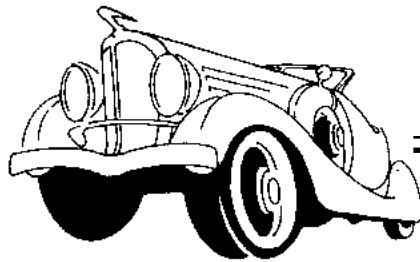


BUMPER

SUMMER 2011



GUARDIAN



*1939 Lagonda V-12 Rapide*

*Owned by Bill Holt and Liz Haan*



Pacific Northwest Region -- CCCA



Guided by one very clear objective—  
*to be the world's foremost  
automotive museum!*

SHOWCASE SPONSOR  
  
AMERICA'S CAR MUSEUM®

Celebrating America's love  
affair with the automobile

Phone: 253.779.8490 Toll Free: 877.902.8490 Website: [www.lemaymuseum.org](http://www.lemaymuseum.org)

# 1939 LAGONDA V-12 RAPIDE

*Article and Photography by Bill Holt*

The early history of our Lagonda Rapide is unknown other than it had been in California for a very long time, while owned by Lagonda collector George Chilberg and later by John Melillo. Some time ago we approached John about selling it to us and, after many years of patiently waiting, he finally agreed to part with it in 2008. By that time John had become very involved in collecting Art Deco antiques and was no longer interested in owning Classic Cars.



The car was very tired, but still mobile, so our first move was to transport it home to Vancouver B. C. and immediately place it in the very capable hands of

Mike Taylor and Ian Davey, owners of RX Autoworks (RX) in North Vancouver. We had determined that this rare car was well-deserving of a full frame-off restoration and this was the company that would do it right.



While Mike and Ian tackled the woodwork, metalwork and painting, Robert Fram took-on the mechanical work. The only task subcontracted was the upholstery, which was entrusted to Phoenix Upholstery, conveniently located just upstairs over the RX Shop. This restoration was an intense effort targeted for completion in time for our car to be entered in the 2010 Pebble Beach Concourse d'Elegance.





Bear in mind that this car is one of only twelve (12) Frank Feeley-designed Rapide models out of a total of just 190 total Lagonda's produced during model years 1938/39, all of which were equipped with their new SOHC V-12 engine. Seventy-

plus years after the last V-12 Rapide was produced, NOS and even used replacement parts are virtually impossible to find. RX had to make, or have made, everything that couldn't be salvaged including pistons, connecting rods and even the crankshaft. It took all of their extraordinary resourcefulness, ingenuity and a dedicated effort to complete the restoration in only 18 months.

We are very pleased with the results, both the cosmetics and the more-important mechanicals. The car is a dream to drive and we intend to do just that now that all the big shows are over and done with. At Pebble in 2010 we came second in our class - late pre war European - which is always a tough-one! The following month, at the Kirkland Concourse d'Elegance, we came "Second in Class" to the "Best in Show" car - and were also voted the "Most Elegant" car. Then we took our Rapide home and showed her at the Steamworks show in Vancouver where we won both "Best in Show" for our class and "Most Elegant Pre-War" car.

Liz and I are delighted with our Lagonda Rapide and will enjoy the pleasure of carefully driving it for a long time. It has been my pleasure to bring it to you as the featured car in this issue of our PNR-CCCA Bumper Guardian.



## **MEMBERSHIP PROFILE BILL HOLT & LIZ HANN**

*by Val Dickison*

Bill Holt and Liz Haan are a fun down-to-earth couple that share a passion for a wonderful example of automotive art – their 1939 Lagonda V-12 Rapide. Among their other interests are travel, gardening and model railroading.

Dr. Bill Holt was born and raised in Vancouver, BC, Canada and ran all the mental health facilities for the Burnaby Municipality until his retirement. Under Bill's tutelage were hospitals, outpatient facilities, halfway houses and other related programs for the Burnaby psychiatric community needs.

Liz Haan was born and raised in eastern Canada, living primarily in Montreal. IBM transferred her to Vancouver, where via a mutual friend, she and Bill met on a blind date as dinner guests, in that mutual friend's home. The friend also happened to be a "car guy" so it was apparently a match that was meant to be. Being the extra female and male at the table, or the "third wheel" at the dinner party, Bill and Liz found common interests and have driven down the road of life together ever since.

