

DRIVING IN STYLE

Want to be James Bond for a day? Or perhaps Lewis Hamilton is more your style? No matter who your hero, you can hire a vehicle to suit from Bespokes. Giselle Whiteaker gets behind the wheel.



The raindrops drizzle down the windscreen of the Aston Martin Vantage Roadster and are gently swiped aside by the efficient windscreen wipers. I could have picked a better day to take the Roadster from Bespokes out for a test drive, but then, I'm seated comfortably in the lap of luxury, the heated seat warming my rear at the perfect temperature and the leather steering wheel pliant under my fingers, so perhaps this isn't such a bad idea. Hitting the red-rimmed crystal ignition button and hearing the powerful 4.7-litre V8 engine wake with a roar was the best part of my week.

Bespokes has the largest privately owned Aston Martin fleet in the country and the superb piece of silver machinery I'm enfolded in is the limited edition N400. Built to commemorate Aston Martin's racing successes at the Nürburgring circuit, where it was able to complete a lap in under eight minutes, only 240 of these were released in 2007 – and they sold out instantly. It's hard to say whether it's the sleek lines, the comfortable interior, or the signature exhaust note when it clears its throat past 5000rpm that thrill the most. I suspect it's the top speed of 177mph and the capability of 0-60 in a rapid 4.9 seconds that gets the heart-rate going, but I won't be setting

any land-speed records today. I'm off for a Sunday drive.

Knowing the price tag of the wheel I'm behind, I'm extra cautious navigating through the London traffic, but out on the motorway the car surges forward as if of its own accord, and it excels. Cruising at the speed limit is comfortable, but the Vantage wants to go faster. It's in its DNA.

The V8 Vantage quickly became Aston's most successful car and rightly so. This limited edition drop-top version makes me want to sign a £100,000-plus cheque on the spot. It's stylish yet subtle, powerful yet sensitive and luxurious yet not ostentatious.



The ride is supple and the steering precise. It's everything I want to be and it turns heads wherever it travels.

At the flick of a switch, the fabric hood can be tucked away in 14-seconds, even when driving at speeds of up to 30mph. Luckily for me, the rain eases off, and despite the soon-to-be-winter chill in the air, I can't resist pressing all the buttons. Sure enough, the hood elegantly folds into the boot and I let the wind swirl through

my hair for a few miles, turning up the seat-heating to compensate.

Like most people, when I think of Aston Martin I think of James Bond and while I'm not the action-hero type, the N400 makes me feel like a Bond girl. This is the whole point of hiring a prestige car – it's the thrill of being someone else for the day, or the week, as well as the sheer thrill of handling all that power. "The thought of driving a high-performance Sports, Luxury

or Supercar is just a dream for many people, so short-term self-drive hire can make it a reality. Unlike the numerous race-track based events that are offered, hiring gives the driver the chance to be totally independent and experience what it is like to own one of these amazing cars and drive wherever they want on the open-road," explains Daniel Cullen from Bespokes.

Besides the Aston Martin temporarily in my possession, Bespokes have a stock of around 50 vehicles, ranging from classic sports cars such as a 1969 Jaguar E-Type and an Austin Healey through to the Maserati Gran Cabrio Sport and Lotus Exige – just to name a few. "Our Jaguar E-Type and Morgans are extremely popular in the summer months. The Aston Martin Vantage and DBS are favourites for weddings and the Ferrari 458 Italia Spider and McLaren MP4-12C are for those who want to experience the pinnacle of Supercar driving. We are also the only company to offer a range of TVR and Lotus models which are always popular," Daniel explains.

It's not all about tootling along the A-roads on the weekend either, or opening up the throttle when no-one is looking. Bespokes also run a series of Activity Days, from Sports Car Days, which offer a full day's on-road driving on a spectacular route through the beautiful Hertfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Bedfordshire countryside, to Supercar Days, where participants drive eight Supercars over 150 miles on public roads, spending at least six hours in the cars. "We often get people on birthday treats, pairs or friends wanting to share an experience, or team-building exercises run by small



businesses and large corporations,” comments Daniel.

The N400 is swaying me towards the Aston Martin adventure for a true James Bond experience. This involves a treasure hunt, searching for clues and swapping vehicles at locations en-route, so that every participant can experience their own version of Bond – perhaps from behind the wheel of the Aston Martin Vanquish as the action hero did in *Die Another Day*.

Even with these extended experiences, there’s no clear winner on the preferred car model. “There is no exact science as to people’s choices and we often get very different feedback, but the fast and noisy ones like our Lamborghini LP560 Spider and the raw drive appeal felt in our TVR Sagaris are often favourites,” says Daniel. He’s done thousands of miles in all the cars understanding the particular feel and experience of each one. “Our McLaren MP4-12C in stunning Volcano Orange is definitely a car that still excites me. The incredible on-board technology and design make this car as easy and enjoyable to drive

at slow speeds around town - if you don’t mind being pointed at and photographed – but then it turns into an incredible beast on the open road, leaving pretty much everything behind that it passes.”

I am already becoming far too fond of my 24-hour Aston Martin Vantage, although I’d consider opting for a rock-star moment with the Ferrari 430 Spider or perhaps I

could pretend to be a sporting hero in the Porsche 997 Turbo Roadster. Then there’s the classic styling of the Morgan +8, with its modernised 40-year-old design packing a V8. That will definitely be my summer pick. In the meantime, Bespokes offer gift certificates if you’re wondering what to get me for Christmas.

The powerful 4.7-litre engine wakes with a roar



All Bespokes’ cars include insurance for up to four drivers, 150 free miles for 24 hours, 300 for the weekend and 700 for a week. Delivery and collection can be arranged anywhere in the UK and Europe including all airports and railway stations. The cars can be driven on the continent and those with foreign licenses are welcome. For more details on car hire, supercar days or other exciting car experiences, see www.bespokes.co.uk

