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DB7 vs BMW 840Ci



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COST EFFECTIVE

WHEN MY friends and family learnt that I was taking over the reins of *Aston Martin Driver* last summer, without exception they all said the same two things – can I take them for a drive and aren't Astons really expensive? My replies to both were always the same; only if they were nice to me and not as much as they'd think.

There's no doubt Aston Martins can be pricey – there isn't a current model that starts at under £100,000 – while some classic examples, such as the famous DB5, are £750k and above. But there are also more affordable models, three of which we have in this issue.

It will come as no surprise to many of you that DB7 3.2s start at around £20k. Old-fashioned even when new, as our twin test with a BMW 840Ci on page 70 illustrates, despite the car's huge character, it's not the greatest model in the company's long history and so perhaps deserves its current low values.

But the fact that you can buy both of our cover cars – the first generation of V8 Vantage and the DB9 – for the same price as a mid-sized family hatchback, might come as a shock. It certainly did for me. By both being fast, good-looking and still usable, it seems unfeasible they start at £25,000. It's made me do something that I thought I'd never do without winning the lottery; consider buying an Aston Martin. You'll have to read my feature that starts on page 14 to discover which one.

And if I do buy one of these amazing value cars and you're looking for a lift, then you know what to do.

Paul Walton
Editor



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As the designer of two of Aston's most famous engines, including the 3.7 straight-six and 5.3 V8, Tadek Marek is an important name in the company's post-war history. To mark the 115th anniversary of his birth, we investigate the life and career of this legendary engineer

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UP FRONT NEWS

Aston reveals superbike

Aston Martin and French motorbike manufacturer, Brough Superior, have revealed the AMB 001 Pro, a visceral 997cc track-only superbike inspired by the Valkyrie AMR Pro.

The strictly limited-edition AMB 001 Pro is the latest design collaboration between the two brands, pairing Aston Martin's legendary design with state-of-the-art Brough Superior motorcycle engineering.

Offered in a single Pro specification, the successor to the sold-out AMB 001 was inspired by Aston Martin's track hypercar, the Valkyrie AMR Pro. Like its inspiration, AMB 001 Pro takes track performance to the

extreme, offering a 25 percent power increase on its predecessor, with its 225 HP producing a power-to-weight ratio of 1.28 hp/kg, similar to that of a Formula One car.

Thierry Henriette, chief executive officer of Brough Superior, said, "We are excited to reveal the AMB 001 Pro. The success of its predecessor, coupled with the incredible Aston Martin Valkyrie AMR Pro, inspired us to get together again to create a new superbike; one that we know will excite our customers. We are

particularly proud of the new engine type, with a crankcase fully machined from solid billet aluminium, which is a unique feature for a production motorcycle. With the marked increase in power this takes AMB 001 Pro into the hyperbike sector."

Marek Reichman, executive vice president and chief creative officer of p ppAston Martin continued by saying, "It's a beautifully simple formula. Form plus technology equals performance. When you push something to the very edge of capacity, and do it seamlessly, the resulting experience can have you breathless. There is no separation between the advanced materials, design and technical capabilities of the bike. We've achieved this fluidity again with Brough Superior for those who desire a track superbike like none other. The rider is part of this moving sculpture and will literally feel as though they are part of the track when laying atop the AMB 001 Pro".

The AMB 001, the first-ever Aston Martin motorcycle, was revealed in 2019. The coming together of Aston Martin and Brough Superior, two iconic and historic British performance brands, produced a unique, modern, lightweight and powerful sports bike, limited to just



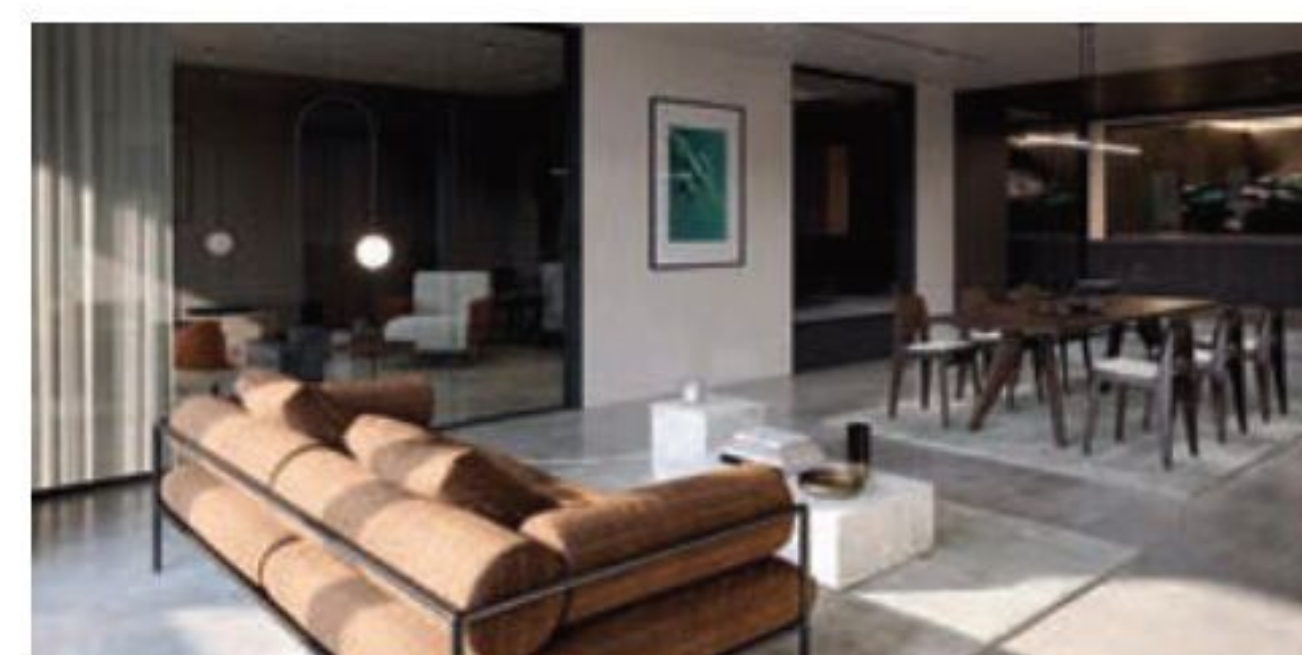
ASTON DESIGNS A HOME IN JAPAN

100 units and now fully sold out. The new AMB 001 Pro builds on what was learned from the AMB 001 and takes track exhilaration to the extreme. The power increase comes courtesy of a new CNC-machined, dual-cylinder 997cc engine.

Downforce is increased via the front spoiler and side wings, with the front cowl now fixed to the bodywork to manage the downforce at the front end of the motorcycle. A tunnel effect air blade directs air over the rider. The airflow enters through a large intake integrated into the front wing, then passes through the new front cowl, to be deflected through the dynamic windshield. A rear fin with an aero stabiliser design further refines the aerodynamic updates.

The AMB 001 Pro is offered in a single specification, featuring a racing livery that combines Aston Martin Verdant Jade with satin-finished carbon fibre and black Cerakote engine and suspension. These are highlighted by Photon Lime accents, paying a nod to Aston Martin's winning bloodline of track racers.

Initial orders have already been taken for the strictly limited-edition AMB 001 Pro, which will be hand built at the Brough Superior factory in Toulouse, France. First deliveries will take place in late 2023.



Aston Martin is to apply its design mastery to the world of Japanese real estate, as part of a new partnership that sees the first luxury home in Asia to be designed by the British marque.

The collaboration between Aston Martin and Japanese concierge leader, VIBROA, commences with the design and construction of 001 Minami Aoyama, a stunning private home in the highly desirable Omotesando area of Minami Aoyama, renowned as one of Tokyo's foremost architectural and style centres.

Working with a local architect, the exterior design of the home – which features an automotive gallery, wine cellar, home cinema, gym, and private spa – was led by Aston Martin's designers, who are also responsible for the interior styling of the property and carefully selected furniture.

The four-storey home, complete with roof terrace and stunning views of Tokyo, is already sold to a private buyer and is scheduled for completion in November 2023. It is Aston Martin's first real estate design collaboration in Asia, and follows successful projects in the United States, including the Sylvan Rock private residential estate and exclusive Aston Martin Residences in Miami, which are now 97 percent sold out ahead of the luxury waterfront tower's scheduled

opening in summer 2023. Marek Reichman, Aston Martin's executive vice president and chief creative officer, said, "The influence of Tokyo culture, with its amazing history and style, holds an important creative space within our design studio. I see fashion, architectural and even culinary references being considered by our team when developing their work, so its presence can really be felt within our practice."

"We thought we would return the favour through our first ultra-luxury collaboration in Asia with VIBROA by tailoring our Aston Martin real estate design principles specifically to the 001 Minami property."

The new design partnership with VIBROA forms part of Aston Martin's wider strategic growth plans in Japan, with the brand seeking to capitalise on the market's huge commercial potential and increasing consumer demand.

Greg Adams, Aston Martin's regional president for Japan and South Korea, said, "As Aston Martin grows in Japan, we are passionate about finding innovative ways to bring our ultra-luxury brand to life and resonate with local consumers. We are delighted to be working with VIBROA, helping create what we believe is a perfect home for an Aston Martin owner, with design elements inspired by our breathtaking portfolio of ultra-luxury and high-performance cars."

VANTAGE WINS GTE AM CHAMPIONSHIP



The Aston Martin Vantage GTE is a world-beater once again after the British-built racing car clinched the FIA World Endurance Trophies for both drivers and teams in the GTE Am class during a dramatic season showdown, the 8 Hours of Bahrain in November 2022.

Team TF Sport drivers, Ben Keating and Marco Sørensen, were crowned drivers' champions after finishing fourth in the tense finale. Following a season-long rivalry with fellow Vantage racers, NorthWest AMR, Keating and Sørensen

– who were partnered by Henrique Chaves in Bahrain – eventually triumphed by 23 points.

Keating and Sørensen began the 8 Hours of Bahrain with a 20-point advantage over NorthWest AMR's trio of Paul Dalla Lana, two-time WEC champion Nicki Thiim and David Pittard, with just 39 points available.

Keating qualified second in class and ran a punishing triple-stint at the start of the race, meaning he achieved his minimum drive time at the earliest opportunity and provided the team with the most flexible strategy for the

remainder of the race, which finished in darkness.

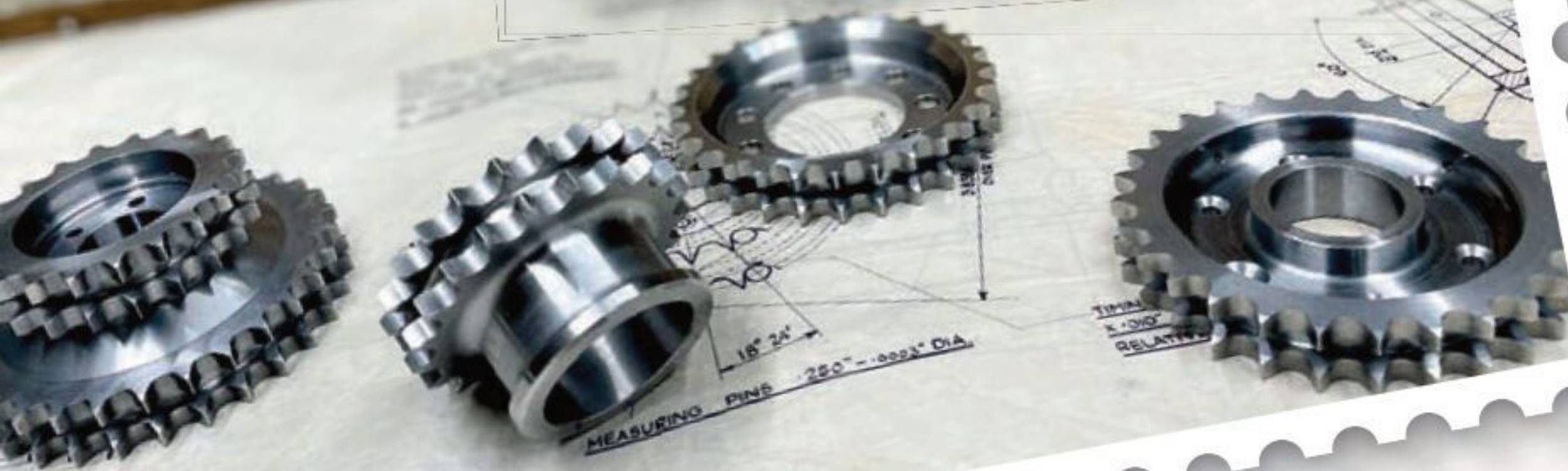
This proved to be the correct decision as the TF Sport trio – who had lost ground thanks to a pair of unfortunately timed full-course yellow periods immediately after their first two green-flag pit stops – bounced back to finish fourth, high enough to clinch the title by 23 points over the NorthWest AMR crew, who were fifth.

It is a first FIA world title for Keating and a third for Sørensen, who has claimed all his WEC crowns with Vantage. Because he was not part of the TF line-up at the Sebring season-opener, Chaves finished third in the points, behind the number 98 crew of Dalla Lana, Pittard and Thiim.

After a gruelling and hard-fought season, the Vantage has been the class of the field in GTE Am with three victories and eight podiums in the six rounds contested, including the Sebring 1000 miles, Le Mans 24 Hours and the 6 Hours of Fuji.

Said Marco Sørensen afterwards, "This is a fantastic achievement for all of us. There have been a lot of crucial moments across the year; Le Mans – which I'd never won before – being the biggest; one that's very special to be able to put on your CV. When it comes to winning a world championship, you must have a group of drivers who can show pace over a whole season and a car that can help them deliver it. We've been consistent at most of the races and not made any bad mistakes. That's how you win in the WEC and we've had an outstanding team performance all year to achieve this." ►





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VETTEL WINS ANOTHER AWARD



Former Aston Martin Formula One driver, the newly retired Sebastian Vettel, received the prestigious Gregor Grant Lifetime Achievement Award at the 2022 Autosport Awards.

Throughout a Formula One racing career spanning 15 years, which saw him win 53 grands prix and four Formula One

world championships, the German has amassed an enviable array of awards and accolades.

Passionate about the environment, equality and social justice, Sebastian has also used his career as a platform to drive positive change.

Upon receiving the award, Sebastian was asked what he would miss about racing. "What I love so much is the opportunity to work with so many people that are very passionate about what they do.

"I thought ten years ago, 'That's normal, it's how everybody lives their lives'. But then I found out it's not normal and a lot of people don't have that privilege.

"You have so much motivation from the inside of you coming out and to meet so many skilled men and women along the way and have fun. There's so much that I took from these years.

"I'm not sure what's next for me, but I'm very excited about it.

"It's not that I hate Formula One, I enjoyed the last couple of races, and after

the announcement it was a big weight off my shoulders because this sport has been in my head a long time and I'm very much looking forward to giving my children the time that I had when I was that age.

"My parents made so much time for me and I want to be there as well."

NEW WEBSITE

Aston Martin Driver's publisher, Kelsey Media, has launched a new website that's dedicated to the world's most exciting cars which includes Aston Martin,

Regularly updated with news, features, auction results and buying guides, prestigeandperformancecar.com is set to bring you all the information needed to keep you updated about your favourite marque.

prestigeandperformancecar.com

ALONSO MAKES HIS DEBUT

Following the final race of the 2022 F1 season at Abu Dhabi's Yas Marina Circuit in November 2022, Aston Martin's new signing, the two-time world champion, Fernando Alonso, completed almost 100 laps in this year's AMR22 at the circuit.

"I feel honoured to be here to drive for such an iconic brand," said the 41-year-old Spaniard afterwards. "I have been looking forward to today so much. It was a very nice experience: a very special day having a first go in the car, getting used to the team and the car, meeting all the mechanics, the engineers and trying to remember a lot of new names in a short space of time. Nothing really surprised me – the car was behaving well. We did 97 laps without any problems.

"There was a lot that we could take away from today. For example, the seat wasn't perfect because I have a bit of



pain in different places – so we will have to make a new one when we have a little bit more time.

"Also, the controls on the steering wheel, the radio volume – all these small things we have to get perfect. They are always

important to get sorted as soon as possible so you can concentrate on the car.

"We need to work hard this winter, including a lot of hours in the simulator, learning all the steering wheel controls and procedures – they are very different compared to what I'm used to. I have to practise them until they become automatic, in my head, in my fingers, so I arrive in Bahrain [for the start of the 2023 season] at 100 percent.

"Next year's car will be very different compared to this one, so any feedback that you get from this one is not really relevant for when we drive the AMR23.

"But I saw some different philosophies around setting up the car, developing the car, as well as managing the power unit. There are many things that you get initial feedback from; we will have to sit down and try to get the best out of everything.

"You can feel the energy in the team and how motivated everyone is. I can't wait for next year. I felt a very special atmosphere in the garage."



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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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V8 VANTAGE VS DB9

WEAPON OF CHOICE

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY PAUL WALTON



**2008
V8 VANTAGE 4.7**



**2005
DB9 6.0**

Despite the V8 Vantage and DB9 having much in common – including age, performance and current values – with one a pure sports car and the other more of a comfortable GT, they're also very different. To discover which we prefer, we're comparing an example of each

TWIN TEST

V8 VANTAGE VS DB9



THE DIFFICULTY in life is the choice," said the Irish novelist, George A. Moore, once. He had a point. From choosing what flavour of ice cream to buy to which TV channel to watch, from where to go on holiday to whether or not we should put the heating on, we spend much of our lives making decisions.

If you have between £25k to £45k to spend on an Aston Martin, then you have one more to make, since the first generation of V8 Vantage and DB9 are now worth roughly the same price.

Although one is a V8-engined sports car and the other more of a V12 grand tourer, they're both good-looking, fast and highly desirable machines, making choosing between them more difficult than between Rocky Road and Mint Choc Chip.





The DB9 made its debut first at the 2003 Frankfurt Motor Show. A brand-new design, it was initially started by designer director, Ian Callum, but when the Scot left for the same position at Jaguar in 1999, it was finished by his replacement, the former BMW designer from Denmark, Henrik Fisker. An effortlessly elegant and graceful car, in one sweep it made the well-matured beauty it replaced, the decade-old DB7, look old-fashioned and awkward. Yet by not reinventing the wheel, the car's pedigree was clear for even the most passing of observers.

"It's achingly beautiful," said *Road & Track* magazine in 2004 about the car. "Aston found no reason to start a styling revolution. The DB9, like the Vanquish, DB7, and V8 Vantage, relies on classic proportions, long-established Aston styling cues, big 19in wheels, and simple sculptured forms to achieve its gorgeous looks."

Although as mentioned earlier it replaced the DB7, the new car wasn't called the DB8 as expected since Aston Martin was worried customers would incorrectly assume it was V8-powered as under the bonnet was roughly the same 6.0-litre V12 as the outgoing DB7 Vantage. But with carbon fibre driveshafts, new cams, inlet and exhaust manifolds as well as a revised engine management

and lubrication system, its maximum power had been increased from 420bhp to 450bhp, resulting in the DB9 having an incredible 180mph top speed. The car was only initially available with a six-speed automatic by ZF but a manual gearbox by Italian transmission specialist, Graziano, later became an option.

At 4,720mm long and 2,016mm wide the DB9 was might have been bigger than the DB7, but with its frame and several panels constructed from aluminium (the front wings and bootlid were composite), it weighed 1,760kg, 65kg less than its predecessor. Not only did this increase performance, economy and durability but Aston Martin also claimed it was 25 percent lighter than the steel bodyshell of its predecessor.

The result was a devastatingly fast machine that rivalled whatever was coming out of Maranello or Sant'Agata. "There are more powerful units and faster-changing gearboxes, but nothing matches the DB9's desirability, sense of occasion and sheer usability," was *Autocar* magazine's assessment in its 1 June 2004 issue.

The DB9 was the first Aston to have been based on the company's then-new VH (vertical horizontal) platform that would be the basis for all future models, although some elements of its design



2008 V8 VANTAGE 4.7





were first seen on the chassis used by the first Vanquish from 2001.

The DB9 was also the first Aston to be produced at the company's then-new manufacturing facility outside Gaydon in Warwickshire, meaning it was the first to be partly produced by automated production. Although this no doubt caused the purists to spill their tea, Aston insisted that due to everything being made or assembled on site, there was a greater hand-built content than the DB7 or Vanquish, while the robot section of the production guaranteed greater precision and quality.

The larger factory, improved assembly techniques and, more importantly, the flexible VH platform allowed Aston Martin to increase production. During an interview in the October 2003 issue of *Top Gear* magazine, the company's then CEO, Dr Ulrich Bez, said it could potentially rise to 4,500-5,000 units per year. Although still a tiny fraction of what Porsche produced, it was a huge improvement over the previous tiny figure of 1,470 in 2001.

And sure enough, less than two years later a second Aston Martin to use the VH platform arrived. Although heavily based on the AMV8 Vantage concept that was revealed at the Detroit Auto Show in January 2003, the eventual production version didn't debut until the 2005 Geneva Motor Show.

The family resemblance might have been clear but by being smaller, lighter and much more muscular in appearance, if the DB9 was a yacht then this was a nimble speed boat.

"The differences are subtle but they are also compelling," said *Top Gear* in its April 2005 issue. "The V8 is very clearly the DB9's punk little brother. It's shorter in the snout, wider around the wheels and more predatory in profile."

As with the DB9, the chassis and panels were all aluminium resulting in it weighing a minuscule 2,570kg. Plus, it was powered by a new-to-Aston 4.3-litre engine which, although related to Jaguar's 4.2-litre AJ unit, was repackaged with a dry sump. The 32-valve cylinder head architecture was slightly primitive, the inlet-only variable valve timing unique to Aston. The engine produced 380bhp and through a

TWIN TEST

V8 VANTAGE VS DB9

six-speed Graziano manual gearbox the car could reach 60mph in as little as 4.8 seconds and had a top speed of 175mph.

