

Donald Thompson

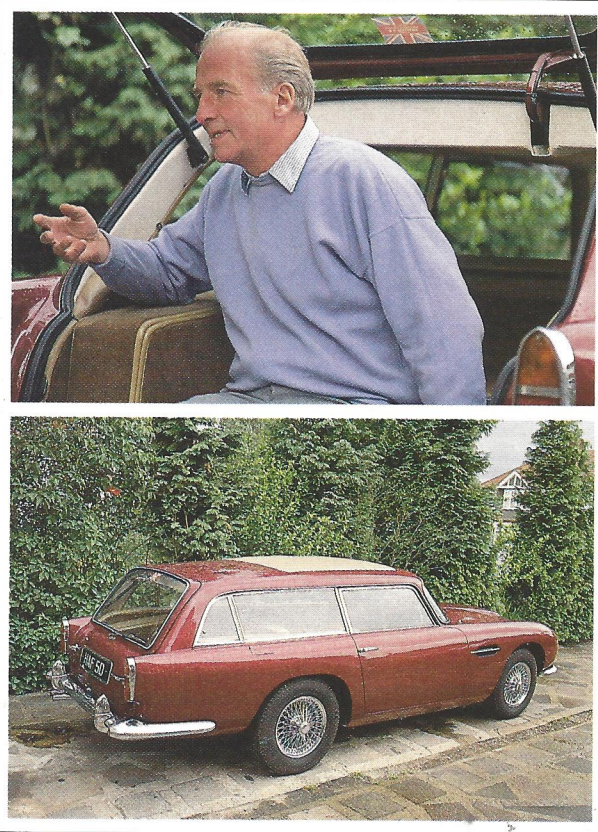
SUPERCARS I HAVE KNOWN

concours held by the Aston Martin OC at Fort Belvedere.

It was while the DB2 was in pieces that my second Aston Martin – the 1967 DB6 automatic – came along, quite by chance. I had no intention of owning two examples of the marque, but this one had covered only 16,000 miles in its five years. It was being sold by executors, and was too good to pass up. It allowed me to continue working on the concours preparation of the DB2, and proceed at the correct pace, free from pressure. The DB6 was also attractive at the time because it was a saloon with good-sized back seats for an Aston Martin. By then we had four children.

Once the DB2 had won the club concours, my son, Neil, by then thoroughly imbued with Aston Martins, joined Richard Williams full time, building engines. Williams recommended that I take on another saloon, a DB4 that he had found in a field. He reckoned I needed another exercise to occupy my mind. The engine had been rebuilt before it was abandoned, but the chassis and the rest of the car needed a lot of work. We made quite good progress over the next couple of years, completing work on the chassis and having the bodywork knocked back into its proper shape. But there was still a lot of work to be done; the paint, for instance, and the interior. To me, the project became impractical as I had always been able to buy my Astons reasonably cheaply and not spend much money on them. But this car would have had to have been sold when the work was completed simply to pay for that work. So I sold it there and then. It became the basis of a DB4 racer that eventually ended up in the United States.

But while I still had the DB4, Williams happened to take a DB5 estate along to the Club's Brands Hatch race meeting. It was immaculate and looked so beautiful that, for the only time in my life, I could not resist the temptation to buy. There are said to have been only three made at the factory, with a further 12 produced by the coachbuilders Harold Radford, and another 18 based on the DB6. Of course I have heard the story about a brick having been dropped accidentally on the



Aston DB5 estate one of just 15 produced by factory and coachbuilders Radford. Thompson likes the car's graceful shape, but admits that extra weight affects handling

back of a DB5 saloon and David Brown, who then owned Aston Martin, having said: 'Make that an estate then!' But I doubt its truth. I place more credence in the knowledge that he was very keen on hunting, shooting and fishing. I find my DB5 estate interesting in that it is so graceful in the way in which the roofline slopes down in just as satisfying a manner as that of the saloons. I have to admit, though, that extra weight of the bodywork at the back affects the handling. But the purchase of the DB5 estate meant that I now had four David Brown-era Aston Martins, a DB2 drop-head coupé, a DB4 manual saloon, a 6 automatic saloon and the 5 estate. That felt like the best of all variants.

By then, three of them were in very good condition, and of comparatively low mileage. That won't change: I don't drive them far, but I like the way they never

create envy, instead generating enthusiasm and excitement among the uninitiated. Friends have found them equally appealing, one having bought three Astons after riding in mine.

This summer, the father of one of the Club's racing drivers was 80 years old. The driver asked Richard Williams whether it would be possible to fulfil his father's greatest wish to travel again in an open car. Williams contacted me and we fixed a date. I enjoyed the experience immensely because of the old man's reaction. It was everything he wanted. That's the sort of thing that gets me on to re-taxing the cars.

The problems of using them so little have been few, although only the DB2 occupies our garage; the 5 and the 6 stand in a car port. The DB2, remarkably, always starts first time, even after a six-month winter rest, while the 5 is more sensitive

to lesser use, and the 6 I drive most weeks. I always feel that it is good to come home from the office to something special in transport, with the optimum safety built into its construction and materials. The carpets in the 6 are just as they left the factory and the leather still smells as good as ever, even though the car is 22 years old. The Tickford-bodied DB2 is superb for a 31-year-old car, and so significant now that Tickford is part of Aston Martin. Until recently, the newest car I had owned was our everyday V-registered Ford Cortina. Now that Ford has taken over Aston Martin, I was happy to replace it with a Sierra Sapphire.

There are such similarities in the performance and style of the XK and the Aston Martins; grace and line are so important. My love of the long bonnet is all part of my overall feeling for lithe lines. I am afraid that recent Aston Martins have become more American in styling. They look so much heavier, and although they have the power, they lack the grace of the earlier models. I feel quite gratified that the new Virage's roofline reflects that of the DB4, but I cannot help feeling that the rest of the car is so heavy that it is not in the same class. And as for the Zagato version of the V8, it would be better not to comment.

The XK and my Aston Martins have shared power and a throaty exhaust sound. The feeling of surge and tone is so exciting. I was brought up to have patriotic feelings and have always been very, very excited when British cars are doing well at Le Mans. This applied especially when the Nimrods were racing, with Neil working on their engines. I'm delighted Aston Martin is now back in the sports car racing fray.

I am sad that so many people cannot afford to get into Aston Martins today. I was extremely fortunate to buy mine so reasonably. Of course, any Aston Martin owner must be able to bear the occasional greater expense when it comes along, but that should not happen too regularly if the car is well looked after by somebody who really knows what he is doing. That's when the car repays the effort and time you expend on it.

Interview by Chris Harvey