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V12 SPEEDSTER

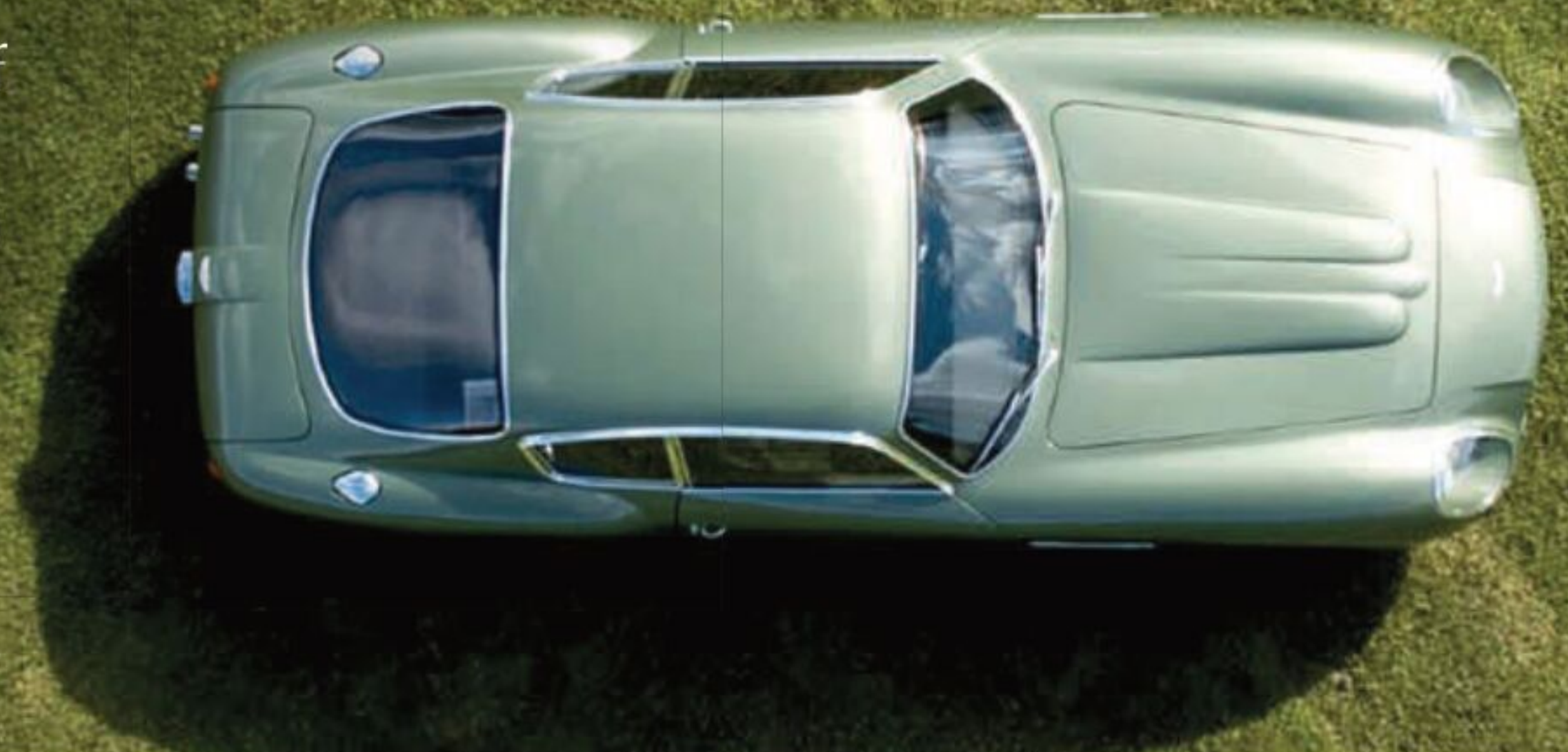


DB7 3.2 VS XKR 4.0

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ASTON MARTIN *driver*

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V12 Speedster



PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

IF THERE'S one thing I've learned after putting my first issue of *Aston Martin Driver* together it's that the company's past can be best described as eventful. Almost going under several times before being saved by brave but generous benefactors (including Sir David Brown in 1947 – see page 54), it's amazing the company is still with us.

Yet not only has it survived but it's arguably stronger than ever with a large and critically acclaimed range of cars. It even has the confidence to develop limited edition, high performance models such as the V12 Speedster which we put through its paces in the wilds of Scotland (p76). And then there's the Formula 1 team. Although good results have so far been few and far between, a crack team of engineers plus a new and cutting edge headquarters means success can't be far away.

Yet the best part of its survival is a long, distinguished and unbroken history that few manufacturers can rival. And so as I settle into my new role, I look forward to exploring more of Aston Martin's past, present and future.

Paul Walton
Editor

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UP FRONT NEWS



Aston reveals DBR22 concept

At this year's Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance in August, Aston Martin unveiled the spectacular DBR22, a V12-engined two-seater coach-built design concept which celebrates the marque's bloodline of sports racers.

Clearly influenced by Aston's world-beating two-seater open-cockpit sportscars of the Fifties such as the DBR1 and DB3S, the DBR22 expresses the same dynamic but with a new take on this compelling theme.

The concept showcases a completely new body from Aston Martin's designers. Its coach-built form is created from a minimal number of body panels to create a more sculpted, muscular presence that results in a smooth and effortless blend of exceptional drama and elegance.

A particularly noteworthy feature is the entirely new front grille which incorporates a unique carbon fibre design in place of the usual veins seen on series production Aston Martins. This design takes inspiration directly from the DBR1 and DB3S, giving a unique identity but one which clearly draws from Aston Martin's heritage.

The bonnet features a dramatic horseshoe vent, recessed to aid airflow from the V12 that sits beneath it.

The DBR22 also features a 3D printed rear subframe – the first time Aston Martin has introduced such a method. The component is made from multiple 3D printed parts printed from aluminium, which are then bonded to form the finished subframe. The advantages are clear, with a significant weight saving and no reduction in stiffness, plus the ability to make special parts for ultra-low volume models, where required.

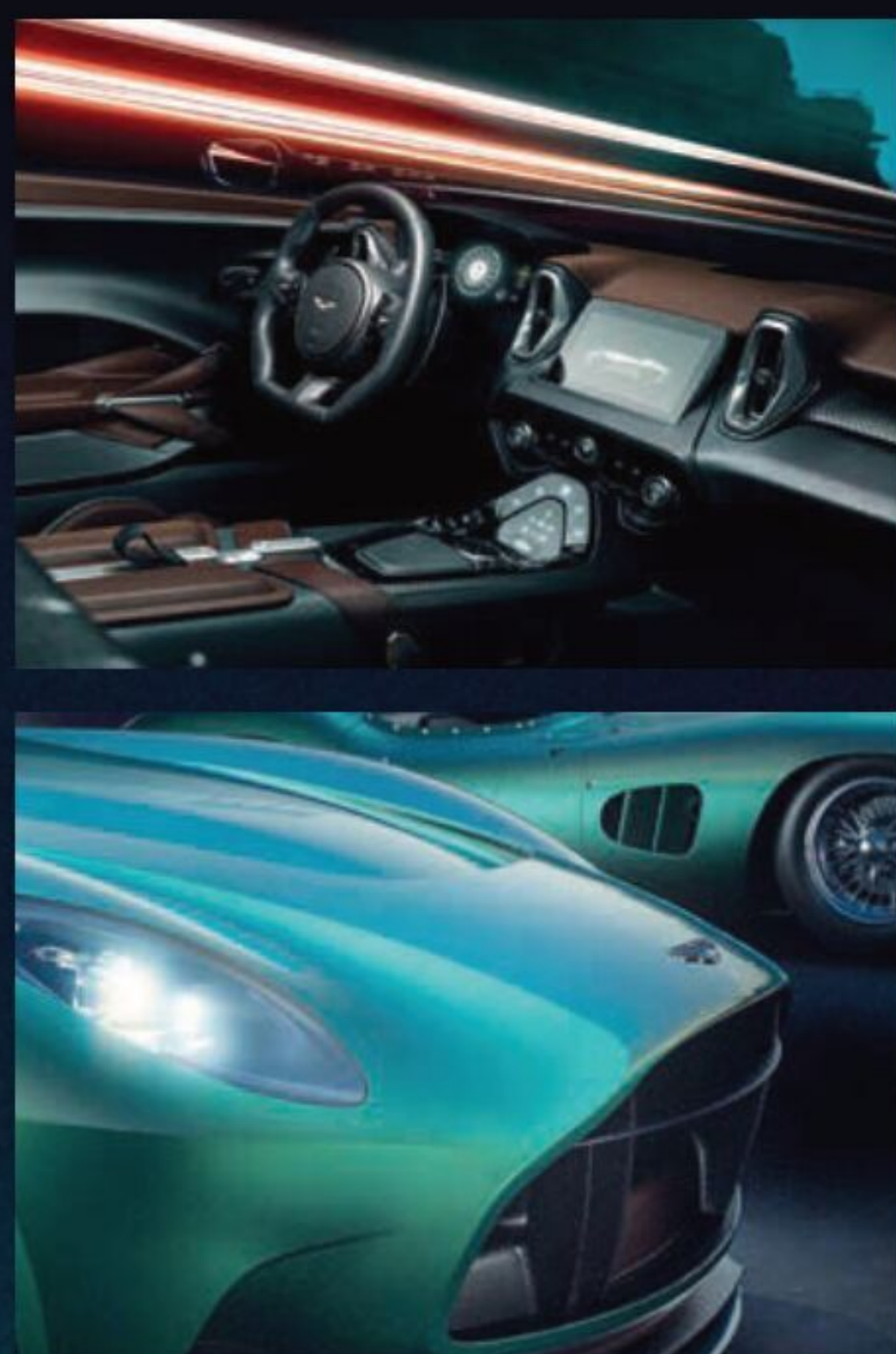
The DBR22's cockpit continues the fusion of classic and contemporary approaches with many unique components and an extensive use of both leather and exposed carbon fibre. With architecture defined by the all-new dashboard and sleek infotainment displays, it sets the tone for a clean, uncluttered environment. Though taking inspiration from Aston Martin's world-beating competition cars, the DBR22 is no bare-bones racer inside.

The 5.2-litre V12 twin-turbo powertrain produces 715PS (705bhp) and 555lb ft resulting in a 0-60mph time of just 3.4



VETTEL TO RETIRE

Read Matt James' thoughts on Vettel's retirement and his replacement on page 84



seconds and a top speed of 198mph. Said Roberto Fedeli, Aston Martin's chief technical officer, "Technology is pivotal in the construction of DBR22, with extensive use of carbon fibre throughout and the use of 3D printing for the manufacture of a structural component."

As such DBR22 showcases Aston Martin's unique capabilities, with world-class design combined with an agile, intelligent approach to engineering and production. For a car that was designed to celebrate the ultimate bespoke customisation service, the engineering developments mean DBR22 truly has the dynamic theatre to match, ensuring the drive is just as addictive as its looks."



Four-time world champion and Aston Martin F1 driver, Sebastian Vettel, will retire from the sport at the end of this season in order to focus on his family and other social issues.

Vettel made the announcement in a video on his newly launched Instagram account on the Thursday before the Hungarian Grand Prix in late July.

"Being a racing driver has never been my sole identify," he said in his announcement. "I have grown other interests outside of F1. My passion for racing and F1 comes with lots of time spent away from them [my family] and takes a lot of energy."

"Committing to my passion the way I did and the way I thought was right, does no longer go side by side with my wish to be a great father and husband."

The 35-year old in recent years had been increasingly vocal about a range of social issues and his retirement announcement referred to these.

Vettel took his four F1 titles with Red Bull from 2010 to 2013, later becoming a race winner for Ferrari and had driven for Aston Martin since the start of last season.

It was later announced by the team that the highly experienced Spaniard, Fernando Alonso, will leave his current team of Alpine to replace Vettel from 2023 onwards after signing a multiyear deal. ▶



THE RETURN OF GREEN PEA

To mark the centenary since Aston Martin's racing debut in July 1922, one of the company's original Grand Prix cars – the TT1 – was driven around Circuit Paul Ricard by Sebastian Vettel before this year's French Grand Prix.

Affectionately nicknamed 'Green Pea', it made its debut at the road circuit of Strasbourg for a 60-lap, 800 km race as one of two Aston Martin entries.

Built by founder Lionel Martin following a commission by wealthy young motor racing driver and pioneer Count Louis Zborowski, two cars – TT1 and TT2 – were originally intended for the 1922 Isle of Man TT (Tourist Trophy) event, but a delay saw them instead make the marque's international racing debut at the French Grand Prix on the 15 July 1922, with Zborowski piloting TT1.

Said Vettel, "It was an incredible honour

to drive this car, exactly 100 years on from it last taking to the starting line at the French Grand Prix.

"Green Pea holds a very special place in Aston Martin's heritage, and you can almost feel that century of history beneath your fingertips when at the wheel.

"The racing spirit and will to win is something that defines Aston Martin, and it's fantastic to celebrate it this weekend as we bring Green Pea and our heritage in motorsport together with the cutting-edge technology and performance of today's AMR22 car."

NEW LOGO REVEALED

Aston Martin has revealed a new version of its famous winged logo that will be applied on Aston Martin's next generation of sports cars.

Created by the manufacturer's design team in collaboration with acclaimed British art director and graphic designer, Peter Saville, it is the first major update to the marque since 2003 and only the eighth time in Aston Martin's 109-year history that it has been significantly adjusted.

The Aston Martin F1 team featured the new wings on its livery for the French Grand Prix in July. Celebrating the 100th anniversary of the brand's

first Grand Prix entry, the team also raced with Aston Martin's original button logo on the nose of its cars, mirroring the marque featured on its first Grand Prix entries in 1922.

Said Peter Saville, "The Aston Martin wings update is a classic example of the necessary evolution of logotypes of provenance.

"Subtle but necessary enhancements not only keep forms fresh, but allow for new technologies, situations and applications to be accommodated in the future. The process was one of clarifying and emphasising the key feature of the Aston Martin marque."





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V8 Vantage (2005 - 2018)	£705	£740	£705	£740	£825	£740	£705	£740	£705	£895
DB9, Rapide, DBS (2007 - 2014), V12 Vantage (2010-2018)	£805	£840	£805	£840	£920	£840	£805	£840	£805	£990

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BROWN'S DB5 FOR SALE

Read our
biography
on Sir David Brown
from page 54 of
this issue



An Aston Martin DB5 Convertible that was ordered and owned by the man who gave his initials to the legendary DB-series of cars – one-time Aston Martin chairman Sir David Brown – is now offered for sale by Aston Martin Specialists, Nicholas Mee & Co.

Delivered to Sir David in January of 1964, the car was built to the highest specification, with a then-new five-speed ZF gearbox, a PowerLok rear axle, chromed wire wheels and a Motorola radio. The factory build sheet, supplied with the car, confirms it was specified in a vibrant Caribbean Pearl, with a Dark Blue interior.

It was cherished by Sir David for three years before being acquired by former Aston Martin DB4 GT owner and garage proprietor, John Wilkinson. During



Wilkinson's ownership, maintenance was carried out at Aston Martin in Newport Pagnell, where records confirm a replacement engine block was installed and a newly stamped manufacturer's identity plate applied in 1969.

In 2014, it benefited from a major restoration faithful to its original specifications, which included a rebuild of the 4.0-litre engine, as well as rebuilds of the suspension, gearbox, brakes

and rear axle. A bare metal re-paint and complete re-trim of the interior in Connolly hide, along with a new hood covering, completed work.

Founder of Nicholas Mee & Co, Nicholas Mee, said, "The very fact that Sir David Brown owned this DB5 Convertible makes it one of the most special and unique DB cars of all time. The DB5 itself is the most iconic Aston Martin model ever produced, but this car's provenance sets it apart.

"It is restored to precisely the same specifications Sir David ordered it in back in 1964, it's a car he cherished and loved. This is a one-of-a-kind example of British automotive history."

The 1964 Aston Martin DB5 Convertible is offered for £1,150,000. For further information, head to www.nicholasmee.co.uk.





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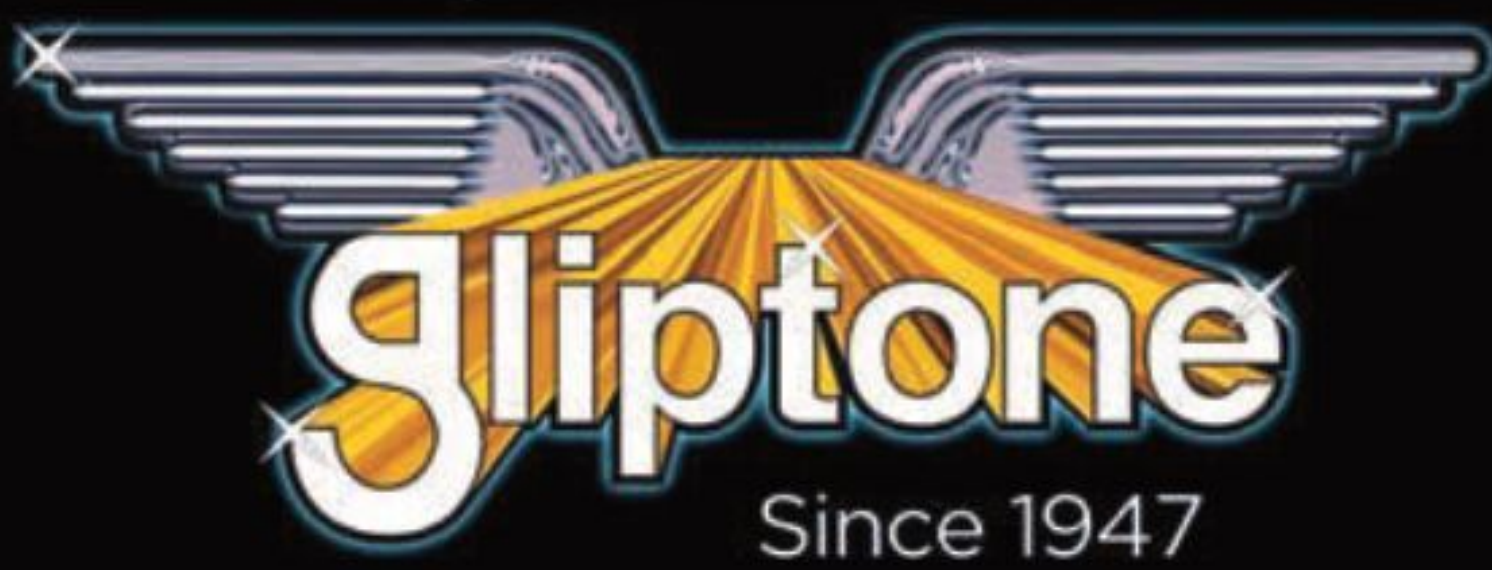
Aston Martin DB7 GTA

One of the rarest DB7s with only 112 made in total, with this car being 1 of only 60 RHD UK cars ever made. This imposing and last hurrah to a much loved Aston Martin model comes in a striking colour combination and has covered 53,507 miles. **£POA**



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MARKET TRENDS:

VANTAGE POINT

Looking for a way into affordable Aston Martin ownership? Then go no further than the original V8 Vantage or the classic six-cylinder DBS

V8 VANTAGE (2004-2017)

IF THERE'S one variety of car that will make your neighbours think that you've made it in life, it's an Aston Martin. With prices for the current range starting in the low six-figure region, you'll need to be the chairman of a major IT company or a lottery winner to be able to afford one. Then there's the classic examples whose values are usually telephone number big.

When it comes to later models, there is a middle ground, though; the first generation of Vantage. Arriving in 2004, they've been around long enough to depreciate heavily but not long enough for them to be seen as highly valuable classics.

The critics praised its handsome yet compact design and almost two decades later it still looks contemporary, not ageing as much as some of its rivals from the day.

Originally powered by a 4.3-litre V8 that created 380bhp, it was fast, reaching 62mph in a mere five seconds and having a 175mph top speed. A 4.7-litre model arrived in 2008 that offered more power and torque, better economy, plus stiffer suspension.

This updated model has meant the original 4.3-litre can often be overlooked on the used market, making them something of a bargain and becoming more so. After being worth over £40k just five to six years ago, recent auction results show they've already lost another £10k-£15k. So a 2005 coupe went under the hammer recently for just £24,125 while a similar car from 2006 was three grand more (both prices excluding commission). To put these into perspective, a top-of-the-range Ford Fiesta ST3 is the same money while a brand-new Vantage costs over £120,000.

However, if it's more power you're after then the first of the 4.7 coupes with 420bhp still only start in the mid-thirties.

No doubt the prices for both models will fall even more; it's an Aston Martin and they don't have a history in holding their values well. But unlike the DB7, which, going by a 1998 example that was recently sold for £16,000, is still a sub-£20k bargain, by being arguably better built than its predecessor and much more modern, we expect Vantage prices to start rising soon.



