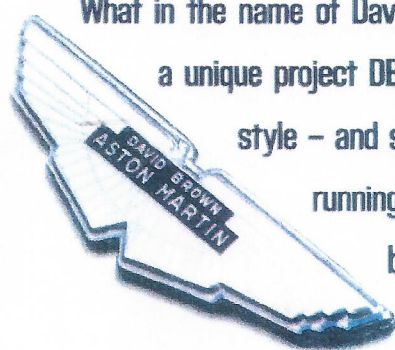


Aston thriller

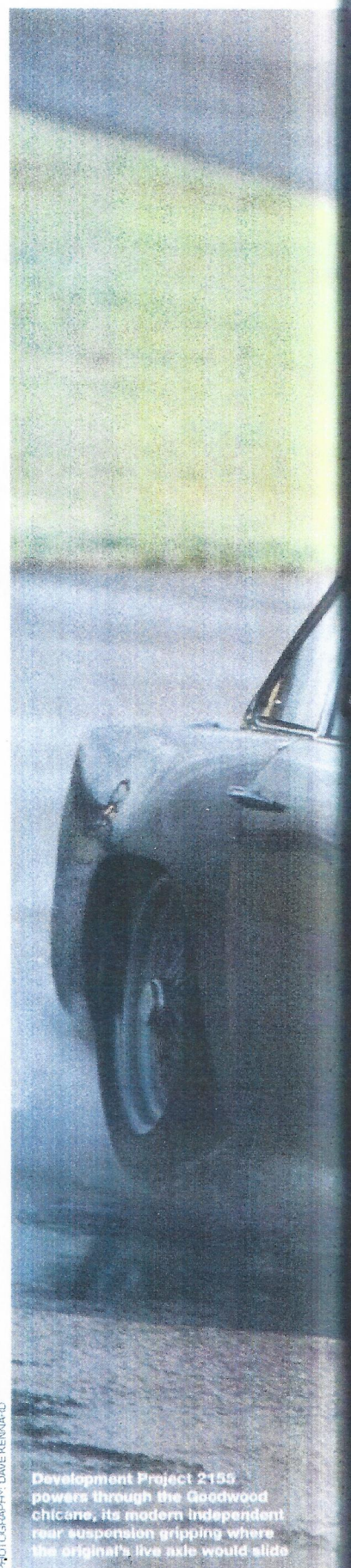


What in the name of David Brown is this? Meet
a unique project DB4 oozing classic Fifties
style – and state-of-the-art Nineties
running gear. Paul Chudecki
blasts it round Goodwood

THERE IS SOMETHING VERY SENSUOUS ABOUT THIS CAR. The way it sits down on its haunches, nose slightly raised, hungry and ready to gobble up the Goodwood tarmac, its body glistening in the sunlight. It may look like an ordinary DB4GT, although obviously modified, but UAW 707 is so much more than that.

This, you see, is a project Aston Martin, one of that special and rare breed which occasionally emerges from the hallowed inner sanctum at Newport Pagnell. Among its predecessors, the most well-known are Development Projects (DP) 212, 214 (two built) and 215 from the early Sixties. These cars were bred from the DB4GT, their mission was to hunt down and chew up Ferrari 250GTOs. Being the latest of this particular line – there have, of course, been other project cars, both competition and otherwise – UAW 707 is officially designated DP215; the '215' in deference to the last of the DB4GT-evolved cars and the '5' representing the fifth in the series.

The opportunity to drive this awesome machine has been a long time coming. Classic Cars first heard of it in 1991 when it was still a glint in the eye of its creator, Kingsley Riding-Felce, service and restoration director of Aston Martin Lagonda (AML). Being an in-house development project, time was not at a premium and it would be more than five years before DP215 would turn a wheel in anger. It was then that AML parent Ford decreed that all prototypes should be sold: happily DP215 passed to an enthusiastic British owner. ➤➤

