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ASTON MARTIN *driver*

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132-PAGE ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

THE DB9 AT 20

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DB9 VS SL600



DBR9 AT LE MANS



DBS V12



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V8 VANTAGE RACES ACROSS AMERICA

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Only 34 DB2/4 MkII Fixedhead Coupes were built in period, with only 14 of those offered for sale in the UK market. This car is number 33 of 34, the final RHD car produced, and has undergone a full restoration at Aston Workshop prior to dry storage in one of the UK's premier Aston Martin collections. Resplendent in its colour specification of Peacock Blue with a Silver Birch roof and Grey leather, the car has Mille Miglia eligibility and is presented in fantastic condition.

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NINE TO DRIVE

IT'S ONLY right we celebrate the 20th anniversary of a car as important as the DB9. Not only is it one of the most beautiful ever produced by the British company but from the V8 Vantage to the current DB12, the DBS V12 to the Rapide, the DB9 would set the tone for all future models. It also returned Aston Martin to the winner's circle of the famous 24-Hours of Le Mans when the DBR9 racing version took GT1 honours in both 2007 and 2008. And finally, with 16,500 examples produced in 12 years, it remains one of the company's most successful.

And so from taking an early example across arguably the best driver's road in the UK (pictured above) to genuine owners discussing some of the real life pitfalls of owning one of these cars, this special 132-page issue of AMD is a celebration of what's clearly been the backbone of Aston Martin's success for the last two decades.



Paul Walton
Editor



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CONTENTS

94



ISSUE TWELVE

6 NEWS

Aston Martin releases details of the new Vantage, the GT3 and the AMR24 F1 contender

13 GARRY TAYLOR

15 GUY WYLES

17 ROB HAWKINS

20 DB9 DEVELOPMENT

We look at the development of the DB9

24 DB9 THROUGH THE NORTH YORK MOORS

To explain why the DB9 remains such a great to drive, we take an early example across one of the best driving roads in the UK, Blakey Ridge in the heart of the North York Moors



32 DB9 MODEL GUIDE

On sale for 12 years, there's more to the DB9 than the original coupe. We explain the different models including updates, limited editions and racing versions

38 2007 LE MANS

The time in 2007 when Aston Martin took its second major victory at the 24 Hours of Le Mans when a DBR9 won the coveted GT1 class

44 HENRIK FISHER

Fisher's time at Aston Martin might have been short, but by being involved with the design of two of the company's most important cars there's no denying he left his mark

80



52 HISTORY OF GAYDON

We look at the history of this historic site from its time as an RAF base to Aston Martin building its new factory there in 2003

58 DB9 OWNING GUIDE

Some of the potential real-life problems of the DB9 are explained and two owners explain their experiences

70 DB9 vs MERCEDES-BENZ SL600

We compare an example of each of these V12 sports cars to discover which of these luxury supercars from the mid-2000s is the best

80 DBS

The DBS from 2007 was heavily based on the DB9 but featured a 510bhp V12 plus updated aerodynamics resulting in a beautiful, desirable yet extremely fast combination

88 DB2/4 FIXEDHEAD COUPE

Just 34 DB2/4 fixedhead coupes were produced making them one of the rarest of the David Brown-era models



94 RESTORED DB6 VANTAGE

After spending 30 years in storage, this DB6 Vantage has recently been restored by marque experts Pugsley & Lewis

102 V8 VANTAGE ACROSS NORTH AMERICA

In 2023 Phil and Will Churchill drove their early UK-registered V8 Vantage across North and Central America. Discover more about this fascinating adventure

112 MOTORSPORT

Matt James takes a look at Aston Martin Racing's recently revealed F1 car for the coming season, the AMR24

116 MEET THE EXPERT

We discover more about the Kent-based marque specialist Quantum Works



123 AMOC

A group of AMOC Members and friends share their experience of touring Germany with their beloved Aston Martins

130 ASTON MARTIN DRIVERS

Pedro Lamy who enjoyed great success with the DBR9

UP FRONT NEWS

NEW VANTAGE REVEALED



Despite being considered as the entry-level Aston Martin, the 4.0-litre V8 of the updated Vantage now has an incredible 650bhp, a 30 percent gain over its predecessor, resulting in a top speed of 202mph while its 0-60mph is a heart-stopping 3.4sec.

These figures together with revamped suspension has resulted in what Aston Martin calls the “fastest Vantage in the famous nameplate’s 74-year history,” and, “an authentic, unadulterated celebration of pure performance, engineered to deliver maximum thrills with maximum confidence.”

The improved performance has been achieved through the adoption of modified cam profiles, optimised compression ratios, larger turbos, and increased cooling yielding.

An added benefit of these changes is that the engine now has, “a more visceral and more vocal character”.

Aston Martin’s chief technology officer, Roberto Fedeli, said that while the Vantage, “will make headlines for

the huge increases in power and torque over the outgoing model”, it is, “the vivid way in which it deploys such immense performance that will seduce enthusiasts and purists”.

All this power has resulted in the exterior having visible changes that were apparently influenced by the One-77 supercar. The front grille is 38 percent larger than the outgoing model, there are more effective vents in the bonnet plus the rear track has been increased by 30mm to cope with bespoke Michelin Pilot Sport S 5 tyres wrapped around massive 21in alloy wheels.

“One look and you know it packs a real punch,” said Aston Martin’s chief creative officer Marek Reichman, “but there’s an elegance of form and proportion that hints at the sophistication that underpins its raw power.”

The car’s aluminium chassis has been extensively revised to improve rigidity and engagement. The front crossmember has been moved rearwards to make the suspension mounting points more rigid while the new engine bay brace is both stiffer and lighter.

The cockpit is now similar to that of the DB12 which Aston says, “delivers a sense of space and clarity for the driver.”

Centre stage of the interior is a 10.25in touchscreen that runs a bespoke Aston-developed infotainment platform, which can connect to a dedicated smartphone app and ushers in a raft of new in-car and connectivity functions. These



VANTAGE GT3



include 3D live mapping, wireless smartphone mirroring and last-mile on-foot navigation. Yet despite the focus on digitisation, Aston also says the focus on digitisation, Aston also says the touchscreen is balanced with, “positive tactility of physical switches”, with buttons retained for the key mechanical operations of gear selection, drive selection, heating and ventilation.

“Any car bearing the Vantage name has much to live-up to, which is why this newest model makes an unwavering commitment to high-performance in its purest and most explicit form,” said Aston Martin’s chief executive officer, Amedeo Felisa. “Together with assertive styling, all-new interior and state-of-the-art infotainment, Vantage is world-class in every respect.”

Production of the new Vantage is due to commence in early 2024, with first deliveries scheduled to begin later in the year.



Aston Martin has also revealed a GT3 version of the new Vantage that will compete in the FIA World Endurance Championship and IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship plus other series around the world.

“Simultaneously revealing the new Vantage and Vantage GT3 race car underlines Aston Martin’s commitment to building the world’s finest sports car, and then proving its capabilities on-track,” said Marco Mattiacci, Aston Martin’s global chief brand and commercial officer.

The new car has been built to comply with all FIA GT3 class regulations, including the new-for-2024 LMGT3 category in which torque sensors are mandated. It is also the first product to come from a collaboration between Aston Martin Racing (AMR) and Aston Martin Performance Technologies (AMPT).

A comprehensive evolution of the recently retired Vantage AMR GTE and GT3 cars – which made their debuts in 2018 – it is built around Aston Martin’s bonded aluminium chassis structure and powered by the same twin-turbo 4.0-litre V8 engine as the new Vantage road car.

Aston Martin says the new GT3 focuses on, “addressing some of the old car’s more challenging handling characteristics, to make the new GT3 as driveable as possible for both professional and amateur drivers alike.”

“These new generation GT3 cars are more dependent than ever on aerodynamic downforce,” said Aston Martin Racing’s head of performance, Gustavo Beteli, “so we wanted to make

the car more stable under braking. The old car would dive a lot under braking, so we had to try and control the pitch with the rear suspension set-up. Working heavily on damper tuning, we have found a much better balance with the new car so we can generate the downforce without compromising the suspension set-up. The result is much-improved progression and greater stability in all conditions.”

Boasting a dramatic, all-new nose-to-tail aerodynamic package, comprehensively revised suspension and state-of-the-art electronics, together they endow this latest-generation Aston Martin GT racer with world-beating potential.

Large louvres in the top of the front wheelarches evacuate high-pressure air to reduce lift while an even larger stack of louvres in the rear arches allows high pressure to escape from the rear to reduce drag.

The nose is a large one-piece clamshell made in carbon fibre that features a quick-release design for rapid removal and replacement. It houses a shorter splitter which, Aston Martin says, moves the centre of pressure rearwards to reduce pitch sensitivity and aid stability.

The GT3 was put through an extensive test programme that featured more than 12,000 kilometres of running and included a 30-hour test. Completed late last year, those taking the wheel were a combination of both Aston Martin’s factory drivers plus selected amateurs.

Aston Martin is targeting 30 customer deliveries (including kits for customers wishing to upgrade their current cars) during the 2024 calendar year.

ASTON MARTIN GOES RACING

Aston Martin has been confirmed as the official High-Performance Partner of The Jockey Club.

The iconic British brand made its debut with The Jockey Club at The Derby Festival at Epsom Downs in 2023 and the new partnership sees it extend its presence to include The Cheltenham Festival, the Randox Grand National Festival at Aintree, Newmarket's QIPCO Guineas Festival as well as the Betfred Derby Festival.

Aston Martin will continue to sponsor the Aston Martin Dash at Epsom Downs, with the Heritage Handicap taking place over the fastest five furlongs in the world on Derby Day. Jack Royle, acting director of partnerships at The Jockey Club, said, "Following a successful first link-up at the 2023 Derby Festival, we are delighted that Aston Martin has decided to take its association with The Jockey Club a step further to become



our first High-Performance Partner. Aston Martin and The Jockey Club both share a rich heritage and association with performance and speed so this feels like a very natural partnership. Our major spring

Festivals will soon be upon us and we look forward to closely working alongside the team at Aston Martin in order to help maximise their brand objectives at these sporting events."

AMR 2024 GT4 DRIVER LINE-UP REVEALED

Aston Martin Racing's 2024 works driver roster will feature an impressive line-up of champions set to propel the British sports car brand into a new era of competition in GT racing.

These include triple FIA World Endurance GT champion Marco Sørensen who has signed a multi-year contract in a deal that commits his long-term future to Aston Martin.

"This is a very exciting time to be a works Aston Martin driver," said Sørensen. "I feel like I am in the prime of my career, and that I have a lot to bring to a works manufacturer programme."

The other half of Aston Martin's famous 'Dane Train', Nicki Thiim, has also committed to race as a works Aston Martin driver in 2024, his 12th consecutive season with the brand.

"It's always an honour to represent Aston Martin, and I'm looking forward to being able to fight for championships again at the top level of GT racing with

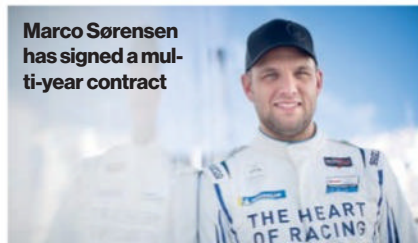
Vantage," said Thiim. "There is still so much to win and still so much history to be made, I'm sure of that."

Aston Martin's works line-up will also feature three new faces in 2024; reigning GT World Challenge Europe Sprint Cup champion Mattia Drudi (ITA), 2022 24 Hours of Le Mans class winner Henrique Chaves (POR) and reigning Nürburgring 24 Hours champion David Pittard (GBR).

"I'm honoured to be joining Aston Martin as a works driver," said Drudi. "I'm really looking forward to being part of such an iconic manufacturer programme in motorsport."

Returning drivers include IMSA GTD Pro race-winner Ross Gunn (GBR), four-time British GT champion Jonny Adam (GBR) who is returning for his 14th season with Aston Martin Racing, Valentin Hasse Clot (FRA) and Aston Martin legend Darren Turner (GBR) who is about to embark on an incredible 20th season as a works Aston Martin Racing driver. "It would have been impossible to imagine

a journey of 20 years with Aston Martin Racing," said Turner, "but I'm so happy that it continues for another chapter. Being involved from the beginning with the Aston Martin DBR9 and now looking forward to racing the next generation of Vantage GT3 and GT4 cars really is something very special."



Marco Sørensen has signed a multi-year contract



Legendary AMR driver Darren Turner returns for his 20th season



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ASTON'S F1 CONTENDER REVEALED

On the same day as the new Vantage and GT3 made their debut, Aston Martin Racing also revealed its challenger for the forthcoming F1 season, the AMR24.

"We are proud to debut the AMR24," said team principal Mike Krack. "It is the result of a huge effort by the whole team at our new AMR Technology Campus and it will allow the team to take another step forward in 2024."

Considered a strong update of last year's successful car, one of the main

changes includes an altered front wing design to help manage front wheel wake in a more efficient manner.

Another update includes the front suspension which has been changed to improve performance in conjunction with the front wing and floor while the rear suspension has been optimised to maximise efficiency of airflow around the rear wing, accommodating Mercedes' latest power unit and gearbox. The design of sidepods and bodywork have also been undertaken to improve airflow management around the floor

and over the rear wing. Lawrence Stroll, executive chairman of Aston Martin, said, "These three brothers in speed embroider our DNA with new dynamism. Simultaneously revealing the new Vantage and Vantage GT3 race car on the very same day as we unleash our AMR24 Formula One challenger at Silverstone demonstrates our ambition to be a leading force in F1 and create the world's finest and most thrilling sports cars."

Read more about the AMR24 in Matt James' motorsport feature on page 122.

BOOK REVIEW

Aston Martin DB9 and Vanquish

The Complete Story

Author: James Taylor

Publisher: Crowood Press

Price: £30

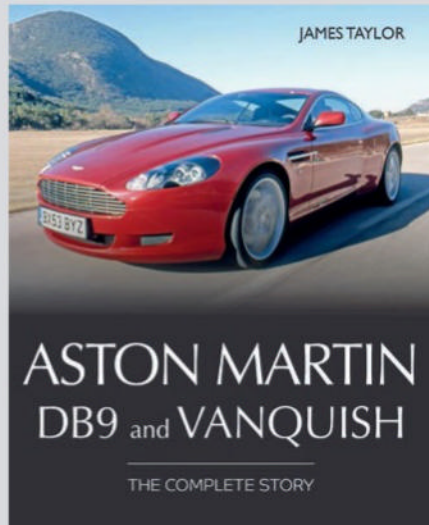
ISBN: 9780719843167

As you'd expect for an author as experienced as James Taylor, this new Crowood Press book on the DB9 and Vanquish covers all aspects of the cars including their design, development, launch and subsequent upgrades. Although both were covered in detail

by the motoring press when new and throughout their production, there's still plenty of facts to keep the most ardent enthusiasts entertained.

The sections about the DB9's confusing design gestation and how the Ford-designed 6.0-litre V12 engine was adopted by Aston Martin are particularly enlightening.

Together with the Gaydon factory, special editions, the DB9's racing pedigree and even a guide to ownership, this is a well-researched and fascinating book. And considering it's also hardbound and with many colour images inside, it's an absolute steal at £30.





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GARRY TAYLOR

HOW IT BEGAN



IT IS intriguing as to why people become really passionate about some marques. Full disclosure – I am not a neuroscientist. But it's probably at some point in childhood, when the brain is still linking nerve cells together, that the young mind combines pleasure with a certain car they saw.

It certainly wasn't James Bond for me. I was too young for *Goldfinger* to have any effect, although I did have the DB5 Corgi toy because that was compulsory growing up at the time. No, it was TV show, *The Persuaders!* that had the biggest effect while still in my shorts. There was this beautiful Aston Martin DBS powering through glamorous landscapes, taking its suave hero on to his next adventure. I dreamt that would be me when I grew up. The red Ferrari Dino did, of course, look good, but that made the DBS look better and less brash (although its Bahama Yellow wasn't subtle).

From then on I needed my Aston Martin fix, but in the days before *Aston Martin Driver* and the internet, there was nothing other than the general motoring press. A few years later, an Aston Martin Owners Club membership was secured to grab as much information about the brand as possible.

Once the AMOC accepted that I could put some words together resembling English, they allowed me to write for their magazine. From that, it was on the 4 November 2004 that I was invited by AML to my first ever press launch, which was the DBR9 at Gaydon – very appropriate with a DB9 theme running through this issue. Here was its racing derivative based on a modified DB9 chassis mechanicals. It was the welcome return to racing, and, round of

applause, Le Mans. The DBR9 made its start line debut at Sebring, Florida in March 2005. Witnessing this unveiling was very special. In attendance was Dr Ulrich Bez, the then CEO of Aston Martin, and David Richards, the head of Prodrive, who was partnering with Aston Martin to make this happen. I had followed Aston Martin at Le Mans over the years, through private entries, Nimrod, AMR and even a DB7 V8, but now this seemed official and long term. More boxes were being ticked for this Aston enthusiast.

My passion for Aston Martin isn't blinkered but 'The Wings' do run through my veins. Today, I continue to meet many like-minded people through AML, AMOC and more recently the Aston Martin Heritage Trust where I am a trustee. I also produce an Aston Martin Heritage podcast covering the cars, the people and the stories.

As an Aston Martin enthusiast yourself, you might appreciate the brand's commitment to craftsmanship and attention to detail. Or with each car being hand-built by skilled technicians, ensuring that every vehicle is unique and of the highest quality. You might also enjoy the sense of exclusivity that comes with owning an Aston Martin, as the brand produces a limited number of vehicles every year. Or maybe, it's as simple as seeing a yellow Aston on TV and thinking, 'I like that'.

*My passion for
Aston Martin isn't
blinkered but 'The
Wings' do run
through my veins*

As well as being a lifelong advocate of the brand, Garry is currently a trustee of the Aston Martin Heritage Trust (www.amht.org.uk)



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GUY WYLES

MY FIRST ASTON JOY RIDE



I didn't imagine earlier on the same day that I'd be dropping down a gear in my father's V8 Vantage X-Pack on the A41 Aylesbury bypass while being hounded by a buzzing Ford Focus ST170 the driver clearly infuriated that I was in my twenties. But this is what happened during the return leg of a trip to Turweston to drop my father off for a meeting.

With his everyday car out of action, the only transport available was his beautiful 1989 X-Pack finished in Buckingham Green with a Prince of Wales spec interior in fawn leather with green piping.

All these years later, I can still picture my father's face when it dawned on him I would need to drive his favourite car some 40 minutes on my own or miss his appointment. Fortunately for me, manners won the day and I had my chance to drive an Aston Martin solo for the first time.

I had driven Astons before – the first car I'd ever taken on the road was a 1996 DB7 GTS 2 with my father calmly (perhaps superficially) guiding me. We must have looked fairly odd dawdling along at 22mph with L plates stuck to this high performance car, endlessly faffing at roundabouts, but it's a memory I cherish.

Including trips to Le Mans, I had enjoyed many miles with my father in his X-Pack so notwithstanding the confusion a dog leg gearbox can give in the heat of the moment, I was fairly used to it.

I knew, of course, if anything were to happen I would never be allowed to drive any of his cars again. And so with warnings of the cost to rebuild a gearbox still ringing in my ears, to begin with I drove home extremely timidly.

But like most people (young men especially), this caution started to temper as the journey drew on and evaporated completely when I was tailgated by an incensed lad – probably my age – in a hot Focus ST170. He darted into the outside lane of the Aylesbury roundabout

at the top of the A41, so quite clearly the 'race' was on. The easy way they snick from third down to second is a timely reminder why transmissions with a dog leg first are configured this way, the engine barking on its way to a self-imposed 4,000rpm limit after I did so. Dad rarely drove his cars hard; the sound of the V8 comfortably below the red line is usually enough to convince owners it's to change up.

The Ford, though, wasn't disappearing in my rear view mirror as quickly I'd hoped. But while I was in the beginnings of the X-Pack's wide powerband, I can imagine he was needing to give the hatchback everything just to keep up.

Fortunately, I had longer gears than him and after half a mile or so he ran out of legs and I was in danger of losing my licence. It was the most exciting minute of my life and the moment I firmly caught the Aston Martin bug, when you realise a Porsche etc isn't what you want; it has to be an Aston.

We all love that X-Pack so it's fortunate my father still owns it. The car even beat a One-77 to come second in the democratic People's Choice Award at the 2023 Aston

Martin Beaulieu event. I imagine the owner of the One-77 wasn't amused – they are such beautiful pieces of automotive art and worth multiples of the Vantage.

But for muscular beauty and sheer road presence, it's still hard to beat a V8 Vantage X-Pack. They regularly top the 'most liked' posts on our social media channels, including the world's most famous car, the DB5. And quite rightly so.

Let's hope the muscular retro designs of the recent Victor and Valour have the same level of character as an X-Pack that other premium marques just cannot compete with.

*It was the most
exciting minute
of my life*

Guy is a director at The Chiltern Aston Centre, one of the six UK Heritage Partners (chilternaston.co.uk)



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ROB HAWKINS

BUDGET-PRICED SUPERCAR



IS THERE such a thing as a budget-priced supercar? Or perhaps I could rephrase that as should there be such a thing as a budget-priced supercar? When many Aston Martins reach a particular age (usually around the 20-year mark), they drop in value to the price of a brand-new mainstream manufactured family saloon, so they are often a tempting purchase. Yet they can cost the same again to fix, so whilst my former question is true (yes, there is such a thing as a budget-priced supercar), my latter question is not so positive.

At present, examples of Astons that seem to have hit rock bottom (around £20k) in second-hand values include the DB7, Vantage and the DB9. They won't remain cheap forever, once a sniff of classic car status creeps in. And not every example is quite so cheap and cheerful; limited-edition models, convertibles (Volante) and ones that have been meticulously maintained generally demand a higher price tag. Remember that when new these supercars rubbed shoulders with the likes of Ferrari, Porsche and Lamborghini, helping to justify a six-figure price tag.

Are the cars in the bargain basement price bracket really worth a look at? It mainly depends on what money you have left over after purchasing such an example and whether you have the resources to keep costs low. As mentioned, you can easily spend the same again or more on repairs. Take a V12 engine that's found in all those models I have mentioned. A new one will cost around £18,000 to buy, excluding the cost of the swap.

Even if you are lucky enough to escape a major problem such as engine failure, you still need plenty of funds available to look after one of these supercars. Tyres can easily cost £200-£300 per corner and should ideally be replaced in pairs across an axle or all round. For a car that in many cases has a top speed approaching 200mph, the rubber that keeps you on the tarmac is surely not worth skimming over.

There are definitely ways to keep costs low, but that shouldn't involve cutting corners

The same attitude for tyres should definitely be adopted for brakes and suspension components. Even if you drive sedately, should you shop around for a set of front brake pads on a DB9 because the genuine ones cost £420? Or look for a cheaper aftermarket suspension damper instead of sticking to an OEM Bilstein.

There are definitely ways to keep costs low, but that shouldn't involve cutting corners. Fixing components

instead of merely replacing them is a starting point, ranging from a sheared headlamp washer to sagging headlining. But there's no escaping the fact that an Aston such as a DB9 is a supercar that demands a different level of looking after than a Ford Mondeo or Vauxhall Insignia, for instance.

If you count the savings made on buying one of these models now in comparison to when it was new, then maybe the potential costs I've mentioned aren't so painful and components such as new tyres, brakes and servicing are regarded as improving your investment. Perhaps then I will be confident in answering the question of whether there should be such a thing as a budget-priced supercar.

ASTON MARTIN *driver*

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NINE LIVES

We chart the development history of the DB9

WORDS PAUL WALTON IMAGES AMD ARCHIVE



THE DB7 might have been one of the prettiest British sports cars of the Nineties – if not of all time – but it was hardly cutting edge. The original straight-six version used an ageing Jaguar-sourced engine while all models, including the Vantage from 1999, were based on an even older chassis.

The DB9 changed all that. Not only did it have a new lightweight, bonded aluminium chassis plus an updated version of the company's 6.0-litre V12, but it was the first car produced at the company's state-of-the-art factory located outside the village of Gaydon in Warwickshire. Little wonder *Autocar* magazine described the car in its 24 February 2004 issue as, "The most modern Aston ever."

The driving force behind the DB9 was Aston's new CEO, Dr Ulrich Bez. After taking over from Bob Dover in July 2000, he quickly discovered the company was working on two new models; a four-seat GT to replace the DB7 (code-named AM802) plus a mid-engined sports car (AM305) to compete with the Ferrari 360. The pair would have joined the Vanquish that went on sale in 2001.

