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VANTAGE

ISSUE 10 | SUMMER 2015

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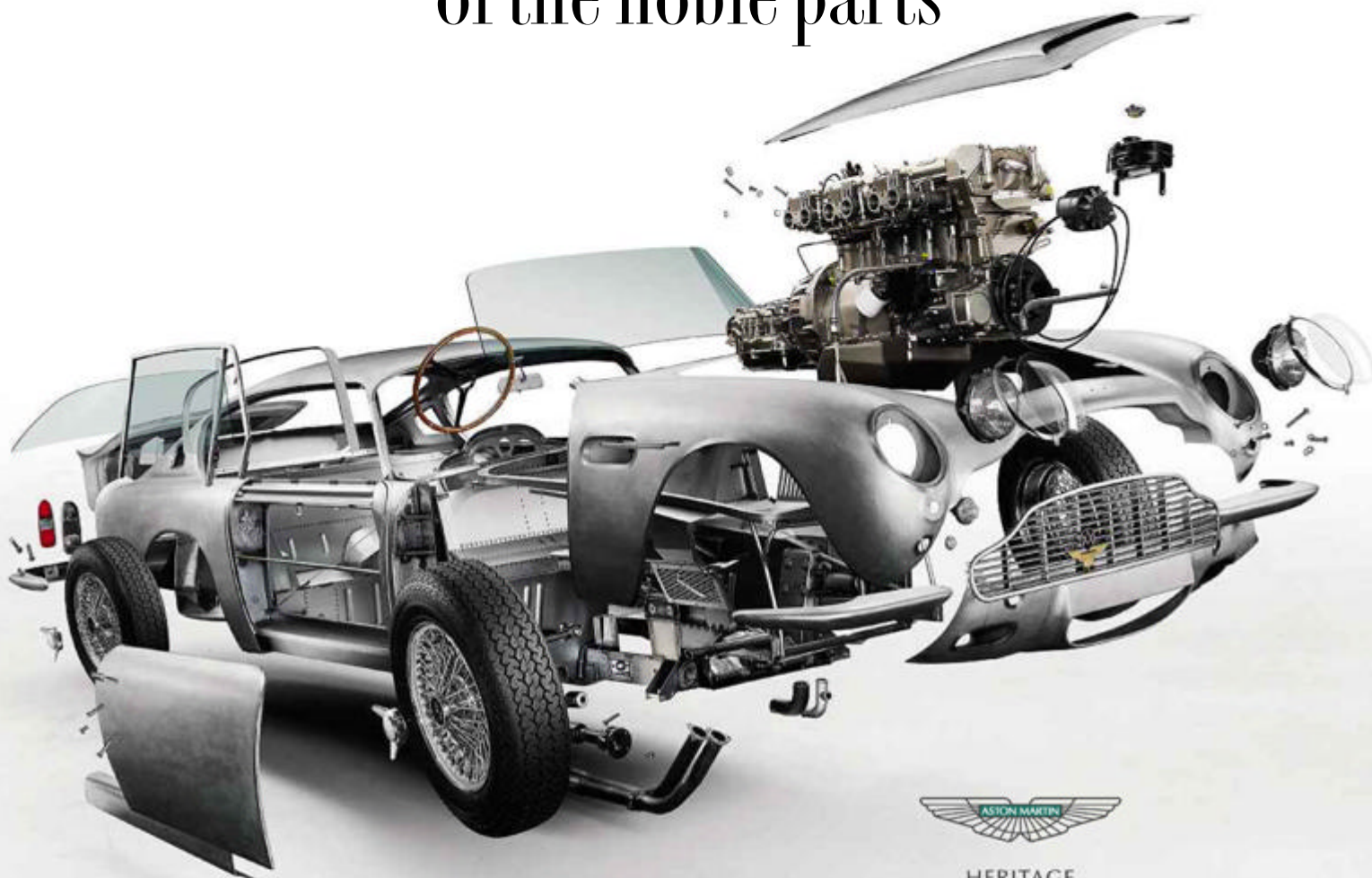
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PHOTOGRAPHY TIM WALLACE

This lovely example of the iconic, hand-built Aston Martin V8 has had only four keepers from new, the last of whom purchased the car from Aston Workshop in 2007. It has covered only 3000 miles since then and been regularly serviced, including a mechanical overhaul by a classic specialist last year. It comes complete with a history folder including specialist bills, MOT certificates, the original service book and an owner's manual.

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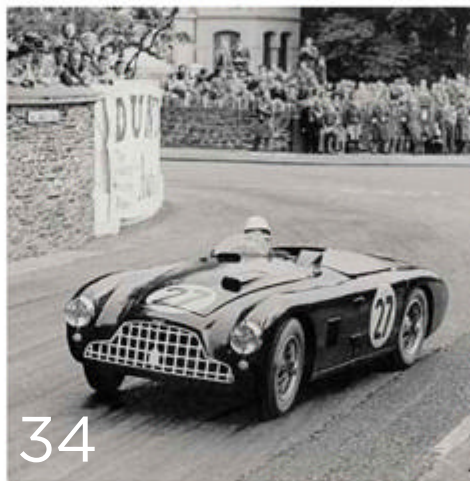
Genuine craftwork and cutting-edge technology coupled with experience and integrity: that's what makes Noble House unique. Being entrusted with the heritage of generations of classic Aston Martins is an honour that no one understands better than Noble House. We're just a little proud of that.

Further interesting information on Noble House can be found at www.noblehouseclassics.nl. We are located in Almere, The Netherlands. +31(0)36-5325300, info@noblehouseclassics.nl

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ASTON MARTIN V8 COUPE. 1996. 27k
£79,950

Viewpoint

Here's to 60 extraordinary years of Aston Martin Works



YOU NEVER FORGET a visit to Aston's Newport Pagnell Works. I can still vividly recall the first time I had a proper tour. It was the summer of 1998 and the hand-built era was drawing to an inevitable yet dignified close. The Bloxham-built DB7 was poised to receive V12 power and, though we didn't know it at the time, the Vanquish would soon propel the marque – and Works – into the 21st century. Not that you'd have known it walking through the charmingly ramshackle collection of

buildings that made up Aston's famous Tickford Street premises.

This was the car factory that time forgot. A place where cars were not just assembled by hand, but literally shaped by hand, too. Seeing sheets of flat, lifeless aluminium being artfully rolled, beaten and teased into glorious shapes using only a selection of hand-tools, leather cushions and stumps of wood remains one of the most amazing demonstrations of skill I've ever seen.

In the engine shop, trolleys and benches laden with exquisite components were painstakingly assembled into bellowing motors destined to sit proudly (and loudly!) in the nose of that true T-Rex of Astons, the monstrous Vantage V600. Elsewhere, expert machinists transformed swathes of supple, aromatic hide into perfectly tailored upholstery, and master craftsmen inspected, matched and mounted thin slivers of fabulous wood veneer to create that most British of interior features.

Those days might be long gone so far as the series production cars are concerned, but Works still has a vital part to play as a centre of excellence with a commitment to passing on those craft skills to a new generation. The magic of Works is that in preserving Aston's past it continues to enrich the future. We hope you enjoy this issue of *Vantage* and its 60-year journey through the history of this very special place.

Richard Meaden, editor

The next issue of *Vantage* will be on sale on September 4, 2015. For subscriptions and back issues visit www.astonmagazine.co.uk

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VANTAGE

Vantage Magazine
5 Tower Court, Irchester Road,
Wollaston, Northants NN29 7PJ, UK
Tel +44 (0)20 7907 6585
Fax +44 (0)1933 667309
email: eds@vantagemag.co.uk

EDITORIAL

Editor **Richard Meaden**
Managing editor **Peter Tomalin**
Art director **Mark Sommer**

Contributing writers

Stephen Archer, Chris Bietzk, Henry Catchpole, Bruce Cox, Paul Chudecki, Mike Duff, John Simister

Contributing photographers

Max Earey, Dominic Fraser, Drew Gibson, Gus Gregory, Matthew Howell, Charlie Magee, Dean Smith, David Wright

Super-sub

Glen Waddington, Chris Bietzk

Office manager

Jane Townsend-Emms

ADVERTISING

Advertising manager **Rob Schulp**
rob@flyingspace.co.uk
Tel +44 (0)1344 761928

Senior production executive

Michael Hills
Tel +44 (0)207 907 6116

SUBSCRIPTIONS

www.astonmagazine.co.uk

PUBLISHING

Editorial director **David Lillywhite**
Publishing director **Geoff Love**
Group managing director
Ian Westwood
Chief financial officer **Brett Reynolds**
Group finance director **Ian Leggett**
CEO **James Tye**
Company founder **Felix Dennis**



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Bulletin

News, analysis and events



Aston's electric shock

THE DBX CONCEPT IS PART OF A RADICAL NEW FUTURE FOR ASTON, BUT ONE THAT ALSO INCLUDES SPORTS CARS, V12 ENGINES AND MANUAL GEARBOXES. IN A WIDE-RANGING INTERVIEW, NEW BOSS ANDY PALMER OUTLINES HIS VISION

WORDS MIKE DUFF | IMAGES ASTON MARTIN



IT'S HARD NOT TO like Andy Palmer. Aston Martin's new boss is one of the motor industry's more affable personalities, direct and approachable in a way that most senior executives are not. He doesn't

suffer fools, or foolish questions, gladly – but he's more than happy to talk about the future and, when he can't get too specific, to drop broad hints. That was true when he was head of product development for Nissan, and happily it seems to be just as much the case now he's CEO of Aston Martin Lagonda.

His move to Gaydon was one that few people saw coming. Palmer had been at Nissan for 23 years, working his way up from heading the company's UK technical

centre to become arguably the most senior Brit in the global car industry. He was even tipped to take overall charge of the business one day. But he gave all that up – gladly, he says – to lead a company that has produced fewer cars since it was established 102 years ago than his former employer builds every five days (70,000 for reference).

So is the job what he imagined? 'Aston is petrolhead heaven,' he tells us when we catch up with him at the Geneva show. 'Six months in, I still can't wait to get to work every day. Of course, the business side is tough. Aston has fundamentally lost money forever. The challenge is the business model, creating products that will hedge against that happening in future.'

Much of what we can expect from Palmer-era Aston will be reassuringly familiar, and entirely predictable. Gorgeous-looking sports cars remain at

the heart of all future plans – the Geneva show stand contained both the track-only Vulcan special and the Vantage GT3 (later renamed the GT12) – but Palmer's determination to move the brand in some radical new directions was also demonstrated by the presence at Geneva of the electrically powered DBX concept.

'Every year we'll do a number of limited series – the cars that will probably become future collectables – with the Vulcan and [GT12] good examples of those,' he says. 'As for the DBX, I signed off on that four days into the job...'

'We know that, like everybody else, we can't stand still. Some people say that hybrids are as inevitable as death and taxes, because emissions regulations force you in that direction. That's the dilemma I came to Aston with. We have to meet the [emissions] standards, so what do I do? Put a downsized four-cylinder engine into an Aston? No way.'



Above and below

Electrically powered DBX concept is to be developed into a new luxury GT 'crossover'. New boss Andy Palmer (inset, opposite) says such a vehicle is vital if Aston Martin is to attract more female buyers and capitalise on emerging markets such as China

The role of a production DBX will be – like that of the unloved Cygnet – to reduce Aston's average CO2 emissions, but Palmer also sees an SUV-lite 'crossover' like the DBX as being vital to broaden Aston's appeal.

'When I came into the company I found out that 96 per cent of the cars we were making were being sold to guys,' he says. 'Women were approving those sales – "Yes, darling, you've done well, you can have an Aston". But I wanted to know why is she not buying it, why is she not rewarding herself? This is saying, rather than start with a 98th percentile man when you design a car, why not start with a fifth percentile woman and work backwards? That's what we've done. With the DBX I want to create a car that a successful businesswoman can reward herself with, in the same way her male colleague rewards himself with a DB9.'

Another motivating factor is the





increasing popularity of crossovers in developing markets, with rival luxury makers set to launch a raft of new SUVs aimed at these rich territories in the next few years. 'We won't do a big, hulking SUV,' says Palmer, 'because we're not a truck-maker. But I can't ignore the way the performance car market is moving, either. We have to make cars that people will want to buy. In 102 years we've only sold 70,000 cars. Of those, 3500 went to women and 2000 went into the BRICS countries [Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa]. So think about the opportunity if you make a car that's approachable for women and the BRICS - with China the obvious proxy for that. You can imagine the opportunity we have.'

The Lagonda Taraf is also part of the broadening strategy. 'We've brought Lagonda back to life for a reason,' says Palmer, 'and it's an opportunity to go into that market and relaunch properly. Ask if I see Lagonda as becoming a brand in its own right and the answer is yes, in time. It will need to be a three-box saloon, but I see it as a serious long-term competitor to Rolls-Royce, even if we don't have the same number of derivatives.'

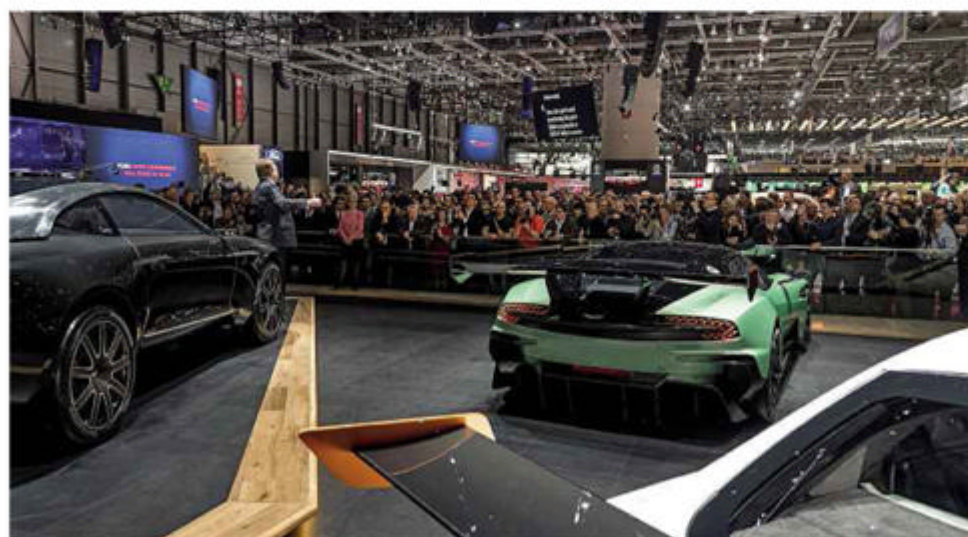
Moving onto more familiar territory, Palmer is keen to stress that sports cars will continue to be at the heart of the Aston brand, and that the long wait for new models will soon be at an end. The first of these will be the replacement for the DB9, which we will see next year. This

will be the first car to feature Daimler technology, including its full electrical architecture - but Palmer all-but confirms that it won't have the Mercedes-AMG V8 engine that is also part of the technical partnership, and instead will be sticking with the familiar V12.

'One of the reasons for having an electric car is to allow me to continue with the V12 for longer,' Palmer says. 'Of course, we've got to make it emissions-compliant; the current V12 has to be completely renewed. But yes, we have a 12-cylinder engine in our future. Our customers expect that.'

That means the first car featuring the AMG V8 will be the replacement for the Vantage, which will follow about six months afterwards. A new Vanquish will follow later to complete the clan. Palmer confirms that the new models will all continue to use Aston's familiar construction technique of bonded and die-cast aluminium and alloy panels, but also insists that criticism of the age of this 'VH' platform is misplaced.

'It was definitely far ahead of its time,' he says. 'It should have been described as modular architecture - like MQB or one of the other systems big manufacturers have adopted. We're always making excuses about it being an old platform, but if you were to compare the original VH platform



Above and left

Palmer launches the DBX concept at the Geneva show, which also saw public debuts for the Vulcan track car and GT12 (formerly GT3) Vantage

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IN BRIEF



NO THUNDERBOLT FROM FISKER

Aston Martin has dropped a lawsuit against Fisker Automotive, issued after former Aston design chief Henrik Fisker revealed a Vanquish-based design prototype called Thunderbolt earlier this year. Aston Martin had said the prototype infringed Aston Martin's rights. However, a joint statement later said: 'Henrik Fisker has decided that Project Thunderbolt will not be produced,' and, as a result, 'Aston Martin will withdraw the lawsuit'. The statement added that the matters had all been resolved amicably.



NEW BOSS MAKES ASTON RACING DEBUT IN 24HRS

The 2015 Dunlop Britcar 24 Hours at Silverstone saw an Aston racing debut for new AML boss Andy Palmer, sharing a V8 Vantage GT4 that finished a highly commendable fifth. Dr Palmer (third from left) shared the #36 car with (from the left) chief creative officer Marek Reichman, motoring journalist Andrew Frankel and 22-year-old racer Alice Powell. Meanwhile another V8 Vantage GT4 entered by Beechdean AMR took overall victory in the event (more details on page 15).



NEW HQ FOR ASTON ENGINEERING

Aston Engineering, the Heritage-approved specialist based in Derby, has relocated to new state-of-the-art premises. The 17,000 sq ft facility, close to the A38 on the western side of the city, brings all the company's operations together for the first time. Managing director David Jack said: 'This is an incredibly exciting time for us. Having seen our business expand over 32 years, we felt our next step was to consolidate all aspects of the business under one roof.' More at www.astonengineering.co.uk

to today's there's an enormous transformation. And it's a great way to build cars in the volumes that we do.'

Although most attention has been paid to the imminent arrival of a Mercedes-engined Aston, Palmer says that the Merc electrical architecture is actually going to be the transformative change: 'We have the pick of their sub-systems, the ability to put whatever we like onto the cars. Anything Daimler has can plug into it, from active safety to potentially full autonomy.' Meaning Astons are set to go from being relatively short of tech to being - potentially - filled with it.

But, in some other areas, Palmer is determined to keep things simple, especially when it comes to gearboxes.

'I would love to be the last car manufacturer providing stick-shifts,' he says. 'And even as the industry moves to twin-clutch transmissions, at the heart of each of those you still have a manual transmission. It's only a matter of breaking it into its parts, and that's where I started my career, as a transmission engineer.'

Palmer confirms Aston will offer a

From the top

GT12 is Aston's answer to Porsche's GT3; Taraf and other Lagondas will be aimed at Rolls-Royce buyers; Vulcan will be followed by other low-run 'collectables'

manual gearbox with the AMG V8, despite the fact Mercedes doesn't - and drops a broad hint that Aston's non-manual gearbox is likely to be standardised on an automated twin-clutch unit. He is also determined that Aston will resist the emissions-enforced pressure to build smaller engines for as long as possible.

'There's an inevitability to downsizing,' he says, when asked about what the Aston of 2025 will look like, 'and although I'd say a six-cylinder engine is possible, I'm not planning anything smaller than a V8 at the moment. It's V8 and V12 as far as I'm concerned.'

Which sounds like a pretty good mission statement to us.

● In late April, AML announced it had secured £200 million of additional capital investment to develop a new luxury GT based on the DBX concept.



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That winning feeling

AN EMOTIONAL CLASS WIN AT THE NÜRBURGRING FOR THE OLD BOSS
AND A THRILLING 24-HOUR RACE DEBUT FOR HIS REPLACEMENT

WORDS RICHARD MEADEN

PHOTOGRAPHY DREW GIBSON / MAX EAREY

AS WE CLOSE FOR PRESS, the chequered flag has just fallen on the Nürburgring 24 Hours. Aston was there in strength, with Aston Martin Racing entering two factory-run V12 Vantage GT3s, while the Gaydon-based Aston Martin Engineering team fielded three cars: a pair of race-prepared Vantage GT12s and a Vantage N430.

Typically, the race was both unpredictable and unforgiving, with patchy rain early on making tyre choice and driving conditions exceptionally difficult. Oil spilled by another car almost claimed the much-fancied #007 Bilstein-liveried Vantage GT3 during the night, but a Herculean effort by the AMR team saw the extensive damage repaired and the car – crewed by Darren Turner, Stefan Mücke and Pedro Lamy – rejoin the fray, eventually finishing 16th overall. AMR's sister #006 Vantage GT3 ran as high as 7th, but retired on Sunday morning with powertrain issues.

Things were looking better for the Gaydon-run cars, especially the #50 GT12, which had claimed SP8 class pole. It led for the first 16 hours of the race and was homing in on a top-twenty overall finish when Andreas Guldén crashed heavily

around 8am on Sunday. The car was too badly damaged to continue. This left the other GT12 carrying hopes of an SP8 class win, but it, too, succumbed to bad luck, retiring from the race with mechanical issues. Honour was upheld, though, with the #49 Vantage N430 taking the SP8 class win. This was an emotional victory – not least for Aston's non-executive chairman, Dr Ulrich Bez (right), who was one of #48's drivers – as the car was presented in the same yellow livery as 'Rose', Aston's very first N24 racer, the car Bez co-drove back in 2006.

This Nürburgring success came on the back of an exceptional result in the Silverstone 24 Hours the previous month, with an outright victory for the Vantage GT4 in the hands of customer team Beechdean AMR. Two more Vantage GT4s occupied top five places, with the Aston Martin Evolution Academy car of Speedworks Motorsport finishing 4th overall and the factory entry taking 5th in the hands of Aston CEO Dr Andy Palmer and chief creative officer Marek Reichman (both making their 24-hour race debuts) together with journalist Andrew Frankel and 22-year-old racer Alice Powell.



In the World Endurance Championship (WEC), the full factory Aston Martin Racing squad has enjoyed a strong start to its season-long campaign. The championship kicked off at the Six Hours of Silverstone with the AMR squad fielding five cars, including a new GTE AM class entry for Roald Goethe, who returns to the WEC in the #96 Vantage after a break in 2014.

Qualifying went perfectly in GTE PRO, with the #95 Young Driver entry for the Danish duo of Nicki Thiim and Marco Sørensen taking pole, followed by the #99 and #97 Vantages in 2nd and 3rd. The promising start continued in GTE AM, with the #98 car of Pedro Lamy, Mathias Lauda and Paul Dalla Lana taking pole.

Sadly, come the race, the vagaries of a full-course yellow caution period gifted competitors a pit-stop advantage over the trio of AMR PRO class Astons that couldn't be clawed-back. At the chequered flag the #95, #97 and #99 took 4th, 5th and 6th respectively. The #98 car enjoyed better luck, converting its dominant qualifying performance into an equally classy win in GTE AM, with the #96 car taking fourth in class.

After Silverstone, the WEC headed to Belgium for the Six Hours of Spa. This is

traditionally where all the teams make their final preparations prior to the Le Mans 24 Hour race, for the fast, flowing curves and long straights of the Spa-Francorchamps circuit are similar in character to the French road course. Once again AMR prevailed in both PRO and AM qualifying sessions, the #99 car of Fernando Rees, Richie Stanaway and Alex MacDowell storming to pole position in the former, Lamy, Lauda and Dalla Lana claiming pole in the latter.

For once the race result reflected AMR's qualifying performance, with the #99 car taking a strong victory in PRO and the #98 car continuing its clean-sweep of pole positions and wins in the AM class. The other three AMR entries all finished, though some way back from their winning teammates. Turner and Mücke's #97 car placed 5th in PRO, followed by the #95 car in 6th, while the #96 car of Goethe, Castellacci and Hall finished 6th in the AM category.

AMR will be hoping to continue its winning streak as the WEC heads to France for the biggest race in the endurance racing calendar, the Le Mans 24 Hours. We very much hope to report on another pair of class wins in the next issue of *Vantage*.



From the top

Driver line-up for the factory-entered GT4 in the Silverstone 24 Hours included (third from left) Aston Martin CEO Andy Palmer; the AMR-entered GTs shone in the WEC round at Spa-Francorchamps; and pitlane action from Silverstone

'The WEC now heads to France for the biggest race in the endurance racing calendar, the Le Mans 24 Hours'





1958 ASTON MARTIN DB2/4 MK III DROPHEAD COUPE Chassis no. AM300/3/1451

2013 ASTON MARTIN CENTENNIAL DB9 SPYDER CONCEPT Coachwork by Zagato; Chassis no. SCFFDABM1DGB14756

1961 ASTON MARTIN DB4 Chassis no. DB4/580/L

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Astons to the fore as new season opens

FROM DONINGTON PARK TO THE TOUR AUTO, HERE ARE THE HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SEASON SO FAR

WORDS STEPHEN ARCHER | PHOTOGRAPHY DAVE BRASSINGTON / TOUR AUTO

IF THE WIND has settled and the barometer risen, then Astons will be seen being used in earnest at the plethora of road and race events available to drivers this year. Already we have seen the Mille Miglia and Tour de France, but the season arguably kicked off with the fine Donington Historic Festival in early May, now a firm fixture on the calendar with large entries including a diverse selection from the Aston Martin fraternity.

Many Astons took part in the festival, from Christopher Scott-McKirdy's 1933 Le Mans to Wolfgang Friedrichs' 1963 DP214 replica. The 1959 DBR4 Grand Prix cars of Marc Valvekens and Freidrichs battled it out in the pre-1966 GP race with the former coming out on top, both cars reminding us that they were fabulous David Brown racing cars but just came out a few years too late. Valvekens came 11th, but all but one of the cars in front were rear-engined.

David Ozanne's 1936 2 Litre Speed model came a strong 9th in the 'Mad Jack' pre-war race ahead of Scott-McKirdy's 1933 Le Mans and Robert Blakemore's own 2 Litre Speed model. It is worth noting that all the Astons, no matter what age, finished despite the varying conditions and frenetic pace. Particularly spectacular were Friedrichs and Les Goble in the DP214 replica. The conditions were less

than perfect for some of the weekend, and those cars are skittish in the wet with their very light tails. To finish 11th in the GT race was a great achievement.

No fewer than five Astons from the 1950s graced the Woodcote Trophy race. Simon Hadfield (DB3S) was the first Aston into Redgate but Steve Boulton-Brooks' 3S was first over the line. Further back were two DB2/4s and the wonderful ex-Peter Collins DB3 of Martin Melling.

The Tour Auto took place in April with a remarkable 300 cars, but this year just three Astons; the fabulous DB4 GTs of Anthony Moody and Ian Dalglish and the 1957 DB MkIII of Benoit Dauchin all completed the gruelling six days.

The Aston Club Racing season started on May 16 at Oulton Park under glorious sunshine. The meeting saw the debut of

Clockwise from above

Chris Scragg's V8 heads the pack in the Intermarque race at Oulton Park; Edward Brunet's V8 Vantage GT4 in the inaugural round of the GT4 and V8 Vantage Cup; and the DB4 GT of Ian Dalglish on the Tour Auto

the GT4 and V8 Vantage Cup. This carries on where the GB GT4 series left off, and with simple regulations and shorter races it is sure to appeal to more amateur drivers. The entry here was not huge but it showed that novices and gentlemen drivers can really get on with these cars. The winner, David Tinn, has some experience, but the Montague/Mercer GT4 in 3rd was much more of a novice entry, and a fine drive saw them take second.

Chris Scragg was an uncharacteristic 3rd in Intermarque with his very rapid V8 (an 83mph lap around Oulton Park is not dawdling) and it was wonderful to see the now-historic DB4 lightweights in action in the hands of Nicholas King, Simon Watts and Martin Melling. The meeting had a lovely, old-world club 'buzz' about it and whetted the appetite thoroughly for the rest of the 2015 season!

COMING UP...

June 13 Le Mans Historic Support Race
June 28 Aston Club Racing, Donington
July 11-12 Historic Superprix, Brands Hatch
July 18 Aston Club Racing, Snetterton
July 24-26 Silverstone Classic





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ASTON MARTIN



Clockwise from left

A dazzling array of DB7s in the Bloxham class; a royal visitor to the Concours was HRH Prince Charles's DB6 Vantage Volante; super-rare AR1 scooped top prize in the Bloxham class; judging the pre-war class, and a lovely Series 3 V8



Sun shines on Spring Concours

GLORIOUS WEATHER, WONDERFUL CARS AND THE PERFECT SETTING

WORDS PETER TOMALIN

PHOTOGRAPHY DOMINIC FRASER

AFTER THE BONHAMS Works Sale at Newport Pagnell on Saturday May 9, Sunday saw another highlight of the Aston Martin year, the AMOC Spring Concours, held just down the road in the grounds of Woburn Abbey.

The timing and location couldn't have worked better, and the Club was rewarded with superb weather and a hugely impressive turnout, Astons stretching as far as the eye could see. Lagondas, too, with a jaw-dropping line-up of 1970s 'Wedges' and a rare opportunity to view the new Taraf supersaloon.

Another star car was the MkII Long Chassis Sports Tourer of David Bracey. This handsome pre-war Aston had graced the Aston Martin stand at Olympia back in 1935, the same year that AMOC was founded, which is why it has been chosen as the 'feature car' for a number of events in the club's 80th anniversary year. Pride of place in front of the house, meanwhile, went to HRH Prince Charles's

famous DB6 Vantage Volante.

But everywhere you looked there were special cars, including Roger Bennington's beautiful, primrose yellow DB4 that appears in the cover story of this issue, the famous DB4 GT Zagato '2 VEV', and a spectacular line-up of DB6s to celebrate the model's own 50th anniversary.

Aston Martin Works had an impressive display of its own and sponsored a special class for the limited-edition Works 60th Anniversary Vanquish. Five of the six Anniversary models were entered, with Works commercial director Paul Spires presenting the trophy to delighted winning owner Jeremy Levinson.

A number of other prizes were presented by Aston Martin Lagonda CEO Andy Palmer, making his first visit to the Concours. Winners included Tom Rollason (2 Litre Second Series, pre-war class), Mark Seligman (DB6 Vantage, Newport Pagnell six-cylinder class), Colin Eades (Vanquish S, Newport Pagnell eight-cylinder and

Vanquish class), Nick Hoggett (AR1, Bloxham class) and Ian Dewsnap (V12 Vantage, Gaydon class). Winner of the Pride of Ownership trophy was Terence Disdale for his DB5, while the Elite class was won by Michael Reed with his DB7 Vantage Volante (awarded a remarkable 97.5 out of a possible 100 by the judges).

This year's Concours was the largest to date, with around 350 cars on show. Mark Donoghue, Concours chairman and chief judge said: 'Today's record event has once again raised the bar for our activities and I'm very happy that so many Aston Martin owners could join us here at Woburn.'

Paul Spires added: 'Just 24 hours after the 16th annual Bonhams auction at Aston Martin Works, the AMOC Spring Concours has been another great day for all of us in the Aston Martin "family".'

The Autumn Concours is at Alnwick Castle on September 27. For details of all future AMOC events, go to www.amoc.org



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The birth of the AM personalised plate

100 YEARS AGO, THE FIRST ASTON WAS REGISTERED FOR THE ROAD – AND WITH AN ‘AM’ PLATE, TOO. A PLAN WAS HATCHED TO MARK THE ANNIVERSARY

WORDS DAVID WRIGHT PHOTOGRAPHY DAVID WRIGHT / AMHT

WHEN ASTON MARTIN celebrated its centenary in 2013, it was clearly a hugely important year – a whole century since Lionel Martin and Robert Bamford incorporated their company on January 15 1913, to be ‘dealers in, manufacturers and repairers of motor cars’. By 1914 the name Aston-Martin was appearing in the motoring press, including a famous series of photographs of the prototype tackling a hillclimb in Brighton in October 1914. A hundred years after that particular event, I was heavily involved in a recreation of the hillclimb (as featured in *Vantage* issue 8).

So what was the next landmark for the fledgling marque? Well, on March 16, 1915, an entry appeared in Wiltshire County Council’s Register of Motor Cars for ‘a dark grey, two seater 14 cwt car for private use’. It was the very first car to be registered as an Aston-Martin for the road! This, I decided, was another event well worth commemorating.

It was Roger Stowers (the Aston archivist and subject of the *Heroes* feature in this very issue) who first told me the story of how Lionel had gone all the way to Wiltshire to register the car even though the company was based in Henniker Mews in central London. This was simply because, at that time, Wiltshire was responsible for number plates beginning with the initials AM.

That first car (‘Coal Scuttle’) was registered as AM 4656, and all subsequent early Astons were registered in Wiltshire just so they could have their AM plates, the idea being to generate some extra publicity for the company. Roger Stowers reckoned Lionel was probably single-handedly responsible – or in Roger’s mind ‘irresponsible’ – for the cult of the cherished number plate!

Much of this history had originally been unearthed by Inman Hunter, Alan Archer and Neil Murray. Sadly both Inman and Alan are no longer with us, but Neil was able to confirm the story – and point me towards the building where Wiltshire

County Council’s register of motor cars had been kept: County Hall in Trowbridge.

Finding the exact building that was in use in 1915 wasn’t easy, as there have been several County Halls over the centuries, and the building in question is no longer owned or used by the council. But after a little detective work I did eventually track it down – on Hill Street, just a few hundred yards from the present New County Hall. So we knew where Lionel went to register his new car; now we needed a suitable cavalcade of cars to mark the 100th anniversary.

Roger Carey, chairman of the Aston Martin Heritage Trust, offered to transport A3 (the oldest Aston still in existence) to Trowbridge and we were joined by a number of other Trustees and their Astons. After posing for photographs outside the old council building, we then headed to Bath for lunch.

Sadly the First World War meant the factory was very much mothballed soon after, so it was not until December 1920 that Lionel registered the next two Astons, as AM 270 and AM 273. His propensity to swap number plates, chassis and engines around, apparently with no regard for any legal necessities, means things then became rather complicated for the historians. But Neil Murray believes that AM 270 went onto chassis B2 or No 2, which later became known as Bunny after a chassis change. And AM 273 was eventually attached to chassis No 3 (or A3 as it is now known). However, when the car was sold to a Captain Douglas in March 1923, it was re-registered as XN 2902, the number it carries to this day.