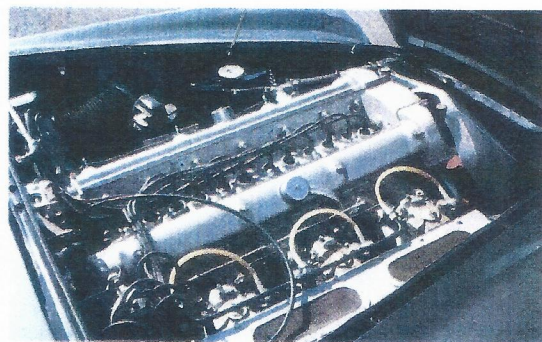
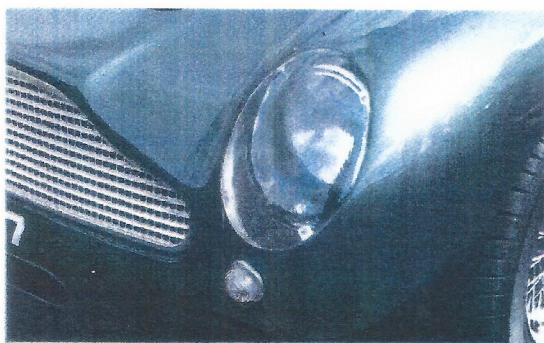


PHOTOGRAPHY: DAVE KENNARD

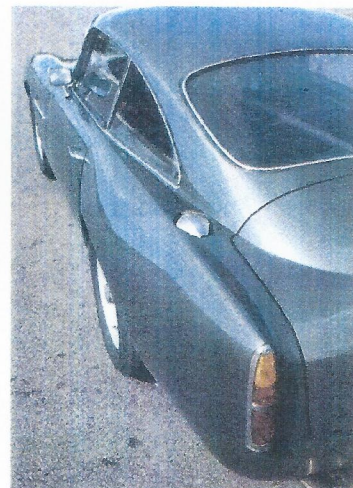
Development Project 215 powers through the Goodwood chicane, its modern independent rear suspension gripping where the original's live axle would slide

EXCLUSIVE DRIVE

Far right: 4.7-litre six engine employs Cosworth pistons and Weber carbs for 334lb ft of torque



Sixties leather bucket seats in the front but no room for rear loungers – the chassis was cut back 5in to GT dimensions



David Bailey, and it could not have gone to a better home.

The Aston started life as a standard 1959 DB4 bearing the chassis number DB4/207/R. It was specifically bought in poor condition as the basis for a service department restoration project that would also see major engineering developments. What ultimately ensued was a chassis and body shortened to

DB4GT dimensions – ie, minus rear seats and five inches but with special lightweight inner sills to the same specification as the original 1959 DB4GT prototype, DP199.

The project team introduced an independent rear suspension, with double wishbones mounted on a subframe that bolts directly to the original axle mountings, with telescopic dampers just as on DP199. This was complemented by heavily revised suspension geometry, that was fully rose-jointed and adjustable like the back. They also brought in competition brakes (thankfully), a Sierra Cosworth limited slip differential and a stretched and modified 4.7-litre version of the standard 3.7-litre twin-plug GT engine, mated to a five-speed ZF gearbox. The team had some fun.

With 351bhp and, more importantly, 334lb ft on hand, DP2155 promised to pack the kick of a homicidal buffalo and a roadholding and handling package that should represent the ultimate evolution of the DB4 chassis.

Now, at last, we were about to find out.

STRAPPED INTO THE GENUINE SIXTIES LEATHER BUCKET seat, your eyes are drawn to the familiar DB4 dashboard, flanked by the unfamiliar forward pair of a six-leg FIA roll cage. Ahead, the swooping curves of the Touring body beckon to the track beyond.

The idle is a trifle lumpy, like any pedigree race engine, but the note is crisp. As the clutch comes up and the throttle goes down, DP2155's exhaust barks out a warning and the triple 50 DCOE Webers snort in oxygen. The rear squats, the nose rises and then the acceleration kicks in – it's like being pinged from the elastic of a gigantic catapult. Before we so much as sniff Madgewick corner we're at the 6000rpm red line in third.

