



THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME?

As iconic Astons become too valuable to race, recreations like this superb homage to the 1958 TT-winning DBR1 could be an appealing alternative. Unthinkable? Read on

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The suggestion that a car like this may one day be accepted as a legitimate representation of a DBR1 will be sacrilege to many. I can almost hear the vast collective intake of breath from

Aston purists at the very notion. Why is it even featured in these pages, some will ask. After all, this magazine is dedicated to the Aston Martin marque but this car is emphatically *not* an Aston Martin by any past or current definition. But stay with me on this. There is, I believe, a significant, developing narrative here.

Firstly, the values of the 'real thing' are now so far into the upper atmosphere that the number of potential buyers even in this age of plentiful billionaires is vanishingly small. Back in August in Monterey, I witnessed the sale of a genuine DBR1 for a staggering \$22.5 million. Needless to say, there weren't many bidders...

An unwelcome by-product of this escalation in values is that such cars are increasingly tucked away in collections and decreasingly driven in anger. There are exceptions: one of the DBR1s is still raced, although only at very select

events. As it happens, the same owner also races one of the Project cars, but the other Projects are now retired and unlikely to race again.

With certain other marques, it's already an open secret in the race paddock that some of the more valuable cars are represented in public by their cloned siblings, or that some gradation of cloning has taken place. This may sound sinister but it does at least mean that the model can still be seen and enjoyed by the public, even if what they see is not 'real'.

There have been Aston replicas for years, of course. I estimate that there are around 100 of one type or another (see sidebar on p118) currently in circulation. Unsurprisingly, these tend to be representations of the more notable models, occasionally pre-war cars, but mostly DB3Ss, DB4 GT Zagatos and Project cars.

And, of course, DBR1s. Norfolk-based AS Motorsport, which builds the 'R1' model you see here, has built more than 30 examples so far, with more orders in the book.

As the enthusiasm for Aston Martin continues to grow, there is a hunger to own not just the road cars but to be able to enjoy the classic racing cars as well. And with the cost of the originals such a hugely limiting factor, it's no wonder that so many are turning to replicas.

'With the cost of the originals such a hugely limiting factor, it's no wonder that so many enthusiasts are turning to replicas'





Above and below

Our man Archer has driven genuine DBR1s, but could he be convinced by this tribute to the 1958 TT-winning car? Below: owner Bob Creese talks him through what has been a two-year labour of love. Some of the dials and switchgear are as fitted to Supermarine Spitfires – another of Bob's passions





*‘Just how authentic would it look and feel?
Could it possibly replicate the sounds and
sensations of driving a real DBR1?’*

I understand the reservations. As a lifelong Aston man, I’ve perhaps been guilty myself of being a little sniffy about copies. But after seeing DBR1/1 hammered down for the best part of £20 million, the chance to drive a DBR1 ‘homage’ costing about a hundredth of that sum was simply impossible to resist.

Just how authentic would it look and feel? Could it possibly replicate the sounds and sensations of driving a real DBR1? And if it does look and drive like the real thing, will cars like this have a fuller role to play in the historic car scene in years to come? All of these questions would be explored on a blissfully sunny autumn day at Goodwood.

NOT HAVING SEEN one of these ASM cars close up before, it’s something of a shock to see it roll out of the transporter into the Goodwood sunshine. A shock because it looks so fabulous and, thanks to the owner’s exacting demands for correct detail, in several ways a dead ringer for the real thing. There are a number of classic car enthusiasts at the circuit today and at no stage do I hear anyone mutter: ‘But is it real?’

The fact that it looks so uncannily at home at Goodwood doubtless helps. After all, this was the scene of some of the DBR1’s finest hours. Owner Bob Creese is a huge fan of both Aston Martin and Stirling Moss, so the car bears Moss’s famous 7 and the correct yellow noseband that DBR1/2 wore at Goodwood in 1958 when Stirling and Tony Brooks took it to overall victory in the Tourist Trophy race.

Bob, an aviculturist specialising in hunting birds, is a long-time Aston enthusiast who also owns a DB9 and a Cygnet. It was in 2014 that he heard about an AMOC visit to AS Motorsport in Bressingham, Norfolk. As it turned out, he missed that particular event but his interest in the cars developed nonetheless and he was soon hooked on the idea of making a high-quality ‘homage’ to Moss’s 1958 car. In fact, even before he placed his order, he acquired the registration number ‘MO55 DBR’. And right from the outset he worked closely with Andrew Soar (the AS in ASM) to achieve the highest possible level of accuracy in a painstaking two-year build.

