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# SPORTS CAR WORLD

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**ALFA ZAGATO 1300**

*WE DRIVE 2-LITRE ALFAS*

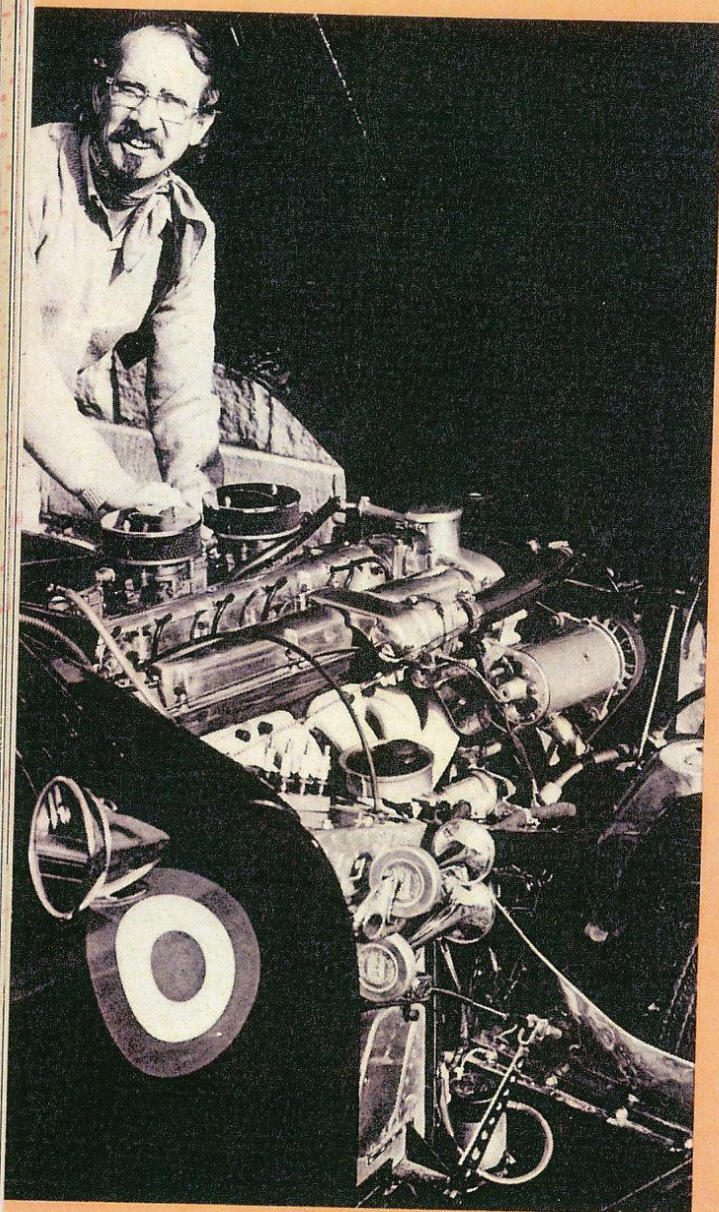
**INDY: MILLION-DOLLAR MAGIC**

**TRIUMPH'S THROATY V8 STAG**



# MARTIN DB 2

## A CLASSIC AMONG CLASSIC COMPETITION MACHINES



*The mighty heart of a proud warrior. The engine bay is a concours judge's delight, all chrome and polished metal. The extent of lightening in this lightweight is typified in the "Swiss cheese" throttle linkage arm under the air horns (air horns?).*

And we found this prize example of a rare model in its original race-and-rally trim right here in Sydney, lovingly restored by perfectionist Alan Puckett.

Story and Photos: JOHN SMAILES

ON THE DASHBOARD of Alan Puckett's 1951 Aston Martin DB2 is a small black button, which can either flash the brake lights without touching the brakes, or cut out the brake lights when the brakes are used.

In the wild and woolly days of the Aston DB2's glory, this was used either to leave the guy behind flying blind in the fog, or to make him brake early and lose valuable seconds.

It's not an entirely original idea. In the dog-eat-dog world of contemporary commercial rallying it's not an unknown ploy — even in Australia.

