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A SHARK Among the Minnows

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It would be rewarding to say that Aston Martin's Rapide S glides through LA traffic like a shark meandering through a school of very shiny, bland fish, but that is one power this Aston Martin, unfortunately, lacks. So while the very attractive Rapide S cannot clear traffic like a 25-foot Great White, it can deal with it, through the ancient and refined arts of looking good and feeling good. In particularly heavy traffic (thank you Los Angeles!), during literally hours of bumper-to-bumper traffic, the Rapide S is a serene and peaceful place to be bottled up. Peaceful inside, and even outside, as its very presence calms and delights the masses. Not in the sense of "Holy cow! Look, it's a LaFerrari!" or "Wow, that driver must be a self-absorbed a-hole!" but in the, "Look at the ceiling in the Sistine Chapel and all of its detailed glory!" kind of way. In my experience behind the wheel of the Rapide S over the course of a week in Los Angeles, it became apparent that people may have no idea what it is, or what it's named, but they do know beauty when they see it.



Beauty is what the Aston Martin Rapide S represents, and why it exists in the first place. Yes, it has four rather usable seats, a stout V-12, a good manner of utility in its own uniquely packaged way, and it is even quite enjoyable when you eventually do get out of LA traffic and the speeds rise as you push through sweeping mountain passes and switchbacks. But...it is beautiful. Even by the standards of Aston Martin, it is a beautiful car. I personally consider the Aston Martin Vantage to be the prettiest

vehicle sold anywhere, maybe ever, but the Rapide, stretching a bit over two feet longer than the Vantage, somehow calms and expands that inherent beauty. The result of that added length is a less aggressive visage, but even more languidly lovely form. Every curve slows your eyes a bit inviting you to gaze a little longer. The design has become even more enticing and subtle, as all that softly shaped metal creates what you can see on these pages. This car is so uniquely stunning in its flowing yet conservative form.





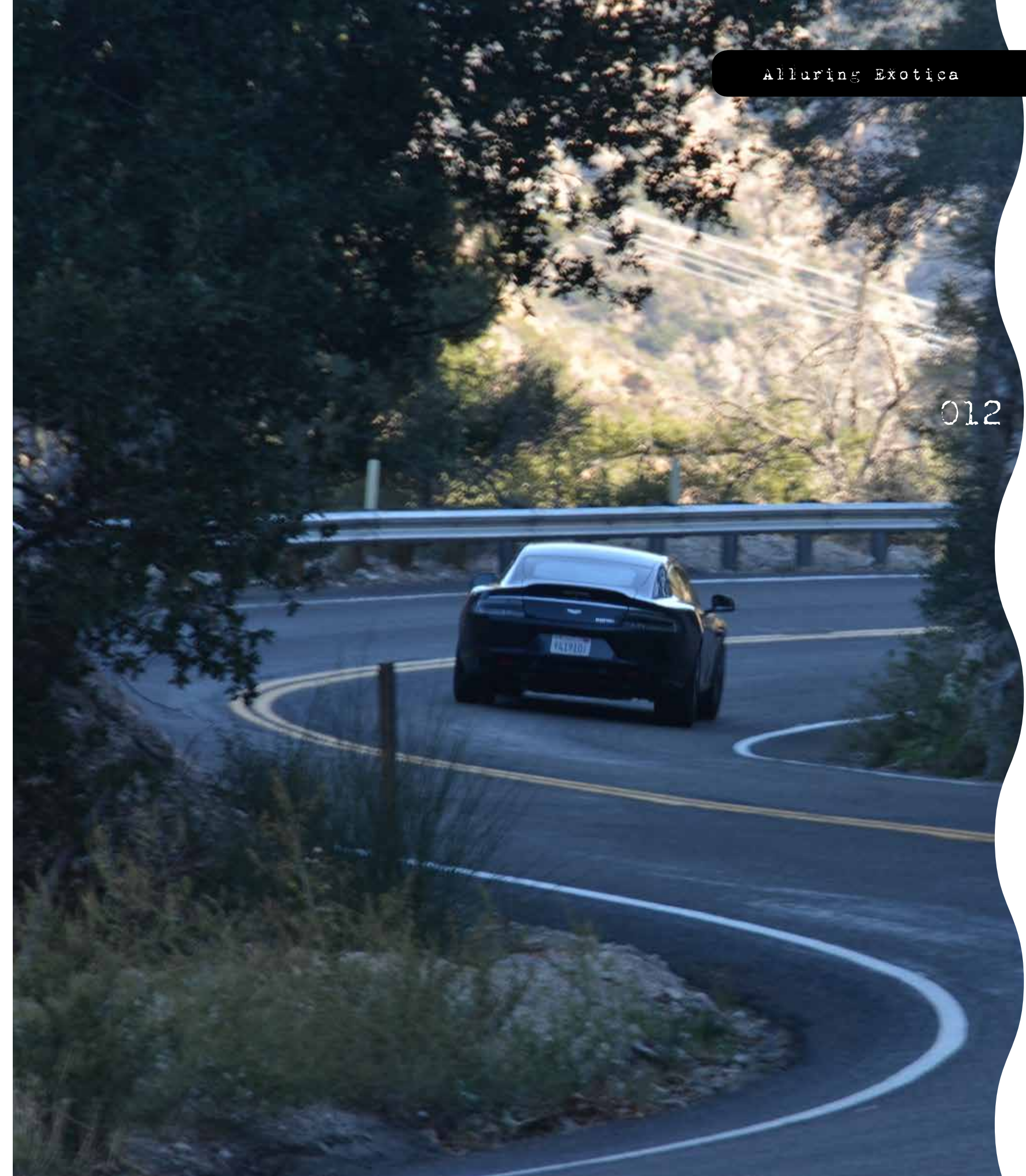
Of course, most of what you just read is glaringly obvious from all the pictures you have most likely been staring at. I think it is a pity that Shakespeare did not stick around another half millennia or so, to more properly elucidate The Rapide's form and appeal in a more fitting way.

