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VANTAGE

ISSUE 29 | SPRING 2020

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CLASSIC V8s, NEW
VANTAGE ROADSTER,
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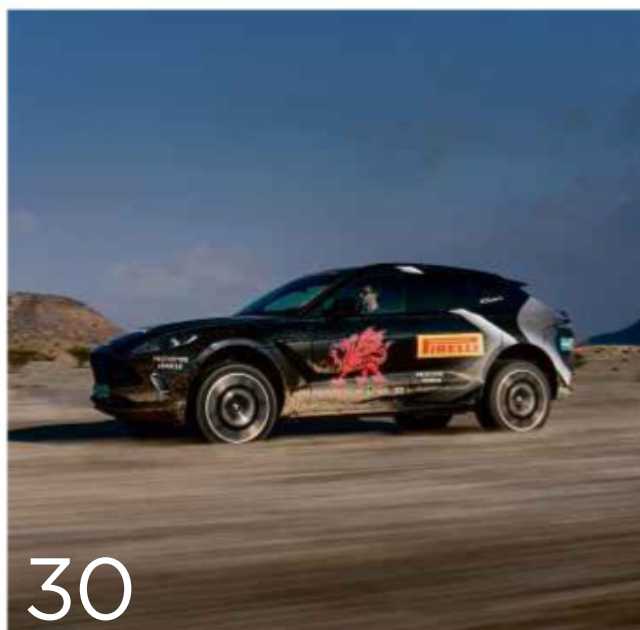
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**1963 ASTON MARTIN DB4 SERIES V
VANTAGE CONVERTIBLE**

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SPRING 2020



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HERITAGE

Viewpoint

Warning: may contain puns



WHERE TO BEGIN. In a plot fit for one of Ian Fleming's James Bond novels, Aston Martin has been saved from the spectre of bankruptcy by a consortium of ultra-wealthy businessmen led by billionaire Canadian fashion mogul and F1 team owner Lawrence Stroll.

Beating a rival bid by Chinese automotive giant Geely, Stroll's £182m investment will secure a 16.7 per cent stake in cash-strapped AML and position him as executive chairman; a

role that is expected to see him a regular visitor to AML's Gaydon HQ. It will be fascinating to see what effect he has on the future direction – and success – of the company.

Stroll is the latest in a long line of larger-than-life characters who have found themselves unable to resist the allure of Aston Martin. Arguably the only automotive marque with a brand to rival that of Ferrari, yet one that has repeatedly struggled to remain solvent, we can take a quantum of solace from the fact this latest injection of capital didn't come a moment too soon.

One thing that's always good for business at Aston Martin is a new Bond movie. The latest – *No Time To Die* – features not one but four Astons: the DB5 first seen in *Goldfinger* and the V8 saloon from *The Living Daylights*, plus a current DBS Superleggera and yet-to-be-launched Valhalla hypercar.

To celebrate this, the 25th official outing for 007, we've pulled out all the stops. First with our cover story drive of one of the original Bond DB5s on the Furka Pass – scene of the iconic image of Connery leaning against the car – followed by driving the living daylights out of one of the purpose-built DB5 stunt cars used in the making of *No Time To Die*. We've had an absolute thunderball putting it all together. For your eyes only, naturally.

Richard Meaden Editor

The next issue of *Vantage* will be on sale on June 4. To subscribe go to dennismags.co.uk/vantage

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Bulletin

News, analysis and events

Vantage opens up

WORDS RICHARD MEADEN

PHOTOGRAPHY AML

NEW VANTAGE ROADSTER PROMISES COUPÉ LEVELS OF PERFORMANCE AND HANDLING AND SEES RETURN OF CLASSIC 'VANE' GRILLE AS AN OPTION

OPEN-TOP ASTONS HAVE always held particular appeal, so it's great to finally see the launch of the long-awaited Vantage Roadster.

Like its predecessor, the new Roadster is a terrific looking machine whether it's taut turret top is up or folded tidily into the tail. Kerbweight is up by 60kg compared with the coupé, but this additional mass has had a minimal impact on performance, with Aston claiming a 0-60mph time of 3.7sec and a top speed of 190mph with the roof raised.

The new, lightweight 'Z-fold' roof mechanism has been designed to preserve as much of the luggage space as possible, with the resulting 200-litre capacity sufficiently large to stow a full-sized golf bag and an assortment of Pringle jumpers. Compact enough to allow the design team to give the Roadster a smooth rear profile, the roof mechanism is also lightning quick. Fast enough, in fact, for Aston Martin to lay claim to the fastest full operating cycle of any powered convertible system, the fabric roof lowering in 6.7sec and raising in 6.8sec at speeds of up to 31mph.







Specification

ENGINE V8, 3982cc, twin-turbo **MAX POWER** 503bhp @ 6000rpm **MAX TORQUE** 505lb ft @ 2000-5000rpm **TRANSMISSION** Eight-speed automatic with paddleshift, rear-wheel drive, E-Diff, torque-vectoring **SUSPENSION** Front: double wishbones, coil springs, telescopic adaptive dampers, anti-roll bar. Rear: multi-link, coil springs, telescopic adaptive dampers, anti-roll bar **STEERING** Rack-and-pinion, electrically assisted **BRAKES** Vented discs, 400mm front, 360mm rear, ABS, EBD **WHEELS** 9 x 20in front, 11 x 20in rear **TYRES** 255/40 ZR20 front, 295/35 ZR20 rear, Pirelli P Zero **WEIGHT** 1690kg **POWER TO WEIGHT** 302bhp/ton **0-60MPH** 3.7sec (claimed) **TOP SPEED** 190mph (claimed) **BASIC PRICE** £126,950

To ensure there's no dynamic compromise, the Roadster has special structural shear panels to maintain a rigid structure that remains uncorrupted by flex when under load – vital given the Vantage majors on an overt sporting character backed up by sharp dynamics. To this end the Roadster shares the coupé's suite of adaptive damping, dynamic stability control, dynamic torque vectoring and electronic rear differential, with a few specific refinements including a bespoke tune for the rear dampers and fresh calibration for the ESP and adaptive damping system.

As you'd expect, there's also the same choice of driver-configurable chassis and powertrain modes, which offer Sport, Sport+ and Track settings to progressively ramp up the Roadster's rate of response

and sense of urgency. And urgent it most certainly will be, thanks to the now-familiar AMG-sourced, AML-honed 4-litre twin-turbo V8 engine, which produces 503bhp and 505lb ft of torque and drives the rear wheels via an eight-speed ZF automatic transmission. There's no manual transmission option from launch, but we see no reason why the Roadster won't be available with a stick-shift at some stage in the not-too-distant future.

Aston has chosen the introduction of the Roadster to also offer some significant options across the Vantage range. Most notable of these is the introduction of the much-loved 'vane' grille as an option on both coupé and Roadster as an alternative to the divisive 'hunter' grille that the Vantage wore at launch. There is also a new range of optional alloy wheels in a

choice of styles and finishes. Another welcome decision is to offer the seven-speed manual transmission as an option on series-production Vantage coupés, having initially only been available in the limited-edition Vantage AMR.

First deliveries of the Vantage Roadster are scheduled to begin in Q2 of this year, with pricing starting at £126,950 (€157,300 in Germany and \$161,000 in the US). The coupé range starts at £114,850.

The new-generation Vantage hasn't delivered the sales volumes Aston needed, but the addition of the Roadster should provide a boost just when Aston needs it most. Together with the introduction of the traditional 'vane' grille and the seven-speed manual option on the coupé, the entry point to Aston's range now has significantly broader appeal.



Speedster steals show

WORDS RICHARD MEADEN | IMAGES AML

GENEVA DEBUT FOR V12-ENGINED
RETRO-INSPIRED LIMITED EDITION



ASTON MARTIN HAS looked to its racing roots for its latest limited-edition special-series model. Called the V12 Speedster, it has clear echoes of the DB3S and DBR1 sports cars of the 1950s, with more recent inspiration taken from the CC100 Speedster Concept built to celebrate the company's centenary in 2013.

Conceived a little over a year ago, the V12 Speedster – of which just 88 examples will be built – uses elements of the bonded aluminium structures featured in the DBS Superleggera and Vantage to create its own unique platform. Its engine is the same formidable 5.2-litre twin-turbo V12 found in the DBS. Developing 700bhp and 516lb ft, it is mated to a ZF eight-speed automatic paddle-shift transmission and limited-slip differential. A claimed top speed of 186mph is some way shy of the ballistic DBS's, but probably quite enough in a car with no windscreen!

Above, left and right

As *Vantage* went to press on the eve of the Geneva show, only these renderings of the new car were available, but they give a mouthwatering flavour of the V12 Speedster's extreme nature and styling themes, inspired by Aston Martin's sports-racing cars of the mid and late 1950s

Braking is provided by carbon-ceramic discs measuring 410mm on the front axle and 360mm on the rear, while the wheels are 21in diameter with race-style centre-lock hubs. Adaptive damping offers Sport, Sport+ and Track modes and there will be the usual suite of electronic systems to enable the driver to tailor the Speedster's dynamic behaviour for road and track use.

The Speedster's body is made almost entirely from carbonfibre, as it combines strength with lightness and enabled Aston's design team to create surfaces that would not be possible using conventional metal panels. A choice of DBR1 or FA-18 specifications offer

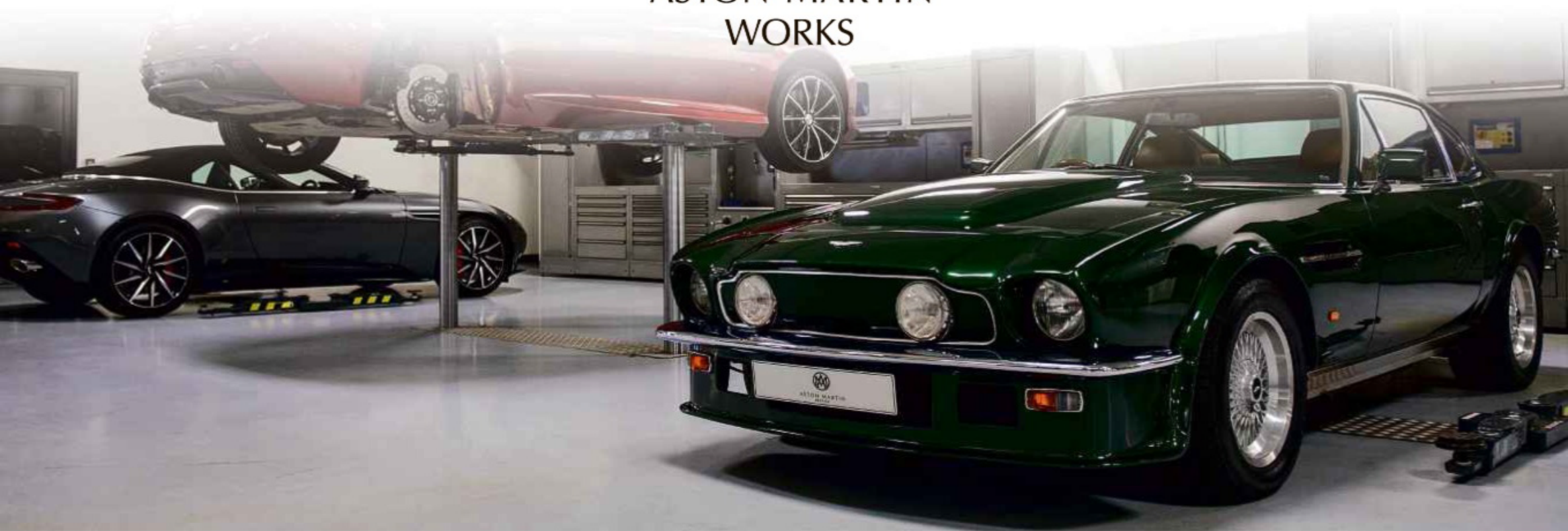
customers two differing themes, the first putting a contemporary twist on Aston's classic racing livery, while the second – as shown at Geneva – looks to 21st century fighter jets for its inspiration, with a combination of Skyfall Silver paintwork and contrasting satin black detailing on the exhaust tips, vents and vanes.

The two-seater cockpit is arguably even more spectacular than the bodywork, combining modern materials such as carbonfibre and 3D-printed rubber with saddle leather, chrome and aluminium. With zero weather protection, it's not for the faint-hearted, but the driving (and passengering!) experience promises to be suitably extreme.

Pricing had yet to be confirmed as we went to press, but expect it to be in the region of £850,000 plus local taxes. Orders are being taken, with deliveries expected in Q1 of 2021.



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V8 – from 2003	£680	£720 ¹	£680	£720 ^{1,2}	£800 ³	£720 ¹	£680 ⁴	£720 ¹	£680	£860 ^{1,3}
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F1 stars test Valkyrie hypercar

TWO MORE VERIFICATION PROTOTYPES JOIN DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

WORDS RICHARD MEADEN IMAGE AML

DEVELOPMENT OF Aston Martin's Valkyrie hypercar has taken a big step forward with the commissioning of a further two verification prototypes, VP2 and VP3 joining VP1 at Silverstone for a landmark test.

Not only was it the first time that more than one functional Valkyrie had been seen on track, but the test provided an opportunity for Red Bull F1 drivers Max Verstappen and Alex Albon to have their first taste of the Adrian Newey-designed hypercar. While they shared VP1, VPs 2 and 3 (right) were driven by Aston Martin high-performance test driver Chris Goodwin and Aston Martin Racing WEC drivers Darren Turner and Alex Lynn.

Some eight VP Valkyries will be built in total, each car being used to develop and validate different systems and attributes of this phenomenally complex machine. Though still relatively early in the physical development phase, we have been told that the new prototypes were running with the active suspension system live: a major step forward as the effectiveness of the suspension system is key to the Valkyrie's aerodynamic performance and delivering on Newey's assertion that the car will work on the road.

On-board video footage released by Aston Martin showed both Verstappen and



Albon behind the wheel of VP1. Both looked to be enjoying themselves, and while some of the gearshifts were audibly hesitant (the transmission is arguably the most complex piece of hardware in the car) the engine sounded magnificent.

After the extensive virtual development programme, it's a massive step to now have three VPs putting on invaluable physical test mileage, especially as it means the development teams at Aston Martin and Red Bull Advanced

Technologies now have the opportunity to receive feedback from Red Bull's F1 drivers as well as Aston's in-house racers.

There's still a tremendous amount of work to be done but, as more VP cars are introduced, the Valkyrie's state of development will progress with increasing speed. As well it needs to, for early Valkyrie customers are being told to expect their cars in the second half of this year. Like them, we cannot wait to experience the finished car.

DBX gets Q personalisation treatment

EARLY GLIMPSE OF CUSTOMISATION POSSIBILITIES

WE'VE ONLY JUST driven a late development prototype (see page 30), but Q by Aston Martin has wasted no time in applying its bespoke personalisation skills to the new DBX, a comprehensively customised example of which was heading for the Geneva motor show as this issue of *Vantage* went to press.

We're sure it would be a nightmare to keep clean, but there's no denying the silky Satin Xenon Grey paintwork suits the DBX's imposing curves, while shiny gloss-black 22in wheels and forged carbonfibre Aston Martin 'wings' badges complete the stealthy exterior scheme.

Inside, there are acres of inky Obsidian Black leather upholstery and extensive use of carbonfibre in a variety of finishes. Machined-from-solid carbonfibre elements

adorn the centre console and door inserts, while the storage area is decked with a single piece of herringbone carbonfibre. Diamond-patterned satin chrome aluminium detailing provides contrast in the otherwise dark-hued interior.

The show car's centre console in particular demonstrates the lengths to which Q will go to create something special. Consisting of 280 individual layers of hand-laid carbonfibre twill, the block of advanced composite required a 12-hour curing process followed by 90 hours of five-axis CNC milling to the final shape and mesmerising finish.

Though there's no word on how much this DBX would cost, it's an impressive demonstration of the three levels of 'Q by Aston Martin' – Commission, Collection



and Accessories – from which DBX customers will be able to choose. Given the recent trend towards personalisation, expect the take-up to be strong.

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Stroll throws Aston a cash lifeline

F1 BILLIONAIRE LEADS RESCUE CONSORTIUM

WORDS RICHARD MEADEN

IMAGE ALAMY

IT'S NO SECRET that Aston Martin has been through the mill since its historic flotation on the London Stock Market, but the last few months have been particularly dicey, even for a marque that has now teetered on the brink of bankruptcy eight times in its 107-year history.

With cash woes from investment in the development of the DBX and the brand new production facility at St Athan compounded by poor sales in 2019, the company needed a substantial and immediate injection of capital.

Thankfully, Aston Martin remains desirable to investors. Chinese automotive giant Geely and a consortium led by billionaire fashion industry magnate (and F1 team owner) Lawrence Stroll each approached AML with offers. Stroll's £182m investment for a 16.7 per cent stake won favour with Aston's board members, who will raise a further £318m via a rights issue, which offers existing shareholders the opportunity to buy additional shares at a discount to the current trading price.

Once in place, this deal will provide cash to ease AML's immediate liquidity issues and help ramp-up production of the DBX. But it will come with job losses and cost-cutting measures. Least surprising is a significant delay to the relaunch of the all-electric Lagonda brand, which is now pushed back beyond 2025.

The family of mid-engined models remains key, but a switch from sponsoring the Red Bull F1 team to Stroll's own Racing Point F1 team at the end of 2020 raises questions over the relationship between AML and Red Bull Advanced Technologies. While the technical partnership between the two will continue until the Valkyrie is delivered, there is no word on whether RBAT's involvement with the Valhalla project will remain in place. Given the so-called 'son of Valkyrie' is still scheduled to appear in 2022 it would suggest some degree of collaboration will remain.

There is cause for optimism. Swiss-domiciled Canadian Stroll, 60, is a fiercely ambitious and enormously successful businessman. He is also a petrolhead. As executive chairman he is expected to play an active role in running AML. Meanwhile, development of the Valkyrie is progressing well. DBX has enjoyed extremely positive reviews and orders for more than 1800 units have been placed. The Vantage range has received a boost with the introduction of the Roadster.

Aston's history tells us the company has a propensity for parlous finances, but those 107 years also demonstrate an unparalleled knack for survival. It will be fascinating to see how Stroll's ambition and acumen shape one of the proudest names in the automotive industry.

IN BRIEF



AN ULTIMATE FOR COLLECTORS

UK auction house Historics is marking its tenth anniversary with a major sale at Ascot Racecourse on March 7, one of the star lots being this 2007 Vanquish S Ultimate, the pinnacle of the mk1 Vanquish line. As senior auction negotiator Mathew Priddy commented: 'There are few Astons as collectable as this - one of just 20 right-hand-drive models, with 4711 miles from new.' For more, visit www.historics.co.uk



ESSEN'S FEAST OF CLASSICS

There will be dozens of Astons on display and for sale at Techno-Classica Essen, March 25-29. Across 120,000 square metres of exhibition space, more than 2700 cars from all eras will be on show, along with trade stands offering services, parts and automobilia. Both Coys and RM Sotheby's are holding auctions, the latter offering a 1989 V8 Vantage Volante X-Pack and a 2014 V12 Vantage Zagato. More at www.siha.de



SPECIAL EDITIONS AT THE DOUBLE

A customer of Aston Martin Cheltenham has become the owner of a fabulous pair of special editions, each built to celebrate the historic 1-2 finish at Le Mans in 1959. The Vantage and DBS Superleggera '59 Editions are both ultra-rare, just 59 of the former and 24 of the latter having been built. Created by Aston's Q division, the pair drew many admiring glances when they were displayed together at the Cheltenham showroom.



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First, the good news...

VANTAGES FLYING, BUT VALKYRIE PLANS ON HOLD

WORDS RICHARD MEADEN

PHOTOGRAPHY ASTON MARTIN



SO LET'S START with the good news. Since we last reported on Aston Martin Racing's exploits in the World Endurance Championship we're thrilled to say that the factory #95 Vantage GTE scored another GTE Pro class win, this time at the inaugural 8 Hours of Bahrain, which took place in December of last year.

Better still, the #95 crew of Danes Nicki Thiim and Marco Sørensen were joined on the podium by teammates Alex Lynn and Maxime Martin in the sister #97 GTE Pro Vantage after the Astons waged a titanic battle with the factory Ferrari 488s.

It was the second GTE Pro win of the year for Thiim and Sørensen, meaning the pair went into the two-month winter break with a 14-point lead in the championship. Reinforcing Aston Martin Racing's success, the #98 Vantage driven by Paul Dalla Lana, Darren Turner and Ross Gunn placed second on the GTE Am class,

having looked in contention for a win for much of the race. Their third podium in four races has boosted their championship campaign, with the trio now lying in third place, 12.5 points shy of the GTE Am championship lead.

Unfortunately, Bahrain delivered a bitter reversal of fortune for TF Sport's bright red #Vantage GTE driven by Salih Yoluc, Jonny Adam and Charlie Eastwood, who went to Bahrain with a precious three-point GTE Am championship lead and left with a 15-point deficit, thanks to a late retirement due to a broken fuel rail. They were hoping for a return to their race-winning form as the WEC teams headed to the Lone Star Le Mans, which took place at the Circuit of the Americas in Austin, Texas, on February 23.

WEC may have taken a two-month break between Bahrain and COTA, but GT teams and drivers have had an extremely

busy start to 2020, with Dubai 24H, Daytona 24H and Bathurst 12H races crammed into the first six weeks of the year. Aston Martin didn't feature in Dubai, where torrential rain eventually brought the race to a premature end due to extensive flooding(!), but two Vantages took part in Daytona. Unfortunately both would retire due to accident damage.

Drama followed the marque to Australia and the magnificent Mount Panorama circuit at Bathurst, first with a huge accident for Marvin Kirchofer in the #62 R-Motorsport Vantage during the qualifying session, followed by a significant but less spectacular crash after just 90 minutes of the race for the #188 Garage 59 Vantage GT3 of Come Ledegar.

R-Motorsport had high hopes for the second of its GT3 entries, with the stunning Castrol-liveried #76 Vantage driven by a stellar line-up of multiple Indy



Clockwise from left
Vantages ran brilliantly in Bahrain, where two GTE Pro crews finished up on the podium; stunning Mount Panorama provided dramatic backdrop to a drama-filled race for the GT teams; sadly plans to race Valkyrie (below) in the Le Mans Hypercar class have been postponed



champion Scott Dixon, local hero Rick Kelly and R-Motorsport DTM driver Jake Dennis. Unfortunately, a misfire early in the race saw Kelly drop back to 29th position, but the crew valiantly fought their way back up to 12th position by the 4.5-hour mark. Frustratingly, an unscheduled stop for a new front splitter and brake pads took 14 minutes and left them six laps down with a little over half the race remaining. Never has a 16th place finish been harder earned.

Now the bad news. Or at least the sad news, which came with the announcement that Aston Martin has postponed its participation in the new Le Mans Hypercar class, which was due to replace current LMP1 cars as WEC's top category for the 2020/21 season.

Together with Toyota, Aston Martin was quick to support the new category when it was proposed last year. But as the rules

for the new class crystallised, it became clear that purpose-built prototypes would also be in contention for outright wins, with a heavy reliance on BoP (Balance of Performance) to try to ensure parity.

Aston had made no secret of its desire to fight for overall victory at Le Mans with a racing version of its road-going Valkyrie hypercar, which would have offered race fans the fabulous prospect of seeing the Newey-designed machine in action. The new LM Hypercar class gave Aston its best chance of repeating its first and so-far sole Le Mans 24H win in 1959, even though the near-1200bhp Valkyrie would have been subject to significant reduction in power to balance its lap time potential.

In an official statement, the company cited uncertainty over the recent Automobile Club de l'Ouest (ACO) and International Motor Sport Association (IMSA) decision to combine the hypercar

class with WEC's upcoming LMDh prototype category from 2021 and the American WeatherTech Sportscar Championship from 2022.

'We entered Valkyrie in the WEC and at Le Mans with the understanding we would be competing with similar machinery and like-minded manufacturers,' said Aston Martin CEO Andy Palmer. 'The situation has changed and it makes sense for us to pause and reconsider our options.'

AML has reiterated its commitment to supporting WEC's GTE category, which it currently contests with the Vantage. It also continues its support of GT3 and GT4 championships, again with the Vantage. The marque's involvement in F1 has also been underlined, with Lawrence Stroll's Racing Point team becoming the Aston Martin F1 team from the 2021 season after Aston's sponsorship agreement with Red Bull finishes at the close of 2020.



That champagne feeling

CONCOURS AND SPORTING ACTION AMONG AMOC HIGHLIGHTS FOR 2020

WORDS MARIA GLENN

PHOTOGRAPHY PETER SINGHOFF/ASTON PARROTT/LOSELEY PARK

THE ASTON MARTIN Owners Club events calendar is bursting at the seams as the club prepares to celebrate its 85th anniversary this year. And, as ever, the biannual concours weekends will be among the major highlights.

Loseley Park, Guildford, will host the Spring Concours on May 16-17, an unmissable world-class coupling of the annual Bonhams Aston Martin sale and the club's highly renowned Concours d'Etat on the Sunday, which will see some of the most exceptional and rare Aston Martins assessed by the white-coated judges.

As in previous years, the concours weekend promises a feast for all the senses, with a driving tour and a variety of culinary experiences to choose from. Meanwhile, the Aston Martin Heritage Trust will be celebrating the Cygnet's 10th birthday with a special line-up, and Loseley Park itself will be open to explore.

The Autumn Concours in September will take members northwards to Harewood House; more details on this in the next issue. Meanwhile, to kick the season off, on Sunday April 5 the Beaulieu National Motor Museum, Brokenhurst, hosts what should be a superb gathering of Astons called 'Simply Aston Martin'. All Aston owners and enthusiasts are welcome and tickets include entry to the wonderful

Clockwise from above left

Plenty of club members will be heading to France in July for the Le Mans Classic; closer to home there will be two spectacular concours weekends, including at Loseley Park

museum and Palace House – visit beaulieu.co.uk to find out more.

This year sees the tenth running of the Le Mans Classic, July 3-5, and club members are being offered hospitality packages that include a champagne reception, parade laps, and display parking on the Bugatti circuit. It's a wonderful opportunity to soak up the atmosphere of bygone days and see some first-rate racing, including the famous Le Mans starts, the cars split into six grids to serve up two days of classic action. Teaming up with 1st Tickets, AMOC is offering bespoke camping packages allowing members to enjoy Le Mans to the full; to book please go to 1st-tickets.co.uk/event/amoc-le-mans-classic.

Another 'save the date' event is the Silverstone Classic, a fabulous family experience, from the funfair to the glorious displays of iconic cars and brilliant racing. This year's dates are July 31-August 2, and AMOC is keen to make the Aston display one to remember.

Hospitality and a warm welcome are also promised at a number of track-

themed events throughout the year. March 19 sees a 'sprint taster day' at Curborough, and members who have always wanted to nurture their inner racing driver will revel in the tuition and support available at both Curborough and again at the Blyton Park trackday on June 19.

The club racing programme has suffered a setback this year, with the last-minute loss of a sponsor, but other clubs will host rounds of the GT Challenge, Aston Martin GT4 Challenge & Intermarque, and Jack Fairman & Innes Ireland Cup at a number of top circuits throughout the year (details at amocracing.com). More good news is that the big AMOC season finale, the St John Horsfall meeting, has been confirmed for Silverstone on October 3.

So plenty to look forward to, plus the usual driving tours, factory visits, and plenty of social events, both national and local. For more details on all of these, and also to find out about AMOC membership, visit www.amoc.org or call 01865 400400.

