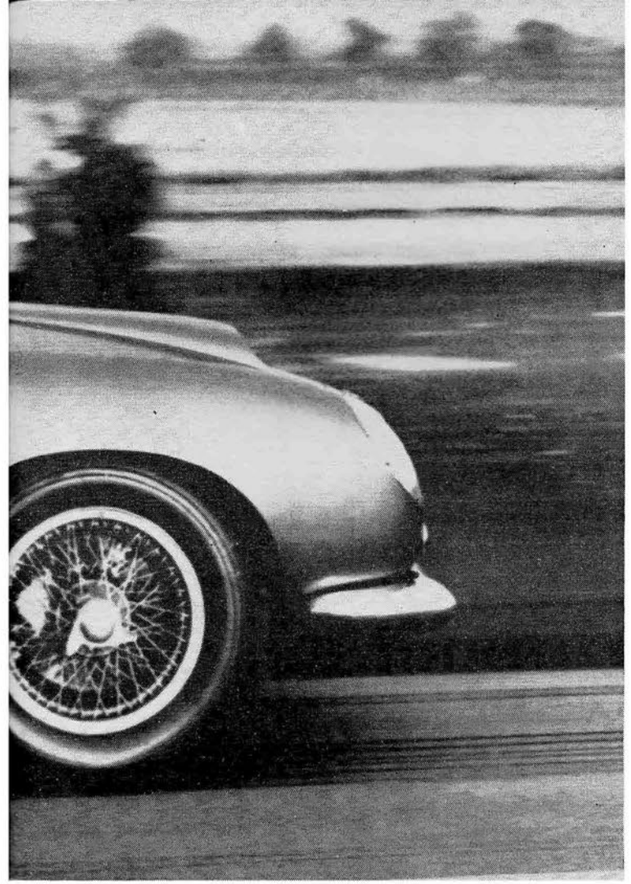
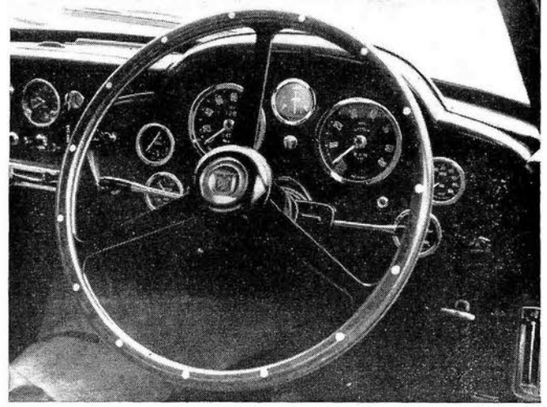




If there's no instrument to tell you, the information probably isn't worth knowing. Buttons on dip switch and turn signal flash the headlights.

The DB4-GT sizzles round Goodwood's Woodcote corner at the very limit of its adhesion on a misty morning. Its handling's always neutral.

Driver's Report: ASTON MARTIN DB4-GT

If you have a penchant for fast driving, cruising at an easy 120, join Contributing Editor Dennis May in the damn-the-economy-full-speed-ahead Aston!

► On M1, Britain's sole and somewhat selfconscious motorway, it's lawful but maybe a bit exhibitionist to pass a police car at 120 mph. So we backed off to a hundred and ten for the few seconds it took to shrink the constabulary Riley to backstud size in the Aston's driving mirror. If the bobbies wanted to ask us for our autographs or anything, they gave no sign.

Combining 331 gross horsepower, respectable aerodynamic shape and as little frontal area as you can reasonably compress within a width and height of 66 by 52 inches, the Aston Martin DB4-GT is Britain's fastest catalogued passenger car. Parochial as M1 is (you've had it in a mite over sixty miles), it's an enlightened piece of engineering, with three lanes per track and short straights alternating with open curves designed as antisoporifics rather than speed abators. So in reporting that on a dry and sunny Sunday, under lenient traffic conditions, we only averaged 107.8 mph for the round south-north-south trip, explanations are in order.

