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LAGONDA

ASTON MARTIN'S WEDGE MASTERPIECE



PLUS
DR ULRICH BEZ
BIOGRAPHY



DB7 GTS RARE & PURPOSEFUL



DB2 VANTAGE



DB4 PROTOTYPE



RAPIDE v FLYING SPUR

This DB4, presented in Wedgewood Blue with an off white interior, is No. 7 of 15 DB4 prototypes built in 1958, and the oldest currently in the UK. Driven by David Brown, it was used for testing and advertising. The car had a full Aston Workshop restoration in 2006, has covered 14,083 miles since and represents a rare opportunity to own an early DB4 with Aston Martin Works provenance in supreme condition.

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1967 DB6 MK1 VOLANTE

POA



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In Mendip Blue Metallic with Parchment leather piped in Blue trim, this DB7 has covered only 59,542 miles and comes with excellent service history from its four previous owners.

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BOLD AND BEAUTIFUL

SOMEONE COMMENTED to me the other day that they don't know how we keep coming up with fresh ideas for a magazine that covers just one marque, especially when its product range has been as narrow as Aston Martin's. It's not like it has an affordable saloon, a two-seater sports car or a production estate in its back catalogue.

Yet although the types of cars it has produced in the post-war period have been largely the same, their designs certainly haven't been. Take our cover car, for example, William Towns' glorious Lagonda. Forty-five years after the car reached production, its wedge shape still looks like nothing else that Aston Martin – or anyone else for that matter – has produced in its 110-year history.

Together with rare models (including the early DB2 Vantage in this issue) and subtly modified cars like the DB7 GTS that we also feature and it's clear there are plenty of fascinating cars yet to cover. Add Aston's unrivalled racing pedigree – soon to include the Valkyrie that from 2025 onwards will race in the World Endurance Championship (see Motorsport) – and it'll be a long time before we run out of things to say.



Paul Walton
Editor



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UP FRONT NEWS

DB12 VOLANTE REVEALED



Aston Martin has introduced its latest Volante model, based on the recently released DB12. It follows a long tradition of convertibles produced by the British company.

“Creating open-air performance machines for drivers has always held a special place in hearts across Aston Martin, dating back to 1965, with our introduction of the first Volante model, the legendary Short Chassis,” said Marek Reichman, Aston Martin’s chief creative officer. “It has been, and always will be, a design beacon for us. The new DB12 Volante is again another emotional Aston Martin design form with a desire to be driven.”

Developed in parallel with its coupe stablemate, the DB12 Volante boasts the same design, engineering and technological advances. This includes the

same rigid bonded aluminium structure which Aston says will deliver a similar level of dynamics as the coupe.

The company also says key structural elements, such as the rear suspension upper mounting points and lateral connections, as well as performance additions including the engine cross brace, boost the DB12 Volante’s global torsional stiffness by almost five percent.

The mounting points for all suspension attachments were extensively upgraded laterally.

Thanks to changes to underbody components, including the engine cross brace, the DB12 Volante sees a 3.7 percent increase in global torsional stiffness, along with focused improvement in lateral stiffness and gains in suspension performance and refinement. A non-isolated steering column and a stiffer front axle (+140 percent) contributes to improvements in on and off-centre steering feel and an overall sense of driver connection.

As per the coupe, the Volante is powered by a 4.0 twin-turbo V8 engine which produces 671bhp and 590lb ft of torque which equates to a 0-60mph time of 3.6 seconds and a top speed of 202mph.



A RIGHT GOOD READ

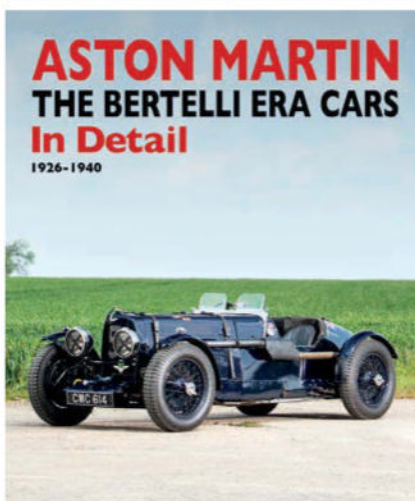
The new Volante features an electrically-operated 'K-fold' roof. Named because of the two-stage folding action, it achieves a class-leading 260mm stack height when folded. When lowered, the K-fold mechanism sits low beneath a hard tonneau cover to create a beautifully elegant tail.

The roof operation takes 14 seconds to open and 16 seconds to close and can be used at speeds of up to 31mph and into a 31mph headwind. For additional convenience and a little theatre, the roof mechanism can be operated via the remote keys within a two-metre radius of the car.

Said Aston Martin's chief executive officer, Amedeo Felisa, "For many of our customers, roof down driving is the greatest pleasure. Aston Martin Volantes have captured that emotion and expressed it in unique style for more than six decades".

Production of the new DB12 Volante is due to commence soon, with first deliveries scheduled to begin late in 2023.

Aston Martin
The Bertelli Era Cars in Detail
Author: Matthew Vale
Publisher: Herridge & Sons
Web: www.herridgeandsons.com
Price: £57.50
ISBN: 978-1-914929-06-9



Dedicated to an arguably less well-known period of Aston Martin's history, The Bertelli Era Cars In Detail concentrates on the models designed and produced by engineer Augustus 'Bert' Bertelli who had joined the company in 1926 as its technical director and designer.

For the next 12 years, while under Bertelli's stewardship, Aston Martin produced a series of world-beating cars which included the 1½-litre T-Type, Le Mans and 2.0-litre 15/98.

Author Matthew Vale digs deep into each model built during this time, explaining their evolution, specification and, where applicable, racing history. He also investigates the company's changing fortunes, including the reasons behind Bertelli's 1937 departure.

Although not huge at 142 pages and at £57.50 relatively pricey, together with the 260 colour and black-and-white images, Vale succeeds in giving a full account of this fascinating era of Aston Martin's long history.

DB1 UNEARTHED

The only one of the 15 2-Litre Sports (colloquially called the 'DB1') to have been sold as a running chassis has been recently unearthed by British auctioneers H&H Classics.

Built in 1947, after initially being fitted with a saloon type of body this was swapped in the late Fifties for a handsome, two-seater style by Swallow Coachbuilding Company that was inspired by its own short-lived Dorretti sports car.

The DB1 was later owned and raced by renowned Aston Martin engineer Shaun Magee who made the radiator grille more Aston Martin like and swapped the original 2.0-litre engine for Aston's later 2.6 straight-six. The DB1 has been with the same owner since 1994 who had unfulfilled plans to restore the car, getting as far as removing and dismantling the engine.

A full feature on this special car will appear in issue 11 of AMD.





VALHALLA TO BE F1-INSPIRED

The long-anticipated Aston Martin Valhalla, the British firm's next limited-run supercar, is set to go into production in 2024 sporting a number of F1-inspired touches. Aston Martin has confirmed that the new car will be limited to 999 examples, with the first running prototype hitting the road later in 2023.

The Valhalla started life as a Red Bull Racing-backed project with the 2019 AM-RB 003 concept before a rethink saw development return in-house. The Valhalla has since benefitted from involvement with the consulting arm of the Aston Martin Formula One team, Aston Martin Performance Technologies (AMPT), with specific focus on what Aston describes as “dynamics, aerodynamics and materials”.

Power comes from a twin-turbocharged V8 and three electric motors producing a total of 998bhp (1,012PS). The Valhalla will feature all-wheel drive with torque vectoring thanks to the two electric motors on the front axle; the third motor is incorporated into the transmission for extra power and as a mild hybrid-style starter motor.

Aston Martin has worked with AMPT to develop the Valhalla's driving characteristics almost completely in simulations, with help from Aston Martin F1 drivers Fernando Alonso and Lance Stroll. The final phase of development will follow later this year when the first prototype hits the road (and track).

The direct F1 connection continues in the car's driver-focused cockpit, which features a driving position designed with AMPT, “to provide the driver with race car level control in order to maximise the pleasure of driving” according to Aston Martin. A false floor raises the driver's heels, while the carbon fibre bucket seat can be reclined to a position similar to that in the Aston Martin AMR23 F1 racer – albeit with some practical concessions to comfort. The recumbent seating position also means the Valhalla's roofline is as low as possible.

That low profile also feeds into the focus on F1-bred aerodynamics. Most of the car's downforce is produced by its underside, which according to Aston closely resembles that of the F1 car. The Valhalla's entire body has been optimised to create downforce and/or minimise drag, while active aerodynamics are also employed front and rear.

The result, according to Aston, is over 600kg of downforce – a figure made easier by the fact that the Valhalla “is not restricted by F1 regulations”, unlike its open-wheel motorsport cousin. The same computational fluid dynamics (CFD) software used to assess the F1 car's aerodynamics was also implemented in the Valhalla's development, as well as the same scale-model wind-tunnel testing.

The Valhalla is fitted with multi-element front and rear wings, which as part of the car's “full vehicle active control algorithms” can be angled for more or

less drag as required, in conjunction with a concave section of the car's floor. The rear wing is also controlled by the same system; in track mode, the wing is raised and is actively controlled by the car. Other aerodynamic features include vortex generators, sill louvres and an F1-inspired roof snorkel.

Carbon fibre is used throughout, with AMPT helping to bring lessons learned from F1 to maximise the car's crash-worthiness and minimise weight. The Valhalla's structure uses a proprietary moulded carbon fibre which helps to create a singular, immensely stiff, strong and light passenger cell which delivers best-in-class dynamic structural attributes and outstanding safety, without compromising driver and passenger ergonomics, according to Aston.

“Our target for Valhalla is to produce a supercar that will set best-in-class standards for performance, dynamics and driving pleasure,” said Carlo Della Casa, Aston Martin's product development director.

“Valhalla will use active technologies to reduce the gap between the ‘gentleman driver’ and the professional one on track. Having open access to the knowledge within the AMF1 team has been a huge advantage for us as we develop this incredible car.”

An on-sale date and prices for the Valhalla are yet to be announced by Aston Martin, but it's likely to sell out quickly regardless of price. It's safe to expect a high six-figure price tag.



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VALKYRIE HEADS TO LE MANS

Aston Martin has confirmed the Valkyrie is to be entered into the top Hypercar class of the FIA World Endurance Championship and IMSA SportsCar Championships from 2025. This means the car will participate in three of sports car racing's most prestigious events including Le Mans, the Rolex 24 at Daytona and the 12 Hours of Sebring.



Lawrence Stroll, Aston Martin's executive chairman, said, "Performance is the lifeblood of everything that we do at Aston Martin, and motorsport is the ultimate expression of this pursuit of excellence.

"We have been present at Le Mans since the earliest days, and through those glorious endeavours we succeeded in winning Le Mans in 1959 and our class 19 times over the past 95 years. Now we return to the scene of those first

triumphs aiming to write new history with a racing prototype inspired by the fastest production car Aston Martin has ever built."

The Valkyrie AMR Pro was originally designed and developed to meet the LMH hypercar regulations and now Aston Martin Performance Technologies – situated in the newly built AMR Technology Campus – has begun the task of developing a competition prototype

version of the Valkyrie for racing within a pre-defined aerodynamic and power performance window that gives it parity with its direct competition in WEC. It will then be homologated for the WEC Hypercar and IMSA GTP classes ahead of the 2025 season.

Turn to page 82 to read Matt James' analysis of the Valkyrie's entrance into the WEC.

HAWKINS TESTS AMR21

Former Formula W racer and current Aston Martin F1 Driver Ambassador Jessica Hawkins has become the first woman in five years to drive a Formula One car when, in September, she completed 26 laps in a two-year-old AMR21 at the Hungaroring circuit near Budapest.

"It's taken me every bit of blood, sweat and tears to get here," said Hawkins afterwards. "I've had to keep it secret for months now, which was pretty hard. It's been absolutely worth it and it's given me really valuable insight."

Previous to Hawkins, the last woman to test an F1 car was in October 2018 when Colombia's Tatiana Calderón drove a Sauber at the Hermanos Rodriguez track in Mexico City. Susie Wolff is the last woman to have participated in an actual practice session, testing a Williams FW37 before the 2015 British Grand Prix. A female driver has not started an actual Formula 1 race since 1976 when the Italian Lella Lombardi finished 12th in Austria.



Although no lap times have been released, considering the car was using old tyres and the track had little grip due to heavy rain, Hawkins said she was pleased with what she had achieved, as was the team's principal, Mike Krack. "We were really impressed by Jessica's preparation

for the test - she worked incredibly hard with our simulator team and that made it an easy decision to put her in the AMR21. Jessica approached the opportunity with great maturity; she was up to speed quickly and found a nice rhythm."



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CUTTING WEDGE



With its futuristic, square-edged design and groundbreaking electronics together with the powerful 5.3-litre V8, the William Towns-designed Lagonda was like no other car produced by Aston Martin before or since. To mark the 45th anniversary of the saloon reaching production, we explain its development before driving a beautiful early example

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY PAUL WALTON



JUDGING BY the 1980 brochure for the Lagonda, it's clear Aston Martin's marketing team didn't know how to describe the car. "Its shape is as functional as it is eye-catching," says the sales blurb, "a pleasing blend of elegance and sportiness. It is a car which commands attention with its air of sophisticated breeding."

Translation – we're not sure what to call it so we're calling it everything.

Yet I don't blame them for this confusion. With its famously razor-edged lines, low nose plus unique proportions, the Lagonda has always pushed the boundaries of car design.

What's even more amazing about the Lagonda isn't what it looks like or the groundbreaking electronics on board, but how this large, unusual and avant-garde saloon helped secure the company that made it.

The Lagonda was the work of William Towns, one of the UK's most creative automotive designers. When he joined Aston Martin in 1966 following stints at Rootes and then Rover it was initially to design car seats. However, he soon approached the company's then chairman, (Sir) David Brown, with sketches of a new, more modern coupe which eventually became the DBS from 1967.

Towns had also developed a longer, four-door version and in 1969 a single prototype was built for Brown's personal use that was fitted with a prototype 5.0-litre version of Aston Martin's new V8. Because Brown had been an enthusiast of the Lagonda marque ever since he'd bought it in 1947, the car was badged as such. It initially remained a one-off until 1974 when, with Aston Martin now owned by an investment bank consortium called Company Developments Ltd, a slightly

redesigned version was put into very limited production. At £14,040 – 24 percent more than the contemporary V8 – together with the Middle East oil crisis, it struggled to find buyers and just seven were produced before it was finally deleted from Aston Martin's line-up in June 1976.

Having been sold again in 1975 after going bankrupt the year before, Aston Martin's new board of directors – Alan Curtis, Dennis Flather, George Minden and Peter Sprague – didn't want to give up on the Lagonda brand. And so in February 1976 plans were made for a new model that had an ambitious target of being ready for the British Motor Show just eight months later.

Towns was again asked to design the car but what he came up with was

“What Towns came up with was like nothing Aston Martin – or any other company had produced before”





nothing like Aston Martin – or any other company for that matter – had produced before. He'd been toying with the idea of a four-door saloon influenced by the angular sports cars of the period for some time, which included the Lamborghini Countach and Lotus Esprit.

"We had a meeting for a presentation by William Towns," wrote Peter Sprague in a feature that appeared in the magazine published by the Aston Martin Owners Club of North America. "He produced a drawing of a spectacularly radical four-door design. He had been quietly dreaming up the design on his own over the previous two or three years. We decided to go for it. I believe that the decision was made in a day. There was no dissension. The four company directors



MODEL PROFILE

LAGONDA

all felt that we wanted to own the car in William's drawings. We wouldn't ever be able to drive it if we didn't build it. Thus the Lagonda was conceived."

