



CAR AND DRIVER ROAD TEST

ASTON MARTIN DB6

A hard-riding, hard-steering reminder of The Good Old Days . . . For virile purists with an Edwardian turn of mind

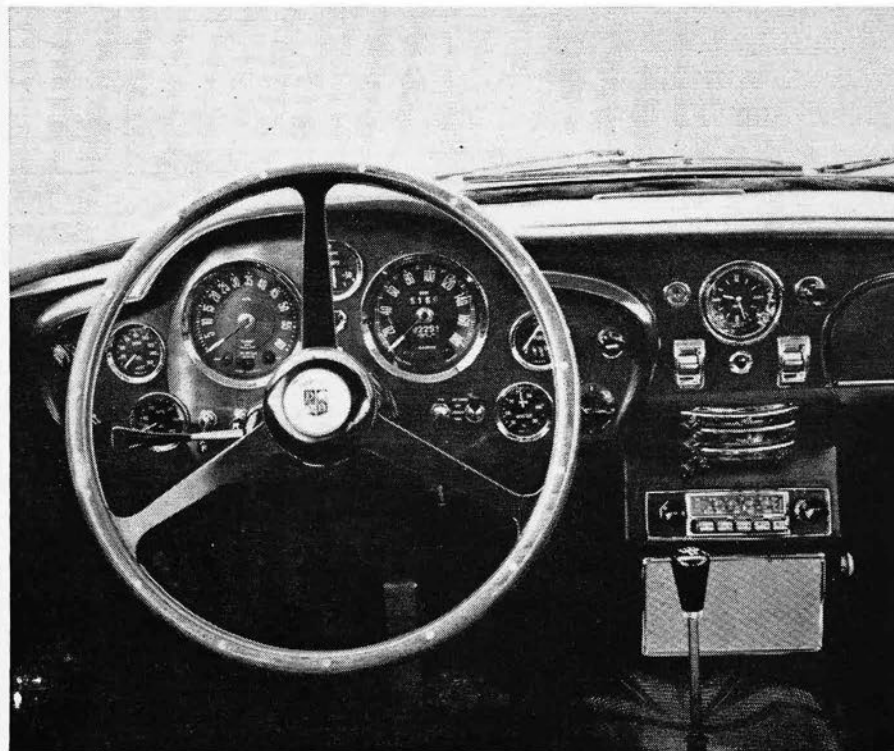
So there's this chick standing at the bus stop at 57th and Park Avenue and she's the prototype for all the beautiful brunettes with whom you ever wanted to wreck your life. Her suit is by Chanel, her hair is done to perfection, she's wearing gigantic sunglasses, she's about twenty-two—slim, yet full in calf and bosom—and she appears to be worth maybe \$1500 on the hoof, not counting any trust funds or 5½% bonds Daddy may have stashed away for her.

But, for all her upper-class splendor, she's uncomfortable . . . kinda, you know, *wiggly*. She switches her bag back and forth from hand to hand. She stretches. She takes off her sunglasses and puts them on again. She's in some kind of exquisite *pain*, man. She shifts her weight from one foot to the other. She smiles tentatively, not without embarrassment.

What's wrong with her? Well sir, just about thirty seconds ago, she fell in love with an Aston Martin



It's a 4½ Liter Low Chassis Invicta with electric windows and Italian styling. The Aston Martin DB6 is a sort of super Shelby Mustang—A GT 350 with luxury and lots of Old World Charm—like Rocky Graziano in a Coldstream Guards' uniform



DB6 that got stuck in traffic across the street from her. She's not sick, she's just trying to attract the car's attention!

There she was, on her way home to Central Park West to write fan letters to Bill Buckley or something, and along came this wild red car with the long, Freudian front-end and the chopped-off Kamm tail and the exhaust going whomp, whomp, and the two guys inside, and suddenly she's standing at the corner of 57th and Park *trying to pick up an Aston Martin!* Her! White stockings, twelve dollar wash-and-set, yé-yé glasses, respectable parents, good schools, and everything. *Holy Junior League!* For all she knows the occupants are a couple of sex-starved escaped convicts, but she's hypnotized by that red machine and she'll gladly take her chances.

No wonder James Bond makes out so well. Sitting inside the DB6 and watching that performance repeat itself at every second or third stoplight, you can be forgiven if you begin to think that your wishes have all been granted and you've been blessed with some foolproof power over women.

