

VULCAN UNLEASHED!
Wildest Aston hits the track

AN INDEPENDENT ASTON MARTIN MAGAZINE

VANTAGE

ISSUE 11 | AUTUMN 2015

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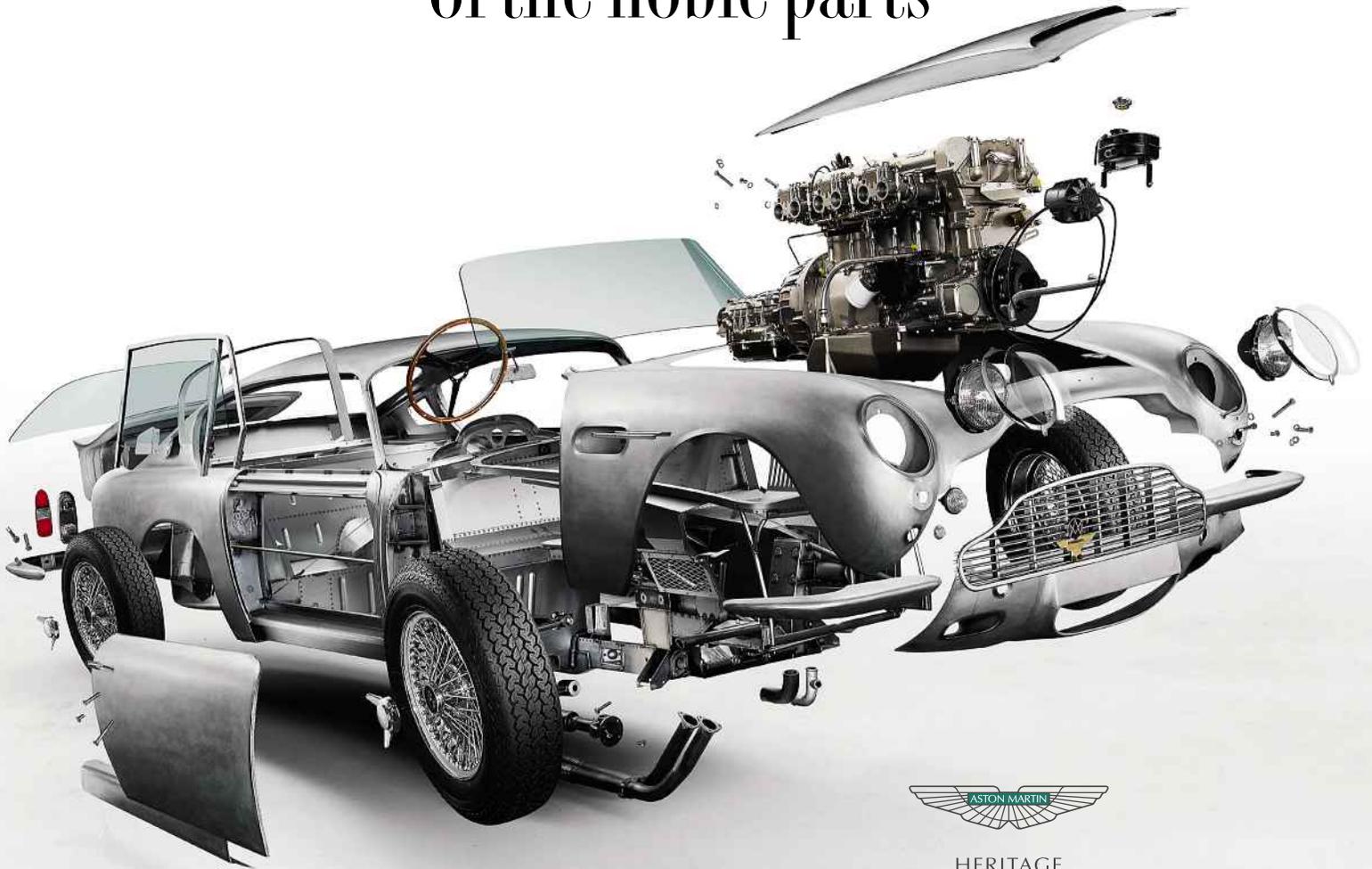


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£POA



1989 Aston Martin V8 Volante 'PoW'
£POA



1991 Aston Martin Lagonda
£POA



1991 Aston Martin Virage
£99,950



1985 Aston Martin V8 Efi Coupe
£145,000

Viewpoint

The timeless thrill of the road trip



THERE'S ALWAYS something special about a road trip, but when it's a road trip in a racing car, well, there's little to beat it. If said racing car happens to be an Aston Martin, then driving nirvana has surely been reached.

Look back into the marque's history and you'll see it wasn't so unusual for Aston Martin racing cars – even those campaigned at the very highest levels of the sport – to be driven on the road. The finest example of this being Aston's 1959

DBR1 Le Mans winner, which was driven the 25 miles from the team's base at the Hotel de France to the Circuit de la Sarthe on the morning of the great race.

It seems mad to think a manufacturer would put its hopes and dreams at the mercy of an errant 2CV or *camion*, but back then it was just what teams did. Not least because racing cars like the DBR1 were genuinely road-legal. Aston Martin Racing may not have driven their rather-less-than-road-legal V8 Vantage GTEs all the way to the circuit for this year's race, but it speaks volumes for the team's appreciation of its past – not to mention the affection in which Aston Martin is held – that the streets of La Chartre-sur-le-Loir once again echoed to the sound of unsilenced racing engines. Naturally, *Vantage* was there to capture the moment.

Inspired by this fine Aston tradition, two of our more daring contributors made road-race pilgrimages of their own, Jethro Bovingdon returning Aston's pioneering Nürburgring V8 Vantage racer, 'Rose', to the scene of its finest (24) hours, while Stephen Archer got in the mood by travelling from London to Le Mans in a competition DB4, before driving a DP214 replica in the Le Mans Legends race. Epic tales both, and proof that Aston's intrepid spirit is as timeless as the illicit thrill of taking to the road in a car born for the track.

Richard Meaden, editor

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AN INDEPENDENT ASTON MARTIN MAGAZINE

VANTAGE

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Bulletin

News, analysis and events



THE WILDEST RIDE OF ALL

WE JOIN THE AWE-INSPIRING, £1.5 MILLION, 820BHP
VULCAN HYPERCAR FOR ONLY ITS SECOND
OFFICIAL TEST SESSION - AND HITCH A RIDE WITH
DEVELOPMENT DRIVER DARREN TURNER

WORDS JETHRO BOVINGDON | PHOTOGRAPHY DREW GIBSON



UNLESS YOU'VE BEEN LIVING under a rock for the last few months, you'll recognise the Vulcan. It's the wild, track-only hypercar that dropped jaws at the Geneva show back in March, the furious V12-powered wedge of carbonfibre that lit up the Goodwood Festival of Speed with its screaming soundtrack and smoke pouring from its spinning tyres. The Vulcan is a triumphant celebration of everything for which Aston Martin stands – glorious naturally aspirated engines (for now), incredible design, exquisite detailing and gritty race-proven endurance. Just 24 will be made at £1.5 million plus local taxes, the price including a two-year driver training package at some of the most iconic circuits in the world.

I have a strong feeling that Snetterton in Norfolk won't form a part of that programme, but it's where we meet the Vulcan properly for the first time. By 'properly' I mean it's the first time we see and hear it in anger, not just doing crowd-pleasing burnouts on that famous driveway, but pounding around for lap after lap to hone the set-up, iron out niggles and see its true performance start to come to life.

This is only the second proper track test of the Vulcan and today *Vantage*, as well as a few lucky deposit-holders, will get to experience the Vulcan from the passenger seat. Darren Turner, factory racer and the man charged with unlocking the Vulcan's potential, is our driver for the day.

Before we climb in, chief engineer Fraser Dunn is on hand to explain the car in a little more detail. 'Basically we devised what we'd end up with if we were going to make a track-only car that didn't comply to a given racing class but did comply to FIA safety standards,' he begins. 'So we sat down, working around a One-77 tub with a V12 engine with a similar installation and looked at what the targets would be. We came up with a 1300kg car, 800bhp-plus, 590lb ft, and GT3 to GT1 levels of downforce.'

Initially this internal discussion was around a 'One-77 R' project, but soon it snowballed into something almost entirely new, although the same basic targets remained. As with the One-77 the carbonfibre chassis, bodywork and

Right and below
Suspended on built-in air-jacks, the Vulcan receives some more fettling before heading back out onto Snetterton's tarmac. Below right: writer Bovington prepares for a white-knuckle ride with Aston racer Darren Turner



Vulcan in brief



- All 24 Vulcans will be built at Aston Martin's new Q Advanced Engineering facility in Wellesbourne
- From receiving the tub, body and suspension from Multimatic, it will take a team of 20 around three weeks to complete each car
- Vulcans will be built in batches of four or five and all will be shaken down on the same day, probably at Silverstone
- With 1300kg of downforce at 200mph, the Vulcan has more downforce than a GT3 racing car, and with over 800bhp the aim is to hit lap times well beyond the capability of a GT3 car
- Several owners want to race the Vulcan, so expect it to appear in competition at the Nürburgring some time in 2016 as part of an invitational class
- The Vulcan was never intended to be road-legal but Aston Martin concedes that some owners may attempt to get their cars registered for the road



suspension is supplied by Multimatic. The tub itself is similar to the One-77's but revised for this new application, the suspension remains inboard but at the front the dampers run longitudinally rather than laterally to save weight and improve cooling routes to the engine, and that incredible shape produces 1300kg of downforce at 200mph. Like many F1 cars and much of the Le Mans grid, the Vulcan runs Multimatic's DSSV dampers that utilise spool valves rather than shim stacks for better control, more accurate tolerances and consistency even under very high operating temperatures.

The engine itself is a 7-litre V12 based on that of the GT3 race engine, as Dunn explains. 'One-77 is a variable-valve-timing 7.3 Cosworth engine; this is a 7-litre fixed cam - essentially an evolution of the GT3 and LMP engine by Aston Martin Racing

[Prodrive]. There was a big weight-saving to be had. And essentially it was more of a known entity in terms of durability. It was a bit of a no-brainer.'

To allow owners to ease themselves into the Vulcan experience, there will be three power settings. 'The top output is yet to be confirmed as we're still undergoing final calibration but we think it'll be 820-830 brake,' says Dunn, 'the middle setting will be 650bhp and the lower setting around 550.' That mighty engine drives through a six-speed pneumatic-shift sequential gearbox by Xtrac, again shared with the GT3 and GTE race-cars. Driveability will be enhanced through 11-stage traction control and seven-stage ABS systems by Bosch.

All the electronics in the world couldn't detract from the sheer sense of menace possessed by the Vulcan. High in the air



‘The noise, heat and forces feel pure race-car.
The engine is heavily silenced today but
sounds hard-edged and angry’



on its in-built air-jacks, mechanics and engineers buzzing around it, laptop wires trailing from its electronics systems and fierce heat emanating from the V12 and the side-exit exhausts that run through the sills, it looks irresistibly terrifying. Yet despite the sinister drama it's been designed to be predictable and tolerant of mistakes, chiefly by ensuring its aerodynamic centre of pressure remains relatively consistent. Graham Humphrys was lured back to Aston Martin from his tenure developing the Bentley Continental GT3 racing car - renowned for being easy for gentlemen drivers to exploit - and his aim was to imbue the Vulcan with a similarly stable platform.

Darren Turner is looking to build upon this inherent balance with his set-up work. As I fold myself over the thick carbonfibre sill and fall into the gorgeous passenger seat, he tells me: 'The key will be to find a performance window that is fast to drive but useable for the type of owners we'll attract. If I want to look for the last tenth, it'll become edgy, so we've got to get a comfortable set-up that'll work on most circuits without too much of a change and put driveability into the car.' I'm almost



Above and below

Car is already finished to an exceptionally high standard; three-sided steering wheel is a work of art, while the seats are fabulously supportive and immaculately tailored. V12 delivers immense power and accompanying pyrotechnics



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Above
The Vulcan development team, including, front left, Darren Turner, and, front right, Graham Humphrys

reassured. Then the vast V12 erupts into life, the Michelin slicks touch down and we're away.

The noise, heat and forces feel pure race-car. The engine is heavily silenced today but sounds hard-edged and angry, the braking force is simply astonishing, and the way Darren snaps the car into corners at speeds that just don't seem to compute is pretty mind-scrambling. The magic of downforce really is an experience like nothing else if you're used to road cars, even very fast ones. For a lap or two I just grin, giggle and have many of those horrible moments when the brain is expecting heavy braking but in reality Darren punches in another upshift, leaving my stomach a hundred yards back. It catches up with a bang when – finally – it's time to hit the new carbon-ceramic Brembo racing brakes.

Slowly my faculties return and I can sense the ease of use that everybody has been so keen to emphasise. Grip is phenomenal and Darren is clearly super-smooth, but the car does have a tangible sense of balance. That big V12 doesn't seem to hurt agility on corner-entry and, when oversteer does arrive out of the tightest corners, I can feel it through the chassis as quickly as Darren is correcting it with the steering wheel. It's impossible to read too much into these passenger

rides, but it's very obvious that the intimidation factor created by the sheer performance on offer and the Vulcan's amazing design isn't matched by an edgy, super-aggressive set of dynamics. From being pretty nervous about jumping into the passenger seat, I'm converted to wanting a go for myself within about three laps. Maybe another day...

Darren pits after six or seven laps and I can relax and take in some of the Vulcan's other extraordinary details. The interior is absolutely stunning. It may feel like a pure racer on the move, but the elegant design and gorgeous materials create a unique setting – part endurance racing car, part sci-fi and blended with traditional craftsmanship that is such a part of the Aston Martin story. The Vulcan is a huge amount of money but it's almost hypnotic to be around and, given the requisite funds, you'd need a hard heart to walk by without your wallet twitching uncontrollably. Dave King, Aston Martin's director of special projects and motorsport, later gives the most telling insight into the project. 'The vision was to make a car that is faster than the cars we race in GT3 and GTE but finished to a concours standard,' he explains. 'We felt it needed to be a collectable work of art as well as a devastatingly fast track car.'

Job well and truly done. **V**

IN BRIEF



TURNER PRIZED

Aston Martin Racing has announced it is to continue its long-standing relationship with driver Darren Turner for another three years. The deal sees the rapid and popular Aston stalwart continue as an integral part of AMR's World Endurance Championship campaign, both as a race driver and as a key player in the development of the team's next generation of cars and drivers. It also hints that Turner could adopt a wider role within the organisation as development driver and brand ambassador to the road car business.

A VERY GRAND TOUR

As we went to press, spaces were still available on the AMOC Area 20 Tour to the Pyrenees and South of France starting on September 27. The ten-day touring holiday starts with a sailing from Plymouth to Santander, then follows a coastal route before heading into the Pyrenees. The organisers promise spectacular roads and first-class hotels, and the tour will include a lap of the Grand Prix circuit at Pau before the finale black tie evening in Biarritz. For further details, contact Thomas Brimblecombe at Classic Grand Touring, tel: +44 (0)1483 281 282



CHICANE'S NEW DIRECTION

Aston specialist Chicane Classics has moved to new premises in Bramshill, Berkshire. The 1.5-acre site includes a large service workshop together with a dedicated engine build shop and a separate restoration workshop (currently housing a DB5, DB6 and DBS V8). Combined with the recruitment of more Aston trained technicians, the move has allowed Chicane to expand its repairs, maintenance and service coverage to include modern-era models as well as classics. Director John Watson commented: 'The move has provided an opportunity to grow the business and expand our coverage of the Aston Martin range, whilst still remaining faithful to the company's, and my, roots in the classic '60s and '70s era.' More info at www.chicaneclassics.co.uk



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The art of going the distance

LE MANS AND SPA HAVE OFTEN BEEN HAPPY HUNTING GROUNDS FOR ASTON MARTIN, BUT THIS YEAR'S RACES PROVED A REAL TRIAL OF ENDURANCE

WORDS RICHARD MEADEN

PHOTOGRAPHY DREW GIBSON, PETER MAY

LE MANS might seem like a distant memory but, as we close for press, the World Endurance Championship (WEC) is yet to resume after its summer sabbatical. We'd hoped to reflect on GTE class wins for Aston Martin Racing, but Le Mans 2015 proved to be a bittersweet affair for the Banbury-based squad.

Things started brilliantly with AMR V8 Vantages claiming pole in both the GTE PRO and GTE AM classes, ahead of deadly rivals Corvette, Ferrari and an uncharacteristically off-form Porsche effort. All eyes, then, were on Aston. Not least because the #97 car (which qualified P3 in the PRO class) wore a dramatic 'art car' livery designed by German abstract artist Tobias Rehberger, who used bold geometric shapes and patterns to create an accentuated impression of speed.

And speed really was of the essence in a race that ran at a ferocious pace from the word go, with the Corvette team in particular fighting every inch of the way for GTE PRO honours. At half-distance things were looking very good for AMR, thanks to the red-and-yellow Hanergy-liveried #99 Vantage of Fernando Rees, Alex MacDowall and Richie Stanaway keeping the Corvette at bay to hold the PRO class lead, while the Gulf-liveried #98 Vantage of Pedro Lamy, Paul Dalla Lana and Mathias Lauda held a commanding one-minute lead in AM.

After a fighting start for Darren Turner, Stefan Mücke and Rob Bell, in which they fought for the PRO class lead, their race ended during the night when the #97 art car succumbed to an engine issue caused by damage incurred earlier in the race. The fancied #95 PRO Vantage of all-Danish crew Nicki Thiim, Marco Sørensen and Christoffer Nygaard lost time early in

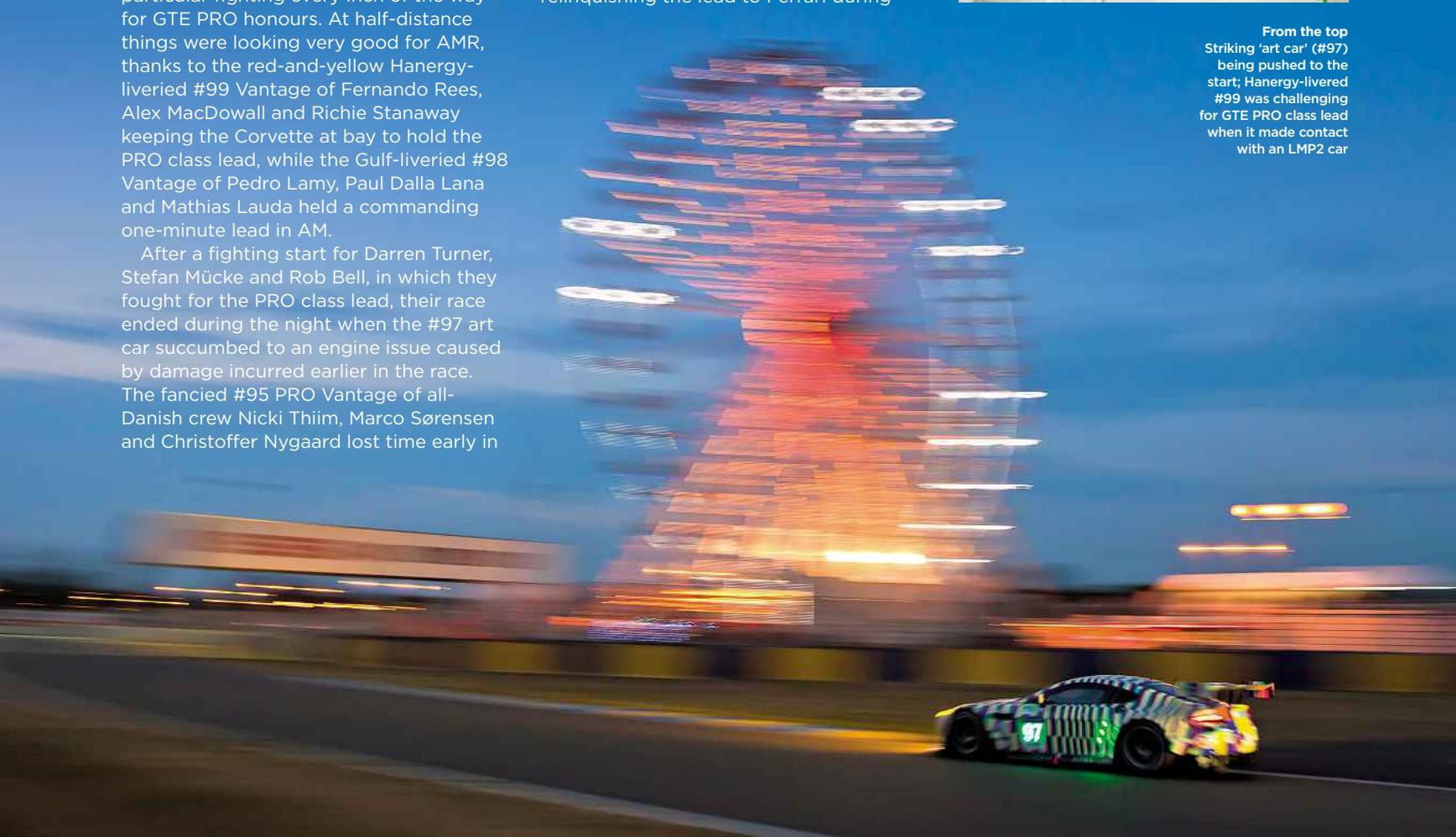
the race due to an unscheduled pit-stop for power steering issues, while the #96 AM car of Stuart Hall, Francesco Castellacci and Roald Goethe was involved in an incident that put them back to 12th position at the halfway stage.

The second half of the race was no less fraught, as the battle with Corvette raged on. Fernando Rees was right in the thick of it and pushing to the limit when he made contact with an LMP2 car, ending hopes of a GTE PRO win. This left Corvette and Ferrari to fight for class victory, the big V8 Chevrolet eventually prevailing to give Briton Ollie Gavin his fifth Le Mans class win.

Meanwhile, in GTE AM, Roald Goethe was lucky to emerge with no more than shock and bruising after a huge accident on the exit of the Porsche Curves. By contrast the #98 Vantage crew, led by veteran Portuguese driver Pedro Lamy, was putting on a dominant display, only relinquishing the lead to Ferrari during



From the top Striking 'art car' (#97) being pushed to the start; Hanergy-liveried #99 was challenging for GTE PRO class lead when it made contact with an LMP2 car



'The Ardennes put on a vintage Spa welcome, with truly atrocious conditions making it more a challenge for survival than a race'



pit-stops. It was looking very good for AMR, until heartbreakingly Dalla Lana crashed into retirement at the Ford Chicane with less than an hour of the race remaining. For AMR, this was a Le Mans of what-might-have-beens.

With the WEC not resuming until the Six Hours of Nürburgring, AMR's attention switched next to Belgium for the 24 Hours of Spa. Run to the Blancpain Endurance Series' GT3 rules, and not GTE regs as in WEC, Spa is a race for factory-supported customer teams, which in Aston Martin's case meant the Leonard Motorsport and Oman Racing by Motorbase teams, both contesting the PRO-AM class in the proven V12 Vantage GT3.

Qualifying went particularly well for the Leonard team, their combined efforts in day and night qualifying earning them a shot in the Top 20 'Superpole' shoot-out. Stefan Mücke, on loan from AMR, set 15th fastest time overall, good enough for 3rd in the PRO-AM class.

The Ardennes put on a vintage Spa welcome for the start of the race, with truly atrocious conditions making it more a challenge for survival than a race. Conditions remained foul well into the night, ensuring the safety car was busy for the first half of the race during prolonged periods of full-course yellows and barrier repairs after a succession of crashes. Both AMR customer teams

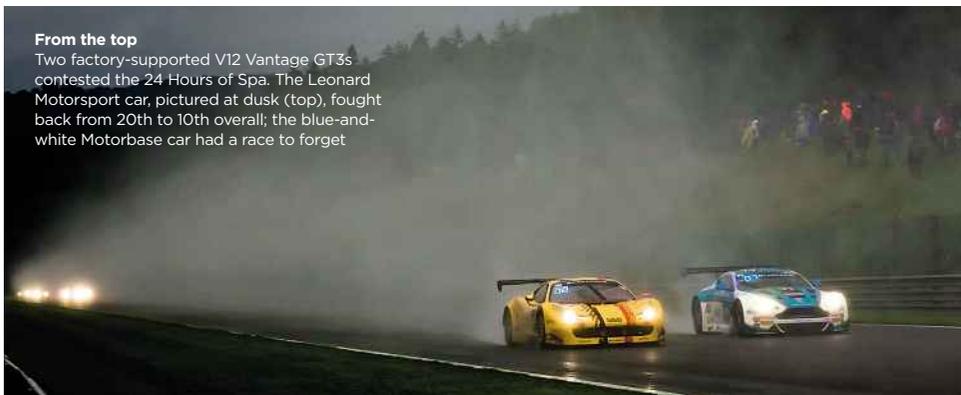


encountered problems and incurred penalties that dropped them down the order. It would prove to be a long race with scant reward for either, though the efforts of the Leonard Motorsport car should not be overlooked, Tom Onslow-Cole having fought back to 9th overall and 3rd in class, only for a long pit-stop to drop the car back to 20th overall and 10th in class with 16 hours gone. At the flag, the Leonard team had doggedly worked their way back to 10th overall, while the Oman team finished a race to forget in 30th place.

With the WEC action set to resume just a few days after our deadline, we look forward to reporting on an intense second half of the season and, hopefully, a GTE World title or two for AMR. In the meantime, you can keep up with all the latest news at astonmartin.com/racing.

From the top

Two factory-supported V12 Vantage GT3s contested the 24 Hours of Spa. The Leonard Motorsport car, pictured at dusk (top), fought back from 20th to 10th overall; the blue-and-white Motorbase car had a race to forget



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Clockwise from left
Friedrichs/Hadfield DB4 GT splashes to victory at Silverstone; John Briggs in LM15 at Oulton, and the Scragg/Thurtle V8 suffers door issues at Donington



Classics shine in the rain

SUMMER BROUGHT A PACKED SPORTING CALENDAR -
AND SOME TYPICALLY BRITISH WEATHER

WORDS STEPHEN ARCHER PHOTOGRAPHY DAVE BRASSINGTON/PETER MCFADYEN

THE SUMMER SEASON is so packed that Aston owners looking for some competitive action are almost spoilt for choice. So where to begin? As a late-spring warm-up, there can be no grander event than the Mille Miglia, and this year no fewer than 18 Astons were entered in the vast field of 456 cars: seven Le Mans models, an International, three 2-Litres, six DB2s and DB2/4s, and a DB3S. Most finished the 1000-mile course, and the Le Mans of Dan Erejomovich and Gus Llanos from Argentina came a brilliant 8th overall.

You can read about Aston Martin's less-than-glorious Le Mans weekend elsewhere in this issue. Later in June, Aston Club Racing had a very enjoyable meeting at Donington Park. Conditions were damp, and at Donington this means a combination of water and unburnt aviation fuel from Boeings approaching East Midlands Airport – treacherous to say the least. This made for some topsy-turvy grids – and even more exciting racing in the dry conditions later. In the Intermarque race, the V8 of Chris Scragg and Boysie Thurtle had to make two pit-stops, which pushed them down to one from last place. A fabulous drive by Thurtle saw the V8 thunder through to take a remarkable 2nd at the flag. Meanwhile, Steven Byrne's pole in the GT4

Cup was ill-rewarded with a broken driveshaft, leaving the podium to David Tinn on the top step and Robin Marriott, both in Stratton Motor Company cars.

Also in June was the Autosport 3Hrs, in which Steve Boulton-Brooks' DB3S came third overall in the FISCAR race. He would have been first had not a driveshaft snapped on the last lap. What is it with Aston Martin driveshafts?!

The Vintage Sports-Car Club has been organising fabulous race meetings since soon after the combustion engine was married to a chassis, and many notable drivers of historic cut their teeth at these events, Nick Mason and Martin Stretton among them. In July the VSCC returned to Oulton Park for a day of close racing that saw newcomer John Briggs finish a fine 12th against tough competition in his first full year racing the Team Ulster LM15.

In July, the Masters Festival at Donington found Nicholas King on fine form with his lightweight DB4, finishing 2nd overall in both races and 1st in class. King also put on a good show at Snetterton in July against a very strong field of GT4s and N24s in the new GT4 and V8 Vantage Cup. However, with other marques invited to compete at this round, Christopher Kemp's GT4 was beaten by a Lotus GT4. Well, we were in Norfolk.

