

From Austin to Aston Martin
FIFTY YEARS OF SELLING CARS



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Like so many Dad's in the nineteen fifties, mine needed a way of keeping me occupied whilst in his car. Predominantly, this was achieved by teaching me how to identify all the different makes and model cars that we saw, until I was able to name most every car that came into sight. With access to private ground, he taught me to drive when I was Ten and it was my job to put away his car at night. It was his work ethics, commitment, dedication and principals, to which I owe my success.

He further encouraged my interest by buying me a Ford E93A Popular for £10 suggesting that I took it apart and put it back together again – I was great at the first part, maybe not so good at rebuilding!

My first experience of an Aston Martin was in the mid-sixties, as a teenager hanging around the garage behind my parents' shop, after school. The garage owner would purchase damage repairable cars, one such was a DB6 Vantage in Dark Blue and I have often wondered if it was Mick Jagger's.

Pursuing my passion for cars and perhaps to address my shortfall in mechanical know-how, I joined a Rootes dealer as an apprentice and still in the probationary period formed a friendship with a Junior Salesman – giving me a lift home one night, I was admiring his Sunbeam Stiletto and wondering how he could afford a new car and he explained that as a salesman, he got a brand-new demonstrator as part of the job. At that very moment, the die was cast – I wanted to sell not to fix!

My first job selling cars was at 18 in the Autumn of 1970, working for a dealer with two used car showrooms in London, one of which specialised in American cars. I loved American cars, their size, ostentatious design and most of all the sound made by a V8 engine. The owner was a hard task master but from him I learnt the importance of extolling every virtue of each individual car and the art of display.

In the Spring of 1971, I achieved employment with Mann Egerton & Co Ltd., at their Wallington Branch, as a Junior Salesman. Part of my reward package was a new Mini 1000 demonstration car. After my first week, the General Manager called me into his office and said, "I've seen you with a lot of customers this week, Jones, but you haven't sold anything!" With the confidence of youth, I replied "Well you can take a horse to water, Sir, but you can't make it drink." at which point he fixed me with his steely gaze and responded, it's not up to you to make them drink, it's up to you to make them thirsty! It's advice I took to heart and what I have been doing ever since.

Mann Egerton were the largest British Leyland Dealer Group in the U.K. They had an excellent in-house training department and also employed outside trainers from the R.T.I.T.B. (Road Transport Industry Training Board) and British Leyland's own Training College in Studly, Warwickshire. They also had a computerised accounting system that was the envy of many. As a Junior it was my job to look after the large used car display, ensuring each car was cleaned, presented to look its best, priced correctly and each positioned to produce a good colour mix and an enticing display. It was in the cut and thrust of competition on the showroom floor where I started to hone my selling skills.



Using what I had learnt at that first used car dealer, the Junior Salesman duty of keeping the used car presentation at the dealership in tip top condition with a good colour balance, priced well and waxed to a shine came easily and the same skills came to the fore when in 1976 I was given my first opportunity to organise and manage an outside display for the company that represented all of the four local branches, promoting their franchise and specialists' operations.



Later that year I was promoted to Sales Manager at their Wallington Branch, with responsibility for annual new and used car sales of approximately 500 units.

Located at a set of traffic lights on one of the busiest roads in North East Surrey, our considerable selection of used cars would come under scrutiny every time the traffic lights turned red! With such a high-profile site and a stock turn of ten times a year, in time I established the Used Car operation at Wallington Branch, to be one of the most successful in the company.



The burgeoning sales ability combined with the organisation skills saw me promoted to General Manager where I had the accolade of the youngest in the company to hold that role. But ambition burned bright and I left to start my own business in 1985, 14 years after those first tentative steps into sales.

Using the many contacts made in my role at Mann Egerton, I was soon supplying cars to trade buyers sourced from other dealers, auctions, London Embassies and from regular trips to the Channel Islands.

It was on one of my Channel Island trips that my love affair with Aston Martin really began. I heard about an Aston Martin Convertible in the Vale area of Guernsey – it took several more trips before I got to meet the owner and see the car. But what a car – DBVC/2319/R was a Short Chassis Volante that had been bought new by the then owner, she had only covered 17,000 miles! He had it flown onto the island on a Dakota DC3 but she had not been unused for some time. Garaged in a hut that had housed German soldiers during World War II, she was sinking into the floor and needed some TLC. These were different times and recounting the tale, the deal even now makes me wince and think “What if!” – I paid £12,000 to the owner and a further £2,000 to HM Customs and brought her home – my first Aston! The photo shows my Son Matthew and I standing between the Short Chassis Volante and a R-R Silver Shadow I had purchased, in the customs clearing shed at Portsmouth.



A short time after this, I purchased my garage and being a fledgling business, I needed money and sadly, had to sell the Aston but the seed was sown! I liked the cars but more importantly, I liked the people that it bought me in contact with, owners, club and factory.



It is funny when I think about those couple of years and the influence they had – that Volante's value went up tenfold in the year I sold mine – I saw the same model sell for £250,000 but then six months later, another sold for £70,000 – it was the nature of boom and bust in 1989/1990. And that cycle of boom and bust nearly broke me!

It cost me my working capital, it cost me my marriage and it very nearly cost me my home but in a funny echo of the advice given to me by first General Manager, I listened to the American Sales Guru Zig Ziglar who said ***“You Can Have Everything In Life You Want, If You Will Just Help Enough Other People Get What They Want.”*** I wanted to continue to specialise in Aston Martin and as I have heard it said, necessity is the mother of invention, with Zig's quote ringing in my ears, I changed my business to a brokerage service for members of the Aston Martin Owners Club and Aston Martin owners everywhere.

After 30 years as a broker, I have to say it was one of my best decisions. I still enjoy specialising in Aston Martin Lagonda cars and look forward to coming to my desk each day. I believe I have met more owners across our world than I would have done as a dealer. Our extensive archives have been key in selling and acquiring some exceptional cars.

I firmly believe that people buy people and our skills in preparation, presentation and marketing, enhances an owner's return on investment. The principal of providing a service of consideration, honesty transparency and respect, ensures we remain profitable and in business. And being able to bring what is now 50 years of front-line experience at the coalface of sales, I can offer a great deal to my clients.



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