Liz retired a few years back from her IBM career and went on to attain the scholastic ranking of "Master Gardener". For the last thirty years she has planted, transplanted, manicured and tended to her extensive gardens at their shared home in southern Vancouver, British Columbia. The gardens are a treat for any visitor, I shall attest. Liz also maintains two community gardens near their home for the City of Vancouver. She is a volunteer at the University of British Columbia Botanical Gardens, as well.

Although Bill does not have an operating model train layout, he maintains a "static display" and has been a "train-nut" since boyhood. He has an extensive collection of various gauges, including HO, O and On3.

The couple enjoys travel and has spent time on botanical tours observing native habitats in various countries, including China. Trips nowadays may be closer to home, but future plans do include venturing east to Newfoundland. Car tours or caravans are always in the mix. If you see them on a tour, their infectious down-to-earth sense of humor will always captivate you and welcome you warmly.





## THE LAGONDA MOTOR CAR COMPANY

*Article by Raymond Loe*

The Lagonda automobile has always been recognizably British; surprisingly however, its founder was an American. The name Walter Gunn chose for his English company was based upon the Shawnee Indian word for "smooth running waters", which was the name of a small river near his hometown in up-state Ohio, USA.

Trained as an engineer and, after being groomed to enter his family's sheep-shearing machinery business, young Walter decided to emigrate to England in pursuit of becoming an opera singer. Instead, around 1898 he started making motorcycles and powered tricycles on a small scale at his home. After establishing a reputation for producing fast high quality bikes, in 1905 Gunn set-up a factory in Stains Bridge, Middlesex to begin producing 4-cylinder 20-hp automobiles. In 1907 he launched his first car, the "Torpedo" which was used to win the Moscow - St. Petersburg race of 1910." This success resulted in a big order for exports to Russia. Most of the early Lagondas went there -- an apparent reason that none produced before 1913 seemed to have survived.

In 1913, a newly designed Lagonda powered by a 1.1 liter, 4-cylinder F-head engine mounted on a 93" wheelbase went on sale in England. This car had ultra-quick steering and good performance. However, production was interrupted after little more than a year due to the outbreak of WWI at which time the entire factory was converted to produce artillery shells. As with many small companies founded at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Lagonda existed on a financial knife-edge. When Gunn became ill and died in 1920, at the age of 61 years, three of his existing directors headed by Colin Parbury took charge of the company.

In 1920, despite the tragic death of founder Gunn, Parbury was able to resume production of the Lagonda 1.1 liter 4-cylinder car using the original chassis along with a new 108" wheelbase version. This lineup remained in place until 1926 when two larger fours were introduced, a 1.4 liter and a 2.0 liter on 108" and 120" chassis respectively. One year later the "Speed Model", a 4-seat sports car on the longer chassis was made available. Smooth running but heavy, these cars were guaranteed to hit 80 MPH.

In 1928 Lagonda touring cars became more sporting, offering a new 2.7-liter 6-cylinder model on a 129" wheelbase chassis followed in 1929 with an even longer 132" version. In 1932 the firm began buying engines on the outside including a "Meadows" 6-cylinder 4.5 liter. Using this engine, a Lagonda BPK202 broke Alpha Romeo's four years of domination, winning the prestigious 1935 Le Mans Grand Prix by 8.5 km.

Meanwhile, Lagonda's on-going financial problems worsened under Parbury's watch and in 1935 it declared itself bankrupt. In due course, the company was put up for auction and bought by Alan Good when he outbid Rolls Royce. Good was then able to convince William Owen "W O" Bentley (who had been footloose since his own firm had been bought-out by Rolls Royce) to join Lagonda as Chief Engineer and bring with him many of his former R-R engineering staff.

W O immediately started work on a new V-12 engine and at the same time focused on making a luxury sports car out of their existing M45 Rapide. By reducing the wheelbase to 123", making substantial improvements to the Meadows 6-cylinder OHV engine and reducing its weight, the resulting 1936 LG45R Rapide was guaranteed to hit 100 MPH and sold as fast as they could be built. With 150-hp and independent front torsion-bar suspension this next generation "Rapide" had indeed become a sports car for the connoisseur. The lineup was soon expanded to include 4.5-liter Meadows-powered passenger models, some with wheelbases as long as 135", built to carry coach-built bodies.

