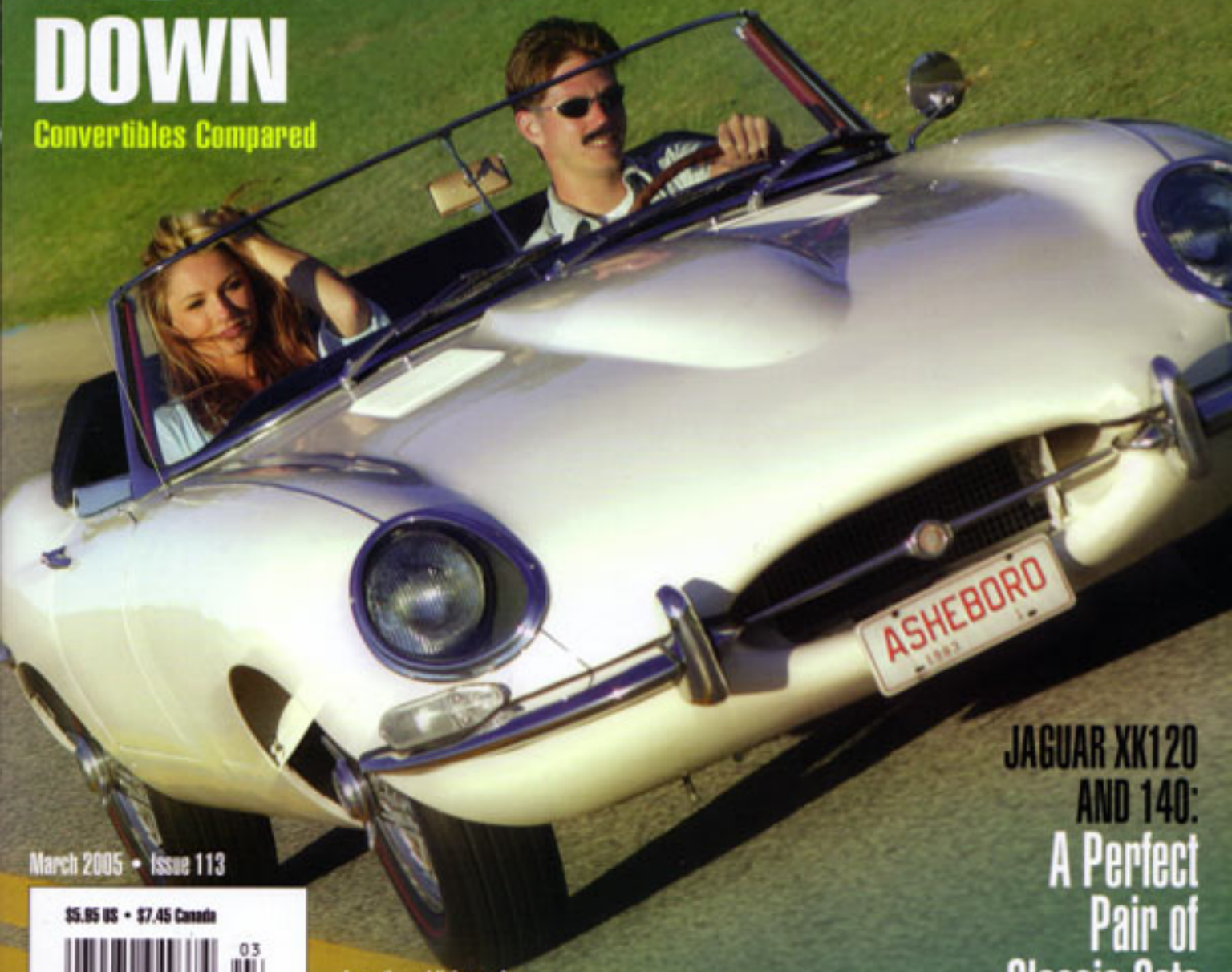


Convertible Top Installation • Porsche 911 Project • Aston Martin

Classic Motorsports

TOP DOWN

Convertibles Compared



March 2005 • Issue 113

\$5.95 US • \$7.45 Canada



from the publishers of

**Grassroots
Motorsports**
THE HARDCORE SPORTS CAR MAGAZINE

JAGUAR XK120
AND 140:
A Perfect
Pair of
Classic Cats

www.ClassicMotorsports.net



LICENSE to THRILL

This Super-Rare Aston Martin DB4 Is as Stunning in Motion as It Is Sitting Still

By Scott R. Lear
Photography as credited

Can a car ever be too beautiful or too rare to drive? If you answered yes, then skip this article—or consider yourself forewarned. If you believe that an automobile's kinetic ability is inherent to its overall beauty, then Larry Macks and his Aston Martin will bring a smile to your face.

