
Northern Soul

24 August 2006 | Classic Driver



You don't normally need much of a reason to get behind the wheel of an Aston but a round trip to the Scottish Borders, the childhood home of Jim Clark, was made even more interesting by the self-imposed requirement to do it in a day - some 1,200 kms or 745 miles there and back.

And it was in a very special Aston Martin V8, the car the factory used to celebrate the production of the company's 30,000th car, one that had completed 30,000 miles (48,279 kms) in 30 days at the hands of 30 of the company's employees (who then signed the bonnet). As the first journalist to add his signature to the roof, it needed a feat of endurance worthy of the car.

World Motor Racing Champion Jim Clark grew up in the Borders and was an early member of the Border Reivers racing team. Graduating from Jaguar D-Type to the team's Lister Jaguar and Lotus Elite, his first serious brush with Astons was at Le Mans in 1960 when, driving the ex-works DBR1, he finished third overall behind two Ferraris, paired with the '59 winner, Roy Salvadori.



In 1961 and '62, now a fully fledged F1 driver for Lotus, Clark was installed in an Aston once again for various GT races, this time driving for John Ogier's Essex Racing Team in the DB4GT Zagato 2 VEV. The image of Clark effortlessly throwing the brutal little coupé around Goodwood is timeless - a quiet, unassuming man with an extraordinary talent driving one of the all-time greats, his lurid slides and drifts a prelude to Lotus Cortina action in years to come, forever captured on camera by the likes of Michael Cooper and Geoff Goddard.

So it was a journey to pay our respects to an Aston driver of old, in the company's newest car, one that had already covered perhaps three years' of 'ordinary' driving in just a month.

The odometer of the LHD car read 49,823 kms (30,649 miles) when it was delivered, fully resplendent in its 'warpaint' of dirt and flies, together with the silver signatures of the lucky 30 works drivers. Don't wash it! Well OK, I think we need a clear windscreen and glass, but otherwise, let's spend the time driving rather than cleaning, and let the Le Mans-style finish draw a lot of looks on the way.

We really like these cars. The last time a V8 Vantage was available it was difficult not to find a reason to drive it and 6 months or so on, the feeling's just the same. And this time it was to be a two-driver trip, so there was the opportunity to chat about the car on the long motorway stretches ever northwards.



It felt like a new car, no hold on, it felt better than the 'new' car we drove before because the gearbox was smoother from cold and the motor even more fluid. The doors opened and closed with the requisite 'thunk' while the steering and braking (new discs for the trip, so be warned...) were as sublime as before, if a little 'dead' in the stopping department. Perhaps it's me but it felt quieter too

at sub-exhaust-valve opening engine speeds. You could pedal it along in 6th at a high UK cruising speed with the motor just on-cam and ready for action.

We said it before but don't be put off by other testers' comments on the more moderate level of power than they anticipated. In the real world the V8 Vantage has everything you need – and more. It's quick enough for anyone bar the most determined to outrun a Ferrari 599 GTB at 150 + mph speeds.



The destination was Duns, the small town that housed the Jim Clark Room with its shelves of memorabilia dedicated to its most famous resident. With a stop for breakfast, the journey was accomplished in around 6 hours, no records to be broken; just hard driving on motorway and across country. A visit to the museum, the art deco Chirnside Primary School buildings that Clark attended before private education in Edinburgh, and the now disused Charterhall circuit just a few miles away from his family farm at Edington Mains were all ticked off before teatime and the long return journey.

Time for some serious driving on the open roads of the rolling Borders countryside and then re-programming the car's (very good) sat-nav to North London. A couple of re-fuelling stops to 'brim it' for collection the following day and some 16 hours from setting off we were back home again.

Journey over, a few more clicks on the odometer and the car was ready for Dr Bez to take it for an airline-chaos-cheating run from the UK to Germany that weekend.



When a youthful Jim Clark tested the Aston Martin DBR2 for Astons at Goodwood in 1960 it was, according to Eric Dymock in his excellent book '*Jim Clark*', "the most powerful car he had driven...yet he was astonished at how well it handled. It had good traction and was blisteringly fast".

The V8 Vantage is not the most powerful car I have driven – yet I'd concur on all the other points and having a few miles on the clock seems to only make it better.

Roll on the next 30,000.

Story: *Steve Wakefield*

Photos: *Classic Driver + The Michael Cooper Archive*

Editor's Note: *We are indebted to Liz Cooper for kindly allowing the reproduction of another fantastic Michael Cooper image of Jim Clark driving **Aston Martin DB4GT Zagato 2 VEV** at the Goodwood TT in 1961. This high quality print, and many others, is available from **The Michael Cooper Archive**. Michael enjoyed a special relationship with several of the drivers, Jim Clark in particular, and in many cases the shots were specially 'set-up' by the drivers when they knew Michael would be at a particular corner.*

For further information please visit www.motorsportimage.co.uk.

The Jim Clark Room is located at 44 Newtown Street, Duns, Scotland and is open from 1 April to 30 September (Mon - Sat 10.30 - 13.00, 14.00 - 16.30, Sunday 14.00 - 16.00) and in October (Mon - Sat, 13.00 - 16.00). Call +44(0)1361 883960 for more details.

Eric Dymock's book 'Jim Clark' can be ordered from www.collectorscarbooks.co.uk. The latest edition is published by Motorbooks International ISBN 0-7603-1703-8.

ClassicInside - The Classic Driver Newsletter

[Free Subscription!](#)

<https://www.classicdriver.com/en/article/northern-soul>

© Classic Driver. All rights reserved.