So, what next in the Aston Martin story? It was not until the June 6, 1919, that the next significant thing occurred, when Coal Scuttle was entered in the London-Edinburgh Trial, going on to win a gold medal. Clearly we must mark the 100th anniversary of Aston’s first competitive event. Fortunately I have four years to organise something suitably special!



From top

A3, the oldest Aston still in existence, outside the building where its sister car, Coal Scuttle, had been registered exactly 100 years earlier (and where A3, too, was first registered, as AM 270); Heritage trustees marked the occasion with a photocall, followed by lunch in nearby Bath; Coal Scuttle, wearing another AM plate, with Kate ‘Calamity’ Martin at the wheel; and Lionel Martin at Brooklands in February 1921 with the other early Aston, known as Bunny

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Drop-top DBs star at Bonhams' Aston Works sale

DB4 AND DB5 CONVERTIBLES RACE PAST £1 MILLION IN NEWPORT PAGNELL

WORDS CHRIS BIETZK

PHOTOGRAPHY DOMINIC FRASER / BONHAMS

PERCEPTIONS ARE NOT easily shifted, and until very recently – 9 May, to be precise – we had always thought of Sir Peter Ustinov as the second-best Poirot, but following Bonhams' 16th Aston Works sale we will forever know him as the lucky beggar who for a time enjoyed the 1962 DB4 Series 4 Vantage Convertible pictured below.

Offered for sale from a private collection in Switzerland, and with four previous owners in addition to the second-best Poirot, it brought £1,513,500 including premium, a sum commensurate with its rarity (just 70 DB4 Convertibles were built), condition (beautiful), and provenance (Ustinov was a towering talent, even if his version of Agatha Christie's Belgian detective was slow and clownish, with a ridiculous accent).

The DB4 was one of two cars to crash through the million-pound barrier at the sale, which raised £10,280,275 in total – a new record for the annual Works auction. The other seven-figure Aston was the penultimate lot, a 1966 DB5 Convertible with hardtop that raced to a final price of £1,524,700. Interestingly, it was far from original: crashed in the 1970s, it was given a new chassis and body by specialist Bodylines in the 1980s, and fitted with a replacement, Vantage-spec engine some time later.

While there was an element of Trigger's broom about it, all the work had evidently been carried out with enormous care, and those who saw the car in person before the sale will no doubt have understood the impulse to hurl money at it. Like the Ustinov car, the DB5 beat its estimate handily (the former was expected to make up to £1,000,000 and the latter up to £1,200,000), and the strong bidding reinforced the impression given by results in Paris in February that drop-top DB4s and 5s are very much the Asters to have at present.

Bonhams always sees to it that the Works auction features a pleasing array of less obvious machines, and our favourite this year was a well-restored 1970 David Brown 780 Selectamatic tractor that proved popular with bidders, too. Estimated at £5000-7000, it sold for £10,350. The oddest of all Asters, the William Towns Lagonda, has become something of a *cause célèbre* for enthusiasts of a certain vintage, and the two examples offered here found an appreciative audience, too.

A 1984 car with 29,400 miles on the clock made £50,600, while an even fresher example – unrestored and with only 1632 miles – relieved its buyer of £98,940. Both cars seemed to have been well looked after, so their new keepers can at least hope that they won't have to spend vast amounts



of money on the notoriously temperamental electronics system any time soon.

Of course, cars tend to be viewed less critically as they age, so it is possible that the Lagonda's flaws are now deemed 'charming' or 'characterful' by fans. No matter how astonishing the car's styling might be (and it has lost none of its power to shock), we'd struggle to forgive it some of its quirks at £100,000, but prices are only going one way.

Virage apologists also had much to cheer at the auction: all four cars offered were snapped up, with one in particular, a 1990 coupé, attracting hefty bids. Upgraded by the factory when new at the request of a foreign royal, it was sold here for £74,300 – which is £25,000 less than the cost of the work undertaken alone. Viewed in that context, it was very good value. Whether it represented a shrewd investment, we'll have to wait and see. Perceptions are not easily shifted, but if time can be kind to the William Towns Lagonda, then perhaps Richard Meaden was right when he asserted in issue nine that the unfashionable Virage 'has coolness within its grasp'.

From top

The May 9 auction was the biggest Works sale yet in terms of money raised and lots offered, and was very well attended, attracting some 2000 guests despite iffy weather; Peter Ustinov's DB4 Convertible and a low-mileage Towns Lagonda were among the stars of the day

Looking back at a busy quarter...

...AND AHEAD TO THE SALE OF A SPECIAL RACING CAR

WORDS CHRIS BIETZK

PHOTOGRAPHY RM SOTHEBY'S / DARIN SCHNABEL; BONHAMS

AWAY FROM NEWPORT PAGNELL there has been plentiful, if largely unremarkable, Aston-related auction activity over the last three months, with DB7s as usual accounting for a large proportion of cars sold and, as usual, making the sort of money that enabled us to include the DB7 V12 among our selection of '£30k Astons' in the last issue.

In the year of its 50th birthday the DB6 has continued its steady rise into the realm of the mega-money classics, with a nicely preserved, single-owner 1970 Mk2 Vantage offered by RM Sotheby's at Amelia Island commanding \$700,000 (£474,500). Delivered new to Canada and with every option going (including 12 pints of anti-freeze, amusingly), it looked a corker, the like of which are only going to become harder to find. Given that Historics at Brooklands sold a standard, freshly restored 1968 DB6 just a week earlier, on March 7, for £191,520, you might argue that the winner of the Mk2 Vantage paid an unreasonable premium for his car, but there is little evidence to suggest he'll come to regret his purchase.

RM Sotheby's hammered two more interesting cars at its Amelia Island sale, both with racing history but from opposite ends of the DB spectrum. First to be offered was a tuned 2006 DBRS9 that was campaigned extensively by New York-based Autosport Designs in SCCA GT3 competition. The \$170,500 paid seemed a fair price for such a lot of engineering, but if the buyer can afford to run it for a full season, we don't suppose he was too worried about the cost of the car, anyway.

A few lots later, \$335,500 bought a delightful '57 DB2/4 MkIII that was kitted out for competition in period with a DB3S cylinder head and triple Weber side-draught carburettors, and more recently restored and used in classic rallies.

Distinctly less affordable was the '53 DB2/4 that was offered, again by RM Sotheby's, as part of the Andrews Collection in Austin on May 2 – but that's



not to say it wasn't worth every cent of the \$1,320,000 it took to acquire it. We've long felt that the earlier DBs are undervalued, and as one of only two Bertone-bodied DB2/4 Drophead Coupés produced, this particular car (like the others in the Andrews Collection, exceptionally well maintained and honest) really did tick all the boxes.

The summer's sales should turn up several cars about which the same could be said, but we'll be surprised if there's a more important Aston offered for auction than the one below – the very first built under David Brown. The 1948 2-litre works racer, which will be among the stars at Bonhams' Quail Lodge event on August 13-14, helped to establish Aston Martin's post-war reputation by winning the 24 Hours of Spa, and returned home under its own steam (arguably the more impressive achievement) to be displayed at the London Motor Show.

At the wheel for that famous win in '48 was Jock Horsfall, a former spy whose wartime exploits were well known to a young intelligence officer named Ian Fleming, and who was very probably the inspiration for a character called James Bond.

Consider the car's historical significance, its excellent condition, *and* its connection with the real 007 and tell us it's not a potential bargain at its estimate of \$600,000-900,000.

Above and below

Predictably, the Maranello-built Italian stuff grabbed the headlines at the sale of the Andrews Collection in Austin, but our pick of the cars (perhaps equally predictably) was this beautiful DB2/4 Drophead Coupé by Bertone, one of only two made. Bonhams' Quail Lodge sale in August will be graced by the 1948 24 Hours of Spa-winning Aston works racer, the car that announced to the world the beginning of the David Brown era at Aston Martin



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A night to remember

I thought your readers might be interested in a story about my late father's Aston Martin.

Some 25 years ago I was living in Hersham, Surrey, and every Thursday a group of us went to the Bricklayers Arms for a few pints and to talk about cars. I was restoring a Healey 100 at the time and needed a bit of moral support!

One Thursday there was a change of plan. My friend Steve had heard there was a talk at nearby Brooklands and suggested we go there instead, so off we went. During the evening, I asked the chap giving the talk if he knew anything about an Aston that was raced at Brooklands by a man called Ernie Lord. No, he said, and that was that – or so I thought...

On our way home, Steve asked me what that was all about, so I told him how in the early '50s my father, Christopher Taylor, and his brother (my uncle Richard) had gone to a garage in London and bought an ex-works Aston Martin each. Both cars had racing history – hence the Brooklands connection. Dad and uncle Richard used to 'race' each other around the country and when it rained they'd drive to Shepherds Bush, where there was a wood-block roundabout and test their skidding skills – until the police stopped them! The cars were sold in the late-50s and that was the last I knew of them.

Steve suggested we drive home via Queens Road – he said



Left and above
Peter Taylor's father's 2 Litre;
and (above) with his uncle's
Ulster in the early '50s

an old Aston, a bright red car, sometimes parked on a driveway there. As we approached the house, there was indeed an old Aston, but not a red one. This one was British racing green with the reg number BGF 557. 'I don't believe it!' I blurted out. 'That's the car I was talking about. That's my father's Aston!'

I don't think Steve could believe it either. In fact he thought it was the drink talking (to be fair, I had drunk some six pints of Guinness during the evening). 'Take me home and I'll show you some old pictures,' I said. 'If I'm wrong, next Thursday I'll buy the drinks and the food!'

So the bet was on. I managed to find the photo album with the Astons and showed Steve. 'Get back in the car!' he said. When we got back to Queens Road it was 11.45pm. We rang the bell and a gentleman in his 60s opened the door in a dressing gown. I opened

my mouth but nothing came out. Steve showed him the album and said: 'This bloke here – his dad owned that car there!' The gentleman looked and said: 'I'll get my son out of bed!' Minutes later a younger man appeared, fully dressed, and introduced himself as Andy Bell, restorer of pre-war Astons [and boss of Ecurie Bertelli, featured on p128].

He looked at the pictures for some time, and concluded that it was indeed my father's old car. Something about having a 2-litre dry-sump engine and the exhaust exiting on the right-hand side.

'You're very lucky,' said Andy. 'I've just restored this car, and it's got to be on the ferry at Portsmouth in the morning as the owner is about to do the Mille Miglia. I thought I'd break the journey and stop overnight with dad. Any other night and you wouldn't have seen the car.' Then he added: 'Come on then, I'll take you for a spin!'

So it's now well after midnight, and I'm sitting in the passenger seat whizzing around Hersham. At one point we touched 85mph on the Seven Hills Road. I can still remember the feeling some 25 years later! Wow, what fun! I remember walking through my front door and bursting into tears.

Thank you Andy.
Peter Taylor, Haslemere, Surrey

DBR4 request

Firstly, thank you for producing such a high-quality magazine as *Vantage*. Although I am not an Aston owner (way out of reach for me) I do have 36 models from 1:43 to 1:18 scale and quite a large library to dream over. I include a photo of the last model I built, a 250F Maserati in 1:6 scale: hand-beaten aluminium body on a steel tube chassis, 72-spoke Borrani wire wheels and hand-made tyres. I built this car as a substitute for the Aston DBR4 that I first set out to do, but I was unable to obtain enough information to start the build.

Haynes produced a manual on the 250F that was a great help, along with other sources of information, and if I could get this much help, I could start on the DBR4. Is there anyone among your readers with access to a DBR4 who could feed me information?

If so I would be very grateful. This is a purely personal undertaking and I do not build for commission, nor for sale. I am retired and this is a good way to occupy my time! Anyone who might be able to help can contact me at hbreedon@bigpond.com.au
John Breedon



Stunning 1:6-scale Maserati;
now John wants to build
a DBR4, but needs help



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Aston-related objects of desire, including a spectacular 1:8-scale Vanquish model



**Aston Martin AM50004
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£449 | www.astonstore.co.uk

Marma's AM50004 glasses might be brand new for 2015, but they belong in the glovebox of a 1970s V8; just like the V8, they're equal-parts Commander Bond and Lieutenant Kojak, and somehow all the better for it.



**Aston Martin 'Power Series'
cufflinks by Grant Macdonald**

£245 | www.grantmacdonald.com

The Elton Johns and Walt Fraziers of the world might disagree with us, but a man really needs just one pair of cufflinks, and the latest from Grant Macdonald, in rose gold and gunmetal, should last a lifetime – just as long as you manage to prevent them from disappearing into that black hole between the bed and the nightstand.



Goldfinger DB5 print by Jesús Prudencio

£15.39 | www.carsandfilms.com

The colourful, graphic 'Cars And Films' prints by Seville-based designer Jesús Prudencio feature automotive icons of the silver screen, from Mr Bean's Mini to Ferris Bueller's (friend's dad's) Ferrari 250GT California Spider – oh, and this old thing, of course...



1:8-scale Vanquish model by Amalgam

£4200 | www.finemodelcars.com

The marketing blurb will tell you that the Vanquish represents 'the height of... design, engineering, technology and craftsmanship', and the same is true of this staggeringly detailed 1:8-scale replica, which was created by Amalgam using CAD data supplied by Aston. Bespoke models can be ordered, but bog-standard Aviemore Blue looks more than fine to us, thanks very much.

Desirables

More Aston-related goodies, including a certain secret agent's latest wristwatch

GT Racing Bonnet by the V Collection

From £2325 | www.vcollection.com

Even if you believe that there 'ain't no replacement for displacement', you'll concede that there are ways of boosting a car's performance other than an engine swap. This bonnet from the V Collection, available in full carbonfibre or ready-to-paint FRP, is designed to help V8 and V12 Vantage owners realise the full potential of their car through its prominent vents, said to improve engine efficiency.



007 Seamaster Aqua Terra 150M by Omega

£4630 | www.omegawatches.com

At the time of writing, the release of *Spectre* is still over six months away, but we already know what 007's latest piece of arm-candy will look like – and no, we don't mean Monica Bellucci, you swines. For his 24th big-screen outing, the world's most conspicuous spook will be wearing a suitably modified Omega Seamaster Aqua Terra 150M, and a non-lethal version of the same, with a dial design inspired by the Bond family crest, has been made available to civilians.



British Empire by John Ketchell

£795 | www.historicarart.net

Though it couldn't quite match the achievements of DBR1, DBR2 was a fearsome beast, and particularly formidable in the hands of Stirling Moss. 'Mr Motor Racing' and DBR2/2 thumped all-comers in the 1958 Empire Trophy Race at Oulton Park, as recorded for posterity in this new painting by John Ketchell. The original is currently available at Historic Car Art, but if somebody beats you to it – Sir Stirling, probably – you'll be able to console yourself with a £40 print.

Desirables is compiled by Chris Bietzk. If you'd like to have an item considered for inclusion, email eds@vantagemag.co.uk

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GEOFF DUKE

ASTON RACER

SIX-TIMES WORLD MOTORCYCLE CHAMPION GEOFF DUKE, WHO DIED RECENTLY, WAS ALSO - BRIEFLY - AN ASTON WORKS DRIVER, AND A DAMN QUICK ONE TOO

WORDS BRUCE COX

PHOTOGRAPHY DUKE FAMILY ARCHIVE / VARIOUS

ON MAY 1 THIS YEAR, when Geoff Duke passed away at the fine age of 92 on the Isle of Man – the scene of so much of his success and his home for most of his adult life – British motorsport lost a man who had quite literally become a legend in his own lifetime. In the early 1950s, Duke was one of this country's most prominent sports stars. In fact, with six World Motorcycle Championships to his credit, plus six Isle of Man TT wins and the honour of being crowned Britain's 'Sportsman of the Year' in 1951, he was a 'superstar' before that term had even been invented.

Back in the early 1950s, there were really only two names from motorsport that regularly featured in the UK national press outside of the sports pages. Geoff Duke and Stirling Moss were the darlings of the dailies as they battled foreign opposition, frequently with outdated and underpowered British machines. And in Duke's case he actually won as often as not. Three of his six world titles were won when he was riding British single-cylinder Manx Nortons against the best multi-cylinder opposition that the Italian factories like MV Agusta, Gilera and Moto Guzzi could muster.

What's less well known is that respected motor racing insiders at the time thought Duke had the potential to go all the way to the top on four wheels as well as two. His talents at the wheel of a car were admired by authorities no less than the legendary Mercedes-Benz team manager, Alfred Neubauer, and the almost as legendary John Wyer, who managed the Aston Martin team. And this was in 1952, a

dozen years before John Surtees made his own indelible mark on motorsport by becoming the only man to win World Championships on both two and four wheels.

In 1951, at the age of 28, Duke achieved an incredible 'double' when he won both 350cc and 500cc titles for Norton despite a 20-horsepower disadvantage to the Italian opposition. For that feat he was voted Britain's Sportsman of the Year, and this led to a test drive for Aston Martin early the following year.

It is fair to say that Geoff's immediate pace on four wheels was a revelation for all who were at that Silverstone test – not least for John Wyer, who had this to say in his autobiography...

'Duke really was sensational right from the start. The car was one of the lightweight DB2s and he had asked me not to time him during the first session as he was just going to go out and get the feel of the car. In fact I did time him, just for my own interest, and in that first spell he was only a second slower than the best time any of our drivers had ever done on that track. In the very next session he lapped faster than any of our team drivers had ever done – and I promptly signed him up!'

Not wishing to burn his bridges as far as his motorcycle career was concerned, Duke's contract with Aston Martin was for specific races, allowing him to challenge for the two-wheeled title double again in 1952 – and ride in selected international races that paid the kind of appearance money a reigning double World Champion deserved. It was going to be a hectic year for the young Lancastrian.

Geoff's Aston debut saw him driving the prototype DB3 in one of the six-lap handicap races that were always a popular feature of the Goodwood Easter Monday meeting as they forced the faster drivers to spend the whole race charging past slower competitors who had been allowed to start earlier. Geoff finished third on handicap behind two Jaguar XK120s that had enjoyed starting advantages of almost a minute over him. But, more importantly, he had made the most of his own 25-second starting advantage ahead of Stirling Moss and remained ahead of him at the finish. On actual non-handicap times Stirling and his Jaguar C-type were quicker, but a close second in a smaller car behind Britain's acknowledged fastest driver was still a satisfying debut.

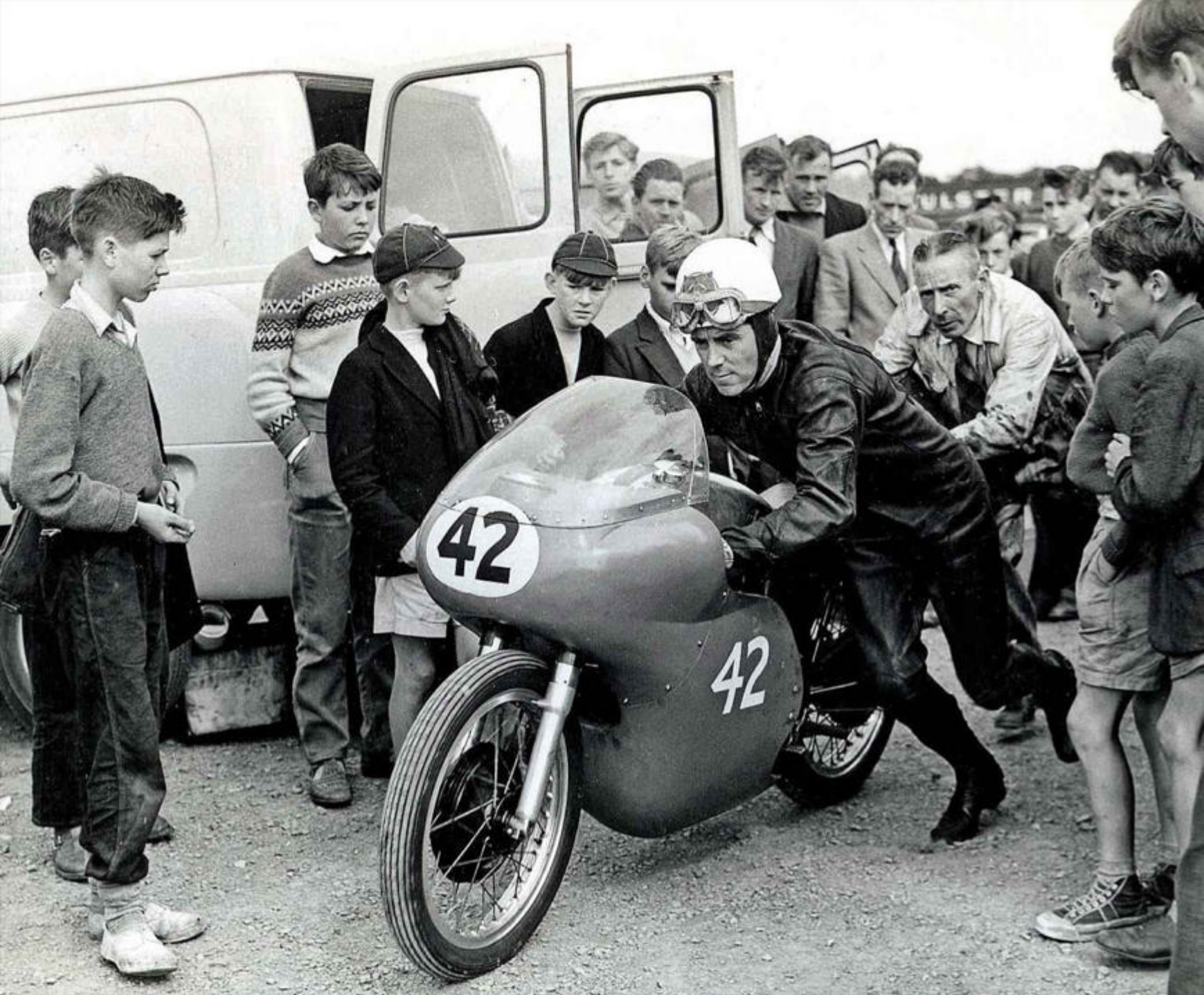
About a month (and three important motorcycle race wins) later, Geoff was back at Silverstone with the DB3 for what would turn out to be both an exciting and a frustrating race.

First of all, a car that he was lapping broke a con-rod, holed its sump and dumped all of its oil in front of Geoff. As *Motor Sport* magazine reported at the time: 'Duke went spinning round several times and into the palisades fencing but kept his engine running and drove off again to the approval of the crowd.'

Above right and right

Geoff Duke in a DB3 leads Duncan Hamilton (Jaguar C-type) in the 1952 British Empire Trophy race at Douglas on the Isle of Man – 'home ground' for Duke. With Stirling Moss: the two superstars of British motorsport in the early '50s





‘Crowned Britain’s Sportsman of the Year in 1951, Geoff Duke was a superstar before that term had even been invented’

But worse was to come a lap later at Abbey Curve, then a flat-out left-hander taken at over 120mph in the DB3. Geoff later recalled: ‘I had just set the car up for the corner when it simply went straight on. Something in the steering box had failed and the marshals in the adjoining wheatfield had to scatter as I did my impression of a high-speed combine harvester!’

Next came the Swiss Grand Prix meeting on the dangerous Bremgarten. It was a circuit where Duke, weaned on equally dangerous tracks like the Isle of Man TT, was in his element. Not only that, it was a combined car and motorcycle event where he could demonstrate both his riding and driving talents on the same weekend. And he duly began to do so by winning the 350cc bike GP for Norton.

Switching from two wheels to four, Geoff then lined up in a DB2 saloon against two factory Lancias and a formidable Mercedes-Benz works team of four 300SL lightweight coupés. Once again a car race was to produce

some unusual excitement for Geoff, but not before he had qualified fifth behind the Mercs. Unfortunately he had done this in the second qualifying session and while driving the car of team leader Reg Parnell after his own had run poorly in the first one. As a result, the organisers placed Parnell’s car in the fifth grid spot and that of ‘new boy’ Duke at the back!

Happily, by the time the flag dropped to start the race his misfire had been cured and Geoff easily picked up a number of places on the opening lap, passing both his experienced team leader and one of the Lancia team in the process.

Then came a bizarre incident when Mercedes ace Rudolf Caracciola went off the road and hit a tree, bringing it down across the track! His three team-mates were ahead of him at the time so were unaffected, but the rest of the field, Duke included, had to queue up and wait while the tree was dragged away. By which time the leading Mercs that had enjoyed a clear track had caught up with the back of the waiting field!



Life after racing

During the ten years of his stellar motorcycling career, Geoff Duke won six World Championships, six Isle of Man TTs and 32 Grands Prix. For his double World Championship on British Norton machines in 1952, he was awarded the Order of the British Empire. But there was so much more to Geoff.

Until his death on May 1 this year, he lived in comfortable retirement on his beloved Isle of Man and was able to look back on a varied and interesting business career since he quit motorcycle racing for good on a day in 1959 at Locarno in Switzerland where he won all three major races (250, 350 and 500cc) on the card of the non-Championship Swiss Grand Prix.

His business ventures included the luxurious four-star Aragon Hotel that sat in its own grounds just south of Douglas, the Island's capital, as well as involvement in both the first containerised freight company operating between the Isle of Man and the UK mainland and the Manx Lines passenger shipping company (later acquired by its older-established rival, the Isle of Man Steam Packet Company) which introduced the first 'roll on, roll off' ferries to the Island. Ever interested in cars, he became one of the first Audi dealers in the UK during the 1970s and his allied garage business grew into the IoM's largest wholesale auto parts supplier. He also opened the first self-service petrol station on the island, and in later years was a supportive though non-participatory director of the Duke Video company started by his eldest son, Peter.

Geoff also remained heavily involved in motorcycle sport for many years after his retirement from competition and in 1963 he persuaded Gilera to loan him its 1957 machines to run in the World Championships and other major international races as Scuderia Duke. There was virtually no money forthcoming from the factory with which to make up for six years of lost development, however, so the magical Mike Hailwood and MV Agusta still reigned supreme that year.

Despite the disappointment of Scuderia Duke, Geoff stayed involved in racing and from 1964 helped design and develop a neat little 250cc two-stroke racer for Royal Enfield to sell to private riders. Over the next three years it was one of the most successful of a number of British single-cylinder 'production racers'.

It was yet another achievement that went towards making Geoff Duke a genuine legend in his own lifetime and a name that will now forever be revered by motorsport enthusiasts.

Left and above

Schoolboy hero: Duke in his early-50s pomp at the Ulster Grand Prix. And above, the start of the sports car race at the 1952 Swiss Grand Prix, Duke in the second DB2 (car no 12) just behind Reg Parnell in an identical car

In what was one of his best drives for Aston, Geoff got ahead of the pack after the restart and actually kept the three leading Mercedes cars behind him for most of the race – even after they had lapped everyone else. He held that leading German trio at bay until the Aston Martin straight-six went on to only five cylinders for the last two laps and they were able to lap him as well. Nevertheless he still brought the ailing car home in fourth place behind the Mercs. It was a spectacular drive – and one made in front of the right people. After the race, Alfred Neubauer sought out Duke and offered him a Mercedes test drive – two clear years before the same offer was made to Stirling Moss.

But before that opportunity could be taken up there was a final race to run for Aston Martin. Unfortunately it followed the same pattern as Silverstone, Geoff's performance overshadowed by problems that were not of his making.

The race was the British Empire Trophy, held on a short four-mile road circuit on Geoff's beloved Isle of Man. Less than a mile of it was shared with the 37¼-mile Mountain circuit on which he had enjoyed so much two-wheeled success, but it was still the sort of natural road course on which he excelled.

This he proved in the race, when he easily passed the factory Jaguar C-type of Duncan Hamilton after two laps and then pulled out a comfortable lead until his engine cut out. The culprit was a detached wire behind the dashboard – an easily cured fault that had also been experienced in practice and which should never have been allowed to re-occur in the race.

Geoff quickly made a temporary repair and limped back to the pits to get it properly fixed. He then began to chase down Hamilton but the strain was too much for what was later revealed

to be an already-tired Aston engine. So tired, in fact, that it broke its crankshaft two laps later.

Back at the pits, Aston Martin's owner, David Brown, was full of apologies. As Geoff recalled: 'He told me that particular engine had done a terrific lot of running on the test bench and that it was selected because the factory had primarily looked upon the Manx race as good practice for me rather than a serious outing. He told me that had they known I would drive so well they would have fitted a decent engine into the car!'

Even though he had won a third motorcycle World Championship for Norton in 1952, and frustrating though his races with Aston Martin had been, Duke still felt encouraged enough by his own driving performances to accept the new contract that John Wyer offered him for 1953.

Sadly, it ended in tears of frustration for all concerned. Geoff made what he later admitted was an elementary and unnecessary mistake in the very first race of the season, the important Sebring 12 Hours in Florida. A mistake that saw the DB3 he was sharing with Peter Collins put out of the race when in a comfortable lead.

'Peter was a very fine driver,' Geoff later recalled. 'He drove the first stint and built up a commanding lead, which I then managed to maintain. Unfortunately I went for a gap on the inside of a slower MG in a corner when I really should have just waited and powered by on the next straight. I suppose it was my motorcycle racing instincts to blame. Anyway, I drifted into



a collision with the MG and from there spun into a concrete-filled oil drum, which damaged the suspension enough to cause our retirement.'

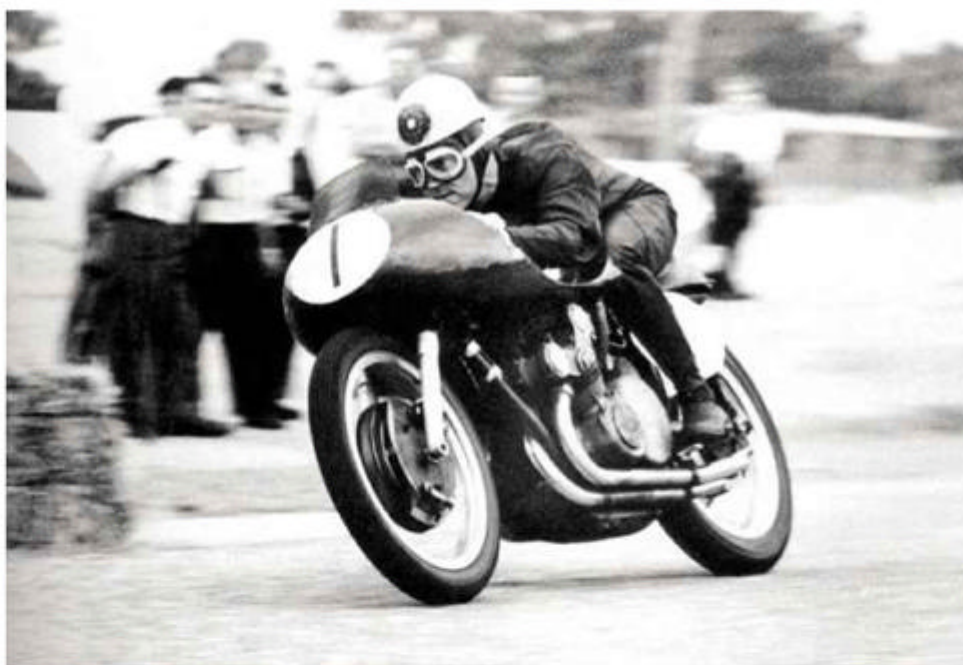
Peter Collins was then one of the up-and-coming 'golden boys' of British motor racing and had joined Aston at the same time as Geoff in 1952. During that season, Geoff had privately felt there was some resentment towards him from the established drivers – and Collins in particular – for being a 'mere motorbike rider' getting more than his fair share of attention.

'Certainly, after the Sebring incident, Collins made some very scathing remarks about my status as a driver, and an already-charged atmosphere became unbearable,' Geoff told me. 'I seriously began to question my decision to change from two wheels to four.'

So much so that when the next race, at Silverstone, again ended in disappointment and frustration due to clutch problems, he asked David Brown if he could terminate his contract. This was in order to accept a lucrative 'two wheels only' offer to lead the Italian Gilera factory team that he had previously battled on unequal terms when riding for Norton. Ever the gentleman, DB agreed without hesitation.

It was the right move. Geoff shook off his disappointment at Aston Martin and won that 1953 season's 500cc World Championship on the four-cylinder Gilera. He then took that title again for the Italian factory in both 1954 and '55.

But in making the decision to leave Aston Martin he left his only real shot at a four-wheel career behind. Because of his Gilera contract, he never did take up the offer of a test with Mercedes and when he did try car racing again seven years later he was 'yesterday's man' in 'yesterday's cars' – driving a front-engined Formula Junior for the underfunded Gemini team when Cooper had already staged the 'rear-



engined revolution' and then a privately-entered and outdated F1 Cooper which almost killed him in a Swedish Grand Prix crash.

Nowadays his time with Aston is an almost forgotten footnote to a glittering motorcycle career. But could it have been different on four wheels? 'The generally accepted judgement,' wrote John Wyr in his autobiography, 'is that Duke was a very great motorcyclist who failed to make the transition to cars. But I maintain that I had more opportunity to evaluate him than anyone else and I am convinced that he had great potential. I will always regard his early retirement from the Aston Martin team as a real loss to motor racing.' **V**

Top and above

Duke with Aston Martin team-mate Peter Collins (passenger) in a DB3; privately Geoff believed Collins resented the attention he was getting as a 'mere motorcyclist'. Classic Geoff Duke on a 500cc Gilera Four



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THE LONG WAY HOME

THE DB4 WAS THE FIRST TRUE NEWPORT PAGNELL ASTON
AND THIS WAS THE TENTH BUILT. WE TAKE IT HOME

WORDS STEPHEN ARCHER | PHOTOGRAPHY DEAN SMITH







This is a very promising motor car,' said David Brown to the designer Harold Beach after his first drive of the DB4 in 1958. It was a promise that would be fulfilled beyond anyone's expectations. Demand for the DB4 greatly outstripped the ability to supply cars for many years and the DB4 would evolve through five different series between 1958 and 1963, by which time the car was virtually the DB5. Indeed, the original Bond car was a Series 5 DB4, not a DB5, but good luck trying to tell the world that Bond ejected a man from a DB4.