Realising then that even with the might of parent Ford behind it, Aston wasn't in a position to build three separate chassis. So on just his second day, Bez canned both projects and instigated a new platform that could be used for all



future models, starting with the DB7's replacement which would arrive first.

Due to the success of the Lotus-developed bonded composite structure of the Vanquish, it was decided to further develop it for the new car. "We learned a lot about aluminium structures from Vanquish," the chief programme engineer, Dave King, said to *European Automotive Design* for its November 2003 issue, "but with its combination of steel, aluminium and composite it is quite a complex and costly assembly not really suited to the bigger production run."

The essence of the chassis was retained but it was modified so it could be adapted to suit future cars in different classes plus to improve the efficiency of its assembly.

The new platform was christened VH for 'vertical horizontal'. The vertical represented the fact it could be used up and down Aston's range while the horizontal part suggested that elements – such as the suspension components – could be shared between different Aston Martin models.

To keep weight to a minimum, the DB9's bonnet, roof and rear wings were all aluminium while the front wings and boot lid were made from composite material. Even the windscreen surround was in cast aluminium with magnesium alloy used in the steering column and inner door frames. As a result, the bodyshell was 25

percent lighter than the DB7's yet it had twice the torsional rigidity.

In 1999 when work started on the car, Aston Martin still didn't have its own studio and so commissioned the same company behind the DB7, TWR in Kidlington, for the design. This meant the DB9 was largely the work of the company's chief designer, Ian Callum, who had also been responsible for its immediate predecessor.

When the Scot joined Jaguar – another Ford-owned company – as its design director later in 1999, he had to juggle responsibilities for both. "We had a separate small studio, with an annexe – nobody knew about it, except me and a couple of other designers – and we designed this separately with a group of three or four designers, and that's how it came about," said Callum to *cardesignnews.com* in 2019.

According to Callum, the DB9 was actually a development of what would have been the mid-engined model, the AM305. "We took the form language [the basic shapes] of the car that we'd built, the small one, and then pumped it up because we needed to do it very quickly," he continued to *www.cardesignnews.com*. "So, the form language actually became very similar to the V8 [Vantage] – and you can see that, actually – because the intention was to go back to the V8 [Vantage] and redesign it. But



HISTORY

DB9 DEVELOPMENT

unfortunately, I never got the chance, because I was asked to focus entirely on Jaguars at that point.”

In 2001, Aston took on its own dedicated design director, Henrik Fisker, leaving Callum to concentrate on Jaguar. Although he's since confirmed Fisker finished the DB9, Callum has also said he was responsible for the majority of its design. “I'd say pretty much 100 percent including the interior,” he said during a 2010 interview with *Car & Driver* magazine when asked how much had been done before Fisker joined. “Maybe not colour and trim and wood finishes, but certainly the surfaces of the car.”

With its smooth, clean lines and perfect front-engined proportions, the finished shape was clearly an evolution of the DB7's while little touches such as air vents in the front wings behind the front wheels were discreet nods to the iconic DB4, DB5 and DB6 models.

There would be only one engine available throughout the DB9's production, the same 6.0-litre V12 as found in the DB7 Vantage and Vanquish. However, changes were made to the engine's crankshaft, camshafts, manifolds, lubrication and the management system

resulting in the V12 originally producing 450bhp at 6,000rpm although this later increased to 470, 510 and finally 540bhp.

The initial amount was achieved on purpose since it positioned the car below the top-of-the-range 460bhp Vanquish yet with 15bhp more than the DB7 Vantage GT, it still showed clear progression over its predecessor.

In 2004, production of the V12 was moved away from Cosworth's Northamptonshire base that had made the 6.0-litre since 1999 to Ford's engine plant at Cologne. “From 2005 our annual production will increase threefold and the switch to Cologne for our V12 will enable this to happen,” explained Ulrich Bez. “The production base will also be totally flexible, allowing us to assemble modular engine concepts and variations. All the engines built within this facility will be unique to Aston Martin and a perfect fit in terms of technology requirements, quality control and lean production techniques.”

Since the Magnetti Marelli-developed clutchless gearbox that was fitted to the Vanquish wasn't universally liked, the DB9 had the choice of two more traditional transmissions; a six-speed manual by Graziano plus a ZF five-speed shift-by-wire

automatic. This meant the traditional gear selector could be replaced with four dash-mounted buttons marked P, R N and D.

The gearbox was then mounted over the rear axle to improve weight distribution and was driven by a lightweight carbon fibre shaft that ran inside a torque tube, which was cast from aluminium.

The suspension was similar to that used by the Vanquish, consisting of double wishbones at all four corners plus steel coils. The front featured anti-dive geometry while at the rear were dual-rate coil springs and anti-squat and anti-lift geometry designed to keep the car level under heavy acceleration and braking. To lessen body roll, there were also anti-roll bars at both the front and rear.

Wanting the DB9 to be more performance orientated than its predecessor, Aston's engineers did a lot of benchmarking with what they saw as the new car's rivals including those from Ferrari, Jaguar, Mercedes-Benz and Porsche. “And then we set subjective targets,” said King in the 24 February 2004 issue of *Autocar*. “The old DB7 is an XJ6 with good noise suppression and low speed ride. The new car is more



direct, firmer-riding but rounds off bumps. There's not as much isolation because we wanted control."

Yet unusually for a sports car from the early 2000s, the new Aston didn't have the electric-assisted steering that was becoming popular with cars in this class since it was decided the system didn't offer any real benefit. "Electric assistance has got a long way to go in terms of steering feel," continued King. And so, the car received a hydraulic ZF rack with proportional assistance. "It's all classic stuff, done well with good suppliers."

Several prototypes were built which were put through a rigorous testing programme resulting in a cumulative total of a million miles across several countries. These included Italy's Nardò test track, the Ford-owned Lommel proving ground in Belgium plus the MIRA and Millbrook test tracks in the UK.

Cars also went to Death Valley in California for hot weather testing plus Sweden's arctic circle for cold weather work. Further assessment was also carried out across New Zealand.

Most of these prototypes were destroyed once their work was completed, but three were dressed

up as DBSs and destroyed for the dramatic barrel roll scene in the 2006 Bond film *Casino Royale*.

When the finished model finally made its debut at the 2003 Frankfurt Motor Show in early September, it was christened DB9 and not DB8 like many had been expecting. This was for two reasons; Aston Martin didn't want customers to assume the V12-engined car had a V8 like the Jaguar XK8. Plus, a DB8 could have been seen as a gradual evolution of the DB7 whereas the new car was a radical new model and therefore deserved to be numerically distanced from its predecessor.

But no matter what its name was, the press still was impressed by the new model's design. "Traffic jams will be commonplace around parked DB9s," said *Autocar* in its 1 June 2004 issue. "The car is so gracefully beautiful, so instinctively Aston Martin, that people are forced to stop and stare. Identifying weak aspects of Henrik Fisker's design is virtually impossible and that's a rare thing in this type of car."

They were equally positive about how it drove. "There are more powerful units and faster-changing gearboxes," the magazine continued, "but nothing that

matches the DB9's sense of occasion and sheer usability." Although Aston Martin would produce ever faster cars including the DB9-based DBS and second generation of Vanquish, the DB9 was still the backbone of Aston Martin production for 12 years with over 16,500 produced, more than double that of the DB7.

A Volante followed in 2005 while the car was also the basis of an extremely successful racing version, winning the GT1 class of the 24 Hours of Le Mans twice. To help keep it up to date, the DB9 was facelifted in 2008 and more comprehensively four years later. Even when the run-out model, the 540bhp GT, arrived a few months before the car was replaced by the DB11 in 2016, it remained as desirable as when it first went on sale.

"The design is as lovely as ever," commented *Road & Track* in early 2016, "still able to elicit slack-jawed, pic-snapping reactions from fellow motorists and passers-by. Perhaps more than any car on sale today, the Aston Martin DB9 GT is ageless."

The DB9 might have been the most modern Aston Martin at the time, but aesthetically and commercially it remains one of the company's most successful. **AMD**



DRIVE STORY

DB9 OVER THE MOORS

OVER THE



THE TOP



To discover if two decades after its debut the DB9 is still as good to drive as it is to look at, we take an early example across one of the UK's most challenging roads, Blakey Ridge in the heart of the North York Moors

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY PAUL WALTON

AFTER I come barreling over the crest of a hill, the road now stretches out ahead of me like a never-ending grey ribbon that cuts through the barren countryside like my Scalextric track once did on my parents' living room floor. With this being the top of the moor, I can see for miles in all directions, but I have no time to enjoy the view. This most challenging of roads requires all of my attention all of the time.

Called Blakey Ridge, it's one of the most engaging driver's roads in the UK. Not only are the corners fast and the straights long, but it's in one of the most inhospitable locations in England too, the North York Moors. ▶

DRIVE STORY

DB9 OVER THE MOORS

A special road like this requires a special car and thankfully I have one; an Aston Martin DB9. It might have reached two decades old, but as the high-speed nature of Blakey Ridge will prove, this V12-engine coupe remains one of the best performing cars from the early 2000s.

Despite its reputation, Blakey Ridge starts inconspicuously at the edge of Hutton-le-Hole, a small settlement 35 miles north of York that's today famous for its beauty.

The road was already starting to climb Spaunton Moor when I left the village, but its elevation increases quickly, rising all the way to its maximum of 1,325ft, the highest point of the North York Moors. With the countryside starting to plateau, ahead of me now is a long, flat and reasonably straight piece of tarmac that looks more inviting than the Mulsanne at Le Mans or

the Nürburgring's Döttinger Höhe.

With the road clear and, more importantly, not a camera in sight, I pull on the left-hand paddle on the steering column to drop the six-speed, drive-by-wire transmission down to third before flooring the throttle. With 450bhp, the 6.0-litre V12 responds instantly and, as I pull the other paddle to take fourth and then fifth, I streak through the mottled green and brown Yorkshire scenery with the same urgency as a Meteorite Grey-coloured missile.

As a front-engined V12, the DB9 has always been considered as more of a grand tourer than a nimble sports car. But thanks to the immediacy of the engine, there's a noticeable sporting side to the car that's missing from the more luxurious GTs such as the Bentley Continental GT, for example.





There's more to the DB9 than just pure grunt, though. With the big engine pushed a long way back into the chassis helping to give the car perfect 50/50 weight distribution, it also handles beautifully. With it always feeling relaxed and composed, I barely need to lift for the slight bends in the road. As I keep my foot hard down, the quietness of the moor is broken by the loud and piercing note of Aston's always magnificent 6.0-litre V12 no doubt scaring any wildlife in earshot.

I eventually come to the tightest bends of the road, known locally as Stepin Turn, a fast right- and left-hander. As I approach the curves, I again change down to third with the column-mounted paddles, the ZF-sourced gearbox reacting the moment I do so. Thanks to the nicely weighted, if arguably overly assisted steering, I'm able to line the big coupe up for the first corner ►

I streak through mottled green and brown scenery with the same urgency as a Meteorite Grey-coloured missile



DRIVE STORY

DB9 OVER THE MOORS

with the same accuracy as a sniper would looking through a telescopic sight.

At 4,710mm long, 2,017mm wide and tipping the scales at 1,760kg – 130kg more than a V8 Vantage 4.2 – there's no denying the DB9 is a large car. But thanks to its exterior panels made from either aluminium or composite plus the clever bonded aluminium platform that would become the backbone – both literally and figuratively – for the next generation of Aston Martin's cars, this lightweight construction gives it an agility I find surprising for such a large GT.

What else strikes me about the car is how modern it still looks. This particular example might be a very early one, registered during the DB9's first full year of production in September 2004, but thanks to its clean and elegant shape, it hasn't aged like other coupes of the early 2000s such as the bulky Bentley Continental GT or awkward-looking Ferrari 612 Scaglietti.

Replace the 19in, 20-spoke alloys that all early DB9s like this came with for even bigger rims plus the old-fashioned lights (front and rear) for smaller LED units and I reckon the car could easily still be in production.

It drives like it could be too. As I balance the throttle for the bends – a quick dab of the brakes so I can miss an errant sheep, which has wandered on to the road, not unsettling the car – the sharp handling feels surprisingly modern for a car that was originally developed when we all had Nokia 3410s in our pockets and rented DVDs from Blockbuster.

A little further on from the corners I pass the only major structure to line Blakey Ridge, The Lion Inn. Believed to have been built by monks between 1553 and 1558 as a rest stop when carrying coffins over the moors, it has been a public house for four centuries. Considered to be the fourth highest pub in England and the second in Yorkshire after Tan Hill, the ironstone mining industry in the area and its associated railway brought an enhanced trade to the pub throughout the 18th century. Today it's a welcome rest stop for hikers who, incredibly, prefer to walk across Spaunton Moor rather than drive it.

Miles from civilisation or even a Starbucks, this is a desolate location.





In December 2010, two customers and five staff members were trapped in The Lion Inn for over a week due to heavy snowfall. Drifts of snow 20ft (6.1m) deep were layered against the pub stopping the seven from escaping. Even on this reasonably sunny and dry January day the area looks less inviting than the dark side of the moon. Or Swindon.

Thankfully, the warm confines of the DB9 protect me from the worst the moorland has to offer. When new, the car's interior was regularly criticised for its heavy use of Ford and Volvo-sourced switchgear and for it lacking the finesse of its rivals from Ferrari and Bentley. As *Autocar* magazine said in its 1 June 2004 issue, "The rotary heater controls are cheap and the headlamp switch is nasty."

Although that's still true, there's still no denying how comfortable the cabin is, the leather-upholstered seat especially that's so soft I melt into it like I would a bath of warm caramel. I also like the tan colour of this example, finding it richer and more inviting than the more common black that thanks to the car's low roofline results in the interior feeling claustrophobic. And that's just the front seats; I'd hate to ride in the tiny rears that are no more than extra storage.

But what impresses me the most about the interior is the quality of its construction. As mentioned earlier, this is an early example that's covered over 117,000 miles yet as I hurtle over the occasionally rough road there isn't a squeak or a rattle as the separate panels meet and rub together.

The car rides beautifully too. Although the suspension is firm enough to take care of fast corners with little body roll, neither is uncomfortably hard and those imperfections in the road aren't transmitted back into the cabin like they would be in a harder performance car such as a Ferrari F430 Scuderia or the 997 generation of Porsche 911 GT2.

With the Blakey Ridge straightening out once again, I floor the accelerator pedal hard, the instant reaction of the V12 always taking me by surprise. I realise in this age of global warming the idea of a 20-year-old 6.0-litre engine is as acceptable as lighting a tyre fire or smoking in a nursery yet there's no denying how special a V12 feels at full chat. It delivers its power with an urgency missing from smaller, turbocharged units, giving the car a unique and powerful character. In a few years' time when cars like this are no more and we're all driving ►

DRIVE STORY

DB9 OVER THE MOORS

electric vehicles, we'll regret their passing. After around ten miles into my journey, Spaunton Moor starts to drop away, giving me a tremendous view over to Danby High Moor way in the distance. The road also starts to descend, slowly at first before becoming steeper all the way down into Castleton, a pretty little village made up of dark stone houses, typical of the area, that are strong enough to withstand the typically harsh weather of the North Yorks Moors.

Sadly this marks the end of this amazing road and my exciting journey. It might be a mere 15 miles from where Kirby Ridge starts to here in Castleton, but it feels much longer.

As I trickle slowly through the village towards civilisation, I reckon this magnificent road would be enjoyable in any car and I vow to come back in my own. But there's no denying doing so in a V12-engined sports car as sharp and as engaging as this one makes it more so.



It might have four seats, air-conditioning and a decent-sized boot, but the eagerness of its engine, the quick reaction of the six-speed automatic gearbox and composed handling makes the DB9 as much of a sports car as its smaller V8 Vantage sibling. Just as Blakey Ridge is

one of the UK's greatest roads, it's not over the top for me to say that two decades after its debut, the DB9 remains one of Aston Martin's greatest cars. **AMD**

● *Thanks to: the owner of the car featured here, David Williams*



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CATALOGUE RAISONNE

There's more to the DB9 than the original V12 coupe; we look at every version produced between 2004 and 2016 including the facelifts, special editions and racing cars

WORDS PAUL WALTON | IMAGES AMD ARCHIVE



DB9 coupe

Years produced: 2004-2008

Following its debut at the Frankfurt Motor Show in September 2003, the first version of Aston Martin's new car to arrive the following year was the coupe. It was also the first car to use the company's new VH aluminium platform ensuring it was both light yet also very stiff. Under the bonnet was the same version of Aston's 6.0-litre V12 as the Vanquish. With 450bhp, it put the car into a super class resulting in a 0-60mph time of just 4.6 seconds and a 186mph top speed. The DB9 was available with a six-speed automatic or a six-speed manual gearbox.

A minor update arrived in 2008 that introduced a new centre console, while the power of the engine was increased to 470bhp.



DB9 Volante

Years produced: 2005-2016

Thanks to the stiffness of the VH platform, the Volante version – which arrived in early 2005 – used the same basic chassis as the coupe. However, to ensure rigidity, a panel was bolted to the underside over much of the front half of the car and the chassis' sill sections were made from slightly thicker aluminium. Its suspension was then a little softer than its hardtop counterpart.

The hood folded completely away beneath a hard tonneau that closed electrically, flush with the car's bodywork. Raising or lowering the hood took just 17 seconds at the touch of a button, yet the rear seats were unobstructed, and the convertible retained the same boot space as the coupe.

DBR9**Years produced: 2004-2007**

Ever since Dr Ulrich Bez had taken over as Aston Martin's chairman in 2000, he'd wanted to take the company back to international racing. "Aston Martin is the world's most exclusive sports car company," he said in 2004, "but we need to make our cars more accessible. Motorsport will help Aston Martin to become better known around the world."

The DB9 was viewed as the way to achieve this and so Aston Martin joined forces with British motorsport specialist Prodrive to turn the V12 coupe into a racing car.

Although the eventual competition car looked similar to the production model, it featured several important modifications. To begin with, the power output of the V12 was increased to 600bhp and the transmission was a totally different six-speed sequential by Xtrac, mounted longitudinally at the transaxle. Although the chassis was kept largely the same, all of the panels were made from carbon fibre while the body featured extensive aerodynamic aids. The double wishbone suspension was similar to the

road car but updated with revised geometry while the brakes were Brembo six-pot calipers and carbon discs. In total, 16 DBR9s were produced by Prodrive and raced by the outfit itself plus several factory and privateer teams.

After debuting at the 2005 Sebring 12 Hours (when it won the GT class), the DBR9 would go on to take 24 class victories across the globe. In 2006 Aston Martin took the FIA GT Constructors' Championship while the French factory team, Aston Martin Racing Larbre, took the 2006 Le Mans Series with a DBR9. The car's final racing glory came in 2011 when a French privateer outfit, Hexis AMD, took the FIA GT1 World Championship.

From the 2012 season onwards, what had been running as the second tier – GT2 class cars – were promoted up the ladder to become the GT1 class. Aston had already introduced the V8 Vantage at that point, and it became the focus of the British firm's long-distance activities and so the DBR9 was retired.

DBRS9**Years produced: 2005-2008**

Revealed in 2005, the DBRS9 was a cheaper alternative to the DBR9 and aimed at GT3 racing. It was based on the DB9 road car but shared many design features from the full GT1-specification DBR9.

The 6.0-litre engine was detuned to 550bhp (still a 20 percent increase over the road car) and although the six-speed manual 'box was standard, the vast majority of them had the same six-speed sequential as the DBR9.

The chassis was less developed than the GT1 car, but the suspension was shared as was the carbon fibre bodywork, so at 1,280kg the car was very light.

Production of the DBRS9 came to an end in 2008. Costing £175,000, 26 customer cars (plus a couple of factory mules) were produced before the car was replaced by the V8 Vantage GT3.



HISTORY

DB9 MODEL GUIDE

DB9 LM

Year produced: 2008

To celebrate Aston Martin's class win of the 2007 Le Mans 24 Hours, the company released a limited edition of the DB9 coupe. Revealed at the 2007 Frankfurt Motor Show in October, standard specification of the LM included the DB9's sports pack (which consisted of stiffer springs, modified front anti-roll bar and revised dampers) plus Sarthe Silver paint and Magnum Silver grilles. At the rear were clear lenses with the trim again finished in Sarthe Silver and a small red enamel badge on the boot that featured a map of the Le Mans circuit.

Inside, there was Obsidian Black leather upholstery with red stitching, the Le Mans circuit map embroidered in red on to the centre armrest, Tertre Rouge fascia and door cappings (named after the circuit's famous corner), a numbered sill plaques and red brake calipers.

Costing £124,000 (around £20k more than the standard DB9 coupe), deliveries began the following February and March. A production run of 124 cars was initially planned with all dealers receiving one car. But with the DB9 having been given a minor facelift in March the same year, some dealers didn't take their allocation and so total production amounted to just 69 examples.



DB9 facelift

Years produced: 2010-2012

During mid-2010 the DB9 received the largest update to date. The new package of improvements included a new front bumper, bright finish radiator grille and a reshaped lower intake featuring bright hexagonal mesh. There were also new headlight bezels, restyled sills, silver brake calipers, 20-spoke diamond-turned alloy wheels and clear rear light lenses.

Under the skin, the DB9's passive damping system had been replaced by a new Adaptive Damping System (ADS), a new tyre pressure monitoring system (TPMS), a revised Bluetooth microphone system and the addition of a new Double Apex alloy finish trim plus Bang & Olufsen hi-fi options.

DB9 Carbon Black, Quantum Silver & Morning Frost

Year produced: 2010



In late 2010 Aston Martin revealed a trio of DB9 limited editions named after their external colours; Carbon Black, Quantum Silver (the same as 007's DBS in the 2008 Bond film, *Quantum of Solace*) and Morning Frost.

The first two featured a remapped sports exhaust, unique 19in ten-spoke forged alloys with a gloss black and diamond-turned finish. They also had black grilles, graphite tail pipes, perforated seat inners, a semi-aniline leather roof lining, coarse silver stitching plus real polished glass switchgear.

Morning Frost also had 19in ten-spoke alloys but with a silver diamond-turned finish plus silver brake calipers, silver grilles, and metallic bronze leather

headlining with perforated seat inners along with Piano Black centre console and door grabs.

DB9 facelift

Years produced: 2012-2016

The DB9 received a major facelift late 2012 with significant updates to the body and running gear. To begin with, around 60 percent of the body panels were new while the front grille was inspired by that of the Aston Martin One-77 hypercar and featured five horizontal vanes which were then chamfered to create an aerofoil profile.

Under the bonnet was the new generation AM11 V12 engine developed for the then new Vanquish that pushed power up to 510bhp, an impressive eight percent increase on

the previous DB9's 470bhp. New engine bay struts and new underbody sheer panels resulted in the new coupe being 20 percent stiffer while the Volante saw a 30 percent increase. The braking system now featured Carbon Ceramic Matrix (CCM) discs and calipers by Brembo.



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HISTORY

DB9 MODEL GUIDE



DB9 Centenary

Year produced: 2013

The Centenary was produced to mark Aston Martin's 100th anniversary. Just 100 were produced and featured a unique graduated paint finish and solid sterling silver Aston Martin wing badges with tailored 'trans flux' enamel inlay. Inside there was Deep Soft black leather – previously only featured in the One-77 hypercar – with contrasting silver stitching, a special silver thread embroidery of the Aston Martin wings in the head restraints and solid sterling silver sill plaques individually numbered.

DB9 GT

Years produced: 2015-2016

The GT wasn't just another special edition but an update for the DB9's final year with the power of the V12 increased to 540bhp.

Other than the subtle GT badges, the model could be identified by the black-painted splitter and diffuser, revised headlight and tail light treatments and new ten-spoke 20in alloy wheels. Black anodised brake calipers and a GT engraving on the aluminium fuel filler cap further distinguished the new model. Inside, the seats featured the 'GT' embroidered on to the unique fluted leather. The car also received Aston Martin's new AMi II touch-sensitive infotainment system that had debuted with the Vanquish the year before.



DB9 Carbon Black & Carbon White

Year produced: 2014

At the 2014 Geneva Motor Show in early 2014 Aston reintroduced two former limited-edition names, Carbon Black and Carbon White.

Painted in either Carbon Black or Stratus White, both models featured carbon fibre side strakes and black window surrounds. The inside was black upholstery, but with a choice of accent colours plus bespoke sill plaques with the Carbon Black or Carbon White logo.



