testa Rossa-engined Ferrari Dino Grand Prix car for DP215 in 2001.

The engine was as close to the original motor as it could reasonably be, so the last remaining historical solecism was the DB6 gearbox. There was no point in attempting to reinstate the original transaxle configuration, given its disastrous record, but an S532 would put DP215 back to its final, and reliable, factory configuration. The trouble was that only six S532s were built: two for the works DBR2s, two for the works Lagondas, one for DP212 and one for DP215.

'The original gearbox was long gone,' says Nigel, 'but we were able to borrow DP212's gearbox from its owner. Crosthwaite and Gardner copied it to make a new one.'

'That was probably the biggest and most expensive project I have ever undertaken,' adds Neil. But there was one last piece of the jigsaw: the engine, of course, owned by publisher and historic racing exponent Simon Draper along with DP214. 'We came to an arrangement with Simon,' says Nigel, 'and did a swap.'

SO, WHAT HAD THEY BOUGHT? Engine number 400/215/01, number one (of one) of a 4-litre engine spec intended for Design Project 215. Mike Ottway, who owned the engine and DP214 before Draper, wrote a note about its history and specification which the Corners show me. It tells how Colin Crabbe installed

**‘FIFTY-THREE YEARS AFTER
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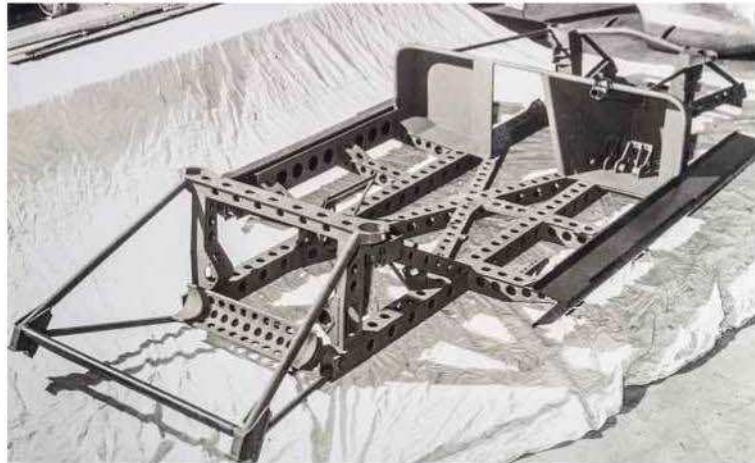


Left and below

That original, 4-litre, dry-sumped, Weber-fed straight-six in all its glory. After DP215 was involved in a road accident in 1965, the engine was sold to the owner of the surviving DP214 sister car, and it had stayed with that car ever since. Only recently was a deal done to reunite it with 215.

Below: 'Can I have a ride, please, mister?' Our man Simister about to experience 215 as its makers originally intended





From top left

The engine as tested at Silverstone in May 1963 prior to that year's Le Mans 24 Hours; chassis frame was extensively drilled for lightness; test day at Silverstone with team manager John Wye (light coat) looking on – the WW2 hangar still survives, and is directly in front of the Rex J Woodgate workshops where car and engine were reunited; crafting the aluminium bodywork at Newport Pagnell; and AML chief electrician Bill Pink personally assembling the instrument panel; light switches came from Lancaster bombers





the engine in DP214, which was modified around the right front suspension turret to accommodate the double oil pump of the dry-sump system.

In Crabbe's hands, the engine dropped a valve during the VSCC's Pomeroy Trophy race, and it wasn't until the 1970s that, in Ottway's ownership, it was rebuilt. This was in wet-sump form, the dry-sump components having been swapped with then-DP215 owner Malcolm Calvert for some Borrani wire wheels. RS Williams, who did the 1970s rebuild, undertook another in 1992, the engine having acquired forged Cosworth pistons along the way in place of the first rebuild's DB5 items.

The engine was run on a test bench twice in the 1980s and once after its 1992 rebuild, but Neil estimates it has covered barely 300 miles, including a 10-lap race, since then. 'The head had to come off when the dry-sump parts [not DP215's originals, now lurking somewhere unknown, but the re-made components from the ex-Indy engine previously in DP215] were being fitted. So we had a look inside, and it was perfect.'

Once it was back together, Chris Woodgate took it to a local

engine dyno to fine-tune the calibration of the three Weber 50DCO4 carburettors, described by him as 'unobtainium'. 'We didn't go for a maximum power run, but it was producing a comfortable 300bhp or more,' he reports. Other specification niceties include Carillo connecting-rods, large-diameter tappet buckets, two Lucas 21D6 racing distributors and 'Project' camshaft profiles.

DP215 IS A HANDSOME THING, its Kamm-tailed form once described by design guru Gordon Murray as 'a very slippery shape'. With its wishbone rear suspension, and an engine mounted well back in a drilled-for-lightness box-section chassis topped by an almost-spaceframe superstructure, it has evolved far from its DB4 GT roots. Vents and scoops abound, including a pair of NACA ducts ahead of the bonnet to feed air to the cockpit. A giant fuel-filler pokes through the Perspex rear window.

Under the featherweight bonnet sits that vitally original engine, tiny 'RAC' stamps either side of the engine number confirming official acceptance of the engine capacity. Now we



Specification

ENGINE In-line six-cylinder, 3996cc, dohc, 12 valves, three Weber 50DCO4 carburettors
MAX POWER 326bhp @ 5800rpm **MAX TORQUE** 312lb ft @ 4500rpm
TRANSMISSION David Brown S532 five-speed gearbox, rear-wheel drive **SUSPENSION** Front and rear:
double wishbones, coil springs, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar **STEERING** Rack and pinion
BRAKES Solid discs all-round **TYRES** 215/70 R15 front, 225/65 R15 rear **TOP SPEED** c200mph

look inside, past doors as meagre in mass as that bonnet, at a dashboard dominated by two circular objects: a giant rev-counter and, over to the left, a hefty eyeball air vent of aerospace provenance. That industry also provided the flattened toggle switches, from a Lancaster, and the floor-mounted petrol cut-off tap, a type particularly favoured by Aston team manager John Wyer who later used it in GT40s. An aluminium-knobbed gear lever emerges from a Ferrari-like open gate.


Nigel and I strap ourselves into the little bucket seats with their authentic green fabric. He fires up the engine and points DP215 towards the fast road between Silverstone and Dadford. There's a relentless stream of torque, vocalised as an explosive, metal-edged trumpeting via two small, token silencers. 'It was 12 seconds a lap quicker than the Ferrari GTOs at Le Mans,' Nigel enthuses, 'and 25 seconds quicker than the DB4 Zagatos.' Through the long-legged ratios we accelerate, DP215 seemingly shrugging off its mass. 'It's a proper Le Mans prototype, built to win, yet you can happily use it on the road.' Is that what he and Neil plan to do? 'Yes – we won't race it, we'll just have fun with it.'

It rides on imperfectly surfaced back-roads rather well, too, which might partly be down to the roadgoing Avon radials it wears, 215/70 at the front, 225/65 at the back. Deftness rather than brute force is the theme here. Earlier, Neil and Nigel were reflecting on the thoughts of Phil Hill at Le Mans in 1963, how he

found the steering very light on the Mulsanne, how he mentioned to Ted Cutting that DP215 could be controlled with just a finger and a thumb, how the torque launched it out of Tertre Rouge like a rocket. They also showed a photograph of Hill in DP215 opposite-locking to avoid an overturned Alpine just beyond the hump at the Dunlop Bridge, black lines of braking clearly visible, the violent torque reversal perhaps sealing the transaxle's fate.

Some fast bends approach. 'This steers and handles even better than a GTO,' Nigel enthuses, 'and the gearchange is just as quick, yet it's so docile. You have to rev a GTO to death, but this pulls all the way to 6200rpm. It's lovely on the road. If it had been developed more, with trick dampers and so on, it would have been amazing. All that potential.'

And what about the fact that the engine now re-installed has a mere 4.0-litre capacity, rather than the 4.2 litres of that ex-Indy motor? 'I'm sure it has just as much power as it ever had,' he says. 'It certainly feels as quick.'

'My father has had three Ferrari GTOs and he never looked at any engine numbers. No-one used to care back then, because no-one expected the cars to be around in the future. But now... taking out an original engine seems like separating a Picasso from its frame. It's great that they're back together.' 

With thanks to Neil and Nigel Corner, and to Chris Woodgate.

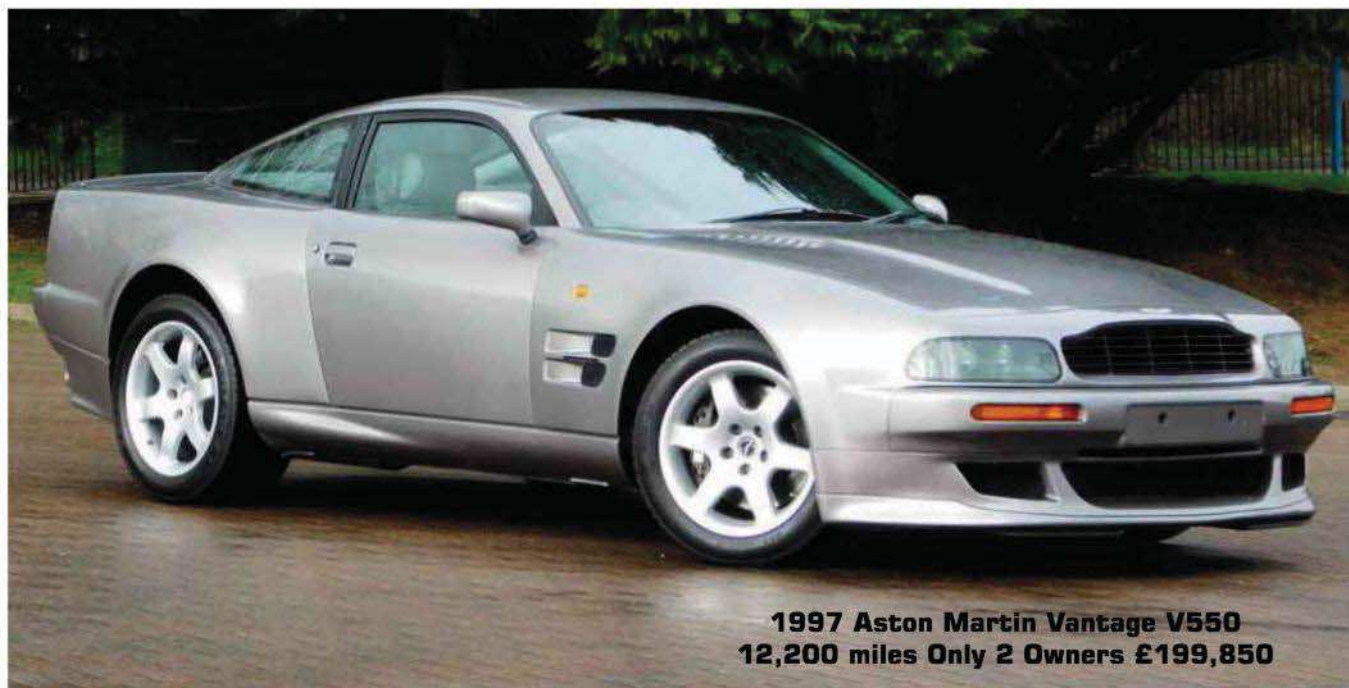
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ROAD TEST | NEW VANTAGE

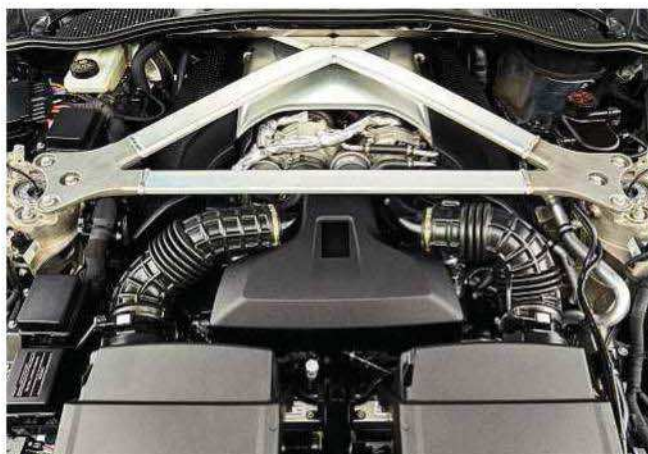




SHOCK OF THE NEW

The new Vantage is an out-and-out sports car that rips up any preconceived ideas about an entry-level Aston. We assess it on UK roads

WORDS RICHARD MEADEN | PHOTOGRAPHY MATTHEW HOWELL



**‘IF IT DRIVES LIKE
IT LOOKS, THE NEW
VANTAGE PROMISES
TO BE THRILLING BUT
SLIGHTLY UNSETTLING’**

Opposite and left
Inside and out – and under
the bonnet with its twin-
turbo V8 – the new Vantage
is a radical reinvention of
the car it replaces

So this is the new V8 Vantage. The smaller, steelier sibling to the suave DB11, and the second all-new model in Aston Martin's Second Century Plan. It succeeds the much-loved VH-generation V8 Vantage – not only the most successful model in Aston's history, but one of the longest-serving, too, with more than a dozen years on the front line.

The world – and indeed Aston Martin – is very different in 2018 than it was in 2005 when the outgoing car was launched. The price is different, too, with Aston's baby now requiring a minimum of £120,900. But the more things change, the more they stay the same. So, as with the VH Vantage, the new car is seen as Aston's Porsche 911. Or, as boss Andy Palmer would like it to be known, Aston's 911-beater. It's a lofty aspiration and a familiar one, for Palmer's predecessor – and ex-Porsche boss – Ulrich Bez pursued the same target with similar zeal. We'll assess its success in this regard in a moment.

It's an automotive truism that press and public alike can be both fickle and contradictory. Witness the old car's styling, universally regarded as a timeless and wholly handsome piece of work, yet also criticised for being too similar to the DB9. This time, Aston's arty sorts were determined there would be a clear difference between models, the character of each explicitly expressed from nose to tail.

As with the DB11, there's much to admire about the way the Vantage looks. It has spectacular road presence on the move and some compelling angles when admiring it at a standstill. But there are also some challenging aspects. The nose in particular draws mixed reactions, its wide-set eyes and fishy pout a big departure from Aston's formerly refined features. If Palmer and Co are true to their word and all Second Century Astons drive like they look, the new Vantage promises to be thrilling but slightly unsettling, at least for those who didn't think there was much wrong with the way the old V8 Vantage went about its business.

The technical highlights certainly back up the notion that this Vantage is going to be a big departure from what we know. Just as, visually, the only thing this car shares with the old one are its unmistakable lolly-stick doorhandles, beneath the skin not only is the old VH architecture a distant memory, but only a little over 30 per cent of the Vantage's new-generation aluminium structure is common to the DB11.

Still a strict two-seater, the new Vantage drops the old, naturally aspirated, Jaguar-derived 4.7-litre V8 for Mercedes-AMG's 4-litre twin-turbocharged V8. Power and especially torque are of a different magnitude, indeed more akin to the outgoing V12 Vantage, with peaks of 503bhp and 505lb ft, the latter from just 2000rpm. New Vantage packs a BIG punch.

Unfortunately it also packs a bit of weight, at least compared with its key rival from Zuffenhausen. Forget the quoted dry weight of 1530kg, as 1600+kg is a more realistic number with fluids and in a representative spec. That's chunky compared with the Porsche, though less so compared with other rivals.





The good news is that the potent AMG V8 is slung behind the front axle for centred mass and perfect weight distribution front-to-rear, helped by the rear-mounted eight-speed transaxle torque-converter gearbox. Adaptive damping – firmer and with three stages: Sport, Sport+ and Track (no GT or ‘comfort’ mode here) – confirms the Vantage’s unashamedly sporting intent.

Despite the odd reservation about the looks, to see the new Vantage is to want to get in and drive it. Fast. The cockpit mirrors the exterior look and feel, in that it’s busier and more aggressive with a lot going on with the switchgear, but it’s nicely focused within view and reach. The instruments are heavily cowed and the faceted steering wheel feels fabulous in your hands, likewise the long-eared paddle shifters, which are fixed to the steering column, so you can dab up- or downshifts while working the wheel.

Firing up a Vantage has always been a moment to savour and this car is no exception. Aston has worked hard to put its own stamp on the V8’s aural signature, and although it’s not as shouty on initial start-up as we’re used to, there are a few pops and crackles before it settles into a pulsing idle.

On the move, you might expect your initial impressions to be shaped by the pure stonk of the twin-turbo motor,

**‘THE AGILITY, GRIP AND
RATE OF RESPONSE
GENUINELY TAKE YOUR
BREATH AWAY’**

Above

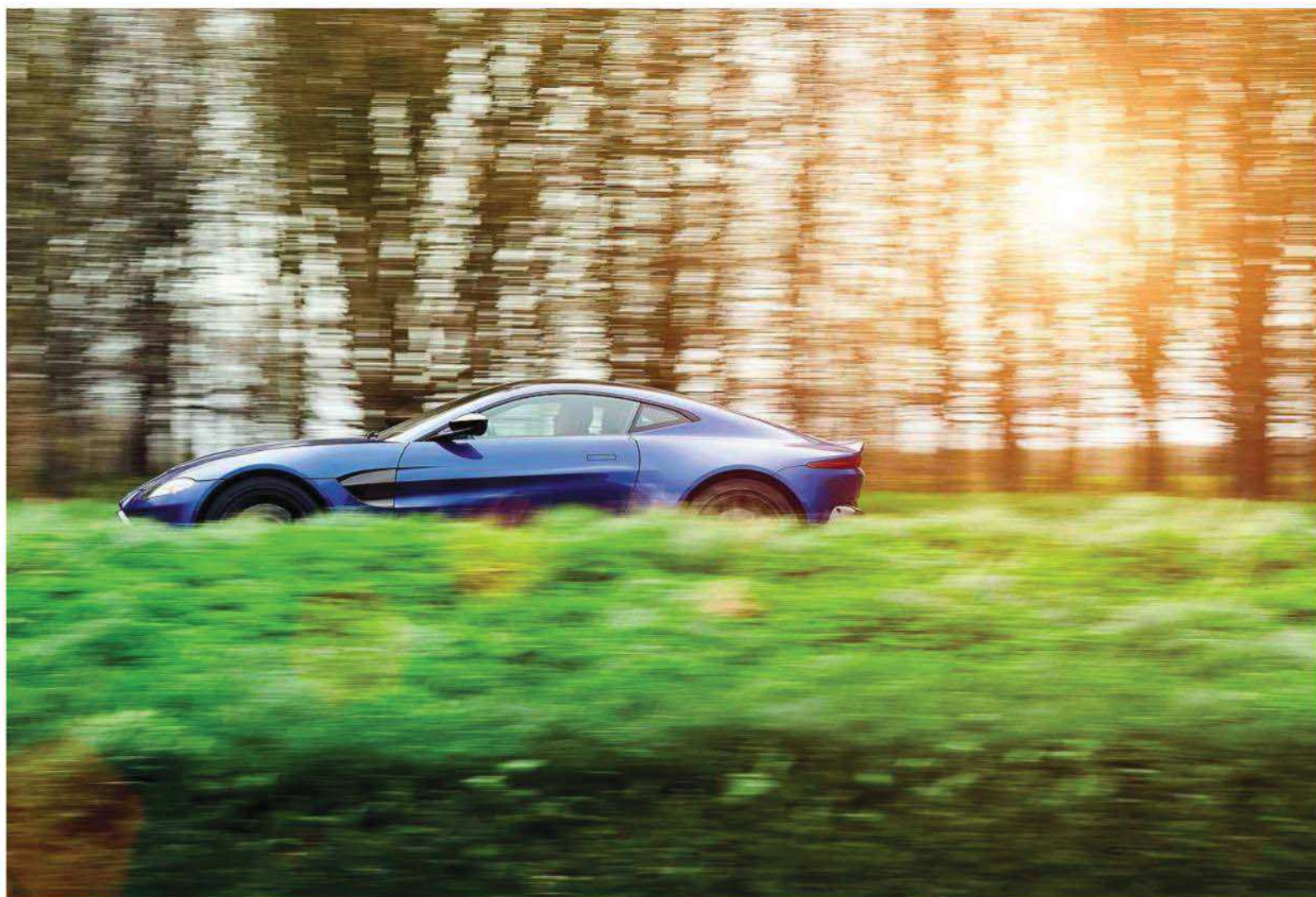
The front view is the one we’re yet to grow to love, but it has immense road presence (though partly because it’s so damn wide)

but, while it is undoubtedly a whole new kind of propulsion for a Vantage, it’s the agility, grip and rate of response that genuinely take your breath away. From your very first exploratory inputs, the new car feels both up for it and utterly underneath you.