“The raw, unabashed shrieking fury that emerges from the tail pipes above 4,500rpm is just about consolidated by the accelerative force,” said *Autocar* in its November 22 2005 issue.

The result was a very different car with a very different character that had a very different price tag than its bigger sibling. At £80k in 2005 it was over 20 grand less than the DB9, making the V8 Vantage something not often attributed to Aston Martin, affordability.

This together with its good looks and high performance made the car relatively popular and between 2005 and 2017, when it was replaced by the second and current generation of Vantage, 21,648 of the first were built. There were also another 3,052 V12 models that had the same 6.0-litre engine as the DBS, which arrived in 2009.

And although it was larger and more expensive, the DB9 was almost as popular with a little over 16,500 produced until the car was superseded by the DB11 in 2016. Admittedly, these are tiny numbers compared to the amount of 911s that Porsche churns out on an annual basis, but it makes them two of Aston's most popular and successful models.

These relatively high numbers have had a significant effect on their used values since early examples of both now start at around £25,000. Similar to choosing between two weeks in Kos or Corfu, this results in a tempting if confusing choice. What's the better decision; a V8 sports car or a V12 coupe? There's only one way to find out.

The two examples shown here perfectly illustrate the differences between the two models. While the Meteorite Grey DB9 is every inch the discreet, subtle and elegant gentleman's carriage that post-war Astons have always been, the Speed Yellow Vantage couldn't be more in your face than if it had just drunk several cans of Stella. Personally, I like it, the colour matching the car's larger-than-life character and showed a new way of thinking for Aston, but I understand why it might not be to the tastes of traditionalists. ►



2005 DB9 6.0



TWIN TEST

V8 VANTAGE VS DB9

Although excited to try both, it's the DB9 I head to first. Even to get close to this beautiful car, to soak in its voluptuous curves and impressive size, is as much a thrill for me now as when I first saw a V8 saloon in the Eighties. By being 338mm longer, it's much more elegant than the short, stocky and muscular Vantage alongside. And unlike most of us, it hasn't aged; while I'm no longer the fresh-faced youth I was in 2003, the DB9 arguably remains as contemporary and fashionable as when it made its debut two decades ago. It's worth pointing out that this particular car has an aftermarket carbon fibre front valance fitted and its 19in, ten-spoke alloys have been repainted black.

If I'm honest, I was expecting a slightly better quality of interior than what faces me. Admittedly in terms of materials used and the overall build quality, it's a huge improvement over the DB7's cheap feeling, overly archaic Ford parts bin special, but the grey plastic fascia and switchgear which was swiped from Aston's sister company at the time, Volvo, lacks the panache you'd expect for a car that in 2005 cost more than most people's homes. I like the dials in the binnacle, though, their polished silver finish having an almost jewelled effect.

All is forgiven when I turn the ignition key, press the starter button in the centre of the console and hear the 6.0-litre V12 burst into life with a smooth, refined but still noticeable roar. Whether it's a piece of Italian exotica or an arguably humbler Jaguar XJ12, there's something special about a V12-engined car and this 2005 Aston is no different.

There's no traditional gearlever; the six-speed automatic transmission is instead controlled by four discreet buttons located just above the radio. Needing the same amount of effort to operate as using a TV remote, I press D for drive, grab the chunky flat-bottomed steering wheel, squeeze the throttle and slowly make a start.

The 6.0 V12 is smooth and quiet on the move, only the rev-counter needle telling me the engine is doing anything. With the supple suspension effortlessly absorbing the worst that the British roads can throw at me, the cabin remains calmer than an exclusive gentleman's club at midnight.

After pressing the D button on the dash, thanks to its seamless changes, I haven't given the transmission a second's thought and it's easy to understand why a mere 385 DB9 coupes and 237 Volantes were sold with the manual 'box.

But when the road clears and I give the throttle the beans the car is immediately transformed. As soon as the gearbox kicks down, it's changed from the soft and gentle grand tourer it has so far been into something much harder. The free-

2008 V8 Vantage 4.7

Engine: 4,735cc V8

Power: 420bhp

Torque: 347lb ft

Max speed: 180mph

0-60mph: 4.7secs

Transmission: 6-spd auto

Weight: 1,610kg

Price new: £83,000

Value now: £37,500-£45,000



revving V12 is quick to respond, offering an instant surge of smooth yet formidable performance. With so much power, it continues to accelerate with a hardness that takes me by surprise and although I have no doubt it will continue to do so until it hits 186mph, with a corner fast approaching, I back off.

Admittedly this is a miserable autumnal day, the roads slipperier than if they'd been covered in cooking oil, but always aware of the DB9's considerable size and firepower under the bonnet, I don't feel comfortable attacking corners with speed especially since the suspension is clearly tuned for comfort rather than

performance driving. For that kind of tomfoolery, Aston Martin developed the DBS in 2008 that was lighter, faster and much more driver-focused.

That leaves the DB9 as more of a traditional, old-fashioned grand tourer, the sort that's still perfect for cruising down the long French autoroutes to your ►



2005 DB9 6.0

Engine: 5,935cc V12

Power: 450bhp

Torque: 420lb ft

Max speed: 186mph

0-60mph: 4.7secs

Transmission: 6-spd auto

Weight: 1,760kg

Price new: £103,000

Value now: £25,000-£45,000

TWIN TEST

V8 VANTAGE VS DB9

summer residence on the Côte d'Azur, the comfortable ride but still powerful engine making short work of the 1,000-mile journey.

The Vantage seen here has a 4.7-litre version of the V8 that was introduced in 2008 to answer criticisms that the original 4.3 wasn't powerful enough. The extra 455cc pushed the power to 420bhp (an increase of 11 percent), torque to 347lb ft (up 15 percent) and lowered the 0-60mph by 0.2 of a second to 4.7 seconds, making it identical to the DB9's.

The chassis was tweaked at the same time, with the coupe inheriting the improved components and stiffer spring rates already fitted to the roadster, which had arrived in 2006, while Bilstein dampers were now standard. The interior also received the same fascia as the DB9 and DBS.

"Aston's revisions for the Vantage are far from glaring," said *Autocar* in its 21 May 2008 issue, "it takes time and a decent drive to fully reveal them – but invest in this and you'll find a car that preserves the character of the original but adds polish where it was needed."

In terms of layout, the same Volvo-sourced switchgear and the materials used, the interior looks and feels similar to the DB9's which was perhaps more acceptable for a car that cost £83,000. Yet I reckon the Jaguar XKR's cabin from the same era feels similar in quality, yet in 2008 was over ten grand less than this car but offered similar levels of performance.

When I look behind me I see the biggest difference between the Vantage and DB9's interior – seats. Whereas the larger car was marketed as a 2+2 (although in reality, the rears are barely large enough for anyone), the Vantage is strictly for two people only.

The car's more purposeful image is confirmed when the V8 fires and it sounds louder and more aggressive than the DB9's V12. This example has the Graziano six-speed manual although the Vantage was also available with a six-speed automatic. After embarrassingly discovering more than once that the clutch has a high biting point, making it easy to stall, it's soon obvious this is a very different animal to the DB9.



The acceleration times of the two cars might be officially identical at 4.7 seconds, but from the driving seat, the Vantage's has a rawer, harder, more ballistic edge. Give the throttle a proper shove and it releases its energy faster than the DB9, shoving me backwards like the lager-swilling lout it clearly is.

The subsequent deep and melodic growl from the engine under full power fills the cabin in the same way Luciano Pavarotti's voice used to in the Royal Albert Hall, until it reaches a screaming crescendo and I finally reach down, grab the stubby gearlever and change up. With short, sharp and precise shifts, the Graziano transmission is a perfect match for the engine, allowing for easy access to all that torque and power.

Lighter, more agile and with much tauter suspension than the DB9's, I've only been in the Vantage for 30 seconds and I'm already comfortable enough to push it harder through corners. With beautifully weighted steering, 50/50 weight distribution and limited body roll, the yellow coupe remains better composed no matter how hard I push through corners, the Bridgestones fitted to the 19in alloys thankfully finding enough grip in the slippery conditions to keep me out of trouble and the car out of a ditch.

As I reluctantly hand the car back to its owner, two things occur to me. Firstly, even after this brief drive, it's easy to understand why the car was popular when new and why it remains so today. Secondly, the Vantage is clearly as different from the DB9 as luxury ice cream is from low fat yoghurt. So which one of these magnificent yet affordable cars do I choose?



Many years ago and following another two-car test, I was criticised by a reader for not putting a car first and, like a modern school sports day, both were winners. I promise you, that won't happen here, but I have to admit these are equally remarkable cars, the DB9 especially.

In this age of greener, smaller, and less imposing cars, it was fabulous to drive one with a V12, especially when it's as good-looking as this.

Compared to the ordinary cars around me, the big grey Aston must have looked like a UFO, meaning few would be able to guess this astonishing car costs less than a family hatchback.

Yet the truth is it's too big, too cumbersome and too extravagant for my tastes. Admittedly I was driving the car on wet and narrow roads rather than in its natural habitat, those empty French autoroutes, but I never felt totally at ease behind the wheel.

By comparison, other than the tricky clutch, I immediately felt at home in the Vantage, finding its instant power delivery, direct steering and sharp transmission more enjoyable than the DB9's. It's an old-school, V8-engined, two-seater sports car, of the sort that this country was once famous for and which I personally find more desirable than V12 GTs, especially when they're the same price.

We might have to make endless decisions every day but this is one I'm all too happy to make. **AMD**

● **Thanks to: Luke and Dennis Harding for supplying their V8 Vantage (www.luden.co.uk) plus DB9 owner, David Ashford**

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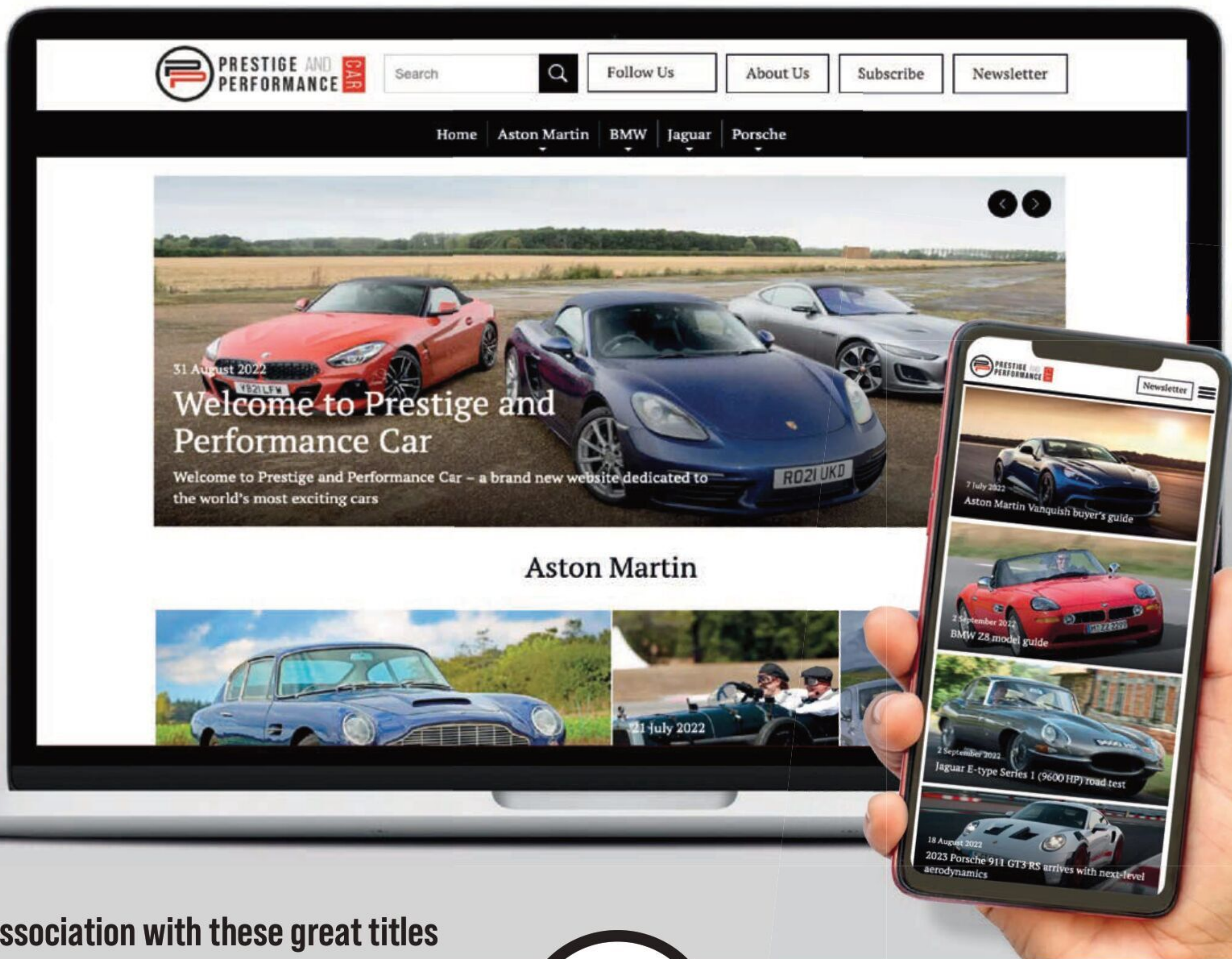


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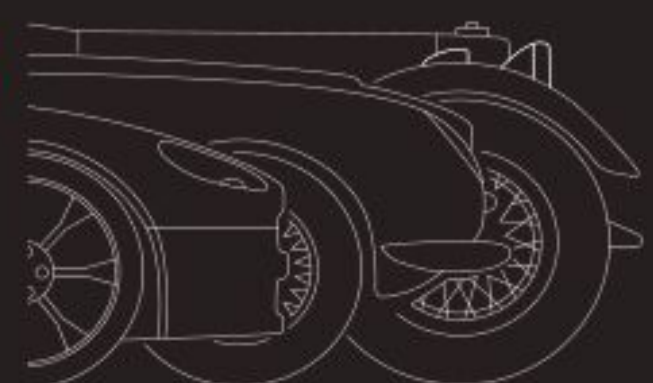
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MODEL PROFILE

DB MK III



DB MK III

GETTING IN SHAPE

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY PAUL WALTON

The final update of the DB2 series, the DB Mk III from 1957, was the first production Aston Martin to feature the now familiar shape of radiator grille making it an important model in the company's past. We look at the car's development, explaining why it's more than just a grille before driving a beautiful example

MODEL PROFILE

DB MK III

TOGETHER WITH the Porsche 911's distinctive profile and the Austin Allegro's famously square steering wheel, the Aston Martin grille is one of the most famous and identifiable shapes in automotive design. Seventy-five years after the definitive outline was introduced on a road car, it now defines the models that feature it and the company that makes them. Yet it didn't happen overnight, taking almost a decade of refinement and evolution before it finally became the shape we know today.

By arriving just before Aston's most influential and iconic series of cars, the first road model to feature the grille – the DB Mk III from 1957 – has never truly received the recognition or place in the company's history it so clearly deserves.

The now familiar grille design has its origins in the first Aston Martin model of the David Brown era, the rare 2-Litre Sports from 1948. The work of long-time Lagonda designer, Frank Feeley, the nose was dominated by a large, upright radiator grille with two smaller vents low down on either side. When the DB2 arrived in 1950, this distinctive design was kept, the lower vents later amalgamated into the main grille creating the rough shape we know today, albeit taller, wider and more angular.

The first grille that combined all three elements close to how we know it today was for the DB3 racing car from 1951, but it was narrower and less shapely than the eventual production version. It wasn't until the DB2/4 was updated in 1957, resulting in the DB Mk III, that the definitive Aston grille arrived. Although similar to the DB3's, the outline was much rounder especially across the top. Over 75 years later, the company still uses a grille shape similar to the Mk III's for all of its cars, making the model an important moment in the company's post-war history.

Yet the car was more than just a grille since it received several key mechanical updates as part of the refresh, most importantly to the W.O. Bentley-designed straight-six engine. The unit had already been enlarged from 2.6 to 2.9 litres in 1952 – originally for the DB3 and later used by the DB2/4 road car the following year – but Aston's chairman, (Sir) David Brown, realised the unit wouldn't last





forever in its original configuration. In 1954 he employed a young Polish engineer, Tadeusz 'Tadek' Marek, who had previously worked for Fiat, General Motors and Austin, to upgrade the engine.

Marek comprehensively re-engineered the engine giving it a new stiffer block with extra webbing on the crankcase, a stiffer crankshaft and cylinder liners that were seated at the top to make fitting easier. A new Hoburn-Eaton oil pump was used with an enlarged sump and new timing chain. At the top of the engine, there were bigger valves and ports reshaped nearer to the style used for the DB3S racing car. Finally, 14mm spark plugs replaced the old 10mm versions and a new inlet manifold was designed to take twin 1.75in SU carburetors. With a simple

exhaust system, the revised engine (known internally as the DBA) produced 162bhp compared to 140bhp of its DB2/4 predecessor while cars with the optional dual exhausts had 178bhp.

Other mechanical changes included a lighter flywheel and the clutch linkage was converted to a hydraulic self-adjusting operation. The four-speed gearbox was also refined to make it easier to use and Girling 12in front disc brakes were later made standard after originally being an optional extra.

Inside, the instruments were moved from the centre of the dash, as they had been in the DB2/4, to a new hooded panel directly in front of the driver while a parcel shelf was fitted in front of the passenger. Outwardly, the rear lamps were restyled, ►



MODEL PROFILE

DB MK III

which together with the new nose, made the otherwise identical car appear larger than the previous DB2 models.

Plus, in terms of performance, drivability and usability, these changes made the Mk III a huge improvement over its immediate predecessor. And so, despite costing over £3,000 in 1957 making it £200 more than the DB2/4 and a grand over the-then new Jaguar XK 150 fixedhead coupe 3.4, the critics were still impressed by the new car. "The latest Aston Martin can be placed among the select group of the world's fastest and safest cars," said *Autocar* magazine at the end of its comprehensive report in the 27 December 1957 issue. "It also enjoys those indefinable qualities which are manifested as character and which instil confidence and affection in the owner."

With such high praise, the car was unsurprisingly popular with a healthy 511 produced between March 1957 and July 1959. A tiny figure by today's standards, it still made the Mk III one of the best-selling Aston Martins at the time. But positive magazine reports weren't the only time when a mention of the Mk III in print helped with sales.

Although author Ian Fleming got its name wrong, the car featured in the seventh James Bond novel, *Goldfinger*, from 1959. The first time the British spy had driven an Aston, it was the origins of the long and famous association with the marque that continues today. "Bond had been offered the Aston Martin or a Jaguar 3.4," wrote Fleming in *Goldfinger*. "He had taken the D.B.III. Either of the cars would have suited his cover – a well-to-do, rather adventurous young man with a taste for the good, the fast things of life. But the D.B.III had the advantage of an up-to-date triptyque, an inconspicuous colour – battleship grey – and certain extras which might or might not come in handy."

Goldfinger was the sole book in which Fleming gave Bond's car several gadgets, with his Aston featuring switches to alter the type and colour of the front and rear lights, reinforced steel bumpers, a Colt .45 in a hidden compartment under the driver's seat and a homing beacon. More importantly, just as the later films would for the DB5, the book made the Mk III appear fast, exciting and exotic.

"James Bond flung the D.B.III through



the last mile of straight and did a racing change down into third and then into second for the short hill before the inevitable traffic crawl through Rochester. Leashed in by the velvet claw of the front discs, the engine muttered its protest with a mild back-popper from the twin exhausts."

This first association with Bond together with the now familiar grille and heavily updated engine makes the DB Mk III an important car in Aston Martin's history and one I'm excited to try.

The 1958 saloon seen here is a perfect example of the breed, the metallic red paint highlighting its handsome lines while that big, famous grille dominates the nose making its heritage known faster than any badge could.

Owned for over two decades by marque enthusiast, Adrian Chettle, who had always wanted a DB Mk III after seeing one in the Seventies while still an apprentice in the motor industry. Superficially restored in the Nineties by only the fourth owner, when Adrian bought the car in 2002 it was missing several parts and much of the reassembly had been completed incorrectly. Over the last 20 years Adrian has had most of the mechanical and suspension parts

renewed and now regularly drives the car all over Europe.

When he kindly offers me a drive and I slip easily behind the wheel, I begin to understand how that's physically possible. The spacious and comfortable interior together with the large boot and hatchback-style rear opening makes the Mk III as usable as any modern sports car. Although Fleming didn't go into this kind of detail in *Goldfinger*, I'm sure Bond would have had enough space for his many dinner jackets, smart shoes and weapon collection.

The art deco-style sweep of the binnacle and the layout of the dials within is simple, stylish and identical to the DB4 Series V Vantage I drove in issue three and similar to the DB6 I compared against an E-type in issue two. Easy to use, as *Autocar* said simply yet clearly in late 1957, "Location of the controls and the instruments is splendid."

The 2.9-litre straight-six fires the moment I hit the starter button, immediately settling down to a meaty thrum. Thanks to the torquey and free-revving nature of the Marek-redesigned straight-six, when I squeeze the throttle even a fraction the resultant acceleration arrives in an instant, feeling remarkably

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MODEL PROFILE

DB MK III



XK 150 3.4 a few months later. It sounds great too; a raspy, throaty exhaust note that's never grating but always lets you know it's there.

Due to the engine's tremendous amount of torque, changing gear for slow bends isn't always a necessity but it misses one of the Mk III's high points, the surprisingly smooth and easy-to-use four-speed 'box with overdrive. The accuracy of the changes together with its short, sharp shifts further facilitates the Aston's image of being a true performance car.

The steering has little of the vagueness many sports cars from the era, such as the Austin-Healey 3000 and Jaguar XK 150, can suffer from. Although light, its accuracy enables me to scythe through corners with ease before I nail the throttle at the exit and feel that wonderfully intoxicating surge of old-fashioned grunt only cars from this era can offer.

