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THE ASTON MARTIN STORY

THE EARLY YEARS (1)

Lionel Martin, an early enthusiast of motor racing, set the scene when he laid out his vision for: *“A quality car of good performance and appearance: a car for the discerning owner driver with fast touring in mind, designed, developed, engineered and built as an individual.”*

Martin turned his passion into a business in 1913, when he joined forces with Robert Bamford to sell Singer cars – adapting them for the tough up-hill challenges that formed an important part of early motorsport. The partners wanted to manufacture cars of their own – and a name was needed. Martin regularly competed in climbs at Aston Hill – and with the simple combination of a hill and a driver, the Aston Martin legend was born.

In 1914 Bamford & Martin Limited bought premises in Chelsea, London – and the following March, the very first Aston Martin car was registered. Fitted with a Coventry Simplex side-valve engine, it became known as ‘Coal Scuttle’.

Further growth was, of course, halted by the war. But once peace was restored Bamford and Martin returned to making cars at new premises in London’s Kensington. And, once again, competition success proved the product: in May 1922, an Aston Martin nicknamed ‘Bunny’ broke ten world speed records at Brooklands, averaging more than 76 mph for 16 and a half hours of non-stop running.

In the same year, Aston Martin entered international racing. With backing from racing driver and Brooklands legend Count Zborowski, Aston Martin built two cars for the French Grand Prix.

Lionel Martin left the company in 1925, by which time the Charnwood family had a major holding. In 1926, Lord Charnwood joined forces with Augustus Cesare Bertelli and William Somerville Renwick to form Aston Martin Motors at new premises in Feltham, Middlesex.

Renwick and Bertelli had already designed an advanced single overhead camshaft 1.5-litre engine which, when placed in a new Aston Martin chassis, helped create the legendary International. The International and later Le Mans and Ulster models became regular race winners with class victories at Le Mans among the highlights.

DAVID BROWN ERA (2 A)

The next significant chapter in the Aston Martin story came in 1947 when David Brown bought the company – and the DB era dawned. Brown had a passion for high performance cars and wanted his new marque to win worldwide recognition. That year he also bought another British sportscar manufacturer, Lagonda Company, which like Aston Martin had established a name in early motorsport.

The marriage of Aston Martin and Lagonda made sound commercial and engineering sense, not least because Lagonda had a newly developed 2.6-litre twin overhead camshaft engine just looking for a suitable chassis. Before long, Brown had the solution. In April 1950, the 2.6-litre DB2 was announced and within two years had helped increase Aston Martin Lagonda production six-fold.

Countless class wins at Le Mans and elsewhere fell to the DB2, while the purpose-built DBR1 conquered the world's race tracks in the mid to late 1950s. Under the guidance of team manager John Wyer, Aston Martin won no fewer than six World Championship races, culminating in outright victory at Le Mans and the World Sports Car Championship crown in 1959.

GRAND TOURING (2 B)

In 1958, the stunning DB4 was unveiled with styling by Touring of Milan. The shape and the engine – a 3.7-litre aluminium alloy six-cylinder unit designed by Tadek Marek – were to become Aston Martin signatures for years to come.

Public and press reaction to the new Aston Martin was overwhelmingly positive. The company claimed that the DB4 could accelerate from rest to 100 mph and brake to a standstill in less than half a minute, and it was no idle boast – the car was easily capable of it.

With the announcement of the DB4, Aston Martin had moved up a gear. For years they had produced fast and well-made sporting cars, which had been rightly acclaimed. But with the DB4, Aston Martin was propelled into the top bracket of supercar manufacturers, making cars that were as fast and sure-footed as anything available in the world.

As the DB4 led to the DB5 and DB6 – taking in track success with the DB4GT and film superstardom courtesy of James Bond and *Goldfinger* along the way – so Aston Martin decided to concentrate on road car production.

In 1964, production increased from around 250 cars a year to peak at 591 in 1966 when the DB6 and DB6 Volante convertible went on sale. The name Volante, which means 'flying' in Italian, first came into use here.