Meanwhile, Nick Naismith made his debut in the Innes Ireland Cup and took 3rd place against some rapid Lotuses in his handsome FIA-spec DB4.

The Silverstone Classic is a monster event these days. The Kidston race for pre-war cars had a huge 55-car grid including ten Astons. Peter Dubsy came all the way from Vienna and finished a superb 12th overall. Despite indifferent weather, Arlette Müller from Germany persevered in her DB4 GT replica and finished 9th overall in the Jet Battle of Britain Race ahead of Byrne's similar car. The RAC Woodcote Trophy attracted ten Astons, including three DB3Ss and the DB3 of Martin Melling. Wolfgang Friedrichs and Simon Hadfield's DB3S took a great 3rd behind some rapid Jaguars in a close-fought race.

The Friedrichs/Hadfield pairing made good in the GT race by winning in their DB4 GT, the famous 1 GRE. The conditions were appallingly wet and it was a testament to great driving and the fine-handling Aston that it should do so well.

DIARY DATES

October 10 Aston Club Racing, Silverstone
September 18-20 Spa Six Hours
October 23-25 Algarve Classic Festival, Portimao, Portugal

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ASTON MARTIN



AMOC hits the big eight-oh

GIANT DISPLAY MARKS EIGHTY YEARS SINCE CLUB FORMATION

WORDS NIKKI WRIGHT PHOTOGRAPHY IAN KENDALL

THE ASTON MARTIN OWNERS CLUB celebrated its 80th anniversary in spectacular style in May with a unique display of 80 Astons forming a huge '1935' – the year the club was formed – against the suitably impressive backdrop of the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst.

Members gathered from all over the world to have their cars included in the formation, which featured one of practically every Aston Martin model ever made. Among them was the MkII Long Chassis Sports Tourer that was displayed at Olympia in 1935. Other star cars included the unmistakable yellow DBS driven by Roger Moore in *The Persuaders*, and the age range came right up to date with a 2015 V12 Vantage S Roadster.

Viscountess Downe, Club president since 2002, was among the guests. The Viscountess has continued the work of her late husband, Viscount Downe, who was Club president for 22 years. 'It has been a pleasure to maintain all the good work that my husband encouraged,' she said.

Club secretary Marc Aylott explained how the anniversary idea came about: 'We were looking to create something very special to mark the 80th anniversary that would involve our members and their cars in a unique and memorable way. We also wanted to do something that had never been done before.

'Once we'd come up with the idea of the 1935 display, we wanted to find somewhere very special to hold it and The Royal Military Academy Sandhurst provided the perfect backdrop. It has been a spectacular and memorable day for everyone that has been involved in this special occasion.'

Committee member Tim Butcher had the tricky task of designing the display. 'Each individual number of the 1935 figure represented an Aston Martin model production era: pre-war, Newport Pagnall, Bloxham and Gaydon,' he explained. 'Members volunteered their Aston Martins to create the display. Planning was a painstaking process involving many late



Top and above
Eighty Astons form a giant '1935', the year AMOC was founded, against the backdrop of Sandhurst. Bertone-bodied DB4 one of the winners in Dublin

nights shuffling cards representing each one of the 80 cars in the display on my kitchen table to get the shape right!

The formation of the Aston Martin Owners Club was the idea of the late Mortimer Morris-Goodall, 'Mort' as he was known (see *Heroes*, page 154). To this day, it aims to enshrine the same principles as those drafted by Mort and his friends in 1935, to 'promote the sport and pastime of motoring', 'develop interest in the Aston Martin car' and 'encourage social interaction between members'.

All of that was very much in evidence at another successful AMOC event this summer, the inaugural Ireland International Concours d'Elegance, held in Dublin on Saturday June 6. The event, organised by AMOC Ireland's John Gallen, showcased the enthusiasm, passion and pride of the Irish membership, and attracted members from the UK as well as further afield, including from Switzerland and the US. Highlights included a Garda-escorted parade of 35 Astons through the streets of Dublin to the famous Phoenix Park for the concours. Winners included Gerry McManus from County Limerick with his 1962 Bertone-bodied DB4 GT.

The next big AMOC event is the Autumn Concours at Alnwick Castle on September 27. For details, go to www.amoc.org.



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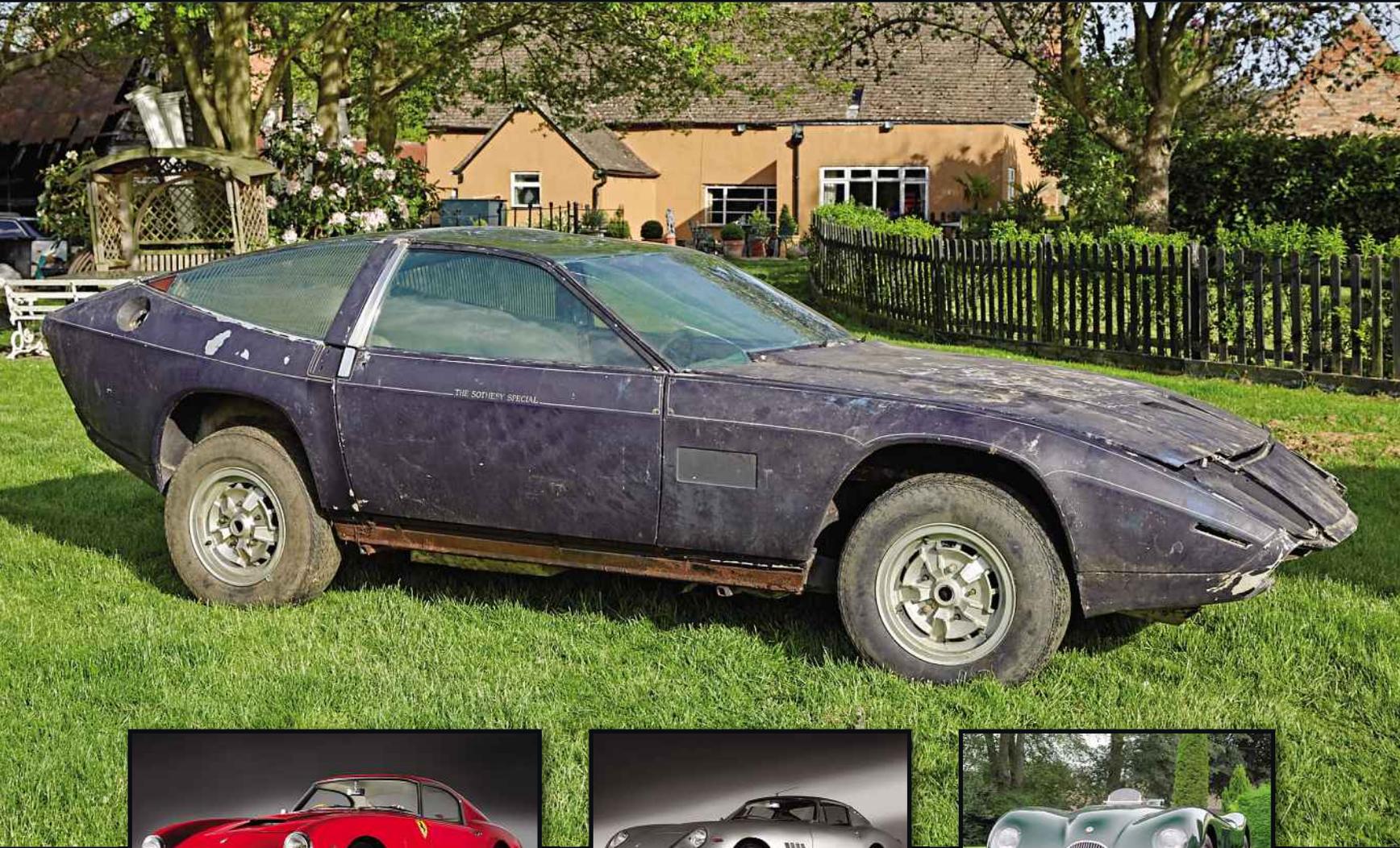
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Golden oldie

A RECORD-SETTING ULSTER STANDS OUT IN A SUMMER OF ASTON-PACKED AUCTIONS

WORDS CHRIS BIETZK

PHOTOGRAPHY MATTHEW HOWELL, ROBIN ADAMS

UNTIL FURTHER notice, the annual Works sale remains the only dedicated Aston Martin auction on the calendar, but those who attended Bonhams' Festival of Speed event on June 26 could have been forgiven for thinking otherwise. The sale featured enough Astons that we had to remove a shoe to count them all - 11 in total, nine of which had found new owners by the time James Knight holstered his hammer.

More striking than the quantity of cars offered, though, was the scope of the consignments, which ranged from V8s and DBs to rarities from the 1920s and '30s, and for once it was an early car that had top billing.

For all the hand-wringing (mostly justified) about the market's relative lack

of enthusiasm for pre-war cars, these automotive antiques still inspire a sense of wonder that more modern machines never will, and visitors to the Bonhams tent were awed by one in particular: the 1935 works Ulster. Much hyped in the run-up to the sale, chassis LM19 came to the block sporting a valuation commensurate with its 'near-concours' condition and its racing history, marked by appearances at the Mille Miglia, the French Grand Prix and, of course, the 24 Hours of Le Mans.

LM19 had been in the same ownership for 45 years, so its sudden availability was a big deal, and the resulting bidding war between three collectors saw the car breeze past its top estimate of £2.2

Clockwise from left

Ex-works Ulster LM19 set a new auction record for a pre-war Aston Martin; delightful 1923 1½-Litre Sports; DB6 Shooting Brake by Radford and DB9 Spyder concept were among the prizes at the Monterey sales

million to make £2,913,500, a new record for a pre-war Aston Martin.

While the appeal of the Ulster is hardly lost on us, our favourite lot was the little 1½ Litre Sports dating from 1923 - the earliest known surviving 'production' Aston. Though it began life as a four-seat tourer, chassis 1920 is today a winsome boat-tailed competition car thanks to a former keeper. Beautifully restored by Ecurie Bertelli, it was more than worth the £186,300 that it fetched. Good value, too, were the '34 1½-Litre Mk II DHC (£178,333) and the '32 1½-Litre New International Sports, which served as a factory team support car at Le Mans (£124,700).

Frankly, the Festival of Speed auction was so intriguing that the traditional bonanza of summer sales in Monterey, California, felt almost superfluous to requirements, but there were many cars to admire across the pond, too. Bonhams sold the 1948 24 Hours of Spa-winning 2-Litre for \$781,000, and Gooding & Co raised \$1,540,000 on an excellent, unrestored 1965 DB5 Convertible.

RM Sotheby's, meanwhile, served up several exotic treats, including a 1967 DB6 Shooting Brake (\$682,000) and the delicious Zagato-bodied 2013 Centennial DB9 Spyder Concept (\$693,000). Both exceeded expectations, underlining the closest thing to a theme to emerge from the Monterey auctions: standard-spec examples of more numerous models, including DB4 and 5, are steady and continue to bring good money, but extreme rarity is increasingly prized.

Might that lead to a broad resurgence of buyer interest in the pre-war Astons, all scarce? We don't have enough fingers and toes to count the reasons that is unlikely to come to pass - but if the market's general apathy towards the greybeards of the car world means there's an outside chance we could one day own that 1923 1½-Litre Sports, we'll not try too hard to change the status quo.



Look sharp

READ THIS, THEN REGISTER TO BID RIGHT AWAY; EARLY SEPTEMBER MIGHT BE THE TIME TO BUY

WORDS CHRIS BIETZK

PHOTOGRAPHY CYMON TAYLOR

WE'RE JUST naïve enough to cling to the idea that you read *Vantage* (or at least thumb through the pages) the moment it hits the doormat each quarter, and we're doubly hopeful that this particular issue will receive your immediate attention, for there are three sales taking place at the beginning of September that you'll want to know about if you've a wedge of cash burning a hole in your pocket.

On the fourth of the month, Silverstone Auctions will invite bids on around 60 cars at Salon Privé, which is being held this year at Blenheim Palace, the vast country pile best known as the birthplace and family home of one Winston Leonard Spencer-Churchill.

Given that the great man's last car was a 1964 Morris Oxford, we don't imagine he'd be inclined to own a classic Aston if he were still alive today, but there's no denying that two consignments in particular would look just right parked up outside the house. The first of those, a 1963 DB4 Series 5 Vantage, is one of the best-presented examples of its type that we've come across recently, finished in Goodwood Green with red leather interior.

Fitted originally (and unusually) with a Borg Warner automatic transmission, the DB4 now, thankfully, boasts a period-correct four-speed manual 'box following a complete mechanical overhaul. Three SU carburettors, a full handling kit and uprated brakes are among the sensible tweaks that have been made, so the car, estimated at £675,000-775,000, should now be as much of a pleasure to drive as it is to behold.

One of the only criticisms you could level at this DB4, in fact, is that the roof won't come down on a sunny day. A land-owning gent might want to complement it, therefore, with lot 211, a superb 1968 DB6 Vantage Volante - one of just 29 made. It's a seriously pricey proposition at £825,000-925,000, but worth selling a few acres for, we'd suggest...

Also crossing the block is an Aston of more recent vintage, and designed for speeds that would get you arrested pretty quickly in rural Oxfordshire. The Vantage GT3 known as 'Bilstein Billie' was a works

entry in the 2013 24 Hours Nürburgring endurance race, piloted by Pedro Lamy, Darren Turner, Stefan Mücke and the late Allan Simonsen, and following a strong performance in that race it was run and maintained by Prodrive, appearing in umpteen series with distinction.

Competition cars can fall unexpectedly and unfairly flat in the wrong auction room, so we're curious to see how 'Billie' is received. It remains a formidable track weapon (it won its last outing, at the Le Mans support event in June) and unquestionably represents £170,000-190,000 of cutting-edge engineering, so it deserves to sell well.

The day after Salon Privé, Bonhams will make an appearance at the Chantilly Arts & Elégance event in France to give bidders a crack at a lovely 1951 'washboard' DB2 Sports Saloon (£350,000-450,000), and at one of only two V8 Coupé-based shooting brakes, completed by the factory in 1996 and with 17,000 miles on the clock (£350,000-550,000).

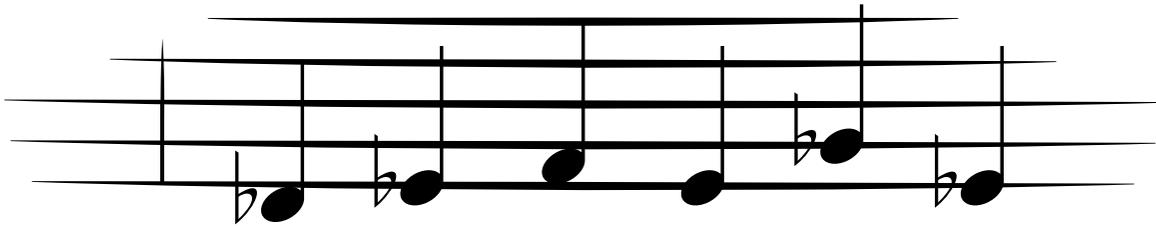
We're sweet on the DB2, and those who share our appreciation for its old-fashioned charms but who miss out in France will surely want to scoot back across the Channel in time for September 7; at RM Sotheby's London event another washboard car will be offered, this one built in 1950 and with a Vantage engine. The top estimate of £350,000 suggests that devotees of David Brown's second road car are rapidly growing in number.

Among the other consignments for London are two cars sure to reignite the 'DB4 or DB5?' debate. Representing the 4 is a Snow Shadow Grey 1960 Series 2 car; fighting for the reputation of the 5 is a 1965 Vantage saloon in Silver Birch. Each appears to be in fine fettle, and while many would take the grunter Bondmobile, we've never been able to look beyond the sleek and utterly unimpeachable beauty of earlier DB4s - and this one looks even more attractive at half the price (£325,000-425,000) of its iconic successor (£700,000-900,000). DB4 for us. Please send your letters of complaint to the editor.



From top

DB4 Series 5 Vantage has been modified with care for an improved driving experience; 'Bilstein Billie' Vantage GT3 has works history and more power than we'd know what to do with; 'washboard' DB2 will be sold by Bonhams; eggcrate grille, cathedral lights, low roof - cars don't come any prettier than the early DB4s



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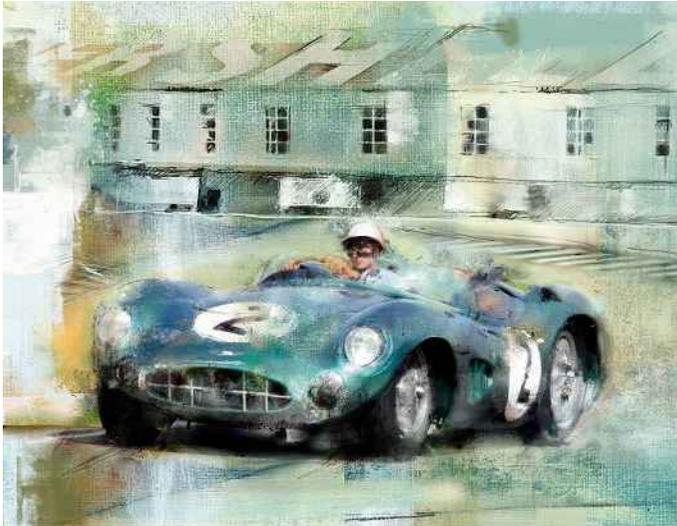
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Desirables

Aston-related objects of desire, including a DB5 that's actually vaguely affordable



Going For Glory by Jonathan Carter

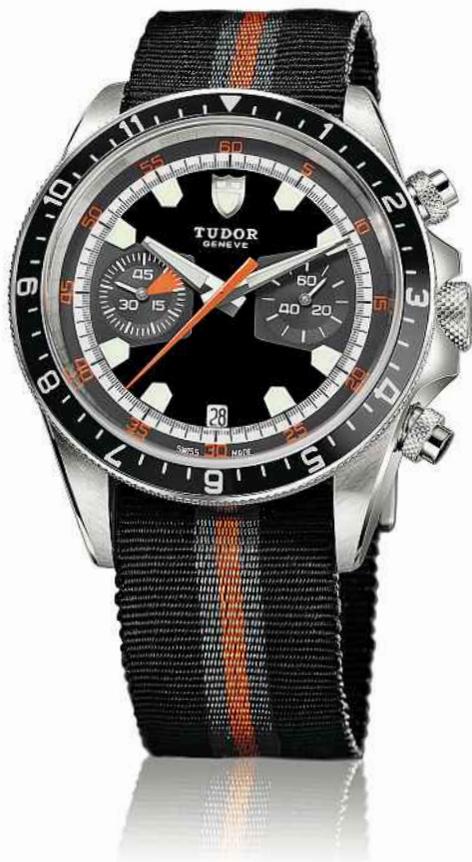
Prints from £40 | www.art48.co.uk

Aston Martin did their best to give away the 1959 Tourist Trophy at Goodwood, setting fire to the leading DBR1 of Stirling Moss and Roy Salvadori during a routine stop for refuelling. No matter, though: Moss simply hopped into the sister car of Carroll Shelby and Jack Fairman and brought that one home in first instead – a feat celebrated in this delightful work by Jonathan Carter.

Scratch-built DB5 model

€3590 | www.diamondcars.de

There are not many people in the world prepared to build a DB5 to your exact specifications, and those who will understandably tend to charge a fortune – and often expect you to find the donor car, to boot. Not German craftsman Dr Jan Freiwald, though; he will accept virtually any request, will hand-make all necessary components and will complete the work within 140 hours – all for the very reasonable price of €3590. You'll have to be a 1:8-scale human to fit inside the end product, of course. There's always a catch somewhere.



Tudor Heritage Chrono

£3010 | www.tudorwatch.com

It is very difficult to believe that the 1970 Tudor 'Monte Carlo', named for its roulette-wheel-like dial, could possibly have emerged from the same decade as the AMC Gremlin and avocado green bathroom suites, but we'll take Google's word for it. The classic design has been subtly tweaked and reissued, and, on its seatbelt-inspired NATO strap, it is one of our favourite driver's chronographs of recent years.

Silver Martini set by Grant Macdonald

£8500 | www.grantmacdonald.com

Probably a touch too spendy for M16 following recent budget cuts, but if you're a long-winded supervillain planning to treat 007 to one last drink before feeding him to the sharks, this beautiful silver Martini set from Grant Macdonald's Aston Martin Collection must qualify as an essential purchase.



Your view

email us eds@vantagemag.co.uk

write to us Vantage Magazine, 5 Tower Court, Irchester Road, Wollaston, Northants NN29 7PJ



DB's 'passion wagon'

A friend loaned me a copy of your magazine, knowing of my employment at Aston Martin between 1968 and 1972. At the time I worked in the finance dept, or, should I say, lack-of-finance dept. Your article about David Richards' DB6 Volante (issue 8) brought back many memories.

In 1970, I think it was, we received an order for a DB6 Mk2 Volante from Kennings on behalf of The Prince of Wales. Panic stations set in, as we had stopped making that model and the tooling was on a rubbish heap behind the factory. The sales department quickly got on to our dealers to see if there was a new one still unsold. Fortunately there was, the last new one available, and it was duly bought back. Prince Charles wanted his in metallic blue and this one was in red with the wrong colour leather interior. No matter; stripping it out, repainting and re-trimming was costly but not a problem.

A couple of things were to be non-standard: a bonnet mascot and the folding roof. Charles had not long been invested as the Prince of Wales and one of the gifts he received was a bonnet mascot in the shape of a Welsh Dragon. A beautiful object in silver with gold wings, it was kept in the cashier's safe in its wooden box whilst the quickly detachable bonnet mount was made.

The second non-standard

feature was the folding roof. Normally when erected they resembled starved cows, but to obviate this it was made with a special inner lining of thin foam sheet. The finished effect was much nicer than standard.

I also recall the four-door DBS [pictured above, issue 10] built for Sir David Brown. It was painted in Sir David's favourite colour, Roman Purple, with upholstery in red velour and was known around the works as the 'passion wagon'.

One weekend I was able to borrow this car for a run up to Yorkshire. It was a very good performer, very rare and attracted much attention. On the way home, cruising down the M1 in the dark, we passed a white Mk2 Jaguar in a short queue of cars cruising in the left-hand lane at about 60mph. Naturally we were cruising at 69mph, but nevertheless I watched the mirror and after a minute or two the close-set headlights detached themselves from the queue and speeded up. My wife expressed concern that we might be stopped for speeding. I replied that all they would want to know was what make of car it was. They duly pulled us over and after the usual identity checks and advice on motorway driving, we were sent on our way. As he set off back to his car the police driver stopped, turned and asked: 'By the way Sir, what sort of car is it?'

Paul Craven, North Yorkshire

A sensible family car

I write this as I sit on the train from Leeds, having just read Henry Catchpole's piece on the last Vanquish S (issue 10). It's particularly poignant as I've just dropped my June 2007 Vanquish S off at JCT600 for some 'slightly after pre-sale' fettling following my purchase of the car last week.

I have dreamed of owning an Aston since I was four. In 1987 I had a tour of the factory with Roger Stowers and this cemented my view that a V8 Zagato was my end goal! I now work for JLR and this time last year moved my family to Shanghai to head up the vehicle engineering team at our joint-venture company, CJLR. The resulting improvement in finances meant I could just about realise my dream of owning a Newport-built AM before I was 40.

Initially, and partly spurred on by the previous issue's '£30K Astons' feature, I set my sights on a Virage Volante as I thought it would be the most fun car for my wife and kids to enjoy with me. After a couple of unfortunate let-downs, thoughts kept on returning to another, more expensive, four-seat option, namely the Vanquish.

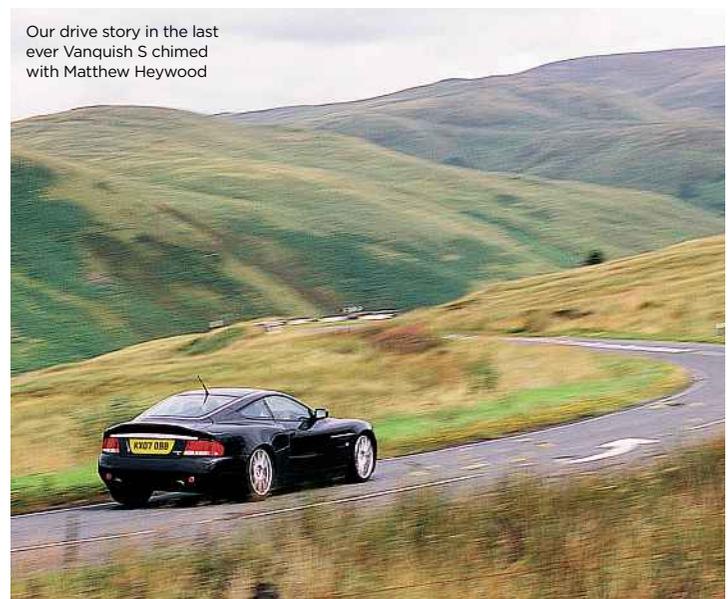
When I found this example with nearly 80k miles but one owner

from new, a service stamp every six months and receipts for £65k, I knew it was the one. And it hasn't disappointed. Boy, that engine sound! I must admit to bringing Matt Monro's *On Days Like These* to play on the return journey (and it did produce goosebumps) but I had to enjoy the exhaust for a good 30 minutes beforehand.

I knew I would love the looks and the sound, but I've been amazed by its ride comfort, progressive handling and acceptable fuel consumption (I ran a Defender as a company car a while ago - best thing I ever did for justifying 17mpg on petrol being good value compared to 23mpg on diesel!). Also, I can just about get the high-back booster seats in for the kids and enough luggage for a weekend away. I think it's one of the best decisions I've made.

I return to Shanghai next week and the car will have to go into storage for 11 months of the year, but I fully intend to use my 3000-mile insurance limit during the few weeks I'm here and, when I'm back in Blighty for good in a couple of years' time, I hope to make this the highest mileage Vanquish S around!

Matthew Heywood



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END OF THE NINE

There's a replacement on the way, but in the meantime the DB9 gets a makeover and a welcome power boost. We drive the DB9 GT

WORDS RICHARD MEADEN | PHOTOGRAPHY DEAN SMITH





As Aston Martin moves ever-closer to the introduction of all-new AMG-influenced models, it has to find new ways of tempting customers into its existing range. With the Vantage, that's been accomplished by adding value at the entry level and relentlessly ramping-up the performance and dynamic focus of the most extreme versions. The DB9 has always been a rather more sophisticated sell, appealing to those who are looking for a more rounded machine that trades as heavily on luxury and refinement as it does on big-hitting performance. With the countdown to an all-new model entering its final phase, the GT is Aston's latest effort at reminding us why we should still love, and more importantly, still buy, the current DB9.

Rewind a dozen or so years and Aston faced the same challenge with the DB7 Vantage. The resulting DB7 GT could have been a cynical run-out model but, perhaps against expectations,

short of the Zagato it was actually far and away the best DB7 of them all. With a comprehensive range of chassis upgrades, an increase in power and some subtly effective styling changes, the GT was vastly improved dynamically and a fine farewell for the DB7. Built in small numbers, it is now highly collectable.

The DB9 GT might follow the same naming strategy, but far from being a limited-run last hurrah it's simply a comprehensive MY16 upgrade that supersedes the regular DB9. This explains why the mechanical differences between GT and outgoing DB9 begin and end with the engine: the 5.9-litre V12 now develops 540bhp and 457lb ft, which makes it the most powerful DB9 ever and shaves a tenth off the 0-60mph time (now 4.4sec). If you've had your expectations raised by the use of the GT name, then the fact there are no other hardware changes may come as a disappointment, though, to be fair, Aston had considerably less room for dynamic improvement with the DB9 than the DB7. That said, studious enthusiasts of the

brand will feel it a little disingenuous to use those illustrious initials on a mainstream model.

The GT certainly looks the part. Indeed, this test car, finished in special order Scintilla Silver (a £3495 option), looks magnificent. The DB9 gained muscle-bulk when it adopted the styling of the short-lived Virage a few years back, meaning some of the original car's lithe and slender understatement was lost, but the curvier shape has a physical presence more suited to the expectations of 2015. The lack of shut-lines is a modern Aston hallmark and makes for a wonderfully clean, unbroken surface on which the light can dance. Shame some of the few panel gaps that remain are rather less than even.