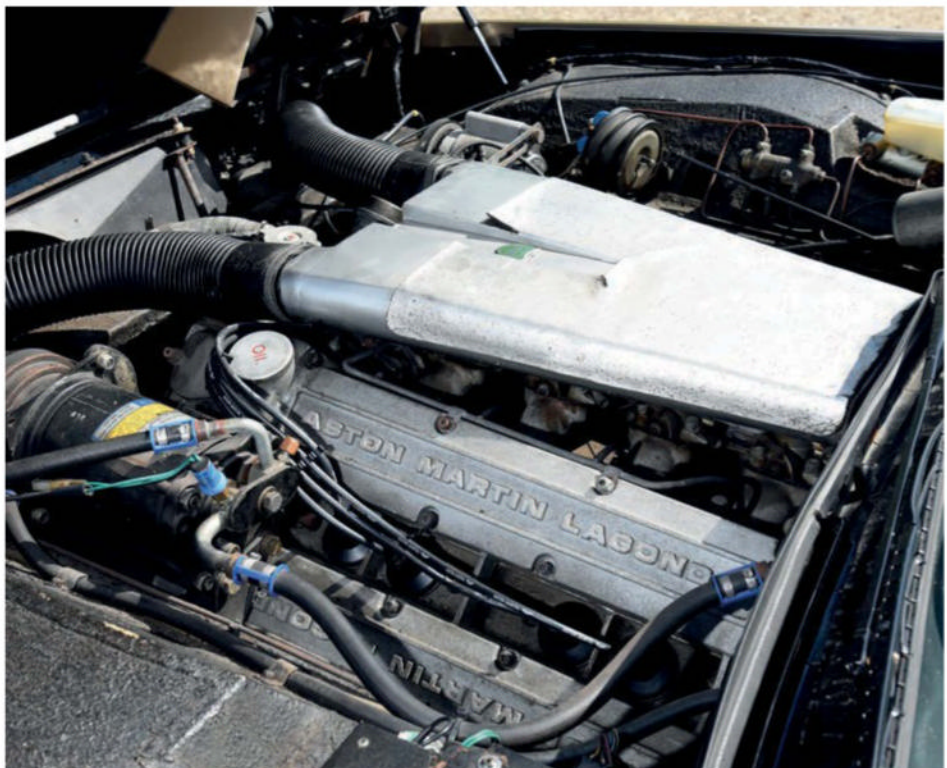
Towns wasn't new to this kind of design, with his Mini-based prototype, the Minissima of 1972, and rebodied E-type Series 3, the Guyson E12, from two years later both featuring very angular lines. The Lagonda, though, took the razor design to another level. "The brief was to radically restyle the longer version of the DBS," said Towns during a 1976 TV interview. He certainly achieved that.

At 5,283mm long and 1,816mm wide, not only was the car huge, its dimensions larger than those of a Rolls Royce Silver Shadow, but there wasn't a smooth line anywhere. And although the nose was also very long and low, requiring the use of pop-up headlights, the boot was short and high, resulting in unusual proportions.

"The shape is decided by aerodynamics more than anything else," said Towns during a 1976 interview. "If you have a high nose you get terrible lift problems, then you get induced drag and it slows the whole thing down."

Amazingly, Towns reckoned by working 12 hours a day it took him just a month to finish. Even more amazingly, the production version changed very little from his initial sketches. "The design of the body was very different to everything else," said Aston's then chief engineer, Mike Loasby, in David Dowsey's 2007 book, *Aston Martin Power Beauty and Soul*. "It was classic William Towns. We altered very little of the design after William's first presentation. We altered the shape at the front by narrowing it a little and we altered the grille because we thought it wasn't quite wide enough, but that's about all. It stayed very much as he wanted it, which is unusual. I think he was happy with the finished production model."

Despite the short development span, it still used a brand new and substantial platform designed by Loasby. "We designed a new chassis because the chassis of the V8 was very expensive; we actually designed a two-door version first," he continued in *Power, Beauty and Soul*. "The original idea had been to put a new skin on the old chassis because





we wanted to give it a new life, but the old chassis was so expensive it was not worth doing.”

The only parts carried over from the existing AMV8 were the differential, gearbox, and some parts of the engine. Said Loasby in Dowsey's book, “The heads were modified, the inlet manifolds were new, the sump was new and so on. They weren't carryover parts. Not one little bit.”

To clear the low bonnet line, a lower air box was needed which affected the maximum power on the carburettor version although the later cars with fuel injection were on a par with the Aston Martin. To alleviate the breathing problem caused by the low air box, the Lagonda version of the 5.3-litre V8 was the first to have 2.1in inlet valves which were later used on the AMV8 Vantage before becoming standard across the range.

Typically for the time, Aston Martin didn't release the engine's power output when the car finally went on sale but it's thought it produced around 280bhp and 360lb ft of torque.

When *Autocar* tested the Lagonda for its 18 October 1980 issue, it achieved a top speed of 143mph putting the car on a par with a Jaguar XJ12 Series 2 but its 0-60mph time of 8.8 secs was almost a second and a half slower.

The front suspension was largely sourced from Jaguar which included the top links although Aston's engineers did design a new bottom link and incorporated new geometry. At the rear there were self-levelling dampers and a De Dion axle. The 15in steel wheels were also from Jaguar but fitted with elegant Towns-designed chrome trims. Later cars came with the same 'Pepperpot' style of alloy as Jaguar was currently using.

The car's design wasn't the only ambitious aspect about the Lagonda, since from the outset it was planned to be an electronic tour de force with never before seen levels of equipment. This included digital read-outs in the dash plus touch-sensitive buttons to control all of the car's functions. It's said Mike Loasby got the idea when visiting the headquarters of National Semiconductor in Santa Clara, California, which Aston Martin co-chairman Peter Sprague had

also taken over in the mid-Sixties. Loasby was particularly taken by the futuristic touch-sensitive buttons the company used in its elevators.

The instruments were initially developed by Fotherby, Willis Electronics Ltd of West Yorkshire, but financial problems meant they couldn't finish the project in time.

And so, although Loasby and his team met their deadline and the Lagonda was unveiled to the public at the London Motor Show on 16 October 1976 (the final one to be held at Earls Court), it had dummy electrics.

“For the show we had the first car built up to look as though it had the electronics in it, but it didn't,” explained Loasby in Dowsey's book. “We had an electronic buck on the stand which was just the passenger compartment of the car without a roof and it had all the electronic displays working on it or looking as if they were.”

Neither could the car run under its own power and when this first prototype appeared to be moving during later appearances on television, it was actually rolling down a hill.

Yet the car was still a triumph. “The star of the show and the best-kept secret of all had to be the sensational Aston Martin Lagonda, practical futurism with sophisticated style and splendid luxury,” was *Motorsport* magazine's view in its November 1976 issue. “We all knew that Aston were revising the four-door Lagonda first shown a couple of years ago; in fact Peter Sprague, and his Aston co-directors had thrown this out as a red herring, for the astonishing reality was a totally new body/chassis unit of superbly proportioned-wedge shape.”

British Prime Minister James Callaghan sat in it while Colin Chapman brought his chief engineer, Mike Kimberly, over to Aston's stand to take a look, asking why Lotus couldn't have done the same exciting instrumentation.

So popular was the car that despite costing £20k when a Daimler Double-Six Vanden Plas was 'just' £10,800, Aston still took over 76 orders, giving the directors the confidence to finish developing it for production. However, due to the complicated electrics, it would take



“It was planned to be an electronic tour-de-force with never before seen levels of equipment”

another 18 months before the first car would reach its customer.

As Alan Curtis said later, “The company promised delivery dates for the Lagonda at the 1976 Motor Show that we didn’t have a cat in hell’s chance of keeping. During 1977 we went through a crucial development phase with the car, and I must confess that at times I thought we made an appalling mess of the whole thing. We’d underestimated the time it would take to develop the car, which, after all, contained many innovations for the automotive world, and some of the costings were sheer guesswork.”

With Fotherby, Willis Electronics out of the picture, Aston Martin’s co-chairman and airplane enthusiast, Alan Curtis, turned to the Cranfield Institute of Technology’s established Centre for Aeronautics for help. Yet it too struggled as Loasby explained in Dowsey’s book. “You should never get any academic on anything because they will never finish the job and they will never get it to work.”

The first multi-chip, 16-bit

microprocessor – the IMP-16 printed circuit card – was sourced from National Semiconductor to run the Lagonda’s dashboard electronics. “The team learned quickly that the automotive environment is much more difficult than that of a modern military aircraft,” said Sprague in his AMOC piece. “Everything is supposed to work immediately at temperatures from -30F to +140F.”

By April 1978, Aston’s management felt confident enough to organise a press event at the nearby Woburn Abbey. This was to hand over the first production vehicle to Lady Tavistock, the wife of Robin Russell who was a stockbroker and future 14th Duke of Bedford. She had complained about the length of time it had taken for her to receive the car she’d ordered as a wedding anniversary present for her husband. Aston’s mechanics had worked around the clock to get the car ready but were still unable to make the Cranfield-built electrical harness work since the IMP-16 chip kept glitching as the manufacturing director, David Flint,

explained in *Power, Beauty and Soul*.

“We worked for two days and two nights solid trying to fit this harness from Cranfield Institute of Technology into the car. We had nearly finished when we were told we had better send the car out ‘right now.’ I’d had enough by this time and I said, ‘If you want to push this car out, you can do it yourself. I’m going home.’ So I went home.”

Despite the known issues, the handover still went ahead but in an utterly embarrassing scene, Lady Tavistock’s car had to be pushed in front of the waiting journalists.

“I stated the obvious, ‘We goofed’ or, more specifically, ‘I goofed,’” wrote Sprague about the speech he made to the assembled press. “I held up the malfunctioning computer circuit board by one corner and explained that the computer had packed it in. It had been my bright idea in the first place; the engineers and the factory were innocent. Everything about the car was magnificent with the slight problem that it did not run. It was

not the fault of the Aston workforce." It was only when Aston's then engineering director, Steve Coughlin, approached Brian Refoy from the Javelina Corporation in Texas who specialised in making and developing aircraft instruments that the electrics were finally sorted. "Aston Martin's decision to go to the US for the electronics was right," confirmed Loasby. "Cranfield made a fearful mess of the electronics because, even though they were at the forefront of technology, they had no idea of the realities of what you could or couldn't do in a car."

Production finally got going at the end of the year with deliveries starting in 1979, although by now the price had risen from £20k to an eye-watering £50k. This made it a substantial £18k more expensive than a Rolls-Royce Silver Shadow II.

Yet despite the high price, its controversial looks or the time it had taken to reach production, the press was still positive about the car when they finally got to drive one. "There is just one respect in which we feel it has no real rival," said *Autocar* in 1980, "and that is in terms of its

eye-catching appearance. No Ferrari, no Rolls-Royce and certainly no lesser car caused quite a stir wherever it is parked."

And judging by the majestic 1980 example featured here, that's clearly still the case. In the 25 years I've been writing about cars for a living, I've never driven one that has created so much attention as this one. Passers-by either stared, gave a thumbs up or stopped to ask what it is.

But due to the car's still dramatic design, I don't blame them. Looking like something from the future, the sort of vehicle Colonel Edward Straker might have driven in the Seventies sci-fi classic *UFO*, it remains as space-age as its 1976 debut.

Although due to its many hard angles and arrow-straight lines, I can't describe it as pretty in the same way a Jaguar XJ12 Series 3 from 1979 is, the car still has a genuinely muscular presence. Unfortunately, the narrow nose is ruined when the pop-up lights are raised, their size giving the car something of a bug-eyed appearance.

As a long-term enthusiast of William Towns' work, I openly admit to loving the

Lagonda and therefore experience a real moment of excitement when I open the heavy door and slide behind the surprisingly small, single-spoked steering wheel. As I get comfortable on the large seat that's covered in a softly ruched brown leather and look around me, my first impression is... how basic the dashboard is. Admittedly, there's a wide strip of rich veneer across the fascia and on all four door tops, but the large and simple black plastic binnacle in front of me that together with the ingenious touch pads on either side make the instrument panel look like an early games console I owned in the Seventies.

It's only after I turn the key to start the V8, the binnacle now filled with a series of red LED numbers, that it starts to make sense. Admittedly, the many read-outs are small and hard to read in the glare of the sun, but the lack of traditional dials makes the car feel even more futuristic, helped by the traditional milometer idden under the bonnet like some dirty little secret.

Although the Lagonda weighs a hefty 2,024kg (around 200kg more than the



MODEL PROFILE

LAGONDA

AMV8) the keenness of its acceleration takes me by surprise. The Chrysler Torqueflite three-speed automatic gearbox kicks down the moment I press the throttle hard resulting in a sudden urge of speed I wasn't expecting. Yet it's still relatively quiet and refined as *Autocar* found in its October 1980 issue.

"It's not just the top speed of the Lagonda that is impressive, it also has the ability to cruise extremely fast indeed. We covered long distances at speeds between 100 and 120mph and the front passenger – who cannot see the instruments – is quite unaware that the car is going so fast."

I had assumed beforehand that the Lagonda would be like a Jaguar XJ12 to drive; smooth, wallowy with all the sharpness of an oil tanker. Yet the steering has the weight and accuracy of a genuine sports car and although the saloon's bulk together with the soft suspension results in plenty of body roll, the always-

composed chassis allows me to swoop through a series of fast S-bend corners with remarkable speed.

Yet what I find most surprising about the car isn't this performance, the controversial design or its high cost – which by January 1990 when production ended had reached £95,000 – the car was, in Aston terms at least, a relative success.

The car was updated twice, firstly in 1986 when fuel injection replaced the four Weber carburettors which increased power to 305bhp, plus new and improved vacuum fluorescent display instrumentation. The second facelift arrived a year later that saw slightly rounder lines, fixed headlights instead of the pop-ups plus 16in alloys.

The 635 production cars (plus around eight prototypes) made Towns' Lagonda one of the most successful Aston Martins of the immediate pre-Ford era and helped keep the company afloat throughout the

turbulent Seventies and early Eighties, which considering its nicheness is remarkable. Sprague, though, never had any doubt of the car's potential.

"I have been asked many times whether we had done any market research, was there a detailed budget, and what gave us the confidence that we could do it?" he said in his AMOC feature. "Basically we looked at William Towns' extraordinary drawings, and we asked Mike Loasby if he and his team could build it. They said 'yes.' We had confidence in the team. It was comparable to building the Spitfire during the Battle of Britain."

Aston Martin's marketing team might have struggled to describe this unique car when it was new but after finally driving one, I can sum it up in one word.

Magnificent. **AMD**

Thanks to: Roger Ivett for supplying the car shown here



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SEATS OR

Although undeniably good-looking and very fast, is the Aston Martin Rapide also spacious and luxurious enough to compete with the epitome of sumptuousness, a Bentley Flying Spur?

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY PAUL WALTON



POWER

ON FIRST glance, the Aston Martin Rapide and Bentley Flying Spur have so much in common that they could be twins. Both are luxurious four-seat saloons produced by established British car manufacturers, powered by huge 6.0-litre V12s and based on chassis used by earlier sports cars. And with them now worth between £25k and £35k, even their values are the same.

But with one putting luxury first and the other being arguably more about performance, they're actually as different as haute cuisine is from fast food.

So which of these two very different cars do we prefer?

"Luxury must be comfortable," said the French fashion designer Coco Chanel once, "otherwise it is not luxury." If this is true – and she would know – it makes the Flying Spur one of the most luxurious

cars ever produced. With generous levels of legroom and large seats covered in soft, supple leather, it offers high levels of comfort that the brand has long been synonymous with.

