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# A VARIED APPROACH

**T**WO OF the most common questions I'm asked are, "Do you want fries with that?" and, "How do we fill a magazine six times a year about a company as small as Aston Martin?"

The answer to the first is simple; always yes.

As for the second, while it's true the firm has produced as many cars in its 111-year history as Mercedes-Benz does in 12 months, they've all been incredibly varied.

Take the cars featured in this issue. From the rare Italian-designed V8 Zagato to the equally scarce DBS Vantage manual, the iconic DB4 to the extremely fast Vantage GT8 (pictured above), other than the famous winged badge on their noses, they have very little in common. It's these differences that makes the Aston Martin brand so fascinating to cover and why, like fries at a fast-food restaurant, we'll never run out of fabulous and interesting cars to feature.



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**Paul Walton**  
Editor

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# UP FRONT NEWS

## LATEST FIA SAFETY CAR



**The latest Vantage FIA safety car that will be used throughout the 2024 season has been revealed. Described by Aston Martin as the “most driver-focused Vantage ever,” it has been perfectly tuned and uniquely equipped to lead the F1 grid around some of the world’s most daunting tracks.**

Powered by a potent, hand-built 4.0 twin-turbo V8, such is the performance of the new road-going Vantage, it required no engine upgrade, no changes to its cooling system and no upgrade in braking

performance to adapt it for its role as the FIA safety car.

Bernd Mayländer, FIA’s safety car driver, said, “It is a pleasure to drive the Aston Martin Vantage. The car comes from an incredible bloodline and this newest version is the fastest yet. My first impressions were very positive as I could immediately feel the improvement in handling and, of course, power. We need a car that is fast and focused so we can respond quickly and safely when we receive the call for on-track deployment and Vantage provides that. I have enjoyed driving Vantage during the past three seasons and I’m happy to now be one of the first to drive the new Vantage and experience its full performance pedigree on the world’s greatest circuits.”

To become the official FIA safety car, the Vantage has additional, modified underfloor aerodynamics, along with an extended and profiled front splitter. For extra downforce, a new rear wing has been specifically fitted in a bespoke position with a tuned Gurney flap. The FIA lightbar has also received new aero-profiling as every millisecond of performance is vital whilst leading the





# HALLMARK TO JOIN ASTON MARTIN



**Aston Martin has announced former Bentley chairman and chief executive officer Adrian Hallmark will join the company as an executive director and CEO no later than 1 October 2024 replacing current CEO Amedeo Felisa.**

Hallmark (61) will bring more than 25 years of highly successful senior automotive experience from the US, Europe, and Asia with companies such as Bentley, Porsche, JLR and Volkswagen.

Said Hallmark, "Like many working within the ultra-luxury segment, I have admired the continued transformation of Aston Martin's brand and products from afar and feel honoured to have the opportunity to work with Lawrence Stroll, the board and the company's employees to lead its next chapter.

"The transformation of Aston Martin is one of the most exciting projects within the ultra-luxury automotive industry. I am looking forward to continuing the company's great momentum and utilising my experience and passion to further unleash this iconic brand's potential and

take it to even greater success."

Ensuring a smooth transition in leadership, 77-year-old Amedeo Felisa will remain as chief executive officer until Hallmark takes up his post. "It has been a great privilege to serve as Aston Martin's chief executive officer," said Felisa, "leading our iconic brand through this exciting era. I am incredibly proud of the progress made over the last two years, which has aligned Aston Martin for a positive future direction. I believe now is the right time to allow the company to transition to new leadership."

After joining Bentley in 2018, Hallmark has overseen a turnaround at the Crewe-based company, with profits rising ten-fold in the past five years, and the company has set out a strategy to sell only electric models from early next decade, experience that will no doubt be of interest to Aston Martin.

According to Bentley, Hallmark was leaving "at his own request and by mutual consent." He will be Aston Martin's fourth CEO since Lawrence Stroll bought the company in 2020.



pack of F1 cars with rapidly cooling tyres. Inside, the production seats have been replaced by competition versions to keep Mayländer and his passenger firmly in place at speed. A bespoke centre console is fitted with switchgear to work the FIA systems, along with screens showing live lap times, the track positioning of all of the cars and a rear-view camera. Although functional, the safety car is still an Aston Martin, so the interior has been finished in a unique Lime Essence trim in a nod to the marque's own racing colours. As in previous years, the cars will be painted in the same Aston Martin Racing Green as the company's Formula One cars.





# GT3 TAKES WEC DOUBLE PODIUM

**The new Aston Martin Vantage GT3 took a brilliant double LMGT3 class podium on its debut in a thrilling opening round of the 2024 FIA World Endurance Championship (WEC), held for the first time at the Lusail International Circuit in Qatar on Saturday 2 March.**

Racing in the new-for-2024 LMGT3 class, the US-based Heart of Racing team, and its drivers Ian James (GBR), Daniel Mancinelli (ITA) and Alex Riberas (ESP), narrowly missed out on a maiden class victory at world level, having led the Qatar 1812 Km for large periods of the event. Ultimately, the team finished a mere five seconds behind the winning car after a storming drive.

Second place was the Heart of Racing's best result on only its fifth race in the WEC, and marks its second consecutive podium finish, after the team was placed third in the 2023 8 Hours of Bahrain finale last November.

Underlining the exciting potential of the new Vantage GT3, D'station Racing also



delivered its second consecutive podium finish with third place, after charging through the order in the second half of the race. It was the perfect reward for the Japanese-run squad whose Vantage GT3 was driven by French WEC debutants Clément Mateu and Erwan Bastard, as well as three-time FIA World Endurance Champion Marco Sørensen (DEN).

Said Adam Carter, Aston Martin's head of Endurance Motorsport, "This was a very promising start for the new Aston Martin Vantage GT3, underlining

its potential both as a competitive racing car and as an accessible platform for racing drivers of all levels to extract the maximum performance from it. WEC must also be congratulated for the new format it has introduced with the LMGT3 class, which proved highly competitive, and entertaining, and is a great platform for rival manufacturers to compete on an equal footing. We now move on to the next round at Imola, confident that we can build on this strong opening result and in the knowledge there is more to come from our new Vantage."

## ALONSO STAYS WITH ASTON MARTIN

**Double F1 world champion Fernando Alonso has signed to stay with Aston Martin in Formula 1 for the next two seasons. The deal will see the 42-year-old Spaniard – who was out of contract at the end of this year – stay with the British team until he is 45, and possibly beyond.**

Alonso said retirement "never went to my mind", adding, "I felt I love driving too much to stop at the moment." Staying at Aston Martin was a "natural decision", once he had made up his mind that he was prepared to make the life sacrifices that would be required by staying in F1.

"Securing Fernando's long-term future with Aston Martin is fantastic news," said team principal Mike Krack. "We have built a strong working relationship over the last 18 months and we share the same determination to see this project succeed.

We have been in constant dialogue over the last few months and Fernando has been true to his word: when he decided he wanted to continue racing, he talked to us first. Fernando has shown he believes in us, and we believe in him."

Krack went on to say the driver is "hungry for success, driving better than ever, is fitter than ever," and "he is completely dedicated to making Aston Martin a competitive force."

The decision will stop the rumours about Alonso going to Red Bull or Mercedes next season. He did admit to talking to other teams, but said, "I felt the most wanted in Aston Martin. The other conversations were just light and maybe more time was needed, whereas in Aston there was a clear desire to work together."

Alonso was widely regarded as one of the outstanding performers of the 2023 season, which saw him return to

the podium for the first time since 2013, six times in the first eight races. Had the team made the right choice of tyres in a late-race rain shower, he could have also beaten world champion Max Verstappen's Red Bull to victory in Monaco.

Despite a disappointing start to the 2024 season which has seen him score just 24 points from the first four races, Alonso choosing to stay at Aston Martin is a big vote of confidence in the team as it seeks to move towards the front of the grid.







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# PRODUCTS

## CORDLESS INFLATER

Machine Mart has recently launched a new battery powered tyre inflator from its Clarke range. The on-board air compressor can inflate anything from a football to a car tyre using a range of supplied adaptors. Powered by a 2Ah 7.4-volt rechargeable lithium-ion battery, which takes up to seven hours to fully charge, this tyre inflator has a 15cm-long USB-C charging cable. It also has an inbuilt torch and everything is contained in a storage bag.

**Price: £57.59 inc VAT**

**Web: [www.machinemart.co.uk](http://www.machinemart.co.uk)**



## KEY SAFE

New from Defender Security Products is this compact key safe that offers greater interior space because the locking mechanism is located within the door. DSP says it can store up to ten keys on one keyring. It has passed stringent attack testing to LPS 1174 Issue 8, resulting in it achieving the UK police-accredited Secured by Design standard. Known as the Defender Pro-TEC Police Preferred key safe, it has over 4,000 possible code combinations from its 12 buttons.

**Price: £49.95 inc VAT**

**Web: [defendersecurityproducts.co.uk](http://defendersecurityproducts.co.uk)**



## CERAMIC WASH

Autoglym has recently launched Ceramic Wash & Protect, an easy-to-use triple-action ceramic car shampoo that delivers a deep clean, creates a smooth high-gloss shine plus leaves a durable water repellent layer of protection.

The product contains Autoglym's new shampoo-specific ceramic technology that creates a protective barrier superior to that offered by conventional car-wash products. This also cuts the time and effort required to dry the car and ensures the next clean can be completed more quickly.

**Price: £24.99 (one-litre bottle)**

**Web: [www.autoglym.com](http://www.autoglym.com)**

## F1 POLO SHIRT

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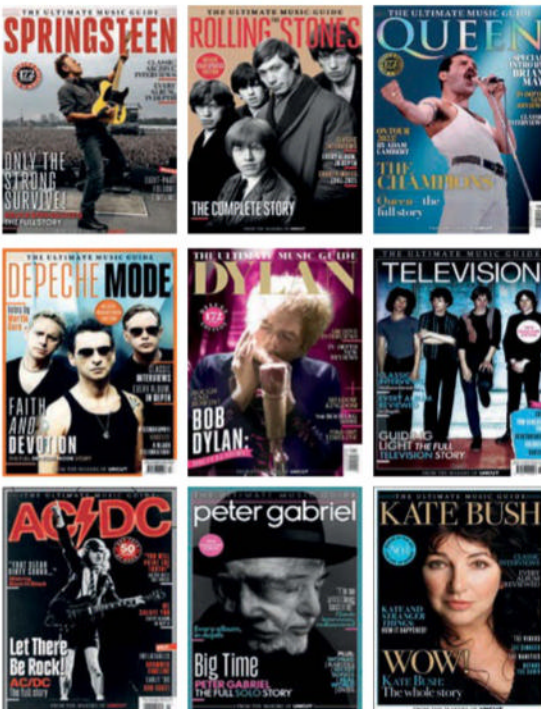
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# GARRY TAYLOR

THE CYGNET PROBLEM – SOLVED?



**I**N EARLY 2019, the Aston Martin Heritage Trust was fortunate to display the one-off Aston Martin V8 Cygnet that had a 4.7-litre from a Vantage S somehow squeezed under the bonnet. It was a visitor draw and the common view was, “Now that is what the Cygnet should have been.”

If only that was the case, because if you want to get a lively reaction from an Aston Martin enthusiast just mention Cygnet. Describing it as a Marmite car doesn't even cover it – many loath it to the core and for some others, well, there is not much love to spread around. Yet so few have actually seen a car in the metal let alone sat in one.

There's been plenty written on why the Cygnet failed, having only produced 798 cars against a projected 4,000 annually over its brief lifespan, but I feel the reason why there's so much anger directed at it for not being a real Aston Martin was because no mechanical changes were made whatsoever to its Toyota iQ origins. Furthermore, it sounded like a washing machine on a fast spin. Hardly the V8 of that unique model. It also apparently stretched credibility being just an iQ with a fancy grille and leather interior, and nobody was buying that idea of a luxury urban runabout.

I suspect Aston Martin knew they had to overcome the 'not invented here' obstacle because at the AMHT we have a copy of the Dealer Marketing Toolbox explaining everything about the car. In its Key Message section, it says, “The Cygnet is an Aston Martin; the same materials and levels of craftsmanship as our sports cars;

same levels of personalisation as our sports cars; sold and serviced through AM dealers.” I cannot imagine a DB12 Toolbox having to refer to the car as a real Aston Martin by way of reassurance.

I feel Aston Martin missed an easy trick to lift it above the iQ entrapment just by changing the exhaust. Do bear with me. Being a Cygnet owner (the car in the above image is mine) one of my frustrations was the driving experience. The appalling understeer at speed I can deal with but not the engine noise, or lack of it. So when

my local dealer fitted a QuickSilver sports exhaust it was transformed. Not only a power hike (okay, 3bhp is hardly a hike) but it had better acceleration through the gears and a pleasant, muted rumble in the cabin. Suddenly it wasn't a fancy iQ but maybe, just maybe, an Aston Martin.

Perhaps the company didn't go down that route, or even super/turbo charging as it was rumoured, due to very expensive type approval or further crash testing since the iQ had already ticked those boxes.

Owners today have a very rare car fetching solid prices and I am sensing a softening of the sour attitude. Not everyone will change their minds but not everyone has sat in the luxurious cabin or even driven one – flash exhaust or not.

***It sounded like a washing machine on a fast spin***

---

**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](http://www.amht.org.uk))**





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# GUY WYLES

GROWING UP WITH ASTONS



**M**Y FASCINATION with speed started in childhood with a Yamaha PW50 scrambler and grew with the engines, from the petulant 125s to the thumping 450s.

Mobile phones weren't commonplace then, and my friends and I would race the local lads on scooters in the nearby fields. They were carefree days and my understanding of money was gauged by how much petrol it would buy.

As might be clear, I was lucky enough to have relaxed and encouraging parents. Importantly, though, they were (and still are) diehard petrolheads to the extent that certain jokes aren't amusing in our household. Like suggesting a Ferrari for a wedding car or a fondness for Teslas.

April Fools' Day was a particularly vibrant time of year, and my father has always been a skilled practitioner. When I was 11 and having suffered his pranks for years, my mother, sister and I hit back by hiding several of his Astons in a nearby field. We even mocked up a break-in, with great success. It's safe to say he was not amused.

One of the few rules growing up was 'no riding motorbikes on the public road' and so at 17 I bought a 1978 MGB Roadster in Pageant Blue, which I helped rebuild (read as, got in the way) at Chiltern Aston during the summer holiday. The hideous and extremely heavy rubber bumpers were removed, the suspension lowered, and the original asthmatic engine swapped for a tuned 2.0-litre.

I drove the car to the Benicàssim music festival in southern Spain the day after we had fitted the engine, somehow finding a garage at 6pm on the Saturday evening in the South of France for its first oil change. I still own 'JLO' (pictured above) and drove it to the office the day I wrote this.

## *I once 'borrowed' my father's V8 Vantage*

My father had worked with Aston Martins since 1968, when he started the business, meaning our front drive was often teaming with several examples. And so I grew up, quite literally, around these beautiful cars. Naturally this incurred some untoward behaviour and more than a little risk.

My sister's first bicycle ride without stabilisers was a panic-stricken moment for the spectators when she careered towards one of his cars, ending in a 'dad dash' any fielder would be proud of.

She later chipped the paintwork of another having opened the door a little too forcefully. We had this corrected at the workshop and managed to keep the episode hidden from our parents for many years – no mean feat! I will always be grateful to the Chiltern bodywork team for that.

It wasn't just my sister. I once 'borrowed' my father's V8 Vantage while he was in the States and stupidly thundered past his preferred pub in the local village, which assured

my undoing. Our proximity to these expensive hand-built cars wasn't always a liability, though, and proved useful at times.

We lived less than a mile from the workshops and could always tell when Dad was setting off for home if he was driving an Aston, as he often did.

For an imminent trip to Le Mans, my father removed the silencers from the optional big bore exhaust of his V8 Vantage V550, much to my delight at the time. After his tinkering you could hear him coming from several miles away, giving ample warning were one to be having an illicit cigarette, for instance.

