



Sale 18211 - Aston Martin and Related Automobilia, 22 May 2010
Newport Pagnell

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Lot Lot



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Lot No: 328
'VMF 65' The Ex-Works, Eric Thompson, Rob Walker, George Abecassis, Major Tony Rolt, Stirling Moss, Peter Collins
1950 Aston Martin DB2 Team Car
Registration no. VMF 65
Chassis no. LML/50/9

Estimate: £380,000 - 440,000

Footnote:

Aston Martin is one of the most charismatic of all world-renowned motoring marques, and one that occupies an especially sophisticated niche with its connotations of slightly tweedy British sportsmanship at its most civilised finest.

Here we are delighted to offer a wonderfully well preserved and highly original ex-works Aston Martin team car which was prepared as new, in 1950, to compete in the second postwar Le Mans 24-Hours race.

Factory team entries had been registered with the organising Automobile Club de l'Ouest for three new sister DB2 Coupes to represent the David Brown-owned marque. These cars were UK road-registered in order 'VMF 63' (to be co-driven by Reg Parnell/Charles Brackenbury), 'VMF 64' (for George Abecassis/Lance Macklin) and this car 'VMF 65' (for subsequent long-term owner Eric Thompson, and Jack Fairman).

Unfortunately, en route to the Sarthe circuit Jack Fairman missed a corner on a French road and overturned. It proved impossible to repair body damage in time for the 24-Hour race, so 'VMF 65' offered here was returned to Aston Martin Lagonda Limited's contemporary factory, at Feltham, Middlesex. There, it was carefully rebuilt in time for Eric Thompson to drive it in the 'Daily Express' One-Hour Production Car Race at the important BRDC International Trophy meeting, Silverstone, on August 26.

Eric Thompson had two gearboxes seize in the car in practice so started with a third installed - "...which I used for the first time at the Le Mans-type start", he recalled. "It had a low first gear which gave me a tremendous start, but then a huge gap to Le Mans ratios so I dutifully let my team-mates by...". 'VMF 65' completed a DB works team 2-3-4 finish, led by the French superstar driver of that era, Raymond Sommer, then Parnell and Thompson.

This important team car's second race was then the RAC Tourist Trophy on the superb Dundrod public road circuit in Ulster. The driver was George Abecassis of HWM team fame and '65' offered here promptly finished 5th. Three weeks later at Shelsley Walsh hill-climb - an important event at that time - Abecassis clocked 47.73secs in this car, and in early-November it was shared by two of Abecassis's HWM team drivers - none other than Stirling Moss and Lance Macklin - to contest the MCC 'Daily Express' 1,000-Mile Rally.

Aston Martin Lagonda Ltd then used it as their dedicated press road-test DB2. In this role it featured prominently in 'The Autocar' magazine of September 17, 1950 and in a John Bolster test in the 'Autosport' magazine issue of March 2, 1951, in which it was pictured upon the front cover.

Mr R.R.C. 'Rob' Walker - later to become the most successful private entrant in Formula 1 racing history with drivers Stirling Moss, Maurice Trintignant and Jo Siffert all winning Grand Prix races in his Scots-blue liveried Cooper and Lotus cars - then bought this DB2 in the Spring of 1951. In his ownership 'VMF 65' ran in the British Empire Trophy race at Douglas, Isle of Man, driven by George Abecassis, and Rob himself then competed with it in the Speed Trials at Ramsgate and on Madeira Drive, Brighton.

Major Tony Rolt, MC & Bar - of Le Mans-winning, Ferguson Research and Colditz Castle PoW fame - took 3rd and 4th places with the car at Goodwood, and Eric Thompson then drove it again in 'VMF 65's second RAC TT at Dundrod - finishing 8th.



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Eric Thompson later won with the car at Snetterton in May 1952, while into 1954 Rob Walker scored a string of victories in Speed Trials at Ramsgate, Tarrant Hinton, Weathersfield and Gosport. That season also saw Roy Salvadori driving this immensely important Aston Martin to a race win at Ibsley in Hampshire while at Fairwood in Wales none other than Peter Collins brought the ageing car home 4th.