Yet when the car arrived in 2005 it was a new, more modern kind of Bentley. Instead of a bespoke chassis like the earlier albeit Rolls-Royce-based models, the Flying Spur used the same platform as the Volkswagen Phaeton, the German ▶



TWIN TEST

RAPIDE VS FLYING SPUR

giant having bought Bentley in 1998. Due to a lack of capacity at Bentley's Crewe factory, the first 1,400 examples were even produced at VW's Dresden plant. It also shared 60 percent of its componentry with the Continental GT coupe that had arrived two years earlier, including the same VW-sourced platform.

What wasn't new, though, was its name. Flying Spur was first used for the S2 Continental of 1959 and then the faster version Rolls Royce Silver Spur III from 1994, its 2005 rebirth instantly linking the modern car to those of the company's past.

Led by Bentley's head of exterior design, Raul Pires, under design director Dirk van Braeckel, the saloon and coupe were designed concurrently meaning they appear almost identical from the front. As with the Continental GT coupe, the faired-in grille and recessed headlights made the design very modern compared to the company's more traditional models. It wasn't always universally liked, though. "Like the GT, the Spur lacks the defiantly bluff stance and attractive caddishness of the Arnage," said *Evo* magazine in its March 2005 issue.

Personally, I'm not a fan of the design thinking it's too ordinary for a Bentley, the rear three quarters looking like a cross between the first generation of Škoda Superb (which Pires also designed) and a London taxi. Yet by towering over the much more feminine Rapide sat alongside it, its size together with that huge mesh grille gives the Flying Spur genuine presence.

As mentioned earlier, the Bentley is the epitome of luxury, the cream leather upholstery so soft that it feels like an expensive flying jacket, while the chrome and aluminium accents give an otherwise ordinary-looking dash some of the theatrics you'd expect from the brand. But there's also too much cheap plastic for a Bentley, making the car feel mass-produced compared to its handmade predecessors.

Although this car has a traditional rear bench, the Spur was also available with two individual seats, similar to what the Rapide was given as standard. Other than the generous levels of legroom that allows me to stretch out like HM King Charles III no doubt can in the Bentley





State Limousine, it feels surprisingly ordinary back there. But the company always reckoned it was a car to appeal to self-drivers rather than chauffeured types, hence the lack of ambience.

The poor way it has worn is disappointing with too many frayed edges and tired-looking leather for a car that when new in 2008 cost £117,500. Admittedly, this example is 15 years old and has covered 145k miles, but Bentleys were traditionally built to last.

There's nothing wrong with the engine, though. The same 6.0-litre W12 as found in the Conti, it's basically two narrow-angle V6 engines joined together at an inclined angle of 72 degrees. With twin turbochargers, it produces an incredible 552bhp and 480lb ft of torque, the resultant 0-60mph time of 4.9 secs and 195mph top speed made the Flying Spur the fastest saloon in the world at the time. Considering this goliath of a car tips the scales at 2,475kg, that's an impressive feat.

"The acceleration barely diminishes," continued *Evo* after driving the car in Italy for its 2005 press launch, "and by the end of a two-mile stretch of motorway, the speedo needle had reached 300kph (186mph) with plenty more to come."

It might weigh the same as a small bus, but with the Flying Spur having permanent four-wheel drive plus adaptive air suspension as standard, it always feels surprisingly composed and confident. When I push hard through a corner, front and rear grip is phenomenal, while it might be slow and overly assisted but the steering is still relatively direct. Yet despite its AWD and even when the air suspension is set to firm, the Spur can never disguise its bulk and driving it quickly becomes more stressful than wrestling a bear.

No, the Spur's natural habitat is wafting effortlessly down long European motorways to your European residence rather than hooning along B-roads, that same air suspension now easily digesting any road roughage. Yet when I bury the throttle, the six-speed transmission immediately kicks down resulting in a sudden and hard shove. But it's never a refined unit, sounding loud under power which together with the traditional interior and weight makes the car feel relatively old-fashioned compared to

TWIN TEST

RAPIDE VS FLYING SPUR

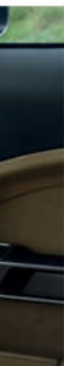


the more contemporary Rapide. Thanks to its immeasurable luxury and power, the Bentley Flying Spur is a likeable car but it's not a perfect one. Its size, weight and design give it all the subtlety of a sledgehammer.

Judging by this 2010 Quantum Silver example, it's not something I can say about the Aston Martin Rapide. Long, low and very sleek, it's more like a sharp scalpel than a blunt, heavy tool.

As with the Bentley, the Rapide shares much with a two-door coupe, this time the DB9, sitting on the same VH bonded-aluminium platform that was also used for the V8 Vantage and DBS V12. Arriving in 2010 as a four-door saloon, the Rapide was the final model of a new family of cars





that had been instigated by Aston's then chairman, Dr Ulrich Bez.

"With Rapide, the entire family can enjoy their Aston Martin together in unison," he explained before the production car's debut at the 2010 Frankfurt Motor Show, "in an invigorating yet comfortable environment, sitting low, with plenty of visibility from every seat and with new levels of comfort, refinement and entertainment."

Again, like the Bentley, the Rapide name was an old one, originally used for the beautiful but low volume DB4-based Lagonda saloon of 1961. The 2010 version was also the first production four-door that Aston Martin had made since before the war.

Although designed under Aston's current chief creative officer, Marek Reichman, it was clearly influenced by the earlier Ian Callum and Henrik Fisker-designed models; as with the Bentleys, see one from the front and it's tricky to distinguish the Rapide from the DB9 or V8 Vantage. Only the different-shaped lower air vents set the trio apart for the casual observer.

Yet it's still a handsome and elegant car, more so than the cumbersome Bentley and despite being an elongated coupe, it has close-to-perfect proportions. "We wanted to make the most beautiful four-door sports car in the world," said Reichman when the concept was first shown at the 2006 Detroit Motor Show.

It might be almost two decades old, but I reckon they achieved that.

There's no denying its coupe-like shape results in a lack of interior space, though. Despite being 5,019mm long (309mm more than the DB9 but 271mm shorter than the gargantuan Flying Spur), I can't stretch out in the same luxurious way as I can in the Bentley. Plus, with the front seats being very tall and wide, my view is heavily restricted meaning the rear could become very claustrophobic. This would be made much worse if the upholstery was black, like most examples are, and not the lighter Sandstorm of this example. But despite its low roofline, headroom is still surprisingly generous; admittedly at 5ft 10in I'm not a giant but I still fit inside

TWIN TEST

RAPIDE VS FLYING SPUR



reasonably comfortably. Due to the two individual seats rather than an old-fashioned bench plus a pair of cupholders and controls for the air-conditioning set in the wide centre console, the Rapide's rear is a very special place. Its character is more like that of a private jet that I once flew in than a simple four-door saloon.

Actually, the Rapide is technically a hatchback, the short luggage area giving access to the interior. Although at 317 litres (158 less than the Spur's) the boot is small for such a large car, but the rear seats can be folded forwards. Although there's no denying this aids its practicality, but it's still not a car you'd want to take to Ikea.

The Rapide eschews the traditional trappings of British luxury saloons so you won't find any veneer across the





dash. Instead, it's the same soft-sheen ambience of the DB9 and V8 Vantage. All very modern, but the cheap-looking plastic controls and grey fascia perhaps lack the glitz and glamour of the Bentley especially considering in 2010 it cost £139,950, an incredible 12 grand more than the Spur cost at the time.

So it should come as no surprise that although the controls feel cheap, the fit and finish of the dashboard's architecture has all the precision of the Austrian railway timetable. But there is a reason for this. As with the Spur, due to Aston Martin's Gaydon factory not being able to keep up with demand for the existing models, for the first couple of years of its production the Rapide was also built overseas, this time by the Graz-based contract

manufacturer Magna Steyr. Power comes courtesy of Aston Martin's always magnificent 6.0-litre V12 that pumps out the same 470bhp as that in the DB9. Mated to a six-speed automatic gearbox (there was never a manual option), it results in a 0-60mph time of 4.7 seconds and a 188mph top speed, both similar to its coupe counterpart.

These figures, though, only tell half the story; they don't describe the responsiveness of the engine, how when I squeeze the throttle on an empty road, the V12 unleashes all of its power in one almighty fury resulting in a hard and sudden acceleration, especially when I use the steering column-mounted paddles. The V12 answers the moment I ask for more power by pulling on the left-

hand lever to change down. The action sends the rev-counter needle dancing to the far right of the dial, ready for me to squeeze the throttle again.

The Rapide might have four doors and weigh close to 2,000kg, but it still feels every inch the sports car. With its chassis and panels both manufactured from aluminium, it offers all the agility of its smaller siblings. The steering has the same accuracy as the V8 Vantage with small movements on the wheel resulting in fast changes of direction yet the nicely damped suspension keeps everything perfectly composed.

It also rides beautifully, offering almost Jaguar saloon levels of comfort with uneven road surfaces not transmitted into the cabin. Unlike traditional sports cars, ►

TWIN TEST

RAPIDE VS FLYING SPUR



the Rapide doesn't need to be driven like a hooligan to get the best from it.

As *Car* magazine said in 2010, "The Rapide certainly lives up to its sports car billing. However, it's how the Rapide makes you feel when you're just bumbling around town that makes it really special."

If you're looking for a luxury limousine for airport chauffeuring duties (like the car featured here once was, hence the high mileage) then it has to be the Bentley. The Aston might be comfortable but it lacks the Spur's opulent levels of space,

wall-to-wall leather upholstery and generous luggage compartment. But while the Bentley is also very fast, it's an otherwise standard saloon. The Aston Martin by comparison has the ability to be much more; it can be a reasonably sensible family four-door hatchback one moment and a powerful sports car the next yet the ride quality remains as good as any properly luxurious limo. It's also better-looking: the Bentley might look like the Škoda Superb, but the Rapide has the same razor-sharp design as Aston's

coupes. From being V12-engined four-door saloons to their luxurious interiors, there might be many ways in which these two cars are similar. But it's their very different personalities and image that stops them from being twins and this is what puts the Aston Martin ahead.

● **Thanks to: Rapide owner, Aaron Muir, plus Nigel Britten from Area 5 of the Aston Martin Owners Club (www.amoc.org)**



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DRIVING FORCE

Dr Ulrich Bez's 13-year tenure as Aston Martin's chairman saw the company transformed from a low volume manufacturer to a major player in the international sports car market. To mark his 80th birthday in November 2023, we look at his long and successful career in the motor industry

WORDS PAUL WALTON IMAGES AMD ARCHIVE



FROM DAVID Brown to Victor Gauntlett, Aston Martin has had some distinguished leaders in its 110-year history. Yet arguably none made an impact as large as Dr Ulrich Bez did during his 13 years at the helm. Thanks to his clear vision of the brand's untapped potential plus his vast expertise in performance models, he helped to reinvent the company, transforming it from a manufacturer of fast but ultimately niche cars to something close to the mainstream.

"We have restored the Aston Martin brand to where many passionate people always thought it should be," he said 11 years after he took over. "We have evolved from a low volume, small-scale operation to a profitable independent luxury sports car manufacturer with worldwide acclaim."



BIOGRAPHY

DR ULRICH BEZ

Bez was born in Bad Cannstatt on the east side of Stuttgart on 7 November 1944. His first job after school was as an apprentice on Porsche's production line before studying aviation technology at the University of Stuttgart, later gaining a doctorate in engineering from the Free University of Berlin. After returning to Bad Cannstatt in the early Seventies, Bez applied to Porsche for a placement to carry out the practical part of his thesis. Six months later, the company's research department offered him a permanent position.

"I actually studied aircraft engineering," he said during a 2014 interview, "and I didn't know what to do with that degree. I felt that the aircraft industry was probably not right for me, so I looked for something close to flying: sports cars. I went to Porsche and asked them for a job and have stayed in the auto industry ever since."

During his time there, Bez learned about bodywork and driving dynamics plus managed projects on accidents, eventually becoming director of vehicle research, responsible for establishing Porsche's crash test programme.

He left in 1982 to become BMW's director of vehicle pre-development, later heading the company's new experimental lab, BMW Technik. One of the first cars he helped to develop during his time there was the Z1 roadster that had started life as a 1985 concept but reached production three years later.



**Ulrich Bez at
Porsche in the
Eighties**



**The BMW Z1 was the first
car developed by BMW
Technik**

Bez's five years at Daewoo resulted in more mainstream cars such as the Lanos



“Developing sports cars is an area where engineers have the chance to max-out technological opportunities and push new developments,” he continued in 2014. “Also, sports cars are highly emotional products, for those who build them and for those who drive them. This is probably the reason why I joined the motor industry after completing my studies in aviation technology.”

Bez was tempted back to Porsche in 1988 when he was appointed the company's director of R&D and motorsport. Instead of replacing the now ageing 911 like instructed, he reinvented it, overseeing the development of the car's saviour, the 993.



Prototypes of the ill-fated 989 four-door saloon Bez instigated during his second stint at the firm

“A very challenging and exciting moment at Porsche was when I carried through the 993,” he said in 2014. “I was asked to lead the development of a 911 replacement. Instead, I proposed to stick with the 911 concept and morphed it into the 993, which marked the turnaround and long life of the 911.”

Almost two decades before Porsche produced the Panamera, he also instigated a four-door saloon concept, the 989, that was based on a new front-engine, rear-drive platform. Although promising, the project was scrapped in early 1991 due to the rising costs of the car's development and Bez left Porsche not long after.

He took everyone by surprise two years later by moving to South Korea to become Daewoo's vice-president of strategy, engineering, and product development. During his five-year stint at the company, he helped inject its cars with some much needed credibility, introducing several mainstream models such as the Matiz, Lanos, and Leganza. Bez headed back to Germany in 1998, saying, “It would be difficult for me to spend another five years in Seoul.” He initially served as chairman of Flender AG, an industrial gearbox maker, before becoming a business adviser for Ford two years later.

Aston Martin moved into its first purpose-built factory outside Gaydon in 2003



BIOGRAPHY

DR ULRICH BEZ

One of his first suggestions was to give Aston Martin (which the American giant had starting buying shares in during 1987) the financial backing it needed to survive. Despite having a negative view of the company and its cars, so persuasive were Bez's arguments that Ford Motor Company's CEO, Jac Nasser, offered him the joint positions of chairman and CEO, replacing Bob Dover who had moved across to Land Rover.

"Before I joined the company, I had never driven an Aston Martin or even been interested in the cars," he admitted in 2008, "simply because I didn't feel that they were anywhere close to being competitive to a Porsche or a BMW."

Yet his reasons for joining were simple; its potential. "I felt that Aston Martin was a sleeping brand with a terrific heritage and appeal that just wasn't showing up in the cars themselves. If they gave me five years' time, I would develop this brand into what it deserves to be." He would more than achieve this goal.

It's not known what Bez thought of Aston's by now dated facilities at Newport Pagnell and Bloxham compared to the state-of-the-art factories he was no doubt used to in Germany, but just three years later the company moved into its first purpose-built factory, a 55-acre facility located on the outskirts of Gaydon in Warwickshire. "It is probably the best facility of its type in the world," he boasted during its 2003 opening, "and the perfect showcase of how to design and build innovative sports cars." The new location would be central to his plans for the future, as was a new platform.

When Bez joined Aston Martin, it was developing two new models, a replacement for the ageing DB7 plus a smaller, mid-engined car. These would join the now completed Vanquish which was launched in 2001, a year later than planned, but Bez apparently delayed the car since he was unhappy with some aspects of its interior including the air vents that were too easily identifiable as coming from the Ford Ka.

