Aston Martin DBX – Road Test

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The Aston Martin DBX premium SUV – built in Wales

Aston Martin is a survivor in a world of hard knocks and is looking for a smoother ride with their latest DBX sports utility vehicle, *writes Robin Roberts (and Miles Better News Agency).*

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After 100 years of making some of the most sought after sports cars in the world it has applied its knowledge to what it sees as a family car, albeit for a well off family.

Keen to blend practicality with performance and panache, there are very few rivals. It entered the market in 2020 against the Bentley Bentayga and Lamborghini Urus with little else to touch it except for the most expensive and up-specced SUVs from Germany's heavyweights.

The DBX is the first product of Aston Martin Lagonda's new assembly plant at St Athan, in the Vale of Glamorgan west of Cardiff, which has recruited about 700 employees to build the car.

At the DBX launch in November 2019 the DBX immediately impressed, with its curvaceousness concealing its size and abundant room for five in a truly luxurious cabin fitted out in quality leather, fine woods and composite detailing.

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The size immediately impresses but it’s all done so well it can trick the eyes into thinking it is actually smaller than it is.

Open the front doors and a small kick-plate plaque tells you it’s built in Wales before your eyes take in sumptuous seating, chilled and heated on the test car, with its double stitching leading the eyes over the full width leather wrapped fascia. The instruments are big and clear with a 12.5-inch screen displaying speedometer and tachometer, dials for water temperature and fuel level and some clever multi-function displays between them, displaying what the driver wishes for trip or fuel consumption.

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A 10.5-inch central infotainment display handles the navigation, communications, cabin comfort and entertainment settings and they are big, clearly shown touch buttons with quick responses.

The usual secondary controls for lights and wipers on stalk or buttons are close to hand on the wheel, the column or lower fascia, with windows and mirror buttons on the driver’s door and there are a few buttons on the console which needed a glance down from the road ahead. These select the mode responses and ride height which are then displayed between the speedo and tacho. A driver can choose to move out of the normal ride mode into two sport settings or two terrain settings to cope with anything the DBX faces, lowering or raising the vehicle in seconds.

Paddles on the column can be used if the driver does not want to let the nine-speed automatic transmission do its own thing, which it accomplishes with truly exceptional smoothness and speed whether going up or down. I liked the Sport+ mode’s throttle crackle when selected.

The bought-in Mercedes-Benz V8 4.0 litre petrol engine is incredibly smooth and a perfect powerhouse for the DBX, delivering immediate pulling power, sustained torque when accelerating or overtaking and exceptional high speed cruising ability. You are aware of engine noise but it is muted unless you open the throttle and it has a lovely note anyway.

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Up or downchanges are incredibly smooth and you never seem to want for a gear to do anything. Even in manual mode the selection is designed to show the driver to the best of skills even if they are not, and all the time you have that wonderful response from the engine, in my case which carried a sign-off plate attributed to Ian Tapper. Well done Ian.

Aston Martins have always been renowned for their handling if not their ride, but the DBX crosses the boundary and beautifully blends the two. This is a comfortable and capable SUV with sports car handling underneath whether in normal or sporting modes. I would have liked a smaller turning circle for urban use but it is fine on winding country roads and motorways and the enormous brakes provide extremely strong retardation with utter control and no drama.

Slowing and stopping is effortless and precise while the DBX’s positioning is pin-point on

the road and there’s no rolling or pitching to deter a driver. Mid-corner bumps never threw it off-line and it was not unsettled by undulating roads or coarse surfaces. The handling was what I’d expect of a sporting Aston Martin, but with greater comfort complementing its composure.

The big wheels and tyres really give it a firm footing for the permanent 4×4 system to do its best on slippery wintry winding ways and inspire great confidence, but they also generate the only real noise source in the car without extending the engine’s performance. Wind and other mechanical noises are absent or very low.

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As mentioned, the DBX is a full five seater and a luxurious one at that with wide opening doors a little rise to get inside and a knee-height loadbed in the carpeted back which is a good shape and size. It’s easy to get loaded with seat-backs which can be releases from the

behind the tailgate to make the most of the split 40/20/40 set up.

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The front seats have multi-adjustable electric settings including lumbar and the column adjusts for height and reach as well to precisely tailor the driving position to individual taste. The rear seats are less deeply shaped but still very comfortable and they all securely locate occupants during cornering.

Room is excellent throughout and the test car's full-length glass sunroof is one of the biggest in any car while the powered windows and comprehensive heating and ventilation system make a very comfortable environment.

There's good vision to front and sides as a result of the low waistline and big windows, intelligent headlights add a good measure of safety with their range and width and the front wipers quickly clear the screen.

Reversing can be a little tricky as the rear flanks and high tail need a cautious eye over them and the sensors and camera do a good job helping when parking.

In performance terms the DBX is very quick thanks to the use of lightweight materials for its integral chassis and body and it leaps into action with the lightest throttle pressure, stays planted on the road and gobbles up the miles.

Over about 260 miles we recorded between 22 and 26 mpg, but heavy use pushed it down very quickly. Drive with some restraint on a motorway and you can expect to get near the top of this bracket.

VERDICT

Aston Martin has been very brave to enter the SUV sector but it will open up a new customer base for them and probably see existing owners buy one for their winter needs.

All that amassed knowledge over 100 years has produced a remarkable SUV by modern

standards. Whether or not the DBX will be the car of choice for Aston Martin's best known driver, James Bond, remains to be seen, but it certainly stirs if it does not shake a driver.

For: Rare, refined, fast, superb powertrain, sharp handling, smooth ride, responsive.

Against: Tyre and road noises, big to park, some blind spots, expensive to buy and run.

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Milestones and Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

Aston Martin DBX premium SUV

Price: £158,000 (as tested £184,335)

Mechanical: 542 bhp 4.0 litre V8 turbo, 700 Nm (516 lb.ft) at 2,200 to 5,000 rpm, 9 speed, AWD

Max Speed: 181 mph

0 – 62 mph: 4.5 sec

Combined MPG: 19.8 (24 mpg on test)

Insurance Group: *TBA*

C02 emissions: 323 g/km

Taxation costs: BiK company car tax 37%, First Year VED £2,175 then £150 + £325 Standard rate annually for 5-years as it costs over £40k.

Warranty: 2 yrs/ unlimited mileage

Size: L 5.04 m (16.54 ft), W 2.05 m (6.73 ft), H 1.68 m (5.51 ft)

Bootspace: 632 litres (22.32 cu.ft)

Kerbweight: 2,245 kg (4,949 lb)