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1959 LE MANS VICTORY



VANTAGE LE MANS



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by Aston Workshop



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THE LURE OF LE MANS



AMAZINGLY, 2024 marked the 53rd appearance of an Aston Martin at the 24 Hours of Le Mans. That's many more than most other winners including Bentley, Jaguar and Mercedes Benz. The influence Le Mans has had on its cars over the decades means the famous race has become part of the company's DNA, arguably just as much as Newport Pagnell or Feltham.

Aston Martin might have won the GT class several times over the last two decades, but its sole overall victory in 1959 remains the company's greatest achievement. To celebrate the 65th anniversary of that success, our full length feature on page 30 explains how if it didn't happen then, it never would.

We also look at one of those race influenced cars I mentioned earlier, the magnificent Vantage Le Mans from 1999 that celebrated the 40th anniversary (p38). Big, bold and loud, it was just like the race itself.

Sadly, this year's race was a relative disappointment when the Vantage GT3 of D'Station (above) finished a distant ninth and the car of Heart of Racing suffered a horrendous crash (see page 84 for a full report). However, the recent announcement that two Valkyries will take part in 2025 means Aston Martin's 54th appearance of this great race could hopefully be just as successful as its 21st was 65 years ago.



Paul Walton
Editor



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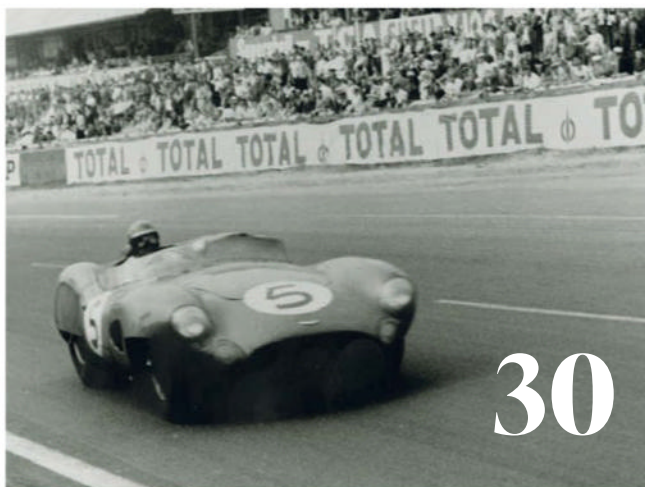
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UPFRONT NEWS

DBX707'S INTERIOR FACELIFTED

The DBX707's interior has received a series of comprehensive upgrades which include the adoption of Aston Martin's state-of-the-art, in-house developed infotainment system plus a striking new cabin architecture design.

Said Marco Mattiacci, Aston Martin's global chief brand and commercial officer, "With its best-in-class performance and dynamics, world-class design and the highest levels of luxury, the DBX707 immediately established a new ultra-luxury SUV benchmark. Now upgraded with state-of-the-art technology and a completely new interior the DBX707 moves the game on once more, further elevating the standard by which all competitors are judged."

Aston Martin's next-generation infotainment system features a bespoke, fully integrated multi-screen system and wireless Apple CarPlay and Android Auto plus full online connectivity supported by the Aston Martin customer app.

The information is displayed on a 12.3in touchscreen – 1.5in larger than those found in the DB12 and Vantage – with a second 10.25in central infotainment display screen



NEW V12 ANNOUNCED

Aston Martin has committed to continuing its 25-year bloodline of V12-engined flagships by announcing an all-new engine. With 835PS (823.6bhp) and an extraordinary 1,000Nm (738lb ft) of torque, the new V12 engine is the result of a complete redesign, targeting optimisation and improvement.

Hardware highlights of the new V12 engine include a strengthened cylinder block and conrods, redesigned cylinder heads incorporating reprofiled camshafts, plus new intake and exhaust ports. Repositioned spark plugs and new higher flow rate fuel injectors deliver optimised combustion for class-leading performance and efficiency gains. In addition, new higher speed, reduced inertia turbochargers deliver increased performance and throttle response.

Aston Martin's chief technical officer, Roberto Fedeli, said, "The V12 engine has



long been a symbol of power and prestige, but it is also a statement of engineering passion and technical prowess. With 835PS and 1000Nm of torque this unparalleled engine represents nothing less than the dawn of a dazzling new V12 era for Aston Martin."

The new V12 engine will make its first appearance in a new flagship model that's set to debut later in 2024 when further technical details will be released.



integrated into the new dashboard and centre console. The DBX's all-new interior is the latest evolution of Aston Martin's new design that debuted in the DB12 and Vantage that it says gives the feel of both a sports car and modern luxury.

Every area of the interior has been updated, from the new steering wheel to redesigned D-pull door release handles and elegant vertical air vents, both of which are now matched to bright chrome or dark chrome interior jewellery. New front door veneer panels are larger and available in a variety of new materials, including gloss smoked oak, gloss titanium mesh and updated ziricote wood, piano black and carbon fibre veneers.

The DBX707 is now fitted as standard with the Aston Martin Premium Audio 800w 14 speaker audio system. Developed utilising advanced hardware, this system features a surround sound mode with QuantumLogic processing for a totally immersive soundscape.

Production of the new DBX707 is due to commence in Q2 of 2024, with first deliveries scheduled to begin later in Q2.

GT3 TAKES MAIDEN VICTORY

Just four months after being unveiled to the world at Silverstone, the new Aston Martin Vantage GT3 recorded its first international triumph with an outstanding GT300 class victory at Suzuka in early June at Japan's prestigious endurance racing championship – the Super GT Series. The success also marks the British brand's first ever win in the series.

Japanese team D'station Racing – which also represents Aston Martin as a partner team in the FIA World Endurance Championship – along with its drivers Tomonobu Fujii and Charlie Fagg, delivered a clean sweep in the three-hour race at Suzuka taking the class pole position (also a first) and victory.

Adam Carter, Aston Martin's head of Endurance Motorsport, said, "We've known from the outset that the new Aston Martin Vantage GT3 can deliver

success at any level of GT-based endurance racing. That its first victory came in Japan is particularly satisfying, given the prestige of Super GT, the fact that we have never won in that series before, and perhaps most importantly because of the excellent work D'station Racing has put in to achieve this success since forming our partnership in 2019."

The GT3's next challenge was the 24 Hours of Le Mans in June. Discover how the car fared on page 84.



KING'S AWARD FOR ENTERPRISE

In recognition of Aston Martin's unique approach to combining handcraft with the latest technology in the creation of its bespoke leather interiors, the company has been proudly honoured with a King's Award for Enterprise, for innovation.

Aston Martin has created and patented an innovative perforating and quilting technique that produces decorative finishes and promotes the cooling function on its ultra-luxury leather seats. Supporting the ability for customers to create their own intimately personal car, Aston Martin's proprietary manufacturing technology has enabled perforated holes to be crafted in bespoke patterns to a customer's specific design, which is impossible with traditional tooling.

"As a company with a commitment to innovation, we are incredibly proud to be honoured with this King's Award for Enterprise, which celebrates both



the ingenuity of our craftspeople and the quality of Aston Martin's bespoke interiors," said Lawrence Stroll, the company's executive chairman. "Recognising our combination of handcraft and cutting-edge manufacturing technology, this award

highlights the unique composition of our ultra-luxury interiors and how our manufacturing team have gone to extra lengths to ensure the highest level of personalisation is offered to our customers, whilst not compromising on our seat technology's core functionality."

HERITAGE FESTIVAL

The Aston Martin Heritage Trust has announced further details of this year's festival. Held at the British Motor Museum on 31 August 2024, it will celebrate both the 80th anniversary of the Mk II and Ulster models plus three decades since the DB7 first went on sale.

The trust's own Ulster will be on display at the event, while in the foyer of the museum itself is the DB7 prototype that was displayed at the 1993 Geneva Motor Show. However, as with previous years, all Aston Martins are welcome, and visitors' cars will be set out by eras resulting in a fantastic display of cars.

Vehicle exhibitor tickets cost just £11 per adult in advance, which includes entry

for the driver and their car. Additional exhibitor passenger tickets can be bought for £11 per adult and £7 per child. This ticket gives entry to the show, the British Motor Museum and the Collections Centre. Normal museum entry applies if you are not displaying an Aston Martin.

For further information, head to www.amht.org.uk or to buy tickets, please visit www.britishmotormuseum.co.uk



QUANTUM WORKS OPEN DAY

To mark its first anniversary, independent marque specialist, Quantum Works, is hosting an open morning at its Kent-based workshop on Sunday 11 August between 8.30am and 1pm.

As well as teas/coffees, cakes, bacon rolls plus a live band, it gives the company's two directors, Jordan Holmes and Antony Jones, the opportunity to show the

services it can offer their current plus potential clients.

"We have been meaning to host a coffee/open morning for months however we just simply haven't had the time," said Quantum's Jordan Holmes. "We have finally decided to organise one as a one-year anniversary from when we first opened our doors."

To learn more, head to www.quantumworksltd.com or call 01622 431177.

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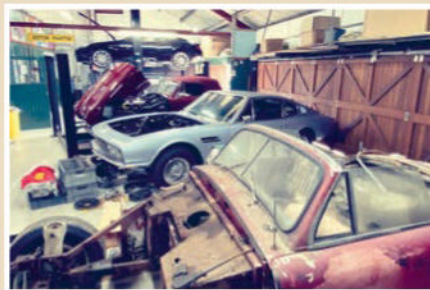
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PRODUCTS

AMR23 & VANTAGE SAFETY CAR MODELS

Boys and girls aged nine years and older can now fulfil their Aston Martin F1 fantasies with this recently released two-car Lego set comprising last year's Formula 1 car, the AMR23, plus a Vantage safety car. Two highly detailed models, the F1 car has a safety halo, rear wing and sponsors' logos while the Vantage features a roof-mounted light bar, a lights control button sticker inside the cockpit and taillights. The set also comes with two Lego minifigures that fit into both cars.

Price: £44.99

Website: www.lego.com



WHEEL CLEANER

The UK's largest vehicle car care brand, Autoglym, has released a new Advanced All Wheel Cleaner, that, thanks to a pH-neutral foaming formula, clings to the wheel for a longer contact period. Requiring little agitation, the cleaner will then safely and effectively remove ferrous brake debris, embedded dirt and other contaminants from all lacquered wheel types. The Advanced All Wheel Cleaner contains active ingredients that react with any ingrained metal particles – turning a deep red as they do so – and lifting them away from the wheel surface so they can be easily rinsed off.

Price: £19.99

Website: www.autoglym.com



KEITH HELFET BIOGRAPHY

Although better known for his work with Jaguar, Keith Helfet does have an Aston Martin connection since his XJ41 project for the Eighties later morphed into the DB7 which is discussed in full in his autobiography, *Design & Desire*. Plus, it's effectively a look at how the British car industry changed from the mid-Seventies until Keith left in 2001 together with his views on automotive design. Beautifully put together and featuring hundreds of colour images – several never been seen before – at just £39 the book is something of a bargain.

Price: £39

ISBN: 978-1-913089-01-6

Website: www.porterpress.co.uk

RATCHET SET

New from Sealey is this set of three ratchet drives for 1/4in, 3/8in and 1/2in sockets. With 90 teeth inside each ratchet mechanism, only four degrees of movement is needed before you can continue tightening or loosening a fastening. Plus, there's a handy button in the centre which, when pressed, releases the socket. The 1/4in drive is 130mm long, whereas the 3/8in drive is 210mm and the 1/2in is 280mm. All three are supplied in a pre-cut foam-lined tray and come with a lifetime guarantee.

Price: £75.54 inc VAT

Part number: AK7933

Website: www.sealey.co.uk





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*Paul Walton
Editor*

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GARRY TAYLOR

DRIVING A PRE-WAR ASTON MARTIN



THE SUN has finally appeared, and your thoughts may tune into those long sun-kissed drives with the burble of the engine echoing off the lush green landscape. In a DB12 Volante? If you are fortunate enough to have one, then a perfect car for the job.

The thing is, the sun may affect your thinking, so with some rose-tinted spectacles, your ideal chariot may lean towards a pre-war Aston Martin to re-create that long-lost idealised motoring vision of a past era. With this column I feel it is my duty to offer a public service announcement about driving a pre-war Aston. Before the vintage Aston Martin fraternity storm my house with pitchforks, please read on, because driving such a car, at first, was quite the education.

The AMHT has in its collection a 1934 Ulster (seen above plus elsewhere in this issue) and as part of its mission to share our cars at shows etc, it is released on several occasions to grace the tarmac. I remember having my first driving lesson in how to drive the Ulster from marque specialist Ecurie Bertelli (after arriving in my DB7 Vantage). I had to prove competence before I was deemed fit to drive it on my own. How hard could it be?

Firstly, the pedals are in a different order compared to today: the accelerator is in the centre, with the brake on the right. Sitting, with almost no seating adjustment at all, meant my eyeline was way over the windscreen. With limited floor space for the feet, and my upper thighs forever kissing the bottom of the extremely large steering wheel, off we went for my assessment.

Why was the steering wheel so large? You try steering the thing otherwise. The effort in turning the front wheels was immense, as was the shove on the brake pedal to stop it. I could say the stopping distance was measured in yards, but you needed to look as far as the eye could see to plan the hindrance to avoid a potential doom-laden outcome. The engine was sprightly though, as expected, because it was advertised as a 100mph car – quite something for a 1.5-litre.

Fortunately, I passed, but was physically exhausted, and to be honest, I hated it. Driving in a relaxed mode, the wrong way round pedals could be dealt with okay, as could the hernia-inducing steering, but when you need to do a more, shall I say, enthusiastic stop, the modern pedal layout default we're used to kicks in and you end up stamping on the accelerator and not the brake. Yelps and other noises usually followed.

Practice makes perfect and my hate turned to love. I discovered I was driving the Ulster too gently, usually in fear, and she bit back. With more confidence, came more attitude to drive it more in keeping with a vintage sports car. The Ulster rewarded me instantly.

At the Aston Martin Heritage Festival this August, we will be celebrating 90 years of the Ulster. And do you know something? I will be so looking forward to driving it again.

Why was the steering wheel so large? You try steering the thing otherwise

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



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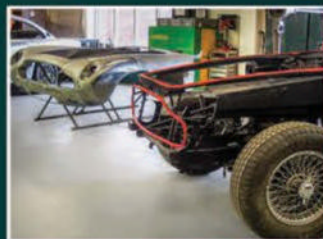
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GUY WYLES

MEMORIES OF LE MANS



I THINK most of us have an acute fear of forgetting our passport and finding out when it's too late. Some of us *bright young things* realise this terror and it's awful. Mine occurred, aged 22, on the M20 headed for Dover with my best friend in our MGB Roadsters at 6.00am, en route to Le Mans. 'Tail-End Charlie' recalls seeing my hands manically striking my forehead before dashing off at the next exit while he gently continued towards the port.

Our ferry was at 8.00am and there was absolutely no way – even at 'immediately lose your licence' speeds (quite tense in an MGB) – I was going to make it. But I did.

Traffic was kind, the ghastly M25 cameras weren't yet in the way, and I knew precisely where I'd left my passport. I screeched through Dover's miles of empty tarmac to arrive as the ferry was pulling up the drawbridge. A *high-vis* took pity on me; he liked his cars and could smell the hot MGB's ordeal and so discreetly let me on with a benevolent smile.

The pilgrimage to Le Mans was introduced to our family in 1994 when my father was charged with selling a Bentley Speed Six – known as 'Old No. 1' – which had won Le Mans twice, in 1929 and 1930. It's the first car to have achieved this feat and in the late Eighties was one of the most valuable cars in the world.

To publicise it, my father invited HRH Prince Michael of Kent to drive 'Old No. 1' to Le Mans for several pre-race laps on the main circuit. With no power steering, these 'locomotives' required huge strength to wrestle them around the roads, and after two laps he yearned to come in for a glass of something cold and crisp. The French track marshals, however, had other ideas and waved him on and on. It remains one of my father's most exciting and exhausting episodes.

For Chiltern Aston's 30th anniversary In 1998, we were kindly allowed to display the Le Mans winning DBR1/2 and there is a photo

somewhere of me sitting in it very carefully. This has disappeared, so the grainy photo above will have to do.

I've since been lucky to attend the most famous race in the world with my father, sister (driving her Mini Mayfair) plus several petrolhead friends. It's a motoring festival where Brits in interesting cars take over huge swathes of French motorway to get there.

Just like music festivals, the sounds – while different – are line-up dependent. The 2005 to 2011 period was a particularly memorable era since Britain had the achingly beautiful and extremely competitive Aston Martin DBR9, which had one of the best-sounding V12s of all time. This magnificent, sonorous commotion was complemented by

the thundering V8 of the equally capable American Corvette C6.R.

With Audi keeping the top level dull by its dominance, the place to be was the GT1 class and, satisfyingly, the Ferraris were always unimpressive. Instead, the real battle was between Brits vs Yanks, the DBR9 vs the Corvette and the V12 vs the V8.

We'd usually stay in the beautiful village of Saint-Céneri, 45 minutes from the circuit, and stop by the Touring Hotel on the Saturday night, along with a few of the 'Bentley Boys' and assorted English old guard. I remember one such gentleman being amused when I asked why he left the keys in his priceless, Le Mans-competing C-type. "Well, dear boy; who's going to pinch it?"