Despite Aston's studio chief, Ian Callum, making progress with the mid-engined car, Bez still cancelled it soon after becoming chairman. What the company needed, he argued, was a single modular



▲ Gaydon offered state-of-the-art facilities





Bez was part of a 30k miles in 30 days project in 2006 using his own V8 Vantage



In 2006 Bez finished fourth in class and 24th overall with this Vantage N24 at the Nürburgring 24 Hours

platform that could be shared by the company's future range, from a two-seater sports car to a 2+2 GT and beyond. And so he pushed for the development of a new and highly flexible bonded aluminium architecture that was similar to that used by the Vanquish.

The first new car produced at Gaydon was the DB9 from 2003



Bez in white overalls celebrating with the team in 2006

Since the outer body panels were not structural, it allowed for several cars to be based on the same platform. "It's like fine dining," said Aston's then director of product development, Ian Minard, in 2012. "We can take the best ingredients and cook to different flavours."

Named VH for vertical/horizontal, V was for the shared body construction principles across all models, while H signified systems shared horizontally through the cars, such as front and

rear suspension units, engines and dashboards.

Arriving in late 2003, the first car to use the VH platform was the Ian Callum-designed V12-engined DB9. Its new chassis made it twice as stiff as the DB7 and 25 percent lighter. Bez described it as, "without doubt, the most important Aston Martin model ever. Not only is it the first time in our history that we have a purpose-built facility but we now also have a dedicated platform."

Two years later, Aston revealed a two-seater sports car again based on the VH chassis but powered by a 4.3-litre V8 developed from Jaguar's AJV8 unit. The V8 Vantage was the most driver focused yet least expensive car in Aston Martin's long history and would have a major impact on its brand and image.

"We have a range that now suits a 25-year-old in the same way as it could suit an 80-year-old," he said in a 2005 interview. "And the DB9 is a very elegant, very mature car... but it is more suited to people older than 30. Now I go to dealer presentations and openings and I see that 30 percent of people there are [aged under] 30."

When asked whether these higher volume cars would threaten Aston's exclusivity, Bez replied simply, "Exclusivity needs visibility. Without it, nobody would even know you exist."

His plan worked, though, since Aston was soon enjoying a small surge in production, from a little over 6,000 cars in 2000 to 7,010 in 2007. It was profitable too, one of the few times the company had made money during its then 94-year history.

Bez wasn't finished yet and in 2009 a third car to use the VH platform joined the line-up. Following the disappointment of the Porsche 989 being cancelled 18 years earlier, as a four-door saloon, the Rapide was no doubt unfinished business for the German.

"The Rapide is the culmination of the Aston Martin range of sports cars, a car that seals the revival of a truly admired marque. There is now an Aston Martin for every taste and for every use," said Bez during the car's reveal.

Yet it wasn't just his engineering skills why Bez was such a success at Aston

BIOGRAPHY

DR ULRICH BEZ

Martin; it was his keen understanding of the brand itself. This was illustrated when he reconfirmed its connection with the James Bond franchise following the Vanquish's appearance in 2002's *Die Another Day*. In 2005 he personally invited Bond producer, Barbara Broccoli, to Gaydon to look at a new model under development in the design studio. Broccoli apparently loved the car and immediately cast it in the next film, 2006's *Casino Royale*, when it would be driven by the new 007 actor, Daniel Craig.

The car in question was the replacement for the Vanquish, the DB9-based DBS, that wouldn't reach production until 2008. "Aston Martin does not need James Bond. And James Bond does not need Aston Martin," Bez would say later. "But, we have a love affair." As a result of Bez's intervention, the British spy films continued to feature Aston Martins, including a DBS Superleggera in 2021's *No Time To Die*.

Bez also spearheaded Aston's return to the track, forming Aston Martin Racing during 2004 in partnership with the Oxfordshire engineering group Prodrive, which is headed by former rally co-driver Dave Richards. Starting with the DBR9 and following in 2012 by the Vantage GTE, the team has been a success, taking several class victories in endurance racing

across the globe, including the 24 Hours of Le Mans five times.

Yet Bez didn't just support Aston's racing activities from the trackside but also from the driving seat too. During his 13 years at the helm, the German competed in the gruelling Nürburgring 24 Hours six times, initially with a V8 Vantage N24 in 2006, 2007 and 2008 which was followed by a V12 Vantage RS in 2009, a V12 Zagato two years later and finally a unique Rapide S in 2013. A hybrid that could run on hydrogen or petrol, Bez made history by driving the first ever zero CO2 emissions lap in an international motor race. "We're at least five to seven years away from seeing it in a road car," said Aston Martin's special projects and motorsport director, David King, at the time, "but running it successfully in a race car can only increase interest and awareness."

Prodrive's David Richards and Bez would have an even closer relationship when the former headed a consortium of investors that bought Aston Martin from Ford in 2007 for £475 million. "This is an incredible opportunity – Aston Martin is one of the world's most iconic brands," said Richards. "We are confident we now have all the right ingredients to take Aston Martin to even greater heights."



▼ Ulrich Bez with his Aston Martin Rapide in 2011



Bez's push for Aston to return to racing culminated in the DBR9 winning the GT1 class at the 2007 24 Hours of Le Mans





David Richards (left) is congratulated by Ulrich Bez during the March 2007 announcement that he was leading a consortium to buy Aston Martin as Adnan A. Al-Musallam, chairman of Investment Dar of Kuwait, and Mustafa E. Al-Saleh, managing director and CEO of Adeem Investment of Kuwait, look on

Despite Richards becoming chairman, Bez was retained as chief executive. During a 2007 interview, the former said that little had changed since the takeover. “Ulrich has day-to-day control of the company like any chief executive,” explained Richards. “My job as chairman is to represent the shareholders’ interests. I’ll need to understand a lot about the company’s workings and help direct its strategy.”

Always affable and his enthusiasm infectious, it was Bez’s personal connections rather than any professional ones that often led to new opportunities. After sharing judging duties at the 2001 Pebble Beach Concours d’Elegance with Andrea Zagato, it was the start of re-establishing Aston Martin’s long and previously successful association with the Italian carrozzeria. The resultant DB7 Vantage-based Zagato coupe and AR1 roadster from 2002 and 2003 respectively were the first Aston Martins designed by Zagato since the Eighties. They would lead to another in 2011, the V12 Zagato.



Bez (left) with Aston’s director of design, Marek Reichman, and the Cygnet during the 2011 Geneva Motor Show

And when the Aston Martin and Toyota teams had garages next to each other at the 2009 Nürburgring 24 Hours, Bez and the Toyota Motor Corporation’s president, Akio Toyoda, struck up a friendship that resulted in the Cygnet, a Toyota IQ with an Aston grille and more luxurious interior. Although arguably the strangest car in Aston’s history, it would help the company beat impending fleet emission targets from 2012.

“The offering of a Cygnet with a DBS, DB9 or Vantage,” said the CEO at the car’s announcement, “is a unique combination of opposites and a novel transport solution allowing intelligent and sensitive mobility on an exclusive and innovative level.”

So close were Bez and Toyoda, they even swapped racing cars at the ‘Ring for the ninth round of the racetrack’s VLN series in October 2011. Bez drove a Lexus LFA while Toyoda took the reins of an Aston Martin V12 Zagato. “Other company bosses meet on the golf course,” commented Bez, “we race together”.

Ulrich finally retired from Aston Martin in 2013 aged 70, initially remaining as an ambassador for the brand he’d worked so hard to build up.

He next joined Alset Global – the hydrogen specialist that had helped develop his 2013 Rapide race car – as non-executive vice-chairman in 2014 and then Magnis, an Australian-based company in the lithium-ion battery sector, three years later as a non-executive director. More recently, in 2020, it was announced he was becoming chairman of the revived Bizzarrini brand.

Although Aston Martin sales had slipped to 3,800 by 2012, Bez still left the company in an arguably healthier place than when he joined it 13 years earlier. Not only was there a new factory and increased model range, but thanks to the investment in both its technology and brand image, the cars are no longer seen as old-fashioned and niche vehicles but genuinely exciting players in the sports car market.

Aston will have other visionary and talented CEOs leading the company in its future, but it’s doubtful any will be the driving force that Dr Ulrich Bez always was. **AMD**



MODEL PROFILE

DB7 GTS

TOUGH APPROACH

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY PAUL WALTON



Commissioned in the mid-Nineties by Aston Martin's largest dealer in response to the forthcoming Jaguar XK8, the GTS made the DB7 much more muscular in appearance. We talk to the company responsible for it before driving a rare example



MODEL PROFILE

DB7 GTS

THE THREAT posed by the XK8 to the DB7 when it went on sale in 1996 was a sizeable one. Whereas the Aston Martin was now three years old and its Jaguar-sourced chassis and running gear were older still, the V8 sports car was largely all new. Add in that the new car was also considerably cheaper and it's surprising the DB7 found any buyers at all.

Aston's dealers understood this but while the majority were helpless to defend the DB7 against this new home-grown enemy, one commissioned a series of simple yet effective aftermarket modifications that would help maintain the car's desirability.

They were the idea of Derek Campbell from Aston Martin Sales of Mayfair (now

Stratstone). With seven dealerships across the country (including the prestigious Berkeley Street in the heart of London), it was Aston Martin's largest franchised dealer and therefore had plenty of clout. Knowing the new XK8 would rob the now three-year-old DB7 of sales, Campbell asked Sales of Mayfair's outsourced bodyshop, Car Care Works (today called Chiltern Aston Centre), located a few miles outside Hemel Hempstead, to develop a series of updates for the car that would be later called the GTS.

"The brief from Derek was to make the DB7 'look more purposeful,'" Chiltern's Gordon Wyles, who was closely involved with the project, tells me. And so the standard alloy wheels were swapped for Speedline Alessio five-spoke split rims





while the window quarters and scuttle panel were now body colour. Inspired by Aston's racing cars of the Fifties, a yellow band was added around the grille plus a coachline down its side.

"We were asked to do one with two broad 'Viper' stripes," continues Gordon, "but it looked appalling. The car was displayed in one of Mayfair's showrooms but when a senior director walked past, he said simply, 'I don't think so.'" Thankfully it remained a one-off.

The most noticeable change was a pair of Zagato-styled twin bonnet bulges with integral air louvres. Not only did these look good but they also helped solve the DB7's under-bonnet heating issues that Gordon says were causing spark plug and coil failures.

The bulges were made from carbon fibre, but the Car Care Works team initially had difficulties bonding them to the steel bonnets of the later cars. It was only

achieved when, by pure coincidence, a retired Boeing engineering director, whose entire working life had been spent bonding dissimilar materials, happened to be visiting the showroom for something unrelated.

"I was talking to her husband, explaining how we were having an interesting time joining carbon fibre to steel," Gordon tells me, "when he said, 'This is just the woman to talk to!' She explained if we did this, this and this and used certain products it was completely doable." Gordon says by following her lengthy but accurate instructions, the issue was finally resolved.

The DB7's plastic eggbox grille was then swapped for an aluminium mesh. The inspiration for this came from a famous source. "We happened to have Old Number 1, the 1929 and 1930 24 Hours of Le Mans-winning Bentley Speed Six, in our showroom at the time," explains Gordon. "I said why don't we make a mesh grille similar to Old Number One's with an aluminium surround and then set it back slightly?" The result was a handsome and sportier look that would influence a generation of cars (and still does).

The car's interior was left largely alone although the dials were now white and the speedo and rev-counter featured the GTS logo. There was also a new wood-rimmed steering wheel plus aluminium gear knob while a Garrard analogue clock was fitted in the centre console. ▶

MODEL PROFILE

DB7 GTS



Other than a sports exhaust, mechanically the car was left standard.

Pleased with the result, Sales of Mayfair ordered seven examples, one for each of its dealers, as a showpiece for their showrooms.

Due to the aesthetical and commercial success of these changes, Mayfair began offering them to customers of both new and used cars, coupes and Volantes.

In 1998 Car Care Works introduced a series of new updates under the GTS II name that again were available from Sales of Mayfair. These included four circular rear lights from the supercharged Vantage that were cleverly set into a panel the same shape and size as the Mazda-sourced originals. The wheels were now the even racier body-coloured split rim Speedline Mistrals with the GTS logo in the centre. There was also the option of a slatted stainless steel grille similar to that fitted to both the later DB7 Vantage and V8 Vantage.

The brakes were updated to six-piston calipers plus 14in cross-drilled discs with a choice of pad material including normal, racing and reduced dust depending on usage.

Finally, the interior had a few more aluminium accents including for the air-conditioning controls and around the door handles. These Mazda-sourced handles – which Gordon tells me always break – were also rebuilt using a higher quality of materials. Chiltern says around 50 DB7s have been converted into GTS and GTS II spec which includes a small number of Vantages.





MODEL PROFILE

DB7 GTS



Judging by the example seen here, Gordon's own GTS II in Balmoral Green, it's clear the Car Care Works team met Derek Campbell's request of making the DB7 more purposeful. The five-spoke wheels and bonnet bulges help make the usually elegant coupe appear much more muscular. Similar to those used by the Ferrari 550 and McLaren F1, I also reckon the circular rear lights are classier than the Mazda 323F originals.

It's not known if Aston Martin Racing took inspiration from the GTS, but the yellow band around the nose is identical to that of the DBR9 from 2004 plus the V8 Vantage GT2 four years later. Together with the later style of slatted

grille, the yellow band helps make the DB7 appear both younger and sportier than it actually is.

Other than the later DB7 Vantage steering wheel fitted to this car, the interior is largely standard although the extra aluminium gives the car's usually cheap-looking cabin a much-needed lift.

The small handful of DB7s like Gordon's that were fitted with the Getrag five-speed manual transmission already feel livelier and more responsive than those with the slow and dim-witted automatic. But the sharpness of the GTS II's updated brakes together with the fruitier exhaust bark further transform the DB7 from a grand tourer into more of a nimble sports car.

The DB7 might have been one of the prettiest cars of the Tenties, but until the V12-engined Vantage arrived in 1999 its dated running gear meant it was soon left behind by the Jaguar XK8 plus other newer rivals.

Yet the simple yet effective updates behind the GTS model helped transform the car both aesthetically and dynamically to give it a new lease of life.

The threat by the XK8 might have been sizeable yet ironically its impending launch resulted in one of the best DB7 models in the car's ten-year production run. **AMD**

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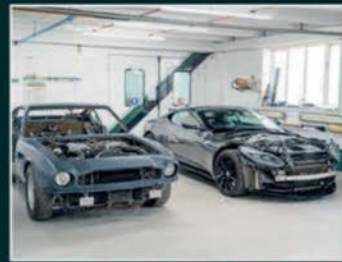
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SHOW-OFF

Not only was this 1950 DB2 Vantage exhibited at the 1951 Earls Court Motor Show but it was built to Vantage spec and then raced in California

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY PAUL WALTON



NO DOUBT everyone who attended the 1951 Earls Court Motor Show stopped to admire the pair of DB2s on Aston Martin's stand, marvelling at their beautiful and voluptuous lines. The model might have been two years old, but due to slow production at the company's Feltham facility, the DB2 still wouldn't have been a common sight on UK roads. Few, though, would have noticed that the engine of the

metallic blue saloon on Aston's stand was uprated to Aston Martin's new Vantage spec that had only become available earlier in the year.

Yet this was an important moment in the company's post-war history since not only did it make the DB2 even more of a sports car, putting it on a par with those from Maranello and Modena, but it marked the start of the company's long history of higher performance models that used the same name. Yet incredibly, this important

show car survives. Chassis LML/50/109 was probably built in late 1950 since from the outset it was fitted with Aston Martin's new and more powerful version of the W.O. Bentley-designed 2.6-litre straight-six that had become an option in the January the following year.

