



DB11 IN NUMBERS

Engine

V12, 5.2l twin-turbo

Max power

600bhp @6500rpm

Max torque

516lb ft @1500rpm

TransmissionEight-speed,
rear-wheel drive**Tyres**255/40 ZR20 front,
295/35 ZR20 rear**Weight**

1770kg

Power-to-weight

339bhp per ton

0-62mph

3.9sec

Top speed

200mph

Price new

From £154,900

POWER DRESSING

Aston Martin's aggressive DB11 ticks all the boxes for a great GT – and there's even a German-inspired interior upgrade

by **Cindy-Lou Dale** – a writer and editor specialising in motoring and travel



I CAUGHT MY breath when the sensual, curvaceous body rolled into view, its engine burbling, silken in tone. It looked bulletproof, as if it owned the ground beneath its wheels. Soon I would discover this to be the best GT I've driven. It's aggressive, mean-looking, handles like a bronco, twitches in the bends, and when you put your foot down you're just not ready for what's about to happen. Given half the chance I felt sure the DB11 would kill me, but at least I'll be roaring through the Pearly Gates. With my hair on fire.

Aston Martin's DB11 is the latest model to join the line-up of desirable sports cars that have brought the GT coupe's rakish good looks into the 21st century. It's a different animal from anything that has come before it, though, with an all-new Aston design, a downsized engine, a broken nose, funky aerodynamics and just a tiny bit borrowed from Mercedes. Essentially the DB11 is a luxury GT in the mould of (but sleeker than) the Bentley Continental GT and Ferrari GTC4.

Historically Aston Martins were hand-made, which meant nothing fitted, they seldom worked properly

and eventually would fall to pieces. Then along came the pretty DB9, which had been properly developed but lacked chutzpah. Then the classy, sleek and graceful DB11 arrived. (The DB10, developed for the Bond film *Spectre*, was never released for sale.)

The DB11's styling is modern and aggressive – an intentional move away from Aston Martin's traditional elongated curves. With an aluminium platform (designed by a former Lotus man), it's now marginally larger and longer, has a pouty grille with a slight overbite, a clever airblade system that removes the need for a rear spoiler, slick aerodynamics that cheat the winds with Vulcan-like cut-off side strakes, and a rear-end emblazoned with boomerang LED tail-lights. Yet it still holds on to the trademark long, sculptured bonnet, sweeping roofline and short rear overhang.

But it's in the cabin where the design gurus have really done their work. Where plain, cheap buttons, ➤

stalks, levers and switchgear dragged the DB9 down, you'll now find solid style married to expensive-looking fittings. An aluminium look is common to much of the trim, as is the brogue finish on the leather.

The DB11 is the first Aston Martin to benefit fully from a technology exchange partnership with Mercedes-Benz (whose parent company, Daimler AG, owns 5 per cent of the British manufacturer). Essentially the in-car electronic architecture has been carried over from the German firm. There's a strong emphasis on comfort, silken-edged interiors and refinement, with ample space in the front (plenty of head and legroom for a couple of tall adults).

IN FULL VOICE

Press the starter button and the V12 gives a death-metal roar of life. At low revs it produces a purposeful warble, and it gets beautifully vocal as it climbs past 3,000rpm, the point where the turbos come into full voice. This is the greatest sound produced by any car – think Barry White eating a wasp – a trademark booming, attack-dog, wall of sound generated by 12 manic cylinders.

Driving the DB11 is phenomenal, but it's hard to keep the DB11 down to a stately lack of haste. It's straining at the leash, raring to break free and catapult to the horizon. Yet it's impressively stable at motorway

speeds. When you cautiously place your foot on the accelerator there's no waiting for the engine to gather its thoughts before the twin turbos kick in. The V12 is there, in your face, raw, utterly exciting, and ready.

The DB11 squats theatrically under acceleration, and in Sports+ the steering is twitchy. Through bends the agility is outstanding. There's no floatiness going on here, no pitch or heave when you show it a corner.

If I had to nit-pick, and obviously I do, I find it annoying that Aston Martin has fixed its eight-speed ZF gear-change paddles on to the steering column rather than the back of the steering wheel, which is an issue when needing to change up a gear on long bends – especially in Sport+ when manual gear change is imperative beyond certain revs.

At £154,900, the DB11 is not cheap. Its obvious rival is the Bentley Continental GT, which, for the V8, starts at £150,000. However, you don't buy a DB11 to save on motoring bills. You're buying into the motoring history of one of the fastest, most desirable long-distance cruisers ever built. You're buying a head-turner. Mobile phones will light up the moment you appear in someone's rear view mirror, then follow you as you fly past. This is Aston Martin's biggest achievement. This is the most hardcore Aston Martin ever made; there is no better GT out there. 📡

'Aston Martin's Aeroblade is a patented aero system that utilises the benefits of high-pressure air as a blade to reduce any need for a large spoiler,' says Aston's chief creative designer, Marek Reichman. 'It allows a greater amount of design freedom to create the purity, drama and therefore character of the DB11. It helps to create the core centre line of the car which is instantly recognisable as a true DB.'



ANYONE FACING execution presumably wouldn't have too much need for a *memento mori*. Certainly Mary Queen of Scots didn't, who in the days before her demise supposedly gave away to a lady-in-waiting, Mary Seton, a pocket watch in the shape of an exquisitely carved silver skull. An elaborate engraving on the forehead was centred around the skeletal figure of death with his scythe; turn over the skull and flip back the jaw, and the watch face was revealed.

It doesn't take a semiotician to perceive the symbolic links between a watch showing time as it ebbed away and a skull embodying the inevitability of death. And amid the '*vanitas-vanitatum*' superstition of the 16th and 17th centuries, skull watches were popular luxuries – Mary's nemesis Elizabeth I owned one too.

More weirdly, though, they've become a peculiarly enduring sub-genre among modern luxury watches, propagated by a few of the more adventurous watch brands. For instance, Richard Mille, the high priest of hi-tech horology, makes a virtue of his brand's contemporary 'skeletonised' style with a watch in which a skull sits in the centre of cross-bone movement bridges, with a tourbillon clamped between its teeth. The French firm Bell & Ross also does a sideline in Jolly Roger timepieces. HYT, a firm of horological futurists, has had its greatest success with sci-fi skull versions. And perhaps the most demonically amusing example is the gem-set Crazy Skull from De Grisogono.

Tasteless? Well, that's a matter of perspective. But it's a decidedly *recherché* niche for a young Scottish creative, with no horological experience, to walk into – but Fiona Krüger's is one of the more unlikely success stories in the modern watch world. At 31, she has come from nowhere (well, Dundee, by way of Mexico, Johannesburg, Edinburgh and Lausanne) to become a player in independent Swiss watchmaking, with an address book of go-to collaborators that reads like a roll-call of top-level Swiss talent, and an eponymous brand built around her colourful skull watch designs. Last