The GT has some subtle identifiers to set it apart from what's gone before, not least the 'GT' badges that have been sprinkled sparingly on the exterior and interior. This car features a number of exterior options, the most obvious – and costly – being the front splitter and rear diffuser, plus the tail-lamp inserts, which replace the standard gloss-black items. Together they



Above and left
Interior has received a substantial facelift, including a Vanquish-style central 'cascade', finished in carbonfibre with subtle filaments of copper, housing revamped controls for the infotainment system. Exterior markers include a liberal sprinkling of GT badges. This car also has optional carbonfibre splitter, diffuser and tail-light inserts



cost almost £5000. The gloss-black diamond-turned alloy wheels (£1295) are also optional, as are the grey brake calipers (£995).

Beautiful though the DB9 GT's exterior undoubtedly is, it's the interior that's the real showstopper. Aromatic, elegant and employing unusual, clever and intriguing uses of materials, it's a fabulous place in which to find yourself. Perhaps the best example of this is the central cascade of carbonfibre that houses the new-for-MY16 touch-sensitive infotainment system from the Vanquish, featuring fine filaments of copper through the carbon weave. As with the GT's exterior, there are many ways in which to enhance the interior, such as the Bronze Metallic leather (£995) with contrasting Bitter Chocolate and Copper stitching seen here. The piano black interior trim pack adds splashes of high-gloss detailing, while the thumping Bang & Olufsen BeoSound audio system is terrific, albeit at a price. £5495 to be precise.

Add up all the options and as tested this DB9 GT retails at a smidge over £161,000, or roughly





DB9 GT

ENGINE V12, 5935cc
MAX POWER 540bhp @ 6500rpm
MAX TORQUE 457lb ft @ 5500rpm
TRANSMISSION Six-speed automatic, rear-wheel drive, limited-slip differential
SUSPENSION Front and rear: double wishbones, coil springs, adaptive telescopic dampers and anti-roll bars
STEERING Rack-and-pinion, power-assisted
BRAKES Vented carbon-ceramic discs, 398mm front, 360mm rear, ABS, EBD
WHEELS 8.5 x 20in front, 11 x 20in rear
TYRES 245/35 ZR20 front, 295/30 ZR20 rear, Pirelli P Zero
WEIGHT 1785kg
POWER TO WEIGHT 307bhp/ton
0-60MPH 4.4sec (claimed)
TOP SPEED 183mph (claimed)
BASIC PRICE £140,000
PRICE AS TESTED £161,430

£20,000 more than the basic £140,000 list price. How does that compare with other premium 12-cylinder rivals from, say, Bentley or AMG? Well, a Conti W12 GT Speed starts at £151,000 while an S65 AMG Coupé weighs-in at £183,000. Whether or not the Aston offers greater value depends on the emphasis you place on power and performance figures over panache.

And the driving experience? Well, it's familiar, but never less than majestic, for whether you're driving to the shops or the South of France the way the GT makes progress is totally intoxicating. It's smooth and effortless, but with a sharpness and immediacy that always reminds you this is a sporting car at heart. First impressions are of a taut, agile and responsive machine with pleasing weight to the controls and a carefully crafted sense of connection. The ride is firm. Truth be told it's actually a bit *too* firm at low speeds, with sharp-edged urban potholes and drain covers too readily transmitted into the cockpit. Build speed and things settle down nicely, at which point the DB9 GT wastes no time in winning you over.

There's something very special about being propelled by a large-capacity, naturally aspirated V12, for it feels and sounds quite unlike mere mortal motors. This engine has never been incandescent in the manner of Ferrari's ferocious 21st century V12s, but it has a mellow warmth of character that suits the car perfectly. You need to engage Sport mode for it to feel at its most alert, sharpening the throttle and the responsiveness of the six-speed Touchtronic II auto transmission. Shame the GT makeover didn't extend to the eight-speed auto from the Vanquish and Rapide S, for it would give the DB9 an extra dimension.

Nevertheless, push deeper into the throttle's travel and the GT reveals a steelier edge to its

character, accelerating hard and pulling smoothly through the full sweep of the tacho needle. Its headline performance figures might not be up there with big-hitting Bentleys or bi-turbo Benzes, but on real roads it still has huge reserves from which to draw. The transmission lacks the immediate, punchy, up- and downshifts of the best double-clutch 'boxes, but its wits are quick enough for you to enjoy the GT on a challenging road. This is backed up in no small part by the carbon-ceramic discs, which have mighty stopping power, but also the rare quality of feel. Better still, not only can you drive it quickly with absolute confidence, you can also drive slowly with absolute finesse.

It'll come as no surprise to learn the DB9 GT is far from a revolution, yet, though it may be born from pragmatism, the careful process of evolution has served to preserve and polish a driving experience that remains vibrant and memorable in the face of fresher, more capable, and more technologically advanced rivals.

Classy and cultured with flourishes of exquisite craftsmanship, the GT looks, feels and sounds very special indeed. As the DB9 enters its dotage, this last major refresh serves the dual purpose of providing a timely reminder of what it is that continues to set Aston's definitive grand tourer apart, and what its all-new replacement will have to build on in order to up its game. **V**



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TURNING BACK THE CLOCK

Two glorious Astons provide a nostalgia overload on road and track at this year's Le Mans 24 Hours

WORDS STEPHEN ARCHER | PHOTOGRAPHY DREW GIBSON





President Hollande so nearly stepped into the slick of hot Aston oil that was heading his way. It wasn't quite how we intended to leave our mark on Le Mans. In a scene of surreal quality, our DP214 replica had been pushed out of the pits after its early retirement from the Legends race that preceded the 24 Hours. The President, of course, was arriving for the start of the main event. And as we leant against the Aston in the car park, along with Angus, our chief mechanic, we slowly realised that the

presidential limo was stopping not 15 feet away. And we were leaking oil. It was a slow leak, but it was seemingly endless, and no matter how much sand we threw on it, it just kept running. It ran across the car park directly towards where the President was stepping out of his car to be greeted by the organising committee. And then, mercifully, the media throng engulfed him and he disappeared in the travelling swarm, some with oil under their smart media shoes. If they only knew the story that oil could tell.

So ended our Le Mans foray, a little less than gloriously. But also, in a way, almost fittingly.

We were winding the clock back to relive some of the early 1960s magic of Le Mans. Our plan was to drive a DB4 from London to Le Mans, race the DP214 replica and drive the DB4 home afterwards. What could possibly go wrong?

In fact, the DB4 GT in its many guises, including the three 'Project cars', never finished Le Mans in all the attempts between 1959 and 1964. The 24 Hours has always been a cruel 'madame', so why should we expect any different? As it turned out, the entire weekend was one for Aston Martin to forget: just one of those years when the stars failed to align.



But what a fabulous pair of cars. Both the DB4 and the DP214 replica belong to Robert Rawe, a long-standing enthusiast of the marque who has been racing Astons for 13 years. The 1961 Series 3 DB4 was his first. Bought at auction, it turned into a 'project' rather quickly since the condition was not quite as expected. His plan, though, was always to compete with the car in road/race FIA specification. It's standard save for a mildly breathed-upon engine, a handling kit, race seats, cage and foam-filled tank. It is not a lightweight. Robert had a great outing in his first race in 2002 with a good finish to give him

confidence. That confidence was rewarded at Oulton Park one week later when he rolled it. Ah, the learning curve of the novice. Undeterred, he has raced the DB4 almost every year since, including the Spa Six Hours and Tour Auto.

In 2009, Robert decided to build a DP214 replica – a decision that would inevitably attract some controversy. But while the case against replicas should be fully respected, the reality is that, of the three surviving 1962-63 Project cars, only one, DP212, is now raced, and rarely. DP215 was retired from the track many years ago and the surviving DP214 in 2012. So if

'The plan was to relive some of the early-1960s magic of Le Mans. And what fabulous cars'

people want to race such a car, or see one racing, then just about the only way is with a replica. This is to say nothing of the now stratospheric value of the originals, and, even if repairs can be afforded, the loss of originality from accident damage or just wear and tear is a huge and understandable concern.

Two 214 replicas already existed, so Robert's mission was to create a road-useable and track-competent car that was as close to the originals as possible in every way. This was no easy task – no drawings exist of the originals, although the technical specification is well understood – and it took four years to complete.

The two original DP14s were homologation specials with quite a bit of liberty taken with the rules of the day. They had DB4 GT chassis numbers so that they could run in the GT class but in reality they were more akin to prototypes. Nothing on the car was standard DB4 GT, least of all the box-section chassis and racing body. The suspension looked the same but was not. The engine, bored out to 3750cc, was perhaps closer to standard than any other element.

Robert's car was built on the chassis remains of a 1962 DB4 that had fallen into spectacular disrepair. It has an Aston Engineering 3.8-litre engine to period spec, a David Brown four-

speed gearbox and modified DB4 underpinnings to match the original 1963 DP specification. The body, interior and chassis are very close to the original: only when you see the car next to the real one can you start to see small differences. To distinguish it from the original (and the other replicas) it has been liveried in the style of the lost original car (DP214 DB4GT/0195/R) as it appeared at Daytona in 1964.

I was honoured and delighted when Robert asked me to share the driving at Le Mans, and, after a couple of 'shakedown' races at Oulton Park, the car was prepped and ready to go.

WEDNESDAY, A DAWN START in Chelsea, with the road-cleaners out and just a few souls leaving home early or heading home late. The DB4's roar fills the streets. It sounds – and feels – wonderfully potent, and as we make our way out of London it seems that every traffic light is green; we hit a virtually empty A3 in no time.

The tautness of the chassis and the heavy yet very positive steering are apparent in the city but just the right weight to give welcome reassurance on the open road, while the race-derived pedal positions are perfect both for long-distance comfort and heel-and-toeing. It's a fabulous driving position and the whole car exudes a feeling of strength, of being engineered rather than assembled. Visibility is superb, the tops of the wings stretching forward to help road positioning.

DB4s are not quiet cars, but by the time the Series 3 arrived the overdrive option was available, and this car has it. It makes a vast difference on fast roads, allowing a much more relaxed gait. The period gauges in the signature Aston dash are rock-steady as the DB4 rumbles along at speed, with just a hint of mechanical

Below and right

Preparing to leave Chelsea at dawn on an English summer's morning, and powering along the N-roads towards Le Mans. The DB4 has been modified to FIA racing spec, but remains a very useable road car

whirr from the gearbox and back axle. In fact the faster you go, the happier it feels: a car built for covering long distances at high speed.

As soon as we drive off the ferry at Caen the reaction of other road users changes from British indifference to French enthusiasm, which only ramps up further the closer we get to the circuit. Along the straight, tree-lined N-roads there's a real sense of the clock being wound back, for this was the journey taken by the works team and by David Brown himself in a DB4. People look up in the villages, older ones with warm recognition, younger ones with excitement. We head straight to the circuit to sign on and meet up with our team – Angus, Barry and Chris – plus, of course, the 214 replica.

The importance of Le Mans to Aston Martin does not need restating, but the weekend itself is extraordinary, one of the largest sporting events in Europe, way bigger than any Grand Prix. This year, 265,000 people are attending, with perhaps 70,000 from the UK. It's a huge party weekend. There's a strong whiff of the 92 years of history, even with the significant modernisation of the circuit. The night racing is, of course, spectacular, and then there's the track itself, with its mystique, its legends and its immense speed. Its origins as a road circuit are easy to see; indeed, even during race weekend, the road sections of the track are re-opened when the track is not in use.

The huge crowds make for a palpable atmosphere, the aroma of pancakes, merguez and beer adding to the olfactory experience. It's a heady brew and one that loses none of its potency with the passing years.

THURSDAY MORNING, and scrutineering is rigorous, so much so that I begin to suspect the officials may have fallen in love with the 214, spending a great deal of time walking around it as if it were a prize heifer at a county show. Then it's time to meet the other drivers and admire the other 60 entries in the Legends race, including a DB4 GT and two DB2s. The drivers' briefing follows in the hallowed hall in which the great names of the past have had the headmaster's 'pre-term chat'.

Practice starts at 4pm, the crowds already swelling in anticipation of the final practice for the 24 Hours. Robert heads out onto the track but everyone is back in after a single lap due to a red flag. Poor Tom Alexander has thrown a rod in his DB4 GT half-way round and left the contents of his sump on the circuit. So we get

DB4 Series 3

ENGINE In-line 6-cylinder, 3670cc **MAX POWER** c250bhp @ 5500rpm **MAX TORQUE** c250lb ft @ 4250rpm **TRANSMISSION** Four-speed manual, rear-wheel drive, limited-slip differential **SUSPENSION** Front: double wishbones, coil springs, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar. Rear: live axle, trailing arms, Watt's linkage, lever-arm dampers **STEERING** Rack-and-pinion **BRAKES** Disc brakes front and rear **WHEELS** 15in wire spoke **TYRES** 185 R15 front and rear, Avon radials **WEIGHT** c1570kg **POWER TO WEIGHT** c160bhp/ton **0-60MPH** sub-8sec (est) **TOP SPEED** c140mph (est)









Above and below left DP214 replica in Legends action before kerb/sump interface. DB4 GT engine is to period spec, while minimalist dash with Lancaster switches and 1962 bus-sourced air vents is an accurate copy of the originals'

just 50 minutes between two drivers, and, since each lap is around 5min 30sec, that's not a lot of laps to learn car and circuit.

As I settle in for my practice stint, it's astonishing to think this as a development of the car that we drove down in. Aside from the weight and power, the DP214 is, on paper, a very similar car to the DB4. But the hundreds of small changes add up to a very different machine. A fine GT car has been transformed into a proper racing car and a far more physical, even visceral driving experience. The 214 is just stunning: tight and wonderfully responsive, with fabulous steering and a gearbox that is deliciously precise. It's a credit to the set-up by Chris Woodgate. It's also seriously quick – and the brakes are pretty decent, too, although, as with the cornering, braking is limited by the period-spec Dunlop racing tyres. Nevertheless, this is a car that one can truly *wear*, the responsiveness and feel such that you're able to *think* inputs rather than make the more conscious effort that the road DB4 demands.

There is no question about the sense of occasion that Le Mans provides and it's a huge

privilege to be able to race there. The track is fast; very fast and very long. It's flat past the pits then up to the Dunlop chicane, taken in 2nd, the car slithering in wonderfully controllable slides though the left then right. Flat again down towards the Esses, 3rd for the left 's' then flat towards Tertre Rouge, which is a fast 3rd, and then in no time the car is on the rev limit in top gear and France is going past rather quickly.

Past Hunaudières to the first Mulsanne chicane: 3rd on entry, 2nd in the middle, then flat on the exit and sit on the rev limit again. A GT40 passes, no silencing, a blissful sight. (It's the ex-Peter Sutcliffe car, and Peter, as many of you will know, drove DP214 at Le Mans in 1964). The second chicane is a fast left-right and next comes the tight Mulsanne corner.

The run to Indianapolis with its two kinks is now as fast as the Mulsanne but feels faster since the road is narrow and the trees nearer. This is part of the original circuit; it's also the public road between the villages of Mulsanne and Arnage. Indianapolis itself is a fast right entry, but 2nd gear for the left-hander, after which it's a short distance to Arnage, the slowest corner on the track (actually a right turn at a minor crossroads).

On my last three practice laps it's raining at Indianapolis and Arnage but nowhere else: a reminder of the scale of the place. It's like ice at Arnage when wet. Then it's flat again to the Porsche Curves, though the curves are to be respected with their varying cambers, zero run-

off and tightening radii. Exiting them is flat until the first Ford chicane, which is taken at medium speed, followed by the second chicane, which is tight and leads onto the pit straight.

Our best time all weekend is 5min 20sec. Which is exactly two minutes slower than pole for the 24 Hours. Later that evening we watch some night practice and witness first-hand just how they save those 2 minutes. Today's cars are incredible, their performance other-worldly.

FRIDAY, AND WE HEAD SOUTH in the DB4 to La Chartre-sur-le-Loir to visit the hallowed Hotel de France where the original DP214s were billeted in 1963. It's a charming, sleepy little town, built more of stone than brick, and it's easy to see why John Wyer was so taken with its tranquillity and the chance to escape from the

'Hundreds of small changes from DB4 to DP214 add up to a very different machine. It's been transformed into a proper racing car'





DP214 replica

ENGINE In-line 6-cylinder, 3750cc **MAX POWER** c375bhp @ 6000rpm **MAX TORQUE** c300lb ft @ 4500rpm
TRANSMISSION Four-speed manual, rear-wheel drive, limited-slip differential **SUSPENSION** Front: double wishbones, coil springs, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar. Rear: live axle, trailing arms, Watt's linkage, longitudinal torsion bars **STEERING** Rack-and-pinion **BRAKES** Disc brakes front and rear **WHEELS** 15in wire spoke **TYRES** Dunlop racing **WEIGHT** c1000kg
POWER TO WEIGHT c375bhp/ton **0-60MPH** n/a **TOP SPEED** c180mph (gearing-dependent)



bustle of the circuit to make his plans. It's also a welcome opportunity to stretch the DB4's legs on the very same roads on which the drivers and mechanics drove the racers to and from the circuit. Our trip back in time feels complete.

SATURDAY, RACE DAY. The Friday rains have cleared, leaving a perfect morning for the Legends race. Robert is to take the 10am start and hand over after three laps. We've qualified exactly mid-field, the standard axle having proved to be too low for Le Mans – other cars that we would normally compete with have edged ahead. Still the learning curve...

At the allotted time, Robert hands over and off I set. Conditions are ideal, and after a few laps I feel my confidence growing. And then I brake for the first Mulsanne chicane a little late, with the consequence that the car rides the kerb – unknown to me, just enough to clip the sump. In the mirror I can see a bit of a smoke-haze, but the car feels fine and it's not sliding on its own oil. My first thought is that perhaps a piece of body has been nudged onto a tyre. Staying off-line and at reduced pace, I pull into the pits, where Angus announces a small but steady leak from a crack in the sump.

There's no other damage, but our race is over. As it turns out, the rest of the race is run under a safety car due to a GT40 dropping its gearbox oil on the Esses, so I didn't miss much racing. Thirty minutes later, President Hollande arrives.

An hour later, the Aston Martin Festival race descends into chaos after a crash and a mix-up with safety cars and red lights. It takes two days to work out who won the shortened race. Worse is to follow in the main race when the leading Astons fall by the wayside one by one and the last class leaders crash in the 24th hour.

Some beers with our team on Saturday night help us find some perspective: things can always be worse in so many ways. For a dose of good, positive philosophy, hang out with mechanics.

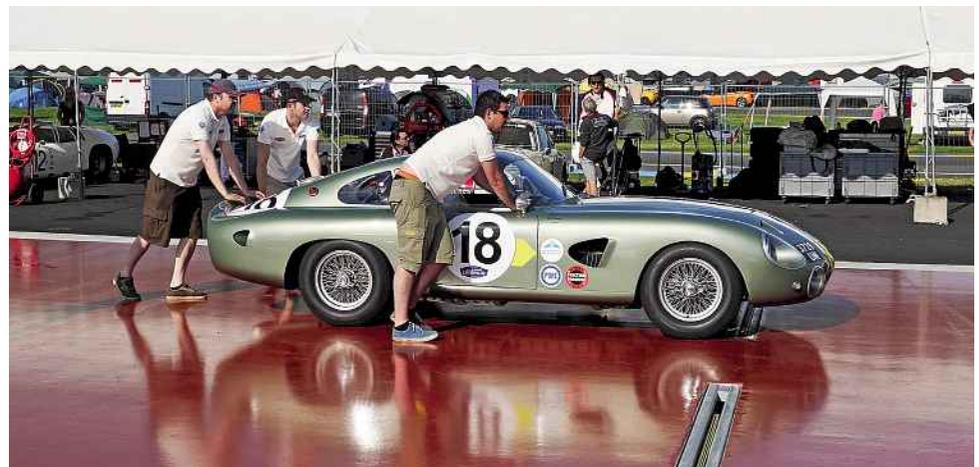
Driving the DB4 back to England on Sunday is a joy. As with so many Astons, it gets better by the mile, and it seems to be saying: 'It's OK, fate

Above and below

Relaxing outside the Hotel de France on the Friday evening, and, below, the 214 replica is pushed towards its close encounter with the President...

is fate and there is always next year.' Even if I never get a chance to race at Le Mans, this was very special. The DB4 loved going there and the DP214 replica looked and felt right at home on the track, just as it should. If the pistons hadn't failed in 1963 they would probably have won. And if I hadn't clipped the sump...

If. Still the most used word in motor racing. 📌



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At launch, the DB4GT was claimed to achieve 0-100 mph and back to standstill in 20 seconds. Interestingly, with a car that was designed with performance in its DNA, the ownership record shows the car's association with some notable racers to complement a recorded podium place of its own.

Acquired by the current owner from Aston Martin specialist RS Williams Ltd., he is a true enthusiast – the car has remained under his stewardship for 12 years as part of a small, discreet and refined

DB4GT

1 of only 75



collection of true classic cars. Membership of the Aston Martin Owners Club has seen the car as a regular participant in events and tours to Finland, France and Spain but most important is the owner's approach to this greatest of classic cars. Throughout his ownership, the car has been serviced, enhanced and maintained by RS Williams Ltd. – their specialist upgrade to a 4.7 litre unleaded specification with gearbox and axle modifications to match. Added to this, the body and chassis have been maintained to the highest standards.

When values soar, too many classic cars spend time as museum pieces. The DB4GT was bred for competition and it is a car whose value lies not in its badge but in its preparation, maintenance and its preparedness for performance. This is not a dusty collector's relic, it is a car that has spent the past decade being cared for under the direction of one of the finest Aston Martin specialists in the World and she is ready for her next owner. **£2,500,000**

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BRIAN JOSCELYNE

NOW & THEN

On the eve of this year's Le Mans, Aston Martin Racing recreated some iconic scenes at the legendary Hotel de France

WORDS DAVID BARZILAY PHOTOGRAPHY DREW GIBSON/VARIOUS

THE USUAL QUIET of the small town of La Chartre-sur-le-Loir was shattered one morning in early June as three Vantage GTEs were fired noisily into life in front of the Hotel de France. Even better, they then proceeded in convoy through the town – just as classic Aston racers had in years gone by when the team used the hotel as their Le Mans base and the cars were driven the 26 miles to and from the circuit. But how did Aston come to be back at La Chartre?

As many of you will know, the Hotel de France was Le Mans HQ for the Aston Martin team between 1953 and 1963, including 1959 when they famously won the race outright under the direction of the legendary John Wyer and team manager Reg Parnell. Aston hadn't officially been back since 1963, but all that changed this year when drivers, cars, team principals and technicians all descended on La Chartre straight after practice for the 24Hrs.

Above and left
The Hotel de France as it was in late 1950s when Aston Martin used it as their Le Mans HQ. And left, today's Aston Martin Racing team recreate a typical scene in the hotel courtyard where the cars were fettled

The return to La Chartre was inspired by the famous images of Astons parked in front of the hotel and in the narrow courtyard where they were prepped for the epic race. Earlier this year, I had a snatched conversation with Aston Martin Racing chairman David Richards about those very images and suggested that it would be fun to recreate them with the present team. David's response was immediate and positive. 'Lets do it!' he said. Martin Overington, the English owner of the hotel and a well-known motorsport enthusiast himself, was similarly positive, and a plan quickly took shape.

And so at dusk on the evening before the photocall, three current drivers – Darren Turner, Richie Stanaway and Mathias Lauda – arrived at the hotel and met up with David Richards in the dining room. This was the very room where John Wyer, the hard-nosed team leader,



Above, from left to right

Current Aston Martin star drivers Mathias Lauda, Richie Stanaway and Darren Turner pay tribute to their predecessors outside the Hotel de France with this year's Vantage GTE Le Mans contenders

would make his plans for Aston Martin's latest assault on the world's greatest endurance race. On this occasion, though, the team chat was all about the plans for the following morning – and specifically about the potential problems of driving three current Le Mans cars with limited ground clearance down narrow streets and through early-morning traffic!

Taking on the role of team manager, David Richards checked what time the cars were due to arrive and what concessions had been allowed by the local mayor and the gendarmerie for driving them through the town. Meanwhile, race operations director Paul Diggins was finalising the arrangements for the visit to La Chartre of cars 97, 98 and 99. Wet-weather tyres in case of rain, fire extinguishers, tools... the list went on. John Wyer himself would have been impressed (probably).

The team were then regaled with stories of Aston's past glories by Maitland Cook, who worked for Wyer for many years. They heard how Wyer and Parnell, together with key drivers such as Stirling Moss and Roy Salvadori, would work out their race strategy right there in the dining room on scraps of paper.

In those days, Cook revealed, the team numbered just 30; at this year's race there were 100. And the total team expenses for the 1959 race were two thousand, three

hundred and sixty one pounds, one shilling and sixpence: less than a set of today's tyres.

Cook explained that at Le Mans the drivers generally didn't actually 'race'; instead they drove to an agreed lap time that would preserve the cars and which was carefully calculated to beat the opposition. One famous exception was in 1959, when Moss was allowed his head; the plan being to encourage the rival Ferraris to chase him and burn themselves out: a successful strategy, as it turned out.

Darren Turner, one of today's star Aston Martin drivers, said afterwards that he'd learned a lot. 'I knew about the hotel and its association with Aston Martin but little about the strategy that was employed or that the team was so small. It seems incredible that they gained the wins that they did. Today we drive at full chat from the first lap to the last; in those days they had to think far more about the cars. It's been a real eye-opener for us and a fantastic opportunity to hear about the history of the Aston Martin racing teams of yesterday.

'These days it's a sprint rather than an endurance race. But when Maitland Cook told us the lap time, which was 4min 20 for the car that won, and 4.22 for the other car, I thought, blimey that's fast, because we're just under 4 minutes. When we saw the video we realised there was a lot less corners, of course, but it's still impressive. I've

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Above and left

The way it was the '50s, when DBR1s were driven to and from the circuit, often by the drivers themselves. AMR got special dispensation to drive this year's cars on the local roads, and the mayor flagged them away

driven cars from that period: I love driving them, but you forget they were difficult. They don't want to turn, they don't want to brake, they don't particularly want to go in a straight line! You're always having to work the wheel. And those guys ran hard. They were competitive. There was a job to do and they were there to get a result. So from that point of view nothing's really changed.

'It was great to see where they prepped the cars and where the team stayed. I stayed in Roy Salvadori's room. It was inspiring, and I felt very honoured to be part of it.'

The hotel bar was packed with local people who came to meet the drivers, to watch a period film of the 1959 win – and recall the parties that were held at the end of a race. Then, the following morning, just before 8am, three transporters crept into the village and up to the hotel. As they revealed their contents, curtains all around the town square were drawn back, a Union Jack was waved with vigour from a first floor window, and a woman in her dressing gown shouted down: *'Superbe!'*

The technicians checked tyre pressures and ride heights and, by the time mayor Jean-Luc Combet arrived with a French Tricolor to wave the cars away, most of the town had turned out. The mayor told Aston Martin that he was proud to have them back, then the drivers started their engines, the crowd cheered and clapped, and the cars left the hotel for a drive through the town. The driver of an 18-wheel Total tanker did a classic double-take as the cars sped towards Le Mans. It had been that sort of day. ♣



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SPOILER ALERT

The Vantage GT12 could just be the most exciting road-going Aston since the One-77. Here's where we find out

WORDS RICHARD MEADEN | PHOTOGRAPHY DEAN SMITH







Wild wings and war paint. Not, it must be said, things ordinarily associated with Aston Martin road cars. But then, as you probably already know, there's nothing remotely ordinary about the Vantage GT12.

Aston has done road-racers before. A long time ago, admittedly. Back in the pre-downforce days when speed was found in the pursuit of reducing mass and minimising drag, cars like the DB4 GT and DB4 GT Zagato were the elegant, intensified results. The GT12 still adheres to the one engineering constant – weight is the enemy! – but its widened and be-winged body sets a very different tone. One where lithe and graceful form has been usurped by a more brutal kind of function.

Of course, being an Aston, there's still beauty to be found, but it's more in the materials used and the attention to detail lavished on every area of the car than in the simple, sculptural beauty of yore. And although it looks like a racing car, today's homologation rules mean it's not actually intended for racing. That robs it of the authenticity of something like a DB4 GT Zagato, but long gone are the days when the only difference between road cars and their racing counterparts was the numbers on the doors. Besides, cars as extreme as today's GT3 and GTE machines have no place on the road. Rather they serve as catalysts, providing the marketing and engineering impetus within companies like Aston Martin, and the appetite amongst the marque's most passionate collectors for the creation of race-inspired creations like the GT12.