This car, the Feltham firm's resident demonstrator and the only one so assigned, was in a state of semi-convalescence following an engine teardown that had included fitting a new crankshaft. The makers didn't enter any specific mercy plea; on the other hand the *carte* didn't look exactly *blanche*. So we compromised by cruising mostly at around 116 mph, intermittently exploring the 120/130 range, frequently and frustratedly dropping into double figures while our Lucas fanfares penetrated the skulls of abominable slowmen sightseeing in the fast lane, and twice briefly bringing up 142 mph (at 6000 rpm) on the speedometer.

If your veins contain anything more viscous than cold tea, this car's attraction is irresistible. Throw it at a long gradient in third and before you can say David Brown, Esquire, it's slicing the horizon at 108 mph — with another cog still to come. Harden your heart and button your nose against the thought and smell of a clutch in thermal travail and you can gun 'er from nothing to an authentic century in less than a quarter of a minute. Savor the car's uncanny sidebite under limit-crowding lateral g, the huge and seemingly inexhaustable stopping power of the Girling disc brakes, and Roy Salvadori's G.T.-class lap record for Goodwood in last year's Tourist Trophy (89.81 mph) no longer seems impossible but merely improbable.

It didn't take us long to see what Mr. Roy Jackson-Moore, Aston Martin's export manager, had meant when he described the DB4-GT as "an Englishman's car", with the tacit implication that it isn't an American's car. This is not to say it won't sell in the U.S. to a select minority of unAmericans — undoubtedly it will. But here's the point. Assuming cost to be no object, a prospect with serious G.T. racing aspirations will take the even pricier Zagato model's invoice on the chin — and gain the substantial extra performance resulting from 200 pounds less weight and an even lower-drag shape. On the other hand, if he doesn't intend to race and just wants to motor far and fast, in more comfort and with two more seats than the G.T. provides, what's wrong with the refined and incidentally much cheaper DB4?

In offering three variations on the same engineering theme, Aston Martin builds a vernier into its sales policy, so to speak: *except* for racing, the noise level in the ultralight Zagato car is, the makers admit, too high even for most Englishmen. On the other hand, there are those to whom the normal G.T.'s standard of refinement and amenity is quite acceptable as long as a truly brutal performance goes with it. (185 pounds lighter than the DB4, five inches shorter in the wheelbase, and developing an extra 68 bhp gross, the G.T. is around five seconds faster from a standstill to 100 mph, with pro rata gains in the other strata of the acceleration scale.)

This digression disposed of, let's go aboard and see how the DB4-GT looks and feels from indoors. The seats, upholstered in seductively supple leather, are neither too firm nor to squidgy. There's none of the engulfing effect you get with, for instance, Ferrari's deeply bucketed Berlinetta seats, but sufficient side-buttressing to contain and restrain posteriors of a size we don't quite aspire to. For maximum shoulder support the seat backs could be an inch or so higher. The smallish (16-inch diameter) steering wheel, with three mat-black spokes and its polished wood rim enchantingly dotted with alloy dowels, is an *objet d'art* in its own right. In the straight-ahead position it obscures only one instrument (the ammeter, which doesn't matter) and perfectly frames six others, all calibrated in white on black dials: tach, 160-mph speedometer, fuel contents, water temperature, oil pressure, oil temperature.