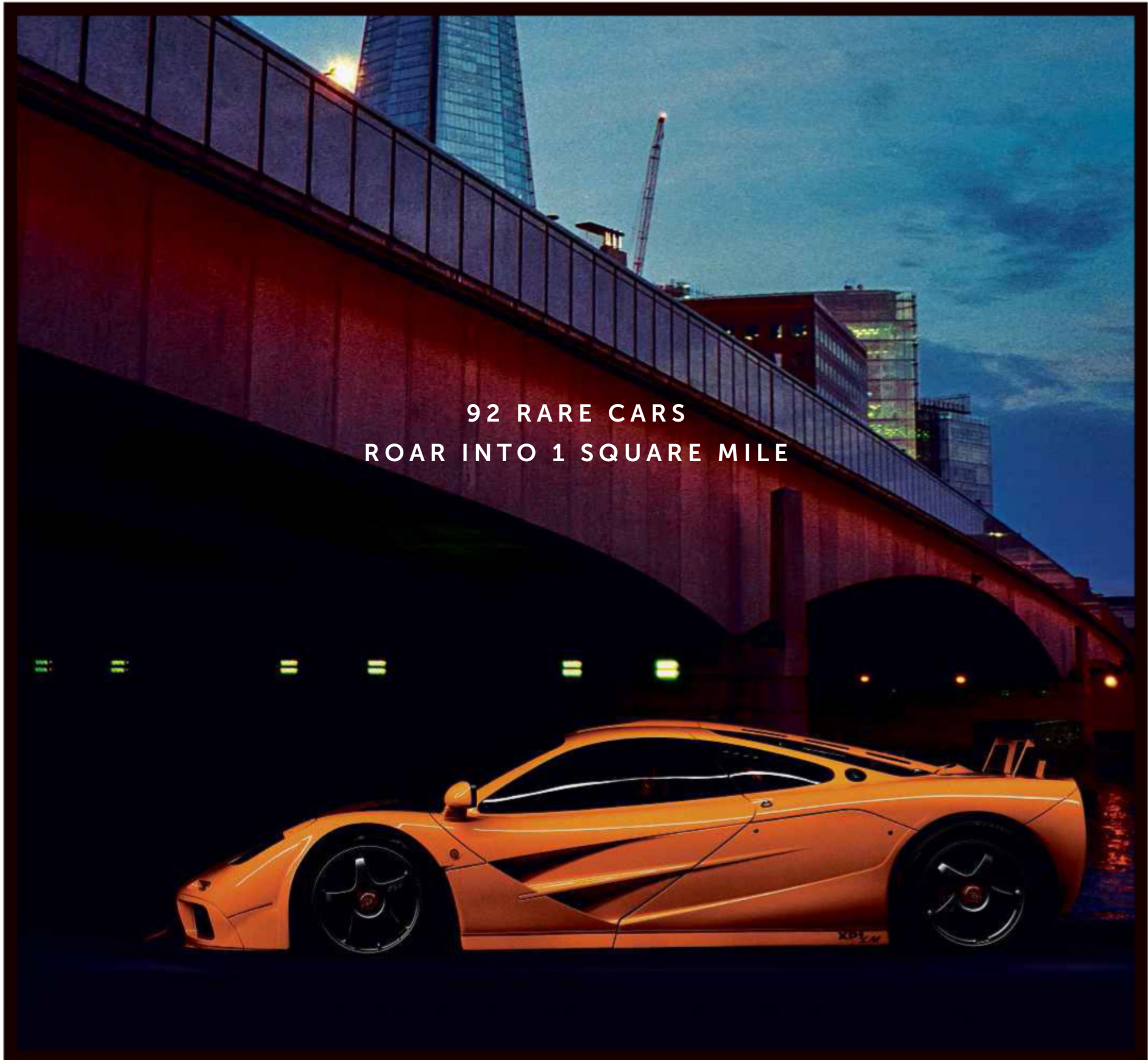
DIARY DATES

March 19 Sprint taster day, Curborough
April 5 Simply Aston Martin, Beaulieu
May 16-17 Spring Concours, Loseley Park
June 19 Blyton Park trackday
July 3-5 Le Mans Classic
July 31-Aug 2 Silverstone Classic



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Opportunity knocks

THE FIRST AUCTIONS OF THE YEAR THROW UP A BARGAIN OR TWO, AND GOODING & CO PRESENTS A RARE CHANCE TO BUY A DB4 GT ZAGATO

WORDS CHRIS BIETZK

PHOTOGRAPHY BONHAMS/RM SOTHEBY'S/GOODING & CO

MINESWEEPER is usually the biggest impediment to the writing of Market Watch, but right now progress is being slowed by the Prime Minister, who is firing and hiring like the Queen of Hearts.

Our attention wanders between a spreadsheet of auction results and TV coverage of the cabinet reshuffle, and as we review the numbers and watch minimally qualified people being given positions of maximal importance, we are reminded that it is always worth throwing your hat into the ring.

At the first major auctions of the year, in Arizona and Paris, 13 out of 16 Aston Martins were sold, but the prices achieved were modest, and across the pond in particular there were bargains to be had for those willing to raise a hopeful hand.

It is a feature of the Arizona sales that many cars come to the block without a reserve price, and as a result one gent drove away from Barrett-Jackson's event in a freshly overhauled, 6800-mile 2003 Vanquish having parted with just \$56,100.

That struck us as a small sum to pay for a nearly-new V12 Bondmobile, but the best buy of Arizona Auction Week was surely the 1955 DB2/4 MkII snapped up for \$112,000 – \$68,000 less than its bottom estimate – at the sale held by RM Sotheby's. One of 199 MkII cars built, and

Clockwise from above left

Gorgeous DB4 Series 4 has factory-fitted DB4 GT engine; Zagato's previous owners include Victor Gauntlett, while DB MkIII was owned by Carroll Shelby in his racing heyday

sympathetically restored in blue over tan, it will offer its new owner a lifetime of driving pleasure – in theory, at least...

There has been much hand-wringing since the UK government announced that a ban on the sale of new petrol, diesel and hybrid cars will now be introduced in 2035 at the latest. A dozen other countries have made similar commitments, and some enthusiasts fear that classics could eventually be legislated off the road.

Frankly, in the long term the old car hobby as we know it will be threatened as much by a lack of interest as by the availability of petrol, but it was nonetheless interesting to see prognosticator Richard Hudson-Evans quoted as saying that 'classic car auction price falls of unknown depths are very likely in the short term' following the decision taken by Boris Johnson & Co.

That's the sort of prediction that will be hard to prove or disprove, given the number of other factors that can influence auction results, but we'll keep an ear out for concerned mutterings over the next couple of months as some choice Astons are offered for sale.

The publication of this issue of *Vantage* will coincide with the Amelia Island auctions, where two delightful cars should change hands. On March 5, Bonhams will offer a 1962 DB4 Series 4 saloon that hides a factory-fitted DB4 GT engine beneath its California Sage bonnet. Expertly restored some 30 years ago and still in fine fettle, it is expected to bring as much as \$1.1m.

The following day, RM Sotheby's will invite bids on a beautiful DB MkIII owned by Carroll Shelby during his years as an Aston Martin works driver. Its condition is as good as its provenance, and the car is accordingly valued at \$300,000-400,000.

Gooding & Co will bring no Astons to Amelia Island, but the house will more than make up for that in April. On the first of the month it will host its very first London sale, at Somerset House. The catalogue will include an ex-Prince Bira 1935 Ulster (estimate: £1.6-2.2m) and a 1955 DB3S (estimate: \$3-4m) campaigned in period by Kangaroo Stable, the Australian team led by David McKay and Tony Gaze.

The star attraction, though, is DB4GT/0176/R, one of the 19 DB4 GT Zagatos built, once the property of Victor Gauntlett and thought to be worth £7-9m. Toss that hat into the ring, would-be owners, and raise a hopeful hand.



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Aston Martin DB11



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Desirables

Aston-related objects of desire, including more than one with a Bond connection



Semper & Adhuc Inopinffce Classique

£1500 | semperadhuc.fr

The Inopinffce Classique is 'make-do and mend' elevated to an artform: its neat case, which measures 44.5mm from lug to lug, houses an expertly restored example of the AS1012, the hand-wound movement that powered so many Swiss watches in the middle of the 20th century.

Scalextric No Time To Die V8 Vantage

£45.99 | scalextric.com

The car that made its silver screen debut in *The Living Daylights* is set to return in *No Time To Die* – minus its original Q-Branch gadgets, we understand, which no doubt made life rather easier for the product development folks at Scalextric.



Live and Let Die, Folio Society edition

£36.95 | foliosociety.com

Another classic James Bond story is brought to life by Fay Dalton, whose pulp-fiction illustrations are the perfect complement to Ian Fleming's propulsive prose. And, as we have come to expect, the pages are beautifully bound in a cloth inspired by 007's tailored suits.



DBX travel wallet

£195 | shop.astonmartin.com

If you've ordered a DBX and plan to test the new car's limits, you'll want one of these, too – a handmade leather travel wallet to keep all your papers tidy as you rumble from one remote border crossing to the next.

Desirables

More Aston-related goodies – and other objects of desire that have caught our eye



GRRC Members' hip flask

£55 | goodwood.com

The weather at the first few race meetings of the year can be positively arctic, but a nip of firewater from this handsome flask will provide some welcome relief on days when you find yourself shivering in the grandstand.



Klipsch Cornwall IV speakers

£6500 (pair) | klipsch.com

Named not, as you might assume, after the land of Poldark and pasties, but because it works unusually well positioned in a corner or against a wall. The model was introduced all the way back in 1959, but this iteration is no relic; it features a brand new mid-range compression driver and a new crossover, among other refinements.

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

1957 Grand Prix of Belgium poster

\$550.00 | arteauto.com

A linen-backed and remarkably well-preserved reminder of one of the DBR1's lesser-known triumphs. Aston's greatest competition car was driven to victory at Spa by Tony Brooks, and a DBR1 took second place, too, with Roy Salvadori holding off four hard-charging Jaguar D-types.



Harrington GB Spirit kids' car

£POA | groupharrington.com

The DB5-inspired GB Spirit boasts a 110cc single-cylinder engine, a three-speed gearbox, fully independent suspension, and Brembo brakes to haul it from 29mph to a standstill in a trice. No mere toy, then, and given that it will accommodate an adult comfortably, you might have a hard time turning over the key to your miniature motorist.

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Artist: Benjamin Freudenthal



Classic Aston Martin tyres from Pirelli



Longstone Tyres is pleased to announce the range of period-style Pirellis now available again for classic Aston Martins



FELTHAM DAVID BROWN CARS

In the 1940s and '50s the majority of the world's best sports cars ran on 16in wheels fitted with 6.00V16 crossply tyres. But for some time there hadn't been a crossply tyre that holds the V-speed rating.

Recently, however, Pirelli's contribution to the world of historic car tyres has been substantial, as it has increased its range of important period rubber.

Driven by the need to make correct tyres for a Maserati 250F, development started on a high-performance crossply tyre. As you can imagine, there has not been a great demand for crossply tyres within Pirelli for some considerable time. Three carcass structures were developed for the planned re-development of the 6.00V16 Stella Bianca tyre of the 1940s and '50s. They were shipped over to Longstone Tyres along with two tyre technicians. A day of testing was arranged with three drivers and a pair of 1950s sports cars.

The decision was unanimous: all three drivers chose the same carcass design for its responsive handling, and so the new production of the Pirelli 6.00V16 Stella Bianca crossply tyre was put into production at the beginning of 2019. The result of this is that there is now a genuine, period V-speed-rated crossply tyre available

for the Feltham car: DB2, DB2/4, DB MkIII and the early DB4.

In 1952 Pirelli developed its Cinturato radial tyre: for the first time a radial tyre suited to sports cars was available. This groundbreaking development was taken up immediately by Lancia, Ferrari, Lotus, Alfa Romeo, Maserati and more.

This exotic, new, European tyre technology did not come cheap. However, if you were prepared to spend the money, David Brown's Aston Martin offered the Pirelli 185VR16 Cinturato CA67 as its high-tech radial upgrade.

DB4, DB5 & DB6

When the 1960s arrived, the top-brass cars started being fitted with 15in wheels. Aston Martin was not to be left behind, the later DB4 running on 15in wheels with 6.70V15 crossplies or 185VR15 radials. This tyre fitment continued through the DB5 to the DB6 Series 1.

There isn't currently a correct crossply tyre with a suitable speed rating. However, as the 1960s developed, the opportunity to maintain higher cruising speeds on motorways and autobahns drove a greater migration towards radial tyres, and so Aston Martin began fitting the 185VR15 Pirelli Cinturato CA67 radial.



Clockwise from far left
Pirelli Cinturato CA67 fills
the wheelarches of the Aston
Martin DB2/4; Lamborghini's
Miura was responsible for a
new range of performance-
rated tyres, of which Aston
Martin took full advantage for
the V8 Vantage; DB4 GT
makes full use of Pirelli
Cinturato radials on
Borrani wire wheels.

If you really wanted to push the boat out, Aston Martin offered aluminium-rimmed lightweight Ruote Borrani wire wheels too, as fitted to the DB4 GT Zagato and various James Bond cars. They are still a fabulous enhancement to an already fabulous car.

DB6 & DBS

In the mid-1960s tyre technology moved on. Pirelli developed the ability to make a 205mm-section tyre, able to withstand the power and speed of cars such as the Ferrari 500 Superfast, Maserati 5000GT, Iso Grifo and Lamborghini Miura P400.

Again, Aston Martin was up there with them. The wheelarches of the DB6 Series 2 were flared to accommodate the same 205VR15 Pirelli Cinturato CN72. A crossply 815V15 tyre was also offered.

If you study *The Persuaders!* carefully enough, you will notice that Lord Brett Rupert George Robert Mark Anthony Andrew Sinclair, being a discerning gentleman, stuck with the Aston Martin fitment on his six-cylinder DBS. It wore 205VR15 Pirelli Cinturato CN72 tyres.

V8 VANTAGE

When Lamborghini developed the later SV version of its fabulous Miura, the power was astounding. A massive rear tyre was

needed to transmit that power to the ground. Pirelli developed the Cinturato CN12, and was then able to make a tyre in the 255/60R15 size!

A similarly brutal amount of power and torque was also available from Aston Martin's V8 Vantage of the late 1970s, and the same enormous tyres were required as a result.

It's worth noting that the W speed rating had not been invented in those days, but the current 255/60WR15 Cinturato CN12 production from Pirelli is speed-rated as capable of maintaining 170mph continuously for one hour.

ASTON MARTIN TYRES

Although the *full* range of tyres for classic Aston Martins is not yet made by Pirelli, the most important landmark tyres have been reproduced. Manufacturing to the very highest standards with modern materials, and employing modern quality control techniques, Pirelli produces tyres that will make your classic Aston Martin feel exactly the way it did when it was first produced, while offering greater safety levels and grip.

Oh yes, and they look great, too!

www.cinturato.net



PIRELLI STELLA BIANCA
A 6.00V16 crossply tyre capable of 150mph. Perfectly suited to the fastest sports cars of the 1940s and '50s. Ideal for a Feltham David Brown Aston Martin.



PIRELLI CINTURATO CA67
The original sports car radial tyre, from the 1950s through the '60s and into the '70s. As fitted to the DB4 GT Zagato Borrani wheel – THE works upgrade for '50s and '60s DB models.



PIRELLI CINTURATO CN72
Original equipment on Maserati 5000GT, Iso Grifo and Ferrari 500 SuperFast. The DB6 Series 2 had flared wheelarches to fit the 205VR15 CN72, the largest tyre available for mid-1960s GT cars.



PIRELLI CINTURATO CN12
Lamborghini needed the enormous 255/60WR15 CN12 on the rear of the 170mph Miura SV. Aston Martin needed them all-round for its 170mph late-1970s V8 Vantage.



H O M E

We drive a pre-production DBX in the damp and cold of the

WORDS MIKE DUFF | PHOTOGRAPHY DEAN SMITH / MAX EAREY

& AWAY

Welsh forests – after first trying it in the heat and dust of Oman



This isn't natural Aston Martin territory. The nearest tarmac road is at least ten miles from this rugged part of the Muscat Governate in Oman. I'm standing in a valley surrounded by jagged peaks and with a barely defined dirt trail running across its rocky floor, zig-zagging a course around bigger boulders.

The noise comes first, a bellowing V8 soundtrack that doesn't so much break the utter silence as smash it into pieces as it echoes from all sides. Next, the DBX enters stage left, already moving at a good pace but with a nose-up stance showing how hard it is still accelerating, and towing a billowing cloud of dust.

Logo-clad black livery makes the DBX look like an oversized WRC car, but there's no mistaking the shape of Aston's trademark radiator grille. Well before the first turn, the car is sliding, adopting an impressive (but not excessive) oversteer angle it carries through the shallow corner. Then it gets trickier: the road

changing direction and requiring an abrupt transition from left to right. With a Scandinavian flick any rally driver would be proud of, the DBX is facing the other way – and travelling at a more exuberant angle. The bigger drift is doubtless for the benefit of both me and a video crew just beyond the apex. I catch a glimpse of a broad grin through the windscreen – Aston's chief engineer Matt Becker enjoying his work – before the dust arrives and the world turns grey. The noise continues for a while longer.

Automotive engineers will often complain that working with development prototypes is hard, frustrating work: chasing faults and working on fixes, 'break it, mend it, break it again', as Becker puts it. But it's not hard to see the appeal of driving new models months and even years before anybody else does, defining their dynamic character and – on occasion – even getting to power-slide them through the deserts of a Middle Eastern Sultanate.

Our car is what is called a '1PT' prototype. That means it has been built in the new plant at St Athan (the earlier mules were made in Wellesbourne), but it isn't a 'saleable unit' so its





'If you've been in another modern Aston, then the DBX's cabin is familiar, with similar design and shared switchgear'



Above and right
The famous wings have never been in this sort of environment before, but DBX seems to thrive on desert trails and mountain roads of Oman. This car one of the final test mules before proper production begins at the St Athan factory

life will be that of a well-beaten test mule, destined ultimately to be scrapped. Despite that, and the graphic-heavy wrap livery, it looks and feels respectably well assembled up close, although Becker is eager to point out that prototypes don't get final-grade leather for their cabins. The obviously not-finished bits are various electronic boxes, including a laptop needed to run the latest versions of various software systems. The digital dashboard is also doing a good impression of a Christmas tree as it reports erroneous errors from various uncalibrated sensors.

If you've been in another modern Aston, then the DBX's cabin is familiar, with similar design and shared switchgear. While obviously further from the ground than in other Astons, the natural seating position is still more reclined than in other big SUVs. Space is good, both front and rear, and the standard full-length glass roof makes the interior feel light and airy, certainly in the Arabian sunshine.

Aston is keen to show the DBX's talents on a variety of surfaces: I get to drive for around 100km on both gravel and tarmac, with the switch between surfaces often happening with little or no notice on minor mountain roads. I also get Matt Becker in the passenger seat, to talk me through the DBX's chassis and powertrain, but also to implicitly discourage me from crashing a hugely valuable test mule.

And the first thing to know is it's definitely Aston-fast. The AMG-sourced 4-litre V8 is the same basic engine that is used in the Vantage and DB11, both of which weigh considerably less than the DBX's 2.2 tonnes. Nor is it at the sharp end of its ridiculously quick segment. On paper, the Lamborghini Urus, W12-powered Bentley Bentayga and Porsche Cayenne Turbo are all faster over the 0-62mph benchmark, as is the Mercedes-AMG GLE 63 S, which uses a brawnier version of the same V8. But unless you are playing Top Trumps, none of this really matters; the DBX's combination of 542bhp and 516lb ft of torque gives a mighty turn of pace.

As in its other applications, the engine is big on both effortless low-down muscle – peak torque arrives at just 2200rpm – but also top-end zing. It's entirely possible to drive at respectable pace using no more than half throttle and leaving the automatic gearbox to its own devices in Drive. But there's also proper reward for pushing harder, not least the snarling soundtrack that comes from proximity to the 7000rpm limiter. There are even some pops and bangs on a lifted throttle in the Sport and Sport Plus dynamic modes, something Becker says can actually be programmed in the Bosch engine management software. But the engineering team hasn't gone overboard with these: it still sounds natural and, yes, Aston-y.

While AMG models use a wet-clutch 'MCT' nine-speed autobox, the DBX has stuck with a conventional torque converter version of the same transmission; Becker says the MCT would



*'The combination of
542bhp and 516lb ft
gives the DBX a
mighty turn of pace'*



have cut unacceptably into the Aston's towing capacity. Changes aren't quite as snappy as they doubtless would be with the quicker 'box, although the prototype was still running non-final software, but refinement at low-tenths progress is impressive.

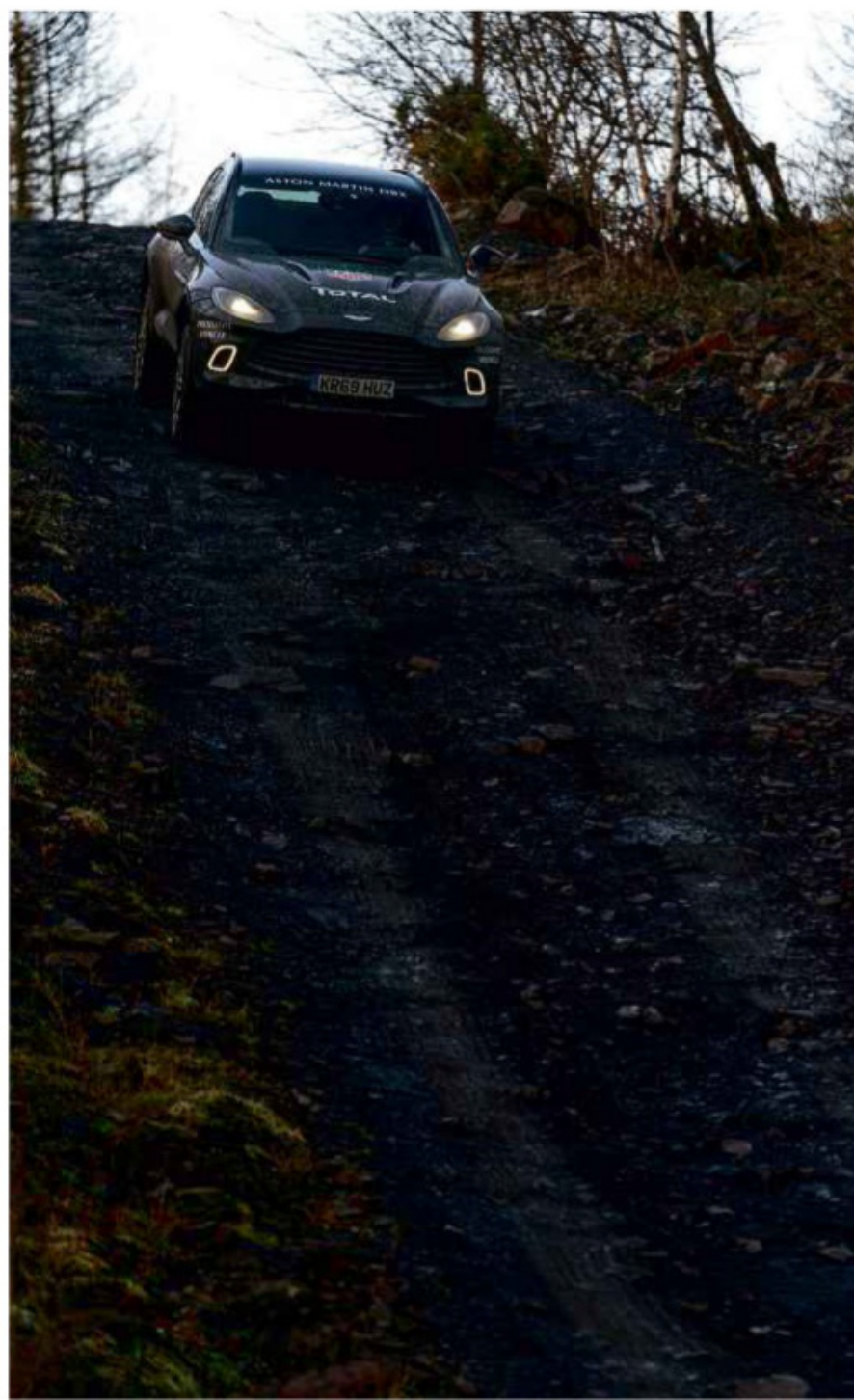
The DBX is Aston's first SUV, but it is also the company's first all-wheel driven model, something that Becker admits has been an equal challenge in ensuring it delivers a brand-appropriate dynamic experience. The idea has been to make the DBX feel rear-wheel drive as much as possible, something that is immediately obvious on Oman's dusty surfaces. Even in the softest GT dynamic mode, the rear-biased torque split is immediately evident. Pushing slightly harder also brings the line-sharpening input of the torque-biasing rear differential into play, this working on the same principle as the system fitted to the Vantage and moving more effort to the outside rear wheel to help the DBX turn under power.

Selecting the more aggressive Sport or Sport Plus dynamic modes increases both the rear torque bias and active differential effect; the DBX will slide on loose surfaces even with the stability control switched on, although the system intervenes intelligently to prevent things from turning wayward. Turning the system off – at Becker's insistence – proves that the DBX can indeed be turned into an unlikely drift machine, although I find that the drivetrain's tendency to shunt torque forwards once the rear is slipping makes it hard to hold big angles for long. So Becker takes over and shows me what's possible at max attack. Relevance to potential buyers – severely limited. But fun? Absolutely.

The all-season Pirelli Scorpion tyres generate impressive grip levels on Oman's generally smooth tarmac – although the rear-drive sensation is still there when pressed hard. But higher loadings give the chassis a chance to demonstrate how refined it is. The standard air springs are very soft, but quick-acting adaptive dampers and an active anti-roll system maintain discipline remarkably well. A pair of 48-volt electric motors apply torque against the anti-roll bars, capable of exerting up to 1400Nm (1033lb ft) to counteract body roll. Aston claims there is less roll than in a Vantage, and after attacking a twisting, downhill mountain road, that sounds both right and impossible at the same time.

After a day in the Gulf, the only real frustration is that of not knowing how the DBX will deal with the very different challenge of the UK.

CUE WOBBLY FADE EFFECT. Three weeks and 4800 miles later, I have an answer. As part of its global tour, the same DBX prototype, minus its Oman licence plates, has returned home and is being used for another round of testing, in south Wales. It's a chance to both experience it, briefly, on UK roads, but also to find out how it copes



Clockwise from left
Walters Arena off-road centre near Neath has all manner of off-road challenges designed to test the mettle of road-orientated SUVs as well as serious mud-pluggers. Not many DBXs will ever be taken green-laning, but actually it acquits itself surprisingly well

*'Wales is a chance to
find out how the DBX
copes with a spot of
moderately serious
off-roading'*





with a spot of moderately serious off-roading.

The DBX has barely changed. Front spring rates have been tweaked, the electric steering software is a later build, and some suspension bushes have been swapped to remove creaking noises that were picked up in Oman.

Today's playground is radically different, though: barely a degree above freezing, with damp, clammy road surfaces. There's a rapid introduction to the sort of subjective factors that development engineers guard against – the DBX feels bigger than I remember, but also much quicker. That's because the roads are narrower and more heavily trafficked, also because limits are lower, the tarmac being much more slippery than in Oman.

At first the DBX feels softer, too, although Becker assures me it's not. My first question is whether the suspension is going to be up to the challenge of digesting rough Welsh tarmac, initial low-speed ride feeling more marshy than pillowy. But the dampers and clever anti-roll system prove to be up to what has become a very different challenge, fighting lean and delivering what is close to a magic carpet impression. It takes the temporary failure of the anti-roll system to prove just how hard it has been working, the DBX suddenly cornering at near-nautical angles. Five minutes with a laptop and the technicians have got it working again.

The drive on-road is brief, conducted to take the DBX to Walters Arena, an off-road centre near Neath. This is used for testing and filming – YouTube offers many videos of butch 4x4s being overwhelmed by impossible obstacles – but today's challenges are milder. The DBX isn't designed to go into the wilderness so much as get itself out of any trouble it might find itself in. So it climbs and descends impressive gradients, and with the air suspension fully raised passes over sharp rocks without expensive grinding noises. It will even ford through what initially seems like an impossible depth of standing water.

But while the production DBX will doubtless be the most off-roadable Aston of all time, that ability won't be the car's big draw. Fun is more important, and on some of the Arena tracks regularly used to test rally cars it gets the chance to prove its credentials again, with wider corners and more generous run-off allowing me to push harder than in Oman. It's only after multiple runs through a 90-degree corner at increasingly silly speeds that one of the marshals draws attention to some debris by the side of the track: it's bits of a hearse that the *Top Gear* TV show rolled here.

There's also the small matter of this prototype still having much work to do, its next task being a stint as a software mule as the team rush to get

the DBX spec finalised (and the bugs squashed) for the formal launch later this year.

MATT BECKER ADMITS that the DBX has been the toughest challenge of his professional career – one that included being Lotus's engineering boss for six years prior to his move to Aston. Sports cars, he says, only need to be good at a few things, whereas luxury SUVs need a much wider spread of talents, from travelling flat-out on an autobahn to towing a horsebox, or indeed handling the challenge of a rock-strewn track taken at injudicious speed. It's entirely possible to debate the merits of Aston's decision to enter this bit of the market, but it's hard to fault the seriousness with which the company has set about trying to make sure the finished car reflects the brand's values.