The turn-in is excellent, the steering pin-sharp, devoid of bump-steer thanks to the modified steering geometry. On the

Aston Martin Lagonda: giving new life to old DB racers

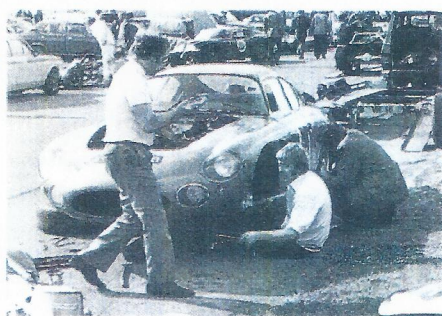
THE CONCEPT of DP2155 was first mooted in 1990 when AML restoration director Kingsley Riding-Felce and then chairman Victor Gauntlett discussed building a unique DB4.

'Lots of people wanted to own David Brown (DB) cars,' says Riding-Felce, 'but they didn't necessarily want to tackle crossply tyres, a hot floor and a cart axle rear end. At the same time we needed to show what we can do; that we can make exciting cars but also modernise them so that our customers could have a classic racer without all the downsides.'

'DP2155 was the longest programme we've ever had. We could see everyone was doing well at club racing level but struggling with the back end. They were strengthening the chassis but couldn't put the power down early enough. The plan was for a conversion that didn't affect the integrity of the cars and would be accepted by the racing boys – it would make for much more fun without spoiling the car.'

The conversion came under the 'Works Prepared' programme that encompasses restorations and unique coachwork construction, race preparation and development of specialist components for past and current Astons. It's part of AML's Car for Life policy that remains unique among manufacturers.

DP2155's engine and suspension work was carried out in co-operation with AM specialist Richard Stewart Williams and Harvey Bailey Engineering. The car was to compete in historic races but was prevented by Ford's 1996 decision to sell prototypes.



Original inspiration. DP212 at Silverstone, 1975



Acceleration is relentless. The Aston pulls 6100rpm in 4th, equivalent to 130mph, with another cog to go

damp track it's also clear the Aston's tail is not so quick that it's prone to oversteer. When it does let go on the damp surface, it lets go sharply, but later than a standard DB4 live, leaf-sprung rear axle. It's easily tempered by a rapid touch of opposite lock. Understeer is minimal, even into the 90° Lavant Corner, and with the throttle flat to the floor in third the Aston tucks beautifully into the sweeping apex that follows.

In the dry, the benefits of the independent rear come into their own – you can still steer the car on the throttle in traditional DB4 style but to a far lesser degree, courtesy of a huge increase in grip and traction. Exiting the chicane after the morning's torrential downpour, it is easy to induce oversteer as the throttle is floored in 2nd, but in the dry even a bout of wheel ataxia produces only a little twitch as the fat Goodyear radials – 225/60-16s all round – dig in and allow a much more rapid exit on to the straight.

Through Madgwick, with its rapid double Apex, there is a tangible difference. Sure with all that power and torque on tap the rear end needs constant correcting to keep the racing line, but it's better behaved than a live axle car, while the flat-out Fordwater bend that follows can be taken with steely composure.

The change on the ZF gearbox is sweet and precise while the clutch is nowhere near as heavy as you might expect. Brake pedal pressure, on the other hand, is almost race-like hard and the movement is minimal.

As for the engine, it's a gem; a dynamo of power with an almost seamless torque curve. It just pulls and pulls. Dropping the clutch at 3000rpm (torque peaks just 500rpm higher) provides blood-bubbling acceleration, with 60mph coming in around five seconds; 100mph in another six, using the 6000rpm power peak as a rev limit. There's little point in exceeding this as thereafter power and torque start to fall, but the torque band is impressively flat – 319lb ft at 3000rpm and 307lb ft at 6000rpm.

All the while the engine feels unburstable with its counter-balanced, steel crankshaft in smooth command of Cosworth pistons and Carrillo rods in the specially braced block. This 4.7-litre six is a gutsy and tractable motor that is made all the sweeter by the combination of throaty intake roar and the burbly bellow of the straight-through exhaust – a combination that never refrains from seducing the senses.

