

CLASSIC DRIVER

Aston Martin Vanquish Celebration Day 6 May 2007



To mark the end of 'Hero Car' production at Newport Pagnell this summer, Aston Martin invited over 100 Vanquish customers to assemble at Works Service, take a last look at the Vanquish line, and then embark on a magnificent cavalcade to Silverstone for the FIA GT Championship round with the company's CEO, Dr Ulrich Bez, heading the V12 'snake'.

Classic Driver was invited to join the fun, this time behind the wheel of the highly-rated Works Service Vanquish S, with its manual transmission conversion.

Some 2,500 Vanquish models have been produced at Newport Pagnell since 2001. Since then, the company has seen tremendous changes, the most notable of which being the move to Gaydon and the introduction of the completely new VH platform DB9 and V8 Vantage models, together with the recent sale to a consortium of investors led by David Richards, and planned introduction of Rapide and DBS models in months and years to come.

Throughout that time, the Vanquish has remained the top model in the range, the 'Hero Car', a genuine handmade 321 kph (200 mph) supercar with advanced technology and a bruising heart infused with DNA from super-powerful Astons of the past such as the V600 and Vantage V8. This is all coming to an end this summer, with the cessation of Newport Pagnell production and the deliveries of the last ever Vanquish S Ultimate Edition, limited to just 40 examples worldwide.

There won't be a dry eye in the place when, after 50 years of car manufacturing, production ceases at the Buckinghamshire town synonymous with the marque, but Sunday's event was a nice send-off and must have represented a very high percentage of UK-domiciled cars.



The Works Service Manual Conversion

Under the eagle eye of Kingsley Riding-Felce, Director, Customer Care and Works Service, and the Special Vehicles Operations team from Gaydon, Works Service has spent 12 months developing a conventional 'stick-shift' manual conversion to replace the 'paddle', ASM transmission standard on all cars since launch. The car retains the Graziano rear transaxle: it's just the means of gear engagement that has changed.

Instead of the bank of buttons on the dash there's only one simply titled 'start', and twisting the key and thumbing the clear acrylic stirrers the 520 hp V12 to life. The clutch is light – although longish in travel – and the gearbox easily moves from cog to cog, in the manner of manual DB9 and V8 Vantages.



It's as easy as that, and for those owners facing potential non-warranty work on the semi-automatic set-up, or having bought an early car with a little change from their budget left it's definitely the way to go. The conversion is compatible with all Vanquish models - the dashboard of pre-2005 cars will be upgraded to 2005 Vanquish S specification, all with leather trim that matches your car's original specification.

The price for parts and fitting starts at £13,250 (+ VAT), and can obviously be co-ordinated with either service or bespoke enhancement work for which Works Service is rightly famous.



Taking the short motorway and A-road journey from Newport Pagnell to Silverstone, one is reminded of the core values of the Vanquish; massive power if you need it, a relaxed ride in a quiet, comfortable, roomy cabin, light controls and sophisticated handling clothed in timeless uniquely Aston styling. Something really special.

A hard act to follow - it will be missed.



Text: Steve Wakefield

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