DBS (1967-1972)

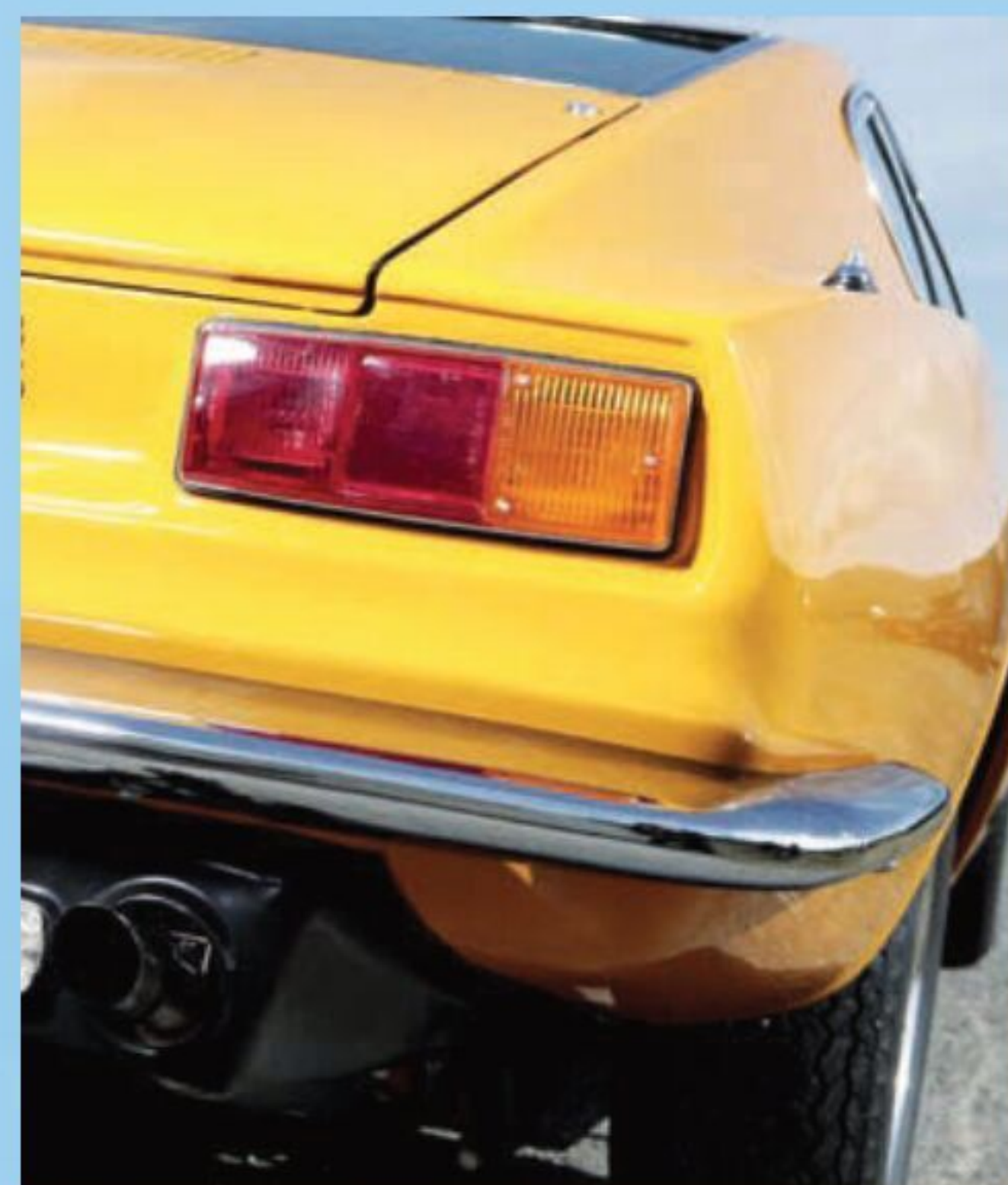


ALTHOUGH THE William Towns-designed DBS was intended to be a replacement for the DB6 when it arrived in 1967, the two ran concurrently until 1971. Longer, wider and more luxurious than its sibling, the new car still used the same 4.0-litre straight-six as its predecessor which was joined by Aston's new 5.3-litre V8 in 1969. The DBS was eventually replaced by the updated V8 model in 1972.

Despite having starring roles in both the 1969 James Bond film, *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, plus the 1971-1972 British TV show, *The Persuaders*, the car's slightly awkward styling has never proved to be quite as popular as the early DB models or the later V8s.

This has had a clear impact on the car's recent values, the straight-six model especially. A very clean 1971 example sold at auction recently for just £42,750 (excluding commission). Looking down the results list shows this wasn't a one-off either with other examples selling for around the same money. Considering DB5s now start at half a million, as an affordable classic Aston, it makes the DBS something of a rarity.

Obviously, DBSs can sell for twice that depending on condition and history, but if you're looking for an affordable yet still highly enjoyable entry point into classic Aston ownership then the DBS has it all.



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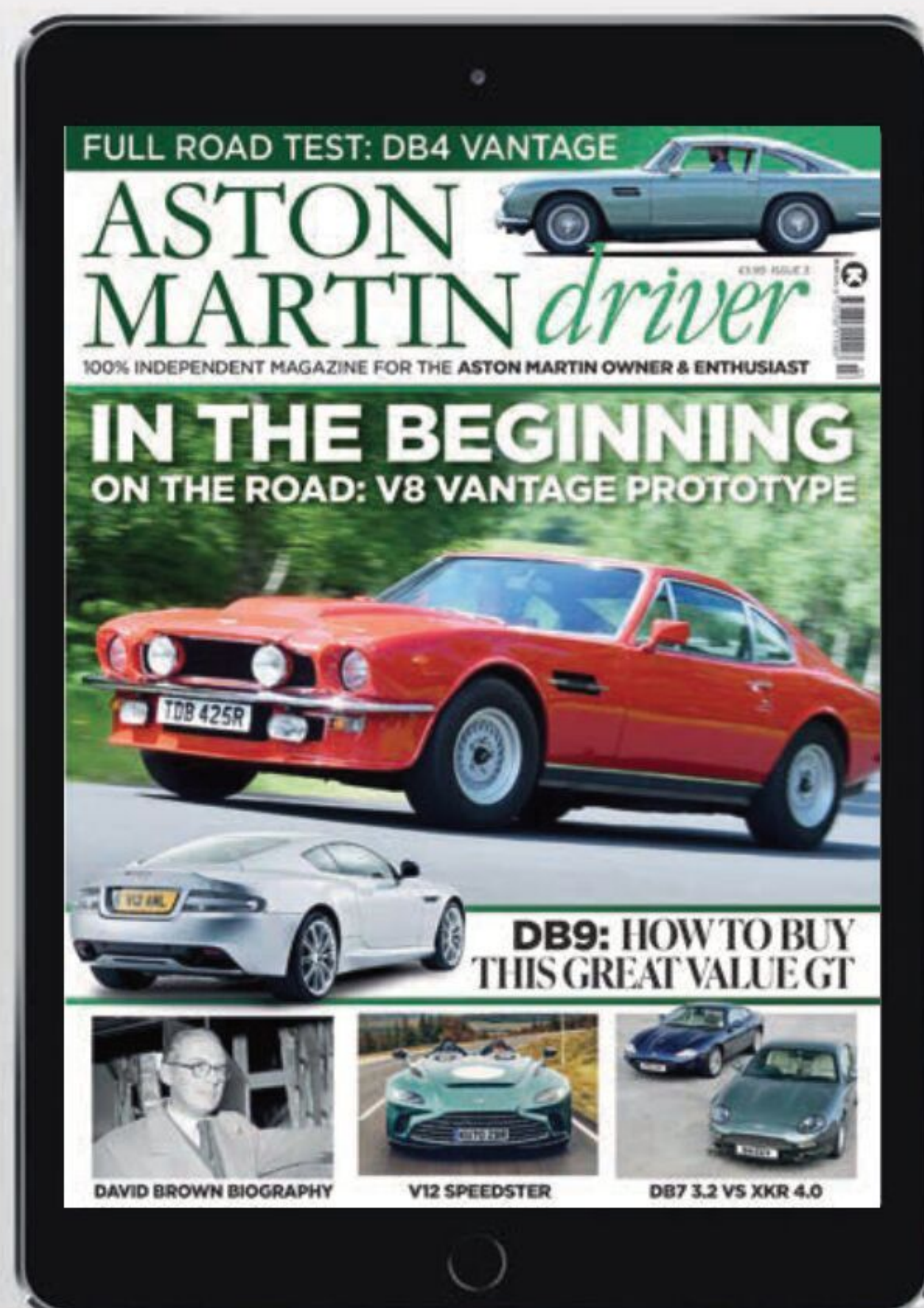
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CLASSIC DRIVE
V8 VANTAGE PROTOTYPE

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY: PAUL WALTON

ORIGIN OF THE SPECIES

If the V8 Vantage is the first British supercar, then this 1976 prototype is the origin of the species. We look at the history of the car before driving it ourselves



CLASSIC DRIVE

V8 VANTAGE PROTOTYPE

THERE ARE some important individual cars that represent the long and varied history of the British automobile industry, cars such as Old Number One, the earliest known MG that was made in 1926, the first production Mini from 1959 or the oldest known Range Rover prototype – the Velar – that was made a year before the model's 1970 debut. But I'd include another on to that list of luminaries; the red V8 Vantage featured here. Not only as an early prototype is it the first of the breed but with the model often considered to be Britain's first genuine supercar, it's just as important as Britain's first true city car or SUV.

Yet unlike the others mentioned earlier, the Vantage wasn't a new car, far from it. A variation of the V8 that had been introduced in 1972 which in turn was a development of the V8-engined DBS, its origins go back to the William Towns-



CLASSIC DRIVE
V8 VANTAGE PROTOTYPE



designed six-cylinder model of 1967.

Aston's engineers knew this, but they also recognized the company didn't have the resources to develop a new car. After going bankrupt in December 1974, the factory had shut down and all 500 members of staff were laid off. But in April 1975 the receiver sold the company for £1.05m to a trio of businessmen, with car production restarting the following September.

Following the second generation of the Lagonda saloon announced at the 1976 British Motor Show, Aston received so many orders, the new management felt it was time to phase out the coupe over the next couple of years. To try and keep this now old car relevant for a little longer, it would receive two stages of development.

Stage one included the 5.3 V8 receiving new camshafts which had a polynomial profile making the valve gear quieter and also eliminating the dip in the power curve at 2,500rpm. At the same time, the valves were given five degrees more overlap on



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V8 VANTAGE PROTOTYPE

the inlet side, raising the power peak to 6,000rpm. These updates didn't actually arrive until June 1977, four months after Stage two.

These came about due to the Lagonda saloon's low nose which required a smaller, flatter airbox, and a modified inlet manifold, which robbed the V8 of both power and torque. As a way to give the engine more performance, the Lagonda's V8 was given new heads with significantly larger valves which when coupled with high-lift cams and larger 48 IDF Weber carburettors with revised inlet manifolds, larger diameter trunking and hotter spark plugs, the engine was able to deliver around 375bhp, an increase of 70bhp. This hotter engine was then destined for a new, faster version of the V8 and first tried in a standard car that was apparently indistinguishable from a standard model.

There was also stiffer suspension, spacers for the rear wheels, the adoption of Koni shock absorbers and wider tyres (255 x 60). It differed physically from the standard V8 by a front air dam, tail spoiler, Perspex headlamp covers (although these were soon dropped), and twin 7in Cibie spotlights recessed into the grille.

Around the same time, marque specialist Robin Hamilton was developing his RHAM/1 Le Mans car and Aston paid for a wind tunnel session to help him develop the aerodynamic aids. At the same time, Aston's designers tested the aerodynamics of a new spoiler and air dam destined for the new car that was fitted with a standard V8. After combining the results of both they created the production version which had a ten percent reduction in drag and almost no lift, which was aided by blanking off the radiator grille that had little effect on cooling. It's because of the two cars being developed together, the road car closely resembled the racing one.

The wind tunnel tests resulted in the radiator grille being blanked off since it increased coolant temperature at idle from 85 to 95 degrees, which was the optimum temperature for engine efficiency.

The first car to receive the full treatment was a 1976 grey V8 coupe, 11470, that had been the factory demonstrator and would carry on in that role. However, as we'll see,

others were used for different areas of development.

There was only one name the new car (that would sit along the standard V8) could be called; Vantage. Although dormant since 1973 and the last of the six-cylinder DBSs, the name still denoted faster Astons and therefore resonated with customers.

Similar to the first Vantage from 1950, the V8 version was initially envisioned as a conversion kit to be installed by the Aston Martin Service department at Newport Pagnell. But after a couple of cars were modified, it quickly became a model in its own right.

When the V8 Vantage debuted in early 1977, at £20k it was a whopping £3,000 more than the entry V8. To put that into perspective, in 1977 a Ford Escort RS Mexico was a little over £3k.

But as *Autocar* said in its 19 February 1977 issue, "In a car of this class, there will always be a handful of owners capable of using, as well as demanding, even more power. This is the market the Vantage is aimed at."

Aston Martin reckoned the car could reach 60mph in 5.3 seconds – one-tenth of a second quicker than the Ferrari Daytona – and with a 170mph top speed, making it the UK's first true supercar and the fastest production four-seater in the world

But when *Motor* magazine tested a Vantage in 1978, it couldn't get past 148mph while the best time to 60mph was half a second off Aston's claims.

Yet it was still a big bruiser of a car and represented something new for a UK manufacturer. "A new performance standard has been set amongst so-called 'supercars'", confirmed *Motorsport* magazine in its April 1978 issue. "And it originates not in Modena or Stuttgart, but in urban Newport Pagnell. For the most breathtakingly exciting, adrenalin churning example of all that rarefied breed, indeed the fastest accelerating current production car in the world is the Aston Martin Vantage." Future supercars such as the Jaguar XJ220, TVR Cerbera and McLaren F1 all followed what the Vantage had started.

With the two stages giving the V8 model the shot in the arm it needed and together



CLASSIC DRIVE V8 VANTAGE PROTOTYPE



with several other updates throughout its lifetime, the V8 stayed in production until 1989, ironically only a year before the Lagonda came to an end. But due to its cost and extreme power the Vantage only ever sold in relatively tiny numbers; in 12 years, a mere 342 saloons (how Aston described this obvious two-door coupe) were produced plus 192 open Volantes that arrived in 1986.

Whilst these figures represent the model's end, located in County Durham is an example of its beginning.

Built in late 1976 and first registered in November the same year, according to Aston Workshop, chassis 11533 was one of Aston Martin's development models for the Vantage. Starting life as a standard V8 saloon, although the 5.3-litre engine was left in the same state of tune as the entry V8, it was given the majority of the external differences that set the Vantage apart including the front air dam plus the driving lights inset into the grille. There's also a full Vantage stainless steel exhaust while the front suspension has been upgraded to Vantage specification for improved road holding.

Later used as a demonstrator at Aston Martin's prestigious Sloane Street showrooms in London, it was loaned to the Duke of Westminster while he was awaiting the delivery of his Lagonda saloon.

It's recently received a full recommission by marque experts, Aston Workshop in County Durham, where it's currently for sale. This included a full bare metal respray plus a refurbishment of the chassis while the suspension was uprated with adjustable shock absorbers, a rear anti-roll bar, all new bushes and stopping power was improved thanks to AP Racing brakes. The engine bay was also refurbished and colour-coded to match the exterior while the interior was fully retrimmed in hide plus there's new carpets and a new steering wheel.

Although in my admittedly limited experience it's slightly unusual to see a red Vantage, the bright, almost whimsical colour at odds with the car's butch, masculine stance, but it's still a handsome, distinctive car. As *Motorsport* magazine said while testing an identical example for its April 1978 issue, "Its appearance in the

CLASSIC DRIVE

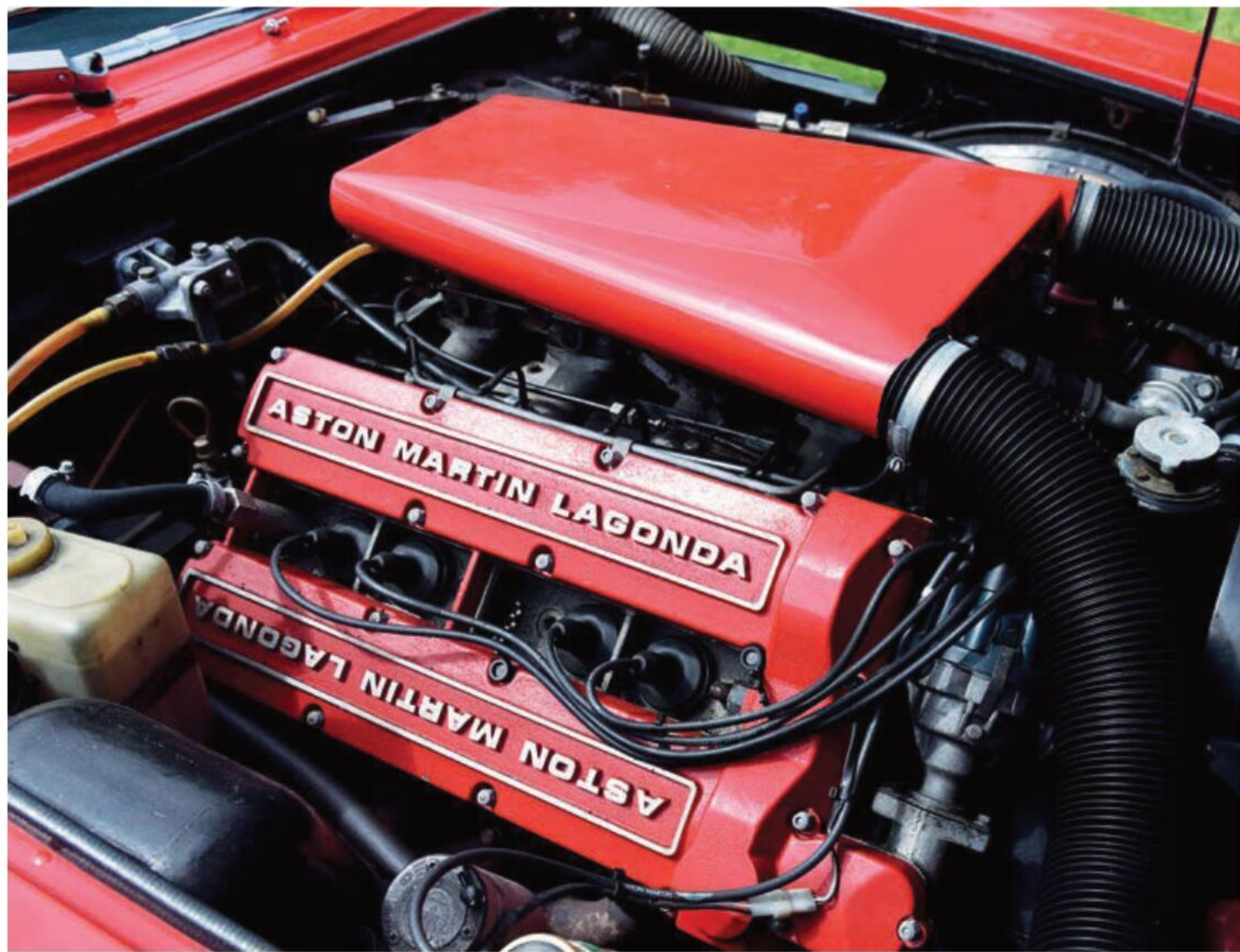
V8 VANTAGE PROTOTYPE

mirrors moves dawdlers out of the way faster than anything I can recall including the Countach.”

It's worth noting the car now wears the lattice-type of alloy wheel that arrived as part of a 1983 update rather than the distinctive GKN wheels it would have originally worn, which makes the car appear slightly more modern than it is.

With permission to take this historically important Aston for a spin, I climb in behind the wheel, the door shutting with a pleasing mechanical thunk. Since it was built in 1976 and therefore not receiving the updates to the interior that arrived the following year, the black vinyl dash and classic white-on-black Smiths dials make the interior appear older than it is, looking more like a car from the Sixties rather than a decade later. Yet it's comfortable and offers surprisingly high levels of visibility for a low-slung coupe... sorry, saloon.

That's enough looking; the fantastic roads in County Durham are beckoning. ▶



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CLASSIC DRIVE

V8 VANTAGE PROTOTYPE

The 5.3-litre V8 churns over a couple of times before it starts filling the cabin with a deep, gravelly growl. Unlike the production Vantages that were only (officially) available with the five-speed manual, this largely standard V8 is mated to a lazy and under-geared three-speed automatic.

After pulling the tall lever down into drive and squeezing the throttle, despite the standard 5.3-litre V8 having a little over 300bhp, I can't say it's overly fast and feels, dare I say it, almost ponderous. That is until I give the pedal a proper shove which forces the three-speed 'box to kick-down into second with a jolt. Suddenly the car wakes up and delivers a much harder acceleration that's more in keeping with the stylised Vantage badge on the rump. And with the V8 having around 330 lb ft of torque (Aston was always reticent to release the figures so it's not known for sure), it'll do so from low speeds and

will keep going long after other, lesser performance models have given up.

The speed is heightened by two things; firstly the magnificent roar of the V8 which sounds like a fighter plane. And secondly, the magnificent view over the long, wide bonnet which is dominated by a huge bulge.

Through the surprisingly small wheel, the steering is a little vague and I need to concentrate hard to keep it in a straight line, especially at speed. But it's also nicely weighted and with plenty of grip through the fat, sticky Avon tyres, I'm able to take long, sweeping corners reasonably quickly before nailing the throttle on the exit when, thanks to all that torque, the car picks up speed with little hesitation. But today is perfectly dry with barely a cloud in the sky; with so much power running through the rear wheels it would be a different story in the wet when I imagine the car would quickly become a real handful.

From road to racing, standard to modified, I've driven all kinds of classic vehicles in the 23 years I've been messing around with cars for a living but in terms of experience, few can match an Aston V8. It's a car I've always wanted to drive and unlike others that have been on my wish-list, it doesn't disappoint.

Although supercars have always sold in tiny numbers compared to compact cars or off-roaders, there's no denying the importance of this Vantage prototype. But of course, unless it heads into a museum like Old Number One, the first production Mini or the oldest Range Rover, it won't receive the wider recognition it deserves. As the start of something important, its place in the history of the British car industry is still assured. **AMD**

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ADVANTAGE ASTON

Although still a current model name, Vantage goes back to the Fifties. We look at the history of the first that was based on the DB2

WORDS: PAUL WALTON

JUST AS AMG has come to define faster versions of Mercedes-Benz as the letter M does for BMW, Vantage is the equivalent for Aston Martin. But while the other two are reasonably new monikers, Vantage goes all the way back to 1950 and the first to feature it, the DB2.