---

**After growing up with these cars, Guy is now a director at established marque specialist, Chiltern Aston ([chilternaston.co.uk](http://chilternaston.co.uk))**



## The Twelve in titanium: a new case of precious mettle.



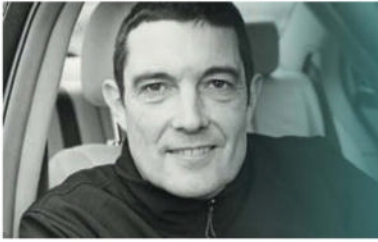
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**Do your research.**



[christopherward.com](http://christopherward.com)





# ROB HAWKINS

WHO WOULD WANT TO BUY A DB4?



**W**HILST WRITING the buying guide to the DB4 in this issue of *AMD*, I couldn't answer a niggling question in the back of my mind concerning who would be seriously interested in what I had to say. And the reason for such a thought is because of the cost of buying a DB4. If you can find a restoration project, then don't expect much change out of £150k, but it will have to remain in an unroadworthy condition unless you have nearly twice that amount spare to restore it.

Should you want to skip the gamble of buying a restoration project and instead find an example you can drive, then prepare to spend at least half a million quid, or several millions if you want something special, such as a Zagato.

So, it might be one of the most beautiful and desirable Astons made to date, but the DB4 is unaffordable for most of us, or is it? That all depends. Those values I mentioned sound eye-watering. Few of us have a spare half a million pounds lying around in a bank account to even consider investing in a DB4, but there is another side to this argument that's not so straightforward to explain.

Not surprisingly, most people are in this price league, but not through choice, but circumstance. And the housing market is the reason with its over-inflated prices.

In the UK for instance, the average house price at present according to some sources is almost £300k. That's twice the price of buying a dilapidated DB4. Whilst this doesn't mean we should all consider buying a DB4, what it does illustrate is that there are some

aspects of life that we currently accept as being expensive and potentially unaffordable, but we have to find a way of paying for it.

Brand-new cars, especially electric vehicles are another example of this argument, with the likes of Porsche's Taycan range costing £90-£100k, yet owners seem to find a way of acquiring them through leasing for instance instead of buying them outright.

Should you manage to find a way of buying a DB4, then the next hurdle concerns the costs of running and repairing it. For a vehicle that's so expensive to buy, surely the cost of parts is going to be crippling.

This is where my buying guide really got me thinking. The cost of parts is not extortionate and many of the mechanical components can be found on other vehicles, so they are more readily available than expected. Brake components for instance, consist of parts made by Dunlop, Girling and Lockheed,

and the differential is a Salisbury 4 HA. Many of these parts are still available and not too costly – a brake caliper costs around £200, which is almost a third of the price of one for a DB7 Vantage.

I admit though that there are some potentially painful and unexpected costs, as with any high-performance car. An engine rebuild can easily cost around £25k, but if you know anyone with a TDV6 engine Range Rover or Land Rover who has had to pay for a new engine, then such an amount isn't too terrifying.

My arguments for buying a DB4 may leave you wondering what the answer is, and I'm not trying to say that everyone is rich enough to afford these cars. But we are in a world where high values are in some cases part of life.

*For a vehicle that's  
so expensive to buy,  
surely the cost of  
parts is going to be  
crippling*



# ITALIAN RIE

Twenty-five years after the DB4 GT Zagato, Aston Martin once again turned to the Italians to clothe one of its cars. The result was an Eighties supercar icon, the V8 Zagato. But is the car worthy of its ancestry?

**WORDS** PAUL WALTON  
**PHOTOGRAPHY** ROBERT GEORGE

**J**EALOUSY. IT can do odd things to an average person. It can make the most placid of husbands get into fist fights over their wives, make normally careful neighbours become debt-ridden as they try to compete with each other and transforms usually careful drivers into Max Verstappen if they're overtaken by lesser powered cars.

It can also make owners of a tiny but prestigious car manufacturer instigate one of the most memorable cars of the Eighties even though the company was severely broke at the time.

When Aston Martin's then chairman, Victor Gauntlett, was at the 1984 Geneva Motor Show and witnessed how many deposits Ferrari and Porsche were taking for ▶





# NAISSANCE





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### V8 ZAGATO

their 288 GTO and Gruppe B prototype (later called the 959) respectively, he grew jealous. He too wanted a slice of this emerging low volume supercar market.

The fact that the company had no money for such a car didn't deter him. With Aston Martin's brand just as strong as those of the Italian and German companies, Gauntlett reckoned it was possible to re-create the same high level of interest with its own low volume model. He reasoned this would be especially true if Aston Martin joined forces with another iconic name that originally worked with the British firm a quarter of a century earlier and had designed one of its most famous models.

And so, while still at the show, Victor together with Aston Martin's major shareholder, Peter Livanos, went to see the Zagato brothers, the Italian designers who had been responsible for the DB4 GT Zagato of the Sixties. Would Gianni and Elio be interested in designing a high-performance, low volume car based

on the existing V8 Vantage chassis? The answer was an immediate yes.

"They were very enthusiastic," Victor told me during an interview with him in 2000, three years before he passed away, "and I got the impression they had been waiting to follow their famous Sixties Aston Martin DB4 for some time."

The result is one of the most enigmatic yet still controversial cars in the company's long history; the V8 Zagato. The hard and angular lines might have been very different from both the car it was based on and its DB4 ancestor, but an uprated engine made it incredibly powerful.

Four decades after the project started, is it time to reassess the car and its impact it made on the company?

Things moved swiftly after the Geneva Motor Show. In April 1984, Livanos together with the company's then director of engineering, Michael Bowler, visited Carrozzeria Zagato in Milan to discuss the car's brief including its specification and performance targets.







It needed to use the same 5.3-litre V8 and ZF-sourced five-speed gearbox as the Vantage, and also break the 300kph (180mph) barrier that the Ferrari 288 GTO and Porsche 959 were expected to reach. But with the V8 considered to be at the limit of its development, the car must also be lighter than the standard model plus have a lower drag coefficient.

More importantly, due to expensive and timely recertification constraints, few changes could be made to the V8 Vantage's existing chassis. "To build a completely new car would have taken too much time and money that we simply didn't have," explained Gauntlett to me in 2000.

In July of that year, Gianni Zagato and the company's chief designer, Giuseppe Mittino, went to Newport Pagnell to show Aston Martin's management some early design outlines. Although very different to the standard model or any other Aston Martin for that matter, Gauntlett still liked what he was presented with. "As soon as I





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saw the sketches,” he continued to me in 2000, “I thought, ‘We’re off!’”

Not everyone was quite so positive, though. “There was a pill to swallow with the design – there’s no doubt about it – but everybody appreciated we had to work with the fixed points we had got,” said Kingsley Riding-Felce, Aston Martin’s then UK sales manager, during a 2022 interview. “You can’t just move things about without spending considerable money on crash testing.”

It was around this time that Aston Martin decided to limit production of the new car to just 50 examples. The figure was deemed the right balance between retaining exclusivity but also for recuperating design, development and tooling costs.

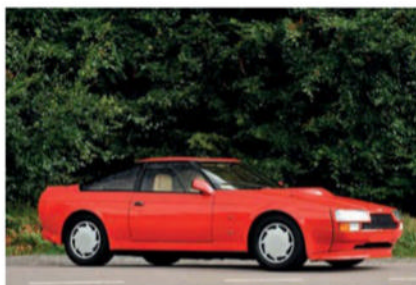
A sketch of the car was revealed to the press and public on 1 March 1985. Due to the allure of these two iconic companies joining forces once again, a drawing and basic specification sheet was deemed adequate to create all the interest required to sell the car. And sure enough, by August of the same year, 50 customers had laid down the requisite £30k deposit for a car that they hadn’t yet seen never mind driven.

“There was a backbone of customers from the Middle East, Europe and the UK,” explained David Eales – then head of Aston Martin’s Works Service – in 2022, “guys who would have one of everything we produced.”

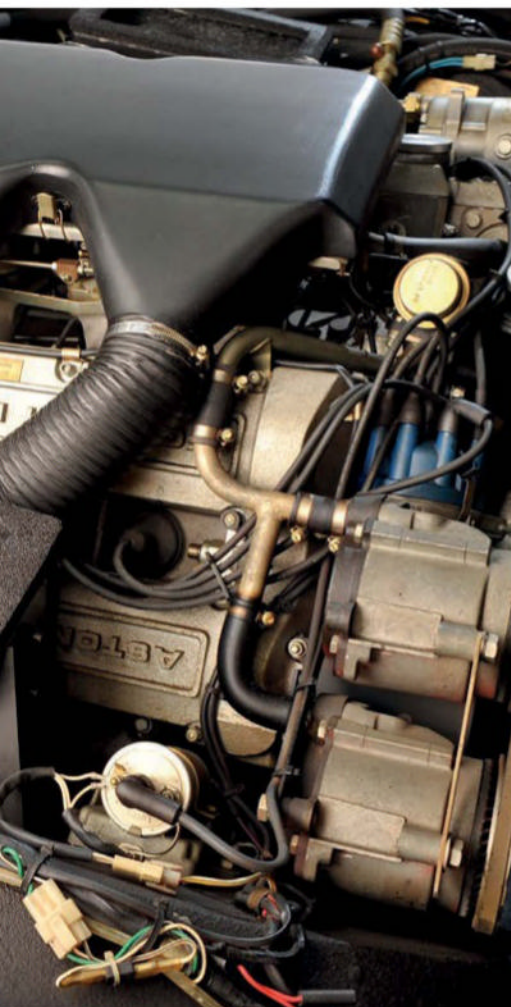
When the Zagato was announced in 1985, the car’s original price was £87k, but by the time customers took delivery a year later, this had increased to £95k.

Incredibly, the finished car made its debut at the 1986 Geneva Motor Show, just 12 months after the design was revealed. “To go from sketches to complete pilot production cars in 12 months is very rapid progress,” admitted Bowler at the time, “which can only be achieved when two companies can work together as well as Aston Martin and Zagato have done.”

Gauntlett also praised working with the famed carrozzeria. “The [Zagato] brothers are wonderfully Italian,” he said to me in 2000, “and by that I mean they have a positive Italian temperament that never wants to let you down. It was a pleasure







to work with them.” As well as cars on both the Aston Martin and Zagato stands, a third example was placed on the roof of the Beau Rivage Hotel that overlooks Geneva’s Lac Léman. “We were trying to make a statement,” continued Kingsley in 2022. “When you think of the size of Jaguar and Ford, and there was little old Aston Martin that managed to draw so much press by putting the car on the roof – everyone at the motor show had to drive past it every day. They must have thought, ‘God almighty, Aston has done it to us again’. It certainly got us talked about.”

With its wide DB2-like grille, there was no doubting the car’s heritage but although it used the same wheelbase as the Vantage, at 14ft 4.75in, the car was around a foot shorter giving it a much squatter appearance while its lines were squarer and more angular.

“Mittino designed a perfect line for the body, the car was super-flat,” explained Elio Zagato’s son and the company’s current CEO, Andrea, in 2022. “We were trying to do something futuristic, like the Lagonda was.”

Together with the discreet but still evident ‘double bubble’ roof, a long-standing Zagato trademark, the result was a very dramatic and unique-looking car.

But alas the critics were not always complimentary about its design especially compared to the original DB4 Zagato. “Aesthetically, the new car is very distant from the old,” opined *Motorsport* in its September 1987 issue, “its forms are linear, extruded rather than plastic; its headlamps rather intrude on a flattened but still recognisable grille, and front heavy bunched-tail profile has been supplanted by a shallow Eighties wedge with a separate glass area added.”

Yet when I spoke to Gauntlett 14 years after the car’s debut, he remained unrepentant about the direction of its design. “You always get resistance when launching a new car and you can’t please everyone,” he told me. “Aston Martin couldn’t sell the original Zagato DB4 and yet they are worth a fortune today.” Unsurprisingly, Gauntlett bought one (still owning it when I spoke to him in 2000) as did Peter Livanos.

One of the most controversial aspects of the design was the power bulge to

house the airbox for the quad Weber 48 IDF carburetors. The car was supposed to have the same Magneti Marelli fuel-injection system that Aston Martin had recently introduced for the standard V8 model, which would have resulted in a flat bonnet. But it was later decided this would not have produced the sufficient power needed to achieve the desired 300kph top speed.

Said Andrea Zagato in 2022, “At the last minute they [Aston Martin] asked for the bubble [for the carburetors]; we said we’d do it, but we didn’t like it at all.”

Those Webers together with high-lift camshafts, larger porting to the cylinder heads plus a 10.2:1 compression ratio resulted in a 410bhp version of the V8, later called the 580X, that was originally developed for the standard Vantage.

Zagato had initially wanted a drag coefficient of 0.29, but using the University of Southampton’s wind tunnel it reached a still praiseworthy 0.32. This was achieved via the use of flush-fitting glass and headlamps, plus a tiny window opening; the driver and passenger windows were fixed, containing a small drop section.

Together with the Zagato weighing 1,650kg, around 170kg less than a standard Vantage, it was incredibly fast. At around the same time as the first production cars were delivered to customers in July 1986, a French motoring magazine, *Sport-Auto*, achieved 185.32mph on a French autoroute using the factory prototype.

“Once on the road, the Zagato eats up the long straights,” said the UK title *Motor* in its July 2 1986 issue. “Once moving, its progress is magnificently effortless. Like most fast cars, it’s as if it isn’t constrained by the physical laws of gravity and air resistance. Unlike most fast cars, however, it fools its driver into thinking that its blistering growling pace is normal, comfortable and undramatic.”

The car’s production process was both lengthy and complicated. Rolling chassis complete with engine, gearbox, suspension and wiring were constructed at Newport Pagnell before being shipped to Milan. After being shaped the old-fashioned way on a wooden master buck, the largely aluminium panels (the nose and rear section were from a glass-



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### V8 ZAGATO

fibre composite) were then added and the interior trimmed. The completed cars were then transported back to Aston Martin for testing.

Despite the initial high demand for the car, Aston Martin kept its word – just – since 52 were produced. To capitalise on the continuing market, a Volante version arrived in 1987 that was again the work of Giuseppe Mittino. “It wasn’t part of the original plan,” continued Andrea in 2022. “It was born from an idea from Zagato and presented as a sketch during the building of the coupe.”

Although production followed the same process as the coupe, when the rolling chassis was sent to Zagato to be bodied there was additional bracing added to improve torsional rigidity. Plus, the engine was a 305bhp version of the V8 with fuel injection meaning the convertible had the flat bonnet Mittino had originally wanted.

“I understand why the convertible had to have the fuel-injected engine, because there were concerns about the hood at speed,” continued Kingsley. “If you saw this thing blatting down the Autobahn with the Vantage engine, the hood would be blown up like a hot-air balloon.”

But by now, the market for low volume, high-performance cars like this was softening and just 37 Zagato Volantes were sold until production ceased in 1988.

Together with the 52 coupes, the 87 produced makes the V8 Zagato one of the British company’s rarest production models from the past four decades. Yet still they helped to bolster the company’s

finances long enough for Ford to buy a stake in 1987 and outright six years later.

Despite the financial importance of the cars, as soon as production finished, the 87 fell into a limbo. Arguably not as pretty as the standard Vantage but also too fast and too rare to be forgotten, they were often overlooked in favour of the standard and always popular model. While the cars that compelled Gauntlett to start the project have always been collectable, the 288 GTO and 959, it took time for the Zagato to receive the same level of desirability. Even in the early 2000s they were still only around their original asking price.

But time has been kind to the car and the design isn’t perhaps as controversial as it was 40 years ago. As interest has risen, so have their values; coupes like the car featured are today worth between £300k and £350k. Admittedly, still chicken feed compared to a DB4 GT Zagato but it’s a slight premium over a V8 Vantage from the same era.

Personally, I’ve always reckoned the car was pretty. Actually, that’s the wrong word; they’re too squat, too wide and too stocky to be described as such. What they are instead is very masculine, the lack of front and rear overhangs making them arguably more so than the already aggressive-looking Vantage. From every angle, it’s a car that clearly means business.

At the time of the Zagato’s 1986 launch, its cabin was often criticised for its sombre appearance; it didn’t even have any veneer, although some cars did have

this fitted later. “The layout of the switches and minor controls – and the general appearance of the interior – are scarcely designed or finished to the delight of the eye,” said *Motorsport* in 1987.

