

## LAGONDA (SERIES 2/3/4)

**B**Y THE END of 1974 Aston Martin was in receivership, and it looked as if the fine old marque was finally finished. But over the next year and a half the company was rescued and rebuilt. Early in 1976, with production once again under way in earnest, the new owners began to plan a spectacular new car that would show that Aston Martin Lagonda was back to stay.

William Towns once again styled the car and, as with the genesis of the DBS in the 1960s, he proposed the concurrent development of two cars: a short-wheelbase Aston and a long-wheelbase Lagonda. But the new cars he proposed were very different to anything Aston Martin had attempted before, with a brave modern shape and plenty of innovation under the skin.

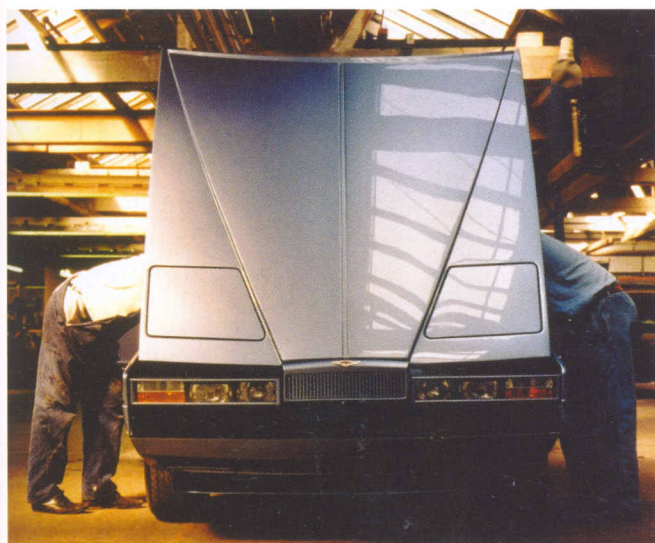
The new management decided to concentrate on the Lagonda, a car that the Aston Martin Owners Club were later to

refer to as the 'Series 2' to differentiate it from the rare 1974–76 Series 1. Towns worked twelve-hour days to turn his initial sketch and scale model into a full-size mock-up from which measurements could be taken to begin the body tooling process. The body itself was made in the now traditional Aston way, with hand-rolled aluminium alloy panels laid over a box-section body frame – but the shape was something else: a futuristic, sharp-nosed wedge. At the front, pop-up headlamps were inset into the bonnet, with two pairs of auxiliary lights flanking a vestigial 'radiator' grille, which actually provided an intake for the gearbox oil cooler. Straight lines and sharp creases defined the shape of the cabin and tail. A glass panel was let into the rear half of the roof, so the Lagonda's cabin felt surprisingly bright and airy.

RIGHT: The 'Series 2'

Lagonda had an eye-catching shape and advanced electronic instruments, but it proved difficult to get into production.

BELOW: Despite the modern shape, the Lagonda used a similar chassis and drivetrain to the V8 cars and was built in much the same way.



Underneath, the Lagonda was based on the usual Aston Martin platform chassis, but considerably lengthened: the new car was 14in (356mm) longer than the old Lagonda, itself 12in (305mm) longer than the Aston Martin V8. Suspension was carried over from the Aston, so the Lagonda retained the wish-bone front suspension and the de Dion rear with inboard rear brakes.

Mike Loasby was now leading Aston Martin's engineering team, and in addition to the chassis work, his men were given the apparently impossible task of making the Aston Martin V8 engine fit under the incredibly low bonnet of the new Lagonda. It was mounted as far back as possible, but still needed a new low-line intake system to squeeze under the bonnet – and the unwelcome side effect of that was a drop in mid-range torque. To restore the V8's output, big-valve cylinder heads were developed, together with lower-lift cam profiles to maintain



piston/valve clearances. The result was the same power and torque as the Aston-spec V8, delivered at lower engine speeds.

The main focus of attention, however, was inside the Lagonda. The interior was the most luxurious that Aston Martin had ever created, and there was adequate, if not generous, space for four people. But it was the Lagonda's instruments and controls that really got people excited: they were to be at once the Lagonda's biggest attraction and its greatest headache.