On a sun-filled spring day outside the old Newport Pagnell buildings is a sight that stops Aston employees and blasé Newport Pagnell inhabitants in their tracks. Not just a DB4 but one of the very first, and in startling but perfect (and original) primrose yellow. Roger Bennington, whose car it is and whose Stratton Motor Company has just completed its painstaking restoration, feels (rightly) that originality is paramount. Seeing the car roll off the transporter with just 14 post-rebuild miles on the clock, back at the place of its birth for the first time in over 50 years, is a real privilege. It dazzles Tickford Street with its presence, its simplicity and its beauty.

There is always something special about the 'first of the line'. Be it the 1950 DB2, 1958 DB4 or 1967 DBS, these were the cars that the designers created with a seminal vision. Later versions may have been an 'improvement' in many ways but rarely did the changes improve on the look of the original. They were also invariably heavier. This car, then, just the tenth to be built, is the DB4 in its purest form.

The DB4 was, of course, a very important car in Aston Martin's history. It was also the first to be totally conceived under David Brown's ownership and the first to start its production life at Newport Pagnell. John Wyer, general manager of Aston Martin at the time, had instigated the replacement for the DB2 series of cars as far back as 1955. 'It is axiomatic,' he declared, 'that the design of a successful car should be one third engine, one third body and one third chassis. Undue emphasis on any of these departments leads to an unbalanced entity.'

And so work began. A rather ugly prototype, DP114, would provide the basis of the new chassis. An all-new 3.7-litre all-alloy straight-six to replace the ageing 2.9-litre Lagonda-derived unit was designed by Polish-born Tadek Marek. For the new body, Wyer was of the view that Aston could benefit from Italian coachwork, and Touring of Milan was chosen. Having seen an Alfa Romeo 1900 with a Touring body keep up with a DB2 at Monza doubtless coloured his thinking. The Alfa had a 'punt'-style platform





'It feels noticeably lighter than the later Newport Pagnell cars. Even on its skinny Avons, it feels wonderfully chuckable'

chassis, so the DB4 should be similar. Aston high-ups had also been impressed by Touring's elegant DB2/4-based Spyder. If Ferrari was worried when the DB4 appeared, the anxiety can only have been heightened by the fact that the body was designed in Italy and used Touring's patented Superleggera (superlight) system of a light alloy body over a frame of thin steel tubing.

The first complete DB4 prototype, DP184/1, was running in July 1957, by which time Marek's new engine was already being proved in the racing DBR2. The car was announced at the end of September 1958, and the press and public reception was ecstatic. At the 1958 Paris launch, the importer, Marcel Blondeau, was thrilled with the car but on hearing the price said: 'This is not a car, it is a folly – but I can sell as many as you can supply!' The US distributor in San Francisco offered to take a thousand DB4s 'if they could be delivered'.

Easter weekend 1959 saw a number of European owners stretch the legs of their new DB4s on the fast Continental roads – only to be cut short when their new engines threw rods. Tasked by John Wyer to identify a common factor, Harold Beach reported back that 'they all failed on Good Friday'. Wyer was not amused. But Good Friday 1959 was particularly hot and a lack of lubrication was found out at high temperatures and high speeds.

It was just as well, then, that production delays meant delivery of cars was very slow for the first year, which gave time for rectification to be devised, chiefly by the fitment of a bigger sump. Not for the first or last time, owners acted as test drivers, a fact borne out by the service records. Quality issues were common, mostly with the Salisbury rear differential, which would often be replaced until an acceptably quiet one was found!

This particular car, DB4/110/R, was the tenth DB4 to be built and was delivered in May 1959 to a customer in Glasgow. Early DB4s (retrospectively called Series 1) had a rear-hinged bonnet, no over-riders, no door-frames, no oil-cooler as standard, and the smaller sump. Being one of the very first, this car also has jacking points passing through the body rather than under it, a feature that disappeared shortly after this car was built. It also has thinner superstructure steel, additional boot-floor reinforcements and an access panel to the top of the exhaust, to name just a few differences from later production cars.

In 1962 the car was bought by Neville Reece, a farmer from mid-Wales. He used it extensively and even had a tow-bar fitted to pull his caravan! He was very fond of the DB4 and when it had to be laid-up in 1982 due to a misfire he vowed to repair it and get it back on the road.

It was not to be. The car languished in a farm building until 2006, when Roger Bennington acquired it in a very advanced state of decay but with only 49,000 miles on the odometer. Reece was a reluctant seller but, on the understanding that Roger would restore his DB4 to better than new condition, he agreed to part with it.

Over the past five years it has been going through the restoration it deserves. It was inevitable that much of the chassis and body would have to be repaired or replaced but this was done by skilled, ex-factory craftsmen. The mechanical parts, on the other hand, are largely original, though of course extensively refurbished. The engine, as with about seven other cars around that time, has a 'PP' engine number: Production Prototype. The AM logos on the cam covers are unique to these very early DB4s. The alloy head, block, liners, rods, crank and pistons were all able to be re-used, so 110 retains its original engine specification. Elsewhere, Roger has resisted any temptation to incorporate the 'upgrades' that so many DB Astons are subjected to, so 110 still rides on original-spec crossply tyres and the steering remains unassisted.

Slipping behind the wood-rimmed steering wheel and taking in that exquisite dashboard design is an event of itself. Has there ever been a more elegant dash? You're also struck by how compact the car is: running next to the 2007 Vanquish for our cover shot, the DB4 felt like the diminutive grandfather. The payoff is excellent ergonomics and a sense of where every part of the car is. Visibility is fabulous, with lots of glass, thin screen pillars and always the long tops of the wings to act as comforting pointers for the bends ahead. Placing the car on the road is pure joy.

You sit *on* rather than *in* the driver's seat. Indeed, pressing on along twisting roads, I found myself shifting my bottom in the seat, rather like shifting on a motorcycle saddle. But the DB4 is right there with you. It feels noticeably lighter than the later Newport Pagnell cars and as a consequence it does everything asked of it without a fight. Even on its skinny Avon Turbospeeds, it feels wonderfully 'chuckable', the handling never feeling compromised by the weight of the engine, with no

Below and right
DB4/110/R, the tenth built, may even have been the very car pictured on the brochure; engine number has a 'PP' prefix (for production prototype); note AM logos on cam covers, unique to the very first cars







DB4 Series 1

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apparent tendency for the front to 'push on'. It would take some clumsiness to get into trouble with this car. Low-speed manoeuvring is a real workout for the driver; even on the move the steering is heavy, but all the more rewarding and communicative for that. The brakes are about perfect – they require effort but reward with great balance and feedback. All is as it should be.

Meanwhile the 3.7-litre straight-six combines turbine-like smoothness with a bestial growl. Though possessing modest power by later Aston standards, torque is strong and it responds keenly to the throttle, propelling the car with real vigour. Of course, with just 14 miles under its Avons, I was careful to ease the car into its stride. Revealingly, by the end of the day it felt as though it had

re-awoken, everything had bedded in, and it just seemed so much happier in itself. The rear axle was rather noisy, but then they often were...

'Aston Marvel'. Not contrived here, but the verdict of *Autosport* when it first saw the DB4 in 1958. It has never seemed truer. It's a real privilege to drive such an early DB4, one that retains so much of its original purity. It feels so solid, so grounded. There's real quality here, and it comes through everything one touches and feels.

A good early DB4 demands to be driven and offers fabulous rewards to the attentive and diligent driver. I know that if I owned one, I'd always want to take the long route home. DB4/110/R certainly achieved that in 2015 when it returned to Newport Pagnell. **V**



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THE EARLY YEARS

ASTON MARTIN HAS BEEN INEXTRICABLY LINKED WITH
NEWPORT PAGNELL SINCE 1955 - BUT THE COACHBUILDING ORIGINS
OF THE TICKFORD STREET WORKS GO BACK MUCH FURTHER

WORDS STEPHEN ARCHER

PHOTOGRAPHY AML / VARIOUS

DAVID BROWN was an inspired matchmaker. When he bought Lagonda in 1947 he acquired not only the WO Bentley engine that would power a generation of Astons, but also many of the firm's skilled staff, including body designer Frank Feeley and engine man Willie Watson. The acquisition of the Tickford factory in 1955 brought a similarly impressive range of skills to Aston Martin, for the coachbuilding traditions of the site stretched back a remarkable 125 years.

Salmons Carriage Works was established in 1830 in Tickford End, at that time a distinct hamlet aside from Newport Pagnell. By the late 1800s the works had grown into Salmons and Sons in Tickford Street and occupied the site we know today. The area where Aston Martin Works is now was the timber yard, and the building behind 'Olympia' was the sawmill. 'Sunnyside', still standing opposite Works, was home to Lucas Salmons until his death in 1955.

Salmons bodied its first car, a Daimler, in 1898 for the local MP. In the years that followed it provided bodies for Panhard, Mercedes, Rolls-Royce and dozens of other car makers. Usually chassis were shipped to the town by train, then towed by horse to Tickford Street, which must have been quite a sight.

In 1912 the company opened a showroom in a newly erected Boulton & Paul aircraft hangar known as Olympia (returned to its original showroom purpose a century later in 2013) and the brand name 'Tickford' was launched in 1925.

During the 1930s, Bert Thickpenny emerged as an important and talented draughtsman and designer for the company. He would later play a key role in the design and development of Aston Martin bodies, right up to his passing in 1965.

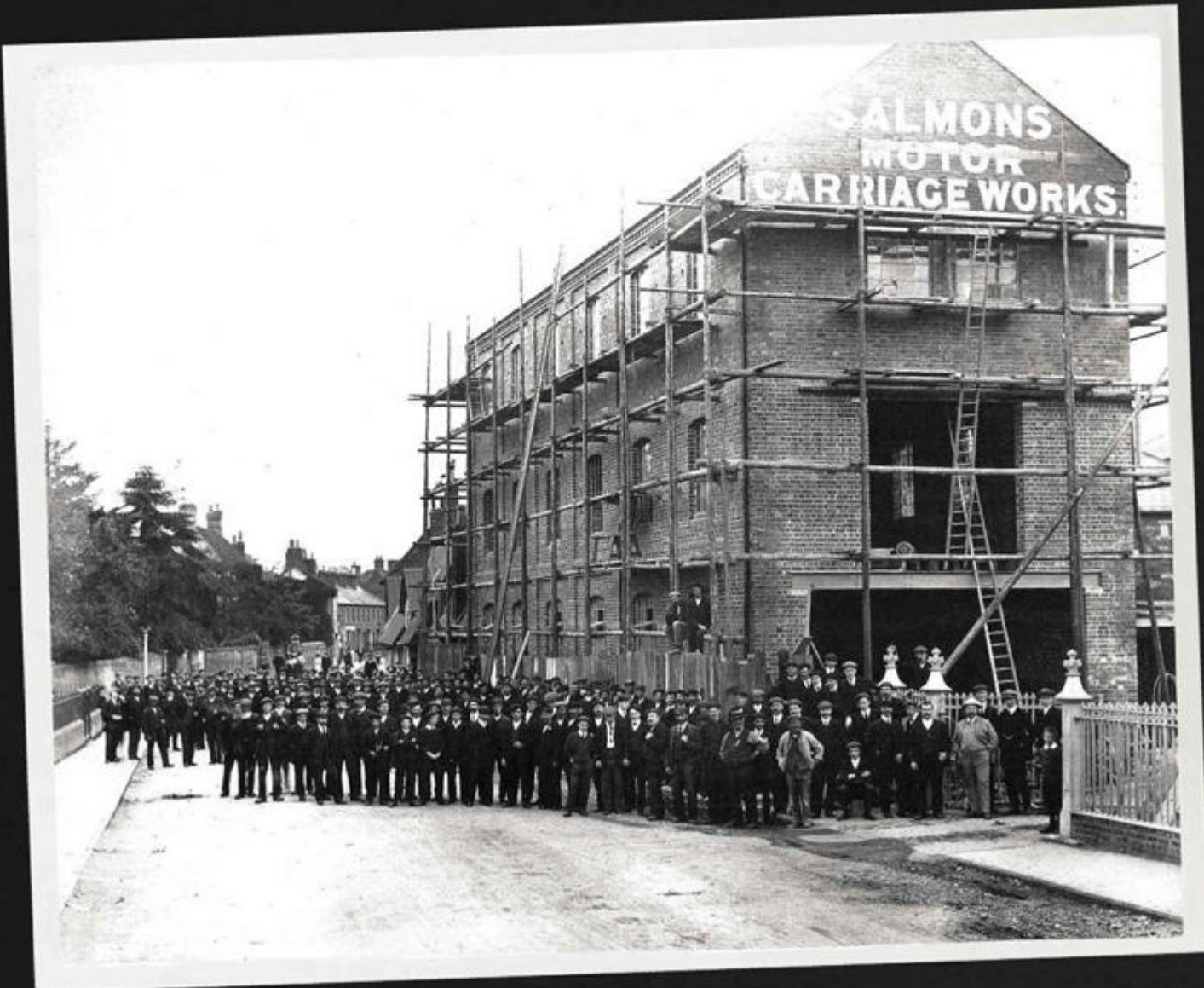
In 1939, Salmons was bought by local businessman Ian Boswell, though the Salmons family stayed actively involved, and it became Tickford Ltd in 1943. The outbreak of war placed different demands on the workforce, including the manufacture of shell and bomb casings, and post-war austerity saw it struggle to get back to its earlier prosperity. The motor industry was changing rapidly, with small manufacturers being consolidated and the pursuit of scale and volume preoccupying most of the industry. Tickford did, however, build the prototype Healey 100 in 1950, numerous clever roofs for the likes of Rover and MG, and bodies for Alvis and Healey. Then, in 1953, came Aston Martin Lagonda...

The DB2 and the Lagonda 2.6-litre had been built mostly at Feltham, but David Brown could see economies in outsourcing the bodies to companies adept at limited, high-quality runs. Thus the 1953-55 DB2/4 body was made at Mulliners in Birmingham (though much of the panel work was actually done at Airflow Streamline in Northampton) and the 1953-58 Lagonda 2.9-litre was produced by Tickford. The 2.9 was designed by Bert Thickpenny and was a great advance on Frank Feeley's dated 2.6.

The Aston connection started in 1955. Until then, Mulliners had delivered the DB2/4 bodies to Brown's tractor works in Yorkshire, where they were mated to the locally built chassis and engines. But when DB was unable to renew the contract with Mulliners, he needed another body-builder. Tickford was the natural choice. He agreed the purchase in December 1954 and completed the acquisition in early 1955. Later that year the DB2/4 MkII was introduced, the first Aston to be built at Newport Pagnell and proudly carrying the Tickford badge on its flanks. Rolling chassis continued to be supplied from Yorkshire, but now it was from Tickford Street that complete Aston Martins emerged.

Meanwhile work soon began on a successor to the 'Feltham cars'. The prototype would be on the road in 1957 and the DB4 was revealed to the public in 1958, the first all-new Aston of the Newport Pagnell era. Chassis continued to be made in Yorkshire; in fact chassis fabrication would not move to Newport Pagnell until 1972, after David Brown sold AML. But engine manufacture moved there in time for the start of DB4 production, and trimming skills had of course been acquired with Tickford. So, chassis aside, the site was now making virtually the whole car. Just as it would for the next 50 years.

With thanks to Neil Murray and Dennis Mynard (author of 'Salmons and Sons: The Tickford Coachbuilders').



Above
Salmons coachbuilders moved to Tickford Street in the late 1800s, and the famous three-storey building – which still stands – was built in 1910. By 1914 there were 250 people working for the company in many different trades: even when David Brown acquired the site at the end of 1954 there was still a working blacksmith's forge on site

Left
The Salmons yard in the early years of the 20th century. Amongst the plethora of coachbuilders in the UK at this time, Salmons was at the upper end of the quality spectrum, supplying bodies for Rolls-Royce and Mercedes chassis among many others. The company was renamed Tickford Ltd in 1943



Right
The first Aston Martin to be assembled at Newport Pagnell was the DB2/4 MkII. Here a rolling chassis supplied from another outpost of the David Brown empire – one of the family firm's tractor factories in Yorkshire – is united with an aluminium body created at the Tickford works



Left
David Brown caused quite a stir when he flew into Newport Pagnell in 1954 to do the deal to acquire the Tickford site. Helicopters were still a novelty at the time, but just the thing for the millionaire industrialist in a hurry



Below
The DB4 was the first all-new Aston introduced after the move to Newport Pagnell. This is the body shop in early 1961. The skills of the workforce in rolling and hand-beating aluminium bodywork were at the heart of the Tickford Street operation for five decades and were still in evidence when the last Vanquish was built in 2007





Left

A slightly pensive-looking David Brown (not yet Sir David) shows Her Majesty the Queen around a busy factory in April 1966, with DB6 production in full flow. AML would enjoy a close relationship with the Royal family for many years: the Queen later famously bought Prince Charles a DB6 Volante for his 21st birthday, and the Prince's passion for the marque would result in a number of purchases of Newport Pagnell Astons, including V8s and Virages

Below

After the appearance of the DB5 in the Bond film *Goldfinger* in 1963, demand for Aston Martins reached new heights. Here a DB5 body takes shape. Convertible and shooting brake versions followed



Above

The Newport Pagnell site in the 1960s. Note the company cricket pitch, complete with sight-screens and pavilion, top right in the picture. The pitch was later sold off for housing



Right

Sunnyside, formerly the home of one of the Salmons family and still today an iconic landmark on Tickford Street, became Aston Martin Lagonda's global headquarters in the early '60s. Along with two other original Salmons buildings, it is today listed but currently empty



Below
The model line-up in 1968: from the left, DB6 saloon, DB6 Volante and DBS. On top of the old two-storey building is an Aston-shaped weathervane, made by company apprentices. In later years this was replaced by a replica of the original Salmons weathervane depicting a horse-drawn carriage



Above
1967 saw the introduction of the DBS. Bodies were still being hand-crafted, but there were a number of changes to the process: while roof panels were still swaged, other alloy panelwork was glued and riveted to save time and make repairs easier

Right
Engine-building had been transferred to Newport Pagnell for the start of DB4 production in 1958 with Tadek Marek's new all-alloy straight-six. Here in the late 1960s a line of DB6 engine blocks (on the left of the picture) await boring on a state-of-the-art £80,000 Dixi transfer machine



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BEST OF THE SIX

FIFTY THIS YEAR, THE DB6 DESERVES A PLACE AMONG THE ASTON
GREATS, AS A DRIVE IN THIS SUPERLATIVE EXAMPLE CONFIRMS

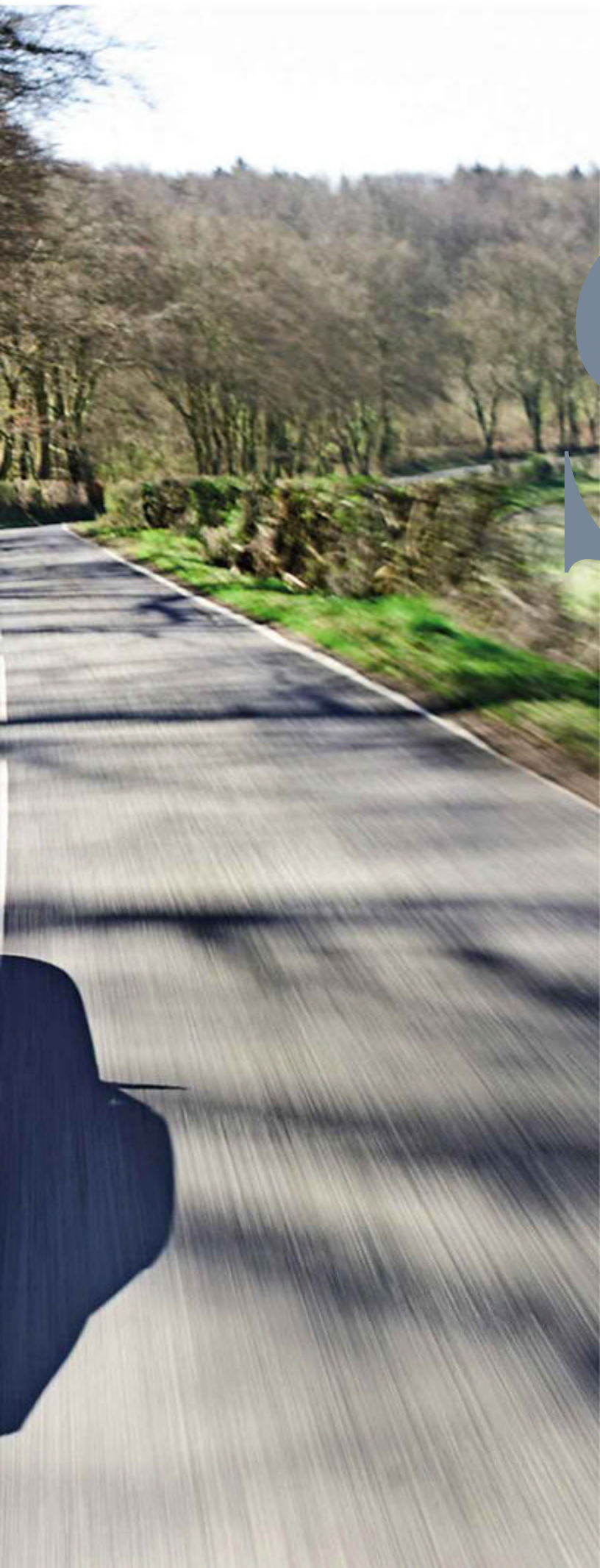
WORDS RICHARD MEADEN

PHOTOGRAPHY GUS GREGORY









Left

Taking to the Sussex B-roads in what may well be the finest DB6 in existence. When the 6 was unveiled in October 1965, its abbreviated 'Kamm' tail was a controversial feature but it reduced lift by almost a third

standing in the presence of this pristine DB6, it seems absurd to think that for years, indeed for most of the half-century since its launch, generations of us have stubbornly refused to take it to our hearts. Of course, the solid-gold legacy of its DB4 and DB5 forebears ensured the third act in the iconic DB trilogy would have the hardest job of all.

Looking back, Aston Martin was unflinching in the face of such a challenge. The shift to a body shaped by contemporary aerodynamic principles challenged aesthetic attitudes of the day. A longer wheelbase, higher roofline and an emphasis on comfort and refinement – at least in relative terms – made the DB6 a more habitable machine, but it also helped propagate the notion that the DB6 had somehow gone a bit soft in looks and deeds. A faltering economy didn't help its cause, either.

Had *Vantage* been around in the mid-60s, I dare say we would have shared that slightly sniffy, critical view of the DB6, but if the passage of 50 years offers us anything it's the opportunity to take a fresh perspective. Free yourself from history's prejudicial baggage and you can approach the DB6 with refreshing neutrality, at which point you see it for what it is: a handsome, charismatic and extremely desirable machine.

The recent upsurge in values certainly suggests the world is finally warming to the DB6 in a big way, yet still collectors and investors have remained reluctant to commit to the kind of full-scale, money-no-object restorations and performance enhancements that are now commonplace with DB4s and DB5s. Until now.

When it comes to breathing new life into tired DBs, specialist RS Williams is among the most experienced and most highly regarded. Visit its Cobham, Surrey, premises and you simply won't believe your eyes. Scattered like precious gems spilled from a dropped jewellery box, you'll find a dazzling array of iconic Astons: from pugilistic DB4 GTs to lithe and delicate DB4 Volantes, iconic DB5s and musclebound V8s. All in various states of disassembly or completion. It's like Heaven with petrol fumes and roller-shutter doors.

Not so long ago, if you spotted a DB6 in the yard it would have been there for palliative care rather than full restoration and enhancement, but today there's a number patiently awaiting the full RS Williams treatment. It's a trend workshop manager Neil Thompson has seen emerge over the last few years, and one that was led by the shining star of our feature.

JUW 6D is a very early DB6, built in the model's first year of production to Vantage specification and purchased in 2013 by a long-standing RS Williams customer – and a man who also happens to be a 1965 model. The original intention was to rebuild the car with minimal enhancements, but, as is often the case with these ageing Astons, once the layers were peeled back the job-list grew, until eventually the tipping point was reached. The customer – a true perfectionist, by all accounts – took the decision to go the whole hog. Laudably, though committed to a complete programme of restoration and performance upgrades, he wished to avoid ending up with a clinical facsimile of the original, so those areas of the body that weren't too far-gone had to be preserved. In a project as extensive as this, it was a small but heartening gesture, for it gave due respect to the original car's dignity and authenticity.

Stripped of its engine, gearbox and suspension, JUW's body underwent





Left and above
RS Williams upgrades include sound-deadening and heat insulation, both of which make the cockpit a far more pleasant place to be. Profile (above) clearly shows the raised and extended roofline, which allowed two proper seats in the rear

‘This is our chance to experience probably the finest DB6 there is, on proper roads, and see how it stacks up in 2015’

a painstaking restoration, including replacement of the original sunroof with a full metal roof – a massive job in itself. The engine was rebuilt to RSW’s tried-and-tested 4.7-litre specification, with a trio of SUs rather than Weber carburettors in order to give it a fat spread of torque for maximum tractability. The five-speed manual transmission was rebuilt and standard final drive retained, while the suspension was swapped for RSW’s fast road kit, employing bespoke Koni dampers and doing away with the rear-end’s lever-arms. The brakes were kept standard apart from modern pads for stronger bite and fade resistance, and the modern power steering uses a speed sensor to automatically vary the assistance, from generous to minimal as your pace increases. In short it’s pretty much everything RS Williams knows about DBs in one beautifully executed car.

A little over 18 months after work commenced, the result is nothing short of stunning. Thompson – a man not given to hyperbole – genuinely believes it to be the best DB6 in existence. While the cynics amongst you are no doubt thinking, ‘Well he would say that, wouldn’t he?’, I defy anyone to pore over this car and disagree, for even in the company of RS Williams’ exceptional inventory, JUW glows as though bathed in some mesmerising, ethereal light.

Simply to stand and stare is pleasure enough, but the best is yet to come, for by some stroke of exceptional generosity, the customer has agreed we can take the car away for the day, even though he himself has yet to take delivery. This, then, is our chance to experience probably the finest DB6 there is, on proper roads, to see how it stacks up in the context of 2015. And – perhaps – to appreciate this oft-maligned model’s core strengths, rather than what it might lack versus its forebears.

The responsibility of taking custody of this pristine masterpiece weighs heavily, but still I’m not sure my feet are actually in contact with the workshop floor as I float towards the driver’s door, ignition key clutched in mildly perspiring hand. As you can imagine, sliding behind the three-spoke steering wheel of a car like this is a truly life-affirming privilege. The interior is an absolute work of art,

the DB6’s plump, simple chairs beautifully upholstered in supple Connolly leather. Finished in dark Burgundy, the hide perfectly compliments the Anthracite Black Pearl bodywork to create an evocative driving environment that’s as quintessentially British as it is unmistakably Aston.

Slot the dainty ignition key into its keep, give it a clockwise twist and the 4.7-litre straight-six bursts into life with a fruity *fwaarrp* before settling into a deliciously meaty, pulsing idle. It’s an honest, authentic sound, free from the contrivances of flaps, valves or any other sops to modern noise legislation. Mellow yet purposeful, much like the car itself.

Our plan is to head south from Cobham, first on the open expanse of the A3 to make good time, then across country to enjoy ourselves traversing the beautiful roads that criss-cross the South Downs and lead, irresistibly, towards the mecca that is Goodwood.

Motorway miles can be the undoing of a ‘60s sports car. Traffic simply didn’t move at the sustained pace it does today when cars like the DB6 were new, yet JUW more than holds its own in the turbulent flow of a late weekday rush hour, steadfastly motoring at (or maybe a little beyond) the national speed limit. It’s not such a surprise to find a 50-year-old Aston cuts it on a modern motorway, for (lest we forget) the DB6 was an elite machine back in the day. Yet it’s a credit to the quality of the engineering that it can slice such an effortless swathe through the sea of Audis, Range Rovers and trucks heading away from London.

There are moments when this car plays tricks. You know you’re in an old car, so you make certain allowances, such as extending your braking distances and trying to dial yourself in to the car’s rhythm and responses, but the crispness, precision and enthusiasm with which it makes progress are hugely impressive. It never feels ordinary, but it allows you to forget yourself and just drive.

It also reminds you just how distant and disconnected modern cars can be. Thanks to state-of-the-art sound-deadening and heat insulation this DB6 applies a welcome filter to unwanted aural and thermal discomfort, but the basic process of driving remains a truly tactile experience.

In fact it’s a surprisingly delicate car to guide, the thin-rimmed three-spoke steering wheel wriggling gently in your hands as the front wheels read the road like it’s Braille.

The gearbox is a joy, its shift precise and confidence-inspiring, like a firm handshake. The ratios give the DB6 fabulous reach, yet offer enough get-up-and-go to punch you down the road with surprising vigour. That’ll be the torque Thompson was talking about. What you come to appreciate, and never tire of exploring, is this car’s ability to cover ground effortlessly. Threading along Sussex B-roads, the DB6 is a perfect partner, making spirited progress yet always feeling well within itself. It’s a fabulous feeling to squeeze the throttle in fourth gear and sense the engine work through its repertoire, snorting from low revs, yet pulling with growing insistence and emitting a vibrant, classy bellow as 4.7 litres of hand-built, beautifully balanced straight-six begins to hit its stride.

Handling-wise, the DB6 has great fluidity. Modern sports cars have tremendous levels of grip and iron-fisted damping that encourage an aggressive, binary style of driving. This car has ample roadholding, but it allows itself to flow more freely. Once you’ve gained confidence in its ability to stop, steer and stick to the tarmac, you relax your grip of the

Below

The flat tail with its flipped-up lip had been trialled on the Project racing cars at Le Mans. The rear lights had more prosaic origins; they were shared with the contemporary Triumph TR4A and TR5







DB6 Mk1 by RS Williams

ENGINE In-line 6-cylinder, 4670cc (RS Williams 4.7-litre conversion) **MAX POWER** 330bhp @ 6000rpm **MAX TORQUE** 335lb ft @ 4500rpm **TRANSMISSION** Five-speed manual, rear-wheel drive, lsd **SUSPENSION** Front: double wishbones, coil springs, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar. Rear: de Dion axle, trailing arms, Watt's linkage, coil springs, telescopic dampers (upgrade) **STEERING** Rack-and-pinion, power-assisted **BRAKES** Discs front and rear, 292mm front, 274mm rear **WHEELS** 15in wire-spoke **TYRES** 205/15

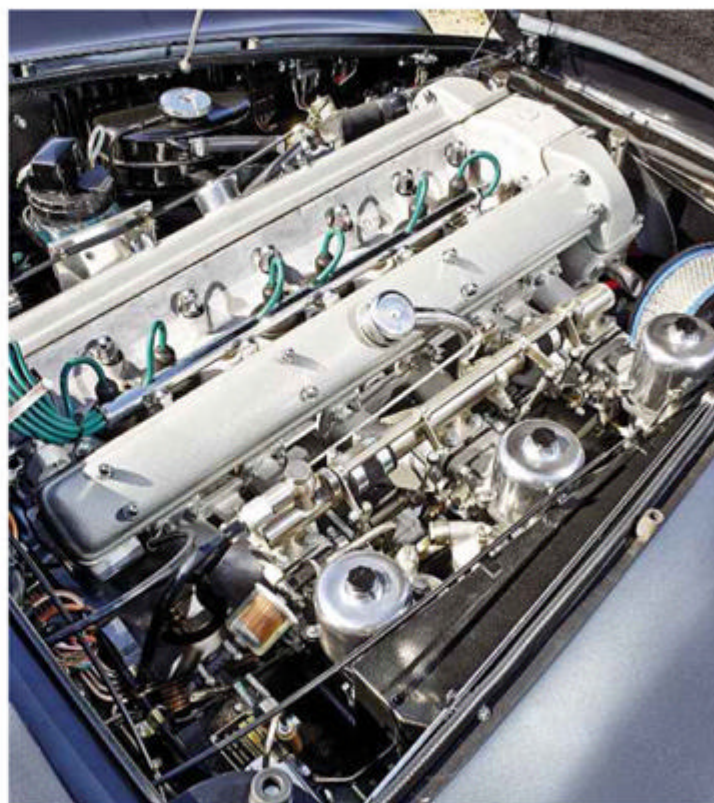
WEIGHT 1498kg **POWER TO WEIGHT** 224bhp/ton **0-60MPH** c6.0sec **TOP SPEED** c150mph **PRICE NEW** £4998 in 1966 (£86,500 in today's money) **VALUE TODAY** c£450,000

steering wheel a little and let the DB6 do its thing. In the modern context, to say a car floats is to suggest it's vague and woolly, but with this DB6 there's something majestic about the way it apparently rises above the worst of the road's imperfections, requiring only the most subtle nudge through the wheel or from the throttle to keep your chosen trajectory.

I'd like to say we elected to come to this perfect corner of West Sussex for some deep and meaningful reason, but in truth we came because it's the nicest place we could think of within reasonable striking distance of RS Williams. That said, once the photos are done and we reluctantly leave for Cobham, I'm struck by the similarities between Goodwood, just up the road, and this lovely DB6. Both are British icons, timeless in their appeal yet thoroughly modern in their recent reinvention. Just as the Revival meeting could have been an ill-judged pastiche, an enhanced '60s Aston could also have missed the mark. Yet both hit the bullseye.

