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£35K CHALLENGE

BEAUTIFUL DB7 VANTAGE
OR MIGHTY V8 VANTAGE?



V8 VOLANTE PROFILE



RARE VIRAGE WIDEBODY



RESTORED DB5



UNIQUE DB1

V8 Vantage or DB7 Vantage?



When Aston Martin Driver looked to find an answer to this question, Aston Workshop were happy to supply the two cars above for a twin test on the roads around our County Durham facility. Both cars represent an affordable entry into Aston Martin ownership, yet offer different driving experiences that share that unique Aston Martin feeling. See below for a selection of V8 Vantages and DB7s that we have for sale.

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As featured in this month's issue

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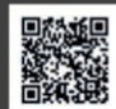
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BETTER LUCK LAST YEAR

WITH THE introduction of the DB12, a highly successful season in Formula 1 (see Motorsport, p80) plus confirmation the Valkyrie supercar is to enter international endurance racing from 2025 onwards, 2023 really was a positive year for Aston Martin.

But as I put this issue together it was made clear to me there's been too few of those in its 111-year history. From going bankrupt in late 1974 before being saved by a consortium led by Peter J. Sprague (see more on p46) to being offloaded by Ford during 2007, it's obvious Aston Martin's past has been chequered to say the least.

Yet something else was obvious too; no matter what the company was going through at the time, the cars it has produced have always been nothing short of remarkable.

Take the V8 Volante which we feature on page 54 of this issue. Although created just a few years after Sprague saved the company, its mix of good looks and stunning performance made the model one of Aston Martin's most successful at the time.

And then there's our two cover stars, the DB7 Vantage and V8 Vantage. With one based largely on another car and the other mostly new, they might come from very different moments in Aston Martin's history, but both are highly desirable albeit for different reasons. Discover which one we prefer on page 14.

I'm sure 2024 will be equally if not more positive than last year but no matter what happens, the cars Aston Martin is going to produce will be just as fantastic as those from its not always straightforward past.



Paul Walton
Editor



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UP FRONT NEWS ELECTRIC DB6

A British specialist in transforming classic cars into electric vehicles, Lunaz, has announced a concept for an electric-powered DB6 with an interior that features eco-friendly materials.

While the concept is currently a design study, all the innovations are production-ready, many of which have already been used on previous classic cars electrified

by Lunaz which include a Jaguar XK120. Like all classic cars upcycled by Lunaz, the concept includes the company's proprietary modular electric powertrain, developed entirely in-house and comprising the highest standard European-sourced Tier 1 OEM battery cells and motors. All current Lunaz vehicles' battery capacity ranges from 80-120 kWh with Combined Charging System (CCS) fast-charging capability, a 255-mile range and 375bhp.

The dashboard face, gear shifter and three-quarter glass handle are then finished in a unique, biodegradable composite material, used as a replacement for oil-based plastics. Produced from discarded egg and nut shells combined with an organic, biodegradable binder, it can be made to precisely replicate a range of natural high-luxury materials, including the 'marble' used in the DB6. The material is 100 percent natural and compostable.





The DB6's door cards are finished in a bio-based fabric constructed from a blend of renewable plant-based materials, including corn and wood pulp-based fibres. The unique matt surface features a subtle organic texture with a semi-lustrous base. Its multi-layer construction reduces the number of raw materials required, without sacrificing durability or ease of maintenance.

For the seat bolsters, flute accent, parcel shelf and transmission tunnel, Lunaz has used a Savannah colourway of the world's lowest-carbon leather, with total emissions in its manufacture around 30-50 percent below the industry standard. The leather itself is a by-product of the meat industry and is 100% biodegradable.

The soft yet highly durable cabin and boot floor carpets are made from a regenerated nylon derived from recycled waste material such as discarded carpets and fishing nets. The backing is made from 100 percent recycled polyethylene terephthalate (PET) plastic bottles.

Said Lunaz's founder, David Lorenz, "The fact that our team has been able to bring together such a wide range of innovative materials in this sumptuous, tactile and completely harmonious interior is a testament to their skill and creativity. It's an exceptional marriage of materials and methods that elevates automotive interiors beyond anything available in the market."



ASTON MARTIN REVEALS BICYCLE

Aston Martin and British bicycle manufacturer J.Laverack have come together to create a road bicycle; the J. Laverack Aston Martin .1R.

Developed with input from high-performance automotive designers, the .1R is said to be the most bespoke, most advanced and most engineered bicycle ever created featuring a number of world firsts.

To begin with, the J.Laverack Aston Martin .1R uses a fusion of parametrically designed, 3D-printed titanium lugs plus sculpted carbon fibre tubes. This ensures a frame that not only delivers an exceptional blend of response and comfort, but also sets new standards of elegance and beauty on two wheels.

The saddle is from a British company, Brooks, and has been specifically commissioned for the .1R. Each seat can be trimmed in the owner's choice of leather or Alcantara and is finished with a single titanium rivet. The same material choice is available for the handlebar grips, with the full suite of Aston Martin colours on offer.

Owners of the .1R will be invited to Aston Martin's headquarters in Gaydon where a full fitting will take place with the founders of J.Laverack, providing an opportunity to customise their bike. Customers can

select the exact same colour palettes and trim choices available on Aston Martin's cars, providing the opportunity to pair car and bike, should they wish to.

Each J.Laverack Aston Martin .1R and its components such as hubs, cranks and frame are numbered. The bicycle will also be supplied with its own case, either in aluminium or carbon, which will double as both a travel solution and somewhere to display the .1R appropriately. Each .1R travel case will also include a track pump that matches the bike, featuring Alcantara or leather-covered handles, and sits securely inside the protective case.

Oliver Laverack, co-founder of J.Laverack Bicycles, said, "Working with the team at Aston Martin has unlocked new ideas and innovations, the application of which has created a bicycle more advanced than anything currently available on the market. Working in collaboration with Aston Martin we have not only taken our titanium bicycles to new heights but have also unlocked true innovation within the cycling industry, creating a bicycle with unparalleled levels of craftsmanship and performance engineering."

For further information visit astonmartin.jlaverack.co.uk.

ASTON RECEIVES ELECTRIC FUNDING

Aston Martin's high-performance electrification strategy has been awarded £9million of British government funding through the Advanced Propulsion Centre UK (APC), further supplementing the research and development of Aston Martin's innovative modular battery electric vehicle (BEV) platform.

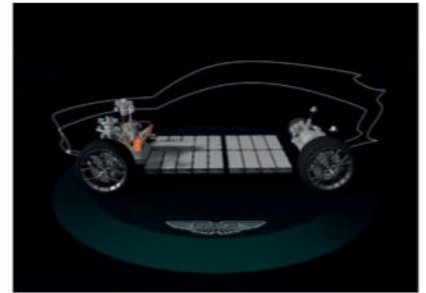
Awarded following a competitive process, the government grant will support the development of Aston Martin's luxury BEV platform and enable a route to net-zero, including investment in vehicle light weighting, a digital toolchain and electrification training.

The announcement is another positive step in Aston Martin's electrification programme, which forms a pillar of the company's wider Racing. Green. sustainability strategy. The innovative British ultra-luxury manufacturer is making a £2billion commitment to advanced

technologies over the next five years, with its investment phasing from the internal combustion engine (ICE) to BEV technology.

Project ELEVATION, a six-partner collaborative research and development project led by Aston Martin, is supported by the Manufacturing Technology Centre, Expert Tooling & Automation, Creative Composites, Fuzzy Logic Studio and University of Warwick. The project will address the technical challenges of developing a lightweight, 800v traction battery pack and twin front electric drive unit (EDU) into a modular BEV platform with a bandwidth from supercar to SUV.

Roberto Fedeli, group chief technology officer of Aston Martin, said, "The award of funding from the APC is another major boost to our electrification strategy and constant strive for innovation. Providing further resources to explore the possibilities of our bespoke BEV platform, it will help achieve our ambition to be an in-house BEV technology leader in the



ultra-luxury, high-performance segment. We look forward to progressing this project with our collaborative partners and thank the APC for their incredible support."

Aston Martin is developing alternatives to the ICE with the first all-electric Aston Martin targeted for launch in 2025. In 2024 the company will deliver its first plug-in hybrid – the mid-engined supercar, Valhalla. By 2026 all new Aston Martin model lines will feature an electrified powertrain option, with the long-term objective for its core range to be fully electrified by 2030.

DBX707 TAKES OVER THE LAS VEGAS GRAND PRIX

Not only did the Aston Martin Formula 1 team enjoy a double points finish at the Las Vegas Grand Prix in November 2023, but the supercar of SUVs, the DBX707, took centre stage of the entertainment capital of the world.

Thrilling fans with its unrivalled performance, the DBX707 lit up the Las Vegas Strip Circuit on the Saturday with an exclusive track takeover ahead of the first Las Vegas Grand Prix in 41 years.

The DBX707's display on the track was only matched by an accompanying 15-minute spectacle on Sphere's Exosphere – the largest LED screen on Earth. Seeking to convey the intense sensations being experienced on track in DBX707, the immersive content featured real biometric visualisations of drivers experiencing the intensity of driving an Aston Martin at full performance, including their pupil dilation and heartbeat.

Marco Mattiacci, global chief brand and commercial officer of Aston Martin said, "From delivering the largest-ever



digital display of a car on Sphere, through to unleashing a stunning line-up of DBX707 models on the Las Vegas strip, Aston Martin has put our iconic brand at the heart of one of the most innovative sporting events in the world.

"Touching all of our marketing channels, our activities in Las Vegas demonstrate how we are infusing our brand with F1's unique high-performance and technology credentials and curating ultra-luxury experiences and events."



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DOUBLE PODIUM AT BAHRAIN

The Aston Martin Vantage GTE recorded a double-podium finish on its final appearance in the FIA World Endurance Championship (WEC), in the season-ending 8 Hours of Bahrain on Saturday, 4 November 2023. The result brought the curtain down on an incredible era of GT racing, as the class closes with Vantage as the most successful car in LM GTE-Am history.

In a race free of safety car periods, pure performance mattered more in Bahrain than at any other race in the 2023 WEC, and this enabled Aston Martin Racing partner teams D'station Racing, Heart of Racing and ORT by TF to show the true endurance pace of the Vantage GTE and score a milestone 75th LM GTE-Am podium in the category's final race.

Japanese entrant D'station Racing, with a Vantage GTE operated by 2022 World Champions TF Sport, scored its best ever result in the WEC as series debutant Liam Talbot qualified second in GTE-Am and set a strong pace; the intensity of which was matched by team-mates Casper Stevenson and Tomonobu Fujii as the trio

finished second, just five seconds from victory after eight hours of hard racing.

The Heart of Racing team made it a double-podium finish. Its trio of drivers, led by Team Principal Ian James, Daniel Mancinelli and Alex Riberas took third, with the team in contention for victory until contact delayed car 98 with two hours to go.

The race result means that the Vantage GTE completes the GTE-Am era as its most successful car with a record 33 wins and a total of 75 podiums.

In what was the best event of the year for Vantage, ORT by TF ran strongly inside the top four after a quick and consistent performance by Omani driver Ahmad Al Harthy, Michael Dinan (USA) and Aston Martin works racer Charlie Eastwood (IRL), but retired with 20 minutes to go.

Combining both the GTE-Am and GTE-Pro classes – the latter of which was discontinued after 2022 – Vantage has amassed 52 victories in the WEC's 85 races and has finished on the podium 119 times, at least one of which came in every single season since the FIA revived the World Championship in 2012.



“The Aston Martin Vantage GTE has completed every single one of its objectives and covered itself in glory in the process,” said Aston Martin’s head of endurance racing, Adam Carter. “A multiple championship-winning race car, Vantage won the 24 Hours of Le Mans in both classes and was a force throughout its six-year run in the World Championship. It will be rightly remembered as one of the great sportscars in the modern era of the sport. We’re incredibly excited about what’s coming next for Aston Martin in world endurance racing, but we must also be proud of what has been achieved with Vantage GTE.”

YOUNG DRIVER OF THE YEAR

Aston Martin has announced that Joseph Loake is the 2023 Aston Martin Autosport BRDC Young Driver of the Year Award winner. The 18-year-old Briton from Macclesfield was awarded the most prestigious honour in junior motorsport during the gala Autosport Awards ceremony held at the Grosvenor House Hotel, on London’s Park Lane, on Sunday 3 December.

Loake, who was a GB3 Championship race winner and consistent front-runner in 2023, earns a test in an Aston Martin Aramco Cognizant Formula One Team car on the Silverstone Grand Prix circuit. He also received a cheque for £200,000 on the night plus a full membership to the BRDC.

To win the Award, Loake had to outshine three other outstanding finalists in what was considered one of the most closely

contested shoot-outs in the Award’s history. Taylor Barnard (19), runner-up in the Formula Regional Middle East Championship and a race winner in the 2023 FIA F3 Championship, Macau GP Formula 4 winner Arvid Lindblad (16) who was third in the Italian F4 Championship, and GB3 champion Callum Voisin (17), all excelled in an intensive two-day shoot-out on Silverstone’s Grand Prix circuit.

“I honestly can’t believe I’ve won the award,” said Loake afterwards, who becomes the 34th winner, and the fourth since Aston Martin became the principal partner of the initiative. “This is the best thing I have received in my life. Thank you to everyone for helping me and sticking by me.

“This has topped off an incredible season for me, I wasn’t expecting it. It felt like I’d done a good job during the assessment and I think I stood out in the





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Paul Walton
Editor

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TWIN TEST

DB7 VANTAGE VS V8 VANTAGE

JUDGEMENT



EVENT DAY



Do you have £25k-£35k to spend on an Aston Martin? Then look no further than a late DB7 Vantage or an early V8 Vantage. We drive both back-to-back to decide which one you should buy

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY PAUL WALTON

TWIN TEST

DB7 VANTAGE VS V8 VANTAGE



IT'S A larger, harder and more complicated question than deciding which restaurant to eat at and whether to have a starter or leave room for dessert.

If you're looking for a handsome, powerful and now affordable Aston Martin, which should you choose out of a late DB7 Vantage 5.9 or an early V8 Vantage 4.3?

With both being handsome, powerful and now highly sought-after modern classics, they have much in common. Yet their biggest similarity is price since they are now both worth between £25,000 and £35,000.

But coming from separate eras in Aston Martin's history and powered by very different engines, in terms of their history and personality, they're equally poles apart. So like studying the menu, we drive an example of both to try and decide which one of these classic Aston Martins we would buy.

Like the straight-six model before it, the V12-engined DB7 Vantage was never made at Aston Martin's traditional home of Newport Pagnell but rather the former TWR factory outside Bloxham.

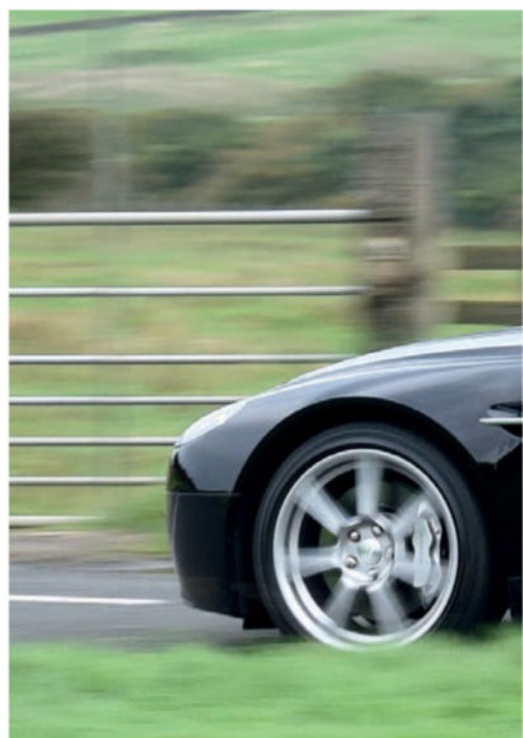
Yet the new engine aside, the DB7 Vantage continued to use many Jaguar-sourced parts, which included the chassis that was originally used by the XJ-S way back in 1975.

Despite this mixed heritage, the DB7 Vantage still represented the end of an era. Not only would Aston Martin transfer production to its new facility located in nearby Gaydon during 2004, but future cars would be arguably less hand built than the DB7. They would also use a modern bonded aluminium chassis, the VH platform, that was similar to that used by the Vanquish.

This might make the DB7 seem rather old-fashioned today, but the Tungsten Silver example featured here still looks stunning. Registered in June 2003, only a few months before production came to an end in December the same year, it's one of the last to leave the assembly line.

In my view, its voluptuous lines and perfect proportions are far more elegant than the more brutish V8 Vantage parked alongside it. Yet the pronounced lower side sills, large front fog lights (supposedly influenced by those of the DBR1 racer) plus a rear spoiler still give the Vantage a leaner, more muscular look than the earlier straight-six models. This was a conscious decision by the car's designer, Ian Callum.

"I soon saw that the car had to change once I realised it was going to be faster, more aggressive, more expensive and the air intakes had to be bigger because of the new engine," he said during an interview in the 10 March 1999 issue of *Autocar*. "Once





you understand a car's altered function, you can see what needs doing."

When I open the door and peer inside the cabin, there's no denying the DB7 comes from an earlier era than the V8 Vantage. With there being plenty of rich veneer similar to that of Aston's older cars, you'd imagine there was a larger gap between the DB7 Vantage ending and the V8 Vantage starting than just two years.

Despite the DB7 Vantage costing just under £97k in 2003 (the same as a Mercedes-Benz SL600 and ten grand less than a Porsche 911 Turbo), the interior has the same reliance on too many Ford and Jaguar-sourced parts as the original straight-six. Yet it definitely feels like fewer corners have been cut in its construction than the earlier models; there's better consistency in the panel gaps and the plastics are of a higher quality too. Don't just take my word for it; this is what *Autocar* magazine had to say in its 23 June 1999 issue;

"The cabin is a demonstration of how to create a cossetting and characterful environment for seriously fast long-distance driving. Acres of luxurious Connolly leather sweep across the interior, trimmed to a very high standard."

One of the advantages (on paper at least) the DB7 has over the V8 Vantage

is it being a four-seater. Yet don't be fooled by the description; the rears are ludicrously tight and useless for anyone over child height. Best to leave them for extra storage since at 180 litres (120 smaller than the V8 Vantage's) the boot is relatively small.