We should be grateful for that, because there's no question the GT12 is an extraordinary car. A special-series

model built in a strictly limited run of 100 cars and costing £250,000 before any options, it's an emphatic last hurrah for the Vantage range as its all-new replacement approaches. With 592bhp (up 27bhp on the regular V12 Vantage S) and weighing a substantial 100kg less, it's the most explosively potent Vantage ever. Combined with wide-track suspension, aerodynamic downforce and giant carbon-ceramic brakes, and with its multi-mode damping, stability and ABS systems honed to suit its greater performance, the GT12 promises to be one of the most exciting – and collectable – Aston Martins ever made.

All of which makes it rather extraordinary to be handed the keys to what is currently the one and only GT12 in existence for two unaccompanied days driving on some of the UK's finest roads and, as befits a car with racing in its blood, some laps at the spectacular Anglesey Circuit.

I've been fortunate to spend many (many) happy hours behind the wheel of pretty much every Gaydon-era Vantage model over the last ten years or so, yet none has felt so special, or as serious, as this. It positively pulsates with power and potency, its familiar 5.9-litre V12 honed to a level of urgency and aggression not seen in any road-going Aston this side of the One-77.

As with the exterior, which is formed largely from lightweight carbonfibre, the interior is a cocoon of carefully crafted composites. The new centre-stack features touch-sensitive switches from the Vanquish, plus a fixed infotainment screen where the regular item would retract to sit flush with the dashboard. The ambience is tilted in favour of motorsport-infused minimalism, but satnav, air-con and the optional Bang & Olufsen hi-fi ensure you still have welcome creature comforts. Where there is upholstery – both leather and Alcantara – it is beautifully executed

Above and opposite
Cockpit favours motorsport-inspired minimalism, but satnav, air-con and (on this car) a B&O hi-fi mean it's not short of creature comforts. Copious use of carbonfibre, both inside and out, helped trim 100kg from regular V12 Vantage kerbweight



‘UNLIKE SO MANY OF
TODAY’S SUPER-SPORTS
CARS, THE GT12 ENGAGES
YOU FROM THE MOMENT
YOU START THE ENGINE’







Above and right

Wings, skirts and rear diffuser create aerodynamic downforce, which actually limits the top speed (though 185mph isn't exactly slow). 592bhp V12 engine breathes through a new cast-magnesium intake system and all-titanium exhaust

and ensures the GT12's cockpit is a wonderful place to be.

Given its looks, you might be forgiven for expecting the GT12 to be a prickly and short-tempered road car, but, far from sacrificing on-road manners, it's remarkably well behaved. Thanks to the seven-speed Sportshift III gearbox (there is no manual alternative) it's a doddle to simply jump in and drive. And while you can't help but be mindful of the power and torque at your command, the GT12 is mature and measured in its behaviour, which puts you at ease as you begin to explore its performance.

And my word there's a lot to explore! The experience is naturally dominated by the engine. But I stress the use of the word dominated, not overwhelmed. It's a huge personality, but it doesn't swamp the qualities for which

previous Vantages have been renowned. Of course, anything developing 592bhp and 461lb ft of torque has the potential to deliver a wild ride, but there's a level of subtlety to the GT12 that places it ahead of all others. In particular the steering (still hydraulically assisted) and the damping, which retains the three-stage Normal, Sport and Track settings of the regular V12 Vantage S, albeit retuned to suit the GT12's increased power and grip.

The steering feels a little lighter and freer, with brighter and more detailed feedback. Its rate of response is perfectly judged to give genuine agility, but not so much that it destabilises the rear end, so there's perfect unison in the way it changes direction. What's more, you always know how hard each corner of the car is working, so you can judge



your turn-in speed to perfection. Lean on the front end and you can work the outside tyre just hard enough for it to yield its hold on the road before ever-so-gently pushing wide of your chosen mark. From here you can ease off the power or chase the throttle a little more insistently and feel the tail begin to tighten your line. Better still, the electronic stability control is perfectly judged. It allows the car to work beneath you – just enough to require small steering corrections – but when you need help it gives it, smoothly and calmly intervening like an unseen hand.

In wet conditions, this combination of grip, progression, feel and expertly calibrated driver aids makes the GT12 so much more benign and enjoyable than any near-600bhp rear-wheel-drive road-racer has any right to be. In the dry

it finds more outright grip, and therefore the potential for greater speed, but the poise and progression remain just as accessible. Unlike so many of today's super-sports cars, the GT12 engages you from the moment you start the engine. How much fun you have is not dependent on how fast or how many risks you're prepared to take.

That said, you'll need monastic levels of self-restraint not to be led into temptation by what is without doubt one of the most sensational internal combustion engines money can buy. Breathing through a new cast-magnesium intake system and all-titanium exhaust, it sounds and feels sharper than ever. The engine management system has been remapped to suit, and you can feel the benefits all the way through the rev-range. There's tons of torque, so you



don't need to dig too deep for the GT12 to feel mighty, but its appetite for revs is such that the deeper you do dig, the more you find. If there's a criticism, it's that it's all too easy to hit the rev-limiter, such is the speed with which it devours each gear.

The Sportshift III gearbox isn't as immediate as the best double-clutch transmissions, but it's about as good as single-clutch 'boxes get. There's still a slight hesitation with up and downshifts, but it's only for the briefest split-second and doesn't get in the way of your enjoyment or control. The brakes – enormous 398mm front and 360mm rear carbon-ceramic discs – are boundlessly powerful and beautifully progressive, mirroring the precision and tactility of the steering and the polish of the damping and the stability control system. Rain or shine, it's a magnificent road car that excels where all but the best would falter.

However, to truly experience the GT12's full ferocity you need a race track. Fortunately the Ty Croes circuit, perched on Anglesey's cliff-tops, is within easy striking distance of our favoured Snowdonia road route. Just how much ferocity is hard to credit the first time you floor the throttle and keep it there, gear after gear after gear. The noise is extraordinary, the sustained feeling of hard, physical acceleration mildly dizzying.

With Sport mode engaged to open the exhaust and sharpen the gearshifts, and with the suspension and stability system set to Track, the GT12 feels fabulously fast and reassuring. You really can rely on the stability control system to save your skin, but it rarely feels like it's holding

Vantage GT12

ENGINE V12, 5935cc
MAX POWER 592bhp @ 7000rpm
MAX TORQUE 461lb ft @ 5500rpm
TRANSMISSION Seven-speed automated manual, rear-wheel drive, limited-slip differential, DSC
SUSPENSION Double wishbones, coil springs, three-stage adaptive dampers and anti-roll bar front and rear
STEERING Rack-and-pinion, power-assisted
BRAKES Vented and cross-drilled carbon-ceramic discs, 398mm front, 360mm rear, ABS, EBD
WHEELS 9.5 x 19in front, 11.5 x 19in rear, forged aluminium alloy
TYRES 265/35 ZR19 front, 325/30 ZR19 rear, Michelin Pilot Super Sport
WEIGHT 1565kg
POWER TO WEIGHT 389bhp/ton
0-60MPH 3.5sec (claimed)
TOP SPEED 185mph (claimed)
PRICE From £250,000

you back or depriving you of feeling a hugely powerful rear-wheel-drive car coming alive. The brakes are tireless and the gearbox benefits from the more binary nature of all-out track driving. Switch off the stability control system and the GT12 suffers from an inherent lack of traction, especially as tyre temperatures build. It's the only area you can point to where this car falls short of similarly race-bred rivals from Porsche and Ferrari, although how significant this is depends entirely on how much value you attach to what are essentially road cars chasing lap-times.

Given the inherent rightness of the Vantage road car, and the success of Aston Martin Racing's Vantage-based racers, it's a shame we haven't been treated to a more affordable series-production Vantage in the mould of Porsche's ultra-successful 911 GT3 sports car. There's surely the appetite for one, as witnessed by the speed with which the GT12 was declared sold-out shortly after it was announced. Still, we shouldn't forget how far Aston has come since the turn of the century, nor the financial battles it has had to wage in order to survive a brutal economic downturn and still come out fighting.

The GT12 is a celebration of many things: Aston's racing pedigree, the company's world-leading ability to create ultra-low-volume, ultra-desirable 'specials' and, of course, the enduring brilliance of the Gaydon-era Vantage. For those fortunate hundred who have their names against orders, the GT12 will undoubtedly be a highlight of their collections and a source of exceptional pleasure when they (hopefully) drive the car as it was intended to be driven. **V**



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SLEDGEHAMMER

It's eight years since Aston Martin first squeezed its mighty V12 into the compact Vantage, but the shockwaves can still be felt. Today the V12 Vantage makes a resoundingly good used buy

WORDS PETER TOMALIN | PHOTOGRAPHY MATTHEW HOWELL



IT WAS ON DECEMBER 11, 2007, at a launch party for its then-new design studio at Gaydon that Aston Martin chose to unveil a rather special project on which its top engineers had been quietly beavering away. They called it the V12 Vantage RS Concept. The official line was that it might make limited production, if there was sufficient interest...

That was, of course, just a line. Aston had already decided it was going ahead, and the RS Concept was already a fully running prototype with a tuned, dry-sumped, 600bhp version of the 5.9-litre V12. But even Aston was surprised

by the press reaction – and the unprecedented number of calls to dealers. This was never going to be a limited edition. A little over a year later, the V12 Vantage (no longer RS) broke cover in production form. The engine was now the wet-sumped 510bhp unit from the DBS; the RS's active rear aerofoil had been dropped, but otherwise it was remarkably true to the concept, right down to the prominent bonnet vents, essential to keep the V12 cool.

Squeezing its largest engine into its smallest car was no mean feat. The task of assessing the feasibility had originally been contracted-out

to an independent engineering consultancy, which concluded that it couldn't be done. So Aston brought it back in house to prove that it could. The main packaging issue wasn't the V12 engine's width, but rather its height. For the RS, the bonnet line was raised to clear the leading edges; for the production car the front subframe and the engine's oil sump were both modified to allow it to sit a little lower. Meanwhile, the V12's extra weight (c100kg) was offset by extensive use of carbonfibre (bonnet, diffuser, seats, brakes) so the eventual overall weight penalty was just 50kg.



'ENTHUSIASTIC DRIVERS TOOK THE V12 VANTAGE TO THEIR HEARTS - AND THEY CONTINUE TO CHERISH THIS MOST EXHILARATING OF ASTONS'

The resulting power-to-weight ratio of 308bhp per ton meant virtually supercar levels of performance. Aston Martin claimed a top speed of 190mph and 0-60mph in 4.1sec, and although independent road-testers couldn't quite match that (our sister title, *evo*, recorded 4.4sec, with 0-100mph in 9.7), the V12V was widely acclaimed as the most exciting Aston in pure driving terms for many a long year – probably since the V8 Zagato of the late 1980s.

The rest of the spec was suitably hardcore. Early cars all came with a good old-fashioned stick-shift gearbox, a Graziano six-speeder (the Sportshift automated manual wasn't available until the arrival of the S version). There was a mechanical limited-slip differential along with three-stage electronic traction control. The braking system featured the DBS's massive carbon-ceramic discs, the conventional fixed-rate dampers were tuned to give a firm ride, and the tyres were near-track-spec Pirelli P Zero Corsas. These offered phenomenal grip on warm, dry roads – and scarily little purchase on cold, wet ones. Indeed, many owners have subsequently switched to regular P Zeros.

So it wasn't for the faint-hearted, and the £135,000 price tag (a cool £50,000 more than a contemporary V8) lifted it right into junior Ferrari territory. But enthusiastic drivers took the V12V to their hearts – and continue to cherish this most exhilarating of modern Astons. As a result, the age-old laws of supply and demand have kept prices buoyant; values of early coupés have fallen very little, if at all, in recent times, with even a late '09 or early 2010 car still likely to command £80,000, and up to £90,000 for a low-mileage example with a watertight service history and all the best toys. In fact standard equipment levels are high, but the B&O hi-fi is one sought-after option.

As is the modern Aston way, there would be a number of variations on the basic theme, such as the Carbon Black edition, which arrived in early 2010 and boasted unique Carbon Black metallic paint, a carbonfibre side-strake, ten-spoke gloss-black diamond-turned alloys, carbon-shelled seats, black leather trim with silver stitching, and 700W Premium Sound.

An open version of the V12V was naturally eagerly anticipated. In fact the Roadster didn't arrive until autumn 2012, with production limited to just 101 cars. List price was £150,000 and both the mechanical spec – including the six-speed manual 'box – and the performance figures were identical to those of the coupé. Unsurprisingly, these are highly prized today.

V12 Vantage production ended in June 2013, by which time 1200 had been built: not a huge number by modern Aston standards. Any tinge of disappointment was soon chased away by the announcement of its replacement, the V12 Vantage S. Thanks to a new Bosch engine management system and variable camshaft timing, Aston's engineers had extracted a further 55bhp and 37lb ft of torque from the V12, lifting peak outputs to 565bhp and 457lb ft. This was the same engine that had appeared in the new Vanquish; installed in the smaller, lighter Vantage, the results were sensational.

Mated for the first time to the seven-speed Sportshift paddle-operated gearbox (the stick shift was now officially dead), it gave genuine supercar performance: the 0-60mph time was slashed to 3.7sec and top speed was a claimed 205mph. It was the quickest series-production Aston to date; only the One-77 hypercar was faster. A year later, in summer 2014, the 201mph V12 Vantage S Roadster joined the range, becoming the fastest Aston convertible to date. Both have three-stage adaptive damping, with Normal, Sport and Track modes, and Servotronic steering with varying levels of assistance.

Arguably the most desirable derivative of all

Opposite and below

Pristine 2009 car at Aston Martin Works is now sold, but others are available. No question, V12 is a tight fit under the Vantage's bonnet, but V12V is proving one of the most issue-free (and highly prized) of Gaydon-era Astons

is the V12 Zagato, just 101 of which were built, with an eye-watering price tag of £396,000. But we're into exotic territory here. Even the 'regular' V12 Vantage is an astonishingly quick, capable and desirable machine.

So, what to look out for if you're tempted. The good news, according to specialist John McGurk, is that by 2009 the Gaydon Astons were generally well sorted: 'By the time they launched the V12 Vantage, they'd ironed out all the niggles that had affected the early Vantages and the earlier V12 engines – timing cover leaks, ECU gremlins, oxygen sensor issues and so on. Yes, the V12 is a squeeze under the bonnet, but there don't appear to be any cooling issues or any problems with routine servicing. The engines themselves are very reliable. One thing I would highlight is battery age and condition, as a poor battery can lead to electrical gremlins.'

A full service history is obviously important – servicing should be every 10,000 miles or 12 months, whichever comes sooner; McGurk charges £712.45 for a standard service – but it's not the whole story. The V12 can use oil, so the level needs to be checked fastidiously – if you're viewing a privately advertised car, it would be wise to ascertain that the owner is aware of this.

The biggest unscheduled bill you're likely to face is for a new clutch: well over £2500, even from an independent. 'It's the single biggest weakpoint,' says John McGurk, 'though of course it depends how the car is driven. They





V12 VANTAGE COUPE

ENGINE V12, 5935cc **MAX POWER** 510bhp @ 6500rpm **MAX TORQUE** 420lb ft @ 5750rpm **TRANSMISSION** Six-speed manual gearbox (Sportshift automated manual option on later cars), rear-wheel drive, limited-slip differential, DSC **SUSPENSION** Double wishbones, coil springs, telescopic dampers and anti-roll bar front and rear **STEERING** Rack-and-pinion, power-assisted **BRAKES** Vented and cross-drilled carbon-ceramic discs, 398mm front, 360mm rear, ABS, EBD **WHEELS** 9 x 19in front, 11 x 19in rear, aluminium alloy **TYRES** 255/35 ZR19 front, 295/30 ZR19 rear, Pirelli P Zero **WEIGHT** 1680kg **POWER TO WEIGHT** 308bhp/ton **0-60MPH** 4.1sec (claimed) **TOP SPEED** 190mph (claimed) **PRICE NEW** £135,000 in 2009 (£160,886 in today's money) **VALUES TODAY** £80,000-£90,000 ('S' from £100,000)

can last as long as 35,000 miles, but as little as 6000. Clutch judder or slip are the clues. So find a nice big hill and go up in third or fourth gear with maximum throttle from low revs.'

Far less common, but an even bigger potential expense, is having to replace the ceramic discs: 'We've yet to replace a set on a V12 Vantage, and they really should last an awfully long time, but if a car's been tracked and the brakes have got really hot and they haven't done any cooling-down laps, you can get problems. The surface becomes really rough, then you put a new set of pads on and they get ripped to bits.' If the disc feels like sandpaper, take note: a complete set of discs and pads is a five-figure sum!

Corrosion shouldn't be an issue, but do check the carbonfibre front splitter and rear diffuser. 'We've known people to reverse over a kerb and crack the diffuser. They're very difficult to repair because of the weave, so they usually have to be replaced. A new diffuser is around £3500.

'Tyre choice is an interesting area with the V12 Vantage. They were originally on Pirelli P Zero Corsas, which are sticky when it's dry, but if the conditions change then the car can be quite a handful. Later cars went to P Zeros, which are better suited to general road use. OK, they're not as impressive on a circuit, but how much time do you spend on track? Also check rear tread depth; as soon as they start to go off, the difference in the car is huge, so anything less than 4mm and we'd say replace them.

'Another thing to consider is the sports seats, which are a fixed bucket and definitely not for everyone. Even if you get on with them, it could be an issue at resale time. Speaking of which, in my experience the brighter the colour the better. Yellows, bright blues... the V12 Vantage is just that sort of car, a really special Aston Martin.'

Indeed it is. The V12 Vantage is not only monumentally quick, it handles and stops brilliantly, it sounds glorious and it looks stunning. It's also relatively rare by recent Aston Martin standards, and it's the last V12-engined Aston with a traditional manual gearshift. I wonder those values are holding so firm. **V**

What the road testers said at the time

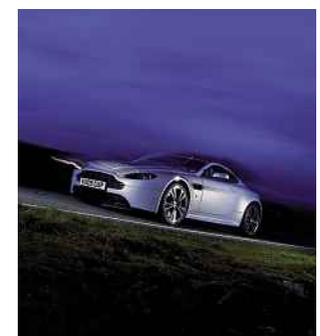
'SUSTAINED ACCELERATION out of, say, a roundabout is incredibly linear - no peaks and troughs in the delivery, just an unwavering line climbing up the speed-versus-time graph. So it feels fast but somehow not mind-blowing. However, on a give-and-take-road where you're constantly slowing and accelerating, the V12 is brutal. Whatever gear, whatever revs, the shrink-wrapped engine leaps forward as soon as your right foot flexes. No lag, no wind-up, it's as though you've instantly hit the supercar sweet-spot every time you accelerate.

Fortunately, the V12 Vantage is equipped with the huge carbon brakes from the DBS, and they're some of the best I've ever tried, progressive and powerful right from the top of the pedal's travel.

Part of the braking performance is, naturally, down to the tyres. Indeed the Pirelli P Zero Corsas are the other defining factor around which the car was engineered. They are an extreme road tyre and the fact they are fitted shows just what the philosophy is for the V12 Vantage. You're sitting in a fixed-back carbon bucket seat and holding an Alcantara-covered steering wheel for a reason: the V12 Vantage is no freakish, over-engineered dragster, no soft straight-line train, it is a gentleman's road-racer. Grip [in the dry] is phenomenal, the whole car much more connected to the surface of the road than either a V8 or DBS, the alacrity of direction changes just what you'd expect from such a short wheelbase.

There is no doubt that the V12 Vantage is the best car that Aston makes. It's got character, yet it's refined; it's got instant pace yet a depth that makes you want to live with it. It feels like a truly British Aston, and I love it.'

- **evo magazine, July 2009**



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DB4 Series 2 LHD

1960 78,000 miles California Sage over Black £375,850

DBS Coupe

2008 (58) 16,500 miles Meteorite Over Obsidian £79,850
Vanquish

2003 (03) 45,000 miles Tour de France Blue
over Parchment £59,850

DB9 Volante

2006 (56) 23,000 miles Tungsten over Iron Ore £49,850
2006 (06) 30,900 miles Rothesay Red over Sandstorm £46,850
2006 (06) 32,100 miles Titanium over Phantom £46,850

DB9 Coupe

2007 (57) 19,100 miles Onyx Black over Obsidian £49,850
2007 (56) 50,690 miles Aston Green over Sandstorm £39,850
2004 (54) 27,000 miles Titanium over Phantom £39,850
2005 (05) 41,000 miles Grigio Titanium over Sandstorm £38,850
2005 (05) 44,500 miles Tungsten Silver over Falcon £37,850

DB9 Coupe Manual

2005 (05) 27,650 miles Titanium over Phantom £39,850

V8 Vantage 4.7 Coupe

2008 (58) 42,500 miles Titanium over Aurora £45,850

V8 Vantage Roadster

2008 (57) 17,900 miles Tungsten over Obsidian £47,850
2008 (57) 12,500 miles Titanium over Obsidian and Chancellor £47,850
2007 (07) 23,100 miles Onyx Black over Obsidian £47,850
2007 (07) 24,000 miles Titanium over Iron Ore £45,850

V8 Vantage Coupe 4.3

2008 (57) 38,600 miles Tungsten Silver over Phantom £44,850
2007 (07) 29,600 miles Onyx over Obsidian £39,850
2006 (06) 17,880 miles Meteorite over Obsidian £39,850
2006 (06) 37,700 miles Meteorite over Phantom £37,850
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RETURN TO THE 'RING

Katharine Minchin's unique Aston was built to race at the Nürburgring. Eighty years later, she took it back there

WORDS PETER TOMALIN

PHOTOGRAPHY CHARLIE MAGEE



Were you to meet Katharine Minchin at the local church fete, you'd probably have her down as the archetypal English gentlewoman. Cream teas, choral society, croquet on the vicarage lawn, that sort of thing. And you wouldn't be so wide of the mark: she does indeed belong to the local choral society, she's a church warden, and she actually does coach croquet. It's just that there's another side to Katharine – one that right now I'm privileged to be witnessing at close quarters.

I'm squeezed into the passenger seat of 'Mary' – Katharine's completely wonderful 1934 Aston – and we're hammering along the leafy lanes near her home in West Sussex. It's clearly a very physical and exacting car to drive, from the unassisted steering and brakes to the non-synchro gearbox (back-to-front layout, of course, and not forgetting the central throttle pedal). And Katharine, 71, is really *driving* it, hefting the huge, narrow-rimmed wheel through the turns, blipping the throttle and double-declutching to smooth the downshifts, and, when the road opens up, gunning the game little Bertelli 'four' for all it's worth, cut-off exhaust barking enthusiastically somewhere below my left elbow. 'Before the engine rebuild I restricted myself to around 3500rpm,' she shouts above the din. 'Not any more!'

As I duck below the aero screen, the view down the long bonnet with those cycle wings bobbing busily either side and the hedgerows rushing past is mesmerising. I glance across at the speedo, which has passed 60mph and is now climbing towards the national limit. The knuckles on my left hand, which had been resting – nonchalantly I hope – on the top-roll of the dash, whiten ever so slightly as we thunder towards genteel Midhurst. Just as the 30mph limit hoves into view, Katharine lifts her right foot and pivots to the brake pedal. Happily, Mary sheds speed as impressively as she gains it. 'Excellent brakes,' affirms Katharine, as we burble into town.

Mary is clearly a very special car, and one with a remarkable story. The latest chapter was written this summer, when Katharine drove her around the notorious Nürburgring Nordschleife, eighty years to the day since she had made her race debut there. More of that in a moment.

To begin at the beginning, a rolling chassis was ordered from Feltham by a German racing driver, Werner Hillegaart, and delivered to him in late 1934. But Hillegaart wasn't happy. Apparently he'd asked for works racing specification, but what he got was a standard MkII, chassis number G4/463/L. So he sent it back. Aston relented and the mechanicals were updated to Ulster spec, which included a much-uprated engine with fully machined billet

crankshaft, high-lift camshaft, bigger inlet valves with double valve-springs, and bigger SU carbs. The changes were acknowledged on the amended chassis plate, with an 'I' stamped next to the 'L' to create a 'U'. But to avoid export/import complications, Aston sent the car back with the MkII's slatted grille rather than the Ulster's usual mesh, so that outwardly it would appear to be the same car. Satisfied, Hillegaart then dispatched the chassis to a German coachbuilder, Gläser Karosserie, of Dresden, to be bodied. The unique coachwork, with its distinctive tail and cutaway doors, remains with the car to this day.

Hillegaart's first event in the Aston was the famous Eifelrennen race on the tree-lined Nordschleife on June 16, 1935. Sharing the track with such legends as Rosemeyer and Caracciola, he scored a fine victory in the sports car class. He entered again in 1936 and '37, though he was unable to repeat his winning feat. Records show he also returned in 1938, finishing third in the 'German Sports Car Race'.

Then came the war. The Gläser coachworks were destroyed during the bombing of Dresden. 'There are stories that Hillegaart was interned,'

Above right

Werner Hillegaart celebrates winning the sports car class in the 1935 Eifelrennen, the Aston's debut race; the car has survived in wonderfully original condition and is driven with gusto by current owner Katharine Minchin, rain or shine





says Katharine, 'but what we do know is he lived to a ripe age. In the late 1980s we got in touch with his family, because we'd loved to have found out more, but by the time we got through, Alzheimer's had set in.'

After the war, the Aston found its way back to the UK and competed sporadically in sports car races in the hands of several owners before in February 1953 it was advertised for sale in *Motor Sport* magazine. The ad caught the eye of a keen young sportsman called Bill Minchin.

'This was many years before I met him,' says Katharine. 'Bill was 22 at the time, a great golfer and a keen motorcyclist. He'd set off one day on his motorbike with his clubs; hit a patch of ice; he and his clubs went one way, the bike went the other way, and a lorry went between them. Mother was appalled and told him he had to get something with four wheels, but Bill didn't like anything that was coming off the production line. Then he spotted the ad. I think he paid £400 for her, which was a lot of money in 1953.'

It was Bill who named the Aston 'Mary' on account of the blood-red coachwork. He, too, did a fair bit of racing with her through the 1950s and '60s, first with the AMOC, then the Vintage Sports-Car Club. 'I think she also served him well on the dating front!' smiles Katharine. 'However he didn't get married until he was nearly 54, when he met me.'

It was 1984, and Bill clearly recognised a kindred spirit in Katharine, then recently

widowed. She'd already led quite a life, growing up on the family farm (with David Brown tractors) before joining the Fleet Air Arm straight from school 'because my brothers were being very boring about any boyfriends who walked me home'. In the Navy she worked on jet aircraft and learned to ski and dive. She also met her first husband, a dental surgeon, whom she helped to run a dental practice in Petersfield after they'd both left the Navy. Sadly he developed rheumatoid arthritis and later died from a heart attack.

It was soon after that she met Bill, the seemingly eternal bachelor. He was clearly smitten. 'Nobody else had driven Mary since Bill bought her in 1953,' says Katharine. 'When someone from the VSCC saw me driving her, word went round very quickly: "He's obviously serious about this one – she's driving his car!"'

They married in 1985. 'Bill taught me to drive Mary – and enjoyed seeing me enjoy driving her. There's an awful lot of chaps who have interesting cars and wouldn't dream of allowing their wives near them. I was very fortunate.'

They travelled all over Britain and enjoyed several jaunts into Europe. 'We had a lot of fun with her and met a lot of wonderful people through her,' says Katharine. 'Through that, I've driven vintage Bentleys; I even drove a locomotive because Bill's best man was restoring an old line that Beaching had dug up. Oh, and a traction engine. The torque... staggering!'

Sadly, when he was in his 70s, Bill began to develop vascular dementia and died five years ago. But Katharine has continued to relish driving Mary at every opportunity.

'I use her all year round,' she says. 'I won't set out if it's raining because that's just miserable, but if I get caught out, well, fine. And I don't take her out if they've salted the roads. But otherwise she gets used all the time – what's the point of having them if you don't use them? I can't be doing with these over-shiny "boiled sweets" that look like they're never used.'

