

Sorry, one of Aston's sup



JIMMY CARR

Quite simply put, the Vantage is rubbish — you don't want to own one. There's no need to read further. Stop now and spend your £80,000 elsewhere. If you have read on, sorry about the above. I was obviously talking tripe but I figure that's as far as the average Premiership footballer will have read — limited attention span and all that — and the last thing we need is footballers spending a week's wages on a Vantage.

In the real world the Vantage has a lot to recommend it. If you're having one of those ultimate-car conversations over a pint, the Vantage is not going to get a look-in. It's fast but it can't break the sound barrier and it can't do 0-60 before you've closed the door, like some supercars.

And as you know, in those pub conversations there is no place for compromise. But if you want a car you are going to drive every day and enjoy, rather than an impractical "top trump" card made flesh, then the Vantage is a brilliant motor.

This isn't the lumbering heavy Aston of old. It's a lithe machine with just two seats. The drive is exactly what you'd expect from a car designed to compete with the Porsche 911. It points beautifully into corners, feels sure-footed — it's a joy.

I didn't take the Vantage onto a track and put it through its paces, first because I'd have killed myself, and second because you won't either. This car drives brilliantly on the road — which is where it belongs.

It is available only with a proper gearbox (I think that's because if they put cool, flappy paddles on the car they'd have problems selling the DB9, the Vantage's big brother). Initially I thought this was a limitation but in fact Aston Martin is giving you what you didn't know you wanted. It's a lovely, meaty gearchange and it forces you to interact with the car — to really drive it.

The Vantage actually has that rarest of things for a supercool car, a good boot. If you want to take your James Bond fantasies to their logical conclusion you could probably fit a rocket launcher in there.

This car is basically the ultimate hot hatch. And the hatchback has another less practical use; it enables anyone driving the car to sound incredibly nonchalant when asked: "What are you driving?" "A new hatchback," you reply.

I loved every minute in the Vantage, but I wanted to see how it compared to the Daddy: the Vanquish S. The Vanquish S costs an eye-watering £97,000 more than the Vantage, which means you could buy a matching set of his 'n' hers Vantages and still have £17,000 change.

But in the interests of objective and thorough journalism I wanted to see what you get for all that extra hard-earned cash.

The first thing you notice in the Vanquish S is the sound system. I'm not talking about the stereo, I'm talking about the sound of the car. It is properly amazing.

I took it on a road trip to see Little Britain in Birmingham with a friend. Half way through a conversation, mid-sentence, I'd go to overtake.

I'd kick the engine into third and floor it, and suddenly all the talking stopped. We'd listen to the engine until we were safely back in fifth gear, cruising, and then take up the conversation where we left off. It is jaw-droppingly amazing. I'm not saying the Vantage is quiet but it doesn't sound like a Harrier jump jet landing in the driveway — the Vanquish does.

Apart from the huge power reserves the other obvious advantage the Vanquish has over the Vantage is it has back seats. I say it has back seats; in fact on closer inspection it has things that look like normal everyday back seats but viewed from a long way off.

Unless you're planning to drive round with some midgets or Douglas Bader in the back, there's no real point to them. The Vanquish is for all intents and purposes like every other Aston — a two-seater.

It is safe to assume that Bader would have despised the Vantage. Not because it didn't have back seats but because for a car that claims to be as British as James Bond it carries with it the unmistakable whiff of Johnny Foreigner.

With an engine made in Cologne and a gearbox built in Italy all that's missing is a Japanese sat nav and you'd have a car built by the Axis powers.