Apart from its beautiful design, the other reason to buy a DB7 Vantage is its magnificent 5,935cc all-aluminium block V12. Originally an after-hours project by Ford's engineering team in Dearborn, America, conceptually it's two 3.0-litre Duratec V6s placed end to end but with a new head and block by Cosworth (that would build the production engine) plus improved cooling.

It was originally envisaged that the 5,935cc V12 would be used in a production version of the Lagonda Vignale concept that was revealed at the 1993 Geneva Motor Show. When that didn't come to fruition and after being seen in the 1996 Ford Indigo concept, the V12 finally found a home with the DB7 from 1999 onwards.

The unit would go on to become an Aston Martin mainstay with ever more powerful versions used in the Vanquish, DB9 and Rapide amongst many others.

With 420bhp, its eagerness and responsiveness helps this DB7 Vantage



TWIN TEST

DB7 VANTAGE VS V8 VANTAGE

feel younger than its 2003 registration year would suggest. When I bury the throttle on a long and empty road, the ZF five-speed automatic box fitted to this example (a six-speed manual by Tremec was also available) kicks down instantly, resulting in a sudden thrust of acceleration. It's as hard and urgent as any front-engined sports car from the mid-2000s I've driven, which includes the V8 Vantage.

Heavy acceleration causes the V12 to emit a rich, baritone growl, so deep and gravelly it sounds like I have Louis Armstrong in the boot. Purposely created by Aston Martin's engineers in a sound booth, it's more characterful than the laboured wheeze of the supercharged straight-six originally fitted to the DB7.

Although the design of the car's suspension was largely left alone for the Vantage, the front coil sprung double wishbones have different dimensions to accommodate the massive 355mm-diameter ventilated brake discs while a cross-shaped cage below the diff controls axle tramp under full power and braking. The spring rates are also 15 to 20 percent stiffer than the six's plus the steering was sharpened from 2.7 to 2.5 turns lock to lock.

The result is that the car feels sharper, more focused than its older straight-six sibling, its ancient Jaguar XJ-S-based underpinnings still capable of keeping up with the extra power of the V12. The only issue is the slow and unresponsive steering that isn't a match for the engine or the stability of the chassis.

Yet the DB7 Vantage is more than just a pure performance car due to its suspension which is supple enough to soak up the rough stuff as easily as a sponge does water, and it's also a majestic grand tourer. With the V12 being one of the smoothest and creamiest engines ever produced, together with that old-fashioned interior, the DB7 Vantage remains the ultimate expression of luxury travel. The last time I travelled this fast and this comfortably was when I flew by private jet. But with the example *Autocar* tested in mid-1999 returning on average a mere 15mpg, the DB7 Vantage will be just as expensive to use as any Learjet.

Other more physical issues that the





DB7 can suffer from include radiator thermostat failure, which can go on to cause engine overheating, several electrical gremlins plus corrosion of the steel subframe.

These aside, with its old-fashioned character yet modern performance, the DB7 Vantage remains one of Aston Martin's most memorable cars from the last two decades. Its current low values would make it a dead cert if it wasn't for another special model that arrived a couple of years after production had ended.

The V8 Vantage might have been the second car to use Aston's then new VH-bonded aluminium architecture after the DB9, but as a two-seater and a genuine rival to the Porsche 911, this was a new kind of Aston Martin.

The design was again the work of Ian Callum before he left for Jaguar in 1999 and it was finished by his replacement, Henrik Fisker. Although the overall shape and proportions make it unmistakably an Aston Martin, by being shorter, squatter and with tall haunches it's noticeably more aggressive than any of its siblings.

"The V8 Vantage is clearly the DB9's punk little brother," said BBC's *Top Gear* magazine in its June 2005 issue. "It's shorter in the snout, wider around the wheels and more predatory in profile."

This is a personal view but I don't think it's as pretty as the DB7 Vantage, lacking the purity of the older car's lines. But by being priced at just £79,995 in its 2005 launch year – over 20 grand less than the DB9 – the V8 Vantage quickly became Aston's most popular model with 21,648 produced between 2005 and 2017, 17,500 more than the DB7 Vantage.

It was a different kind of Aston Martin for another reason; it was the first and only model to use a modified version of Jaguar's 4,196cc V8. Not only was its capacity increased to 4,280cc (4,735cc from 2008), but it was given a new crankshaft and pistons plus its own exhaust manifold and a race-style dry sump lubrication, which enabled the engine to be mounted low to help lower the car's centre of gravity. With 380bhp, the 4.3-litre produced 80bhp more than the original Jaguar unit and the resulting 0-60mph time of 4.9 seconds made the

TWIN TEST

DB7 VANTAGE VS V8 VANTAGE

V8 Vantage faster than both the XK8 and 911 Carrera 2.

When I nestle in the tight black leather seat and squeeze the throttle of this Onyx Black example from 2006, the punch of its acceleration arrives hard and fast. Unlike the Jaguar version, the 4.3 V8 likes – no, needs – to be pushed hard, for the needle to dance around the rev-counter's red line close to 7,000rpm before I shift the six-speed manual gearbox up a gear.

Sourced from Italian driveline specialist Graziano Trasmissioni, the transmission has the short, snappy shifts you'd want for a performance car like this, slotting into gear with the smoothness of loading a bullet into the chamber of a well-oiled Lee-Enfield rifle.

For those of you who prefer automatics, from 2007 the V8 Vantage could also be ordered with a clutchless manual gearbox. Called the Sportshift, it was a development of the Magneti Marelli system that was used in the Vanquish.

The V8 soon makes itself known under full power, offering a proper old-fashioned V8 bark that isn't as synthetic as other cars such as the later Jaguar F-Type R, for example, but a genuinely raw, unabated, shrieking fury.

It doesn't take too many corners to realise the steering is sharper and more accurate than the DB7's, having more weight and needing fewer corrections. With its chassis, bonnet, doors, roof and hatch all constructed from aluminium while the front wings and bumpers are in composite (only the rear quarters are steel), the V8 Vantage tips the scales at a featherweight 1,570kg, 52kg less than the steel-framed DB7 Vantage. This lightness, together with much firmer suspension and the stiffness of the VH platform, makes the newer coupe more of an agile, pure-blooded sports car than its fast yet ultimately GT-like predecessor.

The pay-off, though, is an often uncomfortable ride. Whereas the DB7 Vantage largely glides over imperfections without its occupants knowing, the V8 Vantage transmits them back into the cabin with a harshness I begin to find uncomfortable over time.

The other way the V8 Vantage lets you know it's a sports car rather than a long-distance cruiser is the interior. Although





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1972 Aston Martin DBS V8 Stock: #16553

Presenting this left-hand-drive 1972 Aston Martin DBS V8 featured with matching numbers and finished in Blue gracefully complemented with a Beige interior. This rare example is 1 out of only 402 ever produced. Equipped with an automatic transmission, fuel-injected V8 engine, Kienzle analog clock, Philips radio, and "V8" badges. This example will need brake repair service before is roadworthy. For \$62,500

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TWIN TEST

DB7 VANTAGE VS V8 VANTAGE

spacious, it lacks the warm, cosy intimacy of the DB7's wood-lined cabin, the black and silver plastic that covers the dash looking and feeling too ordinary for an Aston Martin, even an entry-level one. With much of the switchgear sourced from sister company Volvo, take away the famous Aston Martin wings on the steering wheel, and I could be sat in any car from within the Ford empire (which owned the company when the V8 Vantage was being developed).

I'm not the only one to think so either. As *Autocar* said in its 25 November 2005 issue, "We've driven a selection of V8 Vantages now and although the standard fit and finish is impressive, the cars lack the deep-rooted feeling of engineering togetherness that a Porsche or BMW exudes."

As mentioned earlier, the V8 Vantage is a two-seater although there is a small shelf behind the front seats for storage. Plus, not only is the boot more generous and larger than its rivals from the time, including the Audi R8 and 997-generation of Porsche 911, but as a hatchback it's practical and easy to access.

Although the V8 Vantage is still a relatively modern car, it's not without its issues. The main problems to look out

for include oxidation of the aluminium panels, oil leaks from the engine's timing chest area and water ingress around the tailgate.

These minor quibbles, though, don't diminish what a terrific car the V8 Vantage 4.3 remains and its current £25k-£35k value (more for low-mileage models) makes it the bargain of the 2020s. But is it a better one than the older but arguably prettier DB7?

When I first proposed this feature, I reckoned I'd choose the V8 Vantage. Having driven several examples recently, I know how fast they are, how accurate the steering is and how modern the car still feels, especially compared to a DB7. Yet there's something I didn't factor in, character. After driving both the cars featured here back-to-back, I can't help but think the V8 Vantage lacks some of the DB7 Vantage's appeal, that indescribable magic that sets special cars apart from great ones.

There's the design of the V8 Vantage for one thing; admittedly looks are subjective but there's no denying the DB7 Vantage is the more elegant of the two. It's like comparing a long-limbed golden retriever with an angry little terrier.

Then there's the interior. I'm no slave to tradition and have little issue with the V8 Vantage lacking the rich walnut veneer of its predecessor, but all of that anodyne plastic means climbing into the car was never the sensory overload it was with the more luxurious DB7 Vantage.

There's no denying the V8 Vantage is the better driver's car and I wouldn't blame anyone for putting it ahead for that reason. But while that punishing ride would be perfect for occasional track use, for everything else I'd rather drive the DB7 Vantage and its more forgiving suspension.

Finally, there are potential future values of the two cars to consider. I reckon the DB7 Vantage's rarity together with its stature as one of the last of the old school, handmade Astons will see its prices rise while the more common V8 Vantage's prices will probably drop even lower.

It's for all of these reasons why I'd choose the DB7 Vantage over the V8 Vantage. But like choosing dessert when the starters also look appetising, it hasn't been an easy decision. **AMD**

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VANQUISH BUYING GUIDE

With prices upwards of around £50k, is now the time to consider buying a V12 Vanquish produced between 2001 and 2007 that originally cost £157k when launched? Find out what to look for with our comprehensive buying guide

WORDS ROB HAWKINS PHOTOGRAPHY MAX EAREY



WHAT WOULD you say to owning a second-hand GT-styled supercar with 460-520bhp at the flywheel of a 5,935cc V12 engine mated to a six-speed automated manual gearbox (with paddle shifts) that will hit 60mph from stationary in under five seconds and goes on to a maximum speed of 190mph or more? And all for around £50k or more.

Manufactured between 2001 and 2007, the V12 Vanquish and the V12 Vanquish S (introduced in September 2004) had a reasonably short production life with a mere 2,588 sales. The reason for such a low volume wasn't down to poor demand, but as Guy Jenner who's

the CEO of HWM Aston Martin explains, "In a world of higher volume supercars, Aston Martin continued their tradition of intensely handcrafted cars. V12 Vanquish had a six week build process. The painted bodies alone, were hand-buffed after each paint application which would take two days to finish."

So, there's an aspect of rarity to owning one now, making it more exclusive than rivals such as the Ferrari 360, which is surprisingly similarly priced on the used car market. And remember that these Astons were largely hand-built at Newport Pagnell (the last to be built there before the move to Gaydon), although the Lotus derived bonded aluminium and carbon fibre chassis is top-level technology for car construction.

LIMITED EDITIONS

Despite its exclusivity, the Vanquish is hard to miss thanks to its association with the 2002 James Bond film, *Die Another Day*. If you're keen on investing in a Vanquish, then don't ignore the effect the Bond connection had on the DB5, which surely has an influence on the popularity of the Vanquish. Owning a Vanquish with Tungsten Silver paintwork and a black interior may not help to make it too collectable (the same specification as the Bond film cars), but there are some limited-edition models, including the 50 run-out Ultimate Editions from 2007 with Ultimate Black exterior paintwork and personalised sill plaques (originally priced at £182,095). Ultra rare one-offs include the Vanquish Zagato



Roadster from 2004 and the Vanquish Bertone Jet 2 Shooting Brake from the same year, both of which were displayed at the Geneva Motor Show.

2+2 models appear to be more desirable than the two-seaters (the rear seats are only suited to small children), along with a full-leather interior and the Linn audio system, which was introduced in 2003 to replace the equipment from Alpine.

Guy Jenner says that the Sports Dynamic Pack (SDP) is a rare option and only 94 cars were made with it (announced in 2003). The spec includes stronger, stiffer and shorter suspension springs (reducing the ride height by 5mm) and revised dampers. The steering is 20% faster, the front brake discs are 378mm in diameter (up from 355mm) and equipped with six-pot calipers instead of four-pots with an extra 2mm thickness on the

rear discs. And the wheels are 30% lighter with slim nine-spokes instead of the standard 12-spokes, which Guy believes are the "best wheels ever seen on a V12 Vanquish."

Top of the list of desirables has got to be the Vanquish S (it replaced the SDP), which has 520bhp instead of 460bhp, the aforementioned brake and suspension upgrades from the Sports Dynamic Pack, along with several exterior differences (a raised bootlid with a larger integrated spoiler, different nose and a front splitter) and a better gearshift.

"It wasn't faster 0-60 despite the extra power," comments Guy Jenner. "It was 0.1secs slower. Aston Martin gave it longer gearing to chase a 200mph+ top speed, raised from 3.69:1 to 4.30:1 [final drive ratio]." Standard models that have been converted to S spec are sought after, but they won't be as valuable or collectable in the future as a genuine

Vanquish S and Guy Jenner adds, "I would say that originality is now more important than non-standard upgrades."

MANUAL CONVERSIONS

All V12 Vanquish models featured a manual gearbox with an automated shift mechanism, using steering wheel mounted paddles to change gear. However owners can convert their cars to a manual gearbox with a gear stick and clutch pedal, which cost around £20,000 when these were new and now retails at £29,500.

Guy Wyles at Chiltern Aston warns that drivers with large hands may find their knuckles rap the centre console on upward changes but most quickly adapt to this. "We tend to find clients looking for a V12 Vanquish for their collection will shun the manual conversion cars since they are not 'correct' but they are a lovely thing to drive and Works do a beautiful job.



It's just such a shame the press and early buyers weren't always taught how to use the automated gearbox properly thus its reputation, despite being ahead of its time when launched. After the initial launch, clients buying a new Vanquish were given a performance driving course and this, along with better software, really made a difference. Thankfully the Aston Martin Heritage Trust are making a video on how to drive the V12 Vanquish properly and this should be available in 2024."

SERVICING

Up-to-date service records are a must for the Vanquish and Vanquish S. The original service schedule stipulated servicing at every six months or 7,500 miles (whichever came first), but as Guy Jenner explains, "In reality most owners stuck to annual servicing once beyond the initial warranty period." Annual oil changes, fresh brake fluid every couple of



BODYWORK

With an aluminium and composite exterior, closely inspect the condition of the paintwork to look for signs of aluminium oxide that usually starts with bubbling. Moisture can get underneath the paintwork on composite panels, lifting it as well. This type of damage can appear where panels may rub (between a bumper and wing, for example) or where stone-chips remove the exterior finish and expose the aluminium or composite underneath.

Look for a small steel bracket at the end of each sill which can corrode, but worse, its mounting bolts can also corrode, spreading the rust further along with oxidised aluminium.

Underneath the exterior skin of the V12 Vanquish, there are composite front and

rear crash structures and an aluminium and carbon fibre bonded body structure, all of which form a type of chassis. This is a complex structure, so if a vehicle has been involved in an accident, it's essential to know that it has been correctly repaired, but as Guy Jenner explains, "Beyond a bodyshop physically checking, it is worth speaking to an authorised Aston Martin dealer. They can inspect the car, check the warranty history and see if any significant body parts have been ordered for the car."

Check the operation of the aluminium bonnet to ensure it opens and closes easily. Make sure the liner on the underside is present, which costs almost £1,000 to replace. If you are looking at a vehicle with front-end accident damage, for instance, replacement parts are not cheap – a bonnet assembly is over £5,000.



years and software updates for electronic equipment such as the gearbox are essential to keeping on top of problems, regardless of the annual mileage.

Don't assume that missed servicing will be straightforward to catch up on and cheap. Replacing all 12 spark plugs will cost around £500 or more in parts and will take up to a full day to complete. Even the air filter costs almost £150 and a spin-on oil filter and sump plug costs almost £60.

V12 ENGINE TROUBLE

The Vanquish's V12 engine was developed by Ford's engineering team in Dearborn in the US. They took a couple of 3.0-litre Duratec V6s and configured them end to end with new cylinder heads from Cosworth (who went on to build the engines for Aston Martin) and a timing chain assembly to drive the four overhead camshafts. The V12 was fitted to the 1996 Ford Indigo concept and three years later, it was used to power the Aston Martin DB7.

In the Vanquish and Vanquish S, look around the coolant hoses near the front of the engine bay for signs of leaks (residue). Check the coolant temperature gauge to ensure the engine warms up to the normal reading and remains at this level – coolant thermostat failure is a known issue.

Coil pack failure is often caused by

heat damage and water ingress. With 12 cylinders, it can be difficult to identify a misfire, but connecting diagnostic equipment to the OBDII port will help to find relevant fault codes. Budget for around £120 per coil pack and there's one for each cylinder. Whilst it's very unlikely

that all 12 will need to be replaced, the work involved in accessing them means that it may be more economical to change all six of them for one cylinder head.

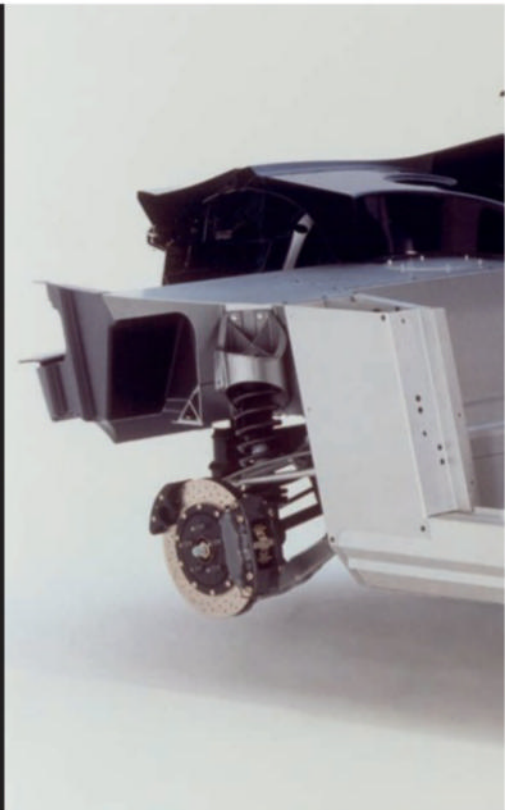
Engine misfires may not be caused by a failed coil pack, but a dodgy spark plug or because oil has leaked down

SUBFRAMES

There's a steel subframe underneath the front end of the Vanquish, which can corrode. Most of it is hidden and protected by an undertray, but this can trap moisture and dirt, accelerating corrosion. If possible, ask for the undertray to be removed so you can inspect the front subframe.