The chance to drive this pre-production car hasn't just been a sneak peak at how we can expect the finished version to behave, it's also been an insight into the scale of the work that has gone into creating it – and just how far Aston's engineering team travels when working on a new car. The DBX may be a very different kind of car to any the company has produced before, and for some a controversial one – but the engineers working on it have poured just as much of their hearts and souls into its creation as they would for any other Aston Martin. **V**

2017 ASTON MARTIN
 DB9 GT VOLANTE 'LAST OF 9'
 £195,000



As production of the DB9 GT ended, a specially equipped end of line edition entitled, 'Last of 9' was discretely announced to Aston Martin main agents in Europe, with the cars being allocated on a first come, first served basis. It is one of these very Last of 9 models we are proud to offer, one of only nine Volantes constructed in total, for all markets.

Finished in classic Cumberland Grey with Bitter Chocolate hides and contrast stitching and piping, the 'Last of 9' by Q reached new levels of interior refinement with tasteful finishes and grace notes which when combined with the ultimate performance delivered the DB9 GT, produces an intoxicating blend of luxury and performance.

This exceptional car, 1 of 2 two Volantes built for the UK market, with just 1,800 miles covered by its first and only owner. Accompanying the car is a 4-piece set of matching Aston Martin luggage, leather bound build book, a numbered car cover and all its originally supplied equipment.

2015 ASTON MARTIN
 DB9 GT 'BOND EDITION'
 £135,000



A fitting tribute to the highly successful Aston Martin and James Bond 50 year relationship, the DB9 GT Bond Edition announced in 2015 attracted global attention, with ultimately 38 examples being delivered in the UK, of the eventual 141 built. Finished in standard issue, Spectre Silver with Obsidian Black hides and Silver stitch, this example is complete with its entire complement of special issue equipment, including a 007 Limited Edition Omega Aqua Terra wrist watch with accessories, display case and books, all contained within the originally issued 20" Globe-Trotter suit case. All remaining unused.

The DB9 GT introduced for 2015, was the last manifestation of the marques highly successful DB9 model, uprated to 540bhp and equipped with Carbon Ceramic brakes and a host of performance upgrades.

This UK supplied example, first registered in 2015, has covered just 960 miles from new, having been driven occasionally, professionally stored and maintained, during its single previous ownership. Indistinguishable from new, this DB9 GT Bond Edition, is the first Aston Martin model, to be built with official 007 branding. A modern classic, extremely rare and built before the conclusion of production of Aston Martin's most successful model ever. The collectability and future appreciation of this wonderfully evocative, rare and desirable collectors' car, is undoubted.



INTERVIEW | TONY BROOKS

SMOOTH OPERATOR

Famed for his smooth style, Tony Brooks starred for Aston Martin in its 1950s racing heyday. Here he recalls those heady times

WORDS BEN BARRY | PHOTOGRAPHY MALCOLM GRIFFITHS







For a man who credibly claims to have always driven within his limits, it seems almost contradictory that Tony Brooks achieved race victories for Aston Martin on the most unforgiving race tracks of them all, especially during an era when so many drivers perished. His great achievements include a win in the wet on his debut at Spa in 1957,

and victory at the Nürburgring 1000km the same year. Smooth, precise and measured Brooks may have been, but clearly the man had natural speed and talent to spare.

Today Brooks is 87, still fit and sharp, and welcomes *Vantage* to his Surrey home, where period photographs, memorabilia and a copy of his entirely self-written and researched autobiography *Poetry in Motion* recall those glory days – not just with Aston Martin in sports car racing, but in F1 too, where he raced for Connaught, BRM, Vanwall and Ferrari.

The name might be less likely to roll off the tongue than that of British contemporaries such as Moss, Hawthorn or Collins, in part because of Brooks' reluctance to embrace the limelight, but as these trophies and mementoes reveal, Tony Brooks achieved success against them all and absolutely merits inclusion as one of the greatest British race drivers of all time. Even judged against international opposition, he still stands tall – second overall in the 1959 Formula 1 World Championship is proof of that.

Brooks intended to follow his father into dentistry, and actually completed his studies during his time as an Aston

Martin sports car driver. But his parents were both keen motorists – indeed it was in his mother's Healey Silverstone that he made his motorsport debut at Goodwood in March 1952, aged 20, his smooth style evident early on. 'I find driving the most natural thing to do, even at my age, and I was always naturally smooth,' he says. 'In those days it was all about controlling the car. They didn't have the grip they do now, which was a good thing. It gave us more scope to drift the cars.'

The delicate touch was noted by a fellow competitor who lent Brooks a Fraser Nash Le Mans Replica, allowing for more competitive outings. Come late 1954, word had got around, leading Aston Martin team boss John Wyer to invite Brooks to a test at Chalgrove Airfield, Oxfordshire.

So impressed was Wyer that he offered Brooks a works drive, his Aston debut seeing him sharing a DB3S with John Riseley-Prichard at Le Mans. Brooks settled in quickly and would get on well with all his Aston teammates during his four years with the team. 'We had a wonderful environment, never any nastiness,' he recalls. 'Three good drivers a year could be killed during the 1950s, and I think the feeling between us all was like fighter pilots, though I'm not suggesting it was as dangerous. Roy Salvadori became a very great friend, I've always been on the best of terms with Stirling... Reg Parnell, I had no problem with him either. Carroll Shelby occasionally joined us, he was great fun. It was a good, happy team.'

Brooks remembers Wyer as 'a smart operator and strict disciplinarian', and that while the DB3S's performance was down compared with the Ferraris at Le Mans, this was offset by its impressive roadholding and handling. But Le Mans 1955 was to be dominated by the worst accident in

Above and right

The hallway of Brooks's Surrey home is a gallery of some of his finest moments in motorsport, including a number of outstanding wins at the wheel of a DBR1 (right). As well as racing sports cars, he also excelled in F1, with works drives for Vanwall and Ferrari



motorsport history, in which Pierre Levegh's Mercedes ploughed through the crowd with the loss of over 80 lives. Twenty-three-year-old Brooks was on track at the time, and while he wasn't involved, he did drive through the aftermath and was deeply affected by events that evening.

'It was a chance to ask yourself "do you really want to go motor racing?", but my attitude was never to force myself to do something unnatural, so I would always drive to the maximum of my ability, not beyond,' he explains. 'I was placed in situations that were dangerous, but not through my doing.'

And so Brooks continued to race, scoring a third with Peter Collins in the Goodwood 9 Hours, while October 1955 saw another pivotal debut, this time in F1 for Connaught, resulting in a remarkable win at Syracuse. It would lead to a drive with BRM for 1956, though Brooks remained an Aston Martin sports car driver as the DB3S evolved into the fabulous DBR1. 'The DB3S was a good, solid car, but it was nothing outstanding,' recalls Brooks. 'The DBR1 was a vast improvement in terms of roadholding, suspension and balance – different era really.'

Early in 1956 Brooks suffered a DNF with Reg Parnell in the 12 Hours of Sebring due to engine trouble, followed by a 5th at the Nürburgring with Collins, both still in the DB3S. And then, with Le Mans in the DBR1 just round the corner, his preparations were thrown up in the air with the first of only two career accidents, when he crashed his BRM F1 car at Silverstone due to a sticking throttle and was thrown from the cockpit. Badly injured, Brooks still made it to La Sarthe that year to partner Parnell in a DBR1, only to retire after 246 laps with transmission trouble.

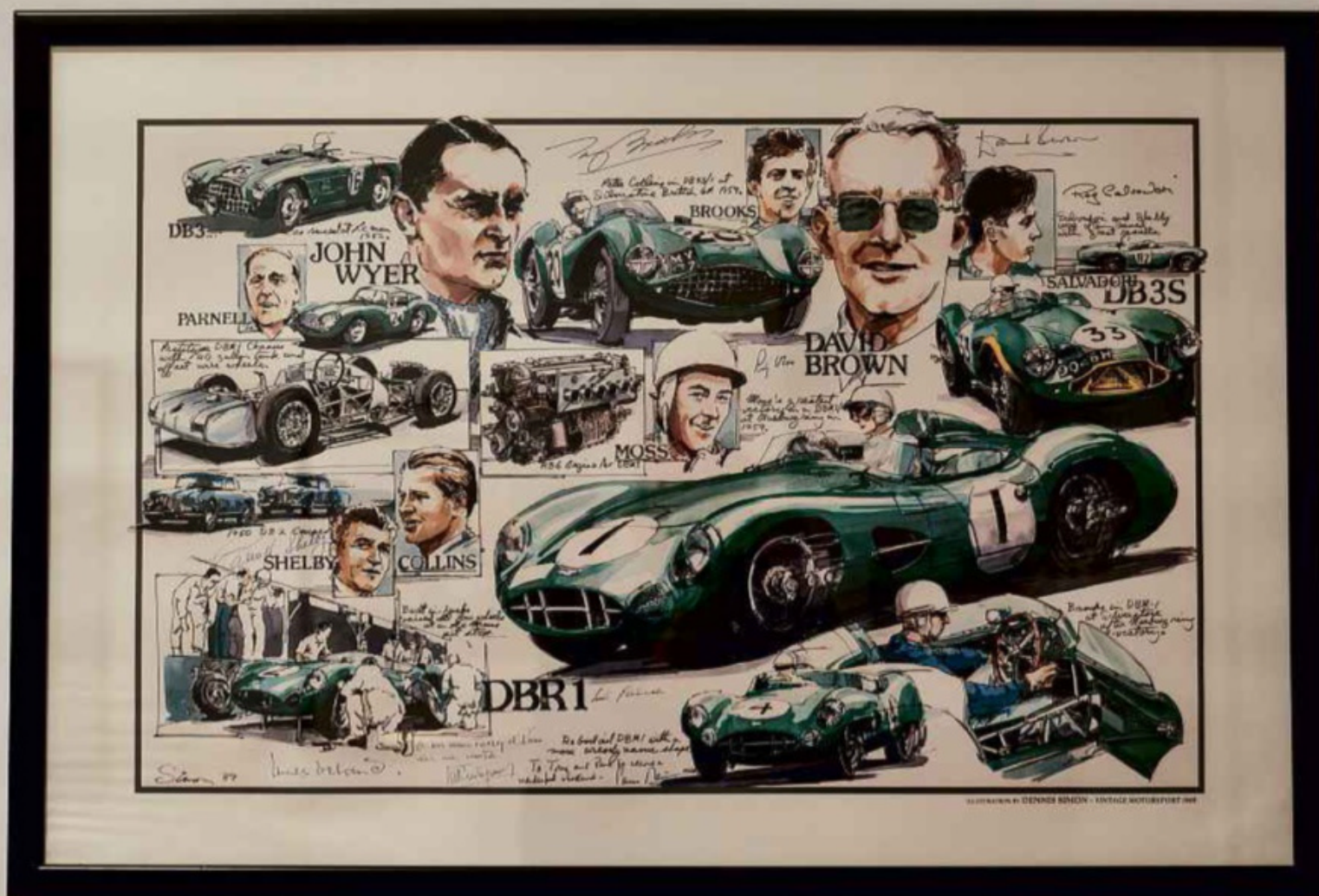
There were highs, too, finishing second to Aston team-leader Stirling Moss in sodden conditions at Oulton Park and then beating Roy Salvadori to win at Goodwood.

But 1957 was the year it all clicked, with a superb victory at the Nürburgring 1000km with Noel Cunningham-Reid, despite the two being relative rookies against the 4.5-litre Maseratis of the experienced Fangio/Moss – in fact, they won by over four minutes from the V12 Ferraris of Collins/Gendebein and Hawthorn/Trintignant. There were also two wins at Spa in the DBR1, the Grand Prix seeing a sensational win in torrential rain on what was both Brooks's Spa debut, and that of the 3.0-litre DBR1, with pole position and fastest lap.

'It's wonderful to have won at those two challenging circuits,' says Brooks. 'Spa and the Nürburgring were the two greatest circuits of my time, each complementary rather than competing for a driver's preference. Spa was much longer then, full of wonderful curves that you were driving on the limit with the merest caress of the steering wheel and the accelerator – swinging gently into a drift from the edge of the road, with all four tyres sliding relative to it, clipping the apex, then out again, gauging the sideways movement at over 100mph so that it came naturally to an end just at the edge of the road on the exit.'

'The Nürburgring was up and down for 14.5 miles through the Eifel mountains, many of the corners blind, and innumerable dips, with g-forces that thrust your guts to the depths of your abdomen – it was a tremendous challenge and little more than a hedged lane at the time. The DBR1 was superb, responding to the need to swing quickly from left- to right-hand drifts again with no more

Right
Still sharp and fit at 87, Brooks reflects on his four years as an Aston Martin works driver, which saw him campaign the DB3S initially and later the DBR1. The painting (below right) marks his superb win in the 1000km race at the Nürburgring; other photos show him with his family and F1 contemporary Mike Hawthorn







Above
Tony Brooks, with pictures, trophies and mementoes of a brief but brilliant career in frontline motorsport

than a caress of the accelerator and steering wheel.'

Brooks would also return to Le Mans in 1957 – and suffer the second and final accident of his career. 'I was paired with Noel Cunningham-Reid, a very good driver, we'd won the 1000km Nürburgring together, and we were running second when he brought the car in at 3 or 4 in the morning to hand over,' explains Brooks. 'Unfortunately the car was stuck in fourth gear. I'd had the same problem at Spa and solved it, and I didn't fancy going further down the field for another 12 hours, so I started accelerating hard, then taking my foot off the accelerator and trying to pull the gearlever out of fourth, loading and de-loading the gearbox. A brilliant idea, except I was looking down and when I looked up I'd gone past my braking point. Ridiculous really...'

He pitched the Aston into a drift but ran out of road. The car rolled, coming to rest on the track with Brooks trapped underneath. He expected either to be 'run over or cremated', until another car hit the DBR1's tail, allowing him to scramble to safety. He would vow to never again drive a mechanically imperfect racecar to the limit.

The following year, 1958, saw Brooks paired with Moss at both Sebring and Targa Florio and retire both times with gearbox failure, a similar fate befalling the DBR1 when he returned to Le Mans for a fourth time. It was to be his last visit to a race he had never liked.

'Le Mans was the most boring race!' he laughs. 'It was a nice circuit, but it was a reliability test for the car and you'd lap 15 seconds slower than in practice – that was the best bit! In 1958 it was also very wet, and by 2 or 3am I'd run out of dry clothes – I was pulling on wet underwear, wet helmet, wet everything, to drive 15 seconds slower than I could. I said if I do this again I shall certify myself.'

Indeed, when Brooks signed for Ferrari in F1 for 1959, he would ask for – and to his amazement be granted – an exemption from racing sports cars at Le Mans. But before that switch to Maranello, he would have one final race

with Stirling Moss in a DBR1 in the first Goodwood Tourist Trophy, Goodwood being a circuit Brooks dearly enjoyed, especially in such a well-suited machine.

'Goodwood is a very challenging circuit, there's a greater variety there in just two-and-a-half miles than some much bigger circuits, and if you designed a car to race around Goodwood, it would've been a DBR1,' he enthuses. 'The car was absolutely perfect. It wasn't loose, but it lent itself to drifting, and all those corners were drifting: Madgwick, St Marys, Woodcote – the only one that wasn't was the Chicane.'

Moss put the DBR1 on pole ahead of the two other works cars, and Brooks remembers the pair enjoying a comfortable race, and that he was backing off towards the end: 'I always believed in winning the race at the lowest possible speed, which is what Fangio always said, though I'm not sure Stirling always subscribed to that.'

With Brooks controlling the race, the three works DBR1s crossed the line separated by just 0.8 seconds (Salvadori and Brabham second, Shelby and Lewis-Evans third), with the fourth-placed Porsche 718 of Behra/Barth some four laps adrift. 'It was a wonderful team and the end of four very happy years,' he says.

Brooks was to enjoy a strong season with Ferrari in 1959, ultimately finishing second in a championship that went down to the wire at the US Grand Prix – and which he would in all probability have won had he not stopped to check for (relatively inconsequential) damage on his car after being rammed from behind by team-mate Wolfgang von Trips on the opening lap.

Initially planning to retire after that high point, Brooks instead endured two frustrating seasons in uncompetitive machinery before hanging up his helmet for good at the end of 1961. It was not the swansong his talent deserved, but no matter: over five incredible seasons in the mid-to-late 1950s, Brooks had already established himself as one of the greatest British racing drivers of all time. **V**

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THE OTHER LAGONDA

Everyone remembers the Lagonda 'wedge', but there was another, earlier, V8-powered four-door. We savour a drive in a rare and special machine

WORDS RICHARD MEADEN | PHOTOGRAPHY MATTHEW HOWELL

If asked to picture a 1970s Lagonda, the vast majority of us will call to mind the infamous William Towns 'wedge'. Even after the best part of five decades, that Series 2 Lagonda (and the two evolutions that followed it) remains one of the most striking and controversial pieces of car design ever to reach production.

But what of its forebear, the mysterious Series 1? Where its descendants enjoyed notoriety – and tremendous popularity with Middle Eastern customers in particular – it's fair to say the original four-door V8-engined Lagonda rose without trace. Mentioned in hushed tones akin to David Attenborough narrating rare footage of an endangered species, the Series 1 is one of those cars many marque enthusiasts know of, but few have seen in the metal and far fewer have driven.

Until today I counted myself among their number, but thanks to the generosity of Bryan Webb and Aston Martin Works all that is about to change. Truly I couldn't be more excited. But before I'm handed the keys to one of the rarest and most intriguing models in AML's history, allow me to recap how it came to be.

It seems hard to believe, but the motor show debuts of the Series 1 and 2 Lagondas were separated by just two years, the former appearing at the 1974 London motor show and the latter creating considerably more of a stir at the same show in 1976. But that's only part of the story, because the idea for what became the S1 had first been tabled by AML owner David Brown as far back as 1966.

Brown wanted a successor to the DB4-based Rapide, which had gone out of production two years earlier. But it would be some three years before the now Sir David would get his wish, a prototype (chassis MP/230/1) being built for his own personal use in late 1969 and announced to the press in January of 1970.

Also the work of William Towns, it was essentially a stretched DBS V8 with four doors, an extra 12in in the wheelbase and a different bootlid that incorporated the panel between the tail lights for ease of loading heavy suitcases.

By all accounts it was a sensational machine. With paintwork in Sir David's favoured shade of Roman Purple, and seats and door-cards upholstered in crimson velour(!), it must have cut quite a dash as his trusted chauffeur, George, whisked him between London, Newport Pagnell and the DB group's HQ in Huddersfield. Those were the days to be a captain of industry.

Given that Sir David was smitten with his Lagonda, it's odd that it wasn't until after he sold AML to Company Developments in 1972 that the Lagonda went into production. What we do know is that there could have been few tougher years to introduce a fiercely expensive and prodigiously thirsty V8-engined 160mph four-door saloon than 1974: a

Right and below

Back at Newport Pagnell for maintenance by Aston Martin Works, just across the road from where it was built in 1974. In the intervening years it has gained the lower bonnet and flicked-up tail of the late-70s 'Oscar India' V8 models – and the small matter of a 7-litre RS Williams engine conversion



'All S1s tend to have interesting histories, but 12003 is special for being the actual car displayed at the 1974 Earls Court show'



time when the world was gripped by a Middle East oil crisis and suffering widespread economic malaise.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, sales were slow. In fact they were glacial, with just seven cars (chassis numbers L/12001 to 12007) built and sold before production ceased in the summer of 1976, shortly before the S2 made its debut.

Unlike the four-headlamp DBS nose of Brown's prototype, the production cars all featured the AM V8's twin-headlamp front-end, albeit with a distinctive central horseshoe grille. All were right-hand drive, with five of the cars equipped with automatic transmission and two sporting five-speed manual gearboxes. An eighth car was subsequently sanctioned some three decades later when marque specialist Roger Bennington tracked down S1 chassis 12008 – the build of which had been started by the factory in period but never finished – and completed it with parts still kept in the Newport Pagnell stores.

The car you see here is L/12003/RCAC. All S1s tend to have interesting histories, but 12003 is special for being the actual car displayed at the 1974 Earls Court show. Over the years it has undergone extensive changes in the hands of its owners. Serial Aston collector Simon Draper had a full-house RS Williams 7.0-litre V8 installed in place of the standard 5.3. In 2002 the car was fitted with later 'Oscar India' wings, boot lid and bonnet as part of a full body restoration by Bodylines and SprayTec that saw the original light blue paint and pale cream leather interior changed to the fabulous combination of Cumberland Grey bodywork and Wildberry hide interior you see today.

In 2010 there was a further twist to the tale, when 12003 was purchased by Aston Martin ahead of the planned revival of the Lagonda marque with the SUV concept shown at the Geneva motor show in 2011. History tells us that although Ulrich Bez's vision for an AML SUV was prescient it found little favour and the project was quietly canned. AML subsequently sold the S1 at auction five years later.

It now seems that 12003 has found a good friend in its present owner, someone who clearly intends that the Lagonda will be used in a manner of which Sir David Brown himself would have heartily approved.

Evidence of that is that despite foul winter weather we are still handed the keys and told to go and enjoy the car. That process begins well before you drive away, for it's a really handsome car. It plays tricks on you in some respects. From the front it's very similar to the two-door Aston V8, grille excepted, but in profile you see the extra pair of doors, the additional wheelbase, the longer roofline and the shift in proportions. It's not wholly successful, but there's still delicacy and precision to its lines. Beautifully sharp creases run from the leading edge of the front wings and extend along the top of the door, all the way down the flanks of the car to the tail, like a freshly pressed crease in your trousers.

The driving experience is something of a mixed bag, too, but ultimately a satisfying one. It feels surprisingly compact for a long, luxurious four-door, but it possesses what has become a hallmark of Aston Martin's more spacious cars, in that it combines comfort, luxury and a sense of occasion with the DNA of a more sporting car.

The engine has a really lovely tone that's mechanical but with a sweetness to it. There's not a harshness or a metallic

Below and right

Series 1 is a big car – a whole foot longer than the two-door AM V8 on which it was based – and weighs almost two tonnes, but it feels surprisingly compact, with a sporting edge to its character. Below right is the view that captains of industry would have had in the 1970s, had more of them bought the Lagonda



'It has an aura of relaxed power... Effortless but engaging, the Lagonda sits very, very comfortably at near-three-figure speeds'





Specification (7-litre)

ENGINE V8, 7010cc **MAX POWER** c510bhp @ 5500rpm **MAX TORQUE** c520lb 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 tube, trailing arms and Watt's linkage, coil springs, telescopic dampers
STEERING Rack-and-pinion, power-assisted **BRAKES** Vented discs, 273mm front, 264mm rear **WHEELS** 7 x 16in front and rear
TYRES 255/50 ZR16, Michelin Pilot Sport **WEIGHT** c1990kg **POWER TO WEIGHT** c260bhp/ton **0-60MPH** c6.0sec **TOP SPEED** c160mph
PRICE NEW £14,000 in 1974 (£166,500 in today's money) **VALUES TODAY** £400,000+

Above

Slightly wider tyres than it would have worn originally give reasonable grip on cold winter roads.

Power steering has a glassy feel but chassis fundamentally benign

sound, it just has a nice mellow sense to it that creates an aura of relaxed power. Yet, when you rev it harder, the note sharpens and deepens to provide a more urgent, serious soundtrack.

The throttle has a long travel – much longer than today's drive-by-wire throttles – and to be honest you're initially left a little bit underwhelmed by the performance from this mighty 7-litre V8 engine. There's a latent potency that's rather pleasing, but it isn't until you extend your ankle and push the pedal into the last 25 per cent of its travel that the S1 really wakes up and changes in character.

It's still not fast in the context of a 2019 supersaloon, but it jumps from 20mph to 80 or 90mph in short order, which feels doubly impressive in a car with old-school power steering that's glassy and a little bit vague. You feel yourself craving more of a sense of connection, particularly on a wet road, but with time you sense that the car has a benign balance. It just takes a while to build that confidence and relax into a driving experience that has plenty of maturity and comfort but never feels lazy or wallowy. As such, it's an enjoyable car to drive quickly.

Much like the steering, the three-speed automatic gearbox is quite soft in the way it responds. It's not seamless like a modern auto, so there is a bit of a jerk when it shifts between gears, but because there are fewer ratios

it doesn't need to change gear that often, especially as the large-capacity engine has the muscularity and the potency to pull without needing to work particularly hard. On a fast, sweeping road it has a wonderfully elastic power delivery. You just squeeze the throttle and the car responds accordingly.

The cabin is not super-spacious in the manner of a contemporary Rolls-Royce or big Jag, but there is enough room to stretch out. The seats are comfortable and generously upholstered, so you settle into them like a comfortable armchair, which is precisely the ambience you want. Effortless but engaging, the Lagonda sits very, very comfortably at near-three-figure speeds – a pace you sense it could keep all day long. At least so long as you're prepared to keep slaking its prodigious thirst for petrol.

It all makes me wonder where this car could have taken Aston Martin, and specifically Lagonda, were it not for the terrible timing of its introduction into the teeth of the oil crisis. Seven cars is scant reward for a car that was clearly so good at what it set out to do. And though always destined to be overshadowed by its extrovert successor, the Series 1 is an intriguing and important part of Lagonda's unique and still unfolding story. **V**

With thanks to Bryan Webb and Aston Martin Works.



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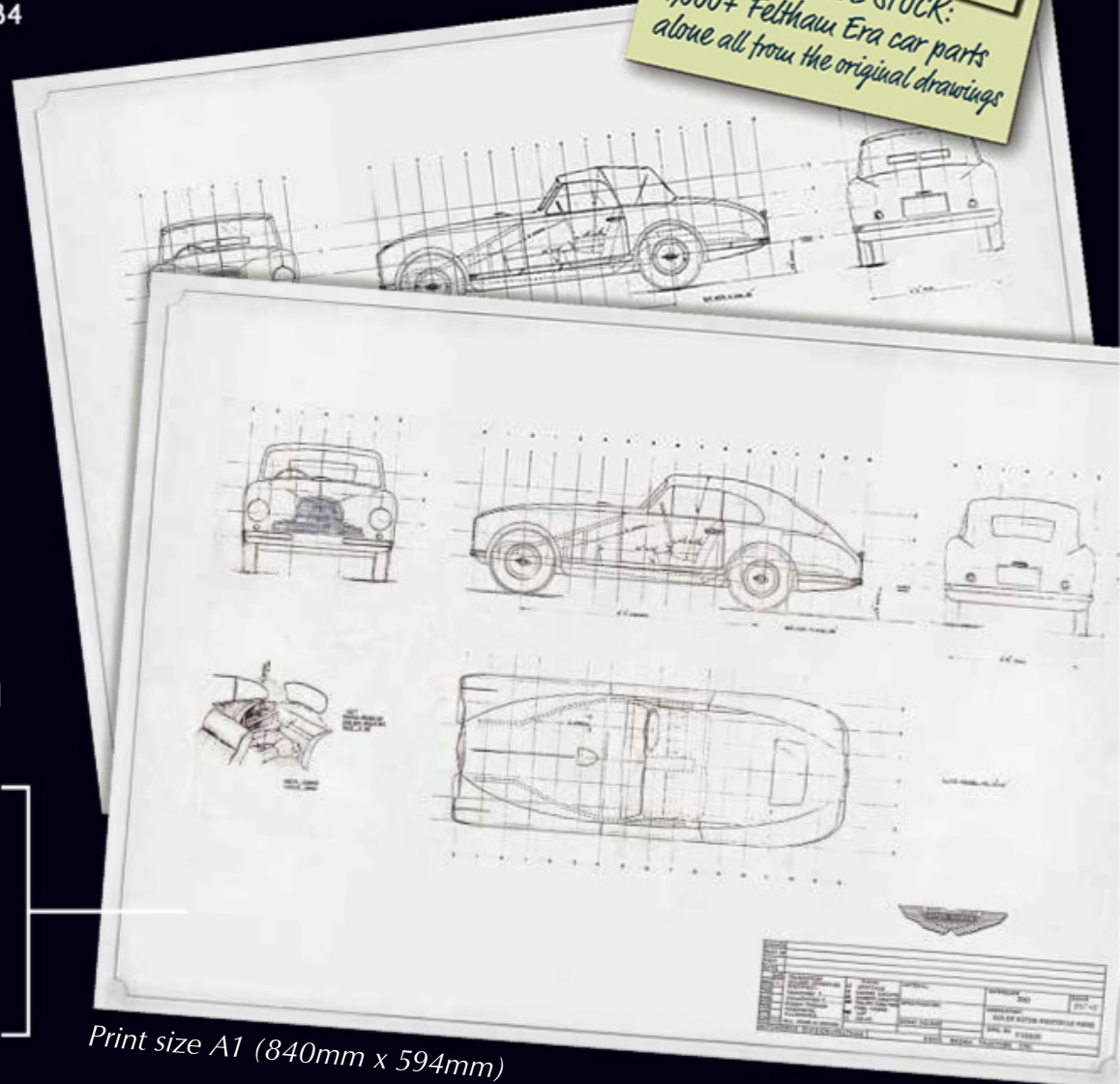
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The DB7-based Twenty Twenty was a Giugiaro concept

TWENTY TW



FEATURE CAR | GIUGIARO DB7

WORDS PETER TOMALIN | PHOTOGRAPHY TIM ANDREW

for a future Aston. In 2020, it still has the power to shock

ENTRY VISION



Tough gig, designing a concept car when the source material is widely acknowledged as one of the most beautiful road cars ever created. It's probably why Giorgetto Giugiaro and son Fabrizio chose such an extreme approach when they penned the DB7-based Twenty Twenty back in 2000.