As we near Cobham, the evening rush hour is beginning to simmer. Thompson had warned us to try to avoid peak hours. I'd assumed this was to avoid over-stressing the DB6 in the inevitable stop-start snarl-ups, but it rapidly transpires it's other road users that lose their cool. Not in a bad way – everyone loves an Aston, don't they? – but in their fervour to grab pictures of the car with their phones. How they don't crash into one another, or worse the DB6's precious rump, I'll never know. It's great to see such a positive reaction, but I can't tell you how good it feels to escape the paparazzi and slide back into the sanctuary of RS Williams' yard.

It's been a long time coming, but there's something rather poetic about half a century of engineering advances and performance enhancements enabling the DB6 finally to make good on its promise and potential. On the evidence of this exceptional car and the transformative – yet sympathetic – work completed by RS Williams, the DB6 has at last assumed its rightful place in the Aston Martin firmament. **V**



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1971
CN12







The other Lagonda

ASTON MARTIN'S LATE-1960s ATTEMPT TO REVIVE THE LAGONDA NAME COINCIDED WITH TURBULENT TIMES AT NEWPORT PAGNELL. WE DRIVE THE UNIQUE PROTOTYPE

WORDS JOHN SIMISTER

PHOTOGRAPHY CHARLIE MAGEE

Mr JL Hopkins of Manchester was not impressed with his purchase. He had bought a car directly from Aston Martin Lagonda Limited, described as a 'used

Lagonda Saloon' in AML's letter of June 6 1975 enclosing the registration book and the MoT certificate. We don't know how much he paid, but there was plenty wrong with his car.

It smoked. Water leaked into the footwells. The electric windows were either slow or static. Much trim was damaged. The air-con didn't work. The respray was poor. And so the list went on. In his letter of August 6, Mr Hopkins announced his intention to visit the factory to check, personally, the standard of rectification work. His handbuilt car was, it seems, about to be handbuilt all over again.

In Aston Martin's defence, it had other things on its corporate mind just then. In fact it was bankrupt when this car was sold, looking to gain any funds it possibly could. The factory had been closed at the beginning of 1975, with just the service and parts operation staggering on over the road. However, on June 27 the

company's new owners paid £1.05m to the receiver and Aston Martin underwent another of its regular re-births. That's why the estimate to Mr Hopkins for completion of the re-trimming had '1975' manually inserted between Lagonda and Limited in the letterhead, denoting the company's new name.

It seems Mr Hopkins was still not happy with his car, to the extent that he never registered it in his name. On September 9 it became the property of Peter Biggs, who kept it until 2010. AML (1975) Ltd billed him a hefty sum to put right yet more faults in November, which seems a bit mean in these more enlightened days of customer service. But then, he did own an unusual car.

As you have seen from the pictures, it's one of the eight four-door, Lagonda-badged extensions of the original Aston Martin DBS idea. The other seven, built between 1974 and '76 and which by rights should have been joined by many more given the design's obvious merit, wore a version of a Lagonda front grille within a broad air intake set between the two headlamps that by then signified the Aston V8's family face. This car, though, has the four-headlamp, slatted-grille face of a DBS and was built five years earlier. Yes, JPP 5G is the prototype.

Below left

Back at 'Sunnyside', Simister tries the rear seat. The car was a familiar sight around Newport Pagnell in the early '70s with Sir David in the back, chauffeur George at the wheel. Below right: publicity shot to show rear legroom

Chassis number MP230/1 was registered on May 5 1969. It wasn't revealed to the press until January 16 1970, however, partly because development was continuing, mainly because it had an experimental version of the V8 engine and the regular DBS V8 didn't make its public debut until October 1969's Earls Court show.

I remember the publicity pictures, showing a dignified-looking four-door saloon that wore its shape well. It seemed a perfectly comfortable extension of the DBS brand, as well it should given that William Towns had conceived the two styles of body at the same time. What the black-and-white publicity photographs did not reveal, though, was that the prototype was painted in Roman Purple and had a crimson interior with seats and doors trimmed in velvet.

This, apparently, was what Sir David Brown requested, and as JPP 5G was to be his personal transport while 'development' continued, he got what he wanted. He also wanted it to be a Lagonda, but that nearly didn't happen.







Main image and far right
Car originally had red velour upholstery, retrimmed in blue leather after DB's departure to make it more saleable. As the publicity shots show, it was also originally fitted with wire wheels, soon deemed not up to the torque of the V8

‘It has never been restored, nor should it have been, having covered just over 14,000 miles from new, verified by the fat service history’

Engineering director Dudley Gershon later described in his book, *Aston Martin 1963-72*, what happened. The younger wielders of power within Aston Martin considered the Lagonda name to be old hat, and on the very day of the new saloon's unveiling came an order from 'a very high corporation official' – Gershon didn't reveal who – to badge it an Aston Martin. Gershon turned 'Nelson's blind eye' to this request and ordered the already-prepared Lagonda badging to be fitted minutes before the press photography began.

That same high official was congratulated later that day by 'our main London distributor' for his foresight in using the Lagonda name, and 'Sir David was reported to have chuckled with suppressed delight'. So, Lagonda V8 it

was, reviving a marque name last used on the Rapide of 1961. Sir David was regularly chauffeured in the purple machine for the next couple of years, until he sold AML at the end of 1971 to Company Developments. MP230/1 continued to lurk around Newport Pagnell but it wasn't replicated until 1974, by which time its original, fuel-injected engine (V/500/009/P, with a 5.0-litre capacity) had been replaced by an early standard production unit with 5340cc and four Weber carburettors, V/540/008/EE.

Those replicated cars with the horseshoe front grille were barely any more productionised than JPP 5G. Michael Bowler in his *Aston Martin V8* book tells of a guided tour of the factory with co-owner George Minden in early 1976, just after production restarted. The Lagondas had



been built on Aston V8 chassis cut in half with an extra 11in inserted in the wheelbase; Minden said that the model would soon have its own jigs but, with the 'wedge' Lagonda's unveiling due later that year, this was not going to happen.

There was also the matter of cost: £14,040 in 1974, compared with an Aston V8's £11,349; by 1976 the list price was £16,731 for anyone who wished to order an example. But no-one did.

TO LOOK AT the prototype Lagonda now, sitting shinily behind the Olney showroom of Desmond J Smail, is to wonder at potential unrealised. It looks delicious in its dark metallic blue, the rectified version of the respray that had so irked Mr Hopkins. Inside, the crimson velour is long gone, replaced by the blue leather

that helped make JPP 56 more saleable in 1975. The carpets, however, are quite new, part of a hefty recommissioning job carried out by Desmond's company at the time of the car's last sale in 2010. Their blueness bears a slight purple tinge, a nod to this interior's gaudy past.

When a car is as handbuilt as Astons of this era were, there's scant difference in quality and consistency between prototype and production car. Clearly Messrs Hopkins and Biggs were the final, unwilling development engineers, but it all seems pretty much up together now, barring panel gaps rather bigger between the doors than between the doors and adjacent wings. It has never been restored, nor should it have been, having covered just over 14,000 miles from new, verified by the fat service history.

Its profile blends the tense, muscular shape of Towns' DBS with the more restrained, formal look of a luxury saloon with fair success, although the tail does look a touch droopy from some angles. It sits on standard 1970s-issue GKN aluminium wheels shod with plump 235/70 R15 Avon Turbosteels; these wheels replaced the wires seen in the original press photographs, quickly deemed unable to cope with a V8's outpourings. The front and rear valances are as messy as ever, but unique among the DBS/V8 canon is the way this car's bootlid extends almost to the bumper.

Open a rear door, observing door-stays taken from a Rover P6, and you'll discover headroom less than generous. There's enough legroom aft to lounge quite luxuriously, even though half of


the wheelbase increase has gone on a bigger boot. The source of the generous footroom is revealed when you relocate to the driver's seat; I have never driven a car in this DBS family with a higher driving position. It's odd to look down on the familiar dashboard, have the steering wheel on your thighs and see so much of the bulging bonnet.

Beyond the steering wheel with its modern-looking DB badge is a fine array of instruments, including a 200mph speedometer and an oil pressure gauge reading up to a filter-bursting 160psi. The engine shows 90psi when running at speed; engine designer Tadek Marek was paranoid about pressure loss caused by expansion of the aluminium block. There are four cigarette lighters, some unlovely British Leyland-style interior door handles and a clunky Coolaire air-con system.

Lengthening the body and cutting extra door apertures made it floppy at the first attempt, so the sills were strengthened with extra box-sections. A new centre bearing kept the longer propeller shaft from vibrating. All of which means that, to drive, the Lagonda simply

feels the longer, heavier, less wieldy Aston V8 that it is. It's still quick, once you've got past the sensation of rotational energy being dissipated as useless heat within the three-speed Chrysler Torqueflite auto (where has all the torque flown to?). The rapid descent of the fuel gauge's reading seems as normal as the woofle of the V8.

The small steering wheel and hefty assistance help disguise the mass in the bends, and you can soon corner with a verve likely to ruin your rear passenger's assimilation of *FT* top stories. Through all this it rides in a civilised-enough fashion, but its genes will never allow it to be cossetting however the Armstrong Selectaride dampers would have been set (if they're still there, the adjustment doesn't work). It is a sports saloon, after all.

How do you value a car like this now? Two of the others straddled the £300,000 mark when auctioned a few years ago, before the latest upward rush of Aston Martin prices, and this one is surely more special. Desmond Smail has it for sale again, so we might know soon enough. It would make a fine stablemate for a new Lagonda Taraf, don't you think? 

Lagonda V8 prototype

ENGINE V8, 5340cc **MAX POWER** c300bhp @ 5000rpm **MAX TORQUE** c350lb ft @ 4000rpm **TRANSMISSION** Three-speed automatic
FRONT SUSPENSION Double wishbones, coil springs, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar **REAR SUSPENSION** de Dion axle on trailing arms, Watt's linkage, coil springs, adjustable dampers **STEERING** Rack-and-pinion, power-assisted **BRAKES** Vented discs front, solid discs rear
WHEELS 15in alloy (originally wire-spoke) **TYRES** 235/70 R15 **0-60MPH** c7.5sec **TOP SPEED** c140mph
PRICE NEW c£15,000 (c£140,000 in today's money) **PRICE TODAY** £445,000 (www.djsmail.co.uk)



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A rare opportunity to provide a new home to one of the best short Chassis Le Mans available! Absolutely ready to race or rally.

The first owner was Bobby Morgan, a well known racing driver of the time (he finished second in the Boulogne GP of 1922 driving Green Pea). The Le Mans was built to his order in 1933. Bobby Morgan owned the car for the next 20 years before passing through a number of subsequent owners.

In 1998 the car was restored by the then owner under the supervision of a former chairman of AMOC. Ecurie Bertelli have carried out work on the car and know it well.

2001 was a busy year for this Le Mans. It was the 'star' of a UK television series on the restoration of classic cars and also featured on the Aston Martin calendar for the year. It was used by AML to publish the launch of the new Vanquish car in Geneva, where they shared the limelight. There was also time for it to become winner of the pre War class at the AMOC Hampton Court Palace concours and be featured on the BEN Christmas card for 2001.

This car boasts an impressive history file with photos, documents and many invoices. The car is capable of good FIVA and HTP papers as well as a VSCC buff form.

The current owner acquired the car in 2003 and used it on the road and in Club races. The engine was rebuilt a few years ago with steel crank and rods and gives good performance making this car a competitive for race or rally. The performance is further enhanced by a close ratio gear box. The rear axle ratio has been changed to 5.00 : 1 as a good compromise between track and road use.

The Le Mans model is welcomed at all the right events including the Mille Miglia, Le Mans Classic, Goodwood, Silverstone Classic and many concours events making it a very sought after car indeed.

Arriving soon at our showroom, this car should be test driven without delay.



1933 1 1/2 litre 12/50 short chassis. Price £150,000

This car left the factory as a long chassis 'Standard' 2 door tourer. It was discovered in 1967 by the present owner in terrible condition on an airfield. As found it was already in short chassis specification and had the nose cone of what was thought to be a Meteor jet bolted to the rear of the chassis acting as rear coachwork.

The car was incomplete and clearly needed a total restoration, so it was completely rebuilt with the expert help of Bill Ellwell-Smith as a 'New International'. The owner (a master craftsman) had a short chassis International and copied the bodywork of this car making a complete body frame in ash and had it panelled by a local company. It is therefore to the correct specification of the rare (only fifteen made) 'New International' in all respects.



12/50 Le Mans, £175,000

This car had a major overhaul in 2003 with a complete and very thorough engine rebuild by David Taylor. This included a new cylinder block fitted with steel crank and rods and a new Le Mans specification cylinder head. The car therefore runs very well and is quite fast and should be strong and reliable for many years to come.

The car has been in Scandinavia for the past 7 years and has been regularly used on rallies and very much enjoyed by the present owner.



1935 Aston Martin MKII 2 litre £SOLD

This car has been hugely successful in the hands of Andy Bell, Simon Allen and Peter Dubsky on the track and with its present owner in road rallies. Andy Bell won the St. John Horsfall race with this car in 1997.

Purchased in 1994 as an already shortened MKII 4 seater it was completely rebuilt, by Andy Bell at Ecurie Bertelli over a three year period, to look like a 1935 high radiator 'Ulster'. The coachwork is an accurate copy of the ex. Derick Edwards Ulster CMC 614 and the engine is a genuine 2 litre Speed Model unit producing around 130BHP. Weighing only 820 kilos this car is still one of the most competitive pre-war Aston Martins in the world and is a truly wonderful track racing car and/or a very exciting rally car.

Aston Martin Ltd. are known to have fitted at least three 2 litre power plants to 1.5 litre chassis in 1936-37 and one car, much rallied by the works, still survives. This combination of 1.5 litre chassis and 2 litre engine makes for a very finely balanced and powerful race or rally car.



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CLOSE TO THE WEDGE

ASTON'S NEXT BID TO RELAUNCH THE LAGONDA MARQUE
CAUSED A SENSATION. TODAY, WITH LAGONDA BACK IN THE
NEWS AGAIN, IT'S TIME TO REASSESS THE ICONIC 'WEDGE'

WORDS PETER TOMALIN | PHOTOGRAPHY MATTHEW HOWELL



Has there ever been another car launch quite like it? It's almost 40 years since the extraordinary Lagonda wedge was unveiled, but you can still almost sense the shockwaves today. As we explain elsewhere in this issue, it was all the more extraordinary for the fact that Aston Martin had just emerged from some of its darkest hours: the factory at Newport Pagnell had actually closed in 1974 before reopening in 1975 under ambitious new owners. And in a move that still seems audacious today, the new management team quickly gave the go-ahead to a radical-looking four-door from the pen of chief stylist William Towns.

Towns's astonishingly low, futuristic Lagonda was shown to the motoring press at the Bell Inn at Aston Clinton in Buckinghamshire on October 12, 1976, and later that month it made its public debut at the London Motor Show at Earls Court. Around 200 orders were taken on the stand.

Kingsley Riding-Felce, who had joined the company just a few months earlier, vividly recalls the excitement created by the Lagonda. 'When it appeared at Earls Court it really did cause a sensation,' he says. 'Concorde had recently come into service [in January 1976], everyone was looking to move the world on

with new technology. For us to come out with such a striking car was a wonderful thing and attracted a lot of attention to the company.'

'It wasn't everyone's cup of tea. People were used to us producing cars with curves. But the beauty of the Lagonda was that it got everyone talking about Aston Martin again, it attracted new customers – and it helped with suppliers, which was a practical consideration after all the difficulties the company had been through.'

'Of course, getting a show car on the stand was one thing, getting it to the stage where it could be delivered to customers was another...'

The main driving force behind the car, according to Kingsley, was George Minden, the North American businessman who, along with compatriot Peter Sprague, had bought Aston Martin at the beginning of 1975. Another key player in the Lagonda story was Brit Mike Loasby, the engineering director at the time. It was Loasby who was chiefly responsible for packaging the V8 engine, three-speed automatic gearbox and all the other underpinnings within Towns's uncompromisingly low and angular shape. Development work took place in what is known as the Olympia building at Newport Pagnell – in those days the 'R&D department', today the Heritage sales showroom.

It wasn't an easy birth – and the main culprits for the delays that ensued were the fantastically

ambitious electronics, particularly the dashboard with its digital instruments and touch-sensitive switchgear. 'We were working at the time with the Cranfield Institute on the electronics,' recalls Kingsley. 'The technology was all very new – I remember in the early development cars it took up the spare wheel-well and some of the boot! But this was cutting-edge technology at the time.' The electronics were later handed over to an American company and the Lagonda's development began to make headway.

'The test driver we had at the time was a racing driver called Bill Nicholson,' continues Kingsley. 'He'd come in and take the cars out over a fixed test route, proper hard miles. Steve Hallam, who went on to Formula 1 fame, managed the development. A lot of good people put a lot into the car, into the suspension and so forth. Everyone worked so hard to get the Lagonda ready for production.'

Three cars were carefully hand-built during 1977, and the first 'customer car' was delivered to Lady Tavistock, a recently appointed director of the company, on April 24, 1978. The press were invited along to witness the proud moment, but alas the battery ran flat and the car had to be rolled out for the photographers.

Electrical issues would continue to dog the early cars, yet slowly but surely the systems were sorted, and by the early 1980s the Lagonda

‘PULLING UP IN
A CAR LIKE
THAT, THE
DASHBOARD
TWINKLING
AWAY AT NIGHT,
IT LOOKED LIKE
YOU’D GOT THE
VERY BEST AND
LATEST THING’

had become a strong seller for Aston Martin – particularly in the Middle East and North America. As Kingsley says: ‘You can imagine in the early ‘80s, somewhere like the Middle East, pulling up in a car as striking as that, the dashboard twinkling away at night – it looked like you’d got the very best and latest thing.’

‘And it probably saved the company. By the time it went out of production in 1990, we’d sold 638 cars – which doesn’t sound like a lot today, but was a significant contribution when you’re only building three or four cars a week.’

So an important car in the Newport Pagnell story, but a wise buy today? As an investment, they’re starting to look a decent bet. At the recent Bonhams Works sale, an excellent low-mileage car made a strong £87,000, though a very tidy, average-miler reached only half that. According to specialist Nick Mee, prices for the best are rising steadily – the Series 4 is the rarest and best-sorted, and an example in first-class all-round condition might now command as much as £120,000 – but you can still find driveable, presentable cars for around £50k.

Still good value, then – but only if you buy a sound car, and essentially one with a solid structure that doesn’t require major restoration. As with all Newport Pagnell cars of this era – and underneath that sharp suit the Lagonda is essentially just another V8 Aston (in fact based on the stretched platform that supported the early-70s DBS-based four-door) – rust is the main enemy. That, and glitchy electronics, but we’ll get to those.

‘It’s aluminium bodywork on top of a steel platform chassis, and it corrodes in all the usual places, particularly the sills, which are a major job,’ says Nigel Woodward, manager of the Heritage workshop at Works. ‘We’ve yet to do a

full body-off restoration, but we have done a number of extensive refurbishments, and the work and costs are much the same as any V8. The big clue is the door gaps. It’s a long chassis, and if any of the doors don’t close properly, it’s a sign of problems underneath. Mechanically they’re pretty robust, but I’d be looking for signs of overheating and listening for any unusual noises. It should be a quiet, smooth-riding car.

‘And obviously check all the electrics work, including the instrumentation. We recently had a car with non-functioning cathode ray tubes, and to replace them and get everything working again you’re looking at £8000-9000.’ Gulp.

No-one knows more about the headaches posed by the Lagonda’s pioneering electrical systems than Dave Dillow – or ‘Mr Lagonda’ as he’s known at Works. One of the longest-serving employees at Newport Pagnell, Dave joined AML as an auto electrician in October 1976 – just as the Lagonda was making its public debut.

‘We’d see them in R&D and we helped out a bit on the development cars,’ he recalls, ‘and then when the early customer cars started going out there were loads of faults. You’d press the button to reset the trip and turn the headlights on! Lots of things like that.’

Today, Dave still works as an auto electrician at Works, but in the Heritage workshop rather than on the production line. He talks us through the evolution of the Lagonda’s digital dash. The original version, with its red LED displays, was created by the Javalina Corporation, a Texas aircraft instrument specialist. ‘It was advanced for its day,’ says Dave, ‘but by today’s technology, they’re very basic. Then there was a mk2 version of the LEDs, and then the CRT screens...’

The trio of cathode ray tubes – basically miniature versions of the old-fashioned TV sets

Right and opposite
Earliest wedges are known as the Series 2 (the early-70s DBS-based Lagonda being the Series 1). This particular car, shot at Works, is an S3, incorporating numerous detail refinements. The final version was the softer-edged Series 4, which ran from 1987 to 1990. The S4 also gained electronic fuel injection where the S2 and S3 had Weber carbs







Lagonda Series 3


ENGINE V8, 5340cc **MAX POWER** 280bhp @ 5500rpm **MAX TORQUE** 301lb ft @ 3000rpm **TRANSMISSION** Three-speed automatic, rear-wheel drive, limited-slip differential
SUSPENSION Front: double wishbones, coil springs, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar. Rear: de Dion axle, Watt's linkage, coil springs, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar
STEERING Rack-and-pinion, power-assisted **BRAKES** Vented discs, 274mm front, 264mm rear **WHEELS** 15in alloy **TYRES** 235/70 VR15 Avon Turbo Steel **WEIGHT** 2095kg
POWER TO WEIGHT 136bhp/ton **0-60MPH** c9.0sec **TOP SPEED** c140mph **PRICE NEW** £53,500 in 1982 (£183,500 in today's money) **PRICES TODAY** £50,000-120,000

that used to be in everyone's sitting rooms – represented the speedo, rev-counter, and a central display for the warning lights. 'Think about taking that TV from your home and bouncing three of them down the road, and you can sort of see how problems might occur,' Dave laughs. 'Actually it was a beautiful dash and easy to read – when it was working.'

There was even one further variation, with the Series 4 cars introduced in 1987, when the CRTs were replaced by VF (vacuum fluorescent) gauges, which were thankfully less problematic.

'Over the years we've developed ways of making each of the systems work,' Dave continues. 'We found the CRTs can be replaced by three LCD screens, which are much more reliable. Other cars have had LEDs replaced by conventional-looking dials.'

He shows us a Lagonda that he's converted to traditional analogue dials. They fit in beautifully, but their traditional look is almost too conservative for a car as bold and slightly barmy as the Lagonda. Those digital displays – for all the headaches they caused – were part of what made the Lagonda special.

Last word to Kingsley Riding-Felce, that great Works stalwart. 'What people forget is that we were a little company at the time. For all its early problems, William Towns gave us something very striking and very special.' 

What the road testers said at the time

'SETTLING INTO the driver's seat for the first time is something of a daunting experience, for the controls are like those of no other car. Flanking the small-diameter, leather-rimmed, single-spoke steering wheel are two panels containing no less than seventeen touch switches, three rotating rheostat switches and a slide lever. Above these panels is a large, blank, black fascia behind a perspex screen, and in front of that the bonnet, disappearing into the distance.

A twist of the ignition key, and the blank space starts to come alive as the digital instruments record the state of the various functions. Engine rpm is displayed in large red figures at the top left, directly below the speedometer. Moving the gear selector causes a flurry of activity on the display as the illuminated monitor records the position of the selector lever.

With gentle pressure on the accelerator the car glides away

with a gentle wuffle from the exhausts, and is soon in top gear, the torque converter smoothing out the changes. Heavier pressure, and the Lagonda leaps forward, accompanied by a strong exhaust note as the revs rise quickly between changes.

Our first few tentative miles were through the thick of London's rush hour. Insulated from the outside world by the luxury of the interior, the stop-go traffic was rather less frustrating than usual – in fact it was almost a pleasure to be traffic-bound. As the flow of traffic speeded up, so it became apparent that the Lagonda is a very quiet car; not so silky-silent as a V12 Jaguar, or so refined as a Rolls-Royce, but at 60mph there is slight rumble from the tyres, no noticeable exhaust noise and only the occasional thump from the suspension.

By the time we finished the day's motoring, the Lagonda had covered 550 miles of very varied motoring and this driver,

having driven for over 500 of them, was feeling no more tired than if he had sat in an armchair all day.

If this car were our own, we would request attention to the erratically reading fuel gauge; a faster fast wipe; and a less sensitive down-change. Other than these quibbles, which are very minor, it is very difficult to fault this glorious car.'

– *Motor Sport*, January 1982





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06.2011, 10'600 km, Cairngorn Grey / Bentley Saddle Tan, Véh CH, 1ère main, B.V. Mécanique

CHF 139'700.—



Aston Martin V8 Vantage Roadster

04.2009, 47'500 km, Berwick Bronze / Bitter Chocolate, Véh. CH, 1ère main, B.V Sportshift

CHF 78'700.—



Aston Martin DB9 Volante

02.2007, 47'000 km, Tungsten Silver / Moon Shadow-Black Cherry, good condition, B.V Touchtronic II

CHF 79'700.—



Aston Martin DB9 Volante

06.2008, 23'700 km, Merlot Red / Sandstorm-Iron Ore Red, Véh. CH, 1ère main, B.V Touchtronic II

CHF 109'700.—



Aston Martin Vanquish

07.2003, 23'500 km, Bowland Black / Geneva Grey, Véh. CH, historique connu, 2 propriétaires, manual

CHF 99'700.—

Aston Riviera Cars SA



Avenue Montchoisi 9
1006 Lausanne
Switzerland

Tel. + 41 21 32 39 007
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BACK FROM THE BRINK

AFTER DAVID BROWN SOLD UP, NEWPORT PAGNELL ENDURED SOME OF ITS DARKEST HOURS - THE FACTORY WAS EVEN FORCED TO CLOSE ITS DOORS IN 1974 - BUT IT WOULD RISE AGAIN

WORDS PETER TOMALIN

PHOTOGRAPHY AML / VARIOUS

A DOWNTURN in the fortunes of the David Brown group of companies forced Sir David to sell AML – reluctantly – in 1972. And so, after a long period of stability, the Newport Pagnell factory entered the most turbulent period of its history. New owner Company Developments kept the factory ticking over, but economic troubles in the wider world meant these were difficult times for a small, luxury car maker.

Eddie Colton (pictured right) well remembers those days. He had arrived at Newport Pagnell in the mid-60s as a mechanic in the service department, later moving across to road test rectification, checking the cars for faults as they reached the end of the assembly line. There was certainly no shortage of faults to be rectified!

'The back axles gave us loads of problems, and so did the power steering,' he says. By the time Company Developments took over, he had been promoted to road tester. 'I tested DB6 Mk2s, DBS sixes, and the V8s, both fuel injection and carburettors. When I drove the cars, there was no trim and no covering over the petrol tank because part of the test was checking for leaks. The test route was down through Woburn to the Ridgmont M1 junction. On the M1 I'd drive at 65-70mph, listening for undue noises – particularly from the axle. Then back to the workshop for inspection, paying special attention to the steering rack, which was often leaking oil from the gaiters. The workshop team would then work through the items I'd rejected.

'One time on the M1 with a fuel-injected V8 the pipe to the oil pressure gauge burst. Sprayed the whole windscreen! Good job I was in the nearside lane and could pull over. I was able to fix it with the small set of tools I carried. I always said the pipe wasn't up to the job, and soon after a proper high-pressure pipe was fitted.

'They were trying to get the cars out quickly, to keep the money coming in.' When the factory closed in 1975 he joined Aston Service Dorset; today he is happily retired, still living in Dorset, but looks back fondly on his Newport Pagnell days. 'To be a road tester was a real step up for me. They had problems but they were splendid cars.'



Below

New owners Company Developments, a consortium of businessmen, had kept the factory ticking over for a couple of years but by the end of 1974 cash-flow problems forced them to put Aston Martin Lagonda into receivership. Workers returning from their Christmas and New Year break found they were without jobs, and the future for AML looked bleak indeed

Right

A face from the past... 'Bert' Bertelli (on the left), the man chiefly responsible for Aston Martin's prewar successes, paid a visit to Newport Pagnell in 1974 and chatted with Company Developments boss William Willson. In the foreground a Bertelli Aston and an AM V8, as the restyled and rebadged DBS V8 was now known, all references to 'DB' having been removed



Below

Partially completed cars in a silent factory in early 1975 as the receiver tried to find a new buyer for Aston Martin Lagonda. The only people left on site at the time were a skeleton staff to maintain the premises and man the restricted spares and service facilities under the direction of general manager Fred Hartley



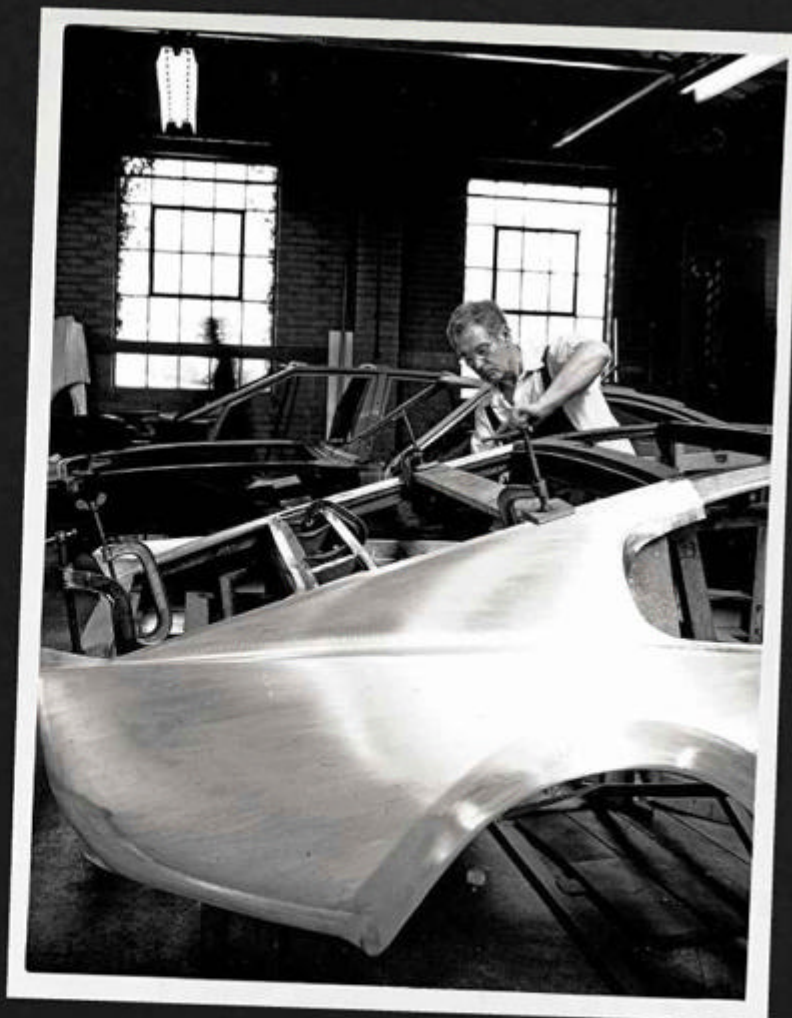


Left
Salvation – and not a moment too soon. A photocall outside Sunnyside for the new saviours of Aston Martin Lagonda – and a starring role for schoolboy Eric Hamer, who had added his £20 savings to the rescue fund launched by the Owners Club. From the left are Fred Hartley, with new investors Peter Sprague, Denis Flather, Alan Curtis and George Minden



Above
New managing director Alan Curtis addresses the Newport Pagnell workforce. Many workers had found new jobs after the factory closure, but most returned when the Tickford Street works reopened, such was the pull of the famous winged badge. Curtis himself had put a cross in the dust of one of the unfinished cars when he'd visited the shutdown factory as a statement of intent

Right
It was not until early 1976 that production restarted, chiefly due to problems persuading key suppliers that this time Aston Martin Lagonda really was back for good. The V8 saloon remained the cornerstone of production, but in the late-70s it was joined by Volante and Vantage versions. A revised body with a kicked-up tail was introduced in October 1978, designated Oscar India (aviation code for OI, for October Introduction) by keen private pilot Curtis

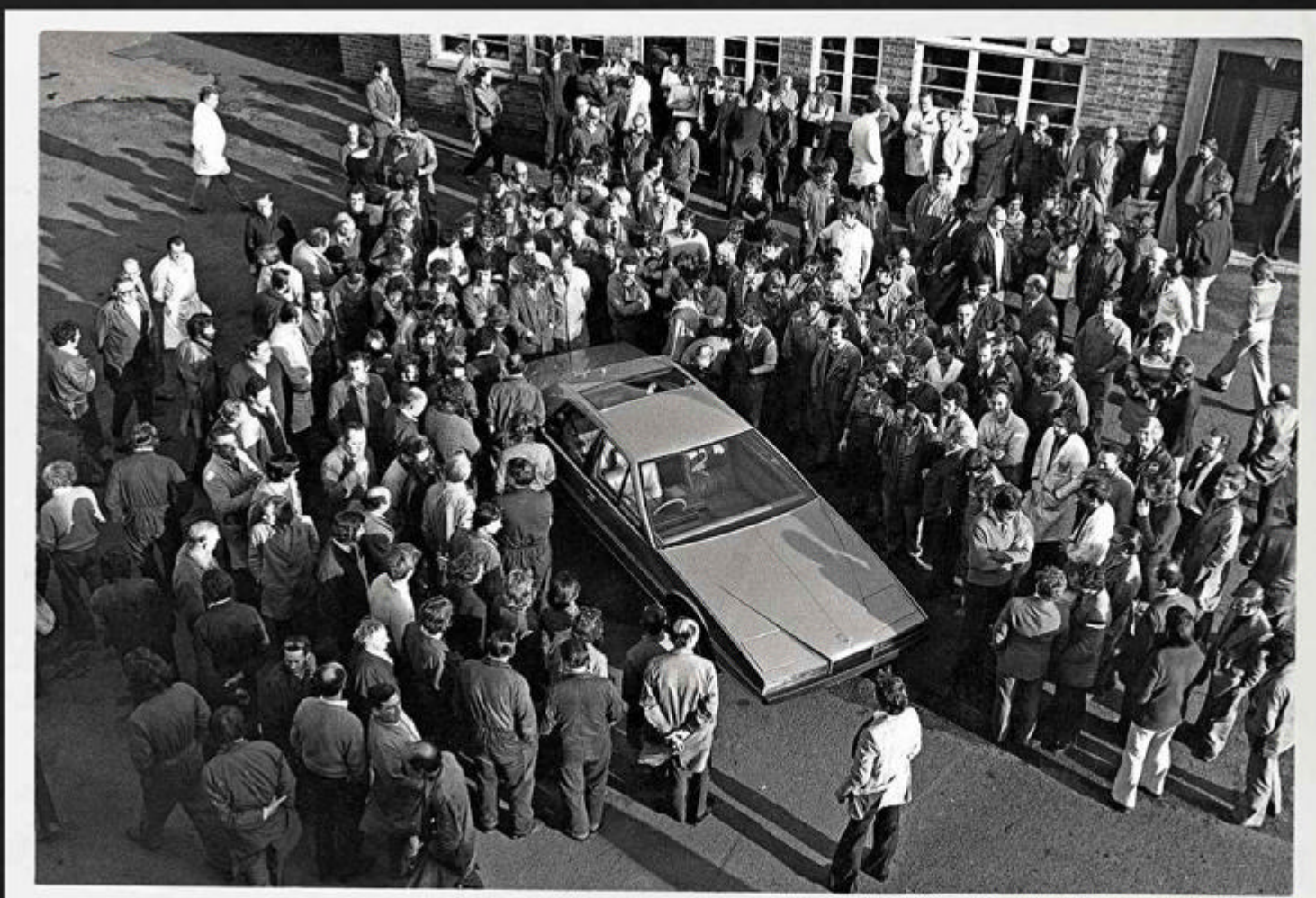


Right
Each V8 engine was hand-assembled by one man. In the mid-70s there were three engine builders at the factory: Fred Waters, Sid King and Fred Osborne. After assembly, each engine was taken across the road to the dynamometer for testing. Legend had it that Aston's engine tester could tell which man had built an engine just by listening to it



Left
One of the first decisions of the new management team was to give the green light to a radical proposal for a new four-door saloon by chief stylist William Towns. Here the pipe-smoking Peter Sprague and Alan Curtis (seated) discuss the interior proposals with members of the design team

Below
Almost as if it had landed from outer space, the new Lagonda in the factory yard at Tickford Street after its headline-grabbing Motor Show debut in 1976. For many of the workforce this was their first proper look at the car which, it was hoped, would ensure their future employment. It's probably fair to speculate that some of them weren't entirely convinced. Such were the problems getting the Lagonda's instruments and touch-sensitive switchgear to function reliably that first deliveries wouldn't start until 1978





Left
After another financial wobble in the late-1970s, it was the charismatic British businessman Victor Gauntlett, backed by investors CH Industrials and, later, shipping tycoon Peter Livanos and his family, who ensured Aston Martin Lagonda entered another decade in reasonably rude health. Here the 1000th Aston is flanked by Gauntlett (left) and John Martin, son of company founder Lionel

Below
HRH Prince Charles, an Aston fan since boyhood, on one of his many visits to the factory, here accompanied by Victor Gauntlett. In 1986 the Prince ordered a special V8 Vantage Volante stripped of the spoilers and sideskirts that were then a feature of the model; the spec became known as PoW (for Prince of Wales) and 26 similar cars were eventually built, all highly prized today



Below

A high point of the Gauntlett years was the rekindling of the relationship between Aston Martin and Italian design house Zagato. With V8 Vantage mechanicals repackaged in shorter, lighter - and controversially angular - bodywork, the limited-production V8 Vantage Zagato was widely praised by the motoring press and an instant hit with collectors. Here the Newport Pagnell workforce are introduced to the new super-Aston by the chairman





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A red Aston Martin V8 Vantage is shown from a low front-quarter angle, driving on a two-lane asphalt road that curves through a hilly, grassy landscape. The car is in motion, as indicated by the blurred background and the road surface. The sky is a pale blue with some light clouds. The overall mood is dynamic and scenic.