It turns with measured urgency and has immense purchase on the road. You’re initially taken aback by how instantly it changes direction, but it almost immediately feels intuitive, the rate of response perfectly matching the degree of steering input. It just grips and goes, but with enough sense of the tyres building lateral load to put you in the picture. What you feel through the steering wheel is finely filtered, but true. There’s less steering weight than in the old car, but still a satisfying sense of physical connection.

It’s precise, too. That’s a good thing as the Vantage might be a smidge shorter than a 911, but it’s a good deal wider. Like a couple of hundred millimetres wider. Given that you can’t really see where the corners of the car are from the driver’s seat, you need that accuracy and consistency to boost your confidence. Once you settle into it, the Vantage feels a size or two smaller than it looks, shrinking around you like all good sports car do, though it has lost the genuine compactness of the old car, which is a shame.

On UK roads, what quickly becomes apparent is that Sport is very much the best suspension setting for everyday use. It’s firm, but there’s a level of control and pliancy that makes





Specification

ENGINE V8, 3982cc, twin-turbo **MAX POWER** 503bhp @ 6000rpm **MAX TORQUE** 505lb ft @ 2000-5000rpm
TRANSMISSION Eight-speed automatic with paddleshift, rear-wheel drive, E-Diff, 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 assisted **BRAKES** Vented discs, 400mm front, 360mm rear, ABS, EBD **WHEELS** 9 x 20in front, 11 x 20in rear **TYRES** 255/40 ZR20 front, 295/35 ZR20 rear, Pirelli P Zero **WEIGHT** 1630kg (est) **POWER TO WEIGHT** 314bhp/ton **0-60MPH** 3.5sec (claimed) **TOP SPEED** 195mph (claimed) **BASIC PRICE** £120,900

it feel more polished than the outgoing car, which had followed a path of increasingly firm suspension since its introduction.

That said, it's very definitely a sports car and not a scaled-down GT. And that's great news, because it backs up the assertion from on high that Vantage was going to have a sharp set of teeth. There's body control in abundance, so Sport+ is only really something you feel tempted to explore when the going is truly rapid and the road has some serious crests and compressions. And Track? Well, that very definitely means track. If you're averse to fiddling, simply keep the car in Sport and let it do its thing, though you might crave the sharper and more intense powertrain delivery that comes with Sport+.

Is it fast? Yes! Emphatically so. The usual benchmark figures claim 0-60mph in 3.5sec and a top speed of 195mph, but it takes just a few seconds of full-bore acceleration in a middling gear to paint a much more vivid picture of its performance. This car is much faster than you will ever want to risk on the road. At least for any more than short, furtive bursts. Just as impressive is the part-throttle performance, which, thanks to the abundant torque, means you just have to flex a bit of muscle to romp by slow traffic or pull the horizon towards you with a little more insistence.

Is it fun? Most definitely. All that grip isn't impervious to all that grunt, so if you're prepared to relax the stability control to Track mode, or even switch it off altogether, you can make the tail squat and sweep a glorious arc through pretty much any given corner. What's more, the super-trick electronic limited-slip differential with torque-vectoring makes it a more controlled and precise action, so you're very much in control rather than taking a leap of gratuitous, throttle-induced faith.

Is it a 911-beater? That's a much harder question to answer, and perhaps one we'll take a look at in a future issue. Character-wise, the Aston is a very different animal, thanks largely to the combination of brawny front/mid-mounted V8 and automatic transmission, but also because the 911 feels like a smaller and more subtly nuanced machine.

The daft thing is that, despite the obsession, I'm not sure you'd want an Aston Martin to be a direct Porsche rival, for surely to beat something you have to play the same game and stick to the same rules? The new Vantage occupies a similar yet not identical space in the market, and hopes to seduce a similar customer as the 911. But where the old car sought to go toe-to-toe, the new Vantage builds on its predecessor's dynamic focus while channeling some of the big-league firepower so vividly possessed by the original '70s/'80s Vantage, and also by the later V550/V600 and V12 Vantage models.

This is surely a very good thing, for those brawny cars remain some of Aston's finest. A fact we're about to be vividly reminded of as we introduce the very latest Vantage to five of its ancestors. Peter, it's over to you. **V**



MEETING THE FAMILY

So we know how good the new Aston is, but how does it measure up to its Vantage forebears? Let's find out

WORDS PETER TOMALIN | PHOTOGRAPHY MATTHEW HOWELL



VANTAGE. The word has a special resonance for anyone who loves Aston Martins. And, while what it signifies has changed many times over the decades, its very mention has always set our pulses beating just a little faster. At this precise moment, its original meaning is being distilled for me with crystal clarity...

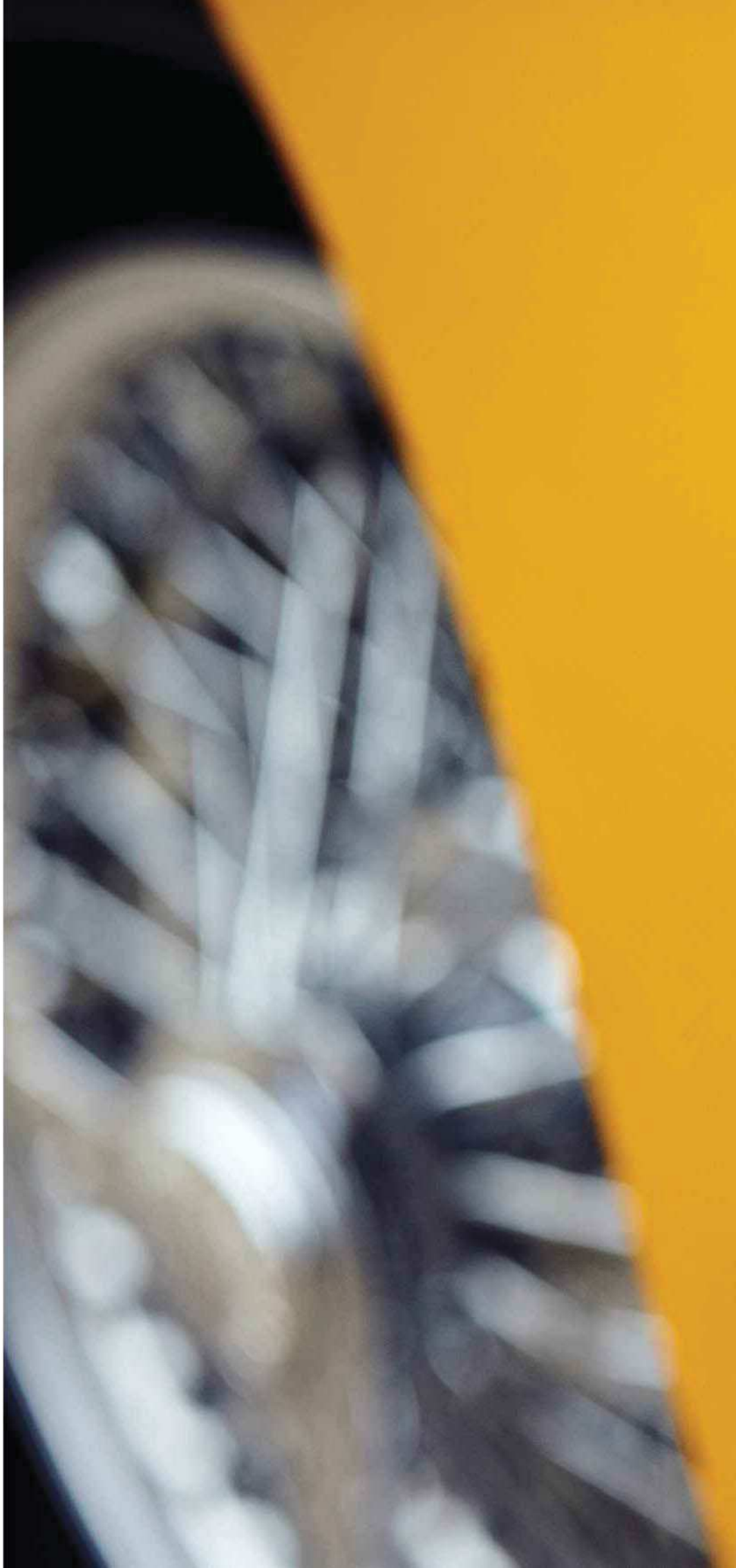
I'm in a dayglo orange DB6, powering down the outside lane of the M1 near Newport Pagnell, and the only thing more shocking than the paintwork is the speed this thing is making. That and the nape-prickling soundtrack of the straight-six Vantage-spec engine, snorting fuel through triple Weber carburettors and exhaling through twin, highly polished tailpipes slung low beneath its sharply cut Kamm tail.

We've the perfect excuse: the car has been in storage for weeks and really needs to clear its throats. Right now – and to the surprise of drivers of rather more modern machinery – a 50-year-old car is the fastest thing on the road, and boy does it feel at home.

Just as it should. At the time the DB6 was being developed, British motorways didn't have a speed limit, so the M1 was used for high-speed testing, not just by Aston Martin, but by Jaguar, too, and famously by racing driver Jack Sears, shaking down a Cobra coupé pre-Le Mans. Sadly, by the time DB6 deliveries started in late 1965, the British government had introduced a 'temporary' 70mph limit that proved not to be so temporary after all. There was still the Continent, though...

In the '50s and '60s, Vantage signified a higher state of tune and extra mph. By the '80s it was a Ferrari-pummelling supercar. Then it became the baby of the range. Mostly, though, it has stood for extra power and extra excitement, the very essence of Aston Martin. And today's Vantage? Well, that's what this test is all about.

So we're heading for Salisbury Plain, to rendezvous with five other Astons, from an early-50s DB2 with a 125bhp Vantage-spec 'six' to the all-new car with its twin-turbo 503bhp V8. Over two days we'll rediscover why the Vantage name means so much, and find out just how the new car relates to its forebears, or if it does at all. Either way, if this DB6 is a taste of what's in store, it's going to be a blast!

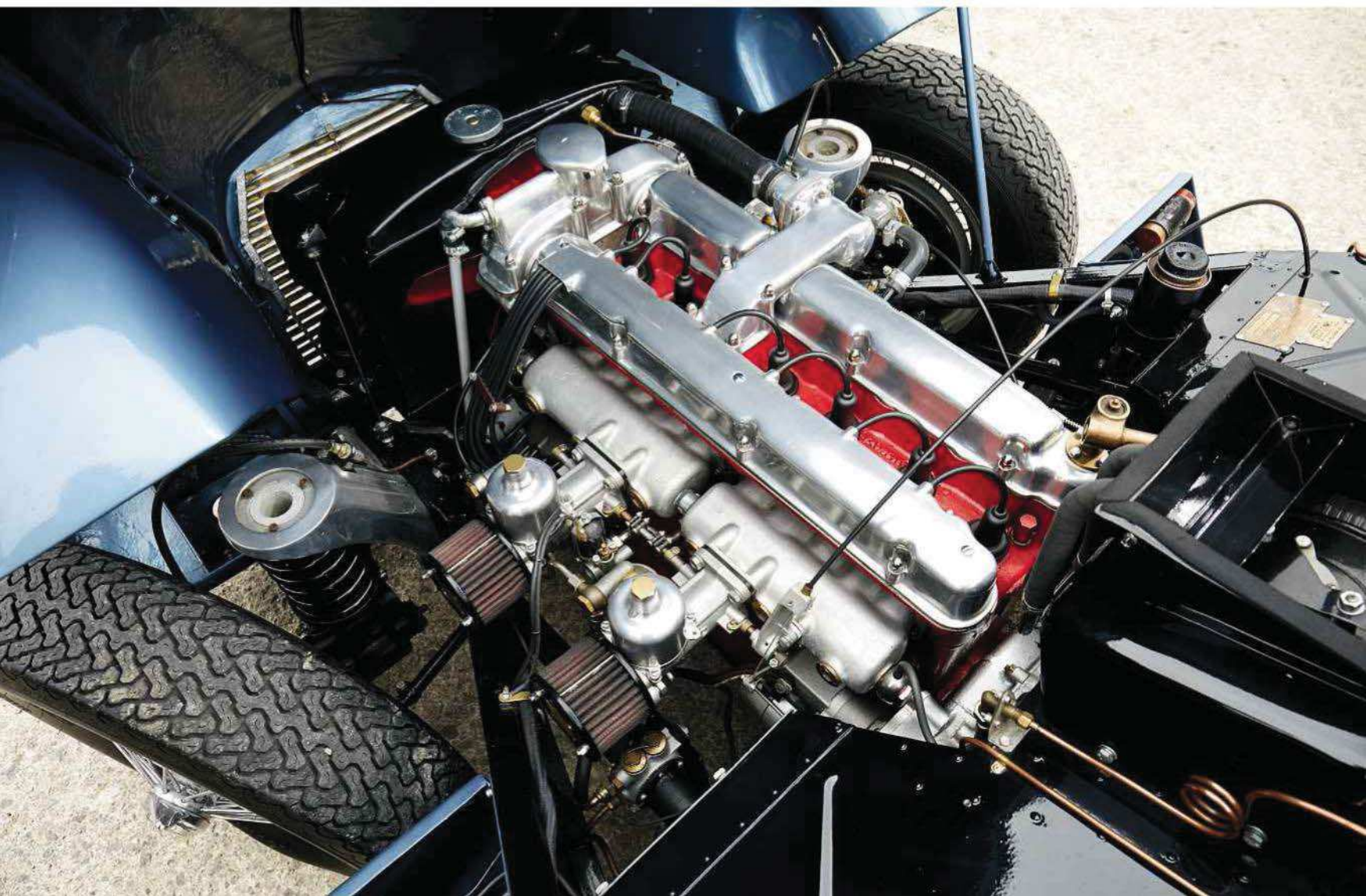




‘In the 1950s and
'60s, the Vantage
name meant a
tuned engine and
added mph’









‘THE DB2 SET THE TEMPLATE. IT WAS ALSO A GENUINELY SPORTING MACHINE’

LOVELY, ISN'T IT? Roger Carey's 1952 DB2 may be the slowest car here but, in terms of charisma, it's off the scale. And it's so much more than a pretty shape. The DB2 may not be as feted as the later DBs, but this was the car that set the template. It was also a genuinely sporting machine, with class wins at Le Mans among its many track successes. And that's where the Vantage name enters the story.

The V-word made its first appearance in publicity material for the DB2, referring to an engine specially tuned for competition work. The main differences were larger SU carburettors and a higher compression ratio, and the effect was to lift the output from the standard 105bhp to 125bhp. There was no external badging; you had to tilt that vast one-piece bonnet forward to find the evidence: Vantage-spec engines had their blocks and heads painted blood-red.

This is the early, 2.6-litre version of the 'LB6' that powered all the early-50s Aston road cars (originally a Lagonda engine, of course, its design overseen by WO Bentley, hence 'LB'). Though the figures don't look special today, when you slide behind the wheel and fire it up, it very quickly wins you over. This is a proper

sports car engine, and while it has a healthy amount of low-rev torque, it only really comes alive when you work it. So you do – and you discover an utterly engaging little car.

The steering has an initially disconcerting amount of free play, but as soon as you apply some lock it feels pleasingly direct and the car turns keenly enough. It rolls in the corners, and it doesn't have a lot of grip, but it's nimble, well-balanced and communicative. The bench seat provides scant support, but it's pretty snug in there, so you can't slide far; hanging onto the big plastic rim of the wheel and bracing your legs against the deep sill and the transmission tunnel helps in the tighter turns.

Shifting gears in the four-speed 'box requires some effort, but it's beautifully, solidly precise in its action. With steel drum brakes all-round, it's fair to say that slowing is not the DB2's forté, but you simply make allowances.

We'll return to it again tomorrow, but in these early miles the DB2 makes a very big impression, and, when I speak to them later, editor Dickie Meaden and regular contributor Stephen Archer are similarly smitten. No question, the DB2 has put down a marker for the cars that follow.

Above and opposite

Beautifully furnished cabin is classiest here; shapely tail (above left) contains only spare wheel and tools – any luggage goes behind seats; 2.6-litre LB6 engine feels strong, thrives on revs

DB2 (Vantage spec)

ENGINE In-line 6-cylinder, 2580cc
MAX POWER 125bhp @ 5000rpm
MAX TORQUE 144lb ft @ 2400rpm
TRANSMISSION Four-speed manual, rear-wheel drive
SUSPENSION Front: independent, trailing arms, coil springs, lever-arm dampers. Rear: live axle, parallel trailing arms, Panhard rod, coil springs, lever-arm dampers
STEERING Worm-and-roller, unassisted
BRAKES Drums front and rear (305mm diameter)
WHEELS 4.5 x 16in, wire-spoke, front and rear
TYRES 6 x HR16 front and rear
WEIGHT c1200kg **POWER TO WEIGHT** c105bhp/ton
0-60MPH 10.8sec **TOP SPEED** 120mph
PRICE NEW £2000 in 1951 (£65,000 in today's money)
VALUES TODAY £200,000-£250,000





YEP, IT'S STILL ORANGE. Or, rather, Bahama Yellow. There were a few DB6s in this colour – including the one driven by Roger Moore in *The Persuaders!* – but apparently this was the only DB6. It was delivered in 1969, making it a late Mk1 Vantage – the name now proudly displayed on the wing vents, so deeply into the motoring lexicon had the V-word now embedded itself.

Fresh from a full Works restoration and for sale at Newport Pagnell at £695,000, it is as pristine as you'd expect and rather better than new. It's certainly catching the eye of other road-users. Which is just as well, because one of the first things I noticed when I climbed in was the complete lack of wing or door mirrors...

In the DB2 you sit low, legs outstretched; here you're higher, on small, shapely chairs, looking down on the impressive fascia – the instruments now grouped directly in front of you – with a splendid view along a rolling expanse of bonnet.

What lies beneath is what makes this car truly special. As with many Marek straight-sixes, this one has been taken from the standard 4 litres to 4.2 and is making a dyno-confirmed 320bhp. It's a fabulous engine, with power everywhere. On the drive down, the DB6 cruises easily at 80mph at around 2750rpm, only the wind noise around

the front quarter-lights betraying its age. Even at that speed, squeezing the floor-hinged throttle invokes an instant surge of power with a matching increase in induction and exhaust noise. Few things in this world make the conversion of petrol into energy quite so joyous as an Aston straight-six on triple Webers! Soon you're travelling at very pre-1965 speeds.

But I'm starting to realise that fast roads with long, sweeping corners are the DB6's forté. On twisting roads and undulating surfaces, it has a little trouble keeping its masses in check, while on skinny 185-section Avon radials it does feel a little under-tyred for the performance.

The steering is slop-free, though in tight turns its low gearing and lack of power-assistance mean you really have to haul on the wooden rim. You'd expect the brakes to require effort too, and they do, but they reward with strong retardation, pulling the car up straight and true, a considerable improvement on the DB2's.

Not so good is the gearchange. The 'box is a bit of a pig when cold, and, even when warm, its gate lacks the definition and its shift action the wonderfully direct, mechanical feel of the DB2's. I finish my first stint with mixed feelings about the DB6. But what an engine!

