

CLASSIC DRIVER

Aston Martin Vanquish S Ultimate Edition



It's debatable exactly when car production started at Aston Martin's Newport Pagnell factory, but there's no doubt when it ended: June 2007. The last off the line was an all-black Vanquish S Ultimate Edition, chassis 502593. A weekend spent with the car just before its retirement to long-term factory ownership evoked memories of models past, and consideration of the mighty Vanquish's place in the iconic British manufacturer's history.

The timing neatly coincided with the Aston Martin Owners Club autumn concours, this year held at Chatsworth Park in Derbyshire. A long run up the motorway, then some short cross-country work led to an early arrival at the magnificent 'Palace of the Peak'. It could have been earlier still, yet the draw of just one last look at the famous Tickford Street address from the driver's seat of an Aston was irresistible.

Works Service will of course maintain its presence on the other side of the road, but from now onwards for all new car production, it's Gaydon or nothing. Steering the big black car back onto the motorway, I'm reminded of 'NP' Aston stories that have passed into legend: testing DB4s at dawn with a run that covered 125 miles up and down the new M1 (once accomplished in 56 minutes, at an average of 133mph), and John Horsman seeing 163mph in a DB4GT-engined DB4 - also on the M1- just north of the Buckinghamshire town.



If the misty autumnal morning didn't quite summon spectral craftsmen, brown-coated and oily of hand and brow, it did reinforce the link of an Aston Martin synonymous with Newport Pagnell, the Vanquish being the very last car to be built by hand in the various buildings on Tickford St.



But the 200mph supercar was also the first of the 'moderns' for the company too, even though it somehow retains something of the older cars in its manner and driving habits. For example, it's an imposing presence and requires a reasonable amount of road. When you open up its 520bhp V12, its carriage and mien are more DBSV8 than, er, 'modern' DBS - the car that's most definitely **not** replacing the outgoing flagship.

It wields a cavalryman's sabre to the newer car's épée and at a price of £158,000 on debut in 2001, rising to £180,000+ at the close, the average Army officer would require a healthy private income to park one of these outside the Mess.



The size and heft of the car melt to manageable proportions on more open roads and - fuel stops apart - the car will eat up colossal motorway distances with ease. This was never going to be a road test in the traditional sense, I'd first driven an 'S' [in early 2006](#), and took the well-used Toro Red demonstrator (that has since been converted by Works Service to six-speed 'stick-shift' manual) on a long West Country trip that explored its limits.

Newer cars like the DBS are easier to drive, more wieldy, and probably far quicker from A to B. The steering wheel is slightly off-centre, the gearbox is idiosyncratic, and the rear screen has a police car-concealing 'wobble' and yet...

Arriving at Chatsworth and parking-up alongside other cars from the company's past, the pieces seem to fall into place. A few cars along is another very late Vanquish (but not an 'Ultimate', for reasons I never quite understood), the one Works Service fitted with a totally glass roof. Near next-door neighbours were examples of DB4, '5 and '6, as well as Newport Pagnell's most numerous production car; the 1972 - 1989 V8.



Careful scrutiny of each will reveal cues that started with the first of the early post-War 'DBs', that were developed with input from racing machinery like the aggressive Project Cars (bodied at NP, please note), and then smoothed and refined via 'Project Vantage' of the late 90s into the final Vanquish and Vanquish S.

The company has been criticised latterly for 'recycling the same designs'. The fairness or otherwise of that remark is not for this author to judge, but in the Vanquish you can see elements of DB4GT Zagato, DB6 and 1980s V8, as well as the forward design direction that was so superbly executed by Henrik Fisker in the first of the 'Gaydon cars', the DB9.



'Recycling'? Aston Martin has its 'car for life' programme and for many the last of Vanquish production, the 'Ultimate' series, represents the apogee of the company's bespoke history, and one that deserves to be kept and cosseted for future generations.

And 'they don't make them like that anymore'? Probably untrue but one thing's definite; they certainly won't make a new Aston Martin in Newport Pagnell again.

With grateful thanks to David Lewington and members of the AMOC, in particular Damen Bennion for the loan of his wonderful green DB4.

Text - [Steve Wakefield](#)

Photos - *Classic Driver*

ClassicInside - The Classic Driver Newsletter

[Free Subscription!](#)

Gallery

Source URL: <https://www.classicdriver.com/en/article/aston-martin-vanquish-s-ultimate-edition-0>
© Classic Driver. All rights reserved.