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Lotus Evora, Aston Martin Vanquish Bentley Continental, Jaguar F-Type SVR



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EDITOR'S LETTER

uring the past 30 years, Aspect County has been celebrating the thrill of driving and the adulation of luxury motoring, the opportunities to do just that have produced some of our magazines most memorable stories. It is for this reason that we have chosen to form their own personal space, a place of purpose and approbation.

Things happen around supercars, memorable things. I have had the opportunity to sit in and drive some of the most exclusive cars imaginable - many of which you will find in this magazine.

From the Rolls Royce Cullinan, the opulent 4x4 named after the world's largest raw diamond, to the Bentley GT, the obscurity of the Lamborghini Aventador and everything in between.

You'd imagine the most memorable experiences would be speed related, or the G-forces which could be likened to that of a rocket launch, maybe the craftsman-like hand-stitched leather cabins, the undeniable smell of `super car' leather. Each one has its unique seductive sweeps, curves and dramatic lines. But NO, what is the most memorable is people's reaction. Heads turn, jaws slacken. They stop and stare at the vision that rumbles past. The reaction a supercar evokes is profound; even those who hold little interest in cars marvel at them.

They draw us in wherever they go, beautiful things happen around supercars and it is for that reason Aspect County have chosen to celebrate their presence.

Each car throughout this issue has their own personality, their own intricacies and their own statement.

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Aspect County

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The motor industry is acutely aware of global warming and the environment, world economies and the price of oil, driver's safety and the war on speed. Gas-guzzling V12 supercars will soon be considered relics from the past, dinosaurs even, relegated to the history books.

urrent trends have luxury motoring brands going down the SUV route. Sports cars are embracing hybrid and electric technology; and supercars are downsizing their mammoth V12s to clean V8 engines – even Ford is joining the party with a V6 twin-turbo GT supercar.

But what does the motoring future look like?

Revolutionary on-board tech has become mainstream for high-end cars. Iconic brands like Rolls-Royce, with their Satellite Aided Transmission software that reads the road ahead and selects the appropriate gear; and Aston Martin's 3D printed centre console with integrated functional switches. Range Rover's Evoque has ClearSight Ground View technology that effectively makes the hood invisible; whilst Ferrari's S-Duct aerodynamics increases downforce at the front of the car; and Bentley with their active anti-roll control system that eliminates body roll.



Mind-blowing next generation tech is in hot pursuit. Here's what to expect:

Voice commands for your car: High on the list of innovations is the introduction of an Alexa-like personal assistant. "You will be able to speak naturally to your car," says Mark Halliday, CPO of the car-tech company Tantalum. "For example, when looking for a parking space, say 'find somewhere to park' and your car will locate the nearest or cheapest garage based on your preferences, then pay for it with your stored card details and navigate you there.

Map options: As navigational maps get blanketed with more data, you'll be able to choose your route based on several measures, like 'least polluted', which will guide you along better air-quality routes. For older folk or someone with chronic asthma, this becomes a huge benefit.

Brain-assisted vehicles: Many accidents could be avoided if the driver swerved or braked just a fraction sooner. Nissan's brain-wave technology will make this possible. By identifying whether a driver is about to perform one of these function, the brain-to-vehicle technology could speed up the process by up to a half second.

Onboard mechanic: "Cars will detect their own mechanical or software problems and search for a diagnosis," says Mark Halliday of Tantalum. "If a mechanic is needed, the car will find a time that works for you and book an appointment. It will also be able to keep looking for better insurance deals and ensure it is covered."

Shared autonomous vehicles: Self-driving cars are already here and doing well in safety tests. By 2020 they'll be fully autonomous in certain circumstances. To enhance this still further, people



will be able to share their autonomous vehicles. Today cars sit unused 80 percent of the time. If the car is self-driving, there's an opportunity for people to coown it, paying only for their share of its use. There's potential for younger people who may not be able to afford their own vehicle, those with disabilities who aren't able to drive, and older folk who may need to stop driving.

Solar powered: Toyota are exploring the possibility of having solar panels outside the car. Ostensibly, the panels could take energy from the car's braking system and reuse that same energy to power the vehicle.

Cars that talk to one another:

Cadillac are working on vehicle-to-vehicle communications, where cars will know the actions of other cars before it happens.

Airbags that prevents accidents: Mercedes are working on airbag technology that goes under a car. Sensors anticipate an accident and deploy airbags to slow the vehicle down to a complete stop, instead of responding after impact.

Active health monitors: Ford's leading the way in technology that monitors health through the driver's seat. They've developed an electro-cardio reader that can detect heart attacks. The sensors can figure out if someone is having a heart attack then auto respond by pulling over and calling paramedics. This technology rolls out in 2020. In the works is a cloud-based health managements system that monitors blood glucose and location-based allergy and pollen alerts.

The future of motoring may well be technologically driven but, heck, this is exciting stuff.





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LOTUS EVORA

Every time I turn the steering wheel, I feel certain I'm drawing a line through physics.



otus is focused on creating sports cars that are big on performance. Comfort and convenience are secondary to handling and acceleration. However, the Lotus Evora is kinder, a gentler version of the all-out track-tuned Elise and Exige, and is most at home on tight, twisting roads. It boasts the world's only midengined 2+2 making the Evora a genuine niche filler and taking the British brand directly into Porsche Cayman territory.

This is Lotus's first automatic for more than 25 years. The 'Intelligent Precision Shift' is a 6-speed unit which, like the 3.5 litre V6 engine, is from Toyota. In this version however, Lotus engineers have pimped the control systems to give it a much sportier feel.

There is no shift lever in the car. Gearbox modes are selected from buttons located on the centre console. The 'sport' button transforms the car from its default drive mode into a full-on sports car, giving the driver a projectile throttle response that can swiftly pass slow-moving traffic on long inclines, accompanied by an understated engine note. Superbly designed 'paddles' mounted either side of the steering wheel switch the car into full manual which revert back to automatic if you make no changes within 10 seconds. In 'sport' mode you get an extra 20 seconds before it switches back.