Below left and right

Triple Weber 45 DCOEs instead of SUs were what made the DB6 Vantage such a potent machine; this engine uprated to 4.2 litres. Full Works restoration also included fitment of air-con, but car otherwise standard

DB6 Vantage (Mk1)

ENGINE In-line 6-cyl, 3995cc

MAX POWER 325bhp @ 5750rpm

MAX TORQUE 290lb ft @ 4500rpm

TRANSMISSION Five-speed manual, rear-wheel drive, limited-slip differential

SUSPENSION Front: double wishbones, coil springs, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar. Rear: live axle, trailing arms, Watt's linkage, lever-arm dampers

BRAKES Solid discs, 292mm front, 274mm rear

WHEELS 5.5 x 15in front and rear

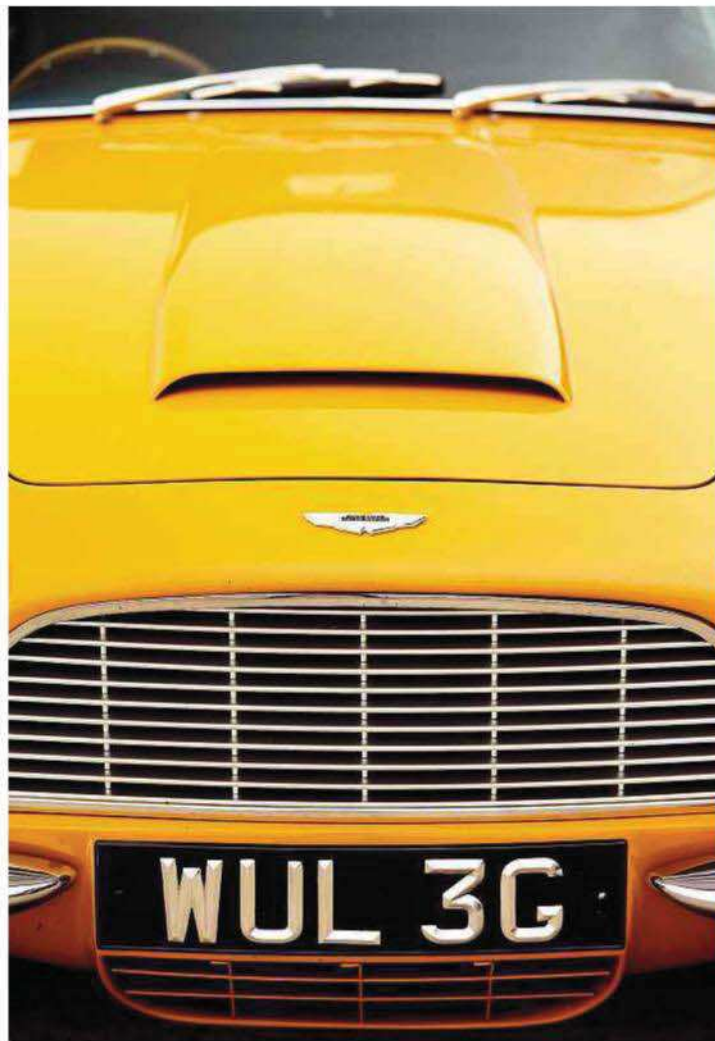
TYRES 185 x 15 front and rear

WEIGHT 1476kg **POWER TO WEIGHT** 224bhp/ton

0-60MPH c8.0sec **TOP SPEED** c150mph

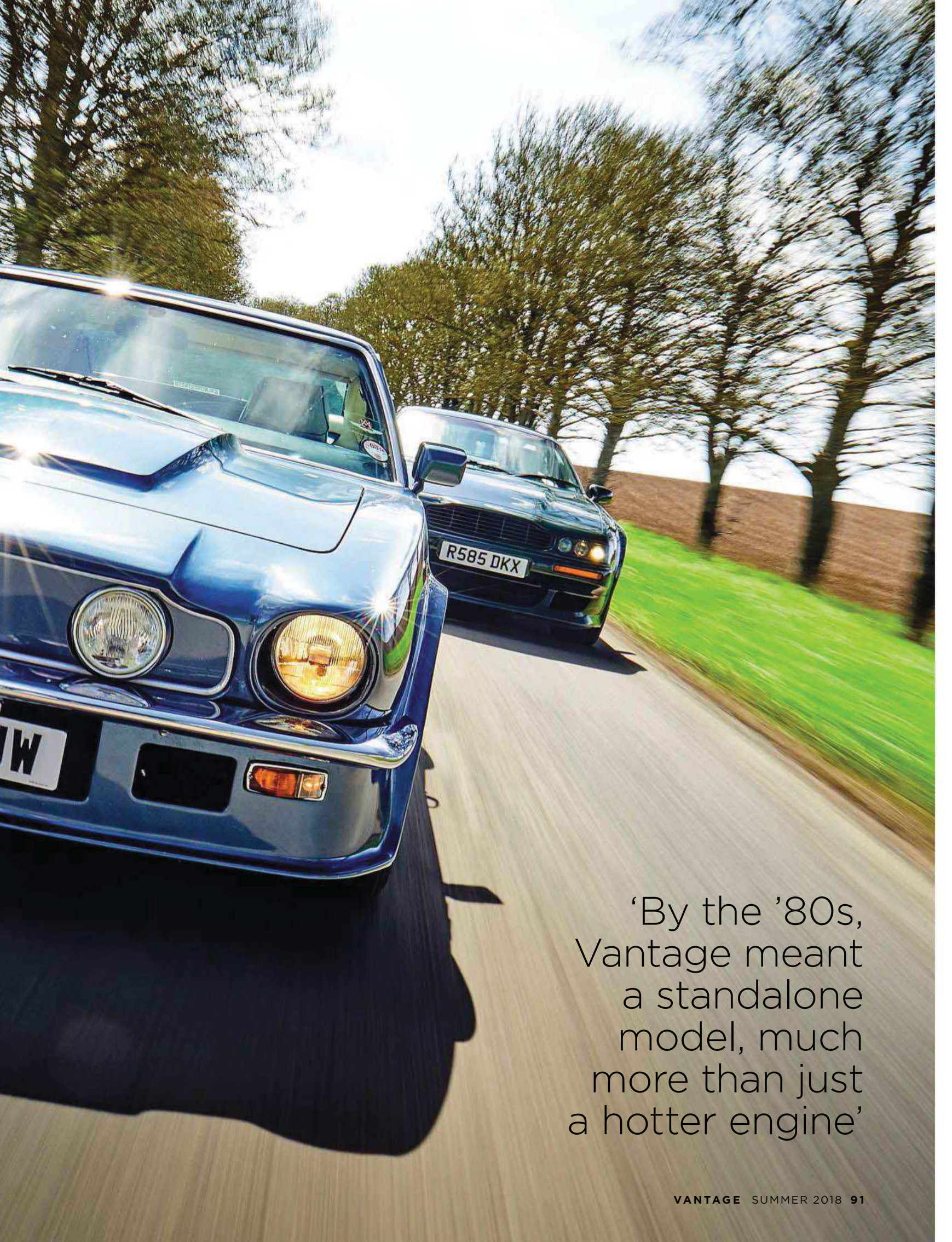
PRICE NEW £4998 in 1966 (£92,000 in today's money)

VALUES NOW £350,000-£600,000









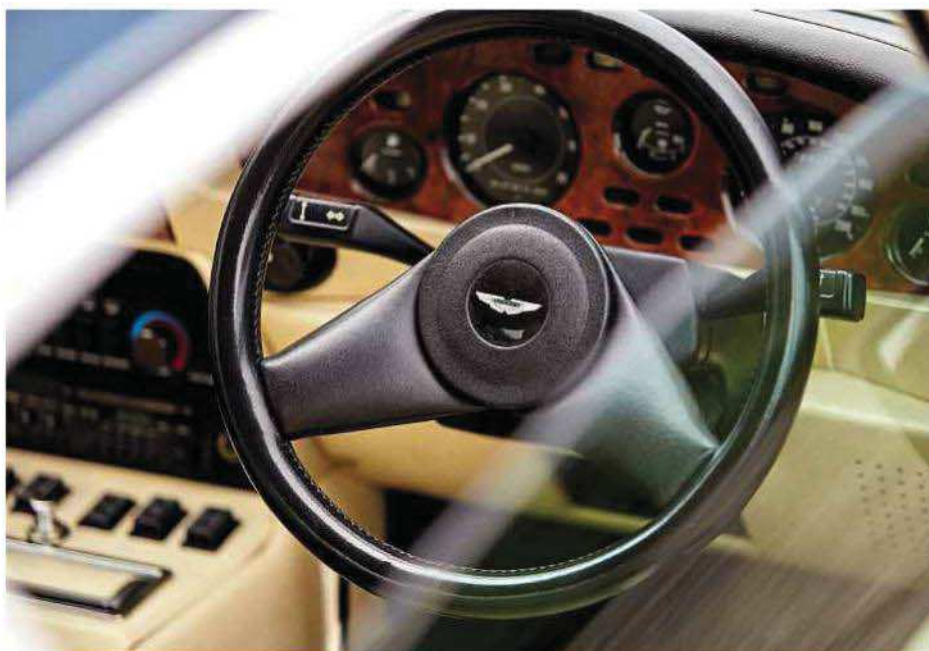
‘By the ’80s,
Vantage meant
a standalone
model, much
more than just
a hotter engine’

'THE V8 NOTE CAN GO FROM
BURBLE TO BLARE, FROM
MAIDSTONE TO MULSANNE'





Right and below
Late-80s Vantage's cabin is lavishly furnished, which makes the sound and fury of the X-Pack V8 engine all the more amusing



AND NOW WE ENTER the era of Vantage as supercar. When Aston launched its super-V8 in 1976, it was the first time the name had been used for a standalone model, and there was good reason, for it was much more than just a hotter version of the regular V8 saloon.

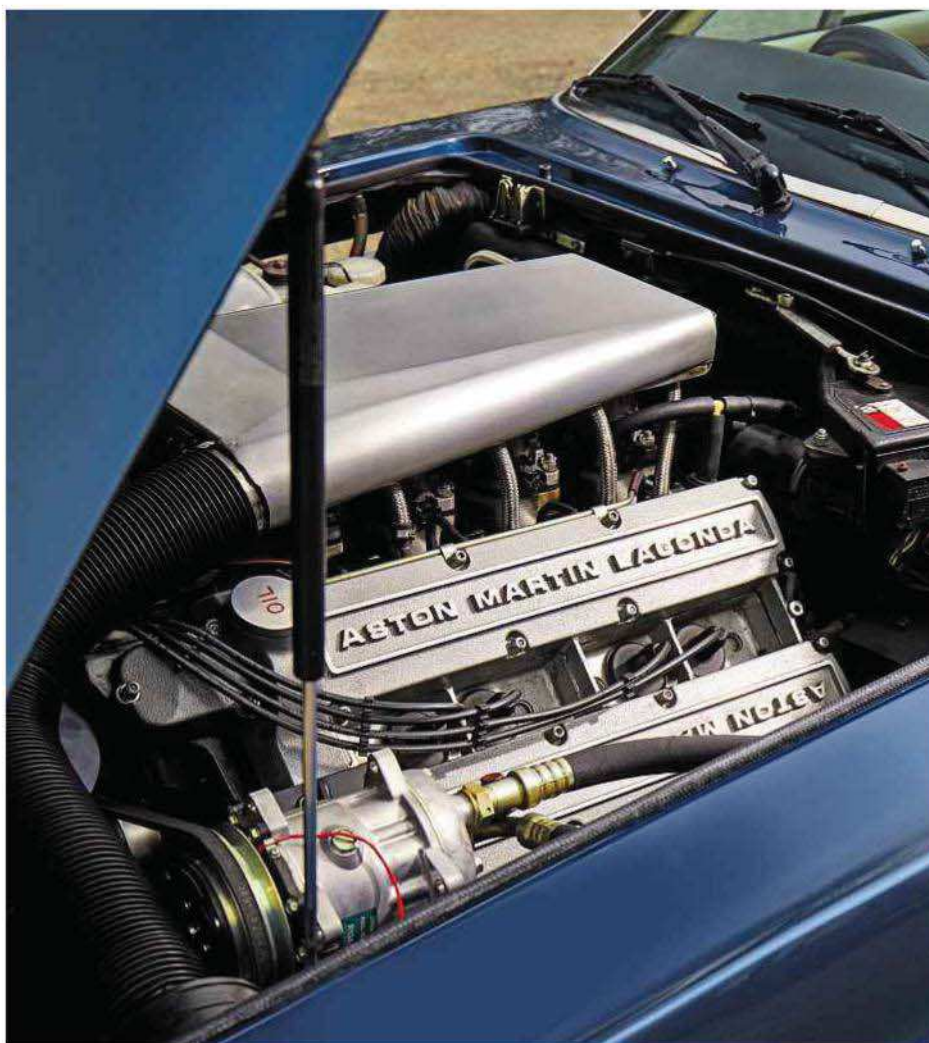
The grille and bonnet scoop were blanked off to reduce drag and there were front and rear spoilers to keep it stable at speed. At chassis-level there were telescopic Konis all-round – no more archaic lever-arm dampers at the rear – along with lower and stiffer springs, thicker front anti-roll bar, wider track and fatter tyres.

But the heart of it, of course, was the engine. The 5.3-litre V8 was fitted with a quartet of downdraught Webers, bigger valves, new cams and reworked intake and exhaust manifolds. The upshot was around 370bhp: enough for a 5.4sec 0-60mph time and a top speed of 170mph.

Even quicker was the 'X-Pack', which came in 1986, the name coined from the 580X engine, which was the same unit fitted to the V8 Zagatos of the period. With four 48 IDF Webers, Cosworth pistons, larger inlet ports and higher lift camshafts, power was now around 410bhp. Only 139 were made. This 1987 car belongs to Glenn Lickfold, who also owns the supercharged V550 on these pages, lucky chap.

From the big, comfy but still supportive driver's seat there's another stunning view over a small acreage of bonnet, and when you turn the key there's an instant aura of big, lazy power and a classic slightly offbeat V8 note that can go from burble to blare, from Maidstone to Mulsanne. It's actually a pussycat to drive. The clutch is easy, the gearshift long of throw but positive enough. First is on a dog-leg, away and back, but that works well, because once you're on the move you're never going to need it again. In fact, on these B-roads, third is all you really need, from 20mph to as fast as you dare.

The power steering is almost disconcertingly light and remote, until you start to load it up. After the DB6, it feels planted, grippy – but then it is on wide, 255/50 Michelin Pilot Sports. It rides better, too. Indeed, considering the chassis



V8 Vantage (X-Pack)

ENGINE V8, 5340cc **MAX POWER** c410bhp @ 6500rpm **MAX TORQUE** c390lb ft @ 5000rpm
TRANSMISSION Five-speed manual, rear-wheel drive, limited-slip differential
SUSPENSION Front: double wishbones, coil springs, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar.
Rear: de Dion tube, trailing arms and Watt's linkage, coil springs, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar
STEERING Rack-and-pinion, power-assisted **BRAKES** Vented discs, 292mm front, 264mm rear
WHEELS 16in front and rear **TYRES** 255/50 ZR16 front and rear **WEIGHT** 1818kg
POWER TO WEIGHT c230bhp/ton **0-60MPH** c5.2sec **TOP SPEED** c175mph
PRICE NEW £59,950 in 1987 (£168,000 in today's money) **VALUES TODAY** £350,000-£450,000









Vantage V550

ENGINE V8, 5340cc, twin-supercharged

MAX POWER 550bhp @ 6500rpm

MAX TORQUE 550lb ft @ 4000rpm

TRANSMISSION Six-speed manual, rear-wheel drive, lsd

SUSPENSION Front: double wishbones, coil springs, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar. Rear: de Dion axle, trailing arms, Watt's linkage, coil springs, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar

STEERING Rack-and-pinion, power-assisted

BRAKES Vented discs, 362mm front, 310mm rear, ABS

WHEELS 10 x 18in front and rear

TYRES 285/45 ZR18

WEIGHT 1920kg

POWER TO WEIGHT 291bhp/ton

0-60MPH 4.6sec

TOP SPEED 186mph

PRICE NEW £177,600 in 1993 (£350,000 in today's money)

VALUES TODAY £175,000-£225,000



is actually an evolution of the DB4's, it handles pretty well. Not exactly agile, but biddable. For a big car, it also responds best to subtle inputs and feels smaller than it looks.

NOT SOMETHING you'd ever say of the V550. Leaves shake in the trees when the supercharged car hoves in view. This is the ultimate expression of Vantage as powerhouse. I mean, just look at that engine bay, like the turbine room of a small warship. The V8 had four-valve heads by then, developed by Calloway for the late-80s Virage. But the twin Eaton blowers were new for the 1992 Vantage and boosted peak power from 330 to 550bhp, with a matching 550lb ft of torque.

Inside, the arc of the dash binnacle harks back to the classic DB models, but this is an interior designed to impress, not seduce. Check out the rows of switches for the electric seat adjustment. And it feels just as it looks: heavyweight. This was the last of the Newport Pagnell V-cars, the last to be completely handbuilt in the old way, its steel and aluminium cut and welded and hammered into shape by artisans. It weighed 1920kg. No carbonfibre here.

The driving experience doesn't disappoint. The clutch feels like compressing a road spring,

and when it takes up there's the sense of a locomotive coupling with coal wagons. The gearshift is similarly meaty and has another long throw, while the turning circle calls to mind the Queen Mary. This is the feeling of high performance car meeting heavy industry.

The airbagged wheel is ugly but it's actually nicer to hold than the X-pack's. The Recaro-style seat grips you more firmly and you sit quite low in relation to the scuttle, so that the flat bonnet falls away into the near distance, which only adds slightly to the intimidation factor.

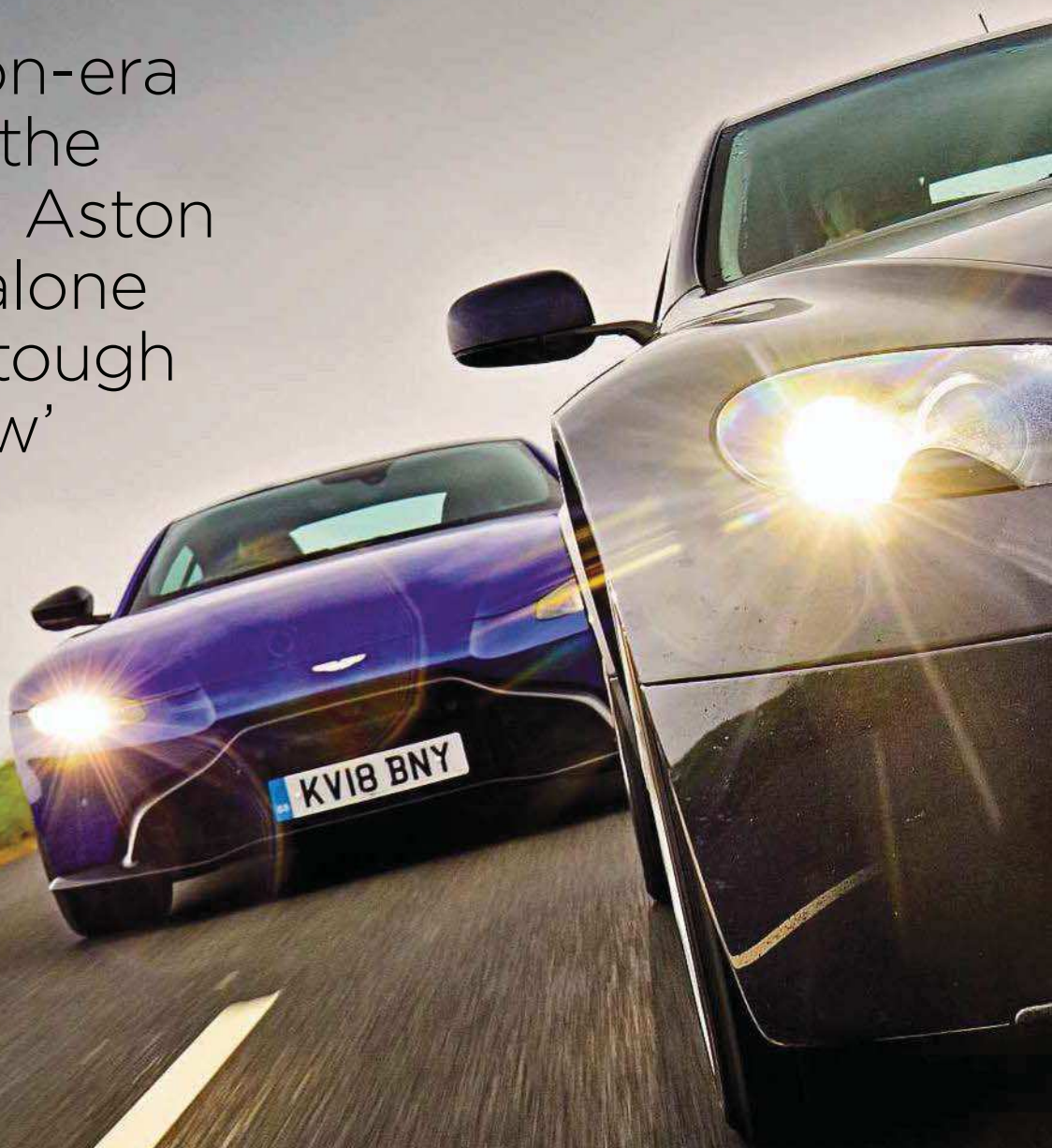
The chassis feels instantly tighter, tauter, as it needs to be, for here is performance on another plane. Such is the monumental thrust that you have to start to recalibrate, to look further down the road, because when it launches it'll get you there very quickly. The downside is that, through all the control surfaces, you feel slightly removed from the mechanical side of the car. Grip is prodigious on 285/45 ZR18 P Zeros, and the Group C-derived brakes are mighty, but you're always acutely aware that there's a lot of (rapidly accelerating) Aston Martin to haul in.