This was their vision of a future Aston Martin, a 'spider' for the year 2020. It was unveiled at the Geneva motor show in March 2001 and it's fair to say it wasn't universally adored. With its aluminium 'exoskeleton' and V12 engine semi-exposed beneath a mesh panel in the composite bonnet, it seemed to be everything that traditional, slightly tweedy Aston Martin was not.

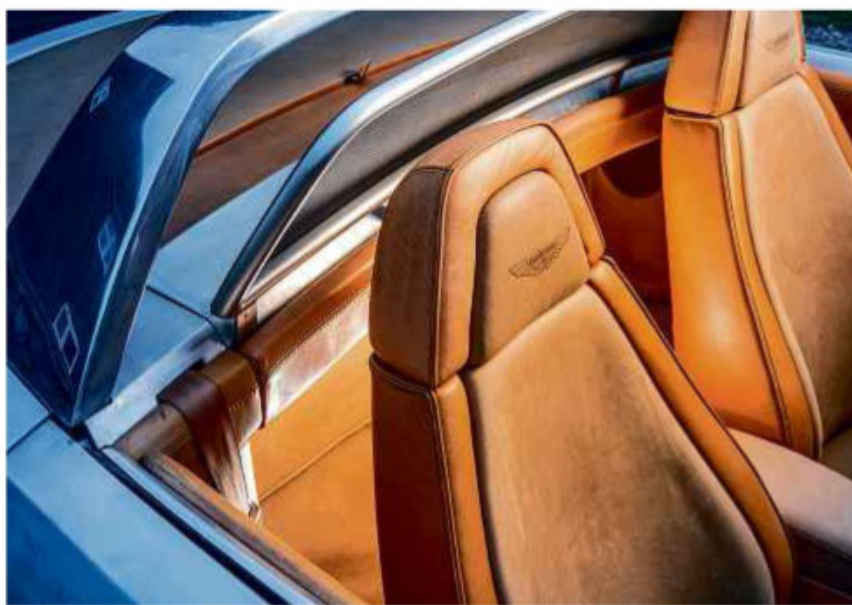
In one respect it succeeded, in that it turned the media spotlight back onto the Giugiaros' company, Italdesign. But if they'd hoped that it would lead to more business with Aston Martin, perhaps in a similar role to that enjoyed by Zagato, they were disappointed. After being initially supportive, including sending a pre-

production DB7 Vantage, chassis no.20, out to Italy to have its bodywork stripped away and replaced, Aston quietly distanced itself from the project. Maybe it was too avant garde; maybe it was simply too far removed from Aston's own design direction at the time.

I was working on *Evo* magazine in 2001, and I confess we weren't quite sure what to make of the Twenty Twenty. Not only was the current DB7 Vantage still among our favourite coupés, but we'd already glimpsed Aston's actual future, in the shape of the upcoming Vanquish, which would be launched in production form later that year. Alongside Vanquish, Twenty Twenty looked, well, a little bit weird.

There was one man who might be able to make sense of the Giugiaros' vision – and explain it to design-illiterates – and that man was the late, great Russell Bulgin, doyen of car journos and at the time an *Evo* contributor, who was duly dispatched to Turin to meet Giorgetto and Fabrizio and to drive the Twenty Twenty.

Bulgin, fantastically tall, unnervingly cool and formidably intelligent, naturally 'got' what the Twenty Twenty was all about, which was, in his words, 'subverting' Aston Martin. 'Maybe



Left and right

Exposed door hinges were a twist on the traditional Aston vent spar; level of finish and detailing is exceptional; whole car was fully functioning; 20in alloys – bespoke BBS split-rims in this case – were unusually large for the time, now almost commonplace



it does take a couple of garrulous, expressive, passionate Italians to reinvent a classic British brand,' he wrote, continuing: 'Too bold a statement? Try this simple test...

'Vanquish? Savile Row, subtle, AOR, respectable, made it. Twenty Twenty? Hoxton, industrial, techno, risk-taker, making it big.'

Bulgin was clearly convinced. The rest of us? We weren't so sure.

NOW THAT WE'VE actually arrived in 2020, it seems a fitting moment to reappraise this most singular of Aston Martin-based concepts. And one thing's for certain, it has lost absolutely none of its ability to unsettle.

In fact it was back in Autumn 2019 that we travelled to Oxfordshire to see Twenty Twenty for ourselves. The car had been shipped over from Italy to join the DB7's 25th birthday celebrations. Once the party had been wrapped, the concept was trailered to The Barn, home of the Aston Martin Owners Club and AM Heritage Trust, where it was to lodge for several months, on display in the Trust's museum, doubtless continuing to amaze and affront all those who set eyes upon it.

As it rolls out under brilliant blue skies, sunlight catches the brushed aluminium framework and glints on the brightwork. The idea was to make the structure – in this case an aluminium spaceframe – part of the styling. 'Spaceframe-on-view,' as Fabrizio described it at the time. In this case, the aluminium frame sat atop the standard DB7 Vantage floorpan and running gear, the V12 mated to a manual gearbox. Carbonfibre body panels were then screwed to the frame, which meant different panels could be easily attached and removed: ideal for a really low production run. The spaceframe could have been painted, but Italdesign left it naked to make the point.

From the front and side, the Aston styling cues are obvious. The nose is a modernist/industrial take on the iconic Aston grille. The side vent is there, too, but with a novel twist: one of the most striking features of the car is the

'The idea was to make the structure – in this case an aluminium spaceframe – part of the styling'





way the vent's spar becomes the top hinge for the door. Form marrying function.

The rear quarters are, how to say this, rather more challenging. Not ugly, but heavy, and not at all Astonesque, almost American. I quite like the rear, but it seems to belong to a different car.

Rob Smith, chairman of the Heritage Trust and the man who approached Italdesign to secure the car for the DB7's birthday gathering, is understandably diplomatic. 'It's attracted a lot of interest. People with an interest in coachbuilding have found it fascinating. Traditional Aston owners are less keen, but a lot of them assume it is a recent car, when in fact it's almost 20 years old. Park it next to a DB7 of the same age and it looks 20 years newer.'

IT DOES FEEL faintly impertinent to be questioning the work of one of the great design houses. Giorgetto Giugiaro's CV is, of course, second to none. Alfa Giulia, Alfasud, Lotus Esprit, Maserati Ghibli, BMW M1, original Golf... He'd also penned a much earlier one-off Aston, while working for Bertone in the early '60s: the DB4 GT Bertone Jet coupé. If not as classically pretty as a regular DB4, that car looks pretty damn good to modern eyes.

Son Fabrizio, however, was finding his feet as a designer, and Twenty Twenty was largely Fabrizio's work, with Giorgetto no doubt keeping a fatherly eye on the project. In fact, the exposed hinges were one of the details that the two disagreed about. Giorgetto didn't like that they were polished steel rather than aluminium – chiefly because they introduced a stray reflection on the body-side; Fabrizio asserted that machining them from steel meant they would open a thousand times, no problem. Clearly, he won the argument.

Inside, the level of detailing is quite staggering, bearing in mind this was never going to be more than a one-off, and mostly to be viewed on a motor show stand. But then the Giugiaros intended it to be a showcase for the whole Italdesign operation, which at the time numbered 1000 employees, involved not only in design but engineering, prototyping, project work, structural analysis...

So it all had to work, as well as look fantastic. And it does. Everything inside is bespoke, with liberal use of aluminium to echo the exterior detailing; the slim-backed seats are wrapped in beautifully soft leather and suede; even the tiniest components are machined, computer-etched from solid alloy. Apparently, after its appearance at Pebble Beach in summer 2001, Fabrizio took it on a driving holiday through the Napa Valley. Alas it has been immobilised for its visit to the UK. No test drives today.

It's not to all tastes, but there's something intellectually invigorating about the Twenty Twenty. Rob Smith brings out a DB7 Zagato, which followed a year after, for period context. The Zagato is the more homogeneous, but also more backwards-looking, its lines simulacrum (a very Bulgin word) of '60s curves. The Giugiaro car is sharper, bolder, more visionary. Italdesign's Twenty Twenty vision, no less. **V**



Above
Zagato-bodied DB7 from
the same era looks almost
tame by comparison

Driving the Twenty Twenty

Russell Bulgin was one of very few journalists who drove the Giugiaro Aston at the time. Here's what he wrote in 2001:

'SO TWIST THE KEY at the leading edge of the console: a tiny demi-key, beneath a hinged, enamelled Aston Martin logo. Punch a starter button. This thing works, no question. Lots of show. And pretty reasonable go.

You sit in a cabin of two-tone matt-finished leather, butterscotch butting caramel. The hide is already scuffed, foxed, matured, looks wonderful. The top roll of the fascia echoes the contours of the leading edge of the bonnet, just floats across the cockpit. What isn't aluminium or leather is pine, Chinese lacquered to a cool taupe. Instruments are white-face, analogue,

with phosphorescent blue night-lights...

To drive, Twenty Twenty is quick-ish, but feels, somehow, a little restricted as the revs build. Understeer comes as standard. Ride comfort is soggy. What else should you expect? This is a rebodied DB7, likely heavier than the standard Aston. On monster 20in BBS rims, wearing 285/30 rear Pirelli P Zeros, 255/35 front. The amount of time Italdesign admits to having spent sorting ride and handling? Zero.

But you could live with this car, so thoroughly is it detailed. The sat-nav functions. Twenty Twenty doesn't even overheat in traffic. There's a mystery creak from the rear end but, that solitary special effect aside, this car is solid. And obsessively bespoke. A celebration of all that is endearing about Italdesign, then.'





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OH OH HEAVEN

WORDS STEPHEN ARCHER | PHOTOGRAPHY ANDY MORGAN

We drive one of the original 1960s Bond DB5s on the actual Alpine pass that featured in *Goldfinger*. It really doesn't get much better than this





“Y

ou don't know me, but I bought the James Bond DB5 at the RM Sotheby's auction last night.' Not a bad opening line, as these things go. And so commenced a conversation with the car's new owner in Monterey last August. On learning that he was planning to take it back to Switzerland, where it had previously been homed, I seized the moment: 'Then you have to take it to the Furka Pass.'

Two months later, photographer Andy Morgan and I are in a hire car, climbing from Lake Lucerne to Andermatt at 4750ft, on roads last graced by Bond 55 years earlier. It's the day before our shoot, and our excitement is tinged with apprehension. Back in 1964, the EON Productions crew could wait days for the weather to be perfect. We have no such luxury. The forecast is fine but the cool whiff of winter is already in the air and anything can happen in the mountains. In fact, something *has* happened. A sign by the road tells us the Furka Pass is closed due to snow.

A quick confab leads to the rather hopeful conclusion that the top of the pass may be under snow, but not where we want to shoot, though we won't know until the next morning. Not a recipe for a restful night at the Aurora Hotel, which is where, in *Goldfinger*, Bond dropped off Tilly Masterson, having casually slashed the tyres of her Mustang. Well, she had almost taken him out with a wayward rifle shot while aiming for the villainous Auric Goldfinger, whom Bond had tailed to Switzerland. It's those driving scenes with the DB5 on the Furka that we're here to recreate. Or at least that's the plan...

Above
Snow-topped Alps
above Andermatt
on the magnificent
Furka Pass.
The scene is set...



THE DAY OF THE SHOOT dawns bright and biting cold, which is a relief tinged with fear that the overnight snow higher up might not melt and allow us onto the road. The DB5's owner, the crew from Graber Sportgarage and the *Vantage* team enjoy breakfast as much as nerves will allow. Will we get up the pass?

Spirits and optimism are raised when we see that Simon, the Graber mechanic, has secured the DB5 in the hotel's underground car park in bay '007'. This is surely a good omen. The crew and cars set off from Andermatt towards the mountains and the foot of the Furka. To the south Italy, to the west Geneva and behind us Zurich.

Big. The word must have been invented here. Of course the Alps are big, but they are truly, spectacularly enormous. The peaks feel all-embracing despite it being miles to their summits. The sun has just risen over the vast, deserted valley. The air is thin and yet the 14,000ft mountains around us radiate a warming glow after the fresh snow, adding a bright rim of light to this spectacle. Leading in the hire car, Andy and I press on ahead and there it is, the 'pass closed' sign. What would Bond do? Of course, we ignore the sign and ten minutes later we're bathed in sunshine and on a stretch of tarmac blissfully untroubled by other (more obedient) road users.

Below, cowbells clank and the distant swoosh of an Alpine river adds a backing soundtrack. And then, in one of those couldn't-make-it-up moments, down below us the driver of a Rolls-Royce Cullinan 4x4 pauses on a bend in the road above the river, just like the bit in the film where Oddjob parks the vintage Rolls. In fact there's only one thing missing from this other-worldly scene.



EON/Danjaq



EON/Danjaq

The peace is broken by the distant rumble of an Aston Martin straight-six. Seconds later, the silver-grey DB5 accelerates into view. Even as little more than a speck in this landscape, its beauty and charisma are immense. And here it is, back on the road that every Bond fan will recognise, the Furka Pass, one of Switzerland's engineering marvels. The scenes shot here soon made 007's Aston Martin DB5 the most famous car in the world.

Remarkably, this is the first time that one of the original Bond cars has been back to this exact location, and exact is the right word. Later, we will even manage to identify the very concrete bollards that Sean Connery and the DB5 were photographed beside in 1964.

By then the pass is open to all, and as the DB5 waits for its next shot, some locals stop to take a picture. When they discover it's The Real Thing, they are just blown away. As am I. Back in 1965, when I was a schoolboy, I was lucky enough to ride in one of the *Goldfinger* cars. It was the moment that cemented my love of Aston Martin. Today feels like a very large circle is being completed.

SPOOL BACK TO 1964 and the filming of what would be the third instalment in the Bond film series. Ian Fleming had written a DB MkIII into *Goldfinger* when he wrote the book in 1959, the Aston replacing Bond's previous Bentley. But when Albert R 'Cubby' Broccoli, the Bond movie producer, wanted an Aston for the film, the then-new DB5

was the natural choice. Hard to believe now, but Aston Martin was lukewarm about the idea of one of its cars being in the film and initially suggested that EON Productions buy a car. All very different to the present day, when many films are heavily funded by product placements.

In the end, Aston Martin lent EON a car. It was DP216/1, the prototype DB5, which had actually started life as a red Series 5 DB4. It was still red when *Autocar* tested it in late 1963, but Aston Martin decided to repaint it Snow Shadow Grey for its film role, though keeping the original dark grey interior (all those Silver-Birch-over-black Bond DB5 homage owners take note).

The DB MkIII in the book was described as having reinforced bumpers and it was from this that the idea of a gadget-laden car took seed in the mind of genius production designer Ken Adam. EON delivered the car to Pinewood and special effects maestro John Stears set about installing the spectacular arsenal of gadgets. Many of these were fully functioning, the main exception being the ejector seat, though one was rigged up for the scene in the film where Bond presses the famous red button.

In summer 1964, the DB5 was shipped to Switzerland for the scenes showing 007 pursuing Auric Goldfinger's Rolls and tangling with Tilly Masterson's white Mustang. Early in the movie, Bond is uncharacteristically taken aback when Q introduces him to the DB5 in the Q division

Left and below

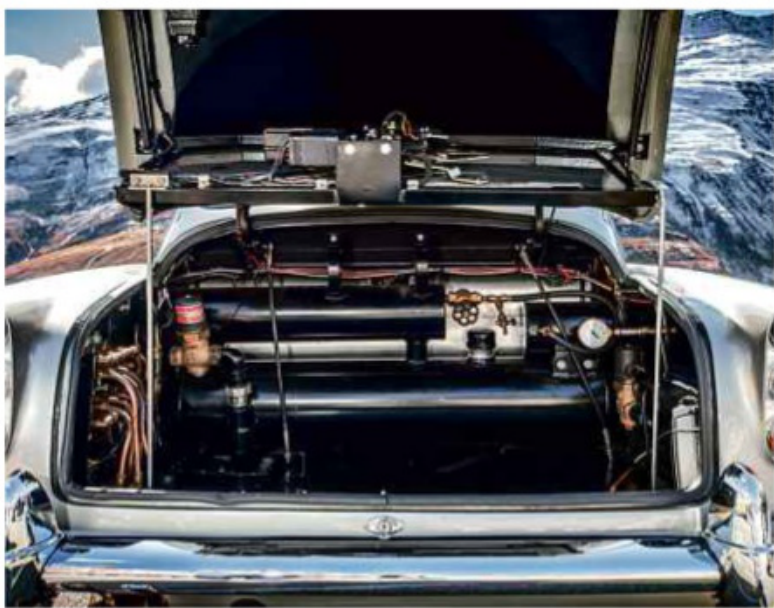
Heading out of the village of Realp, retracing 007's journey into the Alps (below). Further up the pass, Bond spies Goldfinger's Roller. A modern Rolls Cullinan completes the picture today





A silver Jaguar DB5 is parked on a paved road in the foreground. The background features a steep, rocky mountain slope with patches of brown and green vegetation. In the distance, a large, snow-capped mountain peak rises against a sky filled with dramatic, white and grey clouds. The car is positioned on the left side of the frame, facing right.

*‘Even as little more than
a speck in this
landscape, the DB5’s
beauty and charisma are
immense’*



From the top
Hydraulic systems that power many of the gadgets fill much of the boot space; switches concealed in armrest; rotating number plates and extra 'exhaust' to deliver smokescreen or oil slick; weapons tray was one extra that didn't make it onto the big screen

laboratory. Audiences were equally gobsmacked when the car revealed its secret weapons, and the DB5 became an instant and huge hit with the movie-going public. The effect was repeated when the Aston made a welcome re-appearance in *Thunderball* in 1966. Meanwhile, Corgi had introduced the toy Bond car, complete with gadgets. Five million children would come to own one, ejecting the little blue villain for their dog to eat or mum to vacuum up. By then the Bond Aston had gained true icon status.

But there is, as you may well know, more than one Bond Aston. So which car are we looking at here? This is where you'll need to pay attention, as Q might say.

Nowadays, film-making is so costly that a small fleet of cars are prepared in case one breaks down, or gets driven into a lake, as happened before filming started for *Casino Royale*. No such luxury existed in 1964, so when DP216/1's ZF gearbox began to play up during filming in Switzerland another car had to be sent out very quickly. This car, DB5/1486/R, with a David Brown gearbox but minus the gadgets, would become known as the Road Car, while DP216 would be the Effects Car. Close study of the film and stills will reveal which car is which.

After *Goldfinger*'s release, Aston Martin finally saw the marketing value and in 1965 two further DB5s were fitted with the full set of gadgets in partnership with EON. These official Bond Austons would go on a worldwide tour to promote *Thunderball*, and it is one of those cars that is the subject here: DB5/2008/R or '008'.

Now, while the gadgets in DP216 had been installed at Pinewood and intended to work, or appear to work, for a few seconds in the film, they were not installed with the finesse that one might expect. '008', being one of the two cars 'gadgeted' at Newport Pagnell, had its weapons properly engineered to be durable – and all worked, with the exception of the seat and guns.

After their promotional tours, the two cars returned to the UK and were sold, still with Bond's equipment intact. At one time Sir Anthony Bamford owned both, and '008' later had a spell at the Smokey Mountain Car Museum in Tennessee before being sold in 2006 to a Swiss owner. Ten years ago it was rebuilt by Roos Engineering in Zurich, who did a superb job of not only making the car like new but also bringing fresh life and longevity to the gadgets. The owner shipped the car to Monterey last August for the RM Sotheby's auction and the sale became global news when it sold for nearly \$7m, a Bond car record despite 008 never actually appearing on screen, although Connery may have driven it at events promoting *Thunderball*.

STANDING NEXT TO AN original Bond car on the Furka Pass is a genuine pinch-yourself moment or, as Bond said to Pussy Galore: 'I musht be dreaming.' Climbing inside to find you're looking out over an actual glacier only adds to the air of the surreal.

Open the lid of the central armrest; time to have some fun. Flick the switch marked 'Front Overriders' and a purposeful hum of hydraulic power signals that the rams are extending by their full 15 inches. Apparently the hydraulics for the front and rear rams caused the greatest weight addition to the car thanks to a plumbing system in the boot of which Wallace and Gromit would be proud. It has to be said, the maze of pipes and pumps does push them out with considerable hydraulic force.

Not liking the look of the man behind the car, I raise the electrically driven bulletproof shield; that's shown him. Another passer-by is squinting at the number plate; I flick

*'Standing next to an
original Bond car on the
Furka Pass is a genuine
pinch-yourself moment'*







the switch that rotates the three different plates. Dare one shower the locals with a jet of oil or throw 'caltrop' tyre-puncturing devices at them? I opt for a quick burst of smoke from the dummy rear reversing light.

Glancing around the cabin, I'm struck by the prescience of some of the gadgets. Inside the driver's door mirror is a rotating 'radar scanner' connected to the navigation screen that in the film allowed Bond to track Goldfinger's Rolls. Q even put a telephone handset in the driver's door. A car phone? That'll never catch on.

More switches beckon. 'Guns' sees twin barrels pop out from behind the sidelights. You won't be surprised to learn that they don't fire actual bullets but they can fire acetylene gas shots with truly deafening noise. Reaching under the seat reveals the weapons tray (not seen in the film) with a knife, machine gun and hand grenade.

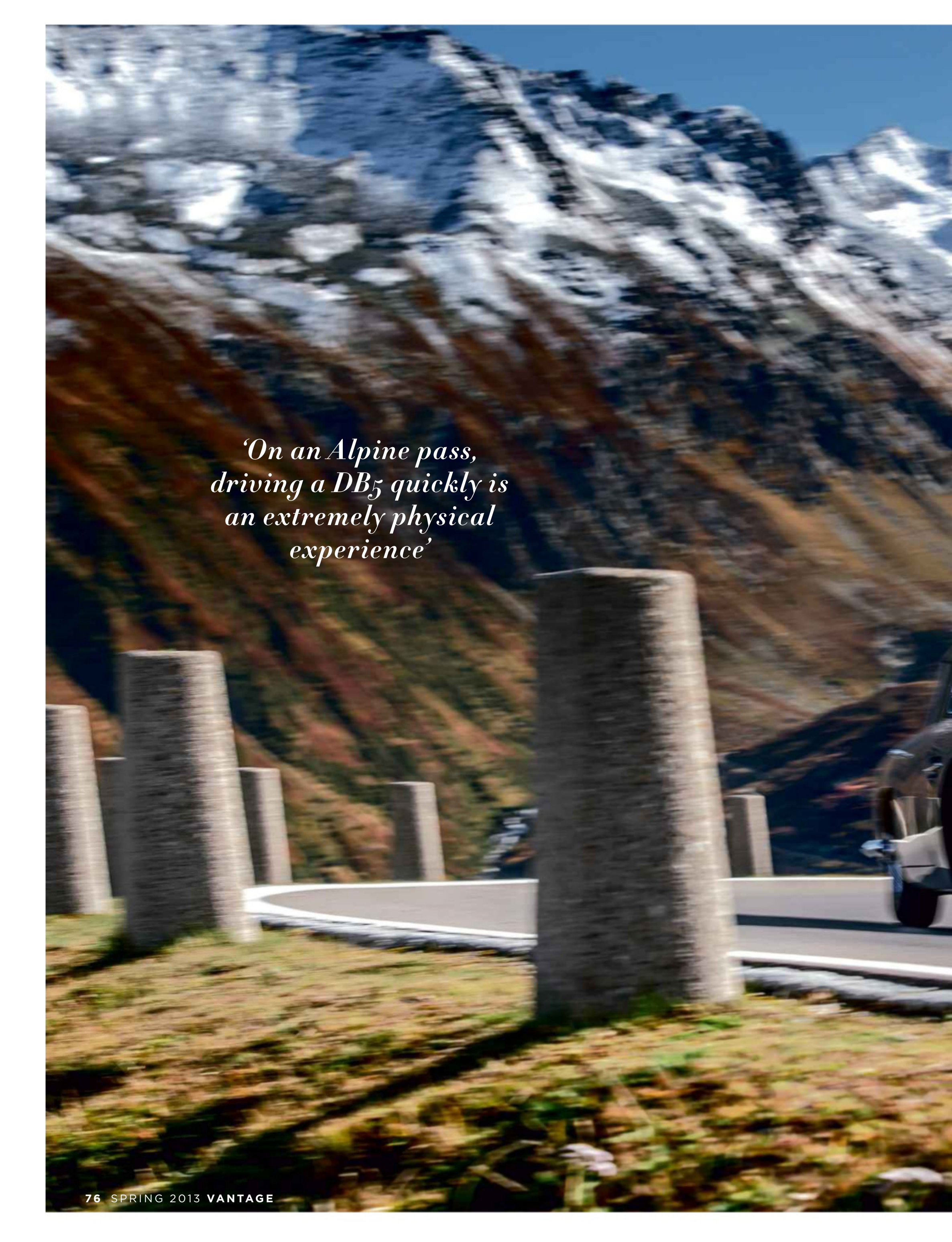
Finally and perhaps the best part of 007's arsenal is, alas, the one thing that does not work, the flip-top gearknob with its ejector seat button underneath. This was surely Ken Adam's idea, having been an RAF fighter pilot. For the ejection scene in the film they fired a seat and dummy out with compressed gas. So it did work once, kind of.

And now to act out every grown-up schoolboy's fantasy and go for a drive. In a real Bond car. On the Furka Pass.

The effect of having all these gadgets is to add about 150 kilos to the DB5's kerbweight. Which sounds a lot, but it's no more than the equivalent of a couple of passengers, so the car drives pretty much as a standard DB5 would. Which is very much in the style of a classic, old-school GT rather than an out-and-out sports car.

The unassisted steering places real demands on the upper body in the tighter turns, and while the seats may be comfy, lateral hold is limited, so you find yourself bracing your legs and hanging onto the wheel. On an Alpine pass, driving a DB5 quickly is an extremely physical experience.

Pointing his lens at a particularly photogenic hairpin,



*'On an Alpine pass,
driving a DB5 quickly is
an extremely physical
experience'*





photographer Andy has asked for some cornering attitude. Here goes then. The vertiginous drop certainly commands one's full attention. Connery had it easy by comparison.

The car has standard DB5 suspension and tyres, and the weight of the engine can certainly be felt when you ask it to change direction. Best to get it settled in the corner before bringing in the power. There's more body-roll than you'd get with a modern car, but this isn't a problem, it just serves to inform you of the loadings on the chassis. It's essentially a well-mannered car and a communicative one – you just need to read the signals it's giving you.

The brakes are strong, but, even with a servo, your right leg gets a good workout on the downhill sections. That said, the all-disc set-up shows no sign of fade or fatigue.

And all the while the rumble of the straight-six is a constant presence, but never intrusive, and when the taps are opened the extra air passing through it makes a wonderful roar to accompany the surge in power. Back in 1964 there were very few cars that could keep up with a DB5. Today, of course, a well-driven hot hatch would be all over your tail – until you flicked one of those switches. But that's not the point; to drive such a car on such roads is a privilege of the highest order. Nerve-wracking, too, I admit. Those granite bollards were somewhat haunting.

To drive the most famous car in the world on one of the finest roads, recreating scenes from one of the best loved Bond movies... For the eight-year-old Archer this would have been unimaginably thrilling. For the schoolboy that still exists within us all, it really is as good as it gets. **V**

With thanks to the Pearl Collection and Graber Sportgarage, Bern



From the top

Archer gets to live out every Bond fan's fantasy at the exact spot that Connery posed for the iconic publicity shot. Bulletproof shield just one of DB5/2008/R's fully operational gadgets

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BOND SPECIAL | NO TIME TO DIE



SHOOTING TO THRILL

WORDS MIKE DUFF | PHOTOGRAPHY MAX EAREY

We join the film crew and stunt drivers on location in Italy for the 25th Bond film, *No Time To Die*



T

he gunman standing closest to me is holding an evil-looking assault rifle and wearing the incongruous combo of a snazzy shirt and a pair of tight white jeans. He looks exactly like a seedy low-level Italian gangster should look, which is either a masterful piece of casting or possibly because he is a low-level Italian gangster.

