

MOVEMENT | TRANSPORTATION

## Power, Beauty, and Soul

—Aston Martin

THERE ARE MANY truly special cars in the world—on this subject, there can be no debate. These cars can come in all shapes and sizes and price ranges. They can originate from any country. They can be handcrafted or machine-made, high-tech and high-powered, old-fashioned or new-fangled. But there are very few car brands that are recognized around the world for their inherent coolness. Aston Martin is one of the very few.

On January 15, 1913, the brand was born in a small workshop in London, fuelled by the vision of two men, Lionel Martin and Robert Bamford. From the very beginning, times have been tough as the company withstood financial challenges, geopolitical upheaval and ownership changes. These pressures were enough to cause the end of countless car companies in the 20th century, but Aston Martin is nothing if not a survivor.

One hundred years is a long time in any business, especially one that is largely driven by technology. Technology requires investment, and investment, any way you slice it, equates to dollars, pounds, yen, or euros. As the company ventures further into their second century, the money question continues to linger. Through it all, the car-maker that epitomizes cool has kept its composure the entire time.

Of course, when your company is responsible for some of the most desirable cars in the world, staying cool is standard operating procedure. The current fleet is a veritable all-star team comprised of exotic machinery that appeals to customers ranging from the erudite to the rambunctious. The money issue has created the necessity that has led to the inventiveness. All cars are built upon different versions of the same platform, a level of flexibility not often found in a niche carmaker. You have your choice of two different types of engines, either a naturally aspirated V8 or a V12, both mounted in the front, but set back towards the middle of the car. All cars are rear-wheel drive. To be precise, the three different transmissions are the 6-speed manual and the 7-speed automated manual (Sportshift) for the Vantage line only; and 8-speed automatic (Touchtronic). There are six coupes to choose from, six convertibles and one sedan.

On one end of the scale, there is the DB9, once labeled the most beautiful car in the world, a grand touring coupe to rival the very best of all-time. The DB9 Volante takes this winning formula and adds extra helpings of vitamin D to create, arguably, an even more tantalizing prospect. At the other end of the scale is the V12 Vantage S and V12 Vantage S Roadster, as menacing a duo as you'll find in any

environment. The performance level of these cars is so stratospheric, it's well beyond the capabilities of even the well-trained driver.

In between these extremes, we have the Vanquish, the Rapide S, and the V8 Vantage. The first in line here is classified as a GT car, but its performance is so close to that of a pure sports car, the difference is negligible. The latest Vanquish is a stunning example of current Aston Martin design, a modern masterpiece from the team headed by Marek Reichman. The Rapide S, the only 4-door in the production line-up, is gorgeous as well. Essentially a DB9 under the skin, the design of the Rapide S is so disarmingly sleek, it creates the optical illusion that it is a coupe from certain angles. Lastly, there is the V8 Vantage. Although this is the nominal "entry-level" Aston Martin, the V8 Vantage is in many ways the obvious choice for aficionados. It's a perfectly proportioned sports car with more than enough performance to keep the average driver entertained.

Regardless of which Aston Martin you're lucky enough to sample, to own, or to race, there will be a sense of occasion woven into every moment behind the wheel. This feeling starts as soon as you slide the crystal key fob into the dash. This act triggers the engine and causes the words *power, beauty* and *soul* to appear in a small window set inside the speedometer; the driving experience itself continues the theme. While the typical Aston Martin often isn't the fastest car in its respective segment, it's more than fast enough. In other measures, such as the roar the engines produce, the precision of the steering, and the balance during cornering, these stunning cars make others seem ordinary by comparison.

The new CEO of the company, Andrew Palmer, who joined Aston Martin in September 2014, is intent on ensuring that cool factor remains in place. "Being asked to lead Aston Martin, an iconic brand with tremendous global recognition and potential, was an opportunity impossible to refuse," said Palmer. Born in Stratford-upon-Avon, nearly 15 kilometres away from Aston Martin HQ in Gaydon, Palmer is a chartered engineer who is described as being a resolute "car bloke." In his brief time in office, he's already hinted at bold plans for the future—a future that will, no doubt, include more sheer driving enjoyment.

—Mark Hacking