A definitive super-GT, the V550 and the even more powerful V600 were the last hurrah for the old-school Aston. And what a way to go out.

'THE ENGINE BAY IS LIKE THE TURBINE ROOM OF A SMALL WARSHIP'

Opposite and above V8 almost hidden by superchargers and all the associated plumbing; V550 has massive road presence; another first-class cabin

‘The Gaydon-era Vantage is the best-selling Aston ever. That alone makes it a tough act to follow’







V8 Vantage (4.3)

ENGINE V8, 4281cc

MAX POWER 380bhp @ 7000rpm

MAX TORQUE 302lb ft @ 5000rpm

TRANSMISSION Six-speed manual, rear-wheel drive, limited-slip differential **SUSPENSION** Front and rear: double wishbones, coil springs, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar

STEERING Rack-and-pinion, power-assisted

BRAKES Vented discs, 355mm front, 330mm rear, ABS

WHEELS 8.5 x 19in front, 9.5 x 19in rear

TYRES 235/40 ZR19 front, 275/35 ZR19 rear

WEIGHT 1570kg **POWER TO WEIGHT** 244bhp/ton

0-60MPH 4.8sec **TOP SPEED** 175mph

PRICE £79,995 in 2005 (£117,000 in today's money)

VALUES TODAY £30,000-£40,000

ASTON DIEHARDS were none too impressed when AML under Ulrich Bez hijacked the hallowed Vantage name for what was, in effect, its entry-level offering. But when the Gaydon-built V8 Vantage went on sale in late 2005, any misgivings were pretty soon forgotten. Here was an all-new Aston that drove as well as it looked, and that was very well indeed.

I'll confess, I was expecting the baby Vantage to feel a bit, well, weedy after the two Newport Pagnell behemoths. Especially since this is an early example with the 380bhp 4.3-litre engine rather than the later, rather more potent 4.7. What's more, David Wright's totally original and unmolested 12-year-old car has covered over 90,000 miles and all it's had, aside from routine servicing, is a new, twin-plate clutch.

Yes, there's a lovely, light, throaty warble to the exhaust note rather than the rumbling thunder of the big-bangers. But the way it goes is something of a revelation. It just feels so damn keen. Right from the off, you can sense the relative lack of inertia, while the V8 delivers its urge in a beautifully linear fashion. At high revs it even curls its lips into a proper snarl.

The steering is much more direct, again very linear in its response, and the nose is so much more eager to turn in. In fact the whole chassis feels nicely taut, but it still rides pliantly. I remember, when it first came out, thinking how stiff it felt, but as sports car get ever more

unyielding, it now feels nicely rounded, with a fine ride/handling trade-off. Good brakes, too, and a proper manual gearbox with – in this company – a pleasingly short throw.

Of course, in years to come, the Vantage chassis would have to cope with much more power than this, and you can really enjoy wringing out every last drop of performance without fearing you're going to get yourself into trouble. At one point, Meaden leads off in the new car and, for a few seconds, I try to hang onto his tail. The gap soon grows, but the older car is by no means disgraced.

The interior is less showy than most here, almost sombre with its dark, leather-wrapped surfaces, but very tasteful and rather classy. The dials, like watch faces, are as hard to read as ever but add to a subtly sporting ambience. This one has mellowed and aged rather well – and obviously thrived on being well-used.

When the V12 version was launched in 2009, the Vantage was once again the sportiest car in the range: the best Aston in pure driving terms since the late-80s Zagato. In 565bhp 'S' form, it became the fastest series-production model yet, with a top speed of 205mph.

But don't underestimate the early V8. It still feels relevant and modern and exciting. It's a proper Aston and it wears its Vantage badges with pride. It's also the best-selling Aston ever, and that alone makes it a tough act to follow...



'YOU CAN REALLY
ENJOY WRINGING OUT
EVERY LAST DROP
OF PERFORMANCE'



Above and left
Early Gaydon-era Vantage
still looks nicely taut of line
and timelessly elegant.
Interior, too, is ageing well.
4.3-litre engine thrives on
revs; later 4.7 had 420bhp
and more torque, too







Clockwise from above
New Vantage shows its playful side; twin-turbo V8 so far back in the engine bay, it's almost hidden; profile view is fist-tight; powertrain and chassis modes are selected via buttons on steering wheel

WHEN I PLAY BACK the recording of my initial thoughts after driving the new Vantage, the first two words are expletives. The first printable word is 'Wow'. Whatever you think of the looks – and a few of us have some reservations – just 20 minutes behind the wheel is all it will take to blow away any negativity.

The bold cabin is a real break with the past. In fact it's rather exhilarating. No, it won't be for everyone, and neither will the centre console. Busy is one word to describe it. Astons have embraced technology before; this one positively celebrates it, even fetishises it. Indeed, there's so much to take in, it's almost overwhelming. Best just to fire it up and drive.

You sit lower still, embraced, cocooned. The bottom of the screen is far away and beyond it... no visible expanse of bonnet here, just a window on the road rushing towards you.

When you look at the spec and see turbos and an automatic gearbox, you think, that'll take the edge off it. You anticipate a smidge of

turbo lag and ever-so-slightly-soft gearchanges. Er, nope. The whole powertrain is whipcrack-sharp. And perfectly matched to the chassis, which is instantly reactive but without feeling in any way edgy or nervous.

I dip a toe into the driver-configurable modes. Sport+ for the powertrain only heightens the excitement, but Meaden was right about the damper modes; whereas the default setting is taut but never brittle, Sport+ makes the ride agitated to no discernible advantage.

And it's so damn fast. OK, it gives around 50bhp to the V550, but the clue is in the power-to-weight ratios. Give it the full beans from a standing start and it'll genuinely take your breath away while scrambling your senses.

Through rapid direction changes, all of its masses seem pulled to the centre of the car, and the harder you drive, the more it seems to suck itself in around you. A glance in the door mirror reminds you of the wide rear haunches. I think back to earlier in the day – there were a couple





of passes with oncoming traffic that were tight in the DB6; for the new car they would have been impossible. But it doesn't *feel* like a big, wide car. So you're mindful of the width, but it will hardly ever stop you enjoying the drive. Which is emphatically what this car is all about. Wow.

DAY TWO, and we fill our Trowbridge hotel car park with the sound of six generations of Aston history. The DB6 requires just a couple of pumps of the throttle to prime the Webers; alongside, the X-Pack V8 erupts into raucous life. On the fast, smooth, gently sinuous road to Devizes, the 'Six' feels fantastic, the sunlight streaming down and bouncing off the vibrant paintwork, a roll of the shoulders being all it takes to line up the next fast, open corner.

By mid-morning, I'm back in the DB2, riding shotgun with Mr Meaden, and we're both grinning like schoolboys. You can tell it's an old-fashioned construction with a separate chassis and coachbuilt body because there's a fair bit of flexing, the doors rattling like a railway carriage over points. And yet... it actually feels very together, in control of its weight, responding faithfully to the steering and to small throttle inputs to adjust its attitude. 'I really like this,' says Dickie, and I'm nodding in agreement.

The engine feels so damn willing, its burble compressing to a strident blare at high revs. The transmission chunters away, and the gears whine. 'It's like the whole car is singing to you,' as Meaden puts it. And everything feels well-matched and in balance – engine, transmission, ride and handling. 'Imagine how fast that felt in 1952!' chimes Stephen Archer. Could it be that the Vantage story has come full circle?

The DB6 is clearly the later car: lower, wider, shaped by aerodynamic science, and, when you slide inside, the DB2's quaint charm is replaced by '60s sophistication with a wraparound front windscreen and even a nod towards ergonomics. Room for four, too, though anyone over 5ft 10in will need to hunch over in the back. With disc brakes and a five-speed gearbox, it's a proper high-performance GT. But not a sports car.

'You can cover ground at speed,' says Dickie, 'but ask any more of it and it's found a bit wanting. It's no DB4 or DB5.' Stephen reckons this car's gearshift isn't representative; he also makes the point that the Mk2 DB6, with its wider track, bigger tyres and standard PAS, was better matched to the Vantage's performance.

But what an engine! Bursting with energy and rejoicing in a throttle response that's dangerously addictive. So the Vantage part of the car is utterly compelling; the rest maybe less so. Whereas the DB2 rewards your efforts, the DB6 isn't that sort of car. But it's never less than an event to be around. As Dickie says: 'You'd have felt pretty special in one of these.' Open the taps and chase away the blues...

What both DBs have reaffirmed is that classic cars with a few well-chosen modern upgrades – improved engine cooling, switchable PAS, air-con – are quite capable of thriving in today's traffic; in fact traffic speeds seem to be coming down to meet them. They have the advantage on narrow roads, too.

You might even question the need for a car capable of 195mph. One that charges up to 95mph with a thrilling soundtrack might be all you need; it might even be all you want. However, some will always crave more power...

Below

A tale of tails... the understanding of aerodynamics is just one of the things that's changed dramatically in the years between DB2 and new Vantage



Vantage: the quest for power



BY DEFINITION, VANTAGE is a place or position affording advantage. Who appropriated it for Aston Martin, originally to denote a more powerful engine, is lost in the swarf of the machine shop. But the reason that Aston decided to offer a high-performance engine option *is* known, and it was borne of the privations of the Second World War.

From 1939 until 1950, the man on the street had to make do with 72-octane 'pool' petrol – hardly conducive to getting power from an engine. There were even questions asked in Parliament about when motorists should no longer expect to see their engines being destroyed by detonation!

When the DB2 was announced in April 1950, its 2.6-litre engine had a low compression ratio of 6.5:1 and a power output of just 105bhp. But, by the end of the year, Aston was offering the option of a more powerful engine with a compression ratio of 8.16:1 and larger carburetors, primarily with motorsport in mind. The block and head were painted red rather than the standard grey, and there was a 'V' in the engine number. With 120bhp, soon 125bhp, this was a very useful power increase, though enthusiast

owners still had to search hard for fuel any higher than 74 octane. It wasn't until 1953 that 85-octane petrol became widely available. Still, the upgrade to Vantage spec was a popular improvement and many DB2s were retro-upgraded at Feltham. The legend was up and running.

For most of the next 50 years, Vantage retained its original meaning by denoting the more powerful engine option. And, from the DB5 onwards, the name would appear externally for all to see. The one exception was the AM Vantage of the early '70s. The last car to be fitted with the by-then-venerable Marek straight-six, it was the lower-powered sibling to the AM V8. But they were odd times...

Through the '80s and '90s, the Vantage name powered on, fuelled by Webers and superchargers, and, in the case of the DB7 Vantage, a brand new V12 engine. Only with the Gaydon-era V8 did it take on a new meaning. For 14 years now, Vantage has been a model range, any upgrades denoted with an 'S'. Perhaps one day it will be rested again before making a comeback with its original meaning. I, for one, rather hope it does.

Stephen Archer



'THE NEW MODEL REINVENTS VANTAGE AS A FULL-ON SPORTS CAR'

AS WITH THE MUSIC you loved in your youth, cars tend to stay with you. I was a teenager when the V8 Vantage appeared in the late 1970s, and it remains a hero car. I have to say it's aged rather better than Jimmy Page or Roger Waters.

This was Aston Martin as luxury express, for owners who felt uneasy unless they could take parts of their drawing room with them. The V550 has the same vibe and there's no question it was a staggering achievement for Newport Pagnell in the early '90s. 'A supercar built in a shed,' is how Stephen describes it. But while the engineering is epic, it doesn't have quite the charm or tactility of the X-Pack. It's more about the numbers. And as Dickie says: 'It can feel a bit like a runaway train!'

John Watson, of Chicane Classics, which looks after both V-cars, puts it this way: 'The X-Pack is a licence-loser; the V550 you might as well drive straight to the nearest police station and hand yourself in.' You might also need to rob a bank or two just to keep them in super-unleaded.

Glenn Lickfold owns both and is presumably on first name terms with the staff of his local filling station. Interestingly, the supercharged car, for all its forced induction and far higher outputs, is by some margin the more economical of the two. Glenn says the X-Pack is usually mid-teens, the V550 low-20s. It's all relative...

With the 2005 V8 Vantage, Aston Martin vaulted clear of its cottage-industry past and into the modern age. It has all the benefits that modern design and build can bestow, while

retaining a unique flavour that's unmistakably Aston Martin – the looks, the sound, the feel.

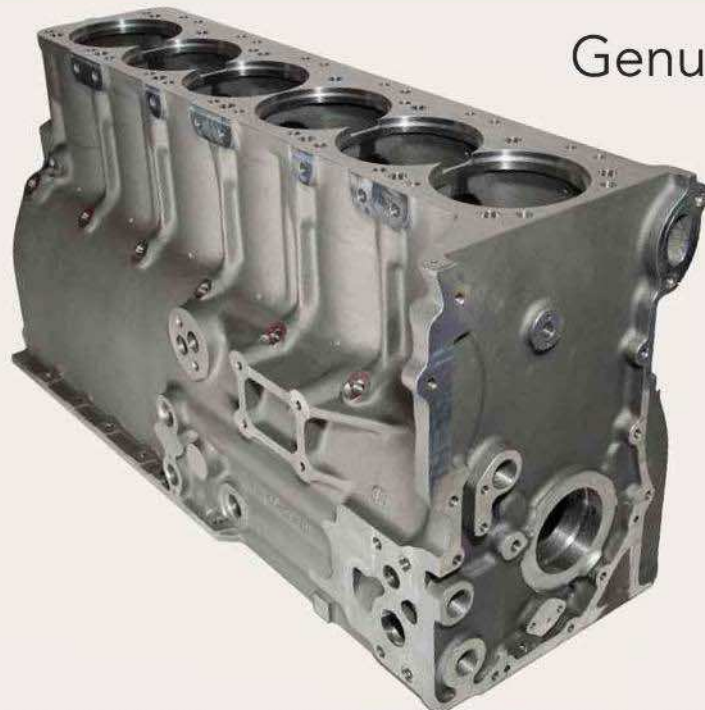
David Wright has had his from new. 'And I think I'm going to keep it forever,' he says. 'I love it. And for the money I'd get, what's the point of selling it?' It's true that these cars are a conspicuous bargain whose values surely can't fall any further. So get in while you can – and drive the thing! On the evidence of this one, you have nothing to fear and so much to enjoy.

And yet New Vantage makes it feel old hat and, it has to be said, rather tame. The new model reinvents Vantage as a full-on sports car, and, despite the odd reservation about the looks, especially head-on, our Aston aficionados seem to love it to a man. 'It's just so incredibly competent,' says Stephen. 'And insanely quick. All the technology keeps you on the road, but it does it without taking the fun away.'

Tellingly, no-one rules out buying one because of the Mercedes-AMG engine, perhaps mindful of the fact that the DB2 had an engine that was effectively bought-in from Lagonda, and that the previous Vantage's V8 started life as a Jaguar unit. People in glass houses and all that.

I suspect that the majority of potential buyers for the new car will neither know nor care who made the engine. And that's fine. The job of the new Vantage is to create a new generation of Aston Martin fans, and that it will surely do. **V**

Many thanks to Roger Carey, Glenn Lickfold, John Watson, David Wright and Aston Martin Works.



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DB5 1965



Silver Birch with red hide. Bare metal re-spray and re-trim carried out in 2003. 4.2ltr engine upgrade approximately 9,500 miles ago. RS Williams maintained since 2003. Invoices showing expenditure in excess of £155,000. 140 miles covered in the last 4 years. Superb in every aspect. Used by Aston Martin in a promotional video.

V8 Vantage X-Pack 1986



Porsche Crystal Green Metallic with dark green hide (the only Aston Martin specified in this colour combination). One of only 29 LHD cars produced in manual transmission. Originally ordered by a member of the Oman Royal family, further unique specifications include fitted luggage to match the interior including matching briefcase, wood interior to full V8 saloon specification.

V8 1976



Midnight blue with magnolia interior. Automatic. RS Williams maintained for 20yrs. Total expenditure in excess of £80k including service expenditure of over £5k in last 2yrs. Bare-metal respray and chassis work completed in 1993 with photographic record. RS Williams major invoice in 2009 to include body, paint and engine work totalling over £10k.

DB6 1970



Dubbonet Rosso with tan interior. Manual gearbox. RSW Ltd maintained for over 25yrs. Engine rebuilt and upgraded to 4.2 lead-free specification. One of only 248 cars produced and in superb condition throughout.

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BIGGER

WORDS STEPHEN ARCHER | PHOTOGRAPHY MATTHEW HOWELL

No, not the Le Mans-winning DBR1, but its larger-engined sibling, the DBR2. It, too, might have won the 24 Hours, and it's a superb car in its own right

BROTHER



G

iven the success and significance of the DBR1, it's no surprise that its big brother tends to be overlooked when people talk about great Aston Martins. But the DBR2 deserves its share of the limelight, even if it didn't have so many famous wins. It came close to greatness itself – it could have won Le Mans in 1957, according to John Wyer. As with the DBR4 Grand Prix car, the record books do not really tell us what a special car it is. So we need to look a little deeper.

To understand the DBR2, it's best to view it as the confluence of three separate strands: ever-changing motorsport regulations; the birth of the DB4 road car, and the saga of the ill-fated racing Lagondas of the mid-1950s. I'll explain.

Back then, regulations were changed with less notice than would ever be tolerated today. The DBR1, for example, was built for the 2.5-litre class in 1956, but in 1957, the capacity limit for the World Sportscar Championship was changed to 3 litres. That was fine because the DBR1's engine was designed to be able to run as a 3-litre. But for Le Mans in 1957 the rules were further relaxed and there was no capacity limit, thus putting the DBR1s at a disadvantage.

Then, as today, the World Championship was important but Le Mans was the real prize. Fortunately, Aston had time to respond and build a larger-capacity car for 1957, and that car would be the DBR2. Which is where the DB4,

or more pertinently its engine, enters the story. Both car and engine were well into their development by early 1957 and, although chief engineer Tadek Marek hadn't envisaged the DB4 engine as a racing unit, general manager Wyer thought otherwise.

With its alloy block and designed capacity of 3.7 litres, Marek's six had the potential to be a large and powerful racing engine, even without the twin-plug heads of the later DB4 GT. Over the years it has been seen in sizes ranging from 3.0 to 4.9 litres, but for 1957 the engine would race in 3.7-litre form.

