

# CLASSIC DRIVER

## [These 8 limited-edition Aston Martin V8 Vantage Volantes are the rarest of them all](#)

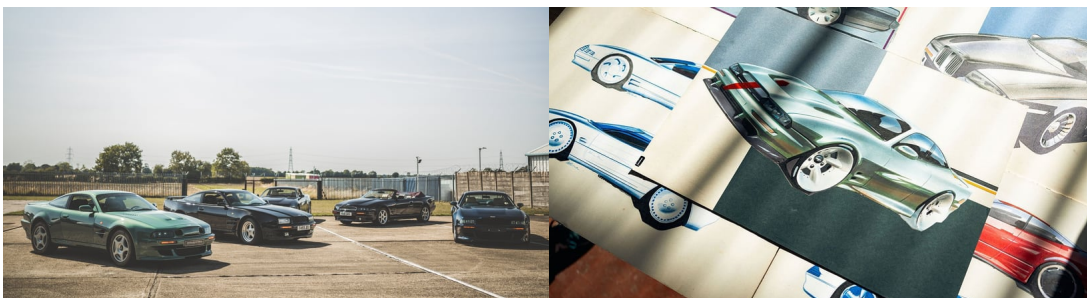
### Lead

What's the pinnacle of modern-day Aston Martins, the most bespoke and desirable model of them all? Brand guru Nicholas Mee suggests you take a closer look at the eight mythical Aston Martin V8 Vantage Volante Limited Editions that were built by the brand's top-secret Special Projects department.



Ask any serious car collector for the most rare and desirable [Aston Martin](#) of them all, and he will most likely mention the DB4 GT, of which only 75 cars were built, or the even rarer, custom-bodied DB4 GT Zagatos made in just 19 units. And a quick glimpse at recent auction results confirms their choice – the 'standard' GTs usually fetch between two and three million euros, while original Zagatos can sell for as much as eight to ten million euros. But interestingly, there is a much rarer, less-well known beast in Aston Martin's rich company history that has been traded for only a fraction of these sums – one that was made in even smaller numbers and, according to some brand specialists, is even more desirable. In fact, only eight units of this mythical unicorn-status collector car have been built, each highly bespoke and unique.

But before we jump into the details, let us take a trip back in time to the early 2000s in Newport Pagnell, where all Aston Martins were produced until the company moved to its new home in Gaydon in 2003. Looking at Aston Martin's current product portfolio, it's hard to imagine that even the very last V8 models to leave Newport Pagnell at that time were properly coachbuilt and tailor-made. Skilled men in long coats welded chassis on jigs, beat body panels with hammers, stitched Connolly leather, and assembled engines entirely by hand. Suffice to say, soya flat whites were not served in the staff canteen.



In the late 1980s and 1990s, [the Aston Martin Virage, Vantage and V8 had been hailed as the pinnacle of British motoring culture](#) – a series of gentlemen's muscle cars that combined understated elegance and bespoke luxury with a merciless punch. Interestingly, Aston Martin's grand tourer was designed by [John Heffernan, the same man who had also created the Bentley Continentals of the 1990s](#). Aston Martin's last hand-built V8 model peaked with the supercharged Vantage V600 and the V8 Vantage Le Mans. "Sliding out of the Volante and nestling into the V600 from 2000 is like moving from a Chesterfield to a Magistretti – it's still a chair, but it's so much more of an experience," wrote marque specialist Stephen Archer [in our buying guide to the last hand-built V8 Aston Martins](#).



It's a common belief that the British Vantage Le Mans V600 was Newport Pagnell's final flourish, but in fact, it wasn't. That honour goes to the stunning convertible you're eyeing here: the Aston Martin V8 Vantage Volante Special Edition. Some argued it was due to the British weather, but for whatever reason, Aston Martin had never offered the elegant drop-top V8 with the destructively powerful twin-supercharged 550 and 600 engines from the coupe.