Even before the car made its official debut at the 1950 New York Motor Show in April, the next three cars that followed what would be the eventual show car on the production line were diverted to Aston's embryonic Competitions department to be prepared for the toughest test in motor racing; the Le Mans 24 Hours race in France. The 2.6-litre Lagonda-designed engine of all three cars – later registered VMF 63, VMF 64 and VMF 65 – were fitted with larger SU HV6 carburettors and given a higher 8.16:1 compression ratio which resulted in 125bhp, a 20bhp increase over the

standard version. They also featured a larger 32-gallon fuel tank, larger battery, quick-action fuel filler caps that were flush with the roof and another flap in the bonnet for a one-gallon oil reserve.

Despite little testing, the cars fared well in this notoriously tough event with two of the three finishing fifth and sixth, securing Aston Martin first and second in the 3.0-litre class.

"The DB2 was reckoned to be the finest sports car made in Europe at the time," said former Aston Martin designer and the man responsible for the model, Claude Hill, in Geoff Courtney's 1978 book, *The Power Behind Aston Martin*. "Its chassis gave stiffness, rigidity, comfort and cornering power – I regard it as the pinnacle of what I did."

In the November of the same year, this performance version of the 2.6 engine became an option for the DB2. Christened Vantage, it originally wasn't a

model name like it is today but applied to the 125bhp straight-six only. With no badging to set them apart, cars with the Vantage engine were indistinguishable from standard models.

Although the Vantage programme was the work of several engineers, a technical paper on valve timing tests stored in the Aston Martin Heritage





Trust archive shows that the renowned racing car designer, Robert Eberan von Eberhorst, oversaw the project. Originally famous for his early work with the Auto Union Type D in the Thirties, he moved to Aston Martin in 1950, later designing the Aston Martin DB3 and DB3S. Due to its improved speed and excellent handling abilities, the motoring magazines of the day were impressed by the new DB2. "In the

acceleration through the gears, there may be cars which, handled with expertise, can keep level with the Aston Martin up to 30mph," wrote *The Motor* magazine in a 1950 test of one of the 1950 Le Mans cars, VMF 63, "but there are very few which can match it at the higher speeds."

Despite the Vantage engine making the already expensive DB2 more

so, it proved to be reasonably popular with a little under 250 of the 411 DB2s produced having the augmented engine. The fact that one finished third overall at the 1951 Le Mans 24 Hours race, as well as winning its class in the following year's Mille Miglia, further rubber-stamped its potential. Although Aston had been around since 1913, it could be argued its status as a manufacturer of high-performance sports cars started with the DB2 Vantage since it set the tone for most of the future models. ►



HISTORY
DB2 VANTAGE





Yet despite the positive impact the Vantage engine had on both the DB2's sales and Aston Martin's image, it would take until the end of the decade before there was another, this time based on the DB4 in 1958 [see page 66]. From that moment on, the name became commonly associated with faster versions of Aston's cars, the exception being the 1972 Vantage. An update of the 4.0-litre DBS, it was the least powerful car in the company's range. The V8 Vantage from 1977 returned the name to its rightful

place as Aston's high-performance model and was later used with both the Virage and DB7. In 2004 it became – as it still is – a model name in its own right once again, this time for a new compact two-seater sports car. Since it's thought more than a third of all Aston Martins have been built to Vantage spec, it's clearly been a fundamental part of the company's post-war success. But none of it would have been possible without the success both on and off the track of the first, the DB2 Vantage. **AMD**



**1999
XKR 4.0**

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY: PAUL WALTON

As supercharged grand tourers, not only are the Aston Martin DB7 and Jaguar XKR similar in concept but, due to their joint Ford parentage, they share much below the surface. The pair even arrived around the same time, too. We get an early example of each side-by-side to look at these similarities as well as their many differences



BLOOD BROTHERS



1995
DB7 3.2

TWIN TEST

DB7 vs XKR

BY THE mid-Eighties, Ford had grown into an enormous empire. As one of the largest automotive manufacturers in the world, it boasted production plants on all continents and sold cars in every country. It also produced an unrivalled array of models. From the popular Fiesta hatchback to the all-conquering F-Series pickup, and the ground-breaking Transit van to a huge range of tractors, there was no market lacking the presence of the famous blue oval.

One thing the American giant didn't have, though, was a great deal of class, especially in the European luxury and sports sector. Although it owned the Lincoln and Mercury brands (the former bought in 1922, the latter created by Edsel Ford in 1938), these were seen as American cars produced for the home market, as was – despite its fame – the Mustang. Meanwhile, Ford's homegrown European luxury car – the Granada – was losing ground against German marques that were quickly becoming synonymous with style, performance and reliability.

Rather than establish a new brand as Toyota had with Lexus, Ford preferred to purchase down-at-heel European brands, and what they lacked in cash, they made up for with unbeatable pedigrees. The first was Aston Martin in 1988, followed by Jaguar the following year. Keen to capitalise on its investment, Ford wanted new sports models from both, which were to arrive close to each other in time, and even closer in concept.

The first to arrive was the Aston Martin DB7. Although it went on sale in 1994, its origins went much further back, to the early Eighties and another British manufacturer.

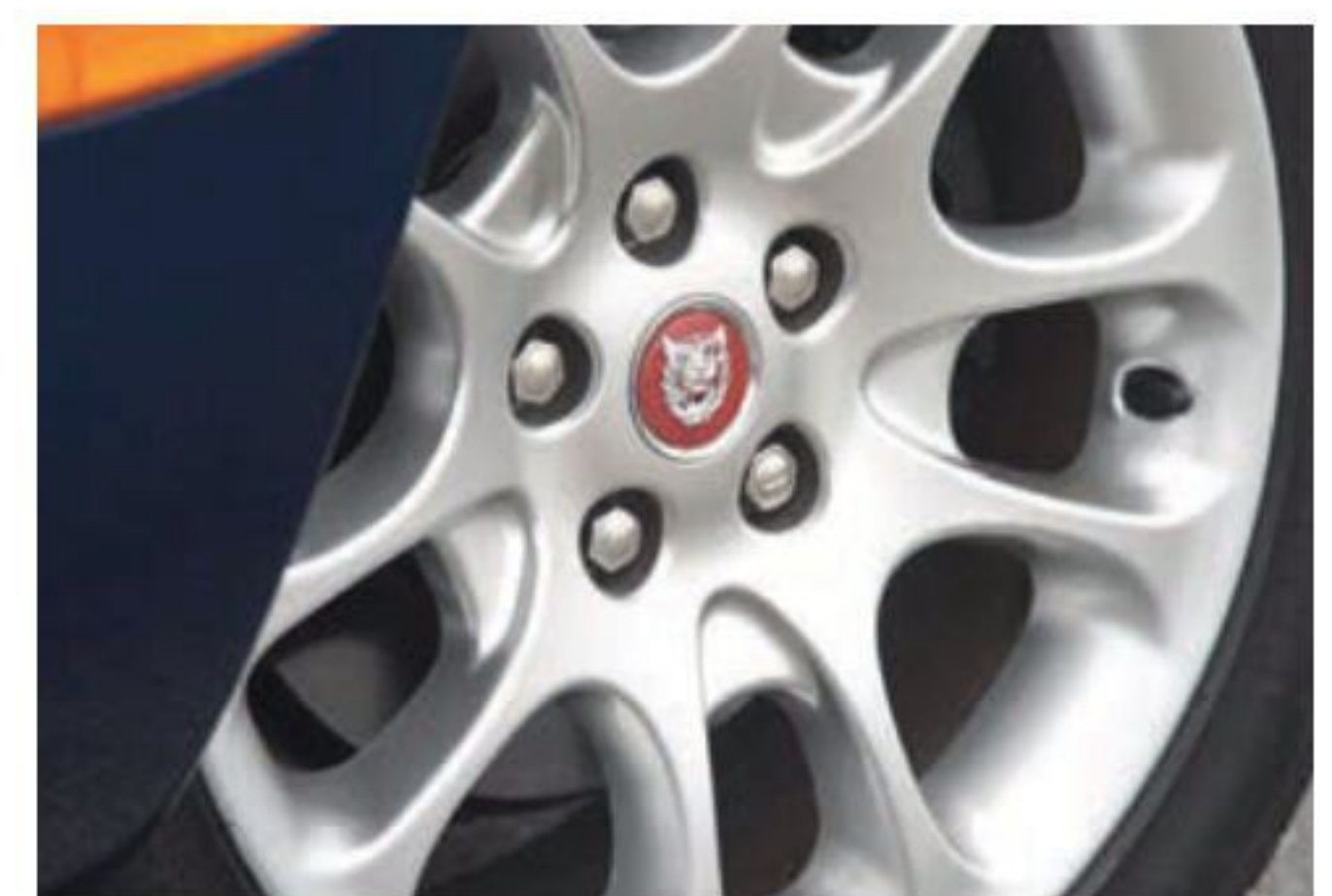
In 1980, Jaguar's chief engineer, Jim Randle, realised that if there was a sports car based on the same chassis as the forthcoming XJ40, then parent company British Leyland was more likely to hand over the £80m needed to finish its development of the new and important saloon. So, Randle asked Jaguar's studio team for a design that he could add to the technical briefing he would give the BL board at London's Grosvenor Hotel



in 1980. Although designer Keith Helfet had only been with Jaguar since 1978 and had to that point only been involved with some of the XJ40's detailing, such as wheels and door handles, his submission was the one eventually chosen. With smooth, voluptuous lines that were clearly reminiscent of the E-type, it was considerably different from the car it replaced, the XJ-S.

The plan worked, and BL released the money, meaning that while the XJ40 neared production, Keith was able to further develop his sports car (internally codenamed XJ41 until the press got wind of it, when it was unofficially nicknamed the F-type).

By the mid-Eighties, development of the XJ41 was progressing and several running prototypes had been produced by the German contract engineering specialist, Karmann. Powered by a twin-turbocharged version of Jaguar's 4.0 straight-six, resulting in 330bhp, they were very fast. Yet speed and beauty wasn't enough to stop Ford canning the car in 1990. Jaguar's new parent company considered the XJ41, with its all-wheel





drive, to be too heavy, too complicated and too expensive to put into production.

However, the project didn't end there. Helfet, who had spent the best part of a decade working on the car, wanted to see his design reach production and began investigating whether the XJ41's body would fit onto the XJ-S chassis, thereby creating a new car with very little outlay. It did, so Randle took the idea to the board of JaguarSport (a separate company owned 50/50 by Jaguar and TWR to produce sportier models). TWR's boss, Tom Walkinshaw, immediately saw its potential and agreed to JaguarSport building it, saving the project.

Although development was now with TWR, the car remained a Jaguar and rechristened Project XX. But that soon changed. Unbeknown to Helfet, Randle and everyone else at Jaguar, Walkinshaw had approached Ford with the idea of rebadging it as an Aston Martin. The Newport Pagnell-based marque was seen as more exclusive than Jaguar, which meant it could charge a higher price for the same car, and Ford readily agreed.

“Unbeknown to everyone at Jaguar, Walkinshaw had approached Ford with the idea of rebadging it as an Aston Martin”



TWIN TEST

DB7 vs XKR

What with the XJ220's high development costs and in the wake of the economic downturn of the early Nineties, Ford had not wanted to pay for a new Aston Martin model, so a car that had already had much of its development paid for by someone else was the perfect solution.

Renamed once again, this time as Project NPX (for Newport Pagnell Experimental, even though it would be built at TWR's facility at Bloxham), the first task was to make the design more like an Aston Martin. This fell to a former Ford designer, Ian Callum, who had joined TWR in 1990. "I had references to Aston in my head," said Callum in Andrew Noake's 2006 book, *Aston Martin DB7, The Complete Story*, "visions of DB4, DB5, DB6 and Zagato. The Zagato was one of the biggest influences on the shape of the NPX; it had a much more voluptuous feel about it. I felt it would be easier to follow some of that than the purity of the DB5."

The biggest changes that Ian made to the design were to the screen, pulling it further forward, plus adding the famed Aston Martin grille; he had spent a lot of time analysing its shape, which was first seen on the 2.0-litre Sports of 1950 and

which started as a large, upright radiator grille with two smaller cooling grilles low down on either side. Eventually, the two small apertures were merged into the larger one and the resulted shape became lower and wider, and it became the first car to use the definitive grille that we know today was the DB3S racing car of 1953. "It took me ages to get right," said Callum. "It's immensely sensitive."

Because Ford was adamant on keeping production costs down, Aston's engineers were forced to raid the expanding company's growing parts bin. The rear taillights came from the Mazda 323F (Ford had starting buying shares in the Japanese company in 1979, owning as much as 33.4 percent by 1995), the chrome door handles were from the Mazda 323 estate, and the turn signals from the Mazda MX-5, while much of the interior switch gear was sourced from Ford itself. The wing mirrors were the only foreign parts, which came from the Citroën CX. As a result of this parts recycling, the project cost a mere \$30 million, pocket change for a new car, even at the time. Despite the penny pinching and outsourced parts

it was a very beautiful car, one that had its own character and that hid its Jaguar parentage well. It looked as if it were a direct descendent of the acclaimed DB family. Little wonder, then, that when the still-unchristened car made its debut at the 1993 Geneva Motor Show, the reception was so positive that there was only one name suitable: the DB7.

It was originally mooted that the car would be powered by a V12, although in the end was the familiar straight-six. Continues Callum in Noakes' book, "Walter Hayes [Aston Martin's then chairman] wanted to do the six. He had a price bracket in mind and the V12, I think, was just too expensive." A six also fitted in with Hayes' view that the new car should be a true successor to the classic DB Astons of the Sixties and Seventies, which were all powered by a straight-six. "I very much wanted an engine that carried DB-ism,' Hayes had said. "We were continuing a distinguished heritage. If you don't respect the heritage you should go and work for someone else."

Hayes originally looked elsewhere for the block, talking to Mercedes-Benz (ironic, considering Aston's current





technical partnership with the German company) and BMW, but in the end returned to the Jaguar AJ16 engine. Again, being from part of the Ford empire, it was the cheapest option, yet there were also some engineering advantages: it had been used in the XJS and XJ41 which meant there was plenty of knowledge about fitting the engine into the chassis.

To increase power, Hayes wanted the engine to feature forced induction, although not the turbocharged version developed for the XJ41. He was aware of the work that Ford had undertaken alongside the American company Eaton for the tenth generation of the Ford Thunderbird from 1989, and preferred supercharging. Consequently, the M90 – the second biggest of the four superchargers that Eaton produced – was chosen.

The 3,239cc version of the AJ16 that had never been available with the XJS was used for the new Aston but with shorter pistons which lower the compression ratio to 8.5:1. There was also a TWR-designed, four-valve cylinder head, while the block featured detailed differences in the machining compared to the Jaguar

unit. The result was 335bhp and 316lb ft of torque, slightly more than Aston's own 5.3-litre V8 that was currently in the Virage and more than Jaguar's 6.0-litre V12.

However, the engine sat too high and was proud of the bonnet line. Since a power bulge was considered too Jaguar-like, the only solution was to drop the motor - achieved by redesigning the front subframe, which carried both the suspension and engine mounts. After heavy lobbying from Callum, the rear suspension was also modified to improve the car's stance.

The result was a car that, although technically based on a Jaguar, featured many unique components, making it a model in its own right.

Fast, beautiful and well-engineered, little wonder the car became a hit with the critics when it was released in the second half of 1994. "Even without the emotional knee-jerk reaction to a car of such beauty, the DB7 is triumph," announced *Autocar* in its October 1994 issue. "On nigh-on every area of engine and chassis performance, it has what it takes to hold its own against the opposition and, in many ways, show them the way home."

It needed to be good. At £78,500, the DB7 was £4k more than the Mercedes-Benz S500C, £6k more than the Porsche 928 GTS and a whopping £30k more than the XJ 6.0 V12. The latter, of course, wasn't too much of a worry; it might have shared much with the DB7, but the Jaguar was perceived as a much older car. The XJS was coming to the end of its life and, behind closed doors, Jaguar was busily working on a replacement.

The cancellation of the XJ41 was a major cause of concern for Jaguar, leaving it without a successor to the already ageing XJ-S. A stopgap solution was to give the old car a major facelift for 1991, yet it went beyond just newer, more modern horizontal rear lights and new instrument panel with six traditional round dials instead of the infamous tumblers of the early cars. Of the car's 490 panels, 180 were replaced or modified, to improve the fit, finish and durability of the bodyshell. The AJ16 3.6-litre straight-six was replaced by the new 4.0 AJ6 unit and the car had the option of ZF's uprated 4HP24 automatic gearbox or Getrag's manual five-speeder. There were also new alloy wheel designs, more modern body colours and better detailing, including a new badge on the boot lid since the hyphen in the car's name was deleted.

Visually, the changes were minor, but the improved build quality beneath the surface did much to increase the car's desirability and, therefore, sales showed a marked improvement, from 3,638 in 1992 to 6,643 in 1994. Yet there was no getting away from the fact that it was an old car and it needed replacing.

Work on a successor – codenamed X100 – began in 1991. After 20 years of the XJ-S' hard, angular lines, there was a feeling by both Ford and Jaguar's management that the new car should go back to the softer curves that the company was renowned for. Explained Jaguar's then design director, the late Geoff Lawson, in the 6 March 1996 issue of *Autocar*, "Internally, we had a very strong view that the XK8 ought to be the spiritual offspring of the E-type, with muscular flowing shapes and a much sportier look than the XJS." That didn't stop the designers investigating many other designs, though, including one

TWIN TEST

DB7 vs XKR

that took inspiration from the XJS. In the end, however, another classic design by Keith Helfet won out, although the project was taken through to production by his colleague Fergus Pollack. With Helfet using the same points of reference for this car as he had for the XJ41, it meant that the new model bore a strong resemblance to the DB7, especially the front and rear arches' smooth, flowing shapes. Lawson played down the comparisons in the April 1996 issue of *Car* magazine, saying, "The similarities between the XK8 and XJ41 are only spiritual."

XKR 4.0

Engine: 3,996cc, V8 SC

Power: 370bhp

Torque: 387lb ft

0-60mph: 5.2secs

Top speed: 155mph (limited)

Transmission: 5-spd auto

Price new: £60,105

Value now: £10,000-£15,000

Due to the lack of funds, something else the car shared with the DB7 was the use of the XJS' chassis – well, part of it – something that didn't especially worry Lawson. "It's a fact of life," he said in the same interview, "So no major issues. Every designer has to deal with it. It's part of the patch, like legislation. You don't like it, it's constraining but you just take it on board." Asked about the changes that were made to the chassis for the new car, he explained, "We wanted to have a more efficient ratio of interior to exterior. So we made it shorter, but about the same width."

At its heart was an all-new V8, its compact size allowing the car to have shorter dimensions than its predecessor. Lawson explains his thinking in another 1996 interview. "V8 engines are shorter than straight-sixes, so it made sense to physically shorten the XK8's bonnet. That, in turn, allowed us to move the windscreen forward, creating a much faster and more interesting profile."

The 3,996cc, quad-cam, 32-valve V8 was designed inhouse, but built at Ford's

power plant factory at Bridgend, in Wales. Because of its compact nature, compared with a straight-six or a V12, rigidity is increased in V8 format, giving potentially better refinement, while its smaller surface area radiates less heat, leading to a shorter warm-up period and, therefore, lower emissions. Also, market research had revealed that the majority of potential customers, both in Europe and the US, preferred a V8 to any other configuration.

Other variations were discussed, as David Szczupak, the AJ26's chief architect, explained in 1996. "We considered all types of alternative line-ups, from V10s and 4.0-litre V12s, flat-eights and flat-sixes, to straight-sixes and V6s. We gradually narrowed these down to a possible three-engine range of V6, V8 and V12. AJ26 was the code name – the number was simply the addition of six, eight and 12."

The result was a refined, yet powerful, engine that with 290bhp put it among its peers. This was increased to 370bhp in 1998 with the supercharged XKR, which



– just as with the Aston – used an Eaton supercharger to eke out more power, but not at the expense of the engine's smoothness or economy. Its limited 155mph top speed might have been the same as the XK8's, but its 0-60mph time of just 5.2 seconds made it Jaguar's first car to offer supercar-like performance since the XJ220.

Yet, at £60k for the coupe (the convertible that arrived the same time was £7k more), it was extremely good value, being £18k less than the Aston, £20k under the Mercedes-Benz SL500's price and £5k less than the Porsche 911 Carrera.

That price difference continues today. Whereas an Aston Martin DB7 3.2 coupe starts at £20,000 and rises to £30,000, you can pick up an XKR 4.0 coupe for less than £10k, rising to between £15k for a good one. Yet bearing in mind its mixed parentage and use of out-sourced parts, did the Aston deserve this difference when new and does it do so today?

There's only way to find out. Maybe part of the reason why the Aston is worth more is simply because it was built in much smaller numbers. With a production run of 7,141 (1,605 of which were 3.2 coupes), although it was the company's best-selling car until it was replaced by the DB9 in 2004, but it still pales in significance compared to the 90,374 X100s (23,098 of which were XKR 4.0s) that were made at the company's now demolished Browns Lane plant.

Due to this rarity, the DB7 isn't a car I've got close to in a while and I admit to being entranced by this gorgeous Aston Racing Green example (similar to the DB4 on page 66 of this issue) that I've arranged to drive. I'd forgotten how perfect its proportions are, how the Aston grille suits the low nose and how the rear window narrows at the bottom to create a beautiful curve that meets the wide rear wheelarches. It is – dare I say – slightly better looking than the XKR that's parked

alongside. Not that the Jaguar is ugly, as this gorgeous 1999 Sapphire Blue example shows, but I think its boot line is a little too tall and too long, and the grille too low. And they might have been sourced from Mazda, but the Aston's slim, wrap-around rear light clusters perfectly match the Aston's pert rump and are more interesting than the XKR's conventional lens.