So haphazard is the centre console that it doesn’t look like it’s been designed but rather that all the buttons have been thrown randomly into place. Plus, perhaps as expected for a low volume model, I can spot plenty of outsourced equipment including Vauxhall Astra steering column stalks, Jaguar switchgear plus Lotus dials.

Yet in my view, these humble components have been harmoniously integrated into an admittedly utilitarian but still stylish cabin. The seats are so beautifully sculptured they look like an occasional chair by famed interior designer Ludwig Mies van der Rohe.

It doesn’t take long to realise this is an unbelievably fast car, the acceleration arriving quickly, effortlessly and if I’m being honest, a little scarily too. As I squeeze the throttle even harder, the gravelly roar coming from the V8 starts to fill the cabin in the same way Tchaikovsky’s rousing 1812 Overture would the Royal Albert Hall.

The ZF-sourced ‘box has a dog-leg first and, although stiff at first, glides into higher gears easier at speed, the smoothness of the action aiding the car’s performance. Although powered, the steering is still accurate and offers plenty of resistance which together with the composed chassis and controlled body lean allows me to take corners surprisingly quickly. The V8 Zagato might have been a controversial car when new but it’s clear it’s never a disappointing one to drive.

It’s an important one too. It not only gave Aston Martin a much-needed cash injection, but as the company’s first all-new design since the DBS two decades earlier, some publicity too.

And finally, it’s a highly desirable one. Not only have those angular lines softened over time, but its high performance makes it just as exciting as other low volume supercars from the Eighties and Nineties I’ve driven such as a Ferrari F40 and Jaguar XJ220.

So not only was jealousy the main instigator behind the car 40 years ago, it’s also what most of us now feel whenever we see one. **AMD**



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# Foreign affairs

Aston Martin has a long history of its cars being rebodied by Italian coachbuilders. From a DB3 coupe in the early Fifties to a Rapide Shooting Brake six decades later, we look at some of those that were converted

WORDS PAUL WALTON | IMAGES AMD ARCHIVE



### Carrozzeria Alfredo Vignale

THE TURIN-based Vignale is arguably the first Italian coachbuilder to rebody a post-war Aston Martin, when it gave the third DB3 a stylish new coupe body. Originally a works car, it was bought in May 1953 by a wealthy French driver, Michel Poberejsky, who commissioned Vignale to design a lightweight coupe body.

Poberejsky then entered the DB3 into the last endurance race of the season, the 12 Hours of Casablanca in December, when he and Aston Martin team driver Roy Salvadori finished fourth overall. In 1954, the Frenchman returned the car to Aston Martin to have the latest DB3S engine fitted, before replacing the coupe with a Ferrari 750 Monza the following year. At some point in the late Fifties, the Vignale bodywork was removed and fitted to a Ferrari 340 America. The fate of the Aston Martin itself is unknown.

Perhaps a better-known connection that Aston Martin has with Vignale is a car made for a king. In 1954 and keen to raise Aston Martin's brand, the company sent 12 DB2/4 rolling chassis to several European coachbuilders.



Vignale received two of these in September the same year and both were given a handsome fastback body with a wrap-around rear screen. The first – LML/802 – was commissioned by King Baudouin of Belgium who took delivery on 10 March the following year. Perhaps preferring the standard DB2 he also owned at the time, the king only kept the Vignale for a few years before selling it to one of his aides.

It would have several other owners, including an American serviceman who took it home with him in the Sixties. When the car was found in a Virginia scrapyard during the early Nineties, it was in a very dilapidated state. The car was finally restored by marque specialist Aston Workshop in the late 2010s. A second example based on chassis LML/608 was produced for a French customer but this has long since disappeared.

### Carrozzeria Touring

IN 1955, Aston Martin sent three DB2/4 chassis to Carrozzeria Touring in Milan to be rebodied. The brief from chairman (Sir) David Brown was to develop a more dramatic-looking roadster than the standard drophead coupe.

The trio are important since they would be the first Aston Martins built using Touring's Superleggera method of construction that consists of a body

frame made up of small-diameter tubes covered with aluminium body panels.

The resultant Spider was the work of Federico Formenti, Touring's talented chief designer. A handsome and elegant design, the cars kept their roots thanks to a grille that although wider was similar in shape to that of the standard model.

After making its debut at the 1956 Milan Motor Show in April, despite the model's good looks, no more were ordered.

More importantly, the cars started a link between Touring and Aston Martin that later resulted in the Italian company designing the DB4 in 1958. Although it – and the future DB5 and DB6 – also used the Superleggera construction, Aston Martin received a licence from Touring to do so in-house.

Aston Martin turned to the company one final time in 1966 when it was looking to replace the DB6, sending two chassis to Milan. Although the resultant prototypes – called the DBS – were handsome and very sleek, the time and expense it would take to productionise the design meant Aston Martin turned to the arguably more modern William Towns model instead, which arrived a year later.

With Touring being wound up not long after due to a lack of commissions, these were the last Aston Martins to be designed by the coachbuilder.





### Gruppo Bertone

SEVEN DB2 chassis were rebodied by the Turin-based Bertone in the mid-Forties. Yet it wasn't Aston Martin behind the modifications but an American dealer, Stanley H. "Wacky" Arnolt, who had obtained the rights to sell the cars of several British manufacturers in the Chicago area.

In 1952, Wacky met Nuccio Bertone at the Turin Auto Salon, later commissioning the Italian coachbuilder to build a limited run of custom-bodied MG TDs which were sold through his Chicago showroom. This relationship soon expanded with Bertone collaborating with the dealer on a very pretty rebodied Bristol.

A year later, Arnolt bought five Aston Martin DB2/4s, again sending them to Bertone to be rebodied. The quintet was transformed into a trio of competition-style Spiders plus a pair of more luxurious convertibles.

Two more found their way to Bertone's Turin studio in 1954; one was configured into a unique two-seat convertible dubbed the Indiana (which Stanley Arnolt retained for his personal



use until 1960) while the second was made into the only coupe of the series.

These weren't the only Astons Bertone would rebody. Two months after the Zagato variant was unveiled in October 1960, Aston Martin sent the final standard DB4GT chassis to Italy. But instead of to Zagato, chassis DB4GT/0201/L headed to Bertone where it was transformed into a notchback coupe by the coachbuilder's young but talented designer, the 22-year-old Giorgetto Giugiaro. This was the first of two Aston Martin concepts he would design.

Called the Jet, the car made its debut on Bertone's stand at the 1961 Geneva Motor Show where, despite its handsome looks, the car was overshadowed by the brand-new Jaguar E-type that was also revealed at the same time. The sole example survives.

Fifty years later, Bertone returned to rebodilying an Aston Martin when a British car collector, Barry Weir, commissioned it to produce a four-door shooting brake body for a Rapide, the Jet 2+2. Due to the positive response following the car's debut at the 2013 Geneva Show, Bertone did plan to put the car into limited production, but the company went into receivership shortly after meaning those plans never came to fruition.



## Zagato

ARGUABLY THE most famous Italian coachbuilder to rebody Aston Martin's cars is the Milan-based Zagato. The connection started in 1960 when the British car builder commissioned the Italian coachbuilder to design an even lighter and more aerodynamic version of the DB4GT.

Designed by Zagato's Ercole Spada – who later went on to pen several cars for Alfa Romeo and Lancia plus the Ford GT70 concept and E45 generation of the BMW 5 Series – the elegant metalwork shaved 183kg off the weight of the standard DB4, while a higher 9.7:1 compression ratio engine delivered 314bhp, an increase of ten over the GT.

Debuting at the 1960 London Motor Show, just 19 would be produced, the bodies made in Italy before being sent to Newport Pagnell where the cars were assembled.

In 1991, and using unallocated chassis numbers from the original series, four Sanction II cars were produced. Although Aston Martin was behind the project, the chassis were from the renowned British specialist, RS Williams, before being sent to Milan for Zagato to add the body. A year later and using leftover parts from the Sanction II project, two Sanction III examples were built. In 2019, Aston Martin Works made a further 19 DB4GT Zagato Continuation cars. Zagato and Aston Martin joined



forces again in the mid-Eighties for a V8 Vantage-based car. An enthusiast of the original DB4GT model, the project was the idea of chairman Victor Gauntlett. Just 89 were produced between 1986 and 1990; 52 coupes and 37 convertibles.

There would be no more Aston Martins designed by the Italian coachbuilder until the early 2000s when the company's then chairman, Dr Ulrich Bez, was on the same judging panel for the 2001 Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance as Andrea Zagato, grandson of the coachbuilder's founder, Ugo. They soon came up with the idea of joining forces again, creating a car in the spirit of the two companies' previous ventures.

The model chosen as the basis was the DB7 that was given a new, very European coupe body by Zagato's chief designer, Norihiko Harada. The cars were constructed by Opac, a Turin-based specialist in low-volume cars, before being transported to Aston's new facility at Gaydon for paint followed by Aston Martin's small factory located

outside Bloxham in Oxfordshire for final assembly. Just 99 were produced, all using the same 435bhp version of Aston's 6.0-litre V12 and the same Tremec six-speed manual gearbox as the DB7 GT.

A convertible version – the AR1 – followed the following year. Again the work of Harada, it looked largely similar to the coupe but since the car was aimed at the warm, dry states of America, such as California, there was no roof. It too used the same running gear as the DB7 GT and again just 99 were produced.

In 2004, Zagato developed a pretty roadster concept based on the Vanquish. Despite hundreds of requests for a production model following its debut at that year's Geneva Motor Show, the sole blue prototype remained a one-off.

For the 50th anniversary of the DB4GT Zagato, the two came together with a car based on the V12 Vantage. Available as either a road or racing car, Aston Martin Racing competed two V12 examples throughout 2011 and 2012. Despite initially saying 150 would be produced, a lack of orders meant just 61 left Aston Martin's Gaydon factory.

To celebrate Aston's 100th anniversary in 2013, Zagato designed three unique concepts. The DB9-based Spider Zagato Centennial was commissioned by an American car collector, Peter Read, and was a one-off model that took inspiration from the DB7 Zagato. A Japanese collector was responsible for commissioning the second, the DBS-based Centennial Coupe. Reminiscent of Zagato models from the Fifties, it featured the coachbuilder's signatory 'double bubble'





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### ITALIAN ASTON MARTINS

roof as did the third Centennial model. This time based on a Virage, it had the same square nose as the other two but a unique shooting brake body.

In many ways these three concepts set the standard for a quartet of Zagato-designed cars that were based on the Vanquish. These included a coupe and Volante in 2016 which were followed by a Shooting Brake and Speedster a year later. Just 325 were produced; 99 each of the first three body types and a mere 28 Speedsters.

Due to the long association between these two iconic brands, it can't be long before we see another Zagato-designed Aston Martin.



### Carrozzeria Allemano

BASED ON chassis LML/761, this is the only DB2/4 rebodied by the Turin-based coachbuilder Serafino Allemano. Bought by Mr. J. O'Hana of Casablanca, a good friend of (Sir) David Brown, the coupe left the Feltham factory in 1953 with a 3.0-litre DB3-specification engine.

Designed by Giovanni Savonuzzi, it's said the design was the inspiration for the later DB4. Although purely conjecture, there's no doubting the resemblance between the two. The sole Allemano Aston Martin survives.



### Italdesign Giugiaro

AT THE 2001 Geneva Motor Show, the Turin-based Italdesign Giugiaro revealed a unique DB7-based concept. Called the Twenty Twenty, it was a 2+2 targa top sports car. What made the car unusual was an exposed aluminium space frame with bonded non-load-bearing carbon fibre and plastic composite body panels.

Although the car received plenty of positive attention, there was never any chance the Twenty Twenty would reach production. "We're flattered that international designers such as Giugiaro want to pay attention to Aston Martin," explained Dr Ulrich Bez at the time. "It's an interesting design, but it's Giugiaro's vision."

### Carrozzeria Ghia

DEBUTING AT the 1993 Geneva Show, the Lagonda Vignale was a large four-door saloon designed by Ghia Design (part of the Ford family since 1973 but still based in Turin). With Ghia by now better known as a Ford trim level, it was named after another Italian design studio that the American firm had

bought the same year. Only three were made; two Lincoln Town Car-based concepts plus a slightly smaller version that used a Jaguar-sourced chassis and V12 engine. It was in this format that Aston Martin Lagonda hoped the car would reach production but when this never happened, the V12 prototype was sold to a collector in the Middle East.





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# PRESS GANG

Produced in 1995, this DB7 was an early Aston Martin press car, appearing in several publications throughout the mid-Nineties. Still with only its first owner, we look at the history of this important example

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY PAUL WALTON









## HISTORY

### DB7 PRESS CAR

**Y**OU MIGHT not think it, but this 1995 DB7 is arguably as important as the DB5 that appeared in *Goldfinger*. Although it lacks any machine guns, an ejector seat or rear shield, it gave the model almost as much exposure as the Bond film did its iconic predecessor 30 years earlier.

As former press car, lent to motoring journalists like me to assess for magazines like this, it continued to show that the DB7 was a new kind of Aston, a smaller, cheaper, and more accessible car than the current V8 models. Plus, it also demonstrated the model had been improved over the well-documented problematic early versions from the year before. The fact that the DB7 became the company's most successful model, until the V8 Vantage that arrived almost a decade later, is partly due to its time in the media.

Chassis 100358 – a right-hand-drive coupe with the Getrag five-speed manual transmission – was started at Aston Martin's Bloxham facility on 4 July 1995







and completed six weeks later. Finished in Brecon Black (a dark metallic grey), like all early DB7s it was painted at Rolls-Royce's plant in Crewe before being trimmed at the Newport Pagnell factory. The seats were in Parchment, the dash was Oxblood while the carpets were red making it one of only three DB7s made with this configuration, the other two being 100008 and 100384. The car was then registered N945 DNM on 26 August.

It's clear the DB7's destination was known from the outset since an early Works Service invoice from September the same year was made out in the name of Aston Martin's PR department, which at the time was located at the Newport Pagnell factory. Apparently, 100358 was one of 15 DB7s used by the company's press office during the model's decade-long lifespan.

It's thought the car's first media appearance was in the November 1995 issue of the British title, *Performance Car*, for a feature entitled, 'New and Improved!'. Referencing the many problems early examples suffered from

(including the magazine's former long-term test car losing its power steering while at 150mph on the Millbrook Proving Ground's two-mile, high-speed bowl), road test editor John Barker explained that due to the many changes Aston Martin had made to the DB7 in the intervening 12 months, 100358 was a big improvement.

"Here on the gravel forecourt at Newport Pagnell is the evidence: an N-plated DB7 with a shade under 1,000 miles on its odometer," he wrote. "It's number 358 and it looks right. The close, even panel gaps and perfect metallic grey paint are things you almost sense rather than see, and also what you expect on an £80,000 car, even if it's a 'bargain' Aston."

The DB7 also made it on the front cover of the 22 November 1995 issue of *Autocar* under the headline, '007: DB7 – the car he should be driving'.

Since it was a BMW Z3 and not the Aston that appeared in that year's Bond film, *Goldeneye*, the magazine decided to show what could have been by driving the car to various locations connected to the British spy including Kent, Eton



## HISTORY

### DB7 PRESS CAR



and London. To further illustrate its Bond car potential, 100358 was then driven to Newport Pagnell when it was photographed alongside the actual Silver Birch DB5 used in the latest film.

"I haven't seen *Goldeneye*," said the article's writer, Michael Harvey, "but I've seen the new Bond, Pierce Brosnan, and he looks just perfect for the role. Just like the DB7."

Harvey also referenced the problems of the early press cars, but he too was impressed with 100358. "DB7s remain unchanged," continued Harvey, "except that the problems with the ill-fitting window glass have been resolved and there is a general sense of much greater quality to the car's exterior."

The car was also used for Aston Martin's own marketing material. It's not sure whether it was taken while being serviced in September or later but the grey DB7 can be clearly seen in a black and white photograph of Aston Martin's Works Service at Newport Pagnell that appeared in a 1995 sales brochure. Also visible, walking towards the reception,

is Works Service's then manager Keith Riddington and technician David Webb.

"I remember that photo like it was yesterday," said Keith to the car's current owner recently, "and it was used worldwide and at all motor shows. It was a very cold day and I cannot divulge what David and I were discussing and it took a couple of goes until this was produced. The photo was blown up to see if we were holding hands and then it was decided to use it."

