

# CLASSIC DRIVER



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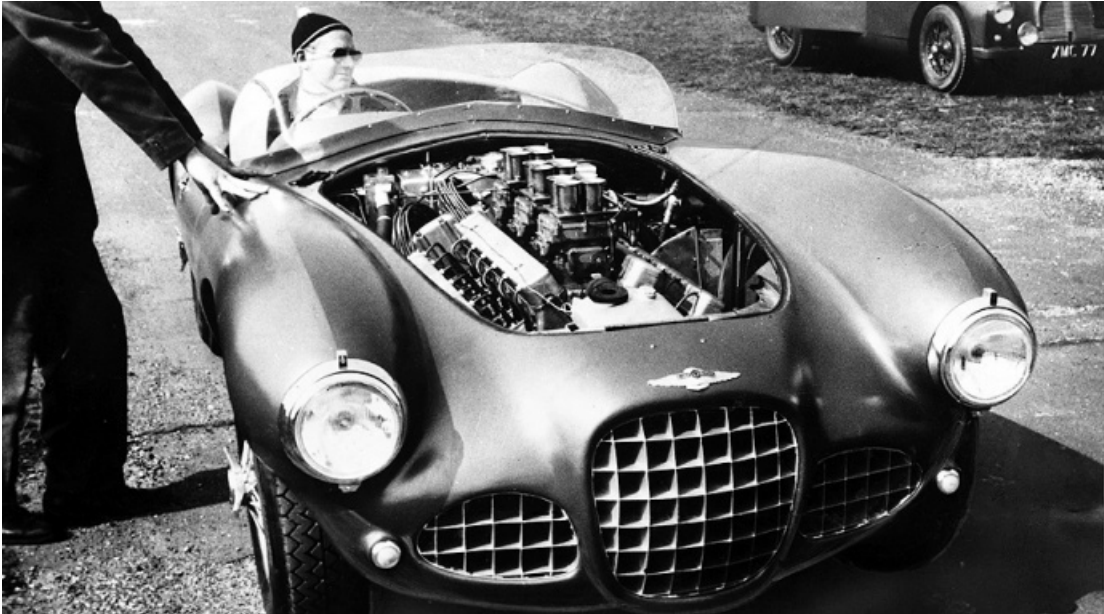
## Cometh the Hour, Cometh the Man: Sir David Brown

10 May 2013 | J. Philip Rathgen

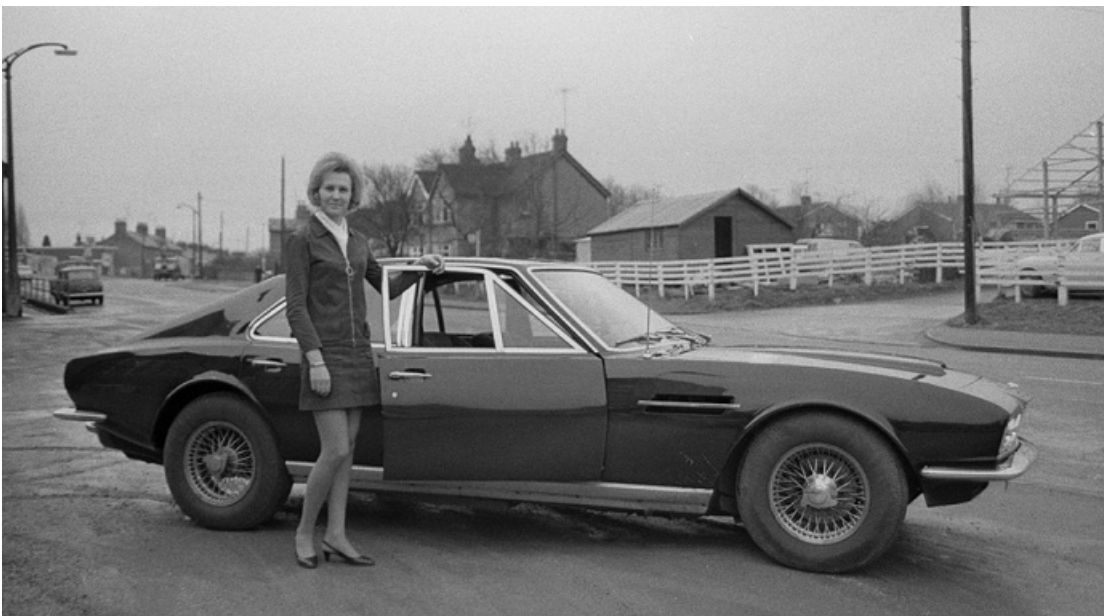
*Amateur racing driver and motorcyclist, Joint Master of the South Oxfordshire Hunt, a keen sailor, shooting aficionado, qualified pilot, polo and tennis player, racehorse owner and water skier – Sir David Brown was every inch the wealthy post-War industrialist.*

However, in late 1946, had he not responded to an advertisement in *The Times*, his name – and initials, ‘DB’ – might never have been associated with Aston Martin. The notice in *The Times* simply invited offers for the purchase of a sports car company. The company, on further investigation, turned out to be Aston Martin – a “very famous” name, Brown remarked. Taking the prototype ‘Atom’ home to Yorkshire, he was impressed with the handling... but less so with the boxy bodywork and anaemic four-cylinder engine.

To the head of a giant engineering conglomerate founded by his grandfather, the £20,500 purchase price for Aston in 1947 wasn’t too taxing. At least he could then *buy* an interesting British luxury car at a time of severe rationing and shortages that meant most Rolls, Jaguar and Bentley production was earmarked for export.



Very much A Man Who Knew What He Wanted, Brown then purchased Lagonda, principally for its W.O. Bentley-designed twin-OHC six. With Lagonda costing £52,500, for an outlay of less than £75,000 Brown had bought two of the most famous British sporting marques, complete with ready-to-manufacture modern chassis, engines and bodywork. A British rival to Ferrari was born, and 'DB' was able to achieve his lifelong aims of building a car to his personal specification and indulging in international motor racing.





Brown was probably at his happiest in the 1950s, finding time to visit some of the races, perhaps flying himself to events in his de Havilland Dove. He had his pet projects: the disastrous 'Ferrari rival' Lagonda V12; the four-door Lagondas; the first DB5 Shooting Brake; an ill-fated foray into Grand Prix racing; the four-door, Lagonda-badged DBSV8; the many 'Roman Purple' demonstrators appropriated for his personal use... He was the boss, after all. Brown was thrice married, and received a knighthood in 1968, but having sanctioned the move to Newport Pagnell, the introduction of the DB4-5-6 models and the DBS, in 1972 Brown sold Aston Martin to Company Developments. He had owned it for exactly 25 years. Liquidity problems with the David Brown Group as a whole and the seemingly impossible job of ever making Aston Martin break even forced his hand.

During that quarter century, with the win at Le Mans in 1959 and one sensational road car after another, there's no doubt that David Brown's influence on the company was enormous. And as a man to serve? Let's leave the final word to John Wyer (Team Manager and later General Manager): "As Chairman of the Board, Chief Executive and *Patron* of a racing team it would be difficult, if not impossible, to find anybody better to work for than David Brown." High praise indeed – from a famously hard-to-please man.

*Photos: Aston Martin Lagonda / Getty Images*

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