'The body, as far as we can tell, is completely original, although the colour changed from the original black, probably when the car came back from Germany. The leather is the original. It's now incredibly battered, but I think this winter I've got enough saved up to get it restored. Not replaced, mind; just restored.'

Mechanically, the Aston feels wonderfully fit. Just as only a small handful of people have driven Mary since the '50s, only three people have ever had their hands on the engine – Bill himself, that doyen of pre-war Astons the late Bill Elwell-Smith, and latterly his 'protégé', Rob Davies, who now runs Elwell-Smith Engineering.

'I can do sparks and oil and water and all that sort of clobber,' says Katharine. 'Anything bigger I entrust to Rob. No-one knows more about old Astons.' It was Rob who prepared Mary for her momentous return to the Nürburgring this summer. So how did that all



Clockwise from right
Bill Minchin bought the car in 1953; this shot was taken after he met Katharine in 1984; sadly he died five years ago. Mechanically the car is Ulster spec; body was by German coachbuilder Dresler; whole car is fabulously original



Right
 Back at the notorious Nürburgring Nordschleife for the first time since the late 1930s, 'Mary' felt right at home, even taking on the famous banked Karussell. Katharine saw 95mph on the longest straight



Robin Minchin/Markus Kaitenbach

come about? 'I thought it would be fun to celebrate her 80th anniversary,' says Katharine, 'and I knew Aston had a test facility at the 'Ring, so I rang Gaydon and fortunately got through to a very helpful chap called Keith Brissenden, who put me in touch with Susanne Engelhardt [assistant manager of the Nürburgring Test Centre]. Susanne and her colleagues couldn't have been more helpful. They even offered to lodge Mary in their garage at the circuit.

'Even then, I did wonder if I might have bitten off more than I could chew. When I talked to my insurance company they pointed out that one of the clauses specifically excluded driving at the 'Ring! I was also warned it would be a public session, so I'd be constantly buzzed by testosterone-fuelled boy-racers.'

Undaunted, Katharine pressed ahead and in mid-June she and Rob, accompanied by her son, Kester, and great-nephew, Robin, set out for Germany, with Mary on a trailer behind Rob's Range Rover. 'I had considered driving her out, but Rob dissuaded me. Probably just as well.'

Come Tuesday June 16, eighty years to the day since Werner Hillegart raced the Aston to class glory in the Eifelrennen, Katharine prepared to make her own 'Ring debut.

The 12.9-mile track itself is daunting enough, and Katharine had had only one 'sighter' lap, in Rob's Range Rover the previous evening. Then she got the news she'd been hoping for: the 'Ring authorities had granted exclusive access for one clear lap, with Rob going ahead in the Range Rover to show her the lines.

'It was so exciting. I hadn't really appreciated how very long in the 'box she is. Rob had said I could go up to 5000 in second and third [he'd replaced the old Hiduminium conrods with steel items] so I hardly got into top. Every time I was about to change, there was another corner!

'Once she's really taken off and she's up on the cam, she's actually quite light to handle. Which was a surprise. At home I regularly get her up to 60, 65 [mph] but nothing like the speeds I was able to get her to on the 'Ring. On the long final straight we were around 95.

'My only sadness as I was driving round was why didn't we do this to celebrate 70 years, when Bill would still have been here.'

Would she do it again? 'Love to. There's a reunion weekend each year for Eifelrennen racers, so we might well be back next summer.'

Choral society commitments permitting. ♣

With thanks to Rob Davies (tel: 07772 384104), and all at AML's Nürburgring Test Centre.



MkII to Ulster spec

CONSTRUCTION Steel ladder chassis, ash frame, aluminium body panels **ENGINE** In-line 4-cylinder, 1495cc
MAX POWER c85bhp @ 5250rpm **MAX TORQUE** n/a **TRANSMISSION** Four-speed manual, rear-wheel drive
SUSPENSION Solid axles front and rear, semi-elliptic leaf springs, friction-type dampers
STEERING Worm-and-castor **BRAKES** 14in diameter steel drums front and rear, cable-operated
WHEELS 18in wire-spoke front and rear **TYRES** 5.30x18 crossply
WEIGHT c900kg **POWER TO WEIGHT** c100bhp/ton **0-60MPH** n/a **TOP SPEED** c95mph

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The last Ulster built lead an active early life with 5 races at Brooklands between 1936 and 1938, an appearance at Donnington in 1937 and an attempt at the Scottish Rally in 1936 as well as some more minor events pre-war.

Post war, there is solid club racing and concours history. In 1982, I5/591/U was re-built by Morntane Engineering (Now Ecurie Bertelli) with an exact copy of the two seat version of the Ulster body. **A frequent participant in the modern Mille Miglia with no fewer than 10 appearances!** This is a car that will be welcomed to any important event around the world.

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'RING OF ROSES

In 2006, a V8 Vantage called Rose debuted in the Nürburgring 24Hrs. We drive it back there, as 'Rose 2' prepares to take on The Green Hell

WORDS JETHRO BOVINGDON | PHOTOGRAPHY DREW GIBSON





Precisely 481.5 miles from here, around 800 drivers and heaven knows how many mechanics, tyre-fitters, race engineers and spectators are praying for sunshine, blue skies and the flush of warm sun on skin. Here at Gaydon it's drizzling, cold and gloomy. Not the perfect start to our own little celebration of Aston Martin's adventures and successes at the Nürburgring 24 Hours. And yet, having said that, I can't stop smiling.

The cold air is welcome because I've got to travel those 481.5 miles in a car with no soundproofing, no air-conditioning and fixed plastic windows, the driver's side mercifully equipped with a small sliding panel to let in a bit of fresh air. A touch of drizzle blowing into the car is a small price to pay for not boiling in a Sparco racing seat for the next couple of days. Of course, the real reason I'm happy is yellow with green flashes, streaked with rubber marks, splattered with insects and idling to the heavy beat of a 4.3-litre V8. Let me introduce you to Rose. She's led quite the life but has lost none of her allure and the journey ahead is just a light snack for this road-going race-car of astounding provenance and endurance.

Rose's story began in late 2005, when a small group of colleagues at Gaydon hatched a plan to prove their new sports car at the Nürburgring 24 Hours. And at 4pm on June 17, 2006, Rose started her first round-the-clock race at the most unforgiving of venues. A real foray into the unknown. The next day, looking battle-hardened but without a dent or crease sulling those lines, Rose took the chequered flag in 24th position overall and 4th in class – a class that included many ferocious purpose-built race-cars.

And now, as the factory team prepares for its tenth N24, we're taking Rose home. As in 2006, she'll be driven to the track on public roads, but this year Rose is just a spectator. However, Rose 2 – a new V8 Vantage N430 finished in the same livery – will defend her honour and serve as a poignant reminder of how a few keen engineers and drivers made a little bit of magic in the Eifel mountains. A little bit of magic that has in turn created a new endurance racing dynasty that's spread from the 'Ring to Bahrain, Le Mans and beyond.

Dave King, director of Special Projects and Motorsport, remembers that first 'Ring adventure like it was yesterday. 'I went out not knowing what to expect, the sheer scale of it,' he tells me. 'It was a really hot, sweltering day, there were fans all around on the road near Brunchen [one of the biggest spectator areas for the Nordschleife]. We'd been to a VLN race here before but there was nobody around, and I remember just being a bit shell-shocked by it all.'

If the tiny team were a little intimidated by this extraordinary event, they were at least confident in Rose, as she'd come to be known. The car started as a silver prototype for the V8 Vantage

road car programme, designated CP25, and with extensive development at the 'Ring they suspected she'd go pretty well.

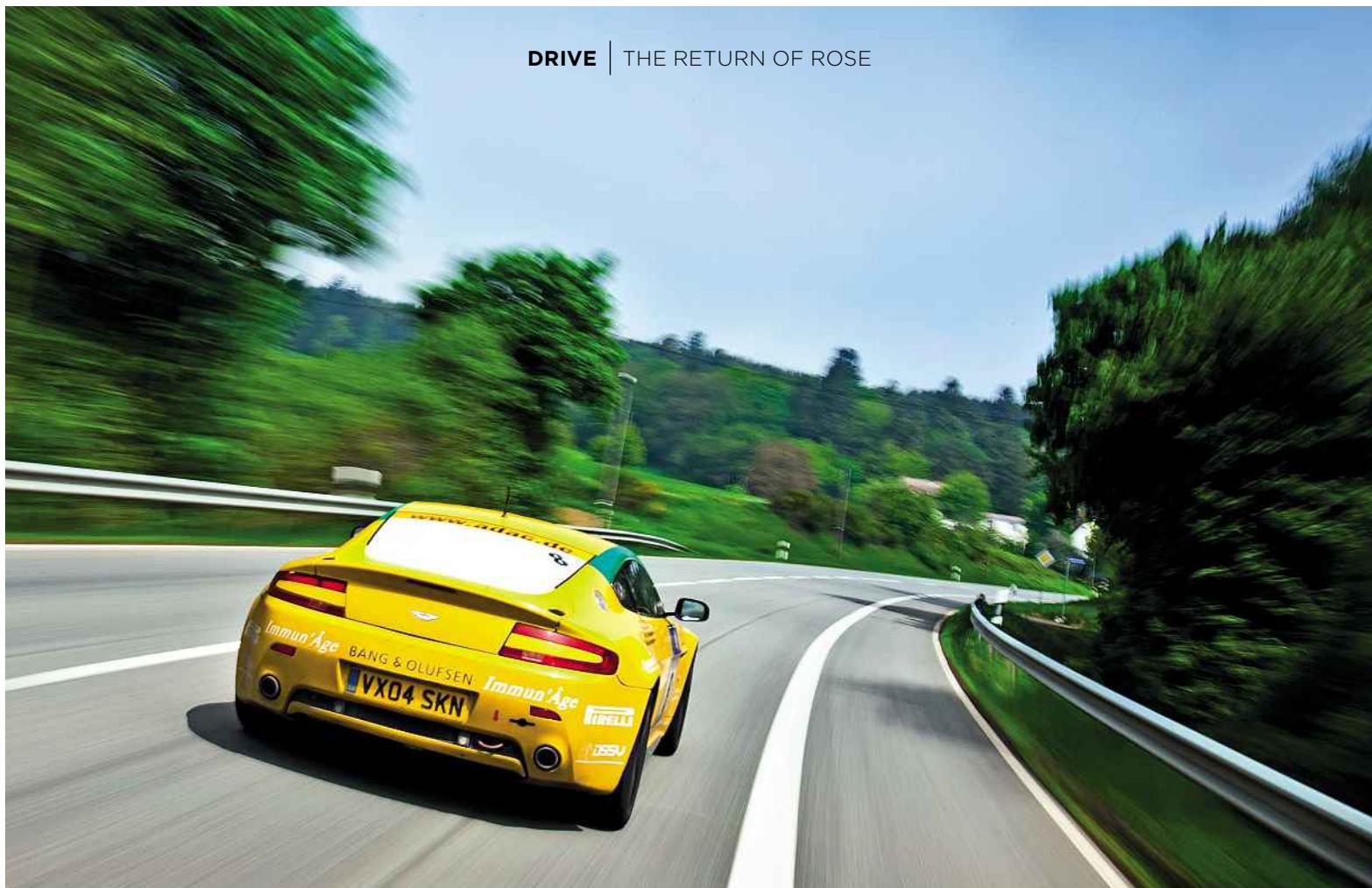
'There were hot air balloons and fireworks and bands and music and it was so extraordinary

Left from the top
Original Rose prepares to set off from Gaydon, still wearing the names of the last to race her (back in 2009); boarding the Eurotunnel train, and a quick pit-stop for Bovingdon en route to the 'Ring



'It's ridiculously special to be in *this* car heading to *that* racetrack'





we were hooked by it, captivated,' continues King. 'And the car just ran and ran and ran and ran. We had Dr Bez in the car, Chris Porritt [then chief engineer], Horst Van Saurma [legendary track tester for *Sport Auto* magazine] and Wolfgang Schuhbauer [Jaguar development driver] who we borrowed for the weekend. And we ended up 24th overall. The classes were different back then so we were in with all sorts of more powerful V8s, but we were 4th in class. We were so thrilled, and surprised in a way, to have done quite so well.'

Although Rose is essentially a stripped and lightened early 4.3-litre V8 Vantage fitted with a roll-cage, the vibe is almost pure racer when you fold yourself through the narrow aperture created by the door bars of that metal latticework. There's just one Sparco race seat (the same one James May famously sat in naked for a *Top Gear* road trip. *Eeww*), the aluminium structure is completely exposed, the dash and centre console are the same shape as in the road car

Above and opposite
Rose closes in on the Nürburgring. This year's N24 saw her successor, Rose 2 (car no.49) look to uphold Gaydon honour. Dave King (top right) and Andy Hindhaugh (centre left) are now N24 veterans

but trimmed in more rudimentary carbonfibre and littered with toggle switches and buttons labelled with yellow stickers, and a couple of electronic displays are tacked on, the largest being fed fresh air by a fat pipe connected to a little vent formed in the passenger side window. You sit very low, this compact car

rising out around you to make it feel broad and a little unwieldy at first. The steering wheel is production-spec but trimmed in Alcantara, and to the right is the stubby flat-topped lever for the six-speed manual gearbox.

That really flummoxes me for a second or two. Of course, all early V8 Vantages had an H-pattern manual 'box, but to find a modern-looking racer without paddles is unusual to say the least. And the thought of driving around the 'Ring at racing speeds and having to operate a clutch, stir a lever and rev-match every downshift with a bit of good old-fashioned heel-and-toeing is mind-boggling. Throw in the blinding glare of the faster cars approaching behind, corners wrapped in darkness, slower traffic, erratic driving (the driving standards in the race are notoriously 'variable') and it makes for a pretty busy nightshift.

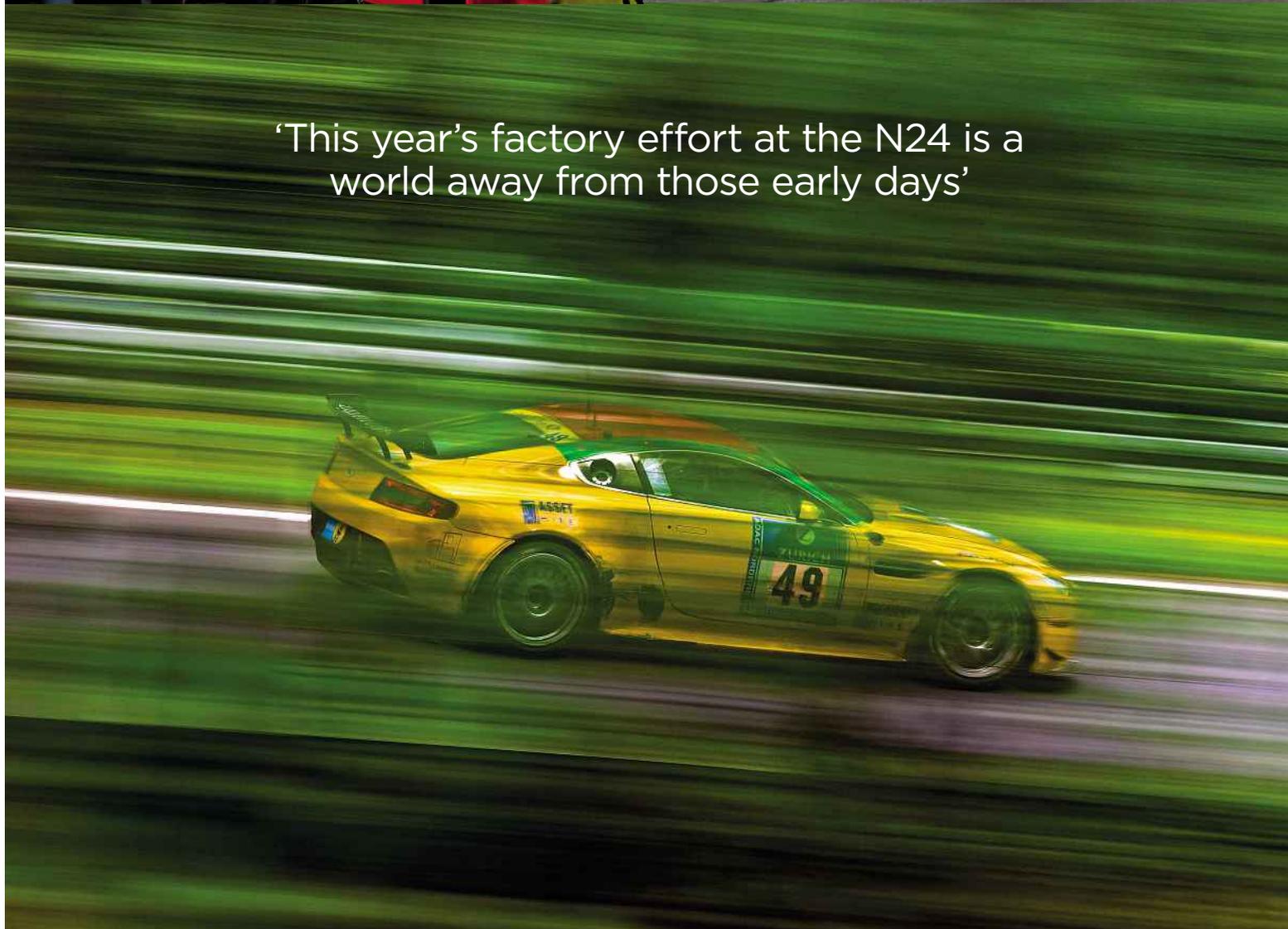
There are no such worries as we slip out of Gaydon and chew up the drive to the Eurotunnel. Rose rides like a highly focused road car – firm but not jarringly so – the steering is smooth, the engine is a real peach that revs and revs given half a chance, and although it's noisy and I get a numb right buttock after about 30 minutes, the driving experience is almost civilised. You really do feel that this is a road car minus the creature comforts rather than a racer with numberplates. It also feels ridiculously special to be in *this* car heading to *that* racetrack.

This year's factory effort at the N24 is a world away from those early days. The team are already there, of course, Aston





'This year's factory effort at the N24 is a world away from those early days'



Martin Racing prepping two full works V8 Vantage GT3s that should be in with a shout of overall victory, a pair of the fearsome new Vantage GT12s looking to prove their pedigree, and Rose 2, whose drivers will once again include Dr Bez.

In 2006 it wasn't quite so slick. Andy Hindhaugh, lead technician on the project, remembers fondly the shorter VLN races that were tackled in the run-up to the big one: 'For that first VLN race we had no garage, just a little van right out of the way,' he says with a grin. 'Our "garage" was one of those dead spaces between the pit garages. And yet that first VLN race we were 3rd in class...' For the 2006 N24, the Aston team used Jaguar's test centre as a base, and throughout it remained a relatively tiny if hugely passionate pet project.

Across France and Belgium, Rose feels a little bit on the leash but there are clues to why it was so successful in 2006 (and again in '07, '08 and '09). Quite aside from its incredible toughness (it ran without any mechanical dramas in the later races too, with a class win in 2008 and also squeezing in the Bahrain 24-hour race and success in the first ever GT4 category race at Silverstone), it's just so intuitive to drive. The 4.3-litre engine lacks a little muscle compared with a 4.7 but it's got the same precise delivery, the 'box must have had an incredible work-out but the throw is accurate and requires just enough effort to feel robust and mechanical without ever baulking, and when we veer away from the autoroutes the chassis is so sweetly balanced. Rose changes direction so cleanly and although she lacks the rabid turn-in of a full-blown racer she's just so stable and positively pulsates with feedback.

It's this combination of immense reliability and inherent poise that are the foundations for tackling the Nürburgring, and Rose, all these years later, feels tailor-made for the place. Peeling away from the A1 south of Cologne and onto the smooth, fast roads that cut through the forests of the Eifel, I can finally unleash Rose and get a taste of her abilities beyond making a surprisingly capable continent-crusher... Just in time, the sun burns through the sulky grey cloud and soon the roads are basking in sunshine. That V8 engine sounds fabulous, ripping up to the limiter again and again; the ride gets more settled with speed, and the car seems to really bite into the road. I daren't turn off the traction control in this precious car but, even so, the way it bleeds between gentle understeer and smooth oversteer even under the watchful eye of the electronics feels fantastically predictable. Rose pulls into the Aston Martin Test Centre with reputation intact, having not missed a beat. I'm genuinely sorry that the journey is over but relieved to hand her back in one piece.

Dave King is waiting and pleased to see Rose, too. 'I still remember standing on the pit wall in '06, seeing the sunrise and realising the car was still going. That was a really special moment. And just seeing the speed of the fast cars at night and how many cars there were and that feeling of euphoria afterwards when you've stayed up all night and you're exhausted... Everyone's emotional. Unless you've been a part of it you can't understand people getting teary, but when you're knackered and you've worked so hard it's really, really special. There's nothing else like it and this car is where it all started.'

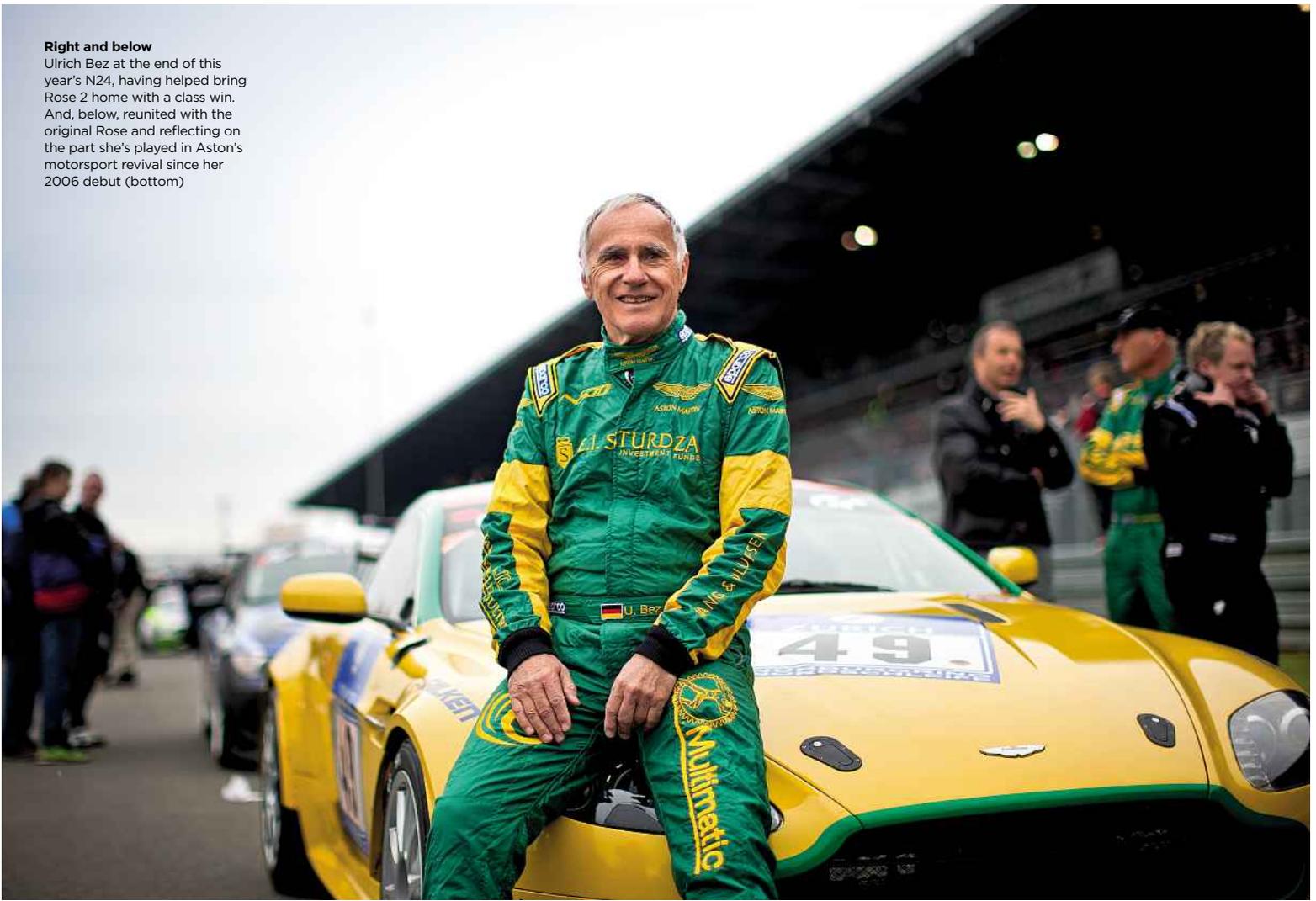
Below

This year's N24 was not a particularly happy one for Aston Martin, with most of its cars retiring. One exception, though, was Rose 2, caught here mid-pit stop, which ran faultlessly throughout



Right and below

Ulrich Bez at the end of this year's N24, having helped bring Rose 2 home with a class win. And, below, reunited with the original Rose and reflecting on the part she's played in Aston's motorsport revival since her 2006 debut (bottom)



Dr Bez and Rose

Aston Martin's former CEO tells us how Rose came to be – and why she's an irreplaceable part of the company's history

FIRST OF ALL, in the past we had no tool, no car that was suitable for the Nürburgring. Of course when we conceived this car I had always in mind what Porsche has done for some time, what I have done with Porsche with the 911. I introduced the 911 Cup when I was responsible for those things and I always felt this car could be something similar. Of course, it's very difficult to make this happen when you have new cars to engineer and launch...

'But over the course of a few weeks, maybe it was a few months, Chris [Porritt, then chief engineer of Vehicle Engineering] came to me and suggested to do something – in the evening and weekends, as we had so many other priorities – and prepare something for this race. The tipping point was when he finally said: 'You can drive the car!' This convinced me! So this is how our relationship with the Nürburgring 24 Hours started. Looking back over ten years, it's a great achievement for Aston Martin and I hope it can go to another level in the future.

'For me personally, I've always had a passion for motorsport. I was at Le Mans when I was 18 or 19 as a student, and I came here to the 'Ring when I was a young engineer at Porsche as a service guy who helped out. In fact I was in control of the fuel... so that made me feel like I was the most important! I suppose with Aston Martin's history of

Right, from the top
Drivers and team line up in 2006, just before Rose's racing debut (Dr Bez first from left), refuelling action from the race, and Rose about to take the chequered flag in a hugely creditable 24th place overall

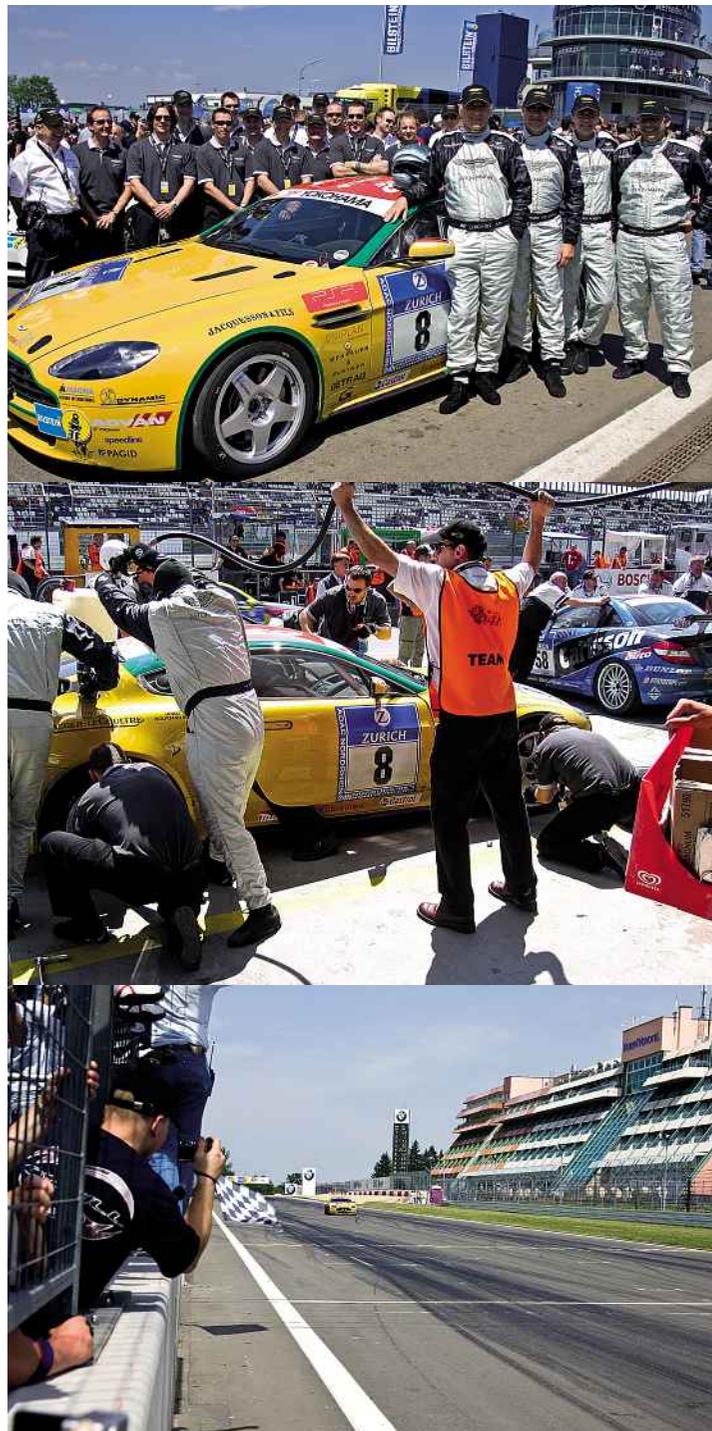
winning Le Mans in '59 it was always just a matter of how can we restart this story. With this car it has built up in a nice way.