The Mk III might be known today as the first road car to feature Aston's famous grille, but I'd argue it's significant for another reason. Although it was again designed by Frank Feeley (his last before he left AML in 1956) and the body produced by another Brown-owned

company, Tickford, in terms of styling, interior layout and performance, it clearly laid the foundations for Aston's later Touring-designed models that started with the DB4 in 1959. Considering the impact these cars had not just on Aston but British culture, it makes the Mk III a significant car for bigger reasons than just the grille.

So, it wasn't just the radiator grille that was getting into shape when Aston Martin introduced the DB Mk III in 1957 but the company as a whole. **AMD**

● **Thanks to: Owner of the DB Mk III featured here, Adrian Chettle**

1958 DB Mk III 2.9

Engine: 2,922cc straight-six

Power: 162bhp

Torque: 180lb ft

Top speed: 120mph

0-60mph: 9.3secs

Transmission: 4-spd manual

Price new: £3,076

Value now: £175,000

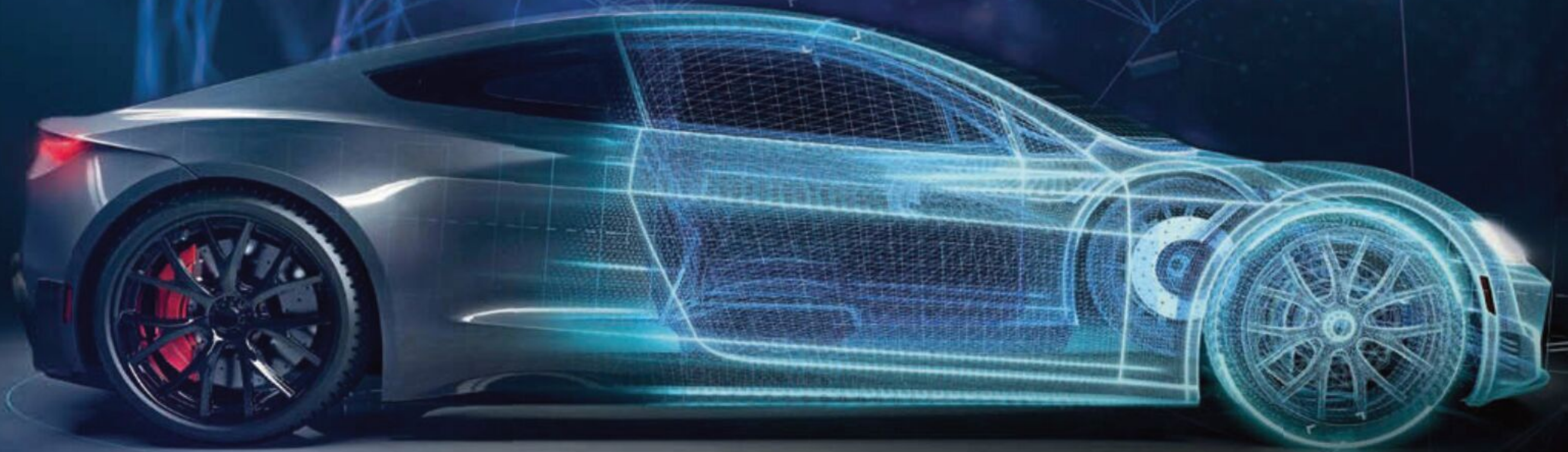
forceful for a car that is coming up to 65 years old. When *Autocar* tested the Mk III in late 1957 it recorded the car's 0-60mph time of 9.7 seconds, a little faster than the DB2/4, but a second slower than it achieved with the larger engined Jaguar



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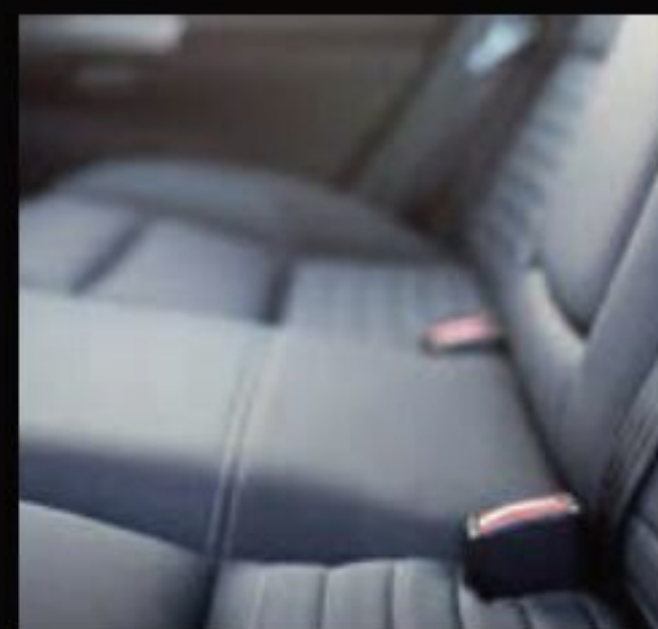
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ASTON MARTIN VICTOR

BACK TO THE FUTURE

WORDS KYLE FORTUNE
PHOTOGRAPHY MAX EAREY



Although its design was influenced by several models from Aston Martin's past, the Victor is a thoroughly modern supercar with a performance to match. We head to Silverstone to fully experience this monstrous 7.3-litre concept



TRACK TEST
ASTON MARTIN VICTOR





WE'RE ALWAYS looking for cool things to do and we had a little used One-77 prototype in storage that we couldn't sell, and we thought it would be good to do something with it," explains Simon Lane, former director of Q and Special Project Sales for Aston Martin Lagonda. The decision was made to make something to celebrate the V8 Vantage as well as the DBS V8 that was developed to race at the 1977 Le Mans 24 Hours as the RHAM/1. Some initial design work was done, Miles Nurnberger, director of design, said, "We don't usually do retrospective design at Aston Martin, but it's good to exercise designers' minds and this was a fun project." That Le Mans race car, built by Robin Hamilton back in the Seventies, with a bit of factory support, gained the nickname 'The Muncher' because of its appetite for brake discs, Nurnberger joked that it also applied to transmissions, tyres and pretty much everything else.

Called the Victor, in honour of Victor Gauntlett, Aston Martin's executive chairman, who presided over the company during the Eighties, is another subtle nod to the past.

The idea, as well as some early CAD design work and engineering feasibility studies, were completed before Aston Martin started approaching its most loyal customers to see if they might be interested in such a car. One was, a Belgian gentleman, his identity, as well as what he paid for the car remaining secret. He's happy, though, for a handful of people to drive it, which explains why I find myself sliding over the broad sill with a brushed aluminium treadplate with 'Aston Martin 1 of 1' engraved within it. The interior, like the rest of the Victor, is unique, but there's little initial opportunity to really revel in all the beautiful detailing, with my time limited and the clouds in the sky looking ominous.

Pushing the key into its slot low in the centre console – before I've fully tightened the Schroth Racing four-point seatbelts – I press the starter button on the wheel



TRACK TEST

ASTON MARTIN VICTOR



for the 7.3-litre, naturally aspirated V12. The starter motor whirrs, before firing and settling into a surprisingly cultured idle. Cosworth, Aston Martin's engine partner, was tasked with fettling the 7.3-litre V12. It stripped it down to its block, before completely rebuilding and tuning it. Cosworth's efforts has seen the power swell to 836bhp, underpinned with 605.5 lb ft of torque, a significant gain over the One-77's quoted 750bhp and 553 lb ft. Like the engine, that prototype One-77 carbon fibre monocoque chassis was sent back to its original supplier, Multimatic, and was essentially rebuilt as new.

Elements of Aston Martin's Vulcan track-only car are utilised, donating its inboard springs and dampers. Visible through the rear window there's six stage settings, Aston's chassis engineers having set it up to work on the road, as the owner intends on having it certified for road use. There are gorgeous centre-lock lattice alloy wheels of 20in, with 285/30 ZR20 front and 325/30 ZR20 rear tyres, behind which sit 380mm front and 360mm rear Brembo CMM-R carbon ceramic discs grasped by six-piston calipers. Those brakes promise GT3 race car levels of braking. Indeed, despite the intended eventual road use, that reference to

race cars isn't the only one Aston Martin quotes, stating that computational fluid dynamic testing reveals the Victor's unique body develops around 60 percent more downforce at 100mph in comparison to one of its Vantage GT4 race cars.

I'll be needing that aero effect today, to push the dry-liking Michelin Pilot Sport Cup 2 tyres through all the water that's just been deposited by a dark, British cloud over Silverstone's Stowe circuit. There's plenty of requirement for quick corrections with the steering because of all the standing water around, the puddles seeing the rear tyres losing purchase momentarily, before the traction control does its best to gather things up. It's not intrusive, aiding progress rather than preventing it, the Victor proving surprisingly easy to drive, even in such horrendous conditions.

The traction control, as well as the ABS, is variable via knobs on the steering wheel, the cut-top 'wheel', a retrimmed item lifted from the Vulcan. There are no paddles behind it though, because unlike both the Vulcan and One-77, there's a third pedal, and a walnut-topped manual gearstick situated in the transmission tunnel. Praise be.





That manual transmission elevates the Victor over any number of super and hypercars these days, it, admitting Lane, being included from the start because it made the project a bit easier. The gearbox is a Graziano six-speed mated to a racing clutch. Aston Martin's engineers have fiddled with the materials to make it work at road speeds. The pedal isn't light, but neither is it so heavy to be obstructive, the sizeable gear knob travelling through its movement with precision and ease.

Grabbing it as the V12 devours another gear while accelerating down the straight is an absolute joy, but it's when you're stood on the middle pedal and roll your foot off to blip the V12 to rev match for downshifts that the gearbox is so engaging. Such old-school thrills feel entirely right in a car with such a retro nod in its looks, defining its character. And it's a car that's absolutely brimming with it; from the incredible soundtrack and response of its naturally aspirated 7.3-litre V12 whose blaring exhaust pipes exit to the side of where my backside's situated, to the gearbox that helps orchestrate it and the playful nature of the chassis.

Embraced by a beautifully upholstered lightweight carbon fibre seat, the pedal spacing also proves to be perfect, with

the gearstick high and near the steering wheel to minimise the time with your hand off the wheel. That's proving useful with all the constant, and sometimes sizeable, corrections required today, as the track dries and the speeds increase. The steering is light, quick and accurate, though there's not a great deal of lock should the rear axle try to overtake the front. Don't ask how I know this... What's quickly apparent is how immersive and hugely entertaining it all is, the combination of its mighty, immediate response from that glorious V12, the strength of the brakes and the pedal's ample feel – and the racer's squealing that accompanies their use – you really revel in the drive.

It's biddable, too, ridiculous as that might sound when applied to something so potent, but within a few laps the Victor reveals a playfulness, starting to move around me, but doing so predictably, transitioning from grip to slip with ease. Entering the corner, you need to be patient, some slight initial understeer needing neutralising before the rear can be coaxed out into a slide.

There's no recalcitrance from the transmission, the clutch being easy to use, likewise the gearbox, while the engine's ►

TRACK TEST

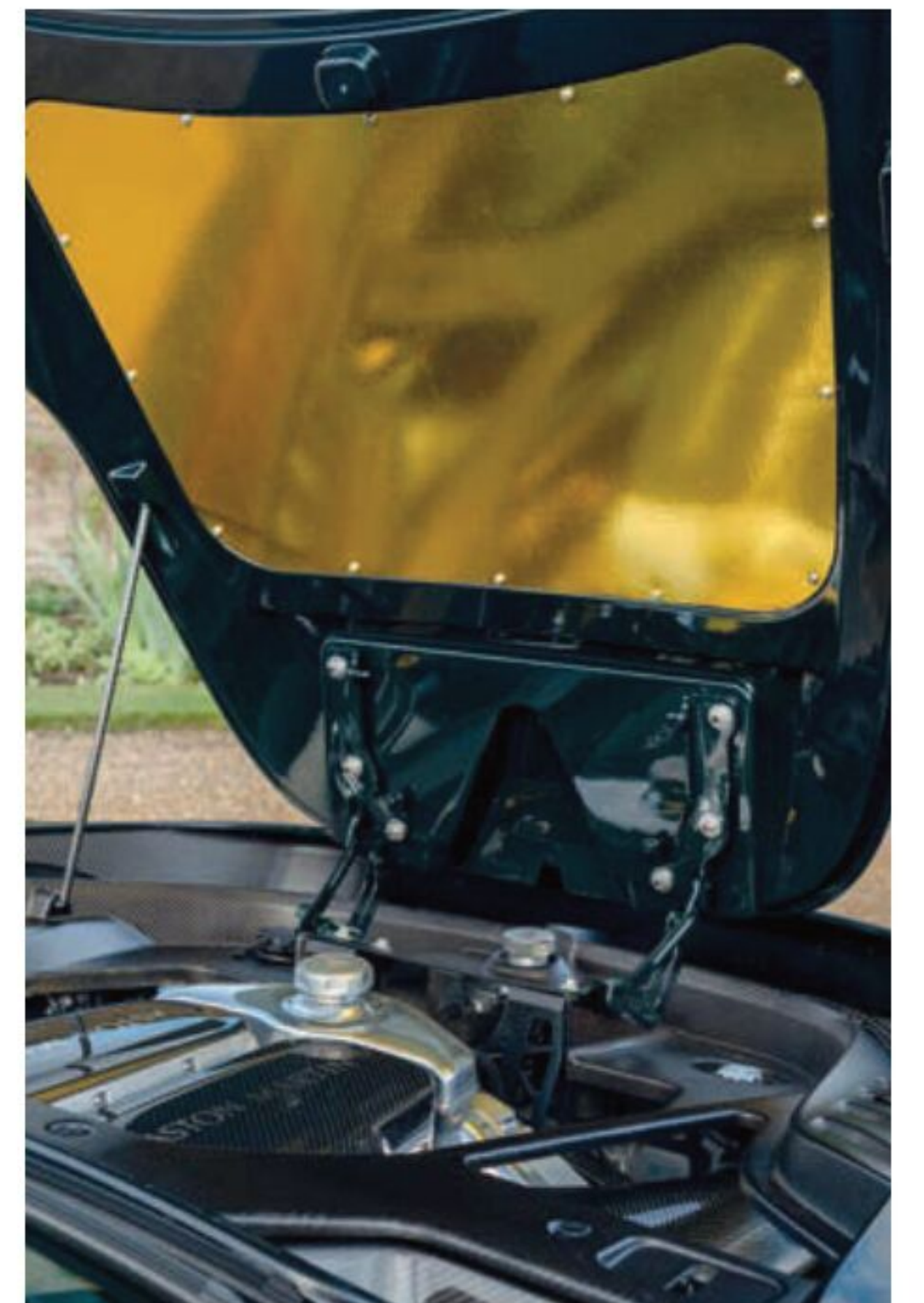
ASTON MARTIN VICTOR

mighty output is produced in such a linear fashion there's no concerns there either, with only the brake squeal being something that might prove tiresome with regular use. It feels, every bit, a proper involving driver's car, and despite the huge numbers associated with it, remarkably civilised, too.

Even so, the owner could, justifiably, park it up and gawp at it, because it's utterly captivating to look at. The Muncher and V8 Vantage references mix perfectly in its bespoke Pentland Green and satin carbon fibre bodywork, pictures not doing the Victor's beauty and proportions justice.

That's true inside, the Victor is a one-off that's built to production car standards, a sensational blend of traditional materials like solid walnut green leather and cashmere headlining with more technical surfaces in satin carbon fibre, anodised aluminium, and polished titanium. It's an exquisitely curated mix, with the result being stunning. However, a conventional instrument cluster, instead of the configurable TFT screen, would perhaps sit more suitably with the overall theme.

A project that Aston Martin says is unlikely ever to be repeated, not least because it no longer has any spare One-77 chassis lying around, the Victor's owner hasn't just got a unique car, but a genuinely incredible one, of the type we'd really love to see some more of. **AMD**



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V8 VOLANTE PoW

FIT FOR AKING

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY PAUL WALTON



When the then Prince of Wales ordered a standard-looking V8 Volante but with a Vantage engine, 22 customers ordered similar cars, creating a now mythical series. We track down a rare example to explain the history and significance of the V8 Volante PoW



MODEL PROFILE

V8 VOLANTE PoW

THE FRIENDS and family of the now HM King Charles III must have found it difficult to buy him birthday presents when he was still the Prince of Wales. What do you get the heir to the throne who has literally everything, including the Duchy of Cornwall's 135,000 acres, several significant London properties and even the Isles of Scilly?

While others no doubt settle on new socks, a novelty tie or perhaps a WHSmith gift voucher, when Charles visited Bahrain at around the same time as his 38th birthday in November 1986, the country's Emir, Isa bin Salman Al-Khalifa, offered to buy him a new Aston Martin.

His Royal Highness was no stranger to the brand, having owned





a DB6 Volante in Seychelles Blue (registration EBY776J) since 1969. A 21st birthday present from his mother, HM Queen Elizabeth II, the young prince apparently sought the advice of double F1 World Champion, Graham Hill, on how to drive the car properly. The blue Volante soon became common sight at royal functions and polo matches and over 50 years later the now King Charles III still owns it. But for the treasured car to meet the then prince's goal of lowering his personal carbon footprint, he had the classic Aston converted to run on what he described during a 2021 interview with the BBC as, "surplus English white wine and whey from the cheese process".

The then Prince of Wales took the Emir up on his generous offer, choosing the new Vantage Volante that had been recently announced at the 1986 British Motor Show. But while Charles appreciated the 400bhp that the 5.3-litre V8 produced, he felt the styling of the Vantage – which included a deep chin valance, side skirts and a bootlid spoiler – was too extreme for his tastes. What he wanted was a standard-looking Volante but with the higher powered engine.

Aston Martin's service and warrant department agreed to build such a model with the work overseen by manager Kingsley Riding-Felce. Due



MODEL PROFILE

V8 VOLANTE PoW



to the extra performance, the prince's car couldn't appear totally identical to the standard Volante since it needed a special chin spoiler, while slightly flared arches were required for the Vantage's larger 16in wheels and tyres. It featured the Vantage's famous bonnet bulge but the model's blanking plate in the radiator surround was replaced by the same style of simple mesh grille as the standard V8.

The prince himself chose British Racing Green with mushroom leather trim, green carpet and a dark green hood. With Riding-Felce's team looking after Charles' existing Aston Martin, they were able to incorporate several personal features into his new one.

"During the years that the prince had owned the DB6," said Riding-Felce during a recent interview, "I had always noticed a jar of sugar lumps for the polo ponies in its glovebox. Additionally, we were advised that the prince could never find a suitable place for his sunglasses. We therefore designed the centre armrest to accommodate a leather-trimmed sugar-lump jar and music cassettes, as well as converting the ashtray into a storage area with a lid to hold sunglasses." The car also had a Nardi steering wheel with a gear knob in matching veneer.

Riding-Felce personally handed the unique Volante (now registered D534HYX) over to Prince Charles at his Gloucestershire home, Highgrove House, on 17 July 1987. As with his DB6, His Royal Highness would use the green Volante a lot over the coming years, covering an impressive 46,000 miles.

But in 1994 and after being loaned such a car by Aston Martin, Prince Charles ordered another special Volante, this time a Virage that again looked standard but was powered by the 6.3-litre version of the V8. After consulting the Emir of Bahrain, the Prince of Wales decided to sell his birthday-gifted V8 Volante for charity. It was eventually sold by Sotheby's in December 1995 for £111,500, with all of the proceeds donated to The Prince of Wales Charities Trust for distribution across various good causes.

Impressed by Charles' original V8 Volante and the discreet power it offered, Aston's then chairman, Victor Gauntlett, ordered a similar example for himself. With the order book noting, 'Build to PoW specification', it's thought this was the first time this now iconic model name was used.

Gauntlett wasn't alone in appreciating the specification though, since Aston Martin would build another 22 similar

cars for UK customers between 1987 and 1989. An additional five examples were then made to US-specification that shared most of the cosmetic features of Prince Charles' car but had less-powerful fuel-injected engines and rubber bumpers.

Although a special order and every example being slightly different, meaning there's no definitive specification, these cars are now collectively known as the 'PoW' model. Their perfect mix of discreet looks but high performance have seen them become some of the most highly sought after V8-engined Astons with values to match.

As I watch Neal Garrard from leading marque specialist, Nicholas Mee, manoeuvre the Windsor Blue example, featured here, out of the showroom where it's currently for sale and into the stark autumnal sunlight, the popularity is easy to understand. The lack of bodykit makes the crisp lines closer to those of the car's original designer, William Towns, yet the flared arches, big lattice wheels and front valance still give the car an imposing presence. With its perfect proportions, quad-headlight treatment and mesh grille, it's difficult to think of a prettier car from the era. ►



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MODEL PROFILE

V8 VOLANTE PoW

Although the layout of the interior was considered old-fashioned when this 1989 example was produced, as I ease myself down into the large seats that are upholstered in thick Magnolia leather and gaze across the generous swathe of rich veneer that dominates the dash, there's no denying its atmosphere of handmade luxury that more mass-produced grand tourers of the time, such as the Mercedes-Benz SEC or Porsche 928, miss out on. "It's all very simple, uncluttered, elegant and couldn't be anything other than the facia of a traditional British thoroughbred," said *Performance Car* magazine in its June 1987 issue about the Vantage Volante.

The big V8 rumbles into life the moment I twist the key, soon settling down into a deep, baritone growl. Neal tells me this is the only one of the 22 PoW cars, including Charles' own, to have been fitted with the three-speed automatic transmission rather than the five-speed manual. So, I ease the chubby lever down into drive, grab the beautiful Nardi wood-rimmed wheel and slowly move forward.

Driving the PoW is a series of contradictions. With the standard Volante weighing around 1,850kg and being 1,829mm wide, it's a big, heavy and substantial car and even with fingertip-light power steering, I'm constantly aware of its bulk. Driving the blue convertible through the quiet country roads that surround Nicholas Mee's Hertfordshire premises is like trying to thread a needle with a shoelace. But at slow speeds the V8 is docile and easy to control, which together with the supple suspension easing away any bumps in the road caused by the hard British winter, results in a smooth, easy and effortless ride.

