

AUTOMOTIVE

Aston Martin translates sports car DNA into debut SUV

November 21, 2019



Aston Martin DBX. Image courtesy of Aston Martin

By SARAH JONES

British automaker Aston Martin has become the latest luxury car marque to get into the sport utility vehicle game, as the 106-year-old brand seeks to expand its global sales.

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Following in the footsteps of Lamborghini, Rolls-Royce, Bentley and other luxury automakers who translated their DNA into SUVs, Aston Martin has unveiled its DBX. The five-seater SUV is designed to introduce a new audience of consumers to the Aston Martin brand by catering to a diversity of lifestyles.

"SUVs print money for automakers these days since that's what consumers globally are demanding," said David Undercoffler, editor in chief of [Autolist](#), San Francisco.

"Aston's brand has considerable equity since it's been building ultra-sexy sports cars for decades and wealthy buyers know and respect the Aston name," he said. "This could easily be the best-selling Aston in the brand's history, and in fact the automaker needs it to be just that."

Mr. Undercoffler is not affiliated with Aston Martin, but agreed to comment as an industry expert. [Aston Martin](#) was reached for comment.

Brand extension

Aston Martin's DBX began in 2015 with virtual development. The automaker started with a clean slate and built a dedicated SUV platform, which enabled it to tailor the chassis to the needs of its customers.

Touches of Aston Martin's sports car engineering are woven into the DBX. For instance, the car is made of bonded aluminum, and the car has been made with adaptive air suspension to enable handling that more closely resembles a car that is lower to the ground.

DBX's design also keeps elements of consistency from the brand's other models, with a tailgate that mimics the look of the Vantage and the signature grille at the front.

The model can go from 0 to 60mph in 4.5 seconds, and it can reach a top speed of 181mph.

Along with being Aston Martin's first SUV, this is the first model from the company to include five seats, opening the potential for the DBX to be used as a family car. The cabin and trunk were designed to be roomy, despite a low roofline, and the focus of the interior design is on both driver and passenger comfort.

Leveraging its experience using space effectively in its comparatively compact sports cars, Aston Martin has created a car with what it says is best in class leg room.

The automaker consulted with children, having them test out the back seating.

Six months were spent considering the positioning of the driver to enable optimal visibility.

Aston Martin also asked its Female Advisory Board of high-net-worth individuals for their input. One of the touches in the cockpit is a bridged center console that can house a handbag, enabling purses to be stored more securely and out of the way.



Interior of Aston Martin's DBX. Image courtesy of Aston Martin

The DBX has also been designed to help drivers carry a significant amount of items in the trunk, whether it is luggage or sporting equipment.

Consumers can purchase 11 accessory packages that are geared towards certain lifestyles and needs.

For instance, a Pet package includes features such as a bumper to protect the paint from paws and a portable washtub. Another option caters to skiers with a roof rack, ski bag and boot warmer.



Aston Martin's DBX Pet package. Image courtesy of Aston Martin

Other packages are designed for parents doing school drop-offs, travelers and entertainers with features such as organizers, luggage sets and hampers.

Priced at \$189,900, the DBX will be the first Aston Martin produced at the company's second factory in St. Athan, Wales. The model is part of the third and last pillar of the brand's Second Century strategy, which focuses on expanding its portfolio.

Introducing the DBX, Aston Martin teamed with Great Guns filmmaker Daisy Zhou to create a visual representation of the car. The film depicts the DBX through the eyes of a child, presenting the car as a being that is about to be uncaged.

Aston Martin's DBX launch film

"The DBX should do well by capitalizing on the understated sports car heritage of Aston," Mr. Undercoffler said. "It's positioned as a performance SUV but at the same time one that's big enough to carry five passengers comfortably and serve as a practical yet classy daily driver.

"It's less garish than the Lamborghini Urus, more engaging than the Bentley Bentayga and more upscale than the Porsche Cayenne Turbo S E-Hybrid," he said.

SUV sales

The car brand has made a number of moves into new categories.

Aston Martin is extending its branding to a two-wheeled vehicle with the debut of its first motorcycle.

Developed in partnership with Brough Superior, the motorbike made its first appearance at EICMA this November. After adding a submarine and other lifestyle offerings, Aston Martin is enabling its enthusiasts to engage with the brand in another category ([see story](#)).

Sales of sport utility vehicles dominated the luxury car market in 2018, but the gap between high-end and mass-market SUVs is narrowing.

More than 1 million luxury vehicles were sold that year, 62 percent of which were SUVs, according to a report from Edmunds. Growing availability of high-end SUVs has driven this trend, but the price gap between luxury and mainstream vehicles has also shrunk 10 percent in the last decade ([see story](#)).

"SUVs are the growth sector globally," said Callum MacRae, director of automotive product development at

GlobalData. "This is the case in the U.S., China, Europe, India, etc. For example, in China SUV share of the market was just over 16 percent in 2012 but by 2018 this had climbed to 42.5 percent. Even in the U.S., a more established SUV market, share climbed from 31.3 percent in 2012 to 46 percent in 2018.

"Second, operating exclusively as a sports car manufacturer Aston Cygnet aside in its 100-plus years as a company it's lived a hand-to-mouth existence. Whatever it's done in the sports car category volume has been variable and it couldn't push past 3,000 a year to become a consistently profitable company.

"An SUV could deliver a long-term sustainable business for [Aston Martin]. Other premium brands have already achieved success in the segment. The Rolls-Royce Cullinan and Bentley Bentayga volumes have exceeded expectations. Similarly, Maserati's Levante SUV is the brand's most successful model helping the brand push much higher volumes than it had historically achieved with a line-up of sports cars and large executive saloon cars."

As regulations across the world strengthen and consumer demand changes, luxury automakers have the difficult task of building SUVs with little emissions while maintaining exclusivity.

Outside of the United States, emissions regulations are becoming increasingly stricter as the world looks for an answer to the global climate crisis. These new parameters are forcing luxury automakers to get creative with their designs to keep the power and exclusivity that they are known for, at the same time as the SUV becomes ubiquitous, according to panelists on *Luxury Daily's* automotive webinar on June 12 ([see story](#)).

"The stakes are very high for Aston Martin with this model, which takes the company into a new segment and - the company hopes - to new customers," said David Leggett, automotive editor at GlobalData, in a statement. "Its appeal to markets such as China, the world's largest market for premium, sports and luxury vehicles will be especially important.

"Aston Martin posted a loss of 13.5 million pounds in the three months to September 2019, and its share price has plummeted since flotation last year," he said. "Developing a new production facility for the DBX has been costly and the company has taken on more debt to fund the project. Revenue from sales of the new model can't come soon enough for the firm."

In its most recent financial report, Aston Martin noted that the category for its Vantage is seeing waning demand.

Ahead of the Nov. 20 reveal of the DBX in Beijing, Aston Martin said it had already sold some of the SUVs at private events, and the consumer response so far has been positive.

"Aston could use the financial help from the higher profits and higher sales volumes of an SUV, given how rocky 2019 has been for the automaker financially," Mr. Undercoffler said. "The success of the DBX will be crucial to the future of Aston in a way few other models have been for the luxury marque."