



Aston Martin: DB and beyond

PART 2



DB2 at the 1000 Miglia in Brescia, Italy in 2018.

WE CONTINUE OUR FEATURE ON THE ASTON MARTIN MARQUE, ITS CONTINUING PARTNERSHIP WITH THE JAMES BOND FRANCHISE, MAKING A SPECTACULAR RETURN TO THE WORLD OF FORMULA ONE, AND THE ONGOING COMMITMENT TO THE UBIQUITOUS AND INSTANTLY RECOGNISABLE DB MODELS.

The Dark Years

Sadly, the costs of developing the V8 and a slump in sales would strain Aston Martin's finances and in 1972 David Brown was forced to sell his company to a consortium while bringing production of the DBS series to an abrupt halt. Two years later, the global recession and the introduction of stringent clean air rules in California (one of Aston's major markets) forced the company into receivership.

In the 70s and 80s, Aston Martin strangely abandoned the DB series and introduced several new hybrid versions of the DBS that included the 1976 Lagonda Series 2 (a four-seater car equipped with a V8 engine), undoubtedly one of the more



remarkable although rather boxy Astons ever made.

The true successor to the DBS was the V8 Vantage (1977-89) convertible, which bore many stylistic similarities to its ancestor. Launched in February 1977, the Vantage featured newly designed camshafts, air-box, larger inlet valves and carburetors, new inlet manifolds and claimed to provide an increase in power of 40%

with 10% more torque. It also boasted a fresher, cleaner design that vaguely resembled a cross between a DB5 and a Ferrari Daytona Spyder!

The Vantage V8 featured the same ZF manual transmission as could be found in the Lagonda saloon. This was enough to help the Vantage attain an impressive top speed of 170 mph and a not unimpressive acceleration from 0-60 mph in 5.2 secs.

Though it never attained the popularity of the DB5, the V8 Vantage deserves recognition as not only the UK's first true supercar but also the fastest four-seater production car in the world. It stood as Aston Martin's flagship model of the company from 1977 to 1989 and remains one of the

most sought-after collector Astons, particularly the 580 X pack versions with 16" Ronal wheels.

Sadly, Aston Martin would then spend over two decades desperately trying to stave off bankruptcy and it was not until 1995, after Ford Motor Company purchased the company, that sales of the DB7 model reached 700 units. (In 1982, Aston recorded its worst-ever sales figures when it sold a mere 30 cars and the brand was virtually moribund and suffering from multiple manufacturing flaws and general design fatigue.) Indeed, under the direction of Victor Gauntlett, who took over the reins of Aston in 1980, the carmaker tried and failed to find a new market niche.

DB7 (1994–99)

When Ford took over, the US auto manufacturer tried to revive the DB line with the DB7, which is arguably the ugliest and least recognisably "DB" model ever built. Its smoothed edges and indistinct lines constitute a betrayal of the series yet, strangely, the DB7 turned out to be a huge financial success and saved Aston Martin.

But Aston purists will let you know that the DB7 is an offshoot from an abandoned Jaguar concept (which was also bought out by Ford) albeit refined and given a decent powerplant by Tom Walkinshaw Racing. The car wasn't even manufactured on an Aston Martin assembly line. Rather, it was mass-produced at the old XJ220 factory where 7,000 units of the alien DB species were replicated. Even its more powerful Vantage variant, launched in 1999, used a 5.9-litre V12 that was nothing more than a pair of Ford V6 engines bolted together. The Vantage did, however, deliver on power if not styling: the car delivered a decent but hardly remarkable 420 bhp and could go from 0–60 mph in a very quick 5.2 seconds.



DB9 (2003–2016)

It was not until Aston Martin launched the DB9 that the marque finally came up with a worthy successor to the DB5 and DBS series. The DB9 2+2 was the first car to be built in Aston Martin's new factory at Gaydon in Warwickshire. The successor model to the appalling DB7, the DB9 was considered such a radical upgrade to its predecessor that Aston Martin had decided to abandon its traditional sequential numbering system and skipped the "DB8" designation altogether. Hence the DB9 designation.

The new grand touring car would prove to be the new mainstay of the Aston Martin fleet. It was made available in both coupe and convertible (Volante) models. Designed by Henrik Fisker and Market Reichman, the DB9 was engineered to be lighter with a large part of the components featuring strong and high-quality aluminium as the main material.

The engine for the DB9 was taken directly from the Aston Martin V12 Vanquish. The 5.9-litre powerplant gave the driver plenty of power resource along with excellent acceleration and a feeling of sportiness with all the comforts afforded by its touring classification.

In the years to follow, the flagship DB9 underwent a steady series of upgrades that saw the introduction of the AM11 V12 engine and advanced new carbon ceramic brakes gave the car improved performance with virtually no fade.

The car would become a favourite amongst celebrity owners such as Hugh Grant and is generally considered to have helped restore Aston Martin to its status as one of the world's elite carmakers.



DB10 (2015)

In 2014, as part of its longstanding affiliation with the Bond franchise, Aston Martin began designing the DB10 specifically for Spectre, the 2015 James Bond film. Only ten DB10s were ever built, and it was intended as a 50th anniversary celebration of the iconic DB5 and the release of Goldfinger, the film that launched the historic partnership between Aston Martin and the Bond franchise.

Essentially, the DB10 is a V8 Vantage dressed up with a sleek new body and should not properly be seen as a unique evolution of the DB series. The DB10 was a concept car that was powered by the same 4.7-litre AJ37 V8 engine found in the V8 Vantage S, with a power output of 430 bhp and 361 lb ft of torque.