Thanks to a higher 8.16:1 compression ratio and larger SU HV6 carburettors, power was increased to 125bhp over the standard unit's 105bhp. Called Vantage, it was a popular upgrade since just shy of ►

HISTORY

DB2 VANTAGE

250 DB2s (in either saloon or drophead coupe form) of the 411 produced were upgraded.

But unlike the later versions, since it was an upgraded engine only, these early Vantages looked no different nor received any special badging meaning they were identical to the standard cars.

Yet the Vantage motor still made a huge difference to the DB2's performance, which was ably demonstrated on the track. The cars Aston Martin had entered into the previous two 24 Hours of Le Mans were all in this 125bhp state of tune and they performed incredibly well, their best finish being a fine third in 1951. "The performance of these Aston Martins, which are all still running, and looking and sounding as good as ever, is perhaps the outstanding feature of the race," reported *Motorsport* magazine in its July 1951 issue.

The blue car must have initially been used as a works demonstrator since it was kept by the factory and displayed at the British Motor Show in October. "On the 1951 Earls Court stand will be displayed two Aston Martin DB2 saloons," said a company press release before the event, "one fitted with the regular engine and one fitted with the 'Vantage' engine, the high-speed regularity of which was demonstrated so forcibly at Le Mans this year and last."

Amazingly, the second car – LML/50/110 – also survives and it too was later upgraded to Vantage spec.

Following the show, the blue car was exported to California and delivered to a well-known British sports car specialist, Motors International, in March 1952.

One of the mechanics there was a young Phil Hill, already an aspiring racing





driver, who would go on to win the 1961 Formula 1 World Championship with Ferrari. He was also contributing to famed American magazine *Road & Track*, which in late 1951 tested a standard-engined DB2 that had been supplied by Motors International. Hill was so impressed by the car that he bought the example featured, expressing his thoughts to the magazine about it. "The Aston handles as well as any sports car I've driven, far better than any normal passenger car."

Hill was just as complimentary about the power the 2.6-litre engine delivered during a journey to Nevada. "I had the time of my life on the way to Reno – blowing off the best Detroit could offer – not only on the winding roads but on the straights."

The blue DB2 Vantage was first bought by a Mr R.E. Gross from Hollister, a small town located 300 miles north of Beverly ▶



HISTORY

DB2 VANTAGE

Hills, who perhaps bought it on the strength of Hill's report. According to a letter by a later owner, Joseph F. Tanous, the car was then raced extensively throughout the west coast of America including at the Pebble Beach and Golden Gate circuits.

Although the Aston Martin changed hands several times over the next two decades, it stayed in California. Tanous says it was left in a garage sometime in the early Seventies and was forgotten about for 25 years. It was only in 1989 when he rescued the car and immediately started a seven-year restoration that altogether cost just short of \$80,000. Although the work was extensive and covered all aspects of the car, this is still a significant sum for today, never mind three decades ago, especially considering when Tanous sold the DB2 at a Pebble Beach auction a decade later it reached \$56,925.

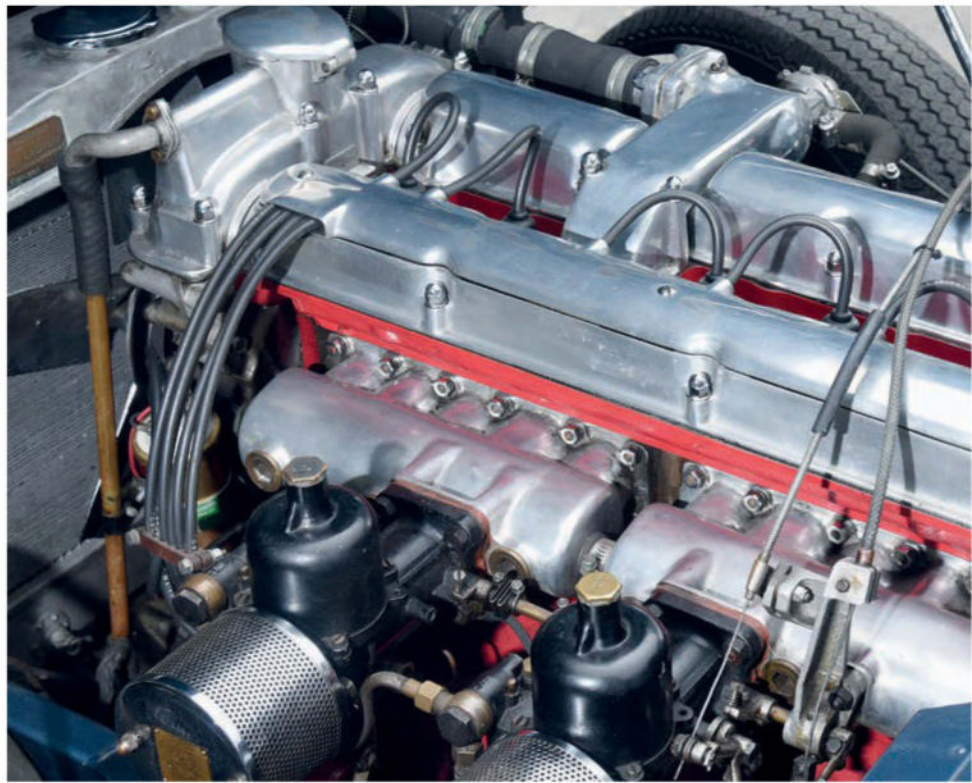
It was bought by a well-known racer in Germany, Robert Leyba, who at the time owned the largest collection of Aston Martins in Europe. The fact that this included several important models such as one of the 1950 Le Mans works cars, VMF 65, plus a rare DB4 GT shows the significance he put on the DB2 Vantage.

During its time with Leyba, the car featured in two German language motoring books, *Englische Sportwagen* and *Aston Martin*. He also travelled to Silverstone with it in 2000 for the 50th anniversary celebrations of the DB2.

Unfortunately, poor health meant Robert had to sell much of his collection soon after and in 2002 the DB2 was put up for auction in the UK by Bonhams.

It was the car's shapely rear that caught the attention of Richard Royle who'd only popped into the sale for a brochure. "We walked in and there it was, the star of the show," Richard tells me. "The lighting really showed off the shape and I thought, 'Well, what is this?'"

Despite being more of a Jaguar enthusiast, still owning an XK convertible, Richard – like his late father before him – had always aspired to buying an Aston Martin and so he was the highest bidder on the Vantage. Yet that wasn't the only Aston Martin he acquired that day. His wife, Michèle, took a fancy to a silver 1954 DB2/4 coupe, chassis LML 666, that



was originally registered to Katherine Martin, the wife of Aston Martin's co-founder Lionel Martin, who is said to have designed the company's first logo. And so Richard secured that too.

They quickly discovered, though, that the silver DB2/4 was in a poor condition and it was sold soon after. But the blue Vantage has been in their ownership ever since. I first saw the car at the AMOC's 2023 concours event at Duxford and was so fascinated by its history that Richard kindly invited me to their Dorset home to learn more about it.

The restoration might have been 30 years ago but it's still in a beautiful condition, no doubt testament to the original high price of the work. And it's not that Richard and Michèle haven't used the car over the last two decades either. It has taken them across the UK for AMOC



HISTORY

DB2 VANTAGE



The blue DB2 Vantage (left) on Aston Martin's stand at the 1951 Earls Court Motor Show

events, to Le Mans several times for the 24-hour race plus a major tour around Scotland which, including the journey there and back, totalled a tremendous 3,000 miles.

But as John Bolster said in a 1952 issue of *Autocar* about the DB2, "Whether one would go shopping, to the theatre, on a long-distance tour or even race at Le Mans, one could have no more perfect companion than the Aston Martin." Seven decades later, that's clearly still true. ▶





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HISTORY

DB2 VANTAGE



Due to a worsening oil leak, the only attention the car has needed in this time was an engine rebuild before the journey north of the border.

It's easy to understand how Richard and Michèle have travelled so many miles in the old car since once you clamber over the wide sill, the interior is surprisingly comfortable considering its diminutive dimensions. There's even room behind the seats for an occasional bench that was an optional extra while the boot is a decent size for a Fifties sports car.

Phil Hill complained in the 1951 *Road & Track* article that the instruments weren't very well marked and it took him, "a couple

of days to become accustomed to them," yet I reckon the dash is clearer than other cars of the era. It consists of just three large dials set into a piece of veneer in the centre of the fascia with a circular panel for the auxiliary controls to the far left.

On the move, the 2.6-litre straight-six engine pulls strongly, more so than the 105bhp unit, needing little persuasion to deliver its chunky power.

This is matched by the familiar and distinctive gruff exhaust note that fills the cabin but is never too obtrusive. With direct steering and limited body roll, it's easy to imagine the car racing in California all those years ago.

Although in terms of performance and design, Vantages have come a long way since 1951, it's clear the original set the standard all later versions have followed. From the DB4 version of 1961 to the current V8 model, they all continue what the DB2 Vantage started. Yet what strikes me the most about Richard's car, though, is how much attention it receives. The DB2 might still be a rarity on these roads, but the amount of glances and questions from passers-by reveal it's just as appreciated now as when it was originally displayed at the motor show over 70 years ago. **AMD**

● **Thanks to: Richard & Michèle Royle**

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This particular model has garnered significant attention, as it was featured in an extensive eight-page article in 'Aston Martin Driver' Magazine in November 2022. Its captivating design and rich history have captivated the automotive world, solidifying its status as a standout among Aston Martin's impressive lineup.

BUYING GUIDE

VIRAGE, VOLANTE AND V8 COUPE



VIRAGE VOLANTE V8 COUPE BUYING GUIDE

Discover what to look out for when buying an Aston Martin Virage, Volante or V8 Coupe from the Eighties and Nineties

WORDS ROB HAWKINS | PHOTOGRAPHY MAX EAREY



BUYING GUIDE

VIRAGE, VOLANTE AND V8 COUPE

LAUNCHED AT the Birmingham Motor Show in October 1988, the Aston Martin Virage was a new sleek-looking four-seater GT, despite that under the hand-formed aluminium skin, there was a shortened version (by 306mm in its wheelbase) of the four-door Lagonda's chassis platform that dated back to 1974. And the headlights were from the Audi 100 (some sources state the Audi 200), whereas the rear lights were shared with Volkswagen's Scirocco.

Under the bonnet, there was a 330bhp version of the familiar 5.3-litre quad-cam V8 engine, with a pair of 32-valve cylinder heads designed by Reeves Callaway in the US and equipped with a Weber/Marelli fuel injection and engine management system. The suspension was also

new, comprising double wishbones at the front and a De Dion rear axle located by triangulated radius rods and a Watts linkage. Braking consisted of 302mm-diameter ventilated discs at the front and outboard-mounted 279mm-diameter solid discs at the rear.

With a price tag of £135,000, the new Aston Martin was joined by the convertible two-seater Virage Volante in 1990, which was subsequently changed to accommodate four people. Two years later, the 5,340cc V8 had been stretched by a little over one litre to 6,347cc, increasing the power output to 475bhp, and it was offered as a factory conversion (through Aston Martin Works) to existing owners for around £50-60k (including brake, suspension and bodywork upgrades). The Vantage was also launched, which borrowed the Virage's roof and door skins, and was marketed as

a more powerful Aston under the guise of the twin-supercharged V550 and V600 (the numbers denoting their engines' power outputs).

The history of the Virage does become a little confusing because sales started to dwindle in the mid-Nineties and the model ceased production towards the end of 1995 but was revived and replaced in 1996 by the V8 Coupe, which was pretty much a Virage but with certain panels from the Vantage body, and with a price tag of £139,500.

In 1997, the Virage Volante was changed to simply being called the V8 Volante and became a long-wheelbase model only. By 2000, production came to an end of all V8 models. According to astonmartins.com, only 101 V8 Coupes were manufactured and AML figures state 580 Virage and Volantes (excluding LWB V8 Volantes) were produced.





PRACTICALITY AND PERFORMANCE

Weighing in at almost two tonnes and with a length of 4,745mm (15ft 7in) and a width of 1,918mm (6ft 3.5in), the Virage and V8 Coupe are big and heavy supercars. They are also traditional grand tourers, with 255-320 litres of boot space and a fuel tank capable of swallowing a little over 100 litres of petrol.

For such a large vehicle, the performance figures are impressive. Even the slowest 5.3-litre 330bhp Virage with an automatic gearbox should hit 60mph in 6.5 seconds (5.8 seconds for the manual 'box), whereas one with a 6.3-litre V8 upgrade is down to 5.1 seconds and an increased top speed from 155mph to 174mph.

These supercars of the Eighties and Nineties lived up to their reputation and price tag, offering a level of luxury and equipment that we now expect as standard. Connolly leather upholstery, heated front seats and a driver's seat with a memory function for it and the electric door mirrors, along with air-conditioning, electric windows and a remote alarm were all fitted as standard.

BUYING GUIDE

VIRAGE, VOLANTE AND V8 COUPE

V8 ENGINE

The Tadek Marek-designed all-aluminium V8 engine that was first fitted to the DBS in 1970 continued to power the Virage and V8 Coupe throughout their production lives, albeit with more modern ancillaries. At first, it retained its 5,340cc displacement, and was fuelled and controlled by Weber and Marelli injection and engine management systems. Its capacity was increased to 6.3 litres around 1992, although both engine sizes continued to be available. All engines consist of an aluminium block and heads with cylinder liners and a timing chain.

Aston Workshop warns that the fuel pump can seize, often because of a lack of use (a new fuel pump kit costs around £500), but they have also come across

DIY repairs that create more problems for the fuelling.

Aston Service Dorset says that the engine idles fast from cold and should be left to warm up. "If Drive is engaged too early this can result in damage to the diff mounts and cradle," says Antony Forshaw at ASD. "If the engine idles fast when hot this is generally down to leaks in the engine vacuum system or a pressure sensor fault."

When inspecting the engine bay, look around the aluminium engine block for signs of coolant or oil. There are weep holes on the side of the engine block, which help to indicate whether there are any issues with the cylinder liner seals. If oil is seeping out of a weep hole, the lower liner seal has usually failed, whereas

if coolant has leaked out, the top seal may have failed. Unfortunately, fixing a failed liner seal requires the engine to be removed and stripped. Aston Workshop estimates this job usually costs between £15,000 and £20,000, whereas a full engine rebuild can cost £25,000-£30,000.



VALUES

For a supercar that when new, cost nearly three times the average price of a house, today's used car values can be seemingly very cheap, with prices starting at around £40,000 for an entry-level 5.3, although the convertible Volante does cost more. Anything with a 6.3-litre V8 can command upwards of £100k, but if it's a genuine factory upgrade and not simply an engine swap, then supporting paperwork needs to be present to prove this and to provide evidence the brakes and suspension were also updated.

There are a number of Virage specials to look out for, such as six Shooting Break conversions produced in 1992, roughly half-a-dozen four-door Lagonda Virage Saloons with 300-460mm longer wheelbases and also 10 Virage LE models.

In comparison to other four-seater supercars from the same era, such as the Ferrari 456 GT, the Virage and V8 Coupe are similarly priced.

SPARES

There's a limited range of spares for these models, with hood seals for the Volante, for example, being no longer available according to Aston Service Dorset.

Components that are shared across other Aston Martins are easier to source, such as the engine, transmission and brakes,

but not all parts are available. Aston Service Dorset says that distributor caps, rotor arms and pick-up modules are hard to find and expensive if they are available. Aston Workshop warns that some brake calipers are now obsolete.

