

Hot-Rod Lagonda

The 1976 Lagonda V8 Series 1 Saloon, which was one of the most expensive cars of its day, was exclusive even by Aston Martin standards

by [Steve Serio](#)

Lagonda had been dormant for a decade when Aston Martin revived the marque in 1974 as the model name for a sensational new four-door sedan based on the existing V8 coupe.

Launched at the London Motor Show in October 1974, the new Lagonda was 305 mm (12") longer in wheelbase than the V8 coupe, whose engine and running gear it shared and to which it bore an understandably strong resemblance. Priced at £14,040 (\$32,713) at the time of its launch, the Lagonda cost 24% more than the contemporary coupe and was one of the most expensive motorcars of the time.

An exclusive model even by Aston Martin standards, it was cataloged until June 1976, by which time a mere seven had been made. Of the seven factory cars built in period, only two were completed with the ZF 5-speed manual gearbox; s/n 12007, the car offered here, was one of them.

The car has been extensively re-engineered and enhanced by respected marque specialists R.S. Williams Ltd. for their client. Sympathetically modified for everyday use, the Lagonda incorporates electronic communications systems—a combined SatNav/DVD/TV display screen is installed just forward of the gear lever, popping up at the press of a finger, with a matching screen on the transmission tunnel for those in the back.

There is an integrated telephone system front and rear and a state-of-the-art, four-speaker, Alpine CD stereo system with trunk-mounted changer. A few other minor changes, mainly the repositioning of switches, were made to the already opulent interior, which has been re-trimmed in elephant gray hide from Italy and boasts the tilt steering column, as fitted to later V8s, in addition to remote central locking and an upgraded air-conditioning system. To cope with the

increased electrical load, a high-output alternator and dual battery pack with automatic change-over have been installed.

Already a powerful car, the Lagonda was endowed with an R.S. Williams 7-liter conversion, enabling it to more than hold its own against modern rivals. The Williams conversion produces a substantial 550 ft-lb and useful 480 hp against the estimated 350 ft-lb and 320 hp of the 5.3-liter original, increases that more than offset the weight gain associated with the Lagonda's extra equipment.

But this also necessitated uprating the Chrysler Torqueflite automatic transmission, which has replaced the original ZF manual gear-box, and strengthening the differential mountings to prevent twisting under load. Increasing water flow around the engine and paying special attention to underhood ducting have improved engine cooling. The complete job took two people over 4,000 hours at an estimated cost of around £100,000 (more than \$200,000).

Motoring writer Paul Chudecki found the Lagonda's enormous torque immediately apparent, with the car feeling effortless and capable. "The 7-liter V8 pulls strongly from around 1,500-1,800 rpm, and from then on it is relentless. Acceleration: a guess would put the 0-60 mph time in the mid-five-second bracket, with 100 mph coming up around ten seconds later—impressive all the way up to 145 mph, as fast as we could go given the limits of the test track. There is no reason to doubt the car could pull its 6,500-rpm limit in top and reach 170 mph given the chance."

Externally, the Lagonda looks original, apart from a Kamm tail as fitted to later Aston V8s and Cibie driving lights where originally there were horizontal radiator slats.

Presented in generally superb condition, 12007 is offered with V5 registration document, current MoT, sundry Works Service invoices dating from the 1980s, and a quantity of R.S. Williams bills dating from 2000 onward.

The SCM Analysis

This car sold for \$498,820 at the Bonhams Newport Pagnell Aston Martin sale on May 17, 2008.

When car geeks chatter about modern Lagondas, it's usually in the same breath as "world's worst car," or "What were they thinking?" This particular Aston Martin is thankfully not of that wedge-shaped ilk and that gross 1980s fraternity. These rare early 1970s AMs have zero in common with those "things" and more shared bloodline with the Aston V8 Vantage.

I'm lucky to own a 1984 V8 Vantage and have to admit, the only thing that would make that car more enjoyable is if it had a second set of doors to allow more access to the rear seats.

As a quick aside, Aston Martin and Porsche are betting four-door performance cars are the next niche market and are launching their own versions. How cool would it be to have your new Aston Martin Rapide sitting next to your 1976 Lagonda V8?

Prior to visiting Newport Pagnell in February 1991, I spied my first Lagonda V8 on the streets of Mayfair and thought what an odd, cool car it was. Later that same day, I saw another example being restored at Aston Martin Works Service, and it was explained to me that I had now seen about 30% of the total production.

I've never seen an affordable example

I'd have one of these things in a minute if I ever had the chance, but I've never seen an affordable example. And I don't think any of the seven have ever lived in the U.S.

This particular offering by Bonhams is a fine example of where the collector car world is today and what buyers appreciate. Limited-production cars that offer great style and usability are almost impossible to value. If something is "one of seven" and in superlative shape, it's akin to buying floor seats at a Celtics vs. Lakers championship game—far more buyers than sellers, and numbers that will make your noggin spin. (\$33,000 for one seat on the hardwood, game 3 in L.A. as I write this.)

To a serious Aston lover, this car falls into the category of a shooting brake, or perhaps the one-offs made for the Sultan of Brunei. Astons are rare, and this is a rare Aston. Granted, it's not in the price or beauty category of a DB4GT, DB5 convertible, or Touring Spyder, but a true aficionado would give it a respectful nod.

What's interesting about chassis "007" (there's always a Bond tie-in, isn't there?) is that it has been hot-rodded, modernized, and neutered of its ZF 5-speed. As I've said in the past, if done by the right specialists, no real buyer gets bent out of shape when it comes to stumping up the cash. You really have quite a collectible when everything can be altered and you still shatter the pre-auction estimates.

Cautious optimism must be the mantra prior to every sale these days, but when rare, desirable offerings bang through estimates by double, standing around slack-jawed at the results is quite common.

Details

Years Produced: 1974-76

Number Produced: 7

Original List Price: £14,040 (about \$42,200)

SCM Valuation: \$350,000-\$500,000

Tune-up Cost: \$1,200-\$2,400

Distributor Caps: \$225

Chassis # Location: Chassis plate on left side inner fender; plate inside driver's side rear door jamb

Engine # Location: Engine bay chassis plate and on block

Club Info: AMOC, Attn: Susan Laskey (secretary), 1301 Avenue of the Americas, 30th Floor, NY, NY 10019

Website: [click to visit](#)

Alternatives: 1975-76 Bentley T1, 1965-75 Rolls-Royce Silver Shadow, 1970-71 Mercedes-Benz 300SEL 6.3