

AM

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The rich history of a special V8

The paint was peeling on the garage door in a non-descript block of identical units in the back streets of Basingstoke. As the up-and-over door was lifted, the bright sunlight reflected off the immaculate bright red paintwork and the familiar Aston Martin Owners Club badge on the blanked-off

radiator grille. The owner lifted the bonnet inviting a stunned viewing of what was a performance engine, 'I'm not interested in air conditioning' he said, 'I wanted it to sound right and go fast - but let me tell you a bit of the background.'

Doug Mitchell was born in North London in 1940 and, like many children spent the war years away from the dangers of the Blitz

with his Father's family in Sunderland. From very working-class beginnings - Dad was bus driver - young Doug became a voracious reader of motoring magazines and at the age of nine read an article by John Bolster reviewing the Aston Martin DB2, which set a dream in the young lad's mind that he would one day own an Aston Martin.

That dream persisted throughout his school years and led to much ribbing from schoolfriends - a boy from Colindale owning an Aston? Like so many of his generation, pocket money came from a paper round and Doug used to finish up at the local Armstrong Siddeley factory where, coming up to leaving school, he asked about an apprenticeship. The chap he asked knew that things weren't looking too good for their factory; 'Don't come here' he said, 'try Burtonwood Engineering.'

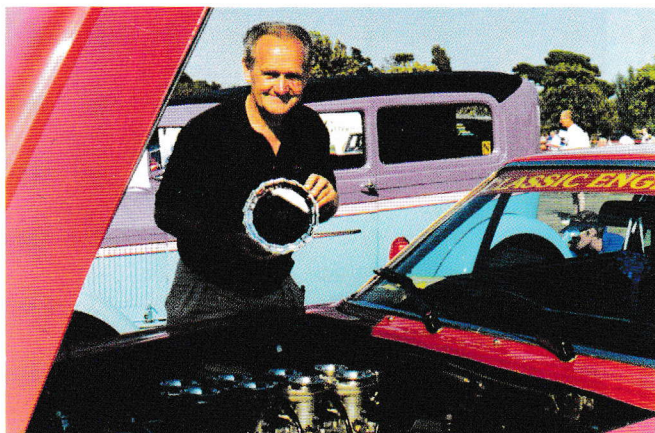
VICTOR

- The Aston Dream Made Reality

By Byron International



Doug Mitchell had this distinctive and memorable plate on his car whenever he competed.



Doug with one of the many trophies he won over the years.



Ready to go out onto the track at Goodwood.

And so began a background in engineering that we can only imagine today. Part of Dutton Forshaw, his new employer occupied a two-storey building with the engineering shop on the ground floor and the engine shop on the top floor. Doug went through the whole lot – valve grinding, white metal bearings, con rods – all carried out on tug engines from the Port of London Authority.

A great lesson came when his foreman invited him to help in the evenings on a special project. They had a lorry lift between the floors and a lorry would be lifted up to the top floor to load completed engines. The job needed a block and tackle to move the engines and was dangerous and time-consuming.

The foreman had the idea to build a tail lift - starting with a geared system adding a brake to try and make the lowering safer. He

and Doug worked at creating an engineering solution to the problem – finally understanding the practicality of a power take off. The drawings and designs were sold to Ratcliff and were the forerunners of everything you see on trucks to this day.

It taught Doug how to create practical engineering solutions that others did not always see.

The company was going to relocate to Warrington and so Doug moved to a similar company, Mansons Engineering, which did a lot of work for RAF people based at nearby Hendon. It was here that he made his first acquaintances with Aston Martin – one of the guys there, Jimmy Potton, recognised Doug's interest in cars and invited him down

to Aston's Feltham factory where Jimmy helped out in the evenings. Doug readily admits he just changed tyres and swept up, but it just built his enthusiasm.

Then a real Aston Martin, an International, came into Mansons and he was given the job of removing the head – easier said than done when he realised that the head had been brazed on! It was also at this time when he was introduced to motor sport.

Invited to meet his foreman early one Sunday, he was confronted by the man's Riley, five men up, with the roof occupied by poles and a big piece of board. He squeezed in and off they went to Silverstone and the guys set up what was their own mini grandstand, with primus stoves for making drinks and food, while they watched the likes of Moss and Salvadori. It created a love of performance and speed that lives on to this day.

