

A Lifetime of Lagondas

Mark Whitehead's reflections on living with the marque for over fifty years.

MINE WAS NO normal childhood in the 'burbs of Sydney in the 50's and 60's.

Firstly Avalon Beach was hardly a normal suburb when we moved there in 1951 when I was a toddler, rather a quiet little coastal village on the lovely coastline 25 miles north of Sydney. (It is very much part of suburbia now.) Secondly our family car was not a Holden or Ford or BMC product. My Father Jim drove to his practice in North Sydney in a DB 2.6 saloon, whilst my Mother shopped and dropped me off at pre-school in a DB 2.6 dhc. (And thirdly and of no relevance, when The Goon Show concluded in the early 60's Spike Milligan moved nearby and I was at the local school with his children; this comic genius was just as entertaining, funny and zany in real life as he was on radio and television.)

The 2.6 saloon had just replaced an Alvis 4.3 as my Father's daily drive, and in our expanding garage it was joined by a 4.3 roadster with one-off coachwork by Vanden Plas. About this time 1954 Jim decided that a V12 would be appropriate company for the 4.3s and duly corresponded with Jim Davies, pre-war Service Manager at Lagonda then proprietor of his own car dealership after the war. Mr Davies sourced the V12 Rapide, which will become the subject of this article, and Jim bought it sight-unseen. It did many trips to Melbourne and Brisbane over the next few years as Jim's architectural practice took on

work interstate, before being retired in the late 50's.

In 1959 my parents travelled to Europe for the first time and brought back with them a 3 litre saloon with the mileage at 6000. During the next years he also added V12 saloons and a V12 dhc to the garage, then for my 13th birthday bought a neglected Supercharged 2 litre in Perth (Western Australia). In 1962 they returned to the UK with the 3 litre, intending to trade it on the new DB Rapide. Unfortunately the Aston Martin Lagonda General Manager, John Wyer, refused to let a model go overseas so early in its production, so they returned with the 3 litre. He drove this for a couple of years until it was pensioned off at 200,000 miles (without the bottom end ever needing to be touched!)

A Bristol 406 became the daily until 1968, when Nancye and Jim returned to England with my sister and me accompanying. We purchased from the estate of the recently-deceased general manager of Guinness Breweries DB Rapide No.55 (of 55), and I also found a very nice 3 litre dhc in the Midlands to bring home.

The DB Rapide came off the road in 1980 and with no modern Lagonda or Alvis models to choose from at that time I am afraid Jim resorted to BMW's. We have recently commenced re-commissioning her for roadworthiness – the major task is rewiring under the dash where the rats and mice have had a wonderful time for the past 30 years



Jim Whitehead's splendid fleet of V12s, plus his equally beautiful Alvis 4.3 roadster.



Jim, busy sorting the wiring on his DB Rapide.



Jim's V12 Rapide, just as beautiful from the rear.



Does the man never stop?

And so to the story proper, prompted by the photo which appeared on Page 13 of club magazine No. 219. Permit me to emphasise that our knowledge of its early history is based upon what Mr Davies told Jim prior to purchase, as we understand the Works records of it were lost when the Staines factory was bombed during the war V12 Rapide 14107R was ordered, with special coachwork to be carried out by James Young, sometime early in 1939 by the eldest son of an Earl. It was one of only four road cars to leave the factory fitted with the Sanction IV four-carburettor engine producing more power, a lightened chassis and modified brakes. (Might it also be the only Rapide with bespoke coachwork?) The body was commissioned to provide a vehicle for fast European touring with baggage security in mind, thus the only access to storage space is behind the fold-down rear seat squab. The rear of the car is a marvel of artisanry, being one sheet of duralium (the metal from which all the body is constructed) from doorpost to doorpost. Arnold Davey informs us that the first registration of FYU 319 was issued by London County Council in October 1939, by which time the chances of a 1940 Le Mans race had disappeared, so the spare race engines were available to be fitted into favoured customers' cars.

About this time the young Lord had gone to France with his regiment, from where he did not return. His younger brother became heir but he was killed in the North Africa campaign. Thus the car became the property of the elderly Earl, however he also died before the end of hostilities. After the war the Rapide was sold to the proprietor of a chain of laundries, then with Jim Davies as agent, to my father. To the best of our knowledge we are the third owners. Dad bought the car relying entirely on

Mr Davies' description and reputation. This was about 5 years before he visited the UK for the first time and attended his first AGM – a mere half century ago!

Upon retirement in 1980 Jim took seriously to his garage in Sydney and set about the restoration of the cars he had been collecting, especially the V12's. At one stage I recall four V12 motors, a DB 3 litre motor and two Alvis 4.3 motors lined up on stands behind the work bench. Short of body-off, he totally restored the V12 Rapide and since 1987 it has been trailered to a few rallies in NSW, Victoria and South Australia and driven a couple of hundred miles

During many trips to England and AGM's since 1959 my parents enjoyed the company and hospitality of many club members, and the families that I recollect being spoken of or that I have met myself include May, Wilby, Crocker, Leo, Forshaw, Davey, Schofield, Overy, Hare, Michael, Seaton, Ody, Valentine, Hine, Bugler, Heard, Painter... and doubtless others I have overlooked. Members of The Lagonda Club (and The Alvis Car Club in Australia), have contributed enormously to my Father's quality of life.

