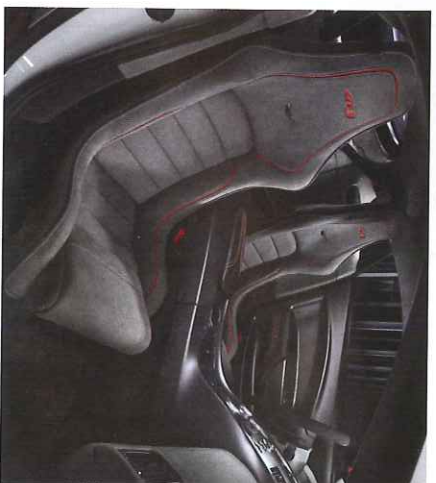
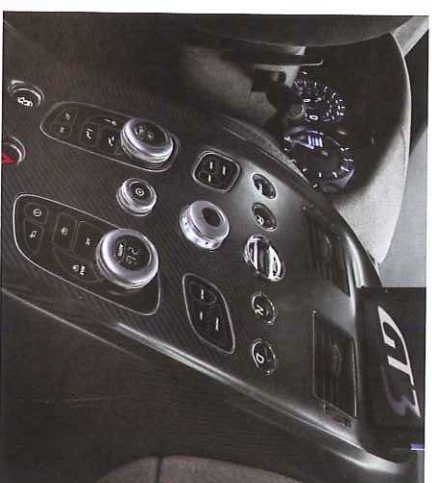
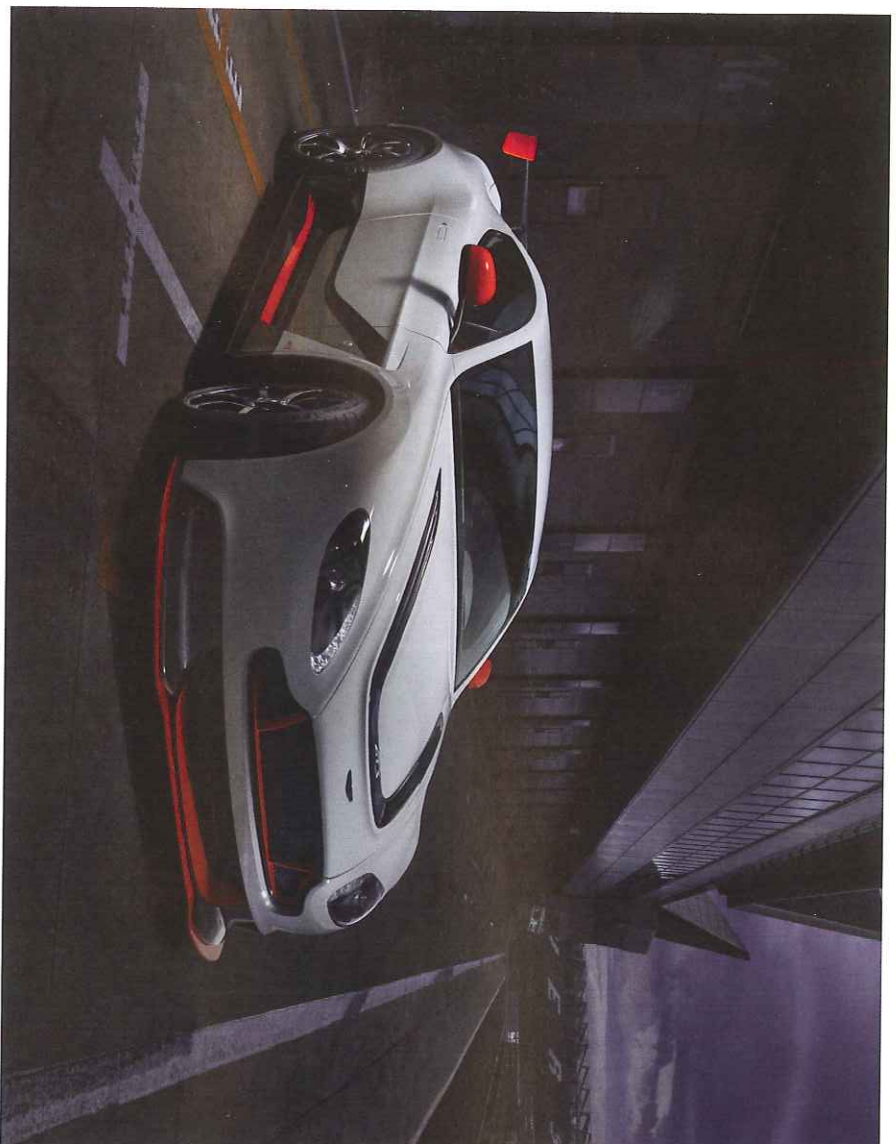




AT THE WHEEL

Motors man Bob Arora, our Top Gear wannabe, plays with some serious cars



It's not about the money...