The DB6 remained in production until 1970. It was followed by the DBS in 1967 with a 4.0-litre engine and later evolved into the much faster 345 horsepower DBSV8. Production of the DBS and

DBSV8 continued until May 1972 when modified versions appeared under the new name of Aston Martin Vantage and AM V8.

V8 DIVERSITY (3 A)

In 1975 the company was taken over by Peter Sprague and George Minden. There were immediate moves to inject new vitality and a direct result was the appearance of a totally new Lagonda in 1976. With coachwork by William Towns, its strikingly modern appearance and very advanced specification made a considerable impact. Gone were the 1960s curves of the Aston Martin shape and in its place were striking sharp-edged lines.

The following year saw the introduction of the Aston Martin V8 Vantage and a year later a convertible version, the Volante, was unveiled. With a top speed of 168 mph (270 km/h) and 0-60 mph in 5.2 seconds, the new V8 Vantage was the fastest accelerating production car in the world.

In 1986 Aston Martin Lagonda partnered with an Italian style house to create the 186 mph (299 km/h) Vantage Zagato – an exclusive model of which just 50 were built. In the following year, Ford purchased 75 per cent of the company's shares.

In October 1988, the Virage was unveiled. Designed to take the company into the 21st century, this 157 mph (253 km/h), two-door 2+2 replaced the V8, which had been in production for 20 years. 1992 saw an extension of the Virage model range – with a 6.3-litre engine conversion and the debut of the Virage Volante convertible. The hugely powerful 550 horsepower, twin supercharged Vantage was also previewed. Despite a weight approaching two tons, the Vantage dispatched the 0-60 mph sprint in around 4.6 seconds, and if you kept your foot down 100 mph would come up in a fraction over 10 seconds.

DB RETURNS (3 B)

The early 1990s saw a recession hit the UK and sales of the big V8-powered Virage and Virage Volante dwindled, with just 46 cars made in 1991. So it was that in 1993 at the Geneva Show, Aston Martin proudly showed the new DB7, a model imbued with the spirit of the classic DB models of the 1960s. The Aston Martin DB7 was named 'Car of the Show'. That summer Ford took complete ownership of Aston Martin Lagonda, having invested £65 million in the company for the design, development and provision of manufacturing facilities for the DB7.

The DB7 rapidly developed into the most successful car ever built by Aston Martin. Major introductions in 1999 included the launch of the DB7 Vantage and Vantage Volante, powered by a 6.0-litre 420 horsepower Aston Martin V12 engine designed and developed in close cooperation with Ford RVT and Cosworth.

In October 2002, Aston Martin announced the most powerful DB7 model ever made – the 435 horsepower DB7 GT, a sportier interpretation of the DB7 Vantage theme. With more power and torque than the DB7 Vantage, the DB7 GT offered sharper handling and a faster accelerating, more responsive drive.



ASTON MARTIN & JAMES BOND (4 A)

The DB5 owed some of its global esteem to a starring role in the James Bond films 'Goldfinger' and 'Thunderball' – where its 'factory fitted options' included machine guns, a passenger ejector seat, hydraulic over-rider rams and equipment for projecting oil, nails and smoke.

Aston Martin teamed up with James Bond again in the 1987 film 'The Living Daylights' featuring an AMV8 and in 2003, the V12 Vanquish became a well-known car to many people following its appearance in 'Die Another Day'.

V12 VANQUISH (4 B)

Introduced in 2001, the exterior design of the V12 Vanquish owes some of its inspiration to the famous DB4GT Zagato but develops the pronounced curves into a stunningly current shape. It's a classic Aston Martin yet clearly contemporary at the same time.

The aluminium and carbon fibre technology developed for the car's structure is a world first combining dimensional accuracy, durability, efficiency, safety and torsional strength for superior handling. The 6.0-litre V12 produces 460 horsepower, enough to power the Vanquish to a top speed of 190 mph and from 0-60 mph in less than 5.0 seconds.

