

CLASSIC DRIVER

[Aston Martin Vanquish S](#)



Five years on from its launch, and set against a backdrop of new models from Astons, the Vanquish still represents the point where old meets new. The fastest production model ever to be built by the company, the Vanquish S is still hand-crafted in Newport Pagnell, and if anyone asks the question "How can you justify the extra money over the excellent DB9?", a few days behind the wheel will soon reveal the answer.

Not exactly a familiar sight on the roads (the company has built around 1,500 cars in total since 2001), the revisions made to the Vanquish in September 2004 served not only to make the visual impact that much more dramatic via subtle changes to the rear bootlid, front 'splitter' and grille, but also to create 'clear water' between the flagship model and the recently introduced DB9 by way of an enhanced driving experience with an extra 60 Hp and myriad suspension changes under the banner; 'Sports Dynamics'.





Being both a touch shorter and wider than a DB9, as well as a little higher, the car has a more muscular mien, more prizefighter than athlete, and yet exhibiting a balanced elegance in overall styling that the DB7 - with its long, flat silhouette and cramped cabin - somehow lacked. The extra splitter and curving grille add to the blend of functionality and highly-charged emotional form. From the front it presents one of the most dramatic aspects on the road today.



Inside the car it's a more traditional cabin than the avant-garde DB9. Like all Astons the ultimate specification is down to the purchaser, and our Press car was fitted with an all-black leather fascia, dashboard and steering wheel, with red inserts in the door trim and seats. The controls are simple to use, the dials and warning lights kept to a minimum. And if some of the switchgear is sourced from outside Newport Pagnell well, it's a switch and it works, so what?

The company's CEO, Dr Ulrich Bez says "The Vanquish S V12 is a combination of state-of-the-art aerospace technology and hand craftsmanship" and you can see that from the way the cabin is laid out, but the reality of it all is that the technology is mainly invisible but provides one of the best driving experiences out there - as we shall soon see.



"You'll like this" said Astons' delivery team as the Toro Red car was unloaded from the transporter. With the DB9 driven last November fresh in my mind (not to mention an enthusiasm for the Magneti Marelli-actuated six-speed transaxle similar to that installed in current Ferraris we also tested last year), it was a simple task to turn the key and press the clear 'Start' button.

DB9s and their ilk may have 'Power, Beauty and Soul' graphics and colour displays but the Vanquish S communicates in the old-fashioned way - simply a mighty growl as the motor springs to life. This is best achieved with a window down or door open, and the effect is all the more impressive from cold after a night outside. Clicking back the right-hand paddle to engage first gear and releasing the fly-off handbrake, the car moves forward with a delicacy belying its tarmac-melting specification.

The way the big car can be just pushed along at normal speeds is extraordinary given its ultimate performance, and the engine noise that is so prevalent outside the car can be heard inside the cabin - but has none of the engineered rasp of the DB9 and V8 Vantage.



Give the motor a little more head and the sound develops into a proper racing V12 howl worthy of a Ferrari Enzo, and anything above 3,500 all the way to the 7,000 red line produces effortless, creamy acceleration of the finest 12-cylinder kind. The gearchange is one of the few dynamic areas of the car that has been left alone in the 'S' version (different suspension, bigger brakes, revised steering, shortened final drive and the additional 60 HP), and the reason's obvious - on the open road its precision and speed will beat a paddle-actuated conventional auto any day of the week. Like all these 'boxes though, their 'auto' function is best left alone.

Like the DB9, the ultra-stiff hi-tech aluminium chassis allows the revised suspension to work in the best possible fashion. Cornering is flat, bumps are ironed out and only low speed rough roads will delineate the flagship model from its gentler brethren. In short, it's as good as the recently-departed 575M Maranello - and looks better to boot.



And it'll carry a good few days luggage for touring with a reasonable trunk, with the rear seats (an option that makes the interior more balanced, if not more practical, although we did origami in a 17 year old daughter for a brief lunch out) employed for squashy luggage. But don't expect to make that a very long trip without adequate access to the petrol pumps, its thirst is commensurate with its performance but it's the surprisingly small (80 litres) fuel tank that will mean extra stops on the way.

Aston Martin are committed to continue making the Vanquish S "For as long as there is demand". That means a nine month wait at the moment, and remember the successor will be made at Gaydon, so this could very well be the last production Aston made at Newport Pagnell.

[The DB9 driven last year](#) was a wonderful car, but for all its excellence I came away from the experience wanting a little more.

I think I may have found it.

The Aston Martin Vanquish S, with 2+0 or 2+2 seating, has a base price in the UK of £177,100.

Standard equipment includes the tremendous Linn Audio 1200W 13 speaker, 13-channel system with six CD autochanger, as well as tyre pressure sensing system, automatic rain sensing wiper operation, automatic headlamp operation, auto dimming rear view mirror, trip computer, Satellite Navigation system.

Additional options include:

- Coloured brake calipers (£295)
- Front wheel stone guards (£255)
- Heated front screen (£295) - fitted to the test car
- Aluminium trim steering wheel (£295)
- Colour keyed leather trim steering wheel (£NCO)
- Chrome door handles (£NCO)

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