Finishing his apprenticeship, he went to Lex at Kingsbury who sold Humbers – 'How good are you?' he was asked and was tested by being asked to try and sort out a mayoral Humber Pullman with an unacceptable differential whine. Success where no-one else had cured the problem gave him the job. It was a time of change when the old 1950's cars were a nuisance to dealers and provided the opportunity for refurbishing unwanted stock, with the sales proceeds providing the funding for a burgeoning race career.

Karting developed from being chased by security men at Croydon Airport to legal

racing at Rye House, then proper racing in variously Austin A40, Jaguar 3.8 and a Hillman Imp California with the engine built-up by tuner Paul Emery.

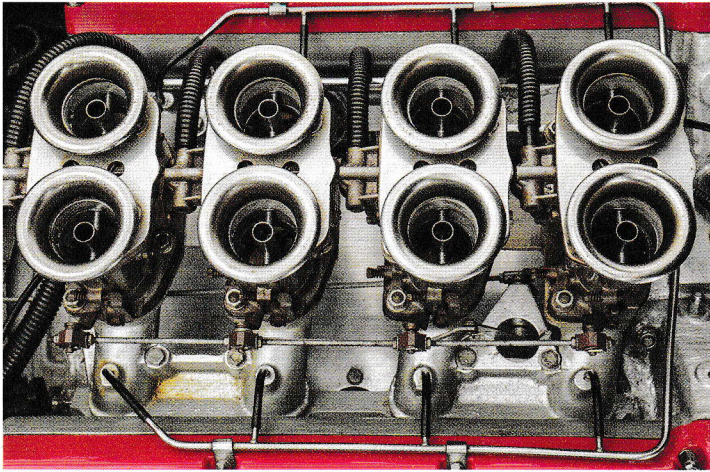
Whether it was race preparation or that engineering background, there was a progression on to Lex Jaguar but also the need to get some stability in his family housing. Rented property in London was very uncertain and greener pastures were on offer in the New Towns, so Doug went with his wife to Basingstoke. The deal in those days was get a job in a new town and you would get a house; so having established that the housing looked good, Doug went to the local Jaguar dealer WW Webber for a job.

The usual greeting of 'How good are you?' was tested again by the presence of ten Jaguar XJ6 2.8 litre cars in the car park – all broken down. With the M3 just down the road, Doug knew that the likely problem was a fault that they burnt out pistons in very short order. His reputation with Webbers and the local community was made. Enjoying his regular pint and a sandwich at lunch in the George pub, a man approached, 'You the Jigger man?' he asked. 'Jigger' was apparently local vernacular for Jaguar. And before he knew it, Doug was working all day at Webbers and in the evening his garage at home was looking after the rest of Basingstoke's Jaguars!

From there, he graduated to his own workshops locally with petrol and a



The V8 class was very popular and well supported throughout the 1990's.



Four twin choke 48 Webers made sure that the V8 had enough fuel to drink.



Full race harnesses were never a standard fitment but a practical proposition for a competition car like this.

convenience store and as that business began to develop, he got a call from a friend: 'There's a guy in London with three Astons for sale - why don't you go and have a look.'

So, he went up to London where there were three cars and one was a V8 Series III Automatic in Yeoman Red. The asking price was £7,000 but that was beyond Doug's budget and he offered the man £5,000, a figure that was finally accepted. So, Doug went back with a precautionary can of oil and drove the car home - within a week, he hated it! The car wallowed around and driving it gave him back ache, but Doug's engineering brain was already looking to solutions.

However, he had to earn his living and with a local shopping development making his business less viable, his reputation led him to employment with Lord Gerald Fitzalan Howard. At first, the appeal for employer and employee was the noble Lord's seven Ferraris, but then Doug's talents were brought to bear with changing left hand drive Alfa Romeo Spiders to right hand

drive - a very lucrative business meeting strong demand for the car.