The Evora, with its visor-like windscreen, sloped rear windows and fixed roof, is a compact looking coupe that makes a Porsche Boxster appear broad and squat. Inside the cabin it's all creature comforts



"CURVES IN ALL THE RIGHT PLACES"

with metal and finely stitched leather, though I did get the impression that some of the switch placements were more to do with aesthetics than ergonomics.

Visibility to the front and sides is excellent, the power-fold door mirrors providing a particularly enticing view of the Evora's curvaceous hips which you'll never tire of looking at. The Recaro seats hold you in all the right places and the driving position is comfortable. The rear view is mainly of the transparent engine cowling over the purring V6 engine but a thoughtfully placed rear view camera ensures that you won't connect with anything unseen.

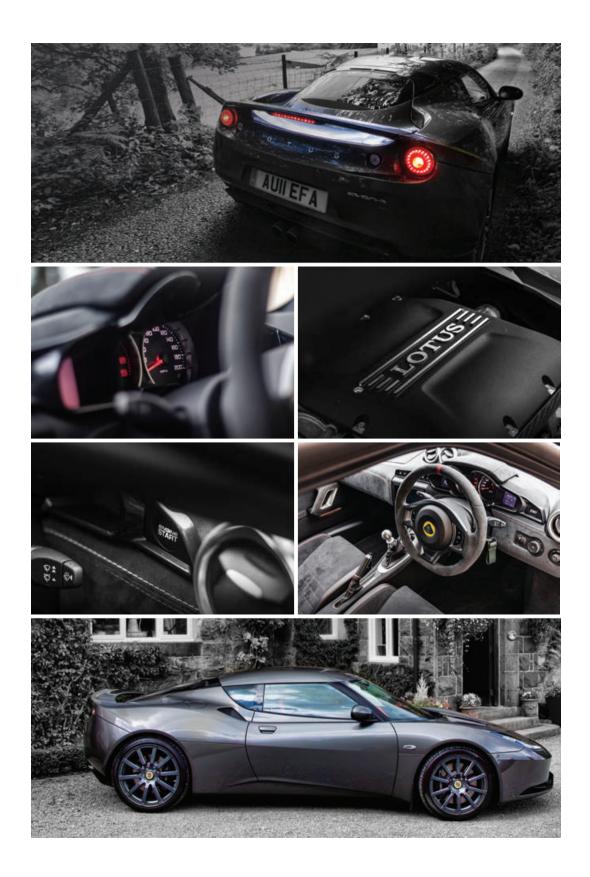
It's meatier than the Lotus Elise in width, height and length but these increased

dimensions gain a significantly longer cabin, ideal for tall people. The generous door opening and narrower side sill facilitates exiting the cockpit elegantly.

Its clever packaging and long wheelbase allow for two rear seats which are barely large enough for two small children; and the boot would comfortably accommodate a large gym bag.

With an estimated curb weight of 1,350 kg (which is 454kg heavier than the Elise), the Evora employs typical Lotus F1 aerodynamic tricks to keep the car planted at high speed, including a rear diffuser, Bilstein shocks and Eibach springs.

Lotus rounds out the dramatic features list with traction and stability control, 18inch alloy front wheels, 19-inch rear wheels



and bi-xenon headlights. Then there's heated exterior mirrors, air-conditioning, leather seats, a tilt-and-telescoping steering wheel and power windows. I particularly like the leather-wrapped gearshift knob and handbrake, plus all the bells and whistles required for connectivity. There's also a windscreen rattling Alpine audio system.

On the downside the SatNav is unintelligible and the seat adjustments need to be done manually.

As you would expect from Lotus, the onthe-road experience is superb. The all-new monocoque chassis helps deliver the ultraaccurate steering and suspension expected of Lotus-level handling.



This car could climb trees, in the wet

The road-runner acceleration has great sticking power in the bends and the powerful anti-lock Bosch brakes and near zero body roll are worthy of praise. It has tight precision that provides feedback to the driver via the hugely tactile steering and Pirelli P-Zero's.

Lotus is as special on the road as it feels behind the wheel – which is why it commands more attention than Porsche, even some Ferrari's. I drove the entire width of the UK from Norwich to the Welsh coast in one stretch and can vouch that Lotus have added luxury and refinement to a car that can do long trips in comfort (and short trips in eestasy), making a unique sports car truly suitable for grand touring.

www.lotuscars.com



Tested: Lotus Evora 2+2, IPS (petrol) **Power:** 276 bhp

Transmission: 6-speed auto with paddles

Acceleration: 0-100 mph in 5.5 seconds

Top speed: 155 mph (250 km/h)

CO2 emission: 208g/km Consumption: 33.2 miles per imperial gallon

Engine:Mid-mounted, transverse 3.5 litre

DOHC V6 VVT-I

Transmission:
Automatic

Chassis: Modular lightweight bonded aluminium structure

Steering: Lotus tuned hydraulically-assisted power steering

Suspension: Forged aluminium double wishbone suspension

Fuel tank: 55 lt

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'm sitting in the prestigious lobby of Maserati's factory in Modena – Italy's Motor Valley, waiting for Giorgio Manicardi, a Maserati authority since the mid-60s. He spent 35 years as their sales manager before retiring and now passionately tells the Trident's tale, explaining every detail in hand crafting their limited-edition exotics.

They don't use robots in their factory, but technology is evident on the production line. The Modena plant turns out especially commissioned GranTurismo's and GranCabrio's. They once built just a few hundred cars per year. Now, with new models, the addition of factories in Mirafiori and Grugliasco and expanded export sales, the total sales figures are rising.

