

may have been too chicken to take it out to the boundaries of human and mechanical function, but I made it go plenty fast enough to know that it goes plenty fast enough. And there's so much torque and the torque range is so broad that, cruising around on city streets, you can pick any gear from one to four and just stick it in there and be perfectly comfortable. Since it's kind of hard to find the gears anyway, this is a convenient feature. The Volante's speed is a strange combination of explosive and effortless. You can't exactly whup a serious street racer off the line, but a heart-beat and a half after liftoff comes this leviathan surge of power that seems as if it would just keep building even if you wound the tach dial around a dozen times. Which, of course, I didn't do, but Aston Martin is too genteel to give you a redline, so I guess you're supposed to do what I did and shift whenever you're afraid not to. And it's all practically silent. Oh, there's a rumble of petrochemical energy conversion in there someplace, but at 100 mph the loudest thing you hear is your conscience. And brakes? God, does this thing have brakes. They'll stop the car, all right. I'll bet they'll stop anything—fights with your wife, the spread of cancer through the lymph system, Vietnamese hegemony in Indochina—anything. According to the Aston Martin literature, the Volante is capable of going from 0 to 100 and back in 25 seconds. I don't know why you would want to do a thing like that, but if you do, this car has the engine and brakes to get it done with.

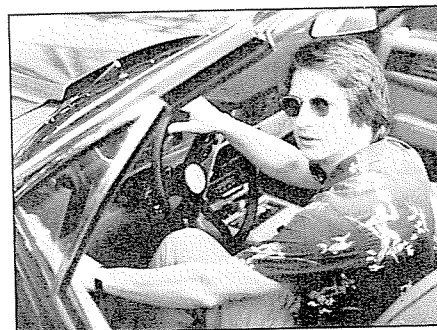
Besides cowardice, there was another problem with testing the Volante's handling. There aren't but about three curves for 100 miles in any direction from Palm Beach. That part of Florida is laid out like a Mondrian painting. The one winding road I could find ran up the beach through a particularly sedate and well-policed section of town. I did the best I could, though, on one late-night run, and what little handling the Volante was called on to do it did with great finesse. There was a slight and very predictable understeer that made the car feel safe as a house, and all forms of throttle, wheel, and other such response were well-nigh unbelievable for something the size of a Bertram sport fisher. The Volante is so good that, even in a city with more police per capita than any other in the world, the



ride was unexciting. But please don't tell a certain Miss D., who was suitably thrilled and did an admirable job of holding both our gin and tonics.

Which brings us to the best thing of all about the Volante: it not only attracts attention, it attracts only the best kind of attention. Mind you, attracting attention with a car isn't easy in a burg filled with 1921 custom-bodied Rolls Platinums Thunderheads and Lamborghinis Amtracks and such-like, but the Volante did it. Everywhere in Palm Beach, we were greeted with appreciative stares. But not just *any* appreciative stares. Across the bridge in West Palm, where we stopped for a FrostiShake, the carhop wouldn't give us the time of day. As far as she was concerned, the body was plastic and it probably had a Volkswagen engine back there someplace behind the seat. Hoi polloi didn't know this thing from a Baja Bug, and they pronounced the nameplate "Austin-Martini" more often than not. But where it counted, the Volante dropped their chins to the bricks. Saturday night we went out for multiple fancy nightcaps (in the Pontiac), and the first thing the bartender said to us was, "Have you seen that Aston Martin convertible driving around? Jesus, I wonder who owns *that!*" The idea that something could be so powerful, high-priced, and stunning but still tasteful and understated struck a responsive chord in the powerful, high-priced, and stunning but still tasteful and understated citizens of Palm Beach. Roll it onto the lawn of some stranger's estate and he'd pop out the

door to chat about the Côte d'Azur. Park it right in the middle of the street for a photo session and policemen would block traffic. Roll in the out drive of the Everglades Club dressed in blue jeans and a hukilau shirt and you'd get a



merry wave from the doorman. We felt like Lindbergh in May of '27. And women. . . . Women melted.

And that says it all, doesn't it? What did you want even more than the perfect GT car when you were fifteen? *Right.* Well, this beauty comes with the original stick to beat gorgeous dames away with. And a Louis Vuitton stick it is. Because the Aston Martin Volante is a dream come true. It is exactly that perfect GT car you designed in sophomore study hall, and it does exactly what you wanted that perfect GT car to do: it makes you look cool to girls. Like most dreams come true, it's about as practical as a home zoo. In fact, it's dumb as dirt. But after 48 hours of having it in my possession, just ask me if I give a shit.



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