In late 1937 Lagonda introduced W.O.'s magnificent, new, cast-iron, single-overhead camshaft V-12 engine with four downdraft SU carburetors. It delivered over 180hp and was said to be capable of smoothly accelerating any of their cars from 7 to 105 MPH in top gear. Lagonda stated at the time " After two years active experiment, the 12-cylinder Lagonda has obtained full 'statuyre'. Figures, which cause even its designers to pause and marvel, are available to show this new motor is designed to eclipse anything of its type so far produced. We built, indeed, even better than

we knew. The car is no mere recapitulation of a good – but tired – design in terms of 1937. It is a new-born car unrelated to any yet on the road – here or on the Continent. Such is the 12-cylinder Lagonda – a car designed to rank, from now on, amongst the greater names in motoring history.”

With the shadow of WWII looming, Lagonda was only able to produce 190 cars on the new V-12 chassis’ during the 1938 & 1939 model years and just twelve of those were the Frank Feeley designed, factory-bodied “Rapides”. Remarkably, all twelve of those Rapides are known to still survive.

The onset of WWII stunted developmental activity as Lagonda, in late 1939, once again converted over to war production, this time becoming one of the largest British gun production plants. Remarkably, during that period, W.O. and his team were able to continue their own mission by designing a completely new Lagonda with a smaller 2.6-liter twin overhead camshaft six-cylinder engine and four-wheel independent suspension. This very successful engine grew to 3.0 liters and was available until 1958.

In 1947 Alan Good’s Lagonda fell into serious financial difficulty. The company was taken over by David Brown and moved to Feltham, Middlesex where it was merged with Aston Martin (AM), which he had also bought. Lagonda production, including the new Lagonda model that had been designed during the war, was finally restarted in 1948 at AM.

During his ownership, David Brown founded the famous Aston Martin DB series that cemented by the DB4, established a good racing pedigree for the firm. By this time, many thought that the name Rapide was gone forever. However, during the four years following 1961, AM built 55 units of a revived Rapide. This time it was in the form of an aluminum-bodied 4-litre luxury saloon capable of reaching 125 MPH.

Sir David Brown’s last Lagonda was, in effect, an AM V8-powered four-door saloon of which a few replicas were made under the new management after Brown sold-out in 1972. There were several more interim owners of this often financially-troubled company until two North American businessmen took it out of bankruptcy in 1975.

Production was slow to restart while the new owners pushed the company into modernizing its line. There were only seven AM-built Lagonda saloons produced between 1974 and 1976 all powered by the venerable AM single-overhead-camshaft V8. These were followed by the Aston Martin Vantage in 1977 and Aston Martin’s Volante series in 1978 all using the same V8

engine.

Alas, the AML company was now badly hit by the economic contraction of the early 1980s resulting in Pace Petroleum and CH Industrials taking over as joint 50/50 owners at the beginning of 1981. After some development and a lot of publicity they were able to successfully sell the Aston Martin-built Lagonda as the “worlds fastest 4-seater production car” into the Persian Gulf States, particularly Oman, Kuwait and Qatar. Also, during the 1980s, AM built one Lagonda concept car displayed at the 1984 British Motor Car Show. It was a long-wheelbase fully-equipped limousine which was planned to be priced in excess of 100,000 pounds sterling. By the end of that decade they had produced 675 more V8-powered Lagonda saloons after which the engine was retired. [In 2001 the company introduced their “new V12 Vanquish” engine (could this have been W.O.’s 1937 engine resurrected?) and, in 2005, AM brought back their “retired” V8 when the new Vantage sports car began production.]

Austin Martin-Lagonda continued having financial problems, bringing in several more “owner/partners” including Ford Europe which first took a share holding in September 1987. Facing a revived economy along with recently improved sales, Ford agreed to take full control of AM-L in 1991. (A review of costs and realizable value on their investment led Ford to sell most of its ownership in the company during 2007.)

After a Lagonda production hiatus, AM-L built another concept car called the “AM-Lagonda Vignale” for display at the 1993 Geneva show. Then, in 1998, a handful of AM-Lagonda 4-door saloons were built on the chassis of the AM-Virage. Lastly, to commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Lagonda name, a 4-Wheel Drive 4-seat Sports Utility Vehicle, powered by a “V12 Vanquish” engine and fitted with 22 inch wheels was displayed at the 2009 Geneva Motor Show. Announced “production could start in 2012.”

Aston Martin claims to still value their Lagonda brand name and has said “it will be used to develop cars that can have a different character than a sports car. The AM-Lagonda will have its own niche with luxurious and versatile products suitable for both existing and emerging markets.”

It will be interesting to see in what form and just when the next “Lagonda” will appear.