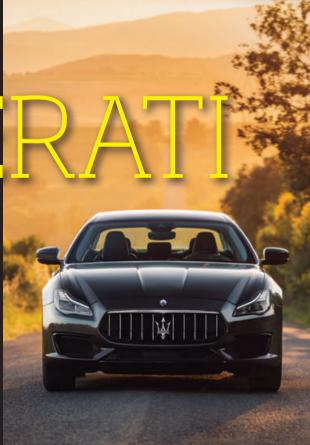
Guiding me through Maserati's sterile factory Manicardi explains this to be unlike regular car factories. Here, he explained, there is no noise, because making a car by hand requires no machinery.

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"With only racing in mind, the Maserati brothers started the business in 1914," says Manicardi. "At first, they worked on other production cars then, 12 years later, they created their own."

"Maserati, she does not make her own bodies, ITCA in Turin forges them," says Manicardi. "They're then taken to Ferrari in Maranello to be painted. Ferrari also assembles the engines, which we test here at Modena. They arrive at our factory in enclosed trucks."

After initial prep work, the empty shells are loaded onto the first production line for wiring and mechanics – like fitting the powertrain (which requires 26 bolts). Every 24 minutes an overhead rail transporter delivers a car onto the next station.

"Each conveyor unit can elevate and rotate the car 90 degrees, right and left," says Manicardi. "Ferrari use a similar system, but without the rotation."

Each car has a rolling trolley at the work station which contains all the parts, including the customer's printed specifications. The trolley tracks the car as it advances through the assembly line. Halfway down the line, the car is raised off the factory floor for the further stages of assembly, which are more easily undertaken from beneath.

Manicardi points to a large overhead digital clock. "Each station has two or three production-line workers who need to complete each task along the first 12 stations within 24 minutes. If one worker isn't finished when this time is up, he moves along with the car to the next station. The line never stops."

After 18 stations (6 on the 'trim' line and 12 on the 'chassis' line), the car is mechanically complete, but there are 12 more stations to follow on the final line. Glass goes into all the windows, interior components and upholstery.

After station 30, before entering the testing area, the car's ignition is turned on for the





first time. Then, the engine is balanced; the suspension is tested using a vibrating bridge, and a test driver takes it on the road to find imperfections. When all the kinks are ironed out it's off to the Finishing Department and an undercarriage clean up. After the car has passed the water test and completed a 50km road test, it's moved to another building for final inspections and further independent testing. When all this is done it's ready for shipment and covered with a white protective film in preparation for transportation.

Finally, the anticipated key handover moment has arrived. For the next five-days, the Rosso Folgore coloured 3.0-litre twin-turbo V6 Quattroporte S is mine. Just touching the steering wheel increases my heartrate.

This car isn't just about head-spinning good looks, it's about image, coupled with a presidential air. The Quattroporte's silhouette is drop dead gorgeous, with modified, well-defined front and rear bumpers. Yet, all the downward swoops, upward kinks and sensual aggressive road presence barely hint at the outrageous Ferrari engine under the bonnet that bellows 'made for speed'

Effectively the interior has three layers of opulence – leather, wood and aluminium, and includes myriads of other luxury essential, like adaptive cruise control, lane-departure warning, forward-collision warning, emergency braking, an 8.4-inch touch-screen infotainment system – okay, so it's a long list, but you get the picture. This may well be one of the most expensive versions of the Quattroporte, but it's also the

most desirable. It has style and elegance that's simply not available in any other sedan in the \$100,000 range.

For a fast grand-touring sports car, swathed in a low-slung body, the performance is astounding, poetry in steel, with supercar acceleration. The steering is responsive, handles beautifully, and its eight-speed ZF transmission is perfect. The Quattroporte's stability and grip in hard cornering is incredible. The strength of the fire-breathing Ferrari engine is obvious. On twisty roads, it owns the bends far more so than its nearest rivals.

Then of course, there's the twin-turbo Ferrari soundtrack of a thousand thundering drums. Tap the 'sport' button and a pleasurable sensation runs up your arm at every turn of the steering wheel.

The car comes alive and turns a terrific car into something sensational. It activates the automatic gearbox to quicken its shifts and firms up the suspension and of course, it also opens the exhaust valves, delivering a deep rumbling voice that recalibrates your mind. Maserati's Quottroporte is a celebration of not what cars are going to be in the future, but what they were in the past. This is pure rock 'n roll, dripping with cool.

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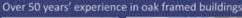
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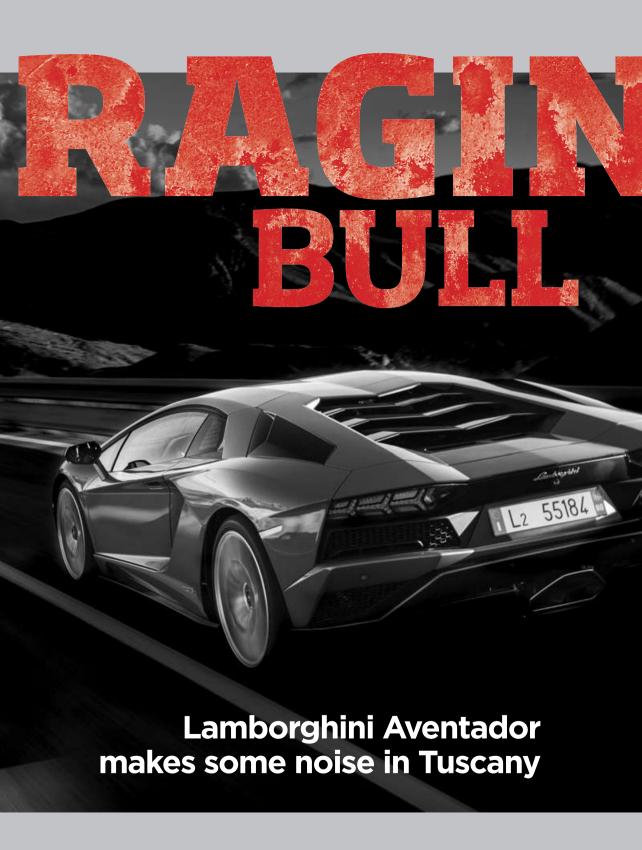
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he closest thing I've seen to a Stealth Fighter rolls through the factory hanger doors in Sant'Agata,
Bologna, its Y-slanted headlights glaring, its sunset orange carbon fibre body and flared air-intakes looking angry. This is Lamborghini's maxi-car, the Aventador: already as much a legend as their flagship battle cruiser, the Murciélago, it's a perfect union of beauty and beast.

