

CLASSIC DRIVER

Aston Martin DB9 Volante



To successfully convert one of the automotive world's most sublime profiles from coupé to convertible is yet another achievement for Aston Martin. The DB9 Volante is a fine looking car with the hood up, yet when you press the 'open-air' button, 17 seconds later the car becomes irresistible.

For many people a cabriolet is **the** luxury sports car, and it's an essential part of the car manufacturer's armoury. Witness a succession of top-of-the-range desirable Aston Martins bearing the 'Volante' name tag, and the fact that whether you are in St Tropez or Portofino, the car of choice is more than likely to be a soft-top with the roof most certainly **down**.

So, remove the top from a car and it crosses the barrier from performance coupé to fashion accessory, right? Not necessarily, and may I remind readers of a string of racing cars of the 1950s and '60s that won events such as Le Mans or the Mille Miglia in open form and personify macho-performance unlimited.

We last drove a DB9 in 2005 and that was an early production coupé, this time it's a Volante and it's not only an example of open-air Aston Martin motoring but also the latest version of the '9, with one or two development improvements under the skin.



Trying to catch the last of the English summer, we headed east towards the coastal reaches of Essex and Suffolk; a long enough journey to test the car hood-up and -down, as well as fast A-road and motorway work.

There's no doubt about it – it's a fabulous looking car from any angle and despite not being a fan of open-tops in general, the way Astons have integrated the hood mechanism under the flat metal panel is an engineering and styling masterpiece. There's just a smooth transition from rear 'seats' to the boot top proper. Very clever, and the Volante even offers the same boot space as the DB9 Coupé, despite having to store the roof and its rear screen – but don't get too carried away with that feature, it's very small (186 litres vs 300 litres for the V8 Vantage) anyway...

The company did such a good job on the dynamics of the car from day one that building a convertible had

clearly been engineered from the start. Astons quote the same kerb weight for both cars (1800 kgs for the automatic) but you do get the impression the open car has been softened just a touch to allow for the inevitable lessening in rigidity. That said, I couldn't feel any lack of stiffness or poise in the chassis – it's one of the best out there and if you want a really hot handler and fresh air get the V8 Vantage and use the spare cash to buy an Audi convertible.



The engine seemed crisper on this car - and quieter - than last year's but the driving experience was much the same; the 450 hp V12 propelling a car that will do pretty well anything the driver wants. Watch the long nose, it'll ground if you are not careful, but that apart, the DB9 Volante will hustle along A-roads with the

best if them, aided by the 'Touchtronic 2', 6 speed gearbox that responds well to knocking up and down manually better than it does in Auto, even in 'Sport' mode. A criticism perhaps, but no-one's perfect, are they?

I liked it with the roof down, but for swift ground-covering it's a calmer experience with it up, and despite the seemingly close-fitting fabric the visibility is surprisingly good - although parallel parking in tight spaces is a breeze with the top down as you simply lift yourself out of the seat and peer over the back. And speaking of seating, this is an area I have criticised on both the DB9 and V8 Vantage but I'm pleased to tell you that mid-2006 seats are much better, and that a new design will feature in 2007 MY cars.





They've also improved the dashboard lighting and the Caspian Blue interior with Walnut veneer seems to be better for reflections too. As we said before, it's a nice cabin for a long drive.

From a market position there's little to touch it. Mercedes-Benz AMG SL55? Ferociously fast but lacks the badge and top-model class. Ferrari F430 Spider? Did we say the SL55 was fast? You should try the F430...but it's a price-bracket higher and has no fully-auto option, same as the Gallardo. Bentley Continental Convertible? Genuine four-seater with the usefulness for the continent of 4wd, but not for me at any rate. Maserati Spyder? Now there's a thought...

No, if you want the best-looking convertible GT out there, head to your nearest Aston dealer. You won't be disappointed.



The Aston Martin DB9 Volante we tested was to the following specification:

Colour & Trim:

- Exterior colour: Azzuro California Blue
- Interior environment colour: Caspian Blue
- Steering wheel colour: Obsidian Black
- Walnut veneer (£NCO)
- Headlining colour: Atlantic Blue
- Seat belt: Warm Charcoal

Exterior Options:

- Bright finish front grille (£295)
- Brake calipers - grey (£NCO)

Production Fit Options:

- Alarm upgrade (volumetric and tilt sensors) (£195)
- Linn Audio 950W system with Dolby Pro Logic II (£2,995)
- Heated front screen (£295)

Total Price:

- £122,630



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