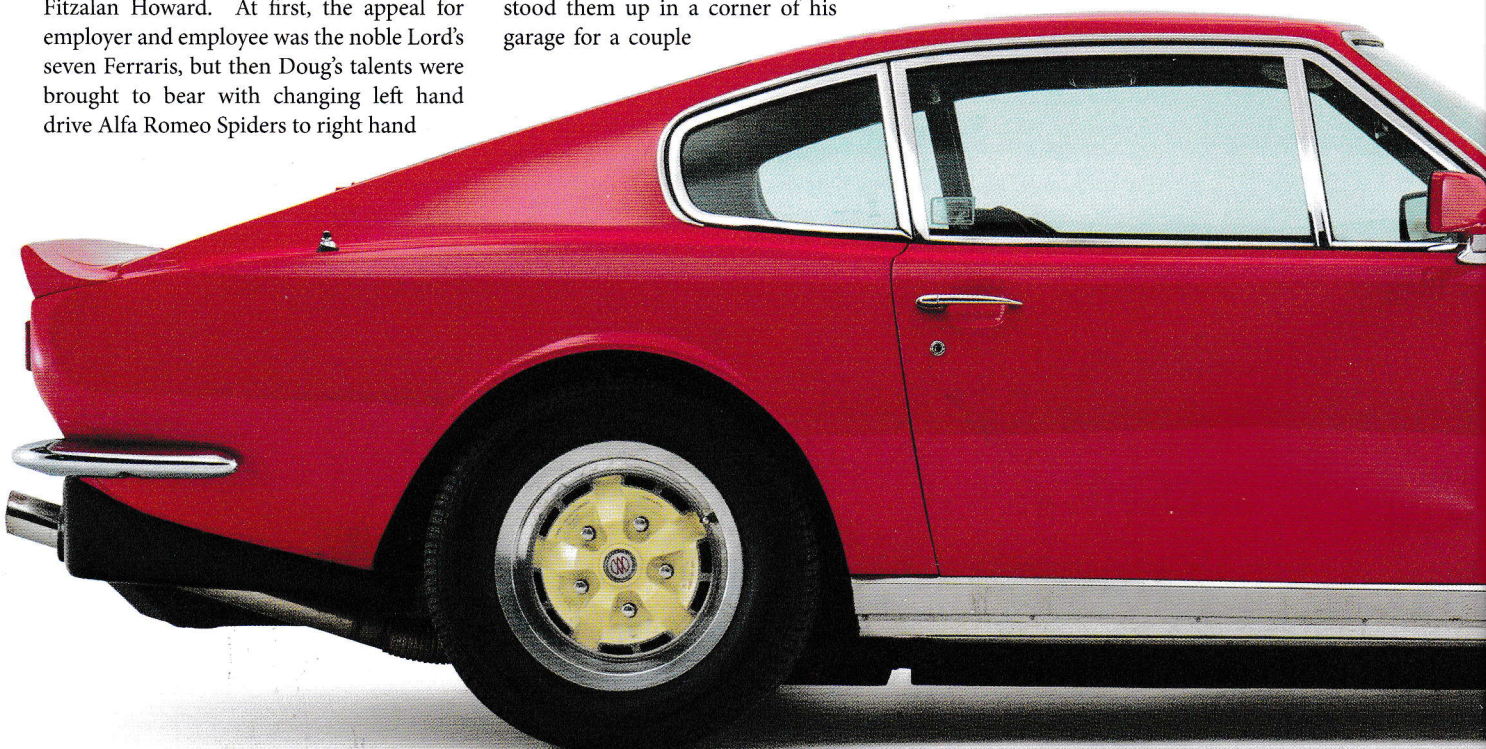
Doug was still working in the evenings to support the ongoing restoration of his own V8 - when he had realised that his childhood dream did not match reality, he set about restoring his Aston Martin to his ideals of performance and engineering.

He rented the garage next door to his house and began the painstaking job of restoration, removing all the interior, and engineering parts ready to strip the car to its bare shell. He scraped all the underseal from the car, revealing the typical woes of an Aston Martin. But it is interesting that at every stage, he looked for an engineering solution:

The sills needed replacing so he went to Aston Martin and bought two new sills - he stood them up in a corner of his garage for a couple

of weeks and when he went to use them, he realised that they already had a film of surface rust on them. So, he went to a local metal fabricator, Daneshill Engineering, who he asked to make up sills to the same pattern but in stainless steel.

