



Automobiles of London
Wednesday, October 28, 2009

1950 Aston Martin DB2 Team Car



LOT: 245

Estimate:

£250,000-£450,000

Chassis No. LML/50/8



Est. 130 bhp, twin overhead camshaft 2,580 cc inline six-cylinder engine, David Brown four-speed gearbox, independent front suspension with trailing link, coil springs and Armstrong lever dampers, live Salisbury rear axle with coil springs, front and rear 12-inch hydraulic drum brakes, Dunlop 16-inch wire wheels. Wheelbase: 99"

ASTON MARTIN – THE EARLY YEARS

Wealthy sportsman Lionel Martin partnered with engineer Robert Bamford in 1913 to produce light cars based on 10-horsepower Singers. Hill climbs were contested by Martin with a particularly satisfying win achieved at the Aston Hill Climb in Buckinghamshire. When Lionel Martin decided to produce a sporting vehicle of his own, he combined his last name with that of the site of his recent success, and the legendary Aston-Martin line of motor cars was announced in 1914.

Much success in competitions followed for Aston-Martin before 53 production road cars were built and sold from 1920 to 1925. However, the admirable but risky business of putting quality before price, a concept which has continued to this day, caused the Bamford and Martin partnership to succumb to bankruptcy in 1925.

THE BERTELLI YEARS (1926 – 1940)

The marque's excellent sporting reputation no doubt encouraged the 1926 corporate rescue (the first of many!), which saw Lord Charnwood join forces with the brilliant engineer/racing driver A.C. Bertelli to form Aston Martin Motors Limited. The next 14 years produced no less than 700 1.5- and 2-litre Astons, including the famous "Ulster" racing model that placed well at Le Mans, Brooklands and in the Tourist Trophy, improving the breed and serving as the company's major advertising thrust. Bertelli left in 1937, but Claude Hill stayed on to work with engineer Gordon Sutherland. A shift in focus in the late 1930s away from racing models to the road car side of the business, along with the introduction of the two-litre Aston Martin, carried the firm through until the war.

THE DAVID BROWN ACHIEVEMENT (1947 – 1972)

After the war, the company faced its third financial crisis when a lack of capital prevented the development of new and necessary

post-war models. An anonymous ad in The Times caught industrialist David Brown's eye, and by February 1947 a mere £20,500 had affected the ownership change. A few months later a second shrewd purchase netted the Lagonda Company, which provided a modern 2580 cc twin overhead cam engine. In various forms this would power some 700 Aston Martin DB2, DB2/4, Mark II and III road cars over a nine year period ending in 1959.

While this satisfied Brown the businessman, Brown the racing man nurtured the dream of scoring an outright victory at the 24 Hours of Le Mans. Under the leadership of newly hired professionals like manager John Wyer, racing began in earnest with the DB3 of 1951, followed by great success in the 1953 - 1956 period by DB3S models. David Brown's racing aspirations were finally met in 1959 when the DBR1 Aston Martin driven by Roy Salvadori and Carroll Shelby won Le Mans. In that year the World Sports Car Championship fell to Aston Martin as well, with help from the likes of Stirling Moss, Jack Fairman and Tony Brooks.

The hugely successful DB4, DB5 and DB6 Grand Tourers powered by a new alloy twin cam six followed in the 1959 to 1969 period. A new V8 engine debuted in 1969 as the DBS V8, versions of this alloy masterpiece powering post-David Brown era Astons for a further two decades. Knighted in 1968, Sir David Brown's 25-year stewardship produced without a doubt the most varied and universally revered range of Aston Martin motor cars.

THE ASTON MARTIN DB2

The DB2, in production from May 1950 until April 1953, was David Brown's first Aston Sporting Saloon. Its tubular steel chassis was based on that of the two-litre Sports, but newly hired engineer Ted Cutting shortened the wheelbase, added cruciform members, triangulation and an extra upper side-rail, providing, in essence, a stiff tubular space frame.

The DB2 production engine "borrowed" from David Brown's other car company, Lagonda, was the 2.6-litre, twin cam six-cylinder designed by W.O. Bentley in 1943, while talented ex-Lagonda designer Frank Feeley penned the handsome coupé bodywork.

Its four-wheel coil spring suspension was advanced and a feature not found on a Jaguar or Ferrari for a decade or more. The front was independent and the live rear-axle was located by trailing arms and a Panhard rod. The four-speed gearbox was sourced in-house from the David Brown Gear Division while a Salisbury hypoid rear axle was fitted. The 12-inch hydraulic drum brakes were often equipped with optional "Al-fin" aluminium drums for competition use. Engine output was governed by the various available options but ranged from 105 bhp to 145 bhp at 5,000 rpm and provided a zero-to-sixty time of about 12 seconds and a top speed of 110 to 135 mph.

England's motoring guru of the time, Laurence Pomeroy, eloquently penned in his October 1950 article in The Motor: "It would appear that every so often the gods pass over some works or another and with an inclination of the head inspire the production of a car with outstanding virtues. The Aston Martin DB2 stands worthy in the pedigree of real motor cars stretching back through the 4 ½ Bentley to the 30/98 Vauxhall."

