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Damon Hill

The F1 champion pits Lamborghini Murcielago against Noble M12 GTO



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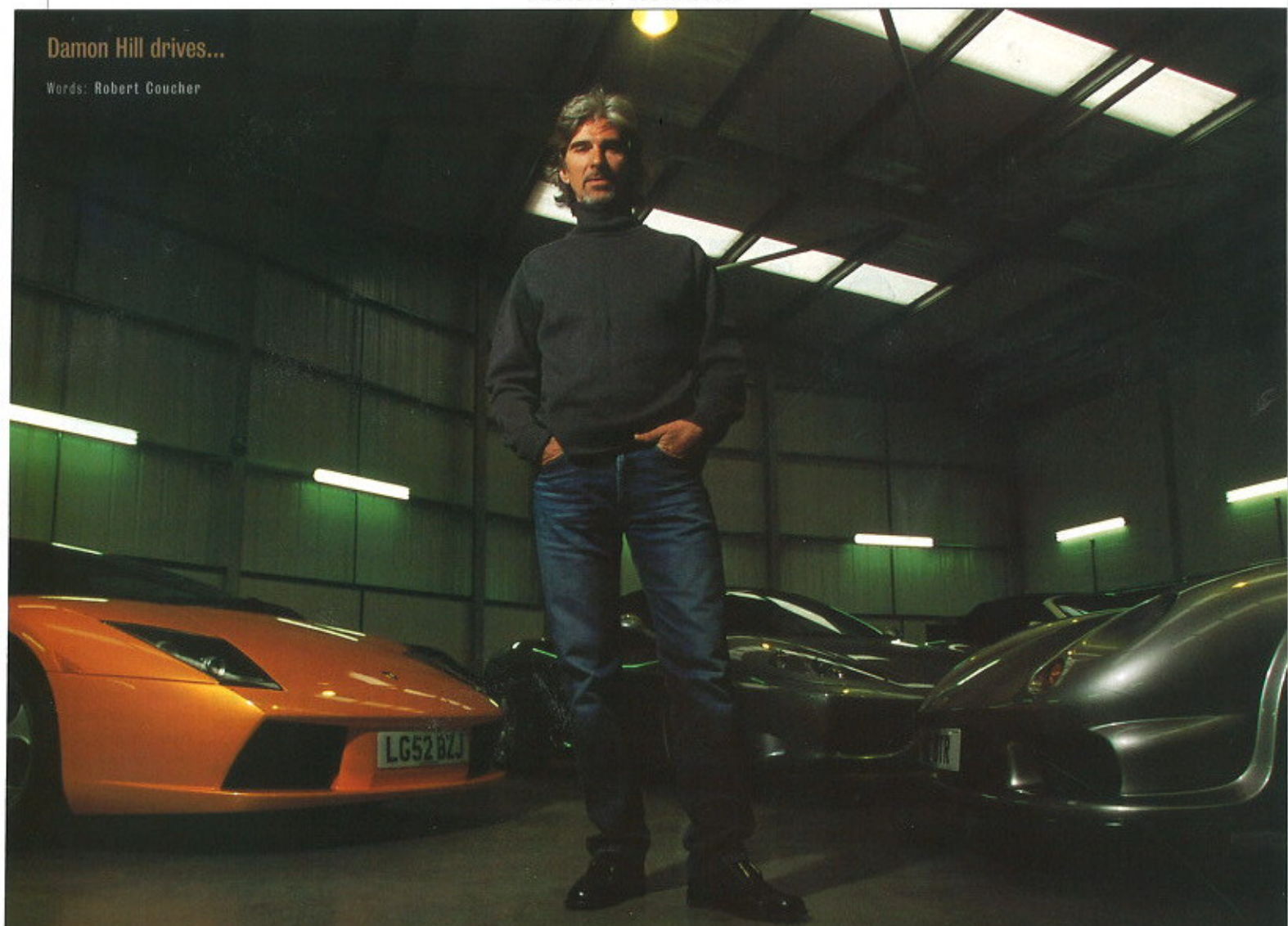
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MOToring CLASSIC



Damon Hill drives...

