

## ASTON MARTIN DB2/4 MARK III COMPETITION SALOON: OUT OF AFRICA...BUT DID IT RACE IN BELGIUM AND RHODESIA?

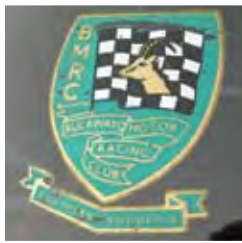
By Bill Noon

Everyone loves a mystery...and I hope you enjoy this one about a remarkable production-derived Aston with racer characteristics from a bygone era.

A warning: the story of this magnificent machine is incomplete. Even in this age of instant information, many names, dates and places remain unknown. We know only a fraction of this car's history.

Should you have suggestions on where to look, or a bit of missing information on this car, we warmly welcome your input. We should all remember something so often ignored: we are merely temporary custodians of these coveted machines; someday we will be gone, and if we are careful, what passed through our hands will be better understood by future enthusiasts.

A brief history of Aston Martin: the post WW II production and racing has been thoroughly documented by far better souls than me. Never can enough credit for Aston's



post-war fortunes be given to David Brown who purchased the remains of Aston Martin and of Lagonda in 1947. Those early years saw only 14 completed examples of the car known as the Two Liter Sports, later dubbed the DB1, based on Aston's prewar design and 4 cylinder engine. What Aston learned early on led to a heavily revised, far more production-oriented DB2 built from Spring 1950 until Spring 1953 with the Aston chassis, and the Lagonda twin cam 6 cylinder engine designed by W.O. Bentley, enveloped in a new body. Four hundred and eleven DB2s were completed with a variety of coachwork configurations and competition derived options. Nearly in parallel to the development and production of these sporting GT cars, Aston was heavily involved in racing, both "Works



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Team Cars” and client cars, with their first true post-war race car, the DB3. Although only 10 DB3s were completed, success on the track came early and what was learned there often found its way into option lists for the DB2.

The logical successor to the DB2 was a slightly revised, more comfortable version called the DB2/4. There were improvements to reliability as well as the addition of “occasional” rear seating, hence the 2/4 label. Most notable on the standard Tickford Saloon was the rear-hatch back, thought to be the first such practical application. Continued performance improvements and available upgrades saw more than a few enthusiastic owners competing with their vehicles in many UK,

be the last, most refined of the original DB2 design, in production for seven years. From March 1957 until July 1959 Aston produced 551 Mark IIIs. Aston offered both comfort and performance options, including four levels of engine tune. While Aston’s reliability and performance had reached its zenith, so had the new model’s weight, now tipping the scales just over 2,800lbs. Even so, in basic 162bhp configuration, the MKIII was capable of top-speed well in excess of 120mph.

Few of the new MKIIIs are recorded as having active competition careers despite the engine tuning options to bring horsepower well over 200bhp. Those that were run in competition rewarded their owner-

few weeks, I began preliminary research to see what we had acquired.

The chassis number made it clear that sequentially this particular MKIII was the 25th of 551 examples. To my untrained eye it was nothing more than a “production” road car and at best I might be able to trace back and contact a few previous owners. Beyond that I had almost nothing else to go on. I wrote to the Aston Martin factory and was amazed at how quickly and how enthusiastically they got back to me. The Aston Martin Heritage Trust Secretary was quite shocked at my initial inquiry, explaining that both the Factory and the AMOC (Aston Martin Owners Club) had lost track of this car after April 1960. It was recorded in the AMOC



Continental and US venues. The DB2/4 was an overwhelming success, and 565 examples were built from October 1953 to October 1955. As with the DB3, Aston produced a vastly improved competition model in parallel with the DB2/4, for “Works” use and that of favored privateers. This legendary sports racer was the new DB3S; Aston produced 30 examples.

Beginning Spring 1955, Aston planned a vastly improved replacement model for the DB2/4. But, prior to the introduction of this new model, a revision of the DB2/4, simply called the DB2/4 Mark II, made its debut in October 1955. Improvements were subtle, leaning towards more refinement as well as standardizing previously optional equipment. Mark II production ran until August 1957 and actually overran the release of the DB2/4 Mark III. Total Mark II production tallied 199 cars.