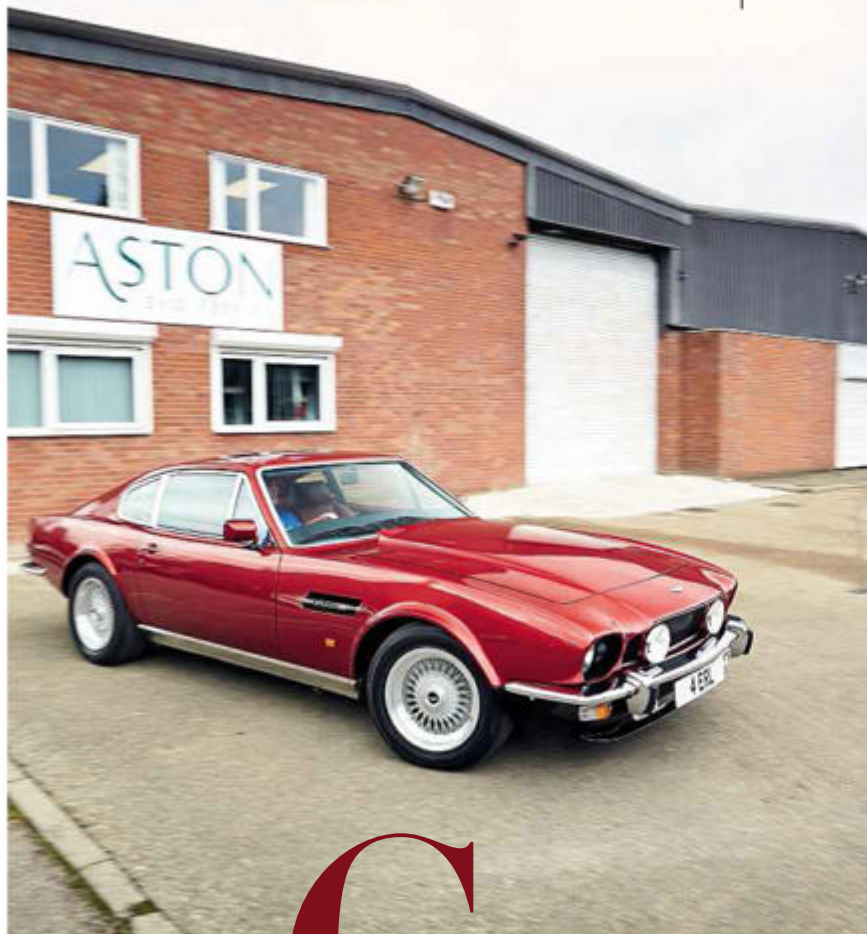
DRIVE | V8 EFi

EIGHTIES REUNION

THIS WONDERFUL LATE-80s V8 EFi HAS JUST
EMERGED FROM AN 18-MONTH RESTORATION.
WE JOIN THE OWNER AS HE GETS REACQUAINTED
WITH THE CAR THAT FIRED HIS ASTON PASSION

WORDS PETER TOMALIN

PHOTOGRAPHY MATTHEW HOWELL



‘WITH ITS NEAT CHIN SPOILER, FLARED ARCHES AND WIDER RUBBER, IT LOOKS BEAUTIFULLY PURPOSEFUL’

So that was my Aston epiphany. I’m sure you can remember yours, too. Scotsman Eric Clark certainly can. His passion for Aston Martin was ignited in 1977, when, as a lad of a similar age, he saw a photograph of the then-new V8 Vantage prototype. It started a love affair with the V8 Aston that’s endured to this day. The difference between Eric and me is that ten years ago he was able to indulge his passion when he bought the car you see here.

It’s a late-1988 series-5 V8 EFi, one of the last 60 or so V8s to be built. So it has the Weber-Marelli electronic fuel injection (hence EFi), so much better sorted than the early Bosch-injected V8s, and rather better built and trimmed too, the final evolution of the V8 line and a fine example of the machines that Newport Pagnell was producing at the height of the Gauntlett era.

After driving and enjoying the car for eight years or so on the roads around his Lanarkshire home – and often much further afield – Eric decided that with 130,000 miles on the clock it was starting to feel a little tired and to treat it to an extensive refurbishment by Aston Engineering. Eighteen months after the process began, we join Eric at the Derby firm’s impressive new HQ. It’s the first time he’s seen the finished car, and this will be the first time he’s driven it since completion. Top chap that he is, he’s agreed that later I can have a turn behind the wheel, too.

And there it is. Fresh from a refurb that’s included bodywork, paint, retrim, mechanical overhaul and a few well-chosen upgrades. Most noticeably, it now runs on 16in Ronal alloys, as fitted to the contemporary Vantage, rather than the V8’s usual 15in BBS wheels, wrapped in slightly lower-profile Michelin Pilot Sports, and with the arches subtly flared to accommodate them. It also has Aston Engineering’s handling kit, comprising uprated springs and front anti-roll bar. With its neat, PoW-style chin spoiler, flared arches, wider, lower-profile rubber and slightly lower stance, it looks beautifully purposeful.

It had left the factory painted Windsor Red with magnolia leather, but Eric wanted to put his personal stamp on the car. ‘I’d seen this colour, Volcano Red, on a new Vanquish and I loved it. For the interior I had a good idea of what I wanted. So it’s claret hide, with black hide across the dash-top, and grey nappa leather headlining.’ It wouldn’t be for everyone, but that’s the point – it’s for Eric. It’s undeniably striking, and quite beautifully done. As we slide inside, he points out the detail stuff: remote

Can you remember your Aston Martin epiphany? The moment when your passion was ignited? I can, like it was yesterday. Being a child of the early ‘60s, I’d played with my cousin’s Goldfinger DB5 and pored over photos of DB6s in my dad’s copies of *Motor Sport*. But living in a small village in Northamptonshire, I’d never actually experienced an Aston ‘in the metal’. That all changed in the summer of 1973. I was 12 at the time, the Aston was an AM V8, and when it appeared in our close it might as well have been Fireball XL5 or Thunderbird 2.

It was there because a local advertising agency had managed to blag it for a photoshoot, and I knew this because my mate Richard’s dad worked for said agency. And that weekend the Aston was parked on their driveway. I did say my *best* mate Richard, didn’t I?

It was the Saturday afternoon. Richard called round. Would I like to go for a ride in the Aston Martin? His dad and his dad’s boss were up front; we squeezed into the back seats. And then we set off for the nearby A5. I can remember Richard’s dad exclaiming: ‘That’s the ton!’

That was impressive enough, but it was the way it got there – with a mighty roar of induction and exhaust – that left the deepest impression. And it just kept accelerating, in a way I’d never experienced before. I’d like to think I whooped and cheered from the back seat, but from what I recall I was pretty much stunned into silence.

Looking back, I was sold from the moment I walked up to it. The huge tyres, the twin exhausts protruding from the rear valance, the sheer width of the thing compared with my dad’s Hillman Minx. Where the DB6 had clearly evolved from a 1950s design, this was bang up to date, every bit as awe-inspiring as the Ferrari Daytona, Iso Grifo and the other super-GTs I’d read about. It certainly got the thumbs-up from the 12-year-old Tomalin.

Above and right
Owner Eric Clark is reunited with his V8 at Derby-based Aston Engineering. Right: heading out into the Peak District. The EFi was the final development of the AM V8, built from 1986 to 1989



central locking, LED lights, the power point in the centre console for recharging phones and iPods...

The weather's closing in, the morning sunshine being replaced by heavy grey clouds. Photographer Matt is getting anxious. Time to head out through the suburbs of Derby and point the V8 towards the Peak District. As Eric guides that long, imposing bonnet through the traffic, he talks about his Aston love affair. 'It's a nostalgia thing. Older guys like the six-cylinder cars, but for me, growing up in the '70s and '80s, V8s were the thing.'

The EFi isn't his only V8. He also owns a very early DBS V8 and the V8 Vantage prototype – the very car he first fell in love with in 1977 and one that featured in many a magazine feature of its own back in the late 1970s.

'That wonderful publicity shot of the Vantage prototype with two greyhounds. I remember seeing it in *Autocar* in about 1977. I remember thinking, that is absolutely stunning. That picture has never left me. Little did I know that 30 years later I would own that car.'

He bought the Vantage about five years ago, then last year added the early DBS V8 to the collection. 'They're all different,' he says. 'The Vantage is brutal. You strap yourself in and hold on tight! It's like a roadgoing Spitfire!'

But 4 ERL was his first Aston and he clearly has a deep attachment to the car. 'I found her in West Sussex and drove her home to Scotland. That's when the love affair really began. I'd been through a very acrimonious divorce and I had to fight for custody of my three sons: so ERL stands for Euan, Rhys and Liam.' Now a company director who owns and runs two family businesses, he adds: 'For 20-odd years I put my family first; now, in my early 50s, I can indulge myself a little.'

And why not. He's clearly loving being back in 4 ERL, and as we ease out of the suburbs and into the rolling Derbyshire hills I'm impressed by how well it rides on the bigger wheels, while the V8 bumbles its bass-heavy beat and the three-speed Torqueflite auto slurs the upshifts.

'I visited four or five times during the restoration to see the work progressing,' Eric continues, 'but this is the first time I've driven her, and I'm delighted with the results. The quality of the work is second to none. She's exactly how I pictured her, and how I hoped she'd drive.'

'All my cars are used and enjoyed. I know some cars only come out a few times a year when the sun's shining, but mine are used all the time. Everything from driving to work to the school run to longer trips. They were built to be driven, and by God I enjoy driving them. Of course some people have them as an investment, but I'm fortunate and for me it's a passion first and an investment as a consequence of that.'

'I remember once I'd had the worst week at work, everything I'd tried to do had gone wrong, and I got home on the Friday night and opened the garage doors and sat in the Vantage prototype, put the keys in the ignition, and within five minutes everything was right with the world. Astons can do that to you.'

Would he buy a modern Aston? 'One of the many pleasures of driving these cars is that they're not like driving a new car. I've driven a DB9, I've driven a DBS and they're wonderful cars,

Right

Volcano Red paintjob suits EFi perfectly. Handling kit, comprising uprated springs and front anti-roll bar, combined with slightly larger wheels and lower profile tyres, brings a sporting edge to the handling







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Above and right

By the 1980s, the AM V8 had gained lashings of wood veneer. The final run of V8s from 1986-89 saw Weber-Marelli electronic fuel injection replace the Weber carbs that had seen the V8 through most of its long production run



DRIVE | V8 EFi



‘ONCE UP TO SPEED,
IT COVERS GROUND AT
A SURPRISING LICK FOR
SUCH A BIG, HEAVY CAR’



Above
Subtle upgrades to Eric's V8 EFi include the bigger, 16in Ronal wheels from the contemporary Vantage in place of the original 15in BBS alloys, and flared wheelarches in the style of the 'PoW' Vantage

phenomenally fast. But they're not like driving these, and it's the nostalgia thing again. It takes me back 30 years to when I was dreaming about owning a car like this.

'There's also the fact that a powerful car of this era can bite you if you get it wrong. Too much throttle on damp roads and the back slips straight out. So you have to respect it. But it all adds to the exhilaration!'

We've arrived on the famous Cat and Fiddle road, just outside Buxton, squally showers blowing in across the moors, the roads intermittently dry and glistening. Ron hands me the key and heads for the warmth and shelter of the Cat and Fiddle pub with sons Euan and Rhys, who have come along for the day. I tell him I'll take good care of 4 ERL in my best reassuring voice.

You sit quite high on the generously padded seat, the wheel set rather low, but this slightly elevated driving position gives you a commanding view over the top of the dash and down the vast bonnet. It helps you feel you're on top of things, which with a V8 Aston – someone else's, fresh from an 18-month rebuild – is a good state to be in.

The steering wheel has a surprisingly small diameter and a chunky rim, clad in more of that claret leather, behind it an impressive dash well-stocked with gauges, including a 200mph speedo to the right and a 7000rpm rev-counter, both rather unlikely figures but sure to impress even a 2015 schoolboy if he were to press his nose against the side window and peer inside. As would the fusillade of exhaust gases when you fire up the mighty 5.3-litre V8.

Press the button in the knurled knob of the shifter, ease back into D and we're off. The throttle pedal is quite stiff, and the big Aston gains speed steadily rather than violently. It's not quick, not by any modern measure, but there's still something compelling about the way it covers the ground, the induction roar when you pin the throttle truly stirring.

Slightly disconcertingly in these early miles, the brake pedal has a pretty numb feel and requires a fair bit of pressure before you experience meaningful retardation.

It really does ride very well though. It's only when a wheel thumps into a pothole that it loses a little composure. Start to work the chassis a little harder through the turns, and it feels like the heavyweight it is. But as long as you're careful with your entry speed you can power through in a most satisfying manner. Once up to speed, it covers ground at a surprising lick for such a big, heavy car. Body movements are kept in check, and for a car with real compliance in the suspension it actually corners pretty flat and finds real bite from its modern Michelin Pilot Sports.

The steering is meaty – you steer from the shoulders not the wrists. But there's little slack and it's far from inert; there are lots of little tugs and pulls over less-than-smooth surfaces. It's nicely weighted too, as it loads and unloads.

The longer I drive the EFi, the more at ease I feel with it, a feeling enhanced by the wonderful visibility afforded by the slim window pillars. Give the brakes a solid prod and they do the job just fine. I'm giving the throttle a proper push now, too, and the V8 responds lustily. It's a constant presence. It never stops throbbing, pulsating, burbling. It dominates the car. Under gentle throttle it murmurs; floor the throttle and it blusters and woofles. Marvellous.

We park up for the final shots. The coachwork glows through the moorland mizzle. It's a wonderful example of a late V8, and proof that with a few well-judged upgrades it can be a thoroughly useable and enjoyable GT.

As Eric says, of his three V8s, this is the one he'd choose for long journeys. 'I'd have no hesitation taking her on trips of 400, 500 miles.' I can see why. There's something about the beautifully furnished interior, the comfy seats, the burbling V8 with its Weber-Marelli fuel injection that takes all conditions in its stride, the smooth auto 'box, the excellent ride, a range of 300-plus miles on a tankful, cruising at an effortless 80-90mph...

In previous summers, Eric tells me, he's made several trips to the north of Scotland and the islands – around Inverness and the Black Isle. It must have been epic. **V**



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INTERVIEW | PETER LIVANOS

THROUGH STORMY WATERS

IN THE 1980s, SHIPPING TYCOON PETER LIVANOS WAS LARGELY RESPONSIBLE FOR KEEPING ASTON MARTIN AFLOAT. IN AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH VANTAGE, HE TALKS ABOUT THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE OF THE MARQUE

WORDS PAUL CHUDECKI

PORTRAIT GUS GREGORY

PETER LIVANOS is something of an enigma. A very private man, he is seldom seen in public and rarely gives interviews. He is also a highly astute and influential businessman, his main focus being his wholly-owned family shipping business (though he has many others): Ceres Hellenic Shipping Enterprises, founded by Livanos's great-grandfather in the 1920s, is one of Greece's foremost shipping lines. Educated in Switzerland and the United States, where he studied industrial engineering, he is an accomplished yachtsman and holder of an Honorary Doctorate of Science at Massachusetts Maritime Academy.

And then there's the Aston Martin connection. Livanos's wealth (personal fortune currently estimated at in excess of a billion pounds) has allowed him to indulge in his well-known passion for cars, most notably Aston Martins. Indeed, the purchase of his first Aston led directly to owning the company. So how did it all come about?

We meet at the purpose-built garage near Gstaad that houses his largely British car collection. Impressive and eclectic, the collection ranges from pre-war and post-war Bentleys to Big Healeys and even a Morris Minor Pick-Up alongside the odd Ferrari, Alfa, Mercedes and Porsche. And then there are the Astons, pride of place going to the fabulous DBR1/1 (as featured in *Vantage* issue 9).

Livanos, 56, is casually dressed – no business meetings today. He speaks quickly but clearly between brief pauses, his university years in the US evident in his accent. 'My first involvement with Astons was in 1978/79 in



Brian Joscelyne

America when I bought a V8,' he begins. 'It was a standard V8 saloon, a very early model and it was secondhand. I bought it from the American importer who was in New Rochelle, New York, and that's how I got involved. Shortly thereafter, with a very good friend of mine, Nick Papanikolaou, we ended up acquiring what was a pretty much bankrupt business from Victor [Gauntlett] and Tim Hearley [chairman of CH Industrials, and co-investor with Gauntlett in 1980].

'We did it in stages,' continues Livanos. 'The first stage was we acquired the US importership. Then Victor began having difficulties with Pace Petroleum and was selling most of his car collection – he had just acquired DBR1/2; he had a previous DBR1, he had a number of 3Ss, he had a great collection of cars. We were faced with the choice of acquiring cars from him or alternatively acquiring the factory. I was in favour of buying the cars and my friend [Papanikolaou] was in favour of buying the factory, and we ended up buying the factory. I felt we were better off staying with the importership and not getting involved in the manufacturing side. Having said that, I'm glad that we did; it was a great experience.'

Shortly after they acquired the factory, Papanikolaou found himself in his own financial difficulties. 'And then that led to my family coming in with additional support,' says Livanos. 'We owned 50/50 at that point – and we ended up coming in and taking over his portion of it.

'The factory itself was in a terrible state – it was the mid-80s and it was really having a lot of difficulty in selling cars. So it required fairly substantial support from my family and that's when my father first got involved. It wasn't something he did willingly, he did it because of a great fondness and love for his wayward son! But he did actually have an underlying deep love of the William Towns Lagonda.

'When we walked into the factory, one of the first things I gave Kingsley [Riding-Felce] was a gold coin. It was put in a little glass case in the factory at the final build shop, and it stayed there. The joke internally was: "In case of emergency break glass!"

'Having taken 100 per cent control of the business, my father elected to give Victor an equity stake of 25 per cent on the basis that he ran it.' And so began another exciting chapter in the story of Aston Martin, one that



Opposite page and left
Peter Livanos and Victor Gauntlett in Livanos's DBR2 at the 1989 Monterey Festival – the pair remained good friends until Gauntlett's death in 2003 – and welcoming HRH Prince Michael of Kent to Newport Pagnell in the mid-80s

‘I FELT WE WERE BETTER OFF NOT GETTING INVOLVED IN THE MANUFACTURING SIDE. BUT I’M GLAD WE DID; IT WAS A GREAT EXPERIENCE’

witnessed the renewal of Aston's relationship with Zagato among other developments. But by the late 1980s it was clear more funds were needed for the marque's long-term survival and the idea of seeking a buyer first arose. Livanos takes up the tale again.

‘This is the true story of how the company was sold. It's not the way the books have written it,’ he says. ‘We came to the conclusion in '87 that the family would not really be able to continue, to do anything more than keep the factory on life support. There were a number of new legislations coming in and the capital investment that was going to have to go into this business was significantly more than what we were willing to do at the time. And we talked with Victor about what we should do, and to find a strategic partner. At that time there was a flurry of activity in the car world, where big manufacturers were buying small manufacturers. So we toyed around with that idea.’

At the time, Livanos was racing DBR2/1 (very successfully, as well as a DB4 GT Zagato and a DB4 Lightweight), regularly beating the Ferrari TR61 of rival driver Peter Sachs – who had close links to Ford (Goldman Sachs had all the Ford Motor Company business). Livanos chatted the idea through with Sachs, and in mid-1987 Sachs asked him if he'd sell Aston Martin. ‘He just called me on the phone one afternoon and said: “Would you be interested?”

‘I called Victor and Victor said: “Well, let's be very careful; what we don't want to do is give Goldman Sachs a hunting licence and then find that all our value's destroyed.” Whatever value it was. And the answer [to Sachs] was: “Well, if we have the right buyer the answer is yes. But what we don't want to do is go through a long, drawn-out process of marketing with the consequent upheaval to the staff and the marque. Otherwise it's not for sale. We will keep it as it is.” And he said: “Well, I think Ford Motor Company would buy it.” It seems that Henry Ford really liked Lagonda as well; nothing to do with the other cars!’

A meeting swiftly ensued between Peter and Victor on one side – their

main concern being Aston going to a good home – and Ford top brass, whose contingent included PR guru Walter Hayes.

Livanos again: ‘Ford said: “We know how to make a million of anything, but if you ask us to make two of anything we don't know how to do it. We think you guys know how to do that. We would be interested in buying the company.” And I said: “Well, we clearly can't continue to develop it the way we think it needs to be developed, and I would love to see you do for Aston what VW did for Porsche or what Fiat did for Ferrari.” They said: “That's exactly what we want to do; we don't want to badge-engineer this, we want to keep it absolutely independent.” On the basis of that, I said: “Let's do a deal.”’

A Ford audit ensued, with the deal concluded in 48 hours for less than £20 million. ‘They bought 90 per cent of the factory, we kept 10 per cent,’ says Livanos. ‘Victor was CEO and chairman and I went on the board. The first board was a great board: Jackie Stewart, Bruce Blythe, Jacques Nasser, Walter Hayes, Tom Walkinshaw, myself, Nick Scheele.

‘Immediately when Ford took over they said: “Okay, here's what we're going to do; we're going to develop a supercar out of Virage,” – which was already on the drawing boards at the factory – “We'll go with that project and that will give us the high-end, handbuilt car to give us some life as we get into the new production.” And then they said: “We now need to get production numbers up dramatically; what can we do to get that?” and they said: “Ah-ha, we've got this left-over Jaguar chassis, let's use that.” So that was DB7.’

The decision to proceed with the already-planned, handbuilt Virage, together with a supercar version, was vital, says Livanos. ‘I absolutely supported Virage. It was necessary. We always knew that we would have to do the coupé, a drophead and a supercar, and it was get the coupé out first, immediately followed by the drophead, where we felt the biggest market share was, and then get the supercar done. And then the Ford deal happened and so the supercar was really on the blocks as to whether it

would go ahead or not. And Walkinshaw didn't want it to go ahead 'cause he wanted things shifted up to his [Bloxham] works where the [Jaguar] XJ220 was failing, because he was having huge difficulties with XJ220. And it was Jackie Stewart and Walter Hayes who basically said: "No, we'll build it at Aston." Walkinshaw said: "Close down Newport Pagnell, you don't need it, forget all this handbuilt stuff, I've got a modern works here, I'm tooled up, ready to go, let's go up here and let's cancel the Vantage."

Next on Ford's agenda was the cheaper model to dramatically increase production numbers. Gauntlett had previously talked about producing an entry-level Aston. 'But,' adds Livanos, 'we were in no condition to do that. It was totally Ford, and they had the bits, Walkinshaw had the factory, so they decided to go down that route, and before DB7 was produced Victor was out. Walkinshaw was out too, and Aston was now under the Ford wing completely. So that was DB7.'

'I stayed on the board. Post-Victor, Walter Hayes took over with enormous gusto and started the lamentable process of erasing the past; so the Papanikolaous were erased, they don't appear in any history, and my involvement was minimised. I was happy that it was, because I didn't do it for any glory; Victor's involvement was again somewhat minimised.'

'But then the story came out that Walter Hayes thought to buy the factory, and it wasn't anywhere near that. But Walter's not here to defend himself, so that's why I've never said anything. I think Walter was mercurial in making the company survive in the Ford system; Walter and Jackie Stewart really were the ones who were the guardians of the heritage in a system that could easily have swamped it. The concept of getting DB back into the series was Walter. I was against it, most of the board was against it, but he said: "No, we've got to bring DB back because it brings back the greatness of the company. And finally he prevailed and got DB7; he got David Brown to agree to do it. But by then we were out and it was

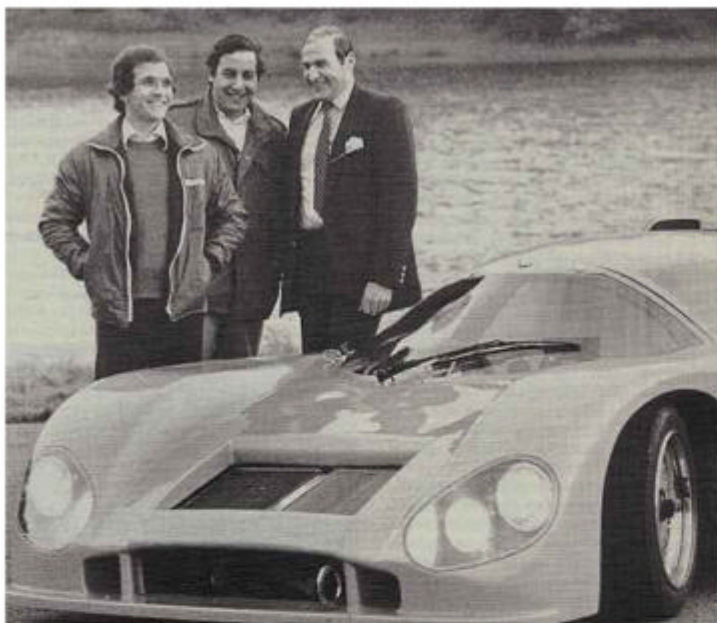
Below left, and right

With Robin Hamilton and Victor Gauntlett at the launch of the Nimrod. And in the pitlane with Richard Williams (hidden), Prince Michael of Kent and Gauntlett shortly before the start of 1989's Le Mans 24 Hours with the AMR1s

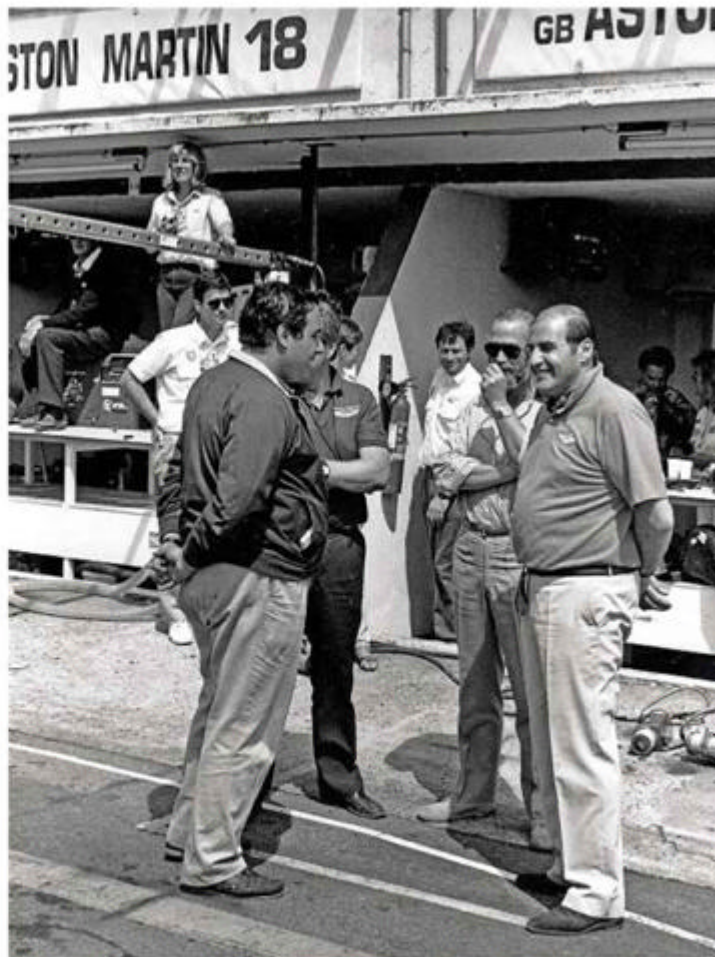
essentially an attempt to erase those middle years, which is fine. But I credit Walter with being as important as Victor was in his day, Peter Sprague was in his day, my family was in our day in terms of keeping that marque alive. Walter was a senior press relations person and when they needed a CEO in 30 seconds they picked Walter. But he rose to the task and did a great job. As I look back, I believe they were magnificent stewards. They made very few mistakes and they fundamentally gave the company the value that will allow it to survive through many difficult times.'

It comes as little surprise to learn that, when Ford sold AML in 2007, Livanos – who owns America's biggest Aston dealership, in New York/Connecticut, and another in Long Island – was, at least initially, involved with the successful consortium. 'I was in that consortium. What took us out was the fact they couldn't raise the leverage level they wanted, so it was going to be a high proportion of equity debt, which meant the returns were going to be difficult. We knew from being in the retail side that there were a lot of cars on inventory that hadn't been sold, and then there were huge projections on Rapide...'

Livanos believes Ulrich Bez made a number of errors of judgement, including naming the four-door Aston 'Rapide' when that was a Lagonda name, but adds that Bez was 'a very good engineer and ended up creating some very good cars. I think the little V8 is lovely, it's probably the best Aston today, fantastic. But Ulrich is all about Ulrich. If you think about it



'LIVANOS HAD BACKED THE GROUP C NIMROD-ASTON AND ITS AMR1 SUCCESSOR. HE STILL WANTS TO WIN LE MANS'



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Roger Stowers

there was a considered effort to erase a lot of the history. Why would you bring back the Vantage name, V8 Vantage, when there was [the original] V8 Vantage – except if you wanted people not to think about that car anymore? He had a complete misunderstanding of the difference between Lagonda and Aston. The Rapide was just like, say, making a Mercedes Silver Ghost. And then they did AMR-One/O-N-E, which actually didn't perform even as well as the original AMR1...'