Filming for *No Time To Die* – the 25th officially sanctioned James Bond flick – is taking place in the spectacular city of Matera in southern Italy, located on a rocky outcrop and famous for

houses hewn into the solid cliffs. Today's action is taking place in a beautiful piazza, with my vantage point on a tall balcony that gives an uninterrupted view of proceedings. Four vehicles are in view: an original Range Rover with an impact-damaged front end, a nineties Maserati Quattroporte, a noughties Lancia Thesis and – centre stage where it belongs – probably the most famous car in the world, James Bond's Aston Martin DB5.

The way the cars are positioned tells the story so far: Bond is surrounded, the DB5 resting where it has stopped after a heavy crash with the Range Rover – that bit was filmed yesterday – and now the baddies are piling out of their cars to finish him off. My pet gunman is one of the Lancia's occupants, and over several hours I follow his personal Groundhog Day as the scene is filmed numerous times from a myriad of angles: he gets out of the car, runs into position, aims at the DB5 and then – on the orders of a more important baddie – everyone starts shooting.

This bit is painfully loud. Blank-firing guns are every bit as noisy as the real thing, and the square rings at painful volume as the gunmen fire volley after volley at the DB5. Then there's a pause as everything gets reset for another take or a different camera and it's done again: out-run-aim-pause-shoot. Over several hours the snazzy-shirted shooter does this at least a dozen times, as do his ten or so accomplices, firing hundreds of rounds at the DB5. I'll be amazed if he gets more than ten seconds of screentime in the finished film.

WHILE 007'S CAR is in Italy – actually, a whole set of them – we don't have the man himself. Daniel Craig is filming scenes elsewhere and my visit is with what's called the second unit, although stunt unit would be more accurate. These are the guys charged with delivering spectacular footage for the big set-pieces that will raise appreciative oohing from audiences around the world. But as the DB5 needs to be driven, somebody else gets to be James Bond, in long shots at least.

Mark Higgins enjoyed a successful career in rallying that included three British championships, but these days the 51-year-old Manxman's most regular work is as a precision driver for movies, with *No Time To Die* set to make plenty of use of his considerable talent. As the shooting scene is being filmed he's not required on set and has time for a chat with visiting journos, the conversation punctuated by gunfire from outside. The first thing I notice, and it would be hard not to, is that Higgins' face is covered with evenly spaced black spots.

'Well it started about four weeks ago and it's not cleared up,' he jokes. 'No, basically it's for face replacement: they

Above and opposite
Filming the new Bond
film on location in
Matera, southern Italy.
The DB5 being shot at
is one of eight specially
constructed replicas
used in the action scenes



can take a reference from me and then put Daniel's face on if they want to. We had to wear masks in previous films, but they never looked right, so they would end up doing CGI to correct it. When we're shooting I'll have costume on and even have the watch on with the right time on it: it's as much detail as that, just in case it's seen.'

No Time To Die is Higgins' fourth Bond, and he admits that the challenge is to raise the bar each time. That's been made much easier on this one through the use of specially created replica DB5s for the stunt work, but more challenging by the conditions that the team found when they arrived in Matera and started to consider the difficulties of the narrow stone roads.

'When we did the recce here we discovered you can hardly walk on some of the roads, they're so slippery,' he says, 'so we were very sceptical it could work.'

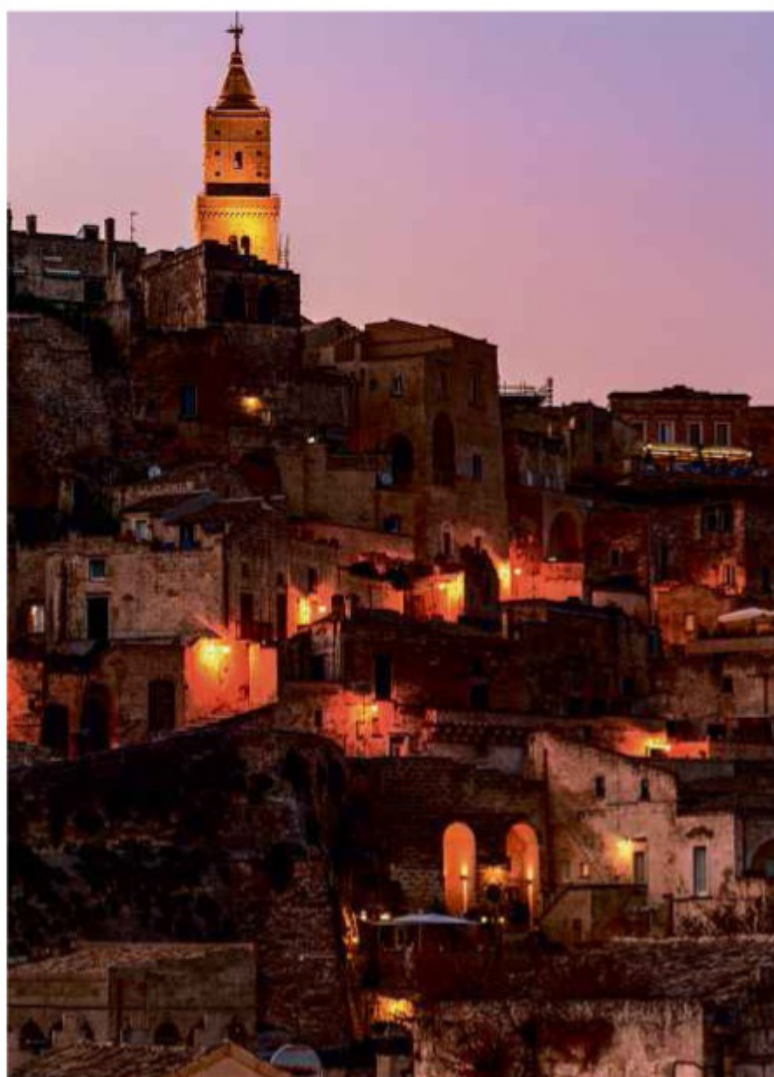
The answer turned out to be Cola – about £50,000-worth of full sugar, carbonated beverage being bought and then sprayed on the surfaces, which Higgins reckons has given at least 50 per cent more adhesion. 'The rear grip isn't an issue, because you want it to look exciting and we don't mind going sideways, but front grip is the issue – if you haven't got speed, you can't do anything with it.'

We're promised plenty of action in the finished film, but Higgins reckons that his ability to deliver the same thing repeatedly is more important than being spectacular. 'You've got 200 people out there and if you make a mess they're looking at you,' he says. 'I'm happy doing my little handbrake turn or whatever it is, but if there's somebody doing a big launch with a cannon or a ramp behind and I mess it up, then the whole thing can go down the drain.'

There's a chance to make a brief visit to the small square where the film cars are looked after and prepared for shots. There's a row of DB5s on one side – three next to each other and one, which was involved in yesterday's crash with the Range Rover, hiding under a sheet. There is also a real DB5 on set, which features in most of the pictures that Bond production company EON has approved for release, but the cars I'm looking at are all purpose-built specials. The impressive thing is that, even from 10ft away, I'm struggling to see any definitive differences.

Stunt cars have come on a huge way from the days when humble vehicles would be disguised as something fancier, and modern films require them to do the sort of near-impossible things that require both multiple cars and huge modifications. Using real DB5s for stunts wasn't considered, meaning convincing-looking replicas would need to be created if Bond was going to get to drive them hard. Aston built a run of eight cars around a spaceframe chassis, with carbonfibre bodywork and a donated non-Aston powertrain. I'm told not to say where this comes from, although the official line that it is a fairly modern, naturally aspirated six-cylinder producing 340bhp makes it pretty simple to create a shortlist of candidates.

Neil Layton, whose Auto Action company has supplied more than 140 vehicles for the production, talks us around one of the replicas, which feature an innovative clamshell system that allows bits of the bodywork to be easily removed to enable easier camera mounting, or different perspectives. The car weighs just 1000kg, so the power-to-weight ratio is considerably brawnier than a standard DB5, but Layton says it's actually the suspension design



Left and above
Matera proved a stunning location, but the stone streets caused issues for the film crew. The solution was certainly a novel one.
Opposite page, going clockwise from left
Auto Action's Neil Layton, precision driver Mark Higgins and special effects boss Chris Corbould



*'When we did
the recce, we
discovered you
could hardly
walk on some of
the roads,
they're so
slippery'*





James Bond always looks best-dressed in an Aston, and never more so than in a DB5'

rather than increased performance that is the critical difference. 'We're running rallycross dampers, so we've got enough droop for doing a "step run",' he explains – and yes, that does mean driving down a flight of steps.

Layton started out working for Prodrive as a motorsport engineer and the skills are similar in his new line of work. 'You've got to maintain a standard ride height or the car will look wrong,' he explains. The really challenging bit is managing big jumps: 'We've got a massive amount of [suspension] droop on these vehicles, and that's what we use to arrest the car and control it.'

Layton is very proud of another invention that we hear about but don't see: this is the 'pod', which allows a car to be driven by somebody outside the vehicle, so the actors can be shot while travelling at full speed and delivering their lines. Previously this has been done with mechanical connections, but the pod is drive-by-wire, meaning it will work even when not mounted onto the vehicle. Higgins confirms that driving a car while looking at it from the outside is 'a bit disorientating'.

Layton is a long-term collaborator of Chris Corbould, *No Time To Die's* special effects boss and a man who has worked on every Bond film since *The Spy Who Loved Me*, making this his 15th. Despite having won an Oscar – for the visual effects on Christopher Nolan's *Inception* in 2011 – Corbould seems to be the most laid-back man on set, happy to chat about both the enduring appeal of car action sequences and his enthusiasm for taking things further.

Despite his job title, Corbould is a huge believer in doing stunts for real rather than through computing power. 'I'm not putting down [the film franchise] *Fast & Furious*, it's been hugely successful,' he says, 'but Bond is based in

Above
Daniel Craig, here with Léa Seydoux, who reprises her role as Madeleine Swann in the new film, is making his fifth and final appearance as Bond in *No Time To Die*

reality.' There's a pause: 'Well, a sort-of reality; but one where we do things properly.'

Corbould says that the DB5's brief return in *Skyfall* triggered thoughts of a bigger return for the iconic car, even given the issues of promoting it to an action role. When Cary Joji Fukunaga became director of *No Time To Die*, replacing Danny Boyle, Corbould found his new boss equally enthusiastic to get Aston back.

'He really wanted a DB5,' Corbould says, 'then we talked about all the other cars and Cary asked for my opinion. As far as I can see, the more Astons in a film the better.' Which is why filmgoers will be treated to the sight of a new DBS Superleggera, a 1980s V8 Vantage similar to the one used in *The Living Daylights*, and the Valhalla supercar. There's also a new Land Rover Defender, and a Triumph scrambler motorbike. When it comes to Bond, everybody wants to get featured.

But the DB5 is definitely going to be the one with its name in lights, especially after what Corbould describes as 'a little bit of an upgrade, let's say'.

THERE'S A CONVENTION with film reviews/previews that when they're about to give away important plot details, they carry a spoiler alert. So skip the next couple of paragraphs if you don't want to know about the updated DB5's new weaponry just yet.

'Everyone remembers the classic Browning machine guns,' says Corbould, 'so the question was how to pay homage but also to move it on.' Another pause. 'Which is why it's got miniguns coming out of the headlights.'

A predictably large amount of cinema magic goes into making this happen, of course, with several different bits of kit required to show the various stages of the Aston's headlights folding down, the multi-barrelled guns coming out and then – as Corbould puts it – 'it's like "you've fired all your bullets, now it's my turn"', Bond does a donut, fires hundreds of bullets and then we hit the classic *Goldfinger* smokescreen.'

That's the plan anyway, and almost certainly the spectacular reality in the finished film. But on the day I visit it just doesn't work out, with filming delayed by two torrential showers and then the minigun refusing to behave. After nearly an hour of attention from the experts, second unit director Alex Witt orders a test run: the minigun whirrs and disgorges hundreds of spent cartridges, but the gun itself isn't firing. There's not enough light left for a second go, so I don't get to see my snazzy-shirted gunman meeting his end. I'll have to wait until the cinema to see it like everyone else.

James Bond is a British cultural institution, but it's both interesting and reassuring to see how deep the connection runs behind the scenes as well. The majority of the crew in Matera are Brits, with regional accents crackling over the radio sets and plenty of Anglo-Saxon invective when things go wrong. Like Corbould, many are veterans of numerous Bond films.

The most famous fictional spy is an automotive tart, to put it mildly. He started out driving vintage Bentleys until lured into an Aston for *Goldfinger*. Since then he's had a go in everything from an AMC Hornet to a Ford Mondeo. But he always looks best-dressed in an Aston, and never more so than a DB5. Try not to break it, 007. **V**

No Time To Die is due to open at cinemas in early April.

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DB5 1965



Silver Birch with Elephant Black Connolly hide and grey Wilton carpeting. RS Williams rebuild in 1999 to include; Gearbox and rear axle rebuild, front and rear suspension rebuild, engine upgrade to 4.7ltr, bare metal respray, new aluminium wheels and Borrani spinners fitted, stainless steel front and rear bumpers fitted, all chrome re-plated, air conditioning upgrade. This DB5 looks stunning and with the RS Williams 4.7ltr upgrade, it performs magnificently.

DB5 Convertible 1964



Sierra Blue with grey hide and blue hood. RS Williams rebuild in 1994/1995 and only 6,000 miles covered since. Rebuild included front and rear suspension, brakes, gearbox, axle and engine rebuild. RSW maintained last 25yrs. Full respray to Sierra Blue and freshly serviced. Turrino wheels fitted with Borrani spinners, this stunning example has a wonderful patina and is ready to be enjoyed.

DB5 1965



Silver Birch with red interior (as per build-sheet, 1 of only approx 124 or so DB5's to be 'true' Silver Birch cars). Full bare metal re-spray and re-trim carried out in 2003. 4.2ltr RSW engine upgrade completed in 2008. RS Williams maintained last 15yrs. Invoices showing expenditure in excess of £155,000. Limited mileage over the last 4 years.

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IMITATION GAME



WORDS RICHARD MEADEN | **PHOTOGRAPHY** MAX EAREY

No Time To Die required no fewer than eight replica DB5s for the action sequences. We find out how they were created – and get behind the wheel



Bond movies are always catnip for car nuts, and Aston fans in particular, but even by the usual lofty standards of EON's blockbuster franchise, *No Time To Die* is something special. As ever, a certain DB5 steals the show (ably supported by the V8 from *The Living Daylights*, a DBS Superleggera and a cameo appearance for the new Valhalla hypercar), but it's the DB5 replicas built specially for the spectacular action sequences that are the four-wheeled heroes of the film.

These stunt cars are the work of Aston's Special Operations team based at Wellesbourne. Led by David King, this crack group of engineers has created many of Aston's wilder machines over the years. Recent highlights include Vulcan, V600 Vantage, and the Valkyrie prototypes currently piling on valuable development miles. King's team even has prior experience of building Bond cars, specifically the DB10s in *Spectre*, but the DB5 stunt cars for *No Time To Die* are something truly unique.

'The DB10 was a major task for the design team, but in engineering terms it was pretty straightforward, as we were effectively re-bodying a VH Vantage,' says King. 'This time, EON explained that the DB5 was going to feature heavily in the plot so they were going to need quite a few cars. They asked if we could source eight DB5s and prepare them to do a lot of stunts and jumps. Our answer was, well, er,

no, not really! Finding that many cars, bringing them all up to the same spec and making them strong, reliable and dynamically capable enough to take all the abuse that they'd get in the film was pretty much impossible. Trouble is, you can't really say no when it's a Bond film...'

Instead of saying no, King asked for 24 hours to sit down with colleagues Fraser Dunn and Graham Humphrys and come up with a plan. That plan rapidly coalesced around a purpose-built steel spaceframe chassis, which would be clad in carbonfibre bodywork exactly replicating the DB5. The engine and gearbox was sourced from – whisper it – the BMW E46 M3 of the early 2000s, as it offered a cheap source of powerful, bulletproof, naturally aspirated straight-six engines that would sit perfectly in the engine bay and sound very similar to an original DB5.

The timeframe to design, engineer and build these cars was a scant six months. 'It's this type of challenge that my department stands for,' says King with well deserved pride. 'It's what we live for, really...'

Over the years I've spent more time ogling old Astons than is strictly healthy, yet looking at the two silver DB5s before me it's very hard to decide which is the original and which is the stunt car. Okay, so up close you can see the criss-cross bracing bars of the roll cage through the stunt car's rear window, and the 3D-printed radiator grille doesn't have the same subtle, complex curvature of the original, but in every other respect it's completely convincing.

Climb in and the basic interior betrays the stunt car's singularity of purpose. A hydraulic handbrake sprouts from the transmission

Right and below

Visually, the stunt car is an almost perfect facsimile of a DB5, but its carbonfibre body is wrapped around a steel spaceframe, which also cradles a BMW straight-six engine (below left). Meaden finds it beautifully poised and biddable around the Stowe Circuit at Silverstone

'The basic interior betrays the stunt car's singularity of purpose. A hydraulic handbrake sprouts from the transmission tunnel...'







Clockwise from above Meaden chats with Mark Higgins; DB5 joined by V8, DBS Superleggera and Valhalla in new movie; stunt car shows its poise; real or fake – you decide

tunnel, while in the footwell a racecar pedal box is mounted to the exposed spaceframe. Round analogue instruments do a passable impression of a DB5's dash, and because the cockpit is the same size and the relationship between the upright windscreen, shallow dashboard and generously sized wood-rim steering wheel are so similar to the real thing, it feels eerily authentic, despite the spartan surroundings.

The motor starts with a convincing snort that's very reminiscent of a Weber-fed Tadek Marek straight-six and once you're accelerating away it shares the same kind of brassy bellow. The only giveaways are the slight step in urgency of the M Power engine's VANOS variable valve timing system at high rpm and wide throttle openings, and the engine's willingness to rev beyond 7000rpm.

One thing that does take a little while to adjust to is the power steering – essential for the demands of on- and over-the-limit precision driving – which is surprisingly light. It's also tricky to wield the wood-rim steering wheel, thanks to its size, the need for more than half a turn of lock to negotiate Stowe's tighter corners, and because the rounded metal bobbles on the back of the rim can give your fingers a painful clout if you get in a tangle with your inputs.

What's remarkable about this machine is just how solid and together it feels. If you didn't know its backstory you really wouldn't guess it was built from scratch in a matter of weeks with a donor engine and gearbox. The suspension helps, with rallycross-spec dampers supplied by Prodrive. The smooth surface at Stowe poses few challenges compared with the high-impact demands of the filming, but it is still possible to appreciate the car's poise and balance.

Weighing just 1000kg and with a little under 340bhp to propel it, the DB5 stunt car has a formidable power-to-weight ratio. There's no traction or stability control, nor is there ABS or indeed servo-assistance for the brakes, so it's an entirely analogue machine. Sitting on narrow-section Avon historic race tyres, which are made from modern compounds but sport a classic tread pattern, the DB5 stunt car has a grunt-to-grip ratio firmly weighted in favour of the former. Unsurprisingly it's an absolute riot to drive, but with an underlying precision and control that must have made it ideal for the inch-perfect slides, jumps and donuts required for the high-pressure action sequences.

Handily, we have just the man to ask, for not only has Aston provided the stunt car and a track on which to drive it, but Mark Higgins –

007's driving double in the last four Bond movies – is also at Stowe. So, what does he think of the stunt DB5?

'It's perfect for what we need. Front-engined, rear-drive, light, powerful, nimble, but behaves in a way that doesn't look stupid given it looks like a real DB5. It's great that there aren't complex electronics, too. Some new cars are really tricky, because the management systems tend to shut down when you start to disconnect things. And from a driver's perspective there's nothing better than an entirely analogue car with great balance and plenty of go.'

As for the stunt driving itself, something I hadn't considered was having to do it all in the style of James Bond. As Higgins explains, not only does he have to drive the wheels off the DB5, but he has to do so in character: 'It sounds weird to describe how a fictional character drives, but Bond is quite a dynamic driver; smooth with nothing too erratic. It's horribly tempting to go round a corner as sideways as possible, because it's fun and it would look really cool, but that's not what the director wants because it wouldn't look right.'

The director might have a point, but, as far as we're concerned, all the time Bond's driving a DB5 you can't go wrong. **V**

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Below

Roger Becker, apparently wearing Roger Moore's slacks and blazer as his driving stand-in, poses with Richard Kiel (aka Jaws), while Barbara Bach (Anya Amasova) waits in the Esprit





THE NAME'S BECKER

WORDS RICHARD MEADEN | PHOTOGRAPHY EON PRODUCTIONS / DANJAG / BECKER FAMILY

Matt Becker, Aston's chief engineer (above), recalls when his dad Roger became Bond's stunt driver on *The Spy Who Loved Me*

Imagine being a five-year-old boy growing-up in Norfolk with a dad whose job it was to develop Lotus sports cars and who also starred in a James Bond film. Pretty darned cool, huh? Well, in 1977 that young nipper was Matt Becker, now Aston Martin's chief engineer for vehicle attributes.

Not only did Becker Jnr's father, Roger, enjoy a 44-year career at Lotus, during which he had a hand in shaping the dynamics of every Lotus road car from Sixties Elan to Noughties Evora, but he famously made Roger Moore look like a handy wheelman in *The Spy Who Loved Me*, driving arguably its biggest star, *that* white S1 Esprit.

Sadly, Roger Becker passed away in 2017, but Matt – who also honed his skills at Lotus before leaving to join Aston Martin in 2014 – continues the family tradition. He's even done some stunt driving himself, having hurled an Evora around in the star-studded action comedy *Red 2*. Thus far he hasn't managed to emulate his father and drive in a Bond movie, but it's clearly a quietly held ambition. EON, if you're reading this, please make it happen.

With *No Time To Die* about to hit cinemas and the Becker family's unique connection to the Bond movie franchise, it feels like the perfect excuse for *Vantage* to thumb through some great old pictures and chat with Matt about his recollections of the time his dad was 007.

How Becker Snr came to do much of the stunt driving is a tale that has passed into motoring folklore. Dispatched by Colin Chapman to accompany a brand new S1 Esprit to Sardinia, where much of *The Spy Who Loved Me* was filmed, it was Becker's job to look after the pristine white machine, provide technical support if needed (as if...), and to help the stunt driver get comfortable enough in the car to drive it in a suitably spectacular manner. Matt takes up the tale:

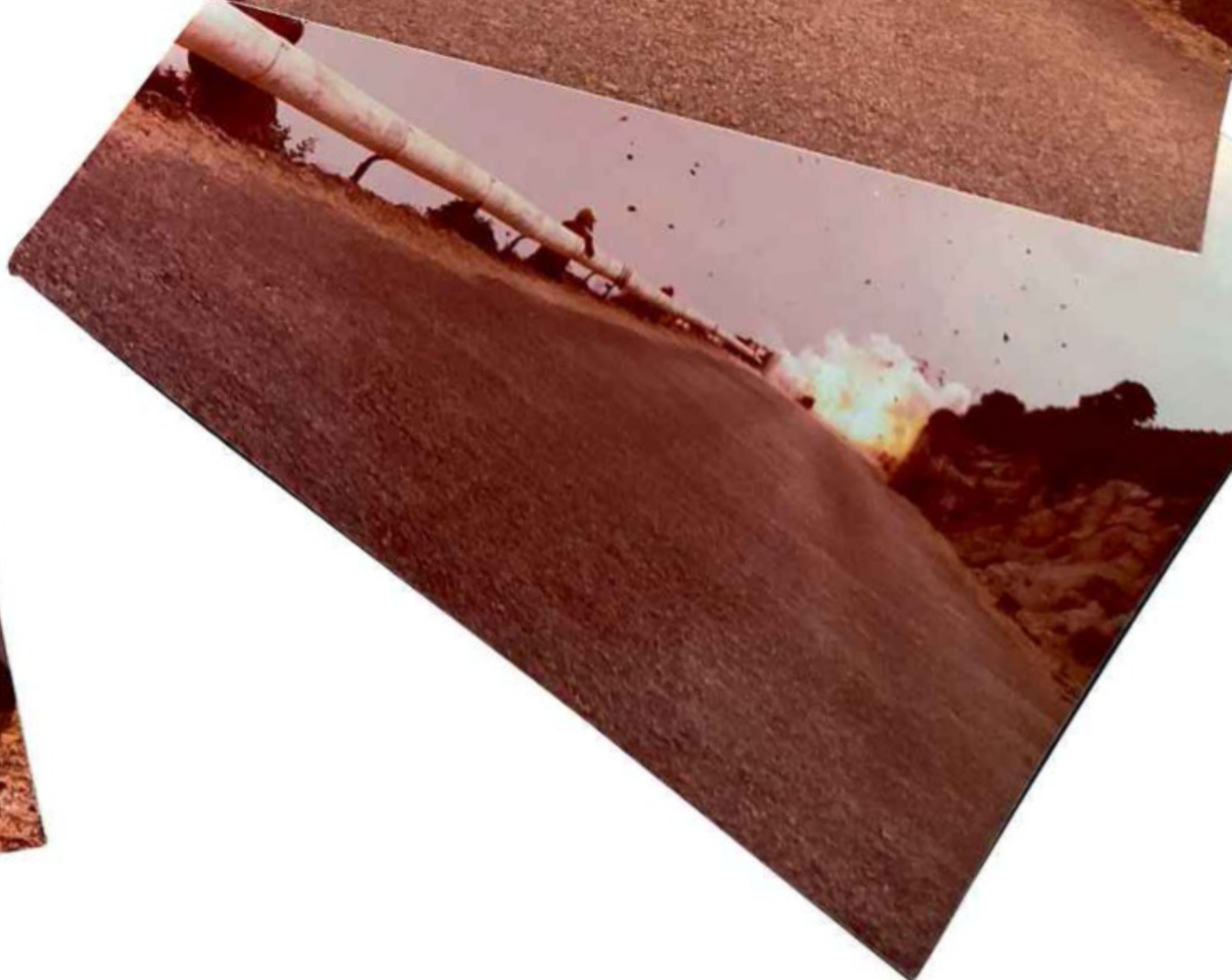
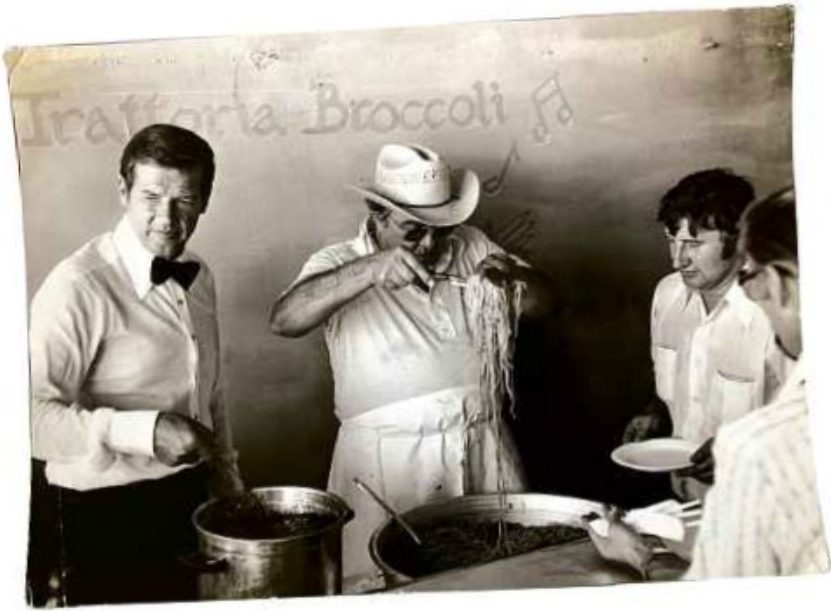
'As always when somebody passes away, there's always the questions you wished you'd



Above
According to Roger Becker, Kiel was a 'super-nice chap, nothing like his character in the film'. And yes, those are Jaws' jaws in the box. Top: 'Wet Nellie', the Esprit sub.

Opposite page
Waiting to be served lunch by Moore and producer 'Cubby' Broccoli; shooting the beach scene; Bond girl Caroline Munro, and filming the big chase sequence

'How Becker Snr came to do much of the stunt driving for The Spy Who Loved Me is a tale that has passed into motoring folklore'





‘Obviously Dad wasn’t meant to be doing the stunt driving, so I think he got paid in cash and hid the money in the car when he drove it back!’ – Matt Becker

asked but, from what I remember, Dad said he did a lot of the main Esprit scenes in the film. There was a particular sequence where the Lotus was going up the side of a mountain, being chased by a helicopter. Guns were going off. Explosions. You know the scene.

