

CLASSIC DRIVER

Road Test: Aston Martin DB9 Sports Pack



Let's get one thing straight: for all the blether about luxury hotels, trans-European journeys from Gstaad to St Tropez and handmade suits, it's a car's driving dynamics and looks that matter. And the name, of course; 'Aston Martin' being a nice starting-point...

Aston had loaned us one of the latest '09-model manual Sports Pack DB9s for the [Goodwood Revival](#) weekend. The scene of many a triumph for the British manufacturer in the 50s, the Sussex circuit's annual historic racing extravaganza can be described as 'pure theatre' off-track - but on the other side of the hydrangea-lined barriers, it's deadly serious.

So much so that when you watch the **Royal Automobile Club Tourist Trophy Celebration** - barring factory involvement - it's as it was in period; the world's best drivers in state-of-the-art GT cars just a touch removed from the showroom.

Aston Martin's more recent involvement with racing has led to many race wins (including the TT in 2005) and two superb class victories at Le Mans with its DB9-based DBR9. Production of the roadgoing '9 has hit well over 10,000 and, this summer, the company announced a series of modifications to both the V12 DB9 and the V8 Vantage. Both cars are faster, handle better and have the vastly improved interior of the flagship DBS.

[We drove the uprated, 4.7-litre V8 in July](#) and were impressed. This time it was the turn of the DB9 in what many consider to be its finest iteration: six-speed manual with the optional Sports Pack that comprises a lower ride-height, revised dampers, springs and roll bars, a 'stiffening', revised undertray and unique lightweight alloy wheels.



These are in addition to the host of changes made to the regular Coupé and Volante (convertible) to improve the ride and steering feedback, as well as endowing the engine with more power and torque (the 6.0-litre

V12 now delivers 470bhp and 600Nm, with more torque available lower down the rev range). You won't spot many differences from the outside, though; the latest model has merely a new 5-bar (vs. 7-) grille and wing mirrors from the DBS.

Inside, all the fiddly-widdly switchgear of the past has been, er, switched for much clearer controls, also from the DBS. Compared with the V8 Vantage (presumably due to its increased cockpit length), the gearchange is much better, too, with less opportunity to crack your elbow on the central, chrome 'desk tidy'.

As we reported on the revised V8, there's more 'style' in its truest sense, and more substance, as well. Emotion Control Unit (ECU) 'key' apart, these are grown-up cars for some serious driving, rather than mere lifestyle accessories.

The current economic turmoil will sort out the men from the boys; and if that means owning an Aston Martin takes a little longer, and can only be within the means of the few, well, it was ever thus.





This is a very fast car. Yes, a statement of the obvious given its 0-60mph of 4.6 seconds and 190mph, but it's worth saying lest, going back to my opening comments, we forget the true *raison d'être* of this sort of machinery. The combination of the much more sporting suspension, manual gearbox and stellar 12-cylinder motor gives the big GT real edge.

It's a fast *driver's* car, too, and requires a degree of experience to get the best out of it. Unlike the [last time I tested a Sports Pack manual](#), the roads were dry. In the wet you would have to exercise a degree of caution as the uncompromising suspension is far less forgiving than standard. Turn-in and cornering are race-track sharp and I would love to explore its limits on a circuit.



Perhaps it's the manual gearbox? I think it's all too easy, in an auto, to select Drive and put your mind into Neutral. Oh yes, I **know** the 'Touchtronic 2' ZF automatic will react in so many nanoseconds, rev on downchange and be far smoother and probably quicker than the conventional stick, and yet...

The engine's flexibility – already a strong point – allows relaxed cruising as well as neck-snapping bursts of acceleration. As on the 8-cylinder, Aston has toned the soundtrack down a touch in line with the car's more mature image. You still get the V12 bark but it now delivers more of a kick in the back to match the blast in the ears.

It's Sunday afternoon and the Tourist Trophy Celebration is under way. Watching the 32 top-class drivers race what **Jamie Knight** of **Bonhams** estimated to be worth "...circa £85m... the most valuable grid of racing cars ever assembled for any historic race anywhere...", my mind strayed to the Titanium Silver DB9 sitting on the grass in the car park. The 'Project' Astons and DB4GTs hurtled through the chicane and I thought, "I've got a car that's just like that."

You could, too.





The car tested was a DB9 Coupé in Titanium Silver, with Chancellor Red interior and Falcon Grey seat stitching, Black Cherry carpet and Chancellor Red Alcantara headlining.

Options fitted included: Auto Dimming Rear View Mirror, Optional Front Grille, Front Parking Sensors, Sports Pack with 5-Spoke Wheels, Red Brake Calipers.

UK prices of the DB9 coupé start at £113,950.

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