The drive home would be lined with French locals waving at the eccentric Brits with a few youths hiding among the bushes with their Super Soakers, hoping for a convertible to come into range. What wonderful days they were.

The sounds are also line-up dependent

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

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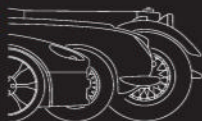
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ROB HAWKINS

FAKING IT



DURING THE late Eighties, when I was a mere 18 years old, I wanted nothing more to drive than an exotic-looking supercar such as a Lamborghini Countach or Ferrari Dino. With the lottery being

half a decade away from launch and no signs of any inheritance coming my way, I looked to the kit car market for the answer to my dreams and settled on a glass reinforced plastic (GRP) creation called the Karma that originated in the US and was very loosely styled around the Ferrari Dino. The UK manufacturer was based in Melton Mowbray, and I soon found a roadworthy example for sale at £3,500.

For the next six years, I drove around in something that looked like a supercar, but under the skin, it was nothing like.

All the mechanical components were from a Volkswagen Beetle. Only the bodywork had been changed, so everything including the floor pan, brakes, suspension, engine and gearbox were from the donor Beetle.

Carrying a little less weight from the lighter GRP body, the performance of the air-cooled engine was mildly entertaining, especially after I fitted twin Weber carburettors and a free-flowing exhaust system. However, the wide wheels and tyres (8in at the front and 10in at the rear) resulted in skittish handling at

times with lots of bump steer. The Karma may have looked exotic, but it drove like a shed on wheels. However, it was mine and I was proud of it. I could afford to run it because spare parts were cheap and plentiful, and I could repair it myself with my basic assortment of tools and a Haynes workshop manual.

I still adore the shape of the Dino and there are now a range of closer-looking re-creations that use readily available components from vehicles such as the MG TF, although roadworthy examples cost a lot more in relative terms than my Beetle-based Karma.

When it comes to Aston Martins, there are some expensive re-creations, but one that appeals to me more than any other is a loose lookalike of the DBR1 (pictured

here), which is based on the mechanical components from the Mazda MX-5. It's made by a company based near Plymouth (see www.quantumsportscars.com/replicar) and was originally designed by Stuart Mills who has produced a wide range of affordable kit cars.

What appeals to me most about the Replicar is that it's not pretending to be the real deal, just like my Karma. It costs around £15k to build yourself and provides a semi-nostalgic taste of a Fifties sports car but with modern mechanical components.

Providing you are not pretending to be something you are not, then what's the harm in a little dreaming?

*For the next six years,
I drove around in
something that looked
like a supercar, but
under the skin, it was
nothing like*



ADD VANTAGE

The new Aston Martin Vantage offers a huge leap in performance – and the promise of more driver engagement, too. But does it deliver?

WORDS TIM PITT
IMAGES ANDY MORGAN/ASTON MARTIN



NEW TEST

VANTAGE

WE ALL love Aston Martin, but its marketing doesn't hold back on hype and hyperbole. The new Vantage, we are told, was 'forged in the fires of the limit' and 'makes a stand for disenfranchised devotees of breathtaking power.' That's before you get to 'tyres shooting traction into your ear canal' (yes, really) or the car's ability to 'grip tarmac and send it running through every inch of aluminium, carbon and steel reverberating through your senses.' Apologies if your eyes are already glazing over.

The last line of the Vantage press release jolts me back to consciousness, though. A concise kicker, it says simply: 'Engineered for real drivers.' Now, I don't claim to be any handier than the next man or woman behind the wheel. I'm not one of those steely-eyed road testers who cut his teeth on the high-speed bowl at Millbrook or carries a loyalty card for the Nordschleife. Nonetheless, any car that aims to make driving more fun commands my attention. Even if that means wading through Aston Martin's woeful PR waffle first.

One driver who definitely qualifies as 'real' is Aston Martin F1 driver, Fernando Alonso. After checking in at Monteblanco circuit and grabbing a strong, Spanish-spec coffee, a video briefing from the Grand Prix ace – who helped to hone the Vantage's chassis set-up – is my first introduction to the car. Reassuringly, he says nothing about forging fires or ear canals, coming quickly to the point, "It's very engaging to drive and a lot of fun." Still, let's not take Fernando's word for it...

The plan for today (and I've pulled worse shifts at work) is to drive the Vantage on-track in the morning, then head for mountain roads in the afternoon. Before playtime, though, it's time for school, with a detailed briefing from Alex Long, Aston Martin's director of product strategy, and Simon Newton, director of vehicle performance. Are you paying attention? Then let's begin.

The 2024 Vantage might resemble a facelift of the car launched in late 2017, but while the hard points haven't changed, almost every body panel is new. Its nose job bears a strong resemblance





to the DB12, with a 38 percent larger veined grille, more rounded headlights and angular cooling gills that nod to the One-77. The traditional Aston Martin side strake also makes a comeback, while the rear bumper incorporates brake cooling vents and four slash-cut tail pipes.

Accentuating its brawny physique, the Vantage's swollen wheelarches wrap around a 15mm wider track and 21-inch forged alloy wheels. Its bonded aluminium structure is beefed up with new shear panels, plus stronger cross members and strut braces. Tyre sizes are the same as the DB12, but the AML-branded Michelin Pilot Sport 5 S rubber has a unique compound developed specifically for the Vantage.

The handling hardware is supported by a serious software upgrade. New Bilstein DTX adaptive dampers can react to the road in milliseconds and are also OE-fitment in the current Porsche 911. A six-axis accelerometer keeps a constant tab on the car's movements, along with inputs to the throttle, brakes and steering, while an electronic rear differential can liven things up if you want to go sideways. More on that shortly...



NEW TEST
VANTAGE



Thankfully, while the Aston Martin's chassis has gone high-tech, its engine remains obstinately old-school. Hand-built by Mercedes-AMG, the 4.0-litre V8 gains a new block and heads, larger twin turbochargers, modified cam profiles and improved cooling. Lift the power-bulged bonnet and you'll see it wedged tight against the bulkhead, making the Vantage effectively mid-engined – and resulting in perfect 50:50 front/rear weight distribution.

Speaking of power, the headline figure is 665hp, up from 510hp in the previous Vantage and 535hp in the F1 Edition. Combined with 510lb ft of torque, an eight-speed automatic gearbox and rear-wheel drive, the results are 0-62mph in 3.5 seconds and a top speed of 202mph. With somebody talented doing the driving, the new car is 3.5 seconds quicker around a lap of Montebello, too.

Lastly, there's the improvement Vantage owners will probably appreciate most in daily use: a new infotainment system. Transplanted directly from the DB12





(and now in the DBX707 as well), the 10.25-inch touchscreen offers wireless Apple CarPlay connectivity and a dedicated Aston Martin app. It sits within a redesigned dashboard with knurled metal rollers for the ventilation and volume controls, hand-stitched leather trim and a bespoke Bowers & Wilkins audio system.

That whopping hike in horsepower – along with a price increase to £165,000 – has shifted the Vantage upmarket, aiming for genuine supercar status. Alex Long confirms that was the plan, saying, “The DBX707 showed us Aston Martin could push power and dynamics to the top of the class. It was soon outselling the regular [550hp] DBX SUV by nine to one. So when it came to the Vantage, we aimed high from the outset. This is an enormous step forward – a car that stimulates all of your senses. We’ve elevated the Vantage to place it firmly among the exotics.”

With the Audi R8 no longer available, those exotic alternatives could include the Mercedes-AMG GT 63, Porsche 911 Turbo and McLaren Artura. But Simon Newton feels the Vantage is almost in a class of its own. “With the DB12, it was easy: we positioned it mid-way between



NEW TEST

VANTAGE

Aston Martin Vantage

Engine: 4.0-litre twin-turbo V8

Power: 665hp

Torque: 590lb ft

0-62mph: 3.5 seconds

Top speed: 202mph

Transmission: 8-spd auto

Price: £165,000

the Bentley Continental GT and the Ferrari Roma," he explains. "But this car doesn't have many obvious rivals or reference points. It very much has its own personality."

Nothing shouts 'SUPERCAR' like an eye-popping paint colour, and the Cosmos Orange machine waiting in the pit lane certainly ups the visual volume. The presence of the official Formula One safety car – a role the Vantage shares on alternate race weekends with the Mercedes-AMG GT Black Series – only heightens my anticipation. Newton hints that its larger splitter and fixed rear wing may appear on a forthcoming Vantage F1 Edition, as per the outgoing model. Watch this space.

My car has the optional lightweight carbon seats, introduced in the DBS 770 Ultimate, which look fantastic and lock in plenty of shoulder and thigh support. Cocooned by a high centre, its muscular haunches looming in the frameless door mirrors, the Vantage already exudes a sense of drama. I prod the start button and the engine barks boisterously into life, then settles to a menacing V8 throb. Time to play.

Aston Martin works driver and former Le Mans winner Darren Turner leads the way in the F1 safety car to show me the fastest line around the circuit. As the Michelins begin to warm up – confirmed by a tyre temperature display – he steadily increases the pace, nudging 160mph on the main straight before braking hard for the right-hand hairpin. Then, after a few laps, his flashing orange lights disappear into the pit lane and I'm on my own.

Wow, this Vantage is fast. The 'hot vee' engine is searingly intense near the 7,000rpm red line, yet also boasts a torque curve so flat you could rest a spirit level on it; maximum muscle arrives at 2,750rpm and lasts all the way to 6,000rpm. Unlike the thunderous V12 in

the outgoing DBS or Valour, though, the V8 doesn't overwhelm the experience. It actually sounds less 'OMG' than in many AMG applications, with the bassline turned down a couple of notches and fewer fireworks on the over-run.

Can the chassis cope with all that extra power? You bet it can. Whether you want to set lap records (more Darren's department, admittedly) or perform gratuitous, smoky slides, the Vantage is game for the challenge. Its new, non-isolated steering column hardwires the connection between your palms and the front tyres, the chunky-rimmed wheel loading up intuitively and providing a meaty on-centre response.

Its balance is just brilliant, too. The front end tucks in and grips hard, so you can place the car precisely and then steer it with your right foot. Like the six-axis technology Ferrari uses in its Side Slip Control system, it makes you feel like a better driver than you really are. But even with the ESC and the traction control switched off, the Vantage needs

deliberate provocation – or silly speeds – to really bite back.

If you do overcook it, the optional carbon-ceramic brakes are tireless, even when punished repeatedly on the track. Cast iron discs are fitted as standard (but not to any of the launch fleet) and both set-ups use a bespoke brake servo to ensure consistent pedal feel. "Developing separate servos is the kind of deep engineering investment Aston Martin would never have made in the past," Alex Long admits.

Downsides? Well, Track mode felt a bit uncompromising on the bumpy asphalt at Montebelario, where Sport Plus worked better, and the Vantage can't fully disguise its kerb weight of 1,670kg (a DIN figure, measured with all fluids and the fuel tank 90 percent full). The ZF auto transmission isn't as sharp as the twin-clutch 'boxes offered by rivals either, even when you shift manually via the paddles. It feels like there is an extra layer of insulation between your fingertips and the meshing cogs. ►





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NEW TEST

VANTAGE

With the digital display now showing the front tyres in orange at 115°C (the 'red zone' starts from around 120°C), it's time to come in, grab another coffee and then head for the hills. "You're going to enjoy this," says Long, as one of the support teams enters the various waypoints into the sat-nav. "The final section feels like the Nürburgring, but with less traffic." Remarkably, that isn't hype or hyperbole. Turns out he's right.

The route starts off less excitingly, with a stop-start grind on the congested A-49 heading west from Seville. It's a chance to play with the Vantage's new touchscreen, which is night-and-day better than the clickwheel-controlled Mercedes tech in the old model, albeit still fiddly to operate on the move. I suspect most owners will simply bypass the native system and use Apple CarPlay. At least they'll have that option now.

While the DB12 defaults to GT mode, the softest setting in the Vantage (apart from Wet mode) is Sport. That says much about the relative characters of these cars; the DB12 makes light work of long distances, but the Vantage never totally settles down. It has a tendency to tramline, its suspension jostles over poor surfaces and its 325-section rear tyres roar at motorway speeds.

On the right road, though, the new Vantage blasts such prosaic problems into the weeds. And the HU-4103, which ducks and weaves between Berrocal and



La Palma del Condado, is absolutely the right road. It's the kind of spectacular – and spectacularly empty – mountain route that scarcely exists outside of video games such as Gran Turismo or Need for Speed. Frankly, it's worth driving your Aston Martin across France and most of Spain for.

Gulping down cool, oxygen-dense mountain air, its serrated snarl echoing off the rocks, the V8 really finds its voice. The Vantage feels like a well-mannered muscle car, an intoxicating combination of power and control. No doubt the electronics are hard at work, but the end result doesn't seem synthesised. It ebbs and flows with the road, riding a wave of ever-ready torque, yet always eager to let

rip. For all its aptitude on a track, this is the Vantage's natural habitat.

I stop for a few photos by the Rio Tinto, a famous river stained orange by high levels of iron deposits. It's tempting to simply turn around and drive the HU-4103 again – then perhaps carry on all the way to England – but Aston Martin needs its car back and I have a plane to catch. Nonetheless, I take a moment to catch my breath and reflect. When I dreamed about being a car journalist, this was the moment I pictured: a sunny day, a deserted road and a very fast car – a true supercar, in fact. However 'real' your ability as a driver, there's no question the new Vantage is the real deal. **AMD**



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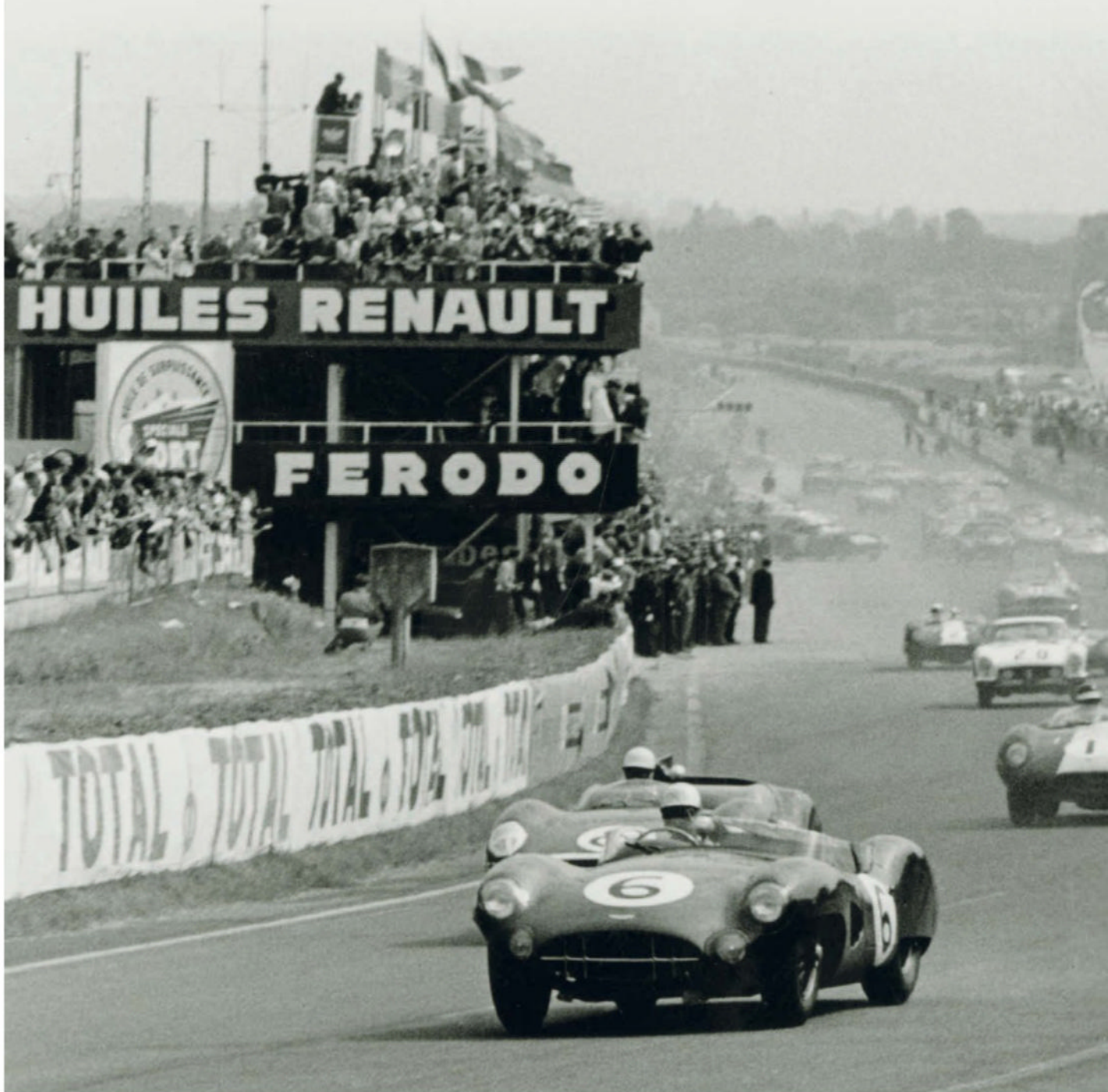
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WINNING COMBINATION



When Aston Martin finally won the 24 Hours of Le Mans in 1959, it was at its 11th attempt. For the 65th anniversary of the victory we explain how it needed the best cars, drivers and a little luck to achieve this goal

WORDS PAUL WALTON **IMAGES** ALAMY & AMD ARCHIVE

THE 1959 Le Mans 24 Hours was the last roll of the dice for Aston Martin. Not only had the team failed to win this prestigious race after 11 previous attempts, but the company's owner, the industrialist (Sir) David Brown, was wanting to concentrate on its burgeoning Formula 1 effort from 1960 onwards. Therefore, if it didn't win in 1959, it never would.