DB9 GT Bond Edition

Year produced: 2015

The 2015 Bond film *Spectre* that featured the DB10 was the perfect opportunity for another special edition. Limited to just 150 examples, the GT Bond Edition featured unique Spectre Silver paint, sterling silver Aston Martin badges front and rear plus discreet '007 Bond Edition' exterior badging.

Inside, the DB9 GT Bond Edition continued its subtle homage to James Bond with unique numbered sill plaques featuring the familiar 007 logo, gun barrel embroidery on the rear seat divider and a special Bond Edition start-up screen on the model's infotainment system.

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Comeback king

The Aston Martin DBR9 dominated the GT1 class of the 2007 24 Hours of Le Mans, taking the company's second major victory in 48 years. We look back at the race and explain its lasting significance

WORDS PAUL WALTON | IMAGES AMD ARCHIVE

IT'S 2.50PM on Sunday 17th June 2007 and the many British spectators that line the 8.47-mile Le Mans Circuit are holding their breath. With only a few minutes remaining of the famous 24-hour race, barring last minute problems, this could be Aston Martin's first major success here since its sole victory in 1959. Although it's not overall honours that the company's current challenger, the DBR9, is chasing, the GT1 class is as hard-fought as an outright victory. But the 24 Hours of Le Mans is the toughest race on the

calendar and an almost certain victory for the Aston team the previous year was denied due to a last-minute clutch problem. To make matters worse, it's also raining, heightening the chance of the car skidding off the track, cruelly denying the team the win.

With the last few moments feeling longer than they actually are, the partisan crowd continue holding their breath, collectively willing the British Racing Green car over the line.

As a passionate racing driver himself, when Dr Ulrich Bez became Aston

Martin's CEO in 2000, he quickly realised racing was the perfect way to demonstrate the potential of the company's future range of cars.

"We need to create heightened awareness for Aston Martin around the world and motorsport will allow us to do this," said Bez in 2004.

With the top level and therefore expensive LMP1 category out of its reach, Bez turned to the more affordable road car-based GT1 class instead. As an Aston Martin enthusiast, Bez found a kindred spirit with David Richards, chairman of

MOTORSPORT

2007 24 HOURS OF LE MANS

British motorsport specialist Prodrive. Part of its long history – which included running Subaru's rally team between 1990 and 2008 plus running the BAR F1 team during the mid-2000s – was developing a racing version of the Ferrari 550 that between 2002 and 2004 had competed in the FIA GT Championship, a highlight being winning the GTS class of the 2003 24 Hours of Le Mans.

A deal was made for Prodrive to develop a racing version of the new DB9, the eventual DBR9, that made its public debut at the end of 2004. It featured a 625bhp version of the road car's 6.0-litre V12 with new, more aerodynamic bodywork largely made from carbon fibre plus a sequential six-speed transmission.

"The 550 was fast, clearly," said Czech driver, Tomáš Enge, during a 2023 interview with *Autosport* since he had driven them both, "but the Aston was much easier to drive – the centre of gravity, the stiffness of the chassis was better,"

This made the DBR9 fast from the outset, winning the GT1 class of its first race, the 2005 12 Hours of Sebring. Throughout its debut and following

season, the DBR9 would take several victories on either side of the Atlantic.

The race both Prodrive and Aston Martin wanted to win the most was the 24 Hours of Le Mans, but this had so far eluded them. After being quick in both 2005 and 2006, technical issues during both years meant the team failed in its quest. A third place followed by a second were scant consolations; could Aston Martin go one better in 2007?

As with the previous years, the works team – a separate company called Aston Martin Racing – would enter two cars, numbered 007 and 009. These would be driven by a roster of highly experienced drivers including an overall winner and two who had previously won GT1 class.



009

David Brabham
Darren Turner
Rickard Rydell

007

Tomáš Enge
Johnny Herbert
Peter Kox



"It's a very strong line-up," said the team's technical director and team principal, George Howard-Chappell, before the race, "all have raced at Le Mans before and four have driven the DBR9 extensively."

The Aston Martin Racing cars were then backed up by four other DBR9s entered by three independent outfits; Larbre Compétition, BMS Racing and Team Modena.

Despite horrific weather during qualifying, the Aston Martins still fared well. The Larbre Competition DBR9 of Christophe Bouchut, Fabrizio Gollin and Casper Elgaard was the fastest in the GT1 class finishing 23rd while the two works cars were 27th (009) and 34th (007).

At 3pm on Saturday 16 June, the moment the flag dropped the 55 cars roared away in a blaze of noise and heat. Other than the pole-sitting Peugeot 908 slithering off the track on the first corner handing the lead to the Audi R10 behind, plus the sole Lamborghini Murciélago R-GT retiring due to transmission failure, the first lap passed uneventfully.

Despite the rain that now fell, the drivers in the works DBR9s – Brabham and Kox – had started their first stints hard. "It's a 24-hour sprint race," explained Darren Turner. "You've got to push."

There was concern not long after when Brabham radioed the pits saying he was worried his DBR9 had picked

up some damage following a scuffle with another car. "He's out the back of the circuit," said David Wilcock, 009's race engineer, "and although the car feels ok, he thinks there might be some damage to the splitter."

Not wanting to call the car into the pits unnecessarily, David Richards had an idea; he asked a photographer to take some shots of 009 as it blasted down Le Mans' long start/finish straight. When they gathered round the back of the Nikon, Brabham was right; a black tyre smudge proved contact with another car. But the pictures also showed no damage to the crucial aerodynamic aid allowing Brabham to continue his charge.

At the one-hour mark, the Larbre Competition car driven by Christophe Bouchut led the GT1 class with the number 64 Chevrolet Corvette in second and the two works Astons in third and fourth.

And then, incredibly, the Corvette – last year's GT1 class winner and Aston's strongest rival – was seen pulling off the track after the Arnage Corner. "I was going from fourth to fifth," said driver Oliver Gavin in the 21 June 2007 issue of *Autosport* magazine, "when it lost drive."

"It's a real shame about the 64 Corvette," said Kox, "I really mean it – we would have liked to beat them fair and square. It's sad to see them go out like that."

Thanks to some fast pit stops by the AMR team, when Brabham handed over to Turner the 009 car was leading the GT1 class. But there was still 21 hours to go and

the rain that had dominated qualifying had returned, falling so hard it necessitated the use of the safety car.

"Le Mans is unpredictable at the best of times," said Howard-Chappell, "but the weather is adding another element of surprise." With Enge now in 007, he soon took second in the GT1 class from the remaining Corvette followed by the lead when 009 made a scheduled pit stop. At 9pm Johnny Herbert – who had won outright in 1991 with Mazda – took over from the Czech. Incredibly, this was the first time the British driver had ever raced a front-engined car. "In the Aston everything was the opposite to what I was used to," he said during an interview in the November 2008 issue of *Motorsport*. "You had to be very smooth. If you were clumsy with the throttle the front would move, but the back was always there."

By now the track was starting to dry allowing the Aston drivers to push even harder to consolidate their positions at the front. Their speed was clearly illustrated when Brabham – back in the 009 car – complained over the radio he was being held up by an LMP1 prototype despite it being two classes above his Aston Martin.

For the AMR mechanics, the night was punctuated by pit stops every dozen laps or so that were completed like clockwork. The relative mundanity was halted, though, when a report came over the radio saying the 007 car had a broken rear light.

At just after 1.30am, Herbert screamed into the pits and the team took the opportunity to fix the problem. In just one minute, the light was replaced, and the British driver was on his way again, safe in the knowledge he'd be seen more clearly in the dark.

Incredibly, as dawn broke, the two cars had made it into the top ten of the overall classification with 007 up to ninth and 009 one place behind. Only eight faster LMP1 cars were above them.

The two cars had made it into the top ten of the overall classification



(L-R) Rydell, Brabham and Turner celebrate their GT1 victory in the rain

“Everything’s going really well,” said Darren Turner at the time. “We’ve had no real problems, and I’m very pleased with my stints.”

And then disaster struck

Just before 7am, Herbert lost concentration at the Porsche Curves and careered into the gravel trap. Although he managed to get moving again, the front splitter was damaged which required an agonising eight minutes in the pits to repair. Although he was soon lapping as quickly as he had done before, his extended time in the pits handed the lead back to 009.

“I feel for them,” said Brabham. “Relatively minor incidents like this can, and will, happen in GT racing. In fact, it’s easy for things like this to crop up in a 24-hour race.”

Unfortunately, 007’s bad luck didn’t end there. At 11am while a hard-charging Tomáš Enge was chasing the third-placed DBR9 of the Larbre Competition team,

the Czech driver lost downforce and skidded into a gravel trap resulting in a puncture, brake problems and a later alternator failure. Although the car kept running, it effectively ended their chances of finishing on the podium. “What a disaster,” Enge told *Autosport* afterwards. “It was just one of those things. I’m quite confident we would have had third, but in every battle there is a winner and a loser and on this occasion, I was the loser.”

With just three hours to go, the rain that had been threatening to make an appearance finally arrived. There were worries in the Aston Martin garage when the number 63 Corvette, a lap down on 009, was setting faster lap times in the wet conditions than the DBR9, but due to the increasingly treacherous conditions the safety car was again brought out.

With it heading back into the pits with just 12 minutes of the race to go and with the Corvette too far behind to mount any kind of challenge in that time, a GT1 victory was there for Aston Martin’s taking. With Brabham in the driving seat, all he had to

do was to finish in one piece. “I was very conscious of the fact that a win was in my hands and it was mine to lose,” said the Australian afterwards. “At the end I could feel my arms and legs getting heavier and heavier as we were getting closer, trying not to put it into the wall by aquaplaning.”

Brabham’s two teammates didn’t take their GT1 victory for granted either, both worried about a mechanical problem. “We weren’t confident of the result,” said Turner to *Autosport*. “Even five minutes from the end we didn’t have our race suits on.”

But much to the relief of the crowd and everyone on the Aston Martin Racing pit wall, at a little after 3pm on the Sunday afternoon Brabham crossed the line still a lap ahead of the Chevrolet Corvette to take GT1 honours. Together with the Larbre Competition DBR9 finishing third, the unlucky 007 in fourth, the BMS car fifth and Modena in seventh, it was a remarkable display of both speed and reliability by the DBR9.

“To see Aston Martin winning at Le Mans again, nearly 50 years after our last famous victory, is a truly magnificent achievement for everybody associated with Aston Martin across the world,” said an emotional David Richards afterwards.

But this was more than just a victory. It not only proved Aston Martin was again a genuine force in the European sports car market, up there with Ferrari and Porsche, but it also showed what the DB9 (still a reasonably new car at the time) was truly capable of. Brabham crossing the line at 3.00pm on Sunday 17th June didn’t just mark the end of the 24-hour race but the start of a new and exciting chapter in Aston Martin’s future fortunes. **AMD**



GREAT DANE

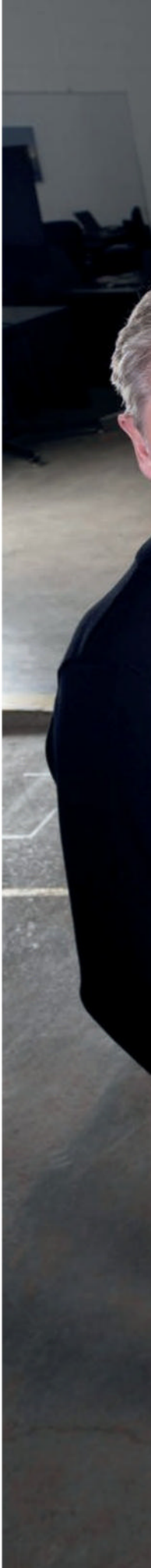
Henrik Fisker's time as Aston Martin's design director was brief but due to the success of the two models that were introduced during this time, he's still one of the company's most significant designers

WORDS PAUL WALTON **IMAGES** AMD ARCHIVE

HENRIK FISKER might have spent a mere three years as Aston Martin's design director but since two of the cars introduced in that time are some of its most successful, there's no denying both his abilities or his place in the company's history.

"It goes without saying that Henrik is a talented designer," said Ford's design chief, J Mays, at the start of Fisker's tenure in 2001. "His strong business sense and background make him uniquely qualified for this position."

But despite the success of the two cars both aesthetically and commercially, the relationship would be over before it really got started. ►





BIOGRAPHY

HENRIK FISKER

Henrik Fisker was born on 10 August 1963 in Allerød, 28 miles to the north of Copenhagen. He first became interested in cars aged five when he was riding with his father in the family Saab near their home and a Maserati Bora raced past. "I got butterflies in my stomach," admitted Fisker during a 2009 interview with the *LA Times*. "It was then that I knew I had to do something with the way cars look."

He began sketching cars for fun, continuing long after boys his age usually outgrow the phase. Despite an obvious talent and passion, his teachers discouraged his dream; with no motoring industry there were no jobs for car designers in Denmark.

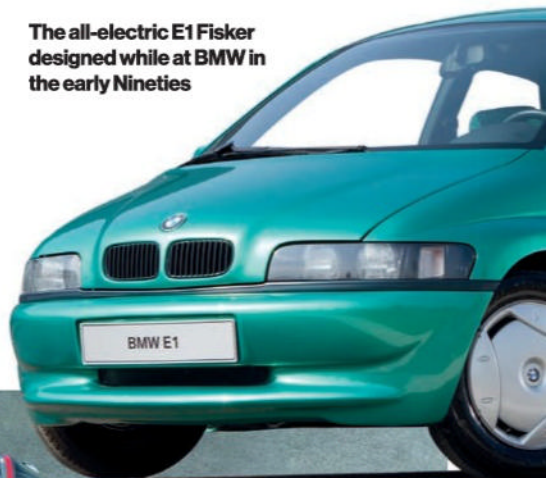
But his father, an electrical engineer who had spent time in the US, encouraged the young Henrik to continue. "America had inspired him to believe that you can do whatever you want in life, and that's what he always told me," Fisker continued to the *LA Times*. "That was not a typical thing to say to your kids in Denmark."

In 1986 Fisker studied at the European campus of the Pasadena-based ArtCenter College of Design in Vevey, Switzerland. After graduating in 1989, Fisker got a job with BMW's advanced design studio in Munich. Fisker rose through the ranks quickly, designing his first car, a small electric vehicle, the

E1, in the early Nineties. Unveiled at the 1991 Frankfurt Motor Show, this quirky four-seat concept never made production (and the sole prototype was destroyed in a fire), but it's the clear predecessor of the successful i3 produced between 2013 and 2022.

After contributing to the design of the first generation of BMW X5, he made his name with the classically designed Z07

The all-electric E1 Fisker designed while at BMW in the early Nineties



Fisker's most famous created before he joined Aston Martin was the Z8 that was influenced by the 507



One of the changes Fisker made to the DB9 was to remove carpet from the interior door cards





Despite Callum saying the opposite, Fisker reckons the V8 Vantage was mainly his own work



The DB9 was designed by Ian Callum but Fisker finished the detailing

new players joining our strong lineup and helping make our global design organization the best in the world," continued J Mays in 2001.

Fisker was also appointed as Aston Martin's design director, taking over responsibility for the look of its future cars from Ian Callum, freeing up the Scot to concentrate on Jaguar.

For Fisker, the move from a German giant to the British minnow was a culture shock. "My time at Aston Martin was very interesting because I came from BMW, which had this huge design-and-engineering department," said Fisker at the time. But he also admitted that as a far smaller operation it allowed him a greater say in the design and development of the company's cars.

This included input into the DB7-based Zagato and AR1 limited-edition models which arrived a year after he did. He also made changes to the DB9's trim before its debut at the 2003 Frankfurt Motor Show.

"One of the things I wanted to change – which is just a detail, really – is that I wanted to get away from having carpet on the doors," he said during a 2007 interview. "I felt it was really ridiculous to have carpet on the doors, just because a lot of people kick the door. I thought, 'This is an Aston Martin, this is a high quality car, and the interior is like an expensive leather



Fisker with the DB9 during the car's debut at the 2003 Frankfurt Motor Show

concept from 1997 that two years later became the Z8. "My inspiration was the BMW 507," Fisker explained to *wired.com* in 2010. "The task was how that car would have looked if it evolved like the Porsche 911 evolved. That's why it has that slightly retro look. But the thing I really like about it is – even if at first glance it has a retro look – it is very, very modern."

Although only ever produced in relatively small numbers, the car was a huge hit with the critics. "The Z8's visual charisma is so powerful that just sitting in this car with the engine off is more fun than driving many other cars," explained *Road & Track* magazine in 2000. "Then when you press the starter button, another entire level of excitement begins."

Two years after being promoted to president and CEO of DesignWorks, a BMW studio headquartered in California, Fisker was headhunted by Ford to run its London Design Enterprise (later named Ingeni) located in London. "Henrik is a strong addition to our team – and is among several

BIOGRAPHY

HENRIK FISKER

The dramatic Fisker Karma hybrid from 2011



The rare BMW 645-based Fisker Latigo CS



Fisker during the late 2000s

couch.' You don't put a carpet patch on an expensive Italian leather couch at home because somebody might kick it. You clean it after, or you make sure they don't kick it. So, there is no carpet on the doors of the DB9. This was an important thing to take out."

While it's generally accepted today that the DB9 was largely finished when Fisker took over from Ian Callum, the Dane has since said the V8 Vantage was mainly his work. This is despite his predecessor often stating it was 80 percent done when he left for Jaguar.

"It's something that happens in many companies," said Fisker in the November 2011 issue of *Car & Driver* magazine, "you go in and take over a project from someone else. That's exactly what happened with both the DB9 and the V8 Vantage. Ian Callum started the DB9, and I finished it. You can argue about the exact cut-off date and who did what, but I would say the V8 Vantage is definitely a car that I sat down and had to sketch myself because there was no vehicle at that point other than a mid-engined concept. There wasn't a clear starting and ending date on the DB9, but there definitely was on the V8 Vantage."

No matter who was responsible, with 24,700 of all variants, both V8 and V12, sold between 2005 and 2018, the car was a massive hit for Aston Martin and remains its largest seller. "When you see your first Vantage, take a walk around it and see how its features appear and disappear as your perception changes," said the April 2005 issue of BBC *Top Gear* magazine. "Whoa! Look at those front arches. My! That nose really falls away. Would you look at that duck tail! And wow, it's a hatchback!"

And then, incredibly, just three years after he'd joined, the Dane walked away from the British firm. "I felt like in my corporate career I had hit the ceiling, and the pinnacle was designing two cars for Aston Martin, the V8 Vantage and DB9," he said during a recent interview with *greencarjournal.com*. "I wanted to get out and get my hands dirty and start doing something where I challenged myself."

He soon set up Fisker Coachbuild

located in Orange County, California, to rebody existing cars. Its first was the Mercedes-Benz SL55-based Tramonto which was followed by the Latigo CS, a reworked BMW 645Ci coupe. Only a tiny handful of either were produced.

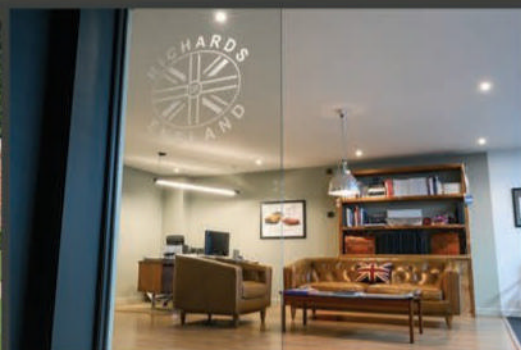
This was quickly followed by Fisker Automotive which planned to be more of a true automobile manufacturer. Its first and only model was the Karma, a plug-in luxury hybrid constructed by Valmet Automotive in Finland. With a pair of 161hp motors that were powered by the electricity produced from a 2.0-litre turbo petrol engine, the Karma could accelerate from 0 to 60mph in six seconds, almost as quickly as the V8 Vantage. "Our cars will say, 'I care. But I also enjoy life,'" said Fisker to the *LA Times* in 2009.

But not long after production of the Karma started in 2012, Fisker left his own company. "I had major disagreements with the management on strategy," he explained to *Top Gear's* website during an



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BIOGRAPHY

HENRIK FISKER

October 2016 interview, “and I resigned in March 2013.”

After producing a handful of Karmas, the company itself went under six months later. The car continues, now known as the Revero, but is still built in the States by a Chinese-owned company called Karma, which the Dane has stated he’s not involved with.

Following his departure from Fisker Automotive, he soon set up HF Design based in Los Angeles to create low-volume models. “I’ve already run a couple of big design studios,” he continued in the *Top Gear* piece. “I ran BMW’s Designworks and I ran Ford’s design studio in London, Ingeni. That’s not what I wanted to do with Henrik Fisker Design. It was really about just me doing more joint ventures. So I only do things where I can be personally involved.”

HFD’s first was the Rocket, a 735bhp carbon fibre-bodied Mustang commissioned by Galpin, a large and long-standing Ford dealer located in Los Angeles that has a history of modifying cars. After a prototype had been revealed at the 2014 North American International Auto Show, the

production version was later produced by a Michigan-based automobile manufacturer, VLF Automotive. Founded in 2012 by former General Motors vice-chairman Bob Lutz plus entrepreneur and manufacturer Gilbert Villarreal, Fisker joined as a shareholder the following year.

In 2016 Fisker also designed a new car based on the Dodge Viper, the Force 1, that was again produced in small numbers by VLF.

Fisker wasn’t finished with Aston Martin, since in 2015 he redesigned the-then current Vanquish. Unveiled at the Amelia Concours d’Elegance, the wonderfully named Thunderbolt had new carbon fibre bodywork with a much larger interpretation of the company’s famed grille. At the rear, the Thunderbolt featured redesigned pillars and a steeply raked rear screen, alongside new light clusters and a boot-mounted spoiler.

“I wanted to create an elegantly beautiful GT sports coupe, with pure emotional sculpture, that would stay timeless,” he said about the car.

Fisker had initially hoped to put the Thunderbolt into limited production through VLF, but Aston Martin quickly

lodged a lawsuit highlighting its resemblance to the standard Vanquish. In return, Fisker filed a \$100 million civil extortion lawsuit against the company in January 2016, claiming the British manufacturer baselessly threatened to sue him for copyright infringement to stall his return to the luxury sports car industry.

“We feel that this is a situation where Aston Martin is terribly threatened by Henrik Fisker,” his attorney said at the time. “Aston Martin does not own the market for high-end designer vehicles. It’s unfortunate that they do not want to compete with him fairly, but he refuses to be intimidated into submission.”

After both parties had reached an amicable agreement – which resulted in Fisker not taking the Thunderbolt any further – the lawsuits were soon dropped.

In the October 2016 interview with *topgear.com*, he admitted things were now good between the two. “At this point in time we have no issues between us. I love the Aston Martin brand and I always will.”

During 2016 Henrik and his wife, Geeta Gupta-Fisker, started another Los Angeles-based automotive company, Fisker Inc, this time to concentrate on EVs. “I felt the right thing to do was to start Fisker again, even though this new car company will produce pure electric vehicles,” he said during a 2016 interview. “I’ve been toying with the idea of doing a pure electric vehicle for a long time, but I didn’t really want to do it until I had the right technology strategy to give me an advantage.”

At the moment, Fisker Inc produces a single model, a handsome mid-sized SUV called the Ocean, built by contract manufacturer Magna Steyr in Austria, but there are plans to increase the range including with a new sports car and even a pickup.

Yet whatever this great Dane does next, for many of us, he’ll be forever linked to the pair of Aston Martins he’s either fully or jointly credited with designing. Although Henrik Fisker’s time with the British icon was short, meaning he never fulfilled his true potential, judging by the continuing popularity of the DB9 and the original V8 Vantage, there’s no denying his positive and long-lasting impact on the company. **AMD**



In 2014 Fisker redesigned the Mustang creating the Rocket



Fisker’s interpretation of the second generation of Vanquish, the Thunderbolt



Henrik Fisker with his all-electric EV, the Ocean

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FACTORY RESET

The success of the DB9 wouldn't have been possible without an advanced and high-tech factory to build it in far greater volumes than any Aston Martin before it. We look at how the marque's 21st century HQ came to be, from its origins as a second world war airbase

WORDS RICHARD GUNN **PHOTOGRAPHY** ASTON MARTIN DRIVER ARCHIVE

FOR MANY enthusiasts and owners, the spiritual home of Aston Martin will forever be Newport Pagnell, the small Buckinghamshire market town that was the marque's headquarters and production facility from 1954 to 2007. It was here that many of the cars which so defined the company and made it famous, from the DB4 through to the original Vanquish, emerged from. It's also the premises that seem to so characterise the David Brown period; a somewhat higgledy-piggledy, ramshackle collection of buildings from different eras separated by a main road that somehow managed to produce some of the most beautiful and dramatic British sports cars of all time. Often when there was no money to even fix the roof so it didn't leak when it rained.