The 6-speed manual transmission is operated by an electro-hydraulic gearshift that operates without the use of a clutch pedal. In Select Shift Manual, the driver flicks Formula One-style paddles to change gears in under 250 milliseconds.

In the not-too-distant past, Aston Martins created at Newport Pagnell were largely built by hand. Panels were hand formed, lovingly smoothed into shape by a combination of trained eye and experienced hand. In contrast, production of the Vanquish bristles with modern techniques and space age materials. But the Vanquish remains far from mass-produced. Each car takes between 6 to 8 weeks to build and each is built to individual customer specification: no two cars are exactly alike.

DB9 (5)

With production commencing in January 2004, the DB9 is a substantially different car from its predecessor, the DB7 Vantage. Lighter with a more rigid body structure, the DB9 is powered by an all aluminium, 6.0-litre V12 producing 450 horsepower and a top speed of 186mph. The DB9's shape is a modern interpretation of a traditional Aston Martin, the successor to such benchmark designs as the DB4 and DB5.

Using a radical new aluminium-bonded body frame, the DB9 body frame has double the rigidity of many rivals as well as being lighter, resulting in superior handling and agility.

Touchtronic manual mode enables the driver to change gear using paddles mounted behind the steering wheel. The automatic gearchange has been tuned to provide the perfect balance between super-fast operation and comfortably smooth shifts. A conventional six-speed manual gearbox will also be offered.

The agility of the car is boosted by the perfect 50:50 weight distribution. This has been achieved partly by putting the gearbox at the rear. A carbon fibre drive shaft, running in a cast aluminium tube, delivers torque from the engine to the gearbox. Handling is further improved by the light aluminium wishbone suspension and aluminium bodied dampers.

The whole DB9 cabin is hand-finished in premium quality materials giving it a simple and functional feel. Aluminium is used in the interior, reflecting the most commonly used material in the structure and body. Even details such as the instrument dials are made from aluminium. Features include full leather Bridge of Weir upholstery of the highest quality and a state of the art music system specially developed for Aston Martin by British sound experts Linn.

The DB9 manages to combine all facets of style, quality and usability of a traditional Aston Martin without relying on retrospective detail or design. It is a totally modern Aston Martin.



THE FUTURE (6)

The DB9 is the first car to be made at Aston Martin's new high-technology facility in Gaydon, Warwickshire, beginning a new chapter in Aston Martin's history.

"Gaydon is the future of Aston Martin," says Dr Ulrich Bez, CEO of Aston Martin. "It combines cutting-edge high technology with hand-craftsmanship and tradition. It is probably the best facility of its type in the world, and the perfect showcase for how to design and build innovative sports and GT cars for the 21st Century."

The technical facilities at Gaydon are far superior to any previous Aston Martin site. Yet the new DB9 is still very much hand built, with approximately 200 man-hours involved in building the car. That's about three times the time needed to assemble a 'mass produced' sports or GT car.

In January 2003, Aston Martin reinforced the new direction the company is taking by unveiling a spectacular concept car that is destined to become the most significant model in the company's 90-year history.

Previously code-named AM305, the Aston Martin AMV8 Vantage is the basis for a smaller third Aston Martin model, due to be launched in 2005, and will sit alongside the DB9 and the flagship Vanquish. Few details have been released about the engine, although Aston Martin has confirmed that it will be a V8 unit of 4.3-litre displacement. The AMV8 Vantage will also be hand-assembled at Gaydon. While the production aspirations for the AMV8 Vantage is higher than any previous Aston Martin models, the car will still retain a high degree of exclusivity – an important characteristic of the British marque.

As CEO Dr Ulrich Bez says: *"Aston Martin is not about numbers. It is not about market share, volume or even performance figures. It never has been and it never will be. Aston Martin is about individuality, emotions, feelings, passion, personal experience and participation."*