TRANSMISSION

A ZF five-speed manual gearbox or a Chrysler three-speed TorqueFlite automatic were initially fitted to the Virage. A ZF six-speed manual from the Vantage was an option on the last cars and the TorqueFlite gained an extra forward gear

in 1993. When the V8 Coupe was launched in 1996, it was only equipped with the four-speed version of the TorqueFlite that had Sport and Touring modes.

Check that the selection of gears on automatics is smooth when changing up and down. On a manual gearbox (autos are more common), listen for the clutch slipping, check the biting point (it's a hydraulically operated clutch) and ensure none of the gears jump out of selection. Gear selection on the ZF may be a little awkward at first when the oil inside is cold, but this should become easier as it

BODYWORK

With aluminium bodywork but GRP bumpers, side sills and a front air dam, many exterior parts are difficult to replace, so check the condition of those on the car. Look for bubbling of paintwork on the aluminium panels, which may suggest it has started to oxidise. This can usually be fixed by rubbing down the affected area to remove the oxidation, which probably won't have created a hole (unlike steel bodywork), before respraying it. However, Aston Service Dorset says that corrosion around the front and rear screen surrounds is common and will probably require the glass to be

removed to fully rectify the problem. Aston Workshop warns that replacement glass and seals are hard to find in some cases, so this can open a can of worms. And delamination of the glass and perishing of the seals can add further problems to corroded surrounds.

Underneath the aluminium and GRP exterior, there's a steel chassis, which can trap moisture (especially where insulation or soundproofing is fitted). Along with any exposed steel underneath the vehicle, these areas can corrode, so if possible, check the sills, outriggers, floors and bulkheads.

ASD has found that the C-post moulding assembly can perish. It takes



quickly warms up – if it doesn't then further investigation is needed.

A Salisbury 4HU differential with Powr-lok limited slip was fitted to all models with a choice of final drive ratios ranging from 3.058:1 to 4.09:1.

"We have seen some of the higher power Vantages push these units to their limits," says Ben Thomson at Simply Performance. "I was told some of the high output supercharged cars had shot peened gear sets to improve the strength. Aside from the normal whines or leaks, the main problem with these are that they can

destroy gear sets and twist shafts on higher power cars. We have rebuilt a number of these units and can supply heavy-duty half shafts as well as replacement shot peened gear sets. We offer replacements or can change ratios for customers depending on their requirements. We also have complete differentials that can be sold for a replacement or even a spare. For a standard rebuild the customer is looking at around £1,000 but this can significantly increase depending on the work we are doing. Anything needed on these axles is no problem for us."

them a couple of hours per side to replace and costs around £550 (per side).

As for the GRP bumpers, side sills and air dam, check for cracks in the plastic exterior, which may have been caused from an impact. Look at the finish of the paint for fading, discolouring and peeling lacquer. If the GRP components are damaged beyond repair, then replacement parts are hard to find.

These models have a few parts bin components on the exterior, so if the rear lights are damaged on a Virage, for example, then as mentioned, they were sourced from the VW Scirocco.

We found new light units at a classic VW specialist for around £130 each, or used units from £20–£50 each. A few examples of similar parts include the door mirrors on the V8 Coupe, which were originally sourced from the Citroën CX, but then from Jaguar. And it's rumoured that the exterior door handles were at some point shared with the Ford Mondeo.



STEERING

With power-assisted rack-and-pinion steering (rumours are that some models were equipped with a rack from a Ford Sierra Cosworth), make sure the steering is smooth to operate when stationary and on the move. Check the column tilt adjustment works and locks. Under the bonnet, look for the power steering fluid reservoir and trace the pipework and hoses to the steering rack and power steering pump, looking for fluid leaks and misting. Parts availability varies for steering components, with a track-rod end costing as little as £30, but most hydraulic hoses and pipes are not available, and those that are can cost over £100 each. Steering rack specialist Kiley Clinton charges around £388 to overhaul a power-assisted steering rack.

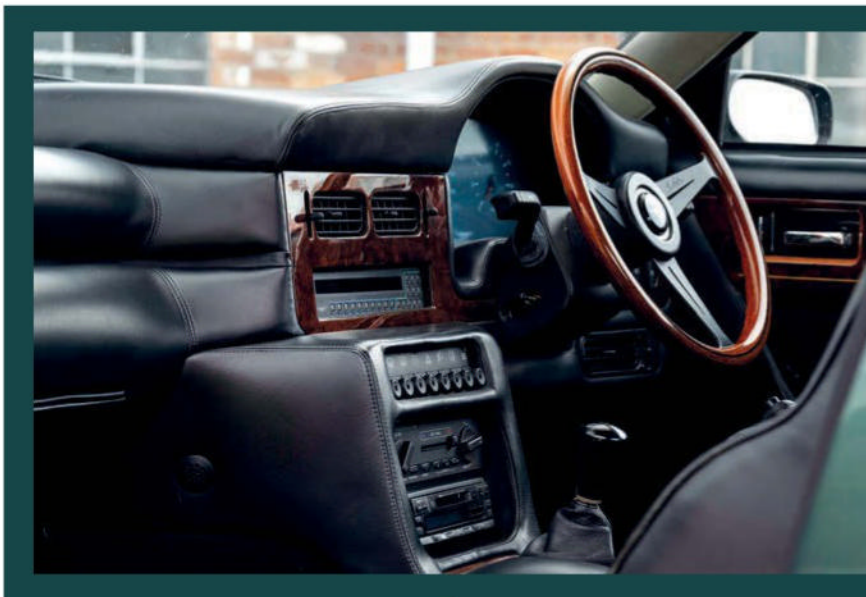
SUSPENSION

The front suspension consists of unequal length upper and lower wishbones with coilovers and an anti-roll bar. Visually inspect the coil springs for fractures and corrosion and the dampers for misting (leaks). Bilstein developed the coilovers for the Virage, but they no longer sell them, although most suspension specialists should be able to strip and overhaul them.

During a test drive, listen for knocks and clonks from around the front suspension, which could be caused by

BUYING GUIDE

VIRAGE, VOLANTE AND V8 COUPE



worn anti-roll bar links, worn suspension bushes or problems with the coilovers. Identifying the cause of these irritating rattles may have you running around in circles and it may be better to replace several components, but costs can easily escalate. A link for the ARB without any bushes costs almost £130 and a complete set of front suspension bushes costs around £500.

At the rear of the Virage and V8 Coupe, the suspension includes a De Dion tube located fore and aft by paired parallel radius arms and transversely by a Watts linkage, along with coilovers. Visually inspect these components for damage and fractures. During a test drive, listen for knocks and similar noise from the rear. Replacement parts are hard to find in some cases, but aftermarket bush manufacturers and suspension specialists may be able to help.

BRAKES

Visually inspect the brake discs through the spokes of the wheels to look for corrosion and wear. Replacements are not cheap, with a pair of rear discs and pads costing over £1,500 and not much less for fronts.

Bosch ABS (anti-lock braking system) was introduced in 1992, so if it's fitted, run the engine and make sure the ABS warning light on the dashboard is displayed when the ignition is switched on but doesn't remain illuminated when the engine is running. Any problems may be

INTERIOR

Closely inspect the condition of the interior because most or all of it will probably be difficult and/or expensive to replace. So look for scuff and tear marks in the leather upholstery, deep scratches in the burr walnut and make sure all electrical equipment works, especially the electrically adjustable driver's seat, the Vehicle Information Centre (VIC) unit and the heated front and rear screens.

Check the air-conditioning blows cold air through the vents and if it doesn't, don't accept that this can be easily fixed with a re-gas, because if the air-conditioning compressor has failed, a new one costs over £800. And check the heater/blower works on all of its settings. If it doesn't, then a new resistor at £230 may be required.

During a test drive, check that the speedometer and all other gauges work. A non-working speedo could be caused by a failed transducer (it converts a digital signal to analogue), which costs nearly £500 to replace, but there are other issues that can cause the speedo to not work, which are shared across other gauges.

There are some common issues with the Driver's Information Module (DIM), which is the instrument panel consisting of analogue gauges. "It can fail due to electrical problems but also quite common now is the rising up of the overlay panel from the main face

of the DIM due to failure of some of the glued surfaces within and this raised overlay can then touch the underside of any of the needles and prevent the gauge from working," explains specialist David Marks. "It is a long and costly job to change the overlay as it involves a full stripdown and subsequent reassembly of the DIM to do so and the parts required are a new overlay and illumination panel as failure of the glued joints on either or both of these will cause problems."

David charges £600 for an overlay, £360 for an illumination panel and £1,026 for the work, which involves everything from dismantling the DIM to reassembly.

The Vehicle Information Centre (VIC) is a separate digital display in the centre console, which can also become problematic. It includes the odometer, a tripmeter, an on-board computer for roughly calculating travel time and warnings for essentials from low screenwash to low fuel and engine oil. The touch panel can degrade, but David Marks sells new ones for £1,140. However, the most worrying aspect is the odometer. It can display a false reading, adding mileage to a car that may not have moved. David can repair this, but will require evidence of mileage (previous MOT data) to ensure a customer isn't attempting to 'turn back the clock'. The work involved is time-consuming and it varies, but prices start at around £3,300 and can easily be more. However, to date, he has repaired 49 VICs, so it's clearly a common problem.

When inspecting a vehicle for sale, operate the touch panel to check that it works and inspect its condition. Check the instruments work, including the speedometer and that the DIM's display is clear.

If you are looking at a Volante, check the operation of the hood. It's hydraulically and electrically operated and, according to Aston Workshop, its control units can fail. Spares are very hard to find, so if there are any issues, find out what needs to be fixed and how much it will cost.

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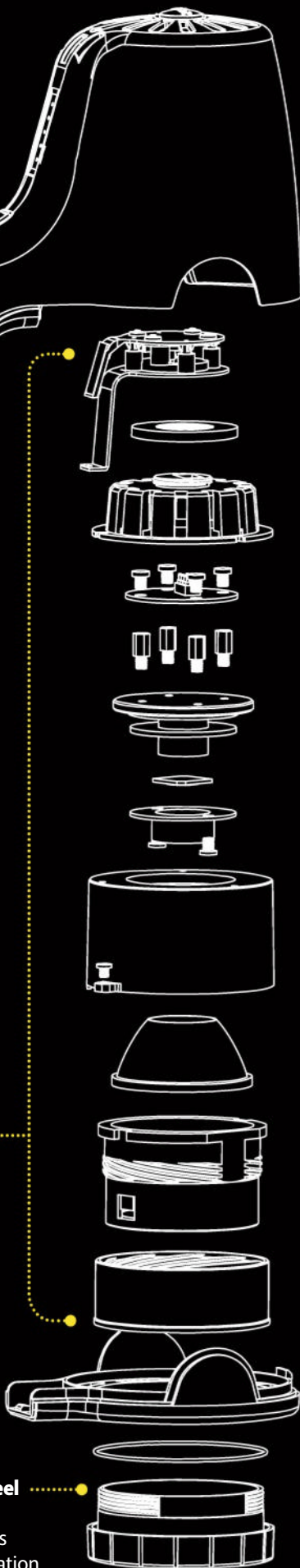
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caused by a failed wheel speed sensor, but replacements are hard to find. Several other parts also seem hard to find, such as replacement calipers, so stripping and overhauling may be the only solution.

WHEELS AND TYRES

A range of 17in and 18in alloy wheels were fitted with five- and six-spoke designs including some manufactured by OZ for the 6.3-litre models. Tyre choices were limited to the likes of Goodyear and Pirelli (e.g. P-Zero) and no spare wheel was fitted in the boot, only an aerosol can.

Check the condition of the wheels, looking for buckling of the rim and corrosion. Look for a four-digit date stamp

on each tyre sidewall to find out when the tyre was manufactured. 0215 for example, means the tyre was manufactured in the second week of 2015. Tyres should be replaced when they are around six or seven years old.

VERDICT

The Virage and V8 Coupe of the Eighties and Nineties isn't as popular or as expensive to buy as many of the Aston Martins that were produced before and after this era. Consequently, demand for spares has dwindled and so they have become difficult to preserve. If, however, you appreciate the nostalgia of their wedgy lines and like the challenge of keeping such

a classic alive, then these supercars that once rubbed shoulders with the likes of Ferrari are rewarding to own and drive.

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HISTORY

DB4 PROTOTYPE



EARLY START

As a prototype and one of the earliest known examples, this 1958 DB4 is an incredibly important car in Aston Martin's long history

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY PAUL WALTON



HISTORY

DB4 PROTOTYPE



IF THE DB5 is a finished painting by a famous grand master, then this DB4 is the equivalent of some early preliminary sketches. Although not quite the finished article, it's a close and important representation of what was to come.

As an early prototype, it not only played a significant role in the DB4's development but helped to lay down the groundwork for what's still considered to be Aston Martin's most famous and iconic car, the DB5.

First registered as 4 SMU on 17 October 1958 to David Brown Industries Ltd, the Wedgewood Blue DB4 with chassis number 107/R was the seventh of 15 prototypes built in the late Fifties to develop Aston's all-new model.

As well as the many non-standard parts fitted to the chassis that were found when the car was restored in the mid-2000s, it was also later given fully framed door

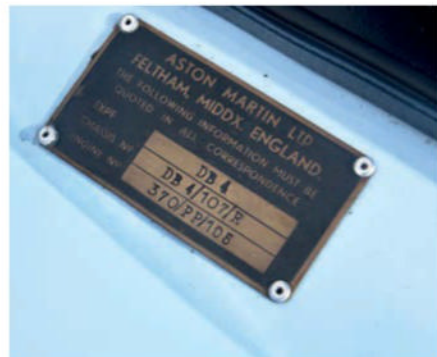
windows plus electric side glass, neither of which the DB4 had until the slightly updated Series 2 arrived in January 1960.

According to the buff-coloured log book, ownership of the car was transferred to Aston Martin Lagonda Ltd in August 1960 when it became a works demonstrator.

The blue car wasn't the only one of these early prototypes to be used for publicity. Chassis 102/L became the French demonstration car, 105/L was displayed at the 1959 Geneva Show before staying in Switzerland while 106/L was sent to New York. As with the first DB4 made – 101/R – incredibly all of these other early examples have survived.

It was as a demonstrator when 107/R made a brief appearance in the 1960 British film *Too Hot to Handle*. Although fleeting, Jayne Mansfield's character, Midnight Franklin, can clearly be





seen climbing out of the driver's seat. Insignificant compared to the DB5's future starring role in several James Bond films but it was proof of both the car and Aston Martin's growing celebrity status.

Aston Martin's chairman, (Sir) David Brown, it said to have also used 107/R during this time. As the first Aston Martin to feature Touring's lightweight Superleggera construction plus Tadek Marek's all-new 3.7-litre straight-six engine, which together put the car in the same high-performance league as Ferrari, Maserati and Mercedes-Benz, Brown was always very proud of the model. "The DB4 was a completely new and a very brave and expensive step," he mused in Geoff Courtney's 1978 book, *The Power Behind Aston Martin*.

The chairman had first driven a DB4 in mid-1957 when the company's chief engineer, Harold Beach, had taken the original prototype to Brown's farm in the Cotswolds for assessment. "The car went really well and Brown was thrilled," continued Beach in Courtney's book. "It was fantastic, in a completely different world from the roadholding points of view in particular. When David Brown had finished, he said to me, 'This is a very promising motor car.'"

Chassis 107/R was initially fitted with what's now considered to be the earliest



HISTORY

DB4 PROTOTYPE

known version of the 3.7-litre straight-six, 370/PP/105 (the PP standing for pre-production). Although different engines were later trialled, when the 107/R was finally sold in February 1961, the original unit was put back and remains in the car.