This uncanny ability of the Aston to attract attention is not limited to women, nor is it the car's only attribute, but it's as good a reason to spend \$15,400 as any other we can think of right now. No car, in our experience, has ever stopped people in their tracks so effectively. Ours was flaming red, with a darkish gray-blue interior. It made all the right noises, and it just seemed to personify the average citizen's notion of what an expensive GT car is supposed to look like.

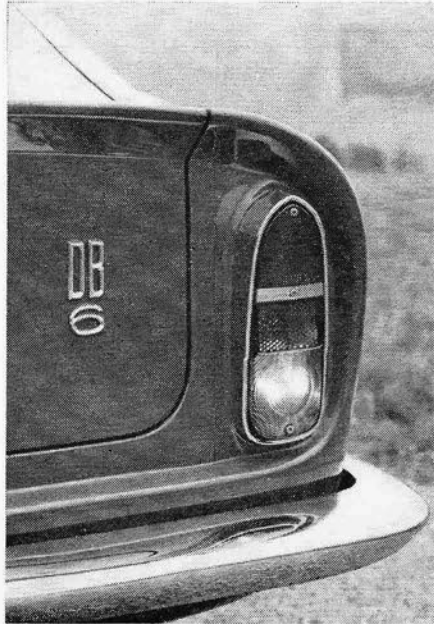
Normally, with a test car of the Aston's ilk, people will ask us what it is, how much it costs, et cetera, and then get a little annoyed when we tell them that it costs over ten thousand dollars. With the DB6, however, we'd lay that stupendous price tag on some guy, and he'd grin happily and nod his approval! It's weird. The car definitely has a special effect on people. Many didn't know what make it was, until we mentioned James Bond, and quite a few others asked if it was a Fer-

Sitting inside a DB6, you can be forgiven if you begin to think that all your wishes have been granted and you've been given some foolproof power over women

rari, but two people actually asked us if it was one of those "Volvo sports jobs"! These were mostly male adults, though. Male teenagers recognized it instantly as a relative of the 007 car, and females of all ages simply surrendered to it without waiting to be introduced.

But looking at an Aston Martin and living with it are two quite different experiences. Our eloquent Art Director, having just spent a weekend with it, said this: "Owning this car would be like being hopelessly infatuated with a beautiful bitch. You love to show her off to your friends, and in public places, but you're the only one who knows what a hard time she's giving you in private."

The Aston Martin is, in our highly subjective view, a perfect GT car for virile, well-heeled purists



with an Edwardian turn of mind. It is *not* a car for the man who merely wants to spend a lot of money to get a unique, thoroughbred substitute for his T-bird. It makes us think of the various efforts being mounted these days to bring out modern versions of old classics—viz., the Virgil Exner-styled Duesenberg. The DB6 is like a 4½ Liter Low Chassis Invicta with Italian styling and electric windows. It accelerates very well, its roadholding is excellent, it can cruise safely at much faster speeds than *you* can, and it is beautifully constructed. But it does not meet modern standards of ride, control-effort, interior noise level, or long-distance cruising comfort. It is a true sports car, in that it is infinitely more satisfactory as a source of recreation and adventure

(Continued on page 80)



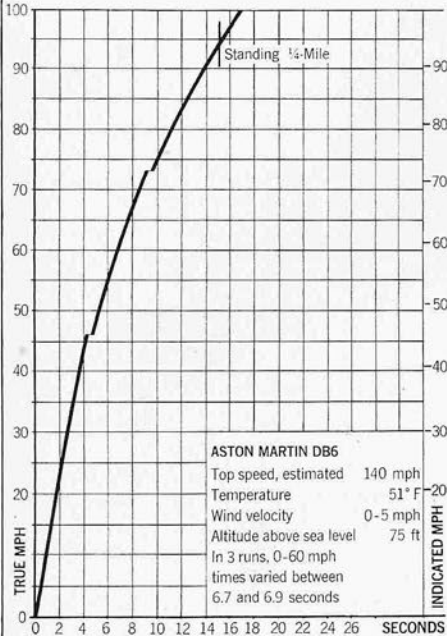
ASTON MARTIN DB6

Importer: Aston Martin Lagonda, Inc.
650 Clark Ave.
King of Prussia, Pa.