Livanos, of course, had backed the original Group C Nimrod-Aston Martin and its AMR1 successor. His long-held ambition to win at Le Mans later led to him buying DBR9/09, which Aston Martin Racing entered in FIA GT, and he's had similar arrangements with Ferrari and Porsche. Today he has Vantage GTE/005 currently entered in the World Endurance Championship by AMR.

'The Vanquish name on the new car – absolutely ludicrous,' he continues, 'particularly because I think the [original] Vanquish is one of the most beautiful cars the factory ever produced; the way Ian Callum designed Vanquish and DB9 are what has kept this company alive.' But he acknowledges that a lot of people who buy Astons today 'have no idea or no interest in the history of the company,' and adds: 'That's what you needed to do to make the company successful.'

Now there are new investor-owners controlling Aston's financial future while new CEO Andy Palmer, highly capable with 25 years at Nissan at the other end of market, is largely in charge of future model direction. Peter's favoured hope for Aston's future may not please traditionalists: 'The Bonomis are a good private equity group,' he says. 'I think they've shown that they can add value and make a return, and they did a good job with Ducati, but they've got an uphill struggle. I think the best thing that could happen is if Aston is sold to Mercedes. So my guess is that's where it will end up. And that will be great. I think Mercedes today is without doubt the premier automobile manufacturer.'

A controversial view no doubt, but it comes from a man with a unique insight into Aston Martin's past – and a passionate interest in its future. **V**



Paul Chudecki

Top and above

Livanos with Viscountess and Viscount Downe, then president of the Aston Martin Owners Club, at the AMOC prizegiving in 1982, and more recently in his Bentley R-Type Continental DHC, one of many British classics in his collection



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THE STANDARD VIRAGE WAS A FINE CAR, BUT IT WAS NEVER GOING TO SET
ANYONE'S TROUSERS ON FIRE. ENTER WORKS SERVICE WITH THE 6.3

T U R N I N G U P



THE HEAT

WORDS RICHARD MEADEN

PHOTOGRAPHY DEAN SMITH





When a business has been to the brink as many times as Aston Martin, the list of company saviours is long and distinguished. David Brown. Victor Gauntlett. Peter Livanos. Walter Hayes. Minky... 'WHO?' I hear you cry. You'd better allow me to explain.

The early '90s were particularly tough for Aston Martin. The transition from much-loved V8 Vantage to the slightly awkward-looking, less-than-incendiary Virage left top-end customers lukewarm, while the all-new DB7 (another saviour) was still a little way off. Whichever way you cut it, Aston was lacking a flagship capable of firing a broadside at the Italian exotica of the day.

Step forward the Aston Martin Lagonda Customer Service Division (aka Works Service), who took the all-too-polite Virage and made it into something altogether more explicit: the Virage 6.3. Even today, more than two decades since this beast of a car first broke cover, the extent to which this crack team of automotive artisans reinvented the Virage is jaw-dropping. Bodywork, engine, chassis, gearbox and brakes all received major attention to create a car that put Aston back on the supercar map.

Central to the conversion was the 6.3-litre engine. Bored and stroked from the familiar 5340cc to 6347cc, the engine gained new Cosworth pistons and a forged steel crankshaft with a longer throw. Up top were reprofiled camshafts and gas-flowed ports, while the catalysts were ditched and the Weber-Alpha electronic fuel injection was tweaked to suit. The result was 465bhp and 460lb ft of torque, putting the Virage on a par with Lamborghini's V12-engined Diablo. This was more like it.

In order to give the invigorated Virage a fighting chance of staying on the road, Works made major changes to the suspension, fitting firmer springs and Koni dampers, plus stiffer anti-roll bars and rosejoints in place of rubber bushes for tighter control and more direct responses. The regular 16in diameter wheels and Avon Turbospeed tyres were swapped for funky-looking 18in OZ split-rims and custom-made 285/45 ZR18 Goodyear Eagle GS-D tyres. Lurking behind the five-spoke wheels were monster 14in discs at the front, grabbed by callipers developed for the Jaguar XJ220 supercar.

The one issue with all this performance enhancement was that the hardware had rather out-grown the Virage's tailoring. Indeed visions of its hand-formed aluminium panels tearing like the Incredible Hulk's shirt aren't so far-

fetched, as the front and rear wheelarches had to be cut away, then new ones beaten by hand, stitched together with fine welding and grafted seamlessly back into the body before the whole car was repainted.

Being commercially minded sorts, the chaps at Works took all these mouthwatering ingredients and made an extensive menu of irresistible upgrades from which customers could pick and choose. You could even have the show without the go (and some indeed did), but if you wanted the engine you had to have all the other elements along with it. As you can imagine, making a full-house 6.3 Virage was not a cheap exercise. The engine (with exhaust) cost £31,410, the suspension and brakes £11,341 and the bodywork a further £14,676. And all this was on top of the £132,000 Aston was asking for the standard Virage. Gulp.

The very first car to undergo the transformation, and the car that served tirelessly as Aston Martin's development and marketing tool, was J402 MNK. You don't need to be a Bletchley Park code-breaker to deduce therefore that 'Minky' isn't a person, but a car. This very car, in fact.

As car nicknames go, Minky's hardly up there with Old Mother Gun, Little Bastard or the Hairry Canary. In fact it sounds more like a cuddly children's TV character. Not that you'd dare think it, let alone voice it, in Minky's presence. One glance at those broad shoulders and mad, staring headlights confirms you wouldn't want to spill its pint.

It certainly didn't deter those prospects courted by Works. In fact the big-hearted brute proved a bit of a charmer, wowing everyone with its blend of bruising looks, ballistic performance and bellowing soundtrack. After a period of intensive development – in which the V8 was tickled even more, eventually hitting 500bhp and 480lb ft – a series of test drives, motor shows and personal appearances generated dozens of orders, a mixture of coupés and Volantes. Even the Aston Martin Register isn't sure of the exact number, but the best estimate is around 40 full-house 6.3 wide-body cars, and a further 30 or so cosmetic conversions. Not huge numbers, but in Aston terms the project had been a massive success, both in terms of bolstering the bottom line and in reminding people that AML could still build a ballsy, heart-pounding supercar. Minky's work was done.

Freshly rebuilt, J402 MNK was sold soon after by the factory (for £115,000) to a collector, who almost immediately placed the car in dry storage. Which is where it remained for almost 20 years, until it was recommissioned ready for sale earlier this year by specialist Christian Lewis. A former Works employee, Lewis knew all those involved in the 6.3 project and fully appreciates the role Minky played in keeping Aston's head above water. It's a car close to his heart.

Below
As a rolling testbed and demo vehicle for the full programme of early '90s Works Service enhancements, this car's long list of special equipment included telephone (left), mini TV and (right) a video player



‘The big-hearted brute proved a bit of a charmer, wowing everyone with its blend of bruising looks, ballistic performance and bellowing soundtrack’



Mine too. Indeed, looking at this monster of a car takes me right back to 1992. It's a perfect time-warp and a special moment, for this very car was a big influence on my love for Aston Martin. Back then it was the star of many breathless motoring magazine tests, and I hungrily devoured every word, in the days before my dreams became my day job. Now, with the key in my hand and the car sat before me, things have come full circle. Everything is as exactly as I remember from the magazines, right down to those giant Goodyear tyres and original numberplates bearing the legend 'Aston Martin Lagonda Customer Service Division' at the bottom.

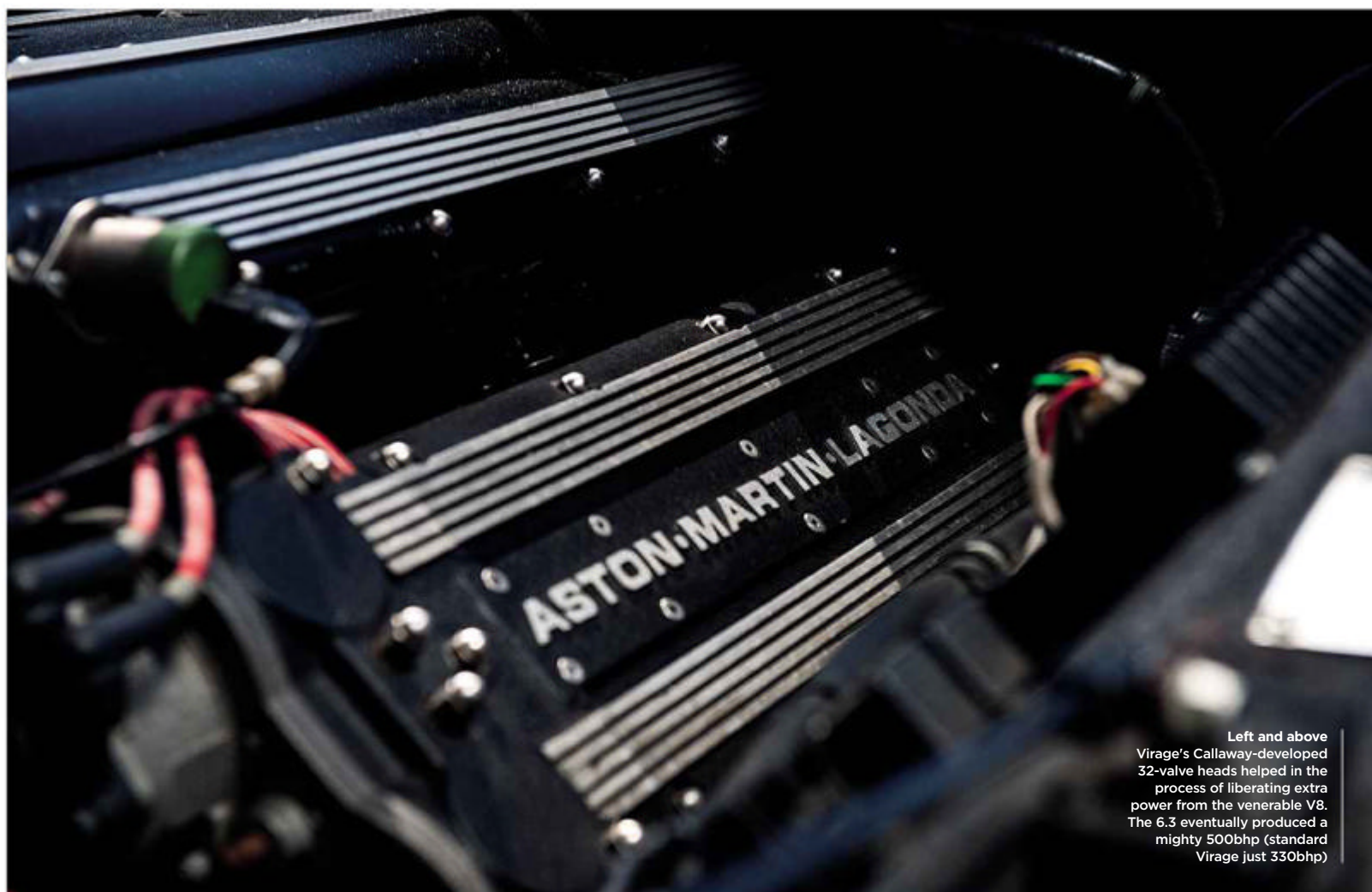
Inside it's very '90s, with big slabs of high-gloss walnut veneer and huge Recaro recliners, wrapped in opulent black leather and capable of a multitude of electric adjustments, none of which manages to get you in quite the right position behind the big, wood-rimmed, Nardi steering wheel. For such a massive car the interior is surprisingly cosy. Not great if you have to sit in the back, but good news if you're the driver, for it ensures the Virage 6.3 feels far smaller and more wieldy than you might expect.

Works offered three choices of transmission: five- or six-speed manual, or three-speed auto. Minky is fitted with the five-speed 'box, though a six-speeder stayed with the car and is back at Lewis's storage facility. Starting the 6.3-litre engine triggers a truly seismic barrage of sound. The air thuds in tune with the V8, its percussive firing order banging like a war drum. The whole car shimmies on its suspension, twisting in a torque-induced spasm when you give the throttle a gratuitous poke. In terms of sheer sonic spectacle it's everything you'd hope it would be and more.

It's a dogleg gearbox, so you slot the Bakelite-topped lever across to the left and back for first gear, though in truth I'm sure Minky could pull away in second. Or indeed third or fourth. The revs are keen to flare

'Starting the 6.3-litre engine triggers a truly seismic barrage of sound. The whole car shimmies on its suspension'





Left and above
Virage's Callaway-developed
32-valve heads helped in the
process of liberating extra
power from the venerable V8.
The 6.3 eventually produced a
mighty 500bhp (standard
Virage just 330bhp)



during the first push of the throttle, but equally keen to fade if you back-off even slightly, so it's tricky to pull away smoothly, but once those fat wheels are turning the Virage gains speed like a landslide.

Back in 1993, *Fast Lane* magazine's Mark Hales extracted an impressive set of standing-start acceleration figures: 60mph arrived in 5.3sec, some 1.2sec faster than the regular Virage; 100mph took 12.7sec (3.1sec up) and 120mph 18.6sec (a massive 4.7sec advantage). Interestingly they didn't put Aston's claimed top speed of 174mph to the test, but they didn't doubt its veracity. One furtive sprint down a quiet road and I understand their reasons for dodging, but not doubting, the claim.

Big, fast cars have come a long way since 1992. They have better manners, ask less of you, go exactly where you point them and have an even balance of grip to grunt. Though the musclebound bodywork and chest-beating exhaust note suggest the contrary, a 6.3 Virage isn't a malevolent or spiteful machine, but it does require a certain level of commitment and concentration if you're to get a tune from it. Stretch it along a fast A- or B-road and there's an awful lot going on. The suspension does an admirable job, but ultimately fails in its quest to harmonise wheel and body movements with the frequency and severity of road imperfections. Combine this with the need to be respectful of the throttle, confident with the gearshift and measured with your application of the powerful brakes and you get the feeling you're a conductor cajoling an orchestra towards the finale of the *1812 Overture*. In short, I love it!

While a regular Virage will never rank alongside Aston's most celebrated Newport Pagnell-built creations, a 6.3, more specifically this 6.3, could well be the glorious exception. Steeped in late-20th century history, brimming with the Bulldog spirit for which V8 Astons are renowned, and blessed with the kudos of playing a part in the company's survival, it's a lesson in improvised brilliance. More importantly, it's a truly fabulous car. Even if it is called Minky.

Thanks to Christian Lewis Performance and Classic Cars (www.christianlewis.com). For enquiries regarding the sale of J402 MNK call +44 1604 764286.



Virage 6.3

ENGINE V8, 6347cc **MAX POWER** 465bhp @ 5750rpm **MAX TORQUE** 460lb ft @ 4250rpm
TRANSMISSION Five-speed manual, rear-wheel drive, limited-slip diff
SUSPENSION Front: double wishbones, coil springs, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar. Rear: de Dion axle, trailing arms, Watt's linkage, coil springs, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar
STEERING Rack-and-pinion, power-assisted
BRAKES Vented discs front and rear, 356mm front, ABS **WHEELS** 10 x 18in front and rear
TYRES 285/45 ZR18 Goodyear Eagle GS-D front and rear **WEIGHT** 1930kg
POWER TO WEIGHT 245bhp/ton
0-60MPH 5.3sec **TOP SPEED** 170mph+
PRICE NEW £189,418 in 1992 (£363,000 in today's money)

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BACK TO THE FUTURE

FINANCIAL STABILITY, THE RETURN OF SIR DAVID BROWN, A GLORIOUS
LAST HURRAH FOR CAR PRODUCTION - AND A NEW ROLE FOR
NEWPORT PAGNELL, HELPING KEEP ASTON MARTIN'S HERITAGE ALIVE

WORDS PETER TOMALIN

PHOTOGRAPHY AML / VARIOUS

IT WAS FORD MONEY in the early 1990s that finally brought Aston Martin the stability it had so often craved. And while a new plant was acquired at Bloxham to build the DB7, there was welcome investment at Newport Pagnell, too, the craftsmen (and women) at Tickford Street bringing their skills to bear on a new generation of handbuilt Astons, from the Virage Volante to the mighty twin-supercharged Vantage.

There was a final chapter in the story of Newport Pagnell-built Astons, too, in the glorious shape of the V12 Vanquish.

But AML was entering its modern era, with much higher production targets and a brand new factory at Gaydon. When the last Vanquish left the line in 2007, it was a sad day in many ways – and an emotional one for the factory workforce, many of whom had spent their whole working lives at Tickford Street. In total, 12,879 Aston Martins were completed at Newport Pagnell between 1955 and 2007.

But as we know, it was by no means the end of Aston Martin's association with Newport Pagnell. Today's Works, encompassing sales of both new and Heritage models, servicing, parts, repairs and restorations, remains a vibrant and vital hub of the Aston world.

As you drive into the town today, the road signs still bear the simple legend: Welcome to Newport Pagnell: Home to Aston Martin Lagonda. After 60 remarkable years, it feels as true today as it ever was.



Above

The V8 engine had been reinvented with four valves per cylinder for the Virage, and in 1993 it gained twin Eaton superchargers, boosting output to a sensational 550bhp for the Vantage model, the flagship of the Aston range for most of the 1990s, and of course handbuilt at Newport Pagnell. Here the mighty mill is installed in a Vantage Volante

Below

The steel structure of a mid-90s Virage Volante, awaiting its hand-beaten aluminium bodywork. The steel platform chassis had been built at Newport Pagnell ever since the ties with the David Brown group had been severed in 1972, while engines, bodywork, electrical wiring, and all the trim had always originated at Tickford Street, a remarkable feat and a source of great pride

Right

In 1993, Sir David Brown was welcomed back into the Aston Martin fold and gave his blessing to the use of his initials on the new DB7. He was made life president of Aston Martin Lagonda and new chairman Walter Hayes (on the right) accompanied him on a tour of his old Newport Pagnell factory. Sir David died later that year, aged 89, at his home in Monte Carlo



Above

The full scale of the Tickford Street works in the early 1990s, the cricket pitch long gone, but Sunnyside, Olympia and the old three-storey and two-storey Salmons Bros buildings still very much at the centre of things. All still survive today, awaiting the next chapter of the Newport Pagnell story

Left

A run of eight Vantage Volante Special Editions marked the end of V8 production in 2000. Here one of those cars has its main instrument pack installed. The V8 engine had been in production for more than 30 years, longer than any other engine in Aston Martin history





Left
In 2001, the factory was given over to production of the sensational new Vanquish supercar. Developed in conjunction with Lotus Engineering, but entirely assembled by the Aston workforce at Newport Pagnell, the Vanquish's radical structure used a combination of aluminium extrusions and carbonfibre in a technological showcase



Left
Part of the joy of the Vanquish was that although it was technologically at the cutting edge beneath its skin, that skin itself was still largely hand-finished in the time-honoured traditions of the Newport Pagnell works

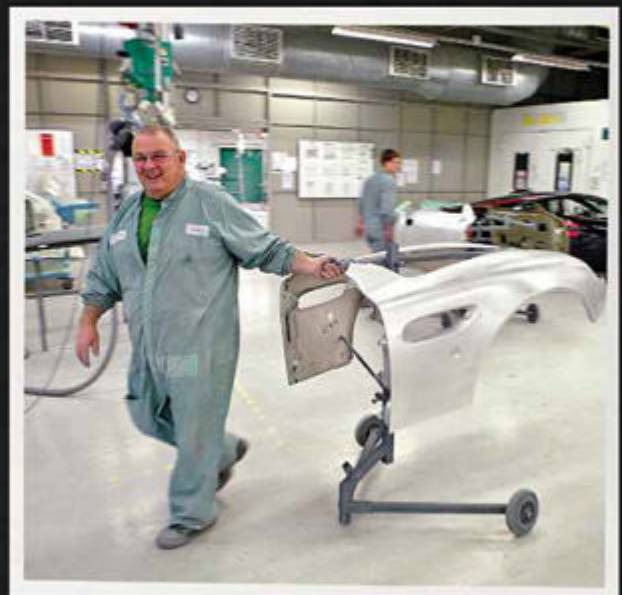


Left
Hand-finishing a Vanquish body before it progressed to the paint shop. Each Vanquish carried a plaque saying 'Handbuilt in England' together with the name of the person who carried out the final inspection, and the engine number – a nice echo of earlier Astons, whose V8 engines carried the name of the engine-builder

Above
V12 engine installed, another Vanquish makes its way down the line. The engines themselves were built off-site, initially by Cosworth Technologies, later at a dedicated plant in Cologne, Germany. So the old engine shop was one of the first casualties of the new era



Below and right
These were the last days of car production at Newport Pagnell. To mark the end of an era, a final run of 50 black 'Ultimate Edition' Vanquishes were built, and this (below) is one of those cars entering the last stages of assembly as it passes through 'Trim and Final'. Hand-finished superformed aluminium panels (right) made up most of the outer skin

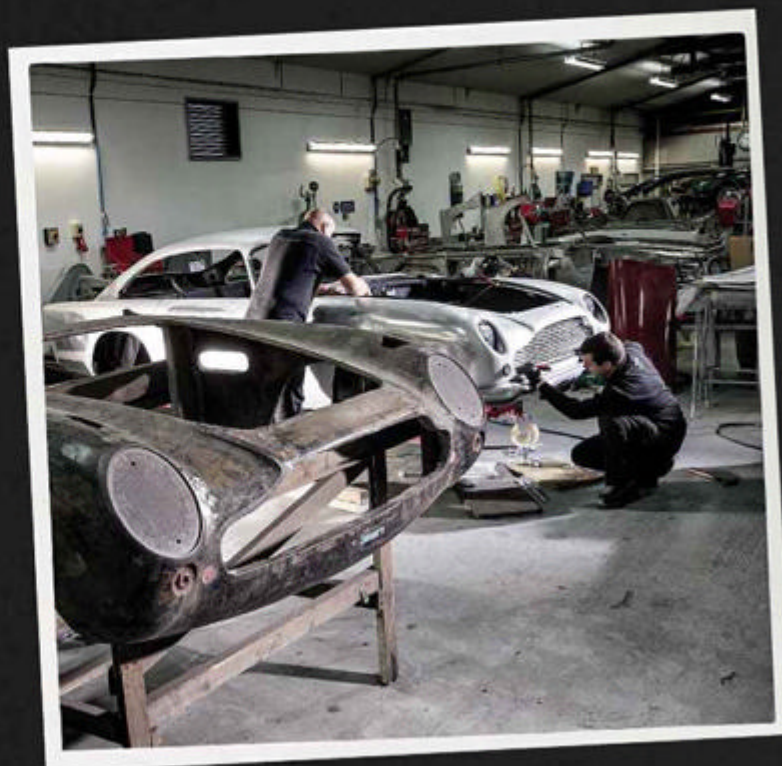


Below
The very last Newport Pagnell Aston, Vanquish S Ultimate Edition chassis no 502593. Kingsley Riding-Felce, who over 30-plus years had worked his way from the factory floor to senior management, told the workforce: 'Our cars are timeless, our cars last lifetimes, and a little part of each of us will live on in these wonderful cars. An Aston Martin is a car for life. It never dies and nor will your great achievements'





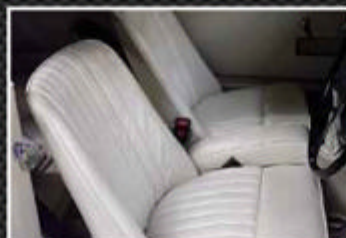
Above
The impressive facade of Aston Martin Works on Tickford Street today. Behind it, the old buildings, formerly home to Works Service, have been sensitively restored. Today they house a new car showroom, modern-era workshop, Heritage workshop and body shop



Right
The body shop, where panels for classic Astons are rolled and beaten by hand, just as they were back in the day, and often using the original factory bucks. Many of the craftsmen at Works learned their skills at the factory. Others are apprentices, learning their craft



Above
The beautifully restored Olympia building has come full circle. Originally a showroom for Salmons Bros, later a cinema and then a panel shop, it's once again a showroom, now for Heritage sales (so mostly cars built in Newport Pagnell). The black Vanquish S, which also appears on our cover, may well have been sold by the time you read this

Aston Martin DB2/4 MK II Concours

Make	Aston Martin	Transmission	Manual
Model	DB2/4 MK II Concours	Exterior colour	Green
Year	1957	Interior colour	Magnolia
Engine	3.0	Body	Coupe
Mileage	65179	Price	£195,850

This is a three owner DB2 the last owner having purchased the car in 1967, 1198 has remained with the family ever since and was passed from Father to Son. There is no doubt about the love this car has had through its life or its history. A very special car and clearly a very difficult decision for the previous owner to see her go.

1198 has a file dating back to 1972 with letters and receipts of various works. The original information from the factory shows various warranty issues in 1957 also. The main bulk of work carried out was in 1991 when 1198 underwent a "body off" nut and bolt restoration. At this time the family also decided on a colour change and thus was transformed into the beautiful Dark Green over Magnolia we see today.

In 2007 VB6J underwent a complete engine rebuild by noted Aston Specialist Tim Stamper. Since then 1198 has been maintained by DB2 specialists Four Ashes Garage of Stratford Upon Avon.

1198 has covered 65,179 miles which we believe to be true.

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THE LONG GOODBYE

PRODUCTION AT NEWPORT PAGNELL ENDED IN 2007.

HENRY CATCHPOLE RECALLS AN EPIC DRIVE IN THE
VERY LAST CAR, A VANQUISH ULTIMATE EDITION

WORDS HENRY CATCHPOLE | PHOTOGRAPHY KENNY P





M

y calves hurt quite a lot by the time Kenny P had finished getting that photo. We'd planned to get a simple static shot of the Vanquish S, but Kenny decided it would

be a nice scene-setter to have me on tiptoe, looking into the old factory on Tickford Street. It was lucky that it was me there and not Richard Meaden – he would never have been able to see over those gates, even on tiptoe.

The Vanquish was the last Aston to be made in Newport Pagnell and so, to mark the end of production both of the car and at the site, in 2007 Aston announced 40 Vanquish S Ultimate Editions. In fact, 50 were eventually built (20 right-hand drive and 30 left-hand drive) and this was the very last of them, number 50 of 50, having left the line on July 19. The Ultimate Edition didn't have any extra power over and above the 520bhp of the regular S, but it did get semi-aniline leather and chrome inside and a new Ultimate Black paint colour on the exterior that apparently had hints of red and blue in it. To me it looked perfect.

It meant a tremendous amount to be asked to write the farewell drive for *Vantage's* sister magazine, *evo*. It was the first time I'd really been let loose with a supercar over lots of pages in spectacular scenery. It was exactly the sort of feature I had always dreamed of writing before I joined the magazine. As a result the plan was probably a little more complicated than it needed to be. In the two days we had, it would have been enough just to retrace the steps of *evo's* original Vanquish road test to the West Coast of Scotland, but I'd decided it would add a bit of spice if we could watch the sun set on the west coast and then race all the way across to the east coast in time to watch it rise again.

Before then we had a hefty number of motorway miles to tackle, but as a consummate GT the Vanquish settled

quickly into a beautifully relaxed lope. Despite weighing the best part of two tons, it felt remarkably light and easy to drive. The steering required very little effort and, even if you took it out of auto, the gearchange was no more taxing than pulling a trigger. Throw in the fine Linn audio system, and everything felt rather regally serene. Just as well given the number of miles and hours ahead of us...

Heading up the A74(M), I remember waking Kenny up to take the shot of the train that we seemed to have fallen in step with. I think I might have put his window down, which was rather mean. The railway swoops from one side of the motorway to the other at that point, and with no traffic around it was relatively easy to keep pace with the red and silver tube for a while and it really did feel like a modern incarnation of the Blue Train races. It remains one of my favourite photos, simply because it would have been almost impossible to set it up if we'd tried.

Kenny P was (still is) a brilliant photographer, but even he couldn't take a photo of a black car at night, which is effectively what I suggested he try to do when we arrived at Mallaig to find there was no sunset. His response remains unprintable. We had something of a nerve-racking journey back to Fort William along what was then a wet and narrow single-track road with the occasional truck coming the other way. They've converted it to two-lanes these days and a good job, too. We did some night

Above and right

Late summer 2007, and writer Catchpole peers at the old factory buildings in Tickford Street before setting out on his marathon drive in the last ever Newport Pagnell-built Aston. Racing the Virgin train on the A74(M) was a highlight

'I'd decided it would add a bit of spice if we watched the sun set on the west coast then raced all the way across to the east coast to watch it rise again'





'It wasn't an out-and-out sports car, yet the Vanquish

shots on the outskirts of Fort William and I have a vague recollection of driving round in circles in a McDonalds car park. Sadly the clan's restaurant was shut, so I made do with petrol station confectionary while Mr P tucked into his ever-present supply of Tupperware-encased nuts.

We dodged deer on Rannoch moor and slid quietly through the streets of Perth in the wee small hours before ending up in St Andrews with a lightening sky. These days there's an app to pinpoint sunrise, but back then there was still Fuji Velvia in the back of the camera and we had to guess at where the current bun was going to show its face. In order to get a decent view we actually drove out to the Bay Hotel just along the coast and then snuck the car out to a small building on the adjoining golf course. I was convinced we'd soon have an irate, early-rising green-keeper setting about us with a rake, but hoped we would only be there a few minutes and would be able to get the

shot and leave before being discovered... Nearly two hours later, cold and slightly delirious from staring expectantly at the horizon, the shutter on Kenny's Canon clicked as the sun finally emerged.

Magazine budgets being what they are, we decided not to shell out on rooms (I'm not quite sure what we would have asked for given that we wanted to check in at about 7am) and instead parked up overlooking West Sands, where we both fell asleep in the car. An hour later we went groggily foraging for breakfast and even Kenny abandoned his normally strict diet in favour of something fried.

The rest of the day (at least until we reached the M6) was essentially a compilation of my favourite driving roads and the Vanquish didn't disappoint. Yes, the single-clutch paddleshift gearbox was like dial-up versus fibre-optic when compared with current dual-clutch offerings, but it was improved throughout the life of the car and there was



gave a wonderful feeling of connection to the road'

something quite enjoyable about judging the requisite amount to back out of the throttle to smooth an upshift. Despite its 1875kg kerbweight, the Vanquish S liked to be hustled and thrown around a bit. The traction control was surprisingly relaxed, however, so you always had to be on your game, especially in the wet.

There was perhaps more roll in the suspension than I might have initially expected, and those GT credentials meant it was no out-and-out sports car. Yet somehow the Vanquish always gave a wonderful feeling of connection to the road. There was a fantastic balance to the handling, too. I can distinctly remember tackling a small sequence of corners where the road dipped and crested as it turned right then left. It was the sort of thing that could have tied the big car in knots, but it was just sublime.

The two things that make me still lust after a Vanquish today are also the things that kept me smiling right up to

the end of our two non-stop days with the Ultimate Edition in 2007. First there is the glorious sound of the V12. I remember being slightly suspicious when I first read that its exhaust note had been engineered, but all concerns are banished the first time you hear it howl. Secondly, there's the looks. Of modern Astons, only the V12 Vantage gets close for sheer brutality and even that can't really compete with the subtle muscularity of the original Vanquish. The way the metal skin looks like it has been pulled taut over shapes beneath is somehow more organic than anything that has worn the winged badge since. Many believe that photos shot on film have an indefinable quality that digital can never quite replicate, whatever the pixel count. Likewise, despite the undoubted accuracy and advantages of modern automated construction techniques, a car made by hand will always possess something a little bit extra...

Today I live less than ten minutes from Newport Pagnell

Above left and right

Mechanically, the Ultimate Edition was unchanged from the regular Vanquish S, but that meant it retained a chassis of rare balance – and surprising agility for such a heavy car, as the Highland roads confirmed



Below

Capturing the sunrise on the east coast of Scotland meant mission accomplished. Then there was just the small matter of a 350-mile drive back to Newport Pagnell. Via one or two special roads, of course

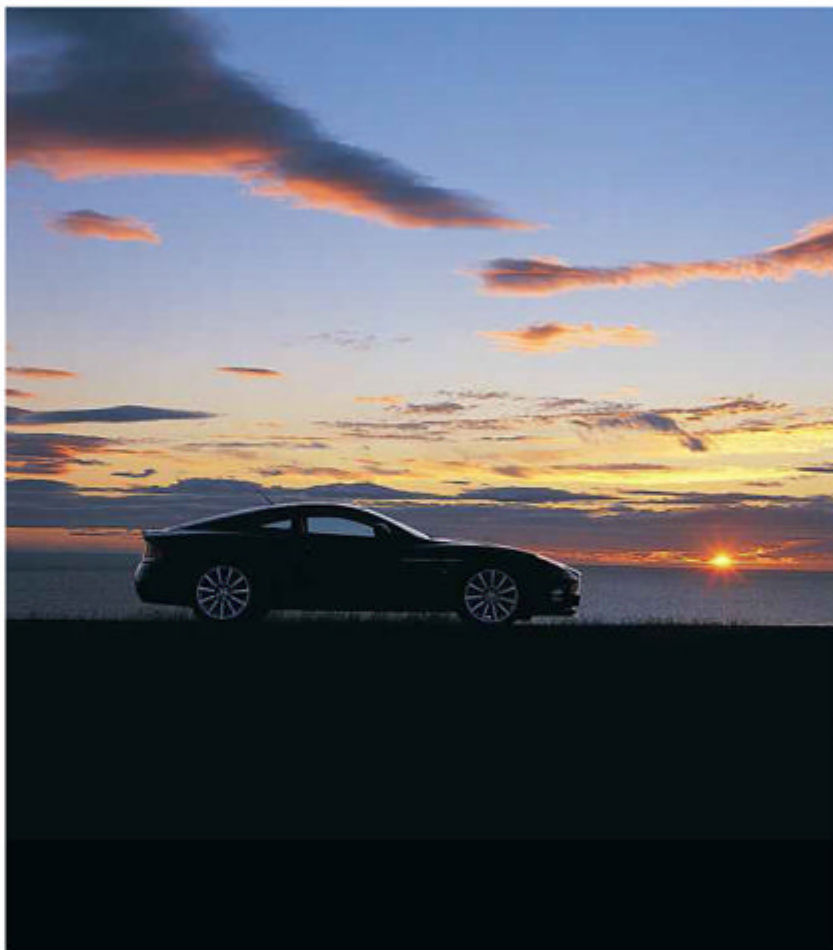
and drive along Tickford Street on a regular basis. When I was asked to write this I went down and parked up one Sunday evening just to have a closer look at what remains. The lovely big brown herringbone gates have sadly been replaced with white boarding that even I'm not tall enough to see over, although a quick peek through a hole shows an Aston Martin Racing truck parked up on the wasteland where the main factory buildings used to be.