‘Anyway, the producer – Cubby Broccoli – wasn’t happy with the stunt driver as he wasn’t exuberant enough. And there’s a call for the car to be driven back to the location, but the stunt driver isn’t around, so dad jumps in and takes it to where it’s needed. Long story short, Cubby Broccoli sees the Esprit being driven, er, “enthusiastically”, as was dad’s default style, and basically says: “I want it driven like that!” From that point on, Dad drove the car in pretty much all the chase’s dynamic scenes.’

Flicking through the pictures, it’s clear life on set must have been great fun for Becker, who can be seen hard at it in a number of shots, reclined on a sun lounger with Lotus Cars colleagues, including PR man Don McLaughlin. It was McLaughlin who scored the coup of

getting Lotus the Bond gig by parking a very early Esprit outside EON’s production office – the logic being that a glimpse of the futuristic, Giugiaro-penned wedge would be enough to grab the executives’ attention. It worked.

‘Dad was away for seven weeks, which felt a long time for the four-year-old me,’ says Matt, ‘but I know he had a brilliant time. It’s funny looking back now, but obviously he wasn’t meant to be doing the stunt driving, so I think he got paid in cash and hid the money in the car when he drove it back! I suspect that’s why we got loads of presents when he came home...’

Compared with the polished, choreographed driving scenes that define the Craig-era Bond, when re-watching the driving in *The Spy Who Loved Me* it looks more straightforward, Bond’s getaway requiring fast driving, a few point-blank overtakes and a few slides. Having spent plenty of time with Roger and Matt over the years, I suspect this was all in a day’s work for Becker Snr, who one suspects regularly plied the lanes around Hethel with similar verve.

Above and opposite

The iconic scene where the Esprit drives up the beach. Top right: Becker (on right) relaxing with Lotus PR man Don McLaughlin (centre) and a member of the crew. Right: Desmond Llewelyn (‘Q’) between takes. Below: Becker at the wheel, and far right: regular stuntman Ken Sheppard prepares to steer the rocket-propelled sidecar





This said, he certainly wouldn't have had experience of dodging helicopters: something he had to do when filming the main chase. 'Dad told me that when he came hooning around a corner the helicopter was hovering a lot lower than it was supposed to and he thought he wasn't going to get underneath it. It must have been flying really low if he thought the Esprit wouldn't fit beneath it!'

Becker Snr made good friendships on set and got on especially well with one of the other stuntmen: 'Dad always spoke fondly of a stuntman called Ken Sheppard. Some of the pictures show him hidden in the rocket sidecar that broke away from the motorcycle and blew the lorry up in the main chase scene. I think he steered it without being able to see much of where he was going. Dad thought he was proper nuts, but was also really impressed by him.'

As is the norm on movie shoots, there were multiple cars to satisfy all the needs of the film crew. Lotus provided two functioning cars (one reputed to be Colin Chapman's personal car) plus six rolling bodyshells. There was also the famous submarine, known as 'Wet Nellie'. It's a mark of the era that although the Esprit had been launched at the 1975 Paris motor show and entered production in June 1976 (the same time as *The Spy Who Loved Me* was being filmed), it suffered from a certain lack of development, as Becker explains:

'Funnily enough, Sardinia proved to be a bit hotter than Hethel and I remember Dad saying they had all kinds of cooling issues. I suspect the dynamic cars were most likely late-phase

prototypes of some description. I suppose you could say Bond filming effectively served as part of the Esprit development process.'

Not all the filming took place in Sardinia. Many of the set-piece action sequences in Bond baddie Karl Stromberg's supertanker lair were shot on a huge soundstage built at Pinewood Studios. As the Esprit was still involved in some of the scenes, Roger Becker was on hand to provide support. Much to Matt's delight, his dad took him along.

'Dad spent a lot of time delivering components for the car to Pinewood Studios and helping where he could. I remember going with him. Walking into that huge supertanker set where the shootout happened was amazing. I was absolutely awestruck by it all.'

'I've watched the film loads of times, but you don't see Dad, at least not in the driving sequences. He said he was one of the extras on the beach when the Esprit "drives" out of the sea – it was actually dragged out – but however many times I've watched the film I haven't managed to spot him.'

'As a kid it was pretty cool having a dad who was a Lotus test driver and did some stunt driving in a Bond film, but to be honest I'm still really proud of him now. He had such an amazing career at Lotus, working closely with Colin Chapman and shaping some great cars. Those are his professional legacy, but being part of *The Spy Who Loved Me* was always special to him and his family.' And with good reason. For when it came to driving that iconic white Esprit, nobody did it better. **V**

'When he came hooning around a corner, the helicopter was hovering a lot lower than it was supposed to'



Above
Matt Becker (foreground) and dad Roger when they were both at Lotus in around 2010. Matt left to join Aston Martin in 2014



Aston Martin DB7 Zagato
2004 | 9,200 miles | £279,850



Aston Martin Vantage GT8
2017 | 1,989 miles | £164,850



Aston Martin Vanquish S
2007 | 6,675 miles | £129,850



Aston Martin V12 Vantage Manual
2013 | 7,000 miles | £104,850



Aston Martin DB9 Volante
2014 | 5,500 miles | £79,850



Aston Martin Rapide S
2017 | 19,700 miles | £69,850

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WHAT LIES

The 'VH' platform underpinned a remarkable 15 years of



THE 'VH' STORY | DB9 TO RAPIDE AMR

BENEATH

Aston Martin production, from first DB9 to Rapide AMR

WORDS ANDREW FRANKEL | PHOTOGRAPHY TIM ANDREW





Above and below
DB9 interior still one of the best, even if some of the details remain a source of irritation. First-generation cars had a 450bhp version of the 5.9-litre V12 that first appeared in DB7 Vantage. Below right: car still steers and rides beautifully, though six-speed auto gearbox is betraying its age now



I've probably been on close to a thousand car launches of one kind or another during all the years I've been doing this job. And almost all leave the mind as soon as the last words about whatever car I've been driving have been filed. Sometimes I'll see in a magazine a picture of my former self driving a car 10, 20 or 30 years ago and I won't have any idea of where or when it was taken, unless the number plate, some topographical feature or the amount of hair left on my head provides a clue. And yet I remember the Aston Martin DB9 launch as if it were yesterday.

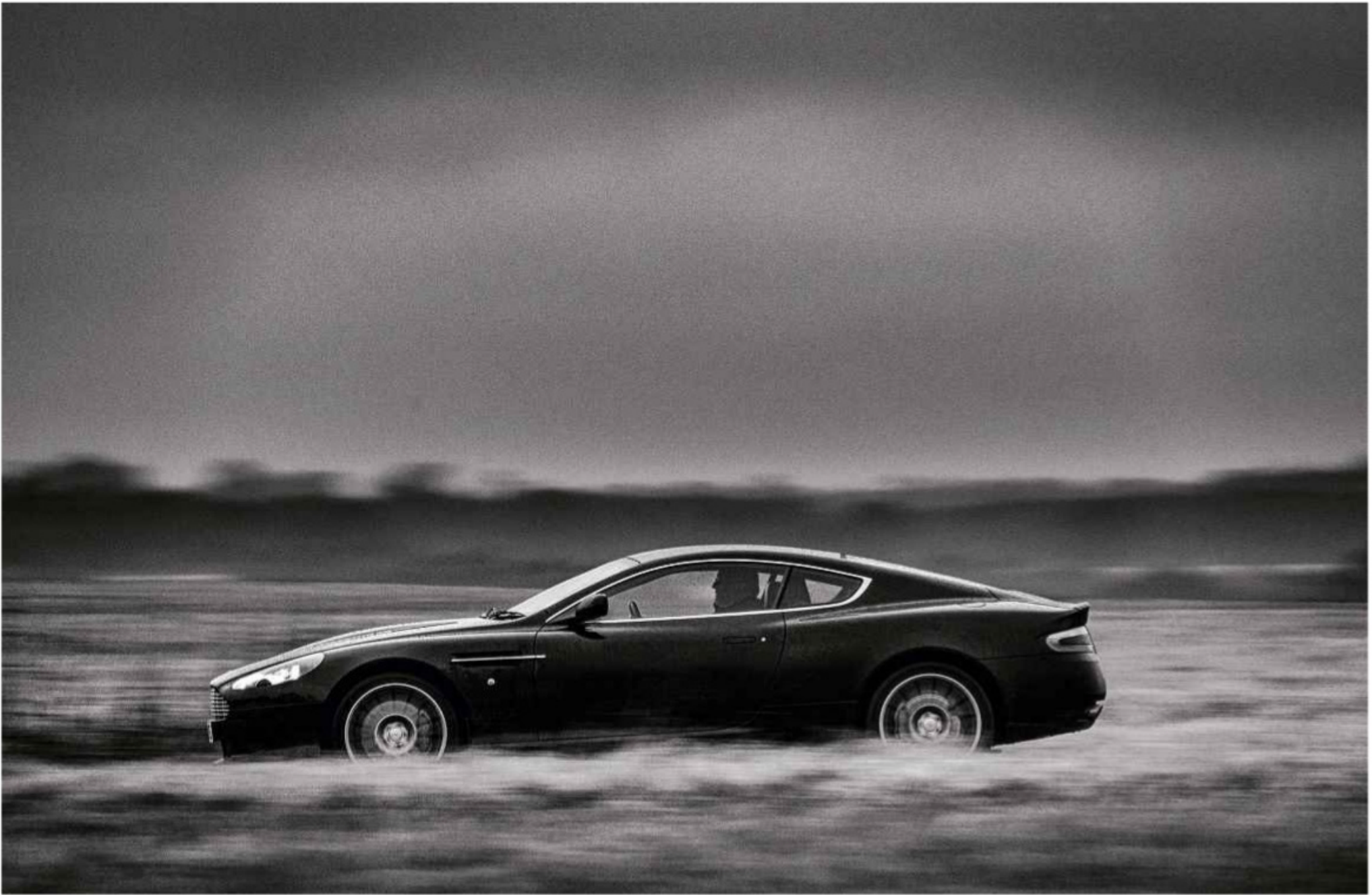
But it wasn't: it was (big pause) 16 years ago. The structure was perfect, an ideal template for a launch that still eludes most car manufacturers to this day. It was held in the South of France and our passage from London to the event hotel could not have been more efficient. What's more, the hotel was literally by the side of one of Europe's finest roads. No schlepping out of a city centre, no long motorway section before you got to the good stuff. All you had to do was drive out of the gates and turn left.

And by a freakish coincidence (though doubtless some conspiracy theorists thought it a sinister plot by the Italians to torpedo Aston's big moment), the British press were invited to drive the Ferrari 612 Scaglietti and the DB9 on precisely the same day. No, you really couldn't make it up. Someone had to blink and, as soon as Ferrari realised they'd be holding a distinctly Brit-lite launch, they hastily moved us from a Monday to the previous Friday.

Which meant we all turned up with the DB9's most fearsome (albeit £67,000 more expensive) rival as fresh in our minds as was possible without actually driving one from Italy to France, and under no illusions whatever about the mountain the Aston had to climb, even to provide a credible alternative to the similarly near-6-litre, V12 2+2 coupé from the other side of the Apennines.

So the following morning I climbed into a silver-grey DB9, sharing the drive with Gavin Green, a former (and renowned) editor of *Car* magazine, an accomplished racer and vastly experienced car tester; there was no-one in the industry whose opinion of a new car I trusted more.

And so we set off, driving what was probably the first Aston Martin in history designed on what any normal car company might regard as a reasonable budget. It was a car built in a brand new factory and one upon whose sculpted shoulders rested the entire future of the company. And, as the miles accrued, so our smiles broadened. It was fast, it was gorgeous, it handled like a dream. It was, being blunt,





'I was expecting the Rapide AMR to feel startlingly different, but it doesn't. Its feel is exactly what it is: a highly evolved but related product'

Below and right
End-of-line Rapide AMR wrings an astonishing 595bhp from the same 5935cc capacity. Being a later version of VH, it also has a stiffer structure, and a more spacious cockpit. Dynamically it's a clear league above the DB9, its adaptive dampers providing a remarkably supple yet controlled ride



bloody marvellous. In fact it was more than that: to me at least, it was better than the outsized, overweight and overpriced Ferrari of such recent acquaintance. Grizzled hacks though we were, Green and I were stunned by the achievement.

Then I started thinking back through all those tests, some of which I'd written, where an Aston Martin was pitched against a Ferrari. And I could not think of one in which the British car triumphed. But now there was no question: the DB9 was better looking and, if not quite so fast, so much more wieldy, so much better to drive that the performance statistics seemed hardly relevant. The DB9 was, and remains with the DB2, DB4 and DB7, a key milestone in the post-war history of the marque.

There is no single reason for its success: you can point your finger at its appearance, its yowling V12, its exquisite (if at times infuriating) interior and build quality beyond the imaginings of any previous Aston, but if you had to name one factor from which the DB9 benefited most, it would be its structure. This was the so-called Vertical/Horizontal platform, that would go on to underpin every Aston Martin made for the next dozen years, save the Cygnet and One-77.

You can read about the technical details of VH in the accompanying box and why its name has nothing to do with dimensions, but suffice to say here that the bonding and riveting of aluminium extrusions provided a structure that was not just strong and stiff but, crucially for a low-volume manufacturer nevertheless needing an entire range of cars, it was quite astonishingly versatile.

How versatile? You need only look at the Rapide AMR next to it. It not only has not a single dimension in common with the very original and lovely DB9, it comes from another era. Of course, they are related by more than their platforms, for both are still powered by a 5935cc, naturally aspirated V12 engine. But some sense of the way Aston Martins developed over time can be gained from the fact that while the DB9 motor produced an entirely respectable 450bhp (itself a rise from the 420bhp it produced in the DB7 V12 Vantage), the Rapide AMR engine has no less than 595bhp from exactly the same capacity, taking the engine over the magic 100bhp-per-litre mark.

But we'll try the original first. I'll decline the opportunity to say it fits like a glove and not just because it's a terrible cliché. Truth is it doesn't fit my 6ft 4in frame at all well. Headroom is limited, legroom barely adequate. Oddly I don't remember feeling cramped in the car in 2004, but that's probably because I was then mentally comparing it with the even smaller DB7.

Even so, it's all very familiar in here and as a thing of beauty I think the interior remains the best of Aston Martin's modern era. A shame then that, to operate, it is perhaps the worst. The



Four versions of VH were produced over a lifetime starting in 2004 and ending in 2019 with the cessation of production of the Rapide AMR'

dials are superbly elegant, but have such small, spidery numerals they are almost unreadable. The minor switchgear is close to unintelligible and the less said about the Volvo-sourced sat-nav the better. You really are better off with a road atlas.

Yet it takes just the press of a button and the pull of a paddle to bring those old feelings rushing back. The engine remains a masterpiece. You can see steam start to curl from the ears of Aston engineers when you describe it as two Ford Mondeo V6s sharing a common crankshaft, a simplification so gross as to be actively misleading – but that was the starting point and from there to have created such a smooth, sonorous and sophisticated motor is a tribute to those at Aston Martin, Ford and Cosworth who were responsible for it.

The ride is less controlled than I remember but that probably says more about the roads I'm on and the age of the dampers on this particular car than any inherent issue with the DB9 itself. And it still has that steering: hefty, precise, perfectly geared and with as much feel as you could hope for from a GT car. It is the most important interface between man and machine, and Aston Martin got it spot-on.

The only other part of the car that really feels its age is the gearbox. I recall being thoroughly impressed by the six-speed automatic ZF transmission back in 2004, but in few areas has the world of cars moved faster. In these days of instant gratification, it seems slow-witted with a discernible pause as it plods through its ratios. Then again, the engine has so much mid-range torque that for give-and-take A- and B-road driving, it's often best to lock it into third or fourth and leave it there.

I was expecting the Rapide AMR to feel startlingly different, but it doesn't. Its feel is exactly what it is: a highly evolved but related product, tailored to do a slightly different job. A younger brother or sister, a nephew or niece perhaps, but very definitely from the same family.

The interior is less pure, but works better, a trade I'd be happy to make because it's still

VH roots – and the VH family tree

THE FIRST THING to understand is that the words Vertical and Horizontal in the VH initialism are intended figuratively, not literally. Both refer to the scalability of the platform, vertically up and down the Aston range, and horizontally where individual components were developed specifically so they could be used, adapted or dropped according to each model's need, without requiring re-engineering of the rest of the car.

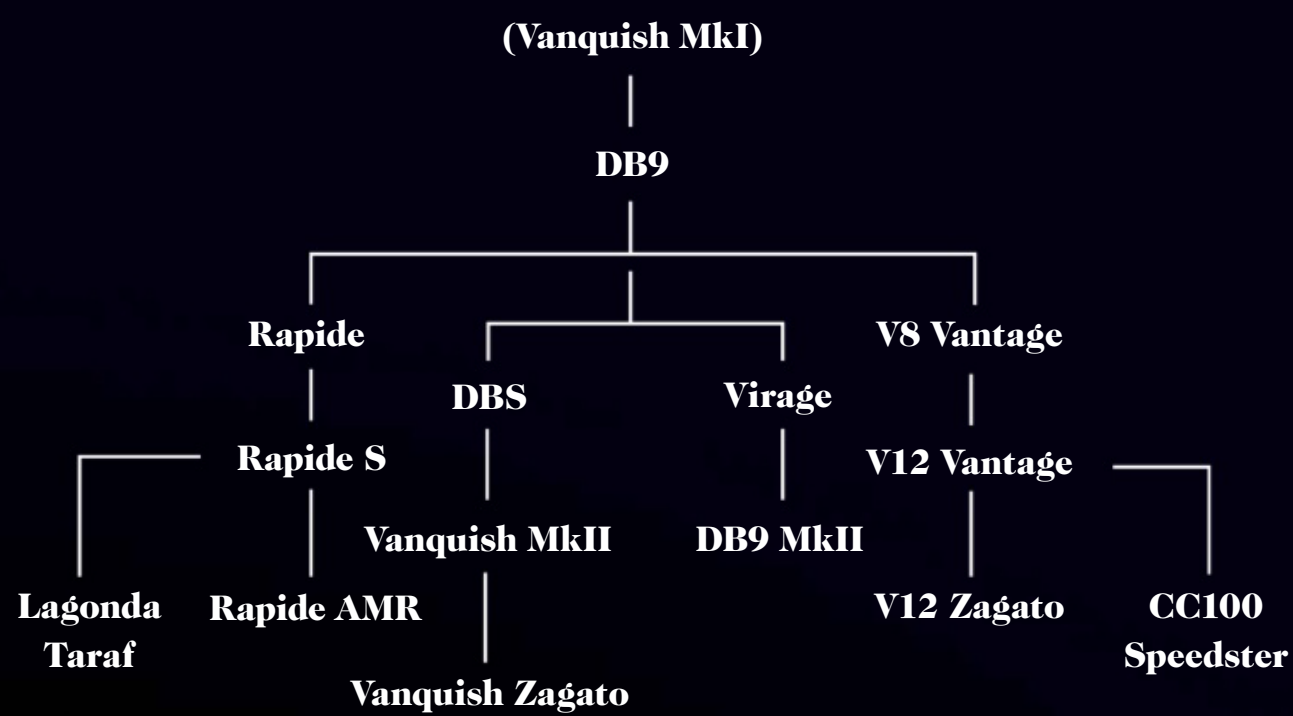
Although the DB9 is regarded as the first VH car, its origins lie in the Lotus-developed mk1 Vanquish, Lotus itself applying technology learned from the production of the similarly constructed Elise. At the time of its introduction it was not only lighter than the Jaguar XJS platform found beneath the skin of the DB7, it was also twice as structurally rigid.

Four versions of VH were produced over a lifetime starting in 2004 and ending in 2019 with the cessation of production of the Rapide AMR. DB9 came

first, followed by a shortened version for the 2005 Vantage and an elongated iteration for the 2010 Rapide. In the meantime, DB9 spawned DBS (pictured) and Virage. Version four arrived in 2013, lowering the DB9's engine, increasing stiffness by 20 per cent and losing 15kg in mass. This platform was also further developed using high carbonfibre content for the second-generation Vanquish and was claimed to be '75 per cent new'.

So was VH the perfect solution? I'd say it was the perfect pragmatic solution for its times. The key was that it did not rely on stressed body panels so could change size and shape without requiring an entire car to be re-engineered. But it had drawbacks: despite its all-aluminium construction (or aluminium and carbonfibre for the mk2 Vanquish), it was never particularly lightweight, nor was it very space-efficient, one reason the DB9 and its descendants are still a tight fit for taller drivers today.







a very attractive place to be, even if all that carbonfibre cascading down the centre console seems more applied after the fact than designed in. It's obviously a more spacious cabin, but not simply because of the Rapide's elongated wheelbase: fourth-generation VH cars just had more room inside, whether it's a Rapide, DB9 or Vanquish.

Two things strike you immediately, the first being the quality of the ride. I've been in purpose-built air-sprung limousines that could learn a lesson or two from this Rapide. With electronically controlled dampers, the elongated wheelbase and softer springs, it wafts you around so deftly that you fear it might pitch and wallow when you get up to speed. But it never does: however hard you try, at least at all sensible road speeds, it maintains its ride height perfectly.

The second surprise is that it doesn't feel as powerful as its engine output suggests. To make it perform properly, you need to keep the revs high and the gears low, a task in which the thankfully more modern and far faster eight-speed automatic gearbox is willing to assist. But it doesn't take long to work out why: firstly, at 1995kg, the Rapide AMR is some 285kg heavier than the DB9. Secondly, unless you resort to

Specifications

DB9

ENGINE V12, 5935cc

MAX POWER 450bhp @ 6000rpm

MAX TORQUE 420lb ft @ 5000rpm

TRANSMISSION Six-speed automatic

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

BRAKES Vented discs, 355mm front, 330mm rear, ABS, EBD **WHEELS** 8.5 x 19in front, 9.5 x 19in rear

TYRES 235/40 ZR19 front, 275/35 ZR19 rear

WEIGHT 1710kg **POWER TO WEIGHT** 267bhp/ton

0-60MPH 4.9sec **TOP SPEED** 186mph

PRICE NEW £109,000 (£165,000 in today's money)

RAPIDE AMR

ENGINE V12, 5935cc

MAX POWER 595bhp @ 7000rpm

MAX TORQUE 465lb ft @ 5500rpm

TRANSMISSION Eight-speed automatic

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

BRAKES Vented carbon-ceramic discs, 400mm front, 360mm rear, ABS, EBD **WHEELS** 8.5 x 21in front, 11 x 21in rear

TYRES 245/35 ZR21 front, 295/30 ZR21 rear

WEIGHT 1995kg **POWER TO WEIGHT** 303bhp/ton

0-60MPH 4.2sec **TOP SPEED** 205mph

PRICE NEW From £194,950 (in 2019)

forced induction, it is almost impossible to raise the output of an engine by so much without concentrating its power in the upper reaches of the rev-range. In fact if you look not at the power-to-weight ratios of the two cars, but instead the more useful but less familiar torque-to-weight ratio, you'll discover the old DB9 is actually better in this regard than the Rapide AMR. And I didn't expect that either.

Naturally both cars provide rare and special driving experiences, exactly as you might expect of a pair of hand-finished, V12-powered British grand tourers offering not only those looks but that badge, too. But while the Rapide is clearly the more accomplished car – it would be strange and sad indeed were that not the case – it is the DB9 to which my thoughts return again and again. It has something, a purity not just in its line but also its conception.

It is the original, the one from which all those other VH Aston Martins were subsequently derived. And with clean, low-mileage examples now available for less than £30,000, it is something else, too: a bargain. **V**

With many thanks to Runnymede Motor Company for supplying the DB9, and Alex Hayes-Griffin for allowing us to shoot his wonderful Rapide AMR.



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Speed freak

WORDS PAUL CHUDECKI | PHOTOGRAPHY TONY BAKER

It's hard to imagine a more unlikely competition car, but Michael Urban's DB6 Volante has won dozens of trophies in races, rallies and sprints. We met up with car and owner at Goodwood





It was something no-one expected to see. Not just a DB6 taking on the racing ranks of DB4s and '5s, but a Volante version no less. The man must be mad. Indeed, when Michael Urban made his and the Aston's competition debut, instead of receiving polite words of encouragement he was told in no uncertain terms that he was an idiot with no chance of success and not to bother. Forty-four years and a cabinet packed full of trophies later, he and the DB6 Volante are gearing up for their first event of 2020.

Surprisingly, ownership of the Aston had come by chance; a Morris Eight at 17 had been followed by a Jaguar E-type roadster at 19, until in 1971 his then wife told him to replace it with a family car. 'I came back with a DB6 hardtop, which fitted all the bills: it had a large boot and four seats,' recalls Michael, chuckling. 'It started off the road to ruin!'

Some two years later, having decided that the '6's automatic gearbox rendered it too slow, he started hankering for another convertible. And in May 1974, a 1968 DB6 Volante in Hereford caught his eye: 'And that was it, that's the car,' he says. Not only did it have a manual 'box, it was a Vantage model with triple Weber 45DCOE carburettors; indeed, chassis DBVC/3671/R was the ultimate specification drop-top DB6. He paid £3900 (around £46,000 in today's money).

After joining the Aston Martin Owners Club in 1975, self-employed company director Michael started regularly entering concours events, but the closest he had come to racing was spectating at Brands Hatch. 'I then went down to Wiscombe [hillclimb],' he continues, 'and thought "Oh, that looks fun!"'

The following year he entered the club's annual hillclimb up the Devon country house's driveway, despite being told he hadn't got a chance. 'I thought, God, I'm going to do it!' he laughs. And he did, in the standard post-DB2

'On debut, Michael was told he was an idiot with no chance of success'

Left, from the top AMOC Goodwood in the early 1980s; leading the pack at Silverstone in 1990; son Christopher and some of the '6's trophies in 1987; dicing with DB4 Lightweights, Brands Hatch, 1989. **Opposite** Michael today, and entry for the 1991 RAC International Historic Rally of GB



road class, on Avon crossplies. 'It wasn't a very good result, I couldn't work out why I was so far behind,' he recalls. 'Then you start talking to the drivers, who suddenly say: "You can't go up on Turbospeeds, you need something sensible because that'd save you two seconds."'

A change to Yokohama AVS radials, with a shorter sidewall and mounted on 6in-wide AC Cobra wire wheels (against the DB6's 5in rims), improved things, after which Michael and the otherwise unmodified Volante made their race debuts at Brands Hatch in 1977. Unsurprisingly, the Aston proved quick to overheat, though this was largely overcome by removing the radiator grille and fully cured by fitting a much larger, free-flow oil cooler.

'It used to get exceedingly hot,' says Michael. 'What we didn't take into account, which you don't notice on the road cars so much, is that you can get air in but there's nowhere for air to come out; the two side vents are blocked by the servos. Of course, the car was never really designed for the abuse it was getting. It took me about 2½ years to get the engine sorted.'

A major performance boost was achieved by installing domed Cosworth pistons, increasing the compression ratio, during a 1979 rebuild of the 4-litre motor forced by a dropped valve; sump baffles were also fitted to eliminate dramatic oil surge under cornering. 'There was quite a big improvement with the Cosworth pistons, the car seriously went a lot quicker, a lot more torque,' says Michael. 'It was definitely the way forward in those days.'

First time out at Loton Park hillclimb in 1981 the Volante then won its class, and more top results ensued in speed events. 'And then I started seriously racing it, about '82/'83...'

Racing the car more seriously (by then in the mildly modified class, and with uprated V8 clutch, standard ZF 'box and stickier Hoosier rubber) highlighted the relative inadequacy of the brakes – already benefiting from air ducting to the front discs and high boiling-point fluid – and in 1990 DB4 GT three-cylinder calipers and 12in front discs were fitted, replacing the standard 11in/two-cylinder items, with Mintex race pads. 'Then we used metallic ones and they

Specification

ENGINE In-line 6-cyl, 4150cc, triple Weber 45DCOE
MAX POWER 290bhp @ 6000rpm (verified)
MAX TORQUE 294lb ft @ 3500rpm (verified)
TRANSMISSION Five-speed manual, rear-wheel drive, limited-slip differential **SUSPENSION** Front: double wishbones, coil springs, Koni telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar. Rear: live axle, trailing arms, Watt's linkage, Koni telescopic dampers **BRAKES** Solid, grooved discs, 305mm front, 274mm rear **WHEELS** 6.0 x 15in front and rear **TYRES** 215/70 Michelin XWX front and rear **WEIGHT** 1474kg **POWER TO WEIGHT** 200bhp/ton **0-60MPH** c6.5sec (estimated) **TOP SPEED** c150mph



'Of course, the car was never really designed for the abuse it was getting'





were absolutely fantastic,' says Michael, who later had the discs 'slotted' to aid water dispersion: 'I never had the money to do everything that I wanted to do all at once!'