Shakespeare though, was never known to drive motor vehicles, so... his loss.

The Rapide is close to 200 inches long and 76 inches wide, with a curb weight of a bit under 4,400 pounds, so even with 552 HP it is not going to run down a McLaren 650S, but it is sur-

prisingly fun to drive on a winding road, and holds its own, overall. At times it can be a bit challenging and even disappointing when a photographer forces you to make several passes to capture that one perfect shot, but the Rapide provided me a comfortable platform to relax in even while properly thrashing the Rapide in a manner perhaps inappropriate in light of its beautiful form, but this car almost revels in such treatment.

In heavy traffic, the Aston is almost excellent. It is large, but the visibility from the driver's seat is better than one might think, and the driving



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controls are very refined and accurate, so the car can easily crawl for several hours in such dour circumstances without bother. At relatively average speed driving, the Rapide is also fine, but not a revelatory miracle. Throttle response backed up by the 6-liter V-12 is adequate and the gear changes from the ZF-sourced 8-speed automat-

ic gearbox are decent. The steering is light for such a lengthy car but that certainly helps in the heavy traffic situations I had to deal with. The brakes are firm and supportive while being very easy to modulate. While navigating such dull and boring driving conditions I almost forgot what I was behind the wheel of as the Aston just delivers what you ask of it.



This car does come into it's own as you begin to stretch its legs at, say, above about 80 percent. At that point, I felt it was time to set the Dynamic Stability Control system to something other than boring and the Rapide S came alive. All of that mass and weight

is still there, as is the size and length, but there is very good feedback, neutral handling, a firm yet supple suspension, and, of course, that V-12. The Aston Martin Rapide S may look like

God's personal limo, but it is more fun than it has any right to be, even if it is not exactly a poster child for low moment of inertia.

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Overall, this is where the Rapide surprised me most. The development engineers could have stopped at the “just look” stage, but they didn’t, and I thank them for their work in creating such an enjoyable car to drive. It is hard to find a car that can seat four, look anywhere near as good as this AND deliver the driving thrills to match. Don’t get me wrong, the Rapide S is not a racecar, but in the hands of a skilled driver this car could not only keep up with, but probably run away from some other “sports cars”

on the market today. And, more importantly, that good driver would be having lots of fun doing so.

Coming back out of the mountains and the “fun” roads I am greeted by LA’s infamous traffic congestion once again. And that is when I realize that perhaps Dickens might be conjured up, not Shakespeare, to convey the reaction, as in “best of times... worst of times”. First, even by the standards of a company like Aston Martin, the materials used, the seat comfort, the apparent quality, basic switch

gear, and the overall feel and look, are elegant and excellent. The interior is lovely, well made, comfortable, cossetting, and quiet. However, many of the non-driving controls and features (audio system, HVAC, navigation) are borderline ancient in appearance and definitely function. The resulting interfaces could be quite recalcitrant and confusing, and the navigation system, well, I should have just glued it shut.



The real problem is that what makes a good engine and/or suspension does not really change too much over half a decade. The electronics of five years ago are like bringing crossbows to a modern day gunfight.