Yet, due to the similarity of their design themes – the shape of the front and rear arches especially – it's clear that the cars are connected, a feeling heightened by the overall dimensions. At 4,760mm, the XKR is a mere 114mm longer than the Aston.

One area where the Jaguar clearly beats its cousin is the interior. Whereas the switchgear in the Aston has clearly been taken from Ford, making the centre console appear as if it's been directly lifted from a Nineties Escort and I swear the six-clock dial pack is identical to the one in the facelifted XJ-S, the Jaguar's dash is totally bespoke. I'm sure what's beneath also ▶



DB7 3.2

Engine: 3,239cc, 6cyl SC

Power: 335bhp

Torque: 361lb ft

0-60mph: 5.8secs

Top speed: 165mph

Transmission: 4-spd auto

Price new: £78,500

Value now: £20,000-£30,000

TWIN TEST

DB7 vs XKR

comes from Ford, but the bits you see, the three dials located directly into the veneer of the spitfire wing-shaped dash and the admittedly complicated centre console, were all new at the time. And although the standard of the Connolly leather and veneer is better in the Aston than that found in the XKR, the overall build quality of the Jaguar is superior. The lines between the individual interior panels are tighter and more consistent and there are fewer areas where corners and, therefore, costs have been cut.

Both cars offer large, comfortable seats to sink into and both have terrible rear legroom, making the back seats unusable beyond offering just extra luggage space.

Time to take a drive. I chose the Aston first; it's been over 20 years since I last drove a straight-six DB7 and I'm excited to become reacquainted. Yet, as I turn the Ford-sourced key in the no-doubt Ford-sourced ignition, the engine has the same, familiar raspy note as every AJ16-engined XJS I've ever driven. This example has the four-speed GM-sourced automatic 'box, so I slot it down into drive, release the fly-off handbrake located to the right of the driver (the biggest visual giveaway the DB7 uses the same chassis as the XJS as the same location does in the XKR), squeeze the throttle and the engine responds instantly. It's noisier than the Jaguar's refined V8, the supercharger whine much more pronounced, but although it has 40 less bhp its performance is harder, rawer, more edgier. On an empty road, I push the throttle further and although even by Nineties standards the idea of a four-speed 'box in a luxury GT is as old fashioned as running

board or starting handle, the transmission changes quickly and precisely, aiding the long pull of acceleration. The Aston feels firmer than the car it's based on plus the XKR, lacking the suppleness you'd expect from a large, luxury GT like this. As a result, it doesn't ride over imperfections quite as cleanly and you can feel everything in the cabin. But body roll is better controlled than the XJS, resulting in the ability to take corners faster. The steering is sharper, more accurate, and makes the DB7 feel more a sports car.

Arguably more so than the XKR, too, its handling being more comfortable than the Bloxham-built car. That's because every supercharged X100 came with Jaguar's clever CATS (computer active technology suspension) system as standard, which leaves the big Jaguar less skittish than the Aston, but also not quite as sharp. What it lacks in bite, though, the Jaguar makes up for in comfort and, in my opinion, would be the better option of the two for long-distance journeys. Although grip is high, since the steering isn't as precise as the Aston's, feeling slightly woolly, and the body roll is a little more pronounced, the XKR doesn't enjoy being pushed through corners quite as quickly.

One area the XKR doesn't lose out on to its cousin is its easily accessible power. Thanks to the responsiveness of the 4.0-litre engine, especially when the big Eaton supercharger comes on song – which, along with the engine, is less audible than in the DB7 – when I squeeze the throttle, the V8 responds instantly. The Mercedes-Benz sourced five-speed 'box (chosen since the ZF unit in the XK8 wasn't strong enough for the XKR's extra

power) kicks down quickly, resulting in a surprisingly forceful acceleration for a car coming up to two decades old; at 5.2 seconds, it reaches 60mph half-a-second faster than the already-fast DB7. But there's more to the XKR's performance than just figures. The V8 is more refined and its power delivery smoother than the Aston's hand-me-down straight-six. The DB7 might have cost more money when new, but even 20 years later it's clear the Jaguar was the newer, better developed car, with a better standard of finish.

Slightly iffy build quality aside, there's no denying the continuing allure of the DB7. Its svelte design still has the ability to stop traffic and there's a certain mystique about the winged Aston Martin badge, more so than with the Jaguar Growler.

But I don't think this warrants the Aston's higher values both then and now. Yes, the DB7 is rarer, which always adds a little, but the two have such similar designs, personalities and performances that it's hard to distinguish between them. Plus, with the XKR being better built and using fewer borrowed parts than the DB7, resulting in a better pedigree, you have to wonder why there's any difference at all. It's due to this price difference why (and I promise this isn't because I have normally aspired version at home) I'd choose the Jaguar. Just as when they were new, it's better value than the Aston.

Costs aside, both cars achieved what Ford wanted, giving the company a major foothold in the luxury sector. More importantly, they also – along with some heavy investment from the parent company – helped safeguard these two historic companies for the future. **AMD**



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DB9

BUYING GUIDE



ARGUABLY ONE of Aston Martin's most beautiful cars, which given the company's history is really saying something, it's incredible to think that the DB9 was introduced way back in 2003. It was the first car to hail from Aston Martin's Gaydon plant, with all of its predecessors having rolled out of the Newport Pagnell factory, though the last car from there would lend some of its tech to Aston's then newcomer. The flagship Vanquish model introduced bonded aluminium and composite construction techniques to the company and the DB9 used a development of this technique that

was co-developed with Lotus. Dubbed Aston Martin's VH (vertical/horizontal) platform (or architecture), versions of this structure would feature under all of Aston Martin's production models including the Vantage, Virage, DBS, 2012 Vanquish and Rapide, before the DB11 introduced an all-new platform in 2016.

Such were the advances over the ancient Jaguar XJS-derived underpinnings of the DB7 before it, that the company chose to leap a generational badge and name its new GT contender DB9. The decision to do so also usefully prevented any confusion that there might be a V8 under its shapely bonnet. There wasn't, the DB9 instead featuring a 5.9-litre V12 engine, which, like the

The first Aston Martin of the modern Gaydon era but now verging on classic status, the DB9 is a tempting sports GT for not too much money. Here's how to buy one

WORDS: KYLE FORTUNE
PHOTOGRAPHY: AMD ARCHIVE



platform, owed a lot to the Vanquish flagship model. Naturally, the DB11's power output was lower than the Vanquish, with Aston Martin quoting peak power of 450PS (443bhp), that being developed at 6,000rpm, with maximum torque of 420 lb ft arriving at 5,000rpm.

That engine drives the rear wheels only, the DB9 initially being launched with a six-speed automatic transmission, it being joined shortly after by a six-speed manual choice – an option that very few buyers picked. The automatic suited the DB9, its placing as a sports GT, as opposed to an out-and-out sports car suiting the automatic better. However, Aston Martin did offer the DB9 with a Sports Pack, which heightened the driving experience by dropping the ride height by 6mm, significantly increasing the spring rates and changing the anti-roll bars, as well as adding a structural under body

panel and dampers to match the other suspension revisions. Able to be ordered new, or retrofitted to any existing DB9, the Sports Pack added agility and precision to the DB9, to allow it to compete better with the more sporting cars in its class. From 2010, Aston Martin updated the DB9, upping power from its engine and also adding adaptive damping to the suspension, along with a number of minor improvements and revisions to the interior and standard and optional equipment.

Among its rivals you could count cars like Ferrari's 575M Maranello, the Porsche 911 Turbo, Maserati GT as well as a number of alternatives from Germany's BMW and Mercedes-Benz brands, but its closest rival, both conceptually and geographically, would be the Bentley Continental GT. Described by Aston Martin as a 2+2, you'd be hard pushed to

get anyone in the rear seats, the company also offering the option to have it built as a 2+0, with a simple storage area behind the front seats. Offered as either a coupe or a Volante convertible, the DB9 cost in excess of £100,000 as a coupe, and you can now pick one up for a quarter of that. Check out what to look for if you're in the market, because while they can be inexpensive to purchase, buying the wrong one will end up costing you in the long run. We speak to Aston Martin specialist, John McGurk, from McGurk Performance Cars, who highlights things to look for.



BODYWORK

The DB9's bodywork is a mix of aluminium and composites which makes it strong and light, but also makes it complex and costly to repair. Don't think that because it's aluminium that it's immune from corrosion, quite the contrary. Aston Martin did provide a 10-year anti-corrosion warranty with the DB9, but it was carefully worded to only include corrosion deemed to be outside in, opposed to water ingress from outside. You don't need to search too hard to find disgruntled owners complaining about Aston Martin's customer service in this regard.

It's fairly well established then, that the DB9 does suffer corrosion issues, these manifesting as bubbling in the



painthreerk, and many will have had remedial work under warranty early in their lives. The most common areas are around the door handles, the trailing edge of the

doors, around the wing mirror mounts, wheelarches and more. Don't think, too, that the composite panels won't also suffer similar problems, the issues apparently arising due to paint preparation during the build process. Aston Martin has apparently addressed this since, which will benefit owners of newer models, but most, if not all, DB9s are likely to have some sort of painthreerk issues. The DB9 isn't alone in this, though repainting panels, particularly composite ones, can get expensive if a lot of work is required. As with any prospective purchase, inspect the bodywork fastidiously, and look out for that telltale bubbling paint.

If you're buying a Volante, check the folding fabric roof for any wear and tear, because if it needs replacing you'll be looking at a £10,000 bill as a minimum. Check the boot in both coupes and Volantes for water ingress, this getting in via the rear taillight seal. While you're looking, check all the lights for condensation build-up, as they're all prone to this, while it's also worth checking the headlight washer jets work.



ENGINE AND TRANSMISSION

Power comes from a 5.9-litre naturally aspirated V12 engine. Initially delivering 450PS (443bhp), Aston Martin's changes for the 2008 model year saw that output rise by 20PS (19.7bhp), with Aston again upping the output in 2013 to 510PS (503bhp). The V12 is mated to either a six-speed automatic transmission supplied by Graziano, or a ZF-sourced six-speed manual. The automatic, by far the more common choice, was named Touchtronic, and along with its fully automatic mode capability the DB9 driver could take over by using the large shifter paddles mounted behind the steering wheel. Manual cars are comparatively rare, and more coveted as a result, meaning you'll likely pay more for one, though, conversely, it'll also be certain to retain its value better.

It'll come as no surprise to potential owners that fuel consumption is heavy, with around 14-15mpg in normal use, less if you're in a hurry and perhaps as high as 20mpg if you're on a long



motorway trip. Servicing is crucial, even if it's not being used regularly - McGurks recommend an annual service to keep everything in order. There are some known issues with the V12, not least that it consumes a decent amount of oil. Keep an eye on levels, because running it low on oil will cause you no end of problems long term. It's worth checking the air filters, too, as oddly, oil can collect in their housings as a result of the failure of a valve (PCV – positive crankcase ventilation) in the engine ventilation system and the pipe that feeds it. Too much oil is delivered to the intake system as a result and excess oil drips into the air intake system, it being a sure sign that it's needing work if oil has collected in the air filter housing.

Listen out when cold starting for a knocking noise, McGurk explaining that, "Cold start knocking is likely to be big end bearings, the noise going away when it gets hot, but the problem doesn't." Similarly, there's a hot ticking sound associated with the V12, which McGurk outlines is, "either little end bearings, or the liners become



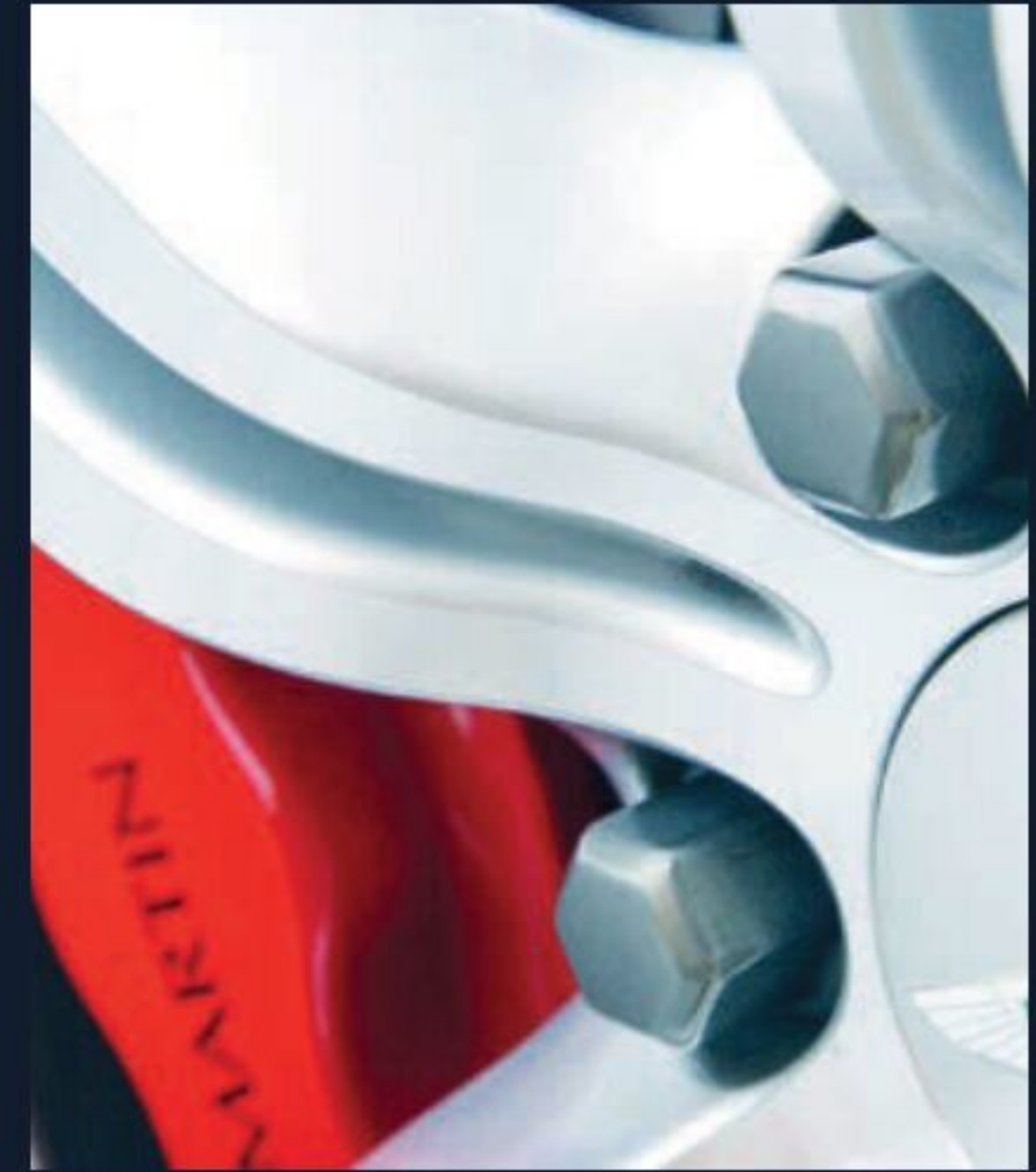
oval and you get piston slap. It's hard to differentiate but either way it's a new engine because a strip and rebuild is becoming too expensive. You can get a new engine direct from Aston Martin for about £13,500+VAT, which is about what you'd pay to rebuild it. The ones Aston Martin supply come with a warranty for a year, they're better value, and they're bench-tested/dyno'd before delivery."

Catalytic convertors are about £5,000 for the part if they need replacing, plus fitting. Plugs and coils are fairly common failures with any misfiring pointing to this. The propshaft can go out of balance - this is obvious if there's a pronounced vibration from underneath - while diffs can be problematic. "What happens is either the crown wheel and pinion fail, or the plates fail, lack of oil changes are to blame," explains McGurk. "You'll hear it very slowly on full lock, it'll grind, you'll feel it through the car. The crown wheel and pinion will be while you're driving the car, coming down the hill when the diff is dragging rather than pushing, and you'll hear it."

SUSPENSION, STEERING AND BRAKES

Riding on double wishbone suspension all round with coil springs, the early DB9 features passive dampers, with later cars gaining a variable damper system. Aston Martin also offered the DB9 with the option of a Sports Pack which dropped the ride height and added stiffer suspension components accordingly, this either fitted as new or retrospectively, and sharpened up the DB9's dynamics considerably.

The standard dampers can leak, which isn't unusual for cars of this age, these costing around £800 each. The subframes to which all the suspension is mounted is of an age now where rust can be problematic, so make sure you have a good look underneath, and remove any of the underbody panels to make sure they're not hiding any potential issues. Brakes shouldn't cause any real problems, and wear should be consistent with use, and service items. The steering doesn't have any reported issues, other than a few recalls in relation to a replacement lower arm and incorrectly torqued bolts, simply calling Aston Martin



with the VIN number will allow you to ascertain whether these have been replaced/remedied as part of the recall.

Riding on 19in wheels, these should be strong, and tyre wear should be consistent if the alignment's all good, uneven wear being a sure sign that it's not. Tyres won't be inexpensive for a car like this, but it's a false economy to look for budget alternatives, because they'll detract significantly from the overall driving experience. Budget on around £200-£250 a corner for a good-quality, recognised brand, high-performance tyres. Check for any play in the suspension, this manifesting as imprecision on the road. New bushings are relatively inexpensive to fit, and transformational in how the car will drive, too.





“A car that’s not just wonderful to look at, but sounds magnificent and still offers incredible performance, too”...



INTERIOR AND TRIM

The DB9's interior is largely free of faults, being nicely finished, though a few squeaks and rattles will be apparent as they age, as is common with any car of this vintage. Look out for things like excessive wear on seat bolsters, scratching of the scuff plates in the doors, and any loose trim. The standard sat-nav from '06 was a Volvo-derived system, and looks ancient now, it never worked with the slickest of ease when new. Check all the carpets for any signs of dampness, as this will point to water ingress, which is never a good thing. From '09 the DB9's conventional

key was replaced by the Emotion Control Unit (ECU), a glass key that starts the engine by slotting into the centre console – it is prone to damage if dropped, which is why most owners will use the second, plastic one instead. There have been issues with the early Linn audio systems, so check it's all working, or opt for a later car which had a standard, improved Alpine system. McGurk highlights some issues with door and roof modules, so check everything is working there, while the seat heating system was subject to a recall for all cars from '06-14, which if it's not addressed could result in a fire.

VERDICT

You might have read all the above and reconsidered buying a DB9, but really, they're no worse, or better, in relation to ownership costs and any mechanical issues, than any car of similar prestige and performance. McGurk admits that they're getting to an age where they are starting to need light restoration work, but, again, that's true of the DB9's contemporaries. Get a good one, and there are plenty to pick from, and you'll have a car that's not just wonderful to look at, but sounds magnificent and still offers incredible performance, too. **AMD**

