

CLASSIC DRIVER

Aston Martin V12 Vantage S: Hot as hell in heavenly Palm Springs

Lead

Here's a scoop: Classic Driver has been to heaven – and come back. And, perhaps surprisingly, it was as hot as hell because it proved to be in California's Coachella Valley desert where this October's temperatures have regularly nudged 90 degrees...

Well, maybe it wasn't your actual heaven, but it certainly felt like it from behind the wheel of Aston Martin's latest work of art, the V12 Vantage S.

"This might just be the finest production car Aston has ever built..."

This deliciously taut and pugnacious-looking 565 horsepower animal would bring out the devil in even the most saintly driver if faced with those endless miles of come-hither asphalt around Palm Springs, where Aston chose to launch its latest hard-core sportster.

It's fitting that the V12S has arrived in the marque's centenary year, too – because this might just be the finest production car Aston has ever built.

Taste the tang

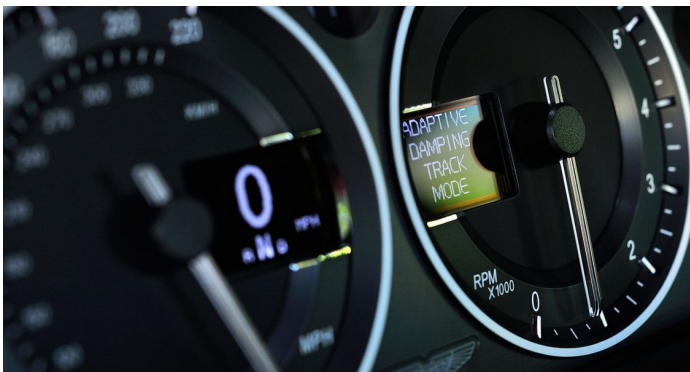


Just looking at the one we drove had us drooling. Its special 'Yellow Tang' metallic paint gave even the California sun a run for its money in the brightness stakes, being tempered only by its black grille, dark 'lipstick' surround and satin-black lightweight wheels.

My experience of driving it was further enhanced by the fact that my co-pilot was none other than Tom Hunt, a chap so charming and self-effacing that when I idiotically asked what his connection was with the car world, he modestly answered: "My father was quite well known as a racing driver." Ah yes. I think he was called James.

For the first few miles, having Hunt jnr. sitting beside me in the passenger seat (more often than not looking uncannily like his dad) made me a trifle nervous, leading me to blame our sedate progress on concerns over the signs littering the desert saying 'Speed enforced by aircraft'. At one point, I think the semi-slick Pirelli P-Zeros were genuinely sticking to the Tarmac, so slowly were we moving.

Temptation wins



They certainly proved to have some grip when temptation finally won the day and we switched from the rather lurching automatic mode of the Oerlikon Graziano seven-speed automated manual gearbox to 'sport' in order to use this genuinely brilliant car as it was intended.

Yes, maybe we did edge very slightly over the 55mph limit on certain occasions, but the consequences would probably have been worth the unbounded joy of experiencing a car in which the chassis, suspension, steering and engine really do seem to work in perfect harmony. And, speaking of harmony, need we mention the sound? Glorious, of course.

The spec sheet says the £138,000 V12S will touch 205mph and sprint from standstill to 62mph in 3.9 seconds. We don't doubt it. But, believe it or not, it makes a beautifully sedate and comfortable highway cruiser, too.

Highway to Heaven



Chuck in great roads, great weather and a travelling companion who just happens to be the son of one of the most charismatic F1 drivers of all time and, if we're not mistaken, that really does add up to heaven, doesn't it?

Of the automotive kind, at least.

Photos: Aston Martin

Gallery