But at least these foreign-made parts work. Which is more than can be said for the Vanquish. The Vanquish is the last of the current crop of Astons to have been built at the firm's original factory in Newport Pagnell, Buckinghamshire, before production moved to the new bells and whistles plant at Gaydon in Warwickshire.



permodels has to walk

And it shows. Granted there is something romantic about the old way of doing things: men with body odour beaming panels, smoking Woodbines and hand-stitching leather. But do you really care about that when the piece of art they have created won't start at 7am on a Tuesday morning and you have to get back to the wife and kids before they notice you didn't come home last night? No. You don't. And wait a moment. Is the Vanquish really as thoroughly British as Harris tweed and game pie? On closer inspection the air vents appear to have been plucked from the parts bin at Volvo — another arm of Ford. How dreadfully common!

The other consideration is the look of these two cars. Both Astons are attractive but there is no doubt in my mind the Vantage is better. Aston has promised a convertible version of the car before the end of the year and that looks set to be the sexiest soft top on the market.

Even in its present coupé form the Vantage is a perfectly proportioned supermodel — it's Eva Herzigova. Standing next to it the Vanquish is like a big, busty, men's mag model. Everything has been turned up to 11. It's just too big for the road. Sure, it's huge curves will turn heads, but just like with the most outstanding page 3 stunners, you can have too much of a good thing. If the Vanquish were a woman you'd think she was attractive but you'd worry about her making a move for fear she was actually a very convincing transvestite.

The Vantage is a dream car but not such an unobtainable one. How many times have you

read or heard reviews of cars stating, "This is a great car, but I couldn't live with it"? Well, you certainly could live with the Vantage.

By comparison the Vanquish would be very high maintenance. Let's say you cover 5,000 miles in the first year. The depreciation is £60,000, servicing £2,000, insurance at least £3,000, so the total cost of the first year's ownership is £65,000. That's even more than the cost of owning a Lamborghini Gallardo (around £44,500 in the first year) or a Bentley Continental GT (around £29,500 in the first year).

I realise David Beckham has more money than sense (let's face facts, he passed that point with his first paper round) so these sort of sums are not going to influence him. But for anyone even on nodding terms with reality these are simply ridiculous amounts.

You may think that because I appear on television I am in this league. Well let me tell you I'm not. However, I can still afford to drive a Vanquish. That's because I'm a member of a supercar club (P1, since you ask). Joining one is like getting your own harem of beautiful cars. The idea is catching on: Google "prestige car clubs" and you'll find quite a few.

So now I own a VW Golf but I drive — well, whatever I choose. It's a bit like drinking champagne and paying beer money.

THE INTERNET FAST LANE

Jeremy Clarkson is away. You can read his past columns at www.timesonline.co.uk/clarkson

VITAL STATISTICS

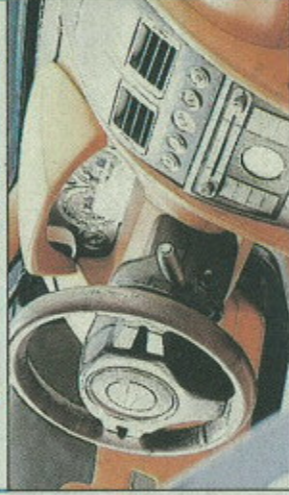
Model	Aston Martin V8 Vantage
Engine	4300cc, eight cylinders
Power	380bhp @ 7300rpm
Torque	302 lb ft @ 5000rpm
Transmission	Six-speed manual
Fuel/CO ₂	16.2mpg (combined cycle) / 406g/km
Performance	0-62mph: 5sec / Top speed: 175mph
Price	£79,995
Rating	★★★★★
Verdict	The best Aston in a generation

Dimensions



Model	Aston Martin Vanquish S
Engine	5935cc, 12 cylinders
Power	520bhp @ 7000rpm
Torque	425 lb ft @ 5800rpm
Transmission	Six-speed manual with auto shift
Fuel/CO ₂	14.9mpg (combined cycle) / 448g/km
Performance	0-62mph: 4.8sec / Top speed: 200mph
Price	£177,100
Rating	★★★★☆
Verdict	Glorious but flawed

Dimensions



The Vantage, left, is made in a state-of-the-art factory, while the Vanquish S, above, is banged together by real men the old fashioned way