Although by finishing third in 1951 plus second in 1955, 1956 and 1958 it got close several times in the past, Aston Martin's cars – the DB3, DB3S and DBR1 – never had the speed nor the reliability of the three-time-winning Jaguar D-type that had ruled endurance racing throughout the mid-Fifties. However, now in 3.0-litre form to meet regulations introduced in 1958, the once ►



MOTORSPORT

1959 LE MANS

successful car was no longer reliable. Therefore, Aston Martin's strongest rivals would be the three 250 TRs entered by Scuderia Ferrari, which had won the previous year's Le Mans.

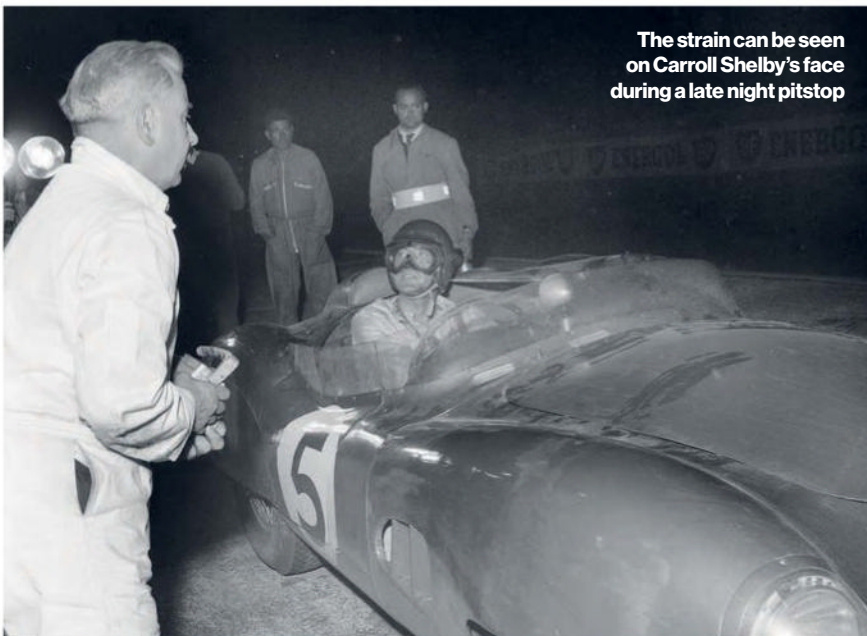
Aston Martin's own contender, the DBR1, had been relatively successful since its 1957 debut especially when it was upgraded from 2.5 to 3.0 litres a year later, winning at Spa, Nürburgring and Goodwood. "Solid, strong and dependable with really good brakes," was how (Sir) Stirling Moss described the car in his 1987 book, *My Cars, My Career*.

Moss went on to say how Aston Martins were often the best prepared cars on the grid, Le Mans especially, and 1959 was no different. Extensive development work leading up to the race had resulted in slightly more aerodynamic bodywork which included spats over the rear

wheels while the fronts were also partially enclosed. New ducts under the nose cooled the front brakes plus the exhaust system was updated with long pipes that ran under the cockpit and emerged at the tail.

Aston Martin's team manager, Reg Parnell, had also gathered a roster of experienced endurance specialists for the three cars entered. These included Moss himself who would be partnered by another Brit, Jack Fairman, in the no. 4 DBR1 while Roy Salvadori and the American Carroll Shelby were in no. 5. Finally, Paul Frère and double Le Mans winner Maurice Trintignant were given car no. 6.

"[Trintignant] was a very experienced and courageous driver, one of those few whose racing activities dated back to before World War Two," said Frère in



The strain can be seen on Carroll Shelby's face during a late night pitstop

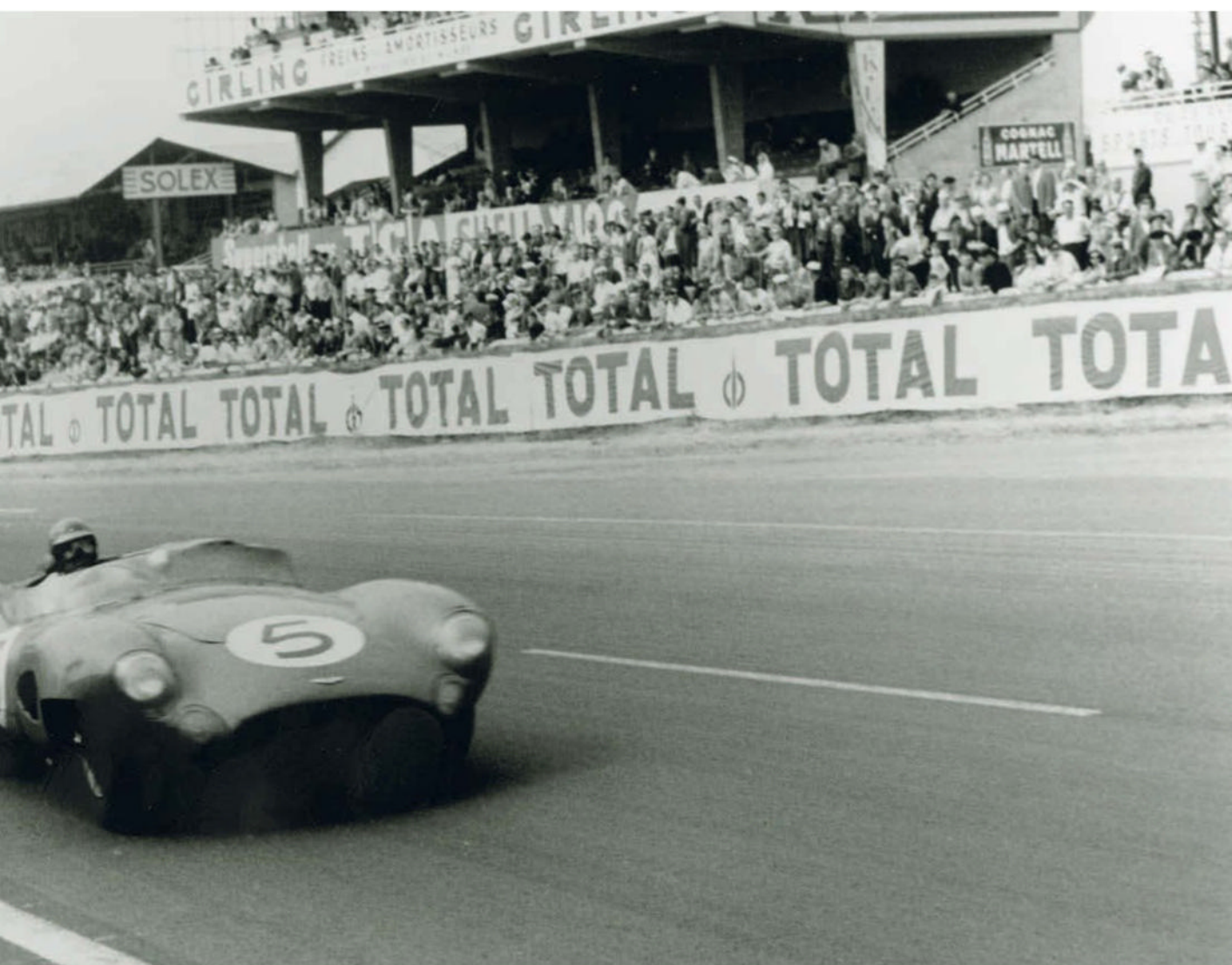


Anthony Pritchard's 2006 book, *Aston Martin: A Racing History*. "He was not a Fangio or a Moss, but he was extremely reliable, and kind to his cars."

Graham Whitehead's privately entered DBR1 (no.7) that was driven by him together with Brian Naylor shored up the works entries.

Although Ferrari had been marginally quicker than the Aston Martins in practice, when the flag dropped at 4pm on the Saturday afternoon, Moss made an excellent start and led the early part of the race.

Parnell had instructed his young driver to act as a 'hare', bating the Italian cars into a fast, engine-breaking pace. For this, the no. 4 DBR1 was given a slightly more powerful straight-six; instead of the 244bhp of the two works cars, it had 255bhp. ►



MOTORSPORT

1959 LE MANS

Moss was still leading the second-placed Ferrari of Phil Hill and Oliver Gendebien two hours later but only by a mere 1.24 seconds. However, despite stalling twice at the start which put him down into 15th, Jean Behra, in another 250 TR (shared with Dan Gurney), was starting to set some blistering lap times in an attempt to catch the leaders. He managed to muscle his way past Moss on the Mulsanne Straight at 5.15pm. Moss, though, wasn't going to give up the lead easily.

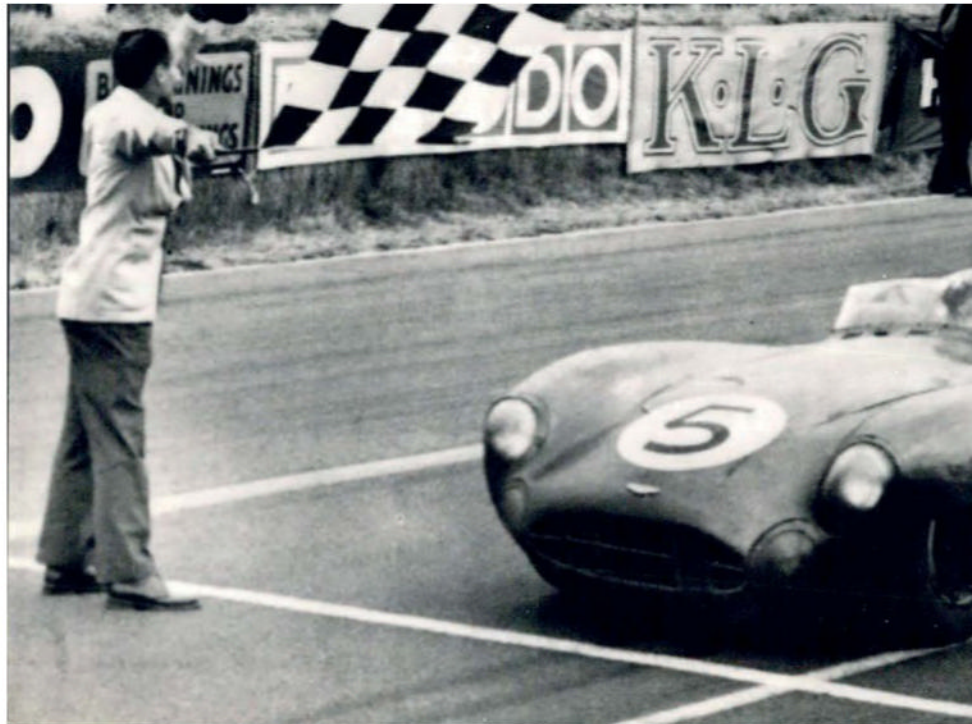
"Behra finally caught me in his very fast Ferrari," he wrote in *My Cars, My Career*, "and I slipstreamed him along Mulsanne to see 6,050rpm at the 4km post, where unassisted I had only been able to reach 5,700rpm!"

Perhaps because of this, following Jack Fairman's 35-lap stint in the early evening, not long after Stirling took over again at 9pm the car stopped for good due to a broken valve. "Yet another Moss Le Mans hit the dust," said Stirling – who would never win the race – in his autobiography.

The two remaining works DBR1s, though, were also making solid progress, the no. 5 car especially. "I was driving at about 4-5 seconds faster than my target lap time," said Salvadori in his own autobiography, "but the pits were not giving me any 'slow' signals and by the end of the second hour I was fifth." When the marshals called Behra into the pits at 10pm due to malfunctioning lights, Salvadori took the lead while the Frère/Trintignant car was now third.

The Ferrari was also starting to lose oil pressure, eventually retiring at 2am, which Parnell later reckoned was caused by Behra trying to catch Moss during the early stages of the race. "It is impossible to over-estimate the part played by Moss in our success at Le Mans," he wrote in his official post-race report. "According to plan, he set a very high average speed for the opening hours of the race in an attempt to break up the Ferrari opposition and his performance was without doubt responsible for the failure of the Behra/Gurney Ferrari."

Yet Aston Martin had its own problems. Whitehead's privately entered DBR1 had retired at the five-hour mark when Brian Naylor hit a patch of oil at Maison Blanche





Roy Salvadori (second right) and Carroll Shelby (far right) confer while team manager Reg Parnell (centre) looks on



Car no.6 of Frère and Trintignant (which would eventually finish second) leaves the pits



The winning DBR1 crossed the line to take Aston Martin's sole overall Le Mans victory

causing the car to roll on to its side. Thankfully, he climbed out unhurt, but the car was then struck by Jim Russell in a Cooper Monaco which was then hit by the Stanguellini EFAC of René-Philippe Faure, which caused the two smaller cars to go up in flames. Again, nobody was badly injured.

Plus, in the early hours of Sunday morning the leading DBR1 developed a rear-end vibration causing Salvadori to pit. Since the mechanics couldn't find anything wrong, he was told to continue. He stopped again two laps later but was instructed to continue until the car was due to be refuelled. "The vibration was now so bad," explained Salvadori in his book, "that I thought the rear end was about to fall off and I lapped at a crawl."

When he stopped for petrol, the car was immediately jacked up and Parnell slid underneath to investigate. He quickly discovered the offside rear tyre was damaged, perhaps by a piece of metal dropped by another car, which had cut away part of the diamond-shaped tread.

Parnell was later openly critical of Salvadori for not realising it was a tyre issue. "This upset me terribly," the driver admitted in his 1985 book, "because I had been driving very quickly but sensibly, we

had never had trouble with the Avon tyres which were run at very high pressures and it had seemed that the vibration was much more likely to be associated with the transmission which was always a weakness of the DBR1."

Salvadori reckoned the issue had cost him and his American teammate – who had taken over the car at the fuel stop – between 12-15 minutes, dropping them down to second behind the Ferrari 250 TR of Phil Hill and Oliver Gendebien.

By setting some blistering lap times throughout the early hours of Sunday morning, Shelby and then Salvadori started to close the gap. "Even so," admitted the British driver 26 years later, "there was no way that we were going to make up the lost three laps on the Ferrari which was still being driven very hard."

This speed, though, came at a cost. At 11am the Aston Martin team were overjoyed to see the scarlet car limp into the pits with steam erupting from under the bonnet. After completing one more lap, it was retired for good, handing the lead to the no. 5 DBR1 while Trintignant and Frère were second.

Despite Salvadori later writing in his autobiography that he started to hear the car make several funny noises during the



final five hours, the DBR1 never missed a beat. At 4pm on Sunday afternoon, the no. 5 Aston Martin took David Brown's longed-for victory while its sister car finished a strong second one lap down.

It was a remarkable achievement and one Brown was happy to enjoy, taking a victory lap in the winning car. "When he knew we were going to win, he'd dressed up in all of his finery with a new sports coat and everything," said Carroll Shelby during a 2009 interview. "But after he got into the car at the end, he sat in about an inch of oil! I felt quite sorry for him, all dressed up like that and covered in oil! But I guess that under the circumstances he didn't mind too much..."

Yet for Salvadori – who because of his American teammate picking up a stomach bug beforehand had driven the majority of the race and had burnt his feet due to the new exhaust layout – the finish was something of an anticlimax. "All I wanted to do was sleep, so I deliberately missed the presentation at the circuit."

Salvadori's indifference aside, it was still a remarkable achievement for the relatively small company against a much larger and more successful foe. It also made Aston Martin only the fourth British outfit after Bentley, Lagonda and Jaguar to take an overall victory.

But 65 years later, it remains its last. Although its Le Mans victory helped Aston Martin win the 1959 World Sportscar Championship, it still pulled out of endurance racing at the end of the season to concentrate on its Formula 1 effort, but a lack of results meant this too came to an end the following year.

From privately entered DB4 GTs in the early Sixties to Robin Hamilton's DBS-based RHAM/1 a decade later, the AMR1 of 1989 to the 2011 AMR-One, plenty of other Aston Martins have tried to win the 24-hour race over the years. But although it has taken GT honours five times between 2005 and 2023, Salvadori and Shelby's victory remains its sole overall success of this famous race.

However, with the Valkyrie set to enter the World Endurance Championship's new Hypercar class from 2025 onwards, Aston Martin could win again.

The dice, it seems, is about to be rolled one more time. **AMD**

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FITTING TRIBUTE



When Aston Martin was looking for a way to celebrate both the 40th anniversary of its sole Le Mans victory and mark the end of the classic V8 models, it developed a special version of the Vantage. Only produced in tiny numbers, the subsequent Le Mans was a fitting tribute to both events

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY PAUL WALTON



MODEL PROFILE

VANTAGE LE MANS

SYNCHRONICITY WAS the word given by the Swiss psychoanalyst Carl Jung in the late Twenties to describe the occurrence of meaningful coincidences that seem to have no cause or connection.

The result of two different projects happening at the same time meant it was definitely synchronicity that was behind the magnificent Vantage Le Mans. A rare yet important limited edition, it paid homage to two important moments in Aston Martin's history: its sole overall Le Mans victory and the end of the original V8 models.