'It was a big challenge in 2006, not just for the car. It is a difficult thing to race here. If you are off for some time, you must learn the track again, and to learn is not so easy because there are so many corner combinations and you have to drive 25km before you see them again! So what I did this time was when I was flying I was always mentally driving, not a computer game but visualising it...

'Of course, in reality it's much more difficult and this car – with the manual shift that you use 200 times in a lap – wow, it's a nice challenge. But if I remember something, it's that the car felt very balanced, which gave me a lot of confidence. And in this first race we came 24th and some time later [in 2008] 18th, this is unbelievable. Of course, V8 Vantage was developed in the Midlands near Gaydon on those bumpy roads, and I always believed the size and weight balance of the car would be perfect for the Nürburgring, which is almost like a road race.

'This will be a car that of course the company will keep and in 10, 20, 30, 40 years it will be a real asset for the company because it's the seed of the new motorsport story. I would buy it immediately! But I would not recommend the company to sell it... No, it's not for sale even if you come with £500,000 or something. You cannot sell cars that are so part of your history. You will show this car, talk about it, have people who were there to tell the stories. Me? In principle I would like to stop racing here but I'd say there's a chance I might come back. I don't think I'd need too much of an excuse!'

'This will be a car that the company will keep. It's the seed of the new motorsport story'



Aston Martin at the 2015 Nürburgring 24-hour race

After nine years of finishing every 24-hour race at the 'Ring with every car they've entered, Aston Martin endured a tough race this year. The 007 Vantage GT3 crashed on oil in the night, dropping to 25th place and then clawing its way back up to finish 16th. Sadly the 006 GT3 car retired with a powertrain issue. The two GT12s also failed to finish: number 50 crashed out from a class lead on the 16th hour and the number 48 car retired with a mechanical failure. Fittingly, Rose 2, driven by Dr Bez, Dr Andreas Bänziger, Mal Rose and Peter Leemhuis, took a class victory and ran faultlessly for the whole 24 hours. Rumours that all subsequent Aston racers will be called Rose are unsubstantiated as we go to print. Seems like a good idea, though.



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Aston Martin V12 Vantage S

02.2014, 4'500 km, Sportshift III, Onyx Black / Obsidian Black, Swiss car as new,

CHF 169'700.—



Aston Martin DB7

05.1995, 55'300 km, Manual, Malvern Silver / Light Grey, Swiss car, very nice condition and drives beautifully

CHF 29'700.—



Aston Martin DB9 Volante

11.2007, 15'000 km, Manual, Meteorite Silver / Dark Tan, one owner Swiss car, as new

CHF 105'700.—



Aston Martin V12 Vanquish

07.2003, 25'500 km, Manual, Bowland Black / Geneva Grey, Driving Dynamics Pack, FSH, Swiss car in impeccable condition

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WE'RE CREATURES OF HABIT. If we find a shirt we like, we tend to buy several. Same goes for pairs of shoes, jeans, slacks, etc. We're drawn to the things we love, even when we have them already. But to add another Aston to your garage, of the same model and in the same colour?

Ron Powell was so smitten with his DB MkIII saloon that he bought a matching convertible just a year later. The two cars are just 22 chassis numbers apart, brothers separated at birth but now reunited, and 56 years after they left Newport Pagnell they make for a fascinating comparison. Of course, every Aston of that era, being handmade, is slightly different to the next in many regards. But in addition to the subtle nuances of individuality conferred at birth, these DB brothers have led very different lives in the intervening years and in the hands of numerous custodians. How different would they feel? And would one emerge as the better car?

To be able to jump from one to the other was a unique and at times perplexing experience. Their long and very different lives have imbued them with mature and very distinct characters. Not just a sense of age but also a sense of very different journeys to the home they now share.

Ron Powell's work in the oil industry means he's been based largely in Abu Dhabi for the last 30 years or so. In that part of the world there's no shortage of modern supercars, but Ron has always had an interest in older cars, having played with the occasional Mini, Lotus, Porsche and others before heading to the Middle East. In fact it was a DB7 Vantage that first got him into Astons, and, because old cars are not so readily available in that part of the world, a 2007 Vanquish S followed. But while the Vanquish cemented his interest and affection for Aston Martin, it also increased his hankering for something older, something to enjoy in the British climate on his return visits to the family home in the north-east of England.

Just before Ron headed to Le Mans in 2009, he noted a DB MkIII advertised for sale in *AMOC News*. There was no phone number, just an invitation to send a stamped addressed envelope for more information. Ron duly sent off the envelope and on his return from Le Mans a large package of information awaited him.

AM300/3/1815 belonged to John Herring, a very keen Aston enthusiast who had bought the





BETTER TOGETHER

Separated at birth, these matching DB MkIIIs, saloon and drophead, are now reunited. We drive them

WORDS STEPHEN ARCHER | PHOTOGRAPHY TIM WALLACE



Above and right
Drophead coupé soon joined MKIII saloon in Ron Powell's garage, the two separated by just 22 chassis numbers. Straight-six has been treated to a full rebuild. Interior, including tiny rear seats, is largely original

'Ron bought it unseen – not the best way to buy an Aston. But when the heart is in the driving seat, these things happen'

car in 1968. Originally Sea Green with 'off white' leather, the car was painted the current racing green and re-trimmed in tan leather not very long after Herring acquired it. Indeed, so well-aged is the leather now that it carries almost a 1950s patina. There is often a lot to be said for some of the 'older restorations'.

The car needed work to bring it to its current condition, and initially it was successfully re-commissioned at Aston Martin Works, though water leaks from the engine pointed to issues that would need resolving later. Still, the work at Newport Pagnell saw the car in sufficiently strong fettle for Ron to be able to drive it home to Yarm on the South Durham/North Yorkshire border, which he did with such enjoyment that for the whole 210 miles he did not stop – for anything! 'I even took a detour as I got close to home in order to enjoy the car on the wonderful North Yorkshire B-roads,' he recalls.

After six months of use, the leaks had become ever more evident and so Ron dispatched the car to the nearby Aston Workshop. A top-end overhaul fixed the ailment and Ron set about seriously enjoying the saloon, which has since travelled the length and breadth of the UK. Indeed it's a real treat to meet someone who so enjoys *using* their car and drives it so extensively.

Ron's enthusiasm is further illustrated by a sumptuous book that he produced in 2010 on the life of the car, written from the car's perspective. It is wonderful, poetic and very engaging. The more significant manifestation of Ron's enthusiasm, however, was satisfying the urge to add a close relation to the stable...

Late in 2010 he saw that a drophead coupé in green was being offered at a relatively obscure UK auction, and so purchased AM300/3/1837 unseen. In his words, it was 'perhaps not the best way to buy an Aston', but when the heart is in the driving seat these things can happen. Only 84 drophead MKIIIs were made, so by any standards this is a rare car as well as a very handsome one. It retains its mostly original leather, but the factory Peony Red was changed at some time in the distant past to the current green. Remarkably, Ron is only the third owner, the previous owner having had it for 45 years.

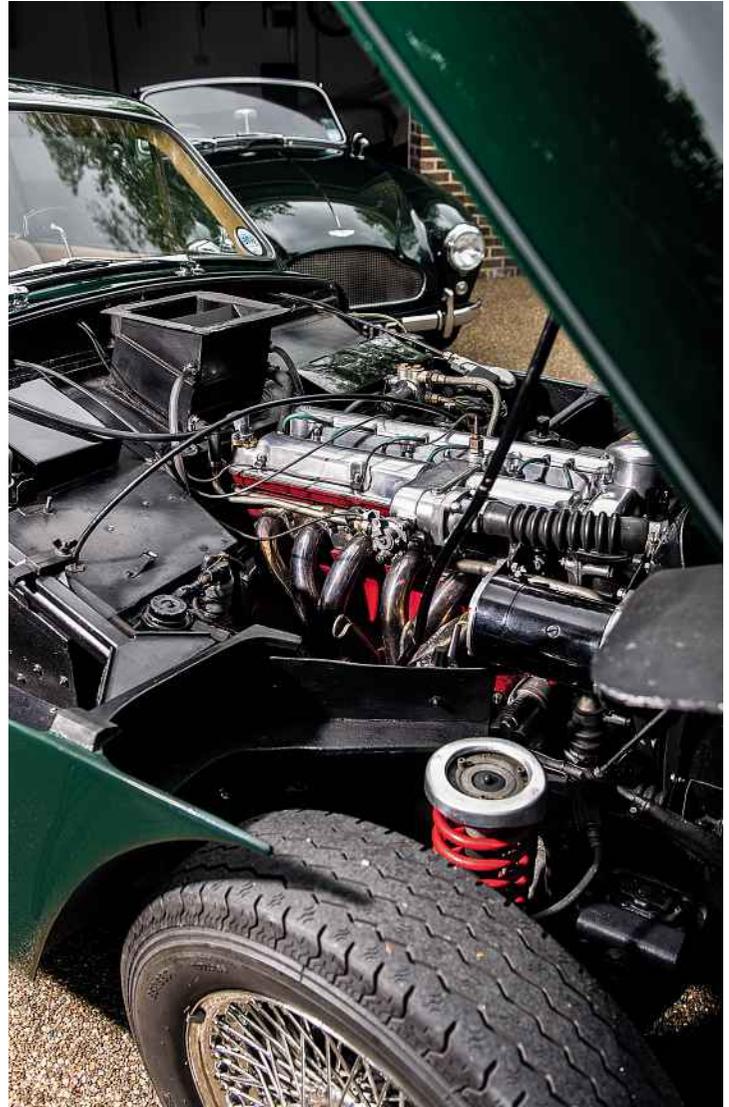
Unfortunately, when he had the car inspected by Aston Workshop the cylinder head was found to be cracked and past viable repair. This led to another workshop visit and a complete engine rebuild as well as a new head. Happily, by today's levels, Ron paid a fair price for the car, so the fact that he has since spent the same amount again to get it to its current state is not











as alarming as it might have been! Crucially, he now has a superb, useable, MkIII convertible. As I'm about to discover for myself.

One of the joys of Ron's location is easy access to the Cleveland Hills, where the roads are scenic, winding, undulating and blissfully quiet. Perfect for these cars.

Approaching the saloon, you're struck by the strong, masculine lines. It's a very handsome car. The door is surprisingly small and light, clicking shut with a gentle touch and with satisfying precision, rather like closing a fine cabinet – a unique trait of 'Feltham' Astons and a reminder of the skill of the Tickford coachbuilders.

The sill is high, as is the floor, so threading yourself into the car under the large steering wheel requires a bit of thought and contortion, but, once into the bucket seat, the comfort and ergonomics are really excellent. The DB MkIII is quite compact (though only one inch narrower than a DB4), so from the inside it's snug but not claustrophobic. Though relatively simply furnished, it exudes quality, from the warm mohair roof lining to the intricate leather window trims, to the neat occasional seats in the rear, which some humourist once likened to toilet seats. Their fold-down backs allow a doubling in boot-space beneath the rear tailgate.

(As many will know, the 1953 DB2/4 from which the MkIII was derived was the first ever production hatchback with fold-down seats.)

The most arresting feature of the interior is right in front of you: the sculpted instrument binnacle, echoing the shape of the grille and the predecessor of the dash that would grace all Astons from 1958 DB4 to 1971 DB6 Mk2. It's a sublime design and completes the cabin to make it feel a very special place, part limousine, part Hawker Sea Fury.

Once warm, the 2.9-litre straight-six settles to a calm tickover, its steady rumble being felt – mostly through the driver's seat and the steering wheel – rather than heard via the exhaust. The clutch is lighter today than it would have been originally, though pedal travel is still lengthy.

Both these cars have had minor modifications to improve their useability. The saloon had overdrive fitted by its previous owner: a very worthwhile enhancement to its driveability on modern roads (the drophead came with overdrive from new). Both have stainless steel exhausts, slightly stiffer springs, radial tyres and the addition of electric power steering. Memories of driving standard Feltham Astons are of heavy-to-drive cars, moderate power, moderate, heavy brakes and, above all, steering

DB MkIII

ENGINE In-line six-cylinder, 2922cc **MAX POWER** 162bhp @ 5500rpm **MAX TORQUE** 180lb ft @ 4000rpm
TRANSMISSION Four-speed manual, rear-wheel drive
SUSPENSION Front: independent, trailing links, coil springs, hydraulic lever-arm dampers, anti-roll bar. Rear: live axle, parallel radius arms, Panhard rod, coil springs, lever-arm dampers **STEERING** Worm-and-castor
BRAKES Discs front, drums rear **WHEELS** 6 x 16in wire-spoke front and rear **TYRES** 185HR16 front and rear
WEIGHT 1361kg (saloon) **POWER TO WEIGHT** 121bhp/ton
0-60MPH 9.3sec (saloon) **TOP SPEED** c120mph
PRICE NEW £3076/£3451 (saloon/drophead) in 1957 (£68,300/£77,119 in today's money) **VALUE NOW** c£250,000 (saloon), c£400,000+ (drophead coupé)

Left and above

Exercising the saloon on the superb country roads near owner Ron Powell's home in the north-east of England. Both engines are in standard tune with twin SU carbs; reckoned to be good for around 160bhp



‘Having witnessed Ron’s deep passion for these cars, one can only imagine the frustration he must feel when his work calls him away’

lighter than the ‘box in the DB4.

The MkIII was the first Aston Martin to be fitted with disc brakes (on the front wheels only) and a brake servo. It is not a particularly heavy car at 3000lb (1361kg) but the brakes are excellent and, again, better than on many early DB4s despite the rears being drums. The brake pedal has fabulous feedback and the pedals are perfectly placed for heeling-and-toeing when making swift progress.

We swap cars and head to Carlton Bank, a 1300ft peak in the Cleveland Hills. These are fabulous B-roads, and Ron decides it’s time to stretch the legs of the Astons. A friendly tussle ensues, with Ron really exercising the saloon and allowing the rare combination of a view of a MkIII’s poise on the road while following in another MkIII. The drophead has very similar brakes and clutch but the eager and silky-smooth six is a revelation. The rebuild has resulted in a superb engine that feels so much sweeter and pulls so much more strongly than the saloon unit. Indeed it’s the nicest that this writer has experienced in a MkIII. So much urge and so little effort.

The drophead’s steering doesn’t suffer the saloon’s deadness at the straight-ahead. And thanks to the electric assistance, the tighter bends no longer require the deep breath for exertion that a standard car would demand. The stiffer springs allow the car to corner more flatly and with more control.

The convertible wants to be driven, and at serious pace. Even the steep climb up the Cleveland Scarp does little to slow our progress, suggesting a nice match of torque to chassis, while on faster stretches of road the overdrive makes the experience almost relaxing. 1959? These cars don’t feel that old. In fact they’ve been a revelation, especially the drophead.

Having witnessed Ron’s deep passion for these cars, one can only imagine the frustration he must feel when his work calls him away. And was there a favourite on the day? When the sun was out it was one car, and when the rain was out it was the other. So you see, you really can’t have too many DB MkIIIs. ♣

With thanks to the Aston Workshop.

worthy of a gym workout, especially at low speed. So the electric power steering is a real boon: while lessening the load it does nothing to remove ‘feel’. This system has now been fitted to a great number of post-war Aston Martins; its installation is extremely neat, and you can switch between settings, from high assistance down to fully off. It’s hard to criticise a modification this discreet, given how much pleasure it adds to the driving experience.

There’s an instant feeling of connection, while the snugness of the cockpit makes it feel more akin to wearing the car than riding in it. There’s a fine view through the fairly shallow screen down the sweep of the bonnet, and you can feel where all four corners of the car are, which makes positioning on the road a simple pleasure.

The Feltham Astons all had worm-and-castor

steering boxes with drop arms. It’s a similar arrangement to the one you see on many tractors, and this actual system was found on milk floats of the time! Nonetheless, it works well enough, though many boxes suffered wear in the centre position, meaning that the steering has a dead and less precise feel at the straight-ahead. Ron’s MkIII saloon suffers from this malady, though one does get used to it. When turning, the accuracy and feel is excellent.

Acceleration is strong and must have felt incredible in its day. At around 4500rpm you can sense the power curve flattening out while the straight-six begins to rumble in mild protest, but the pace that the engine can generate is very impressive. This is a real GT car and a big mile-eater. The gearbox, a David Brown unit, is a delight and in many ways easier, nicer and



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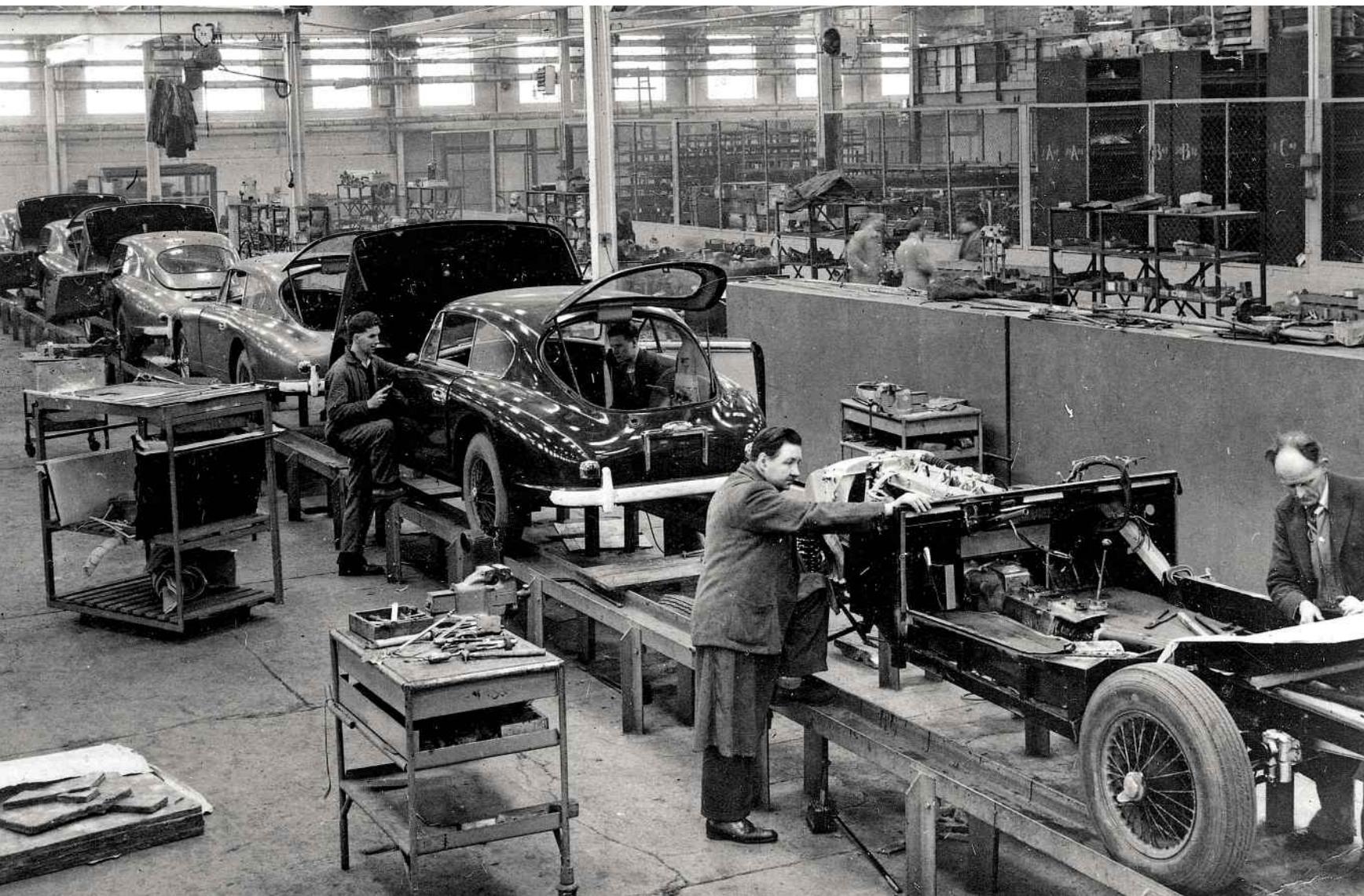


ASTON MARTIN



HERITAGE





FORGOTTEN FARSLEY

Newlands Works, at Farsley in Yorkshire, is the forgotten David Brown factory. But now its part in the Aston Martin story is finally being recognised

WORDS STUART GIBBARD

PICTURES STUART GIBBARD ARCHIVES / VARIOUS ASTON MARTIN

The David Brown generation of Aston Martins is usually defined by two separate and distinct phases: the Feltham era and the Newport Pagnell era. There is the odd reference to car assembly at a 'tractor factory' in Yorkshire, but this vague connection has never been fully explained.

In fact this facility at Farsley on the outskirts of Leeds was central to Aston Martin expansion during the 1950s. Some of the 'Feltham cars', particularly the DB2/4 models, probably owed their existence more to this factory in Yorkshire than to Hanworth Park at Feltham.

Before Aston Martin decamped to Newport Pagnell, the Farsley factory, known as Newlands Works, was Aston's main production centre for both engines and car assembly. And on Saturday September 5, Adam Brown (grandson of Sir David) will unveil a plinth on the site of the works – now a housing estate – to commemorate its vital contribution to DB/AM history.

The celebrations, supported by AMOC, will include a parade of Astons and David Brown tractors through the town, and several of those who worked at the factory will be attending, including former DB apprentices David Sugden, Edward Priestley and Keith Foster.

'Farsley is the forgotten factory in the Aston Martin story,' says David. 'We often feel that it's been airbrushed from the histories, but hope that the unveiling of the plinth will see its contribution finally recognised.'

Farsley was not actually a 'tractor factory', although it came under the control of DB's tractor division. The lease for Newlands Works, previously a wartime shadow factory making munitions and aircraft wings, was acquired by David Brown in July 1947, initially for the production of farm implements, but in 1950 it

began manufacturing tractor engines and the LB6 power unit for the new Aston DB2.

And with Feltham becoming increasingly occupied with design, service and race-car preparation, it was obvious that road-car assembly also needed to be relocated if Aston Martin was to achieve anything approaching volume production. And so, from 1953, Farsley took over assembly of the new DB2/4 model, fitting bodies from Mulliners to chassis fabricated at St Andrews Road, Huddersfield; another David Brown facility. The S430 gearbox was supplied from DB's parent gear company at Park Works, also in Huddersfield, and axles from Salisbury.

The following year, a new extension was added to Newlands Works to house an engine test section. Production of the tractor engines reached around 600 per week, though assembly of the LB6 engines was far less hectic, accounting for just five or six units per week to match car production running at around 23 per month.

Newlands Works was now a hive of activity with around 400 staff, many previously employed by Jowett Cars of Bradford or the steam engine builders, J&H McLaren of Leeds. The general manager on the Aston side was Frank Hough, and the whole operation came under the control of Vincent Gallagher, who held senior management positions at both Aston Martin and David Brown Tractors Ltd. Edward Priestley and Keith Foster, undertaking engineering apprenticeships with the tractor division, started at Farsley in September 1953.

Top Left and below

Newlands Works at Farsley at the time when David Brown acquired the lease in July 1947. Below: the production line for the DB2/4s, which were assembled with bodies supplied by Mulliners

'The DB2/4 bodies came in fully trimmed and painted from Mulliners,' remembers Edward. 'The cars were completely assembled at Newlands Works and then test-driven locally before being checked by the chief inspector, Johnny Duckworth, an ex-Jowett man. Provided the cars could reach 90mph in third while going up the hill from the roundabout in Rodley to the roundabout in Horsforth, they would be signed off. They were then driven by road to Feltham for their final inspection, but Yorkshire pride dictated that every effort was made to ensure there was nothing for the staff at Hanworth Park to fault.'

After David Brown acquired Tickford in late 1954, Newlands Works continued to supply the rolling chassis for the DB2/4 MkII models, which were then shipped to Newport Pagnell – five or six on a weekly transporter – for the bodies to be fitted.

David Sugden, also on a DB engineering apprenticeship, moved to Farsley to work on the machine shop floor on the Aston side of the factory in late 1955. After gaining experience machining cylinder heads, blocks and small components for the LB6 – even assembling a display engine from scrap parts – he moved onto the assembly line for the chassis.

'The chassis came from St Andrews Road with the aluminium sheeting for the bulkhead panels and floor tray already riveted in place. At Farsley, they were placed on trolleys that moved between six workbenches where the various assemblies were fitted.'

Interestingly, David, Edward and Keith are all adamant that the DB gearboxes actually came from ZE, although this has never been mentioned before. DB's records from Park Works suggest that the S430 box was fitted through to the DB2/4 MkII, but it was an open secret that the

gearboxes had problems. It is possible that, rather than have Aston's reputation tarnished by a troublesome gearbox, DB shipped its casings out to Germany for ZF to fit the internals. ZF may also have been responsible for the improved version of the S430 unit as fitted to the DB MkIII, but none of this can be confirmed.

The rolling chassis were test-driven at Farsley fitted with makeshift dummy bodies, painted matt black and made from tubular steel with an aluminium sheet for the roof, canvas sheeting for doors and a single seat for the driver. The only parts that were recognisably Aston Martin were a slave bonnet and windscreen from a DB2/4 MkII to make it road-legal.

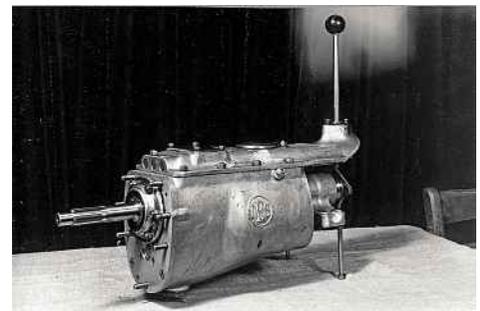
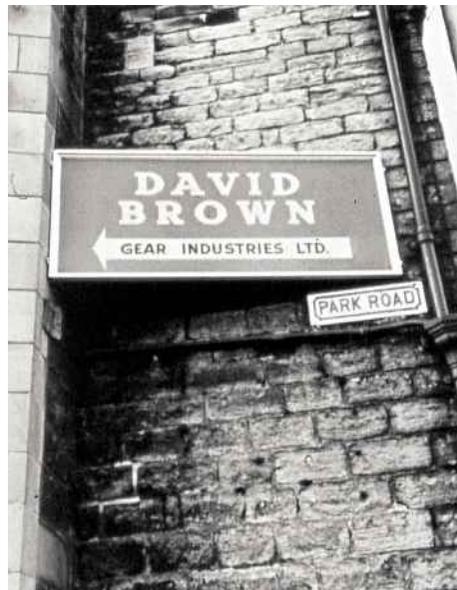
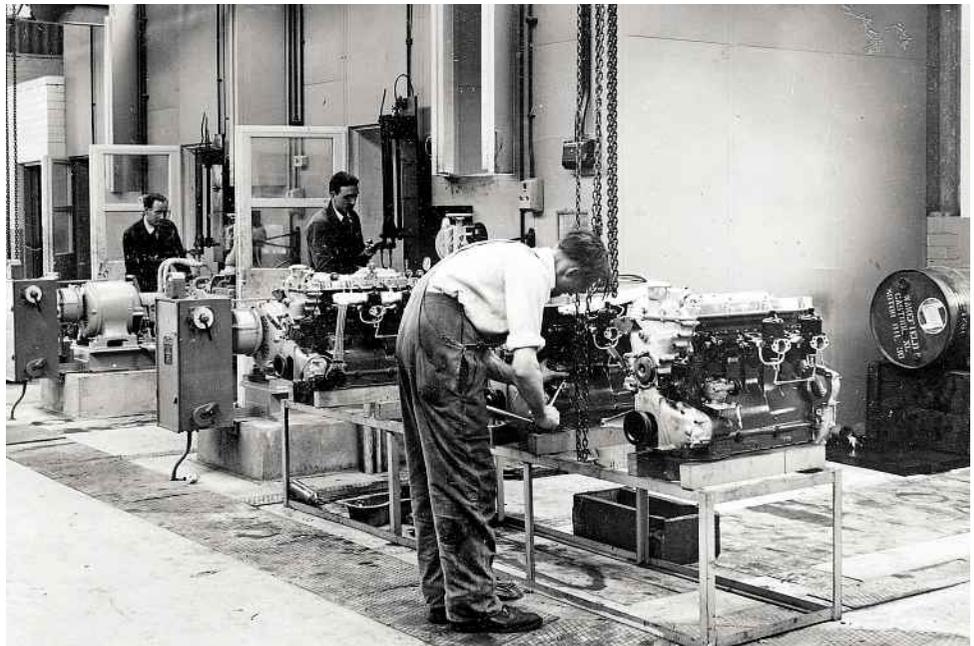
'It was a real lash-up,' says David. 'The drivers had to fit the bodies themselves before going out on test. The cars attracted attention from other motorists, who thought they weren't proper Astons – which led to the odd traffic light grand prix. However, one of the test drivers was a speedway rider, so they didn't stand a chance.'

