

AUCTIONS

Prototype for a dynasty – David Brown's Aston Martin DB Mk II

[Kurt Ernst](#) on at 8:59 am



SHARE     

Photos by Mathieu Heurtault, copyright and courtesy of Gooding & Company.

The Aston Martin brand dates to 1913, and the company produced its first automobile in 1915. Its modern lineage, however, begins with David Brown's purchase of the company in 1947, and 70 years later, his impact is still seen in the styling and performance of Aston Martin automobiles. The first model to carry today's familiar shape was the 1950 DB2, and next month, a [1949 DB Mk II prototype](#) once used as a daily driver by Brown heads to auction at Amelia Island, part of the Gooding & Company sale.

In 1939, Gordon Sutherland and Claude Hill created the Aston Martin Atom, a futuristic four-door prototype saloon car that featured a tubular steel space frame clad in aluminum alloy bodywork. Originally powered by 2.0-liter, overhead-camshaft four-cylinder engine sourced from the Aston Martin 15/98, in 1944 the Atom received an all-new 2.0-liter, overhead-valve four-cylinder with a larger bore and a shorter stroke. Slightly less powerful than its predecessor, the new engine was reportedly smoother, simpler, and more engaging to drive.



It was time behind the wheel of the Atom that convinced industrialist Brown to purchase Aston Martin for the sum of £20,500, after seeing a classified advertisement for a “high class motor business” in London’s *The Times* newspaper. Sutherland and Hill were retained as employees and instructed to begin development of a new Aston Martin model, to be based upon the Atom prototype. Meanwhile, Brown arranged the purchase of automaker Lagonda’s assets (for £52,000), knowing that its recently developed 2.6-liter inline six-cylinder engine would be a good match for future Aston Martin automobiles.

The first product to come from the “new” Aston Martin was the 2-Litre Sports, a two-seat roadster introduced in 1948. Styled by Frank Feeley, it was reminiscent of the Atom yet more conventional in appearance, thanks in part to a traditional grille, and powered by the same 2-liter four added to the Atom in 1944. The model might have been a success, but for the concurrent introduction of the Jaguar XK120, a higher-performance model priced at £500 less than the Aston Martin.



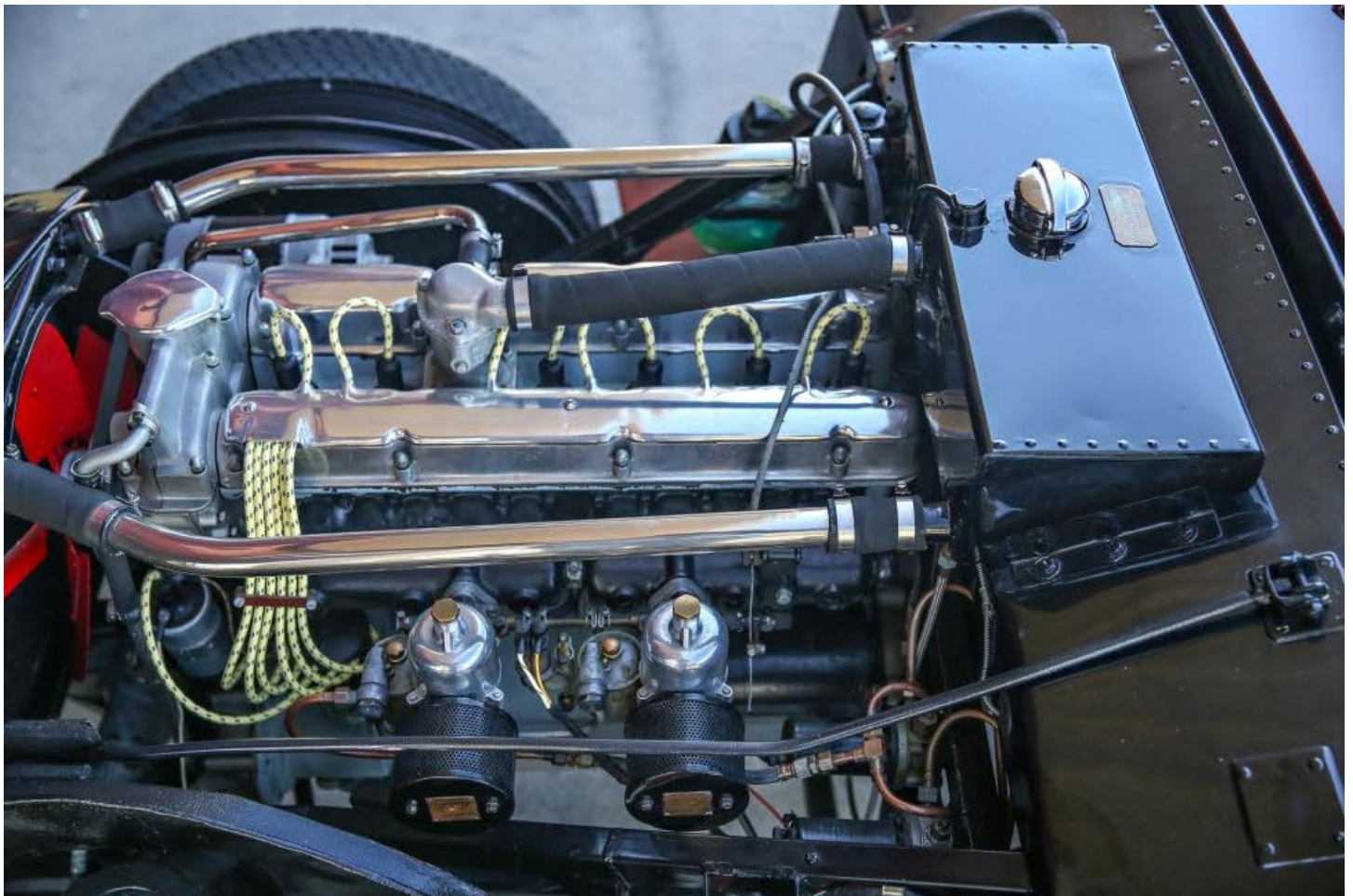
Feeley's next project was a coupe prototype, three of which were developed for the 1949 running of the 24 Hours of Le Mans, the first time the event had been held since 1939. These were called the DB Mk II, or simply the DB2, a nod to being the second car developed by Aston Martin during the David Brown era (following the commercial introduction of the DB2, the 2-Litre Sports model became known as the DB1). For the race, two DB2 prototypes (entered by privateer teams) would be powered by Aston Martin's 2-liter four, while a third (the sole factory entry) would receive the 2.6-liter inline six from Lagonda.

