

ASTON MARTIN SETS THE BENCHMARK
FOR COMFORT AND CAPABILITY.

THE BEST-HANDING, BEST-RIDING LUXURY SUV IN THE WORLD? PROBABLY.

WORDS ANGUS MACKENZIE

The guttural V-8 growl is as familiar as the iconic winged logo on the leather-clad steering wheel. But overlaying it are sounds never before heard in an Aston Martin: a distant ticking of gravel peppering the underside, the muffled thud of rubber on rock, the swoosh of muddy water cascading over the hood.

We're dancing an Aston Martin DBX prototype through the wilderness of Oman, on the southeastern coast of the Arabian Peninsula. It feels right at home.

We've covered the oily bits of Aston's first-ever SUV on MotorTrend.com, but here's a quick recap: The DBX is built on a brand-new all-aluminum body structure engineered and developed in-house at Aston Martin.

Under the hood is the ubiquitous 4.0-liter twin-turbo V-8 that powers sundry Mercedes-AMG models as well as versions of Aston's own DB11 and Vantage sports cars. Developing 542 hp and 516 lb-ft of torque, it's hooked up to Daimler's smooth nine-speed automatic and a performance version of the company's 4Matic all-wheel-drive system, with an active center differential and rear e-diff.

Suspension is by way of triple-chamber air springs with active anti-roll, and 22-inch wheels are standard.

The DBX we're driving is what Aston calls a 1PT—a first production-trial build—which means it's one of the first cars to come off the line at the newly opened factory in St. Athan, Wales.

Riding shotgun is Aston Martin vehicle attribute engineering chief Matt Becker, who points out the steering and suspension calibrations are still being finalized, as is the software that controls the pops and bangs from the exhaust in Sport+ mode. Otherwise—apart from the usual manufacturing process tweaks to ensure things like the door fits and wiper locations are optimized to reduce wind noise—it's close to the final spec of the DBXs that will arrive in the U.S. in the second half of the year.

Prepare to be impressed. The DBX is quick—claimed 0–60 acceleration takes 4.3 seconds en route to a top speed of 181 mph. It doesn't really feel like it, though, perhaps because we're now spoiled for choice when it comes to 500-plus-horsepower SUVs (see also page 58).

And it will go around corners. Becker says it will pull more than 1.00 g lateral



The Aston Martin DBX has an impressively roomy and properly luxurious interior.



acceleration on all-season tires and 1.20 g on summer tires. But it's the ride and refinement that sets it apart from every other luxury SUV on the market today.

With the triple-chamber air suspension in its normal GT mode, the DBX flows down the road—any road, regardless of surface—with remarkable poise. Its primary ride has a beautiful, oily plushness, enhanced by a 120.5-inch wheelbase that's just 0.4 inch shy of that of the new Chevy Tahoe. Superb rebound damping delicately yet precisely checks upward body motions, like a rising balloon being checked with a gentle tug on its string. Despite the 22-inch low-profile Pirelli Scorpion Zero all-season tires (285/40 front and 325/35 rear), impact harshness is well suppressed. There's only the merest hint of noise and patter over small, sharp lumps and bumps.

What's extraordinary is all that comfort doesn't come at the expense of cornering. Turning off the gravel road and onto two-lane tarmac that twisted and heaved through Oman's rocky moonscape revealed the DBX to be an SUV that drives much smaller than it actually is.



At 198.4 inches long, 78.7 inches wide, and 66.1 inches tall, it's closer to a Bentley Bentayga than a Porsche Cayenne, but it reacts to inputs with the fluid grace of a genuine *gran turismo*. It makes a standard Range Rover—shorter, narrower, and with 5.5 inches less in the wheelbase—feel like a linebacker with a busted knee.

All-aluminum construction helps. Aston claims the DBX weighs around 4,950 pounds. That's 140 pounds less than our last Cayenne Turbo, some 350 less than a Bentayga V8, and 862 less than a fully loaded Range Rover SV Autobiography.

But the key enabling technology is the ZF active anti-roll system, which can deploy up to 1,032 lb-ft of torque to twist both the front and rear anti-roll bars

against the cornering forces and keep the DBX flat through corners while allowing the long-travel suspension to do its thing. By comparison, Porsche's only goes to 811 lb-ft on the rear axle of the Cayenne.

There's never the sense you have to make allowances for the DBX's mass or high center of gravity, especially on change of direction, as you do in other big, fast SUVs, even with the suspension in GT, the softest setting. There's a little more busyness to the ride in Sport+, but the high output of the anti-roll system delivers greater rear axle roll stiffness, allowing power oversteer thanks to the 4Matic system that routinely sends up to 100 percent of the drive to the rear axle and no more than 47 percent to the front.

There's also none of the slightly artificial turn-in response you get from SUVs with rear-wheel steering, primarily because the DBX doesn't have it. Although the weighting and off-center gain of the steering had yet to be finalized on the prototype we drove, the 14:1 steering ratio—which splits the difference between the 16:1 ratio used in the Lamborghini Urus and the 12:1 ratio of the Cayenne Turbo—delivered just the right balance of response and stability.

Becker calls the DBX “the most complex car I've ever done” in terms of dynamic development. The systems integration—making the powertrain, suspension, steering, and braking control systems work together to deliver the right blend of ride and handling—was a major challenge.

Starting from an all-new architecture allowed Aston engineers to put the suspension hard points where they wanted them, to push the wheels right out to the corners of the car, delivering truly impressive interior room while shrink-wrapping the sheetmetal around the occupants. But it also meant, Becker says, every detail had to be thought through.

“What I'm most proud of is the level of body control and ride comfort the car has, as well as handling performance,” says Becker, who began his career honing the handling of Lotus sports cars.

And rightly so. Quite simply, the DBX sets a new benchmark in terms of its balance between ride comfort and dynamic capability. It's as profound a line in the sand as the original Range Rover was in relation to its contemporaries; it's the SUV whose manners all others will now be judged against.

Yes, some are faster, some are more powerful, and some will grip even more tenaciously. But in the round, regardless of the road, the Aston Martin DBX drives better than any other luxury performance SUV on the market today. Period. ■



2020 Aston Martin DBX

BASE PRICE	\$192,986
VEHICLE LAYOUT	Front-engine, AWD, 5-pass, 4-door SUV
ENGINE	4.0L/542-hp/516-lb-ft twin-turbo DOHC 32-valve V-8
TRANSMISSION	9-speed automatic
CURB WEIGHT	4,950 lb (mfr)
WHEELBASE	120.5 in
LENGTH X WIDTH X HEIGHT	198.4 x 78.7 x 66.1 in
0-60 MPH	4.3 sec (MT est)
EPA CITY/HWY/COMB FUEL ECON	Not yet rated
ON SALE IN U.S.	Late 2020