But nothing stays the same forever. Before Newport Pagnell there was Henniker Mews,

Abingdon Road and Feltham in London, while in more recent times, Aston Martins have been built in Bloxham in Oxfordshire and St Athan in the Vale of Glamorgan, Wales. However, the public face – and base – of Aston Martin today is the impressive, expansive and visually imposing Gaydon plant in Warwickshire.

Opened in September 2003 to build the new DB9 and financed by Aston Martin's then owner Ford, it was the first ever purpose-built production facility in the company's 90-year history. And, for a brand needing to take the battle to its high-tech 21st century German and Italian rivals, as well as expand and enhance its manufacturing capabilities, Gaydon was absolutely vital. Not only did it vastly increase how many cars Aston Martin could build, it also gave the maker a young, dynamic, thoroughly modern countenance that Newport Pagnell, despite its considerable charm

and character, could never have projected.

However, as up to date as Gaydon was in 2003 – and still is today – its past encompasses a motoring and aviation history stretching back to the second world war. A DB9 may be capable of close to 200mph but, over half a century before Aston Martin made its presence felt at Gaydon, the location was home to machines that were even faster.

In the Thirties, Gaydon was a tiny, quiet village of less than 300 inhabitants. Its biggest claim to fame was the Gaydon Inn which, back in the 18th century, became notorious for its associations with highwaymen preying on travellers. But then came the second world war and Gaydon's sleepy existence changed forever. Farmland to the north-west of the town was chosen as the Royal Air Force site for a satellite airfield of RAF Chipping Warden near Banbury. What was christened RAF Gaydon ►

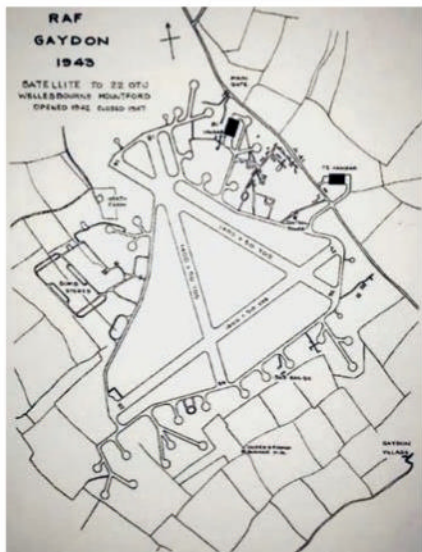


ASTON MARTIN



HISTORY

GAYDON



RAF Gaydon as it was from 1942 to 1947. Aston Martin's Gaydon plant now occupies the area roughly at the end of the north and north-west facing runways

was opened in July 1942 and occupied by the No. 12 Operational Training Unit, familiarising mainly Canadian, Czech and New Zealand crews on Vickers Wellington and Avro Anson bombers. For some, this preparation included flying sorties over Nazi-occupied France, dropping propaganda leaflets as part of the so-called Nickel Raids.

In July 1943, No. 22 Operational Training Unit also moved in, focusing on bombing raids and air-sea rescue operations, despite Gaydon's Midlands location meaning it was inconveniently quite a distance from any large bodies of water. No. 312 Ferry Training Unit RAF occupied Gaydon as well, to teach pilots delivering aircraft overseas. While the airbase's main function as a flying school perhaps made it less dangerous than those engaged in front line duties, it still had its fair share of casualties. In total, 23 of its aircraft were lost, along with 47 aircrew. Many crashed within a few miles of the location, thanks to inexperienced crews and worn-out aircraft. With victory over Germany in May 1945, bomber training at Gaydon ceased in July of that year. The focus then shifted to gliders, but after little more than a year RAF Gaydon was mothballed. It stayed out of use, albeit on a care and maintenance basis, between August 1946 and 1953. The transition from real war to the uneasy peace of the

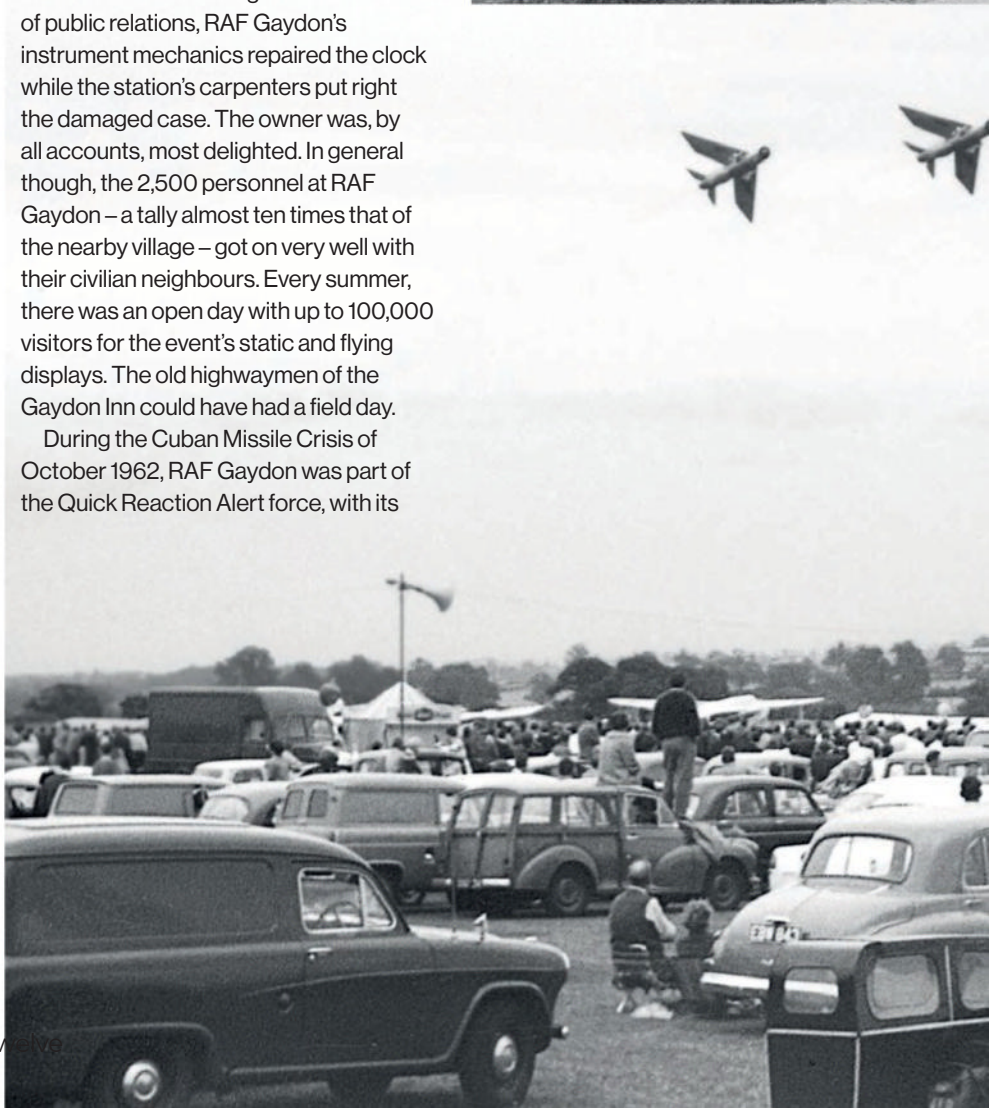
Cold War then resulted in RAF Gaydon being revived with the construction of a new 9,000-foot concrete runway during 1953. It reopened in March 1954 and, in January 1955, became the home for the RAF's first 'V-Force' of nuclear-capable bombers. No. 138 Squadron, part of No. 3 Group Bomber Command, was formed of Vickers Valiants. They were soon followed by the Handley Page Victors of No. 232 Operational Conversion Unit, as well as English Electric Canberras. As it was ten years before, RAF Gaydon's role was primarily a training one as Britain established its bomber-based nuclear deterrent.

These massive and very noisy four-engined jet leviathans operated around the clock, which caused some tensions among the local community. One elderly lady living near the end of the runway complained to the commanding officer that the vibrations from low-flying bombers had resulted in her clock falling off the wall and breaking. In the interests of public relations, RAF Gaydon's instrument mechanics repaired the clock while the station's carpenters put right the damaged case. The owner was, by all accounts, most delighted. In general though, the 2,500 personnel at RAF Gaydon – a tally almost ten times that of the nearby village – got on very well with their civilian neighbours. Every summer, there was an open day with up to 100,000 visitors for the event's static and flying displays. The old highwaymen of the Gaydon Inn could have had a field day.

During the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962, RAF Gaydon was part of the Quick Reaction Alert force, with its



Gaydon before the arrival of aircraft and cars was a sleepy little place, although the 18th century highwaymen associated with the village's Gaydon Inn no doubt added a little local frisson





station; gone were the glory days of the V-bombers, replaced by gliders and twin-prop Vickers Varsity trainers. Although the timepieces of local residents were probably somewhat safer.

With its importance to the security of the nation greatly downgraded, some of the extensive domestic quarters at Gaydon were used to house refugees during the Seventies. In 1975, it was the turn of pupils from Southam High School in Warwickshire to seek shelter at Gaydon; 850 were evacuated there for 12 months due to high harmful alumina levels in the school's concrete. Their headmaster joked that few other schools could handle Concorde landing in its grounds (as RAF Gaydon had been designated as an emergency runway during the supersonic airliner's test flights). That ability to handle the biggest jets of the era on its ultra-long runway meant that Gaydon was also considered as a potential site for London's third airport. However, this idea was dropped, with its distance from the metropolis it would have served – close to 100 miles – no doubt a significant factor.

RAF Gaydon formally closed during 1977. Its future now lay with machines limited to the ground. British Leyland was seeking a single site to use as a unified research, development and test facility. It purchased 900 acres of the airfield and its buildings in 1978 and started to transform them away from aviation. Even though BL was partly nationalised and publicly funded, it was still a huge investment for a vehicle conglomerate that, at the time, was financially troubled. The chief prize was the 9,000-foot runway, which was converted to form part of a four-lane high-



A quartet of English Electric Lightnings thrill the crowds at one of RAF Gaydon's annual Battle of Britain air shows and open days

aircraft fully manned, nuclear-equipped and capable of taking off in just one and a half minutes, 24 hours a day, thus making it a primary target for the USSR. The sense of apprehension and fear around the place couldn't have been helped by one of Gaydon's Victors crashing soon after take-off that same month when it suffered a serious mechanical failure.

By the mid-Sixties, the V-Force was being superseded by the Polaris submarine-based nuclear deterrent. Victors and Valiants ceased training at RAF Gaydon in June 1965. RAF Flying Training Command took over the



Vickers Valiants at Cold War-era Gaydon, when Britain's vital defences also relied on the readiness of the RAF's Standard Vanguard estates

HISTORY

GAYDON

speed track. Elsewhere, other test routes were created along with off-road areas to put Land Rovers through their paces, while £2 million was spent on a purpose-built wind tunnel in 1980. While many of the RAF structures were demolished – although the control tower and two main hangars survived the cull – much of the personnel living accommodation was sold off, and now forms part of the village of Lighthorne Heath.

The site officially became BL Technology in 1979, headed up by innovative Rover design engineer Spen King. The secretive new proving ground at Gaydon was revealed to the press during May 1980, including a giant sandbox where King and co were engaged in finessing production models as well as more speculative prototypes. The development of the Austin Metro, for example, was greatly aided by having a facility such as Gaydon to help notch up two million miles of testing before launch.

Under Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government, parts of British Leyland began to be sold off. Jaguar was privatised in 1984, with BL's van, truck and bus divisions following in 1987. In 1988, what had metamorphosed into the Rover Group was acquired by British Aerospace. The former BL Technology site was part of the deal. Under British Aerospace, the facilities and expertise at Gaydon continued to expand. It also sprouted a museum, with the Heritage Motor Museum (now the British Motor Museum) opening in 1993 to showcase the historic vehicles of the British Motor Industry Heritage Trust.

In 1994, BMW purchased Rover from British Aerospace, and got Gaydon into the bargain. But despite the German firm's best efforts, it failed to put Rover into profit and just six years later it broke the group up and sold Land Rover to Ford. This brought it under the same umbrella as its old BL sibling, Jaguar (owned by the Blue Oval since early 1990) as well as a sexy new sister, Aston Martin (fully controlled by Ford from 1991). Gaydon came as part of the sale.

Ford's vision for Aston Martin was to greatly increase production, and for this to happen, somewhere other than Newport Pagnell – a place described



When British Leyland bought Gaydon, it turned the main runway into a four-lane test track, here having its high-speed credentials being exploited to the full by a Morris Ital estate



The articulation gauge for Land Rovers in use at BL Technology Gaydon Proving Ground in 1980



The BL Technology ECV3, a fuel-efficient and aerodynamic prototype developed by BL Technology at Gaydon



The impressive sandstone face of Gaydon's main frontage was intended to resemble a castle, complete with a moat. This it manages to do very well

as the 'biggest mess you could imagine' by an aghast Ford product manager transferred there – was required to build cars. This brief had been partly fulfilled by the former TWR JaguarSport factory at Wykham Mill in Bloxham in Oxfordshire, home to the new DB7 from 1994. But there was still a vital need for something more specialised, glamorous and dedicated for the sophisticated supercars that Ford envisaged taking Aston Martin into the 21st century (and which might also help it recoup its massive investment in a sports car manufacturer not best known for generating substantial – or often any – profits). Gaydon, with plenty of space still

to expand, provided just that opportunity.

The first purpose-built Aston Martin factory was planned for 55 acres of the 900-acre Gaydon site, making it four times the size of Bloxham. As well as production facilities, it would also house the marque's global headquarters. The original idea was for several phased buildings, but before long, this evolved into one complete structure incorporating the manufacturing hub, administration offices and test areas. This called for an edifice measuring 100 metres by 150 metres, and up to ten metres high in places. For its two-storey curved main entrance – the one used by visitors and customers,

and subsequently so often used as a backdrop for Aston Martin publicity shots – buff Derbyshire sandstone cladding was employed, presenting an imposing, almost castle-like façade. The sense of Gaydon being anything but a traditional, grimy, industrial factory was reinforced by landscaped grounds planted with 900 new trees and 2,000 shrubs. In the words of Chris Evans, director of the Rolton Group (one of the firms involved in the building, alongside main contractor SDC Construction and architect The Weedon Partnership), “it was also a showroom for the marque as well as the HQ. The brief was that this had to be a factory which they could quite comfortably take people around and be proud of.”

Aston Martin Gaydon opened in September 2003, with its first model being the new DB9. It immediately reinforced the marque's bold new image of modernity and freshness. In the words of Dr Ulrich Bez, Aston's chief executive officer at the time, “It is probably the best facility of its type in the world, and the perfect showcase of how to design

and build innovative sports cars.” Upon entering this citadel, guests would find a towering two-storey reception atrium with ‘The Street’ beyond, both displaying current and historic Aston Martin models and giant wall images. The Street's walkway leads past offices and conference rooms to the manufacturing zones and a restaurant capable of catering for over 1,000 employees a day. The 8,000 square metres devoted to the customer reception and neighbouring offices is striking enough, but it is dwarfed by the 35,000 square metres for building cars, with a potential capacity of 7,500 cars per year; a figure unbelievable and utterly unachievable just a few years before. The build process even utilised a single robot – another first for Aston Martin – to apply adhesive to the bonded monocoque bodies, humorously but appropriately nicknamed the James Bonder. Despite this nod to current methods of car manufacture, DB9 production was in many other ways still quite traditional and labour intensive, taking around 200 person-hours. 50 of

those were spent in the paint shop alone. Production of the DB9 at Gaydon began in January 2004, with the AMV8 Vantage joining it during mid-2005.

However, a mere three years after Gaydon's start-up, and despite the huge cost of the state-of-the-art new HQ plus everything else Ford had put into revitalising its English patient, the financially struggling American automotive giant decided to walk away. In 2007 it sold Aston Martin (with its new HQ and factory) to a consortium headed by Prodrive chairman David Richards for £475million. This was despite Gaydon starting to bring home the bacon; that same year saw the company make 7,400 cars. In 2003, the year before the plant came online, the total was 1,514.

While the fluctuating global economy has resulted in more challenging times for Aston Martin, and there has since been another addition to its property portfolio in the form of its St Athan Production and Technology Centre in Wales, Gaydon remains the heart of Aston Martin. In 2017, a new design centre was added while 2014 saw an investment of £20million adding an extra 10,000 square metres, with a new chassis and pilot-build facility plus offices and increased parts and logistics storage. And, after an arrangement with Magna Steyr to build the Rapide in Graz, Austria, came to an end prematurely in mid-2012, it was Gaydon that then took over the four-door GT, thanks to what Dr Ulrich Bez called its ‘flexibility’.

During 2018, Aston Martin was publicly listed on the stock exchange, which has resulted in fresh injections in cash from new shareholders. Investment in Gaydon has been continuous, with developments such as 100 percent renewable electricity for the entire facility (from 2019) helping to keep it cutting edge and environmentally conscious in an ever-changing world making ever greater demands of vehicle manufacturers. Today, all of Aston Martin's sports models are built in Gaydon, with only the DBX SUV put together in St Athan. Over two decades after it opened, and 20 years after the first DB9s departed its assembly halls, Gaydon is just as crucial to Aston Martin's future and prosperity as it ever was. **AMD**



A (nearly) finished product leaves the assembly line at Gaydon



Production in progress at Gaydon during 2009



The haphazard layout of the old Newport Pagnell site shows why Aston Martin needed a new factory



LIVING WITH A DB9

Are you tempted to own a DB9? Find out more about the potential running costs, repairs and maintenance that may be required to keep it on the road.

WORDS ROB HAWKINS PHOTOGRAPHY PAUL WALTON



WITH THE price of a second-hand DB9 dropping to around £20-£30k and even the rarer models with a manual gearbox being below £50k, is this supercar that originally cost over £100k when launched in 2004 worth investing in now? We think so but remember that you are buying a supercar whose performance statistics mean it needs to be looked after to maintain its ability to accelerate from standing to 60mph in under five seconds and go on to almost reach 200mph.

So, whilst the second-hand value of a DB9 may be similar to a brand-new Ford Kuga, the cost of running it undoubtedly isn't. However, there's more to owning a DB9 than being aware of the costs. We've also outlined the practicalities of its size, interior and luggage room, the common problems that may arise and what to expect from living with a DB9.

If you're tempted into owning this supercar that was manufactured within the last 20 years (production finished in 2016), then the DB9 could be the perfect candidate, providing you're ready and prepared.

TAX AND ULEZ

At present, the DB9 qualifies for the highest vehicle tax rate (road fund licence), but it's split into two groups and prices, depending on when it was registered. If a DB9 was registered before 23 March 2006 then it falls into price band K, which is £395 per year if paying annually, or £414.75 if paying monthly. For these pre-2006 models, this includes all vehicles with CO2 emissions over 225g/km (a 2005 coupe, for instance, produces 394g/km).

Any DB9 that was registered after 23 March 2006 is in band M, which is for CO2 emissions over 255g/km – and all models produce over this amount. The annual cost for car tax in this case is £695 for a one-off payment, or £729.75 if paying monthly.

Whilst the annual car tax may seem expensive on account of high emissions, the bewilderingly good news is that all

DB9s are ULEZ compliant, so there's no daily charge to drive within the M25, although congestion charges do apply.

FUEL AND OIL CONSUMPTION

All DB9 models are powered by Ford's 6.0-litre naturally aspirated V12 petrol engine, with power outputs ranging from 443bhp to 540bhp for road cars, and up to 600bhp for race cars including the DBR9. It was originally developed by Ford's engineering team in Dearborn in the US, starting with a couple of 3.0-litre Duratec V6s and configuring them end to end with new cylinder heads from Cosworth and a timing chain assembly to drive four overhead camshafts. The V12 was installed in the 1996 Ford Indigo concept and three years later it was under the bonnet of the Aston Martin DB7.

For such a powerful engine that can propel any DB9 from stationary to 60mph in less than five seconds, there's a price to

pay for this level of entertainment. John McGurk of McGurk Performance Cars says that careful cruising should result in fuel consumption of around 27mpg, but don't be surprised at 21mpg if town driving is included, which for a supercar isn't too painful.

Oily deposits inside the rubber induction hoses to the throttle bodies usually suggest that the positive crankcase ventilation (PCV) valves (breathers) have failed. This oil can drip out and stain the air filter and even find its way into the inlet manifold, resulting in an oily plume of smoke on start-up.

John McGurk warns that with many DB9s approaching 20 years old, their engines need looking after and the oil level should be checked regularly because they can consume it. And if excessive oil consumption arises, it needs to be addressed before components such as the main and big end bearings become



starved of lubrication. A new replacement engine from Aston Martin costs around £18,000 and it takes roughly a week (35 hours) to swap it over. Should this happen to a DB9 that's worth around £20k-£30k, there may seem little point in replacing the engine.

UNDERSTANDING THE CONTROLS

A Linn audio system was installed in the early DB9, which was later changed to an Alpine unit. The Linn system is known for issues and its sat-nav is also very dated in its looks and operation, which cannot compete with a modern smartphone. The later optional premium audio system is regarded as being better. Pairing a modern smartphone to the car's display is one means of updating. Most DB9s have an automatic gearbox (Touchtronic), which can be left to choose its gears by selecting Drive, or you can choose them



INTERIOR SPACE

In comparison to the DB7, the seating position of a DB9 is much lower down and it may take time to become familiar with it. Opinions are mixed.

Luggage space is poor for all models, although being a 2+2 the rear seats are best classed as additional boot space because they can at best only accommodate small children. The official figures for the number of litres in the coupe, Volante and GT seem to vary between sources. It's safe to say that the Volante has the least space because it needs to allocate room for the folding hood, but whichever DB9 you have, expect the same amount of storage capacity as a supermini such as a brand-new Citroën C1 or Fiat 500. If you're planning to cruise down to the south of France, you'll need to pack lightly or courier some extra luggage.



yourself using the paddle shifts mounted behind the steering wheel. Manual gearboxes are a rarity and demand a higher selling price.

WEAR AND TEAR AVOIDANCE

At every service interval, it's worthwhile having the front undertray removed to inspect the condition of the engine bay metalwork that's otherwise hidden by it. Check for corrosion and, if possible, have any treated.

The composite and aluminium exterior can be expensive to repair if paint damage occurs. The paint finish may fade at different rates between the aluminium and composite panels.

Any exterior chromework can become pitted and corroded, so protect it with polish and routinely inspect it.

In the engine bay, try to extract the screws that secure the cover over the slam panel (at the front of the engine bay), then refit them, applying copper grease to their threads because they are known to corrode. The headlining is known to sag, especially if the vehicle is regularly exposed to sunlight, which increases the range of heat cycles on the roof of the vehicle, warming up and cooling down the glue used to secure the material. For further details on how to fix this, see DB9 owner Dave Ashford's account.

SERVICING COSTS

The recommended service interval for the DB9 is every 10,000 miles or 12 months, whichever comes sooner. Chiltern Aston charges from £665.88 for this, which includes an engine oil and filter change, a full inspection and levels check, although

the final bill can be higher because, for example, the coolant is changed at every 50,000 miles or five years, so this service costs £818.76. Additional costs include the spark plugs, which should be replaced every 70,000 miles or seven years and Chiltern charges £857.77 to renew all 12

ENGINE NOISES

The exhaust silencers have baffles built into them, which enable the exhaust note to change at higher engine rpm (usually around 3,000rpm) and on start-up. This seemingly boisterous growl may not be to everyone's liking, and it can be eliminated if those baffles become seized. Or removed if an aftermarket silencer is fitted without them.

