

Revealed – the New DB7 Facelift Model

by Brendan Cunningham

OK, the title might be very slightly misleading. However, although Aston Martin had nothing to do with this project, the car featured does have numerous detail changes that make it different to other DB7s out there.

Why Do It?

I am one of those who believe the DB7 to be the most beautiful of all the Astons, even though the DB7 is the cheapest to buy today and is occasionally scorned by a few as not being a proper Aston Martin.

Much though I loved the car I bought, I never thought it perfect. Many imperfections (aka charming quirks) are beyond my skill or budget to change. Yes, I am working through a long list of refurbishment items including new coil packs (see previous article in *AM Quarterly*, Autumn 2016, Vol. 50, No. 212), suspension overhaul and more, but these are all to factory spec. However, I have always been willing to modify things that I felt could be improved and I could see several aspects of my car ripe for changing.

Changes I Have Made – In No Particular Order

1. My car didn't come with Touchtronic (TT). This was on my pre-purchase checklist, but the car I found was too good to miss even without TT fitted. I decided to solve the issue by retrofitting the system, but chose not to use the factory selector or gear surround. I never liked the standard plastic gear selector surround, which I thought looked clunky and downmarket. The original selector is an ancient BMW variant, so I went for a more modern BMW selector and grafted in a surround for the TT from another TT, an Audi TT. One bonus of this is that I can remove the surround without dismantling half of the car, which is necessary with the standard arrangement.

2. The warning lights on the DB7 are in a row along the top of the instrument cluster and are hard to see. The indicator tell-tales are particularly annoying, they are placed perfectly behind the wheel and you can't see them at all without moving your head. When you consider that the flasher relay is buried in the passenger foot well and is hard to hear,

it's not surprising that inadvertent flashing on the public highway is common among DB7 drivers. I had to take the cluster apart to swap the parts to give me the TT display and maintain the correct odometer reading, so I took the opportunity to graft in new indicator tell-tales that are now impossible to miss.

3. Even the premium sound system is compromised because the subwoofer is squeezed into the small space available in the rear tunnel cover. The conventional siting of a sub is impossible because the fuel tank almost fills the space behind the rear seats and under the 'parcel shelf' (or 'hat rack' as it is described in BMW manuals). I thought about this for quite a long time before coming up with a ducted subwoofer design. A standard compact (10") sub enclosure was taken apart, braced and modified to include a slim duct feeding over the top of the tank to a new grille in the rear parcel shelf. The sub enclosure is bolted to the tank supports and is not fitted to the boot floor, so the lift out panel and deep storage space all remain accessible. ▶

No major changes but the bonnet vents are new





The rear badging is reduced to just 'V12'. The boot spoiler is an obvious change

A new amplifier was fitted in place of the CD changer, which was now surplus because the new head unit accepts multiple inputs including two USB sockets under the arm rest. One socket is fitted with a 64 Gb memory stick with a sizeable high bit rate music collection.

The head unit also has hands free phone function and a DAB radio. The DAB tuner explains why the standard aerial is now a fixed twin lead high gain unit.

How does it all sound new? The sound quality is transformed and well worth the effort.

4. Later Astons, including the runout DB7 GT/GTA, feature bonnet vents. That V12

generates a lot of heat so these are not just for pleasing aesthetics. I could have sought out a factory vented bonnet, but that would have meant a remortgage and going down the route of creating a GT/GTA lookalike is something I didn't want to do. I solved this challenge by fitting modified Jaguar vents, which given the DB7's Jaguar DNA is rather appropriate.

Sadly my striving for individuality has failed here because more than one AMOC Member has since done the same.

5. When I first sat in a DB7 I was mildly disappointed that despite me being 6 ft tall, the view of the long sweeping bonnet was effectively obscured by high sitting,

high profile wipers. I also noticed the once fashionable but now obsolete plastic pipes and washer jets on the arms (vulnerable to freezing). The pantograph driver's side wiper sits even higher and the non-standard end makes retrofitting low profile wipers a real challenge. This update was quite fiddly and meant making hybrid wiper arms and modifying the wiper arc, but I now have ultra-low profile wipers, 'normal' washer jets and an excellent view of the lines of the bonnet (oh yes, and the road ahead).