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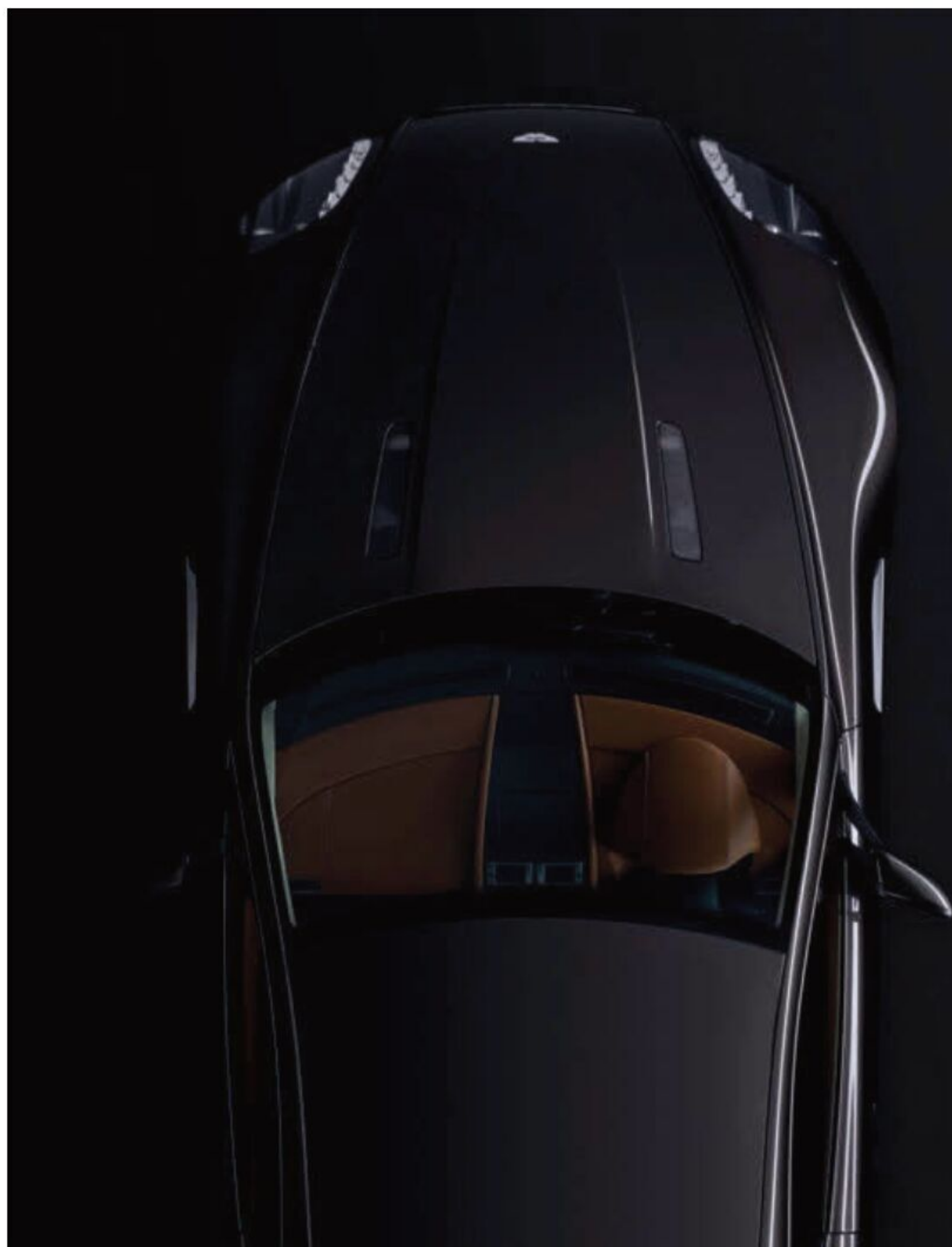
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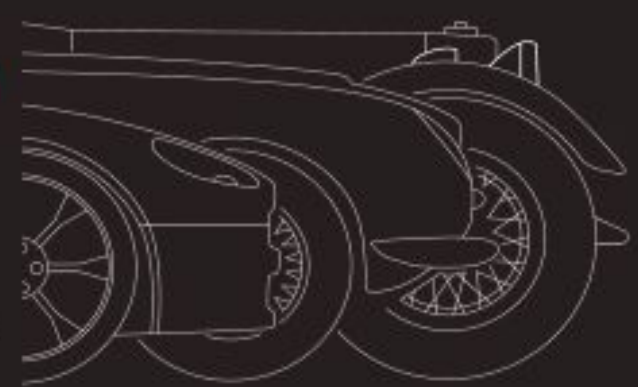
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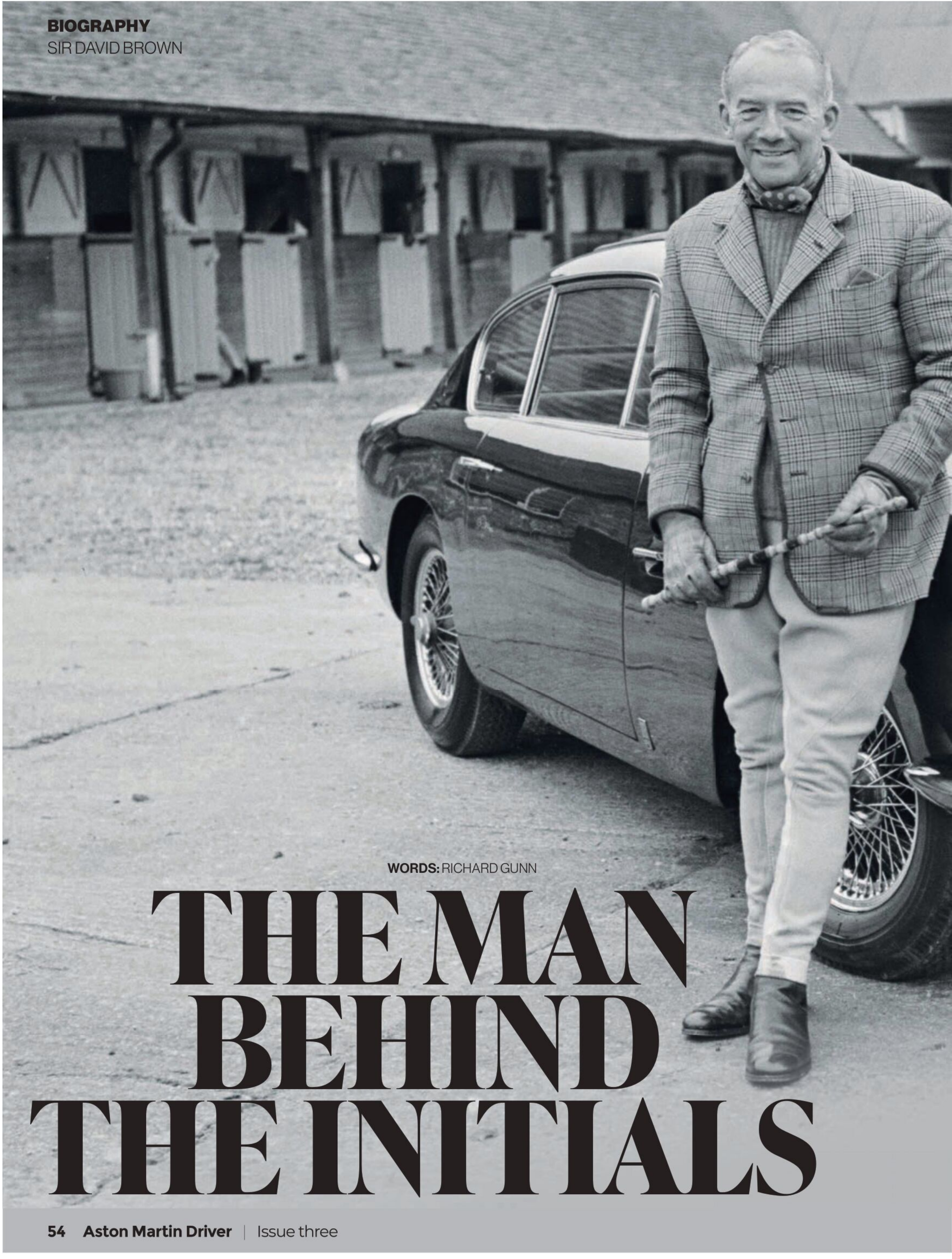
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WORDS: RICHARD GUNN

THE MAN BEHIND THE INITIALS



Without 'DB', Aston Martin might have died out after the second world war, and even if it had survived, it's unlikely it would have achieved the fame it now has. We look back at the life of Sir David Brown, the man who saved Aston and who is arguably its most influential owner

BIOGRAPHY

SIR DAVID BROWN



Brown (left) inspects a model of an Aston Martin DB3S with designer, Frank Feeley, in 1954

IN LATE 1946, an affluent northern industrialist was browsing The Times when he came upon a small advert. It was scant on detail, stating merely, 'HIGH CLASS MOTOR BUSINESS, established 25 years; £30,000; net profits last year £4000. – Write Box V.1362, The Times, EC4', but intriguing enough for him to make further enquiries. He travelled from Yorkshire to London and ultimately decided to make an offer, albeit with an initial bid less than half of the asking price – just £14,000, for he was a Yorkshireman after all. After some further negotiation, the deal was sealed, early in 1947, for £20,000.

That high class motor business was, of course, Aston Martin and its new owner was gear and tractor manufacturer David Brown. Over the next quarter of a century, Brown would make the company embark on a successful racing career, spearhead a series of fast and exotic sports cars that would turn the marque into a British

institution, and ultimately make Aston Martin one of the most famous and desirable brands in the world. And he also ensured virtual immortality by adding his initials, 'DB', to the names of the models built under his custodianship. Such was the appeal of these machines and the significance of David Brown in Aston Martin's history that the 'DB' designation remains in use today, a tribute to the man who effectively saved it from likely oblivion.

David Brown was born on 10 May 1904 in Huddersfield, Yorkshire. His parents were Caroline and Frank Brown; his father being the managing director of David Brown & Sons, an engineering firm specialising in machine-cut gears. It's a common misconception that the engineering firm which bears the David Brown name does so because of the family member born at the dawn of the 20th century. In reality, it was founded by his grandfather in 1860. He died in 1903 and Caroline and Frank named





Brown accepts a trophy at Silverstone in the mid-Fifties

the grandson that he would never know after him. David Brown & Sons was doing very well for itself, and the young David found himself enjoying a privileged childhood, being educated at King James' Grammar School in Almondbury, close to Huddersfield, as well as Rossall School in Fleetwood, Lancashire. He didn't particularly distinguish himself academically, but there was no real need to, for his destiny lay with the family firm. His father took him to the factory every Sunday from an early age, so he could get a thorough grounding in how it was run. However, Brown's early education in motoring came via his mother, one of Yorkshire's first female drivers. His father had little interest in vehicles – despite the firm having acquired the manufacturing rights for Valveless two-stroke cars in 1908 – and couldn't even drive. His young son often found himself accompanying engineer Frederick Tasker Burgess on Valveless test drives and delivery runs and by the age of 11, could also drive himself, albeit with extra cushions and wooden blocks on the pedals to compensate for his diminutive youthful stature.

In 1921, aged 17, Brown began work as just another humble engineering ►



The first car to bare Brown's initials was the DB2 from 1950





Brown with HM The Queen during Her Majesty's 1966 visit to the Newport Pagnell factory

apprentice at David Brown & Sons. As it was a six-mile cycle trip for a 7.30am start, Frank Brown offered to buy his son a motorcycle. Brown Junior chose not some low-powered runabout but a fast and powerful 1100cc Reading Standard V-Twin, which he modified further and started entering hill climb events with it. He did so well that the Douglas motorcycle company noticed him and invited him to be the reserve rider in its Tourist Trophy team. Brown did go to the Isle of Man for practice, but when his father got to hear about it, he abruptly put a stop to things.

The teenage Brown was also upsetting his parents in other ways. He was involved with a woman, Daisy Firth, who they regarded as unsuitable. In an effort to break things up, they sent him to South Africa during 1922 to oversee a project installing David Brown & Sons' gears in Johannesburg gold mines. However, when he returned, his ardour was undiminished and the relationship continued. Brown also started building his own car, with a 1.5-litre straight-eight twin-cam engine of his own design. He used the resources of the factory to manufacture parts which, predictably, also provoked the disapproval of his father. While the engine work was halted,



Aston was successful in sports car racing during Brown's ownership, winning Le Mans in 1959



It was less successful in Formula 1 with the DBR4/250 being outclassed

Brown did manage to build a chassis into which he installed a proprietary Sage 2.0-litre engine. He christened the result the 'Davbro' – even then, he was obviously keen to stamp his name on vehicles. When Brown finished his apprenticeship, he

became a foreman. He also married Daisy in 1926, although his parents still hadn't come around to the idea and didn't attend the wedding.

While a foreman, he was engaged making gears for Aston Martin and also constructed an Amherst Villiers-designed supercharger for a racing Vauxhall belonging to Raymond Mays, later of English Racing Automobiles (ERA) and British Racing Motors (BRM) fame. When Mays turned up late one day to testing at Holme Moss hill in the Pennines, where Brown and Villiers were waiting for him, an impatient Villiers suggested the young man should demonstrate the car instead. Brown did so and recorded a very reputable performance, thanks to his knowledge from his motorcycling days. When Mays eventually put in an appearance, the famous driver was unable to beat Brown's time.

Impressed, Villiers agreed to sell some spares to Brown so he could build a second supercharged racer, provided it displayed 'Amherst Villiers Superchargers' prominently on its bodywork. Apparently capable of a maximum velocity of 140mph, the car made quite a name for itself in hill climbs, and sand racing on Southport beach. ►

BIOGRAPHY

SIR DAVID BROWN

In 1929, after rising to the rank of assistant works manager, Brown was made a director of the family firm and in 1932 became joint managing director. A year later, he became the sole MD. The direction and prosperity of David Brown & Sons was now in his hands.

However, in 1936, somewhat slower machinery than supercharged Vauxhalls began to occupy Brown's time. He'd bought a 700-acre farm in Buckinghamshire and, unhappy with existing tractors, decided to devote a corner of the Huddersfield factory to tractor manufacturing. At first, he collaborated with Harry Ferguson, but when he and Ferguson fell out, Brown decided to go it alone. A former silk mill at Meltham, just outside Huddersfield, was acquired and the first David Brown tractor, the VAK1, was launched in 1939. Responsible for its engineering was Georges Roesch, who'd previously penned sports cars for Talbot. This Aston Martin of tractors proved highly successful; 3,000 orders were taken just at its Royal Show, Windsor, debut.

The second world war made Brown a rich man, with all his factories – including a foundry at Penistone in Yorkshire, opened in 1936 – contributing to the war effort. David Brown & Sons gears were vital in all manner of engines, especially aero ones, while specialised tractors were used by the RAF as aircraft tow tugs. In 1942, a tracklaying variant for army engineers appeared; it was dubbed the DB4, a name that would resurface on a very different David Brown machine some years later. The factories also expanded, which in Huddersfield led to the demolition of the family home, Park Cottage, where he'd been born. Perhaps there was some revenge in this for the way he and Daisy had been treated many years before by his parents.

When Brown acquired Aston Martin in 1947, it was more as a hobby than a serious business proposition. He was a man of many pastimes; his Buckinghamshire farm bred racehorses, he hunted most weekends, and played polo with the Ham Club and Household Brigade in Windsor. He'd also become a qualified pilot, owning a De Havilland Dove as well as his own airfield near



Huddersfield. What had especially attracted him to Aston Martin was the Atom, the advanced prototype sports saloon that had been put together by the financially destitute firm during the war in its bomb-shattered Feltham factory. It was only when he also bought Lagonda at a knock-down price of £52,500 in 1947, upon the recommendation of a

friend (who just happened to be the local Lagonda dealer), that he began to get serious. The lure was Lagonda's LB6 engine, designed by W.O. Bentley, which Brown realised would make a fantastic motor for future Aston Martins. Both Aston Martin and Lagonda were moved into new manufacturing premises, which were leased former aircraft hangars at





It was David Brown who moved Aston Martin's factory from Feltham to Newport Pagnell after buying Tickford in 1955

Hanworth's London Air Park in south-east Feltham, during the second half of 1947. After the Aston Martin 2-Litre of 1948 to 1950, the first DB-badged model appeared in the form of the DB2. It featured the 2.6-litre LB6 engine and incorporated the words 'David Brown' on its Aston Martin-winged logo. Like many rich men who buy car companies, Brown



The DB7 from 1994 was named in Brown's honour

harboured a desire to enter motorsport. When a 2-Litre-based racer achieved a surprise win in the 1948 Spa 24 Hour Race, attention turned to making that dream a reality. The DB3 was introduced in 1953, but proved to be a bit of an also-ran. It was followed in 1953 by the DB3S, which shed weight and proved more competitive, including second places at the 1955 and 1956 Le Mans 24 Hours events. However, it was only with the even lighter and more powerful DBR/1 of 1956 that Aston Martin had a true world-beater – winning Le Mans and the World Sports Car Championship in 1959. It was as good as it would ever get for Aston Martin and owner David Brown and some solace for the company's over-ambitious entry into Formula One the same year with the front-engined DBR/4, which proved to be utterly out-classed.

Racing may improve the breed and help sell road cars, but Aston Martin also proved a constant drain on Brown's resources. As ultra-desirable as Aston Martins were, especially during the Sixties when the marque became the gadget-laden transport of James Bond, they contributed very little, if any, money to the Brown coffers and usually just substantially depleted them. When reputedly asked by one customer if he could have a DB5 at cost price, Brown responded that of course he could – and then quoted a figure £1,000 over the list price.

His personal life was also somewhat tumultuous. He and Daisy, with whom he'd had two children, David and Angela, divorced in 1955 (the same year he started shifting Aston Martin's base from Feltham to Newport Pagnell after buying the Tickford coachbuilding concern in the Buckinghamshire town). He then promptly married his secretary, Marjorie Deans. Ultimately, he'd end up separating from her as well, before getting wed to his personal assistant, Paula Benton Stone, in 1980.

Brown was knighted in 1968 for his services to industry, but industry was now being less than kind to him. What had become the David Brown Corporation was financially ailing, and early in 1972, he was forced to sell both Aston Martin Lagonda and the tractor division. Company Developments, a Birmingham investment consortium, bought the car arm for just £101. And that was after Brown settled all of AML's debts of around £5 million.

Sir David retained other family business interests including the chairmanship of the military and shipbuilding giant Vosper Thornycroft. But when that was nationalised in 1977, he retired, partly in disgust, to Monte Carlo. In 1990, he sold his remaining interests in the David Brown Corporation for £46 million.

Without Sir David at the helm, Aston Martin dropped the 'DB' prefix for its models, but continued its turbulent financial existence under several different owners. That continued until 1987 when the Ford Motor Company took over. Aston Martin's chairman from 1991 was Walter Hayes CBE and he appreciated that the company should also celebrate its past. He contacted Sir David to see if he minded his initials being used for the forthcoming DB7 model, and whether he might also like the role of honorary life president. Aston's former owner quipped that he thought there was probably some DB7 badges somewhere at Newport Pagnell, for that had originally been the intended name for 1967's DBS.

Sir David Brown didn't live long enough to celebrate the DB7's 1994 launch. He died on 3 September 1993 in Monte Carlo, aged 89. It was a life full of achievement, not least rescuing Aston Martin from likely oblivion and transforming it into a British institution adored the world over. **AMD**



MODEL HISTORY: 2-LITRE SPORTS ('DB1')

The promise of things to come and a technical template for the next decade; a long-wheelbase child of the Atom that guaranteed the firm a future. An unexpected Spa winner, the first car produced under David Brown's ownership combined Aston Martin engineering with Lagonda styling



ALTHOUGH ASTON Martin has never been far from turmoil, its first post-war car – the 2-Litre Sports – was imbued with its own turbulence. It owed its existence to the one-off, pre-war saloon called the Atom plus the acquisition of a superb new W.O. Bentley-designed straight-six.

The Atom was itself created to resolve the dilemma of what sort of cars should be made after the second world war. Its incumbent manager, Gordon Sutherland, had gained control of Aston Martin on behalf of his family, who were its owners and biggest investor, in 1936, after Augustus Bertelli, Sutherland's opposite number had resigned owing to irreconcilable differences. Ten years earlier, under the newly incumbent

Renwick & Bertelli, which established Aston Martin Motors following its purchase of the marque from the Charnwood family, they moved into a factory on Victoria Road in Feltham, Surrey. Aston's cars had first and foremost been engineered for racing; its International, Le Mans and Ulster models – developed from the 1½ Litre and Mark II respectively – were fiercely competitive. A powerful single overhead cam, pent-roof combustion chambered, 1.5-litre engine was at the heart of these cars; drawn up between Bill Renwick, Augustus Bertelli, and junior draughtsman, Claude Hill, its performance and reliability were guaranteed in the Ulster, at least to exceed 100mph.

Sutherland, on the other hand – whose dealer father, Sir Arthur Sutherland, had invested in the Feltham firm when it fell on

hard times between 1927 and 1929 – wanted to move the company away from racing and into the more genteel world of road car production. Bill Renwick was out of the picture by this stage; out of money, he left Bertelli to attract financiers alone. From its formation in 1913, Aston had never turned a profit; racing cars were simply too vulnerable to the changing whims of the rich, regardless of how well they were constructed.

Aston limped on selling road cars into the Thirties – altering the bore and stroke of its 1.5-litre Renwick/Bertelli/Hill engine until it displaced 1950cc. Tests began in 1934, and 1½ and 2-Litre models were entered at Le Mans in 1936. Strike action cancelled the race, and the road-going variants of the 2-Litre, the 15/98, Speed Model and Type C, had no racing pedigree to fall back on. ►

MODEL HISTORY

2-LITRE



With Bertelli gone, and war fast approaching, Sutherland and the newly promoted Hill had to make good their losses; the Atom, a four-door enclosed saloon, gave them both hope. This car, the men reasoned, would move the firm into a new age. Aston spent the war making aircraft parts – as a result, it was bombed by the Luftwaffe.

Built on a pitiful budget around Blitz raids in 1940 and V1 damage in 1944, the Atom took shape. It was named by Sutherland, owing to its comparatively small size. Instead of the ladder chassis of the Bertelli cars, Hill – billed as the man who brought Sutherland's ideas to life – had the Atom's chassis constructed out of square and rectangular section tubing, to which the tubular frame that supported the body, was then welded. In doing so, he created the basis for the next generation of Feltham Astons; similarly, the chassis 'platform' architecture laid out by his successor, future technical director, Harold Beach, would underpin Newport Pagnell

Astons from DB4 (via Lagonda Rapid) to DBS/V8 Vantage, with sections serving the A-M Lagonda (Series I-V until 1990) and Virage/Vantage until 2000.

Aluminium alloy panels clothed the Atom, whose styling was inspired by a globular one-off 15/98 body nicknamed 'Donald Duck' by the Feltham works. Hill, while not a stylist, created a futuristic shape. While funds were tight, Atom used a 15/98 engine; by 1944, however, Hill's own overhead valve, 1970cc four-pot was ready.

While technically inferior to the Renwick/Bertelli/Hill unit that he had helped design, the new engine was simpler, used a five-bearing crankshaft, and had offset exhaust valves to help with gas flow. Shorter in bore and stroke, and possessing a more free-revving nature, it was well suited to its future role with the crippling effects of RAC 'fiscal horsepower' taxation just three years away.

It could be said that, while Aston Martin was short of money during wartime, its

coffers were nowhere near as depleted as those of Lagonda that was based in Staines. While its immense engineering versatility led to rapid expansion between 1939 and 1945, Lagonda ended the war with far too many overheads and no steel with which to build cars – it simply wasn't allocated any.

Industrialist Alan Good had stripped many of its assets once peace was declared; there had been enough money left to get the double overhead cam Lagonda-Bentley 6 (LB6) engine, developed by Willie Watson and W.O. Bentley, signed off and ready for production, but that was it. Lagonda was to be wound up.

Denuded and broken, the firm was still of considerable interest to the likes of Jaguar, Rootes and Armstrong Siddeley, each keen to gobble up Lagonda's plant, intellectual property, staff and expertise. These bids soon disappeared, however, when it transpired that the government was looking to nationalise production sites such as Lagonda's Staines works. The receiver, keen to claw back as much money as possible, quickly put the factory up for sale separately, leaving the car business as an ongoing concern.

That Lagonda ended up within the David Brown Group's lifeboat is not entirely surprising; earlier in 1947, he had bought Aston Martin from the Sutherland family, who had listed it for sale a year earlier. Brown had watched Aston's previous successes on the track with interest and after realising the Atom was part of the £20,500 deal, he borrowed the car for a few days to evaluate it.