And that is really frustrating! Aston Martin builds some great and stunning cars, that are great at being cars in every sense of the word car, but they are not masters of consumer electronics, nor should they try to be. The Rapide, with such low production volumes, is trapped between these two worlds and it shows with knobs and switches for some controls and screens for others. The interior designers need to get together with the engineering team and decide how the future of this car is going to play out. Touch screens or rows of toggles and switches? Pick a theme and stick with it! All in, my annoyances with the controls do not take away from the abilities and the useful nature of this beast, at least as long as I use the nav apps in my phone.

The Rapide's other problem is the market in which it resides. The Rapide is a stunning, larger, car that is quite expensive. While it does have four doors and four seats, the rear seats, while comfortable and extremely well crafted, are not thrones to be used as your driver wafts you home. Here, the beauty of the beast, contained in the luscious and uncompromised low curves that define its appearance,



push that compromise to the interior of the car, in the space and in the head room, for those rear seats. You end up with serviceable rear seats that people can tolerate for a short period of time. Or you can use them for children. And that is the problem as it turns out there are not a lot of buyers that want an achingly beautiful coupe that can also contain four people, for a little while, as versus, say, buying a Vanquish and a Land Rover. I would also suggest that the Bentley Continental GT fits into the same category as the Rapide, but the Bentley only has two doors, and truthfully, is a higher roofed, more thuggish car that, as a result, has more comfortable rear seats.

However, when looked at another way, the Aston delivers greater exclusivity. There are not a lot of Vantages out there in the real world, but they are akin to the multitude of (insert your stereotypically British large number here – Africans killed in the Zulu battles, laughs generated by Monty Python, maintenance bills for an E-type or an F1) versus the rare Rapide.

The Rapide is a worthy car, a fun car, and a comfortable one. It works well in almost any civilized situation (we did not test it off road, or even measure approach angles). It will also be faster and more fun than 99 percent of the cars out there, and better looking than 100 percent of those other cars. It will also have some rather vintage issues. On the other hand, consider the possibility of an electric drive RapideE, with a reputed and possible 1,000 HP, something that Aston showed in concept form just last year. It is clear that the Rapide story is not over, which is a very good development.





Specs

Price		\$245,000	
			
Not available			
Engine			
Configuration/Type	V-12 Front mid-mounted engine		
Layout	Front, Mid-Mounted engine, 48 valve		
Material	All Alloy Quad Overhead Camshaft		
Displacement	5935 cc		
Bore x Stroke	Bore 89 Stroke 29.5		
Compression Ratio	10.9:1		
Redline	6650 rpm		
Fuel Delivery	electronic fuel injection		
Transmission			
Rear-Wheel drive	Torque converter Limited-slip		
Type	Automatic with Electronic Shift-by -Wire		
Final Drive Ratio	2.73:1		
Gear	Ratio	Calc Max (RPM)	
1	4.714:1		
2	3.143:1		
3	2.106:1		
4	1.667:1		
5	1.285:1		
6	1.001:1		
7	0.839:1		
8	0.662:1		
Steering			
Assist			
Ratio	15.3		
Turns lock-to-lock	3		
Turning Circle	curb to curb 42.7 ft		
Suspension			
Front	Independent	Double Wishbones, anti-dive Geometry, coil springs	
Rear	Independent	Double Wishbones, anti-dive Geometry, coil springs	
Brakes & Tires			
Front	400 mm diameter carbon-ceramic discs		
Rear	360 mm diameter carbon-ceramic discs		
Tires	Bridgestone Potenza 245/40 R20 Front, 295/35 R20 Rear		
Body & Chassis			
Structure	4 door sports cars with 4 seats		
Length x Width x Height	L 197" x W 84" x H 117"	4" x H 53"	
Wheelbase	117"		
Track, F/R	62.6" x 63.5"		
Doors/Seats	4 doors/4 seats		
EPA Class			
Cargo Capacity	7.8 cu ft		
Drag coefficient			
x Frontal Area			
Optional Equipment on tested car			
Weight			
Curb Weight	4387 lb		
Distribution	51% front, 49% rear		
Weight/power ratio	7.83		
Fuel			
EPA City / Highway	14 mpg city, 22 highway		
Fuel Capacity	19.9 gallons		
Recommended Fuel			
Test Results			
0 - 60 mph	4.2 seconds		
0-1/4 mile,	12.3 seconds		
Top Speed, MPH	203 mph		
Roadholding, G (300-ft skidpad)			

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Acceleration

	Seconds
0-10	
0-20	1.3
0-30	1.8
0-40	2.3
0-50	3.2
0-60	3.9
0-70	5.1
0-80	6.3
0-90	7.6
0-100	9.3
0-110	11.1
0-120	13.1
0-130	15.9
Top Speed	

Braking

60-0 mph	
80-0 mph	
Fade	none

Handling

Roadholding
Balance

Specs