The other time 100358 is known to have appeared in the press is the 16 March 1996 issue of the *Daily Mail* when Simon Le Bon, the lead singer of the British band Duran Duran, and his supermodel wife, Yasmin, were pictured with the car. After both taking it for a test drive, the pair gave their thoughts to journalist Matthew Gwyther for a feature in the paper entitled, 'Whirl about town.'

"This DB7 is the first car I've actually liked driving for years," said the musician. "The truth is, it's not an out-and-out sports car like a Ferrari or Lamborghini. It's a really comfortable grand tourer."







Yasmin – who admitted in the piece that she was a classic car enthusiast – didn't think the 335bhp DB7 was fast enough, saying she was disappointed she couldn't "bare my teeth at traffic lights," and, "for that sort of money, I'd be after a bit more sportiness." However, the supermodel did appreciate the car's heritage and how it was built. "You are investing in a whole craft culture, even if this one isn't beaten out of sheets of aluminium by hand as other Astons are. It's got that feel of real quality about it."

After almost 18 months of press and marketing duties, in April 1997 the car was put up for sale through one of Aston Martin's franchised dealers, Paramount in Derby, where it caught the eye of Andrew Burford. He tells me he had been considering a Ferrari 355 at the time, but thought them too flash so chose the more discreet DB7 instead.

"What attracted me to this car was that it was in dark grey and a manual," he explains. "I've always liked black, grey or silver and at the time I wanted a proper sports car that I could do some track days with so the five-speed was really important to me."

Although Andrew was told at the time of purchase of its former life as an Aston Martin press car, "I just didn't think anything of it," he admits.

Despite its star status, Andrew has never been afraid to use the car. "I've driven it to Paris, through the Swiss Alps to Wengen, over the Dolomites to Venice and on the Autobahn to Germany's Black Forest. It's been put through its paces at Silverstone, Mallory Park and Thruxton with the Aston Martin Owners Club. It has been to many restaurants, pubs and events and a regular attendee at sporting fixtures such as Wimbledon, the British Grand Prix, Henley Regatta and Twickenham."

Amazingly, he still owns the DB7 making it technically a one-owner example. It's only recently that he's started to look into its former life, collecting as many articles it appeared in as he can, creating an almost full account of the car's life.

When we met for this – the latest feature 100358 has appeared in – there's no doubting, by its immaculate condition, the care Andrew has lavished on the DB7



**The black and white brochure shot from 1995 showing 100358 in the Works Service department facing the camera with a plain DB7 number plate**



**The piece in the Daily Mail from 16 March 1996 when 100358 was driven by Simon and Yasmin Le Bon**



## HISTORY

### DB7 PRESS CAR

over the length of his ownership. The dark Brecon Black paint even manages to catch a shine despite the weak sun of this cold winter's day.

But this condition hasn't come easy. In 2019 the car went through an extensive recommissioning that included a full strip and refurbishment of the braking and suspension components while the leather upholstery was repainted and the bodywork tidied in a couple of areas. Three years later, the air-conditioning system then had a complete overhaul with all the major components replaced including the evaporator, condenser and compressor.

Although structurally sound, Andrew was collecting the car from Chiltern Aston in Hertfordshire on the day of the photoshoot after its body repair centre had repaired a tiny but noticeable amount of rust on the driver's side door.

The result is a DB7 that looks like new. If any of the writers who drove the car back in 1995 saw it today, they'd think it had travelled forwards through time. When I get behind the wheel, after Andrew kindly offers me a drive of what's clearly his pride and joy, I can't help but think of all those other journalists who have come before me, many I know and have previously worked with.

After driving hundreds of press cars of all varieties over my own 25-year career, I've often said they feel better built than standard production models. Although never proved, the interior of Andrew's DB7 certainly looks nicer than our admittedly higher mileage but younger former project car from 1997. The gaps between the individual panels are more uniform while the usually cheap-looking walnut veneer on the centre console looks to be thicker, shinier, and richer.

The majority of DB7s were specified with the old-fashioned GM 4L80-E four-speed automatic transmission which in my experience stunts the car's performance in the same way towing something heavy would. It's easy to understand, then, why Aston's PR office specified the rarer five-speed manual for a car that would be driven by the often highly critical press. As I push the throttle hard, the sudden rush of acceleration has an urgency missing from the auto models.

This is confirmed when I later check the time it takes the two to reach 62mph, with the manual version being 1.2 seconds faster than the auto at 5.7.

More importantly, with the five-speed giving me the ability to hold the revs, something the dim-witted and too-quick-to-change automatic never does, I'm able

to perfectly balance the throttle for a long bend before nailing it on the exit, the big engine responding the moment I do for another sudden rush of acceleration.

Together with the always excellent and composed chassis plus its nicely weighted and accurate steering, it's clear the Le Bons were wrong; with plenty of speed, Andrew's DB7 isn't a grand tourer but more of a proper, old-fashioned sports car.

As *Performance Car's* John Barker (a far better driver than I) said about this very example all those years ago, "The handling is keen, responsive and also very progressive in the dry. When you start to hustle, it doesn't feel like a heavy car: when you push it to the limit in the wet, the tail finally drifts wide in a comfortable, easily managed slide."

I began this feature by explaining what an important car 100358 is in Aston's history due to its many appearances in the media, all of which helped to make the DB7 the success we know it became. Although I still stand by that statement, after driving the car I realise it's important for another reason. 2024 might be the 30th anniversary of the DB7 going on sale, but as a well-maintained early manual, 100358 shows what a brilliant car the model can be. Quite simply, the DB7 legend starts here. **AMD**

**Thanks to: Andrew Burford**





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# VANTAGE POINT

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY PAUL WALTON





**Only a handful of DBSs produced had both the higher powered Vantage-specification engine plus a manual transmission, making this 1969 example a genuine rarity. Recently restored to its original condition, we take it for a spin**

**W**ITH ITS more angular lines than Aston Martin's previous models, when the William Towns-designed DBS arrived in late 1967 it was seen as an all-new and much more contemporary car than its increasingly old-fashioned predecessors. "The aluminium alloy-panelled body has little

of the rounded smooth look of the DB6," said Autocar magazine in its September 28 1967 issue, "yet is still sleek, despite the sharp lines that are one of its main features."

Looks can be deceiving, though, since under that new body was the same albeit widened steel platform as the DB6. Plus, as is well-documented, since Aston Martin's new 5.3-litre V8 that

was destined for the DBS wasn't ready at the time of the car's debut, it was originally powered by the same 252bhp overhead camshaft 4.0-litre straight-six as the model before it. There were also a small handful made with AE Brico fuel injection, but this proved to be unreliable and many of the 15 produced were converted back to carburetors. And finally, as with most other models ▶ the



## HISTORY

### DBS VANTAGE MANUAL

David Brown era starting with the DB2 of 1950, there was a higher powered Vantage version. This was achieved by swapping the standard engine's triple SU HD4 carburettors for three Weber 45 DCOEs plus reprofiled camshafts and a higher 9.4:1 compression ratio which together resulted in an extra 43bhp. This helped to lower the car's 0-60mph time from around 8.5 seconds of the 282bhp model to the 7.1 seconds that *Motor* magazine achieved in 1968.

Yet despite this being a cost-free option, it wasn't one that was chosen regularly, and Tim Cottingham from the Aston Martin Heritage Trust tells me that of the 803 DBSs with the 4.0-litre engine produced, just under 300 were made to Vantage specification.

These shouldn't be confused with the 70 DBS-based Vantages built at







Newport Pagnell between 1972 and 1973 that were the last Aston Martins to be powered by the straight-six. This model is identifiable by a redesigned front end that featured two rather than four headlights.

Another cost-free option was the transmission with the DBS which was available with either the Borg-Warner Model 8 three-speed automatic or a five-speed manual from ZF. With the Vantage seen as more of a performance model, of the 298 made, Tim tells me 271 were specified with the manual.

Not a large number for a production car to begin with, he goes on to say natural selection has made them even rarer. "The DBS were not great survivors. Too many were robbed of their Vantage spec engines and five-speed 'boxes to keep the more desirable DB5 and DB6s on the road. In ▶





## HISTORY

### DBS VANTAGE MANUAL

an era of low parts availability, scrapping a rusty donor DBS for the engine and gearbox was sadly commonplace.”

All of this makes the 1969 example shown here (chassis DBS/5431/R), that's currently for sale through the County Durham-based marque specialists Aston Workshop, a genuine rarity. Its original Celeste Blue paint makes it even more so since the dealer reckons just 20 DBSs were made in this colour.

Registered in October 1969, the car is a late 'Series 1', an unofficial designation that separates early models like this that are identifiable by the louvres in the C-pillars from the later 'Series 2'. Introduced in January 1970, these featured many of the subtle changes already seen on the DBS V8 that had arrived the year before including a wide vent beneath the rear screen, a deeper air dam at the front plus stainless steel sill covers.

Other than it was originally supplied through the prestigious London-based Aston Martin dealer HR Owen, little is known about the early life of this DBS Vantage manual. In 2015, when the car had just 70k miles on the clock, it received a £20k restoration that included new brakes, suspension, steering and ignition. Whether this was originally done during this recommissioning or earlier, but it was also resprayed in Celeste Silver. The dark blue Connolly leather upholstery was kept largely original.

The exterior has recently been returned to its original Celeste Blue in Aston Workshop's own bodyshop. Still with only 71k miles, it is a handsome and immaculate example of this clearly rare car. Just as Silver Birch shows off the DB5's svelte lines, Celeste Blue does the same for the DBS. I guess that's why the second DBS brochure from October 1969 shows a car in the same colour.

As a lifelong enthusiast of William Towns' work, I've always preferred the DBS, thinking it has better proportions than its DB6 predecessor while the sharp lines are as pleasingly crisp as a well-ironed shirt.

As mentioned earlier, the interior was left alone during its 2015 restoration meaning the cracks in the blue upholstery give it a character new hide would have lost. The wood veneer around the



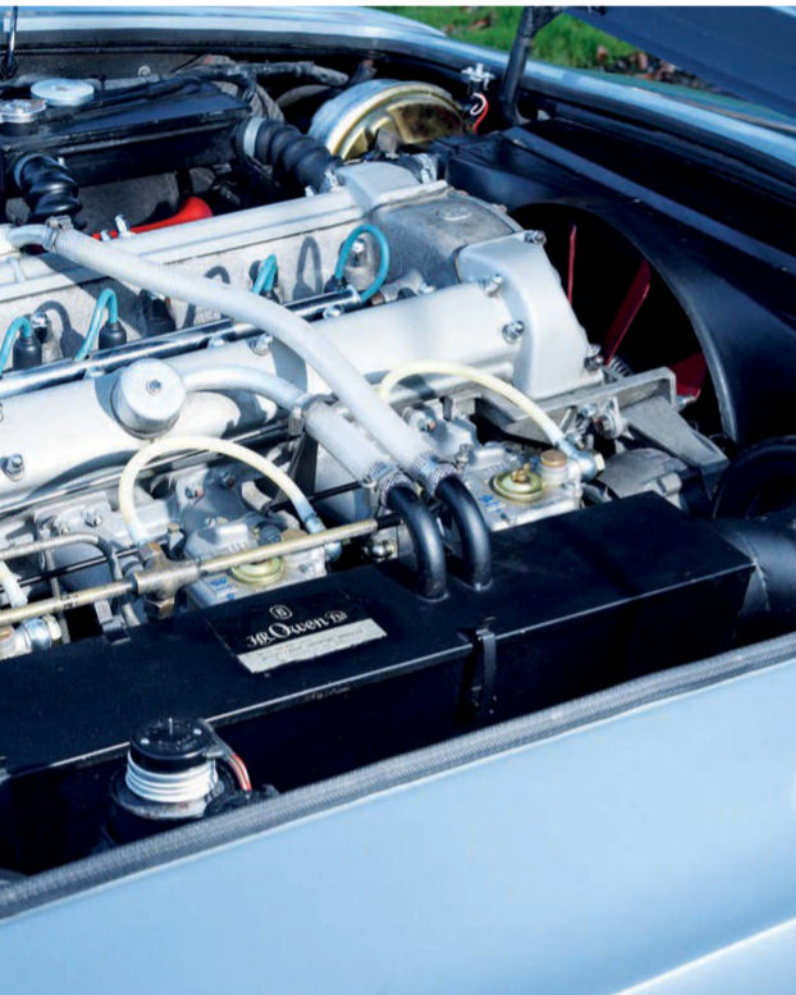
dials of the first models was replaced by black vinyl during the first half of 1969 resulting in this car having a very different, more contemporary ambience than the traditionalism of the earlier DB models. It's like comparing the classic grey three-piece suit (Sir) Sean Connery wore in *Goldfinger* from 1964 with George Lazenby's light brown cardigan in *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* released five years later.

It's about now I should address the elephant in the room; even in 325bhp Vantage form, the DBS isn't particularly fast, which can be blamed on its weight. With the model not having the same Superleggera bodywork of its immediate predecessors, the big coupe weighs a relatively hefty 3,500lbs, 250lbs more than the DB6, resulting in acceleration that can best be described as 'sedate'.

As *Autosport* magazine said in its ►











September 12 1969 issue when it tested the same olive green DBS Vantage manual that appeared in *OHMSS*, “The DBS is substantially heavier than the DB6 and naturally the acceleration suffers in comparison.”

I guess this explains why it was the last Aston Martin M16’s Q-branch equipped 007 with for almost two decades.

In the car’s defence, the DBS was always seen as more of a long-distance tourer than a sports car like its predecessors had been. “We really weren’t concerned much about acceleration in the development of the DBS,” admitted a representative from Aston Martin in the September 1967 issue of the famed American publication *Car & Driver* when it compared an example with a Ferrari 275 GTB4, Lamborghini 400 GT and a Maserati Ghibli. “We like to think that it has long legs. It’s intended for comfortable and secure cruising in the 80-120mph range.”

Yet there’s no denying the eagerness or smoothness of the Vantage engine

and with 290lb of torque it still pulls strongly in any gear. “On the road,” continued *Autosport*, “there is a great reserve of power and the engine is seldom extended.”

Other than having the ability to balance the throttle more easily than in an automatic version, the manual ‘box does little to transform the DBS Vantage into a true sports car. With huge throws between each gear, they’re not the short, sharp shifts of the Ferrari Dino or Porsche 911, for example.

The De Dion rear axle – a first for an Aston Martin – might leave the DBS feeling composed through bends, but the suspension set-up is too neutral for performance driving. “The handling is reminiscent of the best vintage cars,” continued *Autosport* in 1969, “such as the big Lagondas from which it descends.”

As that Aston Martin agent said to *Road & Track* almost six decades ago, the DBS was always considered more of a grand tourer than a pure sports car, which is clearly reflected in its ride.

Unlike those aforementioned Italian and German performance models, the British car absorbs rough surfaces without transmitting them back into the cabin. What it lacks in sharpness it makes up for in comfort.

And finally, the overly light-powered steering – standard on the DBS – kills any lingering desire to drive the car quickly.

Despite this, I still think it’s a terrific car that not only has rarity on its side but also offers tremendous value for money. There’s no denying the £200k this example is priced at is a large chunk of change, but it’s at least £150,000 cheaper than a DB6 and around half a million less than a DB5 in a similarly immaculate condition.

The DBS might not have been a totally new car when it arrived in 1967, but as this rare Vantage manual version proves, it was still a special one. **AMD**

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# CIVIL ENGINEER

**As Aston Martin's engineering director from the mid-Sixties to the early Seventies, Dudley Gershon had a major impact on the cars developed during this time. We look at his nine years with the company**

**WORDS** PAUL WALTON **IMAGES** AMD ARCHIVE



**Dudley Gershon (right) explains Aston Martin's V8 to A. C. Bertelli in 1969**

**T**HE NAME Dudley Gershon might be largely forgotten today compared to other Aston Martin luminaries such as Harold Beach or Tadek Marek, but as the company's engineering director between 1966 and 1972 there's no denying the impact he made on the cars produced during this time.