But it's hardly the sort of device one would expect to find on a gentleman's vehicle — and these days Aston Martin is definitely a maker of Gentlemen's Vehicles, with deliberate capital letters.

They come with eight-track stereo, power windows, power steering, terribly efficient air conditioning, plush seats and automatic gearboxes.

They can be seen parked among the Rolls and Bentleys at Warwick Farm along Members' Row at the Polo Field on Dudley Cup day, being terribly social, but if the owner is a real Aston Martin man he'll have no truck with such goings on.

Alan Puckett is an Aston Martin man. He's had six of them, and not one has had power windows.

Alan is a commercial artist, 48 years old with silver-grey shoulder-length hair and just a wisp of a Van Dyke goatee.

He lives in a fashionable convict-stone house in the fashionable Sydney suburb of Hunters Hill. He bought in, as he puts it, before fashion cost money.

Alan lives with his attractive wife Barbara, who wears a poncho, two Labradors — Rover and Fitzroy — and a long-haired, lanky son called Giles who paints Peace signs on the garage wall and whose pet project of the moment is to put a 90 cc engine into a 50 cc step-through motorcycle frame and blow the local nursing fraternity's Hondas to Hell.

Alan's back garden is sandy and littered with leaves from a confusion of overhanging, overgrowing trees.

Filling a goodly portion of the centre of the

*Simultaneously beautiful and ugly . . . beautiful in its charisma as a classic, ugly in its combination of BRG paintwork with a blazing red grille.*

# UGLY AND BEAUTIFUL: ASTON

## ASTON MARTIN DB2

backyard is the rusting body shell of David McKay's Australian class land speed record-setting DB3S Aston which Alan says he must get around to restoring some day.

At the bottom of the garden is a green-and-white garage, with an Aston Martin insignia on the door leading to the hard-packed dirt rear laneway, and with a number of girlie pinups from a now-defunct English motoring magazine lining the inside walls.

Among a clutter of racing tyres, safety helmets, tools, spare parts and Giles' step-through are one and a half motorcycles — an immaculately restored white MAC Velocette and a featherbed Norton which will be even better when it's completed.

Under a soft-green tarpaulin is the subject of our attention — Alan's DB2 Aston Martin, one of the two 1951 "lightweight" works team cars.

Alan folds the cover back from the nose and the first view of the car is an unbelievably ugly red radiator grille, sitting like a large angry boil on the tip of the beautiful British-Racing-Green snout.

"It was Reg Parnell's team recognition color," Alan explains. "Roy Salvadori had a yellow grille and Peter Collins' was green. I know red isn't the prettiest color but that's the way it was when the car was built and that's the way it will stay."

Fully revealed, Alan's Aston is not perfect. It has a few crows-feet around the doors, and there's even some paint run-marks on the bonnet . . . evidence of a hasty repair job before a recent trip to Mallala. Even 20 years after its construction the DB2 is still a racing car.

Alan started his Aston collection in 1957 with a 1934 Mk II long-chassis tourer. Fitted with a Vanguard engine when the original 1.5-litre unit proved far too unreliable, the car was sold to former SCW editor Mike Kable shortly after he wrote a story about it.

Since then Alan has owned an LM20, a DB2/4, a Mk III, a DB3S and now the DB2.

His road hacks have included an SS Jaguar, a 3.5-litre Bentley and a Phantom II Rolls which he returned to the distributor less than a month after the purchase.

Curiously, the sales of Alan's Astons have all coincided with taxation time. "They're a damned good investment, but you've got to be careful not to blow too much money on them," he says.

"I constantly find myself in need of money at taxation reckoning time — and the Astons provide the answer."

At least they used to. The DB2 is different.

Alan bought the car from its British owner more than three years ago. The acquisition itself was a masterpiece of intrigue and investigation which typifies the world-wide Aston Martin cult.

"Relationships with my bank manager, charming man though he is, had become ever so slightly strained during the time I raced the DB3S," Alan says.

"Dreams of a DBR or a Zagato or a Project 212 all had to be ruthlessly curbed. I knew I had to be practical in my choice.

