

DRIVEN



Aston Martin DBS

Licensed to thrill.

■ OSSINING, NEW YORK

As this is written, the latest James Bond flick, *Quantum of Solace*, is exploding across movie screens, and once again Daniel Craig's Agent 007 is at the wheel of an Aston Martin DBS. Unfortunately, the car doesn't fare much better than the DBS in 2006's *Casino Royale*, which 007 managed to total after just a brief spin. (One wonders how much Aston Martin paid for this privilege, and whether the brand's marketers read the scripts.)

Those whose Astons are not government issued probably treat the DBS, the most expensive and exclusive Aston Martin, a bit more carefully. It commands an eye-watering \$100,000 premium over the DB9 on which it's based. True, the DBS is extensively reworked underneath its rippling, muscular skin. Carbon fiber in the hood, door surrounds, trunk lid, and trunk compartment—not to mention more noticeable but less structural areas like the door armrests, the outside mirror supports, and the rear

diffuser—helps the DBS travel some 200 pounds lighter than the DB9. The car's V-12 engine is bumped up from 469 hp to 510 hp, the net effect being that the DBS shaves 0.3 second off the DB9's factory-measured 0-to-62-mph time, with the max Aston blasting to that speed in 4.3 seconds on its way to 191 mph. **New this year is an optional six-speed, paddleshifted automatic transmission (a true manual remains standard) and an audiophile-quality Bang & Olufsen sound system, complete with tweeters that rise up out of the dash.**

As much as we enjoy a good ear-bleeding stereo, we'd rather listen to the roar of the V-12, spurred by a stomp on the gas pedal and a few quick taps at the downshift paddle. The resultant explosive burst of acceleration sends the traction control system scrambling to keep the rear wheels in line, as the power can easily overwhelm the grip of even these massive, 11.6-inch-wide tires. In less frantic driving, the transmission can be left in drive, in which it does a convincingly smooth approximation of a conventional automatic.

Typical of an Aston Martin, the cabin is as coolly stylish as a dinner jacket and is heavy on the Alcantara suede. In place of the standard package area behind the front seats, buyers can choose a pair of kid-sized rear buckets, which add a modicum of practicality to what remains a very self-indulgent machine. — JOE LORIO



The Specs

ON SALE: Now
PRICE: \$265,000/
\$276,260
(base/as tested)
ENGINE: 5.9L V-12,
510 hp, 420 lb-ft
DRIVE: Rear-wheel

AROUND THE BLOCK In Three People Movers

■ Ford Expedition

The Expedition just might be the best of a dying breed. The full-figured Ford is more refined than a Chevrolet Suburban and has a more useful interior than a Toyota Land Cruiser. Second- and third-row seats fold flat and make room for large items that simply don't fit in many other vehicles. The biggest letdown is the 5.4-liter V-8's inability to provide decent acceleration in return for its decidedly indecent fuel consumption.



■ Volkswagen Touareg TDI

Tired of your mid-size SUV's thirst for fuel? VW is betting that you are, and it thinks the Touareg TDI is the answer. With 407 lb-ft of torque on tap, the 3.0-liter turbo-diesel produces more twist than the Touareg's optional gasoline V-8 but uses less fuel than even the base six-cylinder engine. EPA fuel economy ratings are 17/25 mpg, and the torquey turbo-diesel can tow an impressive 7700 pounds.



■ Dodge Grand Caravan

Dodge has infused a bit of "German engineering" into the 4.0-liter V-6-equipped Grand Caravan by giving it suspension tuning similar to the VW Routan. Unfortunately, ride and handling remain a weak point. There's still much to love, however, in the van's packaging. As ever, it hauls people, cargo, and any combination of the two with aplomb, and the multimedia hands-free system is one of the best in the business.

