

CLASSIC DRIVER

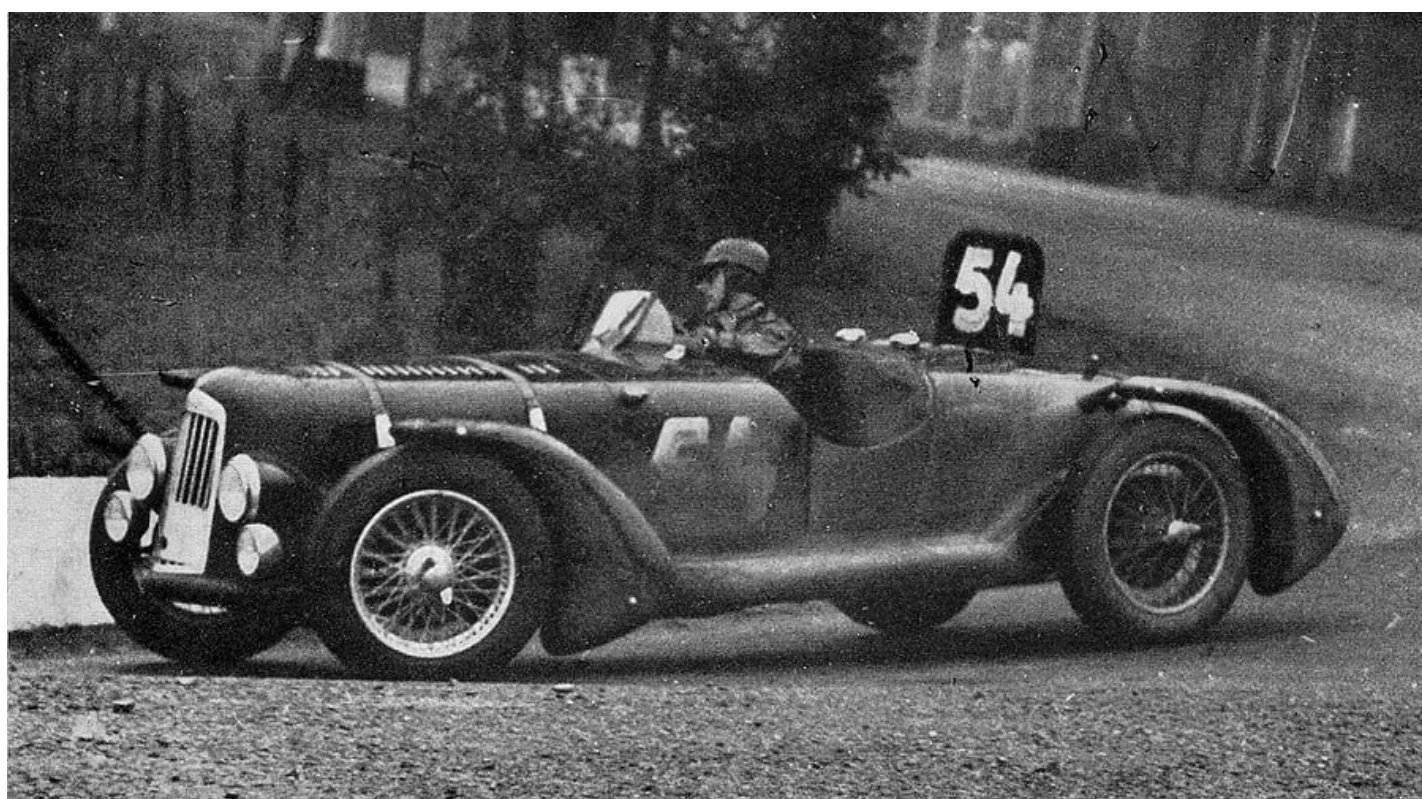
From Hanworth Park to Les Hunaudières: Aston Martin's 'Feltham years'

Lead

When David Brown bought both Aston Martin and Lagonda in 1947, it took a few years before the DB2 made it to production. It was to be a long, hard road from victory at Spa in 1948 to the finest racing performance of the marque to date, first at Le Mans in 1959...