In the late Nineties, Aston Martin's principal engineer for Special Vehicle Operations, Steve Bolton, was wanting to build a car based on the 600bhp upgrade for the Vantage (later called the V600), which he'd call the V200 after top speed

the engineers had achieved in a prototype. "At that time there weren't a lot of cars that could do that," explained Bolton in David Dowsey's 2007 book, *Aston Martin: Power, Beauty and Soul*, "especially heavy cars like [the Vantage.]"

Meanwhile, Aston Martin's chief body engineer, Shaun Rush, was proposing a special model that would celebrate the 40th anniversary of an important moment in the company's history. "I had the concept of a limited-edition car to commemorate the Le Mans victory," explained Rush, also in Dowsey's book, "something I'd had in my mind since the 30th anniversary in 1989. Then with the 40th anniversary coming up in 1999 I approached Kingsley Riding-Felce [managing director for Aston Martin Works] with the idea of a car inspired by the DBR1."





So, Rush's body style for this Le Mans-celebration special plus Bolton's 200mph package came together resulting in a model that even by Aston Martin's standards was very special.

To set it apart from the standard Vantage, the car received several unique enhancements, the most noticeable of which was a blanked-off radiator grille with elliptical openings each side which apparently were part of the original design proposal for the V8 Vantage in 1992. There was also a deeper front air dam designed to create more downforce plus two deep ducts at the front end of the bonnet. At the rear, the spoiler was revised to incorporate high-intensity fog lamps and reversing lights plus the increased-diameter exhaust tail pipes. There were also five-spoke magnesium alloy wheels with centre caps. ►

To set it apart from the standard Vantage, the car received several unique enhancements



MODEL PROFILE

VANTAGE LE MANS

The other major physical change was the side air vents that were similar in shape to those of the Le Mans-winning DBR1. To further underline the car's racing pedigree, two competition-style lockable caps were fitted to the twin fuel fillers.

But not all of Rush's DBR1-themed design ideas made it to production. These included a 'lift-off' bonnet with quick-release pins, white roundels on the doors and bonnet, a basic interior with no rear seats and the aluminium roof left exposed on the inside. Presumably they were considered too 'racy' for even a Le Mans-themed Aston Martin.

The interior, though, did feature some of the updates first used for a trio of special 6.3-litre lightweight Virages that Aston Martin Works had produced in the mid-Nineties for a Far East-based client. Instead of the traditional walnut veneer, there was now a titanium-finish metal across the dash. There was also a machined alloy gear knob and drilled aluminium pedals plus a bright red starter button high on the dashboard next to the dial pack. Also included was a hallmarked sterling silver key fob while directions to the Le Mans circuit were placed in the owner's handbook.

The car's power unit was the same 5.3-litre twin supercharged V8 with 550bhp as the standard model. However, the 600bhp upgrade for the Vantage developed by Bolton's team – known as the V600 – was also available, the extra 50bhp coming from revised superchargers plus a new exhaust system. Since it was never homologated, the 600bhp unit was always an after sale option through Aston Martin Works but despite costing another £43,000, most Le Mans had it fitted from new.

The Le Mans was equipped as standard with the same uprated brake and suspension systems that was part of the V600 package. This included AP Racing six-piston calipers with special grooved and ventilated discs at the front together with four-piston calipers and grooved discs at the rear. Stiffer Eibach springs were also added while Koni adjustable shock absorbers on the front and rear allowed the chassis to be tuned to the preference of the driver. Following the prototype (chassis AM70229), the final 39



Vantages (AM70241 to AM70279) were all to Le Mans specification. Of those, 18 were originally in right-hand drive, the rest had the steering wheel on the other side of the cabin. A variety of colours were available including the same shade of Aston Martin Racing Green as the DBR1 which the majority of the first owners chose.





The Vantage Le Mans debuted at the 1999 Geneva Motor Show in March, the same time and place as the DB7 Vantage. “We had a nice line-up that particular year when we launched the V12,” explained Aston Martin’s then chairman, Bob Dover, in Dowsey’s book, “all painted in Aston Martin Green.” Also on the company’s stand was the actual Le Mans-winning DBR1 as driven by Roy Salvadori and Carroll Shelby. “In 1959, this was everything we knew about how to make a quick car for racing,” said Dover after pulling the cover off the car. “This is all we know about making V8 cars,” he continued about the Vantage Le Mans, “this is the final version of it, this is the best and the fastest. If you want one, be quick.”

He wasn’t wrong. An Aston Martin press release from October 2000 confirming that all 40 cars had been built and, they’d apparently been sold within six months of the model’s 1999 Geneva debut. One customer bought two cars while another took three. Considering at £190,130 the Le Mans cost £12,500 more than a standard Vantage, that was quite some achievement.

However, as you can imagine for a limited-edition Aston Martin that celebrates both the company’s sole overall Le Mans victory plus the end of the V8 era of cars, they’ve grown into money. Examples, like the car shown here that’s currently for sale through Stratton Motor Company Ltd based outside Norwich in Norfolk, are now worth around £500,000.

According to the chromed treadplate in the door frame, it’s car number 12 (chassis 70246). An online auction entry from 2003 says it’s thought to be the final one of the 40 Le Mans sold but there’s no

further proof of this. Originally purchased from Stratstone of Mayfair in London, it was collected on 25 May 2000 and first registered in the Republic of Ireland on 16 June the same year.

Like three other of the 18 right-hand-drive Le Mans, at some point in the car’s history it was changed to LHD before spending several years in Europe. Although now back in the UK, it’s not registered here so it’s worth noting the AMV8 registration isn’t real, and the plates are props for my images.

Even by Vantage standards, with the large air dam, deep bonnet scoops and 18in alloys, this is an aggressive- and thuggish-looking car making it very different from the inspiration behind it, the svelte and feminine DBR1. But although not handsome like the Vanquish that replaced the Vantage still is, the Le Mans is certainly memorable especially in the traditional Aston Martin Racing Green like this one.

Perhaps the result of the RHD/LHD swap, but the interior of number 12 has wood veneer rather than the metal panels the Le Mans was fitted with, meaning it looks largely similar to the Vantage V600 I drove in 2023 for issue eight of *AMD*. The differences are the aluminium gear knob pedals, and an enormous white-faced rev-counter that’s almost twice the size of the speedo and which was originally an option for the V600 but standard on the Le Mans. Hand-built by Aston Martin’s artisan craftsmen at its former Newport Pagnell factory, it’s as beautifully finished as the Ritz Hotel’s Royal Suite. Spend even two minutes inside and that £190k price tag becomes slightly easier to understand.

It takes even less time on the road to ►

MODEL PROFILE

VANTAGE LE MANS

realise this is a proper old-school muscle car. Although the clutch is surprisingly light and the manual five-speed box smoothly clicks into gear, it needs only a small amount of throttle for the twin Eaton superchargers to start whining like the engine of a F-35 Lightning II and the car to surge forward with all the confidence of said fighter jet.

But by weighing a mammoth 1,975kg, it's not a light and agile sports car like the DBR1 no doubt still is. Although grip is excellent, the steering sharp and accurate, enter a corner with any kind of speed and you're quickly aware of its size and bulk. But with perfectly damped suspension, it does ride nicely over the worst the quiet country roads around Stratton's showroom have to offer, not returning the majority of the imperfections into the lavish cabin.

There was no better way for Aston Martin to celebrate these important moments than a car as big, bold, and breathtaking as this one. Just as the marque's sole Le Mans victory or when its original era of V8 models came to an end won't be forgotten, neither will the car that was the perfect tribute to both events.

Synchronicity might have been the reason the car came together but its place in Aston Martin's history is why it will be remembered. **AMD**

● *Thanks to: Stratton Motor Company Ltd (www.strattonmotorcompany.com)*

HISTORY REPEATING

The Vantage Le Mans isn't the only model that celebrated the 1959 victory. In 2019 an Aston Martin dealer introduced the DBS 59

TWO DECADES after the Vantage Le Mans, Aston Martin's then Cambridge dealer, Jardine Motors, commissioned its own limited-edition car to celebrate the DBR1's historic 1959 victory of the famous 24-hour race.

This time based on the DBS Superleggera, the 59 was the work of Aston Martin's Q division and honoured the race winning DBR1 through several discreet styling cues. These included bronze detailing that was a nod to the bronze switches and dials on the Le Mans winner plus a bespoke front grille and an individually numbered roundel painted on the fender. The Aeroblade also had a bronze foil inlay added that outlined the original shape, chassis and engine number of the DBR1 that won Le Mans in 1959. The only colour available was Aston Martin Racing Green.

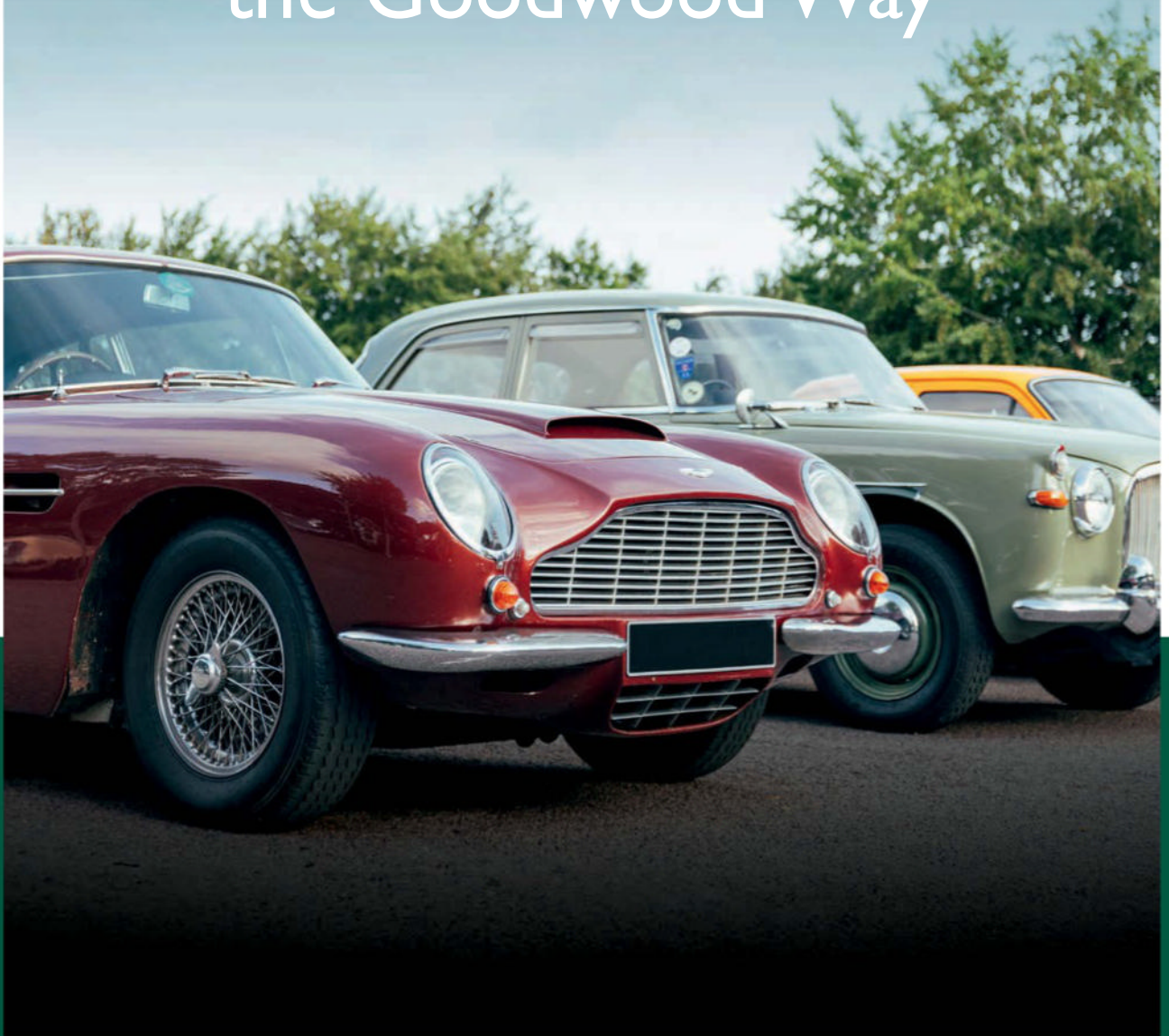
For the interior, Q analysed the original seat material used on the DBR1 and re-created the same weave for the seatbacks and door inserts. The '59 Edition' logo was embroidered on the

seatback and the shift paddles were again in bronze. Finally, embroidered on the driver's sun visor was the exact date of the race plus the 323 laps the winning car completed in 24 hours.

Just 24 DBS 59s were produced, all sold through Aston Martin Cambridge.



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MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

Aston Martin's many successes on the track throughout the Fifties were partly down to the organisational skills of its manager, John Wyer. We look at his long and successful career including four victories at Le Mans

WORDS PAUL WALTON IMAGES AMD ARCHIVE

JOHN WAS the one team manager for whom I always wanted to do well for," wrote Roy Salvadori in his 1985 biography, *Racing Driver*, about his former boss, John Wyer. Tough and demanding, but also well organised and prepared, one of his most important skills was being able to get the best from both his cars and his drivers.

It's because of this why John Wyer's time as Aston Martin's racing manager was so successful, culminating in winning the 1959 Le Mans 24 Hours, and it's why his own team would later enjoy three victories at the famous French race. Three and a half decades after his passing, Wyer remains one of endurance racing's most successful team bosses. ►



BIOGRAPHY
HENRIK FISKER

John Wyer (left) with
JW Automotive's
manager, David Yorke



BIOGRAPHY

JOHN WYER

There was perhaps no surprise that John Wyer chose to work with cars for a living. Born in Kidderminster in 1910, his father had been an agent for the Sunbeam Motor Car Company where, aged 17, his son entered an apprenticeship at its Wolverhampton factory. Wyer Jnr stayed with the firm for another five years after his apprenticeship had ended as a junior design draughtsman. However, knowing the company was close to ending – it would enter bankruptcy in 1934 – Wyer took a job as a sales and service engineer with Solex Carburettors. As an early example of his organisational skills, he was sent to India for two years to sort out its service department.

After returning to the UK, he was appointed assistant to the company's general manager, spending the war being in charge of Solex's production and material control.

Wyer would enjoy great success as manager with the DBR1



Two works Aston Martin DB2s in action in the International Trophy at Silverstone, 1950

When peace returned, Wyer decided it was time to go into business for himself, becoming an unofficial Bugatti service agent. However, always more interested in motorsport, in 1947 he joined Monaco Motors in Watford as managing director in a small garage started by Peter Monkhouse and Ian Connell, which was dedicated to preparing racing cars.

The former soon sold his shares to Dudley Folland who had big plans for the company, entering his own ex-Dick Seaman and ex-Eddie Hertzberger 1936 Aston Martin 2-Litre Speed Model in the 1948 Spa 24 Hours. With Connell as co-driver, it was Wyer's first taste of being a team manager. It's also where he first met Aston Martin's new owner, (Sir)





Stirling Moss cuts the grass in a DB3S at Goodwood in 1956



David Brown. The car ran well, reaching second place behind the works entry of Jock Horsfall and Leslie Johnson until the fuel tank split, spilling petrol on to the rear tyres causing Connell to slide off the road and into retirement.

In 1949, Monaco Motors was bought by the Bristol-based Vauxhall agent, Spurlings, who wanted to expand into London. It was around now when Wyer learned from the technical editor of *The Motor*, Laurence Pomeroy, that Aston Martin's existing competition's manager, John Eason Gibson, was leaving due to a falling out with (Sir) David Brown. Because of Wyer's lack of experience, Brown agreed to take him on but for the 1950 season only.

Wyer started by employing more drivers which included Eric Thompson and Jack Fairman, the latter extensively testing the DB2 at the MIRA proving ground. "There was a tremendous amount of intensive testing done, and it was a good introduction to John Wyer's meticulous methods which made Astons so successful later on," said Fairman years later.

Thanks to several high finishers for the DB2 – including fifth and sixth at the Le Mans 24 Hours plus first, second and third in class for the Tourist Trophy in Dundrod – Wyer was asked to remain with the company.

Serious about racing, Brown had brought in the former Auto Union designer Professor Robert Eberan von Eberhorst as chief engineer to develop a purpose-built racing car that would conquer the burgeoning World Sportscar Championship. However, underpowered and heavy, the subsequent DB3 was no match for the Jaguar C-type that won Le Mans in 1951 and 1953. It's again due to Wyer's organisational skills plus the roster of talented drivers he'd signed, which included Peter Collins, Lance Macklin and Reg Parnell amongst others, that the car achieved anything at all. This included third and fourth at the production car race at Silverstone the same year and first at the 1952 Nine Hours at Goodwood when a fuel spill caused Parnell's car to catch fire. Both Wyer and a mechanic, Jack Sopp, suffered burns and were taken to hospital.