Andrew is here today to talk us through the R1. A qualified engineer, he got drawn into the

replica car world around ten years ago when he came across an unfinished R1 project and ended up buying the small company that was producing it. Andrew himself describes the R1 as a homage, and it’s a fair description, given that no pretence is made to building an exact copy. What ASM sets out to do is produce a faithful representation, though this in turn means that many things are very accurate, the bodywork in particular. The body on Bob’s car is rolled aluminum and assembled the old-fashioned way, but most customers opt for less costly glassfibre. Prices for a completed turn-key car start at £90k, rising to around £200k if you want your R1 with an Aston straight-six engine and aluminium body.

That bodywork is supported by a mild steel spaceframe, ‘in the style of the original’ as Andrew puts it, though the exposed sections in the cockpit look pretty correct. The suspension is designed and fabricated by ASM: wishbones at the front rather than the trailing arms of the original, but a more faithful de Dion arrangement at the rear, with twin trailing arms and Watt’s linkage. It’s mostly Rose-jointed, too,



Clockwise from above
ASM builds some R1s with glassfibre bodies, but this one has hand-formed aluminium bodywork. It also has a genuine Aston engine - a 4-litre straight-six from a scrapped DBS - with Webers adapted for fuel injection. Owner Bob Creese donned ex-Moss overalls for laps of Goodwood: a dream come true





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though where the original used torsion bars for springing, the R1 has coils over adjustable telescopic dampers at all four corners.

The limited-slip diff is a Ford Cosworth unit, the gearbox from a Toyota Supra, though some ASM R1s have been fitted with ZF and David Brown 'boxes. Brakes are Wilwood discs and four-pot calipers at the front with Ford discs and calipers on the rear, the hubs re-engineered by ASM, with adjustable brake balance front to rear. The wheels are DB4-spec 16in wire-spoke, shod with Avon Turbosteels on this car, though Michelin and Dunlop tyres are also options.

Most ASM cars have a 1960s Jaguar XK straight-six, but a number have genuine Aston engines, including this one. The 4-litre Vantage-spec straight-six came from a scrapped 1969 DBS and certainly looks the part. It's fitted with a lower-profile sump to enable it to sit lower in the chassis, and triple Webers cleverly adapted to run with electronically controlled fuel injection. It's reckoned to produce around 300bhp, which should be plenty, though Bob is already talking about having the engine rebuilt and fitted with a twin-plug head...

IT'S TIME TO DRIVE. 'MO55IE' has covered only 120 miles since completion, but Andy is confident enough – and Bob generous enough – to let me have the first stint behind the wheel. Entering the dimensionally accurate R1 is a reminder of just how low and compact a DBR1 is, and dropping into the bucket seat feels just right, largely because Bob went to the trouble and considerable expense of recreating the mesh cloth covering as used in 1958. The pedals are set slightly to the right compared with the original, due to the gearbox being attached to the engine rather than at the rear, but otherwise the ergonomics feel spot-on.

A unique feature of Bob's R1 is the dashboard with its RAF-surplus dials and switches, as fitted to Supermarine Spitfires in the 1940s. It's a very personal touch: Bob has flown many hours in piston-engined aircraft and fancied incorporating something from one British icon into his homage to another. It wasn't easy adapting the aircraft parts for car use, says Andrew Soar, but the results are delightful – the fuel gauge even has an option for readings with tail up or tail down!

Clearly the engine plays a huge part in defining the character of a car such as this and, firing up the 4-litre straight-six, it just feels and sounds *right*. Heading down to Madgwick with a gentle wind buffeting my upper body and a genuine Aston exhaust note from the side-exit pipes, it's quite wonderful.

The modern clutch and gearbox make life very easy and, while the unassisted brakes require more effort, they're strong enough. After just a few laps, the confidence is there to push on a bit. Steering feel is very good, and the chassis balance is excellent, with just a hint of understeer before power is applied. The engine is mounted just behind the front axle line to give the R1 excellent weight distribution, and the chassis demands and rewards driving on the throttle, the right pedal allowing for easy changes in slip angle.

Around 300bhp from the 4-litre engine suits the chassis really well. It also more than matches the original 3-litre engine's output of circa 260bhp. Tipping the scales at around 950kg where the original with its exotic lightweight alloys was closer to 850kg, their power-to-



ASM R1 Le Mans

ENGINE in-line straight-six, 3995cc

MAX POWER c300bhp

MAX TORQUE n/a

TRANSMISSION Five-speed manual, rear-wheel drive, limited-slip differential

SUSPENSION Front: wishbones, coil springs, AVO telescopic dampers. Rear: de Dion tube, trailing arms, Watt's linkage, coil springs, AVO telescopic dampers

STEERING Rack-and-pinion

BRAKES Discs front and rear

WHEELS 16in wire-spoke

WEIGHT c950kg

POWER TO WEIGHT c320bhp/ton

0-60MPH n/a

TOP SPEED c150mph (est)

PRICE c£200,000



weight ratios must be extremely close, and that's how it feels. Make no mistake, this is a fast car.

