



Centenary

CELEBRATION

FOR ASTON MARTIN, IT'S 100 YEARS YOUNG,
MORE VITAL THAN EVER

BY MARK HACKING

On January 15, 1913, a car brand was born in a small workshop in London, fuelled by the vision of two men, Lionel Martin and Robert Bamford.

But this was not just any car brand, this was Aston Martin – a brand that would be exclusive from the very beginning, through numerous ownership changes and in the face of all manner of financial and geopolitical pressures. These pressures were sufficient to signal the end of countless car companies, but Aston Martin is nothing if not a survivor.

One hundred years is a long time in any business, even more so in a business that is largely driven by technology. Technology requires investment – and investment, any way you slice it, equates to dollars, pounds, yen or euros.

Over the past century, times have been rather tough, as the British might say, keeping that stiff upper lip firmly in place. But as per usual, the carmaker that epitomizes cool has kept its composure the entire time – and the arrival of this year represents a very fitting reward.

The Aston Martin centenary celebrations began on January 15 with the unveiling of a plaque in Henniker Mews in Chelsea, site of the original workshop owned by Martin and Bamford. If this occasion might seem a tad understated, the next event, staged a mere two days later, served to redress the balance: an Aston Martin Vanquish



was airlifted to the rooftop of the Burj Al Arab Hotel in Dubai.

This truly set the wheels truly in motion.

Each year, there are a number of activities on the typical premium carmaker's social calendar, including the usual slate of international car shows, as well as specialty events such as the Goodwood Festival of Speed and the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance.

As ever, Aston Martin cut a bold swath across all of these with its latest product offerings, the ferocious Vanquish and the elegant Rapide S. But this year is more special than most for the people at Aston Martin's HQ in Gaydon in Warwickshire, working to ensure the anniversary did not pass by without given its proper due.

The temperature began to rise in May with a number of events, beginning with the annual Bonhams Aston Martin sale in Newport Pagnell, site of the old factory and present home to Aston Martin Works. Here, there is a dealership for new models, a full service area for all cars and a complete restoration shop for the most cherished of Astons. On May 18 of this year, an ultra-rare 1961 Aston Martin DB4GT Jet sold for a world-record £3.25 million (\$5.3 million CDN), helping to cement the brand's status as one of the most desired in the world – as if that were ever in doubt.

That same weekend saw the running of the 24 Hours of Nürburgring, as unforgiving a motor race as you'll find in this day and age. Aston Martin has been a staple at the event since 2006 and this year, they put on impressive display. The parade lap before the start of the race featured 100 different Astons of various vintages. Of these, three in particular made the crowd stand up and take notice.



The first was an Aston Martin DBR1/1 driven by Sir Stirling Moss, the man who raced the very same car to victory in the Nürburgring 1000 km race in 1959. Next, there was James Bond himself – actor Daniel Craig – behind the wheel of a silver Aston Martin DB5, as might be expected. Lastly, the CEO of the company, Dr. Ulrich Bez, had the honour of driving their latest concept car, the drop-dead gorgeous CC100 Speedster.

This final car has been the rolling showpiece for the brand ever since, stealing hearts at the Concorso d'Eleganza in Villa d'Este in late May before embarking on a world tour that would put the hardest-working rock band you could ever imagine to shame.

One of the most important stops – for the CC100 and the brand itself – was a week in late July spent back home in the UK. This is where yours truly had the chance to view the latest creation from Aston Martin in person, along with some classics that hadn't been seen in public for decades.

The week began as any great occasion dedicated to Aston Martin should – behind the wheel. Our small group drove examples of the Vanquish and the Rapide S to the company headquarters and factory in Gaydon, some 140 km northwest of London, enjoying the too brief drive every step of the way. The Rapide S is all about refined performance and superb handling; the Vanquish is more extreme in its performance, yet it somehow manages to be civilized at the same time. Both are remarkable.

Upon arrival, we had the chance to see a small collection of cars owned by the company itself – Aston was a bit late to the game of saving examples of their own product for posterity – and then go on a factory tour. In the age of technology, in this blindingly blurred time in



We stopped by the Aston Martin Works where we learned that a car in any condition can be fully restored for the tidy sum of £300,000 (\$490,000 CDN). This is the only place in the world where factory-approved restorations of Aston Martins take place; understandably, the ledger is full to overflowing with current and future projects.





But the crowning event of the week was the single-marque concours d'elegance in Kensington Palace Gardens on July 21, the perfect setting for the very weekend the royal baby was due. The gardens proved to be a brilliant stage for a staggering fleet of Aston Martins – some 550 in total, the most ever gathered together in one place at one time.

The cars that drew the most admiration from the crowd included the CC100 and the A3, as well as the futuristic Bulldog concept from 1980 and two other concept cars created in honour of the centenary, the DB9 Spider Zagato Centennial and the DBS Coupe Zagato Centennial. There was a special display of cars that appeared in James Bond films and another for Astons from the world of racing. The combined value of all the cars in attendance hovered around the £1 billion mark.

As centenary week drew to a close, representatives from Aston Martin agreed that it was unlikely the next 100 years would yield anything quite so special again. ✕

which we live, it's always refreshing to see true craftspeople keeping the home fires burning.

We meet Mick, for example, a trim specialist who has been in the trade for over 30 years. He wears an Aston Martin shirt with his name embroidered above his heart, but upon closer reflection, we see that his heart is on his sleeve – he lives and breathes the brand as he assembles an interior panel for a DB7 quickly, yet with obvious and painstaking care.

The workstation where Mick plies his trade is just one of many in the facility and one step of many; a complete interior for an Aston Martin takes some 70 hours to complete.

The exterior design of each model is across the board fantastic. During lunch, we have the chance to listen to Marek Reichman, the company's director of design, explain in expert detail why customers find these cars so irresistible. It's all about the interplay between light and shadow and the visual sleight of hand that a seemingly innocuous character line can cause in the mind's eye.

As noted, the cars are visually stunning – but the CC100 takes this characteristic and accelerates it to another level. On display immediately outside the design studio, the roadster is, all at once, entirely modern and an entirely fitting tribute to the racing Astons from the past, notably the DBR1/1.

"The first time you see an Aston Martin," Reichman says, "there has to be a sharp intake of breath." The CC100 is achingly beautiful from every possible angle.

The week continued apace with a visit to the Aston Martin Heritage Trust, a decidedly tucked away museum housed in a 17th-century barn in Oxfordshire. The barn housed a wealth of memorabilia and a pair of cars, including the oldest known Aston in existence, an open-top roadster from 1922 called the A3.

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