The car also scored a solid fifth at

BIOGRAPHY

JOHN WYER



RIGHT: Wyer's biggest achievement as Aston Martin was its 1959 victory of Le Mans. Driver Carroll Shelby is seen celebrating with David Brown after the race

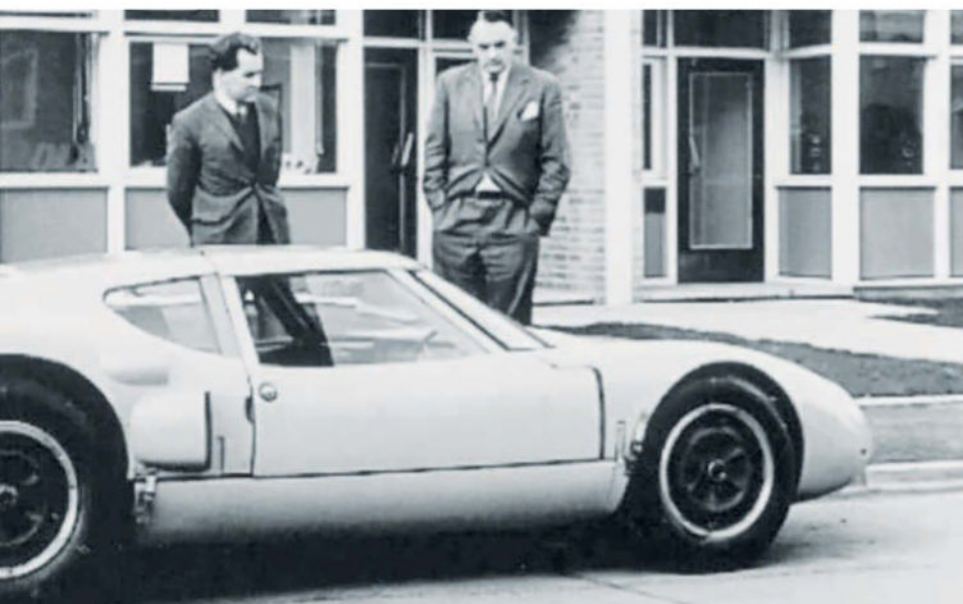
the following year's Mille Miglia, a result of Aston Martin's drivers spending two weeks practising on some of the race's long stages. "It paid off in some respects," wrote Wyer in his 1980 two-volume biography, *Racing with the David Brown Aston Martins*, "because when we came to those sections our drivers were very competitive." But he went on to say they should have spent more time driving around the whole circuit and less time concentrating on specific sections. The team's fortunes improved slightly with



LEFT: The final Aston Martin Wyer was involved with was the DP214 that unsuccessfully raced at Le Mans in 1963

the introduction of a shorter, lighter and stiffer version, the DB3S, that arrived in June 1953. Also arriving that year was Roy Salvadori who always worked well with his team boss, remaining with him on and off for over a decade. "John Wyer always went out of his way to take close interest in new team members, breaking them in gently," continued Salvadori in *Racing Driver*, "talking to them at length about the car after practice and the way it had gone and making detailed notes of their comments."

However, Wyer had, by his own admission, "an inability to suffer fools with



any show of pleasure," while his piercing stare, known as the 'death ray', was famous up and down the paddock. "With old hands," continued Salvadori, "John could be very cutting, almost savage, and he quickly cut anyone down who got out of hand. Then there were John's black moods – when he was in such a mood everyone took great care to keep well out of his way."

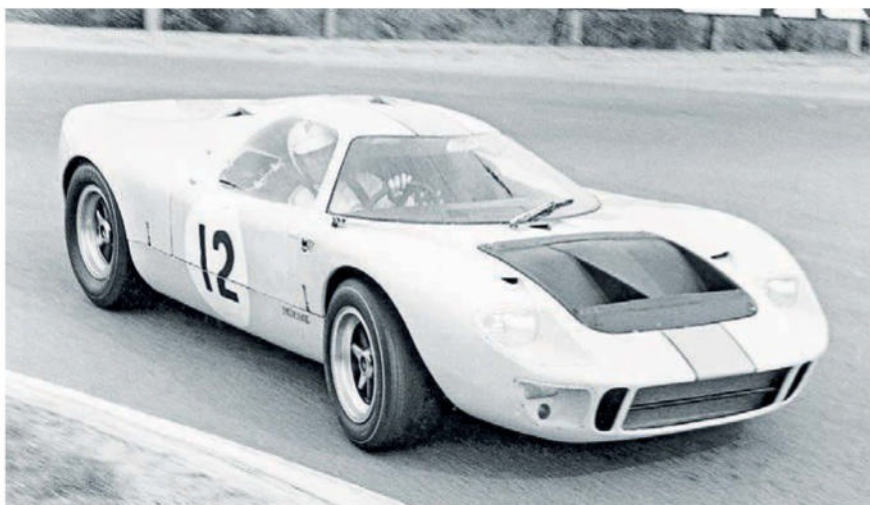
Noted for his dark sense of humour, Wyer was the master of the crushing one-liner. When told that a rival team's car had encountered difficulties, he remarked drily, "Nothing trivial, I trust". And of Pedro Rodriguez, his favourite driver, "The most exercise he gets is turning the pages of his book."

The DB3S proved to be more competitive than its predecessor, winning the 1953 Goodwood Nine Hours, the 1954, 1955 and 1956 Spa Grand Prix for Sports Cars plus finishing second at Le Mans in 1955 and 1956, but it was still no match for the competition. "They always handled nicely," said (Sir) Stirling Moss in his 1987 book, *My Cars, My Career*, who Wyer had cleverly convinced to drive for Aston Martin in 1956, "and felt small and easy to drive but their engines were very picky about rev limits and the rev band always seemed very restricted. You could run it up to the red line in an intermediate gear, change up... and the power would just seem to have faded."

Despite its small size, Moss was impressed by how well organised the team was, saying 30 years later, "for one thing, John Wyer certainly seemed to know all the best restaurants and hotels."

The victory Wyer and Brown wanted the most, the 24 Hours of Le Mans, had so far been elusive. And so, Aston Martin's chief race car designer, Edward 'Ted' Cutting, designed a brand-new model which debuted in early 1957. "The DBR1 was in almost every respect a vast improvement on the DB3S," wrote Salvadori.

Although the engine had been upgraded from 2.5 to 3.0 litres, it was still underpowered compared to its rivals from Ferrari and Jaguar. As always, Wyer made up for its limitations with careful preparation and plenty of testing. "Aston's cars were painstakingly well-prepared,"



JW Automotive's Mirage M1 from 1967 showed promise but a change of the rules meant the project came to a stop



Wyer won his second Le Mans as team manager in 1968 with the JW Automotive entered GT40 driven by Pedro Rodriguez and Lucien Bianchi

BIOGRAPHY

JOHN WYER

wrote Moss in *My Cars, My Career*.

It was because of this together with some clever tactics that saw Moss's fast pace help break the Ferraris and why the team finally won the 24-hour race in 1959 plus that year's World Endurance Championship. Although Wyer had been promoted to being Aston Martin's general manager in late 1956 and his position as racing manager taken over by former driver Reg Parnell, he was still closely involved with the decision making and preparation.

"While the drivers were delighted with their contribution to the team's success, I know we all realised that we owed an immense debt to David Brown, John Wyer and Reg Parnell," admitted Salvadori in his book, "who supplied the expertise, the organisation and the management that made victory possible."

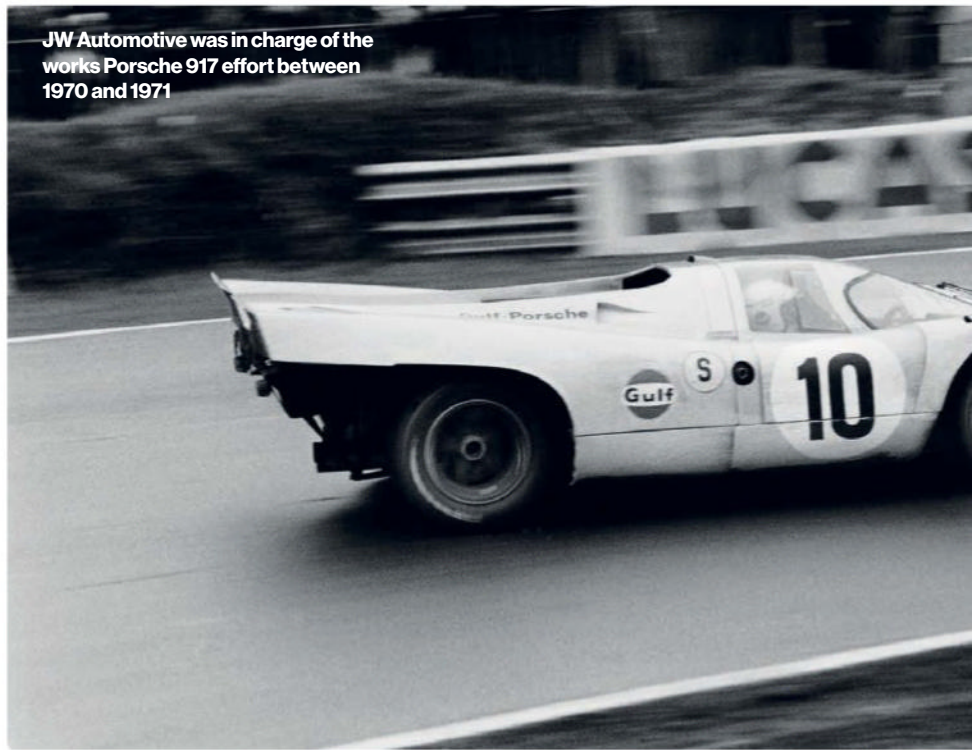
Wanting to remain in endurance racing, Wyer instigated the DB4GT from 1960. "Cut five inches out of a DB4 and produce a cheap and cheerful GT car," were his instructions to Ted Cutting. Wyer's final fling was the DP212, a single prototype that sat on a cut-down DB4 chassis and with an engine bored out from 3.7 to 4.0 litres. Despite not expecting much, at the 1962 Le Mans 24 Hours, the car performed surprisingly well before retiring. On the strength of this performance, Wyer sent two updated versions, the DP214, the following year but neither finished.

This marked the end of Wyer's Aston Martin adventure since he joined Ford's Advanced Vehicle department in Slough at the end of 1963 to oversee its GT40 programme. Always the pragmatist, when he set up a rigorous testing programme, he demanded Salvadori join the team despite Ford preferring Americans.

"I particularly wanted Roy in the team," wrote Wyer in Salvadori's 1985 book, "because in what I could see was going to be a very difficult development period, I needed at least one driver who had worked with me before, with whom I could communicate and upon whom I knew I could rely on to give me an objective and unbiased opinion."

Despite the new location, Wyer's eye for detail hadn't changed. "He always insisted on an immaculate and tidy factory," wrote

JW Automotive was in charge of the works Porsche 917 effort between 1970 and 1971



Jo Ramirez in his 2005 biography, *Memoirs of a Racing Man*, and who briefly worked for Ford Advance Vehicles in the mid-Sixties. "I remember him doing his weekly walks through the workshop and asking, 'What are those engine parts doing there, and those suspensions? What about that bodywork gathering dust? If you're not using them, throw them away.'"

Although Wyer was not in overall charge of the GT40 project, he was responsible for the administration, drivers and preparation. After working with a company as small as Aston Martin, one

as large as Ford was a shock, yet he was never shy at coming forward with his proposals. "The British were regarded by many – perhaps not altogether without reason – as effete, opinionated and autocratic," said Wyer in *Racing with the David Brown Aston Martins*. "I do not suppose I did very much to dispel this antipathy."

After two dismal Le Mans in 1964 and 1965 when none of the cars finished, Ford closed its Advanced Vehicle department, handing the GT40 project over to Holman Moody and Carroll Shelby. In 1966, Wyer



(L-R) John Wyer with Jo Siffert and Brian Redman in 1970 after they'd won the Targa Florio in a JW Automotive entered Porsche 908/03

together with John Willment formed J.W. Automotive Engineering Ltd (JWA), taking over the Slough factory and continuing to build production GT40s.

He later admitted he had learnt a lot from his time with the American firm. "If I had formed my own company after Aston Martin it probably would have failed. After my experience with Ford it was a considerable success and for this I am grateful."

With the GT40 now becoming dated, JWA built its own car for the 1967 season, the Ford-powered and GT40-based Mirage M1 whose aerodynamic body had been designed by Len Bailey. Thanks to Wyer meeting Gulf Oil executive vice-president, Grady Davis, at the Sebring 12 Hours in March 1966, it had the now iconic blue and orange colour scheme of the American petroleum company. Although both cars retired from Nürburgring and one finished ninth at Monza, the M1 was still quick, with Jacky Ickx and Dick Thompson winning the 1967 1000km of Spa in the wet.

But when the FIA announced cars in the Prototype class were to be limited to 3.0

litres from 1968 onwards, JWA decided to concentrate on the GT40 that could run in the Group 4 Sports class because more than 50 had been produced and more importantly it allowed engines up to 5.0 litres. The blue and orange car won Le Mans in 1968 and 1969 plus, thanks to victories at Brands Hatch Monza, Spa and Watkins Glen, the 1968 World Sportscar Championship.

So impressed was Porsche that this private team had beaten it with outdated Fords that the German company invited JWA to operate the works 917 racing cars in 1970 and 1971. Wyer was team director, with David Yorke as manager and another former Aston Martin man, John Horsman, as engineer. Together they formed a formidable management team with the Gulf Porsches sweeping their opposition aside, although they were unable to win Le Mans.

Wyer, though, could be stubborn. When Porsche developed a 4.9-litre engine for the 917, he kept winning with the older 4.5. When Porsche offered the fast (and unstable) long-tail bodywork for Le Mans in 1970, Wyer declined. "Our invariable rule," he reflected later, "when offered new features was to apply the test 'Is it necessary or can we win without it?'"

When Porsche pulled out of endurance racing in favour of Can Am in 1972, JWA built its own Ford DFV-engined cars once again under the Mirage name, later called the Gulf Research Racing Company. After

three years of trying, Wyer supervised another Le Mans. "Victory always seemed within reach of the two well-prepared Gulf Research Racing GR8s," said *Motorsport* in its July 1975 issue, "which took turns at leading the race, and on Sunday afternoon the achievement was recorded by Derek Bell and Jacky Ickx."

JWA remains the only one of two post-war private teams to win the race, the other being Rondeau in 1980.

It would also be Wyer's final victory of the race he had enjoyed so much success at, selling his team in 1976 to Harley Cluxton's Grand Touring Cars Inc operation. A long-term sufferer from asthma, he retired to the dry atmosphere of Arizona with his wife, Tottie, before passing away in early 1989 aged 79. "John Wyer always commanded total respect from his employees and drivers," said *Motorsport* in its obituary in the May 1989 issue, "but it was the relationship to produce success."

His impact and importance not just on Aston Martin but British motorsport as a whole cannot be overstated. Not only do his four Le Mans wins make him one of the most successful team managers in endurance racing history, but his levels of professionalism and eye for detail set new standards that were quickly followed by other team managers.

Wyer's drivers might have wanted to give him everything but he always gave them more in return. **AMD**



Wyer would take his final victory at Le Mans as a team manager with the Gulf Mirage GR8 in 1975 seen here with Derek Bell driving



WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY PAUL WALTON

USER MANUAL





**Experienced Durham-based
marque specialist Aston
Workshop has developed
a manual transmission
modification for the Vanquish,
transforming the car into even
more of a traditional sports car.
We look at how it was achieved
before driving the prototype**

THE SEMI-automatic six-speed transmission fitted to the first generation of Vanquish is very much like Marmite. Some like it, others hate it. Personally, I can take it or leave it, which again is how I feel about the aforementioned yeast spread.

One person who clearly hates it is a customer of Aston Workshop who instructed the established marque specialist to develop a way to make the transmission a traditional, old-fashioned manual 'box complete with a gearlever instead of the original paddles. Although a complicated and time-consuming modification to get right, the company has achieved this goal. Not only is the Vanquish now arguably easier to drive, but by giving the driver better control over the V12's sizeable power, it makes it more of a genuine driver's car too.

MODIFIED
MANUAL VANQUISH



Aston Martin chose the 'box for the Vanquish because the company's then chairman, Bob Dover, wanted to make it more advanced than its siblings. "The technology was extremely important," said Dover in David Dowsey's 2007 book, *Aston Martin: Power, Beauty and Soul*. "The paddle shift, for instance: we could have used a manual shift very easily but the paddle shift was something I wanted to do. The V8 was getting very out of date technologically, the six-cylinder DB7 didn't break any new ground and we needed to get back at the top in terms of technology."

The transmission was the same Tremec T56 six-speed manual as fitted to the DB7 Vantage, but gearchanges were now made via paddle shifters located on the steering column behind the wheel that actuated an electro-hydraulic clutch by Italian firm Magneti Marelli (a similar system is used on the Ferrari F360 Modena).

By being sensitive, dim-witted and therefore awkward to use compared to a traditional manual or automatic transmission, it was a controversial choice and not everyone liked it. Jeremy Clarkson, for example, hated the 'box when he tested the Vanquish during a November 2002 episode of BBC2's *Top Gear*. "What was the matter with a manual?" he exclaimed when trying to complete a tricky uphill three-point turn. "Why do we have to have this?"



"The transmission takes some getting used to," was *Autocar* magazine's more diplomatic view in its 18 April 2001 issue. "Even the engineers admit that your average Aston Martin customer is going to need a little re-education." The company did indeed offer a one-day driver training course for Vanquish buyers that included a lesson in city centre motoring that no doubt helped with those awkward three-point turns.