Suspension and tyres are clearly optimised for road rather than track at present but, even with that softness, the car feels at home on the very fast corners of Goodwood. There are no vices, no surprise twitches or lurches. It all feels very well engineered and works incredibly well. So well that, with a race set-up and stronger brakes, it could have the makings of a very quick and exciting racing car...

HAVING DRIVEN several of the original DBR1s, could this even compare? The short answer is: yes. It feels much more like the real thing than it should, given the chassis differences. Detailed comparison is difficult since this car is not currently configured for the track, but it would clearly be capable on a circuit if set up for that purpose. The basics are there: the spaceframe is stiff and the suspension has a lot of adjustability. Tellingly, Andrew Soar says there is increasing interest in cars being built with more track use in mind.

Bob Creese intends to use 'MO55IE' mostly on the road, with the odd trackday along the way. And where better to start than Goodwood, scene of that TT victory almost 60 years ago? With my stint over, it's Bob's turn. He's not driven around Goodwood before, but that isn't going to deter him: this is the culmination of a three-year labour of love, and he's savouring every moment. But first he has to get properly attired...

Bob's enthusiasm for this project knows no bounds. He acquired one of Moss's actual racing

overalls from the period and as he dons a replica of Moss's Les Leston helmet (signed by Sir Stirling) the effect is complete. As they roar past the pits, the sight does seem a little eerie.

He returns elated. All day long, reaction to the car has been positive, but seeing it in motion takes things to another level. Clearly, for Bob, part of the pleasure is how much other people enjoy seeing the car on the move. It is close enough to the appearance of the real car to reveal the beauty and genius of Ted Cutting's original design. Some purists will still scoff, but I reckon Cutting would have been chuffed to see this homage to his car take to the track – and impressed by the care and the ingenuity that has gone into its creation.

Which brings us back to the opening premise. If we can only rarely see a DBR1 being driven in anger, then why not allow replicas to race? They may never be eligible for the Goodwood Revival, but the Members Meeting and other major events have already allowed good recreations. A handful of these cars against replica Ferrari Testa Rossas and Jaguar D-types would make for a great spectacle and one within the reach of many more drivers, too. They could have their own class amongst the originals, or even their own races. As long as there is transparency, why not?

It was, of course, enthusiasm and ambition that led to the creation of the originals in the 1950s, and, on meeting the players in the story of this car, it is clear we've gone full circle. Drive and enthusiasm have led to this homage, and one can surely only admire that. Besides, such enthusiasm is infectious – and it's spreading fast. ♡

Real or replica? Levels of legitimacy

The terms used to describe a car such as this seem interchangeable, but there are various distinct forms of replica. **Stephen Archer** attempts to straighten out the terminology.

Homage or tribute A car that is presented in the style of the original but makes no pretence to be anything other than what it is: a representation. The ASM R1 fits well into this category.

Replica, facsimile or copy An expert will spot it a mile off, but to the layman it will be indistinguishable from the original and may well have an original type engine and chassis; in significant ways it is more than 50% accurate.

Recreation or reproduction A car that is indistinguishable from the original, even to some experts, in all key areas: body, chassis and engine/drivetrain. There have been some very good DB3S and DB4 GT Zagato recreations that fit this category.

Clone or 'tool-room copy' An exact copy of an existing car. Usually commissioned by the owner to help preserve the original, the clone is raced, the original kept safe. If 100 per cent accurate, these should be acknowledged rather than being the known secret that they are now.

Continuation A car built to the original specification, by the manufacturer. The new DB4 GT is a good example. I recently drove one of these cars for *Octane*: in my view it is a real 4 GT and should be allowed to race with the originals – it's that accurate.

Fake A car that appears to be real but is in fact being passed off as the original car. There have been a few examples of this over recent decades but happily in the Aston world they are all known and easy to identify through records and technical features.

Real Does this need defining? The problem is that many cars, especially race cars, have lost a lot of original components. Some no longer have their original body, chassis or engine. But they are real cars because the changes were documented and the history has been continuous.

In my view, in today's historic scene there should be more clarity of use of these definitions and less concern about the creation of cars such as the ASM R1. After all, it is honest, fun and useable – and amen to that.