The DB10 can accelerate from 0 to 60 mph in 4.3 seconds and has a top speed of 193 mph – not that anyone other than Daniel Craig will ever be able to drive it. Indeed, the car was never intended for mass production and only one model, for the sum of £2.4 million – was ever sold – at a 2016 Christie's charity auction benefitting Médecins Sans Frontières. At the time, Aston Martin CEO Andy Palmer commented: 'The DB10 is one of the rarest cars ever created. Only 10 will ever be made and this is the only one that will be made available for sale.'



DBS SUPERLEGGERA AND DB11 (2018–Present)

Today, the Aston Martin line-up is led by its DBS Superleggera and DB11 flagship "gentleman's model", according to designer Miles Nurnberger, who started with Aston in 2014 and was appointed Head of Design in 2018.

The Superleggera and DB11 are both distinctive variations of a superb new design series that helped Aston



Martin set a record of 6,441 cars sold in 2018. Added to this mix is the new DBX SUV that joins the family and is defined by a distinct new iteration of the iconic DB grille.

Meanwhile, the DBS Superleggera will feature as one of the Aston Martin models driven by Daniel Craig in *No Time to Die*, the 25th Bond film set for release this October in Australia. The highly anticipated movie – Craig’s final turn as 007 – will feature the new DBS Superleggera, V8 Vantage and Valhalla models, as well as the iconic DB5.



DB11.

The inclusion of all four models in *No Time to Die* represents a fitting tribute not only to Craig’s tenure as Bond but also to Aston Martin, whose cars are synonymous with the billion-dollar film franchise.

The DBS Superleggera is commonly understood to be the ultimate Aston Martin and the DB model that most authentically reflects the design and performance values of the marque. It sits at the top of the GT series, surpassing the specs of the DB11 and Vantage in Aston’s three-model elite class.

The Superleggera is powered by a front-mounted twin-turbo V12 that develops a massive 715 bhp and 700 lb ft of torque using an eight-speed ZF gearbox. Directly comparable to the Ferrari 812 Superfast, the Superleggera outperforms the Prancing Horse in the key 1800–5000 rpm range where most drivers will be accustomed to driving the beast.

The turbocharged Aston offers 663 lb ft of torque in this range as compared to the “mere” 529 lb ft that the Ferrari 812 can provide, and which requires 7000 rpm to provide that power. One of the fastest cars in its class (excluding limited production supercars), the Superleggera does 0–60 mph in a formidable 3.4 seconds. (By

comparison, the Porsche 911 GT RS clocks a 0–60 time of 2.7 secs and a top track speed of 211 mph.)

Meanwhile, the DB11 is the DB9’s true successor, equipped with turbochargers for the first time in the model line’s history. The 5.2-litre V12 engine is a perfect complement to the car’s futuristic new looks and a heavily improved interior. The DB11 has since been upgraded with the launch of the DB11 AMR model. It brings 30 more horsepower and a vastly improved suspension geometry.



DBS SUPERLEGGERA.

The Aston Martin DBX SUV (2020–...)

The DB series undergoes a minor revolution this year with the extension of the model to the SUV market with the launch of the Aston Martin DBX. The elite SUV boasts a grille that was first seen on a DB2 prototype in 1949, and provides a distinctive and evocative face for the DBX. The SUV sits on an all-new platform that has been designed uniquely for the vehicle and, like all Aston Martin production sports and GT cars, the DBX features double wishbone front suspension combined with a multi-link rear axle, as well as electronic adaptive damping for every wheel.

A worthy SUV variation on the DB line, the DBX is intended to provide the driver with sportscar like handling and performance. The DBX is powered by a 4.0-litre twin-turbo V-8 engine supplied by Mercedes-AMG that develops 542 horsepower and 516 lb-ft of torque and pairs with a nine-speed automatic transmission, also supplied by Mercedes. Aston Martin claims its world class SUV will have a 0–60-mph time of 4.3 seconds and a top speed of 181 mph.

However, earlier this year the company announced that it will be building its own in-house V6 A hybrid model powerplant set to enter

production in 2022. The V6 engine will replace the Mercedes-AMG 4.0-litre V8 that’s currently used in the Vantage, the base level DB11 series and the soon-to-be-launched DBX. Given that Mercedes is committed to rolling out a new series of four-cylinder engines, Aston Martin was left with little choice but to innovate out of justifiable fear that its customers would never buy a car with a miniature powerplant.

According to CEO Palmer: “Mercedes has made no secret of where their engine technology is moving to, and obviously we don’t foresee four-cylinder engines in our Astons. So, we’ve got to make our own journey.”

Palmer has promised that his V6 will generate just as much power as the Mercedes-AMG V8, if not more. “As you move on, you normally expect a power increase, not a decrease. You’re supposed to do that even with a smaller power unit, so there’s no way our customers are going to expect to step backwards.” He added: “The DBX is already showing how we mean to go on. We’re building those cars only for retail and our order book for 2021 is full.”

Of course, with Aston Martin entering Formula One racing in 2021, this could well be a new turning point in the history of the venerable British automaker. Thanks to the investment consortium led by Lawrence Stroll and the £500m in new financing, Aston has survived yet another financial crunch that nearly toppled the marque several times over the last half-century. The introduction of the DBX SUV could well be the latest new model saviour of the brand and help Aston survive and prosper well into this new decade and beyond.



DBX.

This article was written by Jan Janssen exclusively for the National Collision Repairer in Australia.