

# CLASSIC DRIVER

## Red Light District: On Tour in an Aston Martin V8 Vantage N400

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Its colour might have been 'arresting' but, for 40 minutes accompanied by Police motorcycle outriders, our Aston Martin could disregard the rules of the road with impunity.

The occasion was this year's **Supercar Tour**; the annual run from the **Royal Automobile Club** to Silverstone, escorting the famous **Tourist Trophy** to be awarded to that weekend's winner of the **FIA GT** race. We always enjoy this. It's a chance to savour London's traffic in a manner usually reserved for visiting Heads of State or senior members of the Royal Family.

Red lights and London congestion? Forget them and enjoy the drive, letting **Paul Mostyn** of the **Metropolitan Police's Tactical Motorbike Unit** worry about the three dozen supercars in his charge.









This is how the 'other half' lives and, as I'm approaching this from the driving seat of Aston Martin's limited-edition **V8 Vantage N400** - a **Sportshift Coupé**, number 002 of 240 - I suppose I already have one driving shoe in the privileged zone.

The N400, so-named after the company's success at the **Nürburgring 24 Hours**, and this version's 400bhp, builds on the core values of the V8 Vantage: compact dimensions, sublime styling and a super-stiff chassis.



Power is up by 20bhp, and torque by just a touch: the 4.3-litre V8 now produces 420Nm (309lb ft) at

5000rpm (against 417Nm/302lb ft for the standard car at the same engine speed). All N400s include lessons learned from the latest suspension set-up of the Roadster, having uprated springs and dampers, while the Coupé is also equipped with a rear anti-roll bar. Lightweight forged alloy wheels with a graphite and diamond-turned finish are unique to these cars - although the size remains at 8.5J x 19" front/ 9.5J x 19" rear.



Externally, the car has revised sills - echoing those used on the racing N24 - as well as DBS-type rear lights and steel mesh grilles. Once you step inside, the choose-whatever-you-like options of the standard car go out of the window: it's black leather (with perforated seat squab and backs), contrast-piped to match the paintwork, and faux engine-turned alloy on the central fascia.

Three shades of paint can grace the bodywork: **Bergwerk Black**, **Lightning Silver** or **Karussell Orange** and yes, you guessed it, ours was the latter. You wouldn't get lost in a snowstorm.





Bright orange paintwork, race-tuned suspension and strong links with the famous 'Ring - has Aston Martin produced a pure track-day car, a hard-riding **Porsche 911 GT3** rival? Er, no, no and thrice no; definitely not. If anything, the suspension feels more compliant, poised and sophisticated than the standard car. The extra 20bhp is there, but only really at the top of the rev range, and the revised throttle-mapping makes the power delivery deceptively smoother - aided (in this writer's opinion and, go on, call me boring) by the constantly throatier exhaust note that has done away with the full-on, valve-opening blare, around 4000rpm, of the standard car.





The Supercar Tour package included a few convoy laps of the **Silverstone Grand Prix** circuit and I was impressed with the N400's lack of roll - albeit accompanied by a touch of understeer. Interestingly (and I have to qualify this by stressing the gentle, but serious, level of pace), I found I could keep the car 'on the boil' at 4-5000rpm, rather than constantly up at the top of the rev range. This says a lot about the better flexibility manifesting itself in practical terms, rather than sheer neck-snapping pace.

Last year at the Nürburgring, one of the factory N24s, '*Kermit*', was fitted with the Sportshift gearbox. There will always be fierce opponents and enthusiasts for these paddle-actuated gearchanges. I enjoyed the journey into London in 'Drive', and I enjoyed lapping Silverstone using the paddles with both hands firmly on the wheel. What would I choose? I don't know. For everyday driving I prefer an automatic; I wouldn't consider a current Ferrari without the F1 'box, and yet the 6-speed 'stick' Aston V8 is an absolute delight.

So I'll make a decision and remain firmly on the fence on this one.



You do actually get a good deal with the N400. Not only is it a genuine limited edition, but it also comes with a lot of kit on the options list of the regular car as standard: **satellite navigation, Aston Martin 700 W Premium Audio System, Bluetooth telephone preparation**, and **HID headlamps** are all included in the N400 Coupe Sportshift's £97,000 price tag.

And there's a map of the Nürburgring embroidered just behind the armrest in case the sat-nav lets you down, mid-lap. A nice touch in a nice car: the best-driving version of the V8 Vantage yet.

#### **Aston Martin V8 Vantage N400 - UK prices:**

N400 Coupe Manual - £94,000

N400 Coupe Sportshift - £97,000

N400 Roadster Manual - £102,000  
N400 Roadster Sportshift - £105,000

**Editor's Note:** *You can read the review of the **Royal Automobile Club Tourist Trophy** elsewhere on [Classic Driver](#), and don't forget to put the weekend of 25/26/26 July in your diary; it's the **Silverstone Classic**. For further details, see [www.silverstoneclassic.co.uk](http://www.silverstoneclassic.co.uk).*

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