It was granted FIA papers in January 1991, and two months later DBVC/3671/R entered the gruelling 1000-mile RAC International Historic Rally of Great Britain, finishing a fine sixth overall and second in class.

After bending the rear axle (standard 3.73:1 limited-slip diff) off the line at a Curborough sprint, Michael had renowned specialist RS Williams fit its Lightweight-spec triangulated brace bars, rigidly locating the front of the pinion to the spring mounts, though their fitment precluded using the DB6's intermediate silencers, a complete DB4 system being fitted instead, and also necessitated repositioning the electric motor/pumps for the Aston's hood. 'It's the usual, typical thing – it ended up a little bit more expensive than I'd anticipated!'

The suspension would remain standard until 1992, when beefed-up springs were fitted, together with a much thicker front anti-roll bar. 'It was pretty solid – and that made it go very nicely, very nicely!' continues Michael, smiling. A switch to adjustable telescopic Koni dampers in place of the lever-arm Armstrong Selectarides came next, 'which certainly improved the handling of the car but made it a little bit harsher on road use'.

A second engine rebuild (errant valve/one new liner) in 1994 included installation of high-lift camshafts developed by the late Aston specialist/DB4 racer Ian Moss, making it pull much more strongly above 3500rpm but less so below. Results remained highly respectable but in May 1995, after some piston rings seized, Michael decided on a rebuild to 4.2-litre specification by RSW, including Carrillo con-rods and Cosworth pistons but retaining the Moss cams and standard exhaust; with recalibrated Webers the by-then 4150cc engine produced 290bhp at 6000rpm and 294lb ft at 3500rpm. Following which, Michael adds, chuckling: 'My times got surprisingly quicker!'

After between 120 and 140 competition outings, including 60-odd races, he cites a 1993 AMOC race on Montlhéry's banked circuit as his most memorable. 'That was one of the best ones I've ever done. I thoroughly enjoyed it, and I finished eighth overall, beating all the Lightweights. Of course, they fell out [with me], but I don't care!'

He recalls fondly, too, a Wiscombe hillclimb. 'I think I was the first in Group A of the '4/5/6 range to get up in under 50 seconds; OK, laughingly it was 49.99 or something! [AMOC race officials] Jim Broadey and Philip Wolfe-Parry didn't believe that a DB6 could get up Wiscombe in that time and queried it with the timekeepers, I think twice, checking that they hadn't made a mistake, that the equipment was working perfectly – and still wouldn't have it! Needless to say, the times stood.

In the RAC International Historic Rally it finished 6th overall and 2nd in class'

Right, from the top
Vantage spec means triple Webers, but this engine has also been converted (by RS Williams) to 4.2 litres; stopwatches a legacy of its many rallies; reminders of just some of the dozens of races, sprints, rallies – and concours events – that this remarkable car has taken part in





Michael, who in 1998 co-founded the Aston Martin Heritage Trust and became AMOC chairman from 2004 to 2008, continued competing in speed events until 2000, before cost and a house move dictated a break, though he would continue to enter rallies with the DB6, including the 2010 Rallye Bilbao.

In 2013, a service and checkover revealed that the Aston's chassis had cracked around the top front suspension mounts (perhaps not surprising after four decades of hard use) and requiring welding, necessitating the removal of not only the engine and gearbox but also the interior, only a year after the leather trim had been treated to a thorough refurbishment.

The opportunity was then taken to fit softer springs. 'I wanted a slightly more comfortable ride,' says Michael, 'though it's still a little bit lower and a bit stiffer than the original.' The stiff suspension and the constant stresses had also resulted in cracks in the body in five places, splits in the alloy running aft in sections from around the bonnet's front. That necessitated a repaint, in original Dubonnet Rosso, matched with a new burgundy rather than tan mohair hood: 'I wanted to try to make it look like a coupé by trying to get the colours to blend in,' Michael explains. 'I think it looks nicer.'

Since 2014, Michael's competitive instincts have mostly been channelled into concours events, the '6 taking a number of class wins, including at last year's AMOC event at the Wormsley Estate, the Brooklands Double

Twelve, and the Warren Classic, while it has also won Salon Privé's Club Secretaries Trophy. But Michael clearly still relishes his racing and hillclimbing days with the Volante.

'One thing I liked about it,' he tells me, 'is that if you pushed it too hard and the back started to go, it was quite easy to correct.' That's a plus-point of the longer wheelbase that, ironically, was one of the things that made people initially dismissive of the DB6. 'You could hang it out knowing you had an extra margin of correction,' he explains.

Certainly, as I sample the Aston at Goodwood, the scene of many of its successes, on its 215/70 Michelin XWXs the breakaway point remains at a higher speed than one might expect. 'On the very tight suspension,' Michael adds, 'I could get away with cornering a lot quicker than most others did, it was such a predictable car.'

Still as it was in 1995, the 4.2 six is somewhat off-cam below 3000rpm, but from there on a fairly flat torque curve averages a useful 271lb ft up to 6000rpm; conversely, power at 3000rpm is a relatively low 160bhp, picking up to 196bhp at 3500 before steadily rising. Then the engine pulls strongly right up to its 6000rpm, 290bhp peak. The Aston turns in faithfully enough and power-on traction is good. There is some body roll, though notably less so than with the standard suspension set-up, while the brakes, with carbon-metallic pads, feel strong, although when used hard one can sense the extra weight transfer of that longer body and chassis.

Overall, this lovely DB6 Vantage Volante is still a happy compromise between road and track, with gutsy acceleration and well-balanced chassis. All of which will again be put to the test at Goodwood sprints this summer. **V**

With thanks to Goodwood Motor Circuit.



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WORDS BEN BARRY | PHOTOGRAPHY DAVID SHEPHERD

of upgrades for the classic V8. We compare modified with standard



Above and right

Standard car is very much the soft-edged GT, from its plumply cushioned seats via its relaxed engine delivery to the way it pitches and rolls in corners (though this particular car's rather tired damping accounts for some of the latter). Top right: standard meets upgraded on the North York Moors



Just 73 other Aston Martin V8 Series IIIs were produced in the year between these two examples being hand-assembled at Newport Pagnell. Four decades on, though, there's a far bigger gulf between them – not only in terms of condition, but specification, too.

The car pictured on the left is a standard V8 Series III. Wearing chassis number 11570, it was completed in September 1977 and still retains the original-specification 5.3-litre V8 and three-speed automatic transmission. It's a representative car in need of a little TLC, the kind of V8 you might pick up for £65-70k.

On first acquaintance, our second car (chassis number J1497, built September 1976) might simply appear a very nicely restored example, a car that might command up to £140k in today's market. That's only part of the story, however, because not only has this Aston been treated to a comprehensive refresh, it's also been sympathetically upgraded to create a safer, more comfortable and – the really crucial bit – better-driving kind of grand tourer.

It's the vision of Aston Workshop, the sales, maintenance and restoration business founded – and still owned – by Bob Fountain in 1988. Based in the Durham countryside, it's a near-self-contained and hugely comprehensive business with on-site facilities catering for everything from engine assembly and crash repairs to upholstery and paintwork.

The car we're testing today on the North York Moors with its standard sibling has only recently been completed and showcases the company's







Above
Vantage-style front spoiler
and slightly wider tyres on
later-model BBS alloy
wheels give the V8's looks a
subtle uplift. There's nothing
subtle about the uplift in
performance though...

‘THE RESULT IS A V8 THAT LOOKS MORE PURPOSEFUL THAN THE STANDARD MODEL’

‘V8 Evolution 6.0’ package of upgrades. ‘Think of it as an evolved V8 developed from years of experience rebuilding and upgrading Astons with the latest hardware,’ suggests assistant workshop manager Neil Calvert. ‘You could make it more extreme, but this would be our ultimate road specification.’

The project began when a long-standing customer asked for his V8 to be ‘sexed up’. His left-hand-drive car had first been delivered to Japan (hence the ‘J’ prefix to the chassis number) before more recently residing at the present (British) owner’s Florida residence. It was in good nick when Aston Workshop performed an initial inspection. ‘The problem with these cars is usually rot anywhere that the alloy and steel meets,’ explains senior technician Keith Slater. ‘It can become so bad that you put them on a four-post lift and the doors won’t open, but this car was solid.’

Nonetheless, suspension, engine and interior were removed, with the bodyshell taken down to bare metal from its original Tankard Grey and the outer sills and harness carriers replaced. A respray in Cumberland Grey with an extra helping of metal flake followed; it’s why it glints with a discreet bronze sparkle in the sunlight. Subtly tinted glass, later-model 15in BBS alloys wearing slightly wider 225/70 section tyres, and a deeper chin spoiler from the Vantage finish off the discreet exterior alterations. The original interior was also in good shape before work began, requiring only a dashboard retrim – it’s testament to the craftsmanship that it sits so seamlessly with the existing trim.

The result is a V8 that looks more purposeful than the standard model – in a way you can’t initially quite pin down – without actually appearing modified.

Lift the front-hinged bonnet and you might also take the V8 for a particularly well-presented original-spec motor. Actually it’s substantially reworked, and accounts for the most obvious transformation in this car’s character. Upgraded to a 6.0-litre capacity, it retains the original crankshaft and stroke, but benefits from new pistons and an increased bore. The original quad carburettor set-up makes way for electronic fuel injection and individual Jenvey



‘TURN THE KEY
AND THE V8
INSTANTLY
BRISTLES WITH
EXTRA ENERGY
– THE BODY
ROCKS WHEN
YOU BLIP THE
THROTTLE’

throttle bodies, but because everything is so neatly hidden beneath the vast original air box, you could mistake it for a carburettor installation at a glance. The cylinder head is ported and polished, with the manifolds matched to the inlet tracts, and power is quoted at 430bhp, up from around 300bhp in the standard car. There’s also a new radiator with electronic fan control, and you might spot the air-con upgrade, too.

The original three-speed auto transmission has been swapped for the Tremec T56 six-speed manual gearbox from the DB7, which combines with a custom propshaft and the original de Dion rear axle. ‘We removed the rear axle and fully refurbished it with new bearings and mountings,’ explains Calvert. ‘The diff cradle is a common weak-spot, so it’s been strengthened to deal with the extra power.’

Chassis and brake upgrades top off the package, with Spax coilovers and a thicker front anti-roll bar up front, while the factory lever-arm dampers have been replaced with telescopic Spax units at the rear. Aston Workshop’s brake upgrade introduces six-piston billet aluminium calipers and grooved discs that not only improve stopping power but are said to reduce unsprung weight.

I jump in the original car first for context. The seats are relatively low-set with a satisfyingly

deep squish to the nicely patinated cushions, there’s a thin-rimmed three-spoke leather steering wheel, and a broad transmission tunnel that offsets the pedals on this right-hand-drive model to the right. The cabin feels very much designed for the US market, with a spacious, wide feel across the cabin – it’s a stretch to touch the passenger-side door card from the driver’s seat, even if you’re tall, and you almost expect a bench seat and column shifter.

There’s an equally loungey feel to the drive. The auto transmission and power-assisted steering make light work of moving such a big, heavy car at low speeds, and the suspension has a soft, gentle lope. This relaxed, damped-down feel extends to the engine, which offers acceptable performance for the era, but serves it up in a rather monotone, muted manner, as though someone’s stuffed a pillow over its intake – you’d guess closer to 200bhp than the 300bhp or so quoted. Energy is partly sapped by the torque convertor and age no doubt, but also because this V8 had to contend with stricter US emissions regulations. By now, Aston had also swapped the mechanical fuel injection of earlier cars for Weber carbs, possibly because it was a more reliable system, thinks Calvert.

It’s easy to imagine wealthy owners cruising along freeways with one hand on the wheel, but



Clockwise from top left
 Modified car rolls less and feels much more composed; six-speed manual gearbox is neatly integrated (a six-speed auto is also available); engine mods include increase in capacity to 6.0 litres and fuel injection with Jenvey throttle bodies, lifting power to a quoted 430bhp



as we weave along fast empty roads over the North York Moors, the sense is of steering that has only a gentle influence over the car's trajectory, and a body that floats on the straights and rolls before taking a second to settle during cornering, with the front and rear ends dancing off in slightly different directions. The brakes top off the slushy feel with a soft pedal and distinctly leisurely stopping power.

It's worth noting that this original car's suspension and steering would no doubt benefit from a refresh, helping address some of the slop and slack, but there's clearly scope to make not only a more focused driver's car, but a more confidence-inspiring one, too.

That's exactly what Aston Workshop has created with the V8 Evolution 6.0, and it's the engine that initially grabs your attention. Turn the key and the V8 instantly bristles with extra energy – the body rocks when you blip the throttle, and there's a likeably thunderous, angry if not OTT soundtrack, even with the standard twin exhausts.

The V8's new-found attitude translates to the road, with a surplus of performance and much perkier throttle response courtesy of the Jenvey throttle bodies and the more closely spaced six gear ratios. Acceleration is far more urgent, and makes this 'classic' V8 not just quick with a few caveats, but genuinely rapid full stop.

The power delivery feels radically different, too, with rising drama as sound and speed and revs rush to a thrilling, fizzy peak. It's the V8 liberated from its period shackles, with far greater performance and a richer, more multi-dimensional personality than the standard car.

Such a crowd-pleaser is the uprated engine that it's easy to initially overlook some of the subtler upgrades, but they all contribute to a nicely integrated package.

The new clutch pedal has a long travel, but its progressive biting point means stalling is an unlikely embarrassment, and the manual gear-shift looks very much at home – it's a bolt-in kit that requires no modification to the Aston's structure, just a new gear lever surround panel for a factory look inside. The shift action itself is quite a physical thing to hulk from first to reverse (which is right across to the right of fifth gear) and the 1st/2nd and 3rd/4th planes are close together, which takes acclimatisation and a certain delicacy. Get up and running, though, and the shifts are pleasingly short and direct, and do introduce a layer of interaction that's sorely absent from the three-speed automatic.

Power-assisted steering again makes this an easy car to manoeuvre, but at speed it quickly communicates how much tighter this V8's chassis is, with slop dialled out, a shade more weight added in and a more precise connection to the front tyres. Partly that's because everything has been refreshed, yes, but firmer spring rates and slightly wider tyres will also contribute to the more meaningful steering definition.

Even before reaching a corner, the Aston feels less ponderous, but ease it in and there's greatly



Specifications

STANDARD CAR

ENGINE V8, 5340cc, four Weber carburettors

MAX POWER c300bhp @ 5500rpm

MAX TORQUE c320lb ft @ 4000rpm

TRANSMISSION Three-speed automatic

SUSPENSION Front: wishbones, coil springs, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar. Rear: de Dion tube, trailing arms, Watt's linkage, coil springs, lever-arm dampers

BRAKES Vented discs, 273mm front, 263mm rear

WHEELS 7J x 15in **TYRES** 215/70 R15

WEIGHT 1783kg **POWER TO WEIGHT** 177bhp/ton

0-60MPH c6.5sec **TOP SPEED** c155mph

EVOLUTION 6.0

ENGINE V8, 6000cc, electronic fuel injection

MAX POWER 430bhp @ 5500rpm

MAX TORQUE 430lb ft @ 4000rpm

TRANSMISSION Six-speed manual

SUSPENSION Front: Spax adjustable telescopic dampers with uprated springs, 1in anti-roll bar. Rear: uprated coil springs and telescopic dampers

BRAKES Six-piston calipers with vented, grooved discs, 294mm front, standard 263mm rear

WHEELS 7J x 15in **TYRES** 225/70 R15

WEIGHT c1800kg **POWER TO WEIGHT** 243bhp/ton

0-60MPH c5.5sec (est) **TOP SPEED** 160mph+

reduced body roll, better progression to how the remaining body roll is managed, enhanced grip, and the very welcome sensation that both ends of the car plan to travel in the same direction simultaneously. It's also notable that the firmer set-up entails no real compromise – this remains a comfortable car to indulge a long-distance trip and still feels recognisably like a V8. In fact, it's arguably more comfortable because it's so much more composed.

Most surprising is just how well the chassis copes with the extra power – it doesn't squat excessively under full acceleration, and while it's easier to adjust the car's cornering attitude from the rear thanks to the abundant power and a super-responsive throttle, it's not the over-engined hot-rod you might expect. It certainly put its power down well during the dry conditions of our photo shoot.

The brakes represent as big an improvement as the engine, with a far more robust response from the pedal and what feels a four-fold increase in stopping power – you do have to beware locking up the front tyres more than in the stock car. There's rather too much slack at the top of the pedal as well as too large a gap between brake and throttle for heel-and-toe down-changes, but both could be adjusted to suit a customer's wishes. Or you could opt for the six-speed auto conversion also available from Aston Workshop, and I do wonder if a modern slusher might better suit the V8's GT character and likely use.

That's the beauty of an upgrade like this, though – nothing is set in stone, and you can pick and choose from Aston Workshop's menu based on your budget, the work your donor car will require, how you'd like it to look, and how you'll use it. Yet a car like this – one that appears so original but drives so much better – is a great way to demonstrate the art of the possible. **V**

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HOOKED ON CLASSICS

Pugsley & Lewis have been maintaining, restoring and improving classic Astons for more than 30 years. We find out what drives them

WORDS PETER TOMALIN

PHOTOGRAPHY AMY SHORE

Perhaps surprisingly for an Aston specialist that sets great store on its engines, Pugsley & Lewis doesn't use an engine dyno. Consequently it doesn't make any claims for power and torque. As Tim Lewis says, it's not about the numbers, it's all about how the car drives. Along with business partner Martin Pugsley, Tim has earned a reputation for producing some of the best-driving Astons around. But when you consider the pair's pedigree, that's no surprise at all.

Martin and Tim are both former employees of RS Williams, and there can be few finer places to learn the business of maintaining, improving and restoring Astons. 'I started with Richard in '75, straight from school, under the railway arches in Brixton,' says Martin. 'Tim joined in 1979, though he'd worked there in his summer holidays before that. From 1979 to 1986 we were part of the team that ran the race cars at Le Mans and we worked on other projects, too, helping build the DB4 Lightweights and looking after the Project cars and the DBR1.'

Their big break came when Richard Williams briefly shut up shop in 1989 to run Aston Martin's sadly short-lived Group C racing programme with the AMR1. With Richard's blessing, the two set up their own business – nearby, in a small workshop in Brixton – with the primary

aim of looking after RSW's customers. The stamp of approval came when Richard entrusted the completion of his own DB4 GT Zagato restoration to the new venture. By the time RSW was resurrected around 18 months later, Pugsley & Lewis was well enough established to have its own niche in the world of Aston specialists. The company moved to its current location at Kings Hall Works in leafy Beckenham, south east London, in 1994, and the pair have hardly looked back since.

Today, their particular areas of expertise complement each other nicely. Though both have a solid engineering background, Martin is the man who keeps the whole operation running smoothly; Tim is more hands-on with the cars, his many years as a racing driver allowing him to diagnose mechanical maladies in seconds, and his skills as a test driver ensuring that Pugsley & Lewis-fettled Astons drive as well as any you'll encounter.

Clockwise from right
Classic DB Astons and V8s are the core of the business; Tim Lewis makes a point; straight-six head complete with Webers, partner Martin Pugsley, and some of the many items of Aston memorabilia that fill the walls of the workshop

**'TIM'S SKILLS ENSURE THAT
PUGSLEY & LEWIS-FETTLED
ASTONS DRIVE AS WELL AS
ANY YOU'LL ENCOUNTER'**





DB4, 5 and 6, and the classic V8 models are the core of the business. 'That's what we started on at RS Williams, and that's what we've stayed with,' says Tim, 'though we're doing more modern stuff, too, now – DB9, Vantage, Vanquish...' As if to reinforce the point, there's an early Vanquish on one of the lifts, in for a service, MoT and brake overhaul. 'Later Astons are great cars, too,' adds Martin, 'and it's good for us to have that mix.'

That said, on the day of our visit, there are no fewer than three DB5s in the workshop. One is a restoration they completed a year earlier, now back in for a re-torque and checkover. Another is coming to the end of its restoration. The third is in for a top-end engine overhaul and set-up. 'It was a slow car,' says Tim, before adding with a chuckle: 'It's not going to be when it leaves!'

The company is particularly proud of the smoothness of its Weber-fed engines. By reputation, a Vantage engine on Webers can be prone to rough running, particularly in traffic. 'Well, we've got rid of that,' says Tim. 'If you drive one of our Vantage engines, even in town, you wouldn't know it's a Vantage engine. We've got lots of little techniques we've learned over the years.'

A 4.2-litre conversion remains a popular option for the straight-six, but as Tim says: 'More and more people are wanting to keep things original.' So plenty of owners now want to stick with 3.7 litres if it's a DB4 or 4 litres if it's a DB5 or 6. 'The thing to remember with a 4.2 upgrade, it's only an extra 200cc. It's more to do with the design of the pistons, the compression ratio and things like that.'

'Our skills are in building an engine that suits how the customer wants to use it. Our engines are smooth... they should drive superbly from no revs at all. And they're quick, and they don't leak! A lot of them leak...'

And rather than dyno-test the complete engines, Tim puts his faith in his years of experience and his finely tuned senses on a test drive. 'It's all about how they drive,' he says. 'It's down to hearing, smelling and feeling. Plus, I think I just love driving.'

So clearly and – unsurprisingly given their backgrounds – engines are a huge part of what they do. But only one part. No job is too big or too small, and they oversee a lot of complete restorations, from stripdown to reassembly.

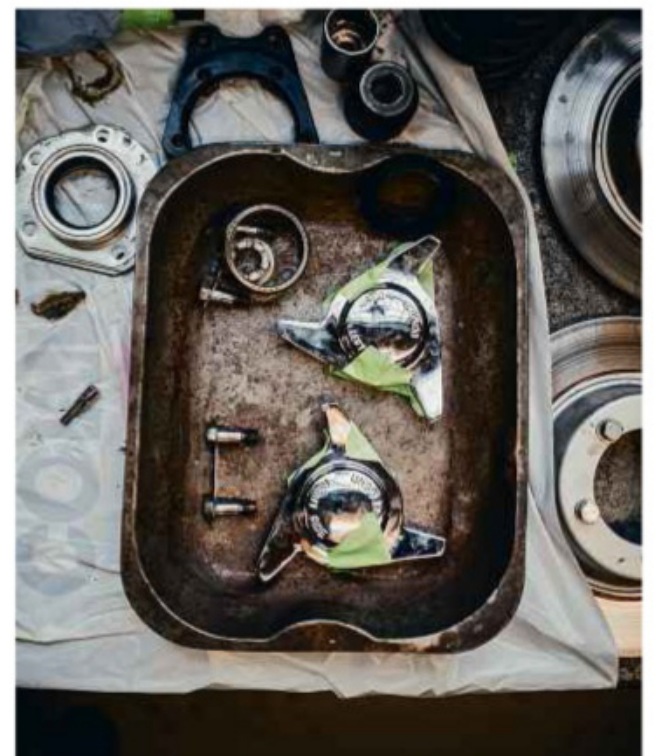
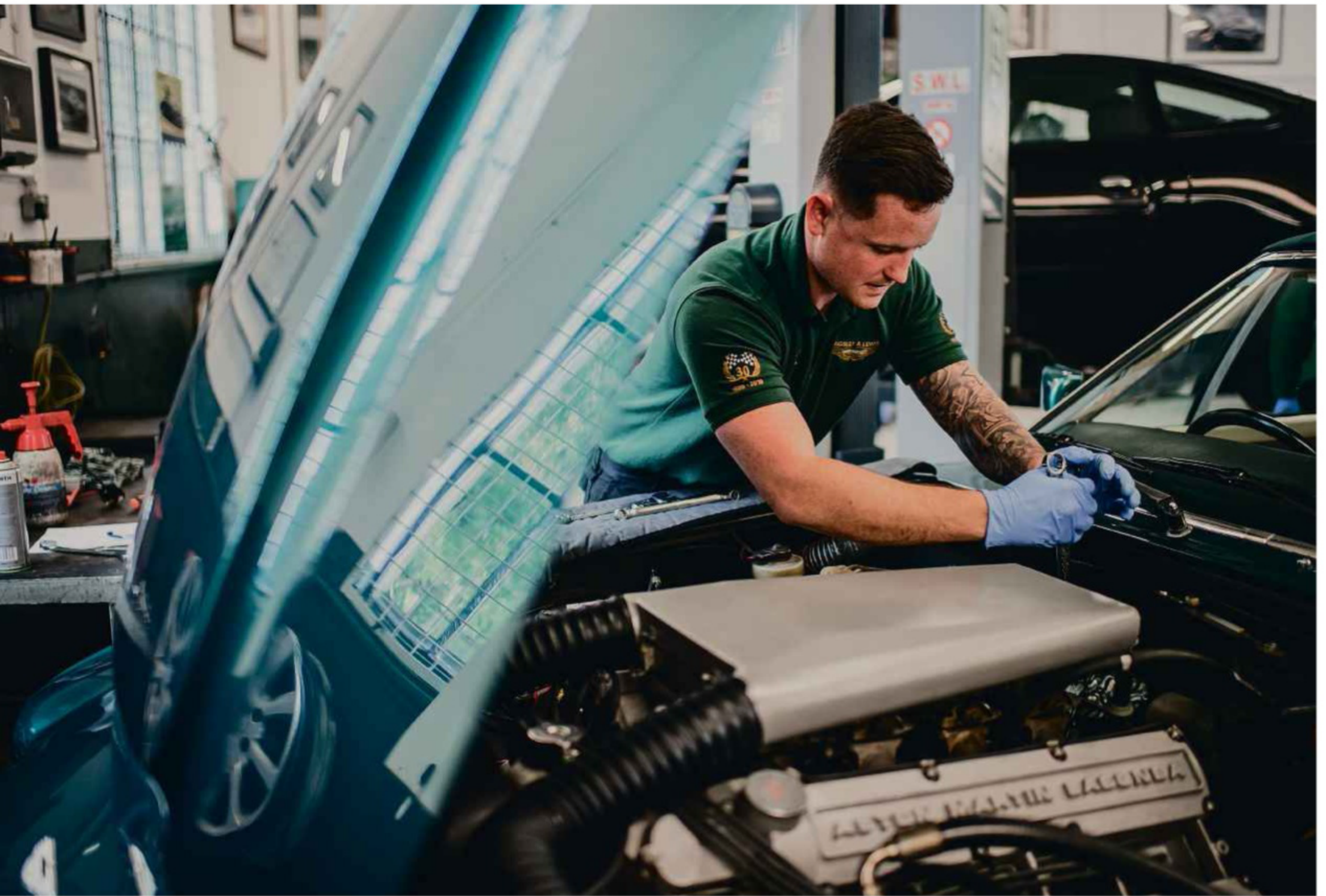
A 1980s V8 Volante is having stainless steel exhaust manifolds fitted, some suspension gaiters replaced, electrical glitches fixed, then a full service. Over there, a late-60s DBS in mid-restoration has just come back from the paintshop, its Black Pearl paintwork gleaming darkly. Martin explains that, as with most other similarly sized Aston specialists, the aluminium bodywork, paint and trim are three areas that Pugsley & Lewis are happy to pass on to acknowledged experts, along with major machining work, though they'll do chassis work themselves, and pretty much everything else.

Original parts are retained wherever possible. One of the DB5s being restored is keeping its original leather trim. 'It's just beautifully worn,' says Tim. 'You can't reproduce that original patina.' Any upgrades are done sensitively, and in keeping with the car's character.

This page and opposite

Antony Jones fixes DB5 trim mid-restoration, and Conor Tolly Brewster rebuilds a brake caliper on a rare Short Chassis Volante. Opposite page: Daniel Condon at work on an '80s V8; cars in storage and awaiting restoration and, far right, Winston Rouse services a mk1 Vanquish





‘DISCREET UPGRADES DON’T CHANGE THE CHARACTER OF THE CAR BUT JUST MAKE IT MORE USEABLE AND ENJOYABLE’



Above right
007 drops his
company car in
for its annual
service
(possibly)

Again, though, there’s a growing trend towards originality and having a car exactly as it left the factory. Tim has mixed feelings about that and is typically forthright in his views. ‘Ferraris have been like that for years, but now Astons seem to be going that way, too. It’s not always a good thing,’ he contends. ‘There are a lot of cars that aren’t original that are lovely. A lot of these improvements are about making a car drive better – and why would you not want a car to drive better?’

‘Electric power steering makes them so much nicer to drive,’ he continues. ‘It’s not just about parking. When you’re on a bendy road with potholes and stuff and the steering’s kicking back, it just takes all that out. It’s invisible, too – we put the unit under the dashboard – and you can adjust the amount of assistance, and it just makes it a much more pleasurable driving experience.’