6. Sadly the standard of driving is falling as the volume of traffic rises. The 'dashcam' is now far more than a nerdy option, it is verging on necessity. Most installs look awful with the unit obscuring the driver's view and wires trailing everywhere. I couldn't allow that so went to great pains to fit an automatic camera that is virtually invisible. Having heard of a case where a 'crash for cash' insurance scam driver ripped out the victim's camera, inconspicuousness is a bonus.

7. I have already stated that I think the DB7 is beautiful (thank you Mr Callum and please forgive me for what follows). The one area of the body that didn't wow me was the rear lip of the boot lid. It was too low and made the rear appear to sag slightly. Again, the DB7 GT/GTA features a raised boot lid 'spoiler' detail. Even though rare and expensive I am not a fan, because in my view the design makes the rear aspect of the car too narrow. This is inevitable because the rear lip has to go from normal to spoiler height and back all within the width of the already narrow boot lid. Solution? I made my own rear spoiler, and yes it was difficult and took ages to get it how I wanted it. It is stuck on and hence is removable, so it is not necessarily the final version, but I am happy with it for now.



The black plastic gear surround has been changed to something more 'durk tecknik'. Note the new indicator tell-tale light glowing in the instrument cluster



There is a brighter powder finish on the wheels and new DAB aerial



Getting the spoiler to flow with the DB7's lines was a major challenge

I have been asked if I would manufacture these. Unfortunately the low production numbers involved mean this is not viable.

8. Towards the end of the Abbey Road album, the Beatles put together a sequence of snippets of tunes they had written because they knew time was running out for the group. So before the editor cuts me off, here are snippets of some (but not all) of the other modifications made: all lights are LED; tail pipes have silicone rubber shrouds to hide the silencers; rear wheel arches now feature part rear liners; the rear badging has been changed; the wheel colour has changed; a boot power socket has been installed; the charging socket is now a waterproof item under the fuel filler flap. And next on my list? Paddle gear shift I think.

Was It Worth It?

For me, a definite yes. I set out to improve my car and believe that I have succeeded according to my own criteria. Yes, I know 'improve' is my choice of verb. After reading this you may substitute 'improve' with 'ruin', 'devalue' or worse. That's OK. I won't be offended.

Reaction So Far

I am told by those nearest to me that my quest to achieve a high quality of finish is verging on obsessive. I think therapy may be in order, but for now the ultimate praise for me is

when people assume everything I have done is actually factory fit (in other words they can't tell which bits are my work and assume I haven't done anything) and this, thankfully, is the normal reaction of observers who aren't familiar with the DB7. Those familiar with the DB7 seem to approve or were far too polite to express their true opinion. Others have sought advice about making some of the changes to their own car.

Enhanced or Devalued?

I guess it depends on your perspective. I have kept many of the original parts so that a new owner could undo some of the changes if they wish. As mentioned, the rear spoiler can be removed.

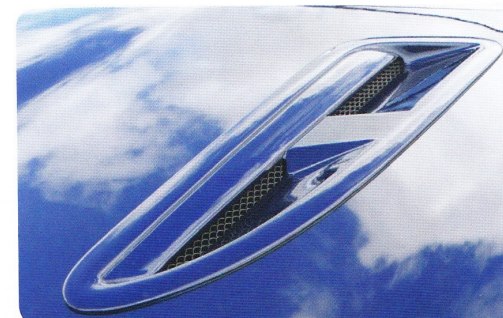
I have updated my workshop manuals to include relevant changes including full wiring diagram updates, so any competent garage or DIY mechanic would have no issues.

I have no plans to sell at the moment, but do understand that to some the fact that the car is no longer original is all that matters. To others, including those who have asked me to contact them should I ever decide to sell, the changes are not a problem and may even be of interest.

At the end of the day my car isn't a half million pound classic that needs to be preserved for the next custodian, it is my hobby and I am unrepentant! ☺



The modified Jaguar vents and new low profile wipers and 'normal' washer jets



Close up of the attention to detail and quality of finish. The vents were fitted with minimal cutting of the bonnet's structural ribs



The new subwoofer ducted over the fuel tank and into the car occupies surprisingly little boot space



The grille for the ducted subwoofer was chosen, finished and fitted to look as original as possible



Now some might think that extending the screen black primer to hide the camera mount and wires a bit obsessive. Ok, it is a bit