I slide into the high-tech cockpit, trying to find an ignition to slot the keys into. "You push the button there," says Moreno. "No there. Mama mia, the button on the centre console!" He points to a Top Gun starter button under a red flipup cover which, when depressed, triggers what sounds and feels like a seismic event. And away we go.

Navigating a winding Tuscan mountain road, I tear towards the medieval mountain village of Compiano. I stop to take in the views then lunch on chestnut gnocchi with ricotta at La Vecchia on the village piazza. While I eat, a crowd tentatively forms around the ear, spellbound by its sinister looks. This would prove to be a common occurrence in the days ahead.

I return to the road, set the car in drive mode. In the hills I steer with what feels like telepathy: the power of suggestion. The Aventador's gearbox is sharp with remarkable traction and fierce pulling power

Even the police get emotional about Lamborghini









"Take one liberty with this car and she'll take you down," says Moreno, Lamborghini's test-driver."

in the corners. For a bit of fun, I drop it into track mode (Corsa), step on the gas and throw it into a few tight corners, which it just shrugs off without me needing to brake or change gear.

Emboldened, I decide to really test out the Aventador's F1-grade power plant on an open stretch of tarmac. In seconds it goes from fun, to exhilarating, to somewhat unsettling. When the horizon begins to warp, I take my foot off the accelerator and slow down some. I round a bend to a sudden magical tableau of small green fields and steepled villages spread across an undulating land, like a shaken-out quilt just settling back onto a bed. I pull off the road to capture the image on camera from atop a rock. Just then a polizia vehicle pulls up beside me. One of the policemen saunters over and asks if he could look inside the Aventador. Sure, I say, and return to taking photos.

He returns a little while later looking downcast. "Lamborghini," he says, "this is a car of dreams, a dream shared by all of Italy." He considers this statement for a moment then, with a sniff, adds, "But looking at her, she makes my heart want to break. I cannot help but think that with the world economy, the environment, the war on speed, and the oil prices – cars like her, she will only be found in the history books. My bambino will not know what she sounds like."

After a couple of selfies, we part

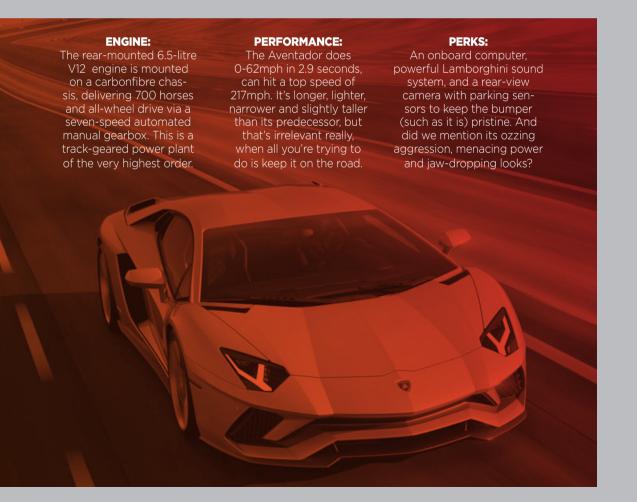
company, him sniffing, me pondering the irony of a police officer lamenting the war on speed. The Italian dream and the car that keeps it real.

The road snakes deeper into the hills towards Rapolano Terme and Laticastelli, where I finally park the car and bed down for a couple of nights. Owned by a former Argentinean polo player, Laticastelli, once a 1,200-year old village ruin, has been painstakingly restored and converted into a boutique hotel offering long views over deep valleys and a restaurant hailed as one of the finest in Tuscany. I end my trip there, contemplating retirement

"The Italian dream and the car that keeps it real."

somewhere ancient with moss softened corners, of quiet, unhurried mornings and good wine. And, naturally, an aircraft-inspired supercar always near to hand to keep things interesting.

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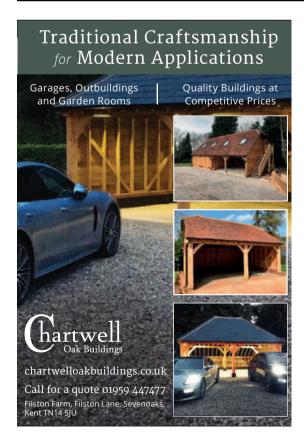
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Aston Martin VANQUISH

A car for connoisseurs

liding in behind the wheel, I savour the smell of old money and new leather. The doors swing slightly upwards, providing high curb clearance. I insert the crystal 'emotion' key into its oblong slot, and the wizardry begins.

The V12 fires up like a spooling jet engine, followed by a sudden explosion and an ear-splitting guttural bellow – a percussive, snarling wave of sound that rattles windows. This is Aston Martin's Vanquish S – squat and mean-looking.

Over the past 20-years, the brawny V-12 Aston Martin Vanquish has been re-styled, renamed and re-marketed a few times. Soon it will be pensioned off in favour of the firm's final incarnation of this, their connoisseur car – the second generation Vanquish S. It's been spiced up to deliver aggressive speed and power, F1-type handling, and arrogant styling.