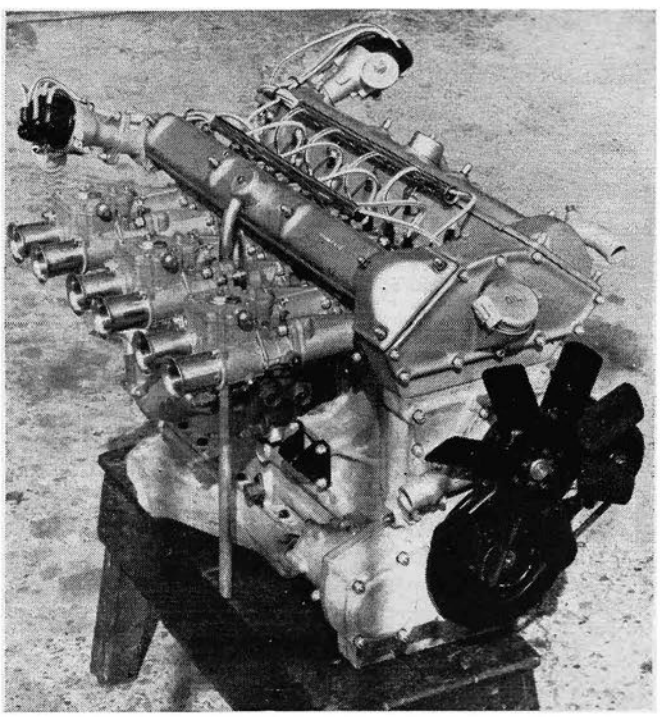
The organ-type accelerator, devoid of rubber or other facing, lines up nicely with the brake pedal for heel/toe stuff. There's a shallow rubber-lined heel well in correct proximity with the pedals, rubber kick protectors on the transmission hump and body lining adjacent to your accelerator foot, and a footrest to slide off onto from the clutch. The short stick controlling the all-synchro 4-speed gearbox is right where you want it, has a short, decisive throw. Make-yourself-at-home aids include fore/aft and up/down seat adjustment, steering wheel adjustment in two planes — in/out and column rake (former allows two fixed settings; both operations need wrenches). Realization that this car's furnishings, controls and instruments were planned by people to whom driving is an end in itself, comes the moment you set Daks to hide.

There's a choice of five axle ratios. If you don't state a preference you get the 3.54 to one gearing that the test car had, giving 22.6 mph per 1000 rpm in top. If you want more acceleration at the price of reduced maximum speed you can opt for 3.77 or 4.09 to one. If you want more speed at the expense of acceleration, 3.31 and 2.93 to one back ends are available, the latter giving 27.3 mph per thousand. This data has obvious relevance to the following acceleration figures that we recorded: zero to 40 mph, 4.0 seconds; to

60 mph; 6.8; to 80 mph, 10.4; to 100 mph, 14.8.

Pre-delivery, says Mr. Jackson-Moore, all DB4-GTs with the 3.77 to one gearing have to get to 100 mph in 14 seconds or less, and most of them vary between 13.4 and 13.7 seconds. In case you think this is a tall story, and assuming it's convenient for you to pay a call on the firm's Newport Pagnell factory when your DB4-GT is undergoing pre-delivery testing, you'll be quite welcome to sit alongside the tester with a stopwatch and have this remarkable accelerative capability demonstrated to you. And if you're specifying the 3.54 to one ratio, he'll oblige with times in the 13.9 to 14.1 band.

The back axle is positively located both laterally and longitudinally, relative to the chassis — inescapably, of course, because coil springs, which are used at the back as well as the front, merely spring and don't locate; also a Powr-Lok limited-slip differential is fitted. The combination of good axle discipline, moderate unsprung weight and the Powr-Lok's traction-promoting properties is valuable under all conditions of vigorous driving but *in*valuable during standing-start getaways: no hop, no judder, minimal wheelspin when the clutch bites home and the power curve really starts reaching for the roof in the 5000-per-minute region.



Rx for performance: take a six-cylinder, 224-cubic-inch engine developing a solid 331 bhp, put it in a DB4-GT chassis for 0-100 in 15 seconds.

Credit is due here, too, to Dunlop's current sports tire, the RS5. This was fitted to the test car but options are Firestone and Avon Turbospeed. During acceleration timings we ran the Dunlops at the 26/28 psi front/back pressures recommended for sub-century driving, increasing to 33/35 for motorway travel. A.M. considers Dunlops give the best traction, specially on wet surfaces, but are inferior to Avons for high-speed tracking.