There was a rumour that Tesco was going to build a supermarket on the site but thankfully nothing seems to have come of it. Several of the old buildings still remain, including Sunnyside. It has always reminded me of a cricket pavilion that's got a bit lost. You can just imagine a gaggle of men in white flannel, standing anxiously on the balcony watching the tense final overs. Today they would see the shiny ranks of cars staring back from the Works showroom opposite. There are even a couple of examples of the new, carbon-bodied, robot-constructed Vanquish.

Looking back, it's staggering just how much ground we covered and how many photos Kenny took during our 36 hours with KX07 OBB. Today, Ultimate Editions command significant premiums over other Vanquishes, but, as far as I know, this very car is still owned by Aston Martin, retained for posterity. It makes me even prouder to think that our journey from Tickford Street to Scotland and back probably remains the longest that it's ever done. **V**

Vanquish S Ultimate Edition

ENGINE V12, 5935cc **MAX POWER** 520bhp @ 7000rpm **MAX TORQUE** 425lb ft @ 4500rpm **TRANSMISSION** Six-speed automated manual, rear-wheel drive, lsd **SUSPENSION** Double wishbones, coil springs, telescopic dampers and anti-roll bar front and rear **BRAKES** Vented discs, 378mm front, 330mm rear, ABS **TYRES** 255/40 ZR19 front, 285/40 ZR19 rear **WEIGHT** 1875kg **POWER TO WEIGHT** 282bhp/ton **0-60MPH** 4.9sec (claimed) **TOP SPEED** 200mph+ (claimed) **PRICE NEW** £180,000 **VALUE TODAY** £150,000-plus





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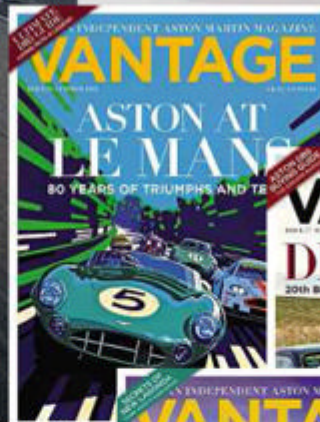
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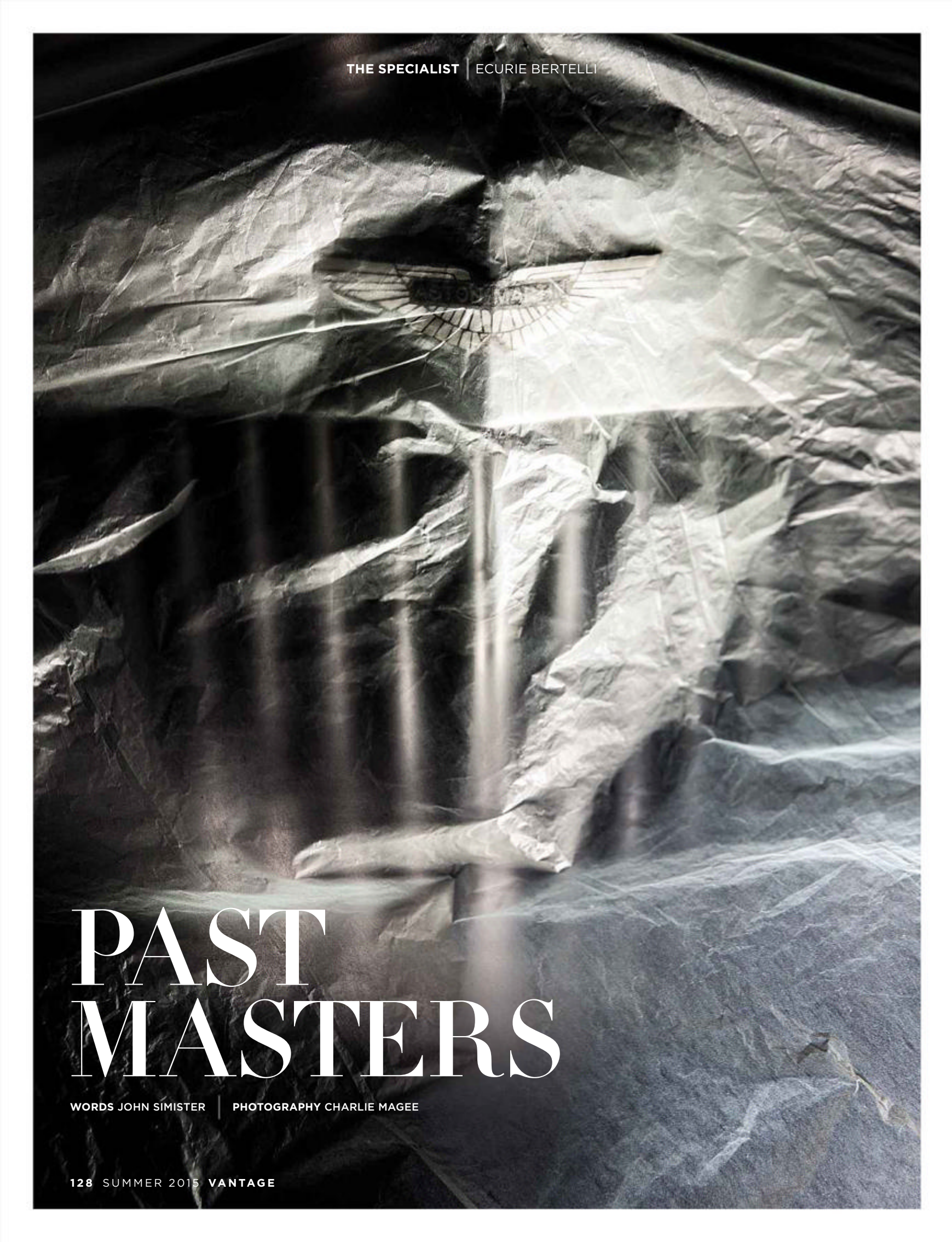
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WHEN IT COMES TO
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WE LOOK INSIDE



Past meets present meets future. What would 'Bert' Bertelli, the Anglicised Italian behind most of Aston Martin's pre-war designs, make of the fact that stock of his famous engine's components is now digitally managed via barcodes?

He did, however, know of the company that later perpetrated this high-tech time-shift, for he survived long enough to witness its formation. Nowadays it bears his name, and Bert could hardly have wished for a more fitting tribute.

Ecurie Bertelli is the vortex out of which nearly all of today's pre-war Aston Martin activity is spun in one way or another. It is the central go-to point, the company that either makes all the parts needed to keep pre-war Aston Martins on the road and racetrack, from LM or Ulster to graceful saloon, or has them made to its specifications. It is also the repository of the deepest knowledge, backed up by factory drawings and a vast archive. Bert Bertelli's legacy lives on in Olney, Bucks.

Andy Bell has been its driving force since 1992, when he bought the business, but this master Aston technician and incorrigible collector of 'stuff' has been involved with the company since 1977, the year after it was formed. At that time it was called Morntane Engineering and was started, with third partner Judy Hogg, by Nick Mason and Derrick Edwards, who raced Aston Martin Ulsters and saw a need for a specialist operation to look after these remarkable cars and, perhaps, to give them an excuse to race them some more.

Andy joined them as an apprentice mechanic; 15 years later he renamed the business Ecurie Bertelli after he had taken control, by which time it

Clockwise from above

Most parts are machined on site; skeletal frame of a short-chassis 'Sidevalve' being built as a replica of the famous racer known as the 'Swiss Car'; present HQ was purpose-built in 1990; the ex-Dick Seaman Speed Model 'Red Dragon'

had relocated from London to this purpose-built workshop and showroom at the end of Stilebrook Road in Olney's Yardley Road Industrial Estate. That estate is home to a few other useful outfits, too, as we shall see.

Today we'll meet Andy, who is in the process of tying up the odd legal thread as Ecurie Bertelli expands into a new future. First, though, we'll meet Robert Blakemore, recently arrived as Andy's heir apparent. He's standing in the showroom next to Red Dragon, a 1937 Speed Model with probably the longest and broadest competition history of any Aston Martin ever. It was modified gradually over the years, receiving much development in the 1950s at the hand of John Wyer, and after an Ecurie Bertelli restoration it recently appeared at the Pebble Beach Concours.

'It's not for sale,' Robert has to tell me before I enquire as to the number of noughts in the price, 'but it's nice to have it in the showroom.' There are two other cars here in the newly refurbished showroom, plus 14 on the go in the workshop and another six in storage.

That's a lot of pre-war Aston Martins, and they include LM3, another famous racer, and 'Buzzbox', the Alldays and Onions to which Bert Bertelli fitted his prototype engine before co-acquiring Aston Martin in 1926.

'We reckon there are about 500 pre-war Aston Martins left worldwide,' says Robert, 'but the numbers do tend to creep around a bit. We probably see about 20 or 30 cars a year for servicing or rebuilding. There are perhaps three or four other workshops worldwide who can do them, and more who think they can. We see their handiwork and put it right. And all of them come to us for parts.'

We head through the doors into the busy workshop, primordial Astons



‘Aluminium boxes, nowadays taken to race meetings full of parts, originally carried Pink Floyd’s touring equipment’

everywhere: on the floor, on ramps, complete, in pieces, spread out as a kit of parts, some nearing completion as fettlers James (fresh from a week’s visit to Paris to do work for some French owners), Will and Brian, and part-time machinist John apply their skills. Here’s a 1935 long-chassis Mk2, shiny and perfect and restored for Aston Martin Works Service conveniently nearby in Newport Pagnell. ‘It’s for an Aston Martin shareholder,’ Robert explains. ‘It’ll go there in two days’ time.’

All this activity. ‘It’s easier to say what we don’t do in-house,’ replies Robert to my inevitable question. Ecurie Bertelli farms out the panelwork to Bodylines and the paint to MW Bodyshop, both within a stone’s throw, as are the creators of woodwork and wiring looms. The trimmer is in Cranfield, also within easy reach.

Here’s LM3, raced by Bert Bertelli himself, sold by EB last year and now being readied for the Mille Miglia, an event for which the pre-war Austons have proved the ideal mount. They’re quick, manoeuvrable and reliable, and their age ensures a relatively low starting number, which helps avoid the worst of the checkpoint queues. The chance of Mille Miglia success has helped push Aston Martin LM values well skyward. ‘The owner wants improvements to the radiator and lamps, new wings, a service and a Halda. It started life in 1929 as a team car, and this is its fourth body.’

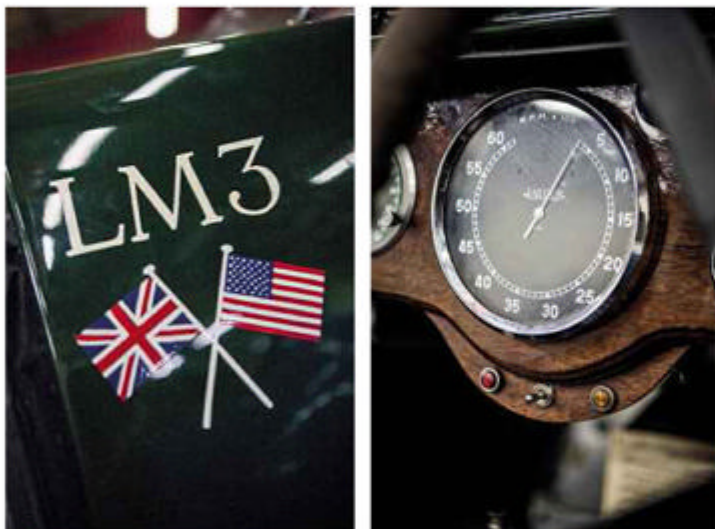
And what is this bright blue vision of semi-streamlined potency? ‘It’s another Speed Model, a sister car to Red Dragon, which is also entered for

the Mille Miglia. The owner bought it for £1000 in the 1960s. Only 22 Speed Models were built and we have four of them here.’ Robert owns one of them himself, the next chassis number on from Red Dragon, which, incidentally, is green.

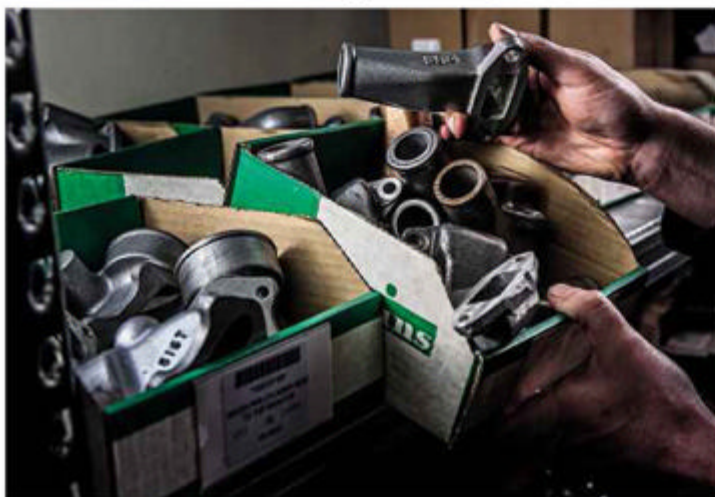
We walk past some aluminium boxes, nowadays taken to race meetings full of parts, originally Pink Floyd’s touring equipment boxes from the 1970s. Next to them are original cylinder blocks, some cracked, some with impressive holes in the side where the original aluminium connecting rods have cried enough. They could possibly be repaired, but there’s no point because Bertelli has had new ones cast.

‘Repairing one could cost as much as a new block and it will never be as strong,’ Robert reckons, ‘so we’ll always use a new block. Having to replace a block once every 80 years isn’t so bad. It costs £40-50,000 to do a run of ten engine blocks, so it’s a complex process of managing stock levels while satisfying the need for a profit.’

Which leads us to the engine build shop, where Simon Fisher is finishing off another Bert Bertelli co-designed engine. On the way are shelves containing components from each customer’s dismantled engine, all kept together to ensure the re-usable parts return to the engine from which they came. It’s a small, busy room, its occupant and machinery soon to move to an adjacent new unit that will contain a machine shop with CNC lathe, a build cell and a dynamometer cell, all shared with noted racing

**Left and opposite**

Ex-team car LM3 is being prepped for the Mille Miglia; twenty different aluminium water pipes are kept in stock. Opposite: stunningly original Ulster, as featured in *Vantage* issue 9; supercharged 2-litre engine has seen 165bhp



A-series engine-builder Rob Selby, who will become a Bertelli employee while continuing to make Minis go very fast.

It was on Selby's dynamometer that I witnessed, a year ago, the sight and sound of a Bertelli engine, freshly built with new block and billet crankshaft, steel connecting rods, a new cylinder head and a camshaft with a modernised profile reaching 7000rpm and 108bhp with remarkable gusto and smoothness. Bert Bertelli would have been staggered. 'Anything above 4000rpm used to be in the lap of the gods,' Robert observes.

How is this possible? New parts, better metals, those new camshaft profiles... but crucially by carefully mapping the ignition and analysing each individual power stroke, which the dynamometer can do. The optimum mapping thus recorded can then be applied to the new 1-2-3 Ignition electronic distributor innards that EB inserts in an original distributor casing. 'Or we can use an old-type distributor or a magneto if that's what you want,' says Simon, 'but few people do.'

'We can build a completely standard engine,' Robert adds, 'but no-one wants one. One customer almost did, but then he got an invitation to race at Goodwood. However, even our standard engines wouldn't have aluminium conrods or white-metalled bearings. There's no point.'

In the machine shop, new castings are finished off, valve guides and studs are created, and myriad other small parts are turned as if by magic from chunks of metal. 'We have access to all the original works drawings,' says Robert with some pride. 'When Aston Martin was sold to David Brown, he gave them to Friary Motors, which was owned by the Sutherlands [former owners of the Aston Martin company]. When Friary Motors packed up, they were given to the Aston Martin Owners Club. We've digitised them.'

Aston Martins of that era were designed to be light, without sacrificing ruggedness. A good example is the aluminium alloy 'sump' – more of a

Meet the bosses: Andy Bell and Robert Blakemore

'By the time I'm 65, Robert will have bought the business,' says Andy Bell. 'I'll still have a few cars of my own that I want to finish off, and in four years' time I'm sure I'll still be in the workshop. Even now, with Robert's arrival, I'm doing what I love to do. I much prefer to be down here than in the office.'

Robert (on the right) is less able to be hands-on, although he would like to be and is learning the skills. 'There's lots of scope in the office, and that probably takes half my time. One of my projects has been to computerise the parts catalogue, which is now online, and introduce a barcode system for approximately 1500 parts. Now we scan a part rather than manually booking it out, which improves stock control, makes the business more efficient and lets us add batch numbers so a part is traceable if there's a fault. We live in a more litigious age.'

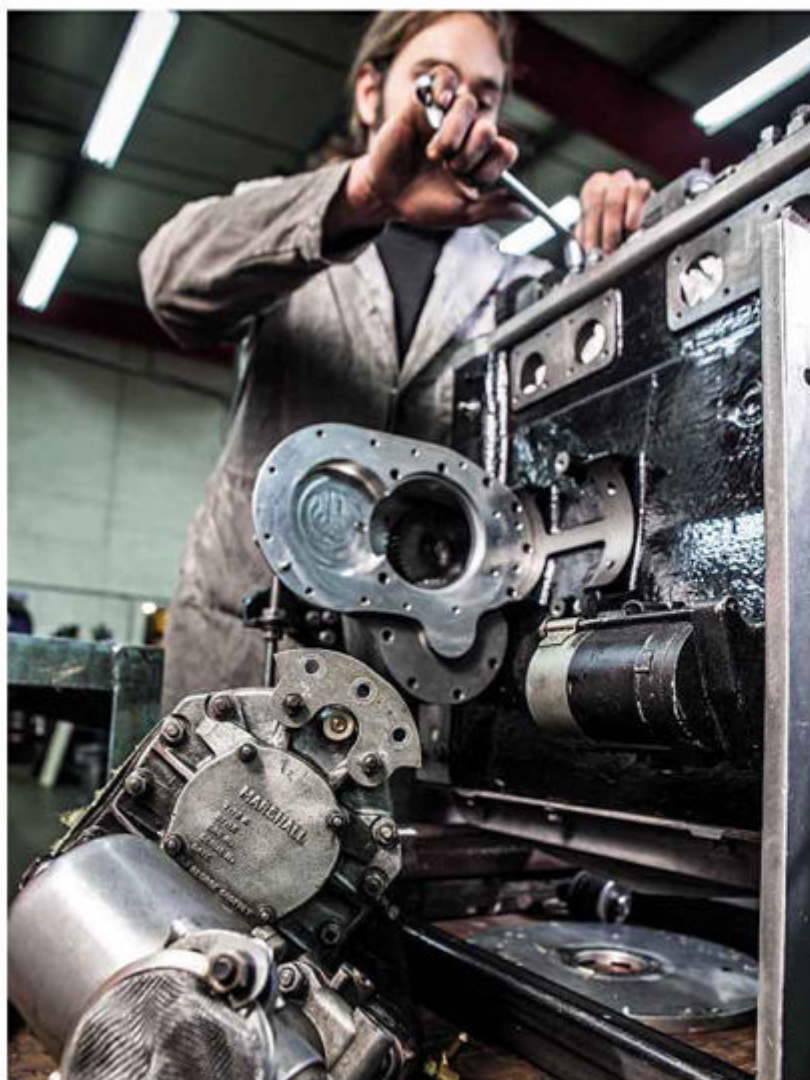
Robert was previously an

airline pilot, so how did he make the leap to EB? 'I've known Andy since I was eight. My father had an Ulster and was a customer, and I started driving it when I was 17 so it's a long-standing hobby. My father raced with Andy and helped him buy the business.'

'A year ago I was made redundant. I knew Andy was going to retire, so I joined him and have been learning. I'll split my time between running the business and working in the workshop.'

That sounds a brilliant arrangement for any car lover. Andy is delighted, too. 'Robert is my redeemer,' he says. 'I was getting very tired and I didn't have an exit plan. The important thing was to keep it all together. This is a niche business and we are the custodians of the cars. If I've done anything over the years, it's to make sure it stays together and passes on.'







‘How much for a full restoration? From a pile of bits, somewhere between £100,000 and £200,000. The cars are simple but there’s a lot of labour’

bottom cover plate, given that these cars have a dry-sump lubrication system – but the works cars had an even lighter version made from Elektron, a magnesium alloy. ‘We can’t reproduce them in Elektron yet,’ Robert admits, ‘but if someone really wanted one we’d have a go.’

‘Recently a US customer broke his Speed Model’s differential, the first one we’ve known to break, when the dipstick broke and fell inside. The carnage shattered the casing. We’ve scanned the bits and will make four new ones, which will leave three on the shelf. So if anyone needs one in the next 30 or 40 years, we’ll have one in stock...’

Now we’re heading upstairs to the mezzanine, where dust, darkness and dismembered parts lurk. ‘We never throw anything away,’ says Robert, as I avoid tripping over an old, bent front-axle beam and a couple of new, unmachined forgings of the same component, ‘because it’s useful to see how things were originally made and maybe use them as a pattern. There’s 40 years’-worth of stuff here. Andy will pick up a piece and say “I remember taking this off a car in 1969” and he’ll probably know where the car is now. No-one knows more than Andy.’

On the mezzanine’s far side are bits stored from cars currently being worked on, again all kept together car by car. Here, too, are kept the bigger wooden casting patterns, ready for the next round of reproduction. From

Above
Ecurie Bertelli was one of the first specialists to use billet steel conrods in vintage engines in the late 1970s, then supplied by Gordon Allen. New parts are machined using the original works drawings wherever possible

up here I can see right across the workshop floor, and spot the sloping tail of a car I missed earlier. ‘Oh yes,’ says Robert, ‘that’s the last LM ever built. We’ve sold it and it’s about to go to Switzerland.’

This all sounds very international, so where do EB’s customers come from? ‘Half come from the UK,’ Robert estimates, ‘and another 30 per cent from Europe, particularly Italy and Poland. Most of the rest are from Hong Kong and the Americas, notably Argentina.’ And what, cutting to the chase, might they pay for a full restoration? ‘From a pile of bits, somewhere between £100,000 and £200,000. The cars are quite simple but there’s a lot of labour, with the machining and grinding needed.’ And just an engine? ‘A complete engine is £40-70,000 if we start from nothing at all.’

Finally we reach the office, where we are noisily greeted by Andy’s dog, Bob, a Yorkshire/Maltese terrier cross, and cautiously investigated by Merlin, Robert’s black labrador. There are shelves of trophies, some fine wooden plan chests with original drawings from Feltham, and a marvellous scrapbook archive – A Pictorial Survey of the History and Development of the Aston Martin Car – by Inman Hunter, who used to work at Feltham. Andy Bell found four boxes of it at a Bonhams auction.

‘We’re careful to conserve as much information as we can,’ says Robert. There could hardly be a more hands-on repository than Ecurie Bertelli. **V**



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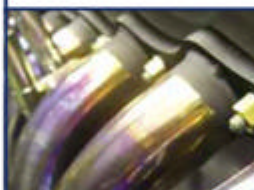


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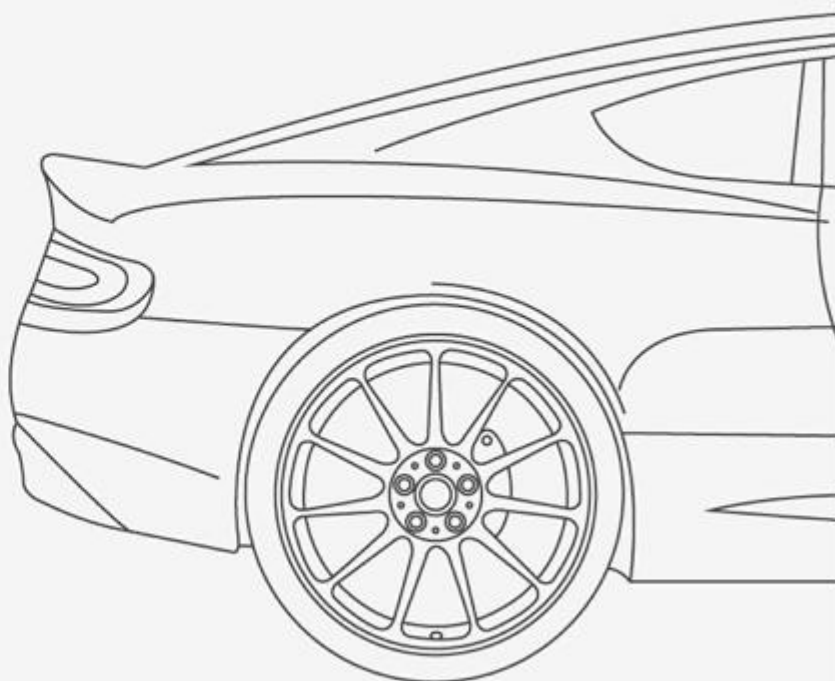
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ALL THE ROAD CARS 1920s-1930s

Sports/Super Sports 1920-1925



SPECIFICATION

Engine 1.5-litre in-line 4
Power 55bhp
Torque n/a
0-60mph n/a
Top speed 90mph

Although the first 'Aston Martin' had been created in 1915, the Great War meant production didn't actually start until 1920. And because the early years were all about motorsport, it wasn't until 1923 that cars went on sale to the general public. The Sports was advanced for its time, with four-wheel brakes and a fully floating rear axle, and in Super Sports form it got a twin-cam, 16-valve four with a lusty 55bhp. Business was tough, though, and after around 60 cars had been sold, the company went into receivership in 1925.

Second Series/New International/Le Mans 1932-1934



SPECIFICATION

Engine 1495cc, in-line 4
Power 70bhp
Torque n/a
0-60mph n/a
Top speed 85mph

Price reductions, made possible by out-sourcing more components, and continuing motorsport success at Le Mans and elsewhere helped lift sales of what are now known as the Second Series cars. Particularly well received was the Le Mans model introduced in 1932. Its high-compression engine pushed power up from 60 to 70bhp. Tourers and saloons were still built but were overshadowed by the sports cars – more than 100 examples were sold of the Le Mans alone. There was also a (much rarer) four-seater version.

Ulster 1934-1936



SPECIFICATION

Engine 1495cc, in-line 4
Power 85bhp
Torque n/a
0-60mph n/a
Top speed 100mph

Most revered of all the early Astons, the Ulster was named in celebration of the Works racers' success in the 1934 Tourist Trophy and was effectively a replica of those factory cars. With power now up to 85bhp from the latest version of the 1.5-litre ohc four, it was enough for Aston to guarantee a 100mph top speed. These cars are distinguished by their sleek body and boat-shaped tail, which houses a horizontally mounted spare wheel. Twenty-one Ulsters were built, all of which are believed to have survived.

First Series/International 1927-1932



SPECIFICATION

Engine 1495cc, in-line 4
Power 56bhp
Torque n/a
0-60mph n/a
Top speed 80mph

With new financial backers, a new factory in Feltham and a new ohc 1.5-litre engine, the era of 'Bertelli' Astons began in 1927. There were sports and competition models, and also a tourer and a saloon (pictured), while 1929 saw the introduction of the low-slung, dry-sumped International model, based on the company's widely successful racing cars of the day. The International was fast and refined but the price was high and sales remained slow. In all, 129 'First Series' cars were produced.

Third Series (MkII) 1934-1936



SPECIFICATION

Engine 1495cc, in-line 4
Power 73bhp
Torque n/a
0-60mph n/a
Top speed 85mph

The MkII was a development of the Second Series, intended to be a more useable yet faster version. A new balanced crankshaft assembly and a few other minor mods to the 1.5-litre engine saw peak power rise to 73bhp, though the top speed for the two-seater remained at 85mph. Short- and long-chassis versions were available with a number of different bodies, including tourer, two-door saloon and drophead coupe. A short chassis with lightweight body was adopted as the Works car and ultimately became the Ulster.

2-litre Speed/Type C 1936-1940



SPECIFICATION

Engine 1949cc, in-line 4
Power 110bhp
Torque n/a
0-60mph n/a
Top speed 95mph

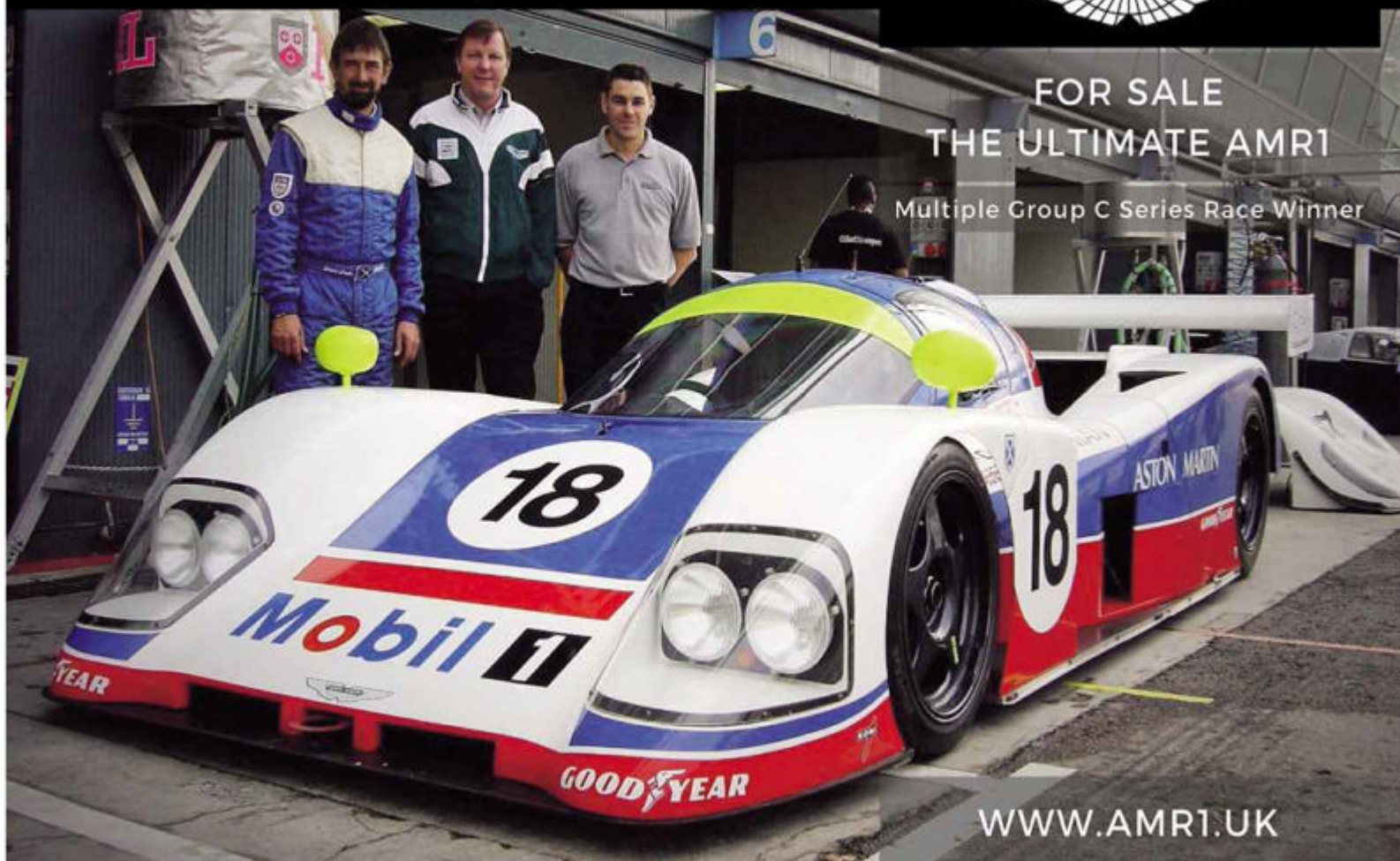
To broaden the appeal of its range, in 1936 Aston introduced a 2-litre engine, based on the 1.5 but with increased bore and stroke and domed pistons. The Speed model was created for the 1936 Le Mans, though in the event the race was cancelled. Some 25 were eventually sold. In 1938 it was decided that eight leftover Speed chassis should be used to create a more 'modern-looking' Aston. The resulting Type C, with rather bulbous bodywork, didn't go down well with enthusiasts and the last one sold at Christmas 1940.

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Photography by Harry Charnock

Aston Martin V8 GTS RT Group C

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ALL THE ROAD CARS 1930s-1950s

15/98 1937-1939



SPECIFICATION

Engine 1949cc, in-line 4
Power 98bhp
Torque n/a
0-60mph n/a
Top speed 85mph

Using the new 2-litre engine in wet-sump form, the 15/98 range (15 from the RAC rating, 98 the peak bhp) included saloons and tourers, but they were heavy and hence slow (slow-selling, too: a planned run of 100 cars was slashed to 50). Better was an attractive short-chassis roadster (pictured). There was also a unique 'monoposto' streamlined single-seater designed to go for the 2-litre outer circuit record at Brooklands. The outbreak of war meant it was put into extended storage before its potential was realised.

