

Aston Martin DB5 and Volante

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After five years, the DB4 had evolved so far from its origins that it deserved a new name. It got one in the autumn of 1963: the Aston Martin DB5. But though it retained the basic chassis, body style, and running gear of late-model DB4s, Aston's newest was once again a different car in many respects. Interestingly, it would be built for only two years and 1021 examples yet became one of the most famous of all Astons. Such is the power of Hollywood. A specially equipped DB5 served as James Bond's spy car in the film *Goldfinger*, thus instantly making this model an international star.

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The best way to begin describing the Aston Martin DB5 is to start with the DB4 from which it was developed. The solid 98-inch-wheelbase pressed-steel platform chassis and the basic dohc six-cylinder engine were retained, as was the choice of four-seat coupe and slightly less spacious convertible models. However, a 4-mm bore increase swelled engine displacement from 3670 to 3995 cc. In original standard form (with three SU carburetors), the DB5 thus carried a rated 282 horsepower. The coupe, complete with headlamps recessed behind sloping covers, looked almost exactly like the last of the DB4s, while the convertible now adopted this treatment (DB4 Convertibles always had exposed headlamps). A detachable steel hardtop remained optional for it. As before, both models carried Touring Superleggera bodies.

Initial DB5 transmission choices were as for late DB4s: 4-speed David Brown manual gearbox, the same with extra-cost electric overdrive, and optional 3-speed Borg-Warner automatic. But there was also a third option now, an all-synchromesh ZF 5-speed manual (also used in six-cylinder Maseratis of the period) in which fifth gear was effectively an overdrive. It became standard by mid-1964 and the 4-speed and separate overdrive vanished.

Autumn of 1964 brought a more powerful engine as a new Aston Martin Vantage option. Breathing through a trio of twin-choke Weber carburetors, it was rated at no less than 325 bhp, and was to be the most popular Aston "Big Six" for the remaining years of its life.

Despite its powerful engine and stunning good looks, the DB5 lacked a few modern features, such as air conditioning and power steering.

Another interesting DB5 footnote concerns the dozen "shooting brake" (station wagon) conversions produced by Harold Radford, the London-based coachbuilders. Built in 1965, they now have considerable rarity value. The convertible was somewhat revised that same year, with quarter bumpers front and rear rather than full-width blades, an additional oil-cooler air intake at the front (under the license plate), and its own surname: Volante ("flying" in Italian). Only 37 were built before the production changeover to the successor DB6.

By this time, the Aston Martin DB was not only faster but significantly heavier than ever. The typical DB5 coupe weighed nearly 3300 pounds, 400 more than the DB4 of five years earlier. Even so, it was still good for about 140 mph. But the extra heft showed up in heavier fuel consumption, and most owners found they could do no better than about 15 mpg.

Though definitely a hand-built thoroughbred in the best British tradition, the DB5 was a dinosaur in some respects. For example, air conditioning wasn't available. Neither was power steering, so you needed strong arms to get the best out of the car on twisty roads. Strong legs didn't hurt either. The DB5's combination of Italian styling and oh-so-British appointments had undeniable charm, but its shortcomings seemed more intolerable — and less professional — as the years passed. Correcting them was the mission for Aston's next-generation design, the DB6.