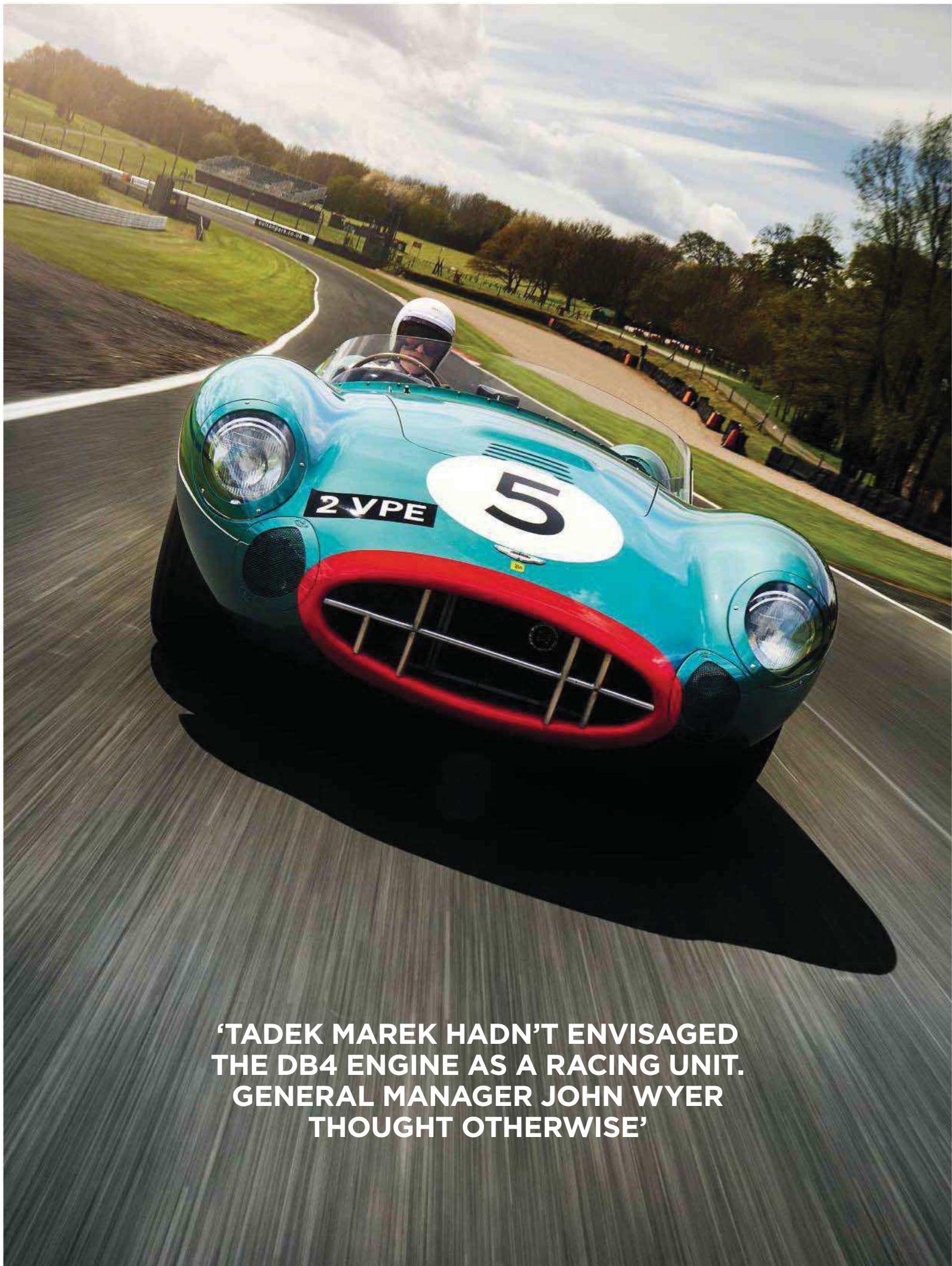
The third element of the story is the car itself, and the DBR2's chassis had actually already appeared at Le Mans, two years earlier, in the form of a racing Lagonda...

David Brown was a long-time fan of the Lagonda marque and, having bought the company in 1947, wasted little time in starting a line of elegant Lagonda road cars, which continued right up to the DB4-based Rapide of 1962. Brown also liked the idea of a racing car with a large V12 engine, to take the fight to the big-engined Ferraris and target not just class honours but outright victory, and Lagonda had history with V12s from the pre-war period.

The racing Lagonda project had been running since 1951 and two cars finally took to the track in 1954. In essence, the new V12 engine was two DB3S straight-sixes arranged in a 'V' but with an alloy block, and it was mounted in a stretched

Right and above

At a glance, a DBR2 could be easily mistaken for a DBR1, but in fact it's slightly bigger in almost every dimension, and under the skin it's a completely different animal. Only two cars were completed; this is DBR2/1, which had by far the most distinguished racing career



**'TADEK MAREK HADN'T ENVISAGED
THE DB4 ENGINE AS A RACING UNIT.
GENERAL MANAGER JOHN WYER
THOUGHT OTHERWISE'**



version of the DB3S chassis. Visually related to the Aston, the cars looked very handsome and sounded even better. But power was disappointing, the engine had oil pressure issues, and the results were not very special. Worse, the Lagonda was slower than the DB3S.

The V12 engine might well have benefited from development, but weight and lack of chassis stiffness were big issues that could more readily be fixed. So Aston Martin set to work on a new chassis for 1955.

The result was Aston's first spaceframe, a tubular central-backbone chassis that was both light and stiff. In fact, with the body off, it looked almost like the chassis of a single-seater. The front suspension was similar to the DBR1's with trailing arms and torsion bars, while the rear had torsion bars supporting a de Dion tube.

Two chassis were built to carry the Lagonda V12 and one car was completed in time for Le Mans, 1955. Alas, it would retire after a loose fuel cap deprived the engine of petrol. More

tellingly, the Lagonda was still eclipsed by the DB3S in performance and straight after Le Mans the entire venture was abandoned. The engines went back into the 1954 chassis and were sold, and the two chassis from 1955 were put to one side, waiting for their moment to come.

TED CUTTING AND his team knew that the 1955 Lagonda spaceframe was a very good thing. So, with opportunity calling, the two chassis were re-purposed and took on a second and rather better life in two DBR2s. Fitting the DB4 engine was straightforward, and it was mated to the underrated and little-used David Brown S532 five-speed gearbox.

The body was a variant of Cutting's DBR1 masterpiece but slightly larger in all dimensions because the chassis was 3 inches longer and the track 1½ inches wider. The most notable difference externally between the two cars is the cockpit, which is far wider because the driver sits outside the central chassis section. So the

Above and right

DBR2/1 wearing the same number that it wore at Le Mans in 1957 (opposite page, top right). Engine was a development of the Tadek Marek-designed straight-six that powered the DB4: originally in 3.7-litre form for Le Mans, later as a 4.2 when it went to race in the US, which is how it is today, making around 340bhp on triple Webers



Getty Images



**'NO FLY-BY-WIRE NONSENSE HERE;
THE THROTTLE IS A DIRECT LINE
TO THE ENGINE ROOM'**





John Ross, Jarrolds.com

DBR2 is a bigger car – and it looks it – but the proportions are still wonderful, thanks to the unerring eye of Ted Cutting.

The first, DBR2/1, was completed just in time for Le Mans in 1957, and is the car featured here. Fitted with six single-choke Webers, it was driven by the privateer Whitehead brothers and was so fast on the Mulsanne that they backed-off for fear that Aston would give the car to a works driver pairing – and this despite the fact that it had a top-end misfire. It eventually retired after 83 laps with a blocked gearbox breather, but its pace was such that John Wyr came to the view that it could have won that year.

DBR2/1 reappeared at Silverstone a few months later, finishing third in the hands of Noel Cunningham-Reid behind Salvadori in DBR2/2. For 1958, however, a capacity limit of 3 litres for the World Sportscar Championship meant that the DBR2s were relegated to non-Championship races. It was in just such a race that Stirling Moss won the British Empire Trophy in DBR2/1 at Oulton Park from Tony Brooks in the sister car. Moss also won at Goodwood, while Tony Brooks took 5th at Silverstone and Carroll Shelby 3rd at Spa.

In 1959, DBR2/1 was sent to the US with a 4.2-litre version of the Marek six and notched up a number of victories in the hands of George

Constantine, doing much to promote the Aston marque. But time, technology and rules moved on again and, by 1960, both DBR2s were back at Aston Martin to be sold to privateers. Between June 1957 and January 1960, DBR2s made 30 race starts, winning 12, with another eight podiums. By most measures, the DBR2 was an extraordinarily successful racing car.

DBR2/1 has served many enthusiastic owners over the years. In 1987 it was taken on the Mille Miglia retrospective by Victor Gauntlett with Prince Michael of Kent. It has been raced and owned by Steve O'Rourke, the late Pink Floyd manager, and today it resides with one of the leading lights of the Historic racing world, who has generously agreed to let your correspondent take to the track at Oulton Park, virtually 60 years to the day since Moss's victory.

APPROACHING THE DBR2 can be disorienting. From some angles it looks just like a DBR1 in size and proportion; from others it looks bigger, but peer into the cockpit and the difference is clear to see. The central backbone of the tubular chassis dominates the centre of the car, pushing the driver's seat over to the right. Open the tiny, featherweight door (there more for regulation-compliance than aiding entry) and there's a wide sill to step over before you sink deep into

Above

Moss in this very car at Oulton Park in 1958, on his way to victory in the British Empire Trophy race; almost exactly 60 years to the day later, the car is back at the Cheshire circuit for our photoshoot, looking – and feeling – as fabulous as ever



the car. Your bottom seems almost to be at tarmac level, and everything feels just right. The gearbox is nestled in the centre of the chassis, the short lever set higher than in a DBR1 and in a fabulous, exposed metal gate, perfectly placed in relation to the steering wheel.

There's some apprehension about driving the car with no silencers at Oulton Park, but sound is a complex thing and, though it *sounds* loud, it doesn't alarm the decibel meters. About a metre of open exhaust nonetheless gives an intimacy with the marriage of air, fuel, sparks and an Aston engine. This one is as alive and breathing as can be, crackling back off the trees.

The engine is similar to its 1959 4.2-litre spec, so it has vast power and even more impressive torque. Even trundling down the pitlane, the latent power is apparent and, once opened up on the track, it's clear it has very deep reserves. Triple twin-choke Webers give a wonderfully crisp throttle response. No fly-by-wire nonsense here; this is a direct line to the engine room.

The race clutch feels more 'on-off' than a road item but easily manageable all the same, while the five-speed DB gearbox is a viceless joy: it's a shame that Aston Martin did not fit this 'box to the DB4 or DB5; it's nicer and lighter than a ZF. No hesitation, no imprecision; the gear is selected so easily and 340 horses are unleashed, which means wheelspin in 1st, 2nd and 3rd, maybe 4th if you're feeling brave.

The 'screen gives good wind protection but the sensation of speed is total and made all the greater by the exhaust note letting you know exactly where you are in the rev-band, though the Jaeger dial is right in your line of sight, too. The uninterrupted view out makes the car seem small and placing it on the track on any type of corner is a doddle. Turn-in is reassuring, power-on cornering holds no dramas, and it stops as well as it goes, with a progressive, feelsome pedal allied to fiercely strong stopping power.

With a light wind buffeting your upper body, plenty of engine noise and a comfortable ride, the overall sensations are not just those of a sports car but almost of a GT car. It has such muscular power and a feeling of unburstability. Le Mans would be its natural home and I can imagine it romping down the Mulsanne at 180mph-plus with ease for hour after hour. The DBR1 is rapier-sharp and delicate in its manner; this is a full-on track fighter, a big-hearted beast.

The DBR2 is surely the most spectacular open racing car that Aston Martin ever made. It is easy to see why more modern racers such as Ray Mallock and Willie Green rate it as a great Aston. It might be the overlooked bigger brother but it is a well-mannered giant, a sportscar masterpiece and yet, for all that, a product of serendipity. **V**

Thanks to Lord Bamford, Michael Lee, Willie Green, Billy Souter, Neill McReynolds and Peter Bradfield.

Specification

ENGINE In-line 6-cylinder, 4164cc, dohc, 12 valves, three Weber carburettors

MAX POWER 340bhp @ 5750rpm

MAX TORQUE n/a

TRANSMISSION Five-speed manual, rear-wheel drive, limited-slip differential

SUSPENSION Front: trailing arms, torsion bars. Rear: de Dion tube, trailing links, longitudinal torsion bars

STEERING Rack-and-pinion

BRAKES Disc brakes all-round, 317mm front, 292mm rear

WHEELS 16in wire-spoke

WEIGHT 801kg **POWER TO WEIGHT** 430bhp/ton **TOP SPEED** 180mph+

ASTON MARTIN V8 VANTAGE COUPE, MANUAL, LHD, 1985



The car has benefitted from contemporary works being carried out by RS Williams Ltd (Factory Heritage Service Centre) in 2015. Further works were also carried out in 2016 by an official Factory Heritage Service Centre. The car is fitted with a ZF manual gearbox and an electric sunroof. The original wheels are also available.

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TRANSFORMER

The moment it appeared, the DB4 turned Aston Martin into one of the world's most desirable marques. And it's still weaving its magic today

WORDS PETER TOMALIN | PHOTOGRAPHY MATTHEW HOWELL







Sixty years ago in October, Aston Martin launched the DB4 at the Paris motor show. It was one of those pivotal moments that happen only a handful of times in the story of a motor manufacturer, and nothing would ever be quite the same again.

There had been plenty of good-looking Astons before, from the pre-war Ulster to the DB MkIII that was the company's production mainstay by the late '50s. The DB4 brought something new. Unmistakably Aston Martin, but glamorous and sophisticated in a way no Aston had ever been before, it bestowed Ferrari/Maserati levels of desirability. That was no accident, of course, David Brown having turned to Italy to clothe the new engine and chassis. The shape was credited to Touring of Milan – these were the days before car designers were openly feted, so the actual stylist, Federico Formenti, went unsung at the time.

While the grille was clearly a version of the one that graced the DB MkIII, it was wider and lower and somehow more exotic. The vents in the front wings, adapted from the DBR racers', would become an Aston signature. The balance of proportions was perfection. But there was nothing showy about it. The genius of the design was the way it blended Italian elegance with a kind of tailored, clipped Britishness.

Touring was also responsible for the method of construction, which again was new to Aston. Its patented Superleggera (super-light) system comprised a framework of small-diameter steel tubes attached to a sturdy steel platform and clothed in aluminium body panels. Touring licensed the system to Aston Martin, so that DB4s could be built at Aston's recently acquired Tickford works in Newport Pagnell.

The method gave a much more rigid structure, to the benefit of performance and refinement. A welcome bonus was that it allowed a larger door aperture and lower sills, providing easier access to the sumptuously trimmed interior than was the case with earlier DB models.

The other big news, of course, lay under the bonnet. This was the first road car of the David Brown era with an all-new engine that owed nothing (well, maybe just a little) to the LB6 unit acquired when Brown bought Lagonda.

The new, 3.7-litre, all-Aston engine was an exotic creation, featuring an aluminum cylinder block and crankcase topped by an aluminium cylinder head with twin chain-driven overhead camshafts. As you might already have read, it appeared first in the DBR2 race car, as featured on the preceding pages. But the DB4 was the car it was conceived for, and with twin SU HD8 carburettors it made a quoted 240bhp at 5500rpm (though, as with most claims from that era, we should take this with a pinch of salt).

All 'regular' DB4s drove through a four-speed David Brown gearbox when new. Top speed was dependent on the final drive, but in 1960 *Autocar* recorded 140mph, which was an impressive result and put it on close terms with the Ferraris of the day. As did the handling and ride, though it was here that engineering chief Harold Beach had been forced to compromise.



While, at the front, Aston's previous trailing-arm suspension was replaced by double wishbones, plans for a de Dion rear with a solidly mounted diff were dropped because of refinement issues. That said, the live rear axle with twin trailing arms and Watt's linkage was well-proven, there was rack-and-pinion steering instead of the old worm-and-roller set-up, and Dunlop disc brakes all-round. In short, the DB4 was a match for anything from mainland Europe.

Also on a level with the Continental exotica was the price – a whisker under £4000 for the standard car in 1959 – but the new Aston Martin nevertheless earned rave reviews and the old Tickford works was soon at capacity.

If you're still in any doubt about the DB4's place at Aston's top table, consider that it would soon spawn the fabulous, lightweight DB4 GT and its even more glamorous Zagato-bodied derivative, which in turn begat the ultra-streamlined Project Cars that would eventually nudge 200mph on the Mulsanne straight. And what was the DB5 – the most celebrated Aston of them all – if not another evolution of the DB4?

But back to the 'regular' DB4, and the Aston aficionados identify five distinct DB4 evolutions: Series 1 to 5. The first was, to most eyes, the prettiest and the purest, with its frameless side windows, elegant 'cathedral' rear lights (so named because their one-piece design resembled a church or cathedral window) and bumpers yet to acquire the over-riders of later cars. The earliest 4s were not without problems, though, mostly with the engines overheating – only solved by fitting a larger sump and an oil cooler – while those frameless side windows never sat in their rubber seals quite as intended.

So there were myriad changes – and almost all for the better – during the DB4's five-year lifespan, and it would take the rest of this article to detail them all, so we'll stick to the highlights. A Convertible was launched in 1961, of which only 70 were built and which today fetch astronomical sums. Echoing a theme of this issue, the same year also saw the debut of the Vantage version, which had the Perspex fairings over the headlights that had first been seen on the 4 GT and would, of course, be carried over to

'AUTOCAR
RECORDED
140MPH, WHICH
PUT THE DB4
ON CLOSE
TERMS WITH
THE FERRARIS
OF THE DAY'





the DB5 (in fact, to most eyes, a DB4 Vantage is pretty much a dead-ringer for a DB5).

Just to muddy things further, you could also order a standard DB4 with the Vantage's 'Special Series' engine, which featured three rather than two SU carburetors and saw peak power climb from 240 to a quoted 266bhp. The car you see here – a Series 5 – is just such a car.

Actually it's a pretty special example, owned back in the 1980s by then Aston boss Victor Gauntlett (and even raced by him in Dubai), later the subject of a sympathetic restoration by RS Williams and Bodylines. With the engine taken out to 4.2 litres and overdrive fitted, it was sold last year by Aston Martin Works and now lives in Germany, where it's used regularly. Still in its original colour and with its original numberplate, it's about as good as it gets.

A similar car today would clearly command a premium, but where are DB4 values generally? After rocketing towards the stratosphere a few years ago, they've dropped back slightly and right now both buyers and sellers are in a generally cautious mood. The best cars can still command £500,000 and more. At the lower end,

tired but useable examples might fetch around £350,000. 'Projects' aren't a lot less, because the restoration costs will be just the same and can be anything from £250,000 to... well, double that.

Unless the car you're viewing has had a full, photo-supported restoration by a well-regarded specialist or you're lucky enough to find one that's had just a small handful of owners and continually documented maintenance, then you need to know just what you're getting into. These are very old cars now; at the time they were built, rust prevention was cursory. Even on restored cars, if best practice wasn't followed, body rot, often hidden, is the biggest concern.

Anywhere aluminium panels meet steel tube – wheelarches, door bottoms, around the bonnet opening – you might see signs of electrolytic corrosion bubbling up on the surface. The steel of the platform chassis can rust away, too, so check the floor of the cabin and boot, the outer ends of the underfloor outriggers, and the box-sections that form the sills, accessed via screwed-on cover plates in the wheelarches.

If in doubt, get your prospective purchase assessed by one of the specialists who advertise

DB4 (Special Series engine)

ENGINE In-line 6-cyl, 3670cc, triple SUs
MAX POWER 266bhp @ 5750rpm
MAX TORQUE 255lb ft @ 4500rpm
TRANSMISSION Four-speed manual, rear-wheel drive, limited-slip differential
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, unassisted
BRAKES Discs, 292mm front, 286mm rear
WHEELS 5 x 15in front and rear, wire spoke
TYRES 185 R15 front and rear, Avon radials
WEIGHT c1500kg
POWER TO WEIGHT c180bhp/ton
0-60MPH c7.0sec
TOP SPEED c140mph
PRICE NEW c£4000 in 1959 (c£90,000 in today's money)
VALUES TODAY £350,000-£550,000



Above
Series 5 DB4, shot at Aston Martin Works, was owned by Victor Gauntlett for three years in the '80s. Now being enjoyed by a new owner in Germany

in the pages of this magazine: they could save you a lot of heartache as well as many thousands of pounds. They will also be able to assess the fitness of the engine and transmission. Although the extensive specialist and parts network means anything mechanical can be rebuilt or replaced, major work will not be cheap.

If you're going it alone, check for coolant seeping from the weep-holes on the side of the block under the carburettors, which would suggest the wet liners are no longer sealing, either through failed O-rings or corrosion. And check there's plenty of oil pressure when the engine is hot: at least 70psi at 3000rpm. If you start it from cold, listen for the slap of worn pistons and the rattle of loose timing chains.

A fit, sound DB4 will give years of pleasure. I borrowed a car very much like this one for an early *Vantage* shoot (issue 2) and found it more than capable of running with modern traffic, and that was without any of the upgrades that so many have had fitted in recent times: alternators, power steering, bigger brakes, uprated cooling, improved heat and sound insulation, air-conditioning... Any or all of these can make a car even more pleasurable to own, and, done discreetly, take nothing away from its appeal.

If it means the cars get used more, that has to be a good thing, but even in original spec the DB4 has pace and style to spare. And what better way to celebrate a big birthday than to go for a drive. Life begins at 60, don't you know. **V**

What the road testers said at the time

THE CAR'S LOW, lithe lines – admired everywhere – conceal seats for four full-sized adults and a sensibly sized luggage trunk. The platform chassis permits a low body sill and entry is not difficult, despite the low roofline. Once in the driving seat, it is a pleasure just to sit and examine the fit and finish of every detail. This kind of quality costs money.

