

Surviving Supercar Ownership

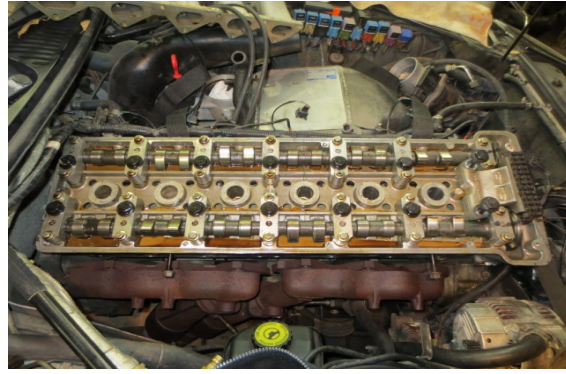
Photos by Matt Toon / Text by John Pharr

Seeking Bob Forward's advice on possibly purchasing a 13-year-old Aston Martin DB7 back in 2010, I asked him one very critical question, "Can you fix it?" Bob said, "Yes", but I hoped that there would never be a major issue. And then the beast blew a head gasket while we were returning from our trek to Mosport last summer.

It's very clear now that this gasket had been leaking for a long time, certainly for the entire Mosport trip, but when a brand-new but poorly-manufactured relay failed, shutting down the cooling fans and causing the car to overheat as we left Bracebridge, that must have been the last straw.



Bob's garage



Head in place

Trucked back from Thunder Bay, the Aston ended up spending the winter in Bob's garage while his TR8 'bunked' at my place. Naturally you expect parts for supercars to be expensive, but \$1,300 CDN (an Aston dealer's quote) for a head gasket kit did seem a bit much. Luckily Ron Bland had a CD of Jaguar shop manuals and this included a manual for the Aston's 3.2 litre DOHC in-line six motor, which was derived from a Jag racing engine. A gasket kit from a Jag parts supplier cost only



Head comes off



Head on the work bench

\$174 USD plus shipping!

Quite a few SBCC members were on hand the night that the head was pulled off the Aston, and the photos clearly show the shiny, squeaky-clean #3 cylinder that was being washed by copious quantities of antifreeze. Thankfully there were no cracks in the head or the cylinder block, so it was largely a matter of replacing the gaskets and getting the coolant out of the oil system. It wasn't a total surprise that Bob found a few other minor issues, including mistakes committed by others, but these were also dealt with.



The culprit



Squeaky clean #3

The Aston was back together in January, and during that temporary thaw Bob was actually able to get it out for a brief drive. It still needed repeat oil changes to flush out the contaminating coolant, but after more extensive test-driving and tweaking Bob was able to return the car to me in late April, running smooth and sweet and not smoking at all.

So, surviving supercar ownership? Luck! Luck finding the car at a reasonable price, luck that the car had the in-line Jaguar six instead of the Aston V-12, luck that the disaster was fairly minor as disasters go, luck that we had cell phone coverage in that remote part of western Ontario, luck that I had a premium CAA membership and didn't have to pay for a 250 km tow, luck that Bob is such a great mechanic and that Ron had that shop manual, and so on and so on.

I also have to thank Rick and Rob and Morris for being so patient as the ailing beast reduced us to driving towards Thunder Bay in 40 km segments between cooling off periods. Our trek to Mosport was STILL a great trip..., after all, the Aston managed 5,000 of the 6,200 km, including a couple of circuits around the Mosport track..., that's unforgettable.