

American Built British Lagondas

LAFAYETTE, Calif. — Wilbur Gunn, a native of Springfield, Ohio, went to England as an opera singer and ended up founding an automobile firm. The name he selected for his firm, which began building boats and later motorbikes, was Lagonda, the name of his father's machinery corporation and the Shawnee Indian name for the creek in his home town.

Due to his successful motorbike production, Gunn began building forecars (small three-wheeled vehicles) and although some 70 were built, today only two are extant.

With each venture more successful than the last, Gunn decided to go into the serious manufacture of motorcars and he began with a 10hp car which used many parts from his last forecar. Production grew from his second car, which employed a Coventry-Simplex 4-cylinder engine, to his third model with a Polyrhoe carburetor and electric lighting.

Both of these latter models had a rudimentary form of unit body construction—an innovation for the time. Gunn was interested in building engineering templates for the future and his cars reflected this farsighted outlook.

His third model won the 1901 Moscow-St. Petersburg Reliability Trial in 1910 and, as a result, attracted large Russian export orders.

The 6-cylinder 30hp cars produced in 1910 were built with a cone clutch and an outside gear change. Because many were exported to Russia, Lagonda Club members hope one of the now lost models may turn up there in the future.

Design and engineering developments continued until World War I when the production of armaments substituted for car

building. Following the war, Gunn continued his automotive work. He died in 1920 and his technically interesting—though no less practical—cars became more conventional vehicles (as opposed to the innovative machines built under Gunn).

Further engineering resulted in the 14/60 introduced at the 1925 London Motor Show. It was the first 2-liter for Lagonda and had a conventional half elliptic suspension, separate engine and gearbox and a very good braking system.

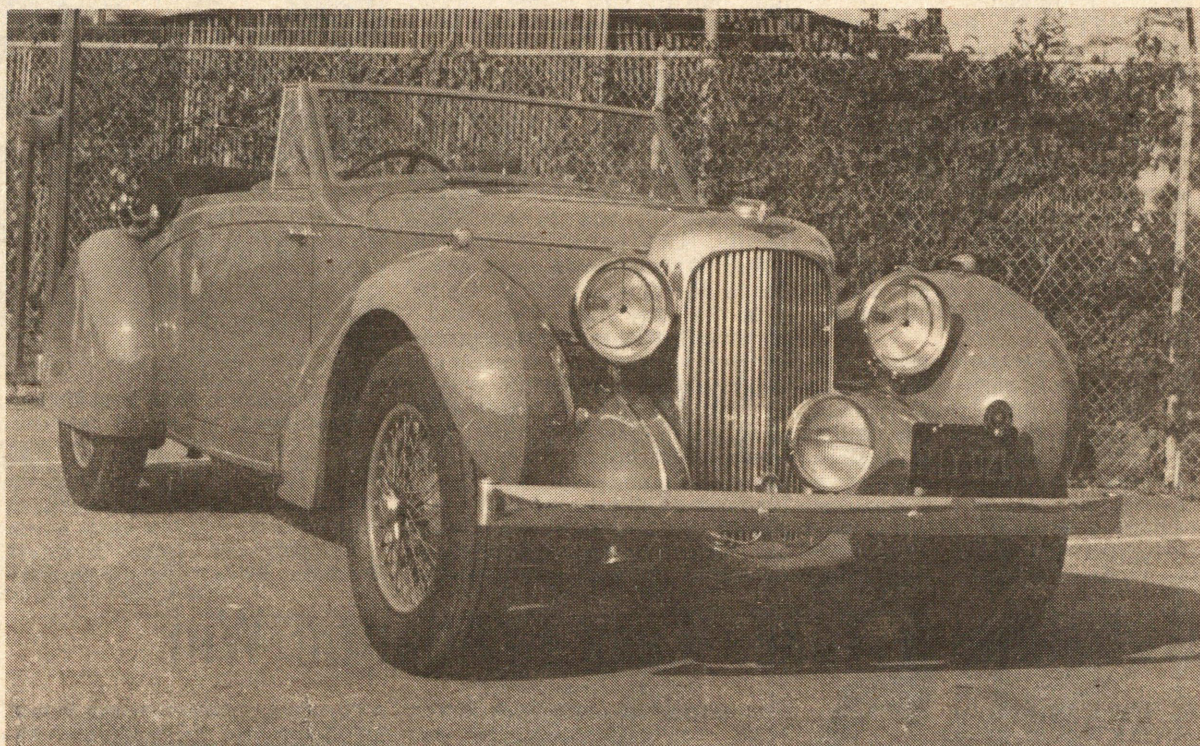
With an interest in performance, Lagonda entered into a program of long distance events first with their 2-liter machines and later with their 3-liter version. The 1928 Le Mans entry placed 11th after running with a cracked frame and no front brakes for the majority of the race. However, the marque didn't meet with any success in the 1929 Le Mans event.