And then, with the road ahead of me clear, I finally gun the throttle hard, the automatic 'box dropping down to second the instant I do. The resultant acceleration now has the hard edge you'd expect 400bhp to have, the majestic engine in front of me pulling long and hard until the transmission finally changes into top. But even then the power doesn't end, the car continues to accelerate hard until an oncoming corner means I need to start to



brake gently, the now accurate steering enabling me to safely negotiate the bend.

Due to their handsome looks but massive performance, even without the royal involvement, the rare PoW series of cars would be special. But with their origins coming from a car once owned by the heir to the British throne – who's now monarch – it means the 22 examples really are fit for a king. **AMD**

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DBR2 RE-CREATION
**MODERN
TAKE**

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY PAUL WALTON



By being based on a 1966 DB6 but converted in the Nineties, this modern interpretation of a DBR2 is as close to the real thing as a re-creation can get. We look at the car's background before experiencing the formidable machine for ourselves



AS I floor the pedal hard, the action resulting in a strong, sudden and violent burst of speed, I have an immediate sense of what (Sir) Stirling Moss, Roy Salvadori and many other legendary Aston Martin drivers must have experienced during the Fifties. But it's not just the speed or handling that's causing this – as a replica of an Aston Martin DBR2, those aspects of the car are a given – but by the distinctive aroma coming into the cockpit.

Although I've never driven a genuine DBR2 before, I have driven other Fifties racing cars including a Jaguar C- and ►

CLASSIC TEST

DBR2 RE-CREATION

D-type and they both had the same unique smell of burnt oil and petrol as this one, making it more than anything, feel like it's the real thing.

The reason for the aromatic accuracy is simple; although hand-built in the early Nineties, this fabulous re-creation of one of Aston Martin's most famous racers is heavily based on a 1966 DB6 saloon (including its original running gear) meaning, mechanically at least, it gets as close to the real thing as any re-creation can get. And I'm not just talking about the smell.

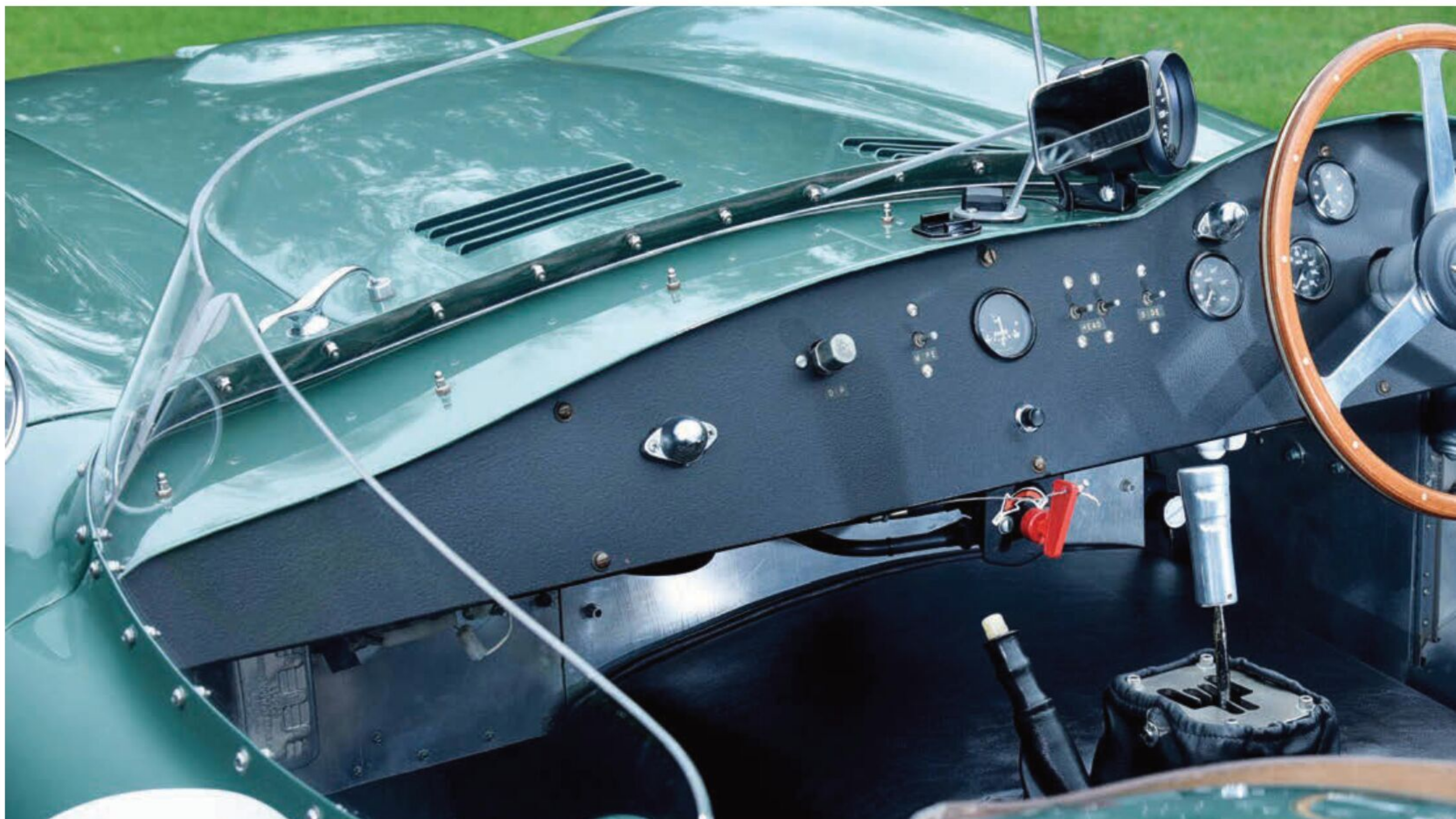
The donor vehicle was a 1966 right-hand-drive DB6 saloon, chassis DB62757, that was originally bought by a Los Angeles-based film director. He used the DB6 for a short time while living and working in the UK, returning the car to Newport Pagnell for its first service at 500 miles. The Aston was then shipped to America where it was involved in a series of accidents over several years that resulted in the body being removed. In the late Eighties the running chassis was





CLASSIC TEST

DBR2 RE-CREATION



transported to New Zealand to be turned into one of five re-creations of the Aston Martin DBR2 by Tempero, a specialist in building replicas of Fifties and Sixties racing cars.

On the face of it the DBR2 was perhaps an unusual choice for a replica since only two genuine examples were produced and in terms of results it wasn't as successful as the earlier DBR1. Yet victories aren't everything and the DBR2 was also one of the best-looking endurance racing cars from the late Fifties.

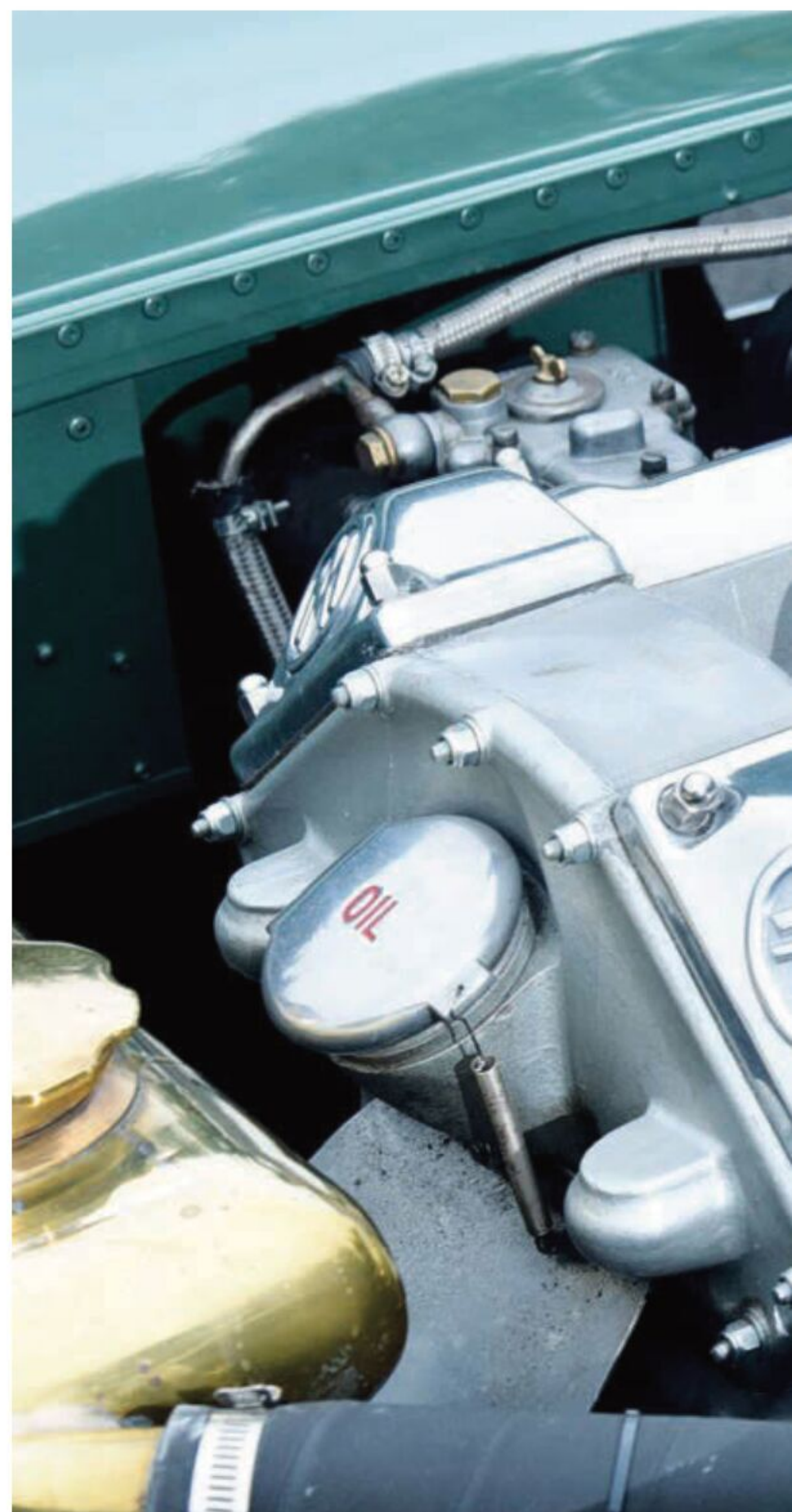
Based on the same chassis as the Lagonda 166 V12-engined racing car from 1955, it was instead powered by the new Tadek Marek-designed 3.7-litre straight-six and featured the same suspension as the DBR1.

The DBR2 made its competition debut at the 1957 24 Hours of Le Mans in June, but the sole example retired after eight hours because of gearbox failure. In September the same year, this first car together with a newly completed second were entered into the Daily Express Trophy meeting at Silverstone. In the hands of Roy Salvadori, the second car – now called DBR2/2 – finished first while Noël Cunningham-Reid in the first car – DBR2/1 – as two places behind.

"It was a very pleasant car to drive," wrote Roy Salvadori in his 1985 biography, *Racing Driver*, "with the reliable five-speed gearbox unit with the engine, it was possible to turn in really quick laps without feeling the car was being pushed too hard."

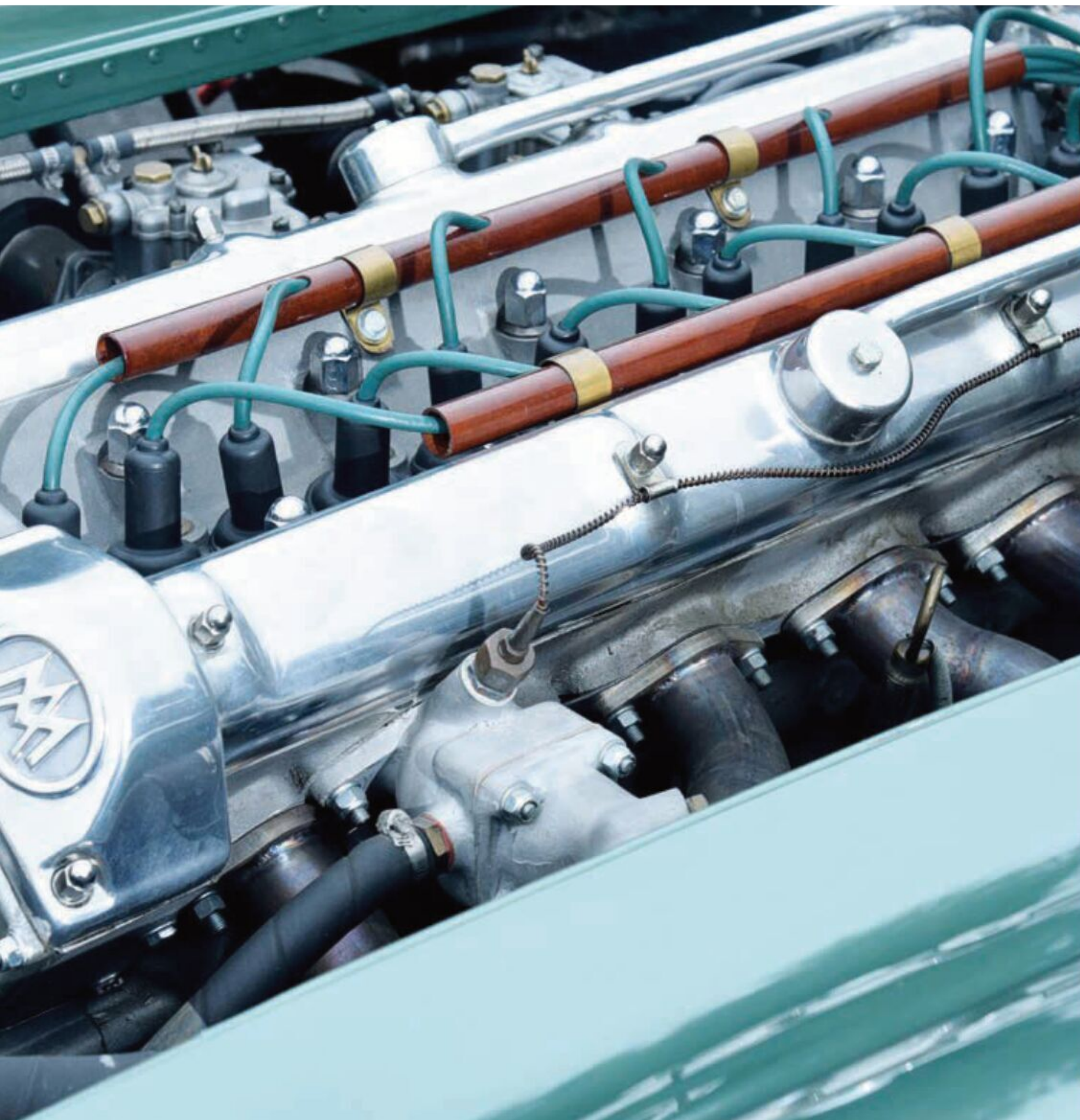
Due to new rules introduced by motorsport's governing body, the FIA, for the 1958 season that outlawed engines over 3.0 litres, the DBR2 was relegated to non-championship races. With their engines now increased to 3.9 litres, the highlights from this period include Stirling Moss winning that year's Goodwood Sussex Trophy plus the Oulton Park British Empire Trophy. Both cars were then shipped to America for the 1959 season when their engines were enlarged to 4.2 litres.

But with the DBR1's racing programme taking up most of the team's time, the DBR2 wasn't as well developed as it perhaps should have been and was often outperformed by the competition. "The poor old DBR2," wrote Stirling Moss in his 1987 biography, *My Cars, My Career*, about the time he raced one in the Los Angeles Times Grand Prix at Riverside, California. "Despite its enlarged engine, the car was completely outclassed. It pulled 149mph





Stirling Moss
on his way to
winning the 1958
Sussex Trophy at
Goodwood driving
DBR2/1



on a 3.25:1 back axle in practice, against Richie Ginther's older 4.1 Ferrari pulling 165!"

The DBR2 project came to an end when Aston Martin announced it was pulling out of sports car racing in late 1959 to concentrate on its ill-fated Formula One effort the following year. The two examples were subsequently sold but survive and are regularly seen at historic events on both sides of the Atlantic.

This fascinating history together with its handsome lines makes the DBR2 a favourite for companies like Tempero that has its origins in a coachbuilding firm started by Errol Tempero in 1949.

According to his grandson, Rod Tempero, four of the replicas (including the one based on DB62757) were commissioned by the now defunct Fine Sports Cars, a classic car specialist based in La Jolla, California, while the fifth was for an Australian customer. Rod also tells me that Fine Sports Cars – founded by former professional racing driver, Bill Freeman – supplied the chassis that were a mix of the DB5, DB6 and DBS.

Although the fate of the others isn't known, Rod says when the re-creation based on DB62757 was finished in 1993 it was sent back to the US when it became

CLASSIC TEST

DBR2 RE-CREATION

part of a large collection of classic cars owned by former navy pilot and millionaire industrialist, Robert Pond. "I always had three cars when I needed one, and six cars when I needed two," said Pond during a 1999 interview, "and now today I have 100 cars and I need one, but these are the cars that I love."

When Pond passed away in 2008, his collection was sold and the DBR2 was bought by another enthusiast, Gary Faulds from Montana. Occasionally using it to take his kids to school, he fitted a taller Perspex screen which was later removed.

In preparation to sell the car, in 2011, Faulds sent the DBR2 to a California-based racing car specialist, Virtuoso Performance, spending around \$40k to make it more roadworthy which included fitting a middle silencer and quieter exhaust. The ignition was replaced with an MSD unit including a rev-limiter, the starter was swapped for a high-torque unit to ensure starting in extreme conditions and the brake system was completely rebuilt including calipers, master cylinders and flexi-hoses.

It was in 2012 when an advert for the car caught the eye of current owner and long-term Aston enthusiast, Ron Powell, who flew over to California, where it was

for sale, to inspect and subsequently buy the car.

Although Ron was living and working in Abu Dhabi at the time, he had the replica shipped to the UK and delivered to established marque specialist, Aston Workshop, in his native north-east of England. The first change he asked for was to have the exhaust replaced with something more suitable.

Whenever he drove the car, Ron would often hear a rattle which was eventually traced to damage to the cylinder's skirts, caused by water getting into the block. Since the engine needed to be rebuilt anyway, the capacity of the DB6's original 3.7 litres was increased to 4.2.

The car was later involved in a minor accident which damaged the offside rear corner. Although disappointed, it also gave Ron the opportunity to resolve a couple of small issues.

With Aston Workshop in charge of the repairs, the chassis was sent to established racing car restorer, R&J Simpson of Tamworth, to have the damaged corner rebuilt while Clive Smart of Shapecraft in Northampton looked after the aluminium body. Due to previously rebuilding DBR2/1 for its

owner, Anthony Bamford, Clive reckoned the front grille of Ron's car wasn't totally accurate so he reshaped it at the same time, making it more representative of the real thing.

When Ron bought the DBR2 re-creation – now officially described in its British registration document as a 'DB6 Roadster' – it was in an incorrect shade of dark green. After much research, it was repainted in Aston Martin Racing Sage Green, circa 1958. The post-accident rebuild took almost a year to complete, but once finished Ron has used the car regularly at events in both the UK and Abu Dhabi – including a trackday at the Yas Marina F1 Grand Prix Circuit – and many who see the re-creation often mistake it for the real thing.

Despite knowing the car's background, even I need to ask Ron if it's definitely not genuine when we meet at Aston Workshop where the car is having some minor remedial work. It's not just the inch-perfect shape, evocative colour or exact detailing that makes me think this, but by sitting on the correct Ruote Borrani wire wheels that Ron replaced the smaller wire wheels it came with, it has the same imposing stance as a genuine DBR2. ►



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DBR2 RE-CREATION



Considering the time and effort it's taken to get the car to this condition, I'm not just honoured when Ron offers me a drive, but also excited and a little daunted too. It might not be the real thing but with Ron reckoning the 4.2-litre engine produces around 310-320bhp yet with the car weighing a mere 925kg, it still promises to be just as formidable as the genuine Jaguar models I mentioned at the start.

After opening the flimsy aluminium door, I swing my left and then right legs over the wide sill before easing my way down behind the large wood-rimmed steering wheel. The interior is as per a genuine DBR2; stark, basic and with few, if any, creature comforts. The dash is dominated by a huge white-on-black Smiths rev-counter in front of me with the minor dials scattered down the length of the black-painted aluminium. The feeling that the car was constructed in the Fifties rather than the Nineties is further heightened by the switches marked with the same style of embossed Dymo labels as every other Fifties and Sixties racing car I've driven. The only concession to modernity is a speedo mounted on the top of the dash which I'll no doubt need, plus a bright red kill switch underneath that I hope I won't.

The 4.2-litre engine starts instantly, a loud, noticeable bark erupting from the

exhaust as it does so. In September 2015 the car was returned to Aston Workshop to have a multi-branch manifold and side-mounted exhaust designed and fitted with what Ron describes as, "for track use but with consideration to sound and noise levels". At the same time, a twin spark plug head and high-compression pistons were also added.

Beneath the new racier body, the car still uses the same running gear as the donor DB6 including the five-speed gearbox, so I'm pleasantly surprised to discover how easy it is to slot into first and then pull away. But with an empty road ahead of me, when I gently squeeze the throttle it throws me forward with a hard, noisy and violent acceleration that's both shocking but also addictive. Although I'm sure a hot hatch would be quicker, the immediacy of the engine's reaction together with the exposure of the open cockpit and yes, that distinctive smell of a classic engine when hot, makes the car much more of an experience than any modern car.

The five-speed transmission is stiff but precise and I soon learn that the rougher I am, the better the changes. With a little practice I'm soon snicking the short, angled lever down into third, balancing the throttle through a long bend before

nailling the throttle at the exit. As the car immediately accelerates in a noisy blast of burnt fuel, I'm no longer in County Durham but transported to France and the famed Circuit de la Sarthe for the 1957 24 Hours of Le Mans.