TIMELINE

1939-1940

The four-door Atom prototype is brought to life by manager, Gordon Sutherland, and draughtsman, Claude Hill, who designed its chassis and awkward, bulbous body. Effectively a chassis construction template for the 2-Litre Sports, it was first fitted with a Bertelli/Hill 1,950cc 15/98 four-pot. Gordon Sutherland, Aston Martin's manager, ran the car through the majority of the second world war with this engine.

1944 Aston Martin continues to develop the Atom; it receives its new Claude Hill-designed, overhead valve, 1970cc four-cylinder engine, which would go on to power the 2-Litre Sports.

1945 Lagonda, in dire financial straits, completes development work on the Lagonda-Bentley 6 (LB6) engine.

1946 Aston Martin is put up for sale via a personal ad in The Times by its owners, the Sutherland family. A fan of Aston's pre-war racing

exploits, David Brown, head of the David Brown Group, responsible for gearboxes, gearsets (and later tractors) is shown around Feltham by the Sutherlands and borrows the Atom prototype for a few days.

1947 Smitten with the Atom's ride and handling, Brown hands over £20,500 for Aston Martin, receiving the Feltham works, Claude Hill's services, staff members, and the Atom itself. Acting on a tip-off (and aware of a certain six-cylinder engine within its ranks), Brown also purchases Lagonda for the knock-down price of £52,500,

Brown was impressed with the Atom's potential; contrary to Sutherland, he preferred open cars, particularly dropheads – but the Atom's ride, handling and drivetrain so impressed the gearbox magnate that he signed off Aston's purchase. With some work, and a new body, Brown reasoned that the Atom would make a fine basis for a sports car.

So too would Lagonda's LB6 straight-six, the only completed engine from a projected range of four- and eight-cylinder units. Bradford Lagonda dealer, Anthony Scatchard, informed Brown that Lagonda was up for grabs; put off by the six-figure sums touted at the outset, he clinched the deal for everything bar the (now sold) Staines factory for £52,500, with Brown adding an extra £2,500 in goodwill over the one bid that remained for what was left of Lagonda.

The receiver quickly agreed – and Lagonda (along with its DOHC LB6 engine and contracts with coachbuilders, Tickford, which had been bought in 1953) became Brown's.

Unfortunately, Aston Martin and Lagonda – now united under one roof inside the former airbase hangars of RAF Hanworth in Feltham – had several duplicated roles, and Hill's secondary job as stylist was in contention.

While Brown liked the Atom's chassis and its 2.0-litre engine, he knew Hill wasn't the right man to create a body for his new sports car. That job went to Lagonda's Frank Feeley, who would shape the 2-Litre Sports, DB2, DB2/4, DB2/4 Mark II and DP114/2, before being ousted by Carrozzeria

Touring's Carlo Felice Bianchi Anderloni and Federico Formenti for the DB4.

Hill had to concede that his talents were better spent on the 2-Litre Sports' running gear. The Atom's tubular chassis was lengthened, its OHV engine retained, and the rear suspension further uprated, a pair of coil springs and trailing arms replacing leaf springs on the Panhard rod-braced back axle.

The front beam of the Bertelli cars had been consigned to history; again, the Atom's coil sprung front end went on to the 2-Litre Sports, now driven by a David Brown gearbox rather than the Cotal units preferred in the Bertelli era.

While Frank Feeley beavered away on the body, adapting Lagonda styling cues for a new client (while introducing the three-part radiator grille that would later become an Aston trademark), Hill's lengthened engine and chassis were given a baptism of fire at the 1948 Spa 24 Hours, clothed in a skimpy body that most closely resembled the Bertelli Type C.

With St John Horsfall at the wheel, and Leslie Johnson navigating, the 2-Litre snatched an outright win, to the surprise and delight of all concerned. Plans were quickly altered to offer a 'Spa Special', in recognition of its victory, alongside the standard 2-Litre Sports, revealed at that year's London Motor Show, but there were no takers.

Alas, the Jaguar XK 120, a lithe, two-seat sports car unveiled at Earls Court that same year, would prove to be the 2-Litre Sports' undoing. While the Feltham car could match its ride and handling, its 160bhp, 3.4-litre XK six-pot left the Aston, with a mere 90bhp four-cylinder, in its dust. Between September 1948 and May 1950, just 14 2-Litre Sports were sold, 13 as dropheads, the other as a chassis. In the interim, however, a new fixedhead coupe, the DB2, was in the works, one that united Hill's chassis with Lagonda's engine. Despite its short career, the 2-Litre Sports set Aston Martin on a path to greatness – leaving a legacy that would soon be consummated. **AMD**

The Aston Martin Atom



receiving everything apart from the factory. And so a series of former wartime hangars at Hanworth Park in Feltham, Sussex, is purchased for both marques.

1948 The Aston Martin 2-Litre Sports is released after 11 intense months of development, in which a reworked Atom chassis was paired with a body drawn by Lagonda stylist Frank Feeley.

Three months before release, its running gear was shaken down at the Spa 24 HHcfffdfours – which it won. A 'Spa Special' was added to the 2-Litre Sports range; there were no takers.

1949 Work progresses on the new DB Mark II (DB2) – essentially a shortened Atom specification chassis with a Lagonda engine and Frank Feeley fastback body. Three prototypes contest the 1949 Le Mans 24 Hours. Ted Cutting, draughtsman for the later DB3, DB3S and DBR1, 2 and 3 racing cars, joins Aston Martin, along with Willie Watson, LB6 designer.

1950 2-Litre Sports production wound down in May, after 14 cars (13 dropheads, one chassis) were completed. With the introduction of the DB2 road car,

the 2-Litre Sports was retrospectively renamed the DB1. Claude Hill left for Ferguson tractors and was replaced with junior draughtsman, Harold Beach. John Wyer and Prof. Robert Eberan von Eberhorst also join the firm; the last two would be instrumental in Aston's racing career as it enters a new decade.



CLASSIC TEST
DB4 SERIES V VANTAGE

SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME



With a longer body, faired-in headlights and distinctive shape, the DB4 Series V Vantage was a precursor to the all-conquering DB5. Yet the car was more than just a trial and is an important and highly desirable model in its own right. We drive a rare example to explain why

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY: PAUL WALTON



CLASSIC TEST
DB4 SERIES V VANTAGE

THERE'S BEEN some important models in Aston Martin's long history; the 1915 'Coal Scuttle' for example which was the original car to bear the name, or the first car under (Sir) David Brown's ownership, the 2-Litre Sports. Then there's the first V8 from 1969 and the 1994 DB7 that was the first model to be produced in serious numbers.

Yet these pale into insignificance compared to the importance of the DB4

Series V Vantage. Not only did it lay the foundations for the company's most famous model, but it would influence all future designs. Park a current DB11 next to one and the family resemblance would be obvious. It was also one of the first Astons to be built at Newport Pagnell.

Although production was tiny, we've tracked down a rare example to further explain its significance.

By the mid-Fifties, the DB2/4 was still well-regarded but, it was clear that in terms of performance and design it needed to be replaced. Aston's management – which included the company's owner, David Brown, plus its general manager, John Wyer – took

the slightly unusual decision to head to Italy for the new car. Although others, including Pininfarina, were considered they eventually chose Touring having had recent contact with the Milan-based carrozzeria. In 1956 it had rebodied a DB2/4 Mk II into a distinctive two-seater, plus Wyer liked its Superleggera (Italian for superlight) construction method that consisted of aluminium panelling over a small-diameter steel-tube framework. It was placed over a rigid platform base designed by Aston's chief engineer, Harold Beach.

With work starting in 1956, what Touring and Beach created was a large, handsome and imposing GT in the same

“Not only did it lay the foundations for the company's most famous model, but it influence all future designs”



CLASSIC TEST
DB4 SERIES V VANTAGE



mould as the Ferrari 250. At 14ft 8.375in long, 5ft 6in wide and 4ft 4in high, it was longer, wider and lower than the outgoing DB Mk III, making it appear much more purposeful. Shuttling between London and Milan during its creation, it was Beach who added the trademark wing vents used on every subsequent Aston.

Yet when the car was revealed at the 1958 London Motor Show at Earls Court, it wasn't just the design that caused a sensation but so did its new engine.

Even after it had been upgraded to 2.9 litres, David Brown realised the Lagonda unit that had powered the DB Mk III had reached the end of its development and so work started on a replacement. "I knew ►



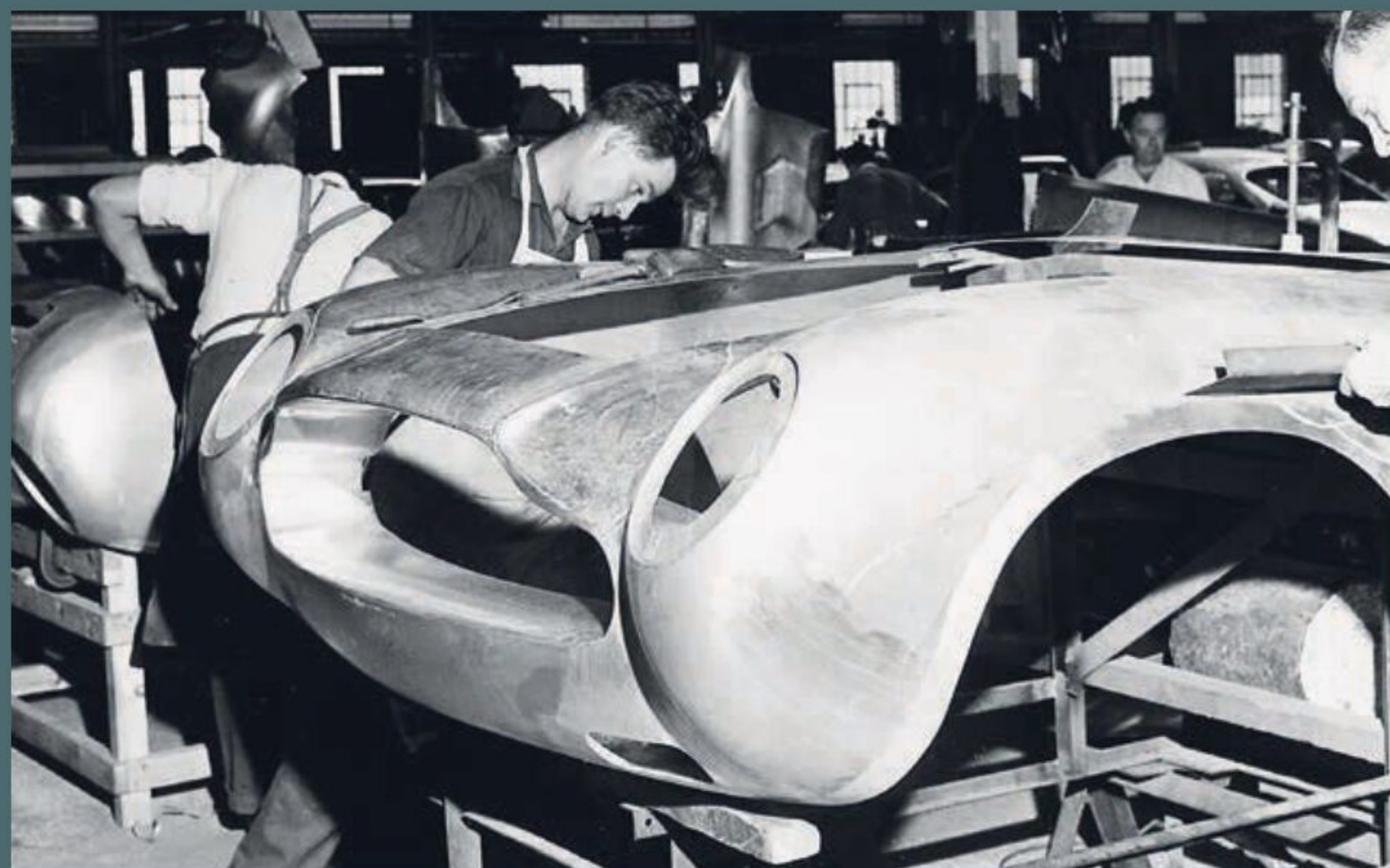
FACTORY FRESH

In late 1954, David Brown bought Tickford Ltd, an independent coachbuilder based in the Buckinghamshire town of Newport Pagnell, which from 1963 until the early years of the millennium became Aston Martin's home and manufacturing base.

During Brown's early ownership of Aston Martin, its cars had been produced in three different locations: the chassis in Huddersfield, the bodywork was by Mulliners in Birmingham while the remainder of the car was assembled at Feltham in Middlesex. But with its generously sized workshop and skilled workforce, Tickford's Newport Pagnell premises offered an opportunity to bring production to a single location.

Although Aston's bodies had already been made there from the DB2 Mk II onwards, in 1963 Brown moved the entire company to Newport Pagnell where the final few examples of the DB4 would be produced.

Aston Martin soon became as closely associated with the town as Ferrari is with Maranello and although it moved into a new facility located outside Gaydon in 2003, it still is. The company's Works department remains in Newport Pagnell and in 2017 car production was restarted for the first time in over a decade with Aston's Continuation series. This includes 24 DB4GTs, 19 DB4 Zagatos and 25 DB5s to the same specification as James Bond's car in *Goldfinger*. And so, almost 60 years after it moved there, Aston's links with Newport Pagnell remain as strong as ever.



the 1939 Polish rally using a Chevrolet Master Sedan. The outbreak of war saw Marek join the Polish army, but he soon found himself in an internment camp and then a civilian refugee. He travelled to the UK in 1941 and worked on the Rolls-Royce Meteor engine that powered the Centurion tank. After hostilities had ended, he spent two years unemployed before joining Austin in 1949 where he developed the C-Series six-cylinder engine that was used in a variety of cars including the Westminster, A90 and Wolseley. He joined Aston Martin in 1954 initially to update the Lagonda engine before starting work a year later on what would become his engineering masterpiece.

The first decision was the size of the engine. David Brown again; "We had a V12 Lagonda engine that had been designed by Eberan von Eberhorst, a former Auto Union man who joined us early in the Fifties and who was responsible for the DB3 competition car. We had constant crankshaft failures with this engine, however, and there was a lot of heart-searching as to whether we should try to rectify the errors and make this the replacement. We also did quite a lot of talking around the possibility of a V8 but eventually we opted for a six-cylinder."

The eventual 3,670cc twin-cam engine featured an alloy block and head, a bore and stroke of 92mm and valves inclined at 80 degrees for better breathing. With a compression ratio of 8.25:1 and twin SU HD8 2in carburettors, power was quoted at 240bhp with torque around 240 lb ft. Marek's new engine debuted in the DBR2

that we had a very good engine man, but he wanted to retire," said Brown in Geoff Courtney's 1978 book, *The Power Behind Aston Martin*. "So, we looked around and found a fellow called Tadek Marek working at Austin."

Born in Kraków in 1908 and a former student at Berlin's Charlottenburg Technical Institute, Tadeusz 'Tadek' Marek started his career for Fiat in Poland and later General Motors. A keen racing driver, he entered the Monte Carlo rally three times between 1937 and 1939 in a Fiat 1100, Lancia Aprilia and Opel Olympia respectively before winning



The DB4 Series V Vantage used the same style of faired in headlights as the GT

racing car in 1957 with the sole highlight being Aston-regular, Roy Salvadori, winning the 1957 Daily Express Trophy at Silverstone. Yet it was always destined for the DB4 that arrived the following year and made the new coupe genuinely fast; as well as being able to reach 60mph in nine seconds, it was the first production car capable of 0-100mph in under half a minute and able to reach the ton in 21 seconds.

“With a good open road ahead, or better, in competition on a circuit, the full use of the remarkable acceleration and speed can be used,” wrote Salvadori (who admitted to being an Aston driver at the start of his piece) in the May 1959 issue of *Road & Track Magazine*. “Never



CLASSIC TEST

DB4 SERIES V VANTAGE



using more than 6,000rpm, you do about 54mph in first, 76mph in second, 108mph in third and 140mph in top (with a 3.54 axle ratio). Changing up at over 100mph, you still feel a definitive kick in the back as you accelerate in fourth.”

Thanks to its high speed and beautiful continental design, the DB4 put Aston into another league, making it a genuine rival to Ferrari, Maserati and Lamborghini. “The DB4 was a completely new, and a very brave and expensive step,” mused David Brown in 1978 for *The Power Behind Aston Martin*.

Since the car took a mere three years to develop, it wasn't without its issues, and it received four updates (unofficially known as Series) with the first arriving in early 1960 and the final one in September 1962. Series V was longer than the earlier models by 9cm (up from 448 to 457cm) and the roof was raised a little too, yet all within the same wheelbase as previous examples, which resulted in a longer boot and arguably better proportions. The diameter of the wheels was also reduced from 16 to 15in.

Aston had also developed two, even more performance-orientated models based on the DB4. The first arrived in 1959 and was the result of the International Trophy meeting at Silverstone holding a Grand Touring race for which Aston developed a faster version of its new machine. Powered by the ex-DBR3

3.0-litre engine, which had raced at that year's Le Mans but had retired, it was identifiable by its headlamps set back into the wing beneath plastic cowls. Weighing 200lb lighter than the standard car and called the DB4GT, Stirling Moss won the race easily.

“All the closed road-going Aston s seemed muscular and strong and a little agricultural,” wrote Moss in his 1987 autobiography, *My Cars, My Career*, “but the DB4GT was also quite balanced, it had bags of power and when I drove it against

Jaguar saloons, it was no contest...” Aston produced around 100 GTs, most with conventional bodywork although 19 had either Zagato coachwork or were works project cars.

In 1961 Aston reintroduced the Vantage name that, as per the first from 1950 which was based on the DB2, offered more power. With three SU HD8 carburetors, 9:1 compression ratio and larger valves, the power was increased by 26bhp to 266. But unlike its DB2 predecessor, the DB4 Vantage was a model in its own right ▶



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CLASSIC TEST

DB4 SERIES V VANTAGE



and could be identified by the same faired-in headlights as the GT.

Fast, powerful and good looking, it received plenty of praise from the critics. "Drivers with a strong sporting sense will derive a great feeling of satisfaction from mastering this car," said *Car & Driver Magazine* in 1962.

The Vantage spec was first available with the Series IV that arrived in the autumn of 1961 followed by the Series V a year later. Together with its longer body and faired-in headlights, the latter was a stunning-looking machine, quickly becoming the definitive Aston Martin design of the Sixties since the arguably more famous DB5 from 1963 was physically identical.

A DB4 Series V Vantage prototype was even used as a test car by the special effect designers of the 1964 James Bond film, *Goldfinger*, to make sure the various gadgets fitted by Q branch – including the ejector seat and machine guns – would fit into a DB5. It's also rumoured this DB4 was used as a stunt car, briefly appearing in the film.

Priced at £4,170 in 1963, only well-paid MI5 agents could afford a DB4 Series V Vantage. To put that figure into perspective, a Jaguar E-type 3.8 fixedhead coupe was over £2,000 less yet still offered a solid performance and beautiful design.

But a DB4 has something most Jaguars lack; exclusivity since a mere 55 DB4 Series Vs were produced with a tiny handful being to Vantage spec. This rarity also means it's often been overshadowed by its more famous replacement, meaning the car's impact on Aston and the subsequent design of its cars has often been overlooked.

Until now.

I have to admit, when I arrive at Classic & Sportscar Centre's premises in Malton, North Yorkshire, and see the beautiful metallic green example I've arranged to drive, even I think it's a DB5. Of course, as one of the most iconic cars in the world, similar to me being mistaken for David Gandy, that's not a bad thing but it doesn't tell the whole story.

An original UK right-hand-drive car, it was delivered new on the 30th November 1962 by Aberfoyle Motors in Scotland to a Mr G Scarth who lived locally in Perthshire. It was kept by its first owner for over two decades, who sold it in 1985 through a London-based dealer with only 35k miles on the clock. The car was restored in the Nineties and again in 2017 resulting in the immaculate example in front of me.

With perfect proportions, beautiful detailing and an imposing stance, it's easy to understand why it's become the most famous of all Aston Martin's designs and why it continues to have an impact. It's not a DB2 or DBS that influenced the DB11 but rather this car. The interior is close to automotive perfection. With no clichéd wood veneer like other cars of the period, the large array of classic white-on-black dials grouped around the steering column are inset into a dashboard of Bakelite. The swooping shape of the dash gives it an almost art-deco look that would continue through to the DB6.

Time to take this magnificent beast for a drive. The straight-six engine starts immediately before settling down to the familiar gruff note at idle. After putting the four-speed manual gearbox manufactured by parent company David Brown into first, I release the surprisingly progressive clutch and begin to move. Other than I could listen to the twin-

cam roar of the engine all day, my first impression is that it doesn't feel all that fast even by the standards of the day and I'm sure an E-type 3.8 would beat it in a dash to 60. Yet the easy revving nature of the engine makes up for any lack of power and it's not difficult to get the best from it, aided by the four-speed manual transmission that feels slick and easy to operate.

As with many cars of the era, the rack-and-pinion steering can feel vague at times, and I need all my concentration to keep the car in a straight line. Plus, unlike other performance models of the time such as the E-type and Mercedes-Benz SL, the DB4 doesn't have independent rear suspension. The car was originally supposed to have a De Dion rear end, but this was swapped for an old-fashioned live axle at the last minute since Aston couldn't find a supply of enough final drive units suitable for mounting onto the Superleggera chassis. This results in the DB4 lacking the nimbleness the other two possess, meaning it drives like a much older machine, reminding me more of a DB2/4.

Yet as I look down that long, voluptuous bonnet that's dominated by the wide power bulge and hear the atmospheric growl of the 3.7-litre straight-six, driving a DB4 Vantage is an experience few, if any, European cars from the time can match. The last time I enjoyed this kind of visceral excitement was when I drove a majestic Lamborghini 350 GT 20 years ago.

