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A Smart Car? One of those little electric G-whizzy things?

No. This, believe it or not, is an Aston Martin. You will of course know Aston Martin (or Aston Martin Lagonda Limited, to give its full name), and the brand of luxury British sports cars. You will know them from the DB5 driven by James Bond in the film *Goldfinger*, and from the open-topped Seychelles Blue DB6 Mark II that Prince William and his new bride drove between Buckingham Palace and Clarence House last month.

So what are Aston Martin doing producing this little thing? Stretching the brand is one thing, but this is surely the antithesis of the entire Aston Martin concept.

Well, the answer is quite simple. Those nice people at the European Union have decreed that, from 2012, all European car companies have to have an 'average' CO2 emission of 130g/km across most of the cars in their range (and across all by 2015) ? or face huge fines. That's pretty bad news if your business is based on producing throbbing V8s. When the company was owned by Ford, I guess a few Ka models could be thrown in to get the average down. But after the 2007 buy-out that saw Aston Martin taken independent again, this option no longer exists.

So, to bring the average down, Aston Martin has produced the £30,000 Cygnet, which emits just 113g/km CO2.

It might well be a lot of fun, I don't know. But I do know that heavy-handed EU rules that force manufacturers to do such daft things should be towed off to the scrap yard.

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