

# CLASSIC DRIVER

## Book Review: 'Aston Martin: Power, Beauty and Soul'



**A new book from Australian author David Dowsey charts the history of Aston Martin under Ford Motor Company ownership, right up to its sale completed in March this year. In a volume that covers all the cars in production at the time, far-and-away the most interesting sections are on the limited-series one-offs commissioned by collectors in Europe and the Far East in the 80s and 90s.**

While we have become used to healthy production figures for a flourishing **Aston Martin** since the introduction of the **DB7**, **Vanquish**, **DB9** and **V8 Vantage**, the period immediately prior to this was lean (to say the least, with just 20 of the Virage-replacement **V8 Coupés** produced annually from 1996 – 2000), so additional work by the company's **Special Projects** team headed by **Kingsley Riding-Felce** considerably added to its coffers, as well as creating the legend of the truly bespoke car in which anything was possible.

The story starts with a background to the company that includes Ford's offer to buy **Aston Martin** in the early 60s, and the details behind the eventual purchase of a majority shareholding on 7 September 1987 for 'between £15m and £20m'. At that time the **William Towns**-designed **V8** in **Saloon**, **Volante** and **Vantage** versions was in production, and these were joined by the limited-run **Zagato coupe** and **Volante**, as well as the totally new **Virage**.





Add to that the **supercharged Vantage**, the last incarnation of the **'wedge' Lagonda**, an endurance racing programme for the **AMR1**, **Sanction II** and **III DB4GT Zagatos**, and finally the start of car production at **Banbury** and **Gaydon**, and you have a whirlwind of activity for the British company that makes fascinating reading.

As far as **Special Projects** was concerned, **Dowsey** was granted unprecedented access to photos and details of some of the most extraordinary custom-made vehicles ever created by **Aston Martin**. The four-door **'Vantage Specials'** have remained a closely guarded secret at Astons for many years. In fact, outside a carefully selected group of technicians and artisans, few people in the company were allowed access to them at all.

The book has photographs and personal stories from the men behind these and such other rarities as the **five-door shooting breaks**, the **'Virage Lightweight'**, the **Pininfarina**-designed **'AM3'** and **'AM4'**, and the last cars in the sequence, the 600bhp **'Vantage Special Series'** with bodywork that evoked **Vanquish** meeting **DB5**.



These final three cars were cancelled mid-project and the exclusivity agreement between Astons and its Far Eastern client meant that the bodies, and the bucks upon which they had been formed, were scrapped. The times had changed, increasingly stringent worldwide regulations meant it was more difficult to make one-offs and the future of the company lay with series-production at **Gaydon**.

Don't expect Palawan-level photos or sumptuous layout, the book relies too much on press shots and owners' contributions that sometimes strike a discordant note. But for **Aston Martin** enthusiasts the book's an essential read, and it's **the** definitive work on the activities of the company in the exciting Ford-owned period.

*The book (casebound with jacket, 300 x 223mm, ISBN: 978 095787 595 1, 344 pages with colour and b/w photographs) is available by mail order direct from the publisher [HERE](#) at US\$ 65.00 plus carriage.*

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