It's perhaps stating the obvious to say there is nothing much wrong with a gearbox that supplies the leverage for, and stands the brunt of, nothing-to-100 takeoffs in substantially less than a quarter-minute. Our only criticism could be that until you get used to it, the third-top shift has a tendency to momentary hang-up if you follow the normal and prudent practice of exerting oblique pressure away from the first-second side of the pattern. All that's needed to overcome the hindrance is a purely straight-back pull, response to which is as fast and clean a shift as any we've known.

As implied by the reference to centigrade smells from the bellhousing under the influence of blitzen getaways, the test car's clutch was getting pretty well all it had stomach for during the acceleration timings, which would partly account for the difference between our times and the factory's claims.

Handled as it likes to be handled, this is a busy piece of mechanism and sounds like it. Get it twisting and it emits a glee recalling Keats's "hum of mighty workings", its elements minor individually but hearty in aggregate . . . a euphony mingling maybe a trace of piston slap with the gossip of twice as many camshafts and timing chains as production V8s boast. Exhaustwise, the G.T. is quiet as racing sports cars go (this was particularly noticeable when Astons of this type traded phons with the G.T. Ferraris in the T.T. last year) but pretty aggressive by average sports car standards. We wouldn't quarrel with that too much if the tail of the twin-pipe exhaust system didn't reduce an otherwise adequate ground clearance to a hindersomely poor one.

At the low idling speed the test car's engine was set at, 500 rpm, the triple twin-throat Webers had the fretfulness and hesitancy that these carbs often evince. Until experience proved the contrary, we wondered whether the condition might portend spark plug extinction by wetting, but nothing of the kind happened. They spit and like it, it seems. Step on these Webers and they take it at a glorious gulp, from any speed.

The makers filled her up before our test with in-between-grade fuel, stating, correctly as it developed, that this wouldn't tax the digestion of the 9.25 to one-compression engine. We nonetheless added a half-tankful of 100-octane before doing the acceleration timings. Knocking couldn't be provoked on either grade, nor any running-on following switch-offs after fullbore driving. The gas tank — capacity, 36 U.S. gallons — shares the trunk with the spare wheel, and there's no pretense that these leave room for anything else. Luggage is amply catered for, though, by a big platform right behind the seats.

We'd classify the Aston's steering as neutral — and more important, *consistently* so. Although in expert hands it eats dust from very few G.T. rivals, as Salvadori's 1960 T.T. performance testified, it entirely lacks the ultrasensitive "mouth" that's characteristic of more esoteric competition machinery. A driver with experience limited to small and stodgy English sedans could step straight into a DB4-GT and not make a monkey of himself. Geared about as you'd expect for a car of this one's *raison d'etre,* 2.6 turns from lock to lock, the steering is initially fairly heavy but lightens progressively as speed rises. We wouldn't ask for either more or less self-centering action; feed-back of road feel through the rack and pinion is perceptible but never excessive. Body roll is well controlled, right up to the threshold of breakaway. If we'd pushed 845XMV more than a degree or two past the angle of roll pictured at the top of page 35, there likely wouldn't have been a car *to* photograph. Just Goodwood landscape.

The Girling disc brakes, like the steering, get their brief term of sluggishness over with when you're going slowly. Anywhere above 50 mph or so they trample inertia to a swift death. Last year, observed and timed by the Motor Industry Research Association, Reg Parnell demonstrated the ability of the DB4-GT to go from zero to 100 mph and back to zero again in 24 seconds. More recently, again officially clocked, he cut this to 20 seconds. We didn't try it personally but it does our English ego good to doubt whether this "Englishman's car" is in much danger of having its feat eclipsed by foreign rivals of comparable rating. Or any rating. —*DM*