Out of this world acceleration in the beautiful Aston Martin GT3. A bit of a stunner with a £250,000 price tag



Imagine a race series where you have some of the world's best car manufacturers competing against each other... I'm talking about cars ranging from Audi, Aston, Ferrari, Lamborghini, Mercedes and BMW. To be able to take part in the championship, a certain number of cars have to be sold to the public, but private teams can also enter their own cars. As you may expect private teams don't have the same budgets as the manufacturers, but the small teams are by no means disgraced at all. These races tend to be full of action and the championship is really becoming very popular indeed.

As you may imagine, these cars need to be very aerodynamic and the outrageous spoilers and body kits make them look totally amazing. Aston currently participates in the championship with the DBRS9 and they have been doing really well; on the back of this success they have decided to enter the Vantage into the championship. This brings me neatly on to the Aston Martin Vantage GT3...

Now before you race to Aston Martin at Houghton-le-Spring, the 100 cars Aston have

produced have already been sold to customers on the VIP list but give them a call if you fancy owning this stunning car. For anyone interested, the purchase price is a cool £250,000. It's the most powerful and road-focused Aston ever; the 5.9lt V12 engine has a top speed of 205mph and it gets to 60mph in a very brisk 3.5 seconds. I know the figures sound impressive but when you sit behind the wheel with your foot floored to the throttle the acceleration is out of this world.

Start the car and the engine just sounds tremendous; it literally makes you want to drive the car really hard. It is based on the Vantage V12 S, which I can say I have had the pleasure of driving a few months ago. I loved the car but I am sure the manual gearbox just wasn't up to the job. The GT3 is fitted with a 7-speed automated manual gearbox; it is much better than the manual box that was fitted to the Vantage S I drove recently. As dual clutch boxes have become the rage I am surprised people still want a manual - maybe I have just become lazy! Aston has extensively used lightweight materials inside and outside the car - they have used carbon fibre, titanium, aluminium and magnesium and in doing so they have

managed to shave 150kg of the car's kerb weight. The interior is still very Aston with stunning use of carbon fibre and Alcantara being used throughout the cabin. Carbon fibre features throughout the dash along with a scattering of leather just for good measure. The interior is still very Aston, despite lashings of carbon fibre it still has to be one of the best interiors around. To help reduce weight the designers have also used magnesium for the alloys along with a titanium exhaust. As with other GT3 cars the aerodynamics and body spoilers make these cars look like they are on steroids. The chassis and suspension are carried over from the Vantage S and sport, normal and track modes have all been carried over from the Vantage V12 S. They alter the throttle response, gearshift speed, timing, exhaust note and finally the steering assistance.

The 19" magnesium alloys are shod in Michelin tyres which is a first for Aston. The alloys can also be specked with a cool looking centre hub cap; this makes you feel like changing tyres like formula one teams would. The large Brembo Carbon Ceramic brakes really do an excellent job of making this car stop so quickly. To help give the car

its distinctive look, the track is 15mm wider at the front and 33mm wider at the back. The ride height remains the same but ground clearance is reduced by aerodynamic features. The use of carbon fibre on the car's bodywork helps save another 20kg. The GT3 is easily distinguishable over the Vantage S thanks to the aerodynamic package. The most striking feature is the horse shoe design on the bonnet; this helps with cooling the engine and it also helps with airflow.

The rear of the car is dominated by a massive spoiler. Anyone looking at this car will be under no illusions that it is as equally happy on the race track as it is on the road. Standing back and looking at the car you can't help but notice what a stunning car this is.

My favourite colour combination was the white bodywork with the use of orange on the front splitter, mirrors and around the rear wing.

Listening to me describing the car you would think it sounds like a total mess, but believe me when I say it looks absolutely stunning, it does.

Car supplied by Aston Martin UK



Keep your nerve to get to grips with the pacy and power-packed Mercedes S63 Coupe

Rapid response vehicle

↳ If you're a regular reader of my reviews, you may remember me talking about one of my car-loving uncles. A fan of Jaguars, one year he decided to go to his local Mercedes garage where he bought a new S-Class.

At the time he could have bought half a dozen houses for the price of this car and my brother and I were in awe of this stunning car, from the beautiful upholstery to the abs brakes which he swiftly demonstrated.

Even at our young age we couldn't believe how heavy the doors were and just how solid the car felt. Fast forward 30 years and I have had the chance to drive the coupe version of the car he owned all those years ago. I personally think Mercedes are

designing some stunning cars at the moment. The front of this car just looks so intimidating if you see it in your rear view; this is partly helped by the stunning LED headlights. I think the back of the car looks

very much like the BMW 6 Series; this is not a bad thing but I think Mercedes could have been a bit more adventurous with the car's rear styling. Opening the driver's door it's déjà vu- the doors are so heavy to close it just feels like it's built to last for ever and ever. The car I drove had a few extra options and it was priced very close to £140,000 so I can't say it's cheap by any means.

For anyone interested, the car averaged about 15mpg while I had it, so I'm sure you will become first name friends with the staff at your local petrol station.

The car was in the showroom and when Frazier started the car, it sounded like the German Luftwaffe was back in town.

I finally set my seat and took the massage function off which was quite complicated.

I drove along Scotswood Road, it had been drizzling all day and as I drove off I managed to wheel spin the car in the first four gears - and the rear end was twitching all the time.