#### **DB2/4 Mark III or simply DB MKIII**

The development of the DB2/4 Mark III was carried out over many months. With the MKIII, Aston incorporated the best of what had been proven reliable and competitive along with innovative features. These would be the last Astons built at the old Feltham works—and also

entrants with a reliable and competitive machine on equal to Ferrari’s then current 250GT Series, and far better performing than Maserati’s all new 3500GT.

Today for a variety of reasons, of the production “Feltham” Astons from the 1950s, the MKIII is most sought after by collectors. The near perfect lines and abundant torque are merely a starting point. Closer examination reveals so much more, but in the end most of today’s collectors are simply amazed at the overall package and performance of even a “base” tune MKIII.

#### **AM/300A/1325: an Aston Martin of particular distinction**

I first became aware of this Aston in October 2008. A dealer in Gifu Shi, Gifu Ken, Japan advised me of its availability. He knew only the color, chassis number and price. His poor quality photos were less than complimentary; knowing no more than that, I did not make a second inquiry. One year later, the owner of our company advised me he had struck a deal and purchased an old Aston. He sent photos, one of which showed the chassis number. Armed only with this and knowledge that the car would arrive in a

REGISTERS as simply “missing.”

As noted, Mark III production began in Spring 1957. Chassis 1325 was an early order car for “export” in left-hand-drive. How and when this car was assembled, and for whom, are all well documented by Aston Martin’s impeccable records. The original Factory Assembly Data Sheets as well as Warranty and “after” Warranty service records provided an amazing amount of vehicle specific information.

In March 1957, the Aston Martin concessionaire in Belgium, Mannes, processed an order on behalf of their favored client, Mr. Therasse of 114 Faubourg de Namur, Nivelles, Belgium. The order specified a “left-hand-drive” export model, odometer in kilometers, a “DBA” specification engine, and the optional dual exhaust that bumped horsepower from 162 to 178. The original color was “Peony” a brilliant shade of bright red with a slight hint of metallic. Interior was standard black carpet and Connolly leather.

Chassis 1325 was recorded as wholesaled on June 26, 1957 and delivered three days later on June 29. The car was however completed no later than May 1957 as it was tested upon completion on both the 2nd and 3rd of that month prior to being readied for delivery.

Mr. Therasse by any account was an enthusiastic owner. His surviving factory service records give more than just a partial glimpse of both how often and how hard he pushed his beautiful new machine. By mid September 1957 he had already covered some 6,500 kilometers and two weeks later he had added another 2,700 kilometers! Such mileage in such a short period of time begged the question: how was this possible? The Aston Martin Historical Trust Secretary as well as various AMOC members and their corresponding REGISTERS could provide very little information.

While still decoding the factory build sheet and Service History, I began inquiring of various known Aston “gurus” via

There is an eight month gap in the Factory Service records in which Mr. Therasse added another 7,500 kilometers to this Aston. While no longer averaging 2,000 kilometers/month, he was still putting on nearly 1,000/month. In late September 1958, with just over 20,000 kilometers on the clock and the car just over a year old, Mr. Therasse had the engine completely rebuilt to “DBC” or full racing specifications. This was a significantly involved rebuild and one that would limit the car’s usability on the road. The DBC sported several modifications:

- Triple Weber carburetors and matching intake manifolds,
- Radically raised compression ratio,
- Different ignition and exhaust cams

in just the first two years of his ownership. While not excessive by today’s standards and the norm of a “heavy commute” it becomes apparent that for more than six months, Mr. Therasse drove his Aston with a “full race-tuned” engine nearly 1,250 kilometers per month.

To date our research on when and where this car may have been competing remains a mystery. The only clue for possibilities comes from a persistent rumor that the car was run in both the Tulip Rallye and Rome-Liege-Rome events of 1957, 1958 and 1959. My persistent inquiries to a knowledgeable individual with access to these races’ entrants, results and dates have produced no results.

## *“Both the Factory and the AMOC had lost track of this car after April 1960. It was recorded in the AMOC REGISTERS as simply ‘missing’”*

standard email searches and AMOC chat sites. Having had several very important Aston racers pass through my hands over the years, (DB3, DB3S, DBR1, DB4GT & DB4GT Zagato to name a few) I was given welcome assistance from all parts of the world. Unfortunately almost nothing was known about this particular car or owner.