He was especially instrumental in the development of both the straight-six and V8 versions of the DBS. "It looked a fine ►







## BIOGRAPHY

### DUDLEY GERSHON

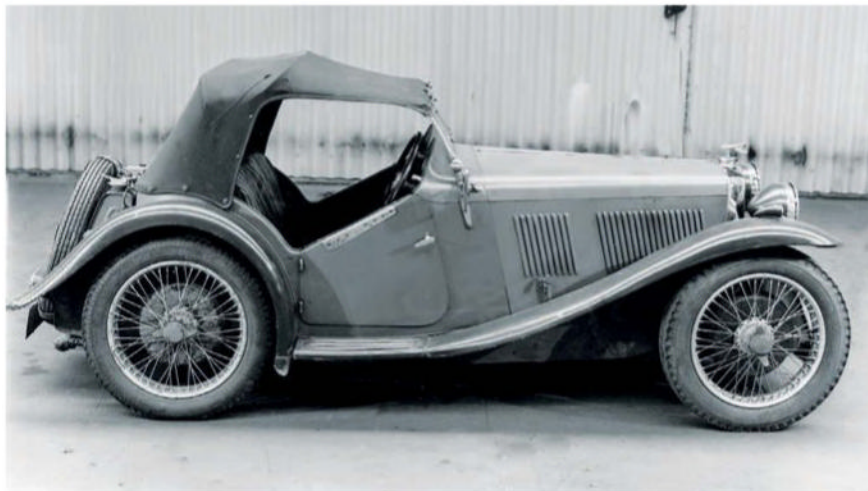
example of what British engineers could still do," he wrote in his 1975 biography, *Aston Martin 1963-1972*.

Gershon was the great nephew of British car magnate William Morris, although he was only told this aged eight after he'd helped an elderly man to crank his Morris Cowley. When the young Dudley asked his mother what the name meant, she replied, "The Morris is your Uncle Willie and he makes those cars." According to Gershon's book, he soon started looking forward to his visits to his great uncle. "Suddenly, the relative maximum speed of a Morris opposed to a Clyno was of vital importance and from that moment there was no other possible career for me."

Not wanting to become a dentist like his father, Gershon had hoped for an apprenticeship at Morris but was rebuked by his great uncle. Worried about accusations of nepotism, Uncle Willie instead arranged for Gershon to join the Coventry car manufacturer Swift, considering it to be, "an excellent place to get trained."

More fascinated by sports cars, Gershon bought a MG J2 which he soon converted into the supercharged J4 version that he occasionally raced. "I used this car for local trials," he wrote in the March 1988 issue of *Motorsport* magazine, "and, when I could afford it, for such events as the Junior Handicap (Nuffield Trophy) at Donington where I crashed it in practice and broke a crank in the race due to my lack of restraint and scant attention to the rev-counter."

Gershon's great uncle, the British car magnate, William Morris



An MG J2 similar to the type Gershon bought in the Thirties and uprated to supercharged J4 spec

After Swift had gone bankrupt in 1931, Gershon was transferred to another Coventry-based car company, Riley, to finish his studies. Although he tried to spend as much time in the shed where the high-performance Brooklands model was produced, he still learnt a lot there. "My engineering training during the Riley days and a subsequent period of management training with commercial experience which was halted by the war, biased me strongly towards sound engineering practices rather than expedients and gave me a capacity first to analyse critically any 'Whiz-kid' suggestions, however promising they might have seemed on presentation."





A rare Brooklands that the young Gershon watched being prepared during his time at Riley



A modern image of the Newport Pagnell factory that Gershon moved Aston Martin's servicing department to in 1964

Gershon was instrumental in increasing production of the DB6 over its predecessor





## BIOGRAPHY

DUDLEY GERSON



The DB6 Volante was developed in a quick time for the 1966 British Motor Show

Following the outbreak of the second world war in 1939, Gershon soon joined up, staying with the army after hostilities had ceased in what his book calls an “engineering and management capacity”. “I was glad to soldier on,” he wrote in 1975, “getting very involved and interested not only in the engineering problems of military equipment but also in their management approach which seemed to me to be well in advance of comparable civilian practice at that time.”

When he finally left the military in 1962, he became the works coordinator for the large car dealer group, the Henley Organisation.

In October the following year and clearly still fascinated by sports cars, Gershon applied for the position of service manager at Aston Martin Lagonda, being interviewed by the company’s then executive director, Steve Heggie. “The post I was applying for was unusual,” he explains in his autobiography, “because the high excellence of the Aston Martin engineering and the unusually high percentage of technically minded owners demanded a qualified engineer with a high-performance car interest to liaise with the more enthusiastic owners, to manage the technical correspondence and to generally protect and further the company’s image.”

Gershon started at the Feltham factory in December 1963, openly admitting in his



Gershon was heavily involved with the development of the William Towns designed DBS

book how excited he was at the prospect. “I had never before dreamed of working at such a heritage shrine to the sports car world and I think I approached the place that day mentally rather like a 12-year-old boy who had just been told he really could drive a train.”

He spent the first two weeks with the engineering department getting to know not only the cars but the people behind them, including both Aston Martin’s then chief engineer, Tadek Marek, and its chief designer, Harold Beach. In his book, Gershon describes the former as, “a very pleasant chap intolerant of design weaknesses or mistakes but with a superb sense of humour,” while he found Beach to be most helpful with an amazing memory for detail. “Nothing was ever too much trouble for either he or Tadek and they were a tremendous help to me in that

memorable fortnight when I needed so much urgent information.”

Gershon also got to drive the company’s range, both past and present, such as the DB4 and DB5. “I had never driven at much over 120mph and had rapidly to get used to taking cars over 145mph to acquaint myself with their road behaviour and to enable me to discuss this with some of the owners who were already familiar with the speeds.”

He quickly settled into his new role, enjoying working with both the cars and their owners. “Some treated it like a day out,” he wrote in *Aston Martin 1963-1972*, “especially later on when everything was at Newport Pagnell, they liked to look around and see wherever we were prepared to show them, according to where their interests lay. The practice tended to create a sense of belonging



and certainly resulted in a healthy bond of loyalty between the customer and the firm.”

Gershon was instrumental in the servicing department's March 1964 move from Feltham to Aston Martin's new and much larger facility in Newport Pagnell. The fact that only 18 out of the department's 100 existing staff were prepared to transfer could have been a disaster but with Gershon discovering a skilled local workforce, the servicing continued reasonably unabated. Although he admitted in his 1975 autobiography that the level of work dropped a little due to the new tradesmen being unfamiliar with the cars, by June the same year the department was up and running at full capacity. “Customers bore with us,” wrote a thankful Gershon a decade later, “generally helping rather than hindering and we made sure they never suffered.”

Perhaps due to his hard work during this time, in mid-1965 Gershon was promoted to the position of assistant general manager. “Steve [Heggie] called me over to his office and greeted me with, ‘How would you like to do my job?’ Naturally I thought this over very carefully for all of three seconds and accepted.”

Gershon became involved with the development of the DB6, largely working out how to increase production over its predecessor. He achieved this by rearranging the Newport Pagnell assembly line, relocating some of the work areas and arranging extra facilities where possible. More men were also brought in to work on a particular stage of

production when required, increasing the number of assembly stages to facilitate this. Thanks to Gershon's changes, by June 1966 production had grown to 18 cars a week, a hitherto unknown figure for the company at that time.

But due to the 95 percent ‘supertax’ Harold Wilson's Labour government imposed on the very wealthy a month later, orders quickly dried up. By August, there were apparently 130 unfinished cars at the factory. Needing to diversify in an attempt to increase sales, Gershon admits in his book that Aston Martin investigated whether it could, “rehash a Hillman Imp set of components with a boosted engine to produce a little GT.” One of the reasons this crazy-sounding idea was dropped was because Rootes was developing its own version, the eventual Californian coupe, which Gershon says, “would have been halfway in appearance to what we intended to do.”

And so, Aston Martin designed the DB6 Volante with a power hood instead, but with Aston Martin's chairman, (Sir) David Brown, insisting the car be revealed at the 1966 British Motor Show in October, there wasn't much time. “This meant a lot of design and development trials at an unbelievable rate,” says Gershon in his book. “We had to somehow cram in the power jacks necessary to operate the power hood frame which had to be designed; and in a position where they could use their power smoothly without distorting the framework in the process.”

Gershon had been promoted for the second time In July 1966 to Aston Martin's

director of engineering, which would give him real influence over a new model. He was initially involved in the pair of Carrozzeria Touring-designed prototypes that would be based on the DB6 chassis, showing the early design sketches to Henley since it was one of Aston Martin's largest and most important dealers.

According to Gershon's book, Aston Martin was also working on another car based on a DB6, which he describes as very sleek and, “the necessary evolutionary step to put the DB4 finally behind us.” But since (Sir) David Brown didn't like the design, the length of the front overhang especially, while the car's cowed headlights would have been vetoed by several countries, the project was quickly dropped.

And so, Gershon and his team looked at another project which had started life as a feasibility study in February 1966 that used a widened DB6 chassis. Work on a new Tadek Marek-designed V8 started at around the same time and from the outset was always destined for the new model.

“We started, very crudely speaking, by looking at the implications of cutting the chassis lengthways down the middle,” explained Gershon, “and inserting approximately three inches to increase the frame width to take the V8 without too much exhaust manifold cramp in the process and to allow for wider wheelarches without sacrificing rear seat width.”

One of Aston Martin's young design engineers, William Towns, was asked to do some sketches for the interior, but



**The V8 version of the DBS finally arrived in 1969**



## BIOGRAPHY

### DUDLEY GERSHON

he also did some for the exterior in his own time. "We were greatly impressed by this proposal," wrote Gershon, "and got him to produce some variations and colour impressions of the whole car, inside and out."

Around the same time as this in October 1966, Towns' design won approval at an Aston Martin board meeting, the pair of Touring-designed DB6-based prototypes were delivered from Milan. Although very beautiful, since it was decided these would take too long to productionise, Gershon and his team concentrated on the wider model instead, giving it the DBS name formerly used by the Italian-designed cars.

As is well known, with the Tadek V8 not being ready for when the DBS was due to be launched in late 1967, Aston Martin resorted to its tried and tested straight-six. Perhaps because of this, despite several changes made to both the interior and windscreen rake which was considered too great for easy ingress, lessening it by three degrees, the first two running prototypes were ready for testing just ten months after the project had been given the green light. "This was a remarkable achievement in any context," declared Gershon in *Aston Martin 1963-1972*.

Both cars were, in his words, flogged mercilessly around the Motor Industry Research Association (MIRA) test track in Leicestershire. One was then sent to Scotland for real-world testing while the other was used to productionise the model. This was largely to discover if Aston Martin's existing 4.0-litre six-cylinder was happy in its new setting. "With a new radiator position and different air currents, then it must be extensively tried," explained Gershon in *Aston Martin 1963-1972*. A little water overheating was apparently cured by adding vents in the front wings similar to those used by Aston Martin's earlier models.

There was also some worry about the brakes overheating due to the car's weight but ducting to direct airflow to the outboard rear calipers easily sorted this.

The finished car made its debut a few months later at the 1967 Earls Court Motor Show in October to what Gershon describes as spectacular acclaim. "I do not remember criticism from anyone



According to Gershon, the V8 was easily fitted into the DBS



Gershon (far left) with Steve Heggie (fourth from left), sales manager Fred Hartley (third from right) and Tadek Marek (far right)



Gershon (far right) and (Sir) David Brown and HM The Queen during her 1966 visit of the Newport Pagnell factory

about any of the road performance aspects of the DBS," he said in his book.

The V8 version arrived two years later. Although the project had been started under Marek, when the Polish-born designer retired to Italy in 1968 it was Gershon who was left in charge. But according to his book, the installation of the 5.3-litre was, "no headache at all."

Two of the problems he and his small team of engineers faced included front lift at high speed, which was rectified by a deeper front chin, plus higher oil temperatures which needed the oil radiators repositioned into the scoop instead of each side of the water radiator as per the six-cylinder models.

The model was again a success when it was revealed at the 1969 British Motor Show. "We were delighted to hear the intake of breath and the pleased expression on people's faces as the car bonnet was lifted to show it [the V8]."

But as the Seventies dawned, not all was well with the chairman's business empire, which was partly caused by David Brown Ltd expanding tractor production

to keep up with its larger rivals. And so, Sir David sold Aston Martin Lagonda to a Midlands-based property firm, Company Developments, in early 1972. Resignation of the directors was a stipulation of the transfer agreement and so Gershon left the same week. "It was the end of a delightful association for me," he said sadly in *Aston Martin 1963-1972*.

Gershon went on to become a successful independent engineering consultant, spending time at Jensen's West Bromwich factory in early 1973 to work on the powerful six-pack (or SP) version of the Chrysler V8.

Although Gershon's impact on Aston Martin might be largely overlooked today, he always had high regard for the company and the cars he'd helped to develop. "My opinion now is that anyone who can afford to get hold of an Aston Martin either new or second-hand would be well advised to acquire one," he finished by saying in *Aston Martin 1963-1972*. "The car will one day be truly acknowledged, like the Bentley of old, as a first class example of British engineering." **AMD**





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# RACING SPIRIT

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY PAUL WALTON





## Arriving in 2016 and influenced by the race-winning GTE, the Vantage GT8 was the fastest, lightest, and most potent V8-engined Vantage

**L**ET'S BE clear about this from the outset; if it's subtlety you're after, then the Vantage GT8 isn't for you. With its Forth Road Bridge-sized rear wing, jutting out front splitter, loud paint schemes and even louder engine, the GT8 is to discretion what Ryanair is to luxury.

But if you're wanting one of the most dramatic and best-handling Aston Martins from the last decade that has the added

advantage of genuine rarity then read on.

Whereas the earlier V8 Vantage S had been influenced by the GT4 and N24 competition models, the GT8 was inspired by the GTE version that was Aston's entrant in the FIA World Endurance Championship.

"We long held the desire to create a road car that truly reflects our racing activity at Le Mans," said Aston Martin's director of its Special Projects and Motorsport department, David King, at the time of the car's 2016 debut. "With the Vantage GT8, we've finally been able to achieve that."

Certainly the 2017 example featured here that's currently for sale at Chiltern Aston Centre looks every inch the competition car. Swap the Cobalt Blue and Golden Saffron for Aston Racing Green and it could easily be getting ready for the 24 Hours of Le Mans and not parked in leafy Hertfordshire.

The GT8 wasn't the first extreme Vantage since the similar-looking GT12 had arrived the year before. As with its V12 sibling, the V8 version was developed by Aston Martin's Special Projects team at its secretive Wellesbourne facility, which is a few miles from the main Gaydon plant. Engines aside, the major difference between the two models was price; at £165,000, the GT8 was £85k less than the GT12. Although that was still £70k more than the Vantage S, the GT8 did offer a lot of bangs for those extra bucks.





## MODERN DRIVE

### VANTAGE GT8

The power of the 4.7 V8 might have been massaged to produce 440bhp – another ten over the Vantage S – but what really set the GT8 apart from other V8 models is the diet Aston Martin put it on. Together with the roof, interior door panels and other components made from carbon fibre plus a polycarbonate rear screen and rear side windows, the car was 100kg lighter than the S.

Although at 4.4 seconds to reach 60mph and its 190mph top speed, this made the GT8 only marginally faster than the Vantage S, but it was much more responsive.

“What makes the GT8 such an unusual delight to drive is the way it responds so cleanly to your inputs,” explained *Auto Express* magazine at the time, “be that on the throttle, the brake pedal, via the steering wheel or even the gearlever.”

From the wheelarch extensions to







the enhanced aerodynamics, the look of the car was clearly influenced by the full racing version. This included a larger splitter, front and rear bumpers, fenders, side sills and rear diffuser all made from carbon fibre. There was even a cutaway front wheelarch similar to that of the GTE.

To make it look even more like the racing car, the large carbon fibre rear wing and extensions to either side of the splitter, as fitted to this one, were options. This example also has the optional seven-spoke centre lock magnesium wheels that cost a whopping – wait for it – £18,000.

This one also has a Q-Accent package which included the roof, front grille, wing badges, sill plaque plus rear tailgate and rear lamp infills all being made from carbon fibre.

I can't say the result is a beautiful or elegant car in the same way the DB7 or DB9 undoubtedly are, but the

modifications do make it genuinely aggressive. Park a standard V8 Vantage next to a GT8 and it would be like comparing a Yorkshire Terrier with a Rottweiler.