David Such of V12Vanquish.com says that it's important to inspect the condition of the front subframe on any vehicle you are looking to purchase. "I offer a rebuild service which will repair, treat and powder-coat the subframe for £2,400," he explains. A genuine replacement front subframe costs £7,554.

The rear subframe is also made of steel and is similarly susceptible to corrosion, but doesn't suffer as much as the front subframe. New ones are still available and cost around £5,000.





As mentioned, replacing the spark plugs is not a five-minute job (the inlet manifolds have to be removed) and is not cheap.

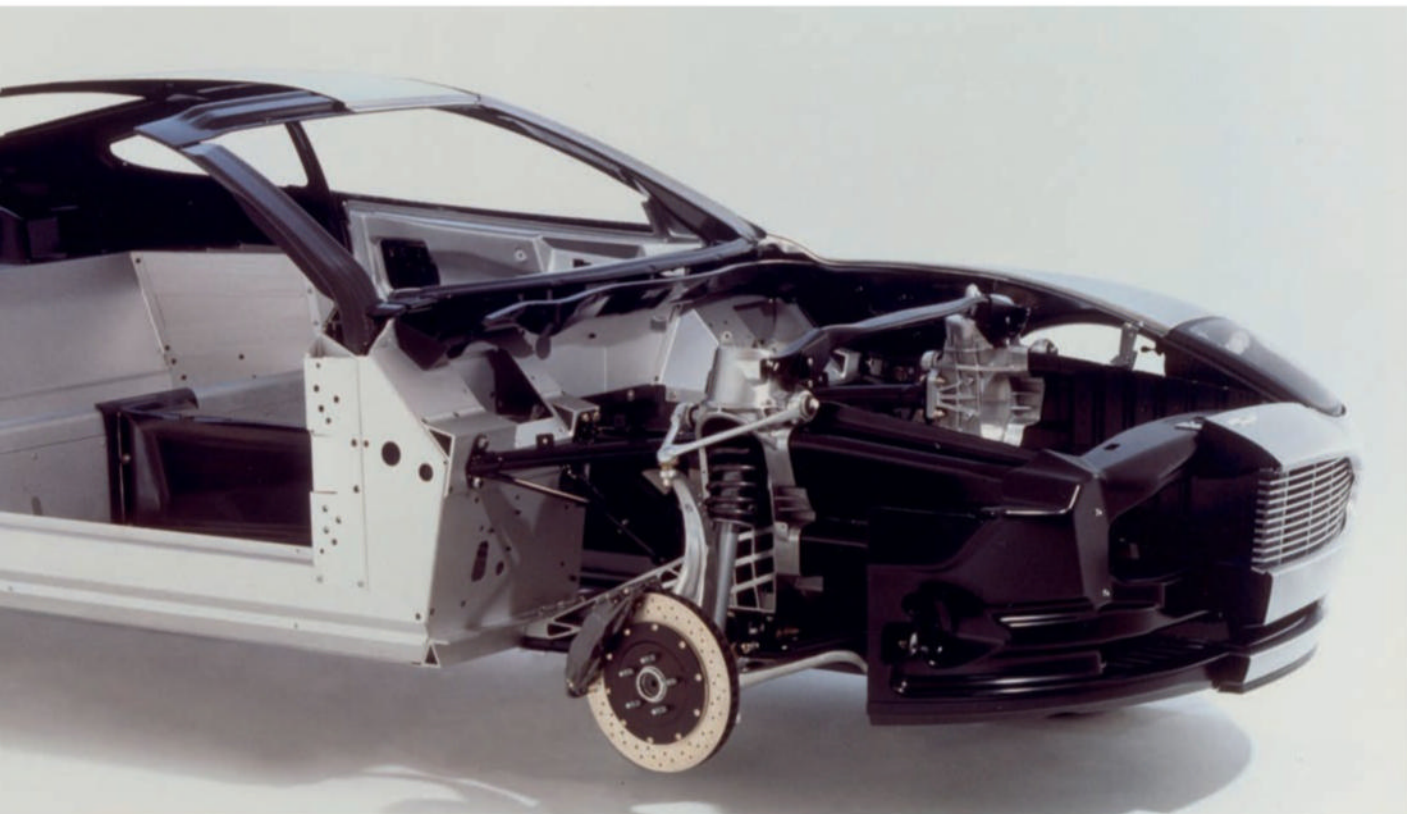
David also says that oily deposits inside the rubber induction hoses to the throttle bodies usually suggests that the positive crankcase ventilation (PCV) valves (breathers) have failed. Whilst oil contamination is a problem, much worse is oil consumption, which if ignored results in a low engine oil level and starvation of lubrication to the bearings (main and big end). Should a V12 engine need a rebuild, budget for around £20,000.

And it may not be the most disastrous aspects found on an engine that can

still be expensive to fix. If the auxiliary drivebelt is perished, for example, then a new kit (belt, tensioner and idlers) costs over £300 (excluding labour to fit them). A visual inspection of the belt to look for cracks across its ribs will help to determine whether it needs to be replaced.

The exhaust system is largely concealed, especially at the rear where insulating blankets are fitted. The rear silencers include vacuum-operated valves, which result in a raspy note upon starting the engine and when it exceeds 3,000rpm. Being around 20 years old in some cases, corrosion of the exhaust

through the spark plug hole. David Such advises that if this results in a major misfire and the engine management light (EML) is flashing, then the unburnt fuel can be ingested by one of the catalytic converters, causing damage to it, so the issue needs to be addressed promptly.



BUYING GUIDE

V12 VANQUISH



system can be an issue. "If it was stainless steel from new it wasn't of a high quality and it does rust," says David Such. "At the very least don't expect any of the clamps to come undone if you need to remove it. Replacement systems are available in various guises from Quicksilver, Larini, or from me - mine is the only valved replacement." David's full exhaust systems (from the cat back) cost £6,360.

MANUAL AUTO

A Tremec T56 six-speed auto shift manual gearbox is fitted to the V12 Vanquish, delivering power to the rear wheels via a propshaft and rear-mounted differential. Check the oil inside it has been changed at every 30,000 miles.

A Magnetti Marelli electronically- and hydraulically-operated gearchange mechanism sits on top of the gearbox to operate gearchanges, so there's no gearlever inside the cockpit, only paddles behind the steering wheel. These gearboxes are readily available to buy in the US and David Such says that "They are pretty much bombproof units."

Check the operation of the paddles to select gears. The earlier analogue gear position sensors are not as reliable as the later magnetic sensors. The later sensors can be fitted, which is a job best saved



INTERIOR AND ELECTRICS

Carefully examine the condition of the interior, looking for deep scratches, tears in the upholstery and permanent marks. Check that all the electrical equipment works. Some components are from Ford, such as the stalk switches (Focus or Fiesta origin) and even the clock, but don't always assume you can visit your local breakers yard to replace a wiper switch, for instance.





for when the clutch is replaced. With no clutch pedal, it's difficult to determine the condition of the dual-plate clutch, other than to listen and feel for it slipping under acceleration. If it does need to be changed, then the parts alone cost around £5,000 and the time required can vary (12-14 hours according to Chiltern Aston), depending on what needs to be done to set up the gearchange, which needs specialist equipment.

During a test drive, listen for any noises from the gearbox, such as a whistling sound, which may mean the spigot shaft bearing is worn. A new bearing is part of the clutch kit, but if the input shaft also needs to be replaced, add an extra £500 to the final bill and David Such warns that this type of work involves a gearbox rebuild, so it's more involved than a clutch renewal. "You can get round it by fitting the spigot bearing further into the crank," he says. "I have done this on my manual converted car due to a failed spigot bearing."

David has found the rear differential's mounting bushes (called the isolator assembly) can wear, resulting in clonking noises and visible movement of the diff if you can lever against them with a pry bar. He understands that these bushes were sourced from the Jaguar S-Type and is currently working on having them remanufactured.

BRAKES

With disc brakes all round (cross-drilled in some cases) and ABS (anti-lock braking system) as standard, look for the ABS light on the dashboard remaining illuminated (it should appear when switching on the ignition, but go off soon after). Electronic brake distribution (EBD) was introduced in the 2004 model year.

Make sure the vehicle brakes in a straight line and doesn't veer to one side, which could suggest a seized brake caliper or a problem with the tyres and tracking (more relevant if the vehicle veers when not braking). Check the temperature of the brake discs afterwards (don't touch them in case you burn your skin) to ensure they are the same across each axle, which helps to identify a dragging or seized caliper. Check that the brakes have been stripped and cleaned at every service

David Such says the V12 Vanquish employs a ring earthing system with lots of braided cables behind the trim. "Over time many cars have earth straps that have come disconnected as the nuts have worked loose," he says. "It's always worth checking when you have it apart or if you have a random electrical problem."

He also says there is a common problem with the cabin heating running constantly hot, which is usually a failure

of the heater valve. Fortunately, the heater valve is a Jaguar part that can be reconditioned for around £60 and takes a couple of hours to remove and refit.

"Look for green dye coming from the high-pressure air con switch, just visible on the right-hand engine bay behind the airbox," he explains. The switch is to blame (gas leaks through the centre of it) and is a Jaguar part, but it's readily available and easy to replace if the air con is losing gas or has lost all of it.





interval to help prolong their life. Where drilled discs are fitted, for instance, it helps to reduce the risk of corrosion if the drilled holes are cleaned.

The price of new discs and pads varies greatly between models and model years. The V12 Vanquish up to 2003 has the cheapest replacement discs and pads, with a pair of genuine 355mm-diameter front discs costing £1,440 and another £493.72 for a full set of front brake pads. The 2004 model year V12 Vanquish's front discs cost £2,419.20 with the pads priced at £493.72. The larger 378mm-diameter front discs on the S and the Sports Dynamic Pack cost £3,600, with a set of front pads priced at £505.20.

David Such says that the larger brakes on a Vanquish S can rattle. "They used to rattle from new," he says, explaining that it's the fault of Aston Martin's bobbin design, which holds the brake disc and bell together. New bobbins are available as part of a repair kit for around £500, but the bells may be worn so the brakes will still rattle.

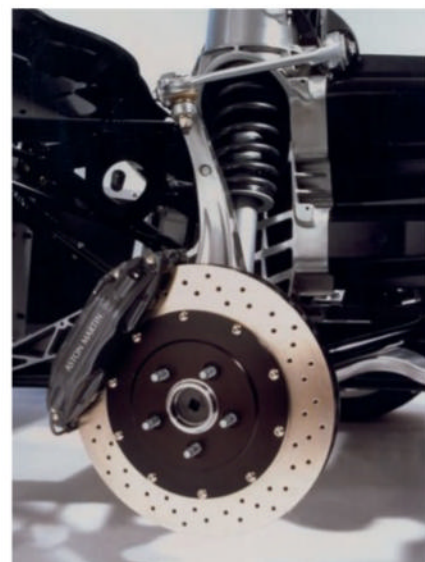
"I supply a different designed disc with different bobbins to prevent this but it is a whole replacement disc," he says, charging £2,160 for the discs and selling aftermarket EBC brake pads for around £220.

SUSPENSION

The front suspension is all mounted to the front subframe and consists of a tall, curved upright and hub assembly to which upper and lower wishbones are attached. There's also a vertically mounted coilover behind each road wheel and a single anti-roll bar.

The rear suspension is also attached to a subframe where there are upper wishbones and lower wishbone-style arms, along with coilovers, track control arms and an anti-roll bar. David Such remarks that many of the suspension components are commonly found on the Jaguar S-Type.

For both the front and rear suspension, listen for knocking noises during a test drive, which could suggest worn anti-roll



bar drop-links and mounting bushes, worn mounting bushes for the dampers, a fractured coil spring or worn mounting bushes for the wishbones.

"Noises are generally the front anti-roll bar bushes," David explains. "Worn bushes will give an under-controlled ride and it will be a bit crashy over bumps."

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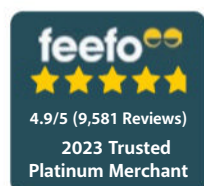
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BUYING GUIDE

V12 VANQUISH

WHEELS AND TYRES

The Vanquish started with 12-spoke 19in wheels all round (9in wide at the front and 10in at the rear), shod with 255/40 and 285/40 tyres front and rear. The 2004 model year Vanquish, which was unveiled at Frankfurt in September 2003, featured seven-spoke 19in wheels.

Guy Jenner explains that the Vanquish S has 11-spoke wheels of the same size and design, but unless you count the spokes, it's hard to tell them apart from those 12-spokes. He also says that tyres have become difficult to source, but he would recommend a modern tyre such as a Michelin PS5 (Pilot Sport) instead. Budget for £200-£300 per tyre.

Look for a four-digit date stamp on the sidewall of each tyre to find out when it was manufactured. 3515, for instance, means the tyre was manufactured in the 35th week of 2015. As a general rule, most tyre manufacturers recommend changing tyres after they are seven years old.

Check there are no tyre pressure monitoring system (TPMS) faults displayed on the dashboard – and, if possible, check this using diagnostic equipment. Each wheel should have a small transmitter fitted to the valve. If this has failed, a new one costs £220 per wheel.

Inspect the condition of the wheels, especially the rims to look for kerb damage and buckling. Check the finish to look for corrosion.

“Wheel nuts corrode and are a common problem of many Fords and Jaguars with a plated cover that swells,” says David Such. “These are easily replaced as they are common to Jaguar. If the right size socket is tight when fitting it, replace the nut, otherwise the cover may come off another time and that’s awkward!”

VERDICT

The 2001-2007 V12 Vanquish has all the right ingredients of a supercar from the start of the 21st century to still make it desirable today. We recommend finding one that has been looked after and meticulously maintained but be prepared to invest in its upkeep to avoid turning it into a money pit. In return, you'll experience a taste of a hand-built Aston Martin with V12 performance and stunning looks to match. **AMD**

Thanks to:

Antony Forshaw at Aston

Service Dorset 01202 574727

astonservicedorset.com

David Such at v12vanquish.com

07947 657334

Guy Jenner at HWM Aston Martin 01932

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Guy Wyles at Chiltern Aston Centre

01442 833177 www.chilternaston.co.uk

Neal Garrard at Nicholas Mee & Co Ltd

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HOW RARE IS A V12 VANQUISH?

Tim Cottingham at the Aston Martin Heritage Trust kindly found the production data for the V12 Vanquish and from the total sales of 2,588, the V12 Vanquish made up 1,499 of them, of which 528 were RHD and 971 were LHD. 1089 of those sold were the Vanquish S, of which 377 were RHD and 712 were LHD. Included in those S sales figures are 50 Ultimate Editions comprising 27 in RHD and 23 in LHD, plus a further three S Ultimate Edition cars for the United Arab Emirates (UAE), all being LHD and finished in Morning Frost White.

As for the Sports Dynamic Pack (introduced in 2003), AML claim 94 were produced, with 61 of them from new and the rest being converted after production.

Tim says there were another five cars not built or finished and he suspects they were probably destroyed.



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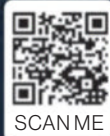


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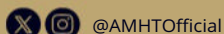
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EIGHTH WONDER

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY PAUL WALTON



This 2-Litre Sports was the eighth and only example to have been sold as a rolling chassis. After later being fitted with a two-seater body and a 2.6-litre engine, it enjoyed a long career in racing before disappearing for 30 years

WITH JUST 15 produced between 1948 and 1950, there's no such thing as an 'ordinary' Aston Martin 2-Litre Sports. Due to so few made, each one is unique with its own traceable history. But as the only example to have been sold minus a body and later updated with a larger engine, even by the standards of its siblings, car number eight is something special.

The 2-Litre Sports was a development of the Atom, a prototype saloon that had been designed by Aston's chief engineer Claude Hill and built between 1939 and 1940. How well it drove was one of the main reasons why (Sir) David Brown bought the company in 1947.

"I decided to try the Atom and took it home and put it through its paces over the Pennines," reminisced Brown in Geoff Courtney's 1978 book, *The Power Behind Aston Martin*. "I liked it, particularly the superb roadholding although it was a bit

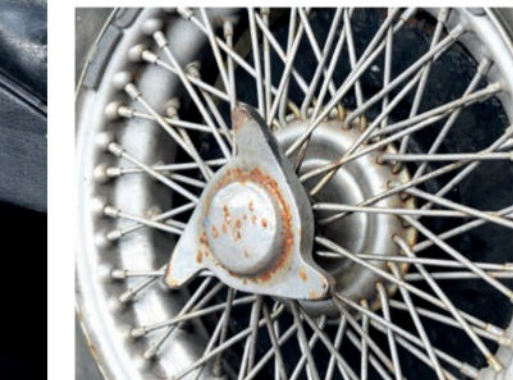
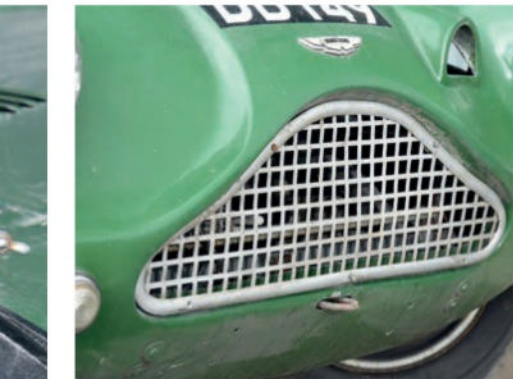
underpowered and not very good looking."

Knowing Aston needed a fresh model, but with a car using Lagonda's new W.O. Bentley-designed 2.6-litre straight-six (another company he would buy a few months later) still some time away, Brown commissioned Hill to update the Atom for production. The model proved its potential when the third prototype, fitted with a simple body and driven by St John 'Jock' Horsfall and Leslie Johnson, won the 1948 24-hour race at Spa-Francorchamps, Belgium.