The DB5 might be better well-known due to its many onscreen escapades but due to the DB4 Series V Vantage setting the standard for it and all future models, there's no denying the car's importance in Aston Martin's long and distinguished history. **AMD**



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DRIVE STORY
V12 SPEEDSTER

V12 SPEEDSTER

HIGHLAND FLING



To explore the limits of the V12 Speedster, we take one of these rare Aston Martin sports cars for a blast through the stunning Scottish countryside

WORDS: KYLE FORTUNE
PHOTOGRAPHY: MARK RICCIONI



IT'S RAINING, heavily, but there's still a sizeable grin on my face. I don't care if I'm getting wet, my only concern is that the next town or village has cause to slow me down to a halt, because as long as the V12 Speedster is moving, very little water gets into the cabin. My face is another matter. Scottish rain blast sounds like some sort of facial treatment you'd pay handsomely for at a luxury spa, and it doesn't come cheap here, with the Aston Martin V12 Speedster starting at £765,000. It's exclusive, too, with just under 90 being built, and the last time we asked, they had all gone.

Why are we here? Why not? Is the most honest answer. Some might mock the V12 Speedster as a rich person's folly, a limited-series car built off something of an Aston Martin greatest hits, the front elements of the chassis being DBS, the middle having DB11 parts while the rear is borrowed from the Vantage, all clothed in a knee-weakeningly gorgeous body. As the name reveals, it's a V12, specifically an all-alloy, 48-valve quad-cam, 5.2-litre twin-turbo V12. Power is a little bit shy of the DBS's 715bhp, but the 700bhp Aston Martin quotes for it is ample. As is the

555lb ft of torque, all that driving the rear wheels via a ZF eight-speed automatic transmission and limited-slip differential.

With just 88 being built the V12 Speedster will be a rare sight indeed, and, if the reaction everywhere we took it is a measure, one that will immediately attract a sizeable crowd. The location? Scotland, because if you want big scenic country, near deserted, and brilliant driving roads then there's not much better. The weather? Well, we'll take our chances with that. The route won't be Scotland's popular North Coast 500 because it's become so successful that the roads are busy to the point of congested. Instead, our Highland fling will take in many of the roads I used to drive in my youth when heading to Scotland's ski resorts. We'll be on roads I know, and love, then, though previously I was driving them in a knackered old Volvo 240 DL estate, rather than an Aston Martin with a V12 up front and no windscreen. Being late June, we're heading north around the longest day, maximising the potential driving time.

The Speedster here is finished with the glorious DBR1 specification, it has Racing Green paint with white roundels on the bonnet and doors and a silver-





anodised grille. Windscreen-less cars can look oddly proportioned, but Aston Martin's stylists have nailed it with the V12 Speedster. It is rippling with a real muscularity that's athletic rather than pugnacious, the rear buttresses under which you can store a pair of helmets or luggage look fantastic. Together with the beautiful surface detailing in the sculptural recesses along its flanks, and the DB5-aping intake (a necessary, and happy styling coincidence to give clearance for the V12 underneath) mean even this, arguably the most ridiculous Aston Martin you could possibly conceive, looks utterly gorgeous.

Slipping into the driver's seat is a treat, too. If the exterior wows, then so too does the cabin. It's a concept car in its style, with cool exposed carbon and fine metal finishes throughout, the fabric seat inserts on the lightweight buckets which don't just look great, but provide incredible support. They clutch you, the height of the cabin-dividing span of bodywork, meaning despite your exposure you feel ensconced in there, the aero screen ahead not looking like it'll do much to help you escape from buffeting, but actually working rather well in reality. I've a helmet ►



DRIVE STORY

V12 SPEEDSTER



with me, but previous experience driving this same car on a launch event revealed that putting it on only adds to the buffeting. It's actually more comfortable without it, though you do have to put to the back of your mind the possibility of a kicked-up stone or any errant flying wildlife, insect or avian, which might decide to demise all over your face.

Glasses and a hat it is, then, the helmet staying in its bag for the duration of this trip. There are plenty of detractors of cars like the V12 Speedster, and in part they're right, these are expensive, ridiculous, unnecessary playthings for the privileged handful, the majority of which will be secreted away in collections never to be driven. This car will be, I've had around 80 miles in it prior to today, and our route should add at least 650 miles to that.

We've not travelled far before the reason we've come here is apparent. Majestically so. Having left Stirling following the A84/A85 though Callander, we're heading for Crianlarich before following the A82 towards Glencoe. The roads are spectacular, a ribbon of meandering tarmac that flows through some incredible scenery, the view getting ever bigger as we head towards Glencoe Mountain Resort. The road sits

in the bottom of the valley, sometimes stretching for miles nearly arrow-straight, before being punctuated by sections where the tarmac's route is dictated by the topography, climbing and twisting as the landscape demands, before, opening up, revealing another incredible view and dropping back down into another valley. Glencoe is mind-meltingly beautiful, there are clouds moving between the mountains, giving fleeting glimpses of what's behind, the moving, rugged landscape with its palette of greens, yellows, ochres, browns and greys making for a stunning vista.

Even among the big views, somewhat unsurprisingly, the V12 Speedster is attracting attention. Stopping to skirt around the back of Glencoe, an enthusiastic group gathers, wanting pictures of it, and then them with the car. Aston Martins always gain admiration, and this one more than usual. For all the Speedster's abundant power, capability and ease, there's something wonderfully engaging about just trickling the open car along. That openness means you're so much more aware of, and enjoy your surroundings more, with the result being lower velocities than you might be doing in a similar specification car with a





windscreen and roof. For all the visceral engagement, the physicality of the wind rushing past you means you rarely hear the V12's notes, it's only really noticeable, if it's quiet when you really wind it up and there are rockfaces, walls or, more usefully, tunnels to have the V12's glorious sounds ricochet off.

The V12 Speedster feels like an event, a car that's defined by its ridiculously open nature, but gloriously addictive, too. That it's so different in character makes it so much more fulfilling to drive. Yes, you'd be just as quick, quicker even, in a DBS, but the V12 Speedster isn't about numbers, or indeed the speed its name suggests, but a connection, a rawness and an additional element to the drive that's long been lost to us as we've become accustomed to driving around isolated from our environment in boxes.

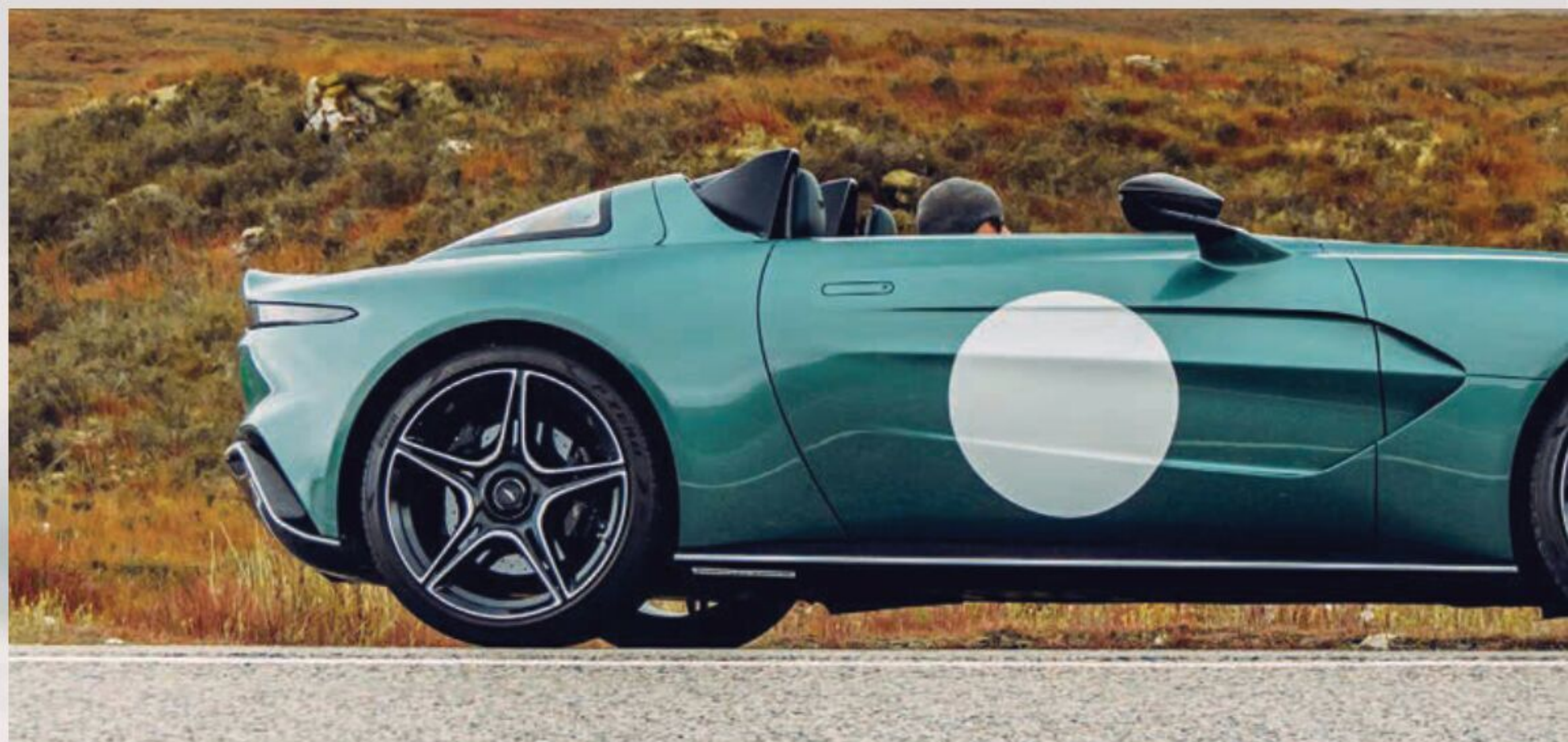
After an overnight in Inverness in a simple hotel on the outskirts of the Highland town, there's much excitement for the day ahead. The route will see us

spearing back down south, but only after we've headed northwest to the fishing port of Ullapool, and beyond it to Kylesku bridge. An early start to exploit the light and quiet roads, these become even more meandering the further north we head. Kylesku's a curious mix of coastal road and mountains, with the resultant mix of changeable weather, the view from the beautiful bridge changing every time you cross it. Temptation in the V12 Speedster is building, the roads are so good here, and deserted and streaming wet. What follows are some incredible miles giving the V12 Speedster a decent workout, doing so reveals that it just keeps getting better, the rain, not detracting from the experience, but actually adding to it. Indeed, it's the absurdity of the situation that makes it impossible not to find yourself grinning manically as you revel in the purity of the drive, taking driving back to basics, and, with the exception of my face, remaining dry, as long as I'm moving, briskly. Turning around, heading

DRIVE STORY

V12 SPEEDSTER

back much the same route we drove here redoubles my assertion that the V12 Speedster is about as brilliant a supercar as you can possibly buy. By definition, supercars are pointless things, only with the V12 Speedster there's an element in the driving mix that means it can genuinely be enjoyed at speeds that aren't antisocial. That's reinforced on the route south, passing back around Inverness towards Nairn, then heading towards Granttown-on-Spey where we stop for the obligatory Scottish delicacy of haggis and chips, before tracing the routes of my youth on Scotland's snow roads. There's





no traffic, save for the odd local on the road climbing past two of Scotland's ski areas, the Lecht and Glenshee, the views here being epic, the roads as memorable to drive as I remember from all those years ago. The rain is now biblical and in the bigger towns on our journey back to Stirling it means many lights and greater traffic, the result being the V12's cabin gets a bit damp, though not enough to dampen my enthusiasm for it, however ridiculous I might look being rained on at the occasional red lights.

It's improbable that any of the 88 owners of the V12 Speedster will ever

do so, but I'd heartily recommend taking it for a long drive, on proper roads, in any weathers, because to do so reveals how very special it really is. Every single one of those 650 miles we've covered have been good for the soul, and every one of them in the V12 Speedster tattooed on my memory, while the V12 Speedster has put smiles on everyone's faces, wherever we've been. And, if that's not something worth celebrating then I don't know what is. The V12 Speedster is a special car, but it's even more so when used as intended. **AMD**



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NEWSBy Matt James
Editor,
Motorsport News

Vettel takes his leave

Following Sebastian Vettel announcing his retirement, his replacement at Aston Martin F1 takes everyone by surprise



AT THE French Grand Prix in mid-July, four-time Formula 1 world champion Sebastian Vettel was giving hints that he was on the verge of inking a new deal to remain with the Aston Martin Formula 1 team for a third season and beyond.

Seven days later in the build-up to the Hungarian Grand Prix, he dropped the bombshell that he was retiring from the sport for good in a move which nobody had seen coming.

Vettel is a contradiction, and nowhere was this more evident than when he went on the BBC's high-profile Question Time programme in May this year. It was a brave decision for someone to take on the big issues of the day on a programme that was not in his native tongue, but he tackled it head on and gave full and effusive answers to all that was asked of him.

He was forthright on his views on the war in Ukraine and also about the need to make sure that everyone has access to fuel and heating, no matter what the increase in price. He also laid out his green credentials.

But, as the Question Time host Fiona Bruce pointed out in a rather unfair manner, his green credentials were somewhat at odds with his British Racing Green credentials as a Formula 1 driver for Aston Martin.

Vettel handled the barb with good grace, but it was stinging. How can a driver who wants to save the world also go around polluting it with the exhaust gases from his F1 machine?

And that is the internal struggle that Vettel has been weighing up over the last few months. So often he has been a voice for good: for example, hitting out against oppressive regimes in countries ▶

“This Aston Martin team is clearly applying the energy and commitment to win, and therefore it is one of the most exciting teams in Formula 1 today”

MOTORSPORT

F1

such as Saudi Arabia, a venue where he lined up on the grid in 2021 when it hosted its maiden grand prix. He is candid about that.

In his retirement statement, Vettel said, "My passion [for racing in Formula 1] comes with certain aspects that I've learned to dislike. They might be solved in the future, but the will to apply that change has to grow much stronger and has to be leading to action today. Talk is not enough, and we cannot afford to wait. There is no alternative, the race [to change the world] is under way."

It was a coup when Aston Martin F1 owner Lawrence Stroll signed the German. After a few years in the doldrums at Ferrari, the latent talent of Vettel was still clear and Aston Martin desperately needed to buy in to a top-line driver who had title-winning knowledge. Vettel fitted that picture perfectly.

Vettel bought into the Lawrence Stroll vision too. Stroll, who is part of a consortium which owns the Aston Martin road-car brand, has huge plans for the team which he introduced on to the F1 grid in 2020. If it had not been for Covid, the squad would already be installed in a brand-new HQ – a facility so big that the owner calls it a "campus", rather than just an F1 factory. It is due to have the first purpose-built wind tunnel in F1 for over 15 years. No stone has been unturned in the Canadian owner's desire to succeed.

Signing the expertise of a multiple title winner (with the sport's current dominators being Red Bull), Vettel was a corner-cut that should have been able to help the team hit the higher strata of F1 in a quicker time than other newer outfits, but that hasn't quite been proven to be true.

Aston Martin, which was a metamorphosis of the bankrupt but highly efficient Racing Point operation, is going through growing pains. The Covid delay has meant that the cash-rich underpinning of the team has yet to materialise, although it has been on a huge recruitment programme in the background to employ the best up-and-coming brains in the F1 paddock. When the project hits top gear, there is no doubt that it will be the envy of a lot of the others in the paddock. And although Vettel's results haven't quite been there yet, his input and knowledge of what it takes to succeed will be felt for years to come.

As Vettel said in his statement, "I hope that the work I did last year and am continuing to do this year will be helpful in



the development of a team that will win in the future, and I will work as hard as I can between now and the end of the year with that goal in mind, giving, as always, my best in the last races.

"Over the past two years I have been an Aston Martin driver – and although our results have not been as good as we had hoped – it is very clear to me that everything is being put together that a team needs to race at the very highest level for years to come."

The German driver also talked of a desire to be a better family man and a father, which he says is one of the reasons he is walking away from the Aston Martin project. The now 35-year-old broke the record as the then-youngest ever points scorer when he finished eighth in the US Grand Prix in

2007 at just 19 years of age and he was the youngest world champion when he lifted his first crown in 2010. He has been at the coalface for almost two decades.

"The decision to retire has been a difficult one for me to take, and I have spent a lot of time thinking about it; at the end of the year I want to take some more time to reflect on what I will focus on next; it is very clear to me that, being a father, I want to spend more time with my family," said the departing driver.

His decision to reverse out of the sport left owner Lawrence Stroll with a predicament. Not that it would ever be said in public, but there is (whisper it) some nepotism going on within the Aston Martin team. The second seat at Aston is occupied by Stroll's son

“The decision to retire has been a difficult one for me to take, and I have spent a lot of time thinking about it

Lance. While Stroll Jnr, who is only 23, is in his sixth season of grand prix racing, he has only shown flashes of speed – and, indeed, has finished on the podium just three times. He has the pace, but he is not the man to lead a team to title success. He hasn't been around the same block as Vettel has.

So, Lawrence Stroll knew he needed an experienced hand on the tiller in the 'other' Aston Martin, which has led to the brave decision to sign two-time world champion and double Le Mans winner Fernando Alonso to replace Vettel.

Out of the Vettel frying pan, into the Alonso fire. But Alonso is just what Aston Martin needs right now. The two-time champion Alonso still has a burning fire for success and is still one of the best out there.

The 41-year-old has signed what has been described as a “multi-year” deal with Aston. Whether he continues to occupy the race seat or not, Aston has replaced like with like: an experienced guiding hand who knows what it takes to win. For Vettel, read Alonso.

The new incumbent Alonso said when the announcement was made that he was joining the team: “This Aston Martin team is clearly applying the energy and commitment to win, and therefore it is one of the most exciting teams in Formula 1 today.

“I have watched as the team has systematically attracted great people with winning pedigrees and I have become aware of the huge commitment to the new facilities and resources at Silverstone.

“No one in Formula 1 today is demonstrating a greater vision and absolute commitment to winning, and that makes it a really exciting opportunity for me.”

And, indeed, it is exciting. Aston Martin might have lost Vettel, but it has employed what could be seen as an upgrade in Alonso. His passion and experience will undoubtedly accelerate Lawrence Stroll's objectives. That is something that will put a smile on many faces.**AMD**



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One of Richards' well-equipped and spacious workshops

MODERN TRADITIONAL

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY: PAUL WALTON

FROM THE high detail of its work to the tastefully decorated reception, from the full spray booth to the many beautiful cars it's currently restoring, after visiting Richards of England's Lincolnshire premises you'd assume it has been around for some

time, perhaps since the Seventies or Eighties. Yet it was actually founded a mere 18 years ago by a then teenager, Paul Richards. Still only 32, he's quickly built Richards of England into one of the UK's most established and respected Aston Martin specialists. "It's a story I should shout about really," he admits.

"A lot of people who don't know me personally don't know the story behind the company."

Always interested in cars, Paul started his career by helping at a local bodyshop, while still at school, that unfortunately went under. Since he was also interested in automotive interiors and their design, he



We head to rural Lincolnshire to discover more about leading Aston Martin specialist, Richards of England, including that its origins are more recent than its established image would have you believe

switched over to trimming, initially looking at an apprenticeship with Rolls-Royce but the financial crash of the late 2000s meant the company was no longer taking anyone on.

Despite not yet being 20, Paul took the brave decision to go it alone. "My dad – who's a woodworker – had a small workshop in the garden so I started to hone my trimming skills in there."

With practice he soon picked up the skills that he required, and his first commission was to retrim a couple of Rolls-Royces for a local wedding hire company. Yet despite his tender age he always had his eye on the future.

"After working on more cars, I decided to go for it, and with a small bank loan leased my first unit that was big enough for a couple of vehicles."

There are three important turning points in the story of Richards of England. The first is when he met Matt Purvis who worked at a workshop opposite and expressed an interest in joining forces.

"We got chatting and soon became friends. He has a real interest in vintage cars and used to work on them at his own garage. I said, 'What do you think about joining forces?' I already had several big projects and he said he was up for it." Matt still works for Paul and remains Richards of England's head mechanic.

The second came in 2015 when he convinced one of his clients who owned a large collection of Astons that they could do more to his cars than just the interior.

"I said, 'I've got a guy who wants to work with me on the mechanical side. Since I also know a good painter, I reckon we can



Richards of England's founder, Paul Richards, with a DB5 that's starting its restoration journey

MEET THE SPECIALIST

RICHARDS OF ENGLAND



Technician Sam Bishop hands deep in the engine of a DB5 that's close to being finished

handle more; how do you feel about us doing more work on your cars?"

The owner said yes and from that moment on the company started to offer full restorations. Needing more space, it moved into Richards' current location, a 2,000 square-foot unit a few miles west of Lincoln. It has grown rapidly since then and the original workshop is now the reception that's recently been revamped to include space for two cars when they're ready for collection by their owners. The other areas of the business are now housed next door in similarly spacious units on the same business park.

The moment Paul discovered a client who wanted the interior of his E-type doing, who was also an automotive electrical specialist, was the third turning point. He too was interested in working for Paul, meaning they could offer even more services on site.

Up until then the company had been more of a British car specialist, but another customer Paul had become close to, had a contact with the sales manager at a more established Aston Martin specialist. It was through him that Paul started to become a specialist in the marque.

"The specialist would sometimes need something doing to one of its cars that wasn't worth transporting back to the factory for. Having previously seen a DBS we'd restored, they liked what we did so we started doing projects on their behalf."

It was now that Paul decided to become an Aston Martin specialist. And less than



Head mechanic and long-time employee, Matt Purvis, works on a DBS

a decade later, he's achieved that goal and although when he shows me round the workshops there's a Ferrari 250 that belongs to an existing client and he's still happy to take on a Jaguar or a Bentley for example, they're mainly full of Aston Martins (plus a Lagonda 3-Litre drophead), in various stages of restoration.

