

# ASTON



# MARTIN

## V8 VANTAGE ROADSTER

Is an Aston Martin your ultimate fantasy car? Tim Barnes-Clay's dreams become reality when he test-drives its Vantage Roadster



Every boy goes through a stage of excitedly playing with cars and some men, like me, never grow out of it. The difference is we're not talking toy cars any more. So, you can imagine my response when Aston Martin Lagonda agreed to let me test drive its V8 Vantage Roadster. To say I was thrilled would be an understatement.

Off I went to Warwickshire where I was given a tour around the Gaydon-based Lagonda factory and witnessed Aston Martins being made by local people rather than robots. It was wonderful to see cars actually being produced like works of art rather than mass-produced. The sheer level of care that goes

into making the exquisite, iconic car is almost beyond belief. It therefore comes as no surprise to discover that Aston Martin production processes involve many, many hours. Even the interior leather, which is stitched by a busy team of people with heads down at sewing machines, is sourced from countries where the cattle are kept in barbed wire-free fields. The reason is that the hide stands less chance of becoming damaged while still on the cow.

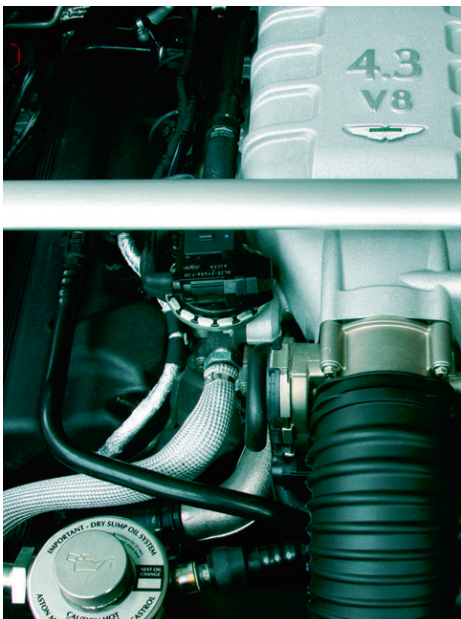
The cars even have to earn their "wings". The iconic Aston Martin winged badge, which by the way is made in Birmingham's jewellery quarter, is the last thing to be added to the car – but only after rigorous testing and checks to

ensure 100 per cent perfection. By the time the visit to the plant finished I was more than itching to get behind the wheel of my V8 Vantage demonstrator.

The convertible version of the Roadster







is a compact sports car with two distinct personalities – open and energising, or closed and protective. I'd go as far to say it is one of the world's most beautiful cars: elegant, yet aggressive with a low, purposeful stance and instantly recognisable as an Aston Martin.

The V8 Vantage line-up benefited from a number of technical changes in 2008 which included a boost to engine performance. The current 4.7 litre V8 engine has a power output of 420bhp (an 11 per cent increase on the previous 4.3 litre unit) and provides the car with massive reserves of mid-range performance and top speed. Aston Martin's Sportshift™ transmission underwent a series of specific changes too. Modifications included a revised control strategy, allowing the transmission, rather than the engine, to dictate how best the engine torque should be deployed

to optimise performance and deliver power smoothly and consistently. Dual Throttle Map software also features. When Comfort mode is selected the engine reacts in a smoother, more progressive manner to driver throttle inputs. and in the default Sports mode the throttle mapping is more aggressive, delivering a more dynamic and sporting feel. Sportshift™ also



has the capability to take inputs from the steering wheel enabling the current gear to be held when the car is negotiating a corner and hill descent detection, allowing a low gear to be held, maximising the effects of engine braking. But enough of all the technical talk, what's the car actually like when you first jump in and sit in the driver's seat?

Once inside the Vantage Roadster you soon realise that the car's interior is just as dramatic as its stunningly fashioned exterior. The instrument pack is crafted from aluminium with a three-dimensional profile for easy reading. The central message displays even use organic electroluminescence (OEL) – a process pioneered by Aston Martin – making them