HISTORY
2-LITRE SPORTS





"This convincing victory by this new British high-performance car puts Aston Martin right on the map again in a sphere of competition activity in which this make has always excelled," said *Motorsport* magazine's report of the race in its August 1948 issue. "How impatiently private sportsmen will now await delivery of the latest 2-litre Aston Martin!"

When the production version – now called the 2-Litre Sports – was revealed at the Earls Court Motor Show later the same year, it featured a handsome drophead coupe body by Lagonda's designer Frank Feeley that was based on sketches he'd made for the pre-war V12 model. Its nose, though, was dominated by a three-piece radiator grille similar to that seen on the Spa Special.

The Atom's 1,970cc OHV four-cylinder engine was now fitted with two SU carburettors giving it 90bhp. The motor was then joined to a four-speed gearbox sourced from David Brown Engineering, located in Huddersfield, that had

synchromesh on the final three ratios.

With its lightweight tubular frame chassis, the press soon praised the 2-Litre Sports for its roadholding. "The Aston Martin corners impeccably without roll," said *Motorsport* in its November 1948 issue, "and is one of the most outstanding cars in this respect."

But due to the car's high price – £2,331 when the six-cylinder Jaguar XK120 that also debuted at the 1948 Earls Court Motor Show was £1,000 less – the 2-Litre Sports was never a big seller. Whereas by the early Fifties Jaguar was producing over a thousand XK120s a year, Aston Martin's Feltham-based factory built a mere 15 2-Litre Sports before it was replaced by the DB2 in 1950 making it one of the rarest cars of the David Brown era.

The majority all featured the same Feeley-designed drophead coupe body but the eighth was sold to its first owner – an A.B. Hunter from Beckenham – as a running chassis. Produced in late 1949, AMC/49/8 was immediately transported



HISTORY

2-LITRE SPORTS

to the South London-based coachbuilder Gurney Nutting Ltd where it was transformed into a saloon.

Unfortunately, the original 2.0-litre needed to be replaced twice in 1950 alone, once in January and again in June (when the gearbox was also changed), both times under warranty by Aston Martin. Maybe it was because of this why Hunter soon sold the car, and it was bought by an F.H. Holmes of Shepshed, Loughborough.

Perhaps inspired by the race-winning DB3S and DBR1, in the late Fifties another owner commissioned the Swallow Coachbuilding Company in Wolverhampton to transform AMC/49/8 into a two-seater sports car. It was similar in design to Swallow's own Triumph-based Doretti, even featuring the same style of chromed grille.

Sometime in the Seventies AMC/49/8 was bought by a well-known Aston Martin engineer and racer, Shaun Magee. To make the car more competitive he



Magee racing the car (now registered MKE 836) in the early Seventies before he altered the nose





swapped the 2.0-litre four-cylinder for a later 2.6 straight-six as fitted to the DB2 and Lagonda. It's said this engine was then brought up to DB3S specification complete with revised camshafts, larger valves and increased sump capacity.

To allow more air under the bonnet, Magee then changed the nose, making the radiator grille both larger and its shape more Aston Martin-like.

He also uprated the car with a DB2 front axle, DB3S gearbox and stronger back axle complete with Powr-lok differential.

Magee raced the 2-Litre Sports in this configuration for the next couple of decades, regularly attending AMOC events across the UK including Silverstone and the Wiscombe Park Hillclimb in Devon.

He eventually sold the car in April 1987 through Christie's Beaulieu auction when it had a brief spell in France. A surviving classified advert from this time describes it (in French) as, "A very nice car in excellent condition. Ready to race."

The 2-Litre Sports returned to the UK in the early Nineties and in 1994 was acquired by its current and long-term owner. Although the 2.6-litre straight-six was said to be a runner, the oil pressure was worryingly low, so he decided to restore the car, starting with the removal of its engine. As is often the way, though, that's as far as he got and for the last three decades this piece of Aston Martin history has remained hidden in his workshop.

After deciding he'll never finish it, the car was offered for sale through H&H Classics' auction held at the Imperial War Museum at Duxford in mid-September 2023 when I was given an exclusive preview of the car.

If I'm being honest, I can't say it's pretty. The grille might make the nose look more like an Aston Martin but it's more awkward than a politician's smile. And maybe it's because my father once owned one in an identical shade of green, but I reckon the rear looks a little like a larger Austin-Healey 'Frogeye' Sprite especially since it uses the same Lucas L549 style of taillight.

Yet the Aston does have perfectly compact proportions and together with the aero screen and white roundels looks every inch the Fifties sports racer only in miniature.

It's also still workshop fresh and the thick layer of dust covering every surface ►

HISTORY

2-LITRE SPORTS



gives an impression of something British archaeologist Howard Carter might have found in an Egyptian tomb. The car wasn't lost in the true sense of the word since the owner knew what he had and where it was, but the grime is proof of how little attention it has received over the years.

The interior looks to be complete even down to the fully fitted carpets, but several exposed screwheads make the dash look homemade (but it probably was). Yet the leather-wrapped steering wheel and racing seats thought to be out of the one-off DB3S from 1958 still make the car inviting to drive. And I'm sure it would be great fun, too, if the engine was under the bonnet and not in another part of the Imperial War Museum for the sale, hence why the nose looks a little high in our images.

What it is, though, is a fantastic project. Just as its first owner, A.B. Hunter, could see the potential of the 2-Litre Sports, when he chose to have one rebodied, I'm sure a future owner will think the same and put this remarkable car back on the road.

Whatever the future might hold, it's clear AMC/49/8's remarkable history isn't finished yet. **AMD**

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BIOGRAPHY

RESCUE REMEDY

When Aston Martin Lagonda Ltd went bankrupt in late 1974, it was bought by a consortium led by an American businessman, Peter J. Sprague. We look at his life, career and what caused him to save this most British of companies

WORDS PAUL WALTON

IMAGES ASTON MARTIN HERITAGE TRUST & AMD ARCHIVE



BIOGRAPHY

PETER J. SPRAGUE

OF ALL the potential saviours of Aston Martin Lagonda Ltd when it went bankrupt in the mid-Seventies, Peter J. Sprague wouldn't have been high on anyone's list. Not only did he have no experience in the British motor trade but he also lived a long way from Newport Pagnell on the other side of the Atlantic.

But it was perhaps due to having no previous involvement and therefore not fully understanding the task at hand why he, together with his co-investors, managed to turn the company around in a relatively short space of time.

"I was the perfect person to get involved in Aston Martin," Sprague wrote years later for a feature in the AMOC of America magazine. "I was 35 years old. I knew nothing about any aspect of the car business. I had never been inside the factory or met any Aston luminaries. I was not as impressed as I should have been that the British economy was in terrible shape. Things were grim, but I was cheerful – I truly did not understand the situation."

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Peter came from a family of inventors. When his grandfather, Frank J. Sprague, joined the US Navy in 1878, he created the inverted type of dynamo before later installing the first electric call bell on an American ship.

When he left the USN in 1883 to work for legendary inventor and businessman Thomas Edison, Sprague was responsible for building the power stations for his lighting systems in Sunbury, Pennsylvania, and Brockton, Massachusetts. But a year later he left to start his own company, Sprague Electric Railway & Motor Company, that soon introduced two inventions; a constant-speed, non-sparking motor with fixed brushes plus regenerative braking. He later founded an electric elevator company in 1892.

"His interest in his work never ceased," said Frank's eldest son, Robert, after his father's passing in 1935. "Only a few hours before the end, he asked to have a newly designed model of his latest invention brought to his bedside."

Like his father before him, Robert had also joined the US Navy before starting his own company, Sprague Electric,



during 1926, in Quincy, Massachusetts, later moving the firm to North Adams. The company would become a leader in radio capacitors. Franks' second son, Julian (Peter's father), joined his brother a couple of years later.

Not long after Peter was born in April 1939, his family moved to Williamstown, Massachusetts, where his mother ran the private school although he later went to the town's public school. He admits today he was a pushy kid, always on the lookout for his next adventure. "I was always in a real hurry," he said during a 2012 interview with Stanford Library, "but looking back I don't know what I was in such a hurry for. It's been a long life since then."

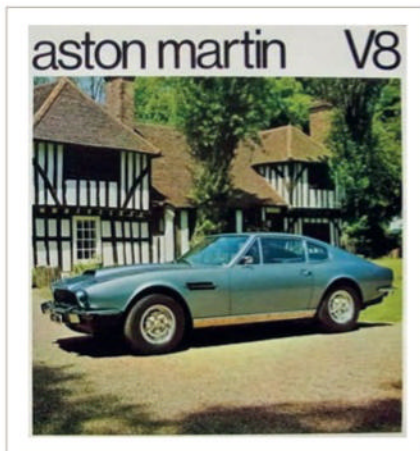
After spending the summer of 1954 in France, Peter worked as a photographer for the Berkshire Evening Eagle, a newspaper based in Pittsfield, Massachusetts.



Alan Curtis (left) and Peter Sprague tour the factory in 1975



The now empty Newport Pagnell factory in late 1974 after Aston Martin had gone bankrupt



A brochure from 1975 after Peter Sprague had restarted the company

"I wanted to be either a journalist or in the foreign service," he recalled years later. "What I didn't want to do was to have anything to do with technology or business." He ultimately failed at staying away from both.

In 1956 his parents sent him to a Swiss finishing school, Institut Le Rosey, on the northern shore of Lake Geneva, but when the Hungarian revolution broke out in October the same year he needed to cover it. "I decided that there would never be another revolution and that I had to be there," he said during an article about the adventure on sprague.com.

And so despite being just 17, after informing the school he was visiting his parents in Europe, he flew to Vienna before hitchhiking to Budapest. "I had no sense of risk, then or later," he said in a feature about the adventure on his website. "Teenagers and journalists believe that they are immortal."

After watching Soviet tanks roll into Budapest, he joined a convoy that was heading towards an Austrian border town but became stuck in a town surrounded by the Russian army. Thankfully, Peter made it out of the country safely, later selling his story to United Press International.

Soon after leaving Le Rosey in 1959, he moved to Russia and worked for UPI. "My job was to keep the UPI White House photographer from getting lost; and taking backup pictures when he did." Sprague's image of Nikita Khrushchev sitting in the cockpit of President Nixon's Boeing 707 was used by *Look* magazine. When he married Tjasa in December 1959, they



Curtis and Sprague (seated) in Aston Martin's drawing office in 1976

BIOGRAPHY

PETER J. SPRAGUE

honeymooned in Outer Mongolia where he again worked for UPI, interviewing the country's prime minister, Yumjaagiin Tsedenbal.

Peter headed back to the States in 1960 to study political science at Yale and MIT, which was followed by a doctoral programme in economics at Columbia University.

During his time at University, Peter was invited to spy on the Eighth World Youth Festival held in Helsinki over the summer of 1962 and organised by the Russian Communist party. He listened to political speeches, made one of his own about witnessing the Hungarian revolution and took clandestine pictures of events. "I liked being a secret agent, I thought I had done a good job," wrote Peter on his website, sprague.com. "But nobody ever asked me to be a secret agent again."

When his father died in 1960, Peter had inherited \$300,000. As a result of his family name and connections to the industry, in 1964 he was invited to invest in National Semiconductor, a small electrical company whose origins went back to the Fifties. "I had already started a family and I had a lot of energy and curiosity." He would remain the company's chairman for the next 30 years.

Peter also had a very brief dalliance with politics when he was the Republican candidate for New York's 17th congressional district for the 1970 congress elections, losing to Democrat Ed Koch who later became the city's mayor. "A less than perfect background for the upcoming events at Aston," he wrote on sprague.com.

As an enthusiast of the brand, owning a DB4 since 1962, when Peter read in early 1975 that Aston Martin had entered receivership in December 1974, he was devastated. "Off and on over the next two days we kept returning to the question of why Aston had to go out of business," he wrote in his AMOC of America piece. "Finally Tjasa brought my complaining into focus. 'Why don't you do something about it?'"

Never one to walk away from a challenge, he called Aston Martin and after speaking to its then managing director Charles Warden, arranged to visit Newport Pagnell the following week.

After fighting through the many journalists at the gate after Warden had leaked to the press that an American businessman was going to save Aston Martin, he was shown around the now abandoned factory. It was this experience more than anything that made him decide to do something.

"A week before everything had stopped without warning," he wrote for the AMOC of America. "We started with the raw materials, racks of sheet metal and leather and parts, walked down the production line and I imagined the process of a car coming to life. Except there was no life, only an eerie quiet with a background aroma of leather and oiled metal. It was clear that I never would see Astons being built, only a graveyard of unresolved craftsmanship. I wanted to see it come alive again. I did not know how difficult it would be or how long it would take, but I became emotionally hooked."

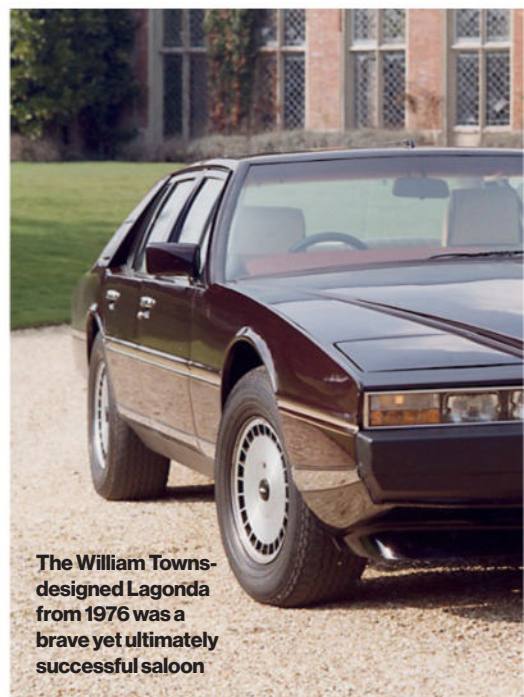
At the same time that Sprague was looking to save the company, Aston Martin's Canadian distributor, George Minden, was hoping to do the same. Following a press conference announcing that he was interested in putting a consortium together, Peter reached out to him.

"I called him up to tell him that I was glad that he was going to save the company and offered to support his efforts," said Sprague in the AMOC of America feature. "George was surprised by the interest that his press conference had stirred up. He was also surprised by my call. He did not intend to save the company on his own. We met in London at The Dorchester Hotel and agreed to work together."

In May 1975 and after securing a £600k loan from The Bank of America, Sprague, together with Minden, offered to buy the company's assets for £1,050,000, which was eventually accepted.

Although the name was changed to Aston Martin Lagonda (1975) Ltd, Sprague always saw it as a continuation of the same firm.

"We're doing it because we love this car and the name should never die," he said during an article about the reborn company in the September 1976 issue of *Motorsport*. "We've acquired a tradition and have a responsibility to see it go on."

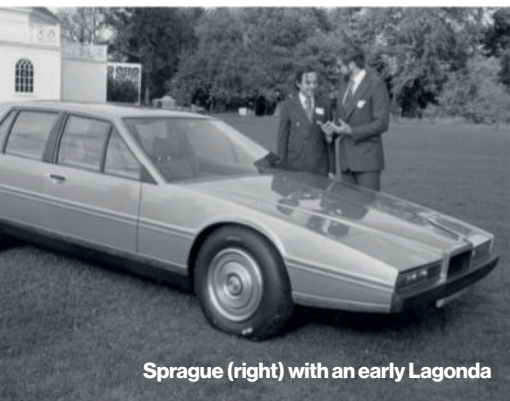


The William Towns-designed Lagonda from 1976 was a brave yet ultimately successful saloon



Curtis and Sprague (seated) in Aston Martin's drawing office in 1976





Sprague (right) with an early Lagonda

Sprague soon convinced Alan Curtis – who had made his money in the construction industry and who had earlier expressed an interest in investing – to also join. “His teenage son – who was an Aston fanatic – answered the phone and in a reverential tone said to his father, ‘Peter Sprague is on the phone.’ Alan later said that he agreed to join in the effort because he couldn’t disappoint his son.”

After touring the still empty factory the next day, Alan could also see the potential and so agreed to invest in the company and joined the board. “Alan was a very modest guy who had little to be modest about,” said Peter about his former co-director during a 2021 interview with the AMOC.

They were later joined in January 1976 by Denis Flather, a retired businessman who’d made his own fortune in the Sheffield steel industry. He was also an Aston Martin enthusiast and owned several classic models. After sending the company a cheque for £50,000 with a note saying, “I think you’ll need this,” he too was invited to join the board.

“He cared deeply about the company and had the kind of stalwart backbone that was necessary at that stage of our revival,” wrote Sprague for the AMOC of America feature about Flather. “We always knew that we could rely on Denis when the going got tough. He had strong opinions about practically everything and he stated them often.”

With an investment of new money, the factory was slowly being brought back to life with laid-off members of staff rejoining. This included Aston’s former general manager, Fred Hartley, who after being made managing director by the new owners, spent much of the first few weeks with Sprague and other personnel trying to make the manufacturing process as streamlined as possible.

“We found that one craftsman with great care was welding a bracket onto the frame,” explained Sprague in the AMOC magazine. “An equally fine craftsman was removing the same bracket with equal care three stages down the production line, about 40 feet away. They had tea together every day. No one knew what the bracket had ever been used for.” In the first six months there were over 2,300 engineering change orders, which Peter says were mostly initiated by the workforce.

Incredibly, by September 1975 manufacturing had restarted at Newport Pagnell, initially with cars that were semi-completed when the company entered receivership but later brand-new examples. Production soon settled down to what it had been three years earlier; an average of five cars a week. It was a remarkable achievement for a company that not long ago was viewed as finished.

“They [the four directors] simplified and streamlined what is probably the only individual hand-beaten metal production car line left in the world,” said *Modern Motor* in its January 1977 issue, “gave it a new heart and its workers new impetus.”

Perhaps even more remarkably, despite Aston Martin still finding its feet, Sprague and his fellow directors soon started planning for the future, realising if the firm was to survive it needed a new model. They decided on a four-door saloon since if the market got wind of a new coupe, customers would stop buying the existing AMV8 and wait for the new one.

It says much about the bravery of the quartet that what they chose was a very angular and totally different kind of saloon by British designer William Towns who’d been responsible for both the DBS and previous generation of Lagonda.

“There was no dissension. The four company directors all felt that we wanted ▶

The more powerful Vantage version of the V8 was introduced in 1977



BIOGRAPHY

PETER J. SPRAGUE

The V8 saloon was updated in 1978 resulting in the Oscar India



to own the car in William's drawings. We wouldn't ever be able to drive it if we didn't build it. Thus the Lagonda was conceived."