"I had once had the care of a DB2 for six months while the owner was in Tasmania. I liked it very much, and the more I read on the Works Team cars of the early '50s the more I wanted a DB2 of my own. So I set the wheels in motion."

That involved more than a year of negotiations.



Offers were made to several British owners including the Hon Gerald Lacelles, the Queen's cousin. But none was prepared to let their cars leave the country — or, at least, not at Alan's price.

"There was a good one going for 650 pounds in the UK, but while that's quite a fair price, the 75 percent customs duty imposed by the Australian government on any car, new or used, running or not, made it quite prohibitive.

"On top of the tax, I would have had shipping charges — and all that before I got down to restoring it in Australia."

Finally Alan's spies found the right car in Birmingham. It was XMC76 — one of two very special lightweights built by Aston and described by their team manager John Wyer as "representing the peak of development of the DB2 as a racing car". It all sounded very TT.

The DB2 had had a hard life. Its first race was at the BRDC Silverstone in 1951 when Reg Parnell drove it to a class win.

The next month Parnell drove it again at Le Mans and averaged 88.1 mph for the 24 hours to take third place in the three-litre class, running to team orders behind two other works cars.

In 1952, and presumably making ample use of the sneak dashboard brake button, Parnell and his navigator took 13th outright and a GT Class second in the Mille Miglia.

The car was driven in a multitude of minor events before reappearing in the 1954 Alpine rally in the hands of Tommy Wisdom where, according to the terse log book statement, it was "put out when hit by a non-competing car".



Spasmodic competition continued until its last-recorded race in 1963, when it won its class at Wiscombe before being whisked off to an at first inglorious retirement.

Buying an Aston is hardly a hit-and-miss affair. After locating the car, Alan researched it thoroughly.

Members of the Aston Martin Owners' Club comprise an almost inexhaustible memory bank and by the time he'd finished Alan felt he knew more about the car than the makers.

Spare parts can be a problem. Alan once imported a crankshaft for his DB3S and the cost came to two-thirds the total purchase price of the car!

Determined not to have that happen again, he asked the DB2's owner, Rob Jones, to pull down the engine and cracktest it — an enormous job on the big straight-six three-litre. But Jones willingly agreed — despite the fact the time and effort involved would almost amount to the purchase price itself.

Six months later Alan owned his Aston — albeit ridden with rust after coming, he suspects, "either awash as deck cargo or stored in some unventilated bilge.

"A flowering powder of red rust was on nearly every steel piece in the chassis. Salt water seemed to have found its way into every imperfection in the paint, and had even blown in through the ports of the cylinder head and attacked the valve seats.

"The car just had to be stripped to the very last nut and bolt."

Twelve months later it was done . . . and that's an oversimplification.

Alan first spent several days taking Polaroid pictures of every section of the car — invaluable when

*The lines represent the ultimate in graciousness for its heyday — but you'd never guess that this is the lightweight version of the DB2!*

it comes to putting it back together again in a year's time.

Panel work took nearly five months alone. It is indicative of the restorer's art the care Alan took in repainting the car.

He stripped the paint, layer by layer. From the skin out he found a pale leaf green, two distinctive coats of dark Jaguar D-type BRG, then a coat of mid-apple green and on top a slightly yellowish BRG rather like the color of an army staff car. It was this last shade that Alan matched.

The car is not strictly original. The front suspension and steering assembly are now chromed and normalised. Originally they were polished steel, but as Alan lives between two salt water estuaries he decided a slight touch of bastardisation was in order.

Similarly, the heater (motor racing was civilised in those days) has been retired permanently to the workbench — completely unsuitable for Australian conditions. Instead the heater-ducts now funnel cold air to the driver's feet.

The car arrived in Australia minus vital engine components, shipped separately after their blueprint.

So keen was Jones on seeing his former car restored correctly he even bought several parts from the Aston works and included them in the freight package. The only components Alan needed to buy were an oil pump, one front spring and an exhaust manifold.

The only major non-standard item on the Aston is

# ASTON MARTIN DB2

the gearbox. John Wyers' records show the DB2 racing boxes had a history of troubles so Alan, wisely, substituted a spare DB3S box he already had at home. Overhauled with a new first gear, layshaft and needle-roller bearings, it now only needs a fifth speed to keep Alan completely happy.