Usual attire for the test drivers was white coats, goggles and flat caps turned back-to-front; evidently for better aerodynamics! The test route included Harewood Avenue (A659) – the long straight heading to Wetherby from the entrance to Harewood House – where the cars were pushed towards their top speed.

In late 1956, Farsley began assembling the rolling chassis for the new DB MkIII. The factory was put under pressure to increase production so that a buffer of 100 chassis could be stockpiled for full assembly to begin at Newport Pagnell. David Brown's ten-year lease on Newlands Works was coming to an end and hadn't been renewed. This final batch of 100 Farsley chassis, numbered 1700 to 1799, was stored at Tickford Street in a structure to the rear of the Olympia building and was used towards the end of the DB MkIII run. The last MkIIIs (1800-1850) would, therefore, be the first cars to be built entirely at Newport Pagnell.

During 1957, the operation at Newlands Works was wound down and DB vacated the premises in October. David and several other apprentices moved to Tickford Street to help set up chassis production. Bill Smith, who was recognised as Farsley's most skilled engine builder, was also persuaded to relocate to Buckinghamshire, but many of the other staff from Newlands Works were made redundant.

After finding his formal apprentice training would not be continued at Newport Pagnell, David eventually returned to Yorkshire to become a management trainee with Hepworth & Grandage. However, his time with Aston cultivated a lifelong interest in fast cars, which passed to his son, Tim Sugden, a professional racing driver and team manager. Fittingly, Tim's career has included co-piloting a V8 Vantage GT2 at Le Mans for JMW Motorsport in 2010. **V**



From the top
DB2/4 assembly line was very makeshift; cars were fitted with 'slave' wheels as they ran along steel channels bolted to supports set into the concrete floor; LB6 engines being prepared for test; four-speed S430 gearbox was developed at David Brown's Park Works in Huddersfield



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WORDS ANDREW ENGLISH | PHOTOGRAPHY GUS GREGORY



The ground shook when these two monsters roamed the streets in the late '90s. We get reacquainted with the V8 Coupé and the awesome V600





DOCTOR GRANT, my dear Doctor Sattler, welcome to Jurassic Park.'

True, Lambourn Downs wasn't as packed with murderous dinosaurs as the eponymous movie park, but, in automotive terms, these cars are *Tyrannosaurus rex*, as big, powerful and scary as they come. Known as the V cars, they are derivatives of the 1988 Virage, developed under the watch of two very different sets of owners: arguably the last of the grandees in the form of Victor Gauntlett and the Livanos family, and then, from 1987, two-shaves-a-day corporate America in the form of the Ford Motor Company.

Well that's the official history, but reality is more nuanced. The Ford deal was largely brokered by friends: Henry Ford II, George Livanos, David Brown, Victor Gauntlett and Walter Hayes. And Gauntlett stayed with Aston for four years after Ford had purchased its 75

per cent stake, handing the mantle to the quiet, pipe-smoking Hayes, who was key to the development of these two monsters.

In truth, Ford can't have been much impressed with the contents of its shopping bag. Three years later it bought Jaguar, and Bill Hayden, the call-a-spade-a-bleedin'-shovel East End production man Ford appointed as its first Jaguar chairman, described the Coventry car maker as 'a terrible organisation making terrible cars'. Heaven knows what he thought of Aston, although, to be fair, in a 1989 interview with another senior Ford exec, I found he neither knew what Aston Martin was, nor that his company owned it.

Anyway, by the time the blue oval had moved into Sunnyside, the Virage was near completion and that must have hurt. Not only had Aston gone to Ford's Corvette-tuning nemesis Reeves Callaway Engineering for the strengthened block, four-valve cylinder heads and preparation for the supercharging of Tadek Marek's V8, but

the Ken Greenley and John Heffernan designed exterior, with its prominent Audi headlamps and Scirocco tail lamps, all represented top-dollar supplier payments from Ford to its rivals.

Underneath the aluminium body, the frame was essentially Harold Beach's steel platform chassis dating from the '70s. Nothing wrong with that, though the production methods (under the bonnet you'll see a patchwork quilt of welded steel plates covered in stone chip and matt black paint) were antediluvian. The de Dion/Watt's linkage rear suspension was carried on an A-frame, reputed to have cost as much as a Ford Sierra to build, but which gave wandering and uncertain handling. Unequal-length front wishbones had good wheel geo, but their bushings were quickly 'cooked' by exhaust heat, so regular and pricey maintenance was essential. At £120,000 at launch, there were better and cheaper cars around.

One of them indeed was the 1997 DB7, albeit based on a humble Jaguar XJS chassis with an



‘These cars are the automotive equivalent of Tyrannosaurus rex, as big, powerful and scary as they come’

Above left and right
V600 chases V8 Coupé. The latter shares many of the Vantage's styling cues. V600 engine (above), however, is in a class of its own with a mighty 600bhp. Interior (right) is a feast for the senses. Previous owner ditched the original, ugly, airbagged steering wheel

XJ40 supercharged 'six' topped off with Ian Callum's delectable design. Despite a few hiccups, it received high praise at launch and immediately outsold the old Virage.

A programme of modifications was carried out alongside DB7 development, which must have sorely tested Aston's resources. Virage was made lighter, faster and more wieldy, with a revised rear suspension with stronger axle location from the old V8 saloon. The body was lightened, with updated coachwork at each end. There were bigger brakes, attention to suspension bushing, springing and damping, and did I mention the superchargers? Oh yes, from the same company, Eaton, that boosted the DB7, the Vantage got a pair of modified truck units, one each side of the V8 along with water-to-air charge-cooling. To handle the grunt, they fitted a ZF six-speed transmission from a Corvette, with the sixth gear blanked off (don't ask!).

Launched in 1993, a year before Ford upped its stake to 100 per cent, the 550bhp Vantage was an unholy piece of kit, though lightweight is in the eye of the beholder since it tipped the scales at 1995kg, 75kg more than a Virage. With a top speed of

186mph and 0-60mph in 4.6sec, it was a fantastical if high-maintenance beast.

Vantage sold, but slowly. To keep the pot boiling, Works Service started a series of ever more incredible modifications overseen in part by none other than Ian Minards, now Aston's director of product development. The hepped-up V600 produced 600bhp and 600lb ft and at that time was the world's most powerful production car. It was the penultimate step before they produced 40 Le Mans special editions in 1998, which for £232,950 had much the same mechanicals, but uprated suspension and garish cabins.

So Rob Smith's 1998 V600 is one of the last of the 280 Vantage and Le Mans cars to be built. Smith, a trustee of the Aston Martin Heritage Trust, says just 98 cars were ever converted to V600 specification and it's worth recalling here that total production of Virage, Vantage and their derivatives didn't amount to much more than 1050; no wonder these cars are not well known. Resplendent in Chichester Blue, Smith's car had all seven of the Works modifications, including the six-pot AP Racing brakes, fuel-cut traction control and suspension upgrades as well as that upgraded supercharged engine.

'Like buying fuel, do you?' I flippantly ask. Smith keeps a straight face. 'In a 50mph limit on the motorway with a warm engine, I reckon it does about 15mpg. If you stand on it, though, you'll be lucky to see 5mpg.'

Holy climate change, Batman. That's some thirst. Just as well we've brought a slightly less dipsomaniacal Vantage along for the ride. The V8 Coupé was Aston's Vantage-lite, sans superchargers, big brakes and wilder body modifications.

While this was an unvarnished attempt to garner sales of the slow-selling Virage/Vantage range, it was a far better car than the original Virage, gaining all the body, engine and weight-saving improvements of the supercharged cars. It didn't sell well though (it never went to America, only selling in Europe and the Middle East) and most of the 101 made were fitted with a Chrysler Torqueflite four-speed automatic.

Compared with the 1998 cost of the V600 of £233,682, the 354bhp/368lb ft V8 Coupé cost £139,500. Performance comparisons show a wide gap, with a top speed of 155mph (V600, 200mph), 0-60mph 5.9sec (V600, 3.9sec), and a fuel consumption of 14mpg (V600 10mpg). So it isn't a slow

Vantage V600

ENGINE V8, 5340cc, twin superchargers **MAX POWER** 600bhp @ 6500rpm **MAX TORQUE** 600lb ft @ 4000rpm
TRANSMISSION Five-speed manual, rear-wheel drive, limited-slip differential **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, 365mm front, 310mm rear, ABS
WHEELS 10 x 18in front and rear **TYRES** 285/45 ZR18 front and rear, Goodyear Eagle GS-D **WEIGHT** 1995kg **POWER TO WEIGHT** 305bhp/ton **0-60MPH** 3.9sec (claimed) **TOP SPEED** 200mph (claimed) **PRICE NEW** £233,682 **VALUE NOW** £180,000+



Below and bottom
V8 Coupé borrowed the
Vantage's fared-in headlights.
It also benefited from many of
the detail improvements that
arrived with the launch of
the supercharged car



V8 Coupé

ENGINE V8, 5340cc **MAX POWER** 354bhp @ 6000rpm **MAX TORQUE** 368lb ft @ 4300rpm

TRANSMISSION Four-speed automatic, rear-wheel drive, limited-slip differential

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, 362mm front, 296mm rear, ABS

WHEELS 10 x 18in front and rear

TYRES 255/50 ZR18 front and rear, Pirelli P Zero

WEIGHT 1950kg **POWER TO WEIGHT** 184bhp/ton

0-60MPH 5.9sec (claimed) **TOP SPEED** 155mph (claimed) **PRICE NEW** £139,500 **VALUE NOW** £80,000+



vehicle exactly, it's just the V600 is, well, epic. This V8 Coupé is for sale at the Runnymede Motor Company, priced at around £80,000, whereas Smith's V600 is valued at £190,000.

The cabins of both cars are very similar and both elicit the same niffs of leather, wool, oil and more worryingly, in the case of the V8 Coupé, petrol. On sighting officials from English Heritage, Aston owners should quickly make tracks for fear their dashboards are instantly listed as Grade I examples of a particular English facia style incorporating the arts of cabinet makers, craft upholsterers and watch-makers.

Both front seats are electrically adjustable, but the V600 perches are more ornate and supportive. Despite that, a period of spirited driving in either car results in a characteristic bruise on the outside of your leg just under the knee as you brace your body against the centre console. Accommodation in the rear is ridiculously small with no discernible leg-room, while the boot is deep and wide, but narrow.



The fascia is simply bamboozling, with eight seemingly identical instruments (nine in the V600 with the addition of a manifold boost gauge, plus a starter button) with highly reflective glass so the displays disappear in the sun. Also AWOL when the sun's out are a series of dimly illuminated displays that look torn out of a wartime Enigma coding machine.

Switches are mostly from Ford, ranging from Fiesta window lifts and ancillaries, to a Lincoln Town Car steering wheel – thankfully replaced on Smith's car. There's a smattering of hidden switches, including the petrol cover releases, to confuse the uninitiated. Since only two thirds of the dash is visible at any one time, what you see depends on where the steering wheel is (it only adjusts for rake). So it's quite possible to forget to switch off the indicators or drive with the rear fog-lamp on. There's a huge central fly-off handbrake and gearlevers that look borrowed from a steam loco. On both cars the fine leather upholstery squeaks along with the ride.

Smith's car rides on wider, lower-profile tyres and the initial ride is firmer, slightly bouncy, but comfortable all the same. Adroit steering is precise, with good feedback and feels slightly over-assisted until you realise the car has the same sized tyres all round so it has to park turn two 18-inch 285/45 Goodyears.

By contrast, the V8 Coupé is softer with more movement in the rear suspension, not helped by the passing of years, so the damping is a bit one-dimensional and it feels simultaneously heavy, fragile and brisk. You need to use the engine's revs, but with 1500rpm between each gear-change, it can feel a little hectic at times, especially as the engine idle is adjusted slightly too high which means that changes aren't the smoothest. It's reasonably refined, though there's a bit of wind bluster round the wing mirrors and screen at motorway speeds. And, despite a Sport button that doesn't appear to do anything much, it's fast enough in its way; best on a sweeping A-road with a good surface.

The Coupé is a proper GT in that respect and, while it doesn't have the all-out grunt of the blown cars, its lower price and much lower running costs, unstressed driveline, (relative) simplicity, and brisk performance make the V8 Coupé a companionable thing to drive. I'd agree with contemporary driving impressions that it would have benefited greatly from a manual transmission, especially a six-speeder so you could utilise the engine's torque more effectively, but Smith says they are super-rare, with possibly only two production cars in existence.

And so the really important thing about this article, which is what does 600bhp and 600lb ft feel like when let loose on an open road? In deference to Smith's maintenance bills (the car is looked after by Trinity Engineering) we didn't do standing starts and avoided high revs, but even with 3000rpm on the clock the V600 is champing at its bit. I've track-tested two other V600 over the years and the extraordinary effect of standing on it never leaves you. Press the



throttle and air flutters under the bonnet and tinkles in the exhausts, the tyres squirm and the nose rises. The superchargers' hard-edged whirring joins the exhaust boom as the revs climb. It's fast in a way like no other, as if you are sitting in a leather armchair while a lovely old wood-panelled library and Battersea Power Station Control Room A are simultaneously pushed past you at a million miles an hour.

Nor does that charge let up as unstoppable force gets stuck into immovable object. You quickly pass through merely fast, steam through downright scary and speed into intergalactic, where the suspension succumbs to weight and the car starts to wander and romp over bumps as it follows the least camber or road seam. Your eyes are out on stalks, your hands gently coaxing the nose to comply and, well, stay on the road. It feels heavy and a little out of control, rather like a runaway train.

There aren't many roads capable of containing

it, to be honest, and full exploitation is for a dry track. I've driven one in the rain and it's like driving a nuclear-powered fried egg. Here are my contemporary notes from a wet Silverstone test in a V600 in October 1998...

'When the front tyres find the drying line they grip and the back end slides. In the cockpit you turn the wheel this way and that (and there's a fair bit of feedback) to keep the nose roughly in the direction you were hoping, and you tease the throttle open once more. Immediately the tail slides out again, you get more opposite lock on and then the front slides straight on. Slip, slide, power on, oversteer, understeer, power off, countersteer, lift, brake... it all sounds scary, but at no time did it feel anything less than benign, hugely fast and funny, which is what Astons are all about, really.'

On a dry road, though, you are pulling a lot more g and there are other road users about. If you think you are on top of it, consider that

under the bonnet, as well as the engine and superchargers, there are two water coolers, three water pumps, an oil radiator, two inlet charge-coolers and an air-conditioning radiator. Get it wrong and you'll drown most of Berkshire in oil, water and Freon. Not that the handling is bad exactly, and the brakes are brilliant, although they heat up and fade quickly. It's just that, at speed, it's at the outer limits of what the chassis can do, so the V600 remains the original slow-in-fast-out car.

It was only made for a few years before the EU legislated it off the road, but, while it roamed the earth, there was nothing, absolutely nothing quite like the V600, the fastest, roariest, and greatest dinosaur of all time. ♣

With thanks to Runnymede Motor Company, www.runnymedemotorcompany.com, Trinity Engineering, www.trinityaston.co.uk and especially to Rob Smith for allowing us to enjoy his wonderful car.

The day the test went wrong

Little-known fact: back in the '80s if you claimed something in your technical specifications, you had to prove it. Thus in March 1993 we found ourselves at the southern Italian test track of Nardò with its fearsome car-breaking 7.8-mile banked track. Aston Martin claimed a 186mph top speed for its twin supercharged V550 Vantage, but the engineers and PR department hoped for nearer 200mph round the sun-baked concrete. The man from the ministry was booked to witness the event and, the day after the Geneva Show press day, a party consisting of yours truly, photographer Nathan Morgan and PR Harry Calton set out, me in a spanking-new, fire-engine-red Vantage and Harry in a Ford Scorpio chase car. Over the course of the next two days we chased the sun down the boot of Italy.

There we were joined by Aston Martin test driver Bev Jones and senior engineer Mike Booth, and we stayed at the hotel Isola lo Scoglio, which had a wall in reception covered with a rogue's gallery of pictures and actual bits of exploded engines that had given up the ghost at Nardò. The following day

Bev drove the two-tonne Aston up to about 160mph, followed by me driving at the same sort of speeds. The car felt strong and heavy. There was certainly more to come, but just how much more?

It was 40 degrees in the shade, but the man from the ministry turned up in a suit, the jacket of which was swiftly discarded as he was strapped into the Aston alongside big Bev. The Welshman took off at some speed and did a lap in the low 180s as Nathan snapped away at the side of the track and we looked at our stop watches. Then we waited... And waited. I fancy we might have heard the crump of an engine seizing but probably not. While initially suspicion fell on the Ford engine management, it turned out to be the cheap grilles used over the air intakes to the superchargers, which had stalled the air at about 180mph. Without air, the blowers had nothing with which to charge the system and two of the engine's pistons had picked up in their bores and seized. Bev reckoned it was one of the longest skid marks he'd ever made - and that wasn't counting the poor ministry man's underpants. **AE**





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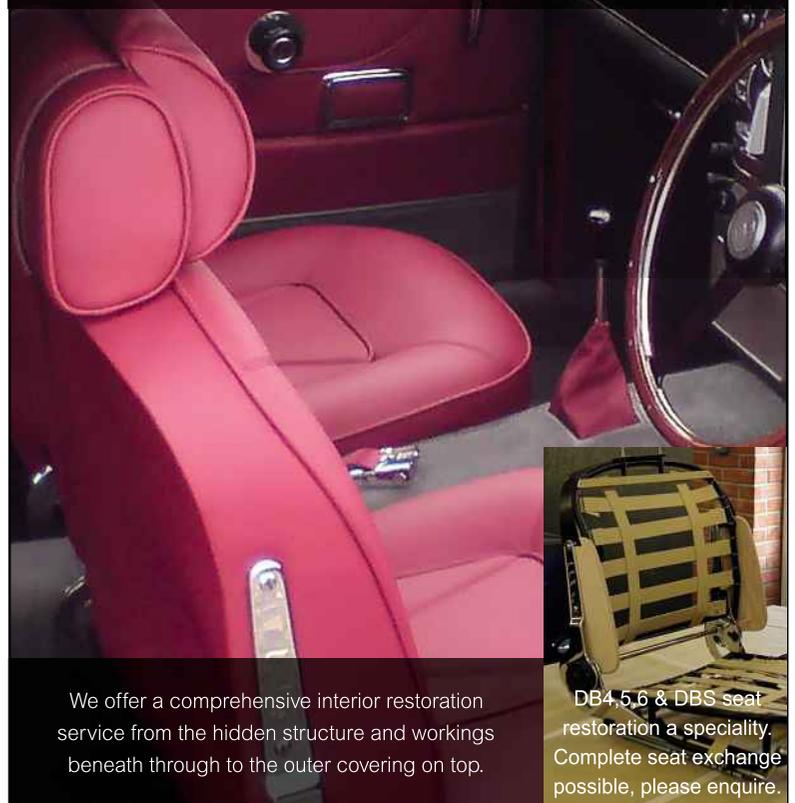


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WHITE RIOT

Aston Martin's Vanquish flagship is dazzlingly fast but also surprisingly civilised, as this Carbon White Edition reveals

WORDS PETER TOMALIN

PHOTOGRAPHY MATTHEW HOWELL



We didn't plan it this way, honest. When we asked Aston Martin if we could borrow the latest Vanquish for three days, we really hadn't realised that the days we'd requested would end on the cusp of a long bank holiday weekend. 'You can have the car,' they said, 'but we won't be able to collect it from you until the following Tuesday. Will that be OK?'

Will that be OK? 'Sure, no problem,' I replied, while silently enacting an Andy Murray-style fist-pump. 'Um, thanks very much.'

So Aston's flagship would be ours for a week. Seven whole days. One hundred and sixty eight hours, give or take. It was a most welcome development, and one that would subtly change the nature of the tale you're now reading.

At the launch of the 2015 MY Vanquish last summer, the motoring media were universally fulsome in their praise, in particular for its new eight-speed automatic gearbox but also for the many detail improvements. The Vanquish, they concluded, had become the consummate super-GT. Visceral supercar one minute, refined mile-eater the next. Well, now we had the time to really get to know the Vanquish; to live with it; to drive it on all manner of roads and in all conditions. From dawn blast to shopping trip. From choked city to deserted moorland.

And all starting in a sleepy Cambridgeshire village, which is where I find myself on a bright early-summer morning, staring at the ravishing Vanquish Carbon Edition (a Carbon White Coupé to be exact) that's filling our driveway.

It's certainly a breathtakingly seductive shape, blending voluptuous curves with sculpted flanks and chiselled aero in naked carbonfibre. So much more of an *event* than a DB9 or a Vantage, great though those two shapes are in their own right.

Being a Carbon Edition, it has extra black detailing, most noticeably the window frames, and unique ten-spoke gloss-black 20in alloys. The net effect is to ramp up the impression of aggressive intent even further. Inside, Carbon Edition means herringbone-pattern carbonfibre on the dash, black rotary controls, carbonfibre sill trim, and black anodised speaker grilles for the Bang & Olufsen hi-fi, all of which adds £7000 to the standard Vanquish's list price, bringing the total to a fiver under £200,000.

The extra touches inside add to the already purposeful air: all blacks and greys and glossy carbonfibre, with black leather lining for the roof and thick, Alcantara-clad A-pillars, alleviated only by subtle red stitching. All that leather and Alcantara certainly hits you as you pop the flush-sitting handle and swing the door open. Don't you just love the smell of a chilled Aston Martin cabin first thing in the morning?

The next assault on your senses is the explosion of sound when you push the now-familiar sapphire lozenge into the centre of the dash. It's a reminder, if any were needed, of the immense potency of the current V12, these days a very different beast to the 420bhp engine that first appeared in the DB7 Vantage back in 1999.

The most recent round of changes included a new Bosch engine management system and saw another small rise in peak power and torque, now up to 568bhp at 6650rpm and 465lb ft at 5500. Thanks largely to the more tightly stacked lower ratios afforded by the eight-speed ZF-

'DON'T YOU LOVE THE SMELL OF A CHILLED ASTON CABIN FIRST THING IN THE MORNING?'



**Left**

New eight-speed gearbox is equally impressive whether you use the paddles or leave it in full auto. Herringbone pattern carbonfibre and black rotary controls are two of the features that mark out a Carbon Edition

sourced 'Touchtronic III' gearbox, and the introduction of a 'launch control' function, the Vanquish's claimed 0-60mph time has been cut from 4.1sec to just 3.6, while a new final drive allows it to reach 201mph. Crikey.

The chunky steering wheel is quite busy, with controls for a Bluetooth phone and cruise control, along with the button for tautening the adaptive dampers and another for Sport, which sharpens the throttle and gearshifts and unleashes even more aural fury. On the centre console, below the buttons for Park, Reverse, Neutral and Drive and the 'haptic' controls for radio, satnav and phone functions are the switches for loosening DSC and activating the aforementioned launch control.

Having already risked the ire of our neighbours with the Aston's opening fusillade, I resist the temptation to investigate the latter, although as I navigate the village streets I can't resist winding the window down, all the better to hear the gargling exhausts. Conversely, as I join the commuter flow on the A14 and head for a rendezvous with photographer Matt Howell, I'm struck by the civility of the new Vanquish, and not just the turbine-like smoothness of the V12, which in 8th gear at an indicated 85mph is turning over at barely 2000rpm.

It's the quality of the revised damping, too. The ride is actually pretty robust – in town and on the motorway there's not a hint of slop or slack in it – but there's no crashing or jolting either, even when one of those alloys smeared with Pirelli P Zero drops into a sunken manhole cover. It doesn't even get agitated by the smaller, pimply stuff. And the whole car feels as tightly constructed as any Aston I've ever sat in.

The gearbox, too, is making all the right moves. I'm leaving it in auto mode for now; I reckon it's how most Vanquish drivers will use it most of the time, and honestly, you can barely tell when it's shifting. The uncanny smoothness is actually most impressive when you floor the throttle from jogging pace, when you can savour the V12's wondrously linear delivery, the way it keeps pouring in with barely any noticeable steps, all the way from 10mph to ten times that speed with just a slight hardening in engine note and a corresponding increase in urgency towards the upper end of the rev-range. Even when you kick down a gear you can barely feel as it slots home; there's just a slight rise in the engine note and a flick of the tacho needle as you're pressed ever more firmly into the embrace of the winged bucket seat. Not only is





'EVEN IN THIRD GEAR ON A BONE-DRY ROAD YOU CAN FEEL THE TYRES FIGHTING TO CONTAIN THE TORQUE'

**Left**

Chassis changes for 2015MY included stiffer dampers and bushes; the ride is firm even in the regular setting, but overall it's still a fine compromise between comfort and control

scenery in your peripheral vision turning liquid. If you're fortunate enough to have driven any of the current breed of supercars, this is no more than par for the course; if your reference points are rather more prosaic (i.e. merely fast), it takes a few moments to mentally recalibrate. I'm yet to drive any of the current 'hypercars' (McLaren P1, LaFerrari, etc), but if they're substantially quicker than the Vanquish – and colleagues suggest they are – then you surely need race-driver reactions (not to mention a track) to be able to drive them anywhere close to their true potential. On regular roads, the Vanquish feels monstrously rapid.

After Derby, where the Aston kicks back and mooches happily round the ring road in full auto mode, we point its carbonfibre splitter towards the Peak District to find some roads that will really work the chassis. One of those is the Snake Pass, as sinuous and undulating as it sounds. Speed limits are rigorously enforced here, but the sequences of corners and the ever-changing surface provide a useful workout.

And while grip is formidable, the Vanquish's chassis is anything but inert. You can really feel all four tyres working, especially the rears. It's communicative, engaging, and flows beautifully. Just occasionally, coming hard out of a corner with a slightly uneven surface, the car pitches diagonally and the traction control light flickers (though it does this in a straight line too). Maybe the chassis just lacks that ultimate edge of steely control, but it's such a brilliant compromise between GT and super-sports car. The brakes are mighty, too, and far more progressive than some ceramic set-ups.

At the end of the shoot, after many hours on the road, I emerge still feeling fresh: in itself a rare feat for a car like this. And the Vanquish continues to impress over the next few days. It's as full-on or as laid-back as you want or need it to be. But it's not perfect, and a week allows some niggles to surface, too. The satnav graphics and interface are clunky; the analogue speedo is illegible; some of the panel gaps aren't quite as crisp and even as you'd hope, and this car gained an irritating chirrup from the driver's side window frame. I'd also like the option *not* to wake my neighbours, but that may be just me.