About a decade ago my parents moved to Walcha where I have been farming since 1977. Most fore-noons Jim drives the short distance out to my property and we put in a few hours in the workshop on the beloved Lagondas (of which he/we have owned 14 or 15) and Alvises (about *5). That, plus my Mum, the love of classical music, fine literature, European history and the occasional good Scotch, is what keeps him ticking over. He is unaware of this article, so it will come as a big surprise when he opens that familiar buff envelope with an enthusiasm that has not diminished in over fifty years... let's hope it is not too great a shock!

PART	No.	TYPE.	DETAILS.	PART	No.	TYPE.	DETAILS.
Carburettor: o/s N/S	P1700	SU-D4	4 carb system	Master Switch.....	P2639	ST330	
Carburettor: o/s	P1701	SU-D4		Ignition Switch.....	Pa-P2070	Switch Panel	
Carburettor: Needles		RK.		Map Light.....			
Petrol Pump.....	Z5821	SU		Speedometer.....	P2006	AT	Mileage 410
DIST Magneto.....	N/S	P459	647 KA	Rev. Counter.....	P2007	AT	
DIST	o/s	P460	647 LA	Clock.....	P2010	Smiths	
Dynamo.....	P458	CS/HV		Ammeter.....	P2000	Hobson	
Starter.....	P457	BSH.1-8/12		Oil Gauge.....	
Batteries.....	P2017	6CT SR15		Petrol Gauge.....	
Radiator.....	P6489	Without Rad Shell.	LM	Thermometer.....	
Steering Wheel.....	P5176			Starting Handle.....	P2172	(Special mod: by coachbuilder)	
Steering Column.....	P5200	510	Ratio Length	Plugs.....	P1208	Blanchin L-10-S	
Gearbox.....	G10-369			Oil Pipe.....		Electric gauge.	
Speedo: Gears.....	P7220	P7221		Auto. Lubrication.....		Tecolent	
Front Axle.....	Torion Bars			Jackall Jacks.....	P6001	DWS	
Rear Axle.....	GA-136-166	Ratio	11 x 45 11 x 49	Tools & Kit.....		Yes.	
Propellor Shaft.....	P3110	Mechanics		Body Colour: Top...			} Belec-Metallic islet grey 202606 (Nobell's Slough) } Special Body by Jungs.
wheels.....	Z4101/2			Body Colour: Bottom			
Tyres.....	P3012	6.50x15	Dunlop	Chassis Colour.....			
Hub Caps.....	Z4333-4			Wheels Colour.....			
Silencer.....	o/s	R-P8547	Bangers.	Wings Colour: Front			
Shock Absorbers.....	Amstrong	Control	Lever	Wings Colour: Rear			
Petrol Tank.....	P4553/1			Trimming.....			
Front Bumper.....	P9296	Barry		Hood & Cover.....			
Head Lamp: N.S.....				Side Curtains.....			
Head Lamp: O.S.....			Specials fitted by coachbuilder	Tonneau Cover.....			
Side Lamps.....	P6640			Screen.....			
Tail Lamp.....			fitted by coachbuilder	Sliding Roof.....			
Fog Lamp.....	P2065	FIG7		Travel Plate.....			
Stop & Reverse Lamp				Mirror.....			
Engine Room Lamp..			Rear Springs P9334	Screen Wipers.....			
Interior Lamp.....				Luggage Carrier.....			
Dash Lamp.....	Yes.	Pa-P2070		Sun Vizor.....			
Indicators.....				Companions.....			
Horns.....	Z4991/2	Indolite	WT 13	Ventilator.....			
Cigar Lighter.....	P2016	Berkshire	Automatic	Keys.....	3 gm MRN1	Doors 4775	

Reference.	Model	Name.	Chassis.	Tourer.	Saloon.	Coupe.
	V.12	Mr Gillson	Rapide 14107			14107 14107

DATE OF ORDER.	PURCHASER'S NAME:—																	
Delivery Required...	PARTICULARS OF ORDER:—																	
Delivery Quoted....	Chassis Delivery. delivery 24th July certain																	
Date Delivered..	3/1/39.																	
Body Number....	No Bonnet. No Headlamps. No Radiator Shell.																	
Engine Numbers...	No front wing assembly. 4 lit B. 2024 3/2 - D.H.C. Footwells.																	
Collection Note Number....	Undrilled front Brake Drum P3018/1 Thin oil in Shafts New type Oil Filler & Level. Water Pump & Suction Filler head. New type Thermostat. New type trailing Brake shoe at front P6868/N/S P6869 9/2																	
Delivery Authorised By.....	<table border="0"> <tr> <td>Total</td> <td>38</td> <td>1</td> <td>5</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Recd.</td> <td>20</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>bill P. 1351 - 2105</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Prob</td> <td>19</td> <td>2</td> <td>0</td> <td>818 - 819</td> </tr> </table>			Total	38	1	5		Recd.	20	0	0	bill P. 1351 - 2105	Prob	19	2	0	818 - 819
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Prob	19	2	0	818 - 819														
Card Checked By.....	<table border="0"> <tr> <td>18016</td> <td>Hesseltine</td> <td>Wilmott</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>			18016	Hesseltine	Wilmott												
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Reference.	Model	Name.	Chassis.	Tourer.	Saloon.	Coupe.
	V.12	W. Gillson	Rapide 14107			2205 1110