

CLASSIC DRIVER

Driven: Aston Martin V12 Vantage Roadster

Lead

Who says you can't have fun with the roof down in December? A warm coat and a set of Pirelli Sottozero winter tyres is all it takes to enjoy 510bhp and some wintry Cotswold sunshine in Aston Martin's latest limited-edition roadster.

And by 'limited' we are talking just 101 examples, nearly all of which have been sold. There's no denying that the vast majority of these will be destined for sunnier climes. But the British enjoy a fine tradition for healthy open-air motoring – witness a typical early spring Vintage Sports Car Club meeting, with Barbour'd and flying-helmeted drivers braving the elements en route to a day on the track.

We're a tough breed.

The V12 Vantage coupé remains Aston Martin's most hard-core sports car. Quite how the company managed to squeeze its DBS-spec 6.0-litre V12 into such a small engine bay is one of the engineering wonders of the world. Without stating too much of the obvious, it is a very fast machine. And, more to the point, it really *feels* like one, too.





To be honest, at times, the delivery of its power in less than perfect conditions can border on the limits of manageability. It's a proper sports car – and all the more fun for that.

So, what does the open version, [launched in July this year](#), bring to the pre-Christmas party? Before discussing its merits, a few words on current line-up at Gaydon. While the names might have stayed the same, every year the cars just get better and better.





The [new DB9 we drove only recently](#) sets standards in its class: faster than ever, beautifully built and wonderfully styled. As an entry-level Aston, [a drive in the 2012-spec V8 Vantage this spring](#) revealed another well set-up car, very different from the early cars; faster and, much more importantly, feeling better balanced with much-improved steering. The seats are more comfortable, and the Garmin-based sat-nav does everything asked of it.

The V12 Vantage Roadster takes all the positives from the current Gaydon production and wraps them in a 'because we could do it' package like few others.

Fun-seekers, form an orderly queue.





And for those looking for a more traditional open grand tourer, can we suggest the new DB9 Volante? (It is pretty much the same price as the limited-edition V12 Vantage Roadster, anyway.)

In V8 form, the Vantage Roadster is a chuckable, very usable sports car for those clear-the-cobwebs, early morning drives. In all honesty, no one really needs the bigger engine, but, with its nigh-on instant delivery of power and torque slicing the tacho needle ever upwards, the V12 Vantage Roadster is driving in its rawest form.

It's only available as a six-speed manual, so the visceral 'I'm in control of this machine' sensation is further heightened. Yes, we got the wheels spinning in second and third but let's pay testament to the brilliant winter tyres. The company's CEO, Dr Ulrich Bez, runs an Aston all year round. And that includes a V12 Vantage coupé in the occasional British snowy weather that paralyses the country.



Exclusivity (only 101 will be built) and unique bodywork (a redesigned rear boot lid and lower front air intake) separate it from other Vantage Roadsters on paper. A drive on the road *really* underlines that separation. It's a special creation.

As it's the festive season, let's conclude by saying that the new V12 Vantage Roadster is an Aston with all the trimmings. And should there be a 4.4m x 2.0m space under our Christmas tree, we'd be happy for it to be occupied by the company's most dynamic open car.

Photos: Simon Clay

Gallery

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