This apathy towards the gearbox hasn't changed in the 22 years since the car was launched and it's why one of Aston Workshop's customers asked the Durham-based specialist to develop a full manual version. The car chosen for the modification was a low-mileage example from 2002 in grey that the specialist sourced from Singapore in late 2023. The work was largely completed by one of the





company's lead technicians, Luke Batey, who tells me his first job was to remove all of the Magnetti Marelli system that included several pumps and reservoirs. The original gearbox, though, remained in place. "All of our six-speed gearbox conversions for the older V8 models use the T56," says Luke, "so we're used to dealing with it."

Next was finding what master and slave cylinder would fit in the tight space to the top left of the engine bay which Luke says is just about large enough if everything is inserted in a certain way. Even though the T56 gearbox is used for the DB7 Vantage, Luke tells me that on the Vanquish there's a sensor and a cog on the input shaft that has a housing which meant he couldn't use the master or slave cylinder from the older car. After trying several different types, he eventually settled on one from a V8 Vantage. He also tried several different clutches including a twin plate, but tells me the original one turned out to be the best. "To make it feel more like a factory update, I've tried to use Aston Martin parts wherever I can," Luke tells me.

The pedal box, though, started life as a Jaguar unit although Luke has needed to cut and reshape it several times. "It's a tight fit," he admits. "One of the things that I had to modify was the orientation of where it mounts because it needed to be at a certain angle for the pivots and then for it to actually fit." This completed pedal box has been 3D-scanned so it can be re-created for future Vanquish customers wanting the same modification.

Change any part of a modern car – including making a semi-automatic gearbox fully manual – and it will set off several warning lights on the dashboard. To get around this, the team worked with a software specialist in the States who previously developed the ECU for Aston Workshop's existing fully automatic gearbox conversion for the Vanquish. The fix they decided on was a new TCU (transmission control unit) with a purpose-made program that makes the ECU accept the mechanical modifications.

Luke then drilled a hole into the carbon fibre transmission tunnel for the gearlever. Amazingly, when he bolted it onto the top of the 'box, and found that the knob was in exactly the right place, he

MODIFIED
MANUAL VANQUISH



thinks Aston Martin might have originally considered giving the car a traditional manual transmission when it was still in development. "There's actually a tiny, raised circle underneath the tunnel just in front of where I drilled my hole that looks as though it may have been a marker for a gearlever hole," says Luke with amazement. "I was quite happy I was in the right place because drilling into the tunnel was probably the most daunting bit of the project."

Despite the car being up and running by early 2024, it would still take several months of fine-tuning before it was right. "Sometimes I would hit on something and I'd be like, 'Oh, that improves that'. And other times I'd have to change this, change that, change the master cylinder, slave cylinder, the pipes, everything."

Although mechanically finished on the day of my visit in mid-April, the car is still a few days away from being totally completed. For example, when I open the door of the otherwise standard-looking car, the carpets (which have been cut





away to give Luke and other technicians better access to the OBD ports) have yet to be replaced. But the chrome gearknob sourced from a VH era of DBS doesn't look out of place and any non-experts would think it's standard. The areas where the two paddles would have been fitted have been blanked off. Although the plastic plates are clearly visible (not when you're behind the wheel), it's a simpler and cheaper option than a brand-new steering column case. Just as importantly, it keeps with Aston Workshop's desire to make the modification reversible. "I haven't cut up the bulkhead or the interior," says Luke. "Everything I've taken off can fit exactly where it was." Two nice little touches at the behest of the owner are the buttons to the right of the starter button that originally would have put the transmission into reverse and auto shift manual (ASM) mode but are now marked MISSILES and GUNS. Although obviously not real, they're still appropriate for a model that was once used by James Bond and certainly more interesting than if they'd

MODIFIED MANUAL VANQUISH

been left alone or simply blanked off.

As I pull away from Aston Workshop's facility, what strikes me first about its conversion is how the weight of the pedals and the physical throws of the gears make the 'box feel like it was always a full manual rather than an aftermarket conversion developed by a specialist. When I hit the open road and nail the throttle, the car responds instantly, the acceleration feeling similarly swift as the standard model. What's different is when I dip the clutch and change up to second and then third it's a much smoother and easier action than using paddles that in my admittedly limited experience can be jerky if you fail to get the timing right when lifting off from the throttle.

The gearbox might lack the kind of short, sharp and sudden shifts you'd expect from a modern transmission but it's no worse than how the T56 feels in a DB7 Vantage or any other sports car from the era that used the same transmission. It is accurate, though, slotting into position with little persuasion. Manually changing down in preparation for a corner is far easier than when the Magnetti Marelli system is in charge.

In my view, the higher control over the gearbox together with its ease of use makes driving the Vanquish much more of a pleasant experience than with the Magnetti Marelli system. It also makes the car into more of a sports car rather than the big, comfortable grand tourer

it was originally. Slicking the box down to third before flooring the throttle of this V12 performance car is a pure and old-fashioned moment of joy especially since large-engined models like this with a manual 'box are becoming rarer.

As I said at the start, the Vanquish's original gearbox cuts opinion like a well-known yeast spread and I realise that some owners will love it. But like preferring peanut butter or jam, for those that don't, Aston Workshop's clever and inventive conversion is an excellent alternative, especially since it doesn't lose any of the car's character but adds to it. **AMD**

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

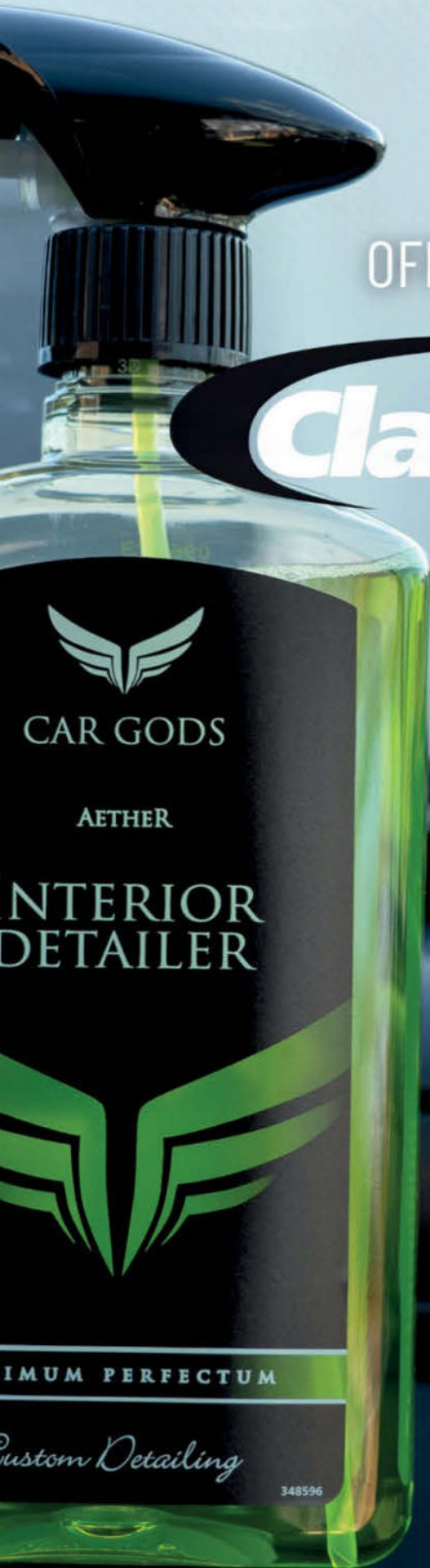




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RACING PEDIGREE

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY PAUL WALTON



A development of the Aston Martin Mark II, the Ulster was the same specification as the works cars that were so successful at the 1934 Tourist Trophy, held outside Belfast, that gave the car its name. To mark the 90th anniversary of the model, we look at its history before driving a well-known example



HISTORY

ULSTER

THERE ARE plenty of cars in Aston Martin's back catalogue that were influenced by the company's long involvement in

motorsport. The Vantage Le Mans in this issue and the GTE-based Vantage GT8 in the previous issue are just two examples. Yet these weren't anything new. The 1934 Ulster is named after the cars that took part in that year's Tourist Trophy held at the Ards Circuit outside Belfast. By having the same mechanical specification as the works cars, they have an even stronger link to Aston Martin's competition cars than the aforementioned modern models.

More often a two-seater like the works racing versions had been, a tiny handful were given a handsome four-seater body instead, cars like the 1934 example that's been part of the Aston Martin Heritage Trust since its inception. To mark the 90th anniversary of the Ulster, we've been given special permission to drive this important car.

The Ulster was the work of Aston Martin's chief engineer A.C. Bertelli and was based on his Aston Martin Mark II (unofficially known as the Third Series), itself an evolution of his Second Series of cars that arrived in February 1932. Debuting two years later, the Mark II featured a redesigned and stronger chassis, a new bulkhead with added side plates to increase rigidity plus revised suspension components. There was also a thermostatically operated radiator grille with vertical slats that would automatically open when the temperature of the radiator rose.

The engine remained the same Bertelli-designed 1.5-litre four-cylinder that had made its debut with his First Series of cars in 1927, but was now heavily updated with a new crankshaft, rockers, timing chain tensioner and oil pumps. The result was an almost brand-new unit that now had 70bhp, a seven percent increase over the version used by the Second Series of cars.

As with its predecessor, the Mark II was available in two chassis lengths; the long wheelbase (10ft) for saloons, tourers and drophead coupes while the shorter one (8ft 6in) was usually fitted with two- and four-seater sports car bodies.





Aston Martin had been involved with motorsport almost from its outset when Count Louis Zborowski commissioned two racing cars from Aston Martin with their debut being the 1922 French Grand Prix when both retired. Other than its first entry at the 24 Hours of Le Mans in 1928, the company had little involvement in racing until Bertelli took over, returning to the French race in 1931 with its 1.5-litre International model. By finishing a fine fifth, the company produced a Le Mans special to celebrate with a specification similar to the works car, the first of Aston Martin's many motorsport-based models.

Unsurprisingly, Bertelli designed a competition version of the Mark II using the shorter chassis that featured a simple, two-seater body that was typical of the age. Due to an increased compression

HISTORY

ULSTER

ratio, improved breathing plus a new camshaft, Bertelli managed to squeeze an extra 10bhp from the 1.5-litre.

Three works cars were produced for the 1934 season that were entered into that year's Le Mans 24 Hours, but sadly none finished. After two of the trio were comprehensively rebuilt with an undrilled chassis plus a third all-new model made from scratch, Aston Martin had better luck at that year's six-hour Tourist Trophy held at the Ards Circuit near Belfast. Not only did they finish in third, sixth and seventh place overall but they were also first, second and third in class, earning Aston Martin the team prize. "The Aston Martins seemed glued to the road," was Motorsport's assessment of the cars in its October 1934 issue.

Aston Martin duly built a production version of the competition version which, thanks to its success in Northern Ireland, was known as the Ulster. With the same 80bhp upgrade to the engine, the car was fast for the time and Aston Martin guaranteed a 100mph top speed. "To own one of these 'Ulster' model Aston Martins is to experience the 'real' thing in road racing," said a 1934 brochure for the car, "and to achieve higher average speeds and more consistent successes than ever before."

Again, all based on the 8ft 6in chassis, the majority of the 21 Ulsters had a similar two-seater body as the works cars. Four, though, had the four-seater body.

One of these was chassis K4/508/U, registration BLB684. Little is known about the car's early years other than what's assumed to be its first owner, an N.G. Watson, entered the 1936 Scottish and RAC rallies with the car plus the following year's JCC Member's Day at Brooklands. By 1939, it had changed hands since a new owner, Mr Doyle, finished first in the JCC Rally, also at Brooklands. He kept the car until after the war, winning the 1950 Surrey Rally, but in 1974, BLB684 was bequeathed to the Aston Martin Owners Club by a Lewis Treece.

Rather generously, the club originally allowed members to take the Ulster away for a few days at a time. Considering the car's significance, it's similar to the Louvre loaning out the Mona Lisa or the British Museum its Rosetta Stone.



Unsurprisingly, this arrangement came to an end in the late Nineties when, to protect the car plus the hundreds of other artefacts the AMOC had collected over the years, it and everything else was gifted to the newly established Aston Martin Heritage Trust where it remains and is very much the star of the show.

Yet like the rest of the cars in the AMHT's collection – which includes the oldest known Aston Martin, a 1921 A3 prototype – the trust isn't afraid to use the Ulster and it's regularly seen at events across the country. This will include the AMHT's 2024 Aston Martin Festival on 31 August that celebrates both 90 years of the Mark II plus 30 years of the DB7. It also includes today since the AMHT is kindly allowing me to drive its arguably most popular exhibit.

Although I've been messing around with cars as a living for 25 years and





The three Aston Martin Ulsters (18,19 & 20) race off at the start of the 1934 Tourist Trophy which gave the car its name

have driven all manner of rare, important and priceless examples in that time, I'm still nervous when I arrive at the trust's Oxfordshire-based museum and see the black Ulster already parked outside. This must be what it's like to handle Leonardo's early 16th century masterpiece.

It is handsome, though. With its rakishly low-slung lines, short screen that will later offer me less protection than pyjamas would when skydiving plus two brightly chromed exhaust pipes exiting out of the bonnet on the passenger side, it looks exactly what Dorothy L. Sayers' fictional detective, the car-loving Lord Peter Wimsey, would have driven. Although

well looked after and recommissioned a few times during the AMHT's ownership, the car has the same attractive patina as a pair of weathered brogues or a well-used Chesterfield sofa.

After I swing open the tiny door and squeeze myself inside the tight cabin, the interior is the epitome of stylish simplicity, the centre panel consisting of a row of dials and neatly arranged chromed flicker switches. It is tight, though, especially when Garry Taylor from the AMHT and AMD columnist climbs on board next to me. Any closer and he'd be on my knee.

It's now when I start to wish I'd worn something other than my comfortable but

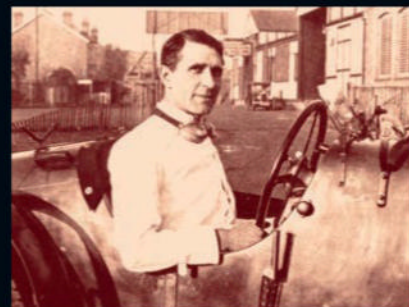
ITALIAN ACCENT

The Ulster, like all of Aston Martin's cars built between 1926 and 1937, was the work of the company's Italian-born engineer A.C. Bertelli

Augustus Cesare Bertelli was the driving force behind Aston Martin and its cars for over a decade. Born in Genoa on 23 March 1890, his family emigrated to Wales when he was just four years old. Following an apprenticeship at a local steel works after leaving school, Bertelli returned to Italy in around 1908. He soon got a job as a development driver at Fiat where he met racing driver Felice Nazzaro, becoming his riding mechanic. Together they would win the 1908 Coppa Florio at the Circuito di Bologna.

Bertelli came back to the UK just before WW1 broke out. After getting turned down by the army on medical grounds, he got a job in the design office of Grahame-White, an aircraft manufacturer located in Hendon, North London, where he remained until the war was over. He later worked at several motoring companies including Enfield-Allday, Armstrong Siddeley, Coventry Simplex and Rover. Together with fellow engineer William Renwick (who he met at Armstrong Siddeley), the pair bought Bamford & Martin in October 1926 for £10,000, forming a new company, Aston Martin Motors Ltd.

Aston Martin under Bertelli's leadership introduced a new series of cars at the 1927 British Motor Show that



used a new 1.5-litre, four-cylinder engine that would become a company mainstay for the next decade. Proudly designing nearly every component of his cars (even specifying materials for the few bought-in components), this process was very expensive, and the company was soon facing financial difficulty. In 1935, Aston Martin was taken over by Sir Arthur Sutherland who made his 22-year-old son, Gordon, joint managing director alongside Bertelli who remained in charge of the engineering side of the business. Due to not liking the direction the Sutherlands were taking the company, Bertelli left in 1937, later joining High Duty Alloys of Slough.

He struck out on his own after the second world war, designing successful agricultural machinery. Bertelli retired to his farm in Berkshire, passing away in 1979 aged 89.

HISTORY

ULSTER

broad-soled walking boots. Not only is the accelerator confusingly located in between the brake and clutch pedals but the space between them is narrower than my footwear.

The Bertelli four-cylinder bursts into life the moment I press the starter button, soon settling down to a hoarse, raspy growl. Despite the throttle pedal being in the wrong place and the four-speed gearbox being back to front with first being where second should be and so on, I still move car away surprisingly easily. With the road ahead of me clear and dry, I angle my foot to squeeze the throttle the best I can, the car responding instantly the moment I do so. The acceleration is

surprisingly brisk for a car built when HM King Charles III's great grandfather was on the throne, the engine feeling strong and confident enough to reach the magic ton. Although I doubt Aston Martin would honour its almost century-old guarantee, it's good to know the car could probably still do it. Revvy and eager, it also pulls well in any gear. Good job too because, as mentioned earlier, the gearbox is back to front meaning it's easier to leave it in top than it is to glance down to try and find third or second.

On the plus side, the steering is surprisingly accurate for a 90-year-old car, the brakes strong and progressive. Even though Bertelli didn't leave enough

room for 21st century shoes, together with its speed it makes the Ulster a genuine delight to drive.

