

Finally, someone has supercharged the Aston Martin Vantage. The baby Aston might be reasonably powered compared with vehicles in its class, but it has always left us wanting more. Besides, a sports car that looks this good and with such a superb pedigree deserves an engine that should vanquish the opposition. (Sorry, I couldn't resist the pun.)

We at MLE have been waiting for this day for quite some time. We often hoped Aston corporate would stuff a V-12 where the current V-8 lies, but knowing the improbability of that scenario, we debated who would be the first to add a little forced induction to the Vantage. Mansory was the most likely, as you'd be hard pressed to think of any other companies that tune Astons. Or what about the twin-turbo geniuses over at Heffner's Performance? Nope. Neither.

The company behind this car is Easy Street Motorsports (ESX for short). Who, you say? We're glad you asked!

TUNING CREDENTIALS

ESX was founded by Ali Afshar, a certified car nut who grew up in Petaluma, California—on the other side of the hill from Infineon Raceway. Afshar originally began toying with American musclecars, even modifying and drag racing his '67 Camaro RS when he was in high school.

As a young man Afshar moved to Los Angeles, and while there he modified other people's cars to pay his way through university. His specialty was tuning Buick Grand Nationals.

When the Subaru WRX came to the U.S. in 2001, Afshar recognized the potential it had and bought one the first day he saw one. ESX may have originated in the '90s with American musclecars, but the company really made a name for itself with Subaru, earning the right to go tinkering around under the hood of Aston Martins.

The ESX team immediately began modifying the turbocharged, all-wheel-drive machines and entered its WRX in the NHRA drag series. (If you recall, back in 2001 drag racing was as popular as drifting is today.)

With great success, the team eventually secured the sponsorship of Subaru North America and over the next several years went from running a 10.5-second car to a 7-second car—a feat that allowed the company to secure two NHRA National Championships. As the dominant force in drag racing, ESX also tried its hand at other forms of motorsports, competing in the 25 Hours of Thunderhill, the '05 Rally America Championship and the SPEED World Challenge GT Series.

OFF THE SHELF

The company became known well enough for Subaru tuning that in 2005 ESX launched the Ali Afshar Signature Series ESX STI—an off-the-shelf, race-inspired street car.

Which brings us back to the ESX Super Vantage. "This project is not meant to be a kit," Afshar says. "Similar to our ESX STI Subarus, the ESX Super Vantage is a complete car. That doesn't mean existing Vantage owners can't have our supercharger added to their car, but it's not originally intended as an add-on. Each car built is numbered, signed and documented. We've built over 32 ESX STIs and hope to do the same with the ESX Super Vantage."

PASSION FOR ASTON

As for why ESX got into the business of tuning Astons, it's quite simple: Afshar loves the cars. "I've owned two supercharged Jaguars," he says, "but when the DB9 came out, I was in love." He set his mind to buying one but couldn't find exactly what he was looking for. That was until a friend at Marin Aston Martin in Corte Madera, California, called. The car, a Ferrari Red (or Rosso Corso) DB9 Volante, was "definitely the Aston for me," says Afshar, a man who has always owned red cars.

"Ever since then, I've loved the Astons," Afshar admits. "They're exclusive, stylish, classy, powerful and rich with history. It's a gentlemen's sports car and not too many people have them. Actually, not too many people even know what they are!"

When the Vantage came out, Afshar fell in love all over again, and once they had been on the market for a while owners apparently started to feel the

