



THE LADY VANQUISHES

We fall in love with the new Aston Martin Vanquish Volante
in the English Riviera, by **Olivia Palamountain**



I've finally got my hands on the key to a man's heart. Heavy in the palm of my hand, it's a cut-crystal block with winged insignia and it fires up the Aston Martin Vanquish Volante. No man is immune to the beauty of this beast; reactions range from admiring glances to jaw-on-the-floor stares. A white van man gives an approving nod, a taxi driver is awestruck. Even Mr Big Shot in his Porsche can't help sneaking a second glance.

Top down, shades on, I'm driving the Vanquish out of London en route to St Mawes in Cornwall. At a cost of nearly £250,000, I'm in control of a machine worth considerably more than the average UK home. A V12 engine takes the Vanquish to 60mph in just 3.6 seconds, making it the quickest accelerating production

Aston in the company's 101-year history. But it's also very forgiving. Aston has fine-tuned this series, offering even more honed, precise and responsive driving; it practically drives itself. It's also a supremely sensual ride; from the clunk and suck of the door closing as it seals you inside to the grip of the botox-smooth, hand-stitched leather steering wheel. I challenge anyone not to fall for this machine. And when it wants to be, the Vanquish is also an outright thrill-seeker, capable of racing to more than 200mph.

On the open road, she comes alive. At first stunned into silence, I'm soon rushing off the power and adrenaline. This car has sex-appeal. Flying down the straights of the A30, my co-pilot and I are roaring hysterically, barely letting up for the entire 290 miles to St Mawes. We manage to shave at least 120 minutes ►



Olivia Palamountain drives the Vanquish Volante through the English Riviera

► off the standard six-hour drive.

St Mawes is a picture-perfect Cornish village, the jewel of the Roseland Peninsula, set on a hillside with uninterrupted views of the sea. The permanent population is just 850 but in summer this swells to accommodate the masses, including rock stars and the odd Royal.

The first luxury accommodation in the area was the Hotel Tresanton, opened by the Forte family's Olga Polizzi in 1997 and widely considered the doyenne of seaside chic. It has since been joined by two further swanky lodgings: Idle Rocks and my home for the weekend, the newly-renovated St Mawes Hotel, both of which are owned by David Richards, former F1 team principal and former chairman of Aston Martin.

St Mawes also hosts a Classic Car Festival every May and Sir Frank Williams, owner of the Williams Formula One team, has a property in the village. With petrolhead pedigree of this calibre, St Mawes is no stranger to supercars and residents are too interested in their fish and chips to gawp at yet another Aston Martin. Hardly a head turns as I pull up outside the hotel.

Launched in Spring this year following a full refurbishment, the St Mawes Hotel (alongside the Idle

Rocks) has been designed by Richards' wife Karen. It's the epitome of maritime country casual, all sailing ropes and driftwood. A breezy-chic bolt-hole, this is the kind of place guests are welcome to wander around in their slippers and locals prop up the informal downstairs bar.

Tucking into a dinner of boat-fresh crab spaghetti and a cracking bottle of Reisling, I know this is my kind of place. But I'd be more inclined to hang out in the hotel if I didn't have the Vanquish waiting outside, begging to be ragged around the Cornish roads.

This twisting terrain was built for driving and makes for a welcome challenge after blitzing down A roads. Through miles of country flanked by thickets of wildflower and glorious views of the sea, I'm able to drink in the Vanquish at a different pace. Thanks to the three-stage adjustable Adaptive Damping System – normal, sport and track – the car sticks to the road like a gecko and navigating the winding lanes is a dream. I get lost just to spend more time behind the wheel.

Beautifully crafted and exquisitely tailored, driving a Vanquish is like dressing in couture; I've found my perfect fit and after this experience I'm no longer prepared to wear anything else. ●