ASTON MARTIN DB2 TEAM CAR – "VMF 64"

The following description is excerpted from a July 1951 Autocar article by Gordon Wilkins:

A CAR WITH A CAREER - Impressions of a famous Aston Martin

Some cars seem destined to draw the spotlight and hold it. Take the Aston Martin DB2 saloon VMF 64, for example. It made one of the outstanding British performances at Le Mans last year, when it was driven by George Abecassis and Lance Macklin, finishing fifth in the general category at 87.26 m.p.h. and tying for first place on Performance Index. Before that it had been driven by the late Raymond Sommer on his memorable run in the 1950 Production Car Race at Silverstone and by September it was in Northern Ireland, where Lance Macklin brought it home third in its class in the T.T. race.

For some months afterwards, it had a somewhat quieter life, being used for business journeys by Mr. David Brown, head of the group which controls Aston Martin and Lagonda, but early this year Mr. Brown decided to lend the car to T.H. Wisdom for the Mille Miglia race. The service department at Feltham gave it a thorough check over and towards the end of April the car was on its way to Brescia.

The result was a success which created a considerable impression in Italy, for the car covered the difficult route of over 970 miles at an average of 68.79 m.p.h. and won the class for fast convertibles and closed cars of production type over 2,000 c.c. with a margin of six minutes ahead of Amendola's Ferrari.

After that it came back to England and was soon handed over to the experimental department of the Aston Martin works to be prepared for the Le Mans 24-hour race. The treatment was rather more extensive this time and a two-pronged programme was undertaken to produce more power and less weight in an effort to improve on last year's performance. The compression ratio was pushed up to 8.16 to 1.

Meanwhile appropriate steps were taken within the framework of the regulations to jettison unnecessary weight. The bonnet was given one of the new light alloy radiator grilles, the interior trim and head lining were removed and very light seats were installed. These alterations permitted a change in the axle ratio, which was lowered from 3.77 to 1 to 3.27, allowing a very high cruising speed to be maintained down the long straight from Tertre Rouge to Mulsanne without overstressing the engine.

Once more VMF 64 rose to the occasion, making the best performance of all the five Aston Martins which made such a brilliant showing in the race. Driven once again by Lance Macklin, who this time had Eric Thompson as co-driver, it won the three-litre class and finished third in the general classification at an average of 90 m.p.h. In the excitement over the high speed at which this year's race was won it is easy to overlook the fact that this 2 ½ litre saloon, in finishing third, maintained a higher average speed than Rosier's 4 ½ Talbot when it won last year's race, despite the bad weather conditions this year."

The above article, written in July, 1951, cannot of course predict the future, so a brief look at VMF 64's further adventures is in order.

The 1951 Alpine Trial saw Mr. and Mrs. Wisdom gain an Alpine Cup while scoring a 1st in four stages. A second Mille Miglia with Wisdom/Lown followed in 1952 where VMF 64 again scored a class win, finishing 12th overall at an average speed of 71.8 mph. A second Alpine Rally, also in 1952, recorded 15th overall and a 5th in class for Tommy Wisdom with Nockolds navigating.

Except for a 1952 Earl's Court display, that ended VMF 64's competition career as the factory service department converted it to road specification for Chairman David Brown's use.

Although this DB2 had frequent factory service, it is worth noting the absolute excellence of design and build quality of these early Astons. Despite being subjected to some nine grueling speed events, including two 24 hour Le Mans races, two Mille Miglias, two Alpine Trials and an Ulster TT grind, VMF 64 never suffered a DNF (did not finish) during its entire career!

ONE OWNER FOR 52 YEARS

In early 1957, after its 1953 conversion to "fast road specification" for David Brown, he sold VMF 64 to his personal friend, the Honourable Gerald Lascelles, the first cousin to the Queen who later served as President of the British Racing Driving Club (BRDC) for a 27 year term. Gerald Lascelles was very fond of this Aston and revisited its racing history when he contested Mille Miglia Storica events in the 1980s with Prince Michael of Kent. When he retired to France, VMF 64 was entrusted to his son Henry who has sympathetically maintained it as it was originally sold to his father in 1957, while participating in occasional road rallies such as the Ecurie Ecosse Tour.

As offered, the car comes complete with an extensive history file, an original purchase invoice and a great deal of correspondence, including letters from David Brown dating back to 1955 before Gerald Lascelles ownership.

After a continuous 52 years with the first private owner of VMF 64, RM Auctions is proud to have been selected to market what is generally considered to be the most significant and original early Aston Martin Team car.

PERIOD EVENT LISTING WITH RESULTS FOR ASTON MARTIN DB2 VMF 64 LML/50/8

- 1950 – Le Mans (Abecassis/Macklin) – 5th O/A; 87.3 mph average speed; 1st on Index; 1st in class
- 1950 – Silverstone BRDC (Sommer) – 2nd in class; 79.9 mph average speed
- 1950 – Ulster "Tourist Trophy" (Macklin) – 3rd in class; 71.8 mph average speed
- 1950 – Shelsley Walsh (Brackenbury) – 6th in class; 3rd Team Prize (50.46 seconds)
- 1951 – Mille Miglia (Wisdom/Hume) – 11th O/A; 1st in class; 68.79 average speed
- 1951 – Le Mans (Macklin/Thompson) – 3rd O/A; 1st in class; 90.0 mph average speed
- 1951 – Alpine Trial (Wisdom/Wisdom) – Alpine Cup; 1st in four stages
- 1951 – Autocar Road Test – 20 July, 1951
- 1952 – Mille Miglia (Wisdom/Lown) – 12th O/A; 1st in class; 71.8 mph average speed
- 1952 – Alpine Trial (Wisdom/Nockolds) – 15th O/A; 5th in class
- 1952 – Earl's Court Show Display

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