The tachometer needle rotates to 6000rpm rapidly, the acceleration is relentless and down Lavant straight the Aston is pulling 6100rpm in 4th before braking for Woodcote – that's equivalent to 130mph and there's still another cog to go. There is no reason to doubt, such is the twin cam's abundant torque, that the Aston wouldn't pull the same revs in 5th, equating to more than 160mph.

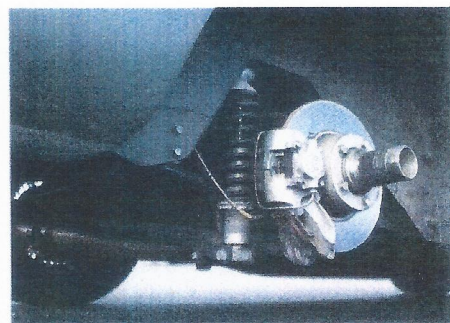
Amid all this unrestrained power, the competition discs have a calming Prozacian quality, 13in diameter at the front with four-pot calipers, and with only a slight sign of fade ➡

EXCLUSIVE DRIVE

Classic styling
belies modern
technology. A
combination to
eclipse most
new road cars.



Top right:
innovative double
wishbone
independent
rear suspension
sits in a subframe
mounted to the
original axle
mounting.



Near right:
more timewarp
contrast with
traditional
DB dash and
a modern
roll-bar



when pushing the car hard, despite road pads being fitted front and rear. Even the brake pedal assembly has been strengthened – fabricated in stainless steel to prevent distortion under a heavy foot.

David Bailey: freezer truck mogul who 'just had to have it'

'I **HONESTLY** believed he was talking about a beautiful woman,' DP2155 owner David Bailey feels he was seduced into buying the prototype.

The MD of a refrigerated haulage business, 55-year-old David is a late starter when it comes to collecting classics. His first, a Jaguar XK140, was bought only six years ago and now, apart from DP2155, and, notably, a '52 DB4 prototype, he also has a Ferrari Dino 246GT, an Austin-Healey 3000 and a VW Beetle.

Before buying DP2155 David had not been into Astons but then he met AML's ultra-enthusiastic Kingsley Riding-Felce, source of the 'beautiful woman' quote, who mentioned he'd been building a DB4 GT prototype for five years.

'Kingsley raved about the DPs, but said AML had to sell them. I sat in the GT, started it up and said "I've got to have it". I never drove it. The whole thing got to



me, the sound, looks, the way Kingsley was besotted with the car.

'I bought it two years ago but left it at the factory as there was work to be done. Since this year it's been kept at home.

'On the road it's exhilarating. Power is instant and astonishing, the roadholding is lovely. It cruises effortlessly and pulls from 5th at any speed. It's wonderful to drive.

'I paid six figures for it and some chap at Coys Festival offered me £220,000 – but I've absolutely no intention of selling!'

On the open road, the independent rear transforms the handling over undulating and twisting surfaces. The tendency for the back axle to jump at every bump is gone and instead the rear feels in much greater harmony with its opposite end and feedback through the leather-covered wood rim is superb. Sudden changes of direction, too, with the power hard on, only induce minimum oversteer, greatly reducing the need to steer by the throttle, and it is on the road where one appreciates the big increase in ride comfort, especially given the stiffly-sprung, rose-jointed suspension.

OVERALL, PROJECT 2155 IS A PHENOMENAL PACKAGE, with every dynamic aspect of the car working in perfect harmony. As Kingsley Riding-Felce says: 'It's the car you build yourself. It's all about passion – and you can't build cars without passion.'

What a sheer joy to drive, so tactile and informative in its responses, so taut and so fast. It's a car with a soul that seduces driver and passenger. Drop dead gorgeous with stunning looks and voluptuously flared wheel arches, it performs every bit as well as its looks promise. Without doubt, DP2155 is one of the most complete cars we have ever driven. Put simply, it is the ultimate rendition of the DB4.

Paul Chudecki owns a 1960 Aston DB4, 1961 Rover 100, 1957 Austin A35 and a TVR Tuscan Challenge car. He thinks the new S-type is: 'A well executed design, but the nose treatment could be more individual.'

NEXT MONTH: PEBBLE BEACH CONCOURS-WINNING BUGATTI