There are mixed opinions on a rattling noise from the V12 engine, especially when warm, on early ones that were built by Cosworth (later engines were built by Ford's Cologne plant). John McGurk at McGurk Performance Cars explained more on this in issue 3 of AMD when we looked at a buying guide to the DB9, explaining the noise is usually caused by, "either little end bearings, or the liners become oval and you get piston slap. It's hard to differentiate but either way it's a new engine..."





of them. A gearbox oil refresh at every 40,000 miles costs £417.41. New air filters at every 40,000 miles or four years cost £318.83 and a new cabin filter at the same interval costs £144.02 to change. All prices include VAT. John McGurk at McGurk Performance Cars recommends



OWNER'S OPINION: DAVE ASHFORD

Dave Ashford bought his 2005 DB9 Coupe in February 2017 with around 60k on the clock and he recalls it cost him the same amount as a brand-new Ford Mondeo. He has since covered roughly 20,000 miles in it, including driving into mainland Europe (when the French police stopped him to listen to the engine) and up to the Lake District – he also intends to drive to Como in Italy this year.

His DB9 has the ZF automatic transmission. "I find the gearbox smooth and effective," he says, "but you have to remember this is a GT car and not a track car, so for me it's about the blend of comfort and performance."

Whilst Dave says his DB9 is easy to drive, he finds some of the dashboard controls messy and he's not so keen on the joystick control for navigating the menu screen. "This and the infotainment controls are not the easiest to use on the move," he says. The dated sat-nav has been upgraded with Apple CarPlay, linking it to the car's audio and screen, which he says is not the best resolution (for the screen), but it does the job.

Admitting that he is jokingly in constant fear of something going wrong as you know it will be expensive, Dave has had a few painful moments, recalling when the "gearbox switch for Park packed up flagging transmission failure. That was a heart attack moment but Grange Aston Martin in Brentwood

sorted that along with the door lock for £500."

Fortunately, Dave is a qualified mechanic, although he hung up his spanners many years ago. Consequently, he has serviced his DB9 himself, replacing the engine oil and filters, and even refreshing the power steering fluid. He has also tackled a number of repairs, such as replacing the front brake calipers, which had seized and sheared one of their bleed screws. Using a source through the AMOC, the total cost was a mere £200. And when one of the rear lower wishbones fractured around the bush housing (a common problem), Dave turned to eBay for a replacement, which cost £90 (Aston Martin had quoted around £500 for the job).

The headlining then sagged (another common problem), so he sought advice through YouTube.

"I removed the A-pillar trims and the rear trim and squeezed the whole headliner out through the door," he explains. "I stripped off the Alcantara liner from the base, cleaned off the flaky glue and leftover sponge bits and reattached with strong spray adhesive, carefully easing the Alcantara on with a spreader."

A broken headlamp washer was replaced by removing the wheelarch liner and extracting the headlamp through the wheel well. "They are part of the headlamp," says Dave. "They go brittle and snap off the headlamp resulting in headlamp removal and careful use of epoxy."

OWNING GUIDE

DB9



the gearbox oil should be changed to help preserve the crown wheel and pinion (CWP) and keep the plates correctly lubricated. He charges £360 for this and says that if a grinding noise can be heard from the rear when the steering is on full lock and the DB9 is moving slowly, this often indicates plate wear in the CWP. He also says that this may mean the clutch plates inside the diff have worn or failed, all of which he can overhaul.

DIAGNOSTICS

All DB9s are equipped with two electronic on-board diagnostic (EOBD) ports, which comply with OBDII specification, so a universal fault code reader can be plugged in to help look for logged faults and identify any faults that have been raised if the engine management light (EML) is permanently displayed on the dashboard. Whether this will help to correctly identify an issue and narrow it down, is impossible to say. This may be easier for a wheel speed sensor issue or a misfire, but Aston Martin's diagnostic equipment may be able to dig a little deeper.

PARTS COSTS

The cost of parts can vary greatly, depending on the model of DB9, year

of manufacture and whether you want genuine or aftermarket components. As a rough guide, we looked at prices from Scuderia Car Parts (www.scuderiaparts.com) for a 2004-2012 DB9 and found a pair of air filters for almost £120, for example. Should the rear suspension springs and dampers need replacing (the early passive type, not the later electronically controlled adaptive ones), then budget for around £1,200 per corner for Bilsteins. At the front of the DB9, if a wheel bearing starts to rumble, then a new hub assembly with bearings costs around £370. An upper wishbone is around £450, and a lower arm/wishbone is £50 more. New brake components can soon add up, with a pair of front discs for around £400, the same again for a single caliper and £420 for a set of front brake pads.

MOT FAILURES

According to the Good Garage Guide (www.good-garage-guide.honestjohn.co.uk), data relating to 171 DB9s that were registered in 2013 and MOT-tested in 2021, revealed a mere 2.3% of them (four) failed on exterior lighting, such as a blown bulb or headlamp aim. A couple of cars had brake issues and there was one failure of each concerning steering, visibility

(e.g. a cracked windscreen), tyres and suspension.

Passing the emissions test may become increasingly difficult for the DB9, especially because of common issues such as spark plug and coil pack failure. In many cases, this results in a misfire which, if identified and resolved in time, will avoid excessive amounts of unburnt fuel contaminating one or more of the catalytic converters and doing further damage.

Heat damage and water ingress are common causes of coil pack failure – there are 12 of them which cost around £120 each, but it's rare for several of them to fail at once.

The headlamp washers will be checked at the MOT test if HID or LED headlamps are fitted. These washers can turn brittle and shear. For further details, see DB9 owner Dave Ashford's account of how he fixed such a problem.

CAT REMOVAL

There are six catalytic converters on the DB9, consisting of two close to each exhaust manifold on each side of the engine and a couple on the underneath of the bodywork. The two cats on each side of the engine are incorporated into the exhaust system, so if one of them fails, a complete assembly has to be purchased,



which costs around £1,500 used or £3,000 new. The two cats underneath the vehicle are around £600 each. All of these cats must be fitted to pass the annual MOT test and John McGurk says that they must be standard specification, so a sports cat with less cells should not be fitted. He also says that as a dealer he cannot sell a car which has modified cats, even if the vehicle has passed the

emissions test at the MOT. And if a private owner sells a car knowing the cats have been modified or removed, the buyer should be informed.

The DVSA (Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency) in the UK says, "From 2001 all replacement catalytic converters must be approved and will show an 'e' mark with an approval number. Removing or replacing a catalytic converter with an un-approved replacement can make a vehicle unlawful to drive."

RECALLS

DB9s manufactured from 2006 to 2014 were recalled for their heated seats because they could catch fire. When checking the MOT history for a vehicle, there is a section that lists any outstanding recalls. And any Aston Martin dealer can check a vehicle is up to date on its recalls.

KEY TROUBLE

From 2008 onwards, Aston Martin introduced an Emotion Control Unit (ECU for short), which was a glass key that starts the engine by slotting it into the centre console (AM also came up with beautification panels, which were plastic covers inside the engine bay). Fortunately, a plastic back-up key was also supplied because the glass one is prone to getting damaged, especially if dropped, whereas the cheaper-looking plastic key is more

robust. If the glass key does get damaged, the innards of the key can be extracted and fitted into a new housing.

RATTLES, KNOCKS AND DRUMMING

The DB9's suspension is a traditional set-up comprising upper and lower wishbones with coilovers and anti-roll bars. Passive dampers were fitted on early models, replaced in 2010 with adaptive damping, which is electronically controlled.

Any knocking noises from the suspension when driving could be caused by worn anti-roll bar drop-links and mounting bushes. A light knock under braking and acceleration could be caused by a fractured wishbone around one of the bush housings – inspect them for cracks.

A Sports Pack option was available, which lowers the ride height of the DB9 by 6mm and stiffens the spring rates, dampers and ARBs.

If the ride quality feels too harsh, start with checking the tyre pressures and the date and condition of the tyres. A four-digit date stamp on the sidewall of the tyre will help to show when it was manufactured (4018, for example, means the tyre was manufactured in the 40th week of 2018). Tyre manufacturers generally recommend replacing tyres once they are around seven years old, regardless of

TYRES

For a vehicle that's capable of almost reaching 200mph (the DB9's top speed is between 183mph and 186mph), it's important to look after its tyres. This means fitting the same brand of tyres at all four corners and ensuring the speed rating is suitable, even if you have no intention of making use of a DB9's top speed.

The speed rating of the DB9's tyres should be 'Y', which caters for a maximum speed of 186mph (300kmh). 19in and 20in wheels are fitted, and suitable tyres include the Goodyear Eagle F1, Michelin Pilot Sport, Pirelli P ZERO and Continental SportContact. Expect to pay over £200 and in some cases a little over £300 per tyre. Note



that the rear tyre is wider than the front, so they cannot be swapped around.

A SmarTire tyre pressure monitoring system (TPMS) was initially fitted to the DB9, which was later replaced (around 2010) with a Beru system – not all DB9s have a TPMS. Both TPMS use individual sensors mounted on to the inner rim of each wheel, which incorporates the valve for inflating the tyre. Messages concerning low tyre pressure are displayed on the dashboard via a control unit which, in the case of the SmarTire, is installed in the boot and can be examined to help diagnose any problems. The battery inside each sensor can go flat, which means the tyre has to be removed from the wheel to replace it.

OWNING GUIDE

DB9

how much tread is left, because the tyre's sidewall starts to break down due to heat cycles and ultraviolet light exposure from the sun.

If the tyres are in good condition, visually inspect the suspension for leaks from the dampers and fractured coil springs. Any problems here can result in a harsh ride quality.

If the propshaft is out of balance, this can affect the ride quality and power delivery, causing a vibration from under the centreline of the vehicle.

VOLANTE HOOD TROUBLE

The soft top of the Volante appears to be robust and reliable. It should take around 17 seconds to operate from up to down or vice versa. It's worthwhile leaving it up to help keep it stretched. Dirt can be removed with a vacuum cleaner, brush or a wet sponge. And the fabric can be cleaned and treated with a suitable hood cleaning and preservation solution. **AMD**

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OWNER'S OPINION: DAVID WILLIAMS

Bought new in 2004, David Williams has now covered 117,000 miles in his DB9, which has included several European tours through France and Belgium. "I have also driven the car on an extended version of the North Coast 500 in Scotland plus; also taking in Harris, Lewis and Skye."

With the automatic gearbox, he says he prefers to use the paddle shift, but comments, "By modern standards the changes are a bit slow, but not excessively so. When the car is driven hard and at high revs in particular, the changes, whether up or down the box, are an absolute delight, because of the fabulous sound from the exhaust and also the throttle blips when shifting down."

Until recently, David's DB9 was always serviced by an Aston Martin main dealership, "but I have just tried Bamford Rose, not to necessarily make any saving in cost, but because they are focussed on Astons of the DB9 era and they just understand the cars so well. They also have the ability to repair parts, where possible, as opposed to simply fitting brand new parts."

Unfortunately, the car suffered from a major failure a few years into his ownership. "The original V12 required replacement at about 55k miles, at a time when it was well out of the manufacturer's warranty," he says. "The problem, which is well publicised in owners' forums, was that the early engines ran with too little oil, creating excessive internal wear and resulting in a 'ticking' noise from the engine.

This was not recognised meaningfully by the factory until May 2008 when a rectification Field Service Alert was issued to dealers. After a stand-off with the main dealer who supplied the car plus the factory, with the help of a fabulous independent engineer, I was eventually supplied with a new engine, at minimal cost to me."

The car has remained reasonably reliable for the last 60k+ miles, with the occasional coil pack and a few suspension arms needing replacement, alongside the usual wear and tear items such as brake discs and pads, and shock absorbers.

"The body paintwork on these cars is notoriously poor, in that random blistering appears in the paintwork on panel edges, requiring ad hoc repairs and panel respraying from time to time," he says. "I also had a complete unexplained failure of a brand-new fan system fitted to the car, albeit that was replaced free of charge under the parts warranty. Also, the Alcantara headlining came unstuck and despite several attempts by the main dealer and an independent trim specialist to re-glue the headlining, the only solution was a rather expensive new mounting panel and headlining."

Despite these issues, and David confirming, "The quality of build, certainly with the early DB9s was not as good as it should have been, with a variety of niggling issues, albeit they were all eventually rectified under warranty," he is a big fan of his DB9. "The fact that I have kept the car for 20 years, driven it regularly and kept on top of any maintenance, shows that I think the car is rather special."

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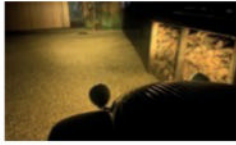


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TWIN TEST
DB9 VS SL600



POWER RULES

How does the Aston Martin DB9 compare with that other great V12-engined sports car of the mid-2000s; the Mercedes-Benz SL600?

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY PAUL WALTON

IF YOU have long distances to cover, from Birmingham to Berlin, Leicester to Lausanne or anywhere to Tipperary, then what you need is a private jet, something fast, sleek, and comfortable such as a Gulfstream G800 or Cessna Citation Longitude.

Obviously, owning a plane wouldn't be practical for most of us; there's the parking for one thing and the thousands

of pounds it takes to refuel. But thankfully there are two more grounded alternatives that offer most of what a Cessna does, but will comfortably fit on your drive; the Aston Martin DB9 and the Mercedes-Benz SL600.

With both cars having large and powerful V12s, their combined power of 944bhp and 341mph maximum speed is close to that of a jet while as top-of-the-range grand tourers, their spacious cabins

are just as luxurious. If you can't afford the jet fuel, then there would be no better way to cover huge distances than in either one of these GTs.

But which of these Gulfstream rivals should you buy? The British bruiser or the German giant? ►





MERCEDES-BENZ SL600

The Mercedes-Benz arrived first, debuting at the 2001 Frankfurt Motor Show in September. As a two-seat convertible, the fifth generation of SL – internally known as the R230 – followed the same recipe as its predecessors, although it was the first to have a retractable hardtop as pioneered by the earlier R170 SLK. This resulted in the R230 having an almost coupe-like appeal.

Clearly an evolution of its R129 predecessor, the R230 was designed with a 3D super-computer called 'CAVE'. This projected full-size images via five projectors permitting close inspection of all surfaces digitally – a first for the car industry.

The look of the car was the responsibility of British designer Steve Mattin, who had joined Mercedes in 1987 and later spent time at Volvo and Lada. Since it followed Mercedes' then current look including the familiar four-sided corporate grille plus double headlights, similar to those of the earlier C-Class, the new SL didn't break any new ground. But as a handsome and well-proportioned sports car it still went down well with the critics.

"Its basic profile evolves from the 1989

model, featuring similar proportions, trademark grilles and side air vents, but all surfaces and corners are polished to a smoother and sleeker finish," said the online magazine *Autozine* in October 2001. "Windscreen and rear window are more steeply raked so that it feels more sporty. The preservation of the low shoulder line makes it look smarter and cleaner than others, especially facing Lexus SC430. British designer Steve Mattin has done a good job here."

As with previous generations of the SL, the R230 had a large range of engines. It was originally available from its 2001 launch with a 5.0-litre V8 with 302bhp plus a 242bhp 3.7-litre V6, but in 2003 came the awesome SL55 AMG boasting the epic 5.5-litre supercharged V8 that developed a whopping 493bhp and 516lb ft of torque, resulting in staggering levels of performance and noise. And finally came two versions of Mercedes' twin-turbocharged V12; the 6.0-litre SL65 AMG that had the same power as the SL55 but more torque plus the version featured here, the more refined and less shouty 5.5-litre SL600.

With 500bhp, it makes the latter a serious performer; 60mph is reached in a similar 4.7 seconds while the top speed was a limited 155mph.

But while one should never judge a book by its cover, I don't think this SL600





— a 2005 example in Tellurium Silver — is as pretty as the DB9 alongside it. It's not that it's an ugly car — the 169,433 R230s produced between 2002 and 2011 compared to 16,500 DB9s would prove otherwise — but those double headlights make the nose look too much like Mercedes' saloons of the same age while the overall shape lacks the perfect proportions and elegant lines of the British car.

It's a similar story when I open the heavy door that shuts behind me with a pleasingly solid thunk. The layout of the dash has been designed with typical Mercedes-Benz efficiency, which is another word for boring. Although there's an accuracy to how it was built that's perhaps missing from the Aston, the look, feel, and materials used (including that particular shade of orange wood only found in Mercs) make it look like any Benz

of this age. If I didn't know better, I'd think I was in an E-Class taxi outside Frankfurt Airport with 250,000km on the clock. This doesn't make it uncomfortable or an unpleasant place to be though, especially due to the generous amounts of room, just uninspiring for a car that when new in 2003 cost £95k.

It's only after you fire the engine, slot the tall gearlever down to put the five-speed automatic transmission into drive before pressing the throttle do you start to understand the car's once high value. Not only is the twin-turbo 5.5-litre V12 more refined than a Pratt & Whitney jet engine, but its acceleration is as quick as any Cessna, leaving the line faster than an anvil would when dropped off a parapet.

Yet it's the mid-range torque that really impresses. Even at 60mph, when I give the throttle an extra shove, the five-speed automatic gearbox kicks down and the car surges forward with a forcefulness that's an assault on my senses. As *Top Gear* magazine said in its April 2003 issue, "This is a fabulous, hilariously fast motorcar that cannot fail to appeal to anyone with taste, discrimination and 90 grand to spend."

It is a heavy car, though. Only the bonnet, roof, bootlid, front wings and doors are made from aluminium and while the inner door shells are magnesium; the rest is all steel. This, together with its complicated roof mechanism that folds the hardtop into the boot, makes the SL weigh a hefty 1,845kg, 85kg more than the DB9. And so even with Mercedes-Benz's clever Active Body Control (or ABC) system that keeps the car level no matter how hard you push through a bend, you're always aware of the SL's bulk. Driving quickly down the narrow County Durham roads that surround the Car Barn, where this example is currently for sale, was like trying to thread a needle with a shoelace.

Yet the ride is supreme, ironing out all imperfections, transforming even a badly pitted road into a marble-smooth tabletop.

What the SL600 is, then, is the grandest of grand tourers. With so much power at your disposal together with its supple suspension and spacious cabin, only a private jet would be more comfortable to cross from one side of Europe to the other. ▶





ASTON MARTIN DB9

Although as a front-engined and luxurious GT, the DB9 was similar in concept to its predecessors like the SL had been, it was still a new kind of Aston Martin. This wasn't due to the engine since the DB7 Vantage was the first to use the Ford-designed 6.0-litre V12 (the only engine it was ever available with), although for the DB9 it was given a new crank, cams, manifold, and engine management system to increase power by 15bhp over the GT model to 450bhp. And neither was it because of the car's bonded aluminium architecture since it was similar to that already used by the Vanquish.





No, what set the DB9 aside from its ancestors was that it would be mass-produced at Aston Martin's new factory at a former RAF base located outside the Warwickshire village of Gaydon. Other than the popular DB7, Aston's former cars had been largely niche models made in tiny numbers meaning the DB9 was the start of Aston becoming more mainstream, making it a genuine rival to the Mercedes we've just tested as well as the Ferrari 512 Scaglietti and Bentley Continental GT.

A new design mainly by Ian Callum, it had some input from Henrik Fisker who had taken over from the Scot as Aston's designer director in 2001. The wide rear arches, sinuously long bonnet, and

covered headlights were still pure Aston Martin, cleverly linking the car to the company's past models.

"It's achingly beautiful," said *Car & Driver* magazine in June 2003. "Aston found no reason to start a styling revolution. The DB9, like the Vanquish, DB7, and V8 Vantage, relies on classic proportions, long-established Aston styling cues, big 19in wheels, and simple sculptured forms to achieve its gorgeous looks."

Unusually for a car in this market that often follows trends more slavishly than any Instagram influencer, the DB9 hasn't aged. The crisp lines look as fresh and as innovative as the day the car was revealed at the 2003 Frankfurt Motor Show.

All of this makes the interior something

of a disappointment. Although at first glance well-designed and perfectly laid out while the handsome silver instruments have the same look as a high-end stereo from the Nineties, it's also too reliant on Ford and Volvo-sourced switchgear for a car that when new was over a hundred grand. It might feature soft leather upholstery and a splash of rich walnut veneer on the dashtop, but all those plastic buttons result in a similar ambience to a V80.

It is comfortable, though, and the tight headroom aside, reasonably spacious. Well, it is in the front; the DB9 might be classed as a four-seater but the rears are so impractical they're only any good when used as an extension to the 227-litre boot. Or the odd occasion when Kylie Minogue ►

TWIN TEST

DB9 VS SL600

asks for a lift to Prague. The cheapness of the interior and lack of rear space become inconsequential the moment I twist the key in the ignition and hit the starter button located high in the centre console, causing the V12 to burst into life with a loud bark.

When I squeeze the throttle hard for the first time, it's clear the Aston's 444bhp V12 lacks a little of the German motor's refinement, sounding and feeling much more raucous. But this only gives it a larger character than the whisper-quiet Mercedes unit. Plus, it might be 50bhp down on the SL600's twin-turbo 5.5-litre, but with the Aston weighing almost 100kg less, its 0-60mph time of 4.6 seconds is 0.1 seconds faster than the Merc. Unrestricted, it'll also keep going until it tops out at 186mph.

If I'm being honest, the Aston unit doesn't have the punch of the SL, lacking the Merc's feeling of being an unstoppable force of nature when pushed really hard.

But thanks to the eagerness of the 6.0-litre plus the speed of the ZF-sourced automatic transmission, changing down when I use the column-mounted paddles, the DB9 still delivers its power as effortlessly as any Gulfstream.

As *Autocar* said in its 1 June 2004 issue, "There are more powerful units and faster changing gearboxes, but nothing that matches the DB9's desirability, sense of occasion and sheer usability."

It sounds wonderful under full power, too, a melodic growl that's far more interesting than the muted wuffle of the SL600.

Where the DB9 really comes out on top is the handling. As mentioned earlier, not only is it lighter than the Mercedes-Benz but the aluminium-bonded chassis and mix of either composite or aluminium panels results in the same razor-sharp reflexes as smaller sports cars rather than a large GT. It attacks bends with the same voracity as a V8 Vantage while the adaptive dampers allow the car to remain composed through the fastest of bends. This coupled with accurate and nicely weighted steering gives the DB9 a confident agility well beyond what its size might suggest.

Obviously this can only be achieved by being firmly sprung, more so than the



SL600 or the DB7 Vantage it replaced, meaning the car transmits further surface information back into the cabin. Yet it's never uncomfortable and is still supple enough for long-distance cruising.

If you can live with the copious amounts of wind noise coming from the A-pillars at high speed, then, with its huge power and comfortable ride, the DB9 is as every bit a jet-rivalling GT as the SL600. ►



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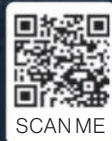
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VERDICT

IT WOULD be very easy to put the SL600 ahead of the DB9. It feels stronger, faster and offers a greater feeling of invincibility than the British car. Driving the big Mercedes featured here was like being behind the wheel of a leather-lined Panzer tank. But it misses out on something very important in this market, character.

The turbine-like twin-turbo V12 aside, the SL isn't as memorable as the DB9, its design, inside and out, is too anodyne,

too safe, and ultimately, too forgetful. You could buy a C-Class for £5k and have a similar ownership experience.

Not that the DB9 is perfect of course; the relatively cheap switchgear is always a big let-down as is its poor legroom in the rear. Plus, no doubt due to their rarity and the allure of the winged badge, DB9s are £10k to £25k more than comparable SL600s. While the German cars start at around £15k for an early example, rising to £25k for the very last ones from 2011, DB9s of the same age are between

£25,000 and £50,000. But in my view, the always gorgeous design, powerful V12 and sharp handling still makes the DB9 the winner here.

Private jets might be out of reach for most of us, but this luxurious yet always engaging grand tourer is the next best thing.

● **Thanks to: the owner of the DB9, Derek Morris, plus Aston Workshop (www.aston.co.uk) for sourcing it. And the Car Barn (www.carbarn.co.uk) for use of the SL600**





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2015 Aston Martin Rapide S Stock: #17013

Presenting this ultra-low mileage 2015 Aston Martin Rapide S featured with merely 15,472 miles on the odometer and finished in a sophisticated color scheme of Cobalt Blue which tastefully complements its Sahara Tan interior. Equipped with an automatic transmission, 6.0-liter V12 engine, brake calipers with "Aston Martin" script, and 20" alloy wheels. An excellent opportunity to acquire this exclusive hand-built Aston Martin Rapid S that is mechanically sound. For \$59,950



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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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MIXED PERSONALITY

Is the DBS a slightly faster DB9 with a bodykit or a model in its own right? We take a beautiful example for a drive to find out

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY PAUL WALTON



IT WOULD be easy to view the DBS as nothing more than a DB9 with a more powerful engine and a bodykit. But that would be like describing the DB5 as a facelift of the DB4 or Elvis Presley as 'just another singer' when the truth is that the car has its own unique and distinct personality that's very different from that of the DB9.