According to the car's original buff-coloured log book, the next owner was a Jonathan Saul of Workington, Cumberland. He kept the DB4 for five years before selling it in June 1966 to a well-known car dealer, Robson & Everard, based in Gosforth, Newcastle upon Tyne. Saul, though, paid the princely sum of £5 to retain the car's original and distinctive 4 SMU numberplate, transferring it to an Alfa Romeo (it's currently on a 2016 Smart FourTwo). The blue DB4 was then given the less memorable YJR 968 instead.

When the prototype was sold a few months later, it was to another automobile dealer, Mr Don Carr of Central Garage, North Shields, although it's believed the car was used for a short time as his personal transport. An invoice from 26 October 1966 reveals it received a full engine rebuild by Aston Martin which cost £590 plus another £39 to have the suspension recommissioned.

The still blue DB4 was next bought in June 1967 by one of Carr's friends, a local dentist called Raymond Stanger. He used



The car's brief appearance in the 1960 film, *Too Hot to Handle*



This image was taken During the car's time as a works demonstrator when it still registered 4 SMU



The poor state of the chassis was revealed during its restoration in the mid 2000s



the now nine-year-old car to drive the ten miles between his home in Newcastle and his Tynemouth dental practice. Although living in St Kitts at the time, Raymond's son, David, bought the car from his father in 1973 for £400, using it whenever he was visiting the UK.

In April 1974, David instructed a Spennymoor-based garage, H. Raine & Sons, to repair several now-rusty areas such as all four wings, the offside jacking point plus the door frames before repainting these areas. The rear bumper was also removed and sent away to be rechromed.

The car received more bodywork repairs in 1987 when it was also given a full metal respray plus further structural work to the chassis. Now living in the UK full time, David drove the DB4 regularly but due to it needing a full restoration, it was placed in storage during the mid-Nineties.

Almost 40 years after his father had first bought the car, David sold the DB4 in 2006 to established marque expert Aston Workshop. Although over the years the prototype DB4 had received whatever needed to keep it on the road, it was largely original and therefore retained many of the original features such as the powered windows.

It was only after the car was stripped that the many differences below the surface were found. For example, it was clear that several alternative positions for the Watts linkage had been tried plus other redundant brackets and mounting points were discovered along with numerous superfluous holes that had been later plug-welded or just left unfilled.

The car might have been complete but it was in a terrible state. Several areas of the chassis needed to be repaired such as both front outriggers, jacking points and front suspension supports. The complete rear suspension supporting structure also needed replacing as did the legs that lead backwards under the boot floor.

The sills, A- and B-posts, windscreen frame, rear window frame and boot aperture all needed to be replaced. The door frames were also reconstructed and the doors themselves reskinned.

That prototype engine was also rebuilt using as many of the original parts as possible. The gearbox and suspension

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HISTORY

DB4 PROTOTYPE



were then recommissioned. Finally, the seats, door cards, dashboard undertray and radio console were then reupholstered in beige leather.

After the body had been repainted in the original Wedgewood Blue, the car was then reassembled in time for the 2007 Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance before being sold.

Following being with the same local owner for several years, the DB4 is now for sale through Aston Workshop where I've travelled to see it. Although its restoration was over 15 years ago, the light blue paint looks as resplendent as the day it was applied, the bright if old-fashioned colour a perfect match for the DB4's always elegant lines. Together with its unmarked chrome, on the surface it looks to be the perfect example of a standard DB4. Only the door frames and buttons for the electric windows in the door cards

set it apart from a standard example. Yet there's more to the car than its admittedly important status as a pre-production model with a full history. Since the DB5 was a direct development of the DB4, this early prototype helped lay the foundations for one of the most famous cars ever

produced. And so, like those preliminary sketches for a grand master painting, without this early DB4 there would be no DB5 as we know it. **AMD**

● **Thanks to: Aston Workshop**
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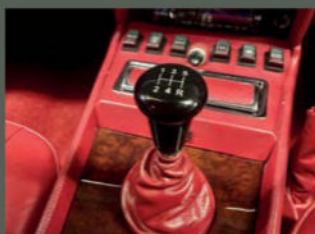
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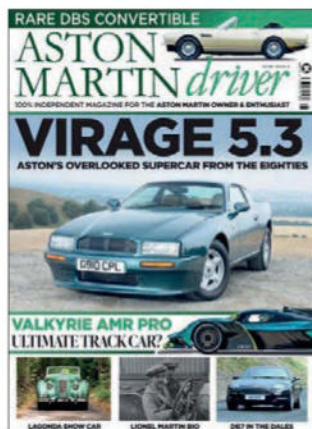
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RIDE OF THE VALKYRIE

With Aston Martin recently announcing the Valkyrie supercar is to enter the World Endurance Championship, Matt James looks at its chances





There is no question that the World Endurance Championship – which is crowned by the Le Mans 24 Hours – is experiencing a boom time and Aston Martin has now confirmed its intention to return to La Sarthe and battle for outright honours.

The recent announcement of a new programme with the Valkyrie sports car has created a fervour of excitement and has added yet another top-flight brand to the grid. Aston will take on the likes of Alpine, BMW, Cadillac, Ferrari, Lamborghini, Peugeot, Porsche and Toyota as it aims for what is arguably the biggest prize in motorsport.

There is a very good reason why sportscar racing is flourishing right now. The two governing bodies of the globe's premier sportscar classes – the Automobile Club de l'Ouest in Europe and IMSA in the United States – showed a rare outbreak of common sense at the start of 2020 and announced a set of rules which would be jointly applied across both series. It ended years of disparity between the two competitions.

The new rules, called LMDh, centred around hybrid cars with entrants able to either design their own systems or use a raft of off-the-peg internals to help shortcut the process. The desire to turn the spotlight on efficient racers at the cutting edge of technology, added to the added appeal of being able to race the same machine in both the World championship and the American series, ►

MOTORSPORT

VALKYRIE

had manufacturers flocking. It was a remarkable reversal of fortunes for a category which had been in the doldrums since the latter part of the last century. Covid played its part in delaying the implementation of the rules, but the start of 2023 was the first glimpse of the fresh dawn for sportscar racing. With such names as Porsche and Ferrari on the grid and with many other high-profile makes on the way, Aston Martin found it impossible to ignore and has confirmed that it will have at least one car battling in the World Endurance Championship in 2025 as well as an assault in the USA, plus the possibility of an extra entry at Le Mans.

Unusually, though, the Aston entry will not use hybrid technology and will be one of the last purely internal combustion-engined entries (alongside a car from American boutique constructor Glickenhaus, whose participation is still in doubt).

Le Mans still stands as Aston Martin's greatest success in motorsport when Carroll Shelby and Roy Salvadori swept to victory in the glorious DBR1/300 machine in 1959. Since then, there have been some half-hearted (and part-factory-supported) efforts to recapture glory. The last attempt at outright victory with partners Prodrive in 2011 with the Aston Martin AMR-One was a disaster with both cars sidelined with engine failure after a combined total of six laps. Since then, Aston has successfully plied its trade in the GT classes with the DBR9 and the Vantage, but now times have changed. And so too, significantly, has Aston Martin.

With Canadian billionaire Lawrence Stroll at the helm, motorsport was always likely to be pushed up the radar. He bought the brand and immediately took it back into Formula 1 with a five-year plan to conquer the discipline. But the firm's bread-and-butter is sportscars, and sights have been set on Le Mans.

As Stroll explains: "Performance is the lifeblood of everything that we do at Aston Martin, and motorsport is the ultimate expression of this pursuit of excellence. We have been present at Le Mans since the earliest days and



through those glorious endeavours we succeeded in winning Le Mans in 1959 and our class 19 times over the past 95 years. "Now we return to the scene of those first triumphs aiming to write a new history with a racing prototype inspired by the fastest production car Aston Martin has ever produced.

"Aston Martin's return to the pinnacle of endurance racing will allow us to build a deeper connection with our customers and community, many of whom found their passion for the brand through our past success at Le Mans."

The self-proclaimed 'fastest Aston ever built' is the stillborn Valkyrie racing machine. The Valkyrie was born when Aston Martin was a supporter of Red Bull's Formula 1 programme and benefited from design genius Adrian Newey's input. The initial plan when the car was unveiled in 2019 was that it would be the ultimate trackday machine with the later derivative, the AMR Pro, being dedicated for track use only.

As well as input from Red Bull, the first machines benefited from the input of race car building experts Multimatic, which was the driving force behind the victorious Ford GT endurance racing programme too. The Valkyrie project stuttered from a sporting perspective and, despite a declaration that it would aim to race at Le Mans in 2021, it was mothballed. It is ironic, therefore, that the sportscar world shifted around the Aston to now make it an ideal machine for the World Endurance Championship, IMSA in the US and the Le Mans 24 Hours. It will shed its

original production-based supercar roots and head instead down the pure-bred prototype route, much like the offerings from the other leading firms.

Speaking to Autosport, Adam Carter, the head of Aston Martin's endurance racing division, explained that the jump into the sport isn't that daunting with the groundwork that Aston had begun almost five years previously.

"The AMR Pro is essentially a Le Mans Prototype that someone can go and buy and use as a track car – it is a 1000bhp, 1000kg racing car with LMP1 performance," he says. "We were able to develop the Valkyrie to the prototype rules sub-set because the new race car is based off the AMR Pro, which gives you a number of opportunities." Power for the Valkyrie Le Mans programme,



which will be based at the new Aston Martin F1 headquarters on the outskirts of the Silverstone circuit, will come from a bespoke V12 6.5-litre motor which was originally developed for the trackday car. The first running will be done with the original AMR Pro while the new machine is created, which means the firm can virtually hit the ground running. The Le Mans challenger itself should break cover early next year before it goes through the homologation process, with the race debut scheduled for the Daytona 24 Hours in January 2025.

In line with many of the leading firms' programmes, the Aston Martin endurance programme will be run by a partner team. Porsche co-opted the American powerhouse Penske to operate its machines, while Ferrari relies on its close relations with the AF Corse squad to operate its 499Ps. Aston has tied up with a US-based squad called Heart of Racing to run the programme.

It is a relatively new squad which is run by US-based ex-pat Briton and racer Ian James in 2020. The team, founded by American philanthropist Gabe Newell, cut its teeth fielding cars in the GT divisions and finished seventh in the GTE Am division of Le Mans this year with a Vantage AMR and it took a class win at the Daytona 24 Hours earlier in the campaign. It has strengthened its alliance with Aston and has exclusively run its products for the last three seasons.

Despite its relative lack of experience, Heart of Racing has quickly established



Aston Martin's disaster at Le Mans in 2011 with the AMR One

its credentials. James said that the experience of blending together the team from ground zero has enabled it to run in a very slick way.

"Starting this programme, it was a blank sheet of paper, so I was able to look back on the last 20 years of who I'd worked with in racing and considering who'd fit best," says James. "It wasn't their credentials or who they worked for that interested me, but who I thought would work together best. Our team owner, Gabe Newell, really supports this approach and wants to have fun—in a personable group—that is also very competitive."

Being competitive has meant that Heart of Racing is in the right place at the right time to capitalise on the fresh impetus from Aston Martin. The weight of taking such a famous brand back to Le Mans is not lost on James.

"We understand and are aligned with the ethos of the brand and we have developed our own systems and technologies to extract the maximum performance of the cars we compete

with," adds James. "Our understanding of the Valkyrie is strong and we have worked closely with it through our customer activation programmes for two years now.

"The Heart of Racing team has big ambitions in endurance racing, and this is absolutely the right time to step into the top class of the World Endurance Championship and IMSA and challenge for overall honours.

"This is not an easy target, but between our partners and the support of Aston Martin Performance Technologies, it is one we have all the tools and capabilities in place to hit the bullseye with."

While Heart of Racing has a full roster of drivers for its GT programme, it is likely that the programme will look for some headline experienced names for the Hypercar foray.

Highly experienced Aston Martin racer Darren Turner is allied to the firm and to the Heart of Racing team, as are Britons Ross Gunn and David Pittard. They might be in the right place to capitalise, but the whole operation is tight-lipped on the potential of the line-up at the controls.

What is certain is that whoever handles the Valkyrie will have the spotlight turned up to maximum as Aston Martin aims to roll back the years to its 1959 success. It might have taken a long time to materialise, but this is a realistic shot at overall glory on the international stage and at Le Mans. **AMD**



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AUTHORITY FIGURE

With its origins going back to the late Sixties, R.S. Williams Ltd is one of the most established, experienced and esteemed Aston Martin specialists in the world. We head to its Surrey premises to learn more

PREVIOUSLY LOCATED in South London and now based in a leafy corner of a Surrey suburb is a genuine Aston Martin institution.

Founded in 1968 and based in its current location since 1989, R.S. Williams' unrivalled history and experience has seen it become one of the world's most established specialists in the British marque. Look through the history of Aston Martin's most famous individual cars and many – if not all – will have passed through Williams' workshop at some point.

The company was founded by Richard Stewart Williams who started his career in 1960 when he completed an apprenticeship at Aston Martin when it was still based in Feltham. Yet it could have been another British marque he chose since he was just as interested in AC Cars located down the road in Thames Ditton. "When I left school at 15," said Richard during a 2013 interview, "I applied for an apprenticeship to both and got the job at Aston. Thank heavens."

Following Richard completing his apprenticeship and while still at the factory, he met a certain Peter Sellers who offered him a job looking after his own cars. Richard would stay with the British film star for six years before branching out on his own, opening Richard Stewart Williams Ltd in 1968

R.S. Williams' small but well-lit showroom at the front of the facility



in a railway arch in Brixton, South London. Thanks to his experience at Feltham, from the outset he always planned to service, restore and prepare Aston Martins.

After leaving business cards under the windscreen wipers of any examples he saw parked across London, Richard's expertise, experience and eye for detail quickly gained him a reputation for perfection, a reputation that continues today. For a car to have any association with R.S. Williams gives it a genuine stamp of approval. "It adds to the provenance," confirms the company's operations manager, Adam Johnson. He goes on to say R.S. Williams has looked after the same cars for years, even after changing owners. "It makes them much easier to work on when you know what's been done to it in the past."

Although Richard sadly passed away in 2021 after retiring six years earlier, little has changed at its leafy suburb base with the company he started still looking after all eras of Aston Martin up to the first generation of Vanquish from 2005. It remains a family business, too, since Richard's daughter, Jacqueline Menzies, has recently taken over the reins as finance director from her mother, Carol.

Many of R.S. Williams' 22-strong staff have been with the company for several years, if not decades, including managing director Neil Thompson who first joined Richard in the Seventies after his father's DB Mk III had been serviced by him. This combined experience is another reason why R.S. Williams has such a good reputation within the Aston Martin community.

"Without the guys who know what they know, we're just the same as any other specialist," says Adam who himself has been with the company for over two decades.

Other than its history, something else that sets R.S. Williams apart from the rest is its engineering facilities. Adam tells me most of the mechanical work (including the engine rebuilds which the company is famed for) is completed on site. There's even a dyno to test rebuilt units before they're fitted back into the cars while well-equipped machining departments can create or repair difficult-to-find parts including engine blocks. "We've only ever

MEET THE EXPERT

R.S. WILLIAMS LTD



RSW managing director, Neil Thompson, has been with the company since the Seventies



A DB4 Vantage midway through disassembly plus a DB5 body-in-white in R.S. Williams' main workshop

had to condemn one cylinder block," Adam tells me. Only panel work and paintwork are handed over to trusted third parties although the cars are still rebuilt by R.S. Williams' technicians.