Macks has taken one of the rarest Aston Martin DB4s in existence and converted it into a vintage racer, without corrupting the authenticity or the beauty of the original car. As gorgeous as it is sitting in a field, it looks even better sliding through the corners just inches away from other careening race cars.

How Rare Is Rare?

During the David Brown years, Aston Martin was turning out some of the most beautiful and quickest cars the world had ever seen. The DB4 was launched in the fall of 1958, featuring a pressed-steel platform frame and aluminum body panels designed by Carrozzeria Touring of Milan, Italy. The lightweight panels were attached to a latticework of small tubes, which helped to keep the curb weight to less than 3000 pounds.

From 1958 through 1963, the hand-built DB4 trickled out of the factory with a variety of changes now recognized as five distinct "Series" by the Aston Martin Owners Club. A tad more than 1100 DB4s saw the light of day, including about 70 convertibles.

The majority of DB4s were powered by a 3670cc inline six making 240 SAE horsepower, while some Vantage models came with 266 horses. Seventy-five were built as DB4GTs, these cars featuring a shorter wheelbase and a hot 302-horsepower version of the straight six lit by twin plugs per cylinder and breathing through three Weber carburetors. Rarer still was the DB4GT Zagato, a lighter, more powerful



Tim Suddard photo

and curvaceous version of which only 19 were built.

Larry's car is rarer still: Of the original-length Series 1 through 4 cars (the Series 5 cars were slightly longer), eight came equipped with the normal body and the hot GT engine tucked under the bonnet. Larry's car, DB4/861/L, was built on June 8, 1962, and is one of just five Series 4 cars with this rare combination of chassis and drivetrain. It left the factory painted Snow Shadow Grey with a red interior, and features a dashboard binnacle with the GT gauges.

A Natural Choice

"I've been a lifelong fan of Aston Martins since I was a kid," says Larry. "It started with my first strong memory of going to the movies, seeing 'Goldfinger' in 1965, when I was about 6 years old."

The silver DB5 that James Bond drove in the film was a physically similar evolution of the DB4, and the sight of it inspired Larry to purchase a series of Astons when he was in his 20s, which he sold when the profits were good. He began working his way up to a 1989 Vantage. "I really wanted an Aston Martin V8 five-speed Vantage Volante," he says. "It took a long while—10 years; Steve Serio up in Aston Martin of New England helped broker the deal. I bought one of the 12 five-speeds in this country from Nicholas Cage. After not having an Aston for 10 years, I had one back."

Larry participated in the Copperstate 1000 Road Rallye in 2003, where he met Bob Gett, who owns KTR European Motorsports (phone 978-772-7800; www.ktrmotorsports.com). Larry became a client of Gett's. "Through my friendship with Bob I started to get very interested in vintage racing. I thought it would be great to race an Aston Martin."

In order to run with the Vintage Sports Car Club of America, where he decided he wanted to start, Larry needed a car that met their late 1950s cutoff date; a Series 4 car would fit the bill, and would accommodate his tall build and his love of the marque. "I thought it would be great to be racing an Aston. I thought at the time it was a decent entry-level

CAR,

and I wanted to race something that was historically significant and aesthetically pleasing."

A series of business contacts led Larry to Don Rose, who is an avid Aston enthusiast and the editor of the Aston Martin Owners Club's publication, *The Vantage Point*. Rose had a car in London that sounded like a good match for what Larry was looking for, so Larry and a friend went to test drive the car.

"My friend and I went to a building in West London; we found the car in a parking lot in the basement garage. It hadn't been started in three months—the keys were sitting on the tire where Don told me," Larry says. "Starts right up, we took it around London, it was awesome. My friend says, 'I think it might be too nice to race.' We open the hood—'Wait a minute, this is a twin-plug GT engine!'" Larry needed no further convincing to buy the car, and about \$230,000 later it was on its way to America.

If Aluminum Could Talk

It turns out that DB4/861/L had quite a history. Originally delivered to J.S. Inskip's dealership in New York in June of 1962, it was purchased by a man in Haverford, Pa., who traded the car in around 1967 for a new DB6. Charlie Turner, an Atlanta dealer, caught wind of the car and alerted well-known enthusiast and lifelong Aston Martin Owners Club member Whit Ball, who paid \$4000 for the DB4

The GT-spec engine was rarely inserted into the regular DB4 chassis, making Larry Macks's Aston Martin one of only five Series 4 cars so equipped. The GT dash enhances the already stunning interior, and the exterior is so pristine that it's hard to believe this is an active racer.



and had it repainted a Porsche chocolate brown with bright red wheels.