Although by sitting on the same VH architecture and based on the same basic design as the DB9 there's no doubting the two are related. But judging by the 2009 Lightning Silver example featured here, it's clear the DBS has a much more aggressive and purposeful look.

This is largely thanks to the bodykit that has similar design elements of those of the DBR9 racing car that won the GT1 class of the 2007 and 2008 24 Hours of Le Mans. This includes twin bonnet air vents, a gaping air intake below the grille, larger bootlid spoiler, carbon fibre splitter and powerful-looking sculpted sill extensions. Plus, there was a new flat undertray and carbon fibre rear diffuser to boost rear downforce.

"This car encapsulates the link between the DB9 road car and the powerful DBR9 race car," said the company's still current design irector, Marek Reichman, at the time of the car's 2006 debut. "It signals an evolutionary development of Aston

Martin's world-renowned style and elegance. While hinting at our future direction, the DBS also has very clear links with our heritage."

Its name certainly gave a nod towards the company's past, being only the second car to use the DBS name since the William Towns-designed original from 1967. Yet it also implied a link with its V12-engined sibling at the same time.

But the car was more than just a DB9 with a bodykit since under the bonnet was a more powerful version of Aston Martin's 6.0-litre V12. Thanks to bigger inlet ports plus a higher 10.9:1 compression ratio it now produced 510bhp, an increase of 60bhp over the DB9 of the time.

The bonnet, bootlid, wings and doors were all made from carbon fibre, shaving 30kg off the car's kerb weight while standard carbon brakes – the first on an Aston road car – shed another 12.5kg. Even the two vestigial rear seats of the DB9 were ditched, making the DBS a strict two-seater (although they ►



MODEL PROFILE

DBS

became an option in 2010). The result of this weight saving was that at 1,695kg the DBS weighed 65kg less than a DB9.

“The carbon fibre material allowed us to wrap bodywork around the 20in rims and maintain the precise relationship between the wheel and the bodywork,” explained Reichman during a 2007 interview. This lightness together with its more powerful V12 transformed the DBS into a genuine supercar; 60mph was reached in 4.3 seconds while its top speed was 191mph, both figures faster than those of the DB9.

With production of the Vanquish S coming to an end a month before the DBS made its debut at the 2007 Pebble Beach Concours d’Elegance in August, the new car was marketed as Aston Martin’s new flagship. Its £160,000 price tag certainly made it the company’s most expensive car at the time.





Yet this wasn't the first time it had been seen, since the DBS had also featured in the James Bond film, *Casino Royale*, released the previous November. The DBS was apparently chosen by long-term Bond producer Barbara Broccoli when Aston's then CEO, Dr Ulrich Bez, had personally invited her to see the car in late 2005 while it was still under development in the design studio.

"The DBS is not of the understated elegance of a DB9, nor the youthful agility of the V8 Vantage," said Bez in May 2006 when it was announced the car would feature in *Casino Royale*. "It is explosive power in a black tie and has its own unique character which will equal that of James Bond."

With production still 18 months away when filming started in 2006, Aston had to make two 'hero' cars for close- ▶



MODEL PROFILE

DBS

ups while three DB9 prototypes were modified to look like the DBS. These were specifically made for the famous barrel roll caused when 007 swerved to miss Vesper Lynd who had been tied up and left on the road by the film's villain, Le Chiffre.

The stunt took place at the Millbrook Proving Ground in Bedfordshire and to begin with the car wouldn't roll even after the ramp had been raised to two feet. Eventually, an air cannon that utilised pressurised nitrogen to fire a ram out of the bottom of the car was used to force the car to turn over. The resultant seven rolls were one of the most dramatic scenes of the film, also setting a new world record for the amount of cannon rolls.

"We were going to be happy with a couple of rolls, maybe three at a push," remembered stunt driver Adam Kirley during a 2020 interview. "As I hit the button the car flipped, landed on its roof and then started to roll. I could feel that we were going for quite a few rolls, so it was just a case of holding on for the ride."

Although the DBS's time on screen was brief, together with an exciting chase with an Alfa Romeo 159 police car through a quarry at the start of the next film, 2008's *Quantum of Solace*, it helped cement the brand's place in the Bond franchise. And despite the car's lack of gadgets, these appearances have helped make the DBS as iconic as the British spy's previous Aston Martins, including *Goldfinger's* DB5 and the V8 Vanquish in *The Living Daylights*.

But even if it wasn't in the 007 hall of fame, the DBS would still be a dramatic-looking car. It retains all the elegance of the DB9 but with a similarly muscular stance as the race-winning version. It's an intriguing combination and why the car has become so sought after by collectors especially when the car was replaced in 2012 by the VH310 generation of Vanquish after just 2,536 coupes and 848 Volantes (which arrived in 2009) were produced.

With its glossy black lacquer centre console, semi-aniline leather upholstery plus turned aluminium for the ventilation dials and controls, the interior is a significant improvement over the DB9's. As *Autocar* said in its 13 February 2008



issue, "Those who like things on the showy side will be in heaven, for there is plenty of automotive heaven in there."

Look closely, though, and there's still too much Ford-sourced switchgear for a car that once cost £160k. The buttons for the electric windows, for example, are straight out of the second generation of Focus.

Unlike its Vanquish predecessor that only came with the often-maligned Magneti Marelli-developed semi-automatic gearbox, the DBS had the choice of two transmissions. There were the same ZF-sourced six-speed automatic as the DB9 or a six-speed manual by Italian driveline specialist, Graziano, as fitted to the example featured here.

Although I quite like the challenge of the Vanquish's gearbox, the short, snappy changes of the Graziano manual six-speeder are a joy and make it much easier to use. Achieving a perfect downshift ►





MODEL PROFILE

DBS

to balance the power for an upcoming corner further adds to the theatre of driving a full-blooded V12-engined performance car like this.

When I give the throttle a proper squeeze, the acceleration is hard, brutal, and uncompromising, noticeably more so than the already fast DB9 I would drive a few days later. And thanks to the high-revving responsiveness of the V12 together with the DBS weighing so little, the engine delivers its endless power arguably easier than its 465bhp sibling. In short, it's not hard to make this car go quickly.

With the VH chassis substantially revised for the DBS including bespoke springs, anti-roll bar settings plus a wider track, it feels considerably sharper than the DB9.

It corners with even more ferocity and suffers from less body roll while thanks to perfect 50/50 weight distribution (partly due to the engine pushed far back in the car's frame), it remains composed through bends. Thankfully for a car with this performance, the carbon fibre Brembo



brakes remain sharp, progressive, and always unfazed.

Yet thanks to the still relatively supple suspension, it's not a hard, uncompromising supercar like the Audi R8, Ford GT or Lamborghini Murciélago can be, riding over imperfections relatively smoothly.

From a marketing point of view, it would have been easy for Aston Martin to have called the car the 'DB9S' and charged £30k less, but that wouldn't have been an accurate reflection of its abilities.

Just as it doesn't take long listening to an Elvis record to realise that he really is the king of rock and roll, it takes only a few miles behind the wheel to understand the DBS is more than just a DB9 in a sharp suit. Its mix of performance and comfort makes it undoubtedly one of Aston Martin's greatest GTs from the last two decades. **AMD**

● **Thanks to: Stratton Motor Company for the car featured here (www.strattonmotorcompany.com)**



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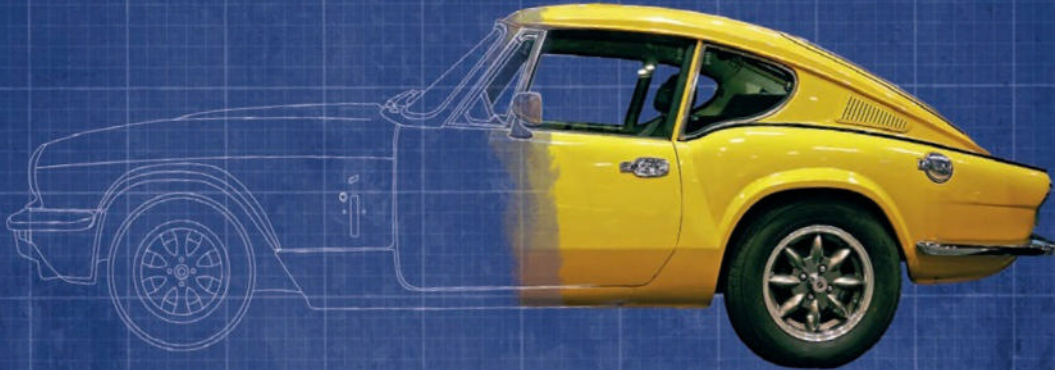
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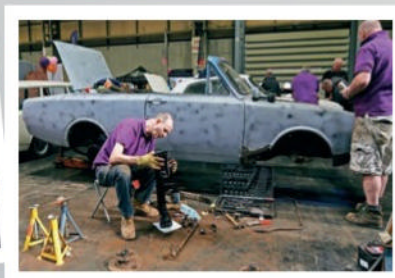


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MODEL PROFILE

DB2/4 MK2 FHC



WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY
PAUL WALTON

RARE BEAUTY

When the DB2/4 was updated in the mid-Fifties, a third body style joined the existing open and closed variants, the fixedhead coupe. Although handsome, it was only produced in tiny numbers making it one of the rarest cars of the David Brown era



IT'S CLEAR that by 1955 the once beleaguered Aston Martin was starting to find its feet. Not only did the now David Brown-owned company have a burgeoning racing team, but it was also a two-model company with both the DB2/4 and Lagonda in production. Impressive stuff for a marque that just eight years earlier wasn't producing anything at all.

Yet that wasn't all, since its new-found confidence also meant Aston Martin was in a position to introduce new variants of its existing models, such as a pretty fixedhead coupe (sometimes called notchback) version of the DB2/4.

The car owes much to David Brown's 1954 acquisition of the Newport Pagnell-based coachbuilder Tickford. Following Brown's 1947 purchase of



MODEL PROFILE

DB2/4 MK2 FHC



Aston Martin, the cars were initially put together in three different locations: the chassis in Huddersfield, the bodywork by a Birmingham-based coachbuilder, Mulliners Ltd, while final assembly was at Lagonda's premises at Feltham, Middlesex. The generous size of the Tickford site together with its skilled workforce offered an opportunity for Brown to bring production together in a single location.

This didn't happen overnight, though, and to begin with only the bodies were produced at Newport Pagnell. The move from Mulliners to Tickford did result in a handful of changes to the DB2/4's design that, although small, warranted in these cars being called the Mk2. The updates included small rear fins for a revised light cluster plus a higher roofline with a chrome strip along the front. There were also two small, hinged air vents, flashing indicators rather than old-fashioned semaphores plus Tickford badges on the front wings below chrome strips that ran horizontally back from the wheelarches to the bonnet's rear edge.

These denoted the line at which the bonnet, when raised, left the lower portions of the main bodywork to help alleviate the bonnet shake of the early models whose bonnet incorporated most of the front wings.

The changes might have been small, but together with the better quality of the bodies produced by Tickford helped to



update the now ageing design, first seen with the DB2 in 1950.

"I have no hesitation in saying that the latest DB2/4 is a sound and most desirable high-performance motor car in every respect," wrote the admittedly Aston Martin-contracted driver Roy Salvadori in the May 1955 issue of *Autocourse*. He went on to say, "The latest Tickford-built aluminium body is a subtle but definite improvement on earlier models."

As with the DB2/4 Mk1, from the outset the Mk2 was available in both hatchback and drophead coupe form, but thanks to the extra production space at Tickford's Newport Pagnell factory a third model joined the range; the fixedhead coupe. The idea was apparently based on Brown's own DB2/4 drophead coupe that in 1953 had been fitted with a hardtop by Mulliners.





Although the nose up to the screen was identical to the existing models, the FHC featured more of a saloon-like roofline that finished with an upright rear window. There was now a longer boot line rather than the curve of the standard hatchback.

But despite being handsome, whether due to lacking the practicality of the three-door or because it was only on sale for two years before the DB2/4 was replaced by the DB MkIII, of the 199 Mk2s produced a mere 34 were fixedhead coupes. And of these, only 20 were in right-hand drive although four were for export. With one also the company's demonstrator and another reserved for David Brown himself, that left just 14 notchbacks for the UK market.

The car featured here – chassis AM300/1283 – is one of these. Not only is it the second-to-last example produced, but the final one in right-hand drive making it an important car in Aston Martin's post-war history.

It left the Feltham production line on 2 March 1957 and was delivered to Aston Martin's distributor in Merseyside, J. Blake and Co. Ltd, before being shipped to Belfast in Northern Ireland where it was registered 9140 AZ on the 26 June of the same year.

Nothing else is known about its early life until 2008 when the-then new owner took the now green and tired-looking car to the respected County Durham-based marque specialist Aston Workshop for a full restoration. Taking two years and £180k to complete, particular attention was given to the chassis and bodywork. It was then decided to return the car to its original Peacock Blue but with the addition of a Silver Birch roof.

Due to the relative rarity of a DB2/4 fixedhead coupe, like finding a lost work by Leonardo Da Vinci or a £10 note in a pocket, I was overjoyed in late 2023 when I discovered it was for sale through Aston Workshop.

Having been mainly dry stored since the restoration, the car still looks resplendent, the stylish colour scheme a perfect match for the always elegant design. Although the standard DB2/4 Mk2 saloon is a handsome car, I reckon with its squarer roofline and longer boot, the proportions of the fixedhead coupe are arguably

MODEL PROFILE

DB2/4 MK2 FHC



more so. Interestingly, the roof does bear a distinct resemblance to that of the Lagonda 3.0-litre saloon.

When I climb inside, the layout of the central dashboard might be identical to the more popular saloon, but it's clear the fixedhead's slightly higher roofline offers a little more headroom for the occasional seats in the rear.

Alas, the snowy conditions on the day of my visit to Aston Workshop hinder any chance of a proper road test. But as I slip and slide the car into position outside the specialist's headquarters located deep in the beautiful County Durham countryside for my images, it's clear by how eagerly the 2.9-litre straight-six bursts into life that there's no doubt it would have all the performance of the more popular saloon.

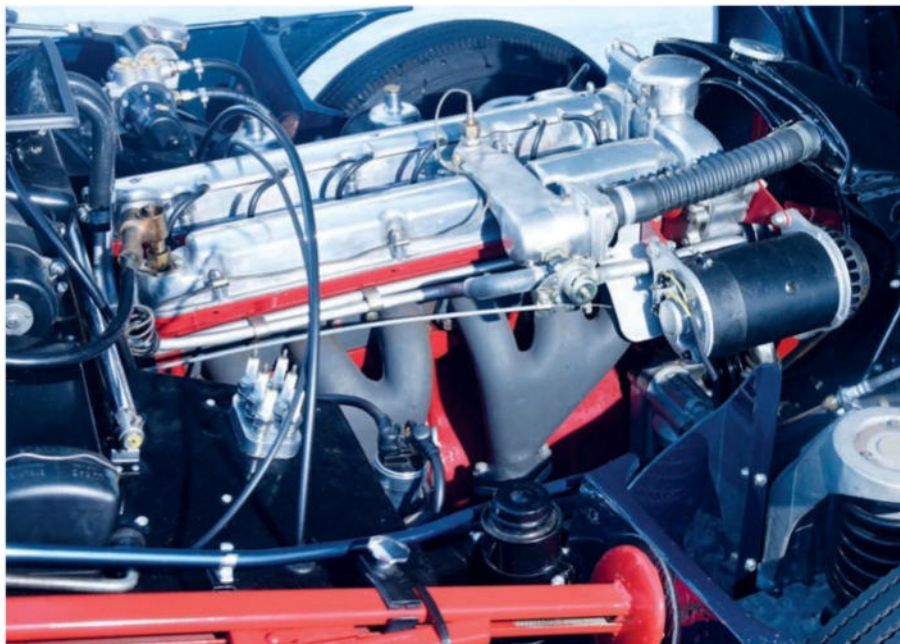
Other than the five similar versions produced in 1958 that were based on the DB2/4's replacement, the DB MkIII, despite the unquestionable elegance of the fixedhead coupe, the lack of sales meant a notchback wasn't a design Aston Martin would revisit again during the Sixties and Seventies. But as the similar-in-concept yet more awkward-looking Jensen Interceptor Coupé from 1975 shows, that's arguably not such a bad thing. I'm not sure a V8 Vantage fixedhead



coupe would have worked quite as well as its Fifties predecessor.

Best, then, not to think of the DB2/4 fixedhead coupe of what could have been but as one of the prettiest cars of the era and genuine proof of Aston Martin's post-war recovery. **AMD**

● **Thanks to: Aston Workshop**
(aston.co.uk)



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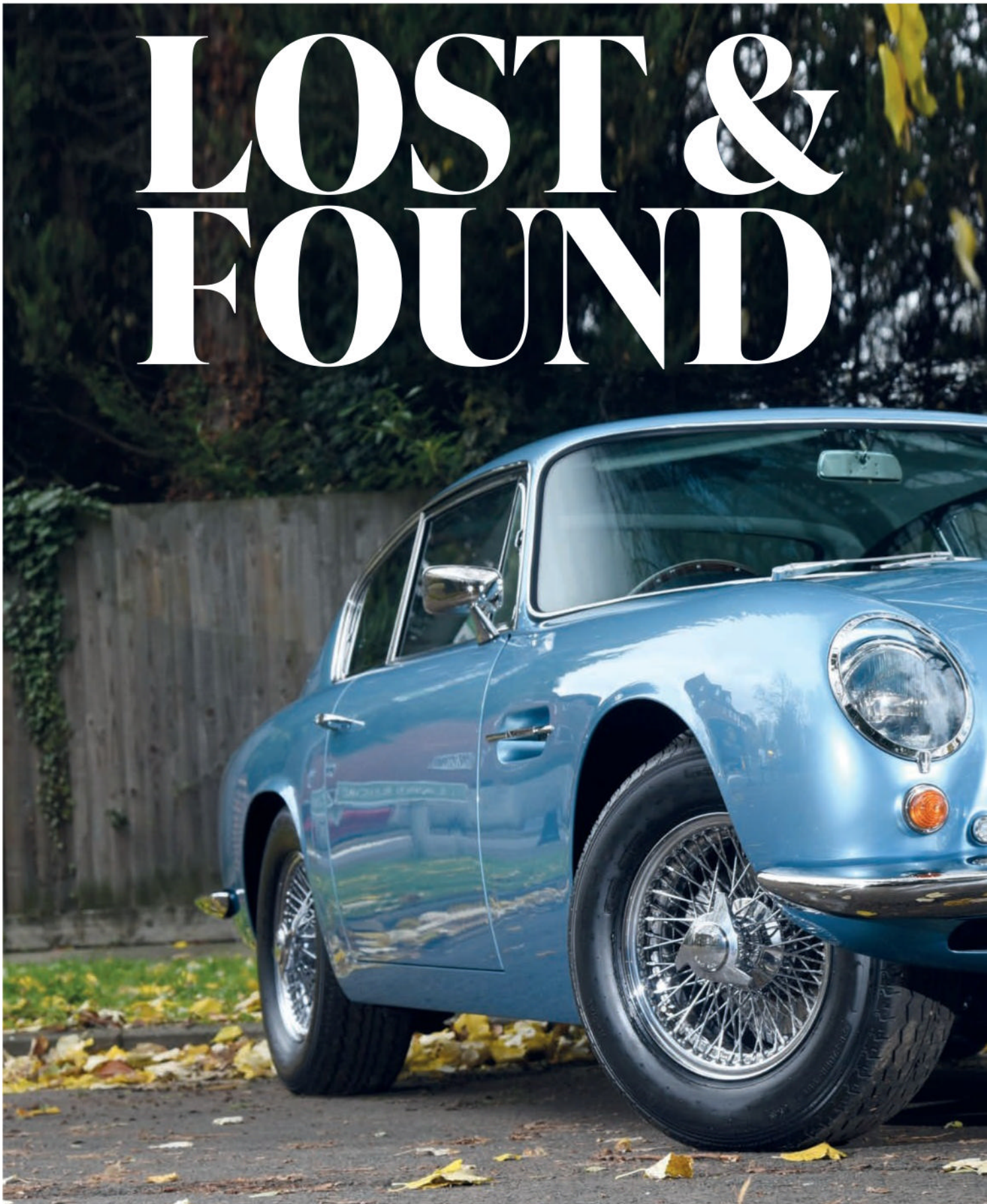
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LOST & FOUND



After languishing untouched in a garage for over 30 years, this rare DB6 Vantage Mk2 has recently undergone a full bare metal restoration. We look at the model's history before speaking to one of those responsible for the car's rebirth

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY PAUL WALTON

DUE TO their often low production numbers and place in British culture, there are plenty of mythical cars in Aston Martin's back catalogue. Take the DB6 Vantage Mk2, for example. Not only does the model mark the end of the iconic design that

arrived with the DB4, later made even more famous by the iconic DB5, but with a little over 70 produced it's also one of the rarest.

This place in Aston Martin's history makes the story of this particular example all the more amazing. Because despite its good looks, rarity and ever-growing values, the car was left languishing in a garage for three decades. Thankfully, after being rescued in early 2021, a two-and-a-half-year-long restoration by a respected specialist has returned this

piece of automotive history back to its former glory.

The DB6 Mk2 arrived in summer 1969 and differed from its predecessor by having slightly wider wheelarches to accommodate broader wheels and tyres. Power steering now became standard and a 10.5in-diameter clutch plate was fitted. There was also the option of AE Brico fuel injection, but this wasn't popular and just 46 left the company's Newport Pagnell factory, the rest all had carburettors. Despite the DB6 arriving in September 1965 and the



RESTORATION

DB6 VANTAGE MK2

car becoming old-fashioned compared to newer rivals (including its own more modern sibling, the DBS, that had been sold alongside the older car since 1967), the press was still largely impressed by the Mk2. In its November 1969 issue, the American magazine *World Car Guide* described the new model as, “well-trying and still highly desirable.”

As with previous DB models, there were two power outputs of the Tadek Marek-designed 4.0-litre straight six; the standard 282bhp model plus the Vantage version that with triple Weber carburettors had an extra 43 horses. This increased power helped to transform the DB6 into a genuine performance car and when *Motor* tested a Vantage Mk1 for its 8 January 1966 issue, the car managed to reach 60mph in a mere 6.1 seconds. “In an effortless way that few other cars can match, the DB6 makes an overall speed limit of 70mph look quite ridiculous,” said the magazine. “At its maximum of more than twice this, it is still reassuringly stable, probably more so than cars struggling to



maintain their 70mph convoy speed.”

Despite its good looks and high performance, the DB6 Mk2 was never a big seller. Just 245 saloons were produced until the car was discontinued in early 1971. And of those, a mere 71 were to Vantage specification, and less than half were right-hand drive. This makes the DB6 Vantage Mk2 featured here

a genuine rarity even by Aston Martin standards.

Other than it's a UK example, registered during the DB6's final full year of production, and originally in Fiesta Red with black leather upholstery, little is known about the car's early years. It's not even established when the previous owner purchased the car, although

invoices in his name go back to 1984.

What we do know is the car was rolled into a lock-up garage during the early Nineties, potentially due to requiring a restoration, and there it stayed for the next three decades.

In early 2021, the still red DB6 Vantage Mk2 was rescued from its long-term slumbers and put up for sale through RM



RESTORATION

DB6 VANTAGE MK2



Sotheby's online Open Roads auction in April 2021. "This DB6 Mk 2 Vantage is presented as a highly complete and well-preserved restoration opportunity," said the catalogue, "looking to return to the open road or concours circuit."

The still dirty and clearly tired-looking Aston Martin caught the eye of a British enthusiast who now spends the majority of his time in Hong Kong. Wanting help on what to look for when buying a DB6, he contacted established marque specialist Pugsley & Lewis, based in Beckenham, Kent. "He phoned us up before the auction to ask us lots of advice," one of the company's directors, Tim Lewis, who founded the company 35 years ago with Martin Pugsley, tells me.

After successfully buying the car for £203,500, he then asked Pugsley & Lewis to restore it. "He later sent a message to say, 'I chose you because you helped me out when I was buying it,'" explains Tim.

"And I have looked at other Aston garages





and decided you were the one to use.” Although Tim describes its condition as ‘dusty,’ and the engine hadn’t run for over three decades with everything seized, with it being 98 percent complete, he also says the car was, “A good and unmolested example with only a few little bits and pieces missing.” The car, though, still required a full, body-off restoration with everything down to the last nut and bolt taken out.

