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[Aston Martin DB AR1 LA Motor Show Car: No. 1 for California SR1](#)

Lead

The sunnier states of the US have always been a motivating force behind the creation of roadsters that truly embrace the romantic spirit of sun, surf and the open road. In 2003 Aston Martin launched its own limited-series convertible.

To be marketed solely in the USA, it was the Zagato-designed DB AR1.

Such was the British company's commitment to the genre that - apart from a simple cover, which had to suffice to protect the car's sumptuous leather interior if it rained - it had no roof.

In 2001 Aston Martin's CEO, Dr Ulrich Bez, met Andrea Zagato at the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance. The pair decided to reprise the two companies' famous association of the early 60s and produce another 'Aston Martin Zagato', this time based on the DB7.





As a result, just over 12 months later the first DB7 Zagato coupé was revealed at the Paris Motor Show. The new car, with characteristic over-sized grille and 'double bubble' roof, was built around a shortened DB7 Vantage Volante chassis and featured an updated, now 435bhp V12.

The short production run of 99 cars was soon snapped up by collectors worldwide, despite a price premium over the standard car in the UK of some £60,000. Special leather, often with diamond-pattern stitching, and a variety of interesting colour schemes made the DB7 Zagato coupé a desirable car, and one with a loyal following today.

There was a problem, though. For reasons of type-approval and homologation, the structurally different (shorter chassis) coupé could not be sold in the USA.

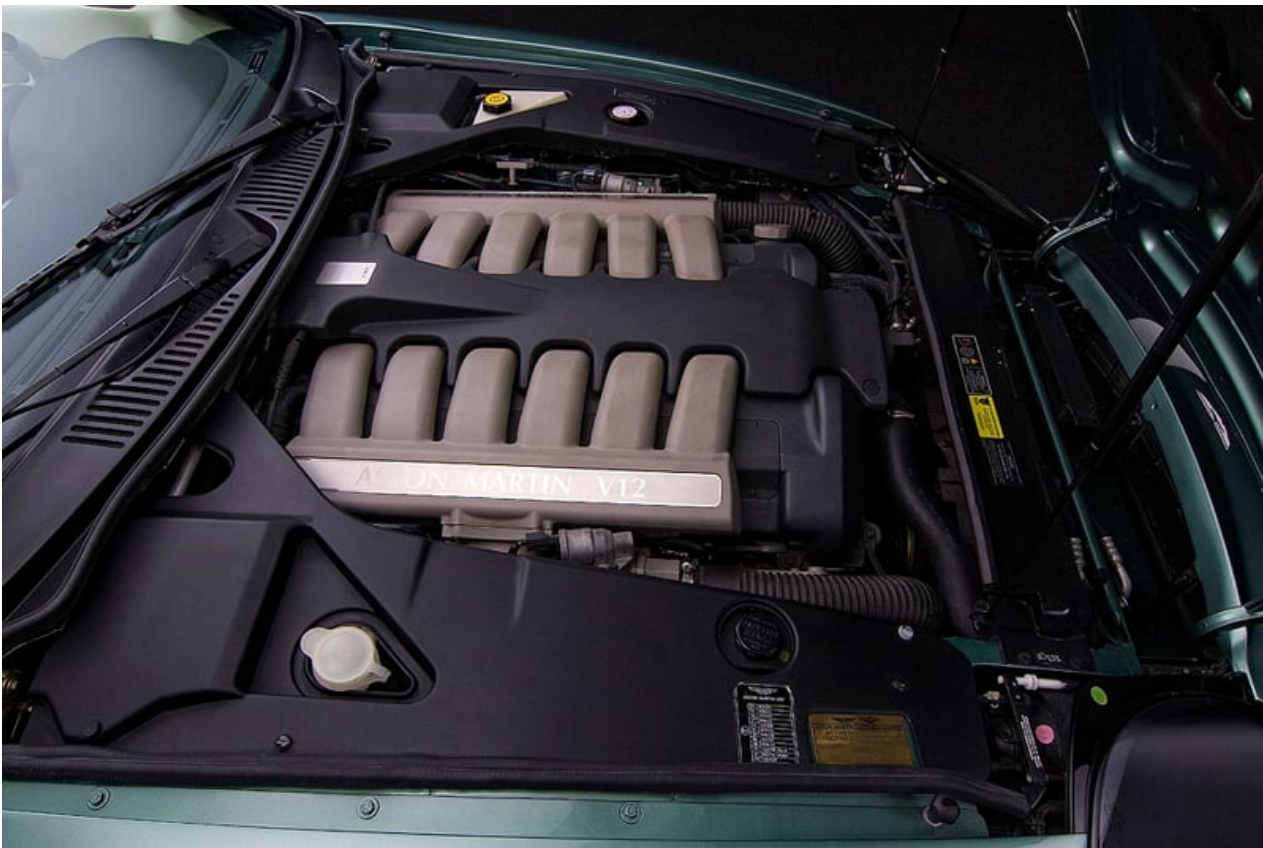


So, in 2003, with order books now full-to-bursting on the coupé, a new take on the DB7 Zagato appeared at a private preview in LA, before a world unveiling at the forthcoming Los Angeles Motor Show. It was the 'DB American Roadster 1', the DB AR1, the actual car you see here.

Based on the chassis of the 2002 MY DB7 Vantage Volante factory launch car, the latest Aston Martin Zagato carried many styling cues from the earlier coupé (grille, 'double-bubble' treatment of the rear deck and a distinctive interior), yet was built on the standard DB7 wheelbase. It could, therefore, pass muster in the USA as a variant of the already homologated DB7 Volante. (Note, please, that the DB AR1 is most certainly NOT a 'Volante'.)

The DB AR1 was the very last Aston to be built at Bloxham - although this writer remembers seeing some cars ready for final inspection and delivery at the only newly opened Gaydon factory.





As with the coupé, it soon sold out. Intended initially as a car solely for America, some examples nonetheless found their way to Europe. All but one are left-hand drive and, unusually, considering the intended market, most have the more powerful 435bhp engine and six-speed manual 'box of the coupé.

In manual form the car is quick. The 435bhp, 410lb ft torque, 6.0-litre V12 was enough to give a 184mph top speed, and it could sprint from zero to 60mph in around five seconds.

And all this could be done in time-honoured 'roof down' fashion... as there was no roof.

The DB American Roadster 1 was very much an 'end of era' car, as Bloxham was to be closed down and from then onwards the all-new VH-platform DB9 and its close relatives built at Gaydon took over.

This example, though, from the 2003 LA Motor Show, was the very first of that final series of DB7s. The very beginning of that end, and a collectors' car in its own right.

Photos: LegendaryAstons

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