Back to the underside of the car, he cut out the rear hangers and welded in new. He refabricated the wheel arches, but all the while was thirsty for the knowledge of the people who built the cars. He enrolled his son into the Aston Martin Young Supporters Club because there were regular factory tours which he attended as a responsible Dad! He would go with packets of cigarettes in his pockets to be able to engage with men on the workshop floor - this was how he found out that Innes Ireland had special anti-roll bars



The V8 looks like a quick car just from its stance.

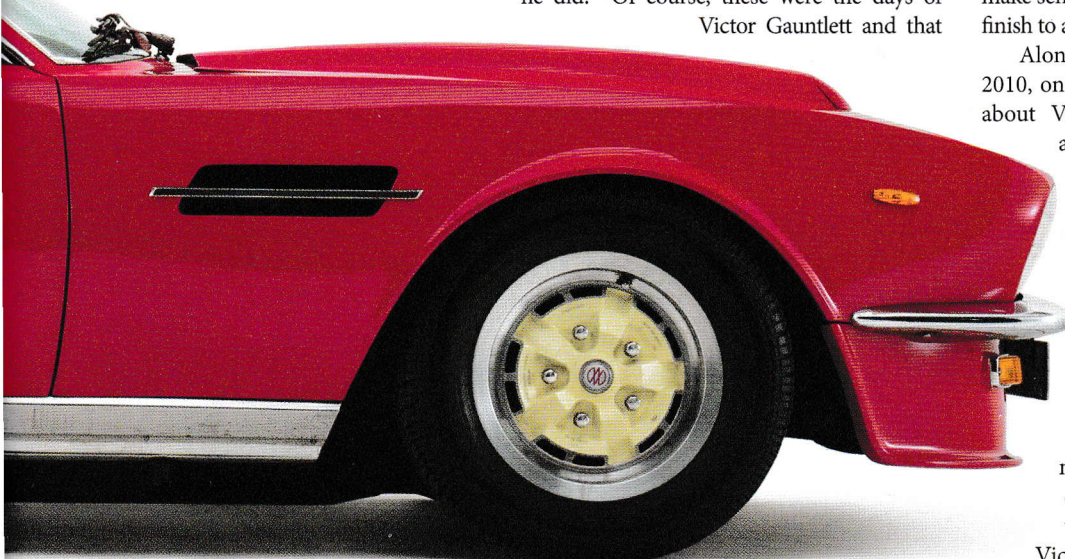
Date	Venue	Comments
19.05.1991	Wiscombe Park Hill Climb	Victor's 1st outing
02.06.1991	Curborough Sprint	
13.07.1991	Goodwood AMOC Meeting	
21.07.1991	Derek Warwick Ocean Village Sprint	
15.09.1991	Barnsfield Heath Sprint	
22.09.1991	Curborough Sprint Meeting	
31.05.1992	Curborough Sprint Meeting	
11.07.1992	Goodwood AMOC Meeting	
19.07.1992	BARC Ocean Village Sprint	
06.09.1992	Rotherfield Park Hill Climb	
15.05.1999	Wiscombe Park Hill Climb	
30.05.1999	Curborough Sprint Meeting	
10.07.1999	Goodwood AMOC Meeting	
05.09.1999	Cornbury Park Sprint	
26.09.1999	Curborough Sprint	
03.10.1999	Bentley Drivers Club Sprint	
20.05.2000	Wiscombe Park Hill Climb	
28.05.2000	Curborough Sprint	
20.08.2000	Curborough Sprint	In the Mallock
03.09.2000	Cornbury Park Sprint	
17.09.2000	Farnborough District M.C. Sprint Royale	In the Mallock
24.09.2000	BARC Curborough Sprint	
12.05.2001	Bentley Drivers Club Sprint	
27.05.2001	Curborough Sprint	Programme notes show Doug & Victor as the course record in their class
14.07.2001	Goodwood AMOC Meeting	
05.08.2001	AMOC Meeting Loton Park	Doug and Victor were in the lead of the MOC 2001 Speeds Series
03.09.2001	Cornbury Park Sprint	
23.09.2001	Curborough Sprint	

made at a factory in Curborough – so he had them make up a front anti roll bar for him.

He looked carefully at the shape and design of the flip tail Astons at the factory and having acquired the end pieces from the factory,

made one for his car with the assistance of his fabricator Daneshill.