More importantly, the car was the perfect way for Aston Martin to celebrate an important and early motorsport success, setting the standard for later models that would do the same. **AMD**

Thanks to: Aston Martin Heritage Trust. See the Ulster at this year's festival at the British Motor Museum on 31 August 2024. Visit www.amht.org.uk/events/ for further details

Plus: Le anoir aux Quat'Saisons (www.belmond.com) for the location of our images

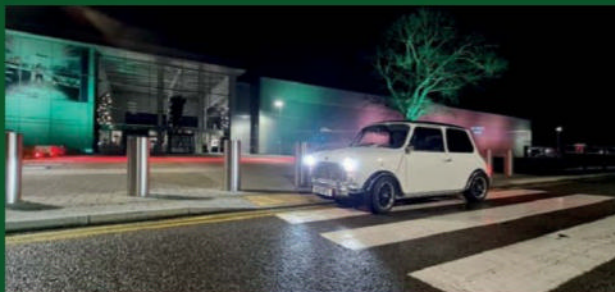


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SHIELD & BURIED



This 1967 DB6 is a one-family-owned example that has spent the majority of its life in a shed. Only recently rescued from its long-term storage, the still-unrestored saloon is currently for sale at Aston Martin Works where we've been to see the car and learn more of its unique history

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY PAUL WALTON



HISTORY

UNRESTORED DB6



IT'S NOT unusual for a car as beautiful and valuable as the DB6 to be surrounded by several 'Please do not touch' signs when parked in a dealer's showroom. But instead of keeping this 1967 example free of grubby finger marks like they do for most cars, they're to stop this one from becoming clean. After spending four decades in a shed, it is covered in a thick layer of dust which its current vendor, Aston Martin Works, is very protective of. Not only is the grime proof of it being a genuine barn find but also that it remains untouched. But if the dirt was to be washed away, what lies beneath is a totally original, one-family-owned and therefore potentially unique Aston Martin DB6 saloon.

Chassis number 3244/R was built in October 1967 and sold through Wolverhampton's Aston Martin main agent, Cyril Williams Motors. The car's first owner was a Lady whose family not only had a London home where, according to the original green log book, the car was officially registered but a sizeable estate in the Berkshire countryside as well. It's easy to imagine her commuting between the two, using all of the 4.0-litre's 282bhp when she finally left the tight confines of the city. Thanks to the masculine appeal of the classic DB4, 5 and 6 range, a female owner was relatively unusual at the time. "She must have been quite a character," the president of Aston Martin Works, Paul Spires, tells me when I visit the company's historic location on Newport





Pagnell's Tickford Street to learn more about the car. This is further confirmed by the unusual combination of a black exterior with dark brown Bridge of Weir leather upholstery that the Lady specified. Included in the car's thick history file is a rare period brochure about Aston Martin and on one page is a colour picture of Sunnyside – the famous mock Tudor house that from the early Sixties to the early 2000s was Aston Martin's office – with a line-up of brand-new, unregistered DB6s parked outside. One of these is a black saloon and Paul suggests that due to the colour's rarity it might be the DB6 in question and why the owner was given the brochure in the first place. With no numberplate, there's no way of proving this but it's an interesting and compelling theory.

The optional extras the first owner ordered included chromed wire wheels, a heated rear screen, three-ear hubcaps, a powered aerial plus three-point seatbelts. It was registered CM 1110 from new, which were her initials.

Aston Martin's original build and service sheet for the car shows it suffered from problems almost immediately after delivery. On 31 October 1967, it was returned to Aston Martin for its first 1,000-mile service when three new SU carburettors and inlet manifolds were fitted as were replacement headlight rubbers. The kingpins and wheel

bearings were adjusted and an oil leak from the distributor rectified. Early the following year at 3,443 miles, it was back to Newport Pagnell for a new speedo head and rev-counter plus two more new headlight rubbers. A rattle from the passenger seat was also resolved.

A major, 5,000-mile service arrived in May the same year while in October it was back again for more new carbs and an engine retune while the power aerial was also replaced. A new oil temp gauge needed to be fitted, the nearside door frame and boot seals were refitted, the rear bumper replaced and the nearside window mechanism adjusted and overhauled.

Final entry on the build sheet was on 7 May 1970, when at 23,188 miles the heater controls were dismantled, cleaned and reassembled plus a new radiator and fan cowl fitted.

All of the above shows the car was clearly well cared for and maintained. So why in the early Eighties, when it had just 31,343 miles on the clock (which it's still showing), the DB6 was taken off the road? The car was stored in a garage on the family estate where it remained, even after the first lady owner passed away in 2006 and the DB6 was inherited by her son.

The car has only recently been unearthed by an independent classic car specialist who immediately offered it to Aston Martin Works, where it's currently for sale. "I fell in love with the romance of the story," explains Paul. "It definitely sold it to me. I thought, 'Oh, that's amazing.'"

As he shows me around the car, it soon becomes clear the black saloon is not your average DB6. Under that thick layer of grime, the paint is heavily pockmarked and chipped, the chrome heavily pitted and rusty, the wire wheels dull and dirty. Yet despite its poor appearance, Paul tells me the big Aston Martin is structurally solid and surprisingly rust-free proving it was stored in a relatively damp-free environment.

Although, as mentioned at the start, Aston Martin Works is protective of the dust since it's proof of the car's status as a barn find, there's a small area on the passenger side window that's been wiped away, presumably by the independent



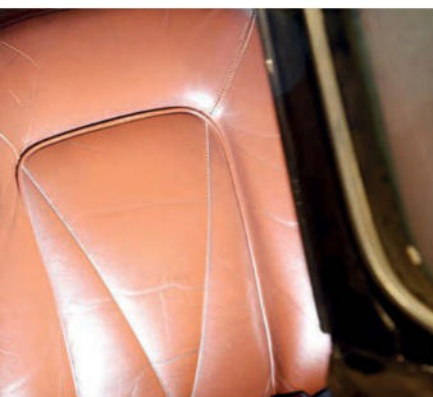


What he would have seen when he first peered through the hole in the dirt is an interior that looks to be frozen in time



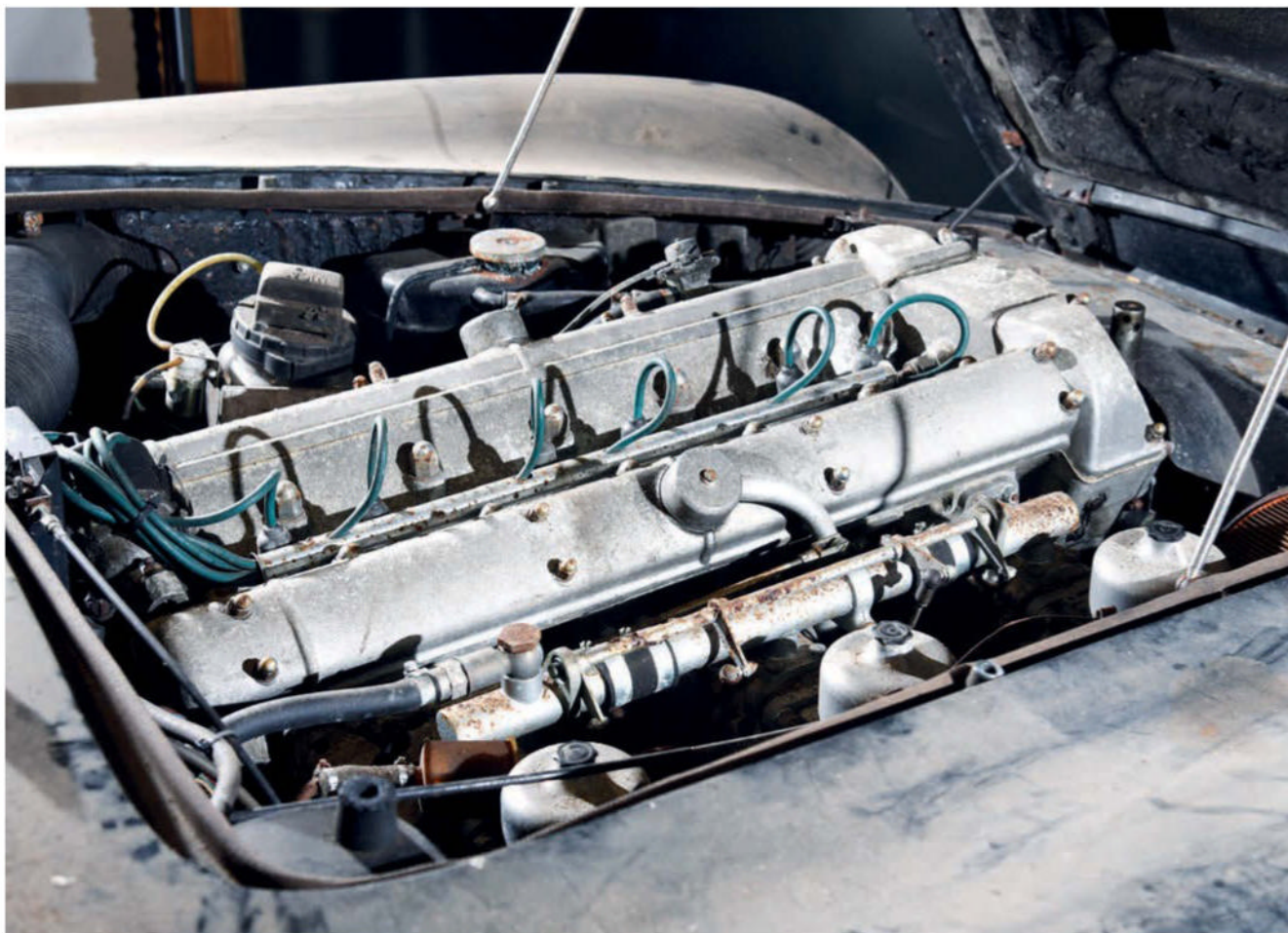
dealer that first discovered the car. Whereas the exterior is showing the signs of age, what he would have seen when he first peered through the hole in the dirt is an interior that looks to be frozen in time. Other than some wear on the driver's seat, it's clean and mould-free. Give the carpets a vacuum and it looks good to go. Special mention needs to be given to the brown leather upholstery the first owner chose since it arguably gives the interior a richer, warmer and more opulent ambience than the more common black.

The car is apparently mechanically sound because despite sitting unused since Simon Le Bon was first hungry like the wolf, the engine will turn over although the fuel pump doesn't work, which is perhaps the reason why it was originally taken off the road and put into storage in the first place. "We did ask ourselves whether we should make it run again," continues Paul, "but we decided just to leave it as it is, for somebody to come along and take it to the next level." Despite barn finds often losing parts due to either



HISTORY

UNRESTORED DB6



being cannibalised for other cars or stripped for an ultimately unrealised return to the road, this one is totally complete, inside and out. Even the first owner's cherished registration remains with the car. It's also original with no signs of any previous work resulting in what could be a uniquely original example.

All of this will make the restoration Aston Martin Works is offering to any future owner easier than if it had been previously messed around with or if it was missing several items. "I'd love to see it restored and back on the road," admits Paul, "transformed into a Pebble Beach Concours winning car." Considering next year marks the 60th anniversary of the DB6, let's hope that happens.

Yet no matter what the car's future is, one thing is for certain; thanks to the history, condition and potential of this remarkable Aston Martin, it won't stay dirty for long. **AMD**



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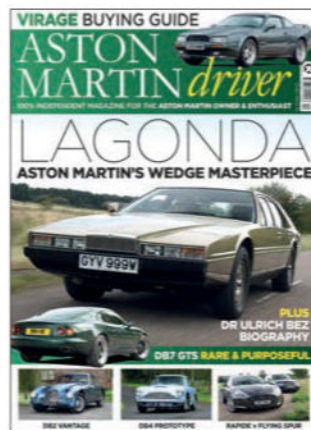
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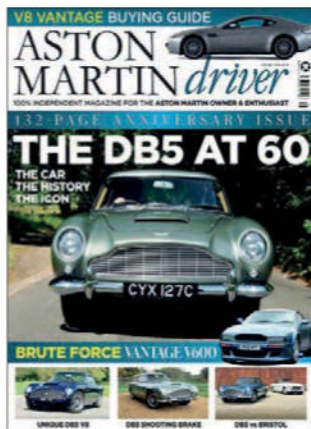
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Why Aston Martin is playing the longer game

Matt James looks at the troubled start to the 2024 grand prix season for last year's breakout star

HEADING INTO the midpart of the 2023 FIA Formula 1 World Championship season, Fernando Alonso could rightly have thought that a race victory was within his grasp.

The Silverstone-based Aston Martin had delivered on its promises and the AMR23 was arguably the second-best chassis on the grid behind the all-conquering Red Bulls of Max Verstappen and Sergio Perez.

As it turned out, the top step of the rostrum remained elusive over the 22-race campaign, but the Lawrence Stroll-owned team had vaulted from a lowly seventh in the Constructors' Championship to a creditable fifth.

It had taken Alonso to fourth in the drivers' standings too with eight podium finishes. Team-mate Lance Stroll collected 12 points-paying results too to back up that form.

Fast forward 12 months and the picture is very different. Aston is still fifth in the battle for makes' points, but the form of the car has derailed significantly. It has struggled to make the impact it did during the previous campaign and the rostrum seems a distant memory.



Alonso's best result in the opening portion of the campaign has been at the lower end of the top five, while Stroll's performances have been patchy in the extreme.

When the AMR24 was launched in March, the talk was about how the Mercedes-powered machine would be an evolution of last year's potent weapon. Team principal Mike Krack said that it would take the strong elements from the AMR23 and build upon them while eradicating some of the flaw that were inherent. That has clearly not worked, and talk is already centred around seasons to come.

There is certainly no lack of progress from Aston Martin in the background. The squad has moved into its new headquarters which has been created at the gates of Silverstone, it has recruited wisely and its technical direction is headed up by ex-Red Bull Racing man Dan Fallows. There is a wind tunnel on the way too, which many grand prix teams believe is the magic bullet to speed up developments. ▶



Aston Martin F1's
team principle,
Mike Krack

“Securing Fernando’s long-term future with Aston Martin is fantastic news,”



MOTORSPORT

FORMULA 1

The growing pains of a new team are still there, but they are being gradually put to bed. The AMR24 has not been a bad car, but it has failed to perform consistently. It started the season as a car which could battle with the Mercedes machines of Lewis Hamilton and George Russell, but it was in the wake of Red Bull and Ferrari. As the season has progressed, McLaren has entered the fray with some strong upgrades for the cars of Oscar Piastri and Lando Norris.

That has pushed Aston down the pecking order so that now it is scrapping around for the crumbs at the bottom part of the top 10.

No F1 team stand still, and Aston rushed through some upgrades for the midseason, which appeared on the car at the Emilia Romagna Grand Prix at Imola in May, but they were a red herring.

Alonso says: "Last year until mid-season, we were the team to look at and copy. Suddenly, you can quickly take two or three steps backwards. Different to other teams, we have a great leader in Lawrence Stroll. We have not only the owner of the team, but also a very competitive person. We will fix things quicker than other teams, I think, thanks to him."

Those upgrades were, according to the drivers, beneficial to the machine but took away some of the drivability of the chassis, which had been such a boost for it over the course of the last year and half.

The engineers thought they had unlocked more speed with another tweak ahead of the wet-dry-wet Canadian Grand Prix in June.

Sixth and seventh for Alonso and Lance Stroll has brought a feeling of optimism for the remainder of the 2024 calendar, although Krack is not getting carried away.

"It would be premature to say we have understood everything," said the German. "I think we have a lot of work to do still. But, obviously, it was a step in the right direction [in Montreal]. There are different and difficult circuits coming up, so we need to sit down and see what is the best package for the races to come, because they are very intense."

There was also the distraction of Adrian Newey. The multiple title-winning



Fernando Alonso



The 2024 Chinese Grand Prix when Alonso set the fastest lap

designer had been embedded in Red Bull Racing since the team was created in 2005, but the British boffin announced earlier this year that he would walk away from the team. Aston Martin was one of those teams which, understandably, made an approach for one of the smartest men in the grand prix paddock. Whether that has been successful or not is yet to be known.

One of the key factors in pushing Aston Martin from mid-pack battler to potential race winner was the signing of two-time World Champion Fernando Alonso, who joined the ambitious squad in 2023.

The 42-year-old might not be in the first flushes of youth, but his skill and speed have matured like a fine wine. What he has definitely got is bucketloads of title-winning experience.

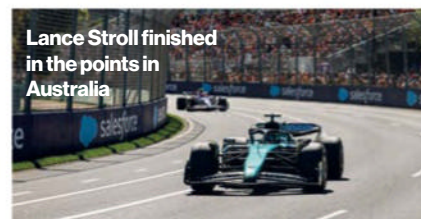
He is a major player on the Formula 1 landscape and when Lewis Hamilton dropped the grand prix bombshell that he was quitting his Mercedes team and switching to Ferrari, it immediately thrust Alonso into the spotlight as a potential replacement for the Brackley-based

Three-Pointed Star. Not only them either: every other team boss took a close look at Alonso's contractual situation.

Alonso and Aston reacted quickly, and the Spanish driver put pen to paper on a fresh deal, described as a multi-year agreement, which would keep him at the team until at least the end of 2026. That was a boost for all concerned as it maintained consistency and it also meant that Aston Martin retained the driver who has become something of a talisman. "Securing Fernando's long-term future with Aston Martin is fantastic news," Krack said at the time. "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."

