

THE ASTON MARTIN EXPERIENCE

by Caroline Pover

Enjoying the high life in a sexy Aston Martin.



Image: Richard Pover-Foullkes

I've always said that Japan is a great place to live, and for many reasons: it's generally safe, the people are usually friendly, and there are so many opportunities to meet interesting people and do interesting things. I'm lucky enough to often be presented with opportunities to do things I would never have had the chance to do back home, and I started off this year with one of them!

When Colin Shea of Tokyo Car Club invited me to drive an Aston Martin for a day, I must admit that at first I turned him down. Cars just aren't my thing. All I really care about is the colour and whether it feels nice to drive, and I am oblivious to any flashy gadgets others may be pointing out. I don't even drive my husband's Fairlady, and I'm not into "brands," so it took me about 12 months to remember what kind of car it was. The last time I drove a car on a regular basis was before I came to Japan over 13 years ago, and that was a red Mini van, so decrepit that the driver's window fell on my head if I didn't close the door carefully, the wheel-arch had rusted to the extent that if

My verdict: THIS is what driving is supposed to feel like, in every way!

you sat in the back you could watch the ground moving beneath you, and once I drove off leaving my mother standing at the side of the road with the passenger door in her hands. I'm not what you would call a car connoisseur.

So I didn't realise exactly what kind of opportunity Colin, along with Matthew Bennett at Aston Martin, was offering me until I casually mentioned it to the husband, when he got yet another opportunity to wonder, albeit with mixed feelings, how he ended up with a wife who is just not into the finer things in life. "Each one is totally handmade!" "It's THE top of the range sports car in the world!" "JAMES BOND DRIVES THEM!" OK, now I'm interested.

So, with the husband and BAB co-publisher Emily (a car fanatic) in tow, I picked up a V8

Vantage convertible from Atlantic Cars in Azabudai, and spent a day driving it around Tokyo and the outskirts.

Driving Miss Emily:

The first thing we did was drive over to the house of Sannah, the third girl in our little gang, who loves expensive grown-up toys but had recently

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given birth so couldn't hang out for the day. I think everybody oohed and aahed over the car more than the newborn, who was immediately placed in the front seat for her first photo (and I am sure not her last) in an Aston Martin. Then off Emily and I went on our quest to find out what the Aston Martin experience is all about.

It soon seemed to me that it was all about attention! I still can't work out if it was the fact that there were two women driving the Aston Martin, two *foreign* women driving it, or the car itself that attracted the level of attention we got. From little boys to granddads, the male

of the species had no qualms about staring as we drove past. People always say that men buy cars to attract women, but I have news for you gentlemen, we're not the ones looking at them! And those two young men in Roppongi Hills were very lucky we were in a two-seater because I swear Emily would have hauled them in the back. Instead, it was off to show her husband, stating "I've had three kids—I'm sure I'm due one of these."

Emily's verdict: "Incredibly empowering to be women driving the kind of car you usually only see a man at the wheel of."

Driving The Husband:

He enjoyed the pose factor too, insisting we had lunch at the Grand Hyatt to take advantage of the valet parking, and in the hope that several

(full) limousine buses were in the vicinity. There weren't, but Richard's disappointment quickly disappeared when I lost the parking ticket and he got to say the words "It's the blue Aston Martin" to the concierge.

Mainly for him, though, it was all about the noise. On our way out of Tokyo we reached an empty tunnel so I hit the gas hard. Suddenly Richard's hand thrust into the air and I realised he was recording the engine on his iPhone. I couldn't stop laughing but I have to admit, this car makes the most incredible sound—not aggressively loud and annoying like most sports cars, but gentle in its power—and I cannot believe I am writing this, but it was rather sexy.

Richard's verdict: "I totally understand why men buy this car. It actually makes you feel like you have a bigger penis."

The experience of driving an Aston Martin for the day was, for someone who thought she

wasn't into cars, a reawakening. I had forgotten how much I used to love driving and how much I used to love driving *fast*. The long, empty roads in the countryside outside of Tokyo lend themselves well to getting some speed up yet you stay relaxed because the V8 is so comfortable. I used to tense up a bit when driving for an extended period of time and ended up with really tight shoulders—instead I felt very much at home throughout.

This car is so beautiful to drive that you actually forget how beautiful it is to look at, until you get out and just want to stare at it. Of course, the interior is as luxurious as you'd expect, the gadgets are all top of the range (there is a very cool button for starting the engine), and Aston Martin manages to make it all very sophisticated without being intimidating.

While parked back in Tokyo, sitting at the wheel, and admiring all the suede and leather, a male friend appears from nowhere with a big kiss saying: "I've always wanted to kiss a beautiful woman driving an Aston Martin."

My verdict: *THIS is what driving is supposed to feel like, in every way!*

BAB

For more information, visit Aston Martin (www.astonmartin.com), or look into the Tokyo Car Club (www.tokyoautotrading.com/carclub.html). Contact Colin Shea for your new or pre treasured Aston Martin, kisses not included. Email: motors@gol.com or tel. 090-8773-0907.