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## Driven: 2012 Aston Martin V8 Vantage

23 March 2012 | Steve Wakefield

*So, this is Aston Martin's revised, 2012-spec V8 Vantage. In virginal ('Stratus', actually) white, it's the company's entry model, the most accessible new Aston Martin ever.*

The Gaydon company had announced changes to the best-selling V8 Vantage range in February this year. Principal among the modifications are the wider tyres, optional seven-speed Sportshift transmission, uprated braking and quicker steering first seen in the Vantage S. And you can now - as an option - order the crystal-clear Garmin satellite navigation system first seen last year on the Virage.

Visually, the side-sills have been nicely rounded and filled out, while the new front lower bumper with its aerodynamic splitter looks particularly smart, the matt black contrasting well with the bright white of this car's paintwork. Likewise, at the rear, a new diffuser freshens the view from behind.



Plus, and it's a big plus, some careful realigning of the price list means that in the UK, an on-the-road outlay of £84,995 (108,500 euros in Germany) is all that's required for Aston Martin ownership, 2012-style. The car you see here weighs in at £87,780, with its optional 'Magnum Silver' meshes, Garmin sat-nav and clear rear lights.

That's new, 991-series 911 territory. But Aston aficionados would argue that the British badge carries greater kudos than Porsche's familiar shield. Driving *an Aston Martin* carries a premium, so the fact that one can now take delivery of what is still a highly attractive coupé, with a strong 4.7-litre, 420bhp V8, all for the price of a top-level German saloon, is something to be relished.

Although they might appear small, the engineering advances immediately make themselves evident. The steering is so much more direct. The ride, less uncompromising than the Vantage S's we drove last year, is supple and well-suited to the faster steering, making it nicely weighted compared to the lighter feeling of the more skittish S.



The brakes? Having driven the car within its limits on UK roads, I'll take Aston's promise of improved

stopping performance on face value. The pedal certainly has very good 'feel'. And the slightly wider (by 10mm) tyres add to the all-round impression of solidity and heft, contributing no doubt to the weight of the steering. "Just right," I would say.

Since its introduction at the Geneva Motor Show in 2005, the V8 Vantage has steadily grown up. The opening exhaust-valve shenanigans have all but disappeared on the regular cars, with the option of a sports set-up for those who want to annoy the neighbours. I like the way Aston has developed these cars; they're much more mature and discreet, fitting today's more considered times.



Performance-wise, the V8's power curve has been refined a touch, with a tweak here and there to produce a very smooth delivery all the way into the high-7000s. It's not neck-snappingly quick; so, given the choice, I'd go for the Sportshift, as that really does get the most out of the motor. With a Gaydon-era manual Aston there's always the issue of the gear-lever sited slightly too far back for comfort - a situation that does not make for quick changes.

The interior remains untouched for 2012. Our car was attractively finished in Spicy Red leather and the cabin is as fine a place to spend several hours behind the wheel as any. The Garmin set-up does not reinvent satellite navigation, but it's clear, accepts a full UK postcode and is a whole lot better than the previous, Volvo-sourced system.



It navigated us to the middle of the Shropshire countryside (almost to the metre) and you can't say fairer than that.

And while we're in the locale, "Give crowns and pounds and guineas/But not your heart away" is a line from A.E. Housman's poem, 'A Shropshire Lad'. In its 2012 V8 Vantage, Aston Martin has shaved a few pounds, shillings and pence off its entry-level GT, confident that buyers' hearts will fall for the badge and the still-desirable lines.

For the money, it's an excellent car. As an Aston Martin, pound for pound, it's probably the best in the company's range.



Photos: Classic Driver

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