Here's a car with the performance of a racing machine and the manners of a town carriage. A gap appears in the traffic, the road is clear for a few hundred yards, and the Aston surges up to 100mph in third gear in a few seconds. The driver of a DB4 is in the happy position of being able to overtake *while slowing down*. He has done his accelerating, has all the speed he needs and can complete the operation smoothly. Not for him the nerve strain of accelerating slowly towards a steadily closing gap.

The seats are superb, upholstered in softest leather, with deep rolls around the edges of cushion and backrest to support one discreetly against high cornering forces. All the controls, from the slim wood-rimmed alloy wheel (on a column adjustable for reach and rake) to the pedals are designed and positioned exactly as one would expect from a company that builds World Champion sports-racing cars.

As the engine starts there is a deep, masculine tone, enough to suggest the presence of 240bhp, but not enough to interfere with the conversation. The clutch, which has to transmit 240lb ft of torque, is fairly heavy to operate, but this is a car a woman can drive. Synchromesh on all gears including first takes effect at a light pressure on the short central lever, and the brakes seem to put down roots that tie you to the ground with irresistible force.

Given full throttle and an open road, the engine really sings; 5500rpm on the standard 3.54 axle gives 50mph in a flash in first gear, 75

in second and 100 in third. Top takes it on to 125mph with barely a pause. For those who have access to more open spaces, the 2.93 axle gives 60 in first, 85 in second, almost 120 in third and a theoretical 150 in top at 5500rpm.

In balance, stability and instant response to the controls, the DB4 is an immense advance over the DB3 [sic] series and comes in the front rank of the world's fastest cars. Driving it is an experience which leaves you elated and awe-struck. You wonder what else life has to offer. But in this case the answer is easy – the short-chassis DB4 GT competition model, which accelerates from 0 to 100mph and stops again, tyres smoking, all in 20 seconds! – **Motor Trend, February, 1960**





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TRACK TEST | EMKA-ASTON





FRONT RUNNER

Last Aston-engined car to lead Le Mans outright? That'll be the little-known but rather brilliant EMKA-Aston Martin

WORDS ANDREW FRANKEL | PHOTOGRAPHY JAYSON FONG



It's a great question for those with a penchant for Aston Martin trivia: when did a car so-powered last hold the lead at the Le Mans 24 Hours? The marque's recent efforts in France have been both mighty and successful, but always in pursuit of class, not outright victory.

Many would probably conclude that it was when the DBR1 of Carroll Shelby and Roy Salvadori swept over the line to claim what remains to date the company's only outright victory in the French classic in 1959. But, as all who know anything about the 1962 race will recall, they'd be wrong. Because three years after that win, Graham Hill appeared at the end of the very first lap in the DB4 GT-based Aston Martin DP212 so far ahead of the field that he appeared to be alone on the track.

But they'd be wrong, too. In fact, the last Aston-powered car to lead Le Mans is this curious-looking device with its no less curious name. For this is the EMKA-Aston Martin C84/1 and in 1985, with our very own Tiff Needell at the wheel, it did indeed lead the field at Le Mans.

The what? The EMKA may sound like something cooked up in a laboratory in some dystopian future – to some it may even look like that – but the truth is far less dramatic. The name is derived from EMma and KAt, the names of the daughters of one Steve O'Rourke, whose day job was to manage Pink Floyd.

Like the Floyd's drummer, Nick Mason, O'Rourke was both car-crazy and a highly accomplished amateur racing driver in his own right. By the time he had the idea that resulted in the EMKA, he'd already raced at Le Mans in a Ferrari Boxer. He wanted Aston Martin to back the venture but, in the end, the factory decided to help Robin Hamilton with his rival Nimrod project; undeterred, O'Rourke decided to do it anyway.

The car was designed by Len Bailey, who was most

Right and below

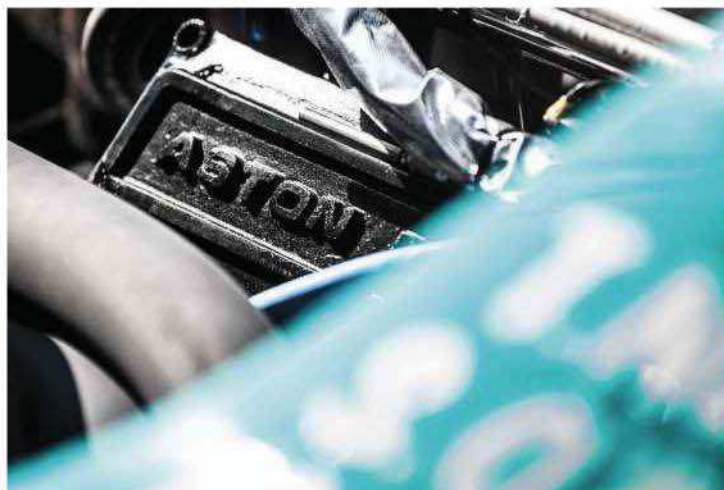
Things were simple then: just bare aluminium and a smattering of dials and switches. Below: the mighty 5.3-litre Aston V8 amidships

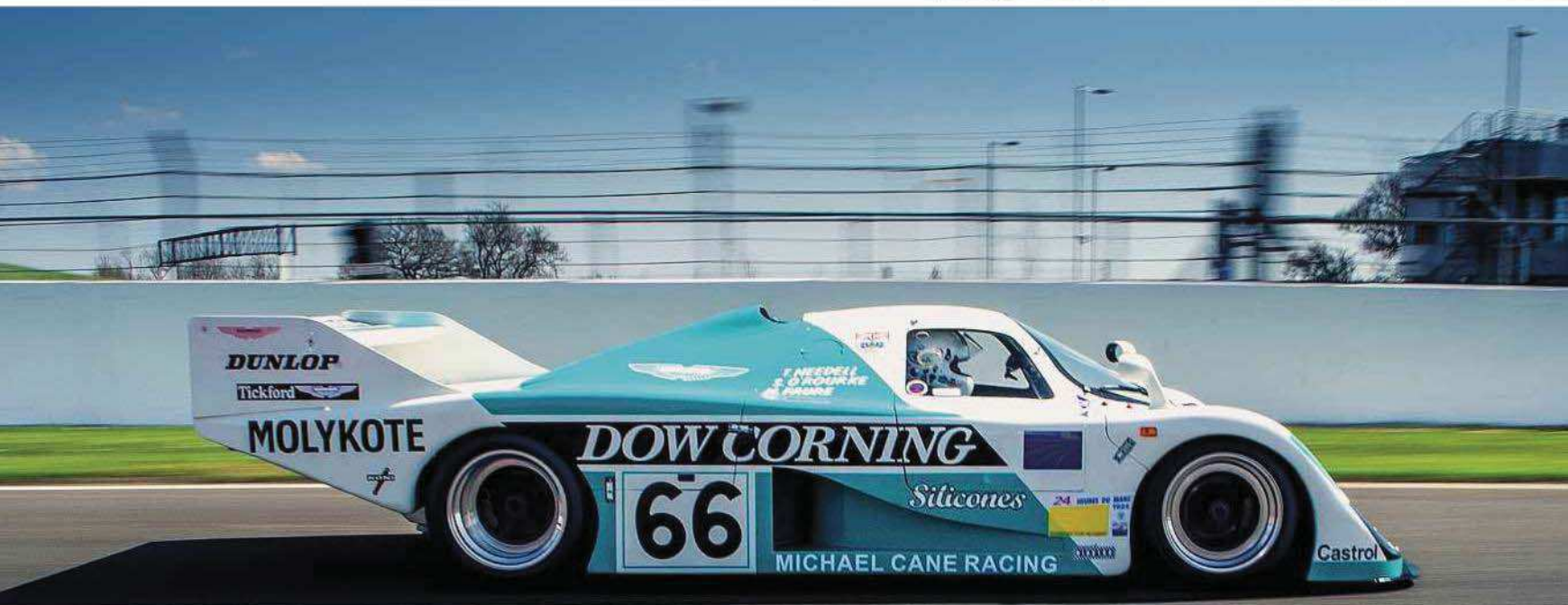
famous for his work on the Ford GT40 in the 1960s, and powered by Aston's famed 5.3-litre V8. It comprised a simple aluminium monocoque clothed in glassfibre bodywork and was designed to meet the rules of the new Group C classification. Unfortunately, Porsche was in the same game and came up with a handy device it called the 956 which, with its 962 derivative, became the most successful prototype sports-racing car there has ever been. Add in some formidably fast Ferrari-powered works Lancias and best of the rest was the absolute most anyone else could ever hope for.

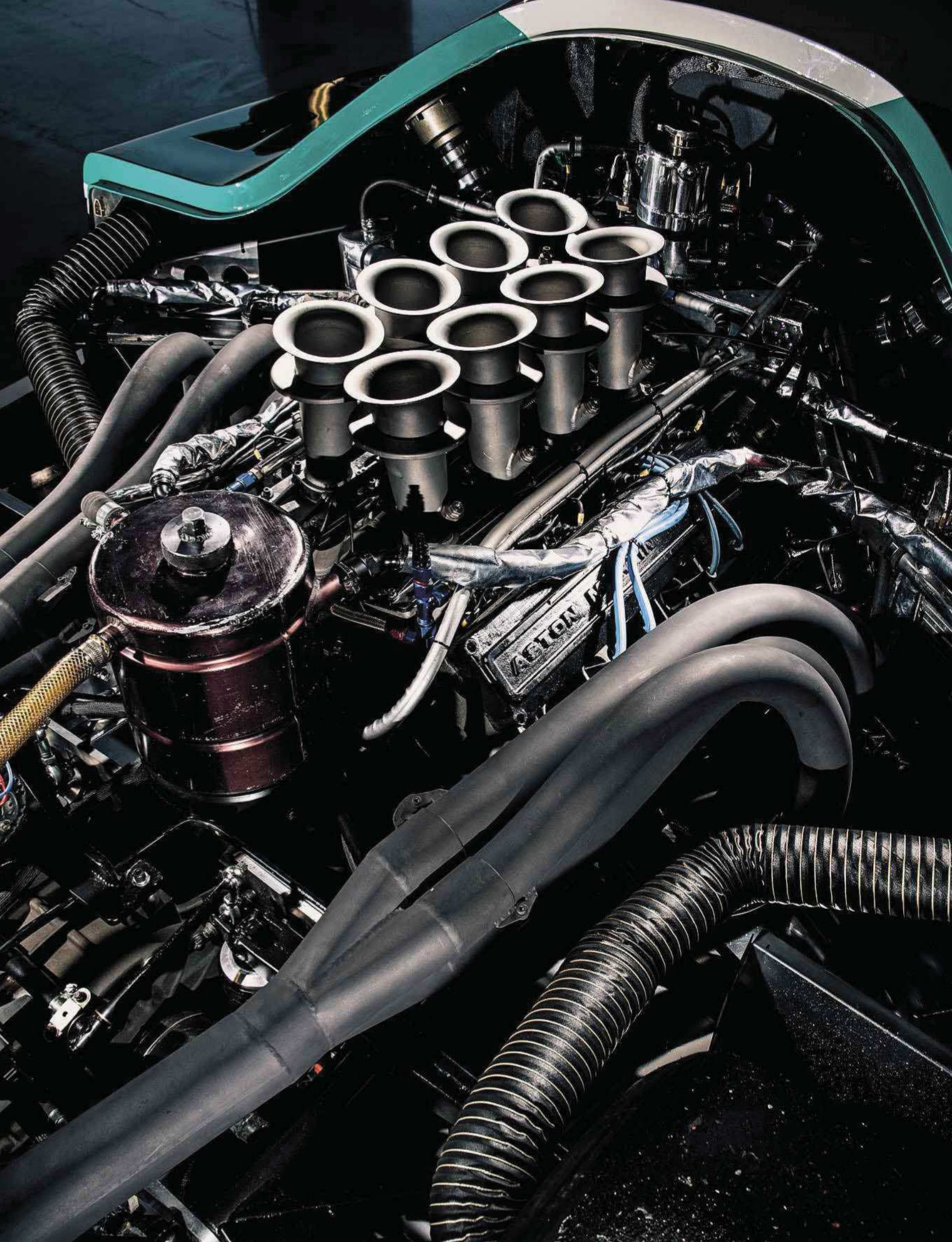
But, in its debut season of 1983, the EMKA wasn't even that. At Le Mans it was a staggering 26 seconds a lap slower than the best Porsche and, gallingly, seven seconds slower than the Nimrod. It was driven by Needell, O'Rourke and professional race driver Nick Faure, who today remembers: 'The car got up to 180mph and just stopped. That would be pretty inconvenient anywhere, but at Le Mans without the chicanes? It was completely hopeless. Porsches were pinging past us going 50mph faster, and more...' At the end of the race, the EMKA came 17th out of 20 finishers, a rather sobering 95 laps behind the winning Porsche.

It seemed the EMKA endeavour was already over, all the more so when the car failed to appear at all in the 1984 season. In fact it was being reworked from stem to stern by race car designer Richard Owen, who discovered the fundamental problem was not a lack of power per se, but the engine being starved of air at speed. So alongside other

**'IMAGINE MORE POWER THAN A V12 VANTAGE S
IN SOMETHING THE WEIGHT OF A SMART CAR'**





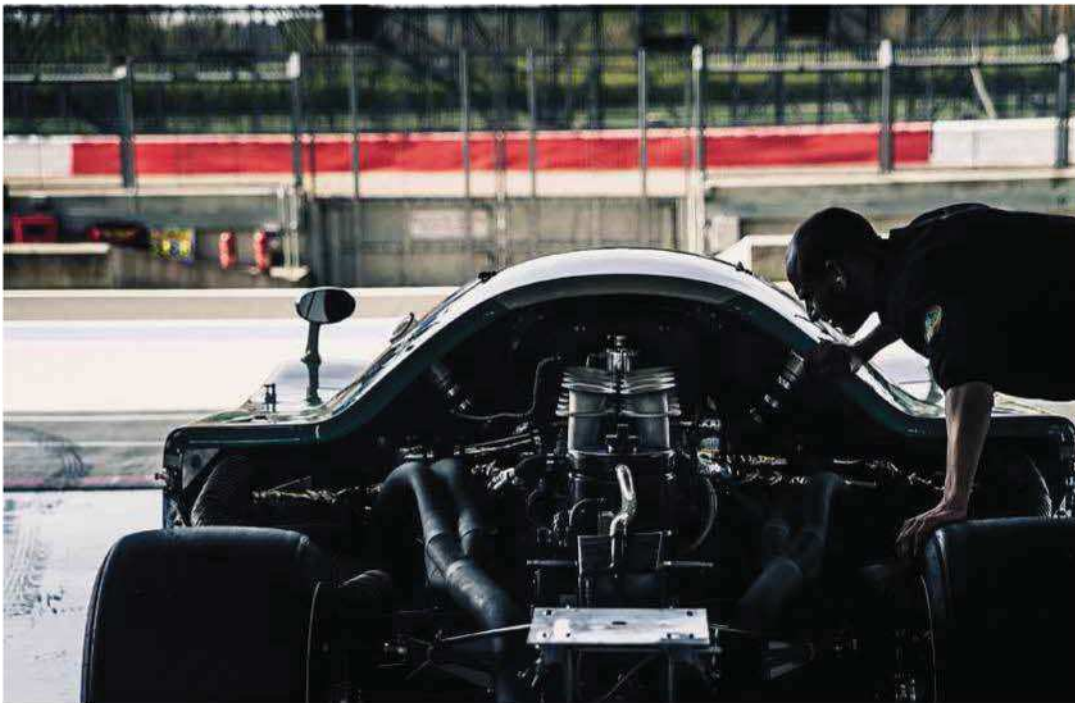


TRACK TEST | EMKA-ASTON



**'I'VE NEVER FELT MORE
INSTANTLY AT HOME
IN A CAR WITH THIS
KIND OF POTENTIAL'**





aerodynamic and mechanical modifications, he designed a new air intake for the engine.

The effect was dramatic to say the least. Tiff qualified 9sec faster than he had in the same car two years earlier, ahead even of three of the Porsches. It was the fastest non-turbo car, in front of two V12 prototype Jaguar XJR-5s. Now instead of struggling up to 180mph on the straight, the EMKA flew past 200mph.

Tiff started the race and by the end of his first stint lay in a remarkable third place entirely on merit. And when he came into the pits, team manager Michael Cane decided only to part-fuel the car, with the result that when the last of the two cars that had lain ahead of him came in to re-fuel, the EMKA did indeed lead Le Mans.

The fairy tale did not last. The car went well but first had a clutch problem and then, with little more than an hour remaining, Tiff pitted, reporting a distinct smell of fuel. A fractured fuel pipe was spraying high-octane petrol all over the red hot engine... But even with the time it took to patch it up, the car still came 11th, beaten only by Porsches and Lancias. In the world's greatest race, it was absolutely the best of the rest.

I find it at Silverstone after a complete restoration by Michael Hibbert Motor Engineers. Its bodywork is new because the original is now too fragile to fit on the car, but otherwise the car is as it was at Le Mans in 1985. And although it has 600bhp and weighs just 890kg (imagine more power than a V12 Vantage S in something weighing the same as a Smart ForTwo), it's not in the least difficult to understand. Once you've wriggled into the tight racing seat, you notice that the steering wheel is unadorned by buttons, switches or lights and that the all-round visibility is rather good. The dashboard contains a simple scattering of analogue dials and a single row of switches, while there are three pedals in the footwell, and five gears in the H-pattern gearbox. Just like a Ford Fiesta.

But a Fiesta doesn't make the ground shake when you fire it up, nor does it make the insides of your ears itch even through ear plugs, a balaclava and thick Arai helmet.



Tiff has already told me that the car should be completely viceless; the track is dry, the enormous Avon slick tyres are brand new and no-one has told me how many laps I can do or how many revs I can use: there'll never be a better chance to understand a Group C racer than this. But as I pull the heavy gearstick across and back into first and chug down the pitlane, I'm still scared witless of damaging something, or just making a twit of myself. I've driven a few such cars and know they exist on the outer edge of what my sadly limited talents can handle.

And yet I've never felt more instantly at home in a car with this kind of potential. At any speed, the acceleration feels as though a wrecking ball has been swung through the back of the car and it shows maximum revs in top gear with contemptuous ease, equating to over 170mph even on sprint gearing. And yet for some reason I find it all just indescribably exhilarating, not utterly terrifying as expected.



This says everything about the car and nothing about me. It doesn't have turbos like a Porsche 962 so there's neither lag nor an almighty bang in the back to scare you witless; and Aston's 5.3-litre V8 is actually quite compact compared with the 7-litre V12 used by Group C Jaguars, so you don't have this enormous weight behind you trying to wrench the back loose in the corners. Instead you have an engine that never delivers a single horsepower more than you ask for and a chassis that's so friendly and indulgent that within five laps the steering is gently writhing in your hands as you manage mild understeer on entry to corners, while at the exit you can dose the rear slicks with enough torque to bring them right to their traction limits, where the car just goes deliciously neutral and you thunder onto the next straight.

As for its speed, all I can tell you is that I was sharing the track with a lot of modern racing cars from the BTCC and the like, and to this car – designed in the early 1980s – they

were simply obstacles, approached at great speed and dispatched without delay.

In fact, once you've acclimatised to its pace, the only difficult aspect of driving the EMKA is the strength required to manhandle it around the track. Modern sports racers have power steering, flappy paddles and air-conditioning, but in the EMKA you are on your own. After fewer than ten laps I was aware of being joined by a new noise in the cockpit, a panting sound quite clearly coming from me. The idea of doing a double stint in the heat of Le Mans in June is beyond my imagining.

But I'd do anything for another set of slicks and a few more laps of a circuit I know well. Yes, I can see why the Porsches were so much quicker, but I now know why those who drove the EMKA loved every minute behind its wheel. It may not have been the fastest out there but, when it came to the provision of pure driving pleasure, I expect it existed in a class of one.

Above and previous pages

Frankel stretches the EMKA's legs around Silverstone; with sprint gearing, it races up to 170mph with ease; at Le Mans in 1985 it was powering past 200mph

From zero to hero: how the EMKA was transformed

OF THE THREE DRIVERS who raced the EMKA-Aston Martin at Le Mans in 1983 and '85, Steve O'Rourke is no longer with us, but both Tiff Needell and Nick Faure look back on that time with a good deal of warmth.