There's nowhere more obvious of the diet Aston put the GT8 on than in the cabin. Due to the door's interior panels made from even more carbon fibre, the driver's side feels considerably lighter than that of a standard Vantage when I open it. There isn't even a proper handle to close it behind me either, just a leather strap. Yet despite the seats being tight, lightweight carbon fibre shells, by being trimmed in rich black leather, they're still relatively comfortable.

I've often been critical in the past of the Vantage's interior looking too dark and too cheap for an Aston Martin but the GT8 is a big improvement over the standard car. Not only is the fascia now ▶





## MODERN DRIVE

### VANTAGE GT8



made from carbon fibre twill but the dash top and steering wheel are both covered in a soft Alcantara all of which results in a nicer, more interesting, and clearly better built cabin. Unlike other racing inspired models of the era such as the Jaguar XKR-S GT and Porsche 911 GT3, the Aston doesn't have a half cage or safety harnesses. The Vantage's body structure apparently made it almost impossible to accommodate the former. Although disappointing for anyone who takes trackdays seriously, it's further proof this is a road and not a racing car. As does the 160W audio system plus Aston Martin's then current AMi III infotainment system that were both standard.

But then not only did the car cost £165k when new but it still demands big, six-figure values today. Other than its specification, this is largely due to its rarity; just 150 GT8s were produced (50 less than the GT12) and as we all know, diamonds are more expensive than coal.







I further understand that big price the moment I press the starter button. Thanks to a new, big bore titanium exhaust that exits just above the rear diffuser (and not the side skirts like the race car sadly) plus Aston removing the secondary cats, the GT8 is ear-meltingly loud.

With a clear road ahead of me, I squeeze the throttle as far as I dare, the V8 responding the moment that I do. The resultant acceleration is hard and uncompromising, the car surging forward with eagerness that is missing from even a Vantage S. At 6,000rpm and above, the already baritone growl starts to fill the cabin with something straight out of Le Mans. The engine is wonderfully progressive, its forcefulness rising with the revs. Below 3,000rpm and it feels almost docile, but it needs persuasion to deliver its potency; between 5,000 and 7,000rpm the GT8 is still one of the fastest cars I've driven.

The GT8 had the option of two transmissions, a seven-speed Sportshift II paddle-operated automatic or – as per this car – a traditional six-speed manual. It might have a slight old-school feel, but it's arguably the better match than the auto. As I enter a bend, I change down, balance the throttle perfectly through a bend before nailing it on the exit.







With close to 50/50 weight distribution, the V8 Vantage was always a great handling car but the lightness adds an extra litheness, making a car that was almost a decade old when the GT8 version arrived in 2016 feel young again.

If the GT8 had been a brand-new model when it arrived in 2016 rather than an update of an existing one, it would probably have had electromechanical steering that newer cars such as Aston

Martin's own DB11, the Jaguar F-Type and the 981 generation of Porsche Cayman. But its more traditional hydraulic steering is still brilliant, being perfectly weighted and offering plenty of feel.

The GT8 shares the widened axle tracks of the GT12 – up on the standard Vantage by 34mm at the front and 54mm at the rear – while front suspension springs were 25 percent stiffer than standard and the front anti-roll bar was also bigger.

But whereas the GT12 had three-stage adaptive dampers, the GT8 gets more predictable track-tuned passive dampers and even more aggressive front axle geometry. This results in tremendous grip, outstanding cornering balance and excellent high-speed stability.

Yet neither is this some uncomfortable track car, like the Porsche 911 GT3, since the suspension offers enough compliance to make the GT8 suitable for touring, although only if you remember your ear plugs.

Its sharp handling, old-school manual transmission and eager V8 makes the GT8 one of the most entertaining sports cars I've ever driven, yet its refinement and usability makes it a highly desirable combination. The Vantage GT8 might never have been a subtle car but there's no doubting it's still a brilliant one. **AMD**

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# DB4 BUYING GUIDE

Discover what to look for when buying a DB4 and  
how much it can cost to run and repair it

WORDS ROB HAWKINS PHOTOGRAPHY MAX EAREY





**L**AUNCHED IN October 1958 and manufactured until June 1963, by setting the standard for the later models, the DB4 has become one of the most sought-after Aston Martins of the David Brown era. When new, its specification was ahead of the competition, boasting a top speed of 140mph from a new Tadek Marek straight-six 3,670cc engine that could propel the four-seater car from standing to 60mph in nine seconds. It was the first production car capable of

accelerating from stationary to 100mph and back to standing in less than 30 seconds.

The DB4's aluminium bodywork had been designed by Touring of Italy and was wrapped around a sophisticated superstructure. Under the skin, there were modern components including servo-assisted disc brakes all round and an all-synchro four-speed manual gearbox.

Initially available as a fastback coupe (saloon), a shorter (by five inches)

DB4GT arrived in 1959 that was intended for GT-class racing, so it was lighter by 86kg (190lb) and the 3.7-litre engine was updated with high-lift camshafts, larger valves and an increased compression ratio and equipped with twin spark plugs per cylinder and triple Weber carburettors. Plus, a twin-plate clutch was fitted.

Several updates in 1960 saw the release of the DB4 Series 2 and a lighter and more powerful DB4GT Zagato (19 were produced).





## BUYING GUIDE

### DB4

By 1961, the DB4 Series 3 was launched, but six months later the Series 4 arrived and in that same year, a convertible appeared.

During 1962, sales of the DB4 were struggling. The overall length of the body was increased by a little over three inches (9cm) in a bid to increase interior space, but this also added to the weight.

When production ended in 1963, sales of the saloon totalled 1,040. The convertible had reached 70, consisting of 30 based on the Series 4 and the rest on the longer Series 5.

### UPGRADES

Throughout the production of the DB4, several upgrades were either available as an optional extra or as standard. An oil cooler, electric windows and an overdrive unit became optional extras on the Series 2, for example. The 3,670cc straight-six engine was offered with various upgrades

and marketed in GT and Special Series specs. Vantage models had faired-in headlights and triple SU carburettors.

### SIZE AND WEIGHT

With the series 5 saloon and convertible measuring 4,480mm (roughly 14ft 8in) from end to end, the DB4 is almost as long as a late Ford Mondeo. It is, however, noticeably slimmer than most modern cars at a mere 1,676mm (almost five and a half feet). For what was marketed as a lightweight supercar, it's moderately heavy by the standards of the 1950s and 1960s, weighing in at 1,308kg.

### TOOLS, SPARES & SPECIALISTS

"In 1977, we purchased from AML all the manufacturing rights for the DB4, GT, Rapide and Zagato," explains Antony Forshaw at Aston Service Dorset. "With this came all the spare parts, build sheets

for each car, build books and parts drawings."

Consequently, ASD has remanufactured many DB4 parts and knows where to source others that were made by other manufacturers (eg. early Dunlop brake calipers).

Some parts are, however, hard to find, and specialist Pugsley & Lewis warns that trim for the interior and exterior can be difficult to source, along with gauges and seats. They also say that the bumpers on early models are hard to find, whereas the later bumpers were fitted to the DB5, so are more readily available.

### VALUES

When new, the DB4 saloon sold for £3,976, whereas the convertible was priced at £4,194. Based on an average annual inflation rate of a little over 5%, a rough calculation shows a modern value is around £100k. The value of the DB4





today is now much greater and such an amount won't even buy a restoration project as they seem to start at £150k or more. At such a starting point, Pugsley & Lewis estimates you'll need at least another £280k to complete a restoration. Consequently, don't expect much change out of £500k for a roadworthy example, or at least £700k for a GT, Series 1 or something out of the ordinary. And if you want a Zagato, set aside a few million pounds.

### CHASSIS NUMBERS

Knowing the chassis number not only helps to verify a DB4's identity, but also to determine what series it is and what should be fitted to it. The Series 1's chassis numbers ran from DB4/101 to 249. The Series 2 is DB4/250 to 600, with the Series 3 being DB4/601 to 765, the Series 4 is DB4/766 to 950 and the Series 5 is DB4/1001 to 1215.





## BUYING GUIDE

DB4

### ENGINE

All DB4s were powered by the same 3,760cc twin-cam straight-six engine, but with a range of power outputs, depending on those aforementioned performance options. Early pre-Series 2 cars suffered from overheating and subsequent engine failure, which was seemingly resolved by fitting an oil cooler and a larger sump.

The engine block has weep holes, so look for coolant residue or oil leaks or both (a mayonnaise mixture). And be wary if these weep holes have been blocked.

In all cases, look for oil leaks from around the camshaft covers, sump and the rear main oil seal (between the engine and gearbox).



Pugsley & Lewis says that the chassis number can be found stamped on to the left-hand side of the front crossmember, close to where the lower wishbone is secured. It is also stamped to the metalwork that's underneath the instrument binnacle, on the inside of the fuel filler flap and the door hinges. And if the interior trim is original, the chassis number should be scribbled in chalk on the back of most interior parts.

### BODYWORK

The aluminium exterior of the DB4 is non-structural. There are no off-the-shelf panels available, so if a door or a rear quarter has been accident damaged, repairs will inevitably be expensive. And Antony at ASD warns, "Body panels are certainly not interchangeable. If anyone is considering putting a second-hand panel on a car as a repair, it will not fit."

It's therefore essential to check all exterior panelwork for damage and blemishes in the paintwork. Inspect the panel gaps to ensure they are even. Look for signs of blistering paint, which may suggest the aluminium underneath has started to oxidise.

"A point of interest is that the Series 1 bonnet was hinged at the rear and this was then changed to being hinged at the front from the Series 2 onwards," says Antony at ASD.

Check the gaps between the headlights, indicators, front grille and

bonnet are similar on both sides and not excessive. Accident damage or poor restoration work can result in a non-symmetrical front end.

Feel around the wired edge of the wheelarches where the aluminium is rolled. This can be a moisture trap and an area of corrosion.

Lift the carpets inside the cabin (if possible) to check the condition of the

floors, sills, propshaft and gearbox tunnel and underneath the rear seats. Water ingress can result in corrosion of the floors, which can be hidden by the carpets on the inside and concealed by Underseal on the underside.

Author of books including *Aston Martin Zagato*, Stephen Archer, comments, "Check the brake cylinder support bracket, it's a moisture trap."

### GEARBOX

A David Brown four-speed all-synchromesh manual transmission was initially fitted to the DB4 with optional overdrive on the Series 4 onwards. Borg-Warner's Model 8 three-speed automatic was introduced later as an option but is very rare.

The manual gearbox is regarded as robust but needs an element of mechanical sympathy to operate it. When changing down gears, for example, it helps to match the engine's rpm to avoid crunching, but if the synchromesh rings are worn, you may still struggle. Rebuilding a gearbox can be difficult because parts availability is very scarce in some cases, so components may need to be fabricated.

Check around the gearbox for oil leaks. There's a rear oil seal that can leak and if oil is covering the back of





"We do a rear main oil seal conversion which is ideal to do at the time of an engine rebuild," says Antony at ASD. "It requires scroll machining of the crankshaft and the fitting of a new aluminium holder and lip seal." The kit costs £248.96, although an engine rebuild can typically cost upwards of £25,000.

A rebuild is a good opportunity to replace all three timing chains, which cost around £320. Antony explains that many engine parts were not available, but he has now had cylinder liners, pistons and valves remanufactured. Cylinder liners cost £277 each, a set of six pistons is £1,967.78, exhaust valves are £70.76 each and inlet

valves are £61.52, and conrods are £2,935 for a set of six.

Evidence of routine oil and filter changes is an essential starting point to ensuring an engine has been looked after. In fact, receipts for routine servicing are a must, but as Pugsley & Lewis warns, changing the oil and filters is quite simple and cost effective, what's more important is identifying any problems and having them fixed. Consequently, they find most customers spend upwards of £800 on a routine service, which involves a test drive, thorough inspection and inevitably a few additional jobs.

Check the doors can open and close smoothly and the shut lines are flush. "They do drop but can be adjusted internally as there is a diagonal tensioning wire that can be tightened," says Antony at Aston Service Dorset. "After that it is a case of rebushing or replacing the door hinges."

Closely check the condition of the doors, which can corrode along the bottom edges (it's largely made of steel

with an aluminium skin). Budget for around £500 for a repair panel, but much more to have the door stripped, repaired and painted.

Pugsley & Lewis has found that the DB4 is the least rotten when compared to the later DB5 and DB6. And Stephen Archer concurs this statement, saying the DB4 was better made. Exterior trim can be expensive or difficult to source if

the engine and the bellhousing, it could be caused by the crankshaft seal (the rear main oil seal), but also a seal for the gearbox.

Test the operation of the clutch, ensuring gears can be selected and there's a sufficient biting point. Under acceleration, listen and feel for the engine over-revving, which could indicate a worn and slipping clutch. Antony at ASD says, "The original single 10in and twin-plate clutch options are now obsolete. The best option is to replace it with a 9.5in balanced diaphragm clutch kit and high release bearing which is £1,770.18 and takes 14-16 hours to fit."

Pugsley & Lewis charges around £3,600 to supply and replace the clutch on a DB4, although they warn that extras may include replacing the slave and master cylinders.

If a DB4 has a Borg-Warner Model 8 automatic gearbox, then there are

a few common problems to be aware of. "Problems most likely occur with failure of friction material (bands and clutch plates) which causes slippage in drive, but also pressure issues due to failure of O-rings," explains David at the independent Borg Warner Specialist. "Subject to the age of the gearbox, oil leaks can occur due to ageing gaskets, which is most common around the sump and front pump/converter seal."

BWS charges from £995 to strip and overhaul an automatic gearbox. "This includes a full stripdown, inspection and clean of all components, followed by replacement of all friction material (forward and reverse clutch plates and bands) and replacement of all O-rings, seals and gaskets," says David. "Reassembly takes place with the operation of the gearbox tested with compressed air and then a final paint. The process can be documented with photos for the owner's records."

it's damaged or missing, so be meticulous with checking its condition or making sure it's present. A windscreen, for instance, costs around £2,000.

A missing front grille and its surround will cost between £1,200 and £2,200 to replace, as Antony at ASD explains, "The grille up to chassis DB4/765 was the mesh type with a surround, which is £344.87 for the mesh and £939.96 for the surround. From DB4/766 they had the traditional slatted grille which is £1,289.85 and uses the same surround."

Don't assume that a component, such as a sticking bonnet lock, will be easy to fix and cheap to replace. A new bonnet lock assembly, for example, costs over £600 and the separate striker plate is almost as much.

The inner rear wheelarches are made from steel, so they can corrode. A visual inspection with the rear wheels removed will help to check their condition. The boot floor and spare wheel well are also made from steel and can corrode, so empty the boot and check this panelwork, right up to the rear bulkhead. And there's a steel tube framework inside the rear wing area, which supports the aluminium bodywork, so inspect it for corrosion and accident damage.

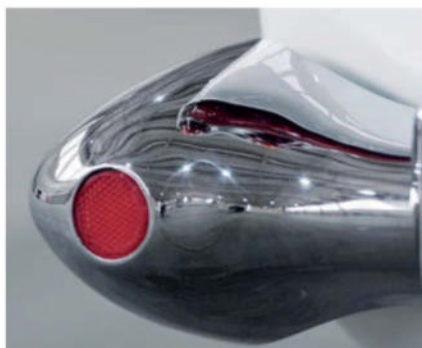
## CHASSIS

Underneath the aluminium exterior, there's a combination of a steel platform chassis with integrated floors and sills, and a lattice of small-diameter steel tubes above to support the upper sections of bodywork. Termed as a 'Superleggera' (super-light), this was Touring's innovative construction method of the Fifties and Sixties.

On a DB4, if any of that steel is original, it's essential to know that it is free from corrosion. Water ingress in the cabin can lead to corrosion of the floors and sills. Repair panels are available in some cases and often reasonably priced. A sill repair panel, for example, can cost between £100 and £200. Chassis legs are around £200, but Stephen Archer warns, "installing them is not a job for an amateur."

A thorough inspection of the underside of the vehicle is essential to look for corrosion, but to also look for damage,





such as crushed jacking points. “Major corrosion points are the rear radius arm attachment points and the outriggers, which can be cut out and replaced for £247.20 each side for the part,” says Antony at ASD.