The S has a hostile look to it, which is entirely fitting for this overtly sporting GT. Outrageously flared rear wheel arches, quad exhaust outlet pipes, a race car-style diffuser,



Aston Martin call it their Super Grand Tourer; I call it a track car with good upholstery and bad attitude.

carbon fibre bonnet louvres, a low front spoiler which significantly cuts lift, simultaneously reducing understeer, and a new Vanquish S badge, which sits proudly on the tailgate like a perfect tie-pin. It rides on 20-inch five-spoke diamond-cut alloys, is shod with broad Pirelli P-Zero tyres and stops on carbon-ceramic brakes – which all adds to the feeling of knowing where the big bucks are spent.

Let's be clear on one thing – you'll not be buying a Vanquish S to reduce your monthly outgoings. Owning a V12 Super GT is never going to be a cheap, but it will be more cost effective to run than a Learjet. It's right up there with the big names, together with a base price of \$200k. My 'Ming Blue' test car has near every option box ticked and brings the price nearer the \$234k mark.

It's spacious upfront, with broad, highmounted seats; but consider the two rear seats as an extension to the boot which is narrow and short.

Although impeccably assembled in rich leather and metal, with the dash finished in brushed carbon-fibre, the drive controls feel outdated. There are spidery analogue instruments, a fiddly and hard-to-read infotainment screen, flimsy wiper and indicator stalks.

On the up side there is an Apple CarPlay and Android Auto to mirror your smartphone's home screen, an analogue and a digital speedometer, a half-decent Sat Nav, the brand's signature leather-wrapped quartic



All round, the DB11 may be the better car; it's £40k cheaper, but what the DB11 doesn't have is continued appeal of exclusivity.

steering wheel and, should you ever tire of the sensational V12's music, a B&O stereo, complete with two periscopes speakers that rise from either side of the dashboard.

The moment the 6.0-litre V12 engine ignites you know you're in for a phenomenal experience; this is after all one of the finest engines in the world.

It all starts with that turbo-free engine, the last of its type in the Aston Martin fleet. Thanks to a few internal tweaks and old-school tuning, the 6.0-litre naturally-aspirated V12 goes like a bat out of hell, with a sort of whooshing acceleration of a F1 racing car. It delivers 600hp which propels the Vanquish S from 0-62mph in just under 3.5 seconds, with a top speed of 201mph.

Without compromising the ride quality, the engineering gurus at Aston Martin have recalibrated the gearbox, sharpened the chassis and tightened the suspension. The changes are not major, but the engineering work in the background is. But there's something else too, an entity that makes the eightspeed transmission feel tight, adding to its sophistication and ride quality.

The performance of the Vanquish S matches the drama of its design, especially when set to 'Sport' where the throttle response is instant – terrifyingly so. Dial it into 'Track' mode and discover just how vicious an automated gearchange can be. On the way up, the engine screams (and pulls) like a Formula One racing car, and on the way down through the ratios, there's a beautiful throttle blip.

The soundtrack is all T-Rex snarling and bellowing

Rather than a barrel-chested boom, there's a menacing junk-yard dog bark, which settles into a bone-rattling idle. Move off with an edgy, back-of-the-throat growl that shifts with the revs. On the open road step on the accelerator for the epic Aston

Martin sonic boom, delivered via four erackle-black exhaust tail pipes.

When thrown around tight bends the Vanquish S hides its size and weight well (6ft 8in wide, 15ft 6in long and 1,739kg in weight), thanks to the pin-sharp steering, aluminium-intensive architecture, grippy tyres and well-balanced chassis. It feels genuinely bespoke, connected to the road, and exciting to drive – exactly how you'd expect a \$200k car would feel.

In a world of downsized turbocharged engines and clever four-wheel drive systems, the Aston Martin Vanquish S stand out as a car for aficionados. Although it has old bones, it's an achingly beautiful, deeply desirable Super GT; and by not changing too much, and enhancing what's already there, Aston Martin have achieved perfection. Let it off its leash and mourn the fact the world won't see or hear big rockets like this anymore.

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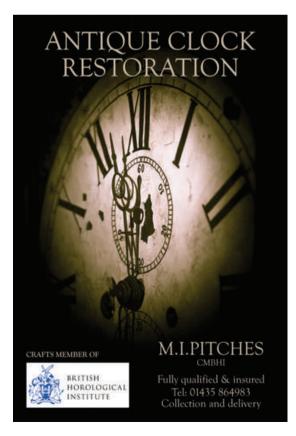
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he Bentley Continental GT Speed is a snorting machine of steel teeth and metal sinew. It is also the most devastating production Bentley has yet delivered.

However, several engineers who worked on the Speed may be ordered to fall on their pencils at this point, but it needs to be said. At first glance what the Conti Speed is, well, it's a GT with an additional 49bhp, a lowered suspension, bigger wheels, and tinkered with aerodynamics. But that's just the start of it as what Bentley have also done is mate this to a four-wheel drive system, a twin-turbo 6-litre W12 engine and a ZF eight-speed gear box – all of which enables a fire-breathing revelation.

I depress the start button and stroke the accelerator with my foot. Sliding the gear lever from 'D' to 'S' (manual mode is great fun too) I feel the throttle response become razor sharp and, with the gearbox holding onto its gears a little longer, the cabin is flooded with a guttural, reverberating W12 bass.

On the open road I floor the accelerator and shoot off at such a speed that my head became a howling sphere on the end of a





whip-like stalk. This is Bentley's fastest car yet, jettisoning its 2.3 ton frame from 0 to 60 in four seconds flat – only surpassed by 60 to 0 in 2.5 seconds if you take the \$10,000 ceramic brake option.

Almost everything in the cabin is trimmed with metal or leather, so the GT Speed feels very luxurious. The ride quality is composed and the monstrous 21-inch wheels hug the road, manoeuvring through tight bends without a twitch.

A British tradition

The Conti Speed is a cross between a Rolls-Royce and an Aston Martin, which may have been fed a box of Viagra. It's a luxury coupe with what feels like sports car handling and savage acceleration.