Ball owned the car for more than a decade, and eventually sold it back to Turner for \$3000; he sold it to Ken Boyd in California, the proprietor of Aston Martin Services. Boyd extracted the GT engine and installed a standard-spec piece, and the body was repainted gold.

In the late 1980s, Ball was surprised to see an ad for the car in the Aston Martin Owners Club newsletter, and he repurchased it from a San Francisco resident. Ball hoped to reinstall a GT engine, but was unable to secure one, so he sold the DB4 to Peter Livanos, the owner of Aston Martin, who also ran Aston Martin Vintage Racing Services, which was the factory supported U.S. racing endeavor. Aston Martin Vintage Racing Services was liquidated in the early 1990s, and the car went to Robert Clerk, who traced the original GT engine from the car and reunited it with the chassis.

Robert and his son, Jon, performed a comprehensive restoration of the car, returning it to the original Snow Shadow Grey color in the process. DB4/861/L took first in class at its Aston Martin Owners Club debut at the Lime Rock Classic Concours in 1996.

Q Would Be Proud

James Bond's DB5 looked very normal at first glance, but it was the cleverly hidden goodies that sent villains into the ditch and kept young eyes glued to the screen. Larry was eager to transform his DB4 into a legal track car, but he wanted the necessary changes to have as minimal an impact as possible on the overall stature of the vehicle.

"I was looking for something that would be very special, that was in great shape, and that we could take to that line of making it as track worthy as possible and still be streetable and have people say, 'yep, this is what it was meant to be,'" Larry says.

"We shipped the car back from London right to KTR in Boston. Andrew [Funk] oversaw the race preparation and did a fantastic job." To keep the Aston as original as possible, many things, like the suspension and triple Weber carburetors, were refreshed to peak condition. The restrictive airbox was removed, a fire-suppression system was installed, and a fuel cell was fabricated to the exact shape of the stock gas tank so the trunk would be unaffected.

The most impressive modification to the car is its roll bar, which KTR fabricated. "I think that the execution of the roll bar was the trickiest, but they did a spectacular job," Larry says. "It looks stock." Larry points out that the bar could be removed without leaving a trace of its installation, should he decide to convert the car back to stock. Finally, KTR fabricated a racing seat for the car, and three months after

hitting the U.S., the DB4 was ready for its first track day, at Lime Rock Park in April of 2004.

"It's very powerful, very torquey—it just handles extremely well on the road," Larry says. "I think that what we have created is the perfect road car. I wanted to have something that I could race and rally, as well as drive up in the country and really enjoy. This is, in terms of being a true GT, exactly what the intention was."

Choosing the Limit

When Larry decided the route he wanted to take with the DB4, many of the decisions he made to preserve the beauty of the car simultaneously hurt its speed as a vintage racer. The bumpers, real glass windows, full interior and accessories are dead weight on a track. Larry doesn't feel that their loss would be worth the fractions of a second per lap for this rare DB4. He has chosen to race a gem of a car, and because of his respect for the vehicle he must keep his adrenaline in check in the heat of battle.

"I would like to tell you that I don't hold back, and I will tell you that that is probably true almost all the time," Larry says with a laugh. "In the VSCCA the cars are the stars, and that to me is what vintage racing is all about. The excitement of being out on a race track with these vintage cars—Ferraris, Maseratis—is just a complete thrill. I have the perfect rally car, and the perfect GT car. In order to make it the perfect race car we would have to do things that would take away from the aesthetic."

Once the racing bug bites you, it's hard to turn back, and the desire to be competitive may mean the DB4 gets a stablemate. "What I have come to find out is that I would like to be more competitive in the racing, and in order to do that I think we would destroy the value of such a rare car. I'm in the process of finding another DB4 that I can build to that end."

Mission Accomplished

Every racer tries to build a car that he or she wants to drive, and while it's not the fastest Aston Martin on the planet, DB4/861/L is as stunning in motion as it is sitting still. The choices Larry made transformed a rare beauty into a unique and exquisite vintage racer. He takes pride in the fact that while the season championship might not be in his grasp, fans appreciate what he has done.

"It draws crowds," Larry says. "I was somewhat surprised, you go to a track and there are multi-million-dollar Ferraris, Can-Ams, Formula 1 cars, and this car always drew as big—if not bigger—crowds. People would come over to our support tent and tell us they have to take pictures." 