Preceding these somewhat billowing-bodied convertibles was the famous '[Spa Special](#)' – the first Aston Martin produced post-War (using elements of the design from the *just* pre-War 'Atom' prototype) and one that won its first race when driven by St. John Horsfall and Leslie Johnson at the 1948 Spa 24 Hours.

It was to be a long, hard road from victory at Spa in 1948 with a car of, let's just say, 'arresting' looks, to the finest racing performance of the marque to date, first and second at the Le Mans 24 Hours in 1959 with one of the most beautiful racing cars ever built, the DBR1.





During that period, the modern-looking six-cylinder DB2 road car developed from a two-seat coupé and convertible into the world's first hatchback (the DB2/4 and DB2/4 Mk II), with its final version, the DB Mk III, remaining in production some eight or nine months after the all-new DB4 was introduced in 1958.

The nose of the 1957 DB Mk III echoed Frank Feeley's styling cue on the DB3S sports-racing cars earlier in the decade, the famous 'arch' for the grille used on every Aston up to and including today's [Rapide S](#).

The 24-hour race at Spa in 1948 was to prove significant for the company in more ways than simply Horsfall's marvellous victory. It was there that Brown noticed John Wyer running fellow Aston competitor Dudley Folland's pit "pretty efficiently". In 1950, looking for a team manager for the new DB2 racing cars, Brown

engaged Wyer “just for one season”. The result was nine years of trials and tribulation on the circuits of the world, culminating in that magnificent one-two at Le Mans in 1959.

Contemporary advertising (your author has a reproduction poster celebrating the '59 success on his office wall) proudly showed the link between racing and road-going Aston Martins. Running the DB3, and particularly the DB3S and DBR1, the team under Wyer's superlative direction won race after race at home, frequently scoring high places abroad but always handicapped by a small-capacity engine compared with the opposition.





DB2

RACE-BRED LUXURY



DB3S
COMPETITION CAR



With very fine drivers of the calibre of Brooks, Salvadori, Collins, Shelby, Parnell and, most of all, Stirling Moss, the fine-handling Astons were a close match for the more powerful Ferraris and Jaguars. Highlights? Eventual 24 Hours win aside, Moss/Collins were brilliant at Le Mans in 1956 to finish second overall in DB3S/9. The team triumphed at the 'Ring 1000km three years running, in '57, '58 and '59. In 1959 it won the World Championship.

Wyer and arch adversary 'Lofty' England of Jaguar enjoyed a close rivalry. More than once, mechanics sweating over an expiring car in the pits would come under the shadow of one or other team principal, innocently enquiring, "Nothing trivial, I hope?"

So, Aston's 'Feltham years' should be remembered for the production of a true Grand Tourer, the DB2 and its successors, cars that defined what a post-War Aston should be: stylish, comfortable, never showy but always *fast*. The period was also a golden time for motor racing, with the quintessentially British, metallic mid-green Aston racing cars a regular sight in the UK and beyond.