Peter wanted the car to be an electrical tour de force with never-before-seen equipment. "As the Lagonda began to take form I added my own special contribution – related to my background in the world of microelectronics. The car looked amazingly modern, why not add an all-electronic, computer-based information and control system and really join the 20th century? It was an excellent idea – but ultimately about 15-20 years ahead of its time."

This meant the Lagonda's development was slower than expected. Following its debut at the 1976 Earls Court Motor show in October, production didn't begin for another two years. Yet its looks and specification meant it was a groundbreaking car that still defines the Sprague era of Aston Martin.

"The Lagonda put Aston Martin back on the automotive map and attracted badly needed new attention," he said in his AMOC piece. "It is clear to me that the Lagonda was a crucial component for the company's survival."

Aston's range soon increase even further thanks to two new models. The first was the faster Vantage version of the AMV8 in 1977 that was followed by the company's first Volante since the DB6 12 months later. Both were a success critically and commercially and, by 1977,

there was a trading profit of £750,000.

"The rescuers of Aston Martin are intensely enthusiastic," said *Sports Car World* magazine in its November 1977 issue. "Happily, it shows in their newest products."

The AMV8 was updated in 1978 resulting in the 'Oscar India' which incorporated a small spoiler to the boot lid and enclosed the bonnet vent to create a power bulge. There was also a revised interior with extensive use of walnut trim.

After spending a considerable time in the UK at the start of his involvement with Aston Martin, by now Sprague was based mainly in the States with regular flying visits to Newport Pagnell. "I began travelling to England about once a month for a week," he explained in the AMOC America piece. "This was an improvement from 1975 when I had made 17 transatlantic round trips. In late 1977 I took one of the first trips on Concorde and continued to use it occasionally."

Peter was always aware that as an American who jointly owned this most British of companies that he should remain behind the scenes. "I saw no reason to broadcast the fact that Aston Martin, that quintessentially British company, was partly owned by an American," he said in the AMOC feature.

Yet his dedication to the company was never in doubt. The September 1976 issue of *Motorsport* magazine described him as, "This tall, affable and modest man, a truly quiet American with an obviously genuine



An American advert for the Lagonda from the late Seventies



enthusiasm for Aston Martin and all it stands for.”

Always the entrepreneur, the British car manufacturer wasn't the only business that Peter was involved with, which were as varied as his own career. But unfortunately these all started to fail at around the same time during the late Seventies.

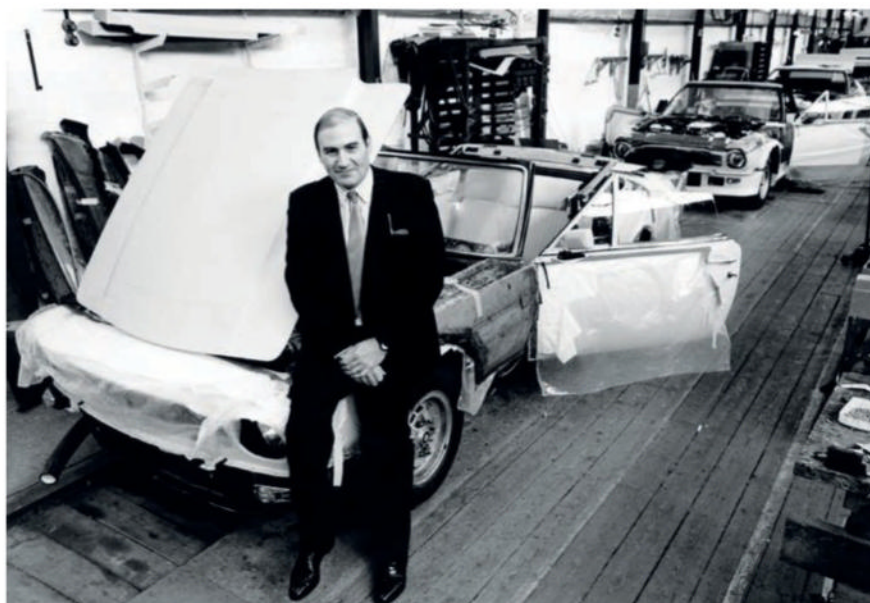
Since 1967 he'd been chairman of Design Research, a retail store that was based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, which went bankrupt in 1979.

At the same time that Peter had invested in Aston Martin, he had also invested with the Advent Corporation, also in Cambridge, that built high-fidelity speakers and components as well as projection televisions. Due to poor sales, the company also went under in 1979.

Since the early Sixties he'd part-owned a chicken farm operation in Iran, but this was taken over by a mullah-controlled cartel when the Shah was overthrown in 1978.

Perhaps worse still was that the stock price of his main business, National Semiconductor, had plummeted along with the rest of the technology industry. Put all of this together and he was in big trouble.

“Looking back at this period it is clear that I was way over extended both financially and personally. Aston was my greatest passion. Passion without cash was not enough.” Due to production dropping to four cars a week, Aston was



In 1981 Sprague and his remaining directors sold his shares to British businessman, Victor Gauntlett

There's no doubt Peter J. Sprague was an unusual choice to save Aston Martin

also ailing and so in 1980 the workforce was cut by 100.

With Minden leaving in 1978, the remaining directors came close to shutting the production side of the business and concentrating on the more lucrative service and restoration department instead. Rescue came in the shape of two British businessmen, Victor Gauntlett from Pace Petroleum and Tim Hearley of CH Industrials, who each bought 12.5 percent shares for £500,000. This increased to 50 percent the following year with Gauntlett very much in a leading role.

“While we are fully aware of the continuing problems facing specialist car builders, both Tim Hearley and myself believe in the future of Aston Martin,” said Gauntlett during an interview at the time. “We recognise that the company presents an exciting challenge and opportunity.”

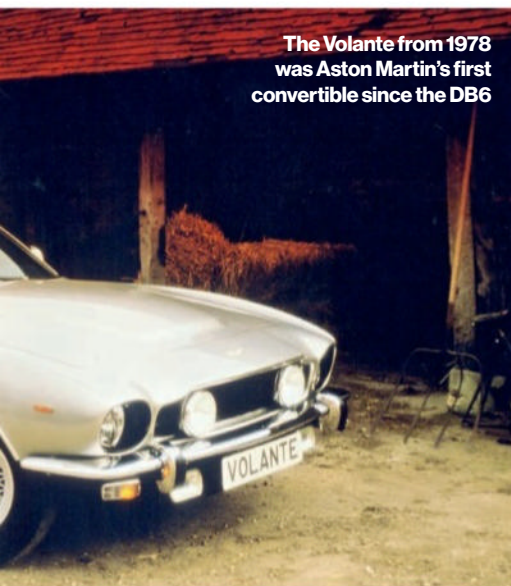
As for Sprague, it was the end of a short but important era. “I had worn the small golden Aston Martin wings on my jacket every day for five years. I took them off, put them in my bureau drawer and got on with my life.”

He later went on to found Wave Systems Corp. that allowed producers and users of electronic information to distribute and purchase content. Although now in his 80s, he remains active with involvement in several companies.

There's no doubt Peter J. Sprague was an unusual choice to save Aston Martin but his unique background made him the perfect candidate to get this equally unique company up and running. The five years he spent there is one of the most critical moments in the company's long history.

If he hadn't stepped in when he did, Aston Martin would have been yet another failed British car manufacturer. And the new models that he and his co-directors introduced such as the Vantage and Lagonda have become some of its most famous and successful, which helped the company to survive long enough to be taken over by Ford in 1987.

Although Peter said during a 2012 interview that he left the company financially about even, the company owes him so much more. **AMD**



The Volante from 1978 was Aston Martin's first convertible since the DB6

WORTH THE WAIT

WORDS PAUL WALTON PHOTOGRAPHY ROBERT GEORGE

When Aston Martin finally removed the roof of the V8 saloon, it created one of the company's most popular cars of the Seventies and Eighties. To mark the 45th anniversary of the Volante going on sale in the UK, we look at its history



DESPITE THEIR relative simplicity, it took a surprisingly long time before some highly successful products were developed. Take wheeled suitcases for example. Although neither part was a new idea, it wasn't that a year after Neil Armstrong had stood on the Moon that someone finally brought wheels and luggage together.

Plus, knives and bread might both be centuries old, but it was as recently as 1928 that the pre-sliced loaf finally arrived.

And then there's the V8 Volante. The car it was based on, the DBS, might have arrived in 1967 and Aston Martin had previously produced convertible versions of its earlier models, but it was still the



MODEL PROFILE

V8 VOLANTE

late Seventies when the company finally chopped the roof off the V8 saloon. But when it did, the result was one of the company's most successful models of the era, helping redefine the company as a manufacturer of luxury vehicles.

"This is a car that impresses itself – favourably and indelibly – upon your mind for the way in which it blends its abilities for their unique sum total," was the view of *Car* magazine in its September 1979 issue. "Visually it is an extremely successful development, this metamorphosis from coupe to convertible."

The reason there wasn't an open version of the DBS is simple; a lack of finances when the British designer William Towns was creating the coupe during the mid-Sixties meant Aston Martin couldn't afford one. And with America looking at introducing new legislation that would have outlawed such cars in the Seventies, there wasn't much point in developing one at a later stage either.

But by the middle of the decade, it was clear these regulations weren't going to arrive (they never did). Knowing a convertible version of the then-current V8 saloon would be successful in America, the president of AML Inc, Rex Woodgate, commissioned the artist Dale W. King to draw one to show the company's new owners, Peter Sprague and George Minden (who'd bought the company in 1975 after it had gone into receivership the year before), what such a car might look like.

"Since Peter and George took over I had been badgering Newport Pagnell to produce a convertible for the States," said Rex in Geoff Courtney's 1978 book, *The Power Behind Aston Martin*.

At the same time, Aston Martin's agent in Los Angeles, Chuck Vandergriff, was also petitioning the company's management for such a car.

"Our American distributors had been asking for a convertible version of the V8





An early brochure for the V8 Volante clearly shows the car's clean lines



since we bought the company,” said the company’s then managing director Alan Curtis in *The Power Behind Aston Martin*, “and in April 1977 I saw for myself how great the demand was when I visited the Los Angeles Motor Show.”

Curtis continued to say in Courtney’s book that he returned to the UK determined to have a V8 convertible designed and in production.

Aston Martin decided to resurrect the Volante name for the new car. First used for a DB5-based convertible from 1965, it was last seen with the DB6 version that had ended five years later. Derived by Aston Martin’s distribution manager, Kent Monk, from the Italian for flying, *volare*, its reuse for the V8 convertible cemented the name’s place in the company’s terminology.

Aston Martin’s former engineering director Harold Beach – who continued working for the company as a consultant after it had been saved in 1975 – quickly modified the car’s platform to accept being transformed into a convertible. Drawing on his experience with the DB4 convertible 16 years earlier, Beach added box sections into the sills while reinforcements to the base and sides of the windscreen pillars also created more strengthening.

Early scuttle-shake was eliminated by fitting a rear underbody subframe, the shape of which was rumoured to have been inspired by a garden gate.

All of this strengthening meant the final car was both strong and rigid but pushed the car’s weight up to 3,950lb (1,792kg), an increase of 150lb (68kg) over the V8 saloon.

The look of the Volante was also the work of Beach. A handsome yet muscular convertible, even minus the roof its angular lines remained true to William Towns’ original design.

When the car was announced in June 1978, it was immediately praised by the critics for its design. “Adaption of the body to a convertible has been very competently done,” said *Autocar* in its June 24 1978 issue, “and either open or closed, the Volante looks most elegant.”

Aston Martin decided to use the new convertible to debut some of the updates that would be seen with the facelifted V8 saloon (universally known today as the

MODEL PROFILE

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'Oscar India') that would arrive later in the same year. These included the closed bonnet intake that created a discreet power bulge.

The layout might have remained the same, the interior was also heavily refreshed with the introduction of burr walnut veneer across the dash and door tops plus a better quality of leather which again was later seen in the saloon. Compared to the monotone black vinyl of the DBS and early V8 models, this was the interior some critics had been waiting for.

"Although traditional almost to the point of being old-fashioned," said *Motor* in its 3 March 1979 issue, "we found the interior's combination of polished walnut, beige Connolly hide and deep pile carpet to be quite exquisite and assembled to a standard fully in keeping with the quality of the materials used."

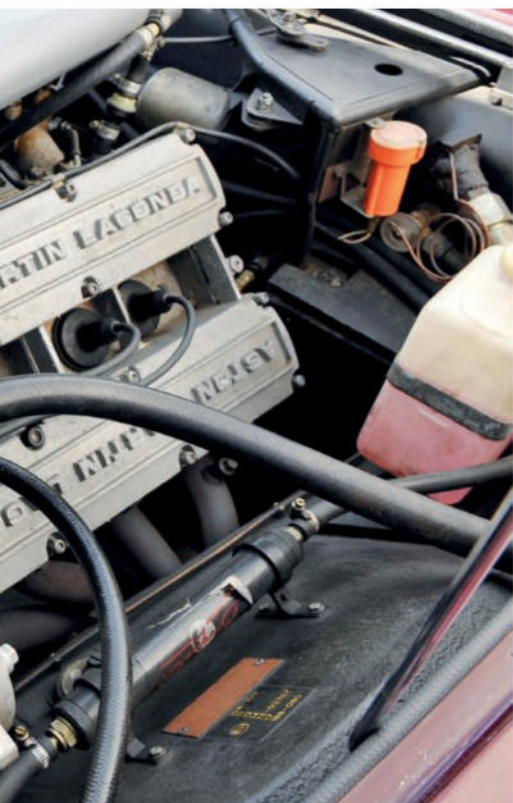
Mechanically, the Volante was the same as the saloon which included the 300bhp 5.3-litre V8 and either the TorqueFlite three-speed automatic or a five-speed manual transmission by ZF. But due to the extra weight of the convertible's strengthening, performance was slightly down on the hardtop. When *Motor* tested the prototype in 1979, the 7.7 seconds it took to reach 60mph was half a second slower than the V8 saloon. Yet by the standards of the day, it was still fast.

"The power is more than sufficient," continued the magazine, "for even when fitted with power sapping automatic transmission the acceleration of this heavy car is little short of stunning and delivered with a semi-muffled bellow from beneath the bonnet that's as pleasing as the performance itself."

Former Mulliner Park Ward chief designer George Moseley – who had earlier designed the hood of the Rolls-Royce Corniche – was responsible for the roof. Fully electric, hydraulic lifting rams raised and lowered the lined canvas hood in a matter of seconds. It was a clean, neat and clever system that went down well with the critics. "The whole operation can be accomplished without leaving the driver's seat," found *Motor* magazine's during its 1979 test.

The original prototype was handmade by a Halifax-based coachbuilder, Woodhall Nicholson, and later used by Alan Curtis.





Although this car was in right-hand drive, the V8 Volante was originally only sold in the States with American dealers quickly ordering the first year's production of 80 cars. But in mid-1979, the Volante was finally available in the UK. At £33,900, when even a Bristol 412 was four grand cheaper, it was an expensive car but also a relatively unique one.



The then Prince of Wales with his Vantage-engined Volante



Due to that proposed but unrealised American legislation, even by the late Seventies the majority of mainstream European manufacturers still weren't producing their own convertibles. It would take until 1988, for example, for Jaguar to develop a fully open version of the XJ-S. With the Volante's only real rivals being the much more expensive Rolls-Royce Corniche and the admittedly cheaper Mercedes-Benz SL, the Aston Martin convertible had much of the market almost to itself.

This quickly saw it become the company's best-selling model and, according to Motor magazine, by 1979 half of the six cars produced a week at the company's Newport Pagnell factory were convertibles. This together with the other new models Aston Martin had introduced at around the same time aided the British firm's survival following its 1975 rebirth.

"The future of this company depends on a mixed build," continued Curtis in *The Power Behind Aston Martin*, "and this we have at present with the V8 saloon and convertible and the Lagonda."

When the V8 saloon was facelifted in 1986 the convertible followed suit. Known informally as the Volante Series 2, the biggest change was fuel injection replacing Weber carburettors which in turn saw the deletion of the bonnet bulge.

Although six examples left the production line in the early Eighties with the more powerful Vantage engine – including chairman Victor Gauntlett's own car that had a brief appearance in the 1987 Bond film, *The Living Daylights*, before it was 'winterised' by Q and transformed into a hardtop – the Volante was initially only available with the standard 5.3-litre V8. But in October 1986, Aston released a production version of the Vantage Volante that not only featured the same 410bhp version of the 5.3-litre as the Vantage saloon but a William Towns-designed bodykit. Together with its wider wheelarches, a front air dam, bootlid spoiler and rear valance, it made the convertible even more aggressive looking than the hardtop version.

With a claimed 160mph top speed and 0-60mph time of 5.5 seconds, the Vantage Volante was marketed as the fastest four-seater convertible in the world. Big claims

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like this usually result in big money and unsurprisingly at its launch the car cost £87,500, fifty grand more than a Porsche 911 convertible.

Although the Vantage Volante was universally praised for its speed and power, many felt the bodykit detracted from the car's usually discreet looks. This included the then HRH Prince Charles who in late 1986 was offered a new Aston Martin by the Emir of Bahrain, Isa Bin Sulman Al-Khalifa, as a present for his 38th birthday.

As an existing owner of a DB6 Vantage Volante, a 21st birthday present from his mother, the late HM Queen Elizabeth II, the Prince chose the new V8 version. But while he liked the car's more powerful engine, he felt the body additions were too extreme for a future king and so specified the Vantage engine but with a standard Volante body.

With it needing the same 16in alloys as the Vantage, Charles' car was given slightly flared wheelarches resulting in a still masculine-looking convertible, but



The V8 Volante that appeared in the 1986 Bond film, *The Living Daylights*

much more discreet than a standard Vantage Volante. Although never an official model, a further 21 were ordered which collectively are now called the Prince of Wales specification.

When production of the V8 Volante came to an end in late 1989, 655 standard cars (split between 439 with carburettors and 216 fuel-injected examples) plus 167 Vantages had been produced making the open version of the V8 saloon one of Aston Martin's best-selling cars of the

Eighties. It was for this reason why when the V8's replacement, the Virage, arrived in 1990, it was quickly joined by a Volante. Including the new DB12, most Aston Martin sports cars since the V8 have had both an open and closed version from the outset.