Words: Robert Coucher



Damon Hill tests Lamborghini vs Noble

1996 Formula One World Champion Damon Hill compares the monster Lamborghini Murcielago against the astonishing Noble M12 GTO.

Damon Hill looks relaxed and in good shape. Casually dressed in a cashmere jersey, he prowls around the collection of supercars housed at his P1 International headquarters in Leatherhead, Surrey. P1 is Damon's private members club offering a limited number of car enthusiasts the opportunity to drive an array of top-flight supercars. Two machines in the collection are the very overt Lamborghini Murcielago and the nimble looking Noble M12 GTO.

It is clear that Damon is a 'car guy'. His eyes light up at the sight of these two machines parked together in the modern HQ. More than that, he understands the engineering behind them.

'Surprisingly, these two very different machines spring from the same idea,' explains Damon. 'They are engineered to offer undiluted driving pleasure and I like the thinking behind each of them. Starting from opposing ends of the motoring spectrum they end up at almost the same point.'

Walking around the Lamborghini he observes, 'The Murcielago is big in every sense but it not as brutish as you'd imagine.' The previous Diablo required much more effort and input from the driver. The Murcielago has evidently benefited from Volkswagen's take-over of Lamborghini and it feels 'more of a piece' and is much better made than its



Damon Hill tests...

'THE LAMBO IS ALL ABOUT CREATING AN IMPRESSION, ALTHOUGH A FAST DRIVE TO THE SOUTH OF FRANCE WOULD BE FABULOUS'



The Lamborghini's V12 is 6.2-litres of brute force, producing an astonishing 580bhp. The car's 0-60mph time is 3.8 seconds and top speed is around 200mph. It's outrageous, especially in orange, although the low-slung leather interior appears surprisingly sedate.

predecessors. As Damon puts it, 'the bottom line is that it's very easy to drive'.

You enter the Lambo through the crazy flip-up doors, and the leather interior is well finished. The seats are seriously low-slung. 'You might need the attentions of a chiropractor if you drive this beast too far,' says Damon. 'I like the interior, especially the acres of leather trim. The only problem is the rearward vision is not good and the car is very wide; not ideal for central London.'

Driving out of the discreet business park in the Lambo, Damon carefully allows the fluids to warm through. The Murcielago has a fantastic engine – a 6.2-litre V12 that pumps out a tyre-shredding 580bhp. That's an impressive figure by any standard. The sound coming from the bazooka-sized twin exhausts is incredible and, being finished in Sunburst Orange, this car is guaranteed to get you noticed. And why not? A Lamborghini has always been an attention grabber, ever since Ferruccio Lamborghini first attempted to upstage Enzo Ferrari. With this car his legacy continues.

On the road the Lambo is mad but, fortunately, not too bad. Within some constraints it's easy to drive (even Rod Stewart can manage his) and it really does the business, attracting attention wherever it goes. 'Bit like sauntering down Bond Street in a loud Versace suit,' says Damon.

Naturally, it's impossible to get anywhere near the Lambo's performance limits on the public road but, when the sight-lines open out, Damon drops a cog, leans on the accelerator pedal and the big V12 takes a deep breath, the exhaust note firms and the Bull starts to bellow. The engine revs to 7500rpm and the car will break the speed limit in first gear. Sixty miles per hour comes storming up in 3.8 seconds and the Lambo tops out at 200mph. Settling into the car Damon comments: 'The four-wheel-drive system induces a bit of understeer and it does

feel large when pressing on but that's not really the point. The Lambo is all about creating an impression, although a long fast drive down to the south of France would be fabulous, even if the excuse is just to visit a masseuse at the other end.'

After a while we return to P1, to swap to the Noble M12 GTO. It's very different in execution but is also focussed on driving pleasure. The car is extremely good value at £42,000; the Murcielago is £168,000.