The motor itself is a concourse judge's delight. Anything that isn't chromed — and thank God that's quite a bit — is highly polished.

Students of the car would quickly spot that the three 35DCO sidedraught Webers used at Le Mans have been replaced with 36DCF downdraughts — far better for cold starts, but any flooding pours down into the cylinders and snuffs out the plugs.

Naturally Alan steers well clear of questions of cost. But he does estimate the entire restoration, including his time, has left him with legitimate bills for \$10,000. And he wouldn't consider parting with the car for much less.

With good reason, too — when you get close to it. The DB2 has all the character and spirit of a WW II Spitfire. From the RAF emblem on the driver's door to the lightweight air-frame construction visible when you open the spare-tyre boot the car has all the same "keep-'em-flying" panache of 76 Squadron.

It even smells like a Spitfire. There's that same antiseptic scrubbed-leather tang with just a touch of grease film on every moving part.

You ease yourself into a green padded leather chair — the original rally seat with huge thigh supports rising on both sides to hold you bolt upright behind the large plastic rimmed steering wheel.

The navigator, on the other hand, has little more than a bench. It seems a strange set-up until you read in Wyer's notes the carburettors had a habit of

catching fire and the navigator had to be able to bail out quickly to extinguish the flames!

The doors are unupholstered and the green-painted support frames running through them add to the aircraft effect. A wing nut hanging beneath the sill of each door screws open a panel in the clear perspex side-windows to channel cooling air straight onto the passenger's face.

To the left of the steering wheel are two large instruments — white on black with long red-tipped needles . . . a six-thou tacho redlined at five-five and a 140 mph speedometer with an odometer reading a "genuine" 93,047 miles.

There are auxiliary switches and gauges all over the dash. On the floor beneath the navigator's right hand is a large, clearly marked reserve fuel tank switch and forward of the gear lever is mounted a modern fire extinguisher.

Pull toggles for the two Le Mans fuel fillers rest on the rear wheel wells. There's an air exhaust vent above the small perspex rear window, which is beginning to craze, making rear vision difficult through the interior mirror.

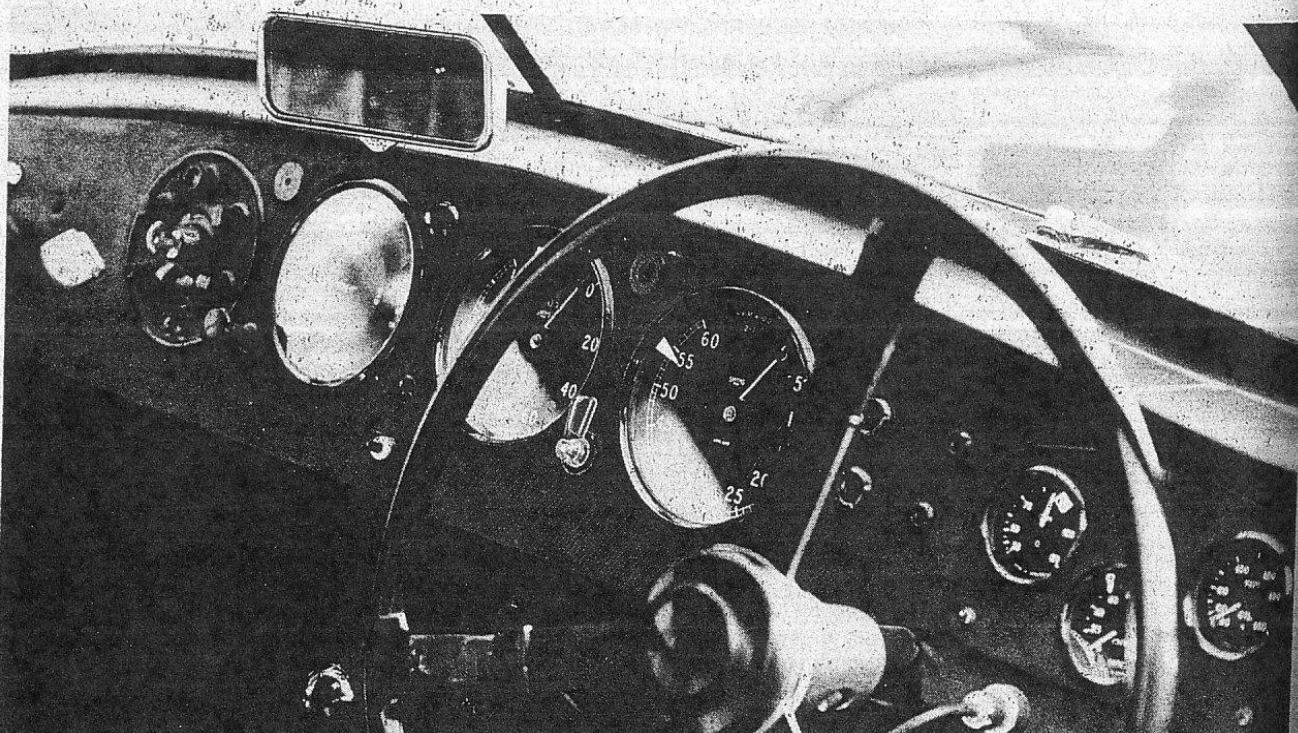
The Aston strikes you not so much as a racing car as a machine of war. By 1951 standards it's probably a lightweight — but nowadays any good sports-racing competitor worth his Biffer's Badge could pare another 5 cwt from its 21.2 cwt dry weight. But then it would be a banging, vibrating beast. Now it's completely tractable.