The V8 Volante might have taken a surprisingly long time to arrive but like those wheeled suitcases had on travel, it still made a major and long-lasting impact on Aston Martin's future. **AMD**



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MODEL PROFILE
VIRAGE VOLANTE WIDEBODY

WIDE BERTH

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY PAUL WALTON



The Virage Volante from 1992 had the option of a widebody style of bodykit which transformed the car into a more aggressive-looking convertible. We've tracked down a rare example to explore the model's history

START WIDE, expand further, and never look back," was the advice the former bodybuilder turned actor Arnold Schwarzenegger once gave.

This was certainly Aston Martin's approach when it designed a wider style of body update for the already sizeable Virage. Developed for a 6.3-litre version of the V8, the combination made the car

much more aggressive. Yet a tiny handful of owners specified the body revisions but kept the standard running gear resulting in a rare and unusual model.

These upgrades were to answer criticisms that, in terms of performance and looks, the Virage fell short of its still popular AMV8 Vantage predecessor.

"We became aware that customers were coming to us saying that they

needed more power and wanting to know how performance could be improved," says the company's then manager of Aston's Works Service department, Kingsley Riding-Felce, in David Dowsey's 2007 book, *Aston Martin Power, Beauty and Soul*.

Aston's new chairman Walter Hayes had already initiated a Vantage version but with the car needing more than just ►



MODEL PROFILE

VIRAGE VOLANTE WIDEBODY

a powerful engine, it would take some time to re-engineer it (the 550bhp supercharged Vantage wouldn't appear until 1993). And so, a stopgap was required to keep customers satisfied.

A few years earlier, leading independent Aston Martin specialist Richard Williams had developed a 6.3-litre version of the existing 5.3 V8. He developed an AMV8 Vantage-based prototype, registered 7 EXY, which was used as a demonstrator. According to Riding-Felce in Dowsey's book, when this 6.3-litre car appeared in an issue of *Classic Cars* magazine it caused a great deal of interest.

With Williams about to close his workshop to concentrate on running Aston's Group C racing team, based in Milton Keynes, some at Newport Pagnell decided the engine was too good to miss.

Continues Riding-Felce, "So we asked Victor Gauntlett [Aston's then chairman] whether it was possible to purchase the car and the intellectual rights to the 6.3 engine from Richard Williams. That in fact was what we did and we received an invoice dated 6 April 1989 for the purchase."

With this 6.3-litre having an extra 135bhp over the standard 5.3 version, it was decided to offer it to existing Virage owners through Aston's Works Service department. A suspension upgrade was also part of the package, which included new front and rear anti-roll bars plus new springs and dampers.

To match the higher performance of the 6.3-litre, it was decided to make the Virage look suitably more aggressive. "We really wanted to make this car very special,"

continued Riding-Felce, "with a real macho look that our customers wanted."

The man responsible for the conversion was Steve Bolton, principal engineer for Aston Martin's Special Vehicle Operations. "What was required from me was to work on something that would differentiate the car dynamically and visually," he said in *Aston Martin Power, Beauty and Soul*.

The team started with huge 18in OZ Racing rims that were also 10in wide. To make room for these, the front and rear bumpers needed to be cut away and flared arches, handcrafted from aluminium, then added. There was also a boot-mounted spoiler, an extended rear valance and a deeper front air dam with fog lights, all fashioned out of glass-



fibre. The bodykit also saw the return of horizontal air vents behind the front wheels, which had been a feature of every Aston Martin since the DB4 but had been absent from the original Virage despite being on the original drawings.

“We started with the wheels and we really started to work on the rear wing shapes which took a lot of time, a lot of evening cups of coffee with a lot of thought, but we knew instinctively what we wanted,” added Riding-Felce. “We wanted the car to have haunches, we wanted it to look beefy, but we wanted it to look sexy. We wanted it to look like it had put on a little bit of weight in the right places and have an elegant shape to it. We eventually got that shape which was fantastic.”

Much of the redesign was done by eye meaning there were no drawings. “The flared wheelarches and wheels, side vents and sill features were sculptured out of clay in the Service Department [prior to the work commencing],” said Aston Martin’s then service manager, David Earles, in *Aston Martin Power, Beauty and Soul*.

The handful of the motoring press that were lucky enough to test the updated Virage were impressed by both its performance and design. “The 6.3 is a car of handsome elegance,” reported *Road & Track* in its November 1992 issue, “the beautifully moulded bulges adding dynamic muscle to the appearance.”

The Virage 6.3 was never a type-approved model available to order from the factory (although some were made

for a well-known collector), but was an aftermarket conversion for existing owners through Aston Martin’s Works Service department.

Considering the full conversion (including the 6.3 V8 upgrade and bodykit) cost £50k in 1992 – the same price as a Jaguar XJR-S – it was an expensive option. Maybe it was because of this why a small handful of Virage owners only ordered the body updates and not the 6.3-litre V8. These are unofficially now known as Virage Widebodies, cars like the Volante shown here.

Although coming two years after the coupe, a convertible had been part of designer John Heffernan’s original Virage styling exercise. The coupe’s chassis had also been engineered from the outset with ample torsional strengthening for ►



Considering the full conversion cost £50k in 1992 – the same price as a Jaguar XJR-S – it was an expensive option



MODEL PROFILE

VIRAGE VOLANTE WIDEBODY

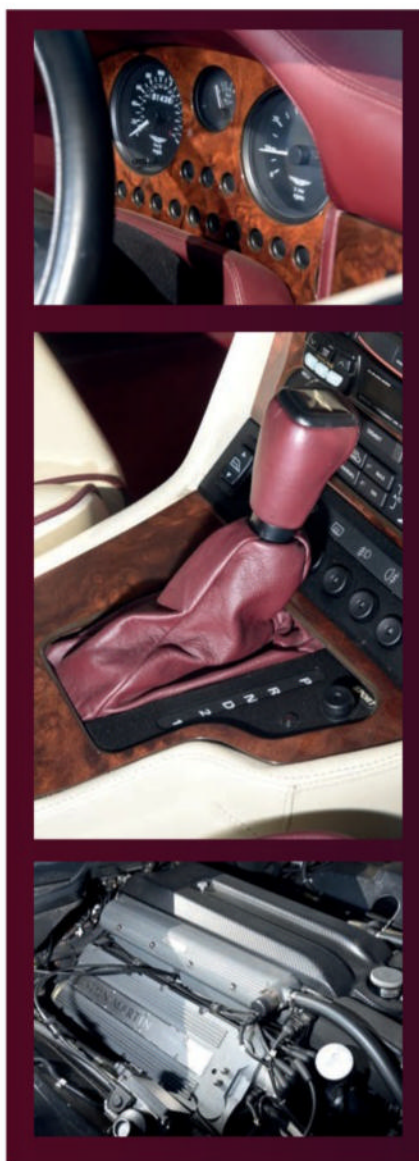


when the roof was finally lopped off. "As we didn't want to have to change it too drastically when we came to do the Volante, we designed [the coupe] from the start without a roof," said design engineer Malcolm Pearson in *Aston Martin Power, Beauty and Soul*.

This enabled the finished Volante to look similar to the coupe although, following criticism of the Virage's all-in-one dashboard, the interior was revised with the dials housed in a piece of walnut veneer. There was also new switchgear plus a steering wheel sourced from the Lincoln Town Car.

"With these changes the Virage has become an even better car from both the driving and aesthetic points of view," said Walter Hayes at the time. "Our customer research has shown that the original concept, although a very good one, could be improved upon and that we have done."

The press were largely positive about the Volante's design. "It looks great; big with lovely proportions," said *Fast Lane* magazine in its August 1993 issue. "You open the big door, slide into the big black leather seats with cream piping and look out over the expanses of leather and the big curving bonnet." However, they were highly critical of its poor handling. "There is a general floatiness and wallow when pressing on and a feeling of flexing from the back when it's leaned on to any extent," continued *Fast Lane*. In Aston Martin terms, the car was still



a relative success and quickly became the company's most popular model. Of the 134 cars made at its Newport Pagnell factory between 1992 and 1993, 125 were convertibles. It was eventually replaced by the slightly longer V8 Volante version in 1997.

Produced in 1996, it makes the red car featured here a very late example. Bought new from the famed Aston Martin dealer, H.W.M in Walton-on-Thames, the car was ordered in a non-standard colour, Cheviot Red. Together with the wider bodywork, driver's airbag and Alpine CD unit, the surviving invoice says it cost £150,040. Considering a Jaguar XJS 6.0 convertible was £58,500 at the time while a Mercedes-Benz 600SL was four grand short of £100k, it made the red Volante expensive at the time. Perhaps that's why the original buyer kept the car for 26 years, only deciding to sell it in 2022.

Although the bodykit wasn't part of the car's initial design, the perfect way the old and new have been joined together makes it look like it was. Those huge arches then make the usually unassuming Virage as ripped as Arnie was in *The Terminator*.

Despite the extra width, the proportions haven't been ruined and like all Virage Volantes, due to the hood's low line, the widebody still looks good when it's erect, having the same low-slung elegance as the coupe.

But if I'm being honest, compared to the visual excitement of the wide bodied car's

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MODEL PROFILE

VIRAGE VOLANTE WIDEBODY

arches and rear wing, the standard nose looks too bland, the two large headlights either side of a black plastic grille lacking the visual excitement of the later Vantage. No doubt that's why a small handful of widebody owners asked Works Service to add the Vantage nose and rear on to their Widebody cars resulting in an unusual mash-up.

Special attention needs to be given to the OZ Racing five-spoke wheels of the widebody version, especially the 10in rears that are ludicrously wide. The last time I saw wheels that large was on a drag car, their size a definite part of the car's more muscular appearance.

The interior is as per a standard Volante but that's no bad thing. The veneer-covered dash is a huge improvement over the plastic binnacle of the early coupe I drove for issue four of *AMD*, giving it a classier and more upmarket appearance. Yet despite the dash top covered in more leather than my sofa, from the switchgear to the ventilation ducts, there's too much of the switchgear and trim swiped from Ford's parts bin for a £150k car.

After starting the V8, I press the button

to lower the electric roof, bathing the interior in the weak autumnal sunlight. Although this is standard, the 5.3-litre with 'just' 330bhp and not the 465bhp 6.3, the engine still feels eager and responsive. When *Fast Car* tested the Volante 5.3-litre in 1993 it reached 60mph in 7.6 seconds – one-and-a-half seconds slower than the Merc 600SL – it doesn't feel slow and when I bury the throttle the engine immediately wakes up and delivers a blow as devastating as any Schwarzenegger landed in *Conan the Barbarian*.

In 1993, the automatic gearbox had been upgraded from the original three-speed to a four-speed unit but although it's quicker to kick down when I squeeze the throttle, the aggressive way it changes up isn't pleasant. Although pressing the unimpressive-looking black plastic Sport button above the gearlever allows the 'box to hold the revs for a little longer, further increasing the acceleration, it makes them even harder.

Weighing 4,800lb (well over two tonnes), this isn't a light or agile sports car and, together with slow steering and that

wallowy suspension, it is more like piloting an oil tanker. On the flip side, the ride is supple and, other than a little scuttle-shake, it glides effortlessly over the rough stuff.

Despite the extra cost, the widebody conversion was a relative success and of the 234 Virage Volantes produced between 1992 and 1996, it's thought 26 were modified.

Maybe it was because with the Virage's successor, the V8 Coupe, taking on many of the same aggressive design cues as the Vantage that an aftermarket bodykit wasn't something Aston would do again. Yet due to its largely positive impact on the originally unloved Virage, despite what a former Austrian bodybuilder might say, it's definitely worth looking back on today. **AMD**

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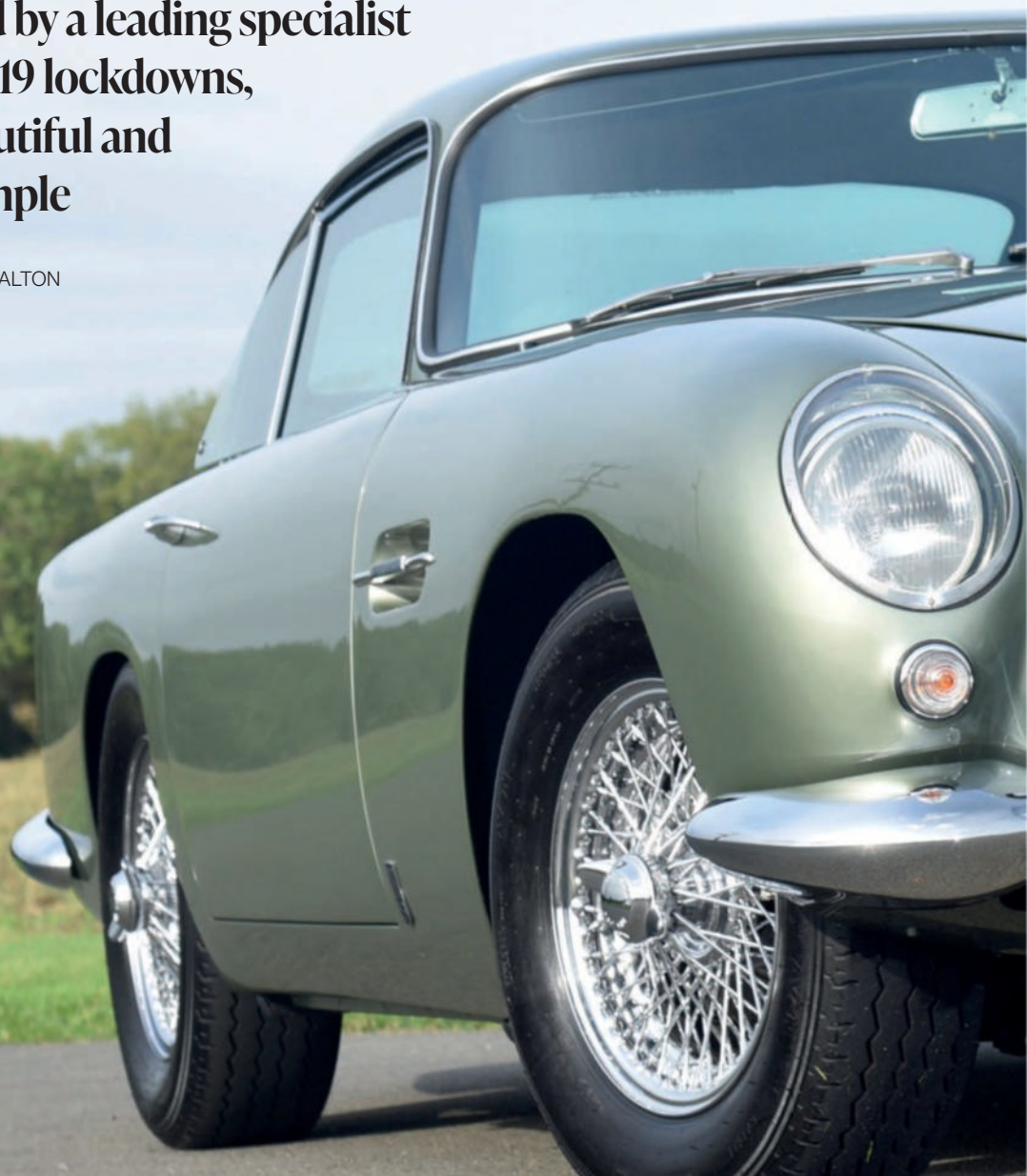
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PRODUCTS

TIME WELL SPENT

ASTON MARTIN DB5
RESTORATION

After falling into disrepair due to a minor accident in the early 2000s, this 1963 DB5 was restored by a leading specialist during the Covid-19 lockdowns, resulting in a beautiful and characterful example

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY PAUL WALTON



O THER THAN hopefully staying safe, how did you pass the many Covid-19 lockdowns during 2020 and 2021? Bake endless banana breads? Learn to play the ukulele? Or, like me, try to take up cycling?

Not John McGurk. He and the team at Warwickshire-based Aston Martin specialist McGurk Performance Cars spent their time restoring a DB5.

"Any restoration is a challenge," says John now, "but to return a car to such immaculate condition while the rest of the world stopped turning is testament to the dedication and passion of all of those involved."



The DB5 as it was when John McGurk took delivery of it in early 2020



RESTORATION

DB5

The car, a Californian Sage coupe in left-hand drive with a four-speed manual 'box, rolled off Aston's Newport Pagnell factory in 1963 making it a reasonably early example. It was immediately exported to the US and delivered to Aston Martin's famed New York concessionaire, J.S. Inskip Inc, located on 64th Street. The car's specification included white wall tyres, a heated screen, Motorola radio, a powered aerial plus air-conditioning.

The first owner was millionaire car enthusiast Paul H. Folwell from Bronxville, New York who, like many others at the time, had the metallic green DB5 later repainted in Silver Birch to make him look more like Sean Connery. Whether for ejecting villains or simply to enjoy warm weather, according to the fitter who signed and dated the panel, Ramone, a sunroof with a bespoke electric motor was also added in 1976.

It's not known which of the car's two American owners was responsible, but while still stateside the DB5 was uprated to Vantage specification. This included replacing the three standard SUs with triple Weber twin-choke 45DCOE carburettors plus revised camshaft profiles which together increased the 4.0-litre straight-six engine's output from 282bhp to 325bhp. To reflect its new status, a pair of chromed bars with the Vantage badge were also added to the wing vents.

In 1988 the still-silver DB5 was exported to France when it was bought via auction by a well-known Paris-based Aston Martin enthusiast, Jean-Marie Cousty. According to the sheaf of paperwork that still exists, John tells me Jean-Marie wrapped the car in cotton wool, and it was regularly maintained by some of the best Aston specialists in the country.

Although he had the engine rebuilt in 1998, Jean-Marie reluctantly sold the car just 12 months later when it went to the Netherlands and was given a local registration. At some point, while in the country, the DB5 was involved in a minor accident that damaged the nearside front quarter panel. Although a local garage started to repair the car, scraping away the silver paint to expose the damaged aluminium beneath, for reasons unknown the work stopped.

In 2006 the still Dutch-registered and damaged car was sold by a Belgian dealer to a collector where it remained in a barn, largely untouched, for 14 years. The DB5 was repatriated back to the UK in early 2020 by a British specialist who had been commissioned by a customer to restore it.