Through the huge wheel, the steering is as precise as any Fifties-style of sports car based on a Sixties GT can be which is largely accurate but can occasionally suffer from a little vagueness. Yet I'm still able to scythe effortlessly through bends with the same confidence as Roy Salvadori obviously had at Silverstone.

Following an all-too-brief drive, it's time to head back to Aston Workshop's premises where I reluctantly hand the car over to Ron. Although its performance can be shockingly hard, needing all my powers of concentration to keep it out of the nearest ditch, it can also be surprisingly easy too, no doubt the result of its DB6 origins.

I may not be a legendary Aston Martin driver like those who piloted the original DBR2 were, but thanks to the easy way in which this well-engineered re-creation delivers its huge amounts of power, I now feel – and certainly smell – as if I am. **AMD**

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



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TADEUSZ 'TADEK' MAREK

POWER SUPPLY

WORDS RICHARD GUNN
ARCHIVE IMAGES KELSEY ARCHIVE

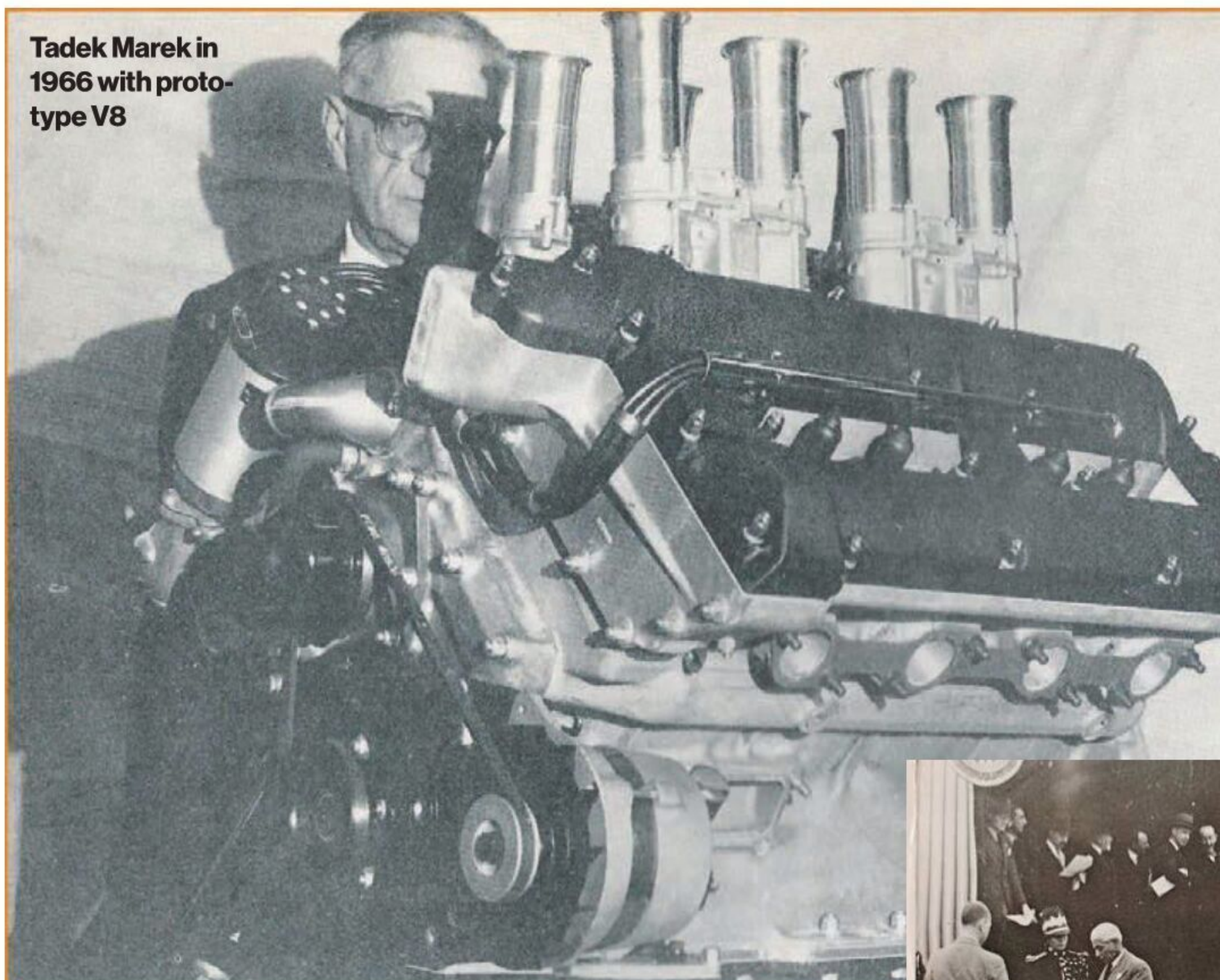
During the second world war, Tadeusz Marek, a Polish refugee fled to England. He'd later pay back the country that gave him shelter – and his employee, Aston Martin – by designing two of the greatest British engines ever

BEHIND EVERY great sports car, there's a great engine. And it usually follows that behind every great engine, there's a great engineer too. In the case of Tadek Marek, chief engineer for Aston Martin, his 15 years at Feltham and Newport Pagnell saw him mastermind not just one but two of the marque's most significant power units. It was thanks to him that the DB4, DB5, DB6 and DBS had such superior and intoxicating performance for their eras. And it was also down to him that the V8 engine that superseded the straight-sixes in these Fifties and Sixties DB models was mighty and muscular enough to see Aston Martin through to the dawn of the 21st century. He was a talented, experienced and inventive engineer, and a perfectionist, and he brought those attributes to the table when he joined Aston Martin in his mid-40s. Prior to that



though, his life had already been packed with adventure and ingenuity.

Tadek (or rather Tadeusz, to give him his full first name) Marek was born in Kraków, Poland's second largest city, during 1908. Although a very historic city full of beautiful architecture, this former capital of Poland was also one of the country's main industrial centres during the early 20th century. So, it's probably unsurprising that the young Marek was fascinated by engineering as a boy; at the age of 14, he rebuilt a military surplus Ford Model T left over from the first world war. However, his interest soon switched from four wheels to two, when he acquired his first motorcycle, a French-built Alcyon. This primitive machine nearly killed him when its belt-drive snapped and thumped him in the back, leaving him barely able to breathe for four hours. Suffice to say, the Alcyon was soon upgraded for more sophisticated, less mechanically dicey rides; first a water-cooled



Tadek Marek in 1966 with prototype V8



▲ Tadek Marek with his first motorbike in 1927

▼ The last Monte Carlo Rally that Tadek Marek competed in was the 1939, event, in an Opel Olympia he considered to be awful. He still finished fifth in class though



▼ Tadek Marek's six-cylinder engine for Aston Martin went on to power DB4s, DB5s, DB6s and DBSs

four-cylinder Indian and then a BMW.

Academically, his further education took him to Charlottenburg Technical Institute in Berlin, where he studied engineering and eventually graduated with a diploma in the subject. He combined his studies with motorbike racing, using the BMW, and was reasonably successful up until 1928 and

the point when he crashed into a fallen rider on a banked circuit, was catapulted over the banking, and landed in the refreshment tent, apparently demolishing its supply of soda bottles in the process. He was in hospital for eight months and although he did subsequently replace his destroyed BMW with a racing Norton, it seems that this second close shave with a motorcycle effectively

ended his two-wheeled competition career.

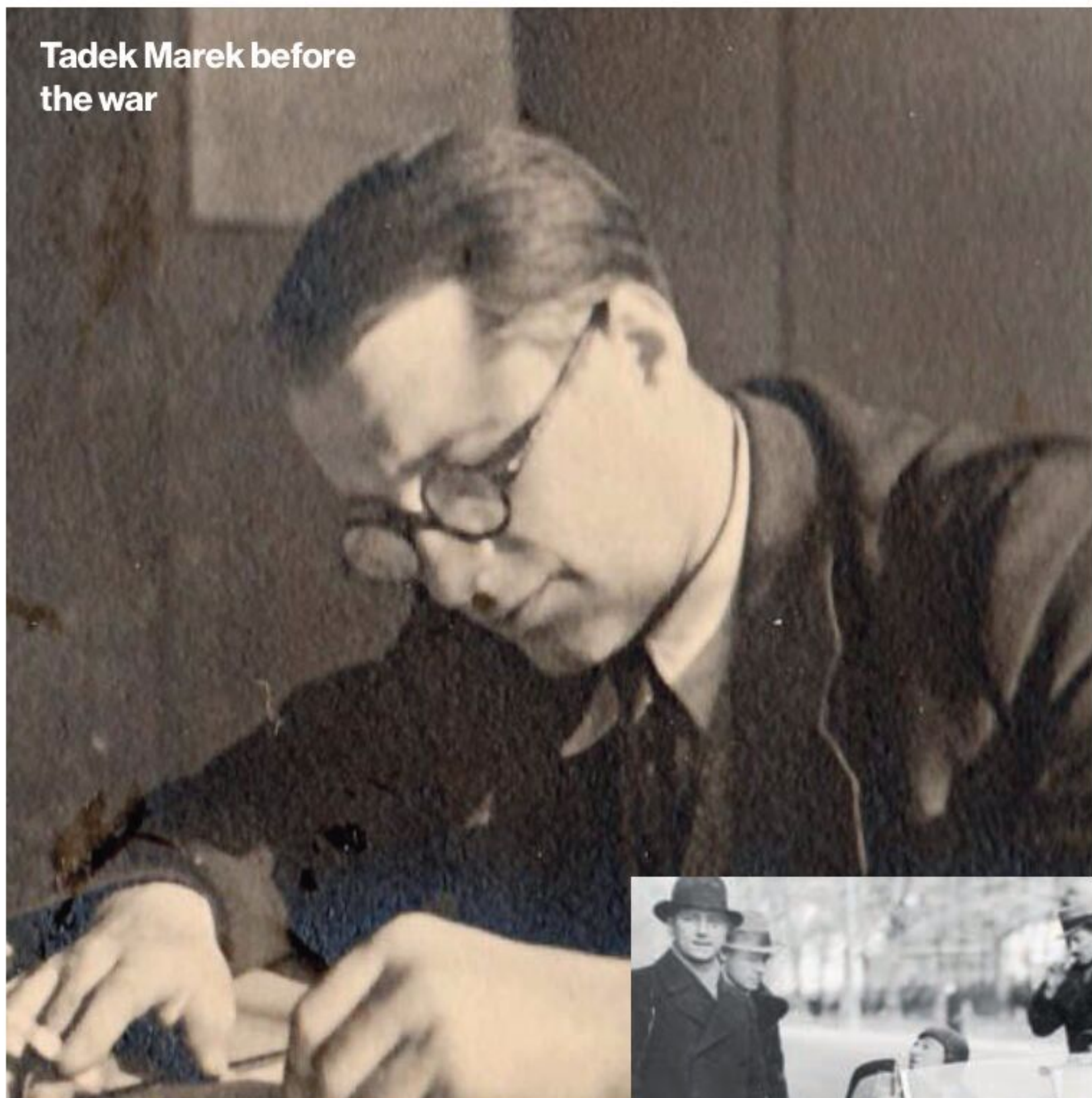
Perhaps feeling that four wheels were a somewhat safer proposition, he started taking part in car rallies, speed trials and hill climbs. By now he was working for a subsidiary of Fiat in Poland, so his choice of racer was, naturally, a car built by the firm that employed him. Increasing success prompted him to enter the 1937 Monte Carlo Rally, starting from Palermo, the capital of Sicily. He'd prepared his Fiat 1100 Special himself, but its brakes had failed before he got off the island and he had to drive nearly 200 miles without any before he could get spares to fix them in Naples. Snow in the Dolomites prevented him reaching Monte Carlo ▶



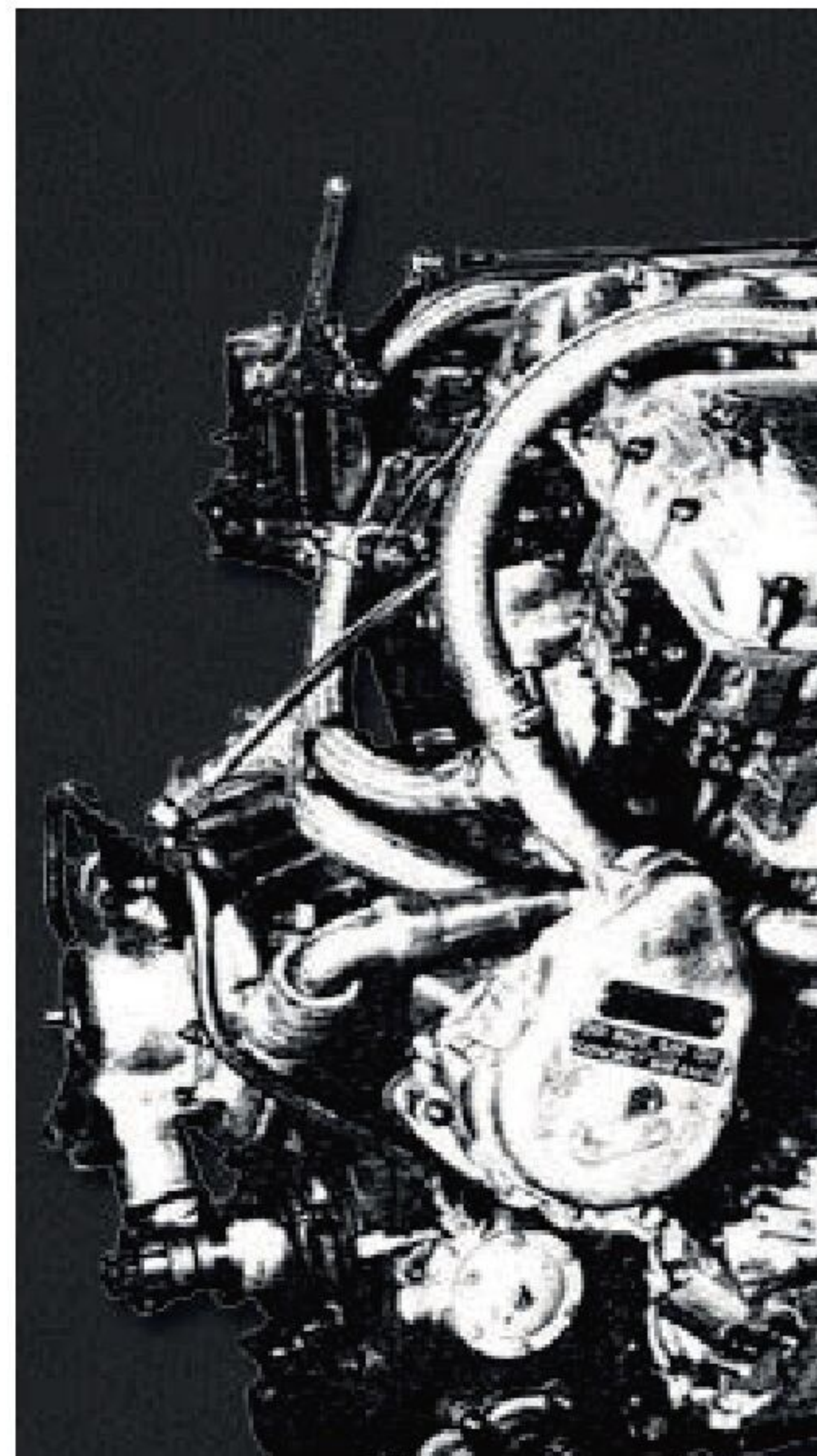
BIOGRAPHY

TADEUSZ 'TADEK' MAREK

Tadek Marek before the war



► Tadek Marek was involved with developing the Rolls-Royce and Rover Meteor V12 tank engine during the war



► Tadek Marek in his Fiat 1100 Special, on his first Monte Carlo Rally in 1937



▼ Tadek Marek's reworking of the W O Bentley Lagonda six-cylinder engine first saw the light of day in the Aston Martin DB MkIII, with the motor dubbed the DBA

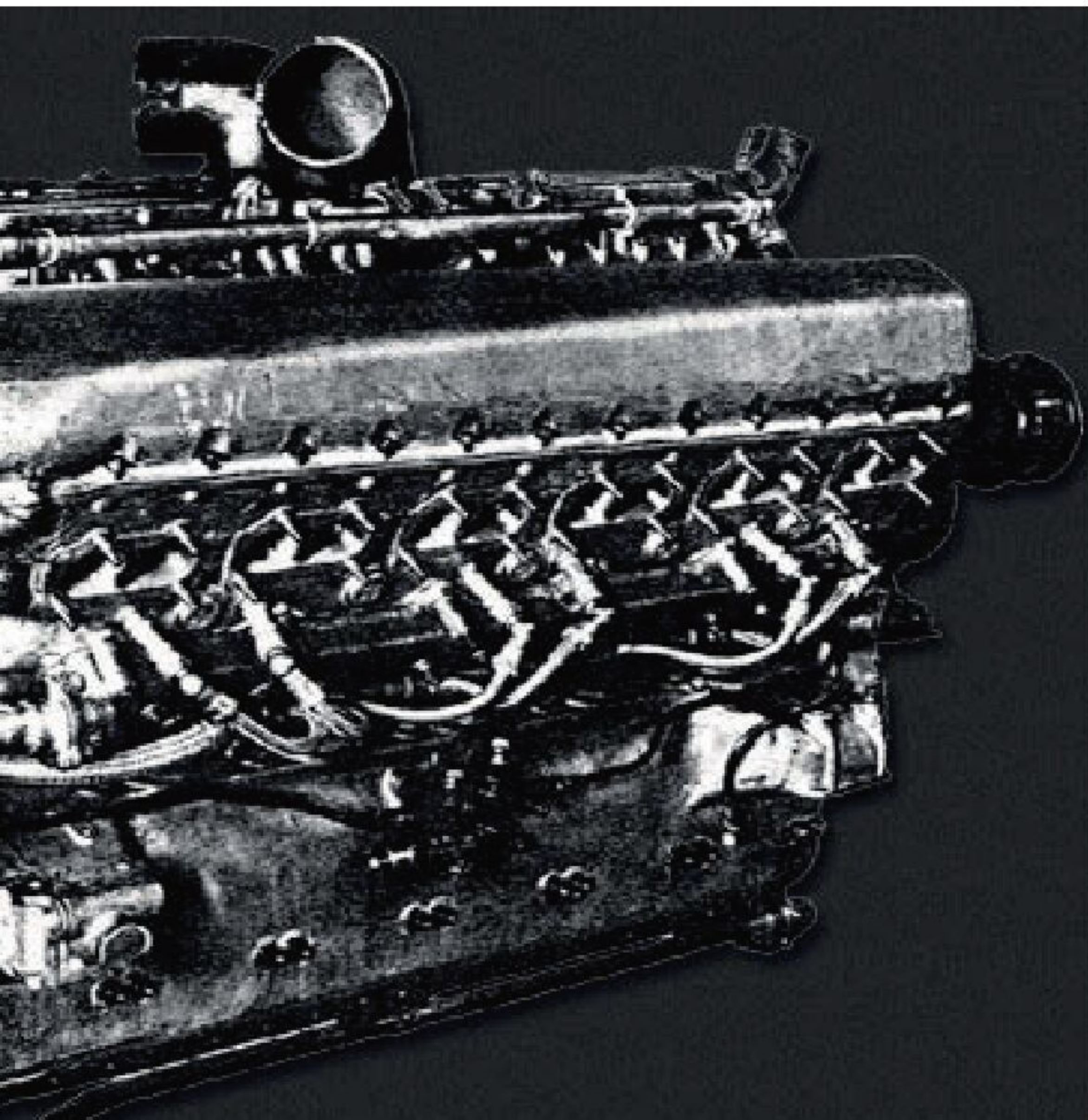
that year, but in 1938 he tried again, this time from Athens and in a Lancia Aprilia. The dreadful roads of Yugoslavia caused its front suspension to collapse, but Marek jerry-rigged it up and managed to finish. He was back again for 1939 and, having left Fiat to work for General Motors, had graduated to an Opel Olympia. He quickly formed the opinion that it was 'an awful car', but he still managed to be the only finisher from his starting point of Tallinn in Estonia to arrive without any penalties. Overall, he was fifth in his class. One of his last triumphs was winning the XII Rally Poland in 1939, using a Chevrolet Master, before the second world war intervened.

Marek joined the Polish Army as a lance corporal, but his country soon fell to invasions by Germany from

the west and the USSR from the east. He was initially interned but later managed to flee to the-then neutral Romania as a refugee. He managed to get hold of a German Embassy car on diplomatic plates and, with that, some forged papers, and his excellent command of the German language, promptly returned to Poland to try and rescue a girlfriend. Unfortunately, she couldn't be found, but he and a friend did help 20 other people escape occupied Poland instead.

News of his exploits reached the Polish government in exile in France, and he was asked to organise a convoy of 20 diplomatic limousines there. At the Yugoslavian/Hungarian border, a guard proved troublesome and wasn't going to let them pass – until Marek recognised him from





a previous Monte Carlo Rally, and they were courteously ushered through the crossing point instead.

Safely in Paris, Marek heard about a new Hispano Suiza factory at Tarbes, in the south-west of the country. He decided to apply there for a job as a designer. Except, when he arrived, there was no factory – its construction hadn't even begun. By the time he got back to Paris in June 1940, the Nazis were closing in and the city was being evacuated. Marek decided to try and get to Britain, but with the short, northern route now

impossible, he used his trusty old Fiat 1100 to carry himself, and six other escapees, to Madrid, where he had to rebuild its tired engine. They then carried on to Casablanca in Morocco. There, Marek and his friends survived by making buttons out of gramophone records, before being arrested for not having a work permit. After release, they turned their hands to making soap out of fish fat, while they waited for the British Consul in Tangiers to organise safe passage to the UK. Bureaucracy meant the process took four months.