There were no conventional instruments at all, instead just a flat black plastic panel ahead of the driver, which lit up with LED readouts and graphic displays when the ignition key was turned. In addition to replacing the usual instruments, the Lagonda system provided a wealth of new information, such as elapsed journey time and average speed – in fact there was so much data that an 'Essential Services Only' switch was provided to turn off everything except speed, time and fuel level for driving at night. The controls were equally innovative, with conventional column stalks replaced by pods behind the wheel carrying touch-sensitive switches. In an era when computers were room-sized and digital watches a novelty, the advanced electronics in the Lagonda were headline news.

But when the Lagonda was unveiled to the press at The Bell Inn, Aston Clinton, in October 1976 it was far from finished, and needed a major redesign before it was ready for production. Aston Martin had promised the first customer cars for the summer of 1977, but it was April 1978 before the first car was delivered, and production did not get under way until months later.

Despite the development problems, the Lagonda was a hit, and became particularly popular in the Middle East. Gradual improvements in the specification included the adoption of BBS wheels (of a different type to those used on the Aston V8) in 1983, and later that year Aston Martin Tickford launched an £85,000 super-luxury conversion (the standard car was £66,000). That was followed in 1984 by a £110,000 long-wheel-base limousine, of which three were built. Also that year came new instruments using cathode-ray tubes, which could display messages in four different languages (English, French, German and, inevitably, Arabic).

In January 1986 the Lagonda adopted Weber-Marelli injection, as did the Aston V8, on what the Aston Martin Owners Club calls the 'Series 3'. A year later the instruments changed again, this time adopting more modern, vacuum fluorescent displays.



**ABOVE:** The Lagonda shape has not aged well, but the car has its devotees. Here two early models line up at an Aston Martin Owners Club event.

**LEFT:** The low nose of the Lagonda incorporated indicators and auxiliary lights. The main headlamps were pop-up units sunk into the bonnet.



Shortly after, a restyled Series 4 Lagonda made its debut at the Geneva Motor Show. The sharp edges were rounded off to suit modern styling preferences, the pop-up headlamps were replaced by six forward-facing lamps inserted into a restyled nose and the indicators dropped down into the front bumper.

The final Lagondas were built in 1989, but the car was not directly replaced, although the Lagonda name was to reappear a couple of years later when Works Service started applying the name to the Virage-based four-door saloons and shooting brakes it built.

Two 'one-off' Lagondas deserve a mention. The first is chassis number 4, one of the first development prototypes, which was later used to explore a high-performance engine

specification. The Vantage engine was too tall to fit under the Lagonda's low bonnet, so instead Aston Martin turned to turbocharging. Two Garrett T03 turbos were fitted, blowing through the standard Weber carburettors. Though effective (the turbo Lagonda could hit 60mph from rest in as little as 6sec), the installation never progressed beyond the prototype stage, and the car was later dismantled.

The other Lagonda one-off was DP2034, a two-door Lagonda, which was the development 'mule' for the chassis and suspension to be used on the Aston Martin Virage. Though Victor Gauntlett, Aston Martin's chairman at the time, said he wondered if there would be a market for the short-wheelbase Lagonda, no production versions were ever made.

**RIGHT: The Lagonda's original LED instruments were replaced by LCDs, then by cathode ray tubes. The final change came in 1987 when these vacuum fluorescent displays were adopted.**

**BELOW: The rounded-off styling of the Series 4 Lagonda made its debut at the Geneva show in 1986.**



## 1976 LAGONDA

Engine	V8, four Weber 42DCNF carburettors
Valvegear	Twin overhead cam per cylinder bank
Bore and stroke	100 × 85mm
Capacity	5340cc
Power	325bhp @ 6,000rpm (approx)
Transmission	Five-speed ZF manual gearbox, Chrysler Torqueflite automatic transmission optional, rear-wheel drive
Chassis/body	Steel platform chassis, box-section body frame with aluminium alloy body
Suspension	Double wishbones and coil springs front, de Dion with trailing arms and Watt link rear
Brakes	Four-wheel Girling disc brakes, hydraulically operated
Performance	(Series 2) 148mph (238km/h), 0–60mph in 7.9sec (approx)