

CLASSIC DRIVER

The Royal Automobile Club Tourist Trophy 2008

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Cold and damp the weather might have been, but spectators at Silverstone witnessed a day of thrilling racing, including a down-to-the-wire battle for the main FIA GT event that eventually went Aston Martin's way. It was the marque's first Tourist Trophy win since the DBR9 debuted at the Northamptonshire track in 2005.

Aston Martin Racing had further cause for celebration when customer **V8 Vantage N24s** dominated entries for the burgeoning **GT4 European Cup**, winning both rounds.

With British weather one of the dominant factors of the weekend, it looked at one point as if pole position in **Tourist Trophy** qualifying might be taken by a **GT2** car. However, at the last moment, natural selection prevailed with an all-**Corvette** front row. Come the start, eventual winner **Karl Wendlinger**, in the **Jetalliance DBR9**, put in an electrifying performance to take the lead, just about keeping ahead of the **Corvettes** and the other **Astons**.



With a drying track, tactics came into play and the **Corvettes**, able to run at a more consistent pace, came back at the British car, with the tyre choice becoming critical. One team 'risking all' was **Gigawave MotorSport**, whose **Nigel Stepney**-engineered **DBR9** started on intermediates and was one of the first to switch to slicks.

This proved a bold but decisive move as the team was able to lead the race for 14 laps, into the final period under a Safety Car. When the pack was released, **Ryan Sharp**, co-driving with **Wendlinger**, caught and passed the silver Gigawave car, holding off a late-charging reigning Champion **Michael Bartels** in the **Vitaphone Maserati MC12**.

In GT2, few were putting money on any result other than a **Ferrari** win and **AF Corse** came out on top, with **Toni Vilander** and **Gianmaria Bruni** leading four other **430 GTCs** home. Mention must be made of series-debutant **CR Scuderia**, which finished a fine second in class.

It was a superb race with something happening for its entire 120-minute duration. Well done to the winners, and congratulations to **SRO** for getting the rules just right.



Supporting the main event were two rounds of the **FIA GT3 European Championship**. The Swiss **Matech GT Racing** team's **Ford GT** of **Thomas Mutsch** and **Ian Khan** won both races, with Sunday's round considerably enlivened by a colossal accident on the start/finish straight, involving an **Aston Martin DBRS9** and **Jacques Laffite's Morgan Aero 8**.



Starting and closing the meeting was a round of the **2008 GT4 European Cup**. This is a series that **Aston Martin** has supported via its customer **V8 Vantage N24s** and, pesky **Mustang FR500Cs** aside, the British cars dominated. The one unfortunate blot on proceedings was the Saturday accident that severely damaged the **R.S. Williams**-entered car of Michael Mallock.



And, finally, **Ferrari GB** proved it is the team to beat in the **Ferrari Challenge Europe Trofeo Pirelli** with dominant wins in both categories. **Team Vertu Racing** driver, **Mike Cantillon**, was victorious on both days in the **Coppa Shell** series, and **Andrea Piccini**, an experienced racing driver participating in the FIA GT series, demolished the opposition in the **Black&Decker**-liveried car on Sunday. Piccini, a chief instructor for the **Ferrari Pilota** courses, actually beat the lap record set by **Bruno Senna** last summer.

Royal Automobile Club Tourist Trophy - Overall Results:

- 1 Wendlinger/Sharp Aston Martin DBR9
- 2 Bertolini/Bartels Maserati MC12 +3.807sec
- 3 Simonsen/Peter Aston Martin DBR9 +5.077sec
- 4 Bouchut/Maassen Corvette C6R +8.295sec
- 5 Hezemans/Gollin Corvette C6R +8.598sec
- 6 Muller/Lichtner-Hoyer Aston Martin DBR9 +22.517sec

Editor's Note: *I was able to sample the weekend's action from behind the wheel of an **Aston Martin V8 Vantage N400** for the Supercar Tour. You can read a full review of this, and the Supercar Tour, [elsewhere on Classic Driver](#).*

Story: Steve Wakefield

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