'The Noble illustrates the engineering, technical and design talent we have in this country. My impression of the Noble is that it is a modern Morgan: cutting-edge and very contemporary. It is small and nimble and the Ford-sourced, turbo-charged, mid-mounted V6 engine musters an impressive 340bhp, in a car weighing a modest 1050kg,' notes Damon.

'On a tricky country road the Lambo won't live with the kart-like Noble. This car is shatteringly quick and hyper-responsive and gets the power down effectively,' says the ex-world champion, clearly enjoying himself from behind the wheel of the GTO. The Noble is not as well finished as a mass-produced car but it has all the right bits and pieces. The interior is akin to a well-trimmed rally car and it all shouts excitement. 'A cracking little machine, which I really enjoy driving at every opportunity,' he adds with enthusiasm.

Damon Hill gets the chance to drive the Lamborghini and Noble regularly, as they're both included in his P1 stable. The club ('P1' is the pit board notation for Position One) is limited to just 250 members in the UK to ensure a high standard of service and car availability. This also makes it one of the most exclusive clubs in the world, allowing members the chance to enjoy a range of the greatest cars.

The supercars in the stable include an Aston Martin Vanquish, Ferrari 360 Spider, Porsche Carrera GT2, Mercedes-

Benz SL55 AMG and Bentley Arnage T. P1 has a new Bentley Continental GT on order and expects delivery soon after launch in the autumn. The members are primarily car enthusiasts who own, or have experience with, this level of machinery. Four of them have been so impressed with the Noble GTO they have each gone out and bought their own.

'When designing P1 we looked very carefully at how many, or how few, miles most owner drive their supercars and how much they spend annually to run them. Including the costs of purchase, insurance, running costs, depreciation and the cost of capital, the real running costs can be far greater than the £12,500 for UK membership of P1,' Hill explains.

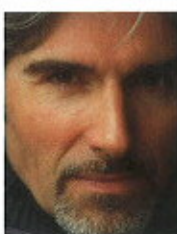
'I always wanted to try out as many cars as I could with the minimum of cost and inconvenience of ownership. With P1 that's now a possibility,' says Hill. But it has not always been like this.

'Before I was old enough to drive legally, my first car was an old Ford Consul, which I bought with a few friends for £5. I learnt to drive in it, whizzing around our private land, across the fields and actually jumping out of it as we drove along. It taught me about mechanics so when I bought my first road car, a VW Beetle, I was able to keep it running.

'The Bug never started because of the hopeless six-volt electrical system but at least it was light and easy to push-start. Everyone should own a car they have to push-start at some point in their lives!'

Today Damon drives a BMW X5 and an Audi TT. 'I like German machines because they offer a "just-so-ness". But it's difficult to resist the charm of Italian cars, with their inherent idiosyncrasies and devil-may-care approach to life.

'I enjoy all sorts of cars, particularly some of the historic cars I get to race. Trouble is, some of them have tell-tale rev counters and video cameras fitted in the cockpit,' laughs Damon Hill, former World Champion and all round dedicated car guy.



Damon Hill's P1

P1 International operates on a simple points system. Members are allocated both a points and mileage allowance at the start of their membership. Each time a booking is made an appropriate number of points are deducted depending on the car, the season and the day, or days, of the week.

P1 also offers its members access to a number of other exclusive events at preferential rates, ranging from a trip to Monaco to watch the F1 Grand Prix from yachts moored at Quay Kennedy, to a rally in club cars and various track days where Damon gets to show the members how it's done.

P1 members also have special access to a fleet of private jets and Sunseeker yachts.

P1 International Ltd:
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No-nonsense Noble interior is fitted with rollcage, Momo steering wheel and full-on bucket seats. Engine is a Ford V6 – with twin turbos and an output of 340bhp. As the car weighs just 1050kg, that's enough to give a 0-60mph time of 3.9 seconds and a 160mph top end. All for a bargain £44,950.

'ON A TRICKY ROAD THE LAMBO WON'T LIVE WITH THE KART-LIKE NOBLE. IT'S SHATTERINGLY QUICK AND IT'S HYPER-RESPONSIVE'