Glory for Aston Martin at Le Mans was not to be, at least in 1949. The six-cylinder DB2 suffered a water pump failure and retired after just six laps, while one of the two privateer DB2s, running in fourth place and without brakes, crashed heavily 21 hours into the race. Driver Pierre Marechal was severely injured, and succumbed to his injuries the following day. The sole bit of good news for Aston Martin was delivered by the remaining privateer DB2 team, which finished seventh overall and third in the 2.0-liter class.



Two additional DB2 prototype coupes were created, including chassis LML/49/4, the car to be offered in Amelia Island. Bridging the gap from prototype to production, these cars were constructed with taller roofs (to improve egress) and reshaped fenders for easier production. Like the three earlier prototypes, these used a tubular steel frame and an aluminum alloy body, and rode on a wheelbase nine-inches shorter than the 2-Liter Sports roadster.

Officially a works prototype, chassis LML/49/4 was used for testing and development, and for publicity purposes when not being driven by Brown. Like the works entry at Le Mans (and later, production DB2 models), it was powered by the Lagonda LB6 engine, a dual-overhead camshaft, inline-six cylinder that produced 105 brake horsepower when fed by a pair of SU carburetors. A four-speed David Brown transmission sent torque to the rear wheels, and 12-inch drum brakes were used in all four corners. The front suspension consisted of trailing arms with coil springs and an anti-roll bar, while out back the live axle received coil springs, trailing arms and a Panhard rod.



In early 1950, LML/49/4 was sold to racer Lance Macklin, who entered the car in the Coppa Inter-Europa in March, finishing second in class. The following month, Macklin campaigned the coupe in the Targa Florio with co-driver John Gordon, but crashed chasing Alberto Ascari's Ferrari 195S. Shipped back to the factory for repairs, Macklin was forced to sell LML/49/4 to cover the cost of the car's rebuilding.

Its competition days largely over, the prototype DB2 once driven by Brown and raced by Macklin has spent the last 67 years under the care of various collectors in the U.K., Europe and the Far East. Returned to Aston Martin Works for a comprehensive restoration completed in 1992, the coupe has since appeared at significant concours events such as Villa d'Este (in 2010), Pebble Beach (in 2015), and Windsor Castle (in 2016). In 2013, it participated in Aston Martin's Centennial celebration, and in 2010, ran in the revival of the Mille Miglia.



With a shape that traces its lineage through models like the DB5 into contemporary Aston Martins, direct ties to David Brown, and a period racing history, chassis LML/49/4 is sure to be coveted by serious collectors of the marque. Gooding & Company predicts a selling price between \$1.5 million and \$2.25 million when the car crosses the auction stage in Florida on Friday, March 10.

The Amelia Island Auction takes place at Racquet Park in the Omni Amelia Island Plantation. For additional details, visit GoodingCo.com.

□ [23 Comments](#) | [Leave a Reply](#)