

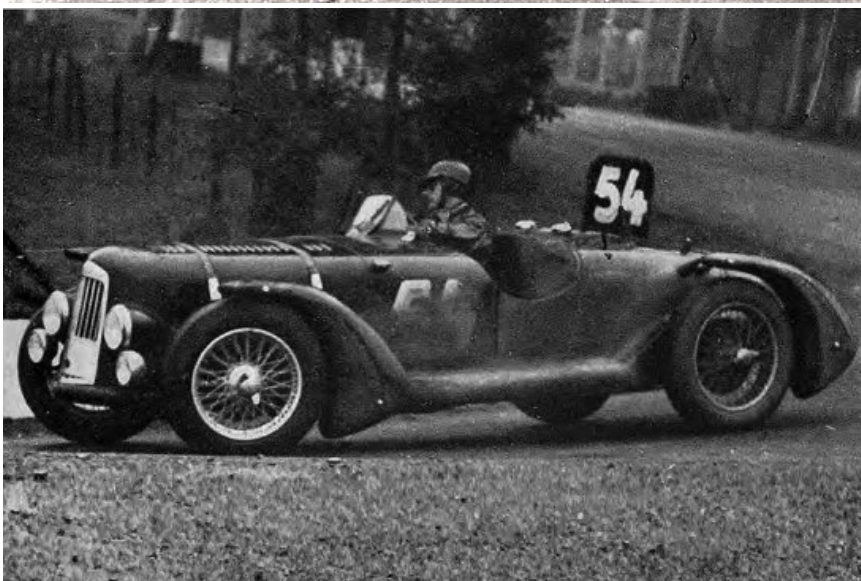
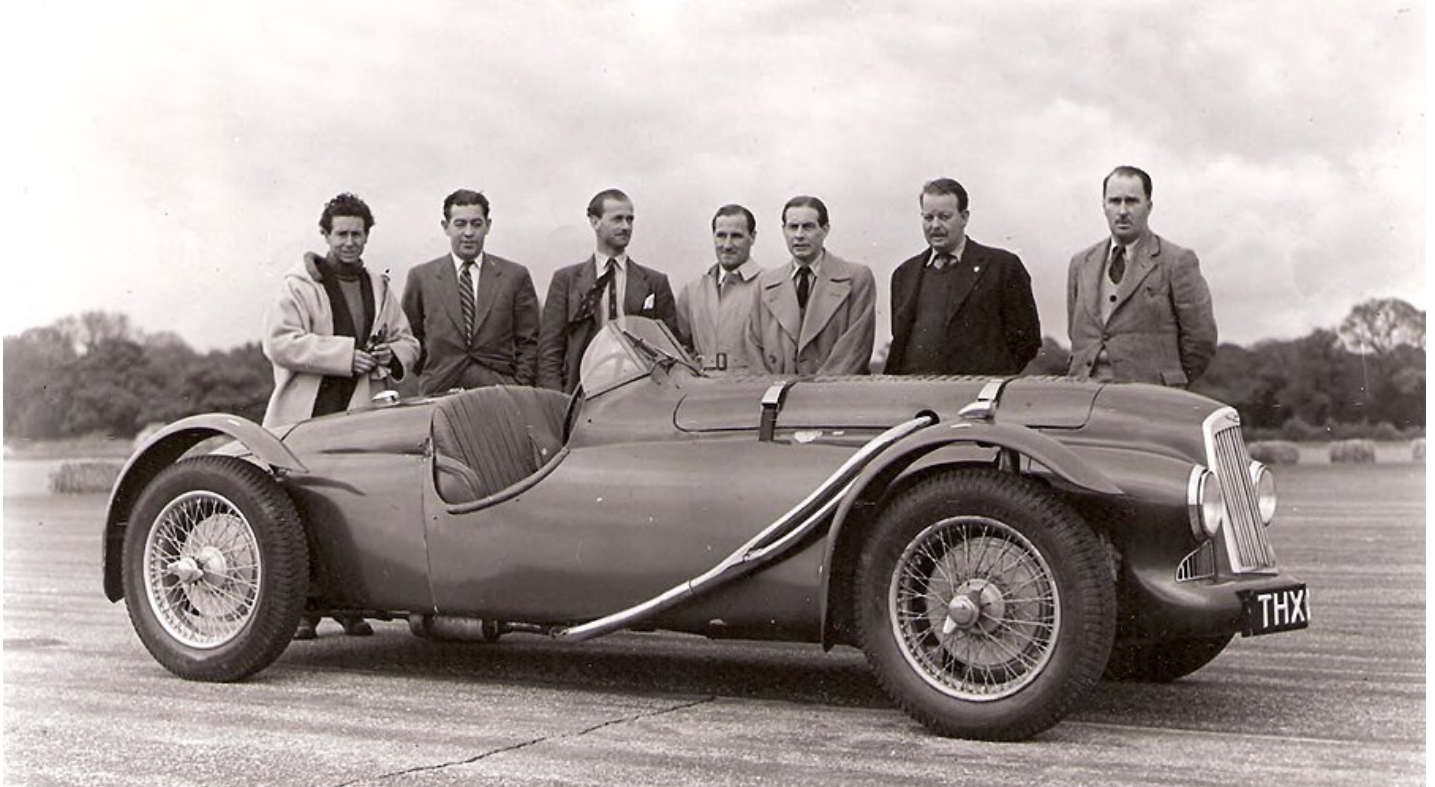
CLASSIC DRIVER