When Pugsley & Lewis’ team of technicians started to pull the DB6 apart, they quickly realised some of the panels were in a poorer condition than they originally thought. “It had too much history in it,” says Tim with a wry smile. “It needed a complete aluminium body at the front, plus door skins, and the rear valances. Bodywork problems like this are standard although it’s unusual for us to replace so many panels since we usually try to keep as many of the originals as possible. The roof, bootlid, rear wings and the boot were the only original panels we kept.”

Once the body was repaired, it was time to have it repainted. Not liking the original Fiesta Red, the owner chose another original DB6 colour, Caribbean Pearl, instead. “I have to say, everyone who sees the car thinks the colour really suits it,” says Tim.



RESTORATION

DB6 VANTAGE MK2



Photographing the Aston Martin for this feature, I'll agree with that. The rich metallic blue catches the weak winter light more than the red would have done, the perfect hue to show off the DB6's always elegant lines.

Since the owner wanted everything new, the interior was retrimmed in black leather. "Some like to keep the original upholstery," says Tim, "but I think the owner considered it too tired-looking for him so we had it replaced by the trimmer that comes to us a few days a week."

The engine also needed rebuilding especially since – as is often the case with Aston's four-litre straight-six – there was a crack. "The cylinder blocks on the DB5 and the DB6 crack down the bottom even when they're just sitting there doing hardly any mileage," Tim tells me. "We've had engines that have done 30,000 miles and

they've cracked and corroded all the way inside." The owner also has a home in Scotland and since he plans to tour the Highlands with the DB6, asked Pugsley & Lewis to include a few modifications to make driving the now 54-year-old car a little easier. This included inertia-reel seatbelts, air-conditioning and LED lights. But when I look inside the car, you'd think it was a standard DB6 Vantage Mk2 interior. Says Tim, "We take a lot of time and effort to hide these upgrades so they're not in your face."

With the team trying to keep as much of the original trim as possible, meaning recommissioning parts instead of simply sourcing replacements, the restoration took around two and a half years. The car was only completed in late 2023 when Tim and Martin invited me to their Beckenham workshop to photograph

it. As you'd expect for a company as experienced as Pugsley & Lewis, the level of the work is outstanding. When I aim my camera lens towards the now perfect example in front of me, it's difficult to believe it's the same car as that tired and dusty-looking example RM Sotheby's auctioned in 2021. Only its original STU404J registration number links the car with its past condition.

Even if it had remained locked in the garage, due to its rarity and place in Aston's history, this DB6 Vantage Mk2 would still have a mythical status. But thanks to the comprehensive restoration resulting in it being transformed into a stunning example, that reputation is now fully justified. **AMD**

● **Thanks to: Pugsley & Lewis**
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TRAVEL LOG

Continuing the adventures of their early V8 Vantage that was once driven between Tokyo and London, in 2023 Phil and Will Churchill explored both North and Central America with the car

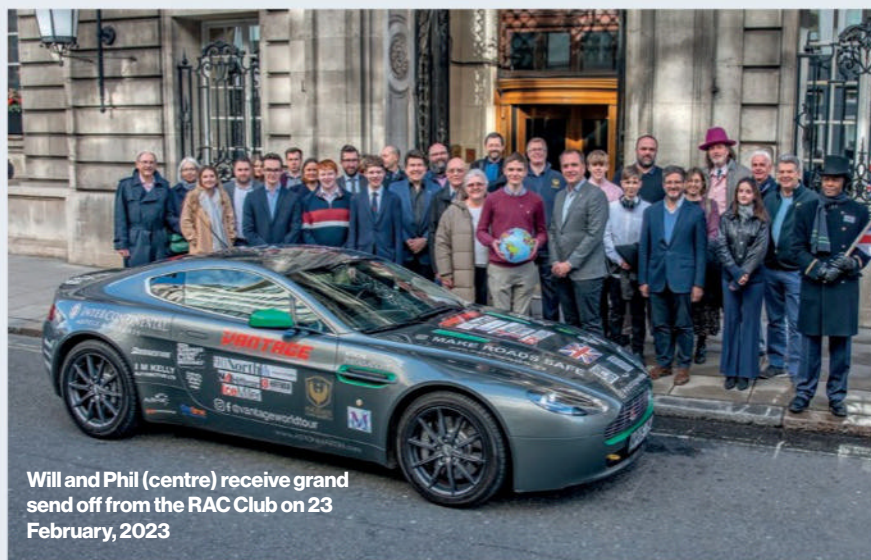
WORDS PAUL WALTON | PHOTOGRAPHY PHIL & WILL CHURCHILL



ALTHOUGH ARGUABLY the least appropriate vehicle for exploration this side of a classic milk float, Phil Churchill's two-decade-old V8 Vantage still performed admirably during his and his son Will's 2023 adventures through North and then Central America. "The only things that went wrong with the car was stuff we did to it," admits Phil.

Considering the many adversities they faced including rough roads, terrible weather and low octane fuel, that's an incredible achievement for the car. But this wasn't the first time this early V8 Vantage has been pushed to its limits.

Produced in 2005, it was the 41st



Will and Phil (centre) receive grand send off from the RAC Club on 23 February, 2023

example built and originally was used by Aston Martin's then CEO, Dr Ulrich Bez, as his company car. With him regularly commuting between his home in Dusseldorf and the UK, the left-hand-drive grey coupe quickly racked up the miles.

In May 2006, to celebrate Aston Martin building its 30,000th car that summer, the Vantage was chosen for a 30k miles in 30 days project when it was driven by 30 employees across the German

autobahn system. But this was a warm-up for the major journey that was to come. When British journalist and adventurer Richard Meredith was looking for a car for a planned journey across the newly completed Asian Highway Network, driving from Tokyo to London, Aston Martin incredibly agreed to lend him the ex-Bez V8 Vantage. Despite the harsh conditions that made the car unsuitable for such a journey, the Vantage not only

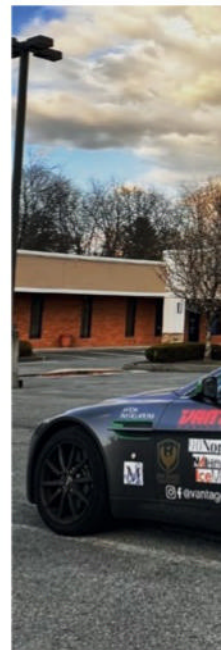




The V8 Vantage takes in Manhattan



On the outskirts of Detroit, Michigan



completed the 10,000-mile journey but survived it. After some PR duties, the grey coupe was sold by auction in December 2007, becoming part of a private collection of cars where it remained for 14 years. During the Covid-19 lockdowns of 2020 and 2021, Phil Churchill read several overland adventure books and fancied attempting something similar with his teenage son, Will. First, though, he needed a car.

Phil originally assumed he'd buy a Porsche, having owned several in the past, but then he saw the V8 Vantage for sale at a London-based dealer. He was immediately attracted to the car due to its unique history plus the fact that it was already prepared for such a trip thanks to the slightly raised suspension plus a strengthened plate to protect the sump that Aston Martin's engineers had fitted for Meredith's journey.

The next question was where to head to. Wanting to circumnavigate the globe one journey at a time, Phil's first plan was to go east but Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine put a stop to this. And so he decided to go the other way and start their adventure in North America, finishing in Mexico before returning later in the same year to explore Central America down to Panama.

In early 2023 and after months of preparation the car was ready, or at least they thought it was. Despite having the

Vantage recommissioned and several little niggles ironed out over the 12 months they'd owned it, with a week to go, the car suffered from several admittedly minor electrical issues.

"The rear lights had failed, one of the front lights stopped working, the airbag warning light wouldn't go out and the side glass didn't dip when you opened the door," says Phil. "I'm not superstitious, but I thought this was a sign that we shouldn't be doing this."

Thankfully, the team at Trinity Engineering at Ripley managed to sort everything out so the pair could reach their start line, the RAC Club on London's Pall Mall, on 23 February 2023. After a tremendous send-off by family, friends and sponsors, Phil and Will headed to Liverpool ready for the car to be loaded onto a ship bound for New York. "Driving north was beautifully peaceful," says Phil. "It was the most relaxing bit of the whole journey. There wasn't a rattle or a squeak; the car felt ready for it."

He does say dropping the Vantage off at the docks was something of an anticlimax after all the build-up. "There was a compound for cars going to New York and it was filled with brand-new Range Rovers, Land Rovers and Aston Martins all waiting to be shipped out."

Three weeks later, Phil and Will boarded a flight at Heathrow bound for JFK, ready for their adventure to begin. They took

with them a small flight case, small enough to fit in the boot that was otherwise filled with a full-sized spare wheel plus two small jerrycans. Phil says packing for their adventure had been tricky since they needed winter clothes for North America, but this portion of the trip would finish in the warmth of the tropics.

After arriving at the busy Port of New York, they found their V8 Vantage surrounded by lots of heavy construction equipment. Not only had it survived the long sea crossing in one piece, but the car's 4.3-litre V8 started first time. "We brought all the stuff we thought we'd need like a battery jump starter," explains Will, "but none of it was needed."

After spending the next day exploring New York in the car, including driving through Times Square and over the Manhattan Bridge, they left the city and headed north towards the town of Summit where they met with the local Aston Martin Owners Club before driving in convoy to Philadelphia.

Phil and Will's plan was to do something fun or interesting every day, which started with the Simeone Foundation Automotive Museum in Philadelphia. Full of incredible racing cars, it was the number 4 DBR1 from the 1959 24 Hours of Le Mans driven by (Sir) Stirling Moss at great speed to break the rival Ferraris, allowing teammates Carroll Shelby and Roy Salvadori to take victory, that caught



Somewhere in Ohio



At the Kennedy Space Centre

Phil's attention the most. "I've got a model of it in my study signed by Moss himself," he tells me.

The pair then got back into the Vantage and headed north-west towards the town of Middlesex on a fast freeway. "This was the most amazing road. We had Dire Straits on the stereo, the sun was setting and we were dicing with large articulated trucks at 100mph."

This wouldn't be an aimless meander around America since the pair had worked out a tight schedule based around two key points. The first was a NASCAR race in Richmond, Virginia, during early April while their second was their flight home from Cancún in Mexico two weeks later.

The next morning, they headed westwards to Detroit to look around the Ford Innovation Museum before pushing on to Chicago where they met one of their trip's sponsors at the Autobahn Country Club. A racetrack with privately owned motor-houses around it, allowed Will – not yet 17 at the time of the trip – to drive the V8 Vantage for the first time. "It was a scary moment because I'd never driven something that powerful before," he says now.

The Windy City was the furthest north-west the pair would reach; from now on they would be steadily heading south.

Indianapolis was next, for a tour of the famed Brickyard circuit before pushing on through Ohio and West Virginia towards

Richmond. They would drive at least eight hours a day to cover the ground they needed to meet their target.

The NASCAR race was the first thing they wanted to do when they were putting their itinerary together. Both were impressed by the speed of the cars and the sportsmanship of the drivers. "I like the fact that if there was a nudge or something the commentator would say, 'That's payback for something that happened three or four laps before,'" says Phil. "It's not like Formula One with the drivers whining and moaning afterwards about how something is unfair. In NASCAR, it's dealt with on the track."

If you're wondering why the Vantage has barely been mentioned so far, it's because Phil says his Aston Martin was running like clockwork and they were climbing into it every morning not worrying that something was about to go wrong. An impressive achievement for a two-decade-old V8 coupe that will pass 250,000km during their trip.

Over the next few days they motored down the south of the country, passing through North and South Carolina, Georgia and Alabama. After taking time to look around the Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville they motored down to New Orleans where they spent a brief morning looking around the European-style streets followed by Houston. They crossed into Mexico at Eagle Pass since

they'd heard it was safer than some of the larger border controls. Initially they were refused entry, when the border guards thought they were a commercial venture due to the stickers on the car, but after a great deal of toing and froing, they were in.

The roads on the Mexican side were incredibly rough. "I think this is the first time I've ever had to ask Dad to stop," remembers Will. "We were getting airborne it was so bad, just constantly bouncing up and down." Thankfully, the closer they got to Mexico City, the better the surfaces became.

It's also where the Vantage suffered the first damage of the trip when a huge fist-sized rock struck the windscreen right in front of Will leaving a nasty chip. "I still don't know how the Aston deflected it," says Phil. "But it did make us feel even more like this is the right car for the job, that it can take whatever comes at it."

And despite the fuel being as poor as the road, the car never missed a beat. "We have 99 octane fuel back in the UK, but we were down to about 91 in Mexico. The engine should have been coughing and missing, but here we are, at an elevation of 10,000ft, yet the car was pulling like a train. It definitely got stronger during the journey."

The Vantage did suffer from one issue, though, which Phil admits was his fault. "We had three mobile phones; one each and a spare for the car. This one got lost

TRAVEL

V8 VANTAGE ACROSS AMERICA

under the seats and I was too vigorous trying to rescue it and managed to dislodge one of the cables for the electric seats.”

When they reached Mexico City they contacted the local Aston Martin dealer, Iconic Broker, to ask if it could help. “They called in their mechanics who had a fiddle but they couldn’t fix it.

“So we went to their workshop the next day and it took four guys a few hours to sort it.” Phil was initially worried how much it was going to cost, but as he says to me, they didn’t have much of a choice. “When it was finished, I said to one of them to let me know how much I owed. He scurried off to his manager, came back and he said, ‘No parts, no charge.’” It wouldn’t be the only time during their trip that they would benefit from the kindness of strangers.

Back on the road, the pair started to encounter lots of roadblocks to stop drugs from heading north and Phil says they were stopped four or five times in the same day but thankfully without any issue.

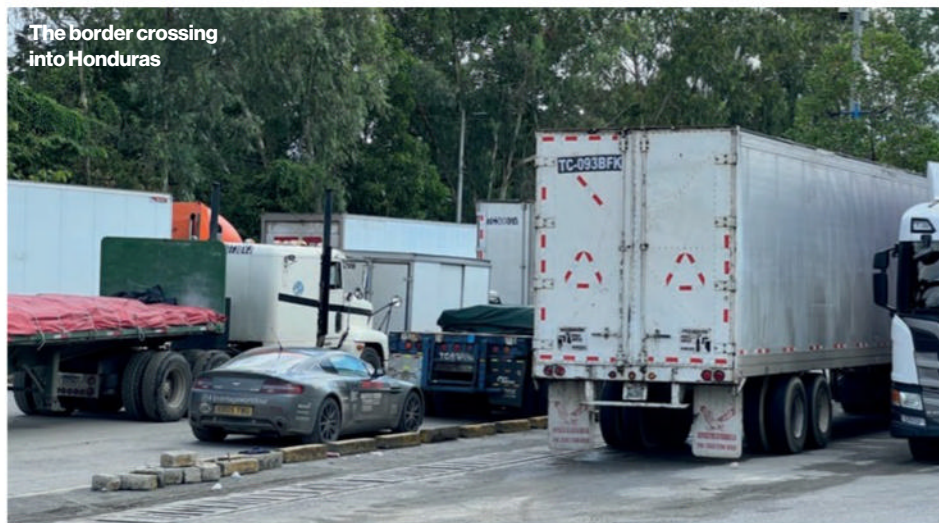
After getting down to -8 degC in Michigan, they were now in the tropics where it would reach a balmy 39 degC. Thankfully despite having a slight leak, the air-con worked well enough to cope with the tropical heat. Says Phil, “The guys at Trinity Engineering said, ‘Look, you can spend 20 grand trying to pull this apart to find the leak. Or we could just top it up for £120 each go.’ And I said, ‘We’re going to do that.’”

Two weeks after leaving New York, they finally reached Cancún on the east coast of Mexico. It was chosen as this part of the trip’s destination since, designated as a free zone, foreign cars can stay there indefinitely without needing a temporary import permit.

Before they’d left home, Phil had managed to find a storage business to leave the car at. Operated outside someone’s home, there was even a plug for the battery’s trickle charger. The pair then flew back to the UK to enjoy their summer. An incredible adventure but this was literally just the start.

Six months later, and the boys were heading back to the car for the second part of their Vantage World Tour; from Cancún down through to Panama.

“About a week before I’d asked the



The border crossing into Honduras



The Hummingbird Highway



A beach in Belize

storage owner to start it,” says Phil. “He said the engine fired on the first press of the button.”

They spent their first afternoon in a nearby workshop giving the car the once over and refilling the air-con. “It hadn’t done a big distance since it was last serviced in the UK,” explains Phil, “but since it had sat in Cancún for six months, I thought we’d better check the fluid levels.”

The central American part of the trip would be very different from the US and Mexico sections due to the number of countries they would have to travel through to reach their destination of Panama, which was 1,700 miles away. “They’re sort of in a chain all through Central America,” says Phil.

From Cancún, they soon crossed into Belize, finding that due to British and European investment in the country, the roads are smoother than they are at home. But that doesn’t mean the journey passed uneventfully.

Not seeing a speed bump in time, Phil hit it hard. “It felt like a film where they slow everything down and all the stuff, the coins, the chewing gum, even our rucksacks, all come flying out. Will wakes up to the car flying through the air and as we land with this almighty crash, I think, ‘We’ve done some damage.’”

When Phil stopped to check the car at the next garage, he saw liquid dripping from underneath. After initially being worried, he eventually works out it was water from the air-conditioning. “I thought we were only two or three days into this and I’ve already lost the car. I felt stupid for not seeing the bloody speed hump.”

His mood was lifted when they joined one of the best roads of the trip; the Hummingbird Highway. “It takes you from the coast of the Caribbean all the way to the border with Guatemala.” Fast, smooth and with great views, this was V8 Vantage country. But it wouldn’t last.

Leading up to their trip there had been



Watching out for big cats in Belize

protests in Guatemala in support of the new president elect, Bernardo Arévalo, so the locals were blocking all the roads into the capital. To bypass Guatemala City, Phil took a rough, unsurfaced road and for three hours they were bounced back and forth. "At some point we hit a rock and broke the front bumper," says Phil. "Once again, the car didn't break; we broke the car."

Whereas the North American part of the trip had been about sightseeing, the Central American section was purely about crossing borders which could take anywhere between four to six hours before racing to try to get to the hotel before it got dark.

"We needed to get the passports and the car's temporary import permit stamped out. And then the passport and temporary import permit stamped in."

With this being the rainy season, the weather coming into Honduras was horrendous. "I couldn't compute what

was going on because you've got stuff all around you," says Phil. "You've got all the flashing lights going and everyone's got their full beams on. Even the trucks are lit up like the Coca-Cola trucks at Christmas. Thank God Will was there because he was spotting for me."

They were again delayed at the border with Nicaragua. "We must have dealt with 20 different people all making sure we had basic paperwork. They also didn't like the fact we were taking fuel in because the fuel tax in Nicaragua is a lot higher than Honduras; truck drivers syphon off the petrol and the diesel and they thought we were doing that. But I said we've only got two little cans!"

They were finally let into Nicaragua when it again started raining and it was now when a headlight stopped working. "It really started to flood and there were cars stranded in the middle and side of the road," Phil tells me. "We foolishly decided to push on and we lost a headlight on the

right hand side through water splashing up. But I later learned the air intake on a V8 Vantage is quite low and so it's amazing we didn't kill the engine."

But Phil says when dry, the roads through Central America were great and the scenery was amazing. "And the reaction from locals about the car was always positive."

After passing through Costa Rica, with a couple of days to go before they were due to fly home, the pair finally reached the Panama border. "Poolside by mid-afternoon was the plan," says Phil, "but Google Maps said there was a roadblock on the highway. We said it must be wrong and so continued but it turns out it wasn't, because when we got to the Panama border, it was closed."

Apparently the Panamanian government had issued a big mining contract to a Canadian company and the locals were objecting to it, blocking all the roads. "I'd been keeping an eye on Guatemala; I didn't even think about Panama," sighs Phil now.

They had their passports stamped out of Costa Rica, but when they went to get the car's temporary import permit stamped, a friendly Frenchman called Jerome came up to them and said, "No, no, no; don't do that. That would be the worst decision you're going to make." He went on to say he and his friends had spent three days in Panama trying to get through these roadblocks but they wouldn't let them through.

With Phil and Will now officially out of Costa Rica, but unable to go any further and the car still officially in Costa Rica, they were stuck. Says Phil, "Jerome said we needed to walk through to the Panamanian passport control and ask for a letter advising that we weren't allowed into Panama because of the issues and bring that letter back to the Costa Rican customs." But typically, the Panamanians had stopped issuing these letters.

Once again they were saved by the kindness of a stranger who explained Phil and Will's plight in Spanish to the customs official. Eventually, a plan was agreed on. "They would stamp us into Panama," explains Phil, "but we couldn't physically go into the country. And then we'd have to come back two hours later

TRAVEL

V8 VANTAGE ACROSS AMERICA

and be stamped out of Panama.” Although this worked, it meant they couldn’t finish their trip in Panama or leave the car at the storage facility Phil had pre-arranged. Instead, they headed towards Costa Rica’s capital, San Jose. With a mountain range in between rising to 11,000 feet, the car used more fuel than usual due to the climb.

Not able to find a petrol station, Phil needed to use the fuel in the reserve tanks for the first time. And then it started raining. “The plastic pipe didn’t fit properly onto the can,” he sighs. “So I’m standing there getting wet and I also got petrol pouring onto my foot because the thing has come loose.”

All in all, it was not a good day.

Thankfully, after finding a hotel for the night – where they classed the Central American section of their journey officially ended – Phil also secured space for the car at a local storage facility. Despite causing chaos by not speaking Spanish, the car was finally parked. “There was no chance of a trickle charger here so we disconnected the battery,” says Phil. “We’d taken a little solar panel with us and Will

cut a hole in the car cover for it which we then gaffer taped it into place. We felt a bit guilty because after everything it has been through, we left it unwashed with a few bits of damage we’d inflicted on it.”

Phil plans to head back in early 2024 to move the car to Panama since the Costa Rican temporary import permit only lasts 12 months.

What’s amazing is Phil still enjoys the car as much as when they set off from New York. Now called ‘Krosy’ due to its registration, the Vantage is the third member of their crew. “It’s always a joy to drive,” he says, “We feel properly connected to it.”

This means both Phil and Will are itching to get back to the car later this year for the South American leg of their Vantage World Tour. “Famous last words,” says Phil, “but the borders are less troublesome than Central America so I hope we can get back to it being more of an adventure and time to do some fun stuff.”

From there, Phil is hoping to have the car transported to Australia for a trip across the outback, but beyond that he has no firm plans about where their global

tour heads to next. Depending on what’s happening in the world – Russia especially – he’d like to bring the car back into Europe via Asia using a similar route to the one Richard Meredith used in 2007.

No matter where in the world they head to next, there’s no doubt this one-of-a-kind V8 Vantage will be able to handle everything Phil and Will ask of it. **AMD**

Thanks to: Phil & Will Churchill
Instagram: @vantageworldtour
Website: www.vantageworldtour.com



The rough road of Guatemala



Will and Phil outside the hotel in San Jose, Costa Rica, that marked the end of the Central American part of their trip

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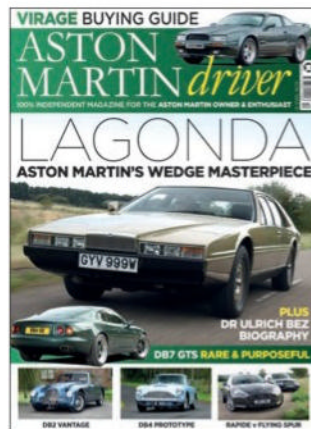
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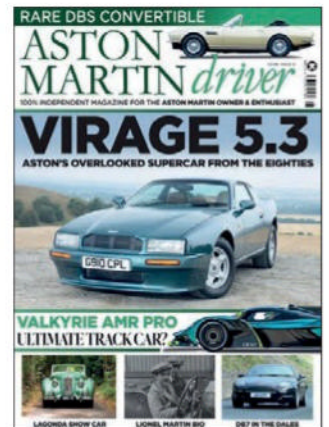
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Aston Martin ready to succeed in F1

Motorsport News editor Matt James examines the promise of Aston Martin's new AMR24 Grand Prix challenger

AMID THE flurry of Formula 1 launches which happened seemingly every day of the first two weeks of February, Aston Martin's reveal of its 2024 Grand Prix challenger could almost be seen to be understated.