'Given where it started off in 1983, it was phenomenally quick in 1985 but really good to drive, too,' says Nick. 'It went like a bomb down the straight and was lovely around the rest of the lap, too. I have very fond memories of that car.'

'For the most part the race was good. Tiff was the quickest of the three of us, while I was Mr Consistent. Steve drove well, too – I suppose about 5sec off the car's ultimate pace, which isn't so much around Le Mans.'

**'IT WAS
PHENOMENALLY
QUICK IN 1985 BUT
REALLY GOOD
TO DRIVE, TOO'**

Tiff remembers it equally fondly. 'It couldn't get out of its own way in 1983,' he laughs. 'It really was a disaster – as the speed rose it just ran out of power. But once Richard Owen had sorted it out, it was a brilliant little car. Such fun to drive, and with no downforce you just spent your time sliding it around. It wasn't as quick as the Porsche I'd raced the year before [a Kremer 956], but it was far nicer to drive.'

'In the race I had a riot. All the Porsches were being quite conservative with their fuel, so I just weaved my way past. Having been so slow in 1983, the thing now just flew down the straight. I could see the Joest and Canon cars up ahead and had no trouble staying with them.'

'And yes, while [team manager] Michael Cane arranged for the car to be first, once we were there, there we stayed. Nothing came past...

'It was a pity we had that problem at the end [the fuel leak that took time to repair and cost them a top-ten finish]. When I came in, they took off the engine cover and saw fuel spraying all over the red hot engine. I can remember someone leaning in and saying: "I think you'd better get out of the car."'



Paul Chudecki

Specification

ENGINE V8, 5340cc **MAX POWER** c600bhp @ 7000rpm **TRANSMISSION** Five-speed manual, rear-wheel drive, limited-slip differential **SUSPENSION** Front: double wishbones, coil springs, adjustable telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar. Rear: lower wishbones, upper A-bracket, coil springs, adjustable telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar **STEERING** Rack-and-pinion **BRAKES** Vented discs **TYRES** Avon slicks **WEIGHT** 890kg **POWER TO WEIGHT** c680bhp/ton **TOP SPEED** c220mph

Above right and below
Tiff Needell pits after leading
the 1985 24Hrs, and below, in
action in the same race



Getty Images



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2003/03 plate Aston Martin DB7 Vantage GT finished in Grigio Titano with All Charcoal leather and charcoal carpeting. Sports seats, Alcantara headlining. Factory heated front windscreen and powerfold mirrors. Climate control knobs, gear knob, pedal pads and sill plates are all in satin finish aluminium. Parchment with black instrument dials and clock. **42,000 miles.....£P.O.A.**

2003/03 plate Aston Martin DB7 Vantage GT finished in Tour de France Blue metallic with grey leather interior and blue carpeting. GT sports seats, Parchment with black instruments and clock. Climate control knobs, gear knob, drilled alloy pads and sill plates are all in satin finish aluminium. A rare low owner. **59,000 miles.....£P.O.A.**

1995/N plate DB7 Coupe with automatic transmission, finished in Chiltern Green mica metallic with Parchment and Forest Green duo-tone hide interior, Parchment Alcantara headlining, green carpeting and burr walnut veneers. One owner from new, full history, original example, amazing opportunity. **9,000 miles.....£P.O.A.**

1996/N plate DB7 Coupe with manual transmission, finished in Chiltern Green Mica metallic with Charcoal and Forest Green duo-tone hide interior, Parchment Alcantara headlining, green carpeting and burr walnut veneers. Heated front windscreen, cruise control, bright stainless steel mesh front grille, Becker Grand Prix Radio Head Unit with Bluetooth, smaller hub caps for the alloy wheels. **17,000 miles.....£P.O.A.**

2003/03 plate Aston Martin DB7 Vantage Volante with touchtronic gearbox, finished in Nero Daytona. Black Metallic with Charcoal hide interior. One of just ten "Keswick" Limited Edition cars. 19in alloy road wheels, sports exhaust, premium audio with sat nav, white-faced instruments and clock. Wind deflector and charcoal leather hood cover. Unique numbered sill plaques. **48,000 miles.....£P.O.A.**

1999/V plate Aston Martin DB7 Vantage Volante with automatic transmission, finished in Aston Martin British Racing Green non-metallic with Forest Green and Saddle Tan leather trim, green carpeting, black mohair hood and burr walnut veneers. Sports exhaust, large bore tail pipes, wind deflector, rear park distance control, powerfold mirrors. **67,000 miles.....£P.O.A.**

1996/P plate DB7 Coupe with manual transmission, finished in Aston Martin Pentland Green metallic with duo-tone olive green and parchment leather interior. Parchment Alcantara headlining, green carpeting and burr walnut veneers. Sports exhaust, stainless steel mesh front grille and Aliseo split rim wheels with polished outer rims. **81,000 miles.....£P.O.A.**

2011/11 plate Rapide with touchtronic transmission, finished in Lightning Silver metallic with Aurora Blue leather interior, silver stitching, tailor's grey Alcantara headlining, Caspian Blue carpets and piano black veneers. Silver brake calipers, cooled front and rear seats, rear seat entertainment system. **17,000 miles.....SOLD**

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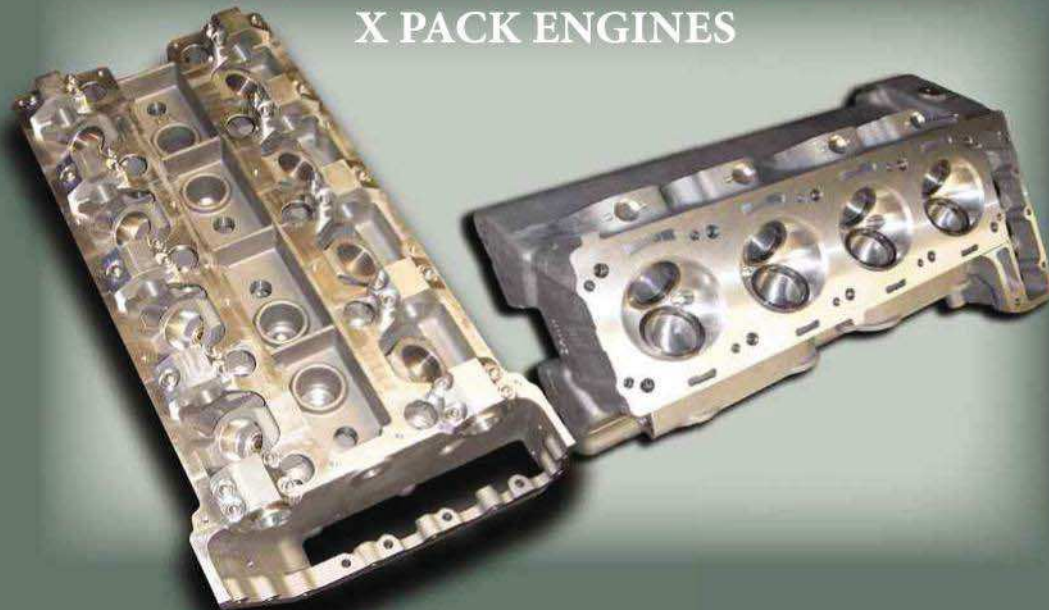
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WORDS STEPHEN ARCHER

PHOTOGRAPHY DAWN DEPPI







Clockwise from left
Larry Hohmann works on a DB5 bumper; DB4 GT (foreground) is having its engine rebuilt; Jon Clerk (left) and Lance Evans have been in partnership since 2000 but both have many more years of experience with Austons

It's some 70 years since Aston Martins were first sold into the United States and, in that time, the population has grown almost exponentially. Yet despite the large number now residing there, it still comes as a delightful surprise when you walk through the door of a seemingly nondescript workshop in rural America to be greeted by the sights and smells of numerous old Austons. It's almost as though a part of England has been transplanted to the former colony.

For decades, Steel Wings has been one of a small handful of 'go to' Aston specialists in the US, and it's clear from the moment you enter that this is a long-established enterprise. Experience speaks from every corner of the building. Without being chaotic, every space is taken up with the ephemera of the marque: important parts, books, assemblies and, of course, cars: all bestow Steel Wings with the authority of time.

Rather like a labyrinthine puzzle, each passage opens up into another fascinating space: racks of DB parts in one, an engine build area in another, almost-complete cars in a brightly lit assembly room, and one large space from where most of the noise emanates: the chassis and fabrication room.

Make no mistake, Steel Wings may be in the 'new country' but it has vast Aston Martin experience behind it. There are few people working in the Aston restoration business anywhere in the world that go back 50 years, but co-founder Lance Evans is in that elite group. And rather than make a big song and dance about all of this, the company just gets on with the job and lets its customers and results do the talking.

There is a reverential focus to the work being done here and, when I arrive, I find co-owner Jon Clerk not sitting at his desk, but attending to a DB4 cylinder head. Along with skill and expertise, modesty and humility are recurring themes. It's very un-shouty and, dare I say, very un-American! You just know that some of the very best Austons have passed through these premises – and continue to do so.

THERE IS A COMMON PATTERN to the way that businesses such as Steel Wings emerge, and it seems to be a combination of serendipity, passion and unforeseen demand. While both Lance and Jon have been acknowledged experts in Austons for decades, in fact they only came together in 2000.

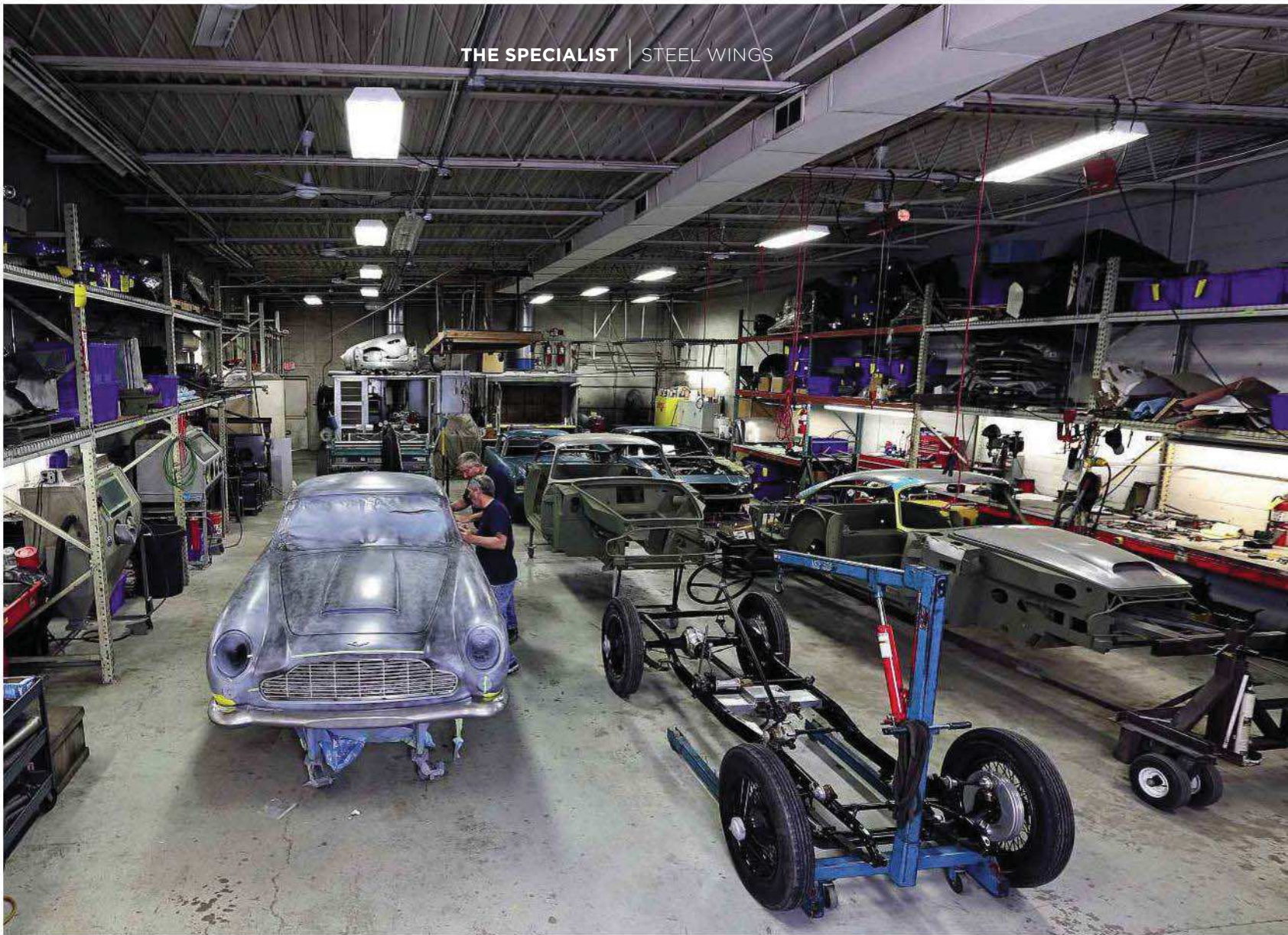
Lance, formerly a Toyota troubleshooter way back in the 1960s, joined Aston legend Rex Woodgate at the North American Aston Martin importer in 1969. As Lance drily recalls: 'Neither Rex nor I were sure that the relationship would last – but it did. It was great fun and I learnt a lot from him. Before I knew it, I had been there ten years.'

Both are strong characters – and both possessors of most impressive facial hair! – but they had huge respect for each



'THEY JUST GET ON WITH THE JOB AND LET THE CUSTOMERS AND THE RESULTS DO THE TALKING'







other. And as Jon says: 'For anyone to gain Rex's respect, they had to be good. Rex's background in Astons went back to the '50s as a works mechanic and he was a stickler for quality.'

It was the finest training possible. But Lance was very much his own man and in 1979 he went on to set up the Evans Service Company in Orelan, Pennsylvania, 'not because I wanted to leave Aston Martin but because they left me!' The importer was moving to Greenwich, Connecticut, and the move did not appeal to him.

He went on to build a sizeable Aston restoration business with around 12 employees before moving to Warminster PA in 1989. The business had all the services under one roof but Lance left the paint shop behind in Orelan – it did not really hold his interest and his real enthusiasm was for mechanical work. A man true to his calling, he has lost count of the number of Aston engines that he has built over the decades. One of the most notable UK engine specialists gave Steel Wings a strong endorsement, which says a lot for the quality of its work.

The move to Warminster also prompted the name change in order to give the business a fresh image and 'Steel Wings' was chosen as a homage to the beautiful (steel) wings on the 15/98 Aston of 1936, for which Lance holds a particular affection.

Through the '90s, Lance built up the business, earning its reputation for high-quality work on Astons of all periods. There are many pre-war models in the US but few people with expert knowledge: Lance is one of them. When I visit, he's

Left and above
Matthew Vaillancourt does a trial fit of some DB5 trim before it goes for paint, and (above) adding an extra weld to the tubular framework

working on the rebuild of a Bamford and Martin car, a simple but very finely engineered machine.

Meanwhile, Jon Clerk was on a parallel path. His father, Robert, also worked for Rex Woodgate but had been happy to make the move north to Connecticut. When Rex returned to the UK, the US business was taken over by Peter Livanos, and Jon apprenticed there from 1987, under the wing of the charismatic and talented Polish engineer, Victor Trochymenko.

By 1990, Jon was ready to go it alone and set up on his own business in Pompano Beach, Florida. 'I liked the weather better there!' he smiles. Performance Tuning and Restoration also had a bias towards Astons and worked on cars for a number of notable customers, including racer Jack Buxstrom.

And then Jon and Lance's paths would finally meet. 'With two Aston specialists on the east coast, it became apparent that if we were to join forces then life would be a lot easier for everyone,' says Jon. 'So I left the Florida sun and headed back to Pennsylvania. And it's worked out very well for us.'

Today, Jon's personal specialty is engine-building while Lance does the more esoteric mechanical work and develops upgrades such as the five-speed Tremec gearbox conversion for various DB models. 'We have also developed suspension upgrades that have been fitted to many cars all over the US and Europe,' Lance tells me.

About half of Steel Wings' current work is full restorations, the balance being engine rebuilds, servicing and other



Left and below
Jon Clerk in the engine build shop, very much his domain, and below, breathtaking, Lime Rock concours-winning DB5



**‘LET’S FACE IT, WE WILL
HEAR ABOUT IT FROM
CUSTOMERS IF THERE
ARE ENGINE PROBLEMS’**

maintenance work. Its in-house skills extend to chassis fabrication, aluminium panelwork and anything mechanical.

The business has seven employees, many of them long-serving. Chief fabricator Larry has an unusual knack not just for fabrication but for doing it exactly as it was done when the cars were built originally, reproducing the same style of welding and fitting. The second fabricator, Matt, comes from a racing background and is also a highly skilled machinist. Pete preps the hundreds of parts taken off a car to perfection while parts are the domain of Jennifer and John. It is a harmonious team and one senses that the mutual respect for each other’s skills is very strong.

When Lance is out of the room, Jon speaks of him with fulsome admiration. ‘Lance always has a way of seeing things with clarity that nobody else does,’ he begins. ‘There are no problems in figuring how to fix or manufacture things; just obstacles and challenges to navigate. Lance can build any part of a car – engine, gearbox, axle and so on. He can weld anything, machine anything and make just about anything.’ High praise indeed, but the same can be heard said of Lance wherever owners gather in America.

Lance, without any prompting, returns the compliment. ‘When we started out together, I was building nearly all the engines,’ he says. ‘Now Jon does the engine-building – and does it as well if not better than I did. That is pretty important because, let’s face it, we will hear about it from customers if there are engine problems.’

WE’RE SITTING NEXT to a DB5, fresh from a concours win at Lime Rock. You get used to seeing freshly restored cars, and to describe any car as perfect is a big claim, but it’s very hard to find fault. Correct, accurate, authentic; these words all describe that DB5. Oh, and spotless. Back in the workshop, full rebuilds of a DB4 GT and DB4 are well underway – each one day to emerge looking as magnificent as this DB5 does.

Steel Wings has always catered to owners of all classic Aston Martins, from the 1920s onwards, but with many more recent Astons becoming enthusiast-owned, the company has taken the logical decision to offer its services to owners of modern cars, too (ie, DB7 onwards). A new facility next to the existing workshop will cater to these customers.

Over the years the company has restored some very special Astons, including a DB4 GT Zagato that went on to win at Pebble Beach. With such skills, achievements and reputation, there is not surprisingly a waiting list to get major work in. But the company does everything it can to keep its customers satisfied and the cars on the road.

As Lance puts it: ‘We repair and restore Astons, but uppermost is that we help owners enjoy their cars to the full.’ Indeed, the most common view you will hear from owners is that the team goes out of its way to be helpful.

