

# Astons Are Forever

Unlike tickets for a James Bond movie, the spy's iconic, and expensive, supercar is in limited supply.

BY DEREK WATTS



**B**read and butter. Horse and carriage. Aston Martin and Bond... James Bond.

Even though 007 started out in a Chevrolet Bel Air convertible in *Dr No*, and has been behind the wheel of a wild assortment of vehicles from a tuk-tuk taxi to a Ford Mustang, it is the British supercar that has an immediate association with the superspy.

And in particular the DB5 which is the iconic Bond-mobile, from *Goldfinger* to *Skyfall* nearly 50 years later!

While Aston Martin Lagonda Limited may have had a rather chequered financial history since the company was founded by Lionel Martin and Robert Bamford in 1913, it is the Bond connotation that has helped to keep the brand high on the supercar desirability scale.

It is, however, an association that is steeped in irony. While the movies portrayed the Astons as the perfect vehicle for Q's cutting edge gadgetry, in the high-tech real world of modern supercars they may have slipped a gear or two.

This is certainly not on your mind though as you paddle through the seven-speed automated manual transmission with the soft top down and the sport button activated to give you a boost in performance and a sample of auditory heaven. A good reason to leave the 1,000 watt Bang & Olufsen stereo off the options list.

And it's the fact that the gearbox is not as smooth as Banarasi silk that makes the V12 Vantage S Roadster fun – and challenging – to drive. You feel that you are

part of the equation for every perfect gear change.

Is that an excuse and will Aston Martin continue to rely on class, image and a colorful history rather than leading the way in automotive engineering?

A clue is that they are spending millions of pounds on state-of-the-art manufacturing facilities at their Gaydon, Warwickshire plant developing their next generation of sports cars.

As we weave through traffic on the highway, the general manager of Aston Martin in Sandton, Rens Rademeyer, assures me that the brand is not going the mass production route.

They make less than 5,000 finely crafted vehicles a year. And as you survey the instrument panel, getting to know the precisely positioned controls and admir-

'Q' book to page through with the aim of ensuring that every stitch of leather, every color choice, reflects your personality. Which I could find rather daunting!

"When Egyptology was the big thing, a client wanted scarab beetle wings inlaid into our emblem. The Aston Martin wings have to stay within the spirit of the brand but our appointed jeweler in London was able to blend the two," says Rademeyer.

"Another customer from China wanted a special piece from his Ming vase collection stitched into his seatbacks. We even had an order from America for all the interior finishes to reflect his superyacht!"

The personal details and options come at a price. While the basic Vantage Roadster will set you back a tad over \$260,000, the extras on a well-specced vehicle can easily add \$40,000 to the bill.

While the local distributors haven't had a price increase in three years, it's no secret that most supercars see a signifi-

The race-inspired Vantage GT12 is an example. It is still in production but you could no doubt sell your place on the limited order list of 100 at a premium.

South Africans will get to see the sleeker, lighter, more powerful version of the Vantage S dodging potholes on their roads.

And now we await the DB10, one of the star turns in *Spectre* – the 24th James Bond film to be shot by Eon Productions.

But Daniel Craig will be one of the few people to get behind the wheel; Aston Martin is only making 10 of them.

So the well-heeled will have to wait for the DB11 which will certainly take a healthy slice of design influence from the Bond car.

Will the Best of British be sought after on the African continent?

Despite a lack of infrastructure and service agents to the north, Astons are sold from Angola to Nigeria and Ghana to Equatorial Guinea.

PHOTO COURTESY ASTON MARTIN SOUTH AFRICA

ing the craftsmanship of the interior styling, you get the overwhelming feeling that every Aston is tailor-made.

"It's beyond bespoke," he says. "We assimilate a client's DNA into the final product."

To get your creative juices flowing, or even racing, there is a delicately prepared

cant drop in value as they are driven off the showroom floor.

Rademeyer claims that there are some unique opportunities in the low production, high demand strategy and you can still make a profit with some intensive research – and ready cash – to get your hands on the exclusive models.

It seems that whoever we are and wherever we live, we can feel Bond on our shoulder as we climb into that beautifully appointed cabin and know that the iconic grille and badge are attracting some envious looks.

After all, you only live twice. **F**