

CLASSIC DRIVER

Goodwood Green: Aston Martin DB4GT and Vantage GT4

“Keep it in a high gear; let the torque of the engine pull you through the bends, and ‘trail brake’ through the first part of the corner before accelerating through the apex and on to the straight.” Top professional driver Anthony Reid is explaining the best way around the super-fast Sussex circuit.

Just moments before, I had been a passenger in **Nicholas Mee Racing’s** (NMR) newly delivered 4.7-litre **Aston Martin V8 Vantage GT4**. The Goodwood test was to shake down the new car and introduce NMR’s three drivers — **Karsten Le Blanc**, **Christiaan Van Lanschot** and **Tarek Mahmoud** — to Aston Martin’s latest ‘gentleman racer’; one of a two-car line-up scheduled to contest several UK and European races in 2009.

Reid will be acting as the newly formed team’s chief tester and driver coach, with occasional race drives, too, as the year progresses.

In addition to the Vantage GT4, packed with hi-tech electronics, aerodynamic aids and computer-designed suspension, there was also the company’s equivalent model of 50 years ago: a **DB4GT**. Owner **Tarek Mahmoud** had brought along his historic racer, a regular entry in the **Le Mans Classic** and **Tour Auto**, where the car is headed later this month.



And, while Reid was discussing camber, castor and toe-in with the **NMR** technicians, **Mahmoud** takes me out for a few high-speed laps in the million-pound machine. The **DB4GT** made its racing debut in 1959,

driven by **Stirling Moss** to a win (and fastest lap) at **Silverstone**. As a shortened, lightened **DB4** with a twin-plug head and impressive array of 45DCOE Webbers on its 3.7-litre motor, the 'GT' was the fastest model in the company's range.

It was to see extensive action in international racing and it was at Goodwood, in 1960, that **Roy Salvadori** finished 2nd overall in the **Tourist Trophy** driving one of the lightweight **Essex Racing Stable** cars.



Madgwick, the first corner, is taken as a broad sweep and the long right-hand kink of **Fordwater** has the M-section Dunlops starting to slide. **Mahmoud's** a useful driver and negotiates the tricky '**No-Name**' right-hand entry to **St Mary's**, where the track rises and dips like a rollercoaster before some braking for **Lavant** and the long drag down the straight. The engine pulls with gusto and the car rockets down the fastest part of the course with the familiar fluttering of wipers on screen betraying its pre-aerodynamic-era styling and upright windscreen. It's then full braking for **Woodcote** and some more sliding as the car drifts into the **Chicane** and onto another lap.

Set up for the road-biased **Tour Auto**, in 'semi-race' trim, with more comfortable seats and silenced exhausts, the older car is slightly compromised for pure track work. Its class and breeding still shine through, though: a bespoke two-seater GT.



Wind the clock forward 50 years and we come to the **Vantage GT4**. As in the '4GT, **Aston Martin** has drawn heavily on the tradition of a fast, user-friendly car for an amateur racer. Times have changed, so it's no longer realistic to drive a car to a circuit, race and drive home again. But, as with the 1960s **DB4GTs**, the **GT4** is based on the road car's design, using broadly standard suspension, brakes, engine and bodywork, with a more free-breathing exhaust and re-mapped ECU. It's also considerably lighter than standard (by 300kg) and has all the safety equipment of the modern racing era.



In addition, the **NMR** team has specified a passenger seat, long-distance race spotlamps and an on-board air jack system for pit-stops in two-driver events – it clearly means business.

In the last track session of the day, I am strapped in tightly (on the right-hand side, as all **Vantage GT4s** are LHD) alongside **Anthony Reid** in the new car. Readers will remember my experiences last year at a ['Prodrive at Goodwood'](#) day; again with Reid but that time in a DBRS9.



Whatever the machinery, the Scotsman is so fast the effect is the same: a devastating performance by one of the world's best in what is clearly a very impressive car. He employs the classic, smooth driving technique at **Goodwood** of winding it up to a fast pace and then keeping braking to a minimum, holding the small car in fifth for much of the circuit. Such is the power and torque available from the now 4.7-litre engine that even in what I would consider tightish corners, such as **Lavant**, he's still travelling immensely quickly in a high

gear.

Okay, he **does** make it look easy, but this is a seriously fast machine. In fact, even two-up we set the fastest time of the day, quicker than anything at last year's **Goodwood Revival**.

Goodwood and **Aston Martin**: one circuit, one marque and two fabulous road-based racing cars fit for 'gentlemen'.



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