

CLASSIC DRIVER

Morgan Aero 8 Test Drive 2003



When a well-known Aston Martin collector is invited to a Goodwood track day featuring a selection of the Newport Pagnell marque's finest; and drives home having ordered a Morgan Aero 8 direct from the Malvern company's managing director Charles Morgan, there must be something about the car that invites further scrutiny. With the aid of official Morgan dealer, and worldwide spares specialist, Melvyn Rutter, Classic Driver were able to drive the car, and see what all the fuss is about.

Pulling up at Melvyn Rutter's garage, just outside Bishops Stortford (near Stanstead airport), you soon find yourself completely immersed in all things Morgan. Rutter, a Morgan specialist for twenty six years, official main dealer for the last five, will cater for all models, from three wheeler via 'flat-rad' four-wheeler, 4/4, Plus 8 and, of course, the latest Aero 8. Such is Melvyn's enthusiasm for Morgans that not only does he publish a magazine '[The Morgan World](#)', but he also runs an active website www.melvyn-rutter.co.uk and will shortly introduce a wire-less internet café for cyber-surfing Morgan fans, with Bluetooth wireless connection.

Perhaps the Aero 8 is Charles Morgan's way of acknowledging the 21st century's new technology. Building on the success of the company's foray into long distance racing in 1997, with a car featuring a composite chassis and refined all-independent suspension, it was clearly an excellent basis for a new road car. Replacing the race-car's Chevy V8 with BMW's superb 4.4 litre hi-tech motor only improved the package for everyday driving, and the 286 bhp torquey motor in a 1000 kg chassis promises a lot of performance – 0-100 kph in less than 5 seconds and a top speed of 160 mph, according to the factory. Well, I guess we weren't able to exploit that sort of performance today; however a drive through pleasant English countryside in the car, hood down of course, was certainly long enough to get a feel for what makes the car tick.

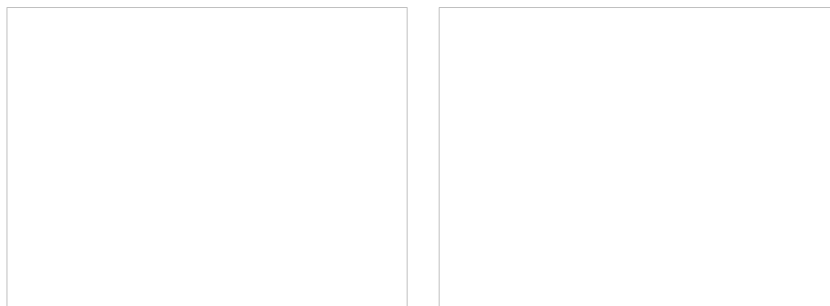


From the passenger seat (comfortable and supportive, if slightly tight for the larger frame), the car rides superbly and the smooth, effortless V8, turbine-like in its performance, impresses. The long bonnet, sloping screen and the dashboard combination of hi-tech engine-turned aluminium and ash wood surround provide a very pleasant view. With the big car

now thoroughly warmed up, I took the helm – which is not a bad metaphor, for the interior design does hold comparison with a modern yacht, given its mix of aluminium, wood and stainless steel. Stepping over the wide running boards, through the traditionally small door into the driver's seat it took a while to get a comfortable driving position; ideally I would prefer the wheel further away and the gear lever nearer but it is easy to adapt given a little time. Given that Morgan had an open design brief, it would have been nice for a little more room and adjustability, particularly given the overall size of the car.

But, criticisms of packaging aside, how does it go? Big engine plus light car is an unbeatable combination and the Aero 8 is no exception. Effortless acceleration is accomplished by a gorgeously smooth motor, which seems a lot torqueier than in the Range Rover I drove last year. That car needed revving to get the most out of it, whereas the Morgan will accelerate viciously from low speed in any gear, giving it the full treatment to the upper end of the rev range elicits a hard metallic V8 drone, but 4th gear will give you 30mph speed limit cruising; as well as ripping up to 100mph in what seems like an instant. The ride, which so impressed from the passenger seat, is no worse with hands and feet connected to the driving controls. Considering the 'rubber band' 225/40/ZR18 tyres on 18" wheels, someone in Morgan's engineering studio has really done a superb job on the chassis and suspension because scuttle-shake is non-existent, and the hard ride of all previous Morgans is totally absent. A track day would really reveal the car's handling, but English B-roads are where it will be driven most of the time, and it stood up to broken tarmac pretty well. Classic Driver contributor, and co-driver of the original prototype car (as well as many racing Plus 8s), Tony Dron likes the car a lot – and you really cannot argue with that sort of experience.

Braking and steering comes straight from the track. No ABS here, just a superb big calliper/disc set up, and the steering is direct and responsive. A by-product of the steering wheel proximity problem is the tendency for arms to get crossed up in tight turns or mini-roundabouts, possibly a minor criticism in a performance car. Perhaps it was a feature of this early demonstrator car, number 017 in the production run, but the Getrag gearbox had a very long throw, particularly in 5th, again exacerbated by the less than perfect driving position.



So it goes well, the finish I thought was extremely good (and stood comparison with other British sports car manufacturers), it's reasonably economical to run, and it will cover a big journey without fuss. What sort of person would buy the Aero 8? Over to Melvyn Rutter; "Probably an older buyer, but not necessarily a Morgan enthusiast, and not necessarily replacing a traditional Plus 8, for example. It's a new product and stands up to comparison with TVR in particular and would be a great track day machine". The looks are distinctive, but despite universal comments on the headlamp styling, as well as the 'fussy' rear treatment, I can only say when you are driving in it you get a wonderful 'long-bonnet' view and the side profile is quite attractive. It is what it is, and the magnificent chassis/engine/suspension package could well have been clothed in coupe bodywork, by Zagato for example, but the price would then have been £100k plus – and it would not have been a Morgan. The little Malvern Company has been around long enough to know its customers, and also to know the perils of over-stretching its resources – long may it continue.

With an on-the-road price, with leather and metallic paint, (strangely absent from a standard spec, which includes air-conditioning), of around £58,000 the car is not cheap. More than a TVR; Porsche 911 and Maserati 4500 GT territory. But for those enthusiasts looking for something genuinely different, with performance to match, from one of Britain's oldest Marques, it **is** worth a drive – you will be surprised, I certainly was.

Story and Photos – Steve Wakefield

With grateful thanks to [Melvyn Rutter Ltd](#)

To read the Classic Driver Car of the Week article on the Aero 8 [please click here](#).

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Gallery

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