In 1955 Rob Walker finally sold the car to Woking Motors and by 1966 it had passed to Nigel Mann who loaned it to the Le Mans Museum where it was displayed until 1979 when its former works driver Eric Thompson acquired it.

He then retained the car for 19 years until 1998 when it was sold via the Brooks Goodwood Sale to its present vendor. Mr Thompson had run the car in the Dubai historic race meeting in 1981, and in 1987 it completed the Mille Miglia retro round Italy, crewed by Mr Thompson and 'Classic Cars' magazine founding editor Michael Bowler. The celebrated 'Autocar' columnist Eoin Young then shared 'VMF 65' with Mr Thompson in the 1990 Pirelli Le Mans Cavalcade - where it ran again in 1992, and in recent years - both in the ownership of Eric Thompson and since 1998 of the current incumbent - the car has been a cherished participant in not only the Goodwood Festival of Speed but also the Goodwood Revival Meeting, and in the BRDC's Silverstone Historic Festival.

As offered here 'VMF 65' is most handsomely presented, its blue radiator grille and large blue night-time recognition light on the right-rear quarter panel matching its original livery. Condition is generally good. There are a few cosmetic issues around front and rear screens and some minor dents reflecting its continuing use as a road racing warrior. The car's interior is stripped for racing with roll-over bar, plumbed-in OMP extinguisher system, two bucket seats with safety harnesses etc, but it still retains its original wooden dash and switchgear. The car stands on 16-inch Borrani wire-spoked wheels shod with Dunlop Racing 6.00L x 16 tyres. Drum brakes, of course, are fitted all round.

The car is accompanied by a continuation log book chronicling the period 1958 to 1966, plus FIA, FIVA and partially completed HTP papers quoting engine number 'LB6A/50/222'. However the engine numbers for these engines are stamped upon the timing case and we are advised that 'VMF 65's timing case broke and was replaced with a timing case bearing the number 'LB6A/50/510'.

The engine presently installed is a racing-specification unit, prepared by Rex Woodgate Ltd (a company now run by the veteran Aston Martin specialist's equally highly-regarded son, Chris Woodgate). This power unit breathes through three Weber 45DCOE twin-choke carburettors, and it is this engine that has propelled Oliver Leyba in so many fine performances by 'VMF 65' in the Goodwood Revival Meetings.

The unit was last 'refreshed' a few years ago, since when 'VMF 65' has competed at Goodwood - and Goodwood only - just twice. The car has been one of the most actively campaigned of closed Coupe works racing team Aston Martins throughout its long and illustrious life.