When put on the spot to express Steel Wings’ *raison d’être*, Lance or Jon will say: ‘We help people realise their dreams.’ It’s the sort of line that’s trotted out by many businesses as a marketing soundbite, but you just get the feeling that when these guys say it, they really mean it. **V**

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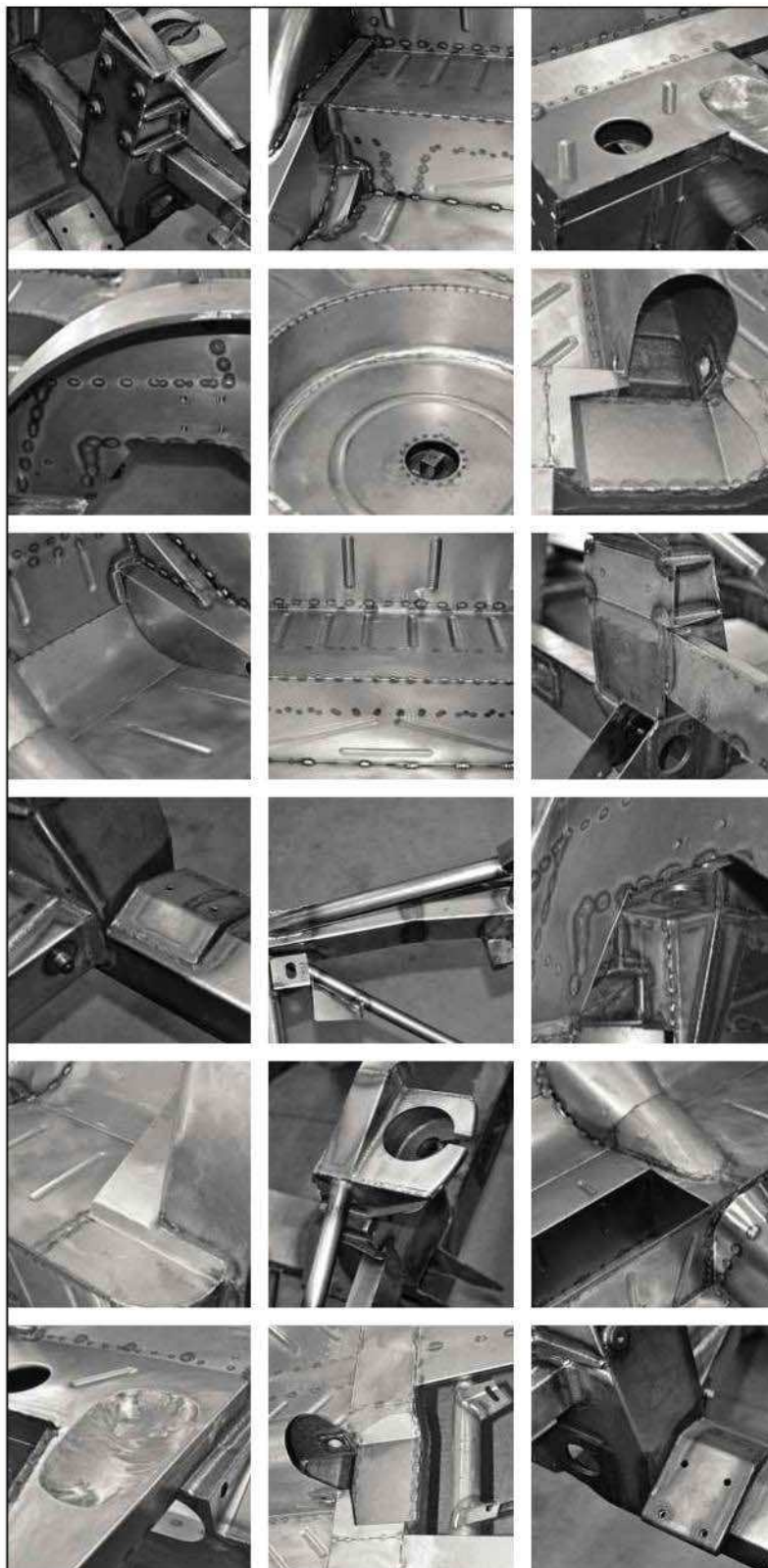
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ALL THE ROAD CARS 1920s-1930s

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 (above) 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, while 1929 saw the introduction of the low-slung, dry-sumped International model (pictured), 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



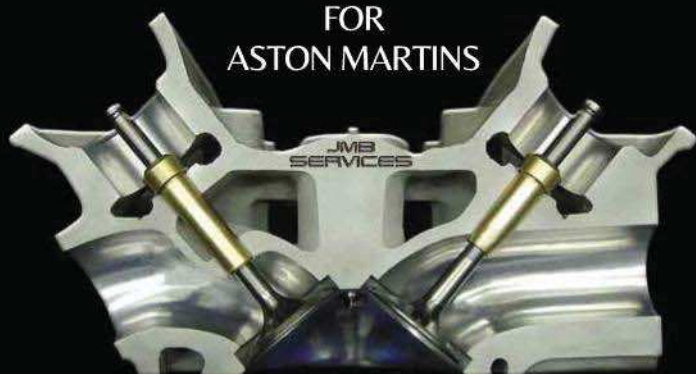
SPECIFICATION

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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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 could be 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 production 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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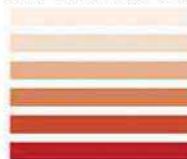
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ALL THE ROAD CARS 1960s-1970s

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 and most desirable 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 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. New for the DB5 was the 4-litre engine and the option of a five-speed gearbox, which soon became standard. Regular DB5s had 282bhp, the Vantage 314bhp. The Convertible version was succeeded in 1965 by the ultra-rare 'Short Chassis Volante' model, the first use of the Volante name. Total production: 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 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. Volante followed in 1966. The Mk2, which arrived in July 1969, had flared wheelarches over wider wheels. Total DB6 production: 1967.

AM V8 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 DBS V8 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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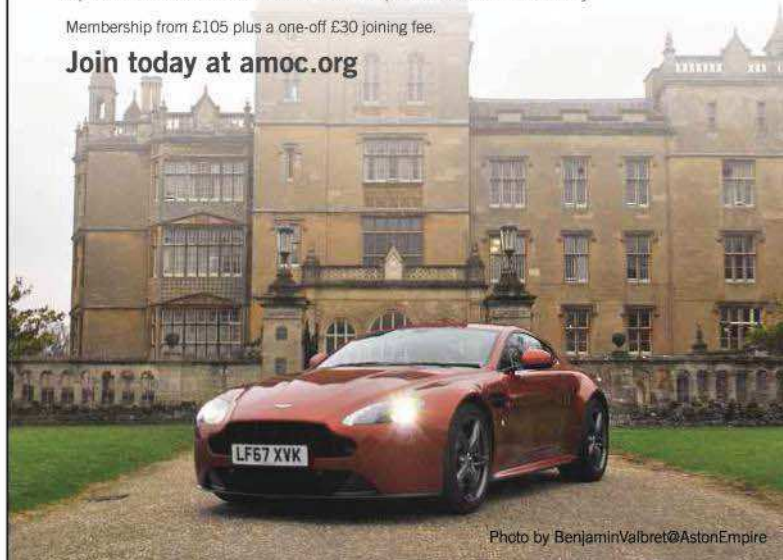


Photo by BenjaminValbret@AstonEmpire

ALL THE ROAD CARS 1970s-1990s

Lagonda (Series 1) 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 (Series 2-4) 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.

Virage 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 Vantage 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 AM V8 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 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 Volante 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 to 60mph and was verified at 185.8mph, making it the fastest Aston yet.

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.

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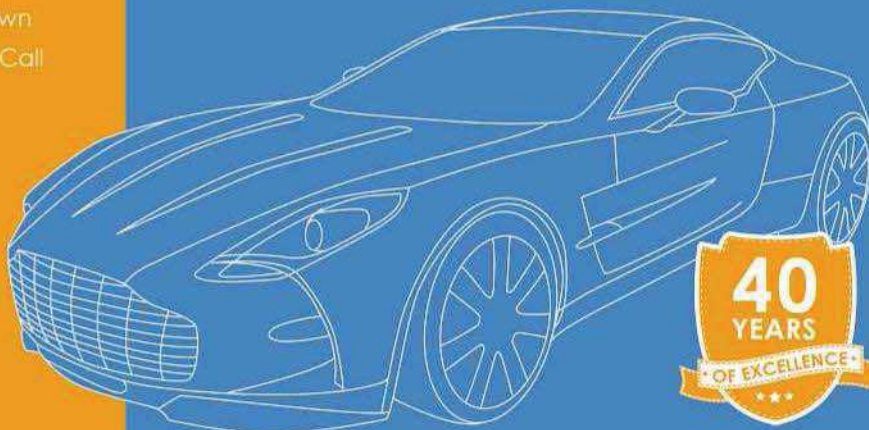
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ALL THE ROAD CARS 1990s-2000s

V8 Coupé 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 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.

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.

DB7 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.

DB9 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.

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ALL THE ROAD CARS 2005-present

V8 Vantage 2005-2018



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, came in 2011. Buying guide, *Vantage* issue 1.

V12 Vantage 2009-2018



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 its finest drivers' cars. Distinguished by its rows of bonnet vents, the V12V built on the V8's agility and added another level of performance and desirability. Roadster arrived in late 2012 and the 565bhp 'S' in 2013: with a top speed of 205mph, it was the fastest series-production Aston so far. The V12 also spawned a Zagato version, just 101 of which were built.

One-77 2010-2012



SPECIFICATION

Engine 7312cc, 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.

DBS 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 debuted as Bond in *Casino Royale*. With power ramped up to 510bhp, aggressive styling and harder-edged dynamics, the DBS was Mr Hyde to the DB9's Dr Jekyll. A Volante version appeared in 2009. At the end of 2012, the DBS was replaced by the new Vanquish. Buying guide, *Vantage* issue 18.

Rapide 2009-2012



SPECIFICATION

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

With Porsche enjoying 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 weren't as strong as Aston hoped, and production moved to Gaydon in late 2012. Relaunched as the Rapide S for 2013 with a deeper new front grille and 550bhp. Buying guide, issue 17.

Cygnnet 2010-2013



SPECIFICATION

Engine 1330cc, in-line 4-cyl
Power 97bhp @ 6000rpm
Torque 92lb ft @ 4400rpm
0-60mph 11.6sec
Top speed 106mph

Based on the Toyota iQ, the Cygnnet was designed to deliver Aston Martin levels of style and opulence in a city car. Extensively rebodied to incorporate familiar Aston design cues and retrimmed in sumptuous leather, but mechanically unchanged, it wasn't without appeal as a city runabout but on the open road it was no performance car. At £30,995, it was also breathtakingly expensive. Dr Bez, whose baby it was, hoped it would sell by the thousand, but with just hundreds sold it was quietly dropped in 2013.

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ALL THE ROAD CARS 2010-present

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.

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.

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 was the most important new Aston since the launch of the DB9 – the car it replaced – more than a decade earlier. With an all-new, 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. V8 version was launched late 2017 with Volante following in 2018 and a new, AMR-branded V12 flagship in summer 2018.

Vanquish 2012-2018



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, and it was a brave move to resurrect the name for a new series-production flagship. If the new car wasn't quite the same game-changer, the combination of aggressively shaped carbonfibre bodywork, a 568bhp V12, adaptive damping and carbon brakes was 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. Up-rated Vanquish S with 592bhp (and a similarly potent Zagato version) launched in late 2016.

Lagonda Taraf 2015-2017



SPECIFICATION

Engine 5935cc, V12
Power 540bhp @ 6650rpm
Torque 465lb ft @ 5500rpm
0-60mph 4.4sec
Top speed 195mph

The Lagonda name hadn't been seen since production of the controversial wedge-shaped Series 2 ended in 1990, but in 2015 it was back, on a brand new luxury saloon – and one that made more than a few visual nods its famous forebear. Based on the Rapide S but with a longer wheelbase to make it a full four-seater, the Taraf combined sumptuous accommodation with almost supercar levels of performance, but at a price – with the addition of a few bespoke options, buyers saw little change from £800k.

Vantage 2018-present



SPECIFICATION

Engine 3982cc, biturbo V8
Power 503bhp @ 6000rpm
Torque 505lb ft @ 2000rpm
0-60mph 3.6sec
Top speed 195mph

Replacing the best-selling Aston of all time is a tough gig, but the all-new Vantage has the hardware and the firepower to make the outgoing model feel almost tame. With a twin-turbocharged 4-litre 503bhp V8 supplied by Mercedes-AMG and a lightning-quick paddleshift gearbox (soon to be joined by a traditional manual), the new car is rabidly quick and super-alert in all its responses. This is an out-and-out sports car, and though the looks haven't met with universal acclaim, as a drivers' car it's among the world's very best.

HEROES: JOHN OGIER

PATRIOT WHO KEPT ASTON'S RACING PRESENCE ALIVE IN THE EARLY '60S

WORDS DOUG NYE PHOTOGRAPH BRIAN JOSCELYNE

John Lionel Eardley Ogier was Aston Martin's original customer for the 'VEV' group of DB4 GT Zagato cars. He made his money in the immediate post-war years as a poultry farmer, spotting the potential in American-style broiler-chicken production and contributing to what became famous as the Buxted Chicken brand. With modern sensibilities that perhaps does not sit well with many people today, but, in the 1950s, providing affordable food to the nation was a primary concern.

Ogier was an ex-military man, a tank section commander who had won the Military Cross for gallantry during the hotly resisted Allied advance up the Adriatic coast of Italy. He rescued his own commander under fire and persisted in action despite being wounded. Upon recovery he was appointed Aide de Camp to Winston Churchill, no less, and upon his return to civilian life became a captain of commerce – and of large-scale chicken farming.

His contemporary friends recall him as having been a fascinating man: intelligent, energetic, loyal, and generous. He was fiercely patriotic in a period when British industry was suffering a real crisis of confidence, and one spin-off from his natural patriotism and support for British industry was his enthusiastic backing for Aston Martin.

He had been born in India, but was educated at St Edward's School, Oxford, before becoming apprenticed to the Austin Motor Company, where he worked exclusively in the competitions department. He joined the Army when it became obvious war was imminent and he became a Dunkirk evacuee in 1940. He was then posted to The Queen's Own Hussars, of which Winston Churchill was Honorary Colonel, and he served with great distinction in North Africa, fighting at El Alamein, before the Italian campaign. In addition to his MC, he would be further mentioned in despatches.

There were evident compensations. During leave at the Cairo Sailing Club he met his future wife, a South African MI6 recruit named Wymond Paull. He was later so successful as Churchill's AdC that the Old Man wanted him to manage his Chartwell Estate. John Ogier, however, had higher ambitions...

In 1945 he married Wymond and in early 1946 borrowed £15,000 from his father and a friend to start his Essex-based chicken farming venture. It proved so successful that the loans were paid off within two years. He also had a



Above

Ogier (centre) at Montlhéry, 1962, with, from left to right, Jim Clark (who was driving 2 VEV), engineer Brian Clayton, and a young (pre-beard) Sir John Whitmore

freezer plant located at Boreham Airfield, which might well be where he first made close contact with the motor racing world.

He began club racing with a Jaguar XK120 bought in 1952. He also met and admired John Tojeiro, becoming both a customer and a marque sponsor. As a driver he was perhaps more bold than truly talented. In October 1957 he lost control of his Tojeiro-Jaguar at the Stapleford hill-climb in Essex, trackside straw bales becoming a launching ramp from which the 'Toj' somersaulted, high in the air, throwing out Ogier and inflicting serious injuries, including a badly broken leg.

He would not compete again as a driver, but his expanding business activities enabled him to acquire a pair of Formula 2 Coopers for 1958, when he entered them under the 'Essex Racing Stable' team title for the young Sir John Whitmore and South African newcomer Tony Maggs. The cars were prepared in the stables of the family home at East Hanningfield, Essex, where John and Wymond raised four children.

In late 1959, David Brown announced he was withdrawing Aston Martin from full-time works racing activity, having just secured the FIA Sportscar World Championship. John Ogier was dismayed, believing it was essential for Great Britain to have top team involvement in world-class endurance racing. He approached Brown and John Wyer at Aston Martin, and for 1960-61 his Essex Racing Stable bought two DB4

GTs (17 TVX and 18 TVX) and subsequently the two initial Zagatos, 1 VEV and 2 VEV.

On 28 February, 1961, Ogier announced that his team would be fielding a DBR1 sports car in addition to the two brand-new Zagatos at Le Mans. Aston Martin works engineer Bryan Clayton was seconded to the team, together with former chief mechanic Eric Hind plus Alan Woods, Des O'Dell and Ian Moss. Sadly, Le Mans proved a disaster. The DBR1 ran fourth after 18 hours, only to retire, while the Zagatos were long gone, due to chronic overheating caused by an engine assembly error.

Ogier – the efficient, high-achieving perfectionist – vented his fury. And the Zagatos bounced back as Lex Davison beat Jaguar in the GT race supporting the British Grand Prix at Aintree, with John Whitmore in a DB4 GT third. With Esso oil company backing, Ogier was then able to sign-up Roy Salvadori and Jim Clark for that year's Goodwood TT, the 'VEVs' finishing third and fourth and doing what their owner was so keen to demonstrate, supporting British industrial prestige on the world stage.

For 1962, Ogier sold the DB4 GTs and ran only the Zagatos – though the original 2 VEV was written-off when loaned to Lucien Bianchi for the Spa GP, and replaced pretty darned quick by the much-enhanced MP209 version that Jimmy Clark drove in the 1962 TT and at Montlhéry in the Paris 1000Kms.

When David Brown decided to revive his works team for 1963, the need for Ogier's quasi-works operation evaporated. By that time he was living in Kent, and his other interests extended to car styling, becoming chairman of Ogle Design Ltd, which produced the Ogle 1000 de luxe Mini and Reliant Scimitar GTE. Ogier also headed the 'Movement for True Industrial Democracy', fostering worker participation and profit-sharing in industry while encouraging the unions to commit to moderation in return.

But tragically, on 15 August 1977, John Ogier – aged 57 – was killed in a road accident while driving home in his Scimitar from an equestrian three-day event. His *Daily Telegraph* obituary reported '...he is mourned not only by his large and devoted family but by his many friends and admirers drawn from a lifetime of varied interests and enthusiasms... John Ogier was not only unfailingly generous with the gift of his own friendship but was uniquely able to use his personality to forge friendship amongst others.' Here was a popular perfectionist, with a brimful life prematurely ended. **V**

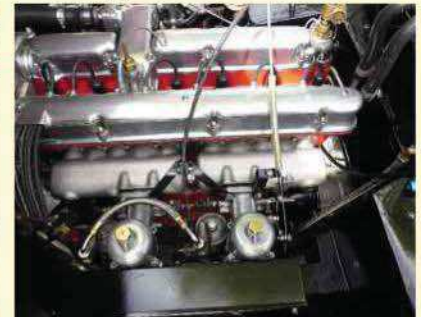
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This exceptional matching numbers Aston Martin DB MkIII saloon has been in the ownership of AMOC Member, David Price in Canada for the past 33 years during which time he has completely restored the car to a standard where he has been highly placed in several concours events, winning his class on more than one occasion. The restoration was completed 11 years ago in 2007 and the car still remains in superb condition. Finished in Aston Racing Green with pale grey hide interior piped in green and complimented with Grey Wilton carpet and a perfect headlining in West of England cloth, the car is beautiful to behold. Sitting on perfect chrome wire wheels and fitted with overdrive, the car provides a very rewarding driving experience and is capable of covering long distances in great comfort. The MkIII was only produced between late 1957 and early 1959 with a total of 459 saloons, 5 fixed head coupes and 85 drop head coupes being built. The car comes with a beautiful engine bay, all original tools, invoices dating back to before it was exported to Canada together with a parts catalogue and instruction manual and memorabilia from various concours events. We will service this car on behalf of the next owner but judging by the manner in which it currently drives it will be a mere formality. Realistically priced for one in this condition.



1955 Aston Martin DB2/4 finished in Burgundy with contrasting Tan hide interior. Undoubtedly one of the best DB2/4's that we have encountered for many years. This car was purchased by the current owner through Four Ashes Garage in January 2010 and at the time was in the process of being rebuilt for a previous owner. The complete restoration by Four Ashes took a further year and the result is a car specifically built to be able to be competitive in Class A1 of AMOC racing yet be civilised as a fast road car for European touring. The restoration included a full engine rebuild to with a new Vetus cylinder block, a MkIII crankshaft and a gas flowed cylinder head with DB3S cams. Having now driven this car I can confirm that it is quite exceptional in performance and yet docile in traffic when required. The cosmetic finish of the car is quite exemplary including the engine bay and the price we are asking on behalf of the owner is very reasonable for a DB2/4 in such fine condition. Please enquire for more details.



1965 Aston Martin DB5 in Black Pearl with black hide interior. Engine rebuilt by Aston Workshop in County Durham 10 years ago with little use since. In our opinion, this car now requires a full body restoration and a complete re-trim and possibly further works in order to bring it to the standard that it deserves. Priced accordingly. Please enquire.



Originally supplied by Aston Martin dealers "Williams of Alton" where the late Innes Ireland was the sales director, this is a 1978 Aston Martin V8"S" Series III in original Kentucky Blue with blue hide interior. It is an excellent example that has had only 2 owners in the last 24 years and the current owner for the past 16 years. It comes with one of the most methodically kept history files that we have ever seen. Chronologically filed and dating back to 1987, the file appears to contain a detailed record of every invoice for maintenance and upgrades together with previous 26 MOT certificates and a photographic record of the back to metal repaint carried out in 2005. Although the repaint is now 13 years old, the finish has remained in near perfect condition. There is also an original build sheet and a Heritage Trust Certificate both of which confirm that the car bears its original registration number and the engine is the original unit. Since 2004, the car has been regularly maintained by Aston Martin Specialists, Davron in Wiltshire and most recent works have included a complete gearbox overhaul in December 2017. The car performs well on the road and the only downside is that the Connolly hide interior is original and due to age an regular use is now in need of either refurbishment or re-trimming and hence the car is priced accordingly at £89,950.

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