

CLASSIC DRIVER

Driven: Aston Martin Virage Volante 6.3-Litre

Lead

"In the strongest possible contrast to the factory-made article, a pair of Lobb's handmade shoes is a work of art, unique to their owner." Substitute 'Aston Martin' for 'Lobb', and change the subject to things automotive, and you have some idea what this particular car is all about.

It is a convertible Virage, named as all open Astons have been since the DB6, a 'Volante'.

The word might imply a fleetness of foot, perhaps the mythological flight of a wood sprite... but the reality of a standard 5,340cc fuel-injected Virage coupé was hardly magical: 'stately progress', little more. And adding the extra weight of chassis strengthening and a power-operated hood to the Volante did not help.

So, when Works Service introduced a 'big-bore', 6.3-litre conversion producing 456bhp and 460lb ft of torque it was just what the model needed, and could propel a Virage to 60mph in well under six seconds and then on to a top speed in excess of 170mph.







In line with this considerable increase in performance, well-developed chassis modifications that included sports suspension, 18in wheels, and vented and drilled 14in front discs were also supplied under the all-encompassing title of 'Works Service 6.3-litre Specification'.

Wider bodywork, incorporating flared wheelarches and new front, side and rear valances gave the car a more aggressive look and was the most-specified configuration.

However, much as Sir might prefer a a brown-and-white, co-respondent brogue to a plain-toe black Oxford, the world of bespoke commissioning at Aston Martin is there to assist and advise. For one very special user, HRH The Prince of Wales, this car - owned by Aston from new - retained its more discreet coachwork yet upgraded the engine, suspension and brakes to the optimum specification. As with the Prince's DB6 Volante, it was a manual - rare for a Virage Volante.



Not only has it been owned by the company since registration, it has also been under the watchful eye of Kingsley Riding-Felce and his team at Works Service ever since. So it was to the all-new ['Works' premises in](#)

[Newport Pagnell](#) I returned, to drive Lot 233 in the forthcoming 19 May, Bonhams all-Aston Martin auction.

The car was just out of the service shop and will be MOT'd and taxed prior to the sale. With a whisker over 34,000 miles recorded from new, it looked very 'ready to go'. The Special British Racing Green non-metallic paintwork and Mushroom hide went well together, in that unassuming, 'not trying too hard' manner much beloved by Britain's elite. The car is, to all intents and purposes, a reprise on the similarly understated, limited series of V8 Vantage Volantes - all 'go' with little to show.

While one felt the weight of the car on wide tyres turning out of 'Works' into Tickford St, from then onwards the big convertible felt very fresh, a credit to the technicians and a reminder of the careful engineering behind the 6.3-litre project. Its manual specification implied 'driver's car', and out on the road the performance did not disappoint.







The engine is terrific, it really makes the car. I've never driven a fuel-injected 6.3 before but this one really pulled the sizeable machine along and genuinely impressed me with its urge, its flexibility and the way it transformed what could have been a lolloping cruiser into a nicely balanced, open 2+2. Likewise, the brakes and suspension are clearly in fine fettle and match the engine well.

With no flickering instrument needles, a surprisingly buffet-free cockpit (even with all windows down) and a muted, yet purposeful exhaust note, this was an awfully nice place to be. In fact, although I have an appointment with another Works-prepared 6.3-litre V8 Aston later this week in Monaco, I'd have happily driven this one down there like a shot.

It felt, in short, every inch the made-to-measure suit, the bespoke shotgun, the Lobb shoes and all the other over-used similes mentioned with the words 'Aston Martin' over the years.

But, don't forget, these names are celebrated for good reasons: timeless British styling, handmade quality, strong performance and personalisation, all qualities this Virage Volante has in abundance.

The 1994 Aston Martin Virage Volante 6.3-Litre, formerly the property of HRH The Prince of Wales, will be offered for sale at the annual Bonhams Aston Martin and Lagonda auction, to be held on Saturday, 19 May. Estimate: £50,000 - 70,000. For further information, see the [car listing in the Classic Driver Marketplace](#).

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Gallery

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