The Bentley Continental GT Speed is incisive and definitely has hutzpah. It delivers face-melting acceleration and will do 205mph whilst playing Bach in surround-sound, and giving you an in-seat massage (if you specify the option) – which makes the £152k base price seem quite reasonable.

Okay, so you won't be seeing too many of these parked outside Greenpeace HQ but whilst it's ticking itself cool at the services



observe the reaction of onlookers. The Conti GT Speed is the master of understatement; it is drawn to order and formality. It distances itself from other cars. It imposes a sense of responsibility and has higher standards of behaviour. But back on the road, you would be forgiven if you felt spurred on to all types of rebellious behaviour.

Let them eat cake

I found the alternative to the Victorian sponge at The Black Douglas tea room in Deal. Here the aroma of freshly baked cake greets one at the door. It's a splendid little shop, in a murky sort of way, with books and newspapers strewn around – as comfortable as an elderly relative's sitting room. It oozes good vibes and is filled with colourful local characters and their pedigreed pooches, making it nothing less than an institution.

A patron stands, ramrod straight, beside one of the large bay windows overlooking the sea,

one hand folded behind his back, the other clasped his porcelain tea cup. Pointing at the Bentley with his cup he announced to his small party: "It's peculiar, this tireless optimism which comes of being British. It may be the very resolve which upholds traditional British design like that Bentley over there. And tea rooms like this."

He settled back down in his chair and continued. "Even with modern Italian style chains threatening to overtake the market, places like this will remain quintessentially Britain's favourites. Since their inception, back in the early 1700s, the sedate ambience of a tea room has changed little and serves as a subtle reminder to perform acts of self-kindness, making the world just a little better. Those are acts of tea."

He pondered his words then added. "It is only proper that a Bentley should be parked beside such an establishment."

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hey're not fashionably late to the SUV party, they've been theorising about it for years and have now perfected the concept, delivering a reconstructed luxury SUV – vehicles of choice of kingmakers, powerbrokers and high net-worth individuals. These new patrons of true luxury are young and intent on venturing off-grid to do crazy stuff – driving through streams, up snowy mountain passes, across deserts or to tame the worst roads in Asia. And as borne out by orders that go beyond 2020, this is exactly what their uncompromising patrons demand.

Cullinan references the 3,106-carat Cullinan diamond discovered in South Africa in 1905 – the largest uncut flawless gem ever found, which is now part of the crown jewels. Like the diamond, Rolls-Royce's take on it is big, bold and expensive.

What lies beneath is the unique-to-Rolls-Royce 'Architecture of Luxury' – a modular aluminium spaceframe with castings in each corner and extrusions in between. A tailored version also underpins the new Phantom, though for Cullinan it's reconfigured into a form that sits higher and shorter on a 30 percent stiffer chassis.

The engine is a recalibrated version of the Phantom's vast 6.75-litre twin-turbo V12 and, despite the 2,660kg kerb-weight, drags the Cullinan to 60mph in five seconds. The car is suspended on vast air spheres which allow the ride height to be altered according to the terrain.

The Cullinan takes ride and refinement to another level. On the tarmae, it purrs along productively, eerily sequestered from its surroundings. The V12 is almost silent (hello 100kg of insulation), the silky ZF eight-speed automatic-only gearbox is magnificently smooth, and thanks to foam lined tyres, wind and road noise is barely perceptible. Regards handling, witcheraft imbeds it in the road – which is all what you'd expect on the tarmae of the world's most refined SUV.

The intimacy of the relationship Rolls-Royce has with its patrons is unquestionable. Rolls-Royce don't do mass crowd-pleasers, instead they





The traditional concepts of beauty are superfluous here - if ever there was a statement car, this is it.

take in their clients' eccentricities and work with this. The fact that the Cullinan's first year's production sold out may be testament to this.

There's a perverse pleasure in pointing the Cullinan up a rocky pass and letting it get on with it (whilst keeping the Dom Perignon chilled). Off road it disguises its near 2.7-tonne heft well and can be confidently hustled along, driving with nothing more than telepathy. On twisting country roads it's particularly able (and delivers a satisfying roar when driven boldly), and on 22-inch wheels it has a surprisingly tight turning circle.

Aided by a camera system that reads the road ahead, it glides over dirt tracks with a self-levelling air suspension which miraculously absorbs off-road ruts and bumps. The active roll bar, satellite-controlled gear shifting, and four-wheel steering all do their jobs manfully. But the fun starts with a flick of the 'Everywhere' switch. This is when the Cullinan flexes its muscles to tackle some off-piste action, including traversing streams up to 540mm deep which, according to Rolls-Royce, is the deepest wading depth of any super-luxury SUV.

Although the Cullinan is graceful and brilliantly crafted, it's no beauty; but there's an energy and modernity to it. The roofline gets faster as your eye travels along its length; there's strong metal touch-points throughout, and big protective spears above the sills that break up the body's side volume. It has heavy coach 'clamshell' doors that wrap its lower edges around the sills, so there's no dirty trousers on entry or exit.



At 2.1m wide and 5.3m long, the body is stumpy. Add to that a height of 1.8m and you've got yourself a mobile viewing platform, with a mean-looking warrior

face and laser headlights complete with vertical and horizontal lines. To emphasise the car's tough remit the long bonnet sits higher than the front wings and the traditional hand-polished Parthenon grille sits proud of the bodywork.

It's deeply impressive, with more layers than ever

Built at the firm's boutique factory in Goodwood, the Cullinan is a heady mix of 21st-century technology and exquisite craftsmanship. Despite prices starting at around \$275k most customers will double that by the time they've added their own bespoke extras like the Recreation Module – a motorised drawer which is a viewing platform, complete with folding leather chairs.

There's certain to be a Saudi Prince out there who'd engage with what is the world's greatest automotive achievement and use the Cullinan to its full 4x4 potential; but most of the Cullinan's end users wouldn't see much action beyond tackling that off-road stretch leading from the tarmac to the Alpine chalet, the desert lodge, or the shoot, which means it runs the risk of it becoming a massively expensive white elephant.