With the company offering everything from basic servicing to full restorations, on the day of my visit the workshops were full of several beautiful cars. These included a DB4 Vantage halfway through being stripped while a DB5 body-in-white was being prepared for paint. There was even one of the 15 2-Litre Sports being restored in the corner while in another workshop there were several DBS and V8 models. With one car coming from Greece and another about to head off to America, it might be based in that leafy suburb, but R.S. Williams is an international outfit.

The company also offers a full suite of modifications, from a 7.0-litre V8 conversion to 4.2 and 4.7 6 Cylinder engine rebuilds to many suspension and brake upgrades, some of which stem from R.S. Williams' extensive racing experience.

"As an example, the DB5's front anti-roll bar was originally half an inch thick," says Adam, "but we automatically upgrade that to an inch. The springs are also 30 percent stiffer and together this really improves the handling."



The chassis of a rare 2-Litre Sports is being reassembled after restoration

Motorsport has always been central to the R.S. Williams story with Richard originally preparing Sellers' own racing cars in the mid-Sixties followed by the DBR1 and DP212 of Lord Downe. In the Eighties, Richard built a series of DB4 lightweights which were driven to great success by famed endurance racer Mike Salmon.

Richard first went to Le Mans in 1979 when he looked after a Ford-powered De Cadenet Lola for Simon Phillips with a young Ray Mallock with his first taste of driving for RSW. In 1982 he managed the team behind Lord Downe's privately entered Nimrod Aston Martin NRA/C2 in the World Sportscar Championship. Thanks to several strong finishes – including seventh at Le Mans – when the works team retired, it was Downe's outfit that secured Nimrod's third place in the Manufacturers Championship, a feat it repeated the following season.

Following a stint managing the famed Ecurie Ecosse team which saw it take the C2 Junior EC title in 1986, Aston Martin asked Richard to head its new AMR1 programme for the 1988 season of the World Endurance Championship, and so he relocated along with Neil to its teams' Milton Keynes headquarters at Milton Keynes. Despite a few fine finishes – such

as fourth in the Brands Hatch 1000km – with another of its recent acquisitions, Jaguar, also competing in the WEC, Aston's new owner, Ford, pulled the plug on the project in 1989. Richard and Neil reopened R.S. Williams at its current premises in Cobham.

One of its first projects was to build four Sanction II Zagato's that were fully sanctioned by Aston Martin and the Italian design house. This is just one of the many important projects the company has been involved with over the decades.

At the front of the facility is a small, well-lit showroom where there's usually a handful of beautiful cars for sale. However, Adam is keen to stress that R.S. Williams is first and foremost an engineering specialist with a few cars for sale rather than a dealer that also handles restorations. With so much going on, that suburb where R.S. Williams has been based for over 30 years might be leafy but it's clearly never dull. **AMD**

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1982 Aston Martin V8 Volante

Presenting this left-hand-drive 1982 Aston Martin V8 Volante that is finished in a color scheme of Canterbury Blue complemented over a tan interior with Dark Blue piping and Blue carpets. Equipped with 3-speed automatic transmission, V8 engine, front-wheel disc brakes, dual exhaust outlets, Smiths instruments, VDO temperature gauge, option dash pad, power operated convertible soft top, side marker lights, three-spoke steering wheel, "Volante" badging, alloy wheels with Goodyear tires, jack, tool roll, and a full-size spare tire fitted in the trunk. Amenities include air conditioning, dual-side mirrors, forward-folding front seats with head restraints, power windows, sun visors, cigar lighter with an ashtray, glove compartment, center console, and a Blaupunkt radio. Also includes a service voucher with stamps and a copy of the certificate of ownership dated from December, 1984. An exciting opportunity to be a part of a select few to own a piece of British automobile history that is mechanically sound.

For \$99,500



1969 Aston Martin DBS

Presenting this rare 1969 Aston Martin DBS (1 of 181 left-hand drive DBS) finished in a color scheme of British Racing Green complemented with a gorgeous tan interior. Equipped with a 5-speed manual transmission, front-wheel disc brakes, Weber carburetors, Smiths instruments, Lucas ammeter gauge, quad headlamps, dual exhaust outlets, "Vantage" badging, Moto-Lita steering wheel, chrome trim/bumpers, air conditioning, Kienzle analog clock, sun visors, headrests, knock-off wire wheels with Michelin tires, and a full-size spare tire fitted in the trunk. An extremely coveted DBS that is currently not running and is an exciting opportunity to be a part of a select few to own a piece of British automobile history.

For \$98,500



1971 Aston Martin DBS V8 Saloon

Presenting this left-hand-drive 1971 Aston Martin DBS V8 Saloon that is finished in red complemented with a black interior. This rare example is #111 out of only 399 ever produced. Equipped with an automatic transmission, V8 engine, front-wheel disc brakes, dual exhaust outlets, Smiths instruments, Lucas ammeter gauge, quad headlamps, chrome trim/bumpers, dual headrests, Kienzle analog clock, Philips radio, sun visors, "V8" badges, dual-side mirrors, lockable glove compartment, alloy wheels with General XP 2000 V4 tires, three-spoke steering wheel, and a full-size spare tire fitted in the trunk. An extremely scarce DBS to acquire, this is such an exciting opportunity to be a part of a select few to own a piece of British automobile history that is mechanically sound.

For \$79,950



2002 Aston Martin DB7 Vantage Convertible

This 2002 Aston Martin DB7 Vantage Convertible featured with 47,592 miles on the odometer is finished in an elegant color combination of black combined with a tan interior. Equipped with an automatic transmission, V12 engine, four-wheel disc brakes, dual exhaust outlet, black convertible soft top, three-spoke steering wheel, tool kit, "DB7 Vantage" badging, and alloy wheels. Amenities include air conditioning, power-adjustable seats, center console with storage, analog clock in the center of the dashboard, sun visors, an umbrella in the trunk, and dual-side mirrors. In addition to the equipment, this DB7 Vantage comes with an owner's manual booklet and a clean Carfax report. British classic cars are constantly rising in value and this is an excellent opportunity to acquire this exclusive hand-built Aston Martin Vantage that will need some cosmetic work, nonetheless, this classic is mechanically sound.

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2004 Aston Martin V12 Vanquish

Presenting 2004 Aston Martin V12 Vanquish featured with 41,578 miles on the odometer and finished in an elegant color combination of Black combined with a Black and Tan interior. Equipped with an automatic transmission, V12 engine, four-wheel disc brakes, dual exhaust outlet, a three-spoke steering wheel, center console, dashboard analog clock, and alloy wheels. British classic cars are constantly rising in value and this is an excellent opportunity to acquire this exclusive hand-built Aston Martin V12 Vanquish that is mechanically sound.

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TASTE THE STORM



FROM THE CLUBHOUSE



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"A traffic jam on Loch Etive Road" Jonathan Lightbody



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"Car wash" Derek Footman



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From the windswept, scenic drives along picturesque coastal roads to exhilarating track days at renowned circuits, our members traverse the landscapes of their dreams, guided by the unmistakable purr of their Aston Martins. They’ve shared tales of roaring engines, breath-taking landscapes, and camaraderie that transcends the mere ownership of a car.

The AMOC is a fellowship of kindred spirits, a fraternity that extends beyond the mere appreciation of sleek, powerful vehicles. It’s a testament to the enduring allure of these machines and the extraordinary experiences they facilitate. Join us, and you too can be part of this enchanting journey into the world of Aston Martin, where adventure knows no bounds and every moment behind the wheel is a story waiting to be told. To quote a long-standing AMOC Member, “I joined for the cars and stayed for the friends”. **AMD**

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

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£25K CHALLENGE

Which of these two £25k Aston Martins from the early 2000s do we prefer? A late DB7 Vantage or early V8 Vantage?



VIRAGE VOLANTE

A look at the rare, wide-bodied Virage Volante



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Restored during the Covid-19 lockdown, this 1964 DB5 has a fascinating history

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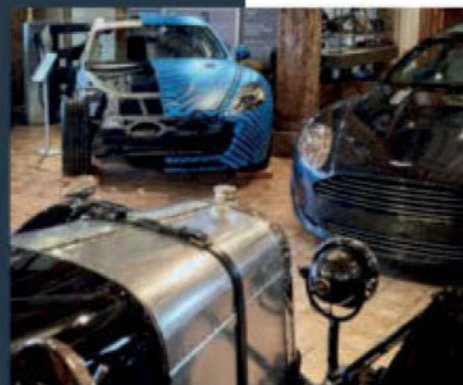
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ASTON MARTIN *drivers*

Peter Collins was one of Aston's most successful drivers of the Fifties. We look at his short career

HANDSOME, CHARMING and universally liked, Peter Collins was the debonair embodiment of the Fifties racing driver. Yet beneath the glamour and the glitz, he was also talented and helped Aston Martin establish itself as a force to be reckoned with in Fifties sports car racing. And if he wasn't such a gentleman, he could have also won the F1 World Championship.

Collins was born in Kidderminster on 6 November 1931. The son of a garage owner, he soon became interested in motorsport and originally competed in trials. His first proper race was at the 1949 Goodwood Easter weekend meeting in a 500cc Cooper-Norton Formula 3 car, a birthday present from his parents. Soon replaced by a newer model fitted with a powerful Manx Norton engine, he took his first victory, the 100-mile race at Silverstone, in July. This was followed by a win at Goodwood in September and several others throughout the following year. He then switched to a Norton-powered JBS for 1951, again winning at Silverstone in September.

A chance meeting with Aston Martin's team manager John Wyer at a party held by former racing driver turned journalist Kay Petre over the winter of 1951/52 was a turning point. After Collins pestered him for a test drive, Wyer relented, putting him into a DB3 at the MIRA test track. By coincidence, the HWM team was also there and Peter drove for both outfits, resulting in two contracts, one for endurance racing, the other in Formula 1 and 2.

It wasn't until June 1952 and the Monaco Grand Prix – which that year was a non-championship event for sports cars – when Collins finally made his Aston Martin debut, finishing a distant seventh in a DB3. His car

then retired from the 24 Hours of Le Mans a few weeks later.

It finally came good for the young driver in September when he and teammate Pat Griffiths won the prestigious Goodwood Nine Hours. The fact that they inherited the victory when two of the three Jaguar C-types and the second DB3 all retired plus the leading Ferrari was delayed due to a battery change didn't matter. By averaging 75.42mph and covering two more laps than the Ferraris in second and third, Collins had made his mark on international racing.



Following several poor results at the start of 1953, things improved following the introduction of the lighter DB3S. Although he again retired from Le Mans, he was a fine third at the British Grand Prix support race at Silverstone followed by second at the Goodwood Nine Hours. "Collins driving like one possessed with a desire to close with the Jaguars, his squealing Avons heralding his coming," said *Motorsport* in the September 1953 issue.

His final outing for Aston that year was the Dundrod TT in September, a circuit he loved, viewing the tricky 7.4-mile County Antrim circuit as a challenge. Despite the foggy conditions and some serious competition, Collins was fast all weekend and together with Griffiths took his second major victory.

Due to the DB3S being overshadowed by the faster Jaguar D-type and Ferrari 375, his results over the next few years were patchy. Winning the support race for the 1954 British Grand Prix – his last for the company – was a rare highlight. It was performances like this why he caught the eye of Enzo Ferrari, signing for the famous Italian team from 1956 onwards.

Collins continued to race for Aston Martin until that year's Le Mans when he and (Sir) Stirling Moss finished second. It was a fine way to end his career with the company.

It was after winning his first Grand Prix at Spa in June and his second at Reims a month later with Ferrari that made Collins a household name. With a second at Silverstone (shared with Alfonso de Portago), by the time F1 reached Monza in early September, he was in with a shout of the championship.

But when the Ferrari D50 of teammate and championship rival Fangio retired with a broken steering arm, Collins stopped and without being asked, offered it to the Argentinian. Fangio would finish second, enough to secure his fourth championship.

The following season was not a good one for Ferrari, but 1958 was better with Collins taking several victories in both endurance racing and Formula 1. These included the 12 Hours of Sebring and the British Grand Prix.

But during the German Grand Prix at the Nürburgring on 3 August 1958, he crashed while chasing Tony Brooks' Vanwall. After being thrown from his somersaulting car, he struck a tree and sustained serious head injuries, passing away later the same day.

Always cheerful, Collins was well liked and his death caused huge grief in the racing community. "Like everyone else," said Brooks in a 2008 interview, "I was very fond of him. Such a pleasant, friendly character." **AMD**

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ASTON MARTIN IN THE THAMES VALLEY



2007 Aston Martin DB9 Coupe finished in Mendip Blue with Pacific Blue and Parchment hide interior with best quality Wilton carpet throughout. 23,000 miles only and a successful competitor in concours events. Recent servicing by Aston Martin in Sevenoaks, most recently in June 2023. Prior to that it has 6 service stamps from Aston Martin dealers and 3 from McGurk. The mileage and condition of this car are closer to a 2020 model, rather than a car of this age. Excellent value at **£39,950**



2006 Aston Martin DB9 Volante, finished in Meteorite Grey with sand beige hide interior and a new Piano black centre console. Fitted with an anthracite grey electric soft top, multi-spoke sports alloy wheels with pale grey callipers, Satellite navigation, air conditioning and a black finish grille. This 2 owner motor car has covered just 63,500 miles from new and has a full service history. A well cared for example, very attractively priced at **£33,750**



1958 Aston Martin DB MkIII, finished in Midnight blue with tan hide interior. This superb example was previously owned by an elderly gentleman and was sold by us to its current owner in 2010. The car has been in regular use ever since with numerous visits to the Goodwood Revival. Various improvements carried out over the past 13 years have included a repaint by Mitchell Motors in 2019, an engine and gearbox strip down and overhaul by Davron in 2014 including an unleaded conversion and an axle rebuild in 2018, thus spending in excess of £60,000 during his ownership. Now in really nice condition and a joy to drive. We believe under-priced. **£175,000**



1955 Aston Martin DB2/4, finished in Elusive Blue with pale grey hide interior with Walnut finished centre dash panel, all in absolutely superb condition throughout. Recently taken in part exchange from a delightful Octogenarian when he purchased a newer car. Previously sold by The Aston Workshop in County Durham, where it was the subject of considerable refurbishment prior to sale. Everything about this car suggests that it has been really well cared-for over a long period of time and whilst it is now 68 years old, it still delivers a nice turn of speed. Realistically priced at **£145,000**



2001 Aston Martin DB7 Vantage finished in Skye Silver with Obsidian Black hide interior with best quality Wilton carpet throughout complimented with the original Walnut trims. This is an exceptionally nice example supplied by us to the 2 most recent owners and during the past 14 years it has covered less than 1,000 miles per annum. The car is superb to drive and is fitted with most available options which include Touchtronic transmission, White dials, heated electric seats, Climate control, big bore sports exhaust, 18" alloys, electric heated seats and a fully adjustable steering column. It is complete with its service records and MOT history and is excellent value for one in this condition at **£27,950**



2002 Aston Martin DB7 Vantage Volante. Finished in Silver with black hide interior and a black mohair electric soft top. Supplied by us to the last owner when it was only 3 years old in 2005 when the mileage was only 25,000. This beautiful motor car has always been garaged and has covered only a further 17,000 miles in his ownership. It has been used solely for high days and holidays and has remained in superb condition throughout. It comes with a full service history and the specification includes Touchtronic transmission, 19" alloys with high speed rated tyres, Up-rated Hifi, alloy pedals and a well-fitting leather hood cover for when the soft top is in the lowered position. From an insurance point of view, these cars have now reached "Classic" status meaning that premiums are generally lower. We consider this car to be excellent value at **£31,950**



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
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
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