Price as Tested: \$15,400.00 East Coast POE

ACCELERATION

Zero to	Seconds
30 mph	2.4
40 mph	3.6
50 mph	5.2
60 mph	6.7
70 mph	8.7
80 mph	11.2
90 mph	13.9
100 mph	17.2
Standing 1/4 mile	94 mph in 15.1



ENGINE

Water-cooled six-in-line, aluminum block, aluminum head, 7 main bearings
 Bore x stroke..... 3.78 x 3.62 in., 96 x 92 mm
 Displacement..... 244 cu. in., 3995 cc
 Compression ratio..... 8.9 to one
 Carburetion..... 3 x 2 Weber 45DCOE9
 Valve gear..... Double overhead camshafts, chain-driven
 Power (SAE)..... 325 bhp @ 5750 rpm
 Torque..... 290 lbs-ft @ 4500 rpm
 Specific power output..... 1.33 bhp per cu. in., 81.2 bhp per liter
 Usable range of engine speeds 800-6000 rpm
 Electrical system .. 12-volt, 60 amp-hr battery, 45A alternator
 Fuel recommended..... Premium
 Mileage..... 12-18 mpg
 Range on 22.8 gallon tank..... 274-410 miles

DRIVE TRAIN

Clutch..... 10.0-inch single dry plate
 Transmission..... 5-speed, all-synchromesh

Gear	Ratio	Overall rpm	Max mph
Rev	3.31	12.35	-6.45
1st	2.73	10.18	7.62
2nd	1.76	6.57	12.12
3rd	1.23	4.59	17.46
4th	1.00	3.73	21.35
5th	.83	3.11	25.62

 Final drive ratio..... 3.73 to one

CHASSIS

Wheelbase..... 101.8 in
 Track..... F: 54.0 R: 53.5 in
 Length..... 182.0 in
 Width..... 66.0 in
 Height..... 53.5 in
 Ground Clearance..... 4.0 in
 Curb Weight..... 3387 lbs
 Test Weight..... 3829 lbs
 Weight distribution front/rear..... 51/49%
 Pounds per bhp (test weight)..... 10.4
 Suspension F: Ind., unequal-length wishbones, coil springs, anti-sway bar
 R: Rigid axle, trailing arms, lateral Watts linkage, coil springs
 Brakes..... 11.5-in. discs F, 10.75-in. discs R
 438 sq in swept area
 Steering..... Rack and pinion
 Turns, lock to lock..... 3.25
 Turning circle..... 34 ft
 Tires and wheels..... 6.70-15 Avon GT on 5.5-in rim, knock-off wire wheels

CHECK LIST

ENGINE

Starting..... Excellent
 Response..... Fair
 Noise..... Fair
 Vibration..... Good

DRIVE TRAIN

Clutch Action..... Good
 Transmission Linkage..... Fair
 Synchromesh Action..... Good
 Power-To-Ground Transmission..... Excellent

BRAKES

Response..... Fair
 Pedal Pressure..... Good
 Fade Resistance..... Good
 Smoothness..... Good
 Directional Stability..... Good

STEERING

Response..... Fair
 Accuracy..... Good
 Feedback..... Good
 Road Feel..... Good

SUSPENSION

Harshness Control..... Poor
 Roll Stiffness..... Good
 Tracking..... Good
 Pitch Control..... Fair
 Shock Damping..... Poor

CONTROLS

Location..... Good
 Relationship..... Good
 Small Controls..... Fair

INTERIOR

Visibility..... Good
 Instrumentation..... Fair
 Lighting..... Good
 Entry/Exit..... Good
 Front Seating Comfort..... Fair
 Front Seating Room..... Good
 Rear Seating Comfort..... Poor
 Rear Seating Room..... Fair
 Storage Space..... Good
 Wind Noise..... Good
 Road Noise..... Unacceptable

WEATHER PROTECTION

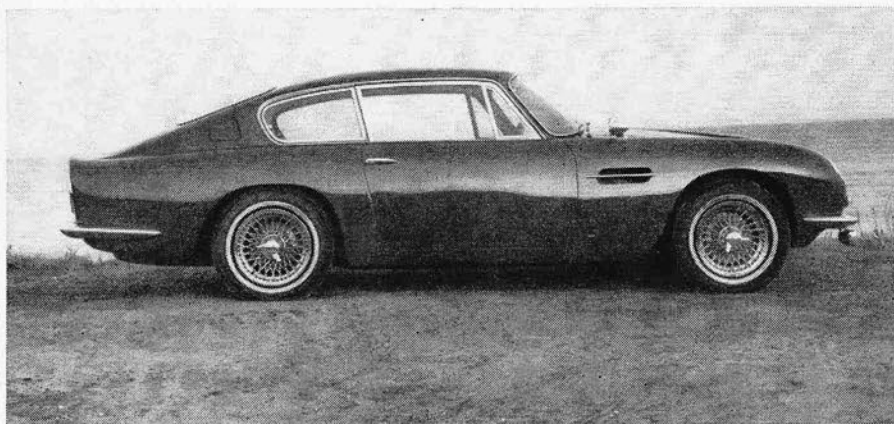
Heater..... Fair
 Defroster..... Fair
 Ventilation..... Fair
 Weather Sealing..... Good
 Windshield Wiper Action..... Poor