That belief was crucial, because it would see Aston Martin through to a radical rule



“After we registered as a power unit supplier for 2026 some other teams contacted us as they were interested in working with Honda,” says Watanabe. “Then we talked to those parties and made a decision. Honda was very impressed with Mr Stroll’s strong passion and his strong leadership to fight for the world championship in 2026.

“They [have] invested a lot of money to establish the factory in Silverstone. We visited them to see the factory that was under construction.

“Several times we have meetings with [Aston Martin Performance Technology’s CEO] Martin Whitmarsh and Mike Krack, so the management team. They are very open, and the entire team is working in the same direction, it’s one united team. That is a very good image for us. At the same time, they also think that Honda is a good partner for them to become world champion.

“We have already started a technical working team and also a steering committee meeting to discuss some important issues that we can maybe improve.”

So those seeds are already being sewn. The future looks bright. The final operating touches are being put to the HQ at Silverstone and the wind tunnel is coming on stream, Alonso has confirmed that he will be at the squad for at least the next two seasons and the work in the background in Honda has already begun.

The results might have taken a step backwards in 2024, but that is set against the backdrop of frenetic work to put the team in the right place going forward into Formula 1’s next generation. **AMD**



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reset for Formula 1 with a new focus on electrical energy from the powerplant which, from the start of 2026, would be provided by Honda as Aston had confirmed a long-term agreement with the Japanese giant.

Looking ahead is something which all teams are doing at the moment. The 2026 regulations are going to alter Formula 1 significantly, with more electrical power coming from the motors and some moveable aerodynamics.

It has shaken the F1 tree significantly, and Audi and Ford will come on board with Sauber and Red Bull respectively.

Honda will also return to grand prix racing and will supply its bespoke motors to Aston Martin in an exclusive deal. That is a fundamental building block for both Aston and for Honda.

Honda had previously linked up with Red Bull but wavered in its commitment, which has led Red Bull to opt for Ford. Honda had made its decision to join grand prix racing again in its own right and then looked around for a suitable squad to join.

Lawrence Stroll’s squad was eventual choice. Speaking to Autosport, Honda Racing Corporation’s president Koji Watanabe has set out some clear objectives for success – and pretty quickly too.

Watanabe says: “[We want] to become world champion from 2026 onwards. We know that it will be very difficult and it is not so easy, but we need some good targets to put in our best effort together with Aston Martin.

“So, that’s why together with Stroll and Toshihiro Mibe [Honda CEO and president], we set the target to just aim for the world championship in that year. In reality, it is not so easy.”

Opting for Aston Martin wasn’t Honda’s only avenue for a grand prix return. The bosses at the Japanese giant had admitted there were conversations with many teams, and it was Stroll’s passion that stood out and convinced Honda, a firm which a glittering trophy cabinet from its association in the 1980s with McLaren, to forge a partnership.

MISSED OPP



ORTUNITY...



Despite showing initial promise, it was a tough weekend for the two privately entered Aston Martin Vantage GT3s at this year's 24 Hours of Le Mans

WORDS PAUL WALTON PHOTOGRAPHY ALAMY & PAUL WALTON

THERE WAS to be no fairy tale ending for the two Vantage GT3s at this year's 24 Hours of Le Mans on the 65th anniversary of Aston Martin's sole overall victory. Despite the still-new racing model showing genuine speed, a horrific accident brought the race of one of the two cars to a sudden and violent end while mixed weather hampered the other.

The two Vantage LMGT3s were entered by a pair of independent teams, America's Heart of Racing (27) plus D'Station Racing from Japan (777). Although this would be the Vantage GT3's Le Mans debut, thanks to the combined experience of the two teams, there was still a high expectation beforehand that the car would fare well.

"The 24 Hours of Le Mans is among the most iconic races in motorsport, so it's absolutely right that Aston Martin's competitive history should be so indelibly linked to it," said Adam Carter,

Aston Martin's head of Endurance Motorsport, before the race. "While we prepare for our return to the top class with the Valkyrie AMR-LMH Hypercar in 2025, this year we will see two outstanding partner teams, D'Station Racing and Heart of Racing, give the new Vantage GT3 its Le Mans debut. That in itself is a momentous occasion."

The teams put themselves in a good position for success when, out of the 23 GT3 car field, they were two of the six fast enough in qualifying to reach Hyperpole held on the Thursday evening. However, neither Vantage could match Inception Racing's McLaren 720S that would take GT3 pole with the Porsche 911 of the Manthey PureRxcing team in second, JMW Motorsport's Ferrari 296 (third) or the Ford Mustang of Proton Competition (fourth). The Heart of Racing team finished in fifth in the GT3 grid and the D'Station in sixth (43rd and 44th overall). ▶

The latter's Danish driver, Marco Sørensen, still took an early lead of the GT3 class and stayed there before being replaced by one of D'Station's owners, Satoshi Hoshino, in his final Le Mans 24 Hours. However, the Japanese driver was given a speed penalty after accidentally pressing the FCY (full course yellow) button, pushing the car down the grid.

Heart of Racing suffered from an issue with the left rear tyre during an early pit stop which also cost the team some

track position. A little after the fifth hour, the team principal, Ian James, took over the Vantage LMGT3 from Spanish driver Alex Riberas, soon reaching fourth in the GT3 class. The first safety car period of the race was called at 11pm following the BMW Hypercar of Dries Vanthoor crashing at Mulsanne Corner. When the track was clear, the Heart of Racing boss maintained his fast pace in the darkness.

Overnight, James rose to third in GT3 behind Manthey PureRxcing in

second and Manthey EMA in third, both using Porsche 911 GT3 R LMGT3s. Meanwhile, the D'Station Vantage was around 12th place

But when rain began to fall once again in the early hours, it was hard enough to bring out the safety car, which lasted for an incredible four hours and 28 minutes.

In the D'Station car, Hoshino finished his final stint around the same time on Sunday morning, handing the car to his French teammate, Erwan Bastard. "I've had



He drifted into the wet lane at high speed, losing control of the car as it slid along the rain-soaked paint of the nearby run-off area...



enough," said Hoshino with a wry smile. "I'm glad I said I was going to stop."

As the morning light covered the soaked circuit, Daniel Mancinelli took over the Heart of Racing Vantage from James. When the safety car finally pulled in, the Italian driver drove from seventh to second in the GT3 class within the first few laps of the track going back to green, taking Heart of Racing's fastest lap of the race – 3 mins 59 secs – in the process.

However, as he was heading into

Indianapolis Corner, Mancinelli was forced out of the racing line to avoid contact with a Ferrari Hypercar. He drifted into the wet lane at high speed, losing control of the car as it slid along the rain-soaked paint of the nearby run-off area, resulting in an impact with the barrier inside of Indianapolis itself. The crash was hard enough to roll the car on to its roof before coming to a rest.

Thankfully, despite the violence of the incident, Mancinelli was still able to

quickly climb out under his own steam, leaving the car stuck upside down in the inside run-off area of the next corner from where his crash had started.

"A very hard pill to swallow," said teammate Riberas afterwards. "Le Mans is very rewarding, but also very mean and a very cruel mistress when it comes to emotions. It gives you a lot, but it's also very hard when things go wrong and things can go wrong in a split second which is what happened to Dani today. ►



MOTORSPORT

24 HOURS OF LE MANS

We were running in second place and looking to possibly fight for a win at the moment of the accident.”

Meanwhile over at the D'Station team, Bastard and Sørensen completed the race, made ever more difficult by the intermittent rain. Thanks to several rivals dropping out, the green Vantage moved up the ranks to eventually finish in a fine ninth place in the GT3 class and 36th overall, 12 seconds ahead of the number 87 Lexus RC F GT3.

“The conditions at Le Mans were very difficult, with rain for most of the race, but Hoshino, Erwan and Sørensen did a fantastic job fighting through it without making any mistakes,” said the team’s managing director, Tomonobu Fujii. “The team did a great job, scoring over 100 points, and fought without any mistakes.”

Although a ninth and a retirement weren’t the results that the two outfits or Aston Martin itself were looking for leading up to the race, the speed and reliability of the Vantage LMGTC3 in its first Le Mans 24 Hours were definite positives.

Roll on 2025. **AMD**



FROM THE TRACKSIDE

Paul Walton gives a spectator’s view of the greatest race in the world

The 92nd 24 Hours of Le Mans was always going to be a good one. Not only was the grid full of 62 cars, but thanks to the still-new Hypercar class, the overall winner wasn’t a foregone conclusion like in previous years. Ferrari, Porsche and Cadillac were all contenders while the French Alpine and Peugeot teams gave the locals something to support. Same with the GT3 class with Aston Martin taking on Chevrolet, BMW, Ferrari, Ford, McLaren and Porsche.

As soon as the flag dropped at 4pm on the Saturday, it felt more like a sprint race than endurance with all cars in all classes flat out from the outset. Mix in often wet conditions – not always across the 8.5-mile-long track – and it resulted in some fabulous and close racing. The fact the lead often changed several times in an hour showed its unpredictability.

But not that I saw much. With 329,000 spectators – a record for the 24 Hours of Le Mans – the circuit felt uncomfortably full, with the trackside often three to four deep of people.

Despite obvious investment in places for the race’s 100th anniversary in 2023, from the food vendors to the toilets, the circuit’s facilities could barely cope with such high numbers. The shuttle buses that ferry people around to different points of the track were also busy and at one point, it took us almost two hours to reach Arnage Corner from our campsite on the Porsche Curves despite being a short distance away physically.

The Le Mans 24 hours remains the greatest race in the world but as a spectator, it’s no longer the greatest experience.





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Champagne
Pommery Domaine

ALL MEMBERS of the Aston Martin Owners Club have access to Membership offers and discounts from our carefully selected Club partners. Here's a taster of just two of the current offers enjoyed by our Members. Don't forget that you do not need to own an Aston Martin to become a Club Member – it's for Aston Martin enthusiasts too

Champagne Pommery

Champagne Pommery has become the new official champagne partner for the Club in 2024 and adds a touch of sparkle to gatherings and events.

Pommery's association with classic cars is deeply rooted in its history, making the partnership a natural progression by blending two worlds synonymous with luxury, craftsmanship, and timeless elegance.

Champagne Pommery is owned by Vranken-Pommery Monopole, a Family-owned Group led by Paul-Francois Vranken. The Group is Europe's largest wine grape grower with vineyards in Champagne, the Camargue, and Provence in France, in the Douro Valley, Portugal and in Hampshire, England. Dating back to 1836, Pommery has consistently epitomised sophistication and refinement, creating a legacy that extends beyond the realm of champagne. Pommery's heritage is steeped in a tradition of producing exceptional champagne, with a focus on quality and craftsmanship which, again, reflects the shared values of this partnership.

The House has consistently pushed boundaries, setting new standards within the industry, which resonates with the discerning Members of the Aston Martin Owners Club. 2024 marks 150 years since Madame Pommery created the first 'brut' champagne.



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Michelin

Michelin became the new official tyre partner of the Aston Martin Owners Club in 2024. Founded in 1889, it is one of the largest, most reputable tyre companies in the world and has been at the forefront of tyre development for over 135 years.

Michelin and Aston Martin have a long-standing history, with the French tyre manufacturer working together with Aston Martin on special projects such as the Vulcan and Valkyrie.

Michelin has rich experience in both road and competition cars, with success on the premier motorsport stages such as Formula One, Le Mans 24hrs and MotoGP as well as being the manufacturer of choice for some of the world's most prestigious cars.

The Michelin range for Aston Martin covers everything from DB2/4 through to the V8 Volante with the Michelin Classic range, and with the full Michelin range covering the more modern Aston Martins. **AMD**



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BOB DOVER BIOGRAPHY

As Aston Martin's chairman between 1997 and 2000, Bob Dover (far left) was instrumental in the Vantage and Vanquish reaching production



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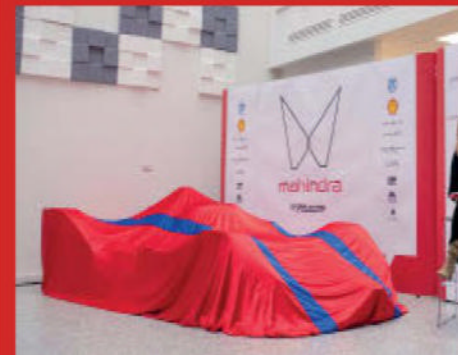


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ASTON MARTIN *drivers*

Jack Fairman's brief time with Aston Martin was the most successful of his long career

IT IS a mark of Jack Fairman's abilities that (Sir) Stirling Moss personally chose him as his partner for the Nürburgring 1000km in June 1959, driving an Aston Martin DBR1. While the younger driver would provide the speed, as Moss said in his 1987 biography, *My Cars, My Career*, what he wanted was a, "steady, reliable and trustworthy co-driver." Victory proved Moss's choice was the right one.

Although Fairman only spent a single season with Aston Martin, it was arguably the most successful of his long career.

Born at Smallfield near Horley, Surrey, on 15 March 1913, Fairman was always more interested in cars than he was joining his family's laundry business like his father had originally wanted. After attending Reigate Grammar School, he studied at Chelsea's Automobile Engineering Training College before joining Daimler's service department in Coventry as an 'improver-fitter'. Fairman's analytical skills became so trusted he was one of only two employees allowed to drive the Royal Double-Sixes when they needed servicing.

He started competing in trials with an Alvis 12/50 in 1934 before changing to hill climbs and eventually short races at Brooklands.

After taking part in the Normandy invasion with the Royal Tank Regiment, Fairman returned home to join the family business which had become involved in engineering.

His first post-war race was the 1948 Spa 24 Hours with an Aston Martin 2.0-litre Speed entered and co-driven by Richard Stallebrass who sadly died after losing control in the rain and the car cartwheeled over a bank.

At the following year's 24 Hours of Le Mans, by finishing eighth in an HRG, Fairman and another future Aston Martin alumnus, Eric Thompson, won the 1.5-litre class. The pair scored a further class victory a few weeks later by finishing tenth at the Spa 24 Hours.

It was perhaps due to these results why following a test at Silverstone, Aston Martin's new competitions manager, John Wyer, signed both for Le Mans.



Fairman drove one of the three works-prepared cars (chassis LML/50/9, registration VMF65) to the Le Mans circuit but due to misjudging a corner near Argentan in northern France, it left the road, the accident breaking the back of his pregnant wife, Marion. Not only was the DB2 badly damaged but Wyer considered Fairman unfit to drive as well. His place in the car's replacement – a prototype known as the 'Sweat Box' (LML/49/3) – was taken by John Gordon. It's no doubt due to the accident why Fairman wouldn't be asked to drive for Aston Martin for another nine years.

Between 1951 and 1958, Fairman raced for a variety of marques including Allard, Bristol, Fraser Nash and Jaguar plus the Ecurie Ecosse team. His results were often patchy, although third at the 12 Hours of Reims in 1956 was a notable exception.

But he also had a reputation for being a talented test driver, later becoming involved in the development of the Jaguar D-type.

In 1952, Fairman joined Moss, Bert Hadley and Leslie Johnson at the Montlhéry Autodrome in France where they averaged 100.31mph in a Jaguar XK120 fixedhead coupe for seven days and nights non-stop. He made his Grand Prix debut at Silverstone the following year with a HWM-Alta when he retired on lap 27 due to clutch failure. There would be 11 more F1 appearances, his best finish being fourth at the 1956 British Grand Prix driving a Connaught.

Moss was instrumental in getting Wyer to reconsider Fairman for the 1959 season and as well as Nürburgring they were partners for the 24 Hours of Le Mans. Although they eventually retired, their fast and consistent pace helped break the Ferraris allowing teammates Roy Salvadori and Carroll Shelby to take Aston Martin's sole overall victory.

Fairman's final major race for the British team was the 1959 Tourist Trophy at Goodwood. When the leading DBR1 of Moss and Salvadori caught fire during a pit stop the former was transferred into the car Fairman was sharing with Carroll Shelby. Moss soon hunted down and passed the leading Ferraris to take the victory and with it, Fairman's finest and most important finish of his career.

He continued competing well into the Sixties, winning the 1960 Grand Prix of Rouen in Graham Whitehead's privately entered DBR1 before taking a fine ninth at Le Mans the same year in Ian Baillie's example. Fifth at the Tourist Trophy the same year in a Ferrari 250 GT was his final finish of note. **AMD**

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1962 Aston Martin DB4 Srs IV, completely dismantled, fully restored and upgraded by us back in 1998 since when it has covered only 19,000 miles. Fitted with 4.2 engine with triple SU's, overdrive gearbox, SS exhaust. And much more. **£375,000**



1965 Aston Martin DB6 Vantage. We have a choice of 3 fully restored examples, all of which are in superb condition. Choice of manual or automatic transmission, all on chrome wires, Well worth viewing with prices from **£295,000**



1972 Aston Martin DBS V8, Finished in Signal red with cream hide interior and fully restored by the previous owner to an exceptionally high standard. Superb to drive and sensibly priced for today's market at **£139,950**



1998 Aston Martin V8 Volante, long Wheelbase providing roomy cabin accommodation for 4 adults. Beautifully finished in Deep Ocean Blue with Cream hide, 32,000 miles only, and one of only 63 of this model produced, hence Extremely Rare. **£157,500**



1998 Aston Martin V600 finished in Chichester blue with Magnolia hide interior, 46,800 miles with a huge history file and maintained regardless of cost over the past 13 years by the current owner. Produced in very limited numbers and very collectable. **£299,950**

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