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I have a date with a man named Guy. It's a blind date, and we're meeting at a restaurant named Alice's. How will I know him? By his shiny Aston Martin DB5, of course.

His last name is Simpson, and he owns a silver specimen from 1964 that he's going to let me drive to Monterey. At the end of the day we'll land at Pebble Beach, land of Ferrari Daytonas on every corner and scenery pretty enough to make you cry.

But right now the marine layer is rolling into San Francisco, and there are many wayward miles to go before I lay down my head. So I board another Aston Martin, this one a loaner 2013 DB9, and whip out of the bay, shedding vegan sophistication and artisanal whiskey cocktails for the zigzagging delights of Skyline Drive (the name a surefire sign of a great road). Mist—or is it fog?—floats in the early-morning air, swirling in mini vortexes behind the V-12-propelled DB9. An hour later, Alice's appears at the intersection of La Honda Road and Skyline, a legendary joint frequented by motorcycles and Shelby Cobras and T-shirt-buying tourists. It's been here a long time, shares its name with a song, has an awfully good breakfast served out on the porch as the Northern California sun, still rising, burns your eyes.

In rolls the DB5. It's glorious. Black radial tires and shiny spoked wheels, fulsome fenders sloping into the infamous upright grille, a



A Guy and his Aston: DB5 owner Guy Simpson (top right) explains the intricacies of his 1964, right-hand-drive beauty to the author, who's in a modern DB9. Above: The exchange of the Aston Martin keys at Alice's Restaurant, meeting point to a world of good roads.

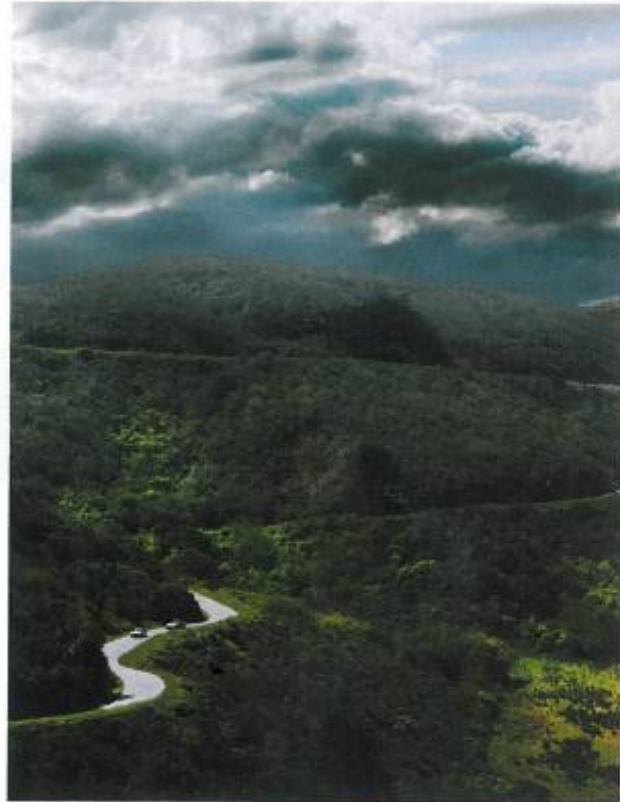


soulful interplay of curves on its slim rear. No wonder it was that savvy Scotsman's pick for *Goldfinger*. Guy, meanwhile, is an ex-pat Brit who's been in California long enough to take on the healthy ease that comes with living in year-round sunshine. Lucky bastard. His perfect DB5 spent several decades in somebody's garage, junk piled on the hood and varmints living in the doors, before he bought it and spent blood, sweat, and years painstakingly putting it back together. One look, and you know he made all the right decisions.

Introductions are made, and Guy hands over the key. It is tiny and looks like it should open a padlock rather than a coupe that would fetch well over half a million dollars at auction. "Drive it. Enjoy it," he says, without rancor and seemingly at ease. I trade him the crystal fob to the DB9—silver birch, 5.9-liter V-12, 510 hp, \$210,905 as driven. I know I got the better deal.

I step into the DB5 to discover that it is right-hand drive. Oh, goody: that'll keep things interesting.

We turn west onto La Honda Road, a squiggly path with car-threatening trees growing at the apexes. I follow Simpson, he in the new, me in the old. He's keeping up a brisk pace, pushing me to push the DB5. Brave man, that Guy.



California caprice: Two Aston Martins, 179 miles, and all the time in the world. Stage Road (above) is one of those zigzagging paths that parallel the Northern California coast and that you find only if you know it's there—or if you're happily lost. Below: An example of the kinds of things you see on a road trip with a vintage Aston Martin, including gawkers and a bronze surfer sculpture in Santa Cruz.