Marek arrived in England in ►

'He was a talented, experienced and inventive engineer, and a perfectionist, and he brought those attributes to the table when he joined Aston Martin in his mid-40s'



◀ Tadek Marek's reworking of the W O Bentley Lagonda six-cylinder engine was christened the DBA

▼ While at Austin, Marek worked on the development of the C-Series engine, used in Austin Westminsters and six-cylinder Austin-Healeys



BIOGRAPHY

TADEUSZ 'TADEK' MAREK

early 1941. The lance corporal was promoted to an honorary major and put in charge of design at a tank factory under the auspices of the Polish Army Institute of Research. From 1944, he was involved with developing the Rolls-Royce/Rover Meteor V12 engine for use in the post-war Centurion tank.

After all his wartime adventures in mainland Europe, the Germans were nearly able to finish him off during one of the last bombing raids on London, destroying where he was living in Finchley. Still, it wasn't all bad news; via the relief workers who helped him, he met the woman, Peggy, who would become his wife. After hostilities ended, the new Mr and Mrs Marek went back to Germany to help out as part of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Association. When they returned to Britain, Marek had a period of unemployment before, in 1949, accepting a position with Austin at Birmingham's Longbridge factory as an engine designer. He was heavily involved in the six-cylinder C-series engine, which found its way into the Austin Westminster and Austin-Healey 100/6. He also came up with a V8 engine using parts from the four-cylinder 1.2-litre unit fitted to early Austin A40s, but it was considered too costly to produce.

It seems that the rejection of this, his first V8 engine, upset Marek and he departed Austin in 1951 to return to the world of tanks, including the project to create an amphibious Centurion. But then, in 1953, a vacancy became available at Aston Martin, following the departure of Eberan von Eberhorst who'd joined in 1950 to design the DB3 racer. At his interview at the main David Brown HQ in Huddersfield, he



The young Tadek Marek

was pretty much told that he'd got the job. A no-doubt jubilant Marek took a trip to Sicily with his wife, only to return to a letter telling him that there was no position after all. Many people might have accepted that as something that was just not meant to be, but Marek wanted to know why a role he'd been practically assured was his had suddenly disappeared. He didn't just write a letter; he returned to Yorkshire to demand a proper explanation. And it was just as well that he did, for it turned out that he'd been sent the letter in error. There was still a position open, and Aston Martin wanted Marek for it. His initial project was revamping the W.O.





▲ The DB4 was the first Aston Martin to use Marek's own design of six-cylinder engine

▼ After the DBS initially appeared with the DB6's six-cylinder engine, it finally got the Marek V8 engine always intended for it in 1969

He'd prepared his Fiat 1100 Special himself, but its brakes failed and he had to drive nearly 200 miles without any before he could get spares to fix them in Naples'



Bentley-designed straight-six engine that had powered Aston Martins and Lagondas from 1948 onwards. Much work had already been done, with its capacity being pushed from 2.6 to 2.9 litres, but for the 1957's DB Mk III model, Marek successfully made the cast-iron block stiffer and revised the crankshaft, inlet and exhaust manifolds, oil pump and engine, improving the breathing along the way. Known at Aston Martin as the DBA, this engine raised power to 162bhp, compared to 140bhp in the DB2/4, and by 1959 had been further modified into the DBC, a £350 competition-spec option boasting 214bhp. Marek had a

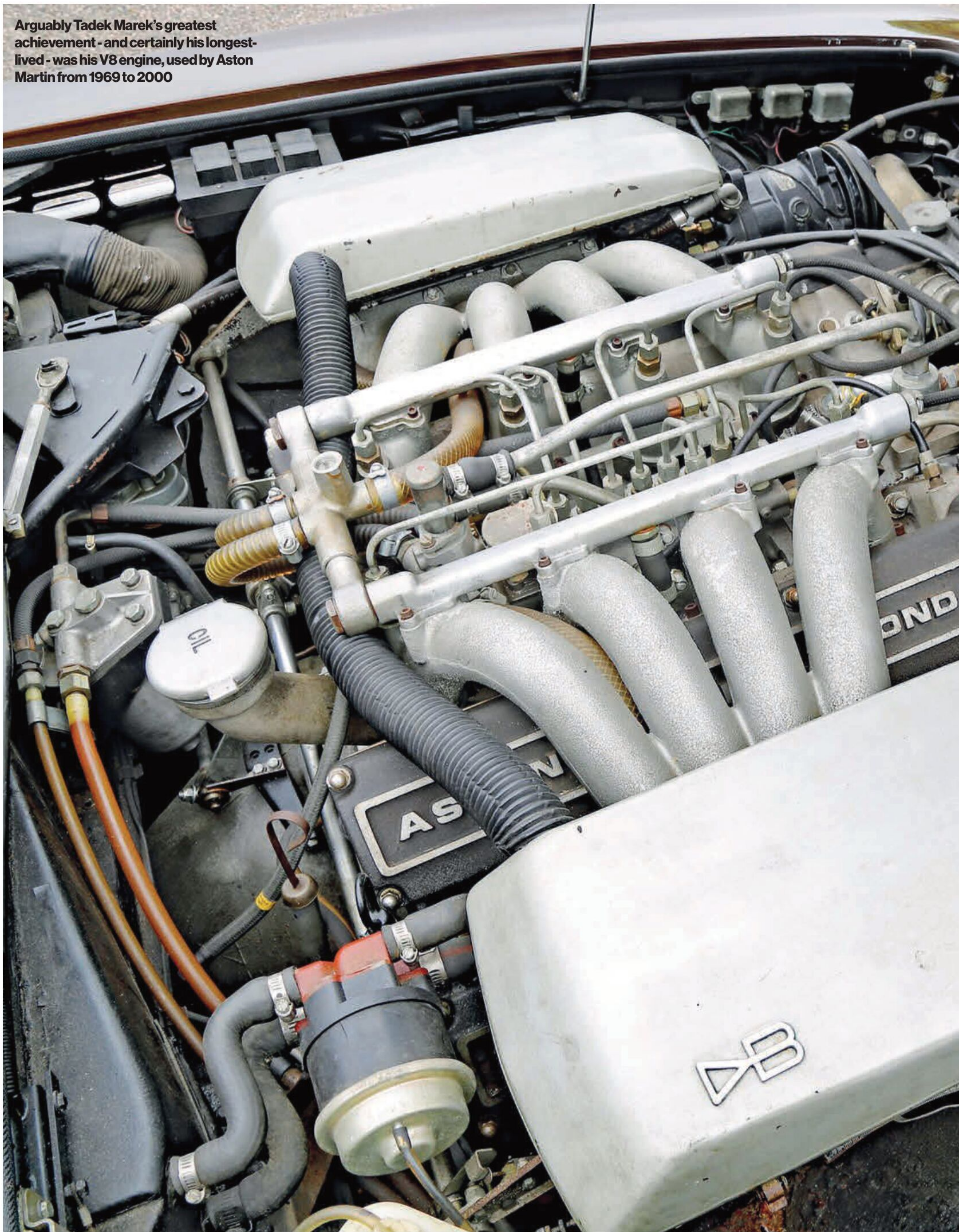
DBA retro-fitted in his personal DB2, which he complemented with a Maserati five-speed transmission. It proved much faster and more flexible than standard.

Reworking what had come before was one thing, but Marek's next task was to come up with his own engine. Development on Project 186 – which would become the DB4's all-alloy 3.7-litre unit – began towards the end of 1955. It seems the alloy block was something of a happy accident; as originally conceived, it was meant to be iron, but the foundry producing it had no spare capacity for iron work. It did, however, have space for alloy castings.

BIOGRAPHY

TADEUSZ 'TADEK' MAREK

Arguably Tadek Marek's greatest achievement - and certainly his longest-lived - was his V8 engine, used by Aston Martin from 1969 to 2000



Designed from scratch, a quad-cam 4.8-litre V8 prototype was being tested by 1965, by Marek himself in a stretched DB5'

Before two years had passed, Marek's new six-pot found itself in the new DBR2 sports racers. This was firmly against its creator's wishes, as he felt he hadn't solved the specific temperature issues of an all-alloy engine and didn't want it ultra-stressed by motorsport. Nevertheless, the two DBR2s proved quite successful and provided valuable real-world experience that assisted the road engine development programme.

Outside of racing, Marek's 3.7-litre straight-six was first installed in the 1958 DB4. It wasn't a complete success, with a tendency for oil pressure problems and blown gaskets, although these issues were largely resolved for its subsequent DB5, DB6 and DBS incarnations. With that out of the way, he was free to return to an earlier theme, a V8.

Work on this kicked off in 1962, intended to bring even greater power and performance to both Aston Martin's road and race machines. Designed from scratch, a quad-cam 4.8-litre prototype was being tested by 1965, by Marek himself in a stretched DB5. It followed the pattern of his previous motor, with an alloy block and heads. This time, recognising that racing had actually proved to be a valuable proving ground, Marek was happier to see his engine trialled in two Lola T70s at the 1967 Le Mans 24 Hours. Both cars failed early

on, leading to the realisation that their blocks simply weren't tough enough. This was awkward for Aston, as its forthcoming DBS, due to be launched in October 1967, was intended to utilise the V8. In the end, the DB6's 4.0-litre straight-six was carried through to the DBS and the new engine was only installed in what was christened the DBS V8 in 1969, when there was enough confidence that the 5.3-litre 325bhp powerhouse was both reliable and strong enough.

By that time, Marek had retired from Aston Martin, leaving during 1968. He and his wife had a 15th century cottage by the Grand Union Canal in Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire, which they'd renovated themselves, but they'd also purchased a villa at Terracina in Italy, on the coast between Rome and Naples – suggesting that Aston Martin's wages must have been quite generous. By contrast to what had been an adventurous and exciting life, he and Peggy spent their later years peacefully and quietly, until Tadek Marek passed away in 1982, aged 74.

Arguably his greatest invention, Aston's long-lived V8, survived him by many years, finally going out of production in 2000 with the Virage. This Polish engineer's biggest legacy will always be one of Britain's best-loved and most celebrated engines. Well, two of them, in fact. **AMD**





**1997
DB7 3.2**



**1997
840Ci 4.4**

Which do we prefer out of this still popular pair of Nineties coupes – the traditional Aston Martin DB7 or the more modern BMW 840Ci? There's only one way for us to find out...

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY: PAUL WALTON

DIFFERENT STROKES

TWIN TEST

DB7 vs 840Ci

AS TWO-door, four-seat coupes that arrived at roughly the same time in the mid-Nineties, the Aston Martin DB7 and BMW 840Ci have, on paper at least, much in common.

But with one exhibiting futuristic styling and powered by a modern V8, while the other being more traditional-looking, that's also based on a much older car that has origins with another manufacturer, they have more differences than they do similarities.

To discover which we prefer out of innovation or convention, we're comparing a 1997 example of both.

BMW 840Ci 4.4

Despite arguably looking and feeling more modern than the Aston Martin DB7, the BMW arrived first, debuting at the 1989 Frankfurt Motor Show before going on sale the following year. By being more powerful and more expensive, it wasn't a direct replacement for BMW's previous coupe, the E24 6-Series.

The idea of such a model was originally considered by BMW in 1981 with the green light for the car – internally known as the E31 – given five years later. The work of in-house designer, Klaus Kapitzka, it featured a much more angular and chiselled design than the softer 6-Series. Plus, by being based on the E32-generation of the 7-Series, it was longer and wider than its predecessor.

The press wasn't always impressed by the new look, though. "It's an old-school, square cut BMW," said *Car* magazine in its November 1996 issue, "elegant but too discreet to be exciting."

What really set the E31 apart from the 6-Series (or the competition for that matter) was the abundance of clever technology, much of it not seen before. This included an electronic drive-by-wire throttle, four-wheel steering and intelligent automatic transmission. Little wonder BMW managed to spend a huge \$900 million on the car's development. Yet this eye-watering amount didn't include a convertible version and other than a handful of expensive aftermarket conversions, the 8-Series was only ever available as a coupe. To begin with, the only engine choice was



BMW's first production V12, a 5.0-litre that delivered 300bhp resulting in a 0-60mph time of seven seconds. This decadent engine together with all that tech made the 850i an expensive choice. At £61,495 in 1992, it cost £13,500 more than its nearest V12-engined rival, the 6.0-litre XJR-S.

Yet the critics were never that impressed by the car, feeling that it lacked character. "You would always respect such country-crossing abilities," said *Car* magazine in its October 1992 issue, "but never fall passionately in love with it as a loyal and faithful servant. Somehow the BMW 850i is a shade too nice, too pinkly soft, too twee: it tries a mite hard to be friendly and accommodating, offers heart but not soul."

A slightly more affordable option, a 4.0-litre V8, arrived in mid-1993 but at £52,950, was still £20k more than the recently updated XJS 4.0. Two years later the capacity was increased to 4.4 litres which didn't change the power output of 286bhp but the torque was increased from 295lb ft to 310lb ft. Often viewed as too big, too complicated and





too expensive, the 8-Series was never as popular as its huge investment warranted. Admittedly the global recession of the early Nineties hit sales hard, the all-important American market especially, but between 1990 and 1999 a mere 30,621 examples were produced. Of those, just 7,803 were the V8-powered 840Ci making the red 1997 example I've arranged to drive a real rarity and one I'm excited to experience.

It might be over five decades since the E31's debut but it remains a big and imposing car, its saloon origins obvious by the way it dwarfs the Aston Martin alongside it. While it could be argued the DB7 is a pastiche of every British sports car before it, the 8-Series was all-new, looking like nothing else before or since with only the famed kidney grilles linking it to the 6-Series and beyond.

Yet as much I as I appreciate the boldness of the design, it's too square, too hard and too large for my own tastes; I prefer the soft voluptuousness of the DB7.

Those themes continue inside. The 8-Series' interior is dominated by a wide

Often viewed as too big, too complicated and too expensive, the 8-Series was never as popular as its huge investment warranted



TWIN TEST

DB7 vs 840Ci

and hard-edged centre console that in typical BMW efficiency is slightly angled towards the driver. The layout, more than the lack of wood, makes it appear more modern than the Aston's antiquated design. As *Car* magazine said in its November 1996 issue about the 8-Series' interior, "The external squareness of the 840 is echoed inside, by edges and angles that looked very high tech in 1989."

Made from a particular variety of strong yet soft-to-touch black plastic only found in German cars, the cabin's ambience is more Braun travel alarm clock than luxury GT but it's still strongly built, more so I'd argue than the often fragile-feeling Aston.

According to the official performance figures, at 6.7 seconds, the BMW is faster to 60mph than the DB7 by a mere 0.1 of a second yet as I squeeze the throttle, thanks to a flatter torque curve with a lower peak, it feels faster than that. A tiny handful of 840Cis were fitted with a six-speed manual transmission while most, like this one, had a five-speed automatic. More eager to kick down than the Aston's ancient four-speed gearbox, it results in punchier acceleration.

The suspension's compliancy is more like that of a genuine sports car, such as BMW's own Z3, resulting in a relatively hard, unforgiving ride. But since the 840Ci weighs 1,855kg – 130kg more than the DB7 coupe – it's also too big and too heavy, plus it suffers from an abundance of body roll to take corners at high speeds comfortably.

Yet for all its faults, the BMW is still a magnificent car; beautifully built and well-engineered, it feels stronger and better put together than the Aston Martin. Is this enough to beat the still popular British GT?

Aston Martin DB7

Peel away the Aston Martin's beautiful curvaceous body plus the hype that surrounds the famous winged badge on

the nose and the car hides a secret; the chassis and suspension are both derived from the Jaguar XJ-S.

This is because the car we now know as the DB7 started life in the early Eighties as a Jaguar project. The work of one of the company's designers, Keith Helfet, the XJ40-based car was originally known as the XJ41 and was planned as the eventual replacement for the XJ-S. With Keith unashamedly influenced by Jaguar's past cars – the E-type especially – his design featured the sort of soft, flowing curves that made the older model so iconic.

But an ever more complicated specification that included all-wheel drive plus a twin turbo version of Jaguar's AJ6 engine meant the company's new owner, Ford, considered the XJ41 too expensive,

Arguably one of the best looking two-door coupes from the Nineties, it hasn't aged like others have from the era including the angular BMW 8-Series alongside





shelving the project in 1989. Keith later realised that the body would fit the XJ-S' platform meaning the programme could be resurrected for a fraction of the cost. Jaguar's then engineering director, Jim Randle, showed the idea to Tom Walkinshaw who immediately agreed to put the reborn XJ41 into production. Walkinshaw and his TWR team had been behind the company's motorsport successes throughout the Eighties and since 1988 had jointly owned a satellite operation, JaguarSport, which made sportier versions of Jaguar's existing range as well as the XJ220 supercar.

Although at this point still a Jaguar (now known as Project XX), unbeknown to Keith, Jim and everyone else at the company, Walkinshaw later approached Ford suggesting that if the car was badged as an Aston Martin – which the American giant had also bought in 1992 – it could be sold for a higher purchase price. Ford readily agreed and despite production being located at the former JaguarSport facility outside Banbury in Bloxham, the project was renamed

NPX for Newport Pagnell Experimental. Walkinshaw then instructed former Ford designer, Ian Callum, to further 'Astonise' the design.

"I did a complete review of the DB7's predecessors to determine the styling cues that make an Aston an Aston," said Callum in the June 1993 *Automobile* magazine. "To get the 'atmosphere' right, I focused on the DB4, DB5 and DB6. They are the most successful Astons, visually, and the ones people remember most. They look very purposeful and very elegant. I wanted to design something that has its own personality but evokes their honesty and integrity without being a pastiche."

The biggest changes Callum made were to pull the screen further forward and add a modern interpretation of the famed Aston Martin radiator grille. According to an interview in Andrew Noakes' 2006 book, *Aston Martin DB7: The Complete Story*, Callum spent a lot of time analysing its shape. "It took me ages to get right," admitted Callum in Noakes' book. "It's immensely sensitive."

Due to Ford demanding production costs to be kept low, Walkinshaw raided the giant company's ever-growing parts bin that included Mazda, which the American giant had been buying shares in since 1979. The rear lights came from the 323F, the chrome door handles were the same as the 323 estate and the indicators were MX-5. Much of the interior switchgear was sourced from Ford itself while power came courtesy of Jaguar's 3.2-litre straight-six. Although it first powered the XJ-S during the early Eighties in 3.6 form, with the addition of a supercharger by American firm, Eaton, the engineers still managed to eke out a healthy 335bhp from the now elderly unit. Strangely, the wing mirrors were the only 'foreign' parts, which were Citroën CX.

As a result of this upcycling, the NPX project cost a mere \$30 million to develop, pocket change for a new car, even at the time.

Yet the penny pinching didn't stop the DB7 coupe (and the Volante from 1996 onwards) from being incredibly beautiful. More importantly, despite its Jaguar heritage, the car still looked like an Aston Martin when it debuted at the Geneva Motor Show in early 1993. *Autocar & Motor* magazine described the car as having, "a classic sports car look, with a long bonnet, short boot and a hint of gently waisted haunches."

And five decades later, it still does. Arguably one of the best-looking two-door coupes from the Nineties, it hasn't aged like others have from the era including the awkwardly angular BMW 8-Series sat next to it.

One aspect of the car that's always disappointed is the interior. As *Autocar* said in its October 19 1994 issue, "There's a lot to find fault with here." Not so much the layout; aside from the cruise control switches located behind the gearlever of this example, it's relatively easy to use. What lets it down is the heavy use of Ford switchgear that makes me feel like I'm sitting in an Escort.

And although there's wood veneer, it's not an integral part of the dash but simply stuck onto the centre console as it might be in a home-made kit car. If the German car is a travel alarm clock, this makes the DB7 a slightly tacky carriage clock. ▶

TWIN TEST

DB7 vs 840Ci

But more disappointing than the Ford switchgear or cheap wood is the poor way it has been put together. Feeling weak and fragile, this black DB7 might be the same age as the red BMW but even though it has 18,000 less miles on the clock, the interior hasn't worn as well. Whereas the 840Ci looks and feels like new, the driver's seat in the Aston is badly

worn plus several areas of the leather trim are starting to come apart. Considering this car cost a whopping £82,500 in 1997, £26k over the 840Ci alongside, it's disappointing.

Despite having 49bhp more than the BMW, the DB7 doesn't feel as quick, the throttle pedal needing a proper shove for the supercharger to finally wake up. But

with 90 percent of the 360lb ft of torque apparently available between 2,200rpm and 5,500rpm, when it arrives the eventual acceleration has a surprisingly hard edge to it. Yet I still view the official 0-60mph time of just under six seconds as overly generous, especially since the BMW is officially just 0.1 seconds faster.

Sounding rough and unrefined, since

1997 DB7 3.2

Engine: 3,229cc i6 SC

Power: 335bhp

Torque: 360lb ft

0-60mph: 5.7secs

Max speed: 165mph

Transmission: 4-spd auto

Weight: 1,725kg

Price new: £82,500

Value now: £15,000-£25,000



the engine's origins go back to the Eighties, even when new the DB7 would have felt old-fashioned.

This example has a four-speed automatic gearbox which, for the Nineties when most other manufacturers were fitting five-speeders, was more old-fashioned than the five-speed bicycle I

had when I was a kid. Slow to act and always dim-witted, it takes a colossus effort for it to kick down. The DB7 was also available with five-speed manual transmission, and I know from past experience that this is the one to choose, allowing the engine to come alive more easily.



1997 840Ci 4.4

Engine: 4,389cc V8

Power: 286bhp

Torque: 310lb ft

0-60mph: 5.8secs

Max speed: 155mph

Transmission: 5-spd auto

Weight: 11,855kg

Price new: £56,850

Value now: £15,000-£25,000

The suspension follows the same route as the XJ-S which means double wishbones at the front with a lower wishbone at the rear and the driveshafts acting as upper links. Yet, feeling tauter, the DB7 doesn't ride as beautifully as the car it's based on and any imperfections can be felt in the cabin.