But with the DB5 arriving in the country just as the first Covid-19 lockdown came into effect and with it being within 30 days of the deal being struck, the client exercised his right for a full refund. The dealer then called several specialists trying to sell the car but due to the





circumstances nobody was interested. It was only when he tried John McGurk at the Warwickshire-based McGurk Performance Cars that he found a sympathetic ear.

Although a respected specialist in the modern VH architecture models, he also likes a challenge. "I'm known in the industry as someone who will have a go at something that's a little bit off the wall," says John citing his well-documented experience with the Jaguar XJ220 as an example. "For me, rare and different is always good."

Yet John still admits that he wasn't that bothered about the DB5 until he went to see it two weeks later when its condition and history started to draw him in. "It was clearly a very original car," he continues. "From the panel gaps to the door shuts, everything about it was dead right and despite the damage I started to see what we could do with it."

He was also attracted to the car's relative rarity since of the 1,023 DB5s produced between 1963 and 1965 a mere 187 were left-hand drive.

After initially advertising the DB5 as it was, in mid-2020 John took the decision to give the car what it clearly deserved – a full restoration. And so the body was removed, taken back to the bare metal

and shot blasted as was the chassis. Every part was then systematically cleaned, recommissioned or where required, replaced.

John disagrees when I suggest that as a specialist better known for V8 Vantages and DB9s it was a brave move for McGurk Performance Cars to take on such a major restoration project. "It was a big step," he admits, "but it's not new territory for us since in the past we probably sold four or five classics a year."

It was only when his team started disassembling the car that it became even clearer just how special the Aston Martin was. Not only was the DB5 a full matching numbers car but structurally the underneath was incredibly solid. This is no doubt testament to the care lavished on the car by Jean-Marie.

John and his team were also astonished by how complete the interior was, which even included the original roof lining although this was later replaced. "When we started to pull it out, everything was correct and in the right place."

He goes on to tell me that when these cars were built it was customary for everyone who worked on the interior to sign and date the panels. When McGurk's ►

RESTORATION

DB5

team stripped the cabin they found all of these dates and signatures, further proving its condition and originality.

Unfortunately, the small handful of parts that the car was either missing (such as a headlamp cover and sunvisors) or that needed replacing like the wiring harness are some of the hardest to track down. "We wanted to buy a new harness but couldn't so we had to strip the old one out and rebuild it."

John also needed to locate a new nose since the damaged original was considered to be beyond repair. "The aluminium was cracked and pitted," he explains. "The garage in The Netherlands had obviously tried to straighten it but it had split so there was nothing we could do to save it. I didn't want to simply pack it full of filler since that would have been the wrong thing to do." He eventually sourced a complete front end from another 1964

DB5 which, after the original had been carefully measured and cut away, was carefully grafted into place.

Although John's team took the car apart and built it back up again, from the recommissioning of major mechanical parts to the bare metal respray, the majority of the work was carried out by trusted third parties. "In the Aston Martin world we have so many friends that we work with that we could pick up the phone,





move the car around and get different companies to do different things. They're all good people that do a good job and who can be trusted which made the project much easier."

After the engine had been taken out, stripped and inspected, it was discovered that due to covering only a few miles since Cousty had rebuilt it in 1998, the 4.0-litre didn't need any further work. Both the sump and diff' were found to be incorrect, though, which were subsequently replaced for the right ones.

John has kept the car's specification as it was when he bought it, which includes the electric-powered sunroof plus the Vantage upgrades. He has, though, returned it to its original Californian Sage considering it suits the car more than the now clichéd Silver Birch.

Plus what must have been Jean-Marie Cousty's AMOC France radiator badge that was on the DB5 when John bought it remains on the grille. It's a small but significant link to the car's past and I hope any future owner doesn't remove it.

Two years after the restoration had begun, the car was finally finished. "You could say we used lockdown productively," says John now. "I'm hugely proud of what my team here have achieved with this beautiful DB5."

Even in McGurk's expansive and well-lit showroom that has two long rows of beautiful cars on either side, the metallic green DB5 still stands out similar to how



RESTORATION

DB5

Red Rum would have done in a field of other racehorses. Hung on the wall behind it like a hunting trophy is the battle scarred and crumbling original nose, its condition tangible proof of how far John and his team have taken the Aston Martin since those uncertain days of 2020.

After he manoeuvres the car outside, the green paint even managing to catch a shine in the weak winter sun, I climb inside and take stock of my surroundings. While the exterior is pristine, the interior isn't quite so perfect with the carpets, for example, showing signs of wear. Yet this was a conscious decision by John.

"The big debate for me was whether to keep the interior as it was," he explains. "It's far from perfect but how much soul

of the car did we want to lose was how I kept looking at it. It's one thing to keep the exterior looking great but for me you want to still feel like you're driving an old car." Personally, I also prefer these minor imperfections since they offer much more character than if everything was brand new.

It's clear from the passenger seat that the car's performance is obvious, the big straight-six pulling strongly in any gear, offering a crisp and confident acceleration. The DB5 is now for sale, but I get the feeling John won't be upset if it remains in the showroom for a little longer. "Yes it's a commodity," he says as he gives the throttle another squeeze, "but I bloody love it!"

Thanks to their relative rarity and current iconic status, the restoration of any DB5 is a special moment. But it's even more so when the car is as unique as this one and when the work was completed during such testing and uncertain times.

While many of us (including me) have given up on our lockdown pastimes, what kept John and his team busy during those dark days will be enjoyed forever. **AMD**

● **Thanks to: John McGurk from McGurk Performance Cars (www.mcgurk.com) where the DB5 is currently for sale**





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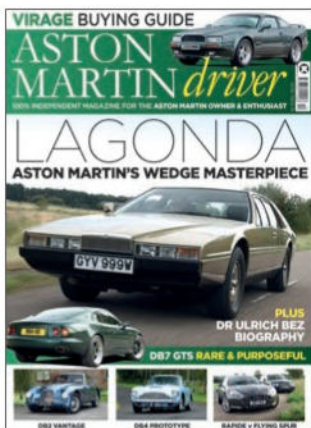
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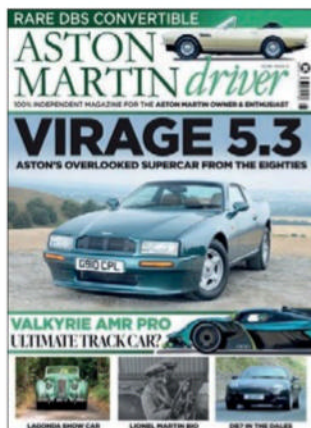
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How Aston Martin has shown the green shoots success

Motorsport News editor Matt James assesses how the famous marque is zeroing in on grand prix glory





THE BARE statistics of the 2023 Formula 1 season might well demonstrate that Aston Martin finished fifth in the constructors' table, a result which marks the Lawrence Stroll-owned team's best performance since it re-entered F1 as a bespoke brand in 2021.

What they don't show was the giant progress made by the squad over the last 12 months. And it could have been more too as the outfit only missed out on fourth in the makes' battle in the dying throes of the 22-race campaign.

TOP: Post Brazilian GP celebrations after Alonso (left) had finished third and Stoll fifth



17th in Singapore was a low point for the Spaniard

The ambition of Aston Martin was clear to see from the outside and there were two statement moves which demonstrated this which began to take effect in the build-up to 2023.

The first was the completion of plans to build an all-singing, all-dancing, purpose-built new HQ. The blueprints had been drawn up when Lawrence Stroll decided to take the team back into grand prix racing three years ago, but a global pandemic got in the way. The final touches are still being put to the premises – which is so large it is called a “campus” rather than a factory – but the impressive facility sits proudly opposite the main gates at Silverstone.

That would bring about long-term gains but the here-and-now ambition was signalled by the recruitment of two-time world beater Fernando Alonso to partner Lance Stroll in the cockpit for 2023. Still widely regarded as one of the most accomplished Grand Prix aces of the modern generation, the Spaniard brought with him a drive to succeed and, importantly, decades of knowledge of how to operate at a title-chasing level.

The Mercedes-powered AMR23 was a huge step forward. In truth, its early-season results – which included five podiums from the opening six events of 2023 – might have been flattering as regular frontrunners Ferrari and Mercedes suffered their own stuttering starts. The AMR23 was, though, a huge step forward for the team which had lumbered to a lacklustre seventh overall the season before.

“It was going to be important because obviously this is the first step of hopefully good progress in the team,” Alonso said after the season. “We always said that this was like year one of Aston Martin being competitive. [There were] a lot of changes in the team, the new factory all of these things that we’ve been saying for a long time.

“So if next year we do a step backwards, that will be bad. We need to keep moving forward. We finished fifth in the constructors’ championship, we need to improve that next year. Fourth, third, second or whatever, will be welcome.”

Those were the platitudes at the end of the year but there had been an alarming slump in form from Aston Martin in the middle of the season. After a trailblazing

A worthy team-mate...



Stroll finished tenth in the 2023 season

While Fernando Alonso was writing headlines with his head-turning performances at the front of the field in Formula 1, team-mate Lance Stroll had the spotlight shone upon his showings but for a very different reason.

The 25-year-old, who fell off his bicycle and broke his hand at the start of the year, was entering his seventh season of Grand Prix racing in arguably the most competitive machine he had ever sat in. The Spaniard on the other side of the garage was proving that.

But, while Alonso was collecting trophies, Stroll's showings fell off a cliff in the middle of the campaign and endured a ten-race spell from May to October with only five points-paying drives from 11 events. It was punctuated by an almighty qualifying accident in Singapore which ultimately led to his withdrawal from the race itself as his car was damaged beyond repair.

There is always extra pressure on Stroll though, as paddock insiders know that he is driving for his dad Lawrence's team and there isn't a driver on the grid with access to more funding. Would he have been given so much leeway in a team if he were not related to the squad's patron? The answer is probably not, but that ignores the fact that his struggles to reach the sharp end of the timesheets corresponded directly to Aston Martin losing its way on set-up for quite a significant period of the 22-race calendar.

Two fifth placed finishes in Brazil and at Las Vegas from the final three rounds of the 2023 campaign silenced those doubters a little, but the Belgian-Canadian driver is always going to have brickbats thrown at him. It comes with the territory of being the son of a billionaire.

While those looking from the outside were quick to judge, Alonso, working alongside Stroll for the first time, was impressed. Given the impact that the Spaniard has had on galvanising Aston Martin throughout the last 14 months, his words will have a strong impact on those in the corridors of power at the Silverstone base.

Said Alonso, "[Myself and Lance] talk a lot, we are in contact every week on the telephone, in the factory, in the races and we try to make sure we are all in the same direction and we share many things.

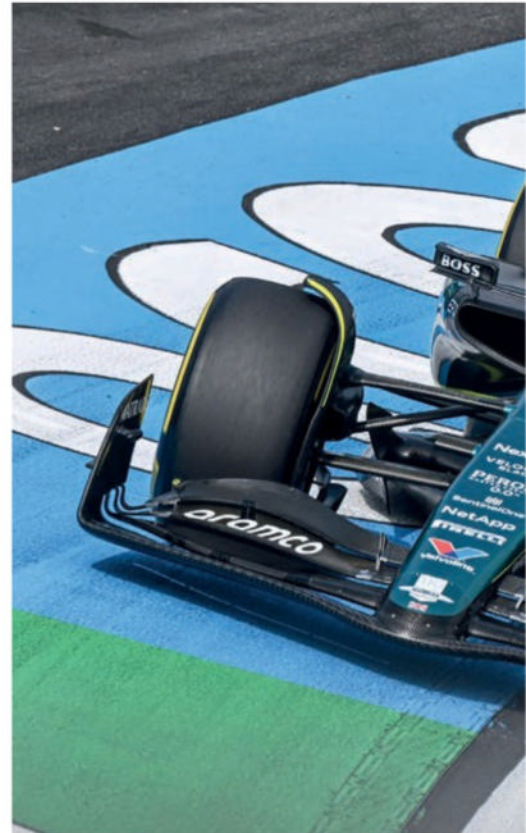
"He's been through some difficulties this year; the car was just changing its behaviour a little bit and he was just struggling a bit more than me and [when] we fixed a few things in the car he was back in top form [at the end of the season].

"It was impressive to see his dedication, his motivation, in the highs and in the lows. At the beginning of the year with the broken hand, as I said, midway through the season with some difficulties. He was so determined to put things back in place again.

"Eventually he did after I think Mexico and the race in Brazil, the race in Vegas, this was the surprise to me, the level of commitment, the level of motivation he has, this is only good news and good things for the team."



Fourth in Australia was Stroll's best finish of the 2023 season



start, there were very few highlights in the late summer and into autumn.

Perhaps evidence that this is still a growing team with the individual elements beginning their journey, the in-season technical developments that were brought to the chassis and to the aerodynamics actually pushed the car further down the pecking order rather than bridging the gap to the all-conquering Red Bull cars which were ripping up the record books at the head of the pack.

Alonso was not disheartened by the speedbumps that the crew faced and believes that the difficulties can be a spur for the future should a similar situation occur.

"I see only positives; those struggles are part of the job and part of the journey of this team," says Alonso. "I think we started really strong with a car that was surprisingly competitive even to us the step from last year to this year. Then we found ourselves maybe in a position that we were not ready for it, fighting with Mercedes, Ferrari, top teams. They are used to fighting at the level.

"I think we need to find some consistency, maybe some of the weak points is the car had to operate in a



Alonso was second at Zandvoort in Holland

alight until the very last laps of the season – witness the way he jumped Red Bull driver Sergio Perez to snatch a final podium of the season at the penultimate race, the Brazilian GP in November.

The driver himself rated his 2023 campaign as the best of his career. Aston Martin will be desperate to maintain a relationship with its talisman beyond the end of his contract which is up after the last race of 2024.

Alonso himself has speculated about his future and thinks that the demands of the ever-increasing number of races on the Formula 1 roster would be the determining factor regarding his future, not his speed at the wheel.

“I said many times even before that the day I will stop racing is not because I will feel not motivated for driving or I feel slow,” Alonso said. “If I feel slow one day, I think it will be noticeable and I will be not happy with my performance and I will be the first one to raise my hand and say this is time.

“But I don’t think that time will arrive, honestly, in terms of feeling slow, because I have extreme self-confidence in my performance. But it could be that with the calendar and with the demanding schedule I will feel it is time because there are other things in life.

“It has been a very demanding season only with 22 races, with two cancellations. Next year, with 24, the proper calendar, we [will] have to see how it feels. I cannot say anything on my future now.”

That might be a dark cloud on the horizon for Aston Martin but there were plenty of silver trophies to lock away after a memorable 2023 campaign. If Alonso is right and those growing pains prove to be nothing more than an ambitious team learning to extract the most from each other, then the lessons of the year just gone could be the ultimate foundations for a title attack in the future. **AMD**



Second in Monaco was Alonso's fifth podium in six races

very narrow window, it's the same with everybody but it seems we were struggling a little bit.

“It would be nice if we can perform always at a stable level and next year see if we can improve the straight-line speed. I think that was the [under] performance in numbers, our weak point always [was we were] a little bit too slow on the straights and if we want to be as fast as the others,

we need to drop too much the rear wing and we ended up slow on the corners as well, so that was probably the loop we could not get out [of] this season.”

While the backroom staff and the engineering prowess might have been experiencing growing pains, Alonso's performance at the controls was as superb as ever. Eight podiums was a stunning return and his fighting spirit remained fully



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PLACE IN HISTORY

For a quarter of a century the AMHT has been educating visitors about Aston Martin's history. We take a trip to its unique headquarters to discover the Trust's own background plus how it supports owners and enthusiasts

YOU DON'T stumble upon your heritage," said the late musician Robbie Robertson once. "It's there, just waiting to be explored and shared."

That's certainly been the philosophy of the Aston Martin Heritage Trust for the past 25 years. With its remit to

educate about the company's long history, it makes the AMHT more than just a museum, but an active organisation involved with all aspects of Aston Martin's past.

"I think we're a heritage centre, a resource centre, a knowledge centre and an educational centre that just happens

to have a few cars," Garry Taylor, the AMHT's treasurer who is also one of its ten trustees, tells me. "We are here for all things about Aston Martin's heritage and not just a museum, which is totally different."

The AMHT was created in 1998 by the Aston Martin Owners Club, mainly to look after a rare 1934 Ulster that had been gifted to the club in the mid-Seventies. Originally the car could be borrowed by AMOC members via a very relaxed and laid-back arrangement.

"You came into the office on a Friday afternoon, signed your name in a book and took the car away for the weekend," the museum's front-of-house guide, Dom Walker, tells me. "People then started taking it for weeks at a time; when the club phoned one guy to see where he and his wife had got to, he replied, 'Oh, we're on holiday in France in it!'"

And so in the late Nineties the AMOC took the decision to protect the car plus the masses of other memorabilia it had collected over the years by forming the Aston Martin Heritage Trust. "It stopped the collection from being sold or abused," explains Garry.

AMHT treasurer and trustee, Garry Taylor



MEET THE EXPERT

ASTON MARTIN HERITAGE TRUST

The first task was to find a suitable location for the Trust's headquarters that would also house both the Ulster plus the artefacts. According to Dom, the club drew a map that showed Aston Martin's three major manufacturing locations of the past and present, which at the time included Bloxham, Feltham and Newport Pagnell. And then they looked at where the majority of its UK members were based, which was largely in the south of England. "That gave them several overlapping concentric circles," he continues, "So they started looking around the area in the middle which was mainly Oxfordshire."

After inspecting several disused pubs, factories and even schools, a 14th century manorial barn in the sleepy village of Drayton St Leonard was discovered. Although still being used as a fertiliser store, it was in a truly terrible state. "A

building at risk,' is how it was described," Dom tells me.

There's no doubt taking on such an ancient building was a brave and risky step, but Garry says the wooden structure was a perfect fit for Aston Martin's handcrafted and hand-built image. Its subsequent restoration was a success on both a physical and aesthetic level with the renovation winning several architectural awards.

As a barn it's very different from any other motoring museum I've visited, its size and wooden structure resulting in a warm, welcoming and more intimate ambience that a modern premises would perhaps miss out on. I can't help but gaze up to the magnificent wooden beams above me that have a similar architectural wonderment as a cathedral's roof structure. Open to the public by pre-booking a time slot online, visitors can

either walk around freely or be given a tour by Dom. "I think this is where we have the edge over some other museums where you just wander in, look at the cars and the information boards," continues Garry. "Dom can take a group around and tell them about the individual stories of the exhibits."