Corrosion of the upper tubular steel framework isn’t easy to see because it’s hidden by the aluminium bodywork, but if there are alignment issues and inconsistent panel gaps, this structure could have weakened.

If the chassis needs to be extensively repaired, then removal of the bodywork may be the best solution, which the Beckenham-based Pugsley & Lewis estimates takes a couple of days. They are however keen to stress that this is a full major undertaking and generally only necessary when a restoration is required.

**LIVE AXLE**

A Salisbury 4 HA differential was fitted to the DB4 inside a live axle, with the final drive ratio being 3.54:1, although ratios including 3.77:1 and 4.09:1 were also used.

Check around the casing for signs of oil leaks, which may mean the seals have blown, but can also be caused by a blocked breather hole on the top of the casing.

“Leaks and noises are the main thing,” remarks Ben Thomson at Simply Performance concerning the rear axle. “Often, halfshaft bearings are not set up correctly - people fiddling with them over the years. Hubs can be problematic to remove to change seals and often require pullers or a further stripdown of the axle.”

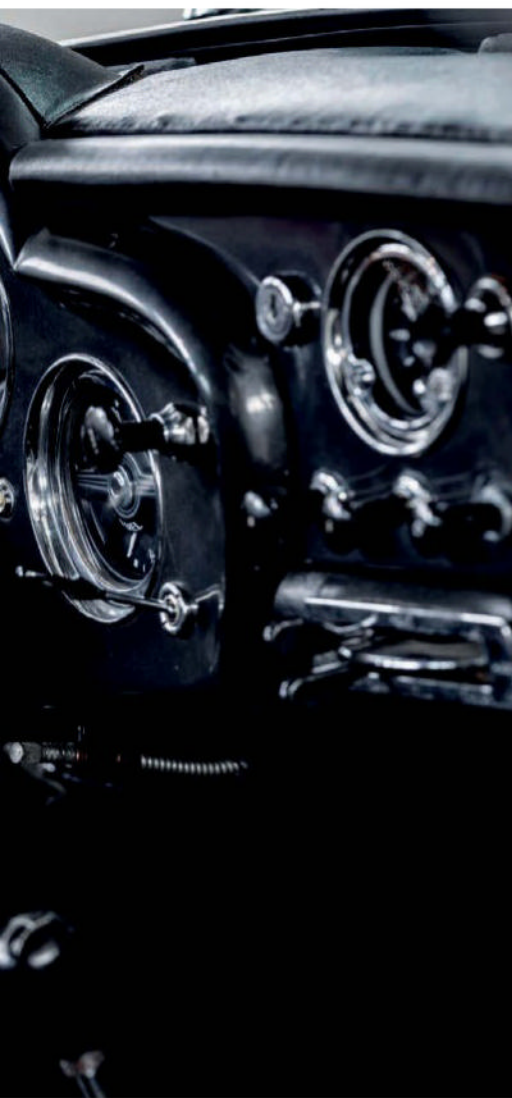
Simply Performance can strip and inspect a 4 HA axle and overhaul it (prices start at £1,050), or even supply the parts (standard and upgrades). Aston Service

Dorset sells brand-new axles from around £14,500. “Salisbury is now part of GKN/ Dana,” says Ben. “With no OEM support we offer Aston Martin owners an OEM level of service, using Timken bearings and modern lipped seals. And we have remanufactured most of the 4 HA range of parts so if there is any damage then we can always sort it out.”

**BRAKES**

A Lockheed vacuum servo-assisted brake set-up is fitted to the DB4, which was initially equipped with Dunlop calipers, switching to Girling after the Series 1, and solid discs all round with a diameter between 11.25in and 12in. Antony at ASD sheds some light on the subject, explaining that these cars had what is known as A and B braking, which refers to the size of the front brake pads (B being





larger). However, it gets more complicated than that. “The discs and wheels are not all the same either,” he warns. “Up to chassis 250, there are 16in wheels and 11.5in discs at £355.47 each, 251 to 1000 is 16in wheels and 12in discs at £354.63 each with B braking, 1001 onwards has 15in wheels and 11.25in discs at £328.93 each.”

The brake calipers are a twin piston set-up and cost around £210 each to replace, although seal kits are available for around £50 to rebuild an existing caliper. The rear calipers incorporate the handbrake mechanism with a separate set of handbrake pads.

Visually inspect the condition of

the brake discs, looking for excessive corrosion, pitting and cracks. During a test drive, check the steering doesn't veer when applying the brakes, which may suggest a seized caliper piston (assuming there are no issues with the suspension, tyres and wheel alignment).

**SUSPENSION**

The front suspension consists of unequal length upper and lower wishbones with kingpins, coilovers (Armstrong shock absorbers – OE-spec Koni replacements are available) and an anti-roll bar. Antony at ASD advises to check for wear in the bushes and aluminium balljoint's hemispherical bearings by raising and

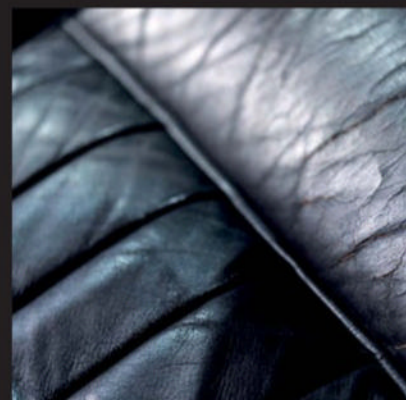
**INTERIOR & ELECTRICS**

12-volt positive earth electrics were originally fitted, but many may have been converted to negative earth and the dynamo changed to an alternator. In all cases, look for corroded earth points, fuses and connections and signs of water ingress. Test all electrical equipment and don't assume a malfunctioning gauge or inactive indicator will be straightforward to fix.

Interior trim can be expensive to replace if it's damaged or missing. The heater selector controls, for instance, cost over £800 and even a demister vent surround is £84. A horn push is £670, whereas a gearlever knob is £184 and a catch for the



rear quarterlight (opening glass) is £237 - the standard seal often causes it to break, but a softer alternative is available for £37. Check the front seats move on their runners. A full set of runners costs around £900.





## BUYING GUIDE

DB4

wagging a road wheel. A balljoint service kit costs £667.14 for both sides, and a front suspension bush kit is £620.72. New lower wishbones are available and are £955.34 each and ASD makes the upper wishbone arms for £873.98 each and the upper wishbone spindle costs £110.05.

The rear suspension consists of a live axle with coil springs, parallel trailing links (also called radius arms), Watts linkage and Armstrong lever arm shock absorbers. Vintage and Classic Shock Absorbers can recondition the rear lever arm shock absorbers along with the linkage. Antony recommends checking for wear in the Watts linkage and the radius arm bushes. "The swinging link on the DB4 was made from aluminium and is prone to cracking," he says. "It's best to replace it with a cast iron DB5 one for £283.46."

## STEERING

Rack-and-pinion steering is employed on the DB4 and Antony at ASD warns that sometimes the housing for the rack can break. He makes later DB5 racks for AML, which are ready to fit onto the DB4 and cost £4,358.46.

Stephen Archer says the most common steering-related issue concerns perished or softened rack mounts which can be replaced. With no power steering fitted as standard, an electric conversion kit is available for around £3,000 (excluding fitting).



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## VERDICT

There's no denying the fact that you need deep pockets to be able to afford to buy a DB4, but once you have got over that initial cost, the upkeep can seem cheap in comparison. However, thanks to their value, these cars have become treasured investments and ornaments, so don't assume that if a DB4 looks as good as new, all of its mechanical components are in perfect working order. A meticulous inspection is essential. **AMD**

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This particular model has garnered significant attention, as it was featured in an extensive eight-page article in 'Aston Martin Driver' Magazine in November 2022. Its captivating design and rich history have captivated the automotive world, solidifying its status as a standout among Aston Martin's impressive lineup.



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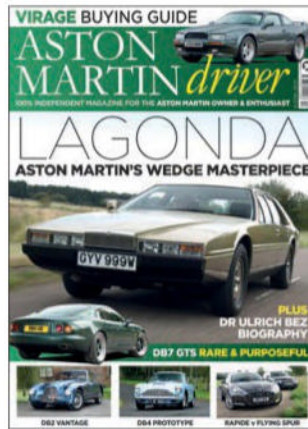
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# Why Aston Martin's new GT fleet is about customer satisfaction

## The popular GT racing ranks have two new additions in the form of an upgraded Vantage model for 2024

**T**O A degree, modern-day GT racing around the world is the most direct reflection on the origins of all motorsport. To begin with, only very wealthy automotive enthusiasts could afford to buy and operate motor vehicles let alone race them. The current GT racing landscape too is populated by well-heeled amateur drivers who are out to slake their thirst for speed.

This is usually done by purchasing an off-the-peg specially designed sportscar to the top-flight rules, GT3, or the more accessible and more production focused GT4 regulations.

The enthusiastic GT amateur racers will then place their pride and joy with a well-known team and usually hire the services of a 'gun' driver for the second seat, regularly an up-and-coming racer or a marque specialist, and then be eligible

to enter myriad races around the globe. These include some of the most famous endurance competitions on the planet.

That means that the marketplace for GT machines is a fierce one but also highly profitable for manufacturers such as Aston Martin, McLaren, Porsche, BMW, Mercedes and even Toyota with its Supra model.

The well-worn adage of 'win on Sunday and sell on Monday' might not ring strictly





true but a successful on-track presence in GT racing can not only enhance a brand's road-going pedigree but it can also lead directly into the bank accounts of the ambitious amateur racers who want to sign the cheques and fulfil their motorsport dreams.

Aston Martin has been a major player in both the GT3 and GT4 divisions for more than 20 years now. When the firm was owned by David Richards, the customer racing programme handled by Prodrive was expanded hugely and that crucial income stream has not stopped since.

The launch of the latest version of the Aston Martin Vantage GT3 at the beginning of 2024 alongside the new Vantage road car heralded a new era for the much-loved sports car, one which would see it once again pitch battle against the giants of the sports car scene.



***GT racing is cyclical. Imagine it like a shopping centre escalator: the heady days of the GT1 monsters in the late Nineties and early 2000s got too expensive, climbed too far up the escalator and it outgrew its sustainability.***





## MOTORSPORT

### VANTAGE GT

The wraps came off the cheaper and less powerful GT4 model a few weeks afterwards and the competition set was complete.

The GT3 model will be the standard-bearer in international GT competition. The Heart of Racing team, the same squad which will oversee Aston's entry into the blue riband Hypercar class in the future with the Valkyrie model, has been entrusted with running the GT3 Vantage in the World Endurance Championship in 2024. There is also a sister version of the four-litre V8 operated by D'station Racing on the global stage.

The potential in the upgraded Vantage GT3 was apparent at the opening round of WEC when Briton Ian James, along with codrivers Daniel Mancinelli and Alex Riberas, finished second in Qatar in early March in the Heart of Racing version. They were followed across the line by D'station's Erwan Bastard, Clement Mateu and Marco Sorensen.

The car learned lessons from the previous Vantage GTE and GT3, which had first taken to the tracks in 2018. The Evo version has a twin-turbo format, upgraded suspension and tweaked aerodynamics.

Given the boom in interest in the World Endurance Championship, most notably in the Hypercar division, each manufacturer is limited to just a brace of entries in that competition.

However, the marketplace is still wide open for the GT3 car. It will race in the USA's top sportscar class, IMSA, the popular GT World Challenge Europe, the European Le Mans Series and in long-distance races at the Nürburgring

Nordschleife. Aside from that, the car can feature in domestic contests too, such as the ever-popular British GT Championship.

While Aston isn't officially involved in any GT3 competitions outside the World Endurance Championship, it does link up with partner teams who operate its products around the pitlanes and race tracks of the world, and it can also help out by seconding its 'factory' drivers to specific teams should they need them.

It isn't just sportscar racing knowledge which has gone into the Vantage GT3. The Lawrence Stroll-owned company now has access to some of the top brains in the sport through its efforts in grand prix racing, and it says that knowledge and expertise will filter down into its road-going range too.

Marco Mattiacci, Aston Martin's global chief marque and commercial officer, says: "[The new Vantage GT3] signals a closer relationship between our road and race programmes, with Aston Martin Racing benefitting from the exceptional pool of talent forged in Formula 1 and found throughout Aston Martin Performance Technologies (AMPT)."

AMPT is a newly created division focused solely on the higher performance areas of the firm's work and it will oversee the development of the new Valhalla supercar. Being based at the new Aston Martin campus at the front gates of Silverstone means the free flow of information between each department is a huge boost.

Adam Carter, Aston Martin's head of endurance motorsport, adds: "The new GT3 is our first opportunity to use AMPT to play a role in leveraging the capabilities,

The GT4 won its debut race at the IMSA Michelin Pilot Challenge two-hour race at Sebring in March



attitude and methodologies of all of Aston Martin's various nerve centres, which we've then combined with the unrivalled GT programme management expertise of AMR.

"The GT racing programme will serve as a development lab that will lead to an increasing transfer of knowledge and approach into future Aston Martin road cars." The wraps came off the GT4 car at the end of February, and this is perhaps an

The Vantage GT3 finished second in class on its debut at the opening round of the 2024 FIA World Endurance Championship (WEC) in Qatar







even more important machine in terms of potential sales.

GT racing is cyclical. Imagine it like a shopping centre escalator: the heady days of the GT1 monsters in the late Nineties and early 2000s got too expensive, climbed too far up the escalator and it outgrew its sustainability. So, the more cost-effective GT2 cars were promoted to be the blue riband racing act in the FIA GT Championship. To fill the void where the second-division GT2 had once been, GT3 was created as a lower tier in 2006.

GT2 also rose too high and devoured itself in high expense, high-tech cars and inflated budgets and so it was dropped. GT3 cars became the headline category, with GT4 being drawn up as the stepping-off point for amateur drivers and it was first introduced in 2007.

Unlike the top-flight class, the GT4 has remained loyal to its more production-flavoured rulebook, which has underpinned its sustainability. That means it remains highly relevant to the manufacturers of supercar and very much within reach of the

amateur racer, hence the upgrade to the GT4 Vantage had been much anticipated.

It takes many cues from the latest Vantage road-going car and no stone has been left unturned in unearthing performance, according to those behind the design.

Refinements have been made to the bodywork and a careful eye has been cast over the aerodynamics. The GT4 rulebook is tight on what can and can't be done in an effort to keep a lid on costs, but a revamped front splitter and newly designed rear wing feature on the Vantage.

The GT4 car has to be more user-friendly as it is not only a pure-bred racing machine, but it has to cope with the demands of non-professional racing drivers who might want to simply use it as a track day weapon. Functionality is far more important than fiddly set-ups for the amateur racer.

Mattiacci adds, "The new Vantage GT4 is a born winner. Benefitting from the significant performance improvements seen in the sensational new Vantage

road car and developed in parallel with the Vantage GT3, the Vantage GT4 is a demonstration of the increased synergy between our road and race car programmes: class-leading power and technology on the road translating into race-winning pace on the track.

"The introduction of the new GT4 also allows us to build an even deeper connection to Aston Martin's partner teams. We currently have 40 partners in active competition across a broad spectrum of global GT racing, many of whom are running multi-class, multi-class programmes. This level of engagement underlines our commitment to all levels of motorsport competition as well as building closer ties with our wider community of fans and followers, many of whom fell in love with our brand through our successes in sportscar racing and at Le Mans."

The GT4 is reputed to produce 470hp although the rule makers run a balance of performance across all machines in the class in an effort to match the speeds of the machines from each different manufacturer. That hasn't stopped the engineers going through the Vantage GT4 with a fine-toothed comb, seeking out further improvements in the cooling systems and suspension.

After its race debut at Daytona (which was actually in advance of the official launch in the UK) Aston has said it plans to build 40 customer examples throughout the year ahead.

Carter says, "The new Vantage GT4 is very much an evolution of the previous car.

"Closer synergies between Aston Martin's road and race car programmes have enabled Aston Martin Racing to capitalise upon the improvements made to the new Vantage road car for increased speed and efficiency, while retaining the core qualities which made the outgoing GT4 so popular with teams and drivers." **AMD**



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**MEET THE EXPERT**  
ASTON KEEPER LTD



Aston Keeper's Ryszard  
Nowobilski



# KEEP IT REAL

Aston Keeper Ltd has a practical and honest view on servicing Aston Martins. We talk to the company's Ryszard Nowobilski to learn more.

