

CLASSIC DRIVER

Road Test: Aston Martin V8 Vantage 4.7



In fact, as soon as the 'Power' legend is illuminated on the dash in Aston's updated V8 Vantage, the start sequence is so fast that the rest of the familiar strapline is consigned to history. This is the eagerly anticipated 4735cc version of the British company's super-successful - 10,000 examples sold since launch in 2005 - two-seater.

Aston Martin has enlarged the engine, installed a new centre-console in line with DBS and current DB9 practice, substantially improved both suspension componentry and design, as well as - in the Sportshift version - made various software changes to enable a smoother and faster gear change.

You get the impression that the design and engineering team at Gaydon has gone through the car from top to toe, in order to iron out any of the weaker areas of the outgoing car. The car tested, a pristine 1200-miler manual with regular suspension, oozed quality paintwork and immaculate interior trim - probably the best-built Aston I've seen since the DBS launch.



Everything did as it should: from correctly 'thunking' doors to memory seats capable of perfect adjustment for really long trips in comfort. It's a classy car and Aston Martin knows that nowadays it has to build cars to match buyers' expectations not only from a performance point of view, but also with regard to long-term ownership, where pride of possession is paramount.

And you can actually read the audio, climate control and sat nav buttons, now.

The company would, it hardly needs saying, be foolish to mess with the lines of one of the sexiest shapes out there. The absence of the rooftop 'bee sting' aerial is the only significant difference, and it makes the latest version look more 'grown-up', more 'mini-Vanquish' than, well, MINI Cooper.

The latest (now standard) 20-spoke, 19in wheels meld nicely with the profile of the car, 'filling' the arches

better than the previous ones. Customers specifying the Sports set-up get not only uprated springs and a revised rear anti-roll bar (on the Coupé, only), but also 5-spoke lightweight aluminium wheels in the style of the N400's.



The V8 has been comprehensively worked-over to produce a more flexible engine. Longer stroke and bigger bore (courtesy of pressed-in liners) means bigger capacity and more power and torque. The latter is now 470Nm (346lb ft) @ 5750rpm - up 15% - while the more free-spinning, bigger capacity motor, with larger inlet valves too, means at 7000rpm the engine now produces 420bhp. That's an 11% increase over the previous 4300cc unit.

All marvellous stuff, but what's it like to drive? The engine improvements, although relatively modest, soon make themselves felt. First of all, the company has toned down the car's famous exhaust note so, instead of tearing up the road as if it was 20% off at Purves & Purves, the car has a steadfast sound - understated in the best traditions of the British style - that only finds full voice at 4000rpm. Exceed this and the familiar crescendo will return, but it's less of a bellow, more a roar of encouragement.

Take the car up into the 6000s and it really moves, with a genuine urge that will surprise you.

Most manoeuvres can now be accomplished one gear higher than before. Want to overtake that line of traffic? Fourth will do pretty well, most of the time. Want to *really* overtake that line of traffic (and there's a truck coming the other way...)? Take third, but leave second alone - the days of frantically dropping down gears to make the small car really fly are gone. 3000rpm is a relaxing Euro-legal lope of 80mph/130km/h in sixth.





With the standard iPod connection, 160W Aston Martin Audio System, improved sat nav (still not perfect, I'm afraid) and clubby cabin atmosphere, you could do some long journeys in this car. And, it has to be said, Aston Martin claims an improvement in combined fuel economy and CO2 emissions of 13%. The old car had a serious drinking problem and I can report the totally unscientific results of: "It went quite a long way, and I didn't have to fill it up. Much." I think you would be in 18mpg/13 litres per 100km territory - better than before.

From a handling perspective, the latest V8 Vantage, with its quality Bilstein dampers and revised steering geometry, is best described as a more complete version of the original car. Oft-praised for its 'roller skate', or 'kart-like', handling, the 2005-to-date V8 Vantage was tremendous fun to drive - but slightly wearing, and demanding a skilled driver to get the most out of it.



The car now rides bumps with alacrity, turns in better than most, rolls just a touch to retain a sublime feel for the nuances of the road, and gives the driver much better feedback than before. Long-travel accelerator (with a touch of delay, or is it me?) apart, you can get in this car and really *drive*. Which is what's it's all about.

Built in Britain, the ability to cover big distances, sexy lines to die for, a comfortable cabin for two in Savile Row, 21st Century style, stunning performance for most; that sounds like an Aston Martin.

It is, and it's a more grown-up, more rounded and complete car than its predecessor. The company now has a seamless line of cars from DBS down, each offering a different spiral of Aston Martin DNA, yet retaining the core values of understated style and performance.

If you've ordered a new V8 Vantage, you won't be disappointed.

*With grateful thanks to **Daylesford Organic** and the team at the Cotswold Farm Shop and Café. For further information, see www.daylesfordorganic.com, or call +44(0)1608 731 700.*

The car tested was a V8 Vantage Coupé in Titanium Silver with Chancellor Red interior and coarse Silver seat stitching, Gunmetal facia, Black Cherry carpet and Ivory Alcantara headlining.

UK prices of the V8 Vantage coupé start at £85,000. The Roadster starts at £93,000.

Extras fitted to the test car included: Bright Finish Grille, HID Headlamps, Powerfold Mirror Assembly, Red Brake Calipers, Heated Front Seats, Auto Dimming Rear View Mirror, High Spec Alarm, Satellite Navigation, Umbrella and Holder, Smokers Kit, Premium Audio, Bluetooth, Cruise Control, Memory Seats and Mirrors.

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