‘Same goes with a brake upgrade for the V8s. The DBs are fine with their brakes, but the V8 is a much heavier car and really needs a brake kit. The original-spec discs were prone to warping, and the pads we fit are much better suited to everyday driving and work well from cold. They just give you more confidence in the car.’

Aluminium radiators, uprated dynamos and alternators and high-torque starter motors are other sensible yet discreet upgrades that don’t change the character of the car but just make it more useable and enjoyable.

‘Tyres are another example,’ says Tim. ‘They drive and ride really well on Michelins, but they weren’t original fitment, so people tend to go for the Avons.’



‘Suspension-wise,’ adds Martin, ‘we use a thicker anti-roll bar, but otherwise we just put it together correctly. I think that’s the difference between a specialist and a non-specialist garage. We occasionally do a telescopic damper conversion at the rear, but we’ll do it in a way that means the owner can go back to the original if they want to.’

Astons are much more than just a business to these guys. Both have a number of Astons of their own, Martin’s collection including an Oscar India V8 and a DB9, Tim’s including a simply gorgeous-looking DB4 Series 1 and, by way of contrast, a V8 of his own with a monstrous 7.3-litre engine conversion.

Both seem very happy with the size of the operation and the niche that they’ve found for themselves. ‘We never wanted to be too big,’ says Tim. There are ten staff in total and they enjoy a good relationship with the owners. ‘People appreciate being able to deal directly with the people who are working on their cars,’ says Martin.

‘We’ve got quite a lot of customers who are still with us from when we started in ‘89,’ adds Tim. ‘Some of them still bring the same cars to us. Back then the cars weren’t worth anything like they are today – they probably couldn’t afford to buy the same cars today...’

So, what defines a Pugsley & Lewis Aston? ‘The key thing for us is that our cars work properly. They’re as good as they look. The engine drives superbly, from no revs at all, and the whole car just drives beautifully. Doors close properly, everything just works, from the engine to the smallest switch and gauge. It’s all the little details.’ **V**

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ALL THE ROAD CARS 1920s-1930s

Sports/Super Sports 1920-1925



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

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

Second Series/New International/Le Mans 1932-1934



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

Price reductions, made possible by out-sourcing more components, and continuing motorsport success at Le Mans and elsewhere helped lift sales of what are now known as the Second Series cars. Particularly well received was the Le Mans (above) 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, while 1929 saw the introduction of the low-slung, dry-sumped International model (pictured), 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.

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 could be 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' bit for its 1957-1959 range of coupés, 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 LB6 was now making well over 150bhp (up to 190bhp on triple Webers). The MkIII actually overlapped with the introduction of the DB4 by several months, and total production hit 551. Buying guide, *Vantage* issue 15.

2-litre Sports (DB1) 1948-1950



SPECIFICATION

Engine 1970cc, 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 production 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 14 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' too. 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. Buying guide, *Vantage* issue 8.

DB4 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, whose 'Superleggera' construction involved aluminium bodywork wrapped around a steel skeleton frame. 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 saw power rise to 266bhp. Total production: 1210. Buying guide, *Vantage* issue 22.

ALL THE ROAD CARS 1960s-1970s

DB4 GT/GT Zagato 1959-1963



SPECIFICATION (Zagato)

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

In 1959, Aston introduced the DB4 GT, a lighter, short-wheelbase competition version of the DB4 with a twin-plug 302bhp engine. A number of chassis were also sent to Zagato to be clothed in even lighter aluminium bodywork, while further tuning lifted peak power to 314bhp. These 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 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 revered in its own right – and famous above all other Astons – wholly because of its role in the James Bond film franchise. New was the 4-litre engine and the option of a five-speed gearbox, which soon became standard. Regular DB5s had 282bhp, the Vantage 314bhp. The Convertible version was succeeded in 1965 by the ultra-rare 'Short Chassis Volante' model, the first use of the Volante name. Total production: 1023. Buying guide, issue 6.

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 1969, but the six-cylinder continued until 1972 as the entry-level Aston. Some 787 six-cylinder DBSs were produced, and 402 V8s. DBS buying guide, 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 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 a 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. Volante came in 1966. The Mk2, which arrived in July 1969, had flared wheelarches over wider wheels. Total production: 1967. Buying guide, issue 9.

AM V8 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 DBS V8 became the AM V8, while the mechanical 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. Volante arrived in 1978, electronic fuel injection in 1986. In its various guises, the V8 would soldier on for almost 20 years, in which time 4021 were built. Buying guide, *Vantage* issue 13.

ALL THE ROAD CARS 1970s-1990s

Lagonda (Series 1) 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 (Series 2-4) 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, 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. Buying guide, issue 10.

Virage 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 was 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. Buying guide, issue 24.

V8 Vantage 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 AM V8 but was now a model-line in its own right. With a 375bhp version of the 5.3-litre V8 (later 410bhp) and a top speed of 170mph, it was pitched head-to-head with the Ferrari BB and Lamborghini Countach for the title of world's fastest car. With its blanked-off grille and bonnet scoop, deep air dam and bootlid spoiler, it certainly looked the part. When production ended in 1989, 534 had been built, 192 of them Volantes. Buying guide, issue 25.

V8 Zagato 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 coupés were immediately snapped up at £87,000 a pop (37 Volante 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 to 60mph and was verified at 185.8mph, making it the fastest Aston yet.

Vantage (supercharged) 1993-2000

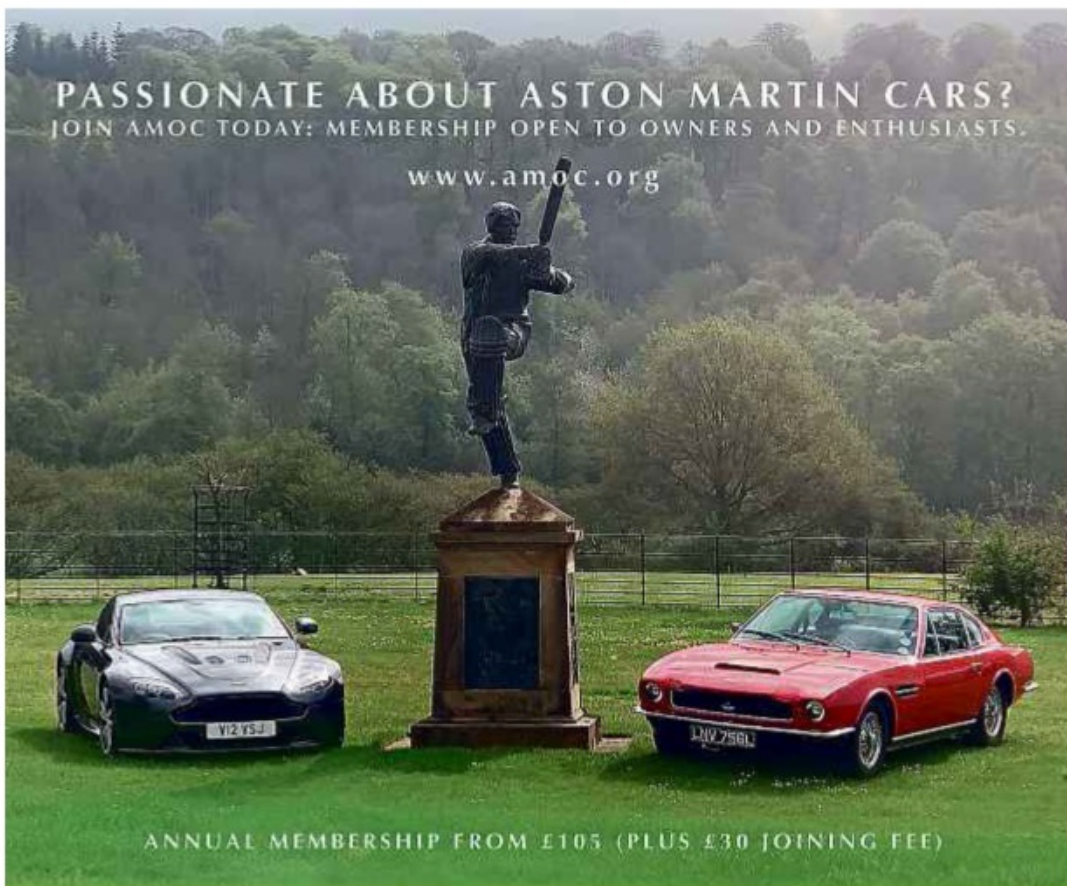


SPECIFICATION (V600)

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

Works' 6.3-litre V8 had shown the appetite for a faster Virage, and in 1993 came the full-house Vantage, 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' editions brought total production to 279. Buying guide, issue 16.

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ALL THE ROAD CARS 1990s-2000s

DB7 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. A Volante followed in 1996. Sales of all variants (including the Vantage) eventually topped 7000, making it by far the most numerous Aston at that point. Buying guide, issue 3.

DB7 V12 Vantage 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.

DB9 2004-2016



SPECIFICATION

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

The DB9 was effectively the successor to the highly successful DB7 Vantage, with the latest version of the 5.9-litre V12, a Touchtronic auto 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. Volante arrived in 2005, and in 2008 power grew to 470bhp. For 2013 the car was given a major refresh, now with 510bhp. End-of-line GT version had 540bhp. Buying guide, issue 7.

V8 Coupé 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.

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 Ian Callum-penned Vanquish had a 460bhp version of the V12 engine and a bonded aluminium platform. The 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. Buying guide, issue 5.

V8 Vantage 2005-2018



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 eventually overtook the DB9 to become the biggest seller yet, with more than 20,000 finding homes. Its Jaguar-derived quad-cam V8, originally a 4.3 (4.7 litres and 420bhp from 2008) gave brisk performance and an extrovert soundtrack – best enjoyed in the Roadster, which arrived in 2007. The 'S', with 430bhp, came in 2011. Buying guide, issue 28.

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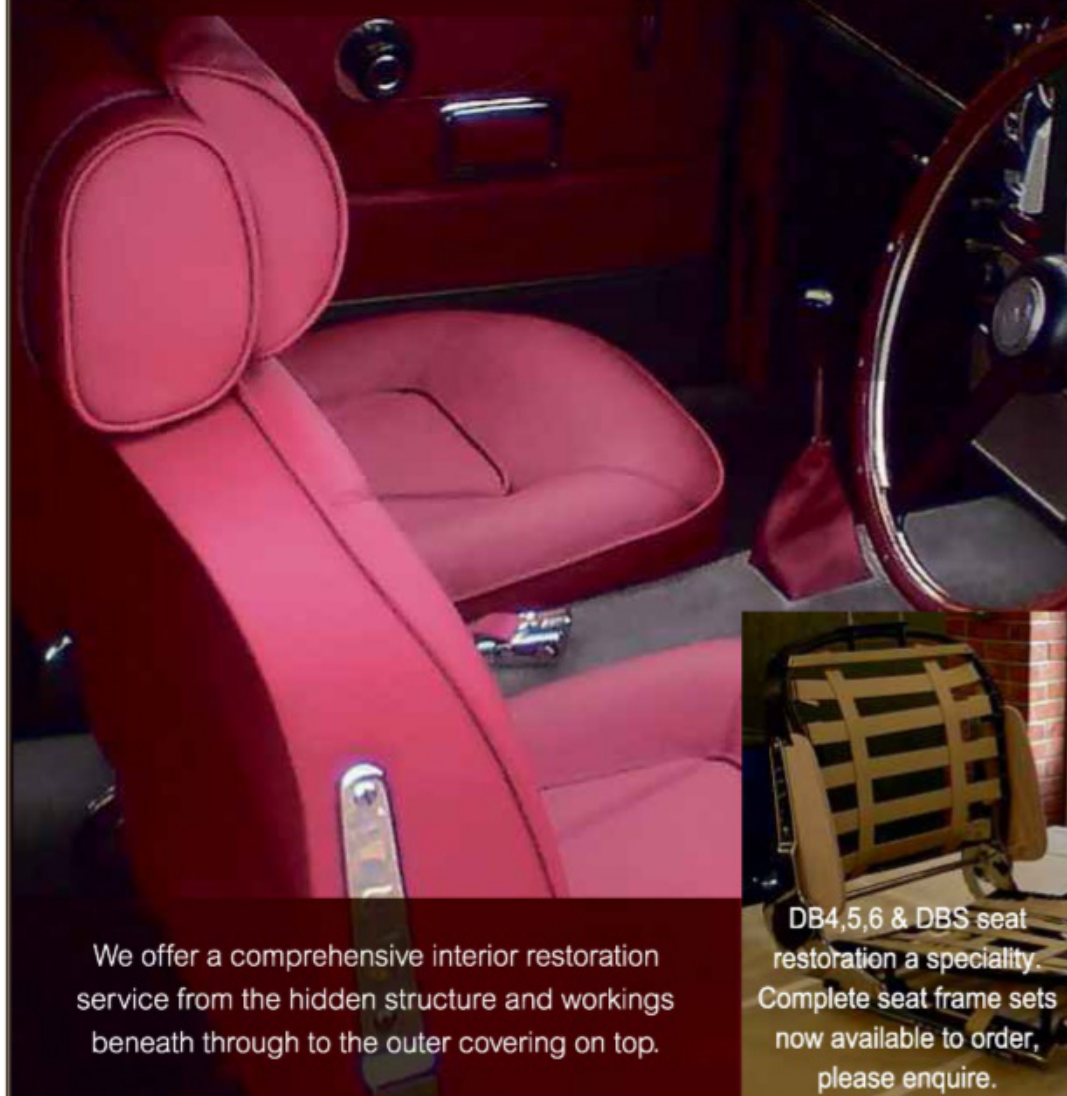
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ALL THE ROAD CARS 2000s-2010s

DBS 2007-2012



SPECIFICATION

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

Resurrecting a name from the late '60s, the DB9-derived DBS replaced the early-noughties Vanquish as the flagship production car in 2007 and gained extra cachet when it was adopted as 007's company car when Daniel Craig debuted as Bond in *Casino Royale*. With power ramped up to 510bhp, aggressive styling and harder-edged dynamics, the DBS was Mr Hyde to the DB9's Dr Jekyll. A Volante version appeared in 2009. At the end of 2012, the DBS was replaced by the mk2 Vanquish. Buying guide, issue 18.

Rapide 2009-2012



SPECIFICATION

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

With Porsche enjoying success with its Panamera saloon and new markets opening up for luxury cars, it was only a matter of time before Aston spun 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 weren't as strong as Aston hoped, and production moved to Gaydon in late 2012. Relaunched as the Rapide S for 2013 with a deeper new front grille and 550bhp. Buying guide, issue 17.

Cygnets 2010-2013



SPECIFICATION

Engine 1330cc, in-line 4-cyl
Power 97bhp @ 6000rpm
Torque 92lb ft @ 4400rpm
0-60mph 11.6sec
Top speed 106mph

Based on the Toyota iQ, the Cygnets was designed to deliver Aston levels of style and opulence in a city car. Extensively rebodied to incorporate familiar Aston design cues and retrimmed in sumptuous leather, but mechanically unchanged, it wasn't without appeal as a city runabout but on the open road it was no performance car. At £30,995, it was also breathtakingly expensive. Ulrich Bez, whose baby it was, hoped it would sell by the thousand, but with just hundreds sold it was quietly dropped in 2013. Buying guide, issue 23.

V12 Vantage 2009-2018



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 it produced one of its finest drivers' cars. Distinguished by its bonnet vents, the V12V built on the V8's agility and added another level of performance and desirability. Roadster arrived in 2012 and the 565bhp 'S' in 2013: with a top speed of 205mph, it was the fastest series-production Aston so far. The V12 also spawned a Zagato version, just 63 of which were built. Buying guide, issue 11.

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.

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 the Virage name was soon dropped, the car effectively becoming the updated DB9 for 2013.

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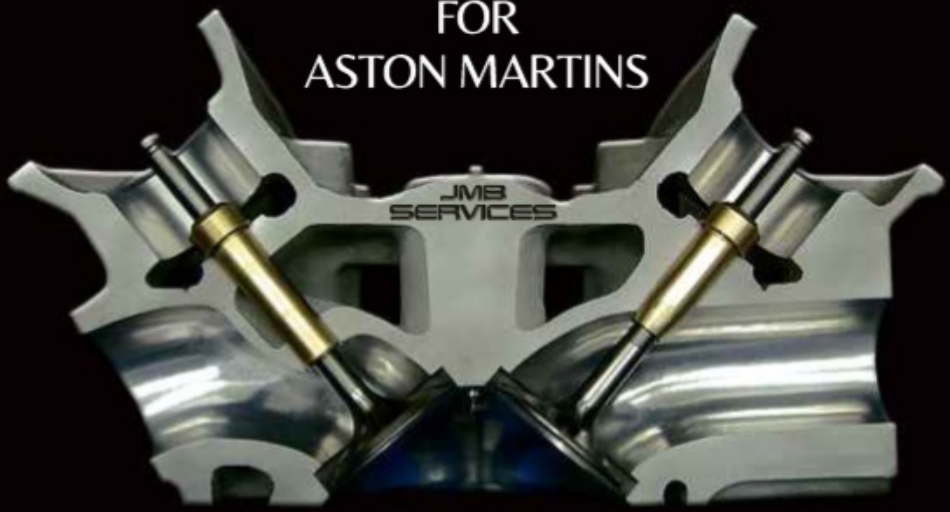
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ALL THE ROAD CARS 2010-present

Vanquish 2012-2018



SPECIFICATION (2015MY)
Engine 5935cc, V12
Power 565bhp @ 6650rpm
Torque 465lb ft @ 5500rpm
0-60mph 3.6sec
Top speed 201mph

The original Vanquish was a landmark car, and it was a brave move to resurrect the name for a new series-production flagship. If the new car wasn't quite the same game-changer, the combination of aggressively shaped carbonfibre bodywork, a 565bhp V12, adaptive damping and carbon brakes was 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. Up-rated Vanquish S with 592bhp (and similarly potent Zagato derivatives) launched late 2016.

Lagonda Taraf 2015-2017



SPECIFICATION
Engine 5935cc, V12
Power 540bhp @ 6650rpm
Torque 465lb ft @ 5500rpm
0-60mph 4.4sec
Top speed 195mph

The Lagonda name hadn't been seen since production of the controversial wedge-shaped saloon ended in 1990, but in 2015 it was back, on a brand new luxury saloon – and one that made more than a few visual nods its famous forebear. Based on the Rapide S but with a longer wheelbase to make it a full four-seater, the Taraf combined sumptuous accommodation with almost supercar levels of performance, but at a price – with the addition of a few bespoke options, buyers saw little change from £800k.

Vantage 2018-present



SPECIFICATION
Engine 3982cc, biturbo V8
Power 503bhp @ 6000rpm
Torque 505lb ft @ 2000rpm
0-60mph 3.6sec
Top speed 195mph

Replacing the best-selling Aston of all time is a tough gig, but the all-new Vantage has the hardware and the firepower to make the outgoing model feel almost tame. With a twin-turbocharged 4-litre 503bhp V8 supplied by Mercedes-AMG and a lightning-quick paddleshift gearbox (now joined by a trad manual), the new car is rabidly quick and super-alert in its responses. This is an out-and-out sports car, and though the looks haven't met with universal acclaim, as a drivers' car it's among the very best. Roadster launched 2020.

Rapide S 2013-2020



SPECIFICATION (2015MY)
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's four-door sports car. A more aggressive grille and headlight treatment gave it considerably more road presence, while variable valve timing and a new management system lifted the power of the V12 from 470 to 550bhp, dropping the 0-60mph time to 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. Run-out AMR version launched 2019.

DB11 2016-present



SPECIFICATION
Engine 5204cc, biturbo V12
Power 600bhp @ 6500rpm
Torque 516lb ft @ 1500rpm
0-60mph 3.7sec
Top speed 200mph

The first all-new production car of the Andy Palmer era, the DB11 was the most important new Aston since the DB9 – the car it replaced – more than a decade earlier. With a new platform, all-new, twin-turbo 5.2-litre V12, a raft of new electronic systems courtesy of technology partner Daimler, and innovative aerodynamic features, it was the standard-bearer for Aston's so-called Second Century Plan. V8 version was launched late 2017, with the Volante following in 2018 and a new, AMR-branded V12 flagship in summer 2018.

DBS Superleggera 2018-present



SPECIFICATION
Engine 5204cc, biturbo V12
Power 715bhp @ 6500rpm
Torque 664lb ft @ 1800rpm
0-60mph 3.5sec
Top speed 211mph

The fastest and most powerful series-production Aston yet, the DB11-based DBS Superleggera turns the wick on the twin-turbo V12 right up to 715bhp and adds a beefed-up eight-speed gearbox, carbon-ceramic brakes and a heap more visual drama. More 'super' than 'leggera' at c1700kg, it nevertheless grips and handles like a proper sports-GT and is mind-bendingly rapid in a straight line. Replaced the Vanquish S as the production flagship and is one of the finest super-GTs currently on sale. Volante launched 2019.

HEROES: SIR KEN ADAM

IMAGINING BOND'S ASTON MARTIN DB5 WAS JUST ONE SMALL CHAPTER IN KEN ADAM'S REMARKABLE LIFE

WORDS PETER TOMALIN

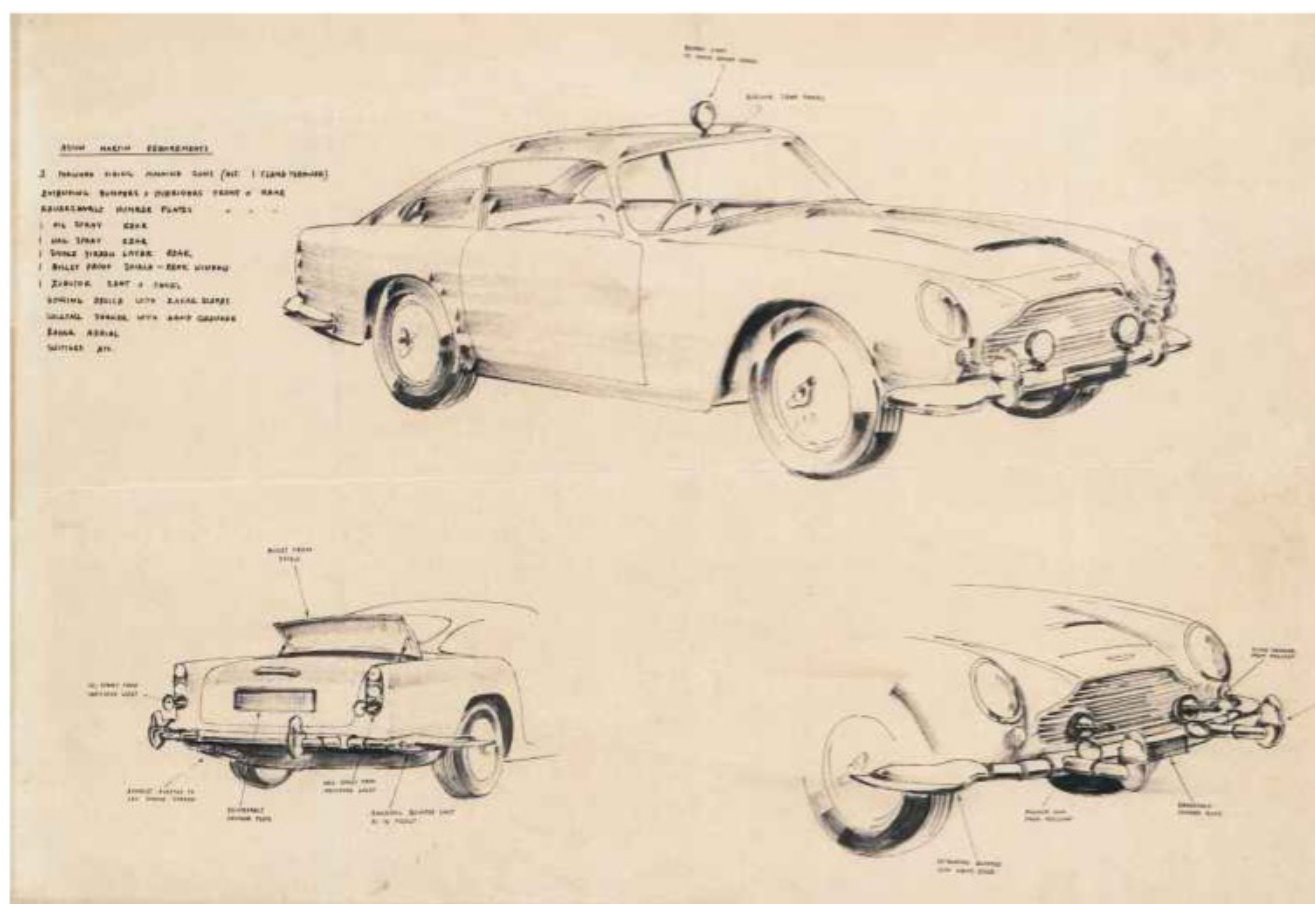
Ken Adam is perhaps best known to Aston Martin enthusiasts as the man who dreamed up James Bond's DB5 with all its gadgets, but there was so much more to his extraordinary life. In fact, 'hero' is entirely fitting in this case, as we shall see.

Born Klaus Hugo Adam in Berlin in 1921 to an upper-middle-class Jewish family, he anglicised his name to Kenneth, and later Ken, after the Adams fled Nazi Germany for Britain in the 1930s. Continuing his schooling in London, the young Ken developed a love of cinema and a keen interest in architecture, for which he took evening classes. By the time the Second World War broke out, he was working as an apprentice draughtsman designing bomb shelters, but in October 1940, aged just 19, he joined the Pioneer Corps, a support unit of the British Army, and eight months later applied to join – and was accepted – for the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve.

After pilot training, initially in Tiger Moths, he joined No.609 Squadron in October 1943 – along with his brother Denis, one of just three German-born pilots to serve in the RAF during the war. As such, they knew that if they had been captured by the Germans, they were liable to execution as traitors, rather than being treated as prisoners of war.

The squadron flew Hawker Typhoons, initially in support of long-range bombing missions, later in support of ground troops, and Flight Lieutenant Adam earned the nickname 'Heinie the tank-buster' from his fellow pilots for his daring exploits.

After demobilisation in 1947, Adam entered the film industry, initially as a draughtsman, though his talents and imagination were soon being put to more creative use in the role of production designer. In 1952 he worked on the



Above and left

Ken Adam's original sketches for the DB5 in *Goldfinger*, and (left) at work at his drawing board

Burt Lancaster film, *The Crimson Pirate*, for which he designed an 18th century hot-air balloon, a flame-throwing tank, and a rowing boat that transformed into a submarine. A taste of things to come, perhaps...

He was in right at the start of the Bond movie series, as production designer on *Dr No*, his sets providing the visual template for the 007 franchise. And though he missed *From Russia With Love* – he was designing the visually stunning sets for Stanley Kubrick's *Dr Strangelove* at the time – he was back in the Bond fold for *Goldfinger*, for which he would sketch the soon-to-be-iconic tricked-out DB5.

Although some of the detail would change by the time filming started, it's all there in Adam's drawings: tyre-slashing blades, battering rams, machine guns, bullet-proof shield, revolving numberplates, smokescreen, oil and nail sprayers and, of course, the ejector seat with its pop-out roof panel above.

He sketched out the interior, too, complete with radar tracking screen and the gearknob housing the ejector button. Reading the notes alongside these sketches gives a fascinating insight into the depth of thought that went into

every Ken Adam creation. Of the radar screen, he noted: 'The moving map display would be projected from a microfilm store (to cover all Europe) and be automatically switched to the next map by using the aircraft beacon system dotted over Europe.' A forerunner of in-car sat-nav, a whole quarter of a century before it would be invented.

Ken Adam would work on seven Bond films in all. Increasingly fantastical villains' lairs, weapons and gadgets, all products of Adam's fertile imagination, set the tone. For *The Spy Who Loved Me*, he not only designed the submersible *Esprit* but also the supertanker set, which was constructed on what was, at the time, the largest sound stage in the world. He also designed the flying car for *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, which was produced by the same team as the Bond series (and the original story for which was written, as you'll probably know, by Bond author Ian Fleming).

Ken Adam's other film credits included *The Trials of Oscar Wilde*, Kubrick's *Barry Lyndon*, for which he won his first Oscar for Best Art Direction, *The Ipcress File*, *Addams Family Values* and *The Madness of King George*, which saw him win his second Academy Award in 1994. But it's the Bond films of the '60s and '70s for which he is best known, and to which generations continue to return, for their wit, their style and invention.

Naturalised as a British citizen, Adam was knighted in 2003 for services to the film industry and Anglo-German relations. He died at his London home, following a short illness, in 2016, aged 95, survived by his wife Maria – and the most wonderful legacy on film. **V**

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