Early DB7s had several panels produced in composite meaning at 1,750kg it was very light, but from July 1996 onwards the bonnet was replaced for a steel version. But at 1,825kg this 1997 example is still 30kg less than the BMW 840Ci. With close to 50/50 weight distribution, controlled body roll, accurate steering and plenty of grip, it's a surprisingly agile machine, more so in my opinion than the larger, heavier and grander 840Ci.

Although far from perfect, the DB7 is still a hugely likable and characterful car that has the added bonus of being relatively rare with only 2,473 3.2 examples (coupe and Volante) made between 1993 and 1999. Is this enough for it to take on the mighty 8-Series?

Regular readers might recognise the black DB7 3.2 featured here as our own, a car I've got to know intimately over the last few months. Although I've come to appreciate its looks, character and even its many foibles over that time, there's no denying it can't hold a candle to the BMW in terms of engineering. Using an old engine and by being based on an even older car, together with being developed on a shoestring in Warwickshire means it wasn't as well put together as the 8-Series. And 30 years later after the model's debut, as judged by the poor state of the interior, that's making itself known more than ever.

Although I'm not a fan of the BMW's bold but slab-sided design or its cold Teutonic efficiency, despite the Aston Martin having slightly better handling, there's no denying in terms of build quality and performance the 840Ci is the much better car.

The two might have many similarities – including current values at between £15k and £25k – but it's due to the many significant differences, and not just on paper, that makes the BMW the winner here. **AMD**

● Thanks to: Debbie and Paul Blythe, owners of the 840Ci featured in this article ▶

THREE'S A CROWD

There was another two-door coupe that made its debut in the mid-Nineties, the Jaguar XK8, which, like the BMW, was fitted with a then-new 4.0-litre V8. By also being initially designed by Keith Helfet – before his colleague, Fergus Pollock, took it through to production – it has resulted in the car that has similar soft lines to the Aston making it, in my eyes, better looking than the more angular BMW. Yet I don't think the Jaguar is as pretty as the DB7, because the nose is too fussy and the tail not as elegant.

Where it wins over both the Aston and BMW is how it drives; with 290bhp, the 4.0 V8 might have 45bhp less

than the Aston's supercharged straight-six, but by being free revving and eager it accelerates just as keenly as the BMW, the five-speed gearbox needing little persuasion to drop down a gear or two, resulting in a sudden and hard acceleration. Although at 6.6 seconds to reach 60mph, it's not as sharp as the BMW's, but the Jaguar's V8 is still a masterful engine. Smooth, refined, yet with a subtle but distinctive growl, there's little wonder it became the mainstay of Jaguar's cars in one form or another for the next decade until replaced by the largely all-new 5.0-litre.

Despite being steel-bodied, at 1,649kg the XK8 is the lightest of the three and with sharp and accurate steering feels much nimbler through corners than the heavyweight German. Its ride is also better than the Aston's, having more of that supple compliance Jaguar is famous for.

With over 90k examples produced between 1996 and 2005, the mass-produced XK8 doesn't have rarity on its side like the other two. But by starting at just £5k for a 4.0-litre coupe such as the 2000 example pictured here, it's one we'd choose over both the BMW 840Ci and Aston Martin DB7.



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in association
withBy Matt James
Editor,
Motorsport News

Back to the top

Matt James explains the history of the car that returned Aston Martin to the top of the Le Mans rostrum in 2007 and 2008, the magnificent DBR9

WITH AUDI taking 13 wins in the first 15 years at Le Mans since the turn of the century, the fight for top honours at Le Mans was very often simply an intra-team battle. Excitement came from the other classes and prime among them was the GT1 battle. Aston Martin took back-to-back wins in the glorious DBR9 in 2007 and 2008, fending off the rumbling Corvette squad on both occasions. The 6.0-litre V12 had first been

introduced in 2005 as Aston sought to re-establish its competition credentials. The car's type number was a clear nod to the Aston Martin DBR/1, which had claimed outright victory at Le Mans in 1959.

The carbon fibre competition DBR9 machine, capable of pushing out 625bhp, was run by David Richards' Prodrive firm with input from the Aston factory.

It shook the establishment with victory in the Sebring 12 Hours in 2005 and an impressive fourth overall on its debut and

the fans in racing green were licking their lips in anticipation of a raft of success.

Driver Darren Turner, who had driven with Prodrive for the two previous seasons in a Ferrari 550 LM GTS, was there for the gestation period of the DBR9. "I was in at the start of the Aston project inasmuch as I could have an input into the car," he explains. "Even before it was built, I was able to tell them the parts in the cockpit which were critical for the drivers in terms of the ergonomics and I could also tell them





CLOCKWISE: Darren Turner; Rickard Rydell, David Brabham and Darren Turner won the GT1 class at the 2007 Le Mans; The two DBR9s at Le Mans in 2005

what was not so necessary. I went through all of that kind of stuff with the design team.”

When the car first did hit the circuits, it was a winter’s day at Donington in early November 2004 and the initial impressions were good. Given Prodrive’s expertise, the rear-wheel-drive car was never going to be too far from the ultimate pace, but even Turner was surprised.

“It was just a general shakedown and we didn’t expect too much from it really,” explains the now 48-year-old, who still races an Aston Martin in the British GT Championship.

“We thought that if we got ten laps under our belt, then that would be fantastic. It was one of those days when we realised ▶



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DBR9

it was going super well and we pounded around and around. The speed was good, we knew it felt lovely and we were straight away in the right ballpark. Like anything, there are obviously things you learn on day one that you then apply to it. And that was the same throughout the life of the car. But if you think about the DBR9, it went from 2005 through to, effectively, the end of 2011. We had seven years with it and with all the various upgrades were eventually able to make it better but we certainly hit the ground running with it. Straight out of the box, it was a pretty special car."

The initial victory at Sebring in March 2005 was a real marker for the opposition. Not only had the car run faultlessly on the highly demanding and less-than-smooth asphalt of the Florida track, but Aston Martin had poked a finger at the GT1 division dominators, Corvette. The American firm had much more funding than the plucky British operation, and the Chevrolet squad had been the benchmark in previous seasons.

David Brabham, son of the three-time F1 champion Sir Jack, helmed the car alongside Turner and French sports car ace Stéphane Ortelli. Brabham remembers the victory causing a few raised eyebrows in the GT racing world.

"We went and did the 12-hour race. The car was fast and it was reliable which shocked us as much as it did the opposition," explains the Australian. "We weren't really expecting it to be trouble-free and it was a great joy for me to be able to cross the line and win. The team was stoked about that result. To do it in Corvette's backyard just made it even more satisfying."

It takes time to unlock all the secrets from any competition car, especially one so new, but there was one factor which would prove to be a real Achilles heel for the DBR9.

The front-engined format, coupled with the positioning of the exhausts, meant that temperatures inside the cabin became almost unbearable for the men at the controls. In a sports car, race drivers can be expected to be at the wheel for anything up to four hours at a time so maintaining concentration is paramount. Anything that can possibly hinder that is

something that needs to be eradicated.

Brabham explains: "After we did Sebring, I told the team that the car was simply too hot. It was way over the top. As you can imagine, drivers complaining about the heat didn't really go down too well with the management.

"They had lots to focus on but I think there was a bit of a mentality issue there too: they would turn around and just say 'well, get fitter then!' It wasn't quite that simple...we were getting cooked. We went to the Le Mans test day and I seemed to be the only one making a fuss about the temperature inside the car. All the other drivers would complain internally to each other but not to the management because they were worried about what the management would say. I knew the drivers were going to get too hot and that would inevitably lead to mistakes."

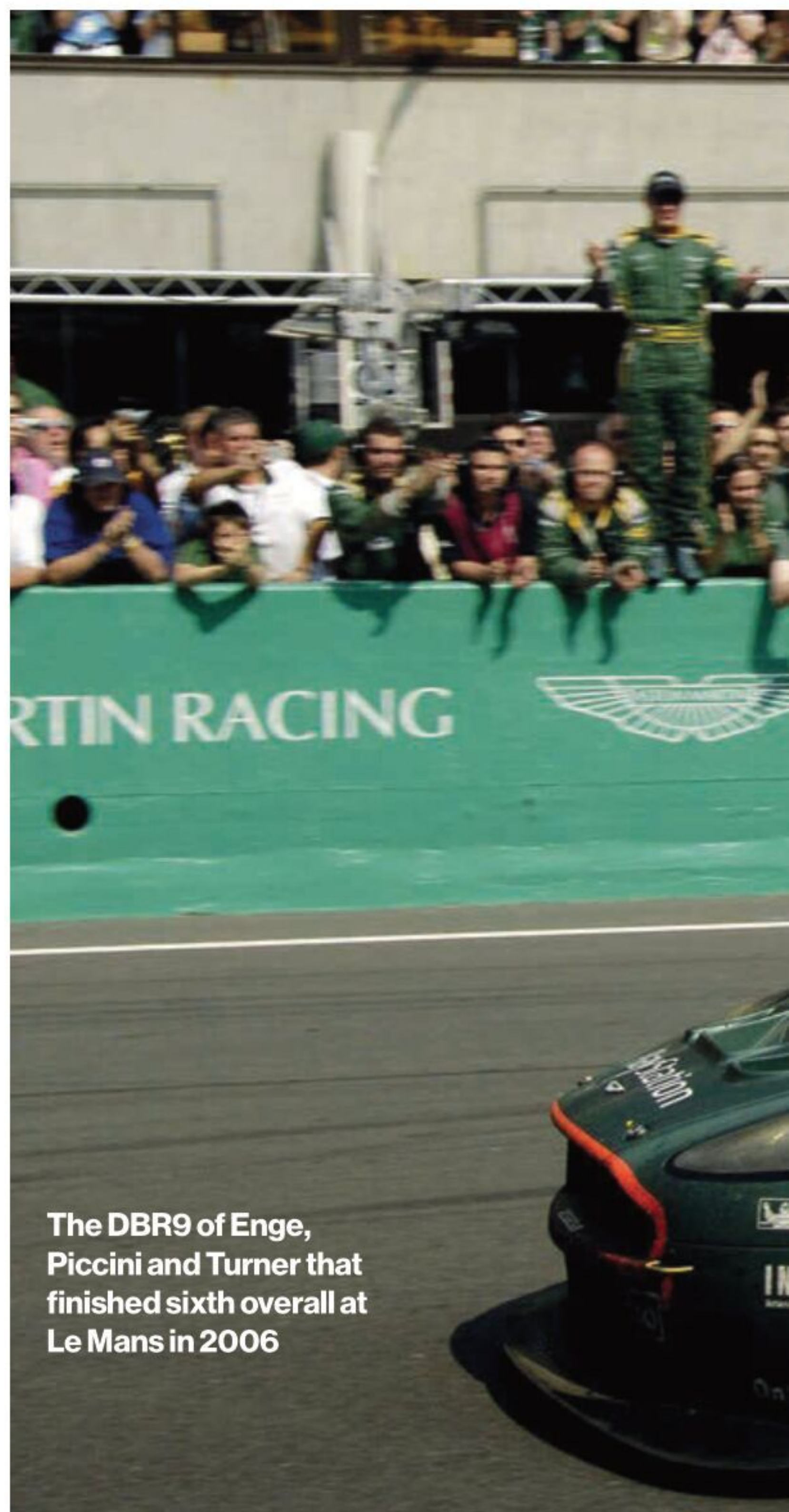
And that was perhaps the downfall of the first attempt at the 24 hours race in 2005. The sweltering hot mid-June weekend didn't help matters. And nor did the fact that extra insulation that the engineers had promised they would install around the power plant before the French classic failed to materialise. Brabham was perplexed to find that the only measure that had been taken was the supply of cool suits for the drivers.

"All three drivers in our car suffered really badly," explains Brabham, "My right calf muscle just ripped apart and I couldn't drive or walk. Darren Turner had a massive blister on his foot so he could hardly drive, and Stéphane Sarrazin had double vision. Luckily, the car had a front radiator leak and so they had to stop the car for a while to fix that and that gave us all some respite. The only one who could get to the finish was Stéphane, who said his vision returned to normal – whether it had or not, I really don't know."

The return to Le Mans had even started badly for Aston. Turner was given the driving duties for the opening stint and collected a penalty in the first couple of hours, which resulted in further problems.

"My penalty was a one-minute stop in the pitlane," he explains, "and they wouldn't even let me open the doors. I went to get some ventilation in it and the French officials said 'non'. I was sat

Late night pitstop during the 2005 Le Mans 24 Hours



The DBR9 of Enge, Piccini and Turner that finished sixth overall at Le Mans in 2006



there with the engine off and there was a full heat soak going through the car. I was already massively hot in there. After that, when I got going and got to the first chicane on the Mulsanne Straight, I was feeling very woozy and I couldn't really make out what was going on and I went off. That was purely down to what my body had been going through. It wasn't the best experience."

Those weren't the only dramas, because a broken splitter – a legacy of Turner's off and something which wasn't discovered until quite late on in the race – and then that radiator leak left them trailing the two factory Corvettes. ▶



Le Mans, 2006



MOTORSPORT

DBR9

“We were double-stinting despite the discomfort in the car,” recalls Brabham. “I remember going out in the morning. I jumped in and the guy who was there to help belt you in to the cockpit pointed out that I had forgotten to put my cool suit on because I was tired, exhausted and just too out of it. I just looked at him, pushed him out of the cockpit, shut the door and off I went.

“On the radio, they said to me that if I didn’t feel up for doing a double stint, I should let them know. I felt like I could do it and when I came in for my pitstop, which was just fuel and no tyres, the door flung open and they unzipped the top of my race suit, stuffed a load of ice down my front, zipped me back up and off I went...

“I went ballistic after that race and I wrote a letter to Prodrive giving my thoughts. I figured I would get fired after that, but I wasn’t and quite a few of the guys realised

that being straight was needed. They realised they needed to prioritise the drivers a bit more.”

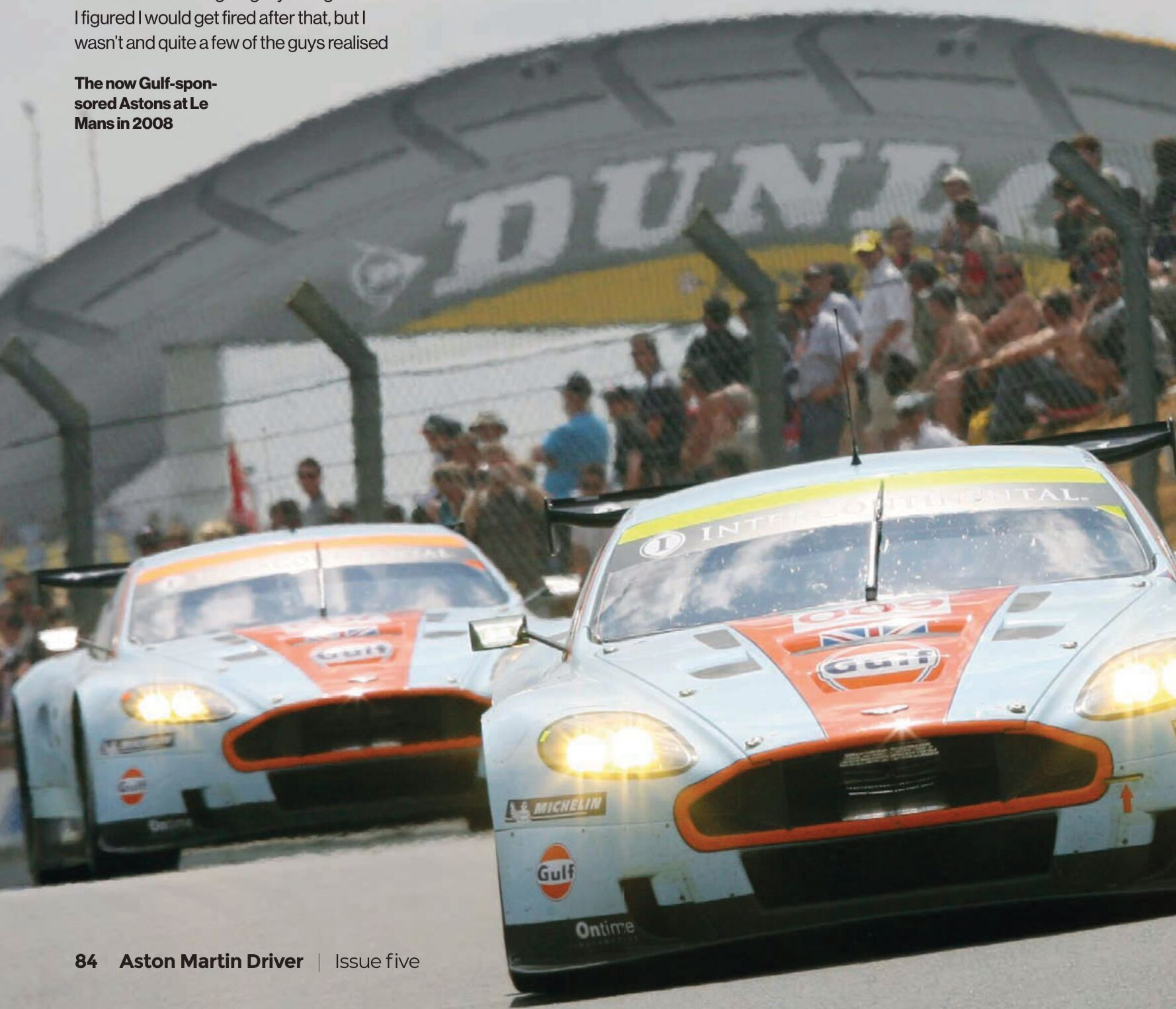
The Aston Martin Racing drivers might have suffered the worst in the sweltering temperatures, but they weren’t the only ones in strife and the rule makers took notice. Following on from that scorcher in 2005, regulations were drawn up to make sure the cockpits stayed below a certain level and air-conditioning was mandated in all the GT1 machines.

With a nicer car to drive for its occupants, the DBR9 really began to make a mark on GT racing. After a defeat to Corvette in 2006, Aston finally returned to the top step of the podium at Le Mans in 2007,

when Rickard Rydell, Turner and Brabham finished a lap ahead of Chevrolet in a remarkable fifth position overall. It was a feat repeated in 2008 when Antonio Garcia joined Turner and Brabham for a tense win over the Corvette.

By this stage, there had been further refinements to the chassis and there were a phalanx of customer teams racing the DBR9 around the globe. A Larbre-run DBR9 won the Le Mans Series GT1 class in 2006 in the hands of Vincent Vosse, Gabriele Gardel and Pedro Lamy and Aston claimed the manufacturers’ title in the same season in the FIA GT Championship against the mighty Maserati MC12 GT1.

The now Gulf-sponsored Astons at Le Mans in 2008



The car raced in the top flight through until the end of 2011, when the rulebook was rewritten and what had been running as the second tier – GT2 class cars – were promoted up the ladder to become the GT1 class. Aston had already introduced the V8 Vantage at that point and it became the focus of the British firm's long-distance activities, but the memory of the DBR9 remains strong with all that were lucky enough to race it.

"I think with the aero set-up that it had for Le Mans – which was different to the sprint races – it was such a nice car," remembers Brabham. "It was well balanced and a real joy to drive. You could just push and push and push and it felt like it wasn't going to snap or bite you back."



Road America, 2006



Sebring, 2005

Turner's history and his part in creating that Aston Martin legacy was something that he still cherishes dearly to this day. "The DBR9 is my favourite race car of all time. It is the one car that I had a really personal relationship with. To have been part of its journey from day one was pretty special right through to when we finished in 2011 and getting the two wins at Le Mans with it," he explains.

"It had a very user-friendly V12 engine which had loads of torque and the handling aspect was also very driver friendly. It didn't do anything which was really on a knife-edge, it gave you confidence. It wanted you to grab hold of it and wring its neck. You were never tentative getting in the car.

"It had the power and it had the downforce that you wanted. It had a sequential gearbox too and you felt really engaged with all the aspects of driving the thing. It had almost an old-school feel to it.

Modern GTs with a paddleshift and ABS aren't quite the same. They are still amazing fun to drive but GT1, in its heyday, was so amazing because you had to do so much behind the wheel. It was super engaging.

"I loved everything about it: the power, the looks, the sound and it was fast. It is the one car that if I was ever in the fortunate enough position to be able to buy one of my race cars back, it would be the one that I would seek out." **AMD**



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FAMILY TIES

By officially beginning in the Forties but its origins going back even further, Aston Service Dorset Ltd is one of the UK's most established specialists in the marque. We discover more from the third generation of the same family in charge, Antony Forshaw, about their long association with Aston Martin

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY: PAUL WALTON



Antony Forshaw pulls out a brand-new Smiths dial from a well-stocked shelf

WHEN I ask Antony Forshaw if he feels any pressure about being the third generation to be

in charge of his family business, Aston Service Dorset, he tells me no. "I could never let it close," he says. "I'm proud of our heritage but also what it is now."

Started over 70 years ago by his grandfather, Ivan Forshaw, and later run by his father and uncle, the company remains well known with Aston Martin enthusiasts both in this country and internationally for its unique history in caring for the marque and huge selection of new and used parts.

Ivan Forshaw was a self-taught engineer and first began working with Lagondas in 1934. As one of the founders of the Lagonda Owners' Club, he soon became the spare parts registrar and the go-to expert for members looking for technical advice.

This continued until the second world war when Ivan became part of the Royal Army Service Corps, rising to the rank of captain and seeing action in both North Africa and Italy. After being invalided out, he returned to Dorset and carried on working with Lagondas.

Following David Brown buying Aston Martin and Lagonda in 1947, Ivan began

working with both brands, becoming an official parts agent in 1948. "Officially, we're the longest-established Aston Martin parts dealer in the country," says Antony proudly.

With his long history working with the cars, Ivan's expertise was well known globally. "People came to him from all over the world wanting help," remembers Antony fondly. "When he died in 2006, aged 94, he was mentally still with it and could remember everything. We still find handwritten notes of his in parts books."