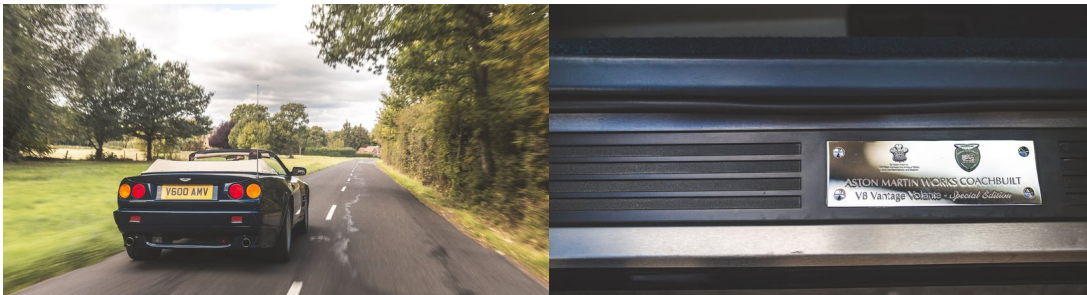
"Good things come to those who wait," says British Aston Martin guru Nicholas Mee. "It's a fact: from the day the Aston Martin's Supercharged Vantage was launched in 1993, customers wanted to know when a convertible version would be available. But the official response was a very clear message: there will be no convertibles". However, with production of the 550 bhp Vantage coming to an end in 1999 and with the persistent demand of VIP clients, the pressure to build a limited number of convertible Vantage's grew. Under the guidance of Aston Martin Works Director Kingsley Riding-Felce, a feasibility study was carried out with the results presented to the Aston Martin Board, who cautiously sanctioned the construction of just eight examples. "Despite the hefty £230,000 base price, all eight were sold by word of month, without an announcement from Aston Martin to the press, until the cars were completed to the various specifications as chosen by the lucky few owners. Whilst a form of presentation brochure was eventually produced, this was not available until after all cars had been built and delivered."



Knowing that these eight cars would be among the very last cars built at Newport Pagnell, the Special Projects unit took extra care to ensure they would be the absolute pinnacle of the 30-year-old V8 model range, promising both unparalleled quality and earth-shattering performance. “Besides the eight cars based on the standard Vantage wheelbase, one additional car was built on the 1997-99 V8 Volante’s longer wheelbase, originally designated for a VVIP client,” remembers Nicholas Mee. The eight cars sanctioned, thereafter becoming known as the ‘Short Chassis’ Vantage Volante. Of these cars, three were built to European left hand drive specification; the remaining five to UK right hand drive.



As with the legendary DB4GT Zagatos from the 1960s, each of the V8 Vantage Volante Special Editions was subtly different, built to the exact specification of its original owner. [In 2019, Classic Driver had the opportunity to test-drive the particular convertible in our photo shoot](#) which had been ordered in a beautiful Rolls-Royce Royal Blue over Parchment Hide. Our author Alex Easthope did not conceal his enthusiasm: “Even with the roof down, the rich scent of Connolly hide permeates the air. Talk about a Jekyll and Hyde personality – someone once described these blown Astons as 200mph living rooms, and they couldn’t have been more right. Once you’re on the move, the car is both extremely comfortable and miraculously fast. Slot the ultra-short-throw gear lever into second and squeeze the throttle as hard as you dare, and the small of your back is squeezed with such ferocity that you don’t so much as drive it as hold on. It beggars belief for a two-tonne luxury Grand Tourer.”



Since the Aston Martin V8 Vantage Volante Special Edition were first delivered to their discerning owners, these unique and bespoke cars have rarely become available for sale. In 2013, left-hand drive chassis number '71006' was sold by Bonhams in what must be the greatest specification of them all - sporting Cumberland Grey metallic paintwork and Smoke Green hide with dark walnut veneers, suede green headlining, green tonneau and dark brown hood.



"The planning, engineering, production and selling of these magnificent machines, without the need of marketing or presenting at motor shows and alike, was a masterclass in the selling of exclusivity," says Nicholas Mee. "Despite its importance in the brand's history, the Vantage Volante Special Edition is still a relatively unknown model to collectors and even Aston Martin enthusiasts alike. The cars rarely come to market, although when they do, they command a substantial sum. The allure and rewarding drive of these idiosyncratic convertibles remains as strong as ever, particularly as the knowledge of the models existence becomes better known. The legacy lives on."



Even if there are currently no Special Edition cars listed among the [400+ Aston Martins offered for sale at Classic Driver](#), you should not give up hope. We suggest you give [brand guru Nicholas Mee](#) a call and ask him to keep you in the loop. If one of the mythical eight might come up for sale again, he should be the first to know.

Photos: *Rob W. Cooper / Tom Shaxson / Bonhams*

**Gallery**

























































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