He became such a familiar face on these tours that Roger Stowers, the Aston Martin historian, used to point him out as someone who knew more about Aston Martins than he did! Of course, these were the days of Victor Gauntlett and that



inevitably lead to Doug's Aston project being christened 'Victor' in his honour – a name for the car that stuck.

Special wheel spacers and extra-long studs came from the intelligence gained at Newport Pagnell, while an overnight trip to Sheffield Springs delivered uprated springs and another long trip provided the correct Koni shock absorbers.

New pistons and liners were put together with two V8 big valve heads with the springs bought from the factory, 48 Webers on the manifolds, a new Lucas distributor, and the automatic transmission was ditched in favour of a ZF manual gearbox and flywheel. A 345 differential came from John Goldsmith.

Doug heard about a specialist exhaust maker in Cullompton in Devon and took a V8 exhaust system to them to ask if they could make one up in 3-inch stainless steel. 'Yes' was the answer, as long as you provide the materials. Well, that gauge of stainless steel comes from the brewing or milk business and Doug provided the materials so that Victor had the best money could buy and the engine could breathe that much better.

Still doing the work from home, his reputation introduced another man and another opportunity. David John, sales manager for that doyen of performance cars, Adrian Hamilton, sought out Doug's help in sorting out Margaret Thatcher's Rolls Royce.

From there, it was a short step to looking after all Adrian Hamilton's workshops, sorting cars as diverse as a variety of Ferraris - an F40, 512 Berlinetta, 250 SWB - and the odd race car or AC Cobra. Doug worked with Adrian Hamilton until he retired at 72, which provided inspiration for the beautiful paintwork on Victor.

'It's Rosso Corsa' said Doug when asked to name the colour, 'we had a couple of Ferraris in being painted so it made sense.' Not only did it make sense, it made for an exemplary external finish to an engineering masterpiece.

Along with that paint finish, updated in 2010, one of the first things that you notice about Victor is the registration number and of course there is a tale to tell.

Doug found the number on a Yorkshire-based Reliant three-wheeler that he had to acquire, get MOT'd, and inspected by the local Tax Office. That was purchased in 1983 and its acquisition is one of the documents on file.

And of course, with his attention to detail, Doug did not let the quality drop. Having campaigned the car regularly in the 1990s and into the noughties, Victor was not allowed to deteriorate from that peak of quality.

One of his fellow Aston Martin enthusiasts encouraged Doug to enter a



Concours – when you see the car in the flesh, you can understand why. Doug was a reluctant entrant and as he says, the men in white coats came to look at the car, lifted the bonnet, recoiled in horror, and walked away without another word!

Those first words from Doug are worth repeating – 'I'm not interested in air conditioning' he said, 'I wanted it to sound right and go fast.'

And when you look through the photographic portfolio, you realise that this is a car built to be driven. Doug loved his speed and as well as Victor, he competed with a Mallock Mark 14/16 - with Victor doing the honours as the tow-car!

Their record speaks volumes of the quality of Victor's preparation – quite a roll of honour.

It has been a journey of fulfilment creating an Aston Martin that reflects not just a young man's dream but a car that is the embodiment of the grown man's engineering skill and pursuit of perfection.

When Victor first came onto the market, we received a note from a long-

term Aston Martin enthusiast which makes a perfect postscript to this story:

'I was driving my own V8 along the A303 back from Wiscombe. It was well before most of the cameras - this of course during the last Millennium - and I was certainly pushing on a bit myself, but this very wide and flat blood orange thing, which had begun as a little rectangle in my mirror was soon looming large. It must have passed me a good 30mph quicker in the outside lane and had become a speck in front by a couple of minutes later.

Next time I saw Mr Mitchell, I had a word with him. He assured me this was how

DUG 1OK always performed. It didn't matter whether he was going through the twisty bits up a greasy lane to the top of Wiscombe Hill on a Saturday morning, or on inter-county cruising mode back towards London late on a Sunday afternoon.

I don't think I've seen it for about 20 years, but I hope the new custodian drives it in exactly the same way!

At Byron International, we are pleased to say that Victor has been purchased by an American enthusiast who has plans for serious road rally action – there is more motorsport glory on the horizon for this delightfully conceived Aston Martin V8. ☺