From a cold start the big engine thuds into life and idles at slightly less than a grand. There's no torque twist and the thin green carpet and twin mufflers help to keep the deep exhaust rumble to a stifled roar.

After a compulsory five-minute warming period, in which the blue haze issuing from both rear pipes vanishes and the gauges steady on 75 degrees water temperature and 20 pounds per square inch oil pressure on idle, you simply select first and move off.

*(Continued on page 68)*

*The dash again is typical of its type, dominated by an enormous steering wheel and back-to-front speedo and tacho.*



## ASTON MARTIN DB2

(Continued from page 26)

The clutch is heavy and is either in or out. The throttle — drilled for lightness like just about every other metal portion of the car — is so stiff your leg muscle control has to be pretty well spot-on.

The throttle runs through a complicated series of linkages to the carbs and it takes quite a deal of conscious effort to keep it delivering the right urge.

Steering, through the 16-inch Avon Turbospeed tyres mounted all round, is nowhere near as heavy as on most of today's racing cars.

You just have to remember that Aston, 20 years ago, had never considered self-centring steering and it's a matter of constantly feeding the wheel backwards and forwards through corners.

We didn't perform any figures, but it took only a few short untimed bursts to realise that the car, by contemporary standards, is no ball of fire.



Geared for racing acceleration with a comparatively low top speed around the ton, it would nonetheless be lucky to see a quarter-mile in 17 seconds.

It makes you realise just how brave the drivers of 20 years ago were to get such heavy, slow accelerating beasts around second-rate circuits on unsophisticated tyres in times which are still respectable today.

Alan's best time at Warwick Farm has been a 2 min 4 sec. That seems laughable to 1971 enthusiasts who are used to seeing HO's boom around in 1 min 49 sec.

But remember only eight years ago there was a monstrous celebration party when Big Pete cracked the two minute barrier in his 3.4 Jag — and that was a far more sophisticated car than the Aston.

The Aston's racing these days is pretty tame stuff compared to its past glories. Like most of Australia's Historic Racing enthusiasts Alan lives in financial fear of a big biff — and he modifies his driving accordingly.

If a faster car is desperate to pass he'll let it, but he still enjoys a hairy-chested, scarf-in-the-breeze dice with any of the closely-knit Historic Racing circus.

In these days of professional motor racing, it's probably the only true gentleman's motor sport left.

But in the heat of a six-lap battle, none of Alan's compatriots would put it past him to succumb to the spirits of punters past and let one hand stray to that button in the middle of the dashboard . . . \*