DB2 1950-1953



SPECIFICATION

Engine 2580cc, in-line 6
Power 105bhp
Torque n/a
0-60mph 12.4sec
Top speed 116mph

The DB2 was the first officially to wear the initials of Aston's new owner, David Brown. It also featured the marque's first six-cylinder engine – in fact a Lagonda unit designed under WO Bentley and picked up when Brown acquired Lagonda shortly after bagging Aston. This 2.6-litre twin-cam was initially temperamental, but once sorted it endowed the sleek Frank Feeley-designed DB2 with impressive performance, especially in 125bhp Vantage form from 1951. A total of 411 DB2s were built, including 102 dropheads.

DB MkIII 1957-1959



SPECIFICATION

Engine 2922cc, in-line 6
Power 162bhp @ 5500rpm
Torque n/a
0-60mph 9.3sec
Top speed 120mph

The MkIII (note: not DB3) was effectively the third series of the DB2/4, but Aston dropped the 2/4 nomenclature for its 1957-1959 range of coupes, dropheads and fixed-heads. The lines were smoother and more purposeful, the grille previewing decades of Astons to come, and even in its lowliest tune the Claude Hill six was now making well over 150bhp (up to 190bhp with triple Webers). The MkIII actually overlapped with the introduction of the DB4 by several months, and total production of all three variants hit 551.

2-litre Sports (DB1) 1948-1950



SPECIFICATION

Engine 1949cc, in-line 4
Power 90bhp
Torque n/a
0-60mph n/a
Top speed 93mph

Retrospectively known as the DB1, the 2-litre Sports was the first Aston Martin to appear after the Second World War and the first under the ownership of wealthy industrialist David Brown. It was based largely on a pre-war prototype known as the Atom, and it featured refinements such as all-round coil spring suspension as well as a new 2-litre pushrod four-cylinder engine designed by Claude Hill. Lacklustre performance, largely a result of the heavy bodywork, and a high price meant only 16 examples were sold.

DB2/4 1953-1957



SPECIFICATION

Engine 2922cc, in-line 6
Power 140bhp
Torque n/a
0-60mph 10.5sec
Top speed 120mph

The '4' tacked onto the end of the DB2's title denotes the addition of two extra seats. The 2+2 seating was made more habitable by a higher rear roofline, and there was a handy 'hatchback' opening rear window. The extra weight slightly took the edge off the performance, so Aston boosted capacity to 2.9 litres in 1954, taking power to 140bhp. The mkII of 1955 incorporated a rear-end restyle, and there was also a rare 'notchback' hardtop version of the drophead. Around 750 DB2/4s were produced in total.

DB4/DB4 GT 1958-1963



SPECIFICATION

Engine 3670cc, in-line 6
Power 240bhp @ 5500rpm
Torque 240lb ft @ 4250rpm
0-60mph 9.0sec
Top speed 140mph

The definitive Aston shape was born with the DB4, the work of Italian design house Touring, its 'superleggera' aluminium bodywork being wrapped around a steel platform. The DB4 also introduced a new, Tadek Marek-designed all-alloy twin-cam straight-six, originally in 240bhp 3.7-litre form. In all there were five series of DB4s, each adding subtle refinements to the original formula. Vantage versions had 266bhp, and the short-wheelbase track-biased GT a formidable 302bhp. Total production: 1210.

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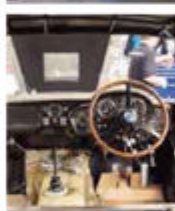
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ALL THE ROAD CARS 1960s-1970s

DB4 GT Zagato 1960-1963



SPECIFICATION

Engine 3670cc, in-line 6
Power 314bhp @ 6000rpm
Torque 278lb ft @ 5400rpm
0-60mph 6.1sec
Top speed 154mph

The rarest, most beautiful and most desirable of all post-war Astons. With the shortened chassis and highly tuned engine of the DB4 GT (but with an even higher compression ratio), and clothed in even lighter aluminium bodywork of quite exquisite proportions (the work of a young Ercole Spada), Zagatos today command vast sums at auction. Incredible to tell, then, that the original planned run of 25 was reduced to 20 because of lack of take-up. The unused chassis numbers were eventually recycled in the '90s as the 'Sanction' cars.

DB5/DB5 Volante 1963-1966



SPECIFICATION

Engine 3995cc, in-line 6
Power 282bhp @ 5500rpm
Torque 288lb ft @ 3850rpm
0-60mph 8.0sec
Top speed 145mph

Really another evolution of the DB4 (it would have been Series 6), the DB5 is now revered in its own right – and famous above all other Astons – wholly because of its role in the James Bond film franchise. In looks it was virtually identical to the DB4 Series 5 Vantage; the main change was the 4-litre engine and the option of a five-speed gearbox, which soon became standard. Regular DB5s had 282bhp, Vantage versions 314bhp, and there were now disc brakes on all four wheels. Total production reached 1023.

DBS/DBS V8 1967-1972



SPECIFICATION

Engine 3995cc, in-line 6
Power 282bhp @ 5500rpm
Torque 288lb ft @ 3850rpm
0-60mph 8.4sec
Top speed 140mph

The DBS ushered in a whole new look for Aston, its modern lines the work of Englishman William Towns. It was also supposed to introduce Tadek Marek's all-new 5.3-litre V8 engine, but that wasn't ready in time, so the DBS was launched with the familiar straight-six from the DB6 (the two models ran concurrently for three years). The 310bhp V8 was finally available from 1970, but the six-cylinder continued until 1972 as the entry-level Aston. Some 787 six-cylinder DBSs were produced, and 402 V8s. Buying guide, *Vantage* issue 2.

Lagonda Rapide 1961-1964



SPECIFICATION

Engine 3995cc, in-line 6
Power 236bhp @ 5000rpm
Torque 265lb ft @ 4000rpm
0-60mph 9.0sec
Top speed 130mph

David Brown had bought Lagonda in 1947, shortly after buying Aston Martin. He wanted it chiefly for its Bentley-designed straight-six engine, but production of the pre-DB Lagonda models continued until 1958. The Lagonda name then vanished for several years, but in 1961 it reappeared on a new four-door saloon based on the DB4 but with the 4-litre engine that would soon power the new DB5. The Rapide (an old Lagonda model name) was fast and capable but the front styling was awkward and only 55 were sold in four years.

DB6/DB6 Volante 1965-1971



SPECIFICATION

Engine 3995cc, in-line 6
Power 282bhp @ 5500rpm
Torque 288lb ft @ 3850rpm
0-60mph 8.4sec
Top speed 150mph

A longer wheelbase and extended roofline – ending in the distinctive cut-off 'Kamm' tail – made the DB6 a decent four-seater, while its slightly heavier build, softer ride and the options of an automatic gearbox and air-conditioning showed that the DB line was moving into GT territory. The base engine was carried over from the DB5, though the Vantage now produced a claimed 325bhp. The Mk2, which arrived in July 1969, had flared wheelarches over its wider wheels. Total DB6 production: 1967.

AM V8/V8 Volante 1972-1990



SPECIFICATION

Engine 5340cc, V8
Power 310bhp @ 5500rpm
Torque 360lb ft @ 3500rpm
0-60mph 5.7sec
Top speed 155mph

If the '60s were Aston's golden era, the '70s saw the glow fade with frequent financial crises. David Brown had sold up, so the big coupe became the AM V8, its convertible sibling the V8 Volante and the troublesome fuel injection system was dropped in favour of four Weber carburettors. Early cars had around 310bhp, but emissions regs saw that figure diminish through the decade. The company's lack of cash meant the V8 would soldier on for almost 20 years, in which time 4021 were built. Volante buying guide, *Vantage* issue 4.

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ALL THE ROAD CARS 1970s-1990s

Lagonda saloon 1974-1976



SPECIFICATION

Engine 5340cc, V8
Power 280bhp @ 5500rpm
Torque 301lb ft @ 3500rpm
0-60mph 6.2sec
Top speed 149mph

Based on the AM V8 but with a stretched wheelbase, the 1974 Lagonda saloon was the first car since the 1961 Rapide to wear the Lagonda badge, and it was not a success. Most of the blame can be attached to the 1974 oil crisis, which seriously limited the appeal of any V8-powered supersaloon, let alone one that would rarely see mpg in double figures. In fact the Lagonda was an impressive and capable machine, but during the two years of production just seven were sold (though another was later assembled from parts).

Lagonda 1978-1990



SPECIFICATION

Engine 5340cc, V8
Power 280bhp @ 5500rpm
Torque 301lb ft @ 3000rpm
0-60mph 8.8sec
Top speed 143mph

One of the most extraordinary cars ever to reach production, the William Towns-designed Lagonda caused a sensation when it was unveiled in 1976. Its advanced but troublesome electronics delayed production for almost two years, and the price was stratospherically high (£50,000 in 1980), but it eventually found a market in the Middle East and stayed in production for more than a decade, during which 645 were sold. Under the bonnet was the familiar V8, its performance somewhat blunted by the two-ton kerbweight.

Virage/Virage Volante 1989-1996



SPECIFICATION

Engine 5340cc, V8
Power 330bhp @ 6000rpm
Torque 350lb ft @ 3700rpm
0-60mph 6.0sec
Top speed 155mph

By the mid-'80s the AM V8 and its Vantage big brother were living on borrowed time, and, under the direction of Victor Gauntlett, Aston began work on a replacement. The Virage was largely still based on the V8, but its new body (by John Heffernan and Ken Greenley), an updated 32-valve fuel-injected V8 and other refinements were enough to give Aston new impetus. In 1992 came the Volante version, and also a Works-developed 500bhp 6.3 monster with widened bodywork. Sales of all variants reached 1050.

V8 Vantage/Vantage Volante 1977-1989



SPECIFICATION

Engine 5340cc, V8
Power 375bhp @ 5500rpm
Torque n/a
0-60mph 5.3sec
Top speed 170mph

Often described as 'Britain's first supercar', the Vantage of 1977 was based on the AMV8 but was now a model-line in its own right. With a 375bhp version of the 5.3-litre V8 (later 405bhp) and a top speed of 170mph, it was pitched head-to-head with the Ferrari Boxer and Lamborghini Countach for the title of world's fastest car. Distinguished by its blanked-off grille and bonnet scoop, deep air dam and bootlid spoiler, it certainly looked the part. By the time production ended in 1989, 534 had been built, 192 of them Volantes.

V8 Zagato/Zagato Volante 1986-1989



SPECIFICATION

Engine 5340cc, V8
Power 432bhp @ 6250rpm
Torque 400lb ft @ 5000rpm
0-60mph 4.8sec
Top speed 186mph

Resurrecting the partnership with Italian design house Zagato in the mid-'80s was a masterstroke by Aston's then-boss Victor Gauntlett, especially when all 50 coupes were immediately snapped up at £87,000 a pop (37 convertibles were also built). The '80s Zagato couldn't match the beauty of the '60s original, but its performance was sensational. Based on the V8 Vantage but with even more power and considerably lighter, it broke 5sec from 0-60mph and was verified at 185.8mph, making it the fastest Aston yet.

V8 Coupé/V8 Volante 1996-1999



SPECIFICATION

Engine 5340cc, V8
Power 349bhp @ 6000rpm
Torque 369lb ft @ 3700rpm
0-60mph 5.9sec
Top speed 155mph+

With the Virage running out of steam in the mid-1990s, Aston Martin relaunched the model as the V8 Coupé – basically a Virage with revised bodywork inspired by the new twin-supercharged Vantage model, including its faired-in headlamps and four round tail-lights. Power was slightly up, the acceleration slightly sharper and the top speed was quoted, not terribly helpfully, as 'over 155mph'. An improvement in almost every way over the Virage, sales were, however, glacially slow. Just 101 Coupés and 63 Volantes were sold.

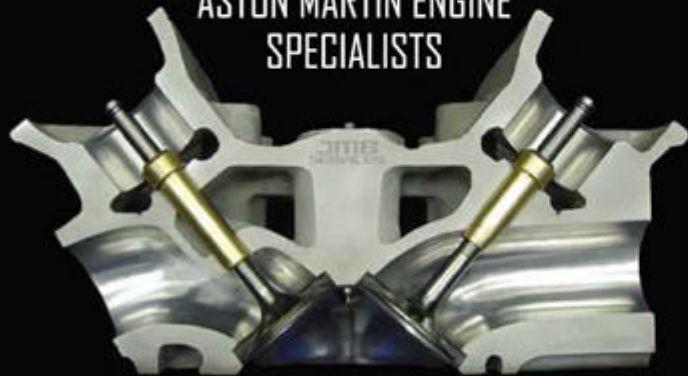
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with automatic transmission, finished in non-standard, Ferrari Canna di Fucile metallic, warm charcoal leather interior, charcoal carpets, smoke grey Alcantara headlining and burr walnut veneers. Sports exhaust, stainless steel grilles and park distance control. 37,000 miles£31,950.00

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ALL THE ROAD CARS 1990s-2000s

Vantage (supercharged) 1993-2000



SPECIFICATION (V600)

Engine 5340cc, V8, twin s/c
Power 600bhp @ 6200rpm
Torque 600lb ft @ 4400rpm
0-60mph 4.6sec
Top speed 190mph+

The wide-bodied 6.3-litre V8 had shown the appetite for a faster Virage, and in 1993 came the full-house Vantage version, extensively restyled (only roof and doors were carried over) with a twin-supercharged version of the 5.3-litre engine providing 550bhp and 550lb ft – at the time the most powerful production engine in the world. In 1998 came the V600, with an additional 50bhp – enough to propel this near-two-ton monster to a reported 200mph. A final run of 40 'Le Mans' special editions brought total production to 279.

DB7 V12 Vantage/Vantage Volante 1999-2003



SPECIFICATION

Engine 5935cc, V12
Power 420bhp @ 6000rpm
Torque 400lb ft @ 5000rpm
0-60mph 4.9sec
Top speed 185mph

The DB7 was given a major fillip in 1999 with the launch of the Vantage model, its styling beefed up by Ian Callum and with the first appearance of a brand-new 5.9-litre V12 engine that would go on to power the next generation of flagship Aston Martins. With reworked suspension too, the Vantage was a significant step on from the six-cylinder DB7 but cost just a few thousand pounds more – it was no surprise that sales of the standard car dried up and it was quickly phased out. The desirable run-out Vantage GT had 435bhp.

DB7 Zagato/DB-AR1 2003-2004



SPECIFICATION

Engine 5935cc, V12
Power 435bhp @ 6000rpm
Torque 410lb ft @ 5000rpm
0-60mph 4.8sec
Top speed 185mph

Like previous Aston/Zagato collaborations, the DB7 Zagato used a shortened chassis, lighter bodywork and familiar Zagato design cues (like the 'double-bubble' roof). It also had an uprated engine, in this case the Vantage's V12 tuned to 435bhp. The production run was limited to 99 cars, all of which were snapped up. The DB-AR1 was a Zagato-designed, somewhat impractical 'speedster' version of the DB7 (it didn't even have a hood) aimed specifically at the west coast of America, where most of the 99 examples still reside.

DB7/DB7 Volante 1994-1999



SPECIFICATION

Engine 3228cc, in-line 6, s/c
Power 335bhp @ 5750rpm
Torque 361lb ft @ 3000rpm
0-60mph 5.8sec
Top speed 157mph

Aston couldn't survive building handfuls of handbuilt supercars; a more affordable model was needed. Ford, who had bought a majority share in AML in 1987, knew this and in 1994 launched the Ian Callum-styled DB7 – evoking memories of the 1960s DB cars – with a supercharged 3.2-litre straight-six and a steel monocoque that had its origins at Jaguar (Ford-owned at the time). A Volante followed in 1996. DB7 sales eventually topped 7000, making it then by far the most numerous Aston. Buying guide, *Vantage* issue 3.

Vanquish/Vanquish S 2001-2007



SPECIFICATION

Engine 5935cc, V12
Power 460bhp @ 6500rpm
Torque 400lb ft @ 5000rpm
0-60mph 4.5sec
Top speed 190mph

While DB7s were rolling out of a new factory at Bloxham, back at Newport Pagnell an all-new flagship model was in development. Launched in summer 2001, the Callum-penned Vanquish had a 460bhp version of the V12 and a bonded aluminium platform that would be developed for all subsequent Astons. Its automated paddleshift manual gearbox was criticised initially for its slow responses. This was improved, as was the handling, for the 520bhp Vanquish S launched in 2004. A total of 2578 Vanquishes were sold.

DB9/DB9 Volante 2004-2012



SPECIFICATION

Engine 5935cc, V12
Power 470bhp @ 6000rpm
Torque 443lb ft @ 5000rpm
0-60mph 4.6sec
Top speed 190mph

The DB9 was effectively a successor to the highly successful DB7 Vantage, with the latest version of the now-familiar 5.9-litre V12, a Touchtronic auto transmission option, and the first appearance of the largely aluminium 'VH' platform, all clothed in another gorgeous Ian Callum body, refined by his successor, Henrik Fisker. It was also the first Aston to be built at Gaydon. A Volante version arrived in 2005, and in 2008 power grew to 470bhp. For 2013MY the car was given a major visual and mechanical refresh, now with 510bhp.



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ALL THE ROAD CARS 2005-present

V8 Vantage/V8 Vantage Roadster 2005-present



SPECIFICATION (4.3)

Engine 4281cc, V8
Power 380bhp @ 7000rpm
Torque 302lb ft @ 5000rpm
0-60mph 4.8sec
Top speed 175mph

Aston's answer to Porsche's 911 and originally conceived as a mid-engined car. Compact and more overtly sporting than the DB9, the Callum/Fisker-styled V8 Vantage has overtaken the DB9 to become the biggest seller yet, with more than 16,000 so far finding homes. Its Jaguar-derived quad-cam V8, originally 4.3 (4.7 litres and 420bhp from 2008) gives brisk performance and an extrovert soundtrack – best enjoyed in the Roadster, which arrived in 2007. The 'S', with 430bhp, arrived in 2011. Buying guide, *Vantage* issue 1.

V12 Vantage/V12 Vantage Roadster 2009-present



SPECIFICATION

Engine 5935cc, V12
Power 510bhp @ 6500rpm
Torque 420lb ft @ 5750rpm
0-60mph 4.1sec
Top speed 190mph

The notion of shoehorning Aston's 5.9-litre V12 into the compact V8 Vantage was always amusing, and when Aston turned the concept into reality in 2009 it produced one of the finest drivers' cars in its history. Distinguished by its rows of (functional) bonnet vents, the V12V builds on the V8 Vantage's agility and adds another dimension of performance and desirability. The Roadster arrived in late 2012. Best of all, though, is the 565bhp 'S' launched in 2013. With a top speed of 205mph, it's the fastest series-production Aston ever.

DBS/DBS Volante 2007-2012



SPECIFICATION

Engine 5935cc, V12
Power 510bhp @ 6500rpm
Torque 420lb ft @ 5750rpm
0-60mph 4.2sec
Top speed 191mph

Resurrecting a name last seen in the late '60s, the DB9-derived DBS replaced the early-noughties Vanquish as the flagship production car in 2007 and gained huge cachet when it was adopted as 007's company car when Daniel Craig assumed the tuxedo for *Casino Royale*. With power ramped up to 510bhp, aggressive styling, harder-edged dynamics and a manual gearbox, the DBS was Mr Hyde to the DB9's Dr Jekyll. A Volante appeared in 2009. At the end of 2012, the DBS was replaced by the new Vanquish.

Rapide 2009-2012



SPECIFICATION

Engine 5935cc, V12
Power 470bhp @ 6000rpm
Torque 443lb ft @ 5000rpm
0-60mph 5.0sec
Top speed 184mph

With Porsche enjoying considerable success with its Panamera saloon and new markets opening up for luxury cars, it was only a matter of time before Aston spun-off a four-seater saloon from its VH platform. The Rapide went into production in late 2009, initially at Magna Steyr in Austria. Despite (or perhaps because of) its sports car-like dynamics, sales haven't been as strong as Aston would have hoped, and production moved to Gaydon in late 2012. Relaunched as the Rapide S for 2013 with a deeper new front grille and 550bhp.

POCKET BUYING GUIDE V8 Vantage



IN A NUTSHELL

The biggest-selling Aston ever. Well over 15,000 produced since 2005, and available as two-seater coupé or soft-top Roadster (from '07). Early cars had 380bhp 4.3-litre V8, 420bhp 4.7 from mid-2008. 'S' version with 430bhp arrived in 2011.

WHAT TO PAY

While early 4.3-litre coupés can be found for £30,000, £35k is a realistic budget for a car that's been well cared for, while the very best low-mileage late 4.3s are £40k-£45k. Roadsters start at around £45k, also the entry point for 4.7 coupés, though most are still £50k+. Add at least another £20k for an 'S'.

NEED TO KNOW

The V8s are generally robust, but a water-tight service history is essential. A common fault is failure of the gasket on the timing cover – expensive to replace because of the several

hours of labour involved – so look for signs of leaks at the front of the engine.

A new clutch is also pricey – Works quotes over £2500 fitted; independents c£2k. A particularly heavy pedal is a clue that it's on the way out; also a rattle that disappears when the pedal is depressed, or any judder or slip when pulling away. Some early manuals are obstructive, particularly going into first and second, but they should get better as they warm up. If you're considering a Sportshift, have an extended drive in various traffic situations: the

automated manual – very different to a torque-converter auto – isn't for everyone. The Sport Pack makes body control tighter but the ride very firm; again, it's not for everyone.

Serious corrosion shouldn't be an issue, but some cars show light bubbling around the base of the A-pillars and the door handles. Unless it has VentureShield or similar fitted, the nose is prone to chips, so it's quite likely the front end will have had a respray. Check for quality and colour-matching.

Battery age and condition is important, as a poor battery can lead to electrical gremlins.

BACK ISSUES

Just the thing to complete your Vantage collection



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- Le Mans 2013 special
- Lagonda meets Rapide S
- From Virage to Vantage – the '90s Astons
- DB7 buying guide



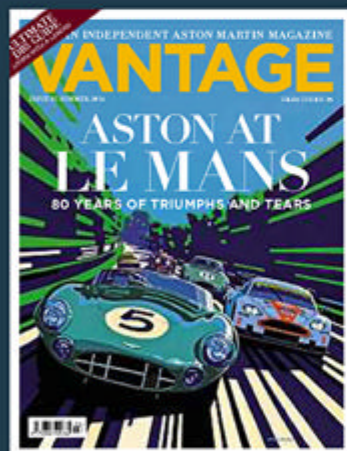
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ALL THE ROAD CARS 2010-present

One-77 2010-2012



SPECIFICATION

Engine 7312cc, V12
Power 750bhp @ 7600rpm
Torque 553lb ft @ 6000rpm
0-60mph 3.6sec
Top speed 220mph+

Aston's answer to the Bugatti Veyron and Pagani Zonda hypercars was the One-77, a no-expense-spared, handbuilt, all-carbonfibre rocketship with the world's most powerful naturally aspirated engine (some have recorded an astonishing 772bhp) and an equally gobsmacking £1.15m price-tag. Strictly limited to 77 examples, the last was delivered in August 2012, though Aston retains one for PR work. The few who have been lucky enough to experience the One-77 describe it as challenging, rewarding and utterly thrilling.

V12 Zagato 2012-2013



SPECIFICATION

Engine 5935cc, V12
Power 510bhp @ 6500rpm
Torque 420lb ft @ 5750rpm
0-60mph 4.1sec
Top speed 190mph

The V12 Zagato is the most recent Aston to feature the badge of the famous Italian styling house – though in fact this particular Zagato was styled by Aston's own Marek Reichman. It was another strictly limited edition: in this case just 101 were made. Based on the V12 Vantage, the Zagato was rebodied in carbonfibre and aluminium, though the mechanical package was virtually unchanged. Still, since the V12 Vantage was already one of the finest drivers' Austons of all time, that was hardly a concern – even at £396,000 a pop.

DB9 2013-present



SPECIFICATION

Engine 5935cc, V12
Power 510bhp @ 6500rpm
Torque 457lb ft @ 5500rpm
0-60mph 4.5sec
Top speed 183mph

The current DB9, launched at the beginning of 2013, is substantially different to the original launched in 2004. The styling takes up where the short-lived Virage left off, with a sharper chin, more dramatically shaped sills and a flicked-up tail spoiler. Underneath there's a more powerful 510bhp V12 with a torquier delivery, a stiffer aluminium structure, revised suspension and carbon-ceramic brakes as standard. The result is a quicker, better-handling and more refined car, its only real flaw its ageing six-speed gearbox.

Virage 2011-2012



SPECIFICATION

Engine 5935cc, V12
Power 490bhp @ 6500rpm
Torque 420lb ft @ 5750rpm
0-60mph 4.5sec
Top speed 186mph

Bringing back a name from the 1990s, the 2011 Virage slotted into the range between the DB9 and the DBS – and even avid Aston fans wondered if it wasn't a variant too far. The idea was to sell a more aggressive car than the DB9 (but one that wasn't as extreme as the DBS). All the panels except the roof were subtly restyled, while the V12 gained an extra 20bhp, though the overall feel was still very much GT. Sales were slow, and when the thoroughly revised DB9 was launched for 2013MY, the Virage was quietly dropped.

Vanquish/Vanquish Volante 2012-present



SPECIFICATION

Engine 5935cc, V12
Power 565bhp @ 6750rpm
Torque 457lb ft @ 5500rpm
0-60mph 4.0sec
Top speed 183mph

The original Vanquish was a landmark car – in many ways the first of the modern Austons with its largely aluminium underpinnings – and it was a brave move to resurrect the name for the current flagship. If the new car isn't quite the same game-changer, the combination of aggressively shaped carbonfibre bodywork, 565bhp from a reworked V12, adaptive damping and carbon-ceramic brakes is still an intoxicating one. A Volante arrived in late 2013, and in late 2014 both versions got a refresh that included an eight-speed gearbox.

Rapide S 2013-present



SPECIFICATION

Engine 5935cc, V12
Power 550bhp @ 6750rpm
Torque 457lb ft @ 5500rpm
0-60mph 4.8sec
Top speed 190mph

The Rapide S, launched in January 2013, represented a significant evolution of Aston Martin's four-door sports car. A more aggressive grille and headlight treatment gave it considerably more road presence, while, under the bonnet, variable valve timing and a new management system lifted the power of the V12 from 470 to 550bhp, dropping the 0-60mph time to just 4.8sec. In late 2014, the S was given an extensive refresh, which included the introduction of an eight-speed gearbox and a host of detail refinements.

ROGER STOWERS

FROM THE MID-1960s ONWARDS, JUST ABOUT EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENED IN THE WORLD OF ASTON MARTIN WAS RECORDED BY ROGER STOWERS

WORDS JOHN SIMISTER PHOTOGRAPHY DAVID WRIGHT

Search on Google Images for 'Roger Stowers Aston Martin' and you won't find a single picture of him. What you'll find instead are many photographs of Aston Martins ancient and modern, many more of the people who worked on them or with them, and many more yet of Astons being enjoyed. That Google search encapsulates the man perfectly, for his devotion to Aston Martins, and to Aston Martin, was complete, and his self-aggrandisement was non-existent.

Roger was Aston's archivist as well as its in-house photographer. His knowledge of the company's products and history was probably unrivalled in its mix of breadth and arcane detail. I met him only once, when researching some Aston Martin history for a supplement in the now-defunct *Motor* magazine in the mid-1980s, and even in the short time I spent with him in the photographic archive within the factory cottage my mind was close to factual meltdown as Roger suggested image after image for my possible use, with unexpurgated background to each.

Roger retired in 2001 and died in 2003, having never married. Perhaps that is not quite true: he was married to Aston Martin. His house was full of Aston memorabilia, mostly the photographs he took between 1966 and the late 1980s, but also race and event programmes, because he went to every Aston Martin Owners Club race meeting he possibly could. He bequeathed this collection to the Aston Martin Heritage Trust, which is gradually working its way through the legacy, digitising the negatives, the prints – both monochrome and colour – and the slides as it goes.

The official photographs he took for the company passed to the British Motor Industry Heritage Trust at Gaydon, which used them as the basis for its 'Aston Martin: a Century of Craftsmanship' exhibition, which ran during 2013 and 2014. The BMIHT, too, is continuing to catalogue this huge resource.

With all his knowledge, Roger was the ideal person to run Newport Pagnell's factory tours. He was well used to interacting with the public, having initially been taken on by Aston Martin as the service receptionist. He had come from a similar customer-service role at the Rootes Group, but he left there when Chrysler took over and started to run things in a more transatlantic way. 'He didn't like working with



Above

A familiar sight at hundreds of AMOC race meetings, Roger was devoted to Aston Martin, its cars and the people who made them

the Americans,' recalls Harry Calton, Aston Martin's public relations director in the 1990s. 'But I had recently arrived from Ford, which had bought Aston Martin Lagonda. Would Roger find this a problem? "Oh no," he said, "Ford are quite different."

'He was very fair-minded. When he was the service receptionist, he would hide the bill in his desk if he thought the customer was being overcharged. He would never have fitted into the modern corporate world. He always did his own thing, arriving in the office early, playing the part of the elderly bachelor. He was the spirit of Aston Martin in his way. Wherever he went in the world, local owners always regarded him as the Messiah.'

Roger, born in 1931, grew up in Littlehampton, Sussex, where his stepfather ran a garage that specialised in Bugattis and Frazer Nashes. Thus was the seed sown for a life in cars, and Aston Martin turned out to be the perfect place for Roger's enthusiasms. Aston Martin Owners Club member David Wright met Roger on a Stowers factory tour, David's twenty-first birthday present. Back then you had to be proposed for AMOC membership by an existing member, and on discovering a

shared interest in photography, Roger proposed David, then still a dental student.

'Roger was the perfect eccentric English gentleman,' says David, 'but he certainly knew his stuff and his photography has been underestimated over the years. I was effectively his photography understudy for the club's Aston Martin Quarterly, so we met and chatted at nearly all the AMOC race meetings from the late 1980s through to his passing. He was very generous with his time to anyone who loved Aston Martins, especially if they were trying to uncover a car's history.'

These AMOC race meetings used then-current Aston Martins as course cars, which Roger borrowed from the factory and drove to the events. He was also a regular at Le Mans, staying at the famous Hotel de France and re-living with other leading lights of AMOC the glory days of the Aston works racing team that used the hotel as its base.

His racing world didn't extend far beyond his favoured marque, however. David Wright tells of a time when Roger went to an early Revival meeting at Goodwood, where he lunched in the March enclosure. David Coulthard and his girlfriend appeared, not sure of where they were supposed to be, and asked if the two empty seats at Roger's table were taken. They weren't, and soon the three of them got chatting. Roger's opening line was: 'And what do you do?'

Naturally, Roger had an Aston Martin of his own, latterly a V8 Volante, which he always drove with the roof down because he thought a convertible pointless if the roof were erected. This showed an independence of spirit that saw him through some of Aston Martin's most turbulent times. Latterly he became semi-detached from the company's management, and thus insulated from its turbulence, by being employed instead by Media Men, Aston Martin's long-standing PR company, headed by Geoff Courtney. It was an arrangement that suited everybody well.

Roger started writing an autobiography for *Aston Martin Quarterly*, but he got no further than chapter five. His funeral wake was held at Works and his coffin bore the wings of the Aston Martin badge. What better departure for a hero?

Many of Roger Stowers' photographs are available to purchase from the Aston Martin Heritage Trust at www.amht.org.uk

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957 Aston Martin DB2/4 MkII Fixed Head Coupe (Notchback) finished in gunmetal with silver roof panel. This is one of only 37 of this model ever produced and it is now nearing the completion of a total "Body Off" restoration which will be finished in early June. No stone has been left unturned and all components have either been totally refurbished or replaced with new. The interior is finished in deep burgundy hide with best quality Wilton carpet and high gloss walnut dashboard panel. The engine is finished to "Fast Road" specification and inspection is invited by appointment. **£250,000**



2001 (51) Aston Martin Vanquish finished in Derwent Green with contrasting green and cream hide interior and special order centre consol finished in body colour. This is an exceptional example for its age and comes with a huge number of sensible upgrades toward Vanquish "S" specification. These include Vanquish "S" Dynamic handling kit, new front uprights and hubs, AP Racing front discs with 6 pot AP racing calipers and 4 pot rear calipers, new stiffer Eibach road springs and new brake hoses. Also fitted is a Vanquish "Quick" steering rack, and a new starter motor at "Works" service. The specification includes a Pioneer AVIC-F220 HIDE-AWAY HIFI and navigation system, blue tooth, Air conditioning, heated electric seats, paddleshift transmission and a fully adjustable steering column. The whole car is in splendid condition and comes with a very detailed history file containing not only service records but every item of expenditure since the current owner purchased the car from us in March 2010. Being the last hand made Newport pagnell model, these cars have already become collectable and are proving to be a safe investment. **Realistically priced at £57,950**



2003 Aston Martin DB7 Vantage Volante finished in Solent Silver with Pacific blue and Parchment hide piped blue with dark blue Wilton Carpets and blue overmats. The interior is complimented by a high gloss Walnut fascia. The electrically operated soft top is finished in dark blue mohair with Alcantara headlining. The car has an excellent specification that includes electrically adjustable heated seats, fully adjustable steering column, heated front and rear screens, heated mirrors, touchtronic transmission, alloy pedals, air conditioning and 18" multi spoke alloy wheels with black brake calipers. The car has covered a total of 42,000 miles with a comprehensive service history. It has had just 4 owners from new and is in superb condition throughout and represents excellent value at **£35,950**

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