It's not just the comfortable reception that makes Richards of England look and feel established or the high number of cars its team are working on; it's the amount of services it offers. These include a fully equipped spray booth that Paul invested in a few years ago so he could ensure the quality of the work. This means that other than the engines – which are rebuilt by an experienced Derby-based specialist – from the chassis to the paint, everything is done in-house.

"The car never leaves the premises," Paul explains. "It's disassembled here, the work on the chassis is done here, as it is for the body, trim, electrical, paint and final refit."

With the company still only eight-strong, Paul takes pride that Richards of England continues to offer the same level of personal service as when it was just him and Matt, with clients liking that he's still the person they speak to and there aren't any project managers in between.

Maybe it's due to Paul starting as a trimmer (although he tells me due to the pressures of running a business and liaising with clients that he's no longer as hands-on as he used to be), but Richards of England has quickly garnered a reputation for its attention to detail, as proven by some of its cars being awarded top concours prizes. These include a DB5 winning the Newport Pagnell class at the AMOC's 2021 Autumn Concours plus the prestigious Salon Privé the same year. "That car was full circle," he says proudly. "We originally met the client on our stand at Salon Privé a couple of years ago who said he wanted a DB5. We stayed in touch and I subsequently heard of a former UK car that was for sale in America, which had been owned by the same family for over 40 years but was now in bits. I sourced it for him and we started the restoration which was then unveiled at last year's Salon Privé."

Paul tells me that while they specialise in Astons from the Feltham cars onwards and look after a couple of DB7s for existing clients, they don't yet cater for the later Gaydon models. But he admits it's an area he's considering moving into. "We're getting lots of enquiries to service DB9s and so on, but we don't have the facilities. But because there's no longer an Aston specialist in Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire or Lincolnshire, the catchment area is huge. So it's a question as to whether we go down that route."

If he does, there's no doubt he'll approach it with the same eye to detail and boundless enthusiasm that's led Richards of England to quickly become one of the UK's leading and now firmly established Aston Martin specialists. **AMD**

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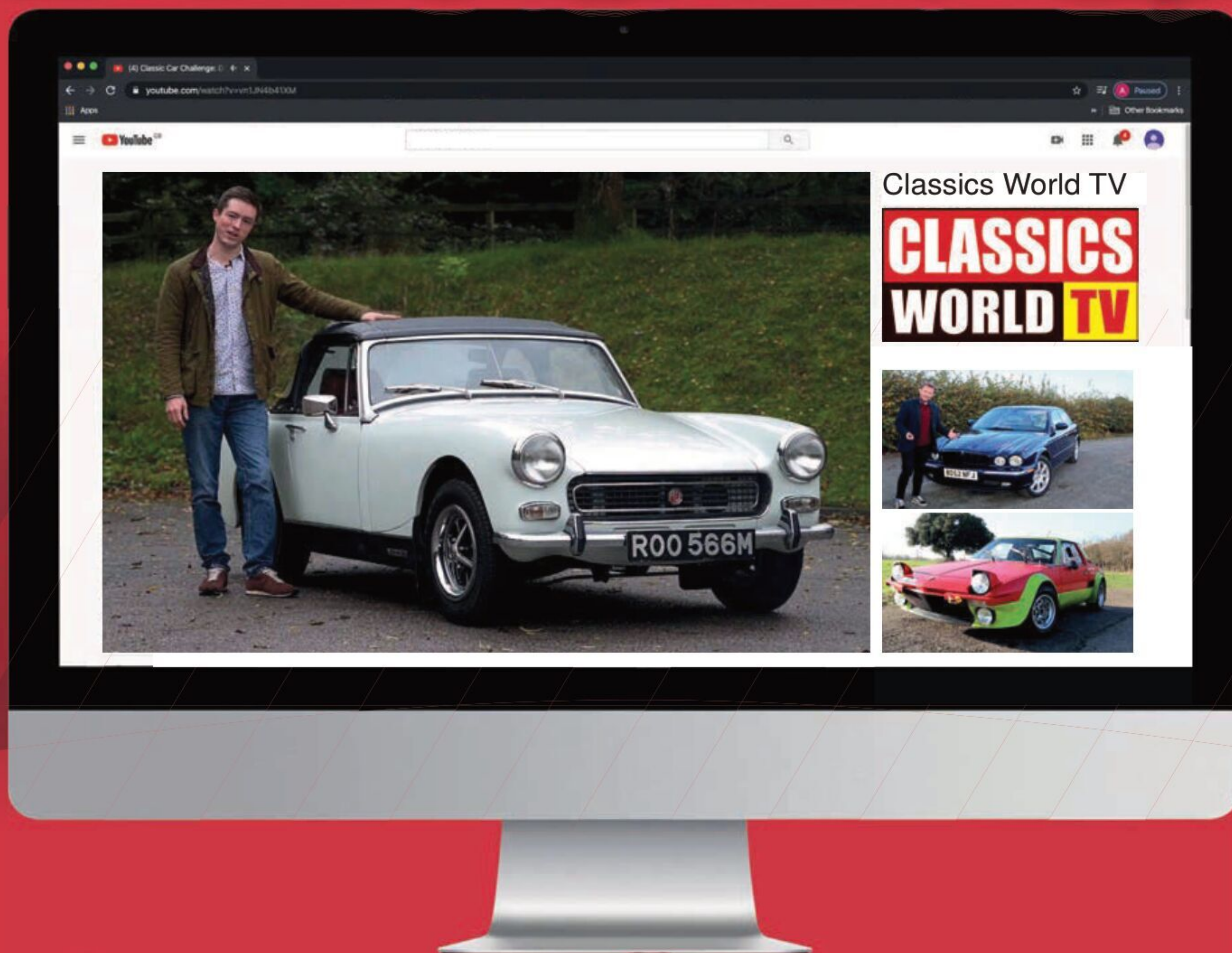
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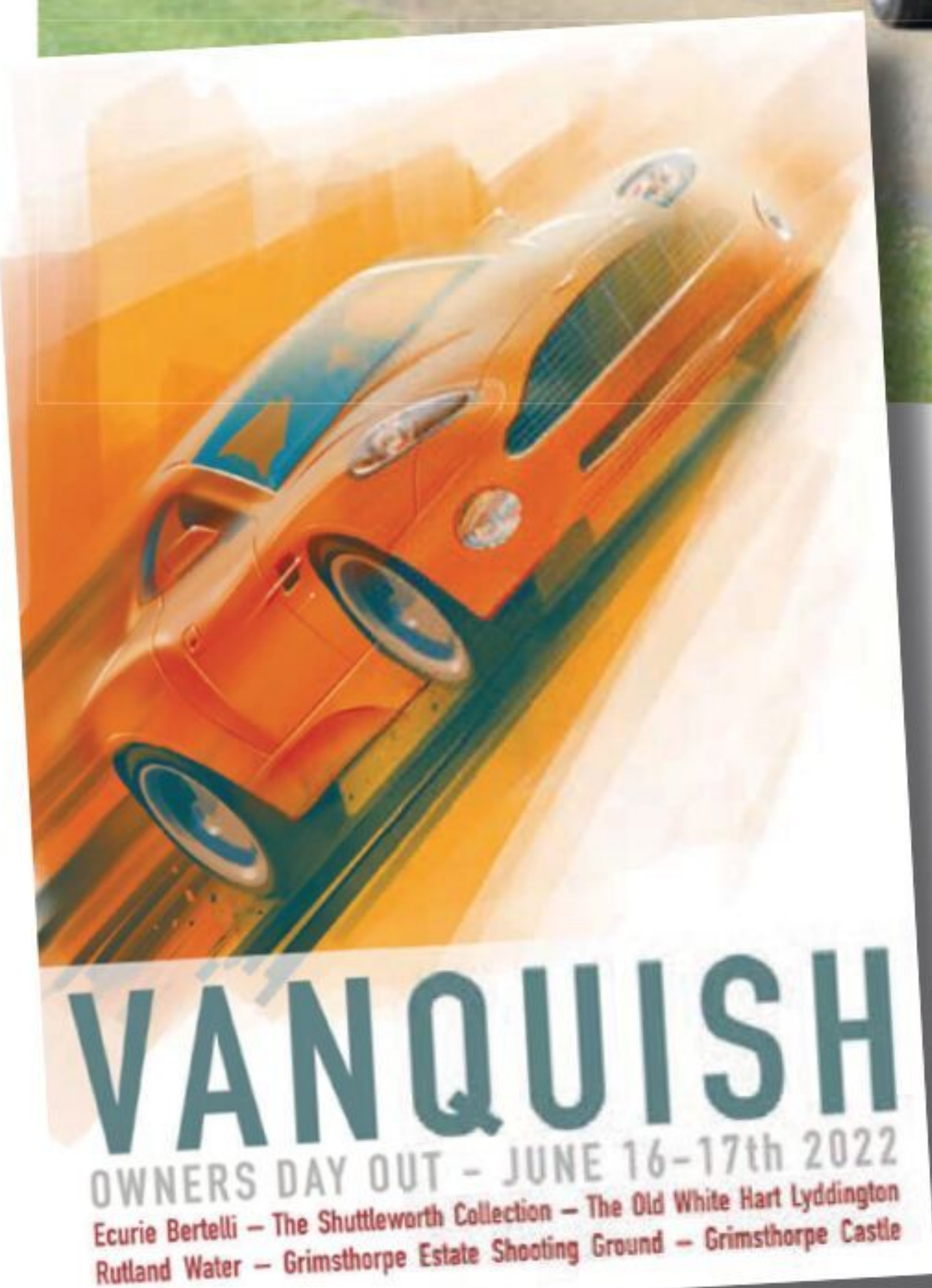
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FROM THE CLUBHOUSE

VANQUISH DAY OUT

Images: Richard Andrews



Inside the workshop of Ecurie Bertelli



Inspecting a pre war model at Ecurie Bertelli

JOINING THE Aston Martin Owners Club is the best way to get the most from owning, or simply being passionate about, Aston Martin cars. The Club's on-line Forum is not only a valuable resource for anyone wanting to learn how to fix or improve their car, it also provides opportunities to arrange meetings outside of the Club's local or international calendar of events.

The Vanquish Day Out is one example. It stemmed from a group of Club members who own original V12 Vanquishes, discussing their cars online and then agreeing to meet up. It has now grown into an annual feature, as 2022 organiser Richard Andrews explains.

"Rutland in the English East Midlands was the base for our fourth annual Vanquish trip. From five cars in 2017, we're now up to 20 and growing."

Being spread around the UK, those approaching from the south met at the Shuttleworth Collection of early 20th Century aircraft, an interesting and enjoyable way to spend a few hours.

Those approaching from the north met at Ecurie Bertelli, the pre-war Aston specialists in Olney, Buckinghamshire.

"This was a highlight for me," adds Richard. "Rob, Andy and their team were very generous with their time and gave a complete tour of the showroom and the numerous workshops. We were able to see cars in various stages of work, from chassis to fully finished. It was special to see so many beautiful cars and a couple blasting between two of the workshops and going out on test."

The Vanquish drivers and co-drivers then enjoyed some great roads up to ▶

FROM THE CLUBHOUSE

AMOC



The Vanquishes lined up outside Grimsthorpe Castle in Lincolnshire

the Old White Hart, an hour north in Lyddington. That was followed by some noisy rivalry on the pub's boule courts and a few drinks in the evening sunshine.

Richard continues, "The next day was a short drive to Rutland Water where we managed to squeeze 19 cars on the water's edge for photos. Boarding the Rutland Belle in clear blue skies, we cast off for a relaxing cruise on one of Europe's largest man-made reservoirs set in what has become a nature reserve. As we returned 90 minutes later, the Rutland water osprey appeared, fishing just 100m away from us... very special!"

The next stop was the Grimsthorpe Estate shooting ground. One of the group was already a 'hot shot' as his air-con had

decided to fail on the hottest day of the year! Here then was an opportunity to share experience and expertise in person, rather than on the Club Forum that originally formed this Vanquish group.

After some hitting and missing of clays, Grimsthorpe Castle was the next stop. "Estate manager Harry Coups had kindly arranged our visit and for the gates to be opened so we could parade sedately down the drive into the beautiful Vanbrugh courtyard" continues Richard. "After many more photos we were invited to cool off in the 18th century hall. Apparently, it never goes above 15 degrees, a very welcoming, cool and delightful finale to the day."

WHY JOIN THE AMOC?

- Welcome pack and member offers/discounts
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- Tours – national and international
- Racing and track days
- Full access to the AMOC Forum (a great technical resource)
- AMOC approved insurance scheme
- Prestigious Club merchandise
- Members are welcome at any local event, anywhere in the world, including BBQs, picnics, displays at stately homes and museums, tours, holidays, car meets, etc.
- All members are also supporters of the Aston Martin Heritage Trust, which includes access to an amazing archive, artefacts collection and displays at the AMHT Museum (free entry) plus their annual journal, 'Aston

Plans are already afoot for the 2023 Vanquish Day Out.

Richard summarises, "The group grows steadily and each year a few new owners are welcomed into what has become a group of friends with a common interest."

That sums up the ethos of the whole worldwide Club. People simply sharing the joy of Aston Martin. **AMD**



NEXT ISSUE:

ON SALE
28 OCTOBER

VIRAGE

A look at what's possibly the most underappreciated Aston Martin from the past 35 years, the first generation of Virage from 1988



LAGONDA 2.6-LITRE

This 1948 drophead is said to be the oldest David Brown-produced Lagonda or Aston Martin in full working order



VALKYRIE

We enjoy a white-knuckle passenger ride in Aston Martin's latest supercar, the Valkyrie



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1967, £170,000. A generally good, smart, sound example, but offered as a project, due to a seized engine and the need for re-commissioning. Please call 01248 602649, Wales. (T)

114827

ASTON MARTIN DBS



1969, £145,000. Registered 1st August 1969 this Aston Martin DBS coupe has been residing in France over recent years. Prior to this the history file includes details of engine and suspension rebuilds. Where MOT certificates indicate very little use over the last 15 years, the car has more recently benefited from a replacement five speed Tremec gearbox, a full repaint in California Sage and a complete interior re trim. Supplied fully serviced with 12 months MOT. Please call 01993 849610, South East. (T)

114935

ASTON MARTIN DB7



2004, £279,000. The DB7 Zagato was introduced at the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance in August 2002 and later shown at the Paris Motor Show the following October. It was only offered for the 2003 model year, with a limited run of 99 cars built (a 100th car was produced for the Aston Martin museum), all of which immediately sold out. Please call 01993 849610, South East. (T)

114936

ASTON MARTIN VANTAGE S



2016, 21,000 miles, £69,995. V8 Roadster. Petrol, automatic, Casino Royale. Please call 01798 874477, Sussex. (T)

ASTON MARTIN LAGONDA



£99,950. 1988/F Aston Martin Lagonda Series 4. Finished in Coniston Sand (one of only 5 manufactured in this colour), with glass sunroof to the rear and Parchment interior with contrasting Dark Brown piping, Beige carpets and Walnut veneers. This superb example has only covered 24,400 miles, having had two owners in total and one owner since 1990. Please call 02085 679729, Greater London. (T)

115723

ASTON MARTIN DB9



2006, 33,000, £40,995. V12, petrol, automatic, onyx black. Please call 01798 874477, Sussex. (T)



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ASTON MARTIN VANTAGE



2007, £39,950. Finished in the most desirable colour of Onyx Black with Obsidian Black leather and a black mohair hood this car has had just two previous owners, has covered just 48000 miles with full dealer and specialist service history with no expense spared. The car is powered by the 4.3 litre V8 engine and 'sport shift' manual gearbox. In 2016 the car had a replacement clutch fitted and has covered just 6000 miles since For a full driving experience and walk round video click the link below or go to the Oselli you tube channel. Please call 01993 849610, South East. (T)

114939

ASTON MARTIN VANTAGE



1998, POA: Registered 20th May 1998 this Supercharged Vantage to full V600 'works dynamics' specification is finished in the most desirable colour combinations of Royal blue metallic with parchment piped blue leather and dark blue carpets. With just 28000 miles and full dealer and latterly 'works service' service history the car wanted for nothing with no expense spared in its maintenance. Most recent works undertaken at 'Works Service' included a full service, new clutch, instrument upgrades and 'Nardi' steering wheel. With out doubt the V600 limited edition has to be regarded as one of the most collectable of the 'Newport Pagnell' aluminium bodied generation Aston Martin's Supplied fully serviced with 12 months warranty. Please call 01993 849610, South East. (T)

114937

ASTON MARTIN V8



1974, £99,950. Finished in original Kentucky blue with bark blue trim this car was purchased from Work Service some tow years ago for the purpose of taking part in Classic Rally's in Europe. The most recent being the Gataag Rally in 2020. But due to limited use the car is now for sale. Prior to its use the owner spent over £50,000 on engine rebuild, suspension upgrade and AP braking system. The car has since proved very reliable. Please call 01993 849610, South East. (T)

114940

ASTON MARTIN V8



1987, 22850 miles, £225,000. 1987 Aston Martin V8 Volante with manual transmission. 22500 miles from new and just 3 previous owners. Kensington Silver metallic paintwork complemented with Portland Grey piped black Connolly leather interior. Fully recommissioned in 2017/18 after being in a collection for twelve years. Please call 07970190472, South East.

115643

ASTON MARTIN DB7 i6



1998, 57,500 miles, £29,995. Petrol, automatic, Pentland green. Please call 01798 874477, Sussex. (T)

ASTON MARTIN DB2



1955, £140,000. Aston Martin DB 2/4 Mk1 completely restored in original Moonbeam Grey with red leather interior. Period upgrade include 4Litre Vantage engine, 5 speed gear box, disc brakes, etc. In current ownership for past 42 years. Please call 01483 486379, South East. (T)

ASTON MARTIN DB4



1960, £549,995. An outstanding Series II Aston Martin DB4. The body is exceptional, the paintwork is pristine, chrome work outstanding and the engine bay first class. The interior has a wonderful high-quality yet aged feel to it, everything works correctly and on the road this Aston Martin DB4 Series II is quite simply outstanding. Please call 01944 758000, London. (T)

ASTON MARTIN DB6



1967, £299,995. DB6 manual coupe. Red with black interior. Good history and low (relative) mileage. Service history will follow but the car is fully serviced by Oselli with 12 month's MoT. Please call 01993 849610, South East. (T)

ASTON MARTIN *drivers*

Not a household name today, but Tony Brooks remains one of Aston Martin's most accomplished drivers

NAME A British racing driver from the Fifties and the chances are you'll answer Sir Stirling Moss. But there was another driver from the same period who was just as talented and who many consider to be the best of them all.

Born in Cheshire on 25 February 1932, Charles Anthony Brooks was the son of a dental surgeon and studied the practice himself at Manchester University Dental School. His real passion, though, was motor racing and in 1952 with the support from his father he started competing at club-level, driving the family's Healey at Silverstone. His best finish being fifth in a five-lap race at Goodwood.

For the following year he swapped over to a faster Frazer Nash owned by a family friend and because he made a good impression over the next two seasons, was invited to drive the factory-entered Frazer Nash Sebring in the 1954 RAC Tourist Trophy at Dundrod, in Co Antrim.

Although Brooks didn't finish, his potential was evident and only a few weeks later he was asked by Aston Martin's team manager, John Wyer, to take part in a series of tests at an Oxfordshire airfield, leading the young driver to join the British team from 1955.

Brooks made his Aston Martin debut at that year's Le Mans 24 Hours race, co-driving with John Riseley-Prichard, an insurance broker. While following the Mercedes of Pierre Levegh that crashed into the crowd killing 81 spectators and the driver, Brooks had to brake hard before finding his way

through the carnage. He retired after nine hours due to battery failure.

Although he'd entered Formula One with BRM in 1956, Brooks stayed with Aston in sports car racing for the next three seasons.

Not always the most successful of partnerships due to the unreliability of the cars, one of Brooks' greatest successes for the Feltham-based outfit was to win the 1957 Nürburgring 1,000km with Noel Cunningham-Reid in a DBR1. "The race attracted strong entries from both Ferrari and Maserati," said Cunningham-Reid for Anthony Pritchard's 2006 book, *Aston Martin A Racing History*, "but Tony staggered everyone, not just with his speed but the relaxed, comfortable way in which he lapped so fast."

At Le Mans the same year, Brooks suffered from a terrible accident when the gearbox of his Aston became stuck in fourth and the car overturned onto a sandbank after he entered Tertre Rouge too quickly. "I was lucky in the Le Mans shunt in that I didn't break anything," he said years later, "but I did have very severe abrasions – there was a hole in the side of my thigh I could literally have put my fist into."

Yet just three weeks later he was back in a Vanwall for the British Grand Prix at Aintree. Still suffering from his injuries, the fatigued Brooks handed teammate (Sir) Stirling Moss his car after his had retired. Moss would take the victory (which was jointly awarded to them both), the first time a British-built car had won a Formula One World Championship race.

Following Moss's move to Aston



Martin in 1957, the pair were teammates in sports car racing and together they won the 1958 RAC Tourist trophy at Goodwood in a DBR1/300 (pictured here with Brooks behind the wheel closely followed by Duncan Hamilton's Jaguar D-type).

Signing for Ferrari in 1959 when he came close to winning the F1 Championship saw the end of Brooks' association with Aston, but it was a short-lived transfer and he left the Italian team at the end of the season.

Although he continued in F1 – first with the Yeoman Credit Cooper team and then BRM – by now acutely aware of the sport's dangers, he lost interest and retired at the end of the 1961 season into relative obscurity.

A man of quiet dignity, despite his six victories in the Formula One World Championship, Brooks never achieved the recognition of his more famous teammate, Sir Stirling Moss, passing away on 3 May 2022, with little acknowledgement or fanfare.

As Moss once said of his friend and former Aston Martin teammate, "Brooks was a tremendous driver, the greatest – if he'll forgive me saying this – 'unknown' racing driver there's ever been." **AMD**

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