Knowledgeable experts suggested I check to see if Mr. Therasse was racing or rallying the car in endurance events in Europe at the time. I thought this was a “sporting” road car and had not considered the possibility of it being raced.

One astute AMOC historian requested copies of the factory records. We both took a closer look at the service history and mileage recorded. In his first six months of ownership, Mr. Therasse accumulated more than 12,000 kilometers—averaging more than 2,000kms /1,200 miles per month! In that same time frame, Aston performed two major rebuilds of the engine. Was this merely an enthusiastic owner and possibly a car with some unsolved engine issues? My own experience with such things led me to believe that Mr. Therasse was most likely racing his Aston Martin, but where he was doing so remained a mystery.

and valve train hardware, and

- New distributor and revised engine timing.

With the tuned exhaust system and open velocity stacks, the DBC engine produced a reliable 214bhp! This was more than a 50bhp increase over the standard MKIII. I spoke at length with the Aston Heritage Trust Secretary about this optional engine. He clarified that in addition to our car, only one other MKIII was so equipped, which was delivered new specifically for racing in the Cuban Grand Prix in October 1958. (Aston Martin Factory Records confirm that both MKIIIs received the full “DBC” engine specification in September 1958. The second example built to these specifications for Cuba was AM/300/3/1708.) He further stated that with the engine in this state of tune, the car would be suitable for the most part for racing only and that this is where we needed to continue our search to learn more of the car’s history.

The last known recorded mileage for this Aston while with Mr. Therasse shows the car having covered some 30,000kms just shy of the car’s second birthday. This would give Mr. Therasse an overall average of nearly 1,000 miles of use per month

Mr. Therasse’s involvement with 1325 ended in early 1960 when it is recorded that the car was sold to fellow Belgian, G.V.S. Pearson of Brussels. His ownership was brief indeed as the car was sold later in 1960 to an unknown owner in South Africa.

While specific information such as mileage, owners and dates are factually known for the first three years of this car’s life, the next 50 are almost entirely blank. There are only a handful of clues. Sometime prior to being sold to South Africa, the car was repainted in a very attractive shade of dark green. The only other clue to the what/where/when, after arriving in Africa, comes from a polite New Zealand enthusiast who spent his youth in Rhodesia.

Mark Cotter worked on a farm in Rhodesia that serviced vehicles including race cars beginning in the late 1950s and well into the 1960s, after which he returned to New Zealand with his family. He stated that this Aston was run regularly under the “BMRC” (Bulawayo Motor Racing Club) banner in Rhodesian, South African and Angolan events at least until 1965. Even after nearly 50 years the rear window still has the remains of a BMRC sticker attached.

**In storage mid-1960s to mid-1990s in Rhodesia—then over a decade in Japan**

Very little is known about the car's African phase, only that sometime in the mid-1960s it went into long-term storage from which it was not liberated until the mid-1990s when it surfaced at a private garage in South Africa. The engine, gearbox, brakes and suspension were thor-


oughly serviced but the car was otherwise completely cosmetically untouched, preserved as last used in the early 1960s. From there the car was purchased by a private museum in Japan, but on arrival it again went into storage, remaining unused until our purchase in late 2009.

The car has been with us and on the road for several weeks. Today the Aston remains a bit dusty but even so, the ancient

paint and interior retain their charm. The Aston is clearly tuned for competition but despite this, it is an absolute delight to drive and begs to be pushed hard.

I do not know who might be the Aston's next custodian. I hope a few things will have happened since I put pen to paper: that we have a far better understanding of this car's history and those involved with it.

**Epilogue**

Steven Dudley M.D. and his wife Lynn of Oshkosh, Wisconsin have since acquired this Aston, and drove it for the first time at Palm Springs CA in January 2010. Please see our report on that event. New Members of AMOC, the Dudleys were the first entry for Lime Rock 2010. Steve has raced 1950s Ferraris as well as the ex Eddie Weschler 250 TDF, a great Ferrari that your Ed. chased around Road America a few times in the early 1980s. We think that the Club will enjoy the Dudleys enjoying this fascinating Mark III – whatever its history may be. 





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Contact Andy Bell