As you'd expect, the cabin's fit and finish is superb. It's not just the look and feel of the leather, wood and metal controls, it's the fluid movement of cockpit controls.

The moment you climb up into the vast cabin you feel strangely empowered. Sitting very high (in an executive airlinestyle pavilion seat) you look down the bonnet at the Spirit of Ecstasy mascot. There's a chunky steering-wheel and beautiful instrumentation graphics, with a central touch-screen multimedia display. There's a vast suite of assistance systems, including cameras with panoramic and helicopter views, and an industry-leading hi-res head-up display.

In the back passengers sit higher than those in the front. Here the pavilion theme continues (either in lounge configuration or sumptuous individual chairs), complete with a fixed centre console incorporating a drinks cabinet, whisky glasses and a decanter, as well as champagne flutes and a cool-box to chill bottles. There's even a glass partition that rises behind the rear seats to create a sealed cabin sanctuary.

This is, in so many ways, a ludicrous car. The looks may be challenging, and the price daunting, and whether you actually like it or not is irrelevant – its what Rolls-Royce customers want. Arguably it's the ultimate car oxymoron: a boutique 2.7-tonne offroader that's rewritten the SUV rule book.

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CONTACT CENTRE COURT MOBILE 07801 668863 01424 210921 / 0800 999 1116 "Of all the supercars you've driven, which is the one you'd like to call your own," asks the delivery driver from Jaguar Land Rover UK – an elderly, soft spoken gentleman. This is a question I'm often asked and, in the most basic of terms, needs to be answered in full.

"Look at it this way," I say. "Porsche is common place, and judging by the reactions of other road users, their drivers are held in as much disdain as BMW's; Ferrari drivers are considered show-offs. Maserati owners are aspiring to Bentley's – who are of the new money brigade, as is Aston Martin; and Rolls-Royce is too much money. After schmoozing around in ears like this for a week at a time I'm often too glad to hand the keys back as I'm in constant fear of having the vehicle trolleyed in a car park, keyed because of what the car symbolises, and constantly being challenged by boy racers."

I continue: "Then there's Jaguar's F-Type – I've driven all their flavours. They come in at a fraction of the price of other supercars but deliver ten times the fun; then add to that a 7-year service warranty! You may understand why handing the keys back each time pains me. So, to answer your question, which one would I want – Jag's F-Type!"

JAGUAR F-TYPE

When you push all the buttons, you dial up the performance, it feels like a track car with the volume turned full-blast.





The old bloke nods knowingly. He gestures I should enter the passenger side. We were heading to Ashford International, my local train station, some 17 miles away. On route`, he talks me through the car's quirks and explain the upgrades. Looking forward to the drive, I strapped myself in and sat ready with my notebook. We proceed in a stately lack of haste – without him engaging Sport mode, touching the paddles or even activating the exhaust button.

He explains that the SVR, built by the Special Vehicles Operation (SVO) division, is their fastest road car to date.

Under the skin

The SVR engine was initially in the Range Rover and has since been transplanted into Jaguar's F-Type, who come with sensible four- and six-cylinder engines further down the range. The V8 SVR is the lunatic, snarling Pitbull, rivalling the 911 Turbo.

To put the SVR into perspective, let me introduce you to the current F-Type line-up. The base V6 model is equipped with 340 horsepower, while the F-Type S comes with 380 horsepower. Then there's the F-Type R AWD, which packs a supercharged 5.0-litre V8, 550 horsepower, clocking up 0-62mph in 4.1 seconds and a top speed of 186mph. The Project 7 uses the same engine as the SVR but tops it off with an additional 17 horses. However, the SVR, with its 8-speed automatic gearbox and steering paddles, raises the stakes by introducing the intoxicating supercharged V8 to 575 horses, rocketing from 0-62 mph in 3.5 seconds and a top speed of 200mph.

The mind-blowing soundtrack

All this menacing performance is complemented by the most insane soundtrack delivered via a titanium and Inconel exhaust system. Forget AMG, or anything with an M badge – they can't get near Jaguar's genius hard-edged exhaust tuning work which bellows a deep and menacing V8 baritone under full throttle and gradually increases in pitch when redlining. Downshifts brings crazy, smile inducing, machine gun-like pops and crackles from the rear. It is music to the ears.

Supermodel looks

To look at, the SVR is beautiful. The proportions are just right, tall in the hind quarters, broad hips, narrow waist, good curves in the front and full lips, topped off with a slick panoramic roofline. It's a perfect mix of arrogance and grace, with just a few choice pieces of jewellery and a gorgeous wing on the boot.

In the cabin

As far as amenities go, this isn't some spartan racecar plucked straight from the track. Everything is plush and colourful with quilted leather seats, a multi-functional leather steering wheel, anodised shift paddles, suede headlining, ambient light, a Meridian sound-system and touchscreen controls.

Talk to the bank

This specific SVR Coupe comes in at just over \$110k (plus around \$10k for extras) which





"The SVR engine was initially in the Range Rover and has since been transplanted into Jaguar's F-Type."

represents huge value when compared to the 911 Turbo S or the Vantage S which will respectively ask for £28k and £35k more, yet is no more powerful than the SVR.

On the road

This is one heck of a car. It oozes opulence, British design, finesse, and comes complete with astounding performance and drama.

At first the steering seems a little excitable, twitchy even and you'll take a while to adapt to its exaggerated rate, but once you do, you'll love the stability, fast throttle response and traction control. This car can hustle at insane

speeds; its raw pace is astounding and huge fun – especially when switching off the safety systems and doing sensational slides, emanating clouds of tyre smoke.