The inlet passages of the 2-liter engine proved to be a problem of to their winding, curved construction and in 1930 a supercharged version was introduced. Unfortunately they were never too reliable due to cooling problems and extreme fuel consumption.

Still, the Lagonda 2- and 3-liters had a good survival record. The Lagonda Club lists about 450 2-liters and 150 3-liter models have been registered since 1950.

In 1933 the 4.5-liter M45 was introduced at the Olympia Show and Lord de Clifford got the model off to a much publicized start by beating a train from Greece to Italy by 14 hours.

In 1934 the M45 was replaced by the M45R. The car was extremely well-constructed and part of its durability was due to the last-minute decision to cast the block and head in Chromidium iron instead of light alloy which was to



This 1940 Lagonda convertible sedan was purchased new by Briggs Cunningham. The V12 overhead cam engine features the Le Mans engine kit which uses four downdraft SU carburetors, one of the rarest SU carburetor types. The side mount wheel and wheel dummy toolbox were removed and the fenders flared in at the factory before delivery was made.

(Briggs Cunningham Automotive Museum photo)

have been used.

Because the M45R was the sixth model being produced by Lagonda—far too many to be economical for the little factory—and despite a win at Le Mans, the financial situation grew dim. Alan Good saved the company by forming LG Motors, dropping all the models and replacing them quickly with the 4.5-liter LG45. This was little more than a facelift of previous models while his chief designer W.O. Bentley began work on his masterpiece, the V12.

The LG6 was the last development of the 6-cylinder 4.5-liter machines. Its chassis was similar to the V12, but the wheelbases differed.

Production continued on the two models past the outbreak of World War II and even U.S. orders were filled well into the '40s. The Lagonda Club has a record of about

50 of the 82 LG6s made and about 100 of the 185 V12s produced.

With financial problems once again plaguing the firm, David Brown bought the company, merging it with Aston Martin. In this shuffle and throughout the ensuing years, Lagonda production dropped off—stopping completely from 1958-'61. The 4-liter Rapide introduced at the 1961 London Motor Show was virtually a 4-door

DB4 Aston Martin and had nothing in common with earlier Lagonda models. About 50 of these were produced from 1962-'64.

Since then there has been no Lagonda production. However, Brown's personal DBS V8 carries the Lagonda badge keeping the door open for the future.

(Special thanks to Arnold Davey, Lagonda Automobile Club, for assistance.)

Precedes 500

USAC Sets Indy Auction

INDIANAPOLIS — Want to buy a used USAC championship car or a dragster? The first annual race car auction will be held here May 25-26 preceding the Indianapolis 500.

Cars, to be consigned from all over the U.S., are expected to sell for \$500 to \$80,000. Auctioning

firm for the event which will take place at Indianapolis Raceway Park is the Kruse Classic Auction Co. from Auburn, Ind.

More than 100 cars are expected for the sale and a swap meet and car show will be part of pre-race festivities.

The United States Auto Club has agreed to sponsor the event and plans to make it a yearly feature of the 500. USAC plans to have old-time race drivers on hand for the auction.

Further information on the sale is available from Kruse at 300 Block South Union, Auburn, Ind. 46706.

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