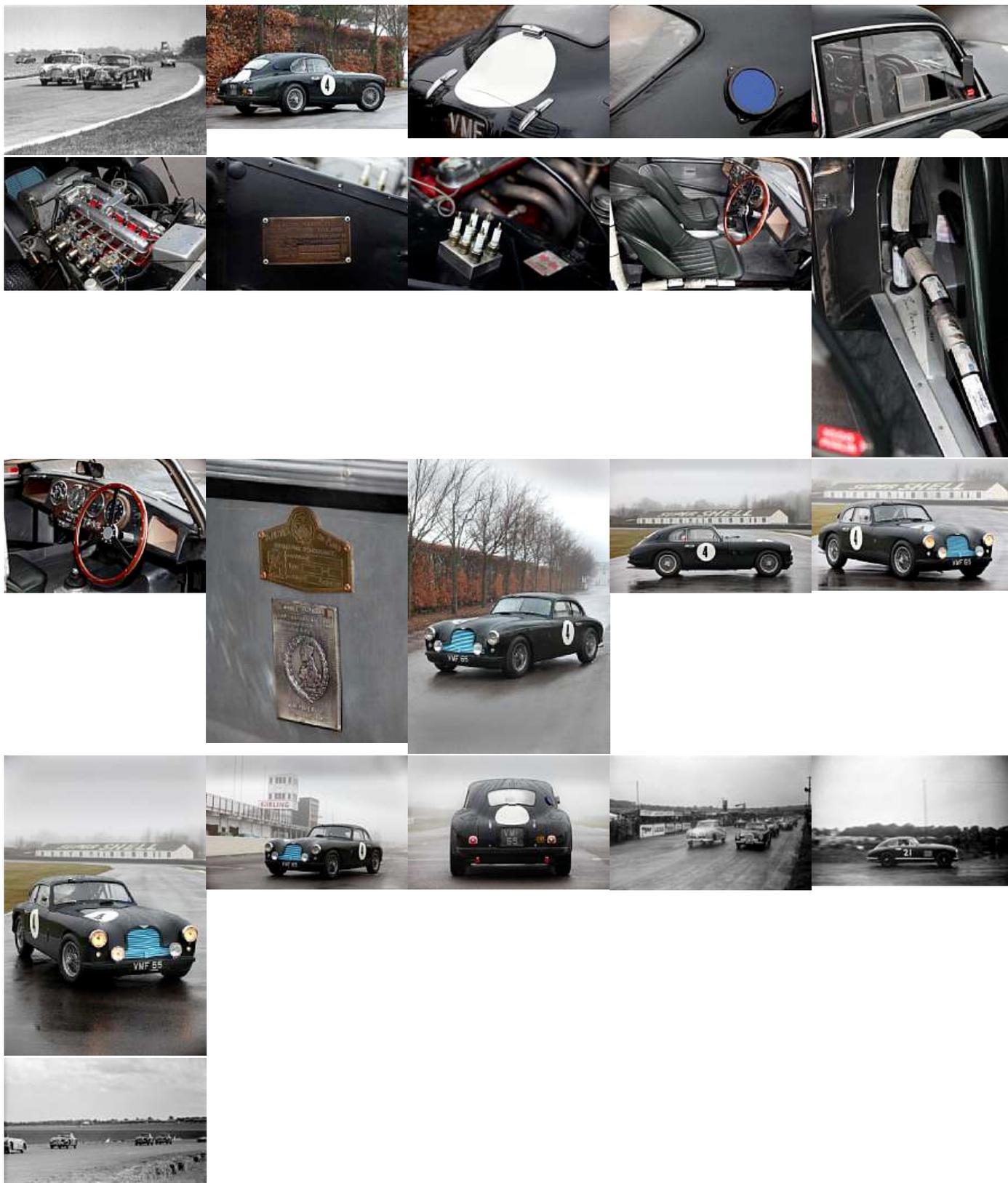
In the ownership of the enthusiast Leyba family, Aston Martin connoisseurs, 'VMF 65' has been stabled alongside its sisters 'VMF 63' (sold by the Forshaw family, via us to Robert Leyba in the late 1990s), and 'XMC 76'. At one time Mr Leyba owned no fewer than 38 Aston Martins. Oliver, who had raced all three of the family owned DB2 Team Cars rated VMF 65 as his favourite, hence it being the last remaining Team Car in the family.

This most-Britannic of Le Mans and Tourist Trophy Grand Touring cars, and one which has been driven competitively by so many illustrious British racing drivers, is today a veteran of the Mille Miglia retro, the Tour Auto and of both the magnificent Goodwood spectacles. It is of course eligible for the Le Mans Classic and for a plethora of other blue riband events worldwide.

The car's on road behaviour is described as being remarkably taut and rattle-free, its suspension being surprisingly 'civilised' and supple but well damped while its handling is characterised as being "...very forgiving and progressive" at substantial speeds. Above all 'VMF 65' is a wonderfully thoroughbred member of a truly thoroughbred breed, and with a record including such names as Moss, Collins, Salvadori, Rolt, Macklin, Abecassis, Eric Thompson and Rob Walker - 'VMF 65' is rightly perceived as the perfect gentleman's competition car - a true gem in British Racing Green.

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