

CLASSIC DRIVER

The First of the Few: 'Sir David's' V8 Lagonda prototype

Lead

Well, it was his company, so why shouldn't Sir David Brown exercise an owner's right to have Aston Martin make anything he jolly well wanted? The result, in 1969, was a prototype DBS V8 with nearly a foot added to its wheelbase, additional rear doors, Lagonda badging and seating for five.

The car was announced to the media in January 1970 and bore Lagonda badges (on a new model for the first time since the early 1960s) - though it did retain the attractive four-headlamp chrome grille of the standard Aston Martin DBS. The idea of a full five-seater Aston Martin, able to transport Brown, a lady companion, two guests and a chauffeur had always appealed to the company's MD.

The concept had, in any case, been considered earlier when the design team under William Towns laid down the original drawings of the DBS. Sir David Brown's car, chassis MP 230/1, registration 'JPP 5G', was fitted with an early, 5.0-litre version of the fuel-injected V8. It also ran on wire wheels - a feature of six-cylinder DBSs - while subsequent DBS V8s were always equipped with GKN alloys. In period, the prototype engine was replaced by a 5.3-litre engine (on carbs) and the wires made way for the more appropriate solid alloys.





Not only was the car lengthened, by some skilful styling the roofline 'broke' much further back, allowing rear-seat passengers an additional 2.5 inches of headroom. And that's with a sunroof. The spare wheel was mounted flat under the floor of the boot whose lid now included the panel between the rear lights, thus allowing picnic equipment, golf clubs or shooting paraphernalia to be loaded and unloaded that much more easily.



As a prototype, MP 230/1 served as the inspiration for a further seven production four-door Lagondas in period (the 'Magnificent Seven', plus a car constructed on a spare chassis in the late 1990s), all subsequently referred to as 'Series I' cars. Featuring horseshoe-shaped grilles, they were built from 1974-1975, after the company had been sold to Company Developments and was no longer part of the David Brown empire.





While in Sir David's ownership, though, resplendent in Roman Purple with a red velour interior, the one-off you see here was a familiar sight in Newport Pagnell. With 'DB' in the rear and faithful chauffeur 'George' at the wheel, it transported the MD to and from meetings in London, Newport Pagnell and Huddersfield, where the David Brown group's HQ was located.





Sitting in the imposing car today, one can't be anything other than impressed. And immediately transported back to the days of meetings at the Confederation of British Industry, three-piece suits with large collars and ties, and a drabber world, still recovering from the War, uncertain of itself in that strange period in Britain when the optimistic 60s turned into the strife-torn 70s.

And, as you can see here, it's as comfortable being 'Sir David' in the back as playing 'George' in the front. Now finished in a more sedate metallic navy blue with blue hide interior, on the back roads of Buckinghamshire the Lagonda feels just like an early, non-Vantage V8. Once warmed up, the carburettored engine and three-speed automatic 'box move the big car along quite well. It rolls a touch, but nothing out of the ordinary for what has always been a luxury (but still sporting) limousine.



Although interested purchasers might ask Aston Martin expert Desmond Smail to quote for total restoration, this is a car that works well as it is. Yes, a 6.3-litre engine, 'quick-shift' gearbox and the very effective braking and suspension parts now available for the V8 model would be nice.

But this writer feels the car is so significant that such modifications take away its uniqueness and place in Aston Martin heritage. A repaint in Roman Purple, with all-red interior, now that's another matter... "Home please, George!"

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