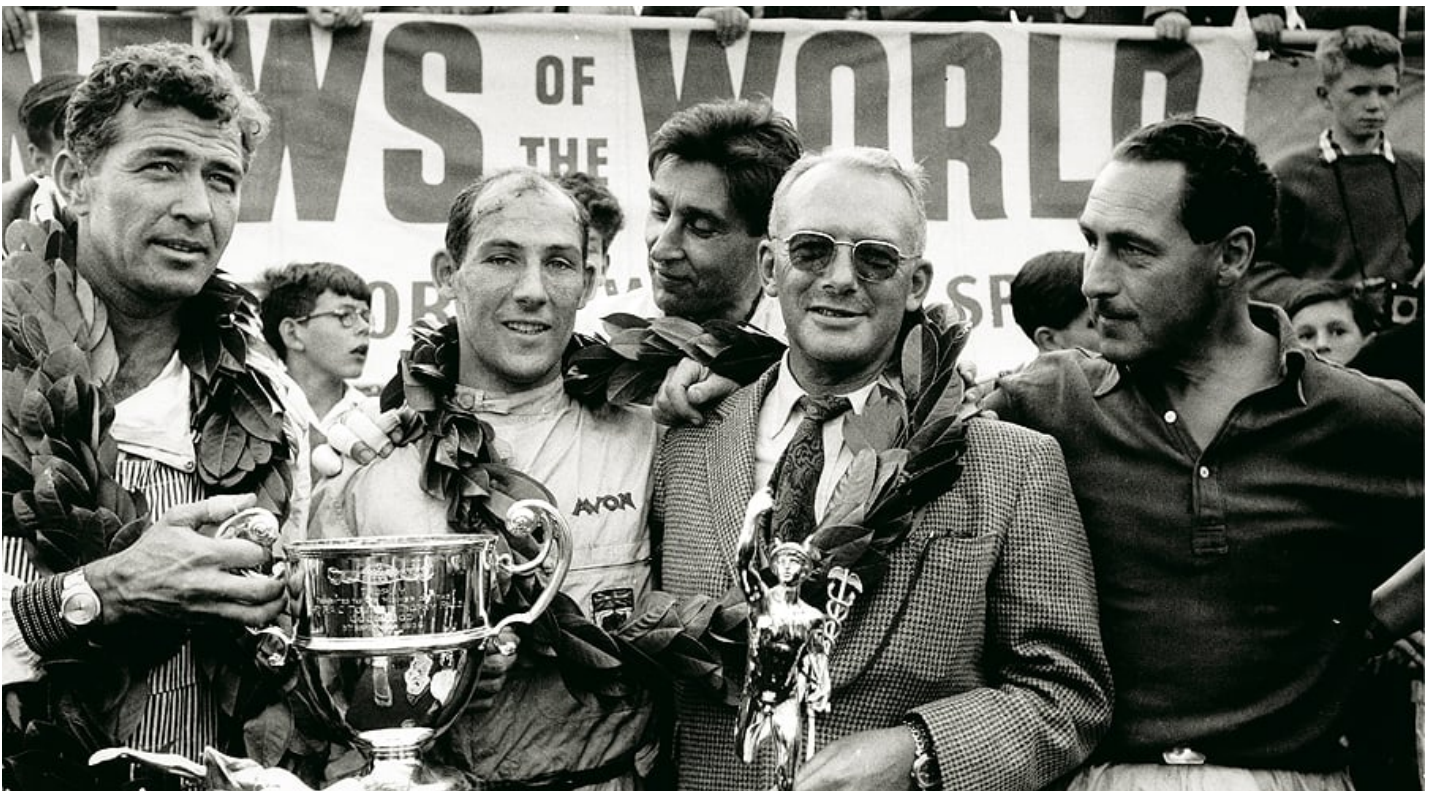




During that decade, special-bodied Astons appeared, too, by Allemano, Bertone, Ghia, Vignale and Touring. It was an exciting time.

While some early DB4s were built at Feltham, it was inevitable that with the acquisition of the Tickford coachworks in Newport Pagnell in the mid-50s, production that was then spread around Middlesex, Yorkshire and Buckinghamshire should be relocated there. The move took some years to complete, and the 1962-1963 'Project Cars' were built and race-prepared by Design, Development and Experimental at Feltham.

Two eras had ended – the company's 'Feltham Years' and 'Racing with the David Brown Aston Martins'.





The 1960s, 'Bond' and, at the end, an inevitable change of ownership were to come with the company now settled at Tickford Street, Newport Pagnell.



Related Links

You can find Aston Martins from pre-War days right up to the new Vanquish in the [Classic Driver Marketplace](#)

Photos: Aston Martin and Aston Martin Heritage Trust, with thanks to Tim Cottingham of www.astonmartins.com

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