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY PAUL WALTON

**A**FTER ARRIVING at Aston Keeper's premises, I admit to checking the address Ryszard Nowobilski had given me since I am in a quiet and leafy street in Egham, Surrey. It's only when he opens the door of the house in front of me that I realise I'm at the right place and that Aston Keeper is clearly based at his home.

"It helps keep the overheads down," explains Ryszard (pronounced Ri-shard) openly when he sees my

confusion. Its location is just one of many reasons that makes Aston Keeper Ltd different from most other specialists. Another is that most of Ryszard's expertise was handed down through the generations: his father Krzysztof used to race in Formula Ford (competing against such luminaries as David Coulthard and Eddie Irvine) with his dad. Though perhaps unlikely due to his experience predominantly in the corporate sector, Ryszard has been around and worked on cars all of his life. A treasured family photo

shows him as a three-year-old wielding a spanner on his father's racing car. "The love has always been there," he acknowledges.

Having owned more cars than he can count over the years, mainly British marques, he's taught himself everything he has needed to know to service and maintain cars to a high standard.

Aston Keeper's online reviews certainly show customers are happy with Ryszard's level of expertise. "If you have an Aston Martin and want





## MEET THE EXPERT

### ASTON KEEPER LTD

a knowledgeable engineering-led approach, take it to Aston Keeper,” said one. “Ryszard’s knowledge and his willingness to go the extra mile have blown me away. Never have I felt my pride and joy was safer than in his hands,” is another.

Becoming a specialist has always been his dream and he finally made this a reality in 2023 when he was made redundant from his position as the global head of HR for a large company in the financial services industry. He chose to specialise in Aston Martin since it’s the brand he’s the most passionate about and has been since he sat in one of the James Bond DB5s in the mid-Nineties. “I’ve had Jaguars, I’ve had Land Rovers, I’ve had all sorts,” he tells me. “But Aston Martin has always been the one that I’ve loved the most.”

In September 2023, he set up Aston Keeper Ltd, the name coming from his and (business) partner Jo’s existing YouTube channel called Classic Keeper about their own distinctive collection of (future) classic cars.

“I like the idea that Aston Martins are something that are looked after like you would a beehive; you have to care for it since it needs huge attention to detail.”

After investigating the price of commercial properties, there was nowhere in his local Surrey area he could make viable, so he took the perhaps brave decision to work from home. It helped that he’d recently built a large workshop for his own cars in the garden. “We’re working around what we already have rather than having everything tailor built,” he explains, “but so far it’s working out quite well.”

Due to the compact size of his workshop, it doesn’t take long for him to show me around. But it’s clean, well equipped and what it lacks in space it makes up for in organisation with every nook and cranny put to good use.

This means Ryszard can’t have too many cars on site at any one time, another reason for choosing Aston Martin. “It’s a niche market,” he says, “which suits me because I don’t want volume.”

The domestic location also helps with customers getting to and from his workshop. Unlike some larger specialists that are often based in a trading estate, miles from anywhere, Aston Keeper is



The full Aston Keeper team; Ryszard, his father Krzysztof, and his partner Jo



Ryszard is happy to work on other marques including Land Rover where this engine is from



**MEET THE EXPERT**  
ASTON KEEPER LTD



Ryszard checks the V12 of a DBS ready to be serviced

within walking distance from Egham train station.

Ryszard reckons that being based at home offers several other benefits. To begin with, he can offer a higher level of customer service than larger garages. With owners literally coming to his house, he can spend more time talking to them about what they want. "I'll then send short videos explaining what needs that doing unlike larger garages that will often just email an invoice with an approve button at the bottom."

He tells me of a customer who took his car into a large specialist for a £2,500 service. At the top of his invoice, it simply said the fan pack was broken. "It was actually shattered," Ryszard tells me, "The plastic was crumbling and turning to dust. The fans themselves were a few miles away from coming off, ripping the engine ▶



Aston Keeper's workshop is small but well organised



Jo dismantles a headrest ready to be retrimmed



## MEET THE EXPERT

### ASTON KEEPER LTD

belt off and doing goodness knows what damage. But nobody had explained this to him.”

Perhaps just as importantly, by keeping his costs down he can afford to keep his prices low. At the moment, he's offering a complete service for a VH era of Aston Martin for just £600 which involves, at its simplest level, a genuine oil filter and oil. But importantly, it also includes a full day of Ryszard's time; if the car requires any other work that will fit within the day's work, the customer no additional labour. “This means if the top bushes, door struts, boot struts, bonnet struts or anything else needs changing, they only pay for the parts. There's no extra charge for labour because it's all included in the day.”

Ryszard was expecting to concentrate on more affordable modern models such as the DB9, V8 Vantage and Rapide, investing in Aston Martin's own diagnostic system for cars up to 2016. Although this is very much Aston Keeper's market, due to his realistic approach, he's already been asked to work on older models such as changing the head gasket on a 1978 V8 Vantage. “The owner said, ‘I read your advert and you just seem like you're just going to do what I need rather than a full restoration.’”

Due to the time they take and their expense, Ryszard isn't interested in doing full restorations, but he'll happily tidy up cars where needed. “For example, the wiper support on the DB9 often becomes rusty. So I'll put it into the blast cabinet for ten minutes and then I'll prime it, paint it, and put it back on.”

Anything that Ryszard can't do, such as large machine work, is given to a local network of trusted specialists.

As further proof of Ryszard trying to help customers save money, after-market specialist AM Upgrades has already appointed Aston Keeper as one of its preferred suppliers for installing its own headlight venting kit. “The headlights of the V8 Vantage and DB9 fogging up is a big problem especially in the winter. But components are so expensive, if they go wrong, you're in real trouble so we regularly fit this venting kit. It's finding these little things like this that offer a big help to customers.”

With Jo's spare-time experience in



The BMW Z4 Ryszard currently races in the BRSCC SW Motorsports Clubsport Trophy



The three-year-old Ryszard works on his father's Formula Ford

all things textile, another service Aston Keeper is now offering is small trim repairs or modifying panels for upgrades such as fitting a modern stereo. In due course, they hope to add custom floor mats to their services.

As for the future, Ryszard would consider moving into larger, commercial premises if the work required it, but not at the expense of customer service. Plus, by following Krzysztof into motor racing, currently competing in the BRSCC SW Motorsports Clubsport Trophy in a BMW Z4, he's also interested in offering sensibly priced race preparation.

The third member of the Aston Keeper team is Krzysztof, who occasionally helps



The moment Ryszard's love of Aston Martins started, sitting in a James Bond DB5 as a child

Ryszard with some of the heavy lifting. This makes the company a very family-oriented concern, lacking the more distant formality of a larger garage.

Due to being based in that quiet Surrey street, there's no denying, Aston Keeper is a different kind of Aston Martin specialist. But thanks to Ryszard's understanding of both the cars and what his customers want, should also see it become a successful one. **AMD**

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## FROM THE CLUBHOUSE



## A slice of club life:



## South East England

Find out what some of our UK areas are up to with their 'motoring and socialising' courtesy of our regional area reps

**Area 00 – Central London****Words: Matthew Godfrey**

I'm writing as our Astons emerge from their winter slumber, commencing with an Area 00 run to the Royal Motor Yachting Club at Sandbanks in April.

In February we had the pleasure of visiting Cliveden House courtesy of Calleija Jewellery and Aston Martin London to enjoy lunch and test the new DB12 and DBX707, both being very impressive. We also enjoyed monthly drinks at the RAC Club.

In early April we went back in time hosting a 00 Zoom call (seems my account still works), where it was great to regroup from around the world. Speaking

of around the world, we very much look forward to meeting our Turkish friends in Istanbul in May and look forward to meeting any fellow Aston owners as we pass through Germany, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, Austria and back through Germany and France.

Later in April I'll be hoping to report from the Aston Martin residences in Miami, but we are looking forward to viewing the new Vantage in the flesh, so to speak, as well as our March drinks at the RAC. In June the main event will be one of our area members in his DB2/4 participating in this year's Mille Miglia! In September a small group of us head to the Atlas Mountains, but welcome all along for the ride from London to Gibraltar and back via Portugal.

**Area 16 – Sussex****Words: Gary Wigzell**

Area 16 had their first event for 2024 with a visit to Bletchley Park, with a total of 27 cars spending the day at Bletchley which included a private tour. It is a fascinating place steeped in history, some of which is only now coming to light after so much secrecy during and following the second world war. Twenty of us opted to stay for a couple of nights at Flitwick Manor close by which served us, and looked after us very well, with private dining and excellent company. The drive to Bletchley took us through some excellent country roads along with a drive through Woburn Abbey Park.

Our next trip away is a long weekend to France (Reims) in May with a couple of champagne house visits. Our final Sunday lunch of the winter was held at Highdown and an excellent lunch was had by all.







**Area 21 – South East Hampshire**  
**Words: Adrian Moore**

The sun shone long and brightly making the perfect backdrop for our March coffee and lunch run. It was a great success with 22 cars (18 Aston Martins) attending the start of the coffee run at a local golf club, who made us very welcome; we will return sometime in the future.

Not all of those 22 cars went on to the lunch venue, but most did and were joined by others to make up another 22 cars on parade with 17 Astons. The route from coffee to lunch was well documented and the Volantes took advantage of the beautiful sunshine with the only drawback being the numerous puddles along the route. This meant everyone was going to have to clean their Astons

afterwards as mud had streaked up many a side and, in some cases, very artistically! So on to our lunch venue, who were very excited to see so many Astons. Indeed, because of the size of our party they gave us exclusive use of their garden room, which was a tented structure attached to the pub overlooking the gardens. It had glazed sides and was heated, but the floor is what one would call a 'fine aggregate' finish. So, no stilettos or floaty dresses but comfortable footwear and warmish clothing was the order of the day and it all worked perfectly. The food, all preselected, was superb and outstanding service completed a very enjoyable day.

The Area 21 tour to The Netherlands and Belgium in April will take in the lovely sights of Bruges, Keukenhof for the flower parade and then Ghent before turning for home.

Then in May we have booked a stunning vineyard for our spring lunch. On arrival we will have English sparkling bubbles followed by a sumptuous Sunday lunch overlooking the many hectares of vines from the first-floor restaurant. Plenty of parking for our Astons which should provide a great photo opportunity.

Later in the year we have organised a long weekend trip, the 'Suffolk Autumn Discovery Tour'. We will be visiting several

of the beautiful villages in Suffolk and the famous Sutton Hoo. Whatever you are doing in your Aston enjoy the coming spring.

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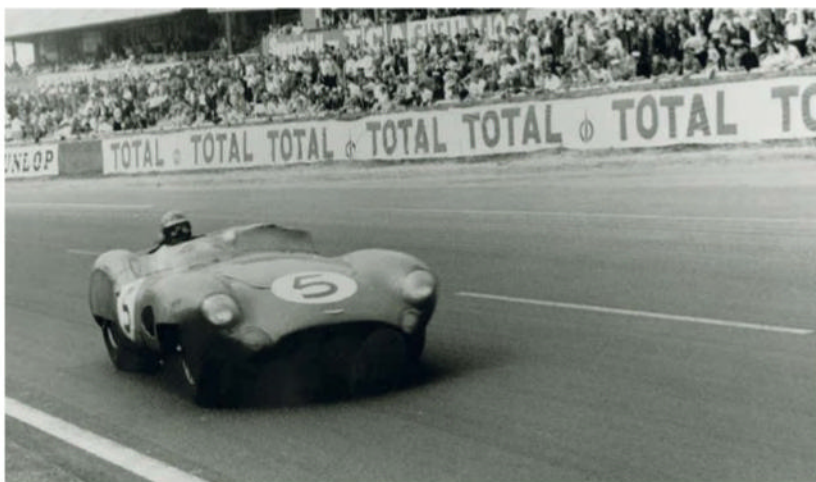
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# ASTON MARTIN *drivers*

As an Aston Martin works driver between 1950 and 1954, Eric Thompson achieved many of the company's early successes in endurance racing

**A**LTHOUGH NOT as well known today as some of his contemporaries, Eric Thompson remains an important figure in Aston Martin's endurance racing programme of the Fifties. Born at Long Ditton, Surrey in November 1919, Eric grew up in Cobham. Close to the famous Brooklands circuit, he would regularly attend races, sparking a lifelong interest in motorsport.

In 1938, Eric and his brother entered the Land's End Trial in an Alvis. "It was a totally unsuitable car," he acknowledged in Anthony Pritchard's 2006 book, *Aston Martin: A Racing History*, "it had no ground clearance and no steering lock." Replacing this with a Ford V8 saw the pair enjoy more success, including a Premier Award at the following year's event.

When he returned home, he became an insurance broker for Lloyd's, a job he kept throughout his racing career. He continued to compete with a 1939 MG TB.

In 1948, an old army friend, Robin Richards, invited Thompson to co-drive his HRG for the Paris 12 Hours. Despite the gruelling 7,767 miles, they finished a fine fourth in the 1,100cc class.

This prompted Thompson to build a lightweight HRG for the 1949 24 Hours of Le Mans, buying a used chassis for £475. Despite Thompson's lack of experience, he and his more established co-driver, Jack Fairman, finished a credible eighth overall, winning the 1,500cc class.

They were equally successful at the Spa 24 Hours a fortnight later when they again won the 1,500cc category.

Although Thompson took his first overall victory with the HRG at Goodwood in August, with it not being practical off the circuit, he soon sold

the car. "I thought that was the end of my motorsport career," he admitted in Pritchard's book. He was wrong.

In April 1950, Thompson received a call from Aston Martin's team manager, John Wyer, who he'd originally met during the 1948 Paris 12 Hours race. No doubt due to his success in the HRG, Wyer invited him to a test session at Silverstone for a place in the Aston Martin team. "I obviously passed muster," he continued in *Aston Martin: A Racing History*,



"because I was summoned to a signing session and press reception at Feltham."

Thompson's first race for the British team was the 1950 Le Mans in a hard-worked DB2 prototype (UMC 66), which he shared with John Gordon. Unfortunately, the car retired after a mere eight laps due to a broken camshaft.

He later finished fourth in the One-Hour Production Sports Car race at Silverstone in August using one of the works DB2s, VMF 65, after letting his faster teammates through.

At the 1951 Le Mans, Thompson drove another of the works cars, VMF 64, with Lance Macklin to a fantastic third. He then drove VMF 65 again, now owned by privateer team owner Rob Walker, at the Tourist Trophy in Dundrod, taking third in class. His next race for Aston Martin was Le Mans in 1952 sharing a DB3 with Reg Parnell, but alas he never got behind the wheel due to final drive failure at the

two-hour mark. Even worse luck came in August when again driving a DB3 with Parnell at the Goodwood 9 Hours, fuel sloshed on to the car during a pit stop which ran on to the undertray, igniting the oil that had dripped from a leaking seal. Thankfully, Thompson managed to escape unhurt from the burning car.

In 1953 he bought the third DB2 works car, VMF 63, racing it at club events across the UK. He also borrowed a DB3 from Aston Martin itself for a race at Thruxton, finishing second.

Thompson finally took his first victory as an Aston Martin works driver when he and Parnell won the Goodwood 9 Hours. They also finished second at the Tourist Trophy a few weeks later.

For the 1954 Le Mans, he raced one of the two Lagonda V12s. Unfortunately, he lost control at the Esses on the 25th lap, spinning into the bank, the impact pushing the bodywork against the rear tyre. Despite Thompson spending over an hour trying to repair it enough to get back to the pits, the car was retired.

Due to Lloyd's needing more of his time, Thompson retired from racing soon after, the exceptions being the 1955 Le Mans and Goodwood 9 Hours when he drove a Connaught, but he failed to finish both.

But he didn't turn his back on Aston Martin completely, often acting as the team's gopher at important races such as the 1959 Le Mans.

In 1979 he bought the same works DB2, VMF 65, that he'd driven in 1951, using it for historic events throughout the Eighties such as the Mille Miglia. After retiring from Lloyd's in 1981, he sold rare and out-of-print books before passing away in August 2016, aged 95. **AMD**



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