Aston Martin V8 Vantage V550

Lead
Never has the expression "do not try this at home" been more apt than it does in relation to the image you see here: an immaculate, Rothesay Red V550 supercharged Vantage sitting on a bed of snow.

The combination of massive, low-profile tyres and the twin-supercharged engine's 550bhp and 550lb ft of torque is not ideal when conditions get slippery...

On a dry road, though, one of Newport Pagnell's very last hand-built cars is an intoxicating experience. Colossal power and torque mean that the big automobile is one of the best ultimate 'horizon shorteners' ever created.
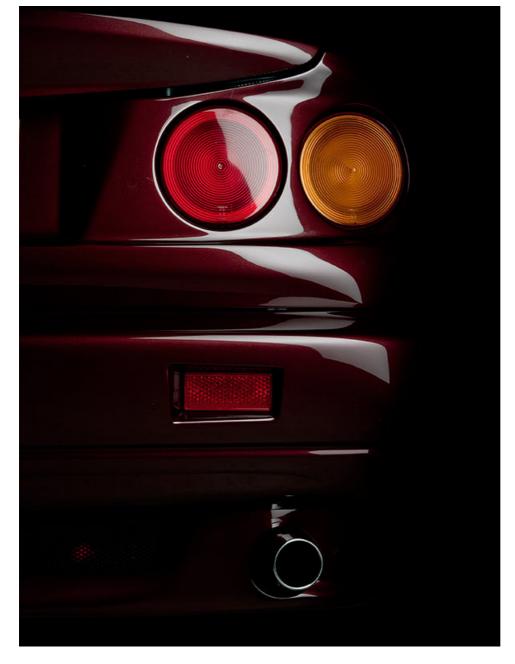
The car, built from 1993 to 1999, carried the 'V8 Vantage' name but was a vastly improved and reworked Virage, with much better lines and a performance-focused chassis and drivetrain. Hence the 'Vantage' suffix, as it was a driver's car, through and through.

Normally available as a six-speed manual (with automatic conversions offered post-purchase by Works Service), it was a very fast car. Speeds approaching 200mph are talked about, and the sight of a V550 on full throttle is akin to watching a Phantom or Lightning embarking on a Cold War emergency scramble. Officially, a 186mph top speed is promised, with 60mph coming up in 4.6 seconds from standstill.

A deep front spoiler channels air to the radiator, the air then exiting via bonnet louvres and the classic Aston Martin side vents. Hauling such an imposing car down from high speed was left to the 362mm-diameter ventilated front discs by AP Racing – at the time, the largest fitted to a road car.

And inside the cabin it's a typical Newport Pagnell all-leather affair, with supportive seats for the driver and passenger and a small amount of space in the back.

Fewer than 250 standard V550s were built, with a further 40 or so of the 'V8 Vantage Le Mans' cars available with either a 550bhp or 600bhp engine.
A truly imposing car, but one that deserves respect. And a dry road.

Photos: Tim Wallace (www.ambientlife.co.uk)

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