QUALITY CONTROL

Materials, Exterior..... Excellent
 Materials, Interior..... Excellent
 Exterior Finish..... Excellent
 Interior Finish..... Excellent
 Hardware and Trim..... Good

GENERAL

Service Accessibility..... Good
 Luggage Space..... Fair
 Bumper Protection..... Poor
 Exterior Lighting..... Excellent
 Resistance to Crosswinds..... Excellent



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ASTON MARTIN DB6 (Continued from page 28)

than as a practical piece of transportation. Which, perhaps, is exactly as it should be.

It's a paradox. Everything about the car seems to point to practicality and modern luxury. It has electric windows, air conditioning, surprisingly good leg room and comfort in the two rear seats, reasonable luggage space, adjustable rear shock absorbers, an electric antenna, heated rear window, and you can even get an automatic transmission. Practical, luxurious—right? But that's when it's sitting still. When you fire it up and move off, it's a hard-riding, hard-steering, noisy sports machine that is absolutely uncompromising in the demands it makes on the occupants.

Our test car was equipped with the optional "Vantage" high-performance engine and a ZF 5-speed manual transmission. The Vantage option produces 325 hp at 5750 rpm, compared to 282 at 5500 for the standard version. This increased performance is due to the fact that it has three dual-throat Weber carburetors and a generally hotter state of tune than the standard engine, which has three single-throat SUs. The two powerplants are otherwise identical, sharing the same aluminum block, aluminum head, 8.9 to one compression ratio, and 4-liter (244 cu. in.) displacement.

Before taking delivery on our test car, we spent two days with another DB6, which had the standard engine and the optional Borg-Warner Model 8 automatic transmission. We have never found any car equipped with this transmission to be worth a damn, and the Aston was no exception. The shifts were rough and unpredictable, and when we tried to hurry the car, the poor gearbox just got all confused and shifted up and/or down more or less at random. We cannot recommend it.

Another thing we learned with this preliminary, "pre-test" car, was that one should resolutely ignore the directions of the owner's manual as to tire pressures. The manual calls for inflations of 28 psi in the front, and 32 in the rear—evidently in the vain hope that the result will be a silky-smooth ride. It turns out that the resident Aston Martin factory people wouldn't think of driving their own cars with less than 35 psi in all four tires, and this made all the difference in the world.

With the "official" pressures the car was an utter truck. It understeered like mad, required the strength of a hairy mammoth to steer, and wallowed through the

corners on loudly protesting tires. In fact, with the normal pressures and the B-W gearbox it was unable to keep up with our publisher's new Plymouth station wagon on a little winding road in Connecticut. We gave it back, and began to worry about the advisability of testing a DB6 at all.

Fortunately, our worries were for naught. When our test car was delivered, it had the 5-speed gearbox, 35 pounds of air in the tires, and it was an entirely different proposition. The ride was just as good, and the handling and steering effort were about 200% improved. Because of this opportunity to compare the two, we hazard this opinion—if you're going to buy an Aston Martin, don't for an instant delude yourself that it can be turned into a luxurious, European T-bird sort of vehicle by ordering it with the mild engine and automatic transmission. You'll only emasculate the car and waste your money.

If you want an Aston Martin in the first place, you want it because it is an intensely masculine, sporty, demanding car to own and drive—order it with the 5-speed box and the Vantage engine, and keep the tires pumped up and the revs high.

The engine and the ZF transmission both require more than a little warm-up before they come into their own. The engine sounds exactly like all the bearings are about to rattle right out through the exhaust pipes, and it keeps rattling like that until the oil gets warm. The drag racing crowd would say "it has some clearances stuck into it," and they'd be right—it is loose, and it does load up like mad in anything but open-highway running.

We made the daily run from home to office in first, second and third, and when it was finally warm enough to get on it briefly—just to clean it out—a short, full-throttle blast in first gear was enough to blanket every car in our wake with an impenetrable cloud of soot and smoke. The gearbox actually takes longer to warm up than the engine, but at least it's quiet about it. It usually took the best part of twenty minutes to reach the point where a smooth shift could be made to any gear, save neutral.