The DB5's steering wheel is large and wooden and perfectly round, with small aluminum rivets punched all the way through that tickle my finger pads. The steering itself is heavy and tells me all kinds of details about the road. It instantly becomes my favorite thing—aside from the car's beauty and provenance and the way it makes beautiful blondes wave as you motor by.

The DB5 has a five-speed ZF stick; double-clutches and toe/heel blips recommended, a process to be considered every time you shift but not so onerous as to obsess over. The nose is heavier than anticipated, the straight six dragging down the front, but it lends a surprising twist of power as you exit every corner. Aside from the ton of torque, it's got 282 horses. The brakes, discs at all four wheels, are linear, but they aren't as good as, say, a Scion's.

The DB5 curls around California's curves, rubber singing softly, until we break out of the forest shadows and the sea winks at us in the distance. We take a southerly course onto Stage Road, a single lane of iffy tarmac glowing warmly in the soft sun. It runs steeply down the mountain into a valley, then back up the other side. The DB5's suspension is far more compliant than expected, chassis handling the bad stuff, tires grabbing gallantly onto the good stuff. I go slowly, wondering if Guy is OK with my ministrations.

We reach Pescadero, which pretends to be an aw-shucks small town but is a bit too much like San Francisco for its own good. Still, it's a likely place to pause and jaw with the curious who pepper us with tired Bond jokes. ("No machine guns, sorry. Ejector seat? Only

Above: Outside the L'Auberge hotel and its Relais & Châteaux restaurant. Below: Feeling fishy along Highway 1. Opposite: A totally legal move on 17-Mile Drive, a road so pretty it makes you want to swoon. So will many of the classic cars you'll see here in August.

for you, old chap.") Then, as all Pebble petitioners must, we turn onto Highway 1. The DB5 is happy to stretch its legs. Turns out 85 mph is as good as 45.

"The car could almost drive itself to Monterey by now," Guy had joked, and I sense he's right. I've never driven a car that seems so at place with its setting. The DB5 was born in the rain-soaked United Kingdom but is meant for a California meander. And although Guy claims his DB5 is "nothing special," he's a prominent member of the Aston Martin Owners Club and has shown the car at the Quail Lodge. Our trip is well timed, as this year is Aston Martin's one-hundredth birthday, an occasion that will be roundly celebrated around Monterey's annual Car Week, which includes historic races and Pebble Beach's storied Concours d'Elegance.

After all these years, the brand still gets it right. Hydraulic steering, rear-wheel drive, long and narrow silhouettes. Onlookers follow the DB9 with their eyes and only notice its forefather when it's almost too late. I glance into the tiny round side mirrors (mounted on the fenders) and watch their looks of surprise when they finally catch sight of the DB5.

No schedule, no rush. We stop for lunch at Whale City Bakery in



Alice's Restaurant, 17288 Skyline Boulevard, Woodside, 650-851-0303, alicesrestaurant.com
Good food on the way to great roads. Look for the classic cars and motorcycles parked outside.

L'Auberge Carmel, Monte Verde Street, Carmel, 831-624-8578, laubergecarmel.com
This intimate hotel is an ideal place to park your car and body during Car Week, as it's close to everything. It's also the site of the Relais & Châteaux restaurant, Aubergine, known for over-the-top tasting menus.

Davenport, dither around side roads, snap a few pics. This is old-world coastal California, colored in sepia and shot through with Steinbeck. Migrant farm workers crooked over in fields and actual hitchhikers, backpacks flung on the ground, with upraised thumbs held aloft in gestures of hopeless hope. (Who picks up a hitchhiker in this day and age?) We detour to crusty Santa Cruz and its tacky pier-side attractions. A Rasta strums his guitar and flocks of corn-haired skateboarders roll by. California, where a cliché is free to be a cliché.

It's the roadside farm stands that finally reel us in. Fresh berries (pick your own), jam to taste, "beach pumpkins," and endless choices of tangerines, clementines, and artichokes. We detour inland, passing close enough to Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca that we can smell the cooking brakes, then skip up and over Laureles Grade Road to Carmel Valley Road and the region's most famous route, 17-Mile Drive. Is it just us, or are the ocean vistas even more beautiful if you avoid paying the \$10 toll? (Just tell them you're staying at the Spanish Bay hotel.)

As the sun kisses the Pacific, we pull up to our hotel in Carmel and take our final reward at its Relais & Châteaux restaurant. No California road trip would really be complete without an over-the-top meal and bottles of California vino.

I look over at Guy and raise my glass. Easily the best blind date a man could have. **AM**