As well as Dom, the AMHT team consists of operations manager Sue Gibbons, collections manager Sophie Anderton, plus research and collections assistant Bryony Gray.

Due to its location in the heart of the beautiful Oxfordshire countryside as well as the uniqueness of the building itself, the AMHT has become a destination for classic car owners from across the globe. "We had an amazing couple from America who turned up in a car very similar to our Ulster, which lives in the UK," Dom tells me. "They fly over, drive it around for two



The AMHT's collection is housed in this beautiful 14th century manorial barn



The magnificent Aston Martin-powered Nimrod Group C racing car



weeks and then take it back and put it in storage.”

Despite being independent from Aston Martin itself, with it now seen as the centre of the company’s heritage, Dom also tells me the brand’s dealers regularly have customers who request to have their new car handed over to them at the barn.

Both Garry and Dom are the first to admit the structure isn’t the largest of spaces yet as Dom gives me a tour, with the many glass cases that line the walls crammed with hundreds of important artefacts all linked to Aston Martin’s heritage, what it lacks in square feet it makes up for with character.

From racing trophies donated by David Brown’s widow to a scale model of almost every Aston Martin ever produced; the actual chequered flag from the 1959 24 Hours of Le Mans to several engines, it’s through these precious exhibits that Aston Martin’s history is vividly brought to life.

The barn also has room for around six of the 24 cars the Heritage has either bought since its inception or are on loan from both Aston Martin and private individuals. This still includes the Ulster but its position as the star of the show is being rivalled by the even older model sat opposite. Bought in a dilapidated state during 2003 and restored five years later to its current running condition, the diminutive A3 from 1921 is one of the original five prototypes developed by Robert Bamford and Lionel Martin and is the oldest surviving Aston Martin in existence.

Despite the two cars’ importance to both the AMHT and Aston Martin’s history as a whole, they’re regularly shown at events such as the parade around Silverstone circuit in mid-2023 of 110 models past and present to mark the company’s 110th anniversary. “They’re not static exhibits,” Garry tells me. “We like to take them out and we like to show them.”

There’s also a 1972 Vantage that was the second example produced and served time as a press car that was bought by the AMHT a decade ago. The two enormous Group C racing cars – a 1982 Aston Martin-powered Nimrod and an AMR1 from seven years later – illustrate part of the company’s long racing pedigree. And finally, thanks to



The car that kick-started the AMHT’s foundation was this 1934 Ulster



A cutaway of the current V8 Vantage with the AMR1 behind



The A3 from 1921, which is the oldest Aston Martin in existence



Two of the engines on display include a straight-six from a DB4GT (foreground) and a 5.3-litre V8

MEET THE EXPERT

ASTON MARTIN HERITAGE TRUST



the AMHT's excellent relationship with Aston Martin itself that regularly loans prototypes or development cars, on the day of my visit there's an engineering cutaway of a current V8 Vantage from 2018 that clearly shows its structure, engine and suspension componentry.

The AMHT has a comprehensive collection that includes images, technical drawings plus several years' worth of build sheets, a copy of which can be bought through the Trust. It also issues heritage certificates that show an individual car's build date and original specification.

Says Garry, "We recently had a gentleman in Japan who thanks to the certificate was excited to discover his V8 saloon is one of the last made by Company Developments before the Newport Pagnell factory went into liquidation during late 1974."

Much of this material has been with the Trust since its formation, but it still receives donations from both Aston Martin and individuals. "There was an architect's plan chest at AML that nobody had really investigated for ages," says Garry. "When someone pulled out the bottom drawer recently it was full of original drawings; everything from the DB4 through to the V8 era. We are lucky to be able to preserve these drawings."

AMHT's collections manager, Sophie Anderton, shows me rows of shelves lined with endless numbered box files filled

ABOVE: A glass cabinet containing several motor racing artefacts from the Fifties



Just some of the many box files that together contain the AMHT's extensive photographic collection

with this ephemera, the majority of which is available with special permission to be studied by journalists and historians. Yet the Trust is also determined the archive is given a much wider audience.

"It's easy just to scoop this material up and put it in a box," continued Garry. "And so through the AMHT's new website, podcast, social media channels and newsletter, in recent years we've tried to share more of what we have."

A new area the AMHT has moved into recently is events that started with the 2021 Aston Martin Heritage Festival held at the Dallas Burston Polo Club near Southam, Warwickshire, which marked the A3's 100th anniversary. Since it was a huge success with around 600 Aston Martins of all eras attending, it was

decided to hold another the following year, this time at the Brooklands Museum to mark 100 years of Aston Martin in racing.

"We're not an event organiser so we thought this would probably be our last one," admits Garry, "but since 2023 was the 110th anniversary of Aston Martin, 75 years of David Brown buying the company, the DB5's 60th anniversary plus 25 years of the AMHT we thought we'd better do something." Held for the first time at the British Motor Museum, Gaydon, last year's event was such a success it looks like the Aston Martin Heritage Festival will be a permanent fixture. Arranged for the 31st of August, plans for this year's event are already well underway.

Again at the British Motor Museum, Garry tells me it will be much more interactive than previous years. "We're going to have a show and tell arena with craftsmen from Aston Martin Works, Newport Pagnell, who will either be putting together leather upholstery, shaping aluminium panels or rebuilding an engine to explain how the cars are actually made."

There will also be a theatre with experts discussing a range of topics such as converting cars to run on ethanol, how to maintain Aston Martins plus market analyses. As Garry says, things that are all relatable to Aston Martin owners.

"It fits with our educational remit," he continues. "By telling the story of Aston Martin's history through events like this, it takes the heritage out of the museum."

Thanks to the dedication of the AMHT it's clear not only will Aston Martin's long history be shared for many years to come, but it will be as protected as the majestic building that houses it has been. **AMD**



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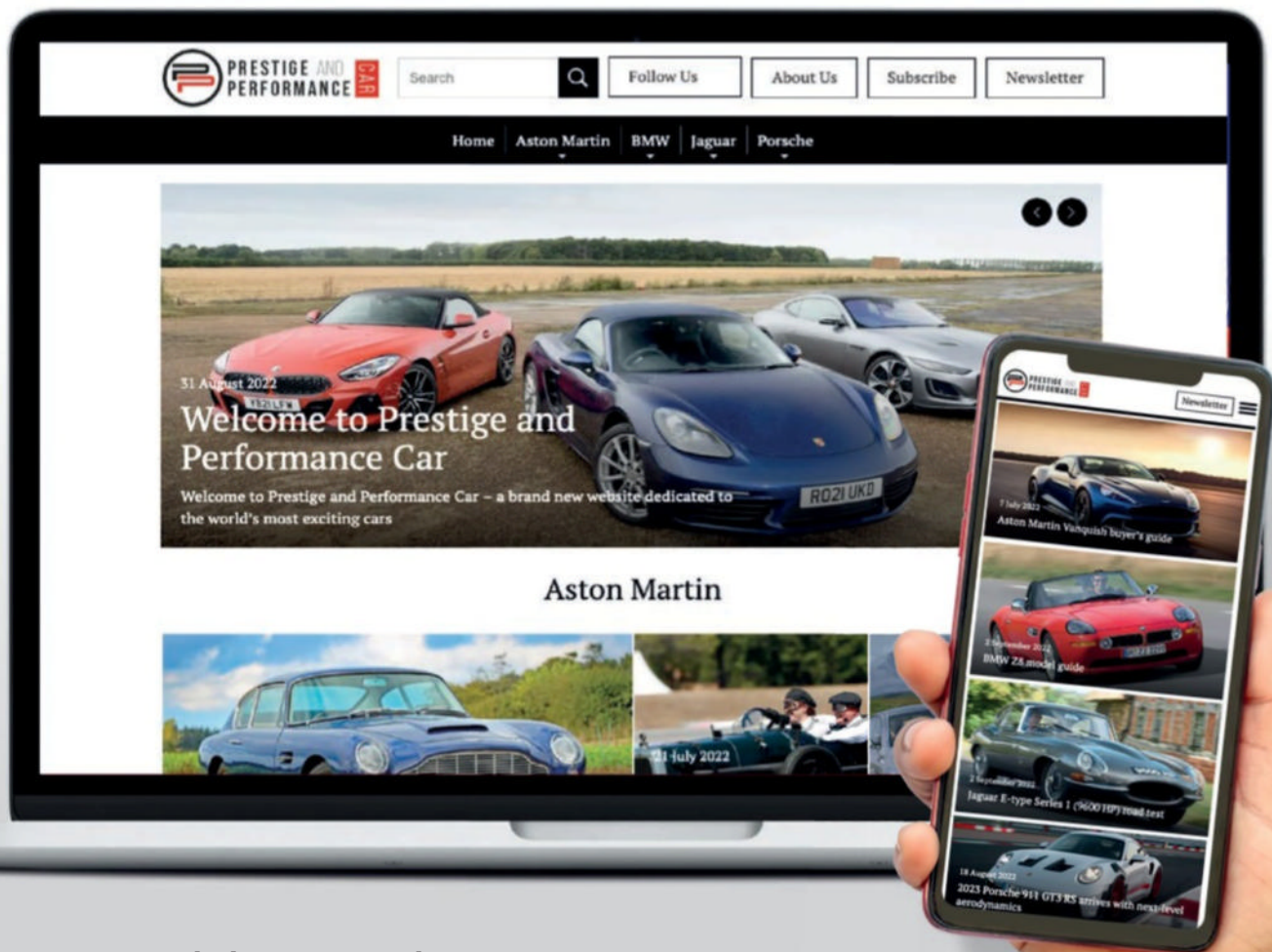
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FROM THE CLUBHOUSE



Winter driving



How to drive your Aston Martin safely during the winter

WORDS: LIISA DANIELS

WINTER DRIVING can be tricky. Take it from someone who managed to play automotive pinball on an autobahn one December when driving a Porsche 911. While travelling backwards at 120mph, time slowed down, and while I cannot say my life flashed before me, self-recrimination did suggest what a berk I had been. I survived, remarkably unscathed, but the poor car did not. It did teach me a painful but valuable lesson that I have not forgotten. This was to not overestimate your driving skills and understand your car, especially in challenging driving conditions.

We all love driving – that's why we love Aston Martins. However, it is easy to forget that while in the depths of summer, winter driving is much more challenging.

Many of us put our cars to bed come autumn and would be no more thinking of driving our precious cars during the winter months than we would gamble our future or current pensions on the last runner at



the Derby. However, there are some of us brave enough to use our cars all year round.

Winter driving presents a number of hazards, as I learnt the hard way. Even on fine days the sun is low on the horizon, often shining in your eyes despite the sunvisor (have pity on those with a Caterham Seven). This makes other road

users and pedestrians much harder to see and can lead to sudden blind spots when you come over the brow of a hill or where buildings or trees are shielding the road from the sun. As a consequence, winter driving requires extra care while navigating these conditions.

The main hazard is the difference in stopping distances when roads are wet





or icy. Your car's stopping distance is the sum of your reaction time (thinking) and your car's braking ability. The first can be affected by a range of factors including:

- Inattention due to tiredness or if you are unwell.
- Using a mobile phone while in a car is illegal for this reason, but equally tuning your radio or interacting with your satellite navigation while driving will increase your reaction time. So will talking hands-free, which is why drivers often stop talking if their cognitive load increases due to a difficult manoeuvre.

It should be noted that in more modern Aston Martins, the ABS doesn't reduce braking distances significantly, but it does prevent the wheels from locking and therefore the car going into a skid (in most conditions). This allows you to continue to

steer the car while the ABS is functioning instead of going into a skid when the brakes are depressed to the point that the wheels lock.

Obviously stopping distances increase with the speed your vehicle is travelling. The UK Highway Code includes the following:

- At 20mph it is 12 metres (or the length of three Aston Martin V8s)
- At 40mph it is 36 metres (nine Aston Martin Rapides)
- At 70mph it is 96 metres (24 Aston Martin DBSs)

In the wet, this may double the braking distance. In icy conditions it may be up to ten times according to the UK's DVLA. The Finns, who have produced a number of world rally champions, have calculated that a car in good condition at 80kph (50mph), in good weather, will stop in 50m and it will quadruple in icy conditions. This assumes you are law abiding and are driving with winter-standard tyres.

That brings us on to winter tyres. A standard tyre's efficiency is reduced below seven degrees centigrade at a time when maximum traction may be required. Winter tyres significantly improve traction in cold conditions (and are obligatory in parts of Europe) by reducing stopping

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- AMOC approved insurance scheme
- Prestigious Club merchandise
- Members are welcome at any local event, anywhere in the world, including BBQs, picnics, displays at stately homes and museums, tours, holidays, car meets, etc.
- All members are also supporters of the Aston Martin Heritage Trust, which includes access to an amazing archive, artefacts collection and displays at the AMHT Museum (free entry) plus their annual journal, 'Aston

distances and improving car control. The problem in the UK is that they need to be below seven degrees to function properly, and this cannot always be guaranteed, making them worse than standard tyres in terms of braking and control. Winter tyres are not options for all Aston Martins, but if you want more information, I recommend you talk to your local AM dealer or ask on the Aston Martin Owners Club (AMOC) forum (<https://forum.amoc.org>).

There are other factors you need to consider before you decide to take your Aston Martin on your next winter ski trip, such as the condition of the suspension and brakes, and we would suggest you seek advice to ensure your Aston Martin is in the best condition for you to do that winter drive. There is a wealth of knowledge - AMOC and members are always happy to share, including advice and tips. There are also a number of training schools that can teach drivers winter driving techniques.

I hope to see you driving your Aston Martin in the depths of January (or perhaps on the way to the ski slopes).

Happy travels! **AMD**

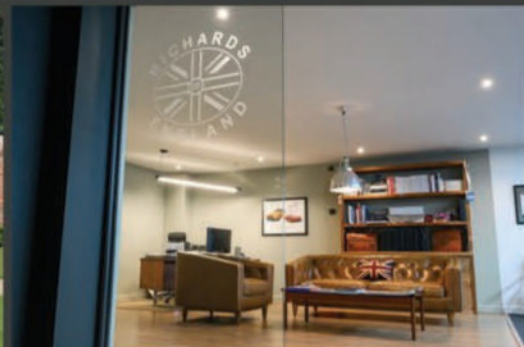
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ON SALE
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DB9 SPECIAL ISSUE



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Reg Parnell was one of Aston Martin's leading drivers throughout the Fifties. We mark the 60th anniversary of his death by looking at his career

ASTON MARTIN *drivers*

ALTHOUGH NOT a household name today, Reg Parnell still helped to establish Aston Martin as a genuine force to be reckoned with in endurance racing both in and out the car.

Born in 1911, he was brought up in a pub in Derby called the Royal Standard (it's still there on Derwent Street, now called The Tap). When Reg was a teenager, his older brother Bill bought a lorry and operated a haulage business from the pub's yard. Long before he was legally old enough to do so, the young Reg was soon driving the truck and the buses that followed, learning how to fix them.

"He used to live in his overalls for days," said Reg's son Tim in the August 2011 issue of *Motorsport*. "He never thought anything could beat him. He was a glutton for hard work and long hours, preferring that to going to school."

When the permanent Donington Park Circuit opened in 1933, Reg went to watch and quickly became hooked on racing. Two years later he bought an old Bugatti for £25, but when the rear axle broke and the spare parts were found to be too expensive, Reg replaced it with an MG Magnette K3 that was developed into a 1,400cc supercharged single seater.

While practising for the 1937 BRDC 500 at Brooklands, he lost control of his MG on the banking and skidded into the Austin 7 of Kay Petre who suffered severe head injuries after the car rolled over. Although she recovered from her injuries, the accident still ended her racing career.

Following a tribunal by the RAC about the incident, Reg's competition licence was revoked for an unlimited period. But following an appeal, when several drivers including Petre spoke on Reg's behalf, it was restored

two years later. Brooklands was the scene for his comeback race when he finished a fine second.

Although he had wanted to join the RAF during the war, his transport business meant he was in a protected occupation.

Keen to get racing again when hostilities came to an end, Reg bought a brand-new Maserati 4CLT. Thanks to success both at home and on the continent, he quickly became one of the country's leading drivers.



For the first race of the inaugural Formula One Championship at Silverstone in May 1950, Alfa Romeo hired Reg to drive its fourth 159. A fine third behind future champions Giuseppe Farina and Luigi Fagioli ensured his place in racing history.

It was largely due to this result why Aston Martin's team manager, John Wyer, asked Reg to join the company's burgeoning racing team. His first race for the British outfit was the 24 Hours of Le Mans in June when he finished sixth in a DB2.

Reg stayed with Aston for several seasons and with the later DB3S would win some of the UK's most prestigious events including the British Empire Trophy, Goodwood Nine Hours and the British Grand Prix support race.

But by now in his mid-40s, time was no longer on Reg's side. He was badly injured after crashing a Connaught at Crystal Palace in May 1956 and although he recovered, later competing in New Zealand, he retired at the

end of the 1957 season.

Yet Reg Parnell hadn't finished with motorsport since he became Aston's team manager, reporting to Wyer who had become its general manager. His mix of racing experience and technical know-how made him the perfect choice.

"The drivers were always relaxed with him because he'd been one of them," continued Tim in *Motorsport*. "And the mechanics loved him. When they were up against it late at night before a race, he'd whip his jacket off, roll up his sleeves and get stuck in with them."

His greatest achievement was overseeing Aston's victory of the 1959 24 Hours of Le Mans, a consolation maybe for never winning it as a driver. Further success at that year's Tourist Trophy at Goodwood and the Nürburgring 1000km saw Aston Martin take the World Sportscar Championship. By comparison, the company's entry into F1 with the DBR4/250 was a disaster and the company pulled out of racing at the end of the 1960 season. Parnell joined the Yeoman Credit F1 team as manager before setting up on his own at the end of 1962, signing a young Chris Amon and the motorbike champion Mike Hailwood.

But during the winter of 1963, Reg became seriously ill. "Just before Christmas my father was stricken with dreadful internal pains," continued Tim. "The doctor came, and said, 'Christmas in hospital isn't too bright, Reg, so we'll get you in afterwards and have a bloody good look at you.' They operated on him after Christmas, but he got peritonitis, then a blood clot went to his heart, and he died on January 7, 1964." Reg was just 52.

Although not as famous as some of his contemporaries such as Sir Stirling Moss or Carroll Shelby, Parnell's contribution to both Aston Martin and British motorsport as a whole cannot be overlooked. **AMD**

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