
Driven: Aston Martin DBS Volante

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I always enjoy a 'finely-tuned sports car', not to mention 'the invigorating feeling of being open to the elements'. So what's the latest flagship open Aston like?

Pretty amazing. No, change that to 'strikingly' amazing, as the big car's looks are dramatic and imposing, rather than 'pretty'. It's too butch for that by far.

The DBS's styling seems to improve with age. When we drove the Aston Martin Racing Green coupé earlier this year, it looked terrific and gained appreciative glances like no other. The open, 'Volante' in Aston-speak, DBS was revealed at this year's Geneva show and launched to the press at Le Mans. By adding a re-profiled, carbonfibre bootlid with spoiler and changing the rear wheel-arch lines, the masculinity and sporting mien of the closed car has been transferred to the convertible.

Hood up or down, it's a head-turner. You are putting a toe in the gently lapping waters of Lake Bling; but such is the worldwide affection for the marque that the car engenders the word 'respect' in its original, and most flattering, meaning.

Inside, 2+2 seating is standard (an option on the coupé), as is a 6-speed manual gearbox with Touchtronic auto an option. I haven't driven a non-auto DBS since the car's launch in 2007 but I have to say that, given the choice, I'd order the manual car any time. It gives the driver so much more control and really makes the best use of the 510bhp V12. The clutch is relatively light and, such is the flexibility and torque of the 6.0-litre engine, most driving can be done in 3rd or 4th gear.

As in the Bentley Continental GTC Speed, substituting alloy and composite for cloth enhances the driving experience rather than detracting from it. With the roof raised, the roar of the V12 (emboldened by an opened valve in the exhaust system over 4000rpm) is that much more prominent – yet not irritatingly so. Far from it.



With the car fully open – a feat it can accomplish at speeds of up to 30mph – you then get the full effect, and the manual 'box allows the precise management of the sound.

Compared with the coupé, the Volante has lost some stiffness but clever strengthening and bracing of the car's underpinnings mean that it's still a very potent performer. In fact, odd foot-to-the-floor blasts aside, one of my most abiding memories of the DBS Volante is the superb chassis control over country roads.

The well-weighted steering allows what is a big car to be guided along relatively confined routes with ease. Which is important, as although it will do all the motorway stuff hood-up in comfort, once you arrive at your destination you want to be able to enjoy the sights and sounds of coastal resort, Alpine pass or city.



After the initial 'I'm driving a sporty car and I expect it to be bumpy' wears off, ultra-high performance machines can be a pain. Sure, the testers like them, and the manufacturers bask in the glow of good write-ups but - living with that every day? Yet a sporty-bumpy compromise isn't always necessary, and the engineers at Gaydon have to be praised for getting the chassis tuning on the DBS Volante spot-on. Well done.

A stiff chassis, well set up geometry and the Adaptive Damping System are responsible for this. You can switch in and out of two settings, 'Standard' and 'Sport', but Sport is probably too firm for everyday driving and the only criticism I would lay at Mr Standard's door would be a slight tendency towards vertical pitching on an undulating motorway. Other than that - it's brilliant.

Oh, and before I forget, our test car was equipped with the optional 10-spoke 20in forged aluminium lightweight wheels, shod with ridiculously low-profile Pirelli P-Zeros. Still a good ride, though.

The open car carries over the Carbon Ceramic Matrix (CCM) brakes of the coupé and this standard-setting system is faultless. You also get the impressive Bang & Olufsen stereo with its performing dash-top speakers, and a special set-up that compensates for open or closed driving.



A couple of days after the DBS Volante was collected, I was at Silverstone and sat alongside Aston Martin Racing's Tomas Enge as he squeezed the last drops of performance out of a DBS coupé. You could not, in all honesty, do that in the Volante.

But then again, there's no way you drive like that on the road anyway. I liked the DBS Volante: it's a special, 'top model' Aston, performs with élan and looks a million dollars. But I'd want the manual.

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