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GO CARS

EDITED BY MATTHEW JONES

CARS

Sea change: Developed by Aston Martin's in-house motoring experts, the 37ft-long AK37 can reach 50 knots on open water

'I'm as cynical as you about badge engineering. If I hadn't been able to design this boat, we wouldn't have built it'

Marek Reichman, Aston Martin

THE BIRTH OF NEPTUNE

Aston Martin's first offering to the sea gods is making waves with the same spirit and strength as the marque's most famous road-farers

STORY BY Jason Barlow

CARS

Short of buying a football team or a private island, the motion of the ocean is what really separates the men from the boys. Russian coal and fertiliser big shot Andrey Melnichenko recently decided that, despite its magnificent Philippe Starck design, heli-pad and bombproof glazing, the 390ft Motor Yacht A wasn't really cutting the mustard. So he's upgraded to the 469ft Sailing Yacht A, whose triple carbon mast configuration and sail area equivalent to a football pitch give it unassailable bragging rights. That's unless Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, president of the UAE, is in town: his yacht, Azzam, is currently the world's longest at 590ft.

Aston Martin's £1.6 million AM37 – so called because it's 37ft long – is a tiddler in the superyacht realm; in fact, your vessel needs to be twice that length and professionally crewed to qualify for the title. But in a world in which every premium brand dreams of lucrative life beyond its core business, an Aston Martin powerboat is a big statement of intent. Thankfully, it's no opportunistic cash-grab; the AM37 is an all-new design from an all-new company, Southampton-based Quintessence Yachts.

"I'm as cynical as you about badge engineering," Aston's chief creative officer, Marek Reichman, tells me. "If I hadn't been able to design this boat, we wouldn't have done it. We've had various approaches over the years, but Quintessence wanted to do it differently. It's as important that this was a ground-up new boat as much as the AM-RB 001 is a new car and I didn't want to compromise. It's an opportunity to challenge the norms of an industry."

Dutch naval architect Bas Mulder drafted the AM37's technical configuration and Quintessence worked



Maiden voyage:
The AM37 in
Monaco Harbour

with Reichman's team to develop the design. Quintessence's CEO, Mariella Mengozzi, is a veteran of Disney and Ferrari. "There are pros and cons, going into business with a start-up," she admits. "But sometimes when you work with leading brands there are constraints. A new company will work a lot harder; you are more flexible and more committed."

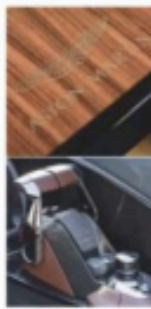
The challenge was to create a powerboat that would double as a day cruiser, but the end result has excess fitness for purpose. Its backbone is carbon fibre, with an outer skin in fibreglass. The structure is vacuum-infused and uses epoxy resin bonding, another technique bequeathed to the project by the automotive side. It's handmade, mostly created in-house, and the carbon fibre ensures rigidity. The AM37 weighs 7.5 tonnes "light ship", although if the 800 litre fuel tanks are full it's a lot heavier. It's good for 50 knots (57mph), which is enough to get your attention if the "sea state" is unpredictable.

The visual standout is the curved windscreen, a complicated structural

NEED TO KNOW

The AM37 has a concave hull rather than a convex one, and an archway effect on the stern means that water exits the rear more efficiently.

ENGINE
50 knots (57mph)
PRICE £1.6 million
CONTACT
astonmartin.com



element that's on the same continuum as Aston Martin's cars. Aston called in some of its tier-one suppliers to ensure aesthetic and brand synergy, so the wood, leather and carbon fibre elements in the cabin are all peerless. The steering wheel is carved out of a single stainless steel billet. The digital instruments live behind a fully waterproof and heat resistant 15-inch HD screen. Three carbon panels can be manoeuvred into different positions above the main deck, or hidden away beneath the rear deck via a button or app. Even the anchor's design is so new Quintessence is planning to patent it. Everything is bespoke, apart from the air vents, the microwave and fridge. There's a 48-inch screen in the cabin, backed up by a server capable of storing 1,500 movies.

Quintessence's head of operations, Stefan Whitmarsh has worked for many industry big names, experience he backs up with a parallel career as an offshore powerboat racer. This particular AM37 is a priceless prototype, so he doesn't go too nuts. We're riding the waves a mile or two off Monaco at about 35 knots and two things are apparent: the boat handles chop and swell with ease and it feels remarkably stable. And even at a fair lick you don't get wet. There are two 520bhp Mercury marine petrol engines, rather than an Aston V8 or V12, which sounds unromantic but means the AM37 can be serviced anywhere in the world. It's also so over-engineered that it can handle way more power than it's currently got, which is promising.

The Aston team worked hard to give it car-like ergonomics, so the throttle control has a seamless weight to it, and the view ahead is vastly better than usual. As Reichman notes, "the better you can see, the more in control you feel, the faster you tend to go..."

FOUR DOORS GOOD



ALFA ROMEO predates Ferrari. In fact, Enzo Ferrari got his big break running the Alfa Romeo Grand Prix racing team in the Thirties. In 1947, he set up on his own and when Scuderia Ferrari beat Alfa Romeo not long after, Enzo wailed operatically, "I have killed my mother."

In 1980, he toyed with the idea of building a four-door saloon, but decided that Ferrari could never do such a dreary thing. Slide behind the wheel of the new Alfa Romeo Giulia QV, though, and you can feel the contemporary Ferrari DNA coursing through it in a way the old man would approve of. This isn't coincidental. The new Giulia's development was overseen by a hand-picked team of the company's top engineers, many of whom had worked on various Ferraris, including the 458 Speciale, possibly the best Ferrari ever, and certainly possessor of one of the great engines of all time.

And that makes this one of the greatest Alfas ever. The engine is a glorious twin-turbo, 2.9-litre, 503bhp V6, the chassis is a clever mix of aluminium and steel, and the roof and bonnet are made of carbon, as are the various bits of aerodynamic addenda. Like modern Ferraris, the Alfa's steering is lightning-fast and inspires you to engage with the machine and the whole experience of driving in a way that increasingly anaesthetised modern cars don't. Fun, I think, is the word. Even the eight-speed, dual-clutch auto heightens the emotion rather than numbing it or dumbing it down. The Giulia QV is also as pretty a four-door saloon as anyone has managed in years, though the interior is patchy. That apart, what we have here is a car that channels Fellini and Ferrari in equal measure, and stirs some much needed soul into the business of getting from A to B. JB £59,000. alfa Romeo.co.uk