This car really has a tremendous amount of power going to the rear wheels; anyone not used to this ferocious power could really do themselves harm.

This may be a case of simple things please simple minds, but I decided to clean the windscreen and I tugged the wiper stalk twice. Nothing interesting there but the way

the wipers clean the screen there was literally no residue water on the screen at all, normally in most other cars you need to use your wipers a few more times just to get rid of any excess water.

The interior seemed to flow quite nicely and it was quite a relaxing place to be on a long journey.

I really loved the steering wheel which not only looks but feels extremely sporty thanks to the leather grips. The dashboard is digital and many people will have seen this in new Range Rovers and Jaguars, but Mercedes have done a great job with the electric dials.

The rest of the car's switchgear and buttons all oozed quality, the Mercedes is no comparison to a Bentley interior but they have managed to do a great job.

One feature I was amazed with was the car's night vision; the dashboard becomes a big screen and you get to see the road ahead in crystal clarity. It helps you see pedestrians on country roads or even animals on the road ahead. The only downside to this technology is you have to take your eyes off the road and the image on the screen is definitely off putting when you're driving. The car's adaptive headlights not only look great but they illuminate the road ahead beautifully. Despite its size and weight this car totally relishes twisty country roads. The car's satnav and radio controls are all operated via a dial next to the driver and the heated and massaging seats are controlled via this dial.

The seats are big and comfy, but despite the car being so large the cabin feels really cramped indeed.

The light switch is also in a stupid place and getting out of the car I managed to whack my knee every time.

But a great feature was the way the boot opened- you wave your foot under the bumper and you do the same again to close it. The car's competitors are the Bentley Continental, Ferrari FF and the Aston Martin Vanquish.

The S63 is a very stylish car indeed and in this AMG guise not only do you have a great handling car but its performance is, for want of a better word, rapid.

This Mercedes is an ideal car for taking four passengers in comfort across long distances; it would be my first choice of car for a long drive to the South of France.

Car supplied by Mercedes Newcastle

Time Traveller

Audi's TT is the car that just keeps on giving. The latest model ups the ante when it comes to the fun of the drive and a classy interior

I can't believe the TT was launched in 1988, 17 years ago... and it was a total sales phenomenon. Dealers had waiting lists and cars were selling for premiums.

Having owned a few of the second generation TTs I can totally understand why they were so popular. My 2lt petrol engine car was not only excellent on economy but it was such an easy and cool looking car to drive, and as they were always in demand, they really held their value too. It wasn't as focused to drive as a Cayman or Boxster but they were ideal for most drivers. This latest third generation TT isn't going to cause the same stir as the original in terms of styling but the shape has evolved like the Mini and the g11. It's much more fun to drive.

Audi have cranked up the styling cues with razor-style headlights, tapered bonnet lines and a single frame grill, all of which give the car a real sporty look and most people will be able to distinguish the second and third generation cars.

It is the same length as the outgoing car but the wheelbase has grown by 37mm. The car is available in two trims, either Sport & S Line as a two or four wheel drive or with a 6 speed manual or a 7 speed dual clutch auto box. All sport models have 18" alloys, xenon lights, led running lights, dab radio and climate control as standard. The new LED headlights really are something else: not only do they illuminate the road ahead brilliantly, they also seem to be better for drivers on the opposite side of the road as well. The S Line models all get 19" alloys, deeper side skirts and unique bumpers as standard.

The car is available with a choice of three engines; the most popular engines will be the 2lt petrol or diesel engines. As with all Audis the interior is absolutely

stunning and the TT is one of the best interiors to date. The dash is dominated by a 12.3" screen; this not only has a traditional looking speedometer and rev counter but it also doubles up as a Sat Nav display with smaller speedo and rev counter dials.

The phone, media and car settings are all also controlled via this screen. It can be a bit off-putting at first but it soon becomes second nature.

Apart from the digital dash my other favourite feature was the ventilation dials which control the air speed, temperature and air flow. The car I drove had the optional Bang & Olufsen speakers which sounded absolutely amazing.

As the car is much lighter it is also a lot more fun to drive around country roads and the beautiful RS4 style sporty steering wheel is an absolute joy to use.

The engine sounded great with the exhaust rasping and popping every time you either changed down a gear. Even though the car is very quick indeed the economy was brilliant and I found myself wondering if the fuel display was actually working.

The 2lt engine has a top speed of 155mph and it gets to 60mph in six seconds. Most owners should expect to average over 38mpg. The diesel engine trumps the petrol engine's figures with a top speed of 150mph and it also gets to 60mph in 7.1 seconds but its trump card has to be its amazing fuel consumption;

most owners should easily get 57mpg. As with the previous car the rear seats are ok for either short journeys or for young children and the boot is absolutely fine for the supermarket run. One thing that initially shocked me was the TT theme tune which always played when the car was switched off. The new TT is a very impressive car, not only is it very sure-footed to drive but the car's interior sets the bar for its competitors.

Car supplied by Audi Newcastle

As with all Audis, the interior is absolutely stunning and the TT is one of the best interiors to date

