

CLASSIC DRIVER

The Aston Martin Rally GT put through its paces



When Aston Martin Racing announced the launch of a version of the V8 Vantage specifically prepared for rallying, there were some raising an uninformed eyebrow at the concept of a low-slung 175mph sports car up to its axles in mud in the middle of a forest.

Let me be the first to disabuse anyone of the notion that either a) this is the sort of event the car is intended for and b) that anyone with the rich engineering heritage of Aston Martin Racing/Prodrive would design anything that was not perfectly suited and set up for the job in hand.



A total of three cars have now been prepared, ready for the forthcoming Race of Champions event at the Stade de France, and all were available at Cornbury Park near Oxford for evaluation by potential teams entering 2007 European events like the French Rally Championship (one car having already run in three rounds this year, coming second in the Series GT class on its debut at the Lyon-Charbonnières Rally). So it will be competing with Porsche 911 GT3s and the like, on rough tarmac on the hills and local roads in the South of France and Italy. Go back forty-odd years and you'll find Ferrari 275 GTBs, 250 GTOs and Porsche 911s doing the very same thing.





Ever eager to expand his horizons beyond circuit racing historic and modern, your Editor was inserted in the co-driver's Recaro alongside Dave Maslen (a Prodrive rally test driver who shakes down the Subaru Impreza World Rally and Group N cars). This was the very first time in a 'rally' car, let alone the first time on a simple special stage like the one used for the day's testing. Waiting by the big Aston Martin Racing trailer, coffee in hand, while the cars shuttled out and back throughout the day the impression was – given what appeared to be only a few minutes absence – that the course was merely a bit of 'out, round a couple of trees, and return again'. I was under a serious misapprehension.

Once under way Dave wielded the throttle, steering wheel, and gear lever - the grey car I was in had the road car's standard transmission, a sequential shift is an option - as if his life depended on it (well mine certainly did anyway) the car flying from crest, to apex, to turning-in point, with a ferocity unimaginable to someone who'd only recently stepped out of the passenger seat of an [Aston Martin Racing DBRS9 GT3 car](#). The engine power has been increased by around 40 – 50 HP, the handling enhanced by retaining the road car's excellent suspension geometry but fitting new competition Eibach springs and three-way adjustable EXE-TC dampers, and a Prodrive-designed roll cage has been installed for safety and increased torsional rigidity.



The result, complete with a decidedly 'loud' exhaust note, is a devastatingly fast machine for tarmac stages, and one that appeared 'sucked' to the road on the wet autumnal afternoon, the colossal grip of the road-legal Pirellis greatedened by the clever suspension set-up.

It soon becomes apparent that the reason the cars only go away for a little while is that the drivers are using every ounce of the V8's performance and every square centimetre of tarmac to travel an awfully long way in as short a timespan as possible. I don't know what speeds we were hitting but he seemed to be pretty flat in 4th at least for a lot of the time - an awesome performance to someone totally unprepared for the experience.





This car is absolutely devastating and a good pointer as to how the roadgoing [V8 Vantage by Prodrive](#), announced only a few days ago, will perform. The test 'mule' was in fact at Cornbury that day, complete with extra gauges, switches and on-board computer equipment. The V8 Vantage is one of our favourites, and with Prodrive's tuning parts is going to be one of the world's best.



Memo to self; try and see the Aston Martin Rally GT in action in 2007.

Memo to V8 Vantage owners; check out the Prodrive modifications, you will have just about the fastest thing out there in real world driving conditions.

For further details contact Aston Martin Racing via www.astonmartinracing.com or call +44(0)1295 754004.

The Race of Champions events will be held on 16th December 2006 at the Stade de France in Paris. For more information please visit www.raceofchampions.com.

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