The recipe of this car (and the sounds it makes) suggests it's an off the leash attack dog, yet its handling is polished. Put simply, it's an adrenalin-rush drive with a Clint Eastwood bad ass-ness about it, which is greeted by thumbs up from fellow road users and mobile phones pointing out of windows hoping to record some exhaust gun shots when passing.

We pull up outside the train station. The old chap from Jaguar Land Rover has three attempts at exiting the vehicle, stating that low sports cars are for the young.

"So, when are you placing your order?" he enquires. I give this some thought and explain that my husband is tight with the cash and that I'll need to wait for him to croak, but I'll be sure to swing by the dealership on the way back from the crematorium.

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FERRARI 488 GTB

click the remote to unlock the doors and the open-mouthed crowd that had gathered around the lusciously red Ferrari 488 GTB part, like the Red Sea before Moses. "Is that your motor, Miss? Tell us about the performance."

I rise to the occasion as I love talking about cars. "Ferrari have taken their pedigreed and brawny supercar and made it comfortable.

The ride is extremely forgiving – especially on the 'Bumpy Road' setting. The road grip of

its 20" Michelin tyres is massive." The crowd leans forward, craning to inspect the wheels.

This 488 would convert any hardened anti super-car activist

A voice at the back asks what it's like to drive. "Easy! The steering is light, responsive and super-fast and the seven-speed gearbox delivers instant F1 style gear-changes. Whatever gear I'm in, and no matter how fast I'm travelling, the performance is out of this world, with hyper-car responses and not





a split second of turbo-lag. And dare I say the engine gets better the harder it's driven." There's a collective intake of breath.

I continue and point out that the 488 looks like a car whose form follows function and explain that its aggressive-looking body, with its clean lines and clever aerodynamics, is sculpted in a wind tunnel.

Trimmed down to the metal muscle Ferrari has removed volumes from the car's aluminium body to reduce drag and create fifty percent more downforce. So much is gained that it more than equals what has been taken away.

A young hipster asks what makes this engine different

"To start with the 488 GTB is hugely efficient, it's downsized, with a direct-injected 3902cc twin-turbocharged V8. This is Ferrari's automotive masterpiece and the finest turbo-charged petrol engine in production; and to meet the turbo-lag













challenge, Maranello's engineering gurus' response is a smart electronic system that restricts the amount of torque released in each gear, as releasing it all at once would give you nothing more than wheelspin.

Maximum torque is delivered in the higher gears and at high speed. What this tech delivers in just point eight of a second is 0-62mph in three seconds flat."

"Ferrari has removed volumes from the car's aluminium body to reduce drag and create fifty percent more downforce."

Built for comfort and speed

"She looks comfortable too," someone volunteered, looking through the open driver's side door. "And look at all this cabin space." He spends time examining the function-festooned steering wheel which is undeniably a thing to behold.

"That's where all the controls are housed – wipers, indicators, lights." I point out the oversized paddles mounted to the steering column, the wraparound infotainment pods and explain that red LED rev lights appear at the top of the steering wheel.

It snarls and barks, spittle flying, straining at the leash

I fire her up. Everyone's mobile phones light up. Without a doubt, the spine-tingling Ferrari baritone is the best-sounding turbo road car out there. A little industrial, something like a modern F1 racing car that's going to take a bite out the ass of whatever's in front of it.

"So, tell me please, how much she cost?" he beamed. I explained that it's painfully expensive – and the £185k asking price is merely the starting point. By adding just a few options you'll push it nearer the £260k mark."

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STANDARD FEATURES INCLUDE

9" Touchscreen, Voice Activated Control, Satellite Navigation, High Performance Sound Audio System, 18" Alloy Wheels, Keyless Start, Cruise Control, Rear Park Assist, and a range of connected features through the Volvo on Call app.

THE XC40 T3 MOMENTUM

on Personal Contract Hire, 36-month agreement, 10,000 miles per annum, excess mileage charges apply, you can never own the vehicle.

CONTACT US NOW TO FIND OUT MORE OR ARRANGE YOUR TEST DRIVE

SQUIRE FURNEAUX LEATHERHEAD

7 Barnett Wood Lane Leatherhead, Surrey, KT22 7DL www.volvocarsleatherhead.co.uk **01372 371900**

HILDENBOROUGH VOLVO

140 Tonbridge Road Hildenborough, Kent, TN11 9HJ www.volvocarshildenborough.co.uk **01732 832424**

Fuel consumption and CO_2 * figures for the MY20 Volvo XC40 T3 Manual, in MPG (I/100km): WLTP Combined 37.2 (7.6) – 41.5 (6.8). NEDC CO_2 emissions 142a/km.

Figures shown are for comparability purposes; only compare fuel consumption and CO₂ figures with other cars tested to the same technical procedures. These figures may not reflect real life driving results, which will depend upon a number of factors including the accessories fitted (post-registration), variations in weather, driving styles and vehicle load. *There is a new test used for fuel consumption and CO₂ figures. The CO₂ figures shown however, are based on the outgoing test cycle and will be used to calculate vehicle tax on first registration. Preliminary data. Please contact your retailer for latest information.

*T&Cs apply. Model shown is the XC40 T3 FWD Momentum Manual. Contract hire provided by Santander Consumer (UK) PLC trading as Volvo Car Financial Services, RH1 1SR. 18s & over. Finance subject to status. **You can never own the vehicle** and it must be returned in good condition to avoid further charges. Excess mileage will be charged at 7.56p per mile for the first 5,000 excess miles. After 5,000 excess miles, excess miles, excess mileage will be charged at 10.08p per mile. Subject to availability at participating retailers on orders received between 01/10/2019 – 31/10/2019. Guarantee may be required. Not available with other promotions.

Grafise Ltd, trading as Hildenborough Volvo and Squire Furneaux Cobham Ltd, trading as Squire Furneaux Leatherhead, are a credit broker not a lender for this financial promotion. We can introduce you to a limited number of carefully selected finance providers and may receive a commission from them for the introduction.