The Vantage engine is really the only way to go with this car, in spite of its ominous clanking sounds when cold, and its finicky tendency to get rough and lumpy in traffic. Coupled with the ZF box, it is very responsive, and "steering with the throttle" becomes perfectly pleasant

and acceptable. Its gearing is such that you must keep the revs up, both to enjoy any throttle response in sudden passing situations, and to keep it from loading up around town, and this dictates running in much lower gears than one might wish with other, more tractable, sports machines. Fifth gear, for instance, is really useless anywhere but on the freeways and turnpikes. The car is quite a bit faster than it feels—running right in the same league with the Ferrari 330 GT 2+2—and seems very happy when cruising in the low hundreds.

Unfortunately, the driver and passengers don't share the engine's happiness. The noise level is high and the ride is rough. Adding tight modern bodywork to a chassis and engine layout that is so essentially "vintage" in concept results in awesome amounts of noise getting trapped inside the structure. Road noise is simply incredible, and engine noise—especially when charging hard—is a full-throated roar. Our test car was fitted with Avon 6.70-15 tires and 5.5-in. rims. We think that some of the road noise could be eliminated with a change of tire, and we'd definitely recommend 6-in. rims and bigger rubber as a step toward better handling and ride.

The handling, on dead-smooth surfaces, is really very good. With the proper tire pressures the car's steer characteristic is near-neutral, with a bias toward understeer. The hang-up comes on little country roads—the very roads where you're inclined to take advantage of good handling. When it gets bumpy, the suspension—especially the live-axle rear—bounces and bangs in a manner that again reminds us of the classic sports cars of yore, a manner calculated to throw the car off-course, and causes the driver to fight the steering wheel more than somewhat. The Aston has a four-position adjustment for the stiffness of the rear shock absorbers, but we never really noticed any marked difference in ride or handling, one way or another.

The passengers are also placed at a disadvantage because of seat design. The rear seats are hard and cramped, just because that's the way they have to be in this kind of 2+2 application. But the fronts are uncomfortable mostly because they're not very well designed. They have the fully adjustable backrests that we all know and love, but the seat itself is little more than a soft rectangular cushion that gives vir-

tually no leg or lateral support at all. We noticed that every one of our front seat passengers was inclined to ride with his or her knees bolt upright and feet flat on the floor—an uncomfortable position, dictated by the seat's tendency to compress at the front, leaving the weight of the upper leg unsupported.

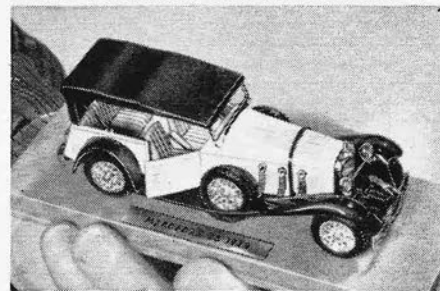
The whole feeling of the interior and the controls was like that . . . beautifully made, very nice materials, but executed with more tradition than engineering. The instrument panel, impressively covered with switches and dials and things, doesn't seem to have been planned at all—they just fitted all those things onto that flat surface, and called it a day. The controls are nicely made, and they're all conveniently placed for fast driving—but the EFFORT! Godallamightydawg! It's as though they'd deliberately designed every linkage, spring, and detent to test the strength and endurance of the driver. Every one of the important controls does its job with accuracy and dispatch, but they're all such hard work that you don't become aware of how well they function until you've had a chance to run for an hour or more at some distinctly illegal cruising speed. This high effort, plus the noise, plus the harshness of the ride, makes it a pretty tiring car for the typical driver.

For the non-typical driver, the virile Edwardian purist we mentioned before, it'll be the cat's meow. He'll love the noise and the jarring ride, and the hard work required to drive the car will give him constant reassurance of his great stamina, skill, and masculinity. The Aston Martin DB6 is a sort of Super Shelby Mustang—a GT 350 with luxury and a lot of expensive old-world charm—like Rocky Graziano in a Coldstream Guards' uniform.

There is obviously a market for cars of this type and price in our country—probably a more lucrative market than anywhere else in the world. We think that the car is horrendously over-priced, but then we're not virile Edwardian purists either. Guys spend twice as much money on racing sloops that are even less useful and more uncomfortable, so we expect the DB6 will continue its current upward sales spiral for the foreseeable future.

And besides, there isn't another car in the world that'll turn women on the way the Aston does. A lot of high-rollers have spent a lot more for that feature alone . . . and they have gotten a whole lot less for their money.

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