



The Centaur (77)

Tue, 21st Feb 2006, The Centaur

Lot 28

Estimate: £26000 - £30000 + Fees

1932 Lagonda 2 Litre Supercharged Drophead Coupe

Registration No: PN 8750

Chassis No: OH 10027

Mot Expiry: Sept 2006

A development of the Lagonda 2-litre that was driven by Andre D'Erlanger and Douglas Hawkes to 11th place overall at the 1928 Le Mans 24-hour race, the 'Low Chassis' model was introduced the following year. Benefiting from a redesigned front axle (complete with rerouted braking system) and rear suspension spacers etc, its reduced centre of gravity resulted in notably sharper handling. Powered by a 1954cc 'twin-cam' four-cylinder engine that boasted hemispherical combustion chambers and inclined overhead valves, the 'Low Chassis' was reckoned to be good for 80mph (though this was somewhat coachwork dependant). Concerned that rivals such as Alvis and Sunbeam were beginning to offer cars of similar performance, the Staines-based company unveiled a supercharged derivative at the Brooklands Fete on 19th July 1930. While, the attendant demonstrator wore a Powerplus single-rotor assembly, the majority of 'blown' production cars were specified with either Cozette No.9 (4psi) or altogether rarer Zoller (5-7psi) units.

First registered on January 2nd 1932 to a Mr Howard Barham of Snape, Wadhurst, Sussex, this particular Low Chassis 2-litre is thought to have begun life with a Zoller supercharger (a supposition supported by its bonnet length and accompanying Lagonda Club correspondence which records it as carrying a Zoller in 1944). Eschewing Lagonda's own line of bodywork, the discerning Mr Barham had PN 8750 clad as a two-door drophead coupe by renowned coachbuilders James Young (the end result bearing a striking resemblance to their various Alfa Romeo 6C 1750 based creations). Reputed to have competed in both the 1932 Torquay and 1933 RAC Rallies (starting from Bath on each occasion), the Lagonda would certainly have found use for the more potent blower.

Acquired by a Mr Harry Chalmers of Welbeck Street, London on October 5th 1934, PN 8750's movements over the next twelve years remain a mystery. Resurfacing at the Royal Naval Engineering College, Reyham, Devonport with new owner Mr Ronald Rolo in 1946, it was bought the following year by fellow serviceman Mr Peter Symons who promptly had its Zoller "stripped and put on test at Manandon (R.N.E.C.)" where the possibly rally-worn component was found to exhibit "very excessive clearance between the tips of the blades and the casing". Notwithstanding this defect, the drophead dutifully followed its master on his travels to Greenwich (R.N. College), Croydon and Bath. Demobbed in 1954, it migrated to first Warminster and then Egham over the next four years before entering the custodianship of Mr Dennis Clarke with whom it would remain for the best part of five decades!

An industrial chemist by profession, Mr Clarke seems to have been a man of meticulous habits as witnessed by the forty

years of correspondence between himself and Ivan Forshaw (former Lagonda Club spares' registrar and later proprietor of Aston Service Dorset) that sits neatly bagged in PN 8750's history file. A quick perusal of this information 'gold mine' reveals that the Lagonda had an eventful 1960s. Treated to an engine rebuild (1962), replacement ash frame (1963-1964), new double-duck hood (1965), fresh clutch (1966), re-trimmed back seats (1967) and hydraulic shock absorber conversion (1969), it also received a police caution in June 1967 following its conduct on the infamous A31 Hog's Back road. Typical of the care he lavished on the Lagonda, Clarke wrote to James Young prior to commencing the body refurbishment only to be told that their records had been destroyed during World War II. Stung by criticism from fellow Lagonda Club members that his beloved PN 8750 was scruffy, the chemist was apt to retort that at least his car got driven as its maker had intended. Though long since divorced from its Zoller, the 2-litre was apparently Mr & Mrs Clarke's sole means of transport until the 1980s when its usage dropped to seven months a year (April 1st to October 31st). Thus, car and driver clocked up well over 100,000 miles together.

Still proudly wearing the replacement water jacket sideplate that it gained during a 1973 engine overhaul, the past few years have seen the old warhorse benefit from attention to its cylinder head (new 'Y' off-take pipe), brake system and Lucas dynamo. A testament to the care it received and proof of its faithful service, the Lagonda comes with no less than forty-two MOT certificates issued between 1961 and 2003. Originally finished in red over black with brown leather upholstery, the Lagonda's weathered green livery is believed to date from the mid 1950s. Proof that one should never judge a book by its cover, Clarke and PN 8750 covered a good 2,000 miles in their final year together including a summer 2004 trip from the South Coast to Yorkshire and back.

Despite being in the present ownership for a comparatively short time, plans were already afoot to reconvert it to forced induction when a boating accident caused the vendor to rethink his motoring needs. Offered for sale with forty-two expired MOT certificates, a large quantity of bills / correspondence (dating back to 1947), original buff logbook (plus two subsequent ones), MOT certificate valid until September 25th 2006 historic class (free) road tax until September 30th 2006 and boxed Volumex supercharger, this wonderfully patinated Lagonda is a real treasure.