It didn't haul the media to Las Vegas like others did and neither did it host the great and good of the press at a special glitzy event at its new Silverstone headquarters.

Instead, there was the quiet release of images and words on the morning of Monday February 12. It was a move more akin to a team which means business on the track and which isn't interested in the frills that go with it.

That philosophy has extended to the new-for-2024 Grand Prix design,

the AMR24. It is the first car which has emanated from Aston Martin Racing's new all-signing Silverstone headquarters, which came on stream last year and, in truth, the fresh design has a lot to live up to.

Aston Martin was the team that made the most progress in 2023 compared to its previous campaigns and it is beginning to show the green shoots of the investment and belief that owner Lawrence Stroll has in the entire programme.



He took the helm when the squad was branded as Racing Point in 2020 and set out his vision for success, which included the shiny new HQ at the gates of Silverstone, an active recruitment process and the unrelenting quest for perfection.

Bringing the Aston Martin name back into Formula 1 in 2021 ramped up that pressure, but the initial steps were faltering. Seventh place in that season was replicated in 2022 and there was a sense of underachievement, even though those involved in the programme could see the efforts ramping up and the pathway to success was being mapped out.

Securing the services of ex-Red Bull Racing head of aerodynamics Dan Fallows allied to luring two-time F1 champion, Fernando Alonso, to the team to partner Lance Stroll meant the pressure was on for 2023. The team delivered. ►



Stroll climbs into the AMR24 at Silverstone

“I always enjoy this feeling at the start of a new campaign with this season marking my 21st as a racing driver in Formula 1...”



MOTORSPORT

FORMULA 1

The AMR23 was the second-fastest Formula 1 car over the opening portion of 2023 and Alonso was unlucky not to win in Monaco when only a pitstop blunder stopped him from going toe-to-toe with Red Bull's Max Verstappen for the victory.

While that chance slipped away, Aston Martin Racing scored eight podium finishes and was fifth in the constructors' standings. That was despite a mid-season wobble when the engineering direction of the Mercedes-powered car took a wrong turn.

The AMR24 has to build on those foundations and stamping out that awkward mid-year slump was something that has been uppermost in the minds of the boffins at Aston Martin.

Technical director Fallows admits as much: "[An] area of focus has been to broaden the car's operating window. We have focused on more versatility for a wider range of specific circuit characteristics. We want a race car that is more of an all-rounder. We believe that the AMR24 provides an ideal platform for in-season development and a season-long challenge."

Making the big leap as Aston Martin was able to do in 2023 could have been a red herring. Firstly, when the team was coming off the back of such a struggle, any gains could appear amplified. This was compounded by the fact that previous pacesetters Mercedes and Ferrari were experiencing troubles at the start of last year. All that combined to put a spring in the collective Aston Martin step, even though it might have been a slightly false dawn. After all, the road to success in Formula 1 is not a short one.

That is something that team principal Mike Krack acknowledges. "It is very easy to be an underdog," he said during the launch of the AMR24. "This team has enjoyed that status for years. It did good things with limited resources and enjoyed its occasional triumphs all the more because they were so very rare. It is easy because there are no expectations.

"On the other end of the scale, there are serial winners in Formula 1 and they have the hardest job because they are held to incredibly high standards. We're on a journey to become one of those teams and, if we are honest, we still have a huge hill to climb.



Aston Martin's technical director, Dan Fallows

Team principal, Mike Krack



"We did not record any podium finishes in 2022 but had eight last year. That provides a degree of confidence – but also raises the level of expectation. We have to learn to cope with that level of expectation, live with greater scrutiny and remain focused."

The brains trust in the design department of the AMR24 were locked in on keeping the many positive aspects of the previous machine while adding in some fresh new tweaks which it hopes will put it on a par with the opposition. Red Bull Racing won 21 of the 22 races last season, so hauling in the noisy neighbours in Milton Keynes is going to be a big ask.

Aston has taken a progressive approach so the new car is lighter (which means with the mandated minimum weight of an F1 car, 'spare' ballast can be added to various parts of the chassis to improve the handling) while attention has been paid to improving the crucial aerodynamics.

"[The AMR24] will allow the team to take another step forward in 2024," continued Krack. "Since the last race in 2023, everyone has been hyper-focused on

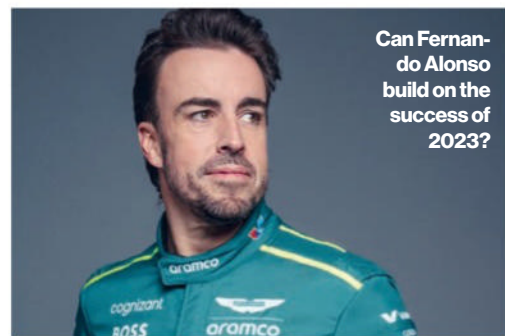


improvements in every area, concentrating our efforts on what really makes a difference, what really matters to be better.

"Almost every area of the car has been refined and improved, building on our strengths and taking on board the lessons of the previous campaign. Last year was our best season to date and our goal this season is to score regular points, podiums and fight for our first win in green."

There are some turbulent times ahead for each of the teams on the Grand Prix grid with a major rule reset, mostly centred around the hybrid powerplants, in 2026. But that doesn't mean that with stable regulations for 2024, the team has rested on its laurels. Indeed, some of the tweaks for the new machine might take a little while yet to hit the track.

The car features pushrod suspension at the front and back while there have been alterations to the floor, a crucial part of the performance package and an area where it is suspected that Aston dropped the ball with a mid-year upgrade in 2023. "Even with stable regulations," Fallows



Can Fernando Alonso build on the success of 2023?

explains, “there are endless possibilities for refinement. I would call the AMR24 a strong evolution of last year’s car and it does look quite different with many new parts to give us a strong platform for development.

“The chassis is new as well as the nose, front wing, front suspension and rear suspension. We want to compete in the development race this season and this car is designed to do just that.”

The backroom staff have worked their magic back at base, so it is now down to the stopwatch to define whether it has been a success or not. There is an intensive pre-season test programme and then two flyaway races in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia to put all the theories into practice before a small break before the Australian GP at the end of March to iron out any early-year hiccups.

It will be important for Aston to continue its trajectory, and one of the spectres which looms over the entire grid is Lewis Hamilton’s recent bombshell that he is switching from Mercedes to drive for Ferrari in 2025. While that has happened on the periphery of what Aston has

been doing, prized asset Alonso has been mentioned in passing as a possible Hamilton replacement at Merc.

While the Spaniard has said that he knows he would be “appealing” to bosses at the Silver Arrows as a future driver, his immediate focus is on the year to come. To stop any poachers tempting the talisman away, Aston bosses will hope the AMR24 can live up to its billing.

Alonso himself has been impressed with what he has seen since the end of 2023. The 42-year-old said: “I am incredibly proud of this team and what has been achieved in such a short space of time. Not only the progress on track, but the investment in all the areas off-track at the AMRTC [Aston Martin Racing Technical Centre].

“I always enjoy this feeling at the start of a new campaign with this season marking my 21st as a racing driver in Formula 1. The whole team has worked flat-out on getting the AMR24 ready for the new season, but there are so many questions to answer in testing and in the first few races. I am excited to get in the cockpit and start

my second season in green.” The initial mileage on the AMR24 was entrusted to Lance Stroll at Silverstone just hours after the wider world had first clapped eyes on the new design. He conducted the shakedown before both chassis were shipped to the Middle East to begin the competition in earnest.

Stroll was under pressure over the latter period of 2023 with some lacklustre performances and this will be a crucial year for the Canadian, regardless of whether or not his dad owns the team.

The 25-year-old is eighth season in grand prix racing and he says he has been buoyed by what he has seen in the background.

“We’re still a young team, but we’re growing up fast,” said Stroll Jr. “There’s that hunger and belief when you walk around the campus – a credit to all of the amazing people working here.

“We all want to push on from what we achieved last year, especially in the final part of the season when we made some strong progress – learning more about the car. I think that sets us up nicely for the new season and I can’t wait to get going.”

Being set up nicely for the new campaign is something that everyone involved in the project will be desperately hoping that they have achieved. It is all about building on the foundations, not wavering off course and keeping the momentum going. Just that, in itself, will be regarded as success in the year to come. **AMD**



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Quantum Works might be a relatively new specialist but as we discover, those behind it aren't

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY PAUL WALTON

WALK INTO Quantum Works' large, well-equipped and spotless workshop and due to the amount of Aston Martins being worked on, you'd think the business has been operating for decades. Yet the truth is, it's not yet 12 months old, only opening its doors during the summer of 2023.

The business might be new but the two directors behind it, Antony Jones and Jordan Holmes, aren't, having learnt their trade at an established and respected

specialist. By both starting as teenagers, together the pair have over 30 years' experience in restoring, servicing and maintaining Aston Martins of all ages.

"I'd always wanted to work on cars," Antony starts by telling me. "Living close to Pugsley & Lewis, when I was 15 my parents suggested I try and get some work experience there. When I walked in and asked, they offered me a two-week trial. Tim Lewis then wrote me a letter saying I'd been really good and they wanted me back."





Quantum Works

Quantum Works' Jordan
Holmes (left) and Antony Hope

MEET THE EXPERT

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Antony would spend 25 years with the company, mainly learning about restorations. "Tim would always build the engines and I'd build the cars and we would road test and finish them together. I learned a lot from him." Antony eventually became Pugsley & Lewis' workshop manager, responsible for the company's restorations.

Jordan's father – who owned a DB9 that was serviced by the same company – also suggested he try and get some work there. "I had just started doing my A levels," he tells me, "and I wasn't really sure if I wanted to go to university. So my dad said to Tim, would I be able to do a bit of work experience there? At the end of my second week they asked if I fancied staying on."

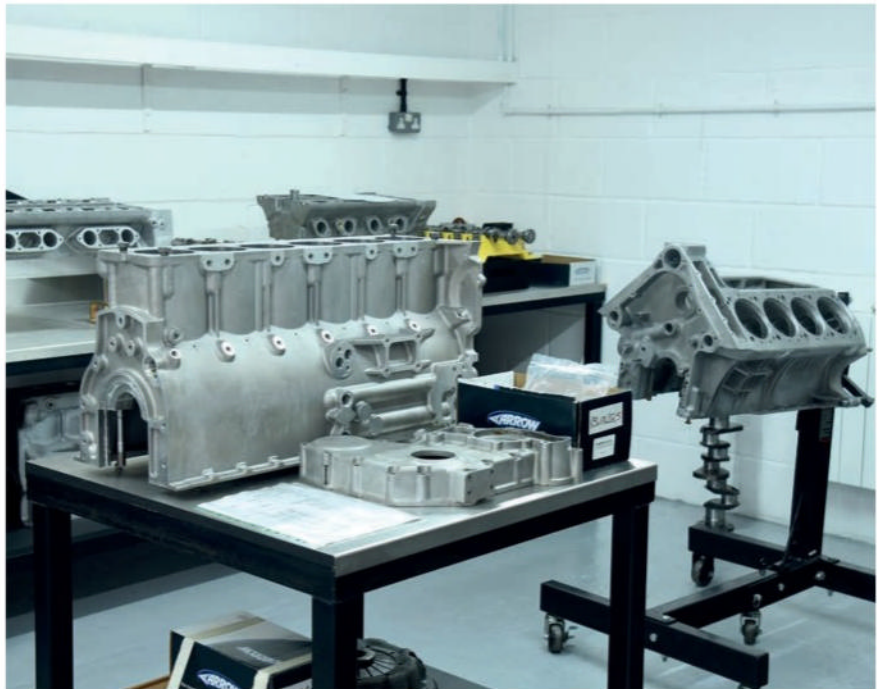
Whereas Antony concentrated on restorations, Jordan learned about rebuilding engines plus working on the more modern cars. "I was always good with the diagnostics," he tells me.

Having enjoyed working together plus their individual skill sets completing each other's, it was in late 2022 when the pair first started discussing setting up on their own. "Jordan does engines and modern cars," Antony tells me, "while I like managing the restoration projects. So between us we cover the whole range."

The pair eventually handed in their notice to Pugsley & Lewis in July 2023 ("They were shocked but we're still friends," says Antony), and they started by locating a suitable workshop for their new enterprise, finding one in Mereworth, Kent.

"It had previously been a classic car and motorbike dealer," says Antony. "The owner wanted to downsize to a smaller location and focus on motorcycles. When we researched where the closest Aston Martin garage was, there wasn't one." Although larger than they initially wanted, Jordan tells me neither did they want to get somewhere and outgrow it straight away. "It was quite daunting, though, especially when it was empty," he says with a smile.

The fact it's not within London's Ultra Low Emission Zone plus close to the M20 and therefore Dover were added bonuses. "We've already had a few inquiries from France because we're not far from the Channel Tunnel," he continues.



The clean room where Jordan rebuilds engines



Jordan inspects a carburettor ready for reassembly

MEET THE EXPERT QUANTUM WORKS LTD

This DB5 that Jordan is seen working on has been stored for several years and the engine won't start

The pair then spent a solid month working seven days a week, 14 hours a day preparing the workshop themselves. They painted the floor, put in a mezzatwelve above the office space for storage, separated a clean section for Jordan's engine rebuilds and finally installed the four car lifts they'd bought from a Mercedes-Benz dealer. "We thought we'd better do it right from the start because we wouldn't be able to do it when we became busy," remembers Jordan.

It was a good plan because ever since Quantum Works opened its doors in August 2023, it's been busy from the outset. They reckon there are two reasons for this. Firstly, word of mouth ▶



Antony inspects the underneath of a V8 Vantage Volante



Recent employee Matt Ford works on the engine of a V8 Vantage saloon with a V8 Vantage NC430 in front



Quantum Works' clean, spacious and very busy workshop located in Mereworth, Kent

MEET THE EXPERT

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from their early customers who were clearly happy with their work has been important. Plus, they also offer a pre-purchase inspection on cars that are for sale both privately or through a dealer. Says Antony, "It gives the customer either peace of mind or clearly shows what they've potentially got to spend to make it right." With cars often having little issues, their pre-inspection customers usually ask Quantum Works to sort them out.

Their knowledge together with the diagnostic equipment they've invested in means Antony and Jordan are able to work on anything from the early DB models from the early Fifties all the way through to those made in 2018.

This was clearly illustrated on the day of my visit when their sizeable workshop was filled with a variety of Aston Martins. These ranged from a beautiful DB5 with an engine that won't start after being stored for several years and a rare V8 Vantage Zagato Volante in for recommissioning to a more recent V8 Vantage NC430 waiting to be serviced.

They've already had to take on their first member of staff, Matt Ford, an engineer with experience in both the motor racing and aviation industries who dropped his CV into the office. "We weren't looking for someone," admits Antony. "Then we had a job that we thought would be ideal for someone with experience and not a total apprentice." And so similar to how Pugsley & Lewis treated them, they gave Matt a week's trial. "He was absolutely fantastic," finishes Antony, "and really seemed to enjoy it."

Enjoying working on these cars is important to them both since they're equally passionate about Aston Martins. "We love these cars and the customers get that from us," says Jordan. "We had one man in with a V8 Vantage S who said he couldn't believe how passionate we are about the cars."

They tell me they complete the majority of the work in-house but for the few areas they don't, Antony already knows all the right people to contact. "I was the one at Pugsley & Lewis who dealt with the body people, the paint shop and the trimmers." This means the level of their work is just as high as specialists who have been around for much longer.



Just three of the amazing cars in the workshop at the same time; a DB5, Zagato Volante and V8 Vantage Volante

Quantum Works also offers an array of sensible upgrades for classic cars, anything from an air-conditioning system Antony is currently working on to a suspension package to improve the handling of the older cars. "We spend a lot of time with the customer to discover what they want from their car," he tells me. "Do they want to compete in concours, meaning originality is important? We can do that. Or do they want something they take to the south of France and enjoy. Then that's what we'll give them."

From holding workshop open days to even developing an Aston Martin racing car for Jordan – who already competes –

to drive, it's clear that this relatively young but eager pair have plenty of plans for the future.

And due to how much they've already accomplished in such a small space of time, I have no doubt they'll achieve it all. **AMD**

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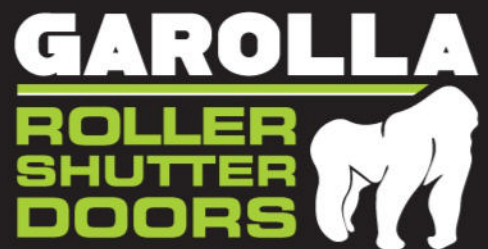
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FROM THE CLUBHOUSE



Members' Germany Tour

A group of AMOC Members and friends share their experience of touring Germany with their beloved Aston Martins



The cars assembled for a synchronised start

The Aston Martin Owners Club Area 7 (South East London & Kent) tour to Germany in 2019 was such a success that we decided to repeat the experience recently. Taking part were 17 Astons from Area 7, six belonging to German AMOC Members, one guest from Sevenoaks & District Motor Club, and further guest cars who joined us for some of the days.

The rendezvous was the Hotel Maashof in Venlo, Netherlands, which is close to the German border and despite the Channel Tunnel experiencing some delays, the journey was fairly straightforward apart from some gridlock around Antwerp, which is not an unusual occurrence.

Being amongst the last to arrive, we joined the others for dinner and discovered that a couple of us had been inducted into 'The Three Wheel Aston Club' during the last year having suddenly lost a rear wheel, apparently due to metal fatigue!



Cruise ship fresh from the factory



A beautiful sunset following a visit to the wind turbine manufacturer

After breakfast next morning we set off into Germany, with some members taking advantage of the derestricted sections of autobahn to put their cars through their paces. Our destination was the Hotel Am Schloss in Aurich in the Friesland area of north Germany which was to be our base for exploring the area over the next few days. The hotel was very well appointed, and the underground car park was reserved for our use, primarily for the older cars with newer models parked at surface level with 24-hour security.

Friday saw us set out on our first visit following the directions in the superb

roadbook that our organiser and his team had prepared for us. This took us to the passenger terminal at Harlesiel for the newly inaugurated fast ferry service to Wangerooge, the easternmost inhabited Frisian Island in the Wadden Sea National Park.

From the ferry terminal at the western end of the island we took the narrow-gauge railway to the village in its centre and walked to a restaurant facing the North Sea on a lovely sunny day for our 'second breakfast'. We were then free to explore the island before catching the train and ferry back to our cars for the return drive to the hotel. We enjoyed a buffet dinner then retreated to the bar, a theme most evenings.

We were starting to get into the swing of things by Saturday and, after an early breakfast, we set off for Wilhelmshaven which had secure parking on the quay. We had a boat tour of the harbour and container terminal and a peek out into the North Sea. All this whilst dodging torrential rain, probably the first time many of the Astons had been exposed to such conditions.

This was to be our longest day of activity as after dinner we were off again, this time to Park der Gärten, an extensive botanical garden that is illuminated at night for three weeks each year – a truly magical experience, but easy to get lost!

After another early breakfast on Sunday it was off again, this time to Leer and Schloss Evenburgh. This picturesque castle dating from 1650 is set in parkland and approached along a magnificent avenue of trees. Guided tours of the castle followed with a 'second breakfast' around midday. Then it was back to Aurich to visit Enercon, a manufacturer of wind turbines, for another tour.

Afterwards we returned to Leer. We parked in the city centre and had time to explore its historic streets before an exceptional dinner at the 'Zur Waage' restaurant adjacent to the river.

Monday saw us touring through a countryside very reminiscent of the Dutch landscape, with canals, bridges, and windmills, to Papenburg. Our venue was Meyer Werft – one of the world's leading manufacturers of cruise ships. We were treated to an extensive tour. The ships are

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- 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'

assembled in sections and gradually built up in a covered dry dock, then floated out into the river for completion while moored up alongside the factory. Anything over 70m high is added while on the river, as that is the maximum height that can float out through the dry dock doors. During our visit they were working on one of several ships that they have built for Disney Cruises.

Feeling peckish we travelled a short distance to Alte Werft, the original shipyard, for a German sausage-themed barbecue lunch. We all parked inside an old factory building where our hosts had organised a synchronised engine start comprising 24 Astons, a Jaguar, Bentley and a Ferrari Superfast. All cars started on cue and with approximately 12,000bhp, it was impressively loud.

Another scenic drive followed as we returned to the hotel for our final dinner. Tuesday saw us depart after breakfast for the Channel Tunnel on a variety of routes through Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium.

Huge thanks go to the organisers for a magnificent tour. **AMD**

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We take a look at the career of the only person to win a Drivers' Championship with the DBR9, Pedro Lamy

ASTON MARTIN *drivers*

WITH TIME spent in F1, endurance racing and touring cars, Pedro Lamy is one of Portugal's most experienced drivers. He's also the only one of the many who have raced the DBR9 to have won a championship with the car, when he took the 2006 Le Mans Endurance Series.

José Pedro Mourão Lamy Viçoso was born in Aldeia Galega da Merceana on the west coast of Portugal on 20th March 1972. He started racing motorbikes from the age of six before progressing to karts seven years later. Lamy won the 1989 Portuguese Formula Ford Championship, his debut year in single-seaters, before moving to Formula Opel Lotus Euroseries the following year and winning the series at his second attempt.

"That changed my future a lot," said Lamy during a 2019 interview. "When I was just racing in Portugal, I didn't know how competitive I would be. So that championship in 1991 meant a lot to me."

He moved to Germany to race in the local Formula 3 Series, taking the title in 1992, before moving to European F3000 where he finished second.

Thanks to these successes, he was asked by Team Lotus to replace the injured Alex Zanardi for the final four races of the 1993 Formula 1 season. Although he scored no points, he was signed with the Norfolk-based team for the following year, but a crash while testing at Silverstone in May, which broke both his legs and wrists, meant he missed all but the first four races.

Lamy returned to F1 halfway through 1995 with Minardi, scoring his first and only point at the last race of the season in Adelaide when he finished sixth. He stayed

with the Italian team for the following year but a lack of resources meant the car received little development and his highest placed finish was ninth at the 1996 San Marino Grand Prix in May.

With no F1 seat available, he moved to the FIA GT Championship for 1997, winning the 1998 GT2 class with a Chrysler Viper. He also competed in the Deutsche Tourenwagen Masters for Mercedes plus the V8 Star Series, which he won in 2003.



In 2004, Lamy took the GTS class of the Le Mans Endurance Series for the French Larbre Compétition team in a Ferrari 550 Maranello which had been developed by Prodrive that was doing the same with the DB9. "That's how I got to race for Aston Martin," he said during a 2018 interview in *Motorsport*. "We won the LMES in 2004 and George [Howard-Chappell, AMR boss] came and asked me to race for Aston Martin."

Lamy competed for AMR in the American Le Mans Series, taking three victories in 2006 with French teammate, Stéphane Sarrazin, at Lime Rock, Mosport and Laguna Seca. "We won a lot of races in America," he continued in *Motorsport*. "We had a really great time."

The Portuguese driver also continued with Larbre Compétition who in 2006 had switched to the DBR9 for the five-

race-long European Le Mans Series. After winning at Istanbul, Nürburgring and finishing second at Jarama, he earned enough points to take the GT1 Championship. Despite the many DBR9 victories across the globe, this was the car's sole driver's crown.

This success with Aston Martin led Lamy to sign for Peugeot the following year to race its 908 HDi FAP sports prototype. Another successful time for the Portuguese driver, he twice finished second overall at the 24 Hours of Le Mans plus won the top LMP1 category of the 2007 European Le Mans Series.

When Peugeot closed the doors on its prototype project at the end of the 2011 season, the Portuguese driver returned to Aston Martin. Although he never repeated his success at Le Mans, he did get close in 2015, only for Canadian teammate Paul Dalla Lana to crash with an hour to go. "We were leading by almost a lap," said Lamy in 2018. "It's always difficult when you have something in your hands and you lose it."

Together with the Austrian Mathias Lauda and Dalla Lana, Lamy took the 2017 GTE Am Drivers' Championship of the World Endurance Championship with a Vantage GTE.

Following two races in 2020 (the 24 Hours of Daytona when he retired following a crash and the 8 Hours of Bahrain that saw him finish 22nd overall), Lamy hung up his helmet for good.

"If my body is OK, I'll surf every day. It doesn't matter where, I just like to surf."

Although not a household name, despite reaching F1, Lamy still enjoyed a long and successful career in motorsport. And with two championships and several race victories, he remains one of Aston Martin's most decorated drivers. **AMD**

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