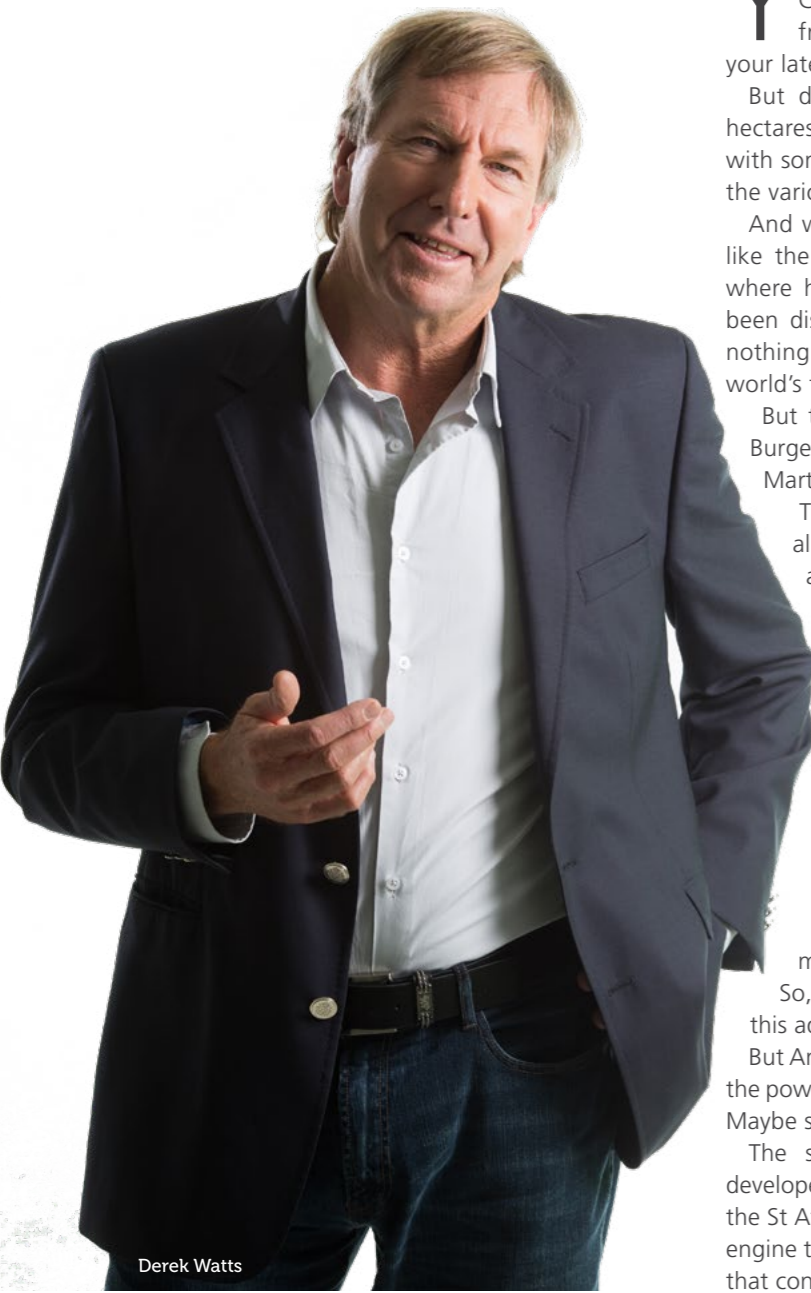


DYSLEXIC ASTON



Derek Watts

You may not have been to Nirox Sculpture Park in the Cradle of Humankind. It hosts more than 50 pieces from masters around the globe which may just inspire your latent appreciation of the arts.

But don't imagine walking into a gallery – this is 30 hectares of picturesque lawns, waterways and wetlands with some diverse local game and birdlife. So, you can spot the various installations while you ramble at leisure.

And while every cyclist in Gauteng will know the Cradle like the back of their gloves, it is a World Heritage Site where hominin fossils dating back 3.5 million years have been discovered. All of which appears to have absolutely nothing to do with the launch of what is claimed to be the world's fastest, most powerful SUV.

But that is where I meet specialist Gaydon driver Andy Burgess on a frosty Tuesday morning to test the new Aston Martin DBX707.

The first wake-up call is that this new Aston is not all that photogenic. In most images it seems disjointed and awkward – like the designers were trying too hard.

But in the flesh, or (to be technically correct) cast aluminium continuous hot bonded monocoque body shell, it really just flows from that massive grille and cavernous ducts to the most ravishing rump in the SUV market.

And remember Aston Martin's first entry into the family market garnered many awards, including Top Gear's 'Super SUV of the Year' and GQ's 'Best Luxury SUV'.

Almost half of the 25 (by my count) James Bond movies released so far have featured an Aston Martin.

So, the '707' seems to be a rather dyslexic allusion to this adrenalin filled relationship.

But Andy Burgess is quick to point out that it's a reference to the power output of the flagship model in metric horsepower. Maybe some imagery went into the handy coincidence!

The source of that raw power is a Mercedes-AMG developed 4-litre twin-turbo V8. But some magic happens at the St Athan factory in South Wales with more tweaks to the engine than a Rafael Nadal service and a new nine-speed box that converts this into a 3.3 second SuperSUV.



Maybe a good thing that carbon ceramic brakes are a standard fitting along with the Sports seat that I slip into followed by the hushed operation of the soft-close doors.

Andy gives me a run down of the controls that, mercifully, have done away with sub menus within the infotainment system and allow the driver immediate fingertip command of the vehicle. Instead there are dedicated buttons for suspension mode, ESP, manual gear selection, and an active exhaust switch (which opens up the valves of the menacing quad tailpipes) so you can annoy the neighbours while still in GT cruising mode.

Time to hit the curves of the Cradle and there was a small problem. You see, the 707 handles like a low-slung sports car and I possibly terrorised Andy on a few corners.

While power and torque are the headline features, the air suspension system (which is a complicated engineering feat) results in minimal body roll and the graded steering response seems to read your mind and driving ability. No comment...

Aston calls it a sabre in a segment of sledgehammers. How is that for fighting talk? Depending on the exchange rate, the sabre will set you back around R4.8m, and that includes some impressive standard features. But while you're busy dropping a few bar, why not create something truly unique and engage the brand's bespoke service. Called 'Q by Aston Martin', his is Option City where you can design the DBX707 of your dreams from unique graphics to tinted carbons and bespoke materials for both the interior and exterior.

As for the rest of us, we can just dream.