

CLASSIC DRIVER

Aston Martin DB9 GT meets Heritage Defender - Farewell, old chaps!

Lead

When the Land Rover Defender and Aston Martin DB9 are withdrawn from duty in 2016, they'll have completed a combined 80 years of service for their respective British empires. We brought the run-out DB9 GT and the special-edition Heritage Defender together in London, for an emotional final farewell...

As charming as both cars are in their own individuals ways, let's skip the pleasantries and get straight down to business: this final-edition pair are the cars we always hoped they might become in their twilight years. Long since officially able to claim a pension in the UK, the final Defender has received a number of subtle styling tweaks that hark back to its greatest-grandfather: the car we all affectionately refer to as Huey. With its Grasmere Green paint and simple 'steelie' wheels among myriad nods to its illustrious heritage - which also include the 'HUE 166' tags on the cloth seats and the grille/badging inspired by the original Series II - we think the Heritage Edition Defender might well be the coolest car you can buy today.

Enter the executioner...



Meanwhile, the 'GT' badge fixed to that rather pert ducktail the DB9 inherited from the Virage signifies more than just the imminent swing of the executioner's axe - it's also the final outing for Aston's formidable 6.0-litre V12 in naturally aspirated form. As part of this conclusive package, the GT gains 30bhp, a carbonfibre front splitter (a much more svelte item than the Vanquish's fussy addendum) and, *finally*, a user-friendly infotainment system that isn't stuck in the dark ages of Ford parentage. As such, the DB9 GT adequately bridges the gap between its older brothers and the incoming DB11, without losing the timeless styling that kept the model in service for so long. Can you name another modern car that has aged so gracefully?

Twilit cobbles



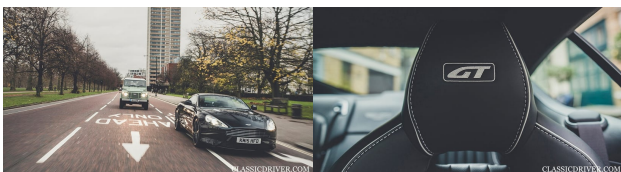
Both served as our workhorses for the week, each travelling several hundred miles and offering experiences about as divergent as they come. But only one location seemed appropriate for their twin-photoshoot: a capital city just as recognisable as they are, where we were struck by the overwhelmingly positive reception both cars received. People looked on adoringly, gave the 'thumbs-up' and quick-drew for their camera phones, particularly on sighting the Defender. We were even let out of several junctions which, as you'll know if you regularly drive in London, just doesn't happen.

Exchanging the guard



Dynamically, the Defender is no different from its less fashion-conscious brethren: the Heritage edition is all about nostalgic style and, perhaps more importantly to buyers, exclusivity. Just 400 have been made for the UK – all of which are accounted for – and some are already being sold on at a considerable premium. Meanwhile, Aston will sell a DB9 GT to anyone with the necessary means (which, if you're wondering, is £140,000 upwards), but many will believe the 'last-of-breed' cachet and pin-perfect balance of British luxury and sporting edge to be a sufficient exchange for a finite number.

Boxing clever



What's more, to us it doesn't even matter that it doesn't have the eight-speed ZF gearbox its rival, bigger brother and eventual successor has, or will have. Quite honestly, manually triple-downshifting to find the right ratio in an eight-slot 'box is overkill. Such is the big V12's famous abundance of torque, six seems the perfect number to match the car's long-legged persona. Plus, with power increased to 540bhp – and an aural armageddon button labelled 'Sport' that also changes its character from purring Persian to snarling savage – you'll never find yourself wanting for more drama. DB9 lives, indeed. We probably owe the residents of Westminster an apology.

The final farewell



Over their respective lives and in their own (very) distinctive ways, these two cars have come to define the British automotive sector, and lend strong and consistent identity when, occasionally and unavoidably, things have slipped off-track. We always hesitate when using the word icon but, in this special case, it couldn't be more apt. Farewell, old chaps...

Text: Joe Breeze/Alex Easthope
Photos by Amy Shore for Classic Driver © 2015

Gallery

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