Aston Martin 'Spa Replica': The first post-War Aston

Lead

We took a quick spin in this remarkable car, a quirky, high-performance one-off with impeccable pedigree (but styling that wasn't to everyone's taste). Simon de Burton tells the story of the unique Spa Replica.

When the the last chequered flag dropped at Brooklands following the outbreak of WWII, few could have anticipated that the occasion would mark the end of serious motorsport in Britain for almost a decade. Even with the conflict over, fuel rationing, lack of cash, lack of cars – and rather more pressing matters such as the rebuilding of a nation – kept racing on the back burner until 1948 when the first post-War meeting was staged at Goodwood, Silverstone was inaugurated as a circuit and things suddenly began to grind back into life.





In February of the previous year, a wealthy Yorkshire entrepreneur named David Brown had responded to an advertisement in *The Times* for a 'high class motor business'. He soon acquired Aston Martin for the not inconsiderable sum of £20,500. It was not long before the first post-War product was being rolled through the doors of the Feltham works (recently rebuilt following bomb damage) in the form of a car based on an updated version of the wartime Atom prototype and featuring a chassis and two-litre, four-cylinder engine designed by Claude Hill.

Aston's official test driver at the time was the colourful St John 'Jock' Horsfall who, having raced the Aston 'Speed' model known as 'the Black Car' during the 1930s, spent his war as a driver for the British Secret Service and famously took part in Operation Mincemeat, the Allied disinformation plot which successfully diverted Nazi attention away from the invasion of Italy from North Africa.





Brown took the view that the best way to evaluate the new car would be to test its mettle in competition, so it duly took its place on the grid at the 1948 24 Hours of Spa, with Horsfall and Leslie Johnson as works drivers. Sporting a body hastily designed by Frank Feeley, the car was far from being the most beautiful Aston Martin ever to turn a wheel – but under the skin it was clearly something special since, almost unbelievably, it won the race outright.

Having been driven home from the event in the best 'golden era' tradition, the car was rebuilt with a fresh body and production engine before being displayed at the London Motor show on the Aston Martin / Lagonda stand (by now Brown had bought the latter, too) in a bid to encourage buyers to part with £3,100 for one of a proposed series of 'Spa Replicas'.



Not everyone in Britain, however, had bounced back from wartime austerity in quite the way that Brown had – and there were no takers for his high-performance ugly duckling. Hence the Spa Replica (which was used by

David Brown Jr. after the London Motor Show) remained a quirky one-off which still exists today. Fully restored and running perfectly, it stands as both a testament to Britain's post-War return to racing glory and to the competition heritage on which Aston Martin is built.

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Photos: Jan Baedeker

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