While we're all anticipating a new generation of Astons, the current flagship is a quite brilliant machine. For me, the gearbox just gives it the edge over even the stunning V12 Vantage S. I reckon it's the best car Aston makes right now, and no, a week really wasn't long enough. **V**

Vanquish Carbon Edition

ENGINE V12, 5935cc **MAX POWER** 568bhp @ 6650rpm **MAX TORQUE** 465lb ft @ 5500rpm

TRANSMISSION Eight-speed automatic with paddleshift, rear-wheel drive, limited-slip diff, DSC

SUSPENSION Front and rear: double wishbones, coil springs, adaptive dampers, anti-roll bar

STEERING Rack-and-pinion, power-assisted

BRAKES Vented carbon-ceramic discs, 398mm

front, 360mm rear, ABS **WHEELS** 9 x 20in front,

11.5 x 20in rear **TYRES** 245/35 ZR20 front,

295/30 ZR20 rear, Pirelli P Zero **WEIGHT** 1739kg

POWER TO WEIGHT 332bhp/ton **0-60MPH** 3.6sec

TOP SPEED 201mph **PRICE** £199,995

it a clear cut above the previous six-speeder, it also trumps the robotised manual in the V12 Vantage, not just for smoothness but also for speed of response. And I've barely touched the paddles so far.

Matt's waiting with a small mountain of camera gear and car-cleaning kit. The Vanquish's boot is shallow but wide, and, utilising the twin stowage spaces where you might expect the rear seats to be (the coupé's a strict two-seater) we manage to pack the lot, plus overnight bags.

First stop is Aston Engineering in Derby, to shoot the V8 EF1 that appeared in the last issue of *Vantage*. On the way across country, the road finally clears and opens up into the distance and I can't resist selecting Sport and pinning the throttle. The first time you unleash the full 568bhp, it's like entering a slightly different dimension, an ever so slightly scary one, as a titanic force absolutely launches you along the tarmac. Even in third gear and on a bone-dry road you can feel the tyres fighting to contain the torque, the rear squirming, almost as if it's floating a fraction above the road surface, the



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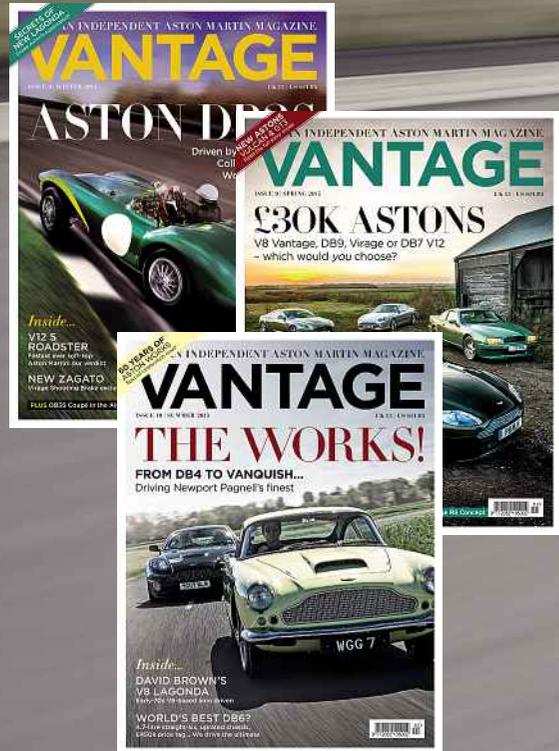
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Richard Meaden
Editor, *Vantage*

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POWER HOUSE

Oselli has built its reputation on its engines, but they're just one facet of today's company

WORDS PETER TOMALIN

PHOTOGRAPHY CHARLIE MAGEE

'WHEN WE MOVED HERE, I'd planned to go into semi-retirement. It hasn't quite worked out like that...' David Eales, owner and managing director of Oselli, is walking us through the firm's substantial acreage of workshops, machine shops and showrooms, all of it gently abuzz with activity. The man has a point. 'Dunno what went wrong,' he chuckles.

'Here' is a business park just outside Milton Keynes in rural Buckinghamshire. Oselli made the move from its previous base in Witney, Oxfordshire, four years ago. The old garage had character; this place has twice the space: 18,000 square feet of it. There are two airy workshops, a machine shop, an engine build shop, a dyno room currently nearing completion, a huge showroom, a car storage facility and two parts stores.

Servicing, sales and restorations are all key parts of the business. But engineering – and specifically engines – are at its very heart. On the day of our visit there are no fewer than 20 Aston engines at various stages of refurbishment, many of them for other Aston specialists.

It was engine tuning that first made Oselli's reputation back in the 1960s, long before David appeared on the scene. Back then it was Mini engines (they were the tuner of choice for many competitors on the Monte). Later they became the go-to guys for MG owners and racers seeking more power. And in the 1990s they started a relationship with Aston Martin, which was when David entered the picture. Oselli still does MG work, but these days its business is 90 per cent Aston: everything from a basic service to a full restoration. 'The only things we contract out are paint and trim,' says David.

He talks us through the cars in the workshops. A DB7 Vantage is being prepped for sale; a DB4 is in for various service items; a classic DBS is having trim and other work. Then there's a gorgeous early DB2/4, just nearing the end of a bare-metal restoration. 'Chris here has spent a lot of time detailing the engine. If it doesn't win a concours, he's out of a job,' winks David.

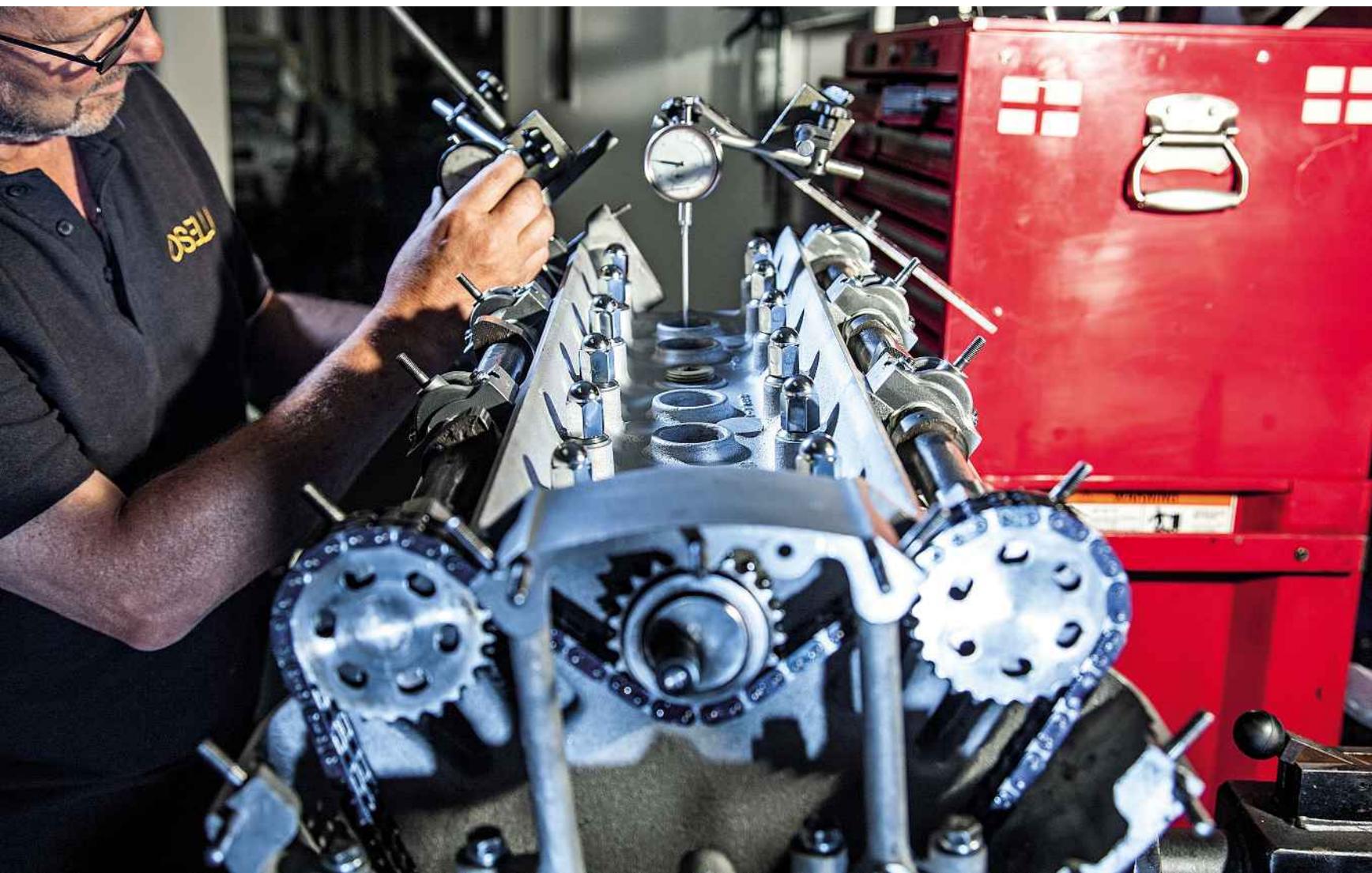
Oselli has eight full-time employees, several of whom have been with the company since the '80s. David's son, Paul, is one of the younger members of the team. 'We also have an apprentice, Max, who's in his third year, and we've plans to take on another. It's the future of the company. I'm in my 60s, as is Robin [one of the machinists], and we won't be here forever.'

For the time being, though, David is still very much hands-on. He shows me a V8 Volante, mid-restoration. 'This car came in from the States: federal engine, low compression. We're building it up to Vantage spec and will be putting a manual gearbox in. It'll be a nice car.'

But not quite as nice as this breathtakingly pretty and rare DB4 soft-top. 'Gorgeous, isn't it? We've converted it to left-hand drive and we're adding power steering.'

Further on, a late-'80s V8 that arrived with fuel injection and an auto 'box is being converted to 580X Vantage spec with manual gearbox: Oselli recently acquired a handful of much-sought-after manual 'boxes. 'It's quite a bit of work changing from fuel injectors to carburettors, but we're nearly there,' says David.

'We're a bit V8-heavy today, but another week there'd be a balance between V8s and straight-sixes. My original knowledge of Astons was from the V8 era, so I know





‘The engine blocks all suffer corrosion to a greater or lesser extent, but 99 out of 100 can be recovered’

Clockwise from above

One of the two main workshops, with a DB2/4 nearing the end of a full restoration; showroom has a smattering of MGs (reflecting Oselli's past) but mostly Astons, including stunning DBR9 racer; welding a block, and machining valve seats in a V8 head

every nut and bolt on them, but we do an awful lot of straight-sixes. In fact, in engine build right now there are more sixes than V8s.'

It's our cue to move through to the machine shop, where an array of cylinder heads are being honed to glinting perfection. 'When we moved from Witney we invested in some brand spanking new machines. They cost an absolute fortune but can do the job of three old machines. A head machine like this will bore out valve seats and valve guides and also vacuum-test seating and so forth.'

Next to it is a surface grinder, used to resurface heads and blocks. Then there are honing machines, milling machines and regular lathes. Ovens are used for heating heads before replacing seats and guides.

My favourite is the machine – actually more of a plunge-pool – for cylinder head pressure-testing. Blanking plates are fitted and a high-pressure airline attached before the head is lowered into a tank full of hot water (to simulate operating temperature) to check for porosity or any leakage. 'It's essential with aluminium because you not only have problems with water jackets, but also with porosity, so you do need to test every head, before and after you fit the guides and so forth.'

When an engine first arrives, it's stripped down in the 'dirty strip-out and wash area' (another chuckle from David) before being placed in one of two huge washing

machines, rather like giant dishwashers, to completely degrease it. It's then soda-blasted to reveal its true condition. 'The blocks all suffer corrosion to a greater or lesser extent. So the next stage is that the corrosion is removed and the aluminium replaced, any cracks in the block are welded up, then it's machined again ready to take the new steel liners. We'll eventually bore the cylinder blocks here too, but currently that's still done at Witney, by a guy in his 70s who's been with Oselli since the 1980s.'

David reckons that 99 out of every 100 blocks can be recovered. 'As far as I know we're the only company that achieves such a high ratio,' he says, 'and that's important because originality is everything today.'

'It's the same with the cylinder heads. If we pressure-test a head and see it's cracked we weld up the head, then remachine the combustion chambers. We sometimes have to ceramic-seal the castings, but again, 99 times out of 100 they can be salvaged.'

When block and head are finished, engine build can commence. Oselli has new steel liners and Cosworth pistons made to its own spec, and, for the 6.3-litre version of the V8, new billet crankshafts too.

'Every engine is different,' continues David. 'You have to machine the piston or the combustion chamber to obtain the compression ratio, because the aim is to set the compression so the engine will run on unleaded fuel.'





Opposite and right
 Pure sculpture – a DB4 and a DB4 GT engine, freshly rebuilt. This page: the whole process starts with the engines being stripped down before being thoroughly degreased in 'giant dishwasher'; dirty valves and shiny SUs on the benches

All sixes are now rebuilt to 4.2-litre capacity. 'It's easier to standardise across the board,' David explains, 'and a 4.2, fully balanced, just drives so well.'

'With the V8 you can have standard 580 [Vantage spec] or 580X [the famous X-pack]: we have the cams made for 580X and we've just had a batch of large-bore airboxes remanufactured. Inlet manifolds, all the things that aren't generally available, we've had all the castings done, all then machined in-house.'

'For carburettors, we can supply 48 IDAs and IDFs and so on, so you can convert to Vantage spec if you want to. Capacity-wise you can have standard 5.3, and of course the 6.3, but we also do a lovely 5.8. Whereas the 6.3 has new pistons, billet crankshaft and Carrillo rods, the 5.8 just uses the 6.3 pistons so it's a lot more affordable and, I think, a cracking engine.'

The ultimate Oselli engine? 'That would be a 6.3 with 580X cams, bored-out inlet manifolds, 48 carbs, our large-bore airbox and large-bore exhaust.' Power output? 'Ooh, I think something around 450bhp.'

Precise power and torque figures will soon be available when the new in-house engine dyno is brought on-stream. 'It'll be semi-automatic and it can run all day long, so we can set the programme and it'll run the engine in for us before we power-test it. The plan is to video each engine, so, along with the full photographic record of all the work we do and the power and torque curves, there'll be a memory stick of the engine being run on the dyno. Some customers will want to come along and view their engine being tested, and that's fine by us!'

Cost? 'Each job is different, but a 4.2 is around £25,000 if you have all the ancillaries. The 6.3 conversion on the V8 costs more – about £30,000 – because the billet crank and Carrillo rods are specially made.'

The final destination on our tour is the vast showroom, which again is predominantly, but not exclusively, Aston. 'All our cars are under cover,' says David, 'so whatever the weather customers can come and browse at their leisure.' Among the stars is a DB6 Volante – 60,000 miles, two owners – and a DBR9, apparently the only example that doesn't need Prodrive factory support to run, perhaps the ultimate track toy for the very rich Aston enthusiast.

There's also a line of MGs, harking back to Oselli's roots. 'I still love MGs; still race them; still supply engines,' says David. 'If I had my way I'd have a separate department for MGs, but there's only so much work you can do, only so many phone calls you can take. The Aston world has sort of swamped us these days. And we've got loads of work – about 18 months' worth if nothing else came through the door.' Somehow I don't think Mr Eales is going to be collecting his pipe and slippers any day soon.



DAVID EALES

...ON HIS 20 YEARS WORKING FOR ASTON MARTIN, AND THE PERILS - AND PLEASURES - OF GOING IT ALONE

David Eales' Aston roots go right back to the mid-1970s. 'An uncle of mine worked at Newport Pagnell as a trimmer. I was in my early 20s, I'd just finished an apprenticeship and he suggested I contact them. A chap called David Beale was the workshop foreman. He said there were no current vacancies but to come along and have a look around.

'They'd just started up again after they'd gone bust, and there was hardly anyone there. They were trying to finish off some of the cars in production, and servicing some others. It was an old building with water leaks everywhere. So David walked me round. Back then I was a bit of a rogue with my motorbikes [he still enjoys his bikes, including the Harley-Davidson Fat Boy in the pic] and I had an earring and rather more hair in those days. But at the end of the chat he said: "If we get a vacancy we'll let you know." Three days later he got in touch to say there was a job if I wanted it. So I started as an engineer in the service department.

'In those days you'd do your time servicing the cars, then you'd eventually move up onto what they called the benches, where you'd build engines and gearboxes. For some reason I found myself on the benches very early on, which didn't go down well with some of my colleagues! And I was very happy doing that for the next four or five years.

'Then in 1979 there was an internal vacancy for an outside engineer, so I put my hand up. By then the company was selling quite a few cars overseas, but there wasn't much of a dealer network, so a car that went off to the Middle East would either be fixed by the locals or someone would go out from the factory. So I'd fly off to the Middle East or Switzerland or wherever and repair a car - usually a Lagonda!

'The service department was growing, and in about '84 I was offered the job of service manager. When I took it on it had a turnover of about £800,000; by the time I left in 1994 it was turning over about £5 million.'

Works Service, as it came to be known, also had its own special projects. One of these was a 6.3-litre conversion for the carburettor-fed V8. 'Aston used to have their own machine shop over the road in production, but the service department didn't really get a look-in,' says David. 'So we needed to subcontract all the machining work...

'Years before, I'd decided to build myself an MGB to go racing and came across this company called Oselli, based in Oxford. I went to see them and bought an engine, exhaust and a Weber carb kit. So when I was pondering who might do the machining for the Astons, I thought of Oselli.'

One of the models Oselli machined the engines for was the Virage 6.3 (the prototype of which was featured in *Vantage* issue 10). 'The standard Virage had been a slow seller. The engineering department were starting to develop the supercharged Vantage but there were all sorts of approvals they had to gain to pass the legislation. So there was a window of opportunity before the Vantage came out, and I did a bit of a sneaky one. We had an old Virage that we used to mess around with, so I nicked a few ideas from engineering and had the panel beaters make these massive flared wheelarches. The bootlid spoiler was off a Ford Sierra, chopped and extended to fit the bootlid. We roped in a load of people: Mike Loasby was one who helped with all the suspension mods. And it was a big success.'

David has particularly fond memories of the Victor Gauntlett years. 'When Ford came in, I became increasingly fed-up with all the bureaucracy. And then Oselli came up, and, being arrogant, I thought I'd do my own business. I had a partner who put money in, and I would run it. Unfortunately I was naive as well as arrogant, and after we bought it we



discovered it had all these debts, which took all the money. So I did a deal with the bank, putting my own home up as guarantee, and they would advance me £100,000 as an overdraft, but I had to go down once a week every Friday to go through the books with the bank manager. He was called Mr Foster, an old guy, car buff, and he supported me really well. And slowly but surely we clawed it all back. I still use the same bank today, and still have the overdraft, but fortunately I never have to use it! Then in the late '90s my partner got into financial trouble and I had to put together every cent I had to buy him out. So it's been hard work, but it's been worth it.'

Any regrets about leaving Aston Martin? 'It was a good time. No regrets though. It wasn't the same after Victor went. It had been like a family, and I didn't enjoy the politics of working for a big organisation. Now I look forward to coming to work every day.' **V**

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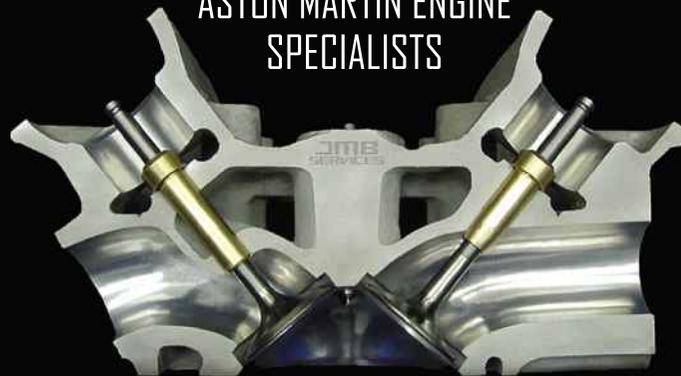
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SPECIFICATION

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

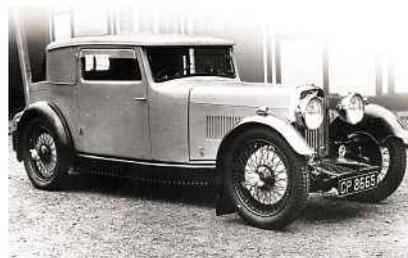


SPECIFICATION

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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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.

Aston Martin V8 Volante



Car Make/Model Aston Martin V8 Volante
Mileage 7,500
Year 1987
Summary Rare LHD Manual finished in Royal Cherry over Tan
Price £185,000



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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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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



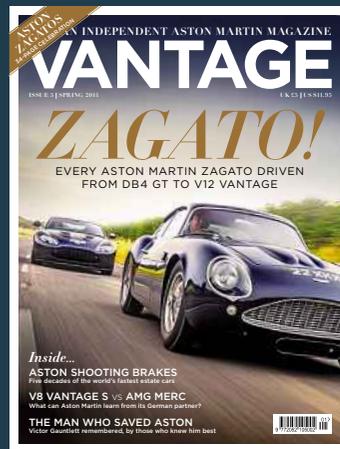
ISSUE 2 (SUMMER 2013)

- DB4 road test
- Le Mans-winning DBR1/2 driven
- The straight-six story
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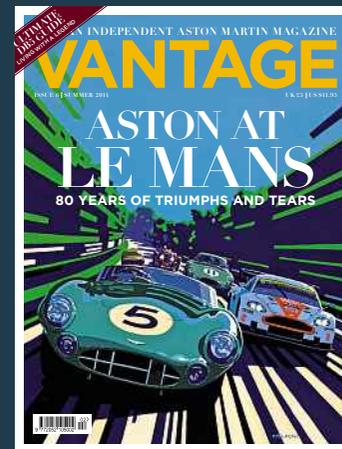
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- Le Mans 2013 special
- Lagonda meets Rapide S
- From Virage to Vantage – the '90s Astons
- DB7 buying guide



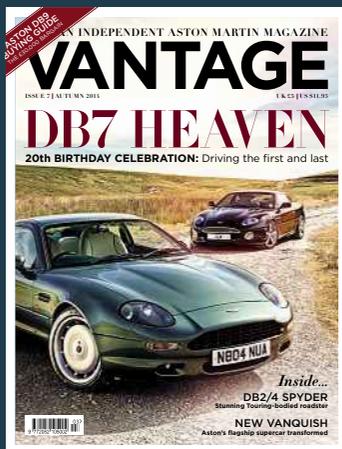
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- N430 on road & track
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- Stirling Moss on his favourite Astons
- DB5 Shooting Brake
 - DBR1 on the road
- V12 Vantage RS Concept
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- David Brown's V8 Lagonda
- DB6 road test
- 1980s V8 EFi
- Lagonda wedge buying guide

VISIT THE BACK ISSUES SECTION AT ASTONMAGAZINE.CO.UK

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' Astons 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 Astons 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.

'MORT' MORRIS-GOODALL

MORTIMER MORRIS-GOODALL, KNOWN AS 'MORT', WAS THE FOUNDER OF THE ASTON MARTIN OWNERS CLUB. BUT THAT WASN'T HIS ONLY CLAIM TO FAME

WORDS JOHN SIMISTER PHOTOGRAPHY DAVID WRIGHT (PORTRAIT BELOW)

Nowadays there are hundreds of owners' clubs catering for all kinds of interesting cars, and even a lot of uninteresting ones. Time was, nearer the dawn of motoring as we know it, that a marque-specific owners' club was a rare thing. Its existence meant that the cars it catered for must have been special, enough so for owners to want to share the warm glow of their experiences. Into this pioneering world was born, in 1935, the Aston Martin Owners Club. Eighty years on, it's still in rude health.

It was the brainwave of one Mortimer Herbert Morris-Goodall, or 'Mort' to those in his circle. In the public domain, Mort's name crops up most often as the father of the famous anthropologist and chimpanzee-behaviour research pioneer, Jane Goodall, but those of a motoring bent might also know of Mort's exploits in the motor-racing world.

In his book, *Jane Goodall: The Woman Who Redefined Man*, American author Dale Peterson describes Mort as 'successful as a racecar driver, less successful as a husband and father'. The relationship with Margaret Myfanwe Joseph (known as Vanne) had started well, though, he having broken his ankle after falling down the stairs of the boarding house in which they both lived during his efforts to attract her attention. She, a secretary for a showbusiness entrepreneur, was much smitten with Mort – 'tall, handsome, with bright blond

hair, blue eyes, dimpled cheeks when he smiled' – and his racy motor car.

That motor car was a white Aston Martin International, which Mort had bought in 1930. Mort had it in mind to race his new toy, but Aston boss Bert Bertelli pointed out the expensive modifications that this would require and suggested starting off with reliability trials. He did a couple of these events, the London to Land's End and the London to Edinburgh, and also entered a few races. But, for 1931, Mort decided he needed a proper racing machine and duly bought LM7 from the works. In June the following year he entered LM7 in the 1000-mile Trial at Brooklands, and in September Mort and Vanne were married. They drove straight from the wedding in London's Sloane Square to Monaco in LM7, spent happy hours once there tearing up and down the mountain roads, and then sped back to England in time for a race at Brooklands.

In 1933, Mort and LM7 joined the Aston Martin works team, fielding LM9 and LM10, for a three-car attack on Le Mans. The team drove there in a convoy, and in the race he shared LM7 with Elsie Wisdom, always known as Bill. She was driving when a connecting rod departed through the side of the engine block.

Mort raced at Le Mans 11 times in all, running as high as second in 1934 in LM12 until the engine broke again. That was the year Jane was born. In 1935, the year of the AMOC's inauguration, the family moved to Weybridge



Above and below

Mort with LM7, which he raced at Le Mans in 1933. Below, with Barry Weir (left), during a return to Le Mans for AMOC's 60th anniversary in 1995

to be near Brooklands, and for Jane's first birthday Mort showed an uncharacteristic flash of affection for his daughter, went into Hamley's toy shop in Regent Street and bought her a giant soft toy in the form of a stuffed chimpanzee. 'I took it home,' he said. 'I didn't expect it to have the effect it had.'

In 1939, he left the Callender cable company, where he had been working as an engineer, to race full-time. He moved the family to France to be closer to races on the European mainland, and was racing in Italy when the diplomatic advice came to get back to Britain quickly as war loomed. Mort spent the war in the Army, was involved in the escape from Dunkirk and was later posted to Burma and Hong Kong.

After the war it was back to racing, no longer specifically Aston-centred although DB2s figured prominently, including a 10th place at Le Mans in 1951. He shared a Jaguar C-type with Stirling Moss for the second of his three Mille Miglias in 1953, and was Jaguar's team manager for that year's C-type landslide victory at Le Mans. Mort was also involved with Healey in its 1950 Le Mans effort as competition manager. His last race was the 1955 Le Mans, finishing 19th in this blackest of events with Leslie Brooke in a Triumph TR2. In that year, according to historicracing.com, which has also contributed much to this story, Mort founded the Healey Drivers' Club; it, too, is still in rude health.

In 2001, at the age of 94, Mort passed away. Thanks to him, thousand of enthusiasts still come together to share their love of Astons. Or indeed Healeys. As long as the cars were fast and the company amenable, Mort was happy.



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1957 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**



1958 Aston Martin DB2/MkIII finished in Rhodium silver with Burgundy hide interior and Wilton Carpet throughout. The car is mechanically perfect having had around £80,000 spent in the past 5 years and is currently being cosmetically fettled in the engine compartment to make perfect. Huge history file. A very sound investment at **£250,000**



1938 Triumph Dolomite Straight Six beautifully built by Rob Green of Gloria Motor Works in Oxfordshire. Rob is the World's leading expert in Pre-war Triumph Motor Cars and here he has recreated a beautiful example from original drawings to mirror the silhouette of the original competition Straight Eights of which only 3 were ever produced. Using an original 1938 Triumph Dolomite chassis and a Dolomite straight six engine coupled all pre-war running gear, this car is really superb. Please enquire for more details **£125,000**

Also currently in stock: 1950 Alard J2, Aston Martin DB7 Vantage Coupe, 3 x Jaguar MkII 3.8, Jaguar E-type 3.8 low drag, Jaguar E-type 3.8, Jaguar XK 150 3.8 FHC, Jensen 541 Racer, Rolls Royce Silver Shadow 1

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