

# CLASSIC DRIVER

## Swift, Sophisticated and Stylish: Driving the new Aston Martin Rapide S

### **Lead**

Building on the success of the radically revised DB9 (that we rated so highly last year), now it's the four-door fastback Rapide's turn to receive a raft of engineering and styling improvements that make it faster, more responsive and better looking than ever.

It's got a new 'face': a fresh take on Aston's trademark grille that is larger than before, with a different radius on the curve on its upper segments. While the initial studio shots when first announced might not have shown the design at its best, in the metal, complete with number plate, it looks superb. The grille is just one part of the company's thorough re-engineering work on the front of its cars to ensure they meet the latest EU pedestrian safety regulations.

This might sound boring, but it saves lives, and the Gaydon styling team's skill at achieving this without detracting from its car's legendary drop-dead-gorgeous appearance is to be commended.

The new look at the front is matched by a far more pronounced tailgate spoiler. In profile, this has the effect of balancing the car both from an aerodynamic and an aesthetic standpoint. There's no denying the fact that it is still a fabulous design, hiding its rear doors well and forcing a double-take for the less knowledgeable who might mistake it for a two-door coupé.





Now, with its new grille, it's less likely to be confused with a V8 Vantage, Vanquish or DB9 – Aston is clearly shaking off its 'they all look the same' image.

Inside, the new Rapide has the standard Gaydon-era interior, leaving the flagship model Vanquish alone in the line-up with an all-new, One-77-derived dash and centre console. That said, the Rapide's high-quality one works well and has a comfortable feel about it, as do the sports seats, the 1,000-watt Bang & Olufsen BeoSound audio system and Garmin satellite navigation. Oh, and the famous crystal 'ECU' key, of course.

And in the back are two 'occasional seats' for children or adult friends hitching a ride to the opera or

restaurant. Folded down, they triple the hatchback's load area: great for a really long trip away or stowing that impulse-purchase Turkish carpet.







But it's in the driving that the new 'S' (available from £149,950 in the UK, the only Rapide now in the company's catalogue) excels. The new AM11-series engine is still 6.0-litre but now generates 550bhp at 6,750rpm – 17 per cent more than its predecessor. As we found with the 510bhp (but lighter) DB9, you can feel the difference straight away.

Pick-up is instantaneous. With an additional 40Nm torque available between idle and 4,000rpm, the big engine/big car combination moves almost with the alacrity of the [highly impressive DB9](#). You do feel the weight a touch, and its extra length when driving on the tighter roads of the Catalunyan launch venue, but on more open curves it handles like a true sports car.

The steering is much improved and the adaptive damping can be kept in its middle, Sport, setting for much of the time. We'd recommend selecting Sport for the engine mapping, too, as it's only then that the car's full potential is unleashed. And, in-town dawdling aside, do use the paddles to change gear, as activating kick-down involves a heavy stab on the accelerator and some unseemly a-hootin' and a-hollerin' from the engine and exhaust, without the smoothest, fastest acceleration to show for it.





As a motorway mile-coverer, it must surely have few equals. And, lest we forget, please note that this is now a true 190mph car.

Not yet having driven the latest Vanquish, perhaps it's a little early to say that Aston Martin has the best line-up of models ever.

But after 300 kilometres in the Rapide S, and positive opinions of the new DB9 still fresh in the memory, we can only say whether you need four doors or two, seating for a nuclear family or just-marrieds, head to your nearest Aston dealer and try its latest V12 GT range, as the improvements made in the last six months make both the DB9 and Rapide S class-leading cars.

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