Ivan had two sons, Roger (Antony's father) and Richard, the former training as an accountant. Although he initially worked elsewhere, including Esso, Roger was still involved with the family business, completing the company's accounts in his spare time before joining the company properly in the early Eighties.

Richard became a qualified engineer and always worked with his father. Antony tells me that his uncle became the driving force in the workshop which moved to its current premises, a spacious former petrol station outside Ferndown, in the mid-Sixties.

An important moment for both the company and its future arrived in 1972 and again in 1978 when Aston Martin, ►

MEET THE EXPERT

ASTON SERVICE DORSET LTD

Aston Service Dorset has all the original drawings and build records for Aston's early post-war cars



no longer interested in its history and no doubt strapped for cash, sold Ivan the manufacturing rights for all its post-war models from the 2-Litre to the DB4 – including the GT and Zagato – plus the Lagonda 2.6. Not only did this include the build records for individual cars and original drawings but also 80 tons of brand-new parts.

Although this has been the backbone of the company's parts business for 50 years, there's still much of it left, some remaining uncatalogued. "We're still finding stuff every day," says Antony with a laugh. "You go and look for something you know you do have, only to find a box of something that you never knew was there, such as brand-new Smith instruments."

He shows me just a small selection of these parts. Some are neatly arranged on shelves and easily accessible while others are in another area of the former fuel station, piled high in their original boxes. Who knows what treasures lie waiting to be discovered?

Antony has plans for this huge stash of unlisted parts, though, including putting in a new mezzanine floor above the



workshop and arranging them properly. He also wants to expand the workshop and build a spray booth. But this isn't the first time he's modernised the company.

Although Antony was brought up with Aston Martins, even driven to school by his father in the family's extensive but now-sold collection of important models including a genuine DB3S, he knew he wanted to do something else with his life and in the early 2000s joined the Royal Marines. But, following tours in Northern

Ireland, Iraq and Afghanistan, he left the service in 2010 as an acting major and immediately joined the family firm. "I always knew I wanted to be involved one day," he tells me. "I love the cars and thought, if I'm going to do a desk job, I might as well come here."

Roger was still running the business at the time with Antony's brother, James, but due to losing enthusiasm, was considering closing the company meaning it was a natural transition for Antony to take over



One of ASD's technicians, Grant Eyles, inspects a Vantage in the workshop

the day-to-day running of the firm.

The first thing he introduced was a new computer system plus a more user-friendly website. "When the computer age arrived in the Eighties and Nineties, we didn't really move with the times," he explains, "and although we had an internet site, it was a simple one-page affair that mentioned my grandfather had passed away, which made a lot of people think we'd closed!"

Antony has also started producing some of the classic parts that Aston Service Dorset has owned the rights to since the Seventies. "I felt we had a responsibility to make these parts available," he tells me. "We had the correct drawings so we can make everything dimensionally perfect. When I first got here in 2010, our stock value was £250k; it's now three times that." He goes on to say that for the Feltham-built cars, they have between 90 and 95 percent of all parts in stock.

These have come in useful for another new project; three DB4 Zagato continuation models that Aston Service Dorset has recently been commissioned to produce. Based on an R&J Simpson ▶

'Despite the changes Antony has brought in, at its heart the company remains unchanged from when Ivan started it several decades ago'...



The newly restored DB6 that's taken three years to complete

MEET THE EXPERT

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LEFT: A GT and two DB3Ss that were once owned by the Forshaw family outside Aston Service Dorset's premises in the Seventies



ABOVE: A young Antony Forshaw in a DB3S with his father, Roger

chassis and with an aluminium body by Shapecraft, other than an original DB4 engine, they'll be brand-new examples. With the first halfway through completion, even to my untrained eye it looks proportionally correct, but then ASD does have plenty of experience with these incredibly rare cars. "We've restored both our original examples plus another," he explains.

Yet despite the changes Antony has brought in, at its heart the company remains unchanged from when Ivan started it several decades ago. As well as remaining an important source of parts for Aston owners all over the world, it continues to service and repair all models including, thanks to the modern diagnostic equipment Antony has recently invested in, the modern generation of Gaydon-built cars.



Ivan Forshaw (right) with his son, Richard, plus a DB2

When Antony took over the business in 2010, the workshop had been closed since the early 2000s following Richard's untimely passing in 1997. "Without his brother, dad couldn't get his head around the practical side of the workshop," he explains. "The two mechanics we had at the time were both in their early 60s and

happy to retire and so from dad's point of view, it was a natural time to close it and concentrate on the parts." But when Antony arrived a decade later, they were still getting enquiries from owners for their cars to be serviced. "We still had the knowledge and still knew people who could come and do it so it made sense to restart the workshop."

When we tour the workshop, as well as a pair of V8 Vantages needing servicing, he shows me a beautiful DB6 that's just been finished following a three-year restoration by ASD. "The only things we don't do in-house are gearboxes and axles plus trimming," says Antony. "For those, we use the best people for the best work."

After spending the morning with Antony, it doesn't surprise me that he feels little pressure at being the third generation of his family to be in charge of this historic company. Thanks to ASD's long history in caring for Astons, plus his obvious and infectious enthusiasm for the brand and a keen eye for the future, it's set to be around to look after many more generations of Aston owners to come. **AMD**



A line up of three DB3S racing cars on Aston Service Dorset's forecourt in the Seventies

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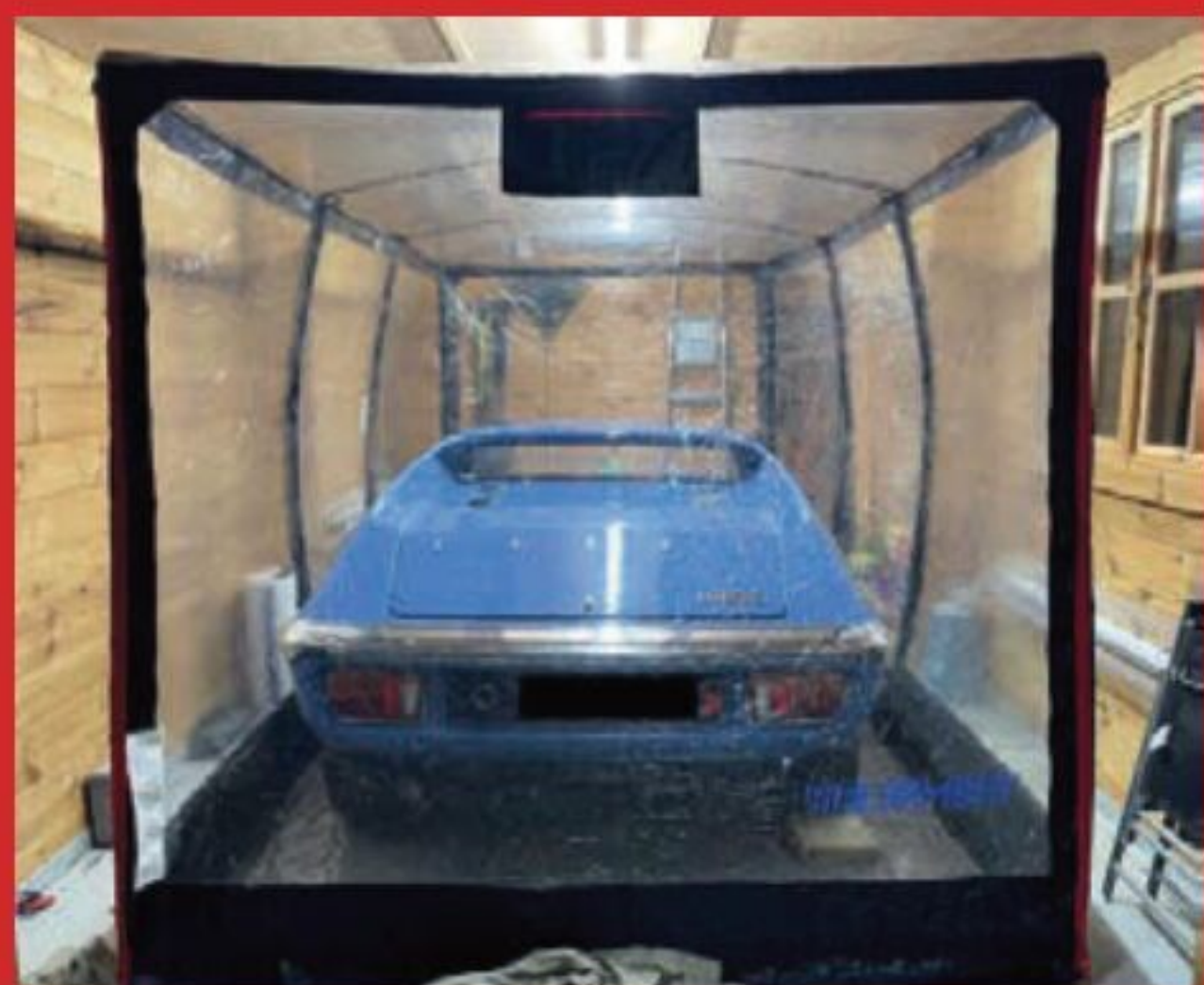
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FROM THE CLUBHOUSE



Explaining OBDs



**Are you missing one of the most essential tools for the modern car toolbox?
AMOC member, Steven McEvoy, explains why you need an OBD reader in your toolbox**



THE GAYDON-ERA Aston Martins (DB9, Vantage, DBS, Rapide and Vanquish) are mechanical wonders, but what really runs the cars are the computers. My 2005 DB9 coupe has about 13 computer modules that control everything from the engine and transmission to the doors and stereo system. Many of us recoil at the idea of working on our own cars now because of these mysterious black boxes and our lack of knowledge about them.

One of my personal pet peeves out on the internet forums is a near daily occurrence of Aston owners posting that their car has turned on the Check Engine Light and some warning message has appeared such as Service Emission System. They post a photo of the message and ask all the other forum members for advice. What usually follows is a wild array of random guesses and home-brewed advice that ranges from, 'Ignore it and see if it goes away' to 'tighten the fuel cap' to my least favourite, 'Give it an Italian tune up.' Most advice given isn't

based on any actual facts. My advice is to 'talk' to your car and ask it what is wrong rather than listening to a bunch of well-intentioned strangers.

It is not actually that scary – you just need the right tool to talk to it. By talking to it you will know a lot more about what is going on with your car and be better empowered to deal with it.

OBDII to the rescue

All cars built since 1996 have an on-board diagnostics port, more commonly known as an OBDII. This port is our gateway to plug into the car and see what it's thinking. Aston Martins are a little unique in this respect since they have two OBDII ports; one is for the computers that run the engine, and the other is for all the other modules such as the transmission, braking systems, airbag systems, doors, centre console, etc. The V12 engine cars actually have two engine control computers, one for each bank of six cylinders. You can find the OBDII ports just under the lower edge of the dash in the driver's side footwell. The OBDII port

is for the engine, transmission and anti-lock brakes while the body port is for all the other control modules (doors, stereo, dash, etc).

To talk to the car, you'll need an OBDII diagnostic tool. I know it sounds complicated, but don't panic! If you can use a smartphone, you'll manage with an OBDII tool. What makes an OBDII simple to use is that all manufacturers have agreed to use a common language to communicate through the OBDII ports, and most cars share a common set of Diagnostic Trouble Codes (DTCs) that reflect issues that can arise. For example, if the engine module diagnoses that it has a misfiring issue it will set the P0300 error code. This is the same code for a Toyota Camry or a V12 Aston Martin Vanquish. Manufacturers are allowed to develop their own unique DTCs and special functions.

Aston Martin dealers use the holy grail of OBDII devices, mainly a laptop that connects to the car through both OBDII ports at the same time. This is called the Aston Martin Dealer System (AMDS).



The Aston Martin DB9 has two OBDII connections

The AMDS is able to talk to the control modules, programme them, and do all sorts of clever tricks such as programme new keys. However, aftermarket tools do many (but not all) of the same things.

Many generic OBDII tools exist that you can purchase for as little as £40 at a local car parts store. These cheap, basic tools are known as code scanners and can essentially plug into the OBDII port and read any DTCs that are present. They will allow you to clear or reset most of them. This is why many users buy one; they just want to stick their head in the sand and reset the Check Engine Light by clearing any DTCs present.

The problem with a generic OBDII code scanner is that they can only provide the most basic information, and only about the engine control module. On the V12s they can't even talk to the second engine control module, so you only get half the picture. While a generic OBDII code scanner is fine for a Toyota Camry, you will need something a little smarter to get the full story from your Aston.

Several OBDII tool makers have more intelligent OBDII diagnostic scanners that are able to talk to all the Aston Martin modules. They know the special DTCs and that the V12s have two control modules. While they aren't a full-blown AMDS system, they can tell you much about what's going on in your Aston.

While I don't know all of the companies that make OBDII tools that can do this trick, I know several models from Autel and Foxwell Technology that can. Both companies specifically list certain models of their tools that are fully Aston Martin compatible, although it's best to verify this before purchasing. I use a Foxwell NT510 which is available on Amazon for £129. While not as cheap as a low-end generic tool, it can do so much more. Having one of these intelligent OBDII tools is essential for the modern toolbox.

Now what?

With the tool in hand, what can you do with it? You can talk to the modules, ask them what DTCs they might be suffering from, even look at the live data from the hundreds of sensors (engine temperature, transmission gear, wheel speed, interior temperature, all that stuff). The Foxwell system I own can even reset the Time for Service reminder after my annual oil change (it's a special function of the driver's information module).

If your Aston turns on the Check Engine Light, you can plug in your trusty OBDII tool and ask it to auto scan all the modules. It will then talk to each module in turn and collect all the DTC codes, including the special Aston Martin ones. It will present the codes to you in a slightly more user-friendly manner. For example, if you have a P0300 fault code, it will also include the text that this is a Random Misfire Detected. It won't tell you why you have a misfire (neither will the almighty AMDS – the technician needs to work it out), but you now have a much better starting point for your troubleshooting.

You might get a combination of DTCs, such as a P0300 about a random misfire and a second code P0192 which is Fuel Rail Pressure Sensor Low Input. You might then surmise that the misfire could be a symptom of the low fuel pressure and focus your efforts on solving that problem first and then see if the misfire issue clears afterwards. It's still up to you or the mechanic to work out the problem based on the DTC and the live sensor data you can now access.

To help with understanding the cause of the DTC codes, Aston Martin has created a technical service guide that goes into

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- 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'



detail about the potential causes, and remedies, for each DTC code. The idea being that you look up the P0300 code in the guide and see what Aston suggests. This is the guide for their trained service technicians and is a great place to gain more understanding.

Your new tool and the information it provides you will demystify much of the electronics side of your modern Aston. You can now post an informed question in the forums and groups. You're likely to get a much better answer from the internet or at least know if the issue is serious and you need to not ignore it and take your car to a knowledgeable specialist or Aston dealer that can dig in even deeper to help. **AMC**

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CURRENT LISTINGS 

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. Please call 01993 849610, South East. (T)

116558

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. Please call 01993 849610, South East. (T)

116559

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. Please call 01993 849610, South East. (T)

116560

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)

116561

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)

116562

ASTON MARTIN VANTAGE



£125,000. First registered 22/06/2015 Aston Martin Vantage S sport shift, finished in the most stunning colour combination of Sunburst Yellow with Obsidian black leather with yellow features and stitching along with a black mohair hood. Please call 01993 849610, South East. (T)

116568



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£125,000. Finished in Royal blue metallic with parchment piped blue leather trim and blue carpets this monster Virage 6.3 manual gearbox muscle car is not for the faint hearted. This low mileage example of the massive Aston Martin Works service upgrade is the second car to be completed back in the day. Please call 01993 849610, South East. (T)

116569

ASTON MARTIN V8 VANTAGE



£399,000. Here we have a very unique V8 rebuilt at no expense spared in developing the car into a 450 + BHP (with 520 ft lb or torque), super Vantage fuel injection car. Finished in Cumberland Grey, 'Black Connolly' trim, with contrasting grey carpets, (James Bond Living Daylights Spec). Please call 01993 849610, South East. (T)

116570

ASTON MARTIN VANQUISH



£59,995. A new Aston Martin for the 21st Century, the V12-engined Vanquish coupé debuted at the Geneva Auto Show in March 2001. Styled by Ian Callum, the man responsible for the DB7, the Vanquish was inspired by one of Aston Martin's most celebrated models: the DB4 GT Zagato. Debuted in the DB7 Vantage, and Aston Martin's first power unit of its type. Please call 01798 874477, South East. (T)

116685

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.. Please call 02085 679729, Greater London. (T)

117336

ASTON MARTIN DB4



1960, Aston Martin / DB4 / Coupe / Green / 3900cc. Being sold on behalf of Solicitors executing a deceased estate. From long term family ownership, FURTHER DETAILS TO FOLLOW. Starting at 12:00pm on Wednesday 14th Dec 2022, Bidding ends for the first lots from 12:00pm on Thursday 15th Dec 2022. Please call 01233506266, South East. (T)

117481

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 4 Litre Vantage engine, 5 speed gear box, disc brakes, etc. In current ownership for past 42 years. Please Call 01483486379, South East.

112032

ASTON MARTIN DB67



2001, £49,995. DB7 Vantage. V12, Midnight Blue with Black trim. Manual. Just under 25k miles covered from new with only 1 previous owner. Full Aston Martin Service History. 18" wheels, Outstanding condition. Please call 01636812700, South East. (T)

ASTON MARTIN DB7



£28,000. Excellent condition v12 Vantage finished in Sky Silver with Parchment over blue interior and Walnut fascia. All original including Aston Martin umbrella. Car has been owned for 8 years garaged with dehumidifier. Fully serviced by both main dealerships and AMOC recommended specialist. Current MoT and Taxed. Excellent engine with stainless steel sports exhaust that has an exceptional tone. Please call 07814807378, South East. (T)

ASTON MARTIN DB7



2002, £90A. POA. Aston Martin DB7 Vantage-original Anthracite Black paint, charcoal interior. Thousands have been spent. Original build sheet available, good service history, lots of spares, (including a complete set of winter wheels and tyres, a spare exhaust as well as most of the parts to get it back to standard). Sold with a year's MoT. Please call 07436002647, South East (T)

114827

NEXT ISSUE:

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30 YEARS OF THE DB7

To mark the 30th anniversary of the DB7's debut in March 1993, the car's history is explored by driving our 3.2 and a late 6.0 GT



DB6 ACROSS THE YORKSHIRE MOORS
We take a DB6 in Autumn Gold for an autumnal drive between Pickering and Whitby in Yorkshire



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ASTON MARTIN *drivers*

With the four-time World Champion, Sebastian Vettel, retiring at the end of the 2022 season, we look back at his successful career

AFTER DOMINATING the sport throughout the 2010s, much was promised when it was announced that former Red Bull and Ferrari driver, Sebastian Vettel, had signed for the newly named Aston Martin F1 team for the 2021 season. Although results have been hard to come by over the last two years, the German driver has still made a sizeable impact on the burgeoning team, scoring the majority of its points in that time.

Vettel's place in F1 was all but guaranteed when the then 17-year-old dominantly secured the 2004 Formula BMW Championship by winning 18 of the season's 20 races. Following a subsequent test for the Williams and Sauber Grand Prix teams, he became the latter's test driver for 2007, making his race debut at Indianapolis the same year when his Sauber teammate, Robert Kubica, suffered a heavy crash at Canada the week before. After starting seventh, Vettel finished a fine eighth to become the-then youngest driver to score a point in Formula One.

Since Vettel was already contracted to the well-known Austrian energy drink manufacturer, Sauber released him to race for Red Bull's junior team, Toro Rosso, for the rest of the 2007 season, securing a full-time seat the following year. At the 2008 Italian Grand Prix, Vettel fulfilled his promise by becoming not only the youngest driver to take pole but to also win a race. As Toro Rosso's then team boss, Gerhard Berger, said, "He proved today he can win races, but he's going to win World Championships."

Berger was right. After being promoted to Red Bull's senior team for 2009 – winning its maiden victory at China the same year – Vettel would take the



2010–2013 World Championships. In 2015 the German moved to Ferrari, yet despite getting close, he failed to win the Drivers' Championship for the Italian team. After several costly mistakes on both sides, the relationship soured and in May 2020 it was announced he was leaving.

Vettel was soon picked up by Lawrence Stroll, the Canadian billionaire who had bought Racing Point in 2018 and who had big plans for the team including renaming it Aston Martin – which he also owned a 17 percent share in – for 2021.

As an experienced multiple race winner, the German was exactly what Stroll was looking for to lead the team. "One of the ways we are going to be World Champions is to get my guys to think and act like World Champions," said Stroll at the time. "And how you do that is bring a four-time World Champion into the team. He is going to take the team in a direction of leading us to where ultimately we want to be."

But despite Racing Point being a race winner in 2020, the newly named Aston Martin F1 team took a step backwards in its debut year. Due to the Mercedes-engined AMR21 lacking speed, Vettel struggled all season and regularly finished out of the points.

The highlight of his two years at Aston Martin was a well-deserved second place at the Azerbaijan Grand Prix in June 2021,

the marque's first ever podium in F1. "I am over the moon," he said afterwards, "and P2 means a great deal to all of us."

But no matter the result, Vettel always understood the significance of motorsport for this historic brand, as shown in July 2022 when he took Aston's oldest racing car – known as 'Little Pea' – for a lap of France's Paul Ricard circuit on the 100th anniversary of the company's first grand prix. "The racing spirit and will to win is something that defines Aston Martin," he said at the time.

Vettel's growing hard line stance on the environment was at odds with the extravagances of F1. And so following another series of poor finishes, it came as no great surprise when in July he announced his retirement from F1 at the end of the 2022 season. "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."

Vettel's time at Aston Martin F1 might not have been as successful as everyone was initially hoping for, but as a highly accomplished and successful driver, he was still exactly who and what the team needed in its formation years. He will go down in history as one of the greatest drivers ever to drive for this historic marque. **AMD**

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