



Lagonda Rapide

Run by Martin Buckley
 Total mileage 86,985
 Miles since July '05 report 6285
 Latest costs £1700

Rapide fit for new rear belts



Above: Quickfit team secures new anchors for seatbelts beneath rear bench. Main: fabric for belts chosen to match Rapide's cream leather



Minimal intrusion in boot from mounts



Neat buckle installation beneath seats



New anchors; headlining needs doing



Shoulder straps emerge from rear shelf

'If the Rapide is to be even semi-usable it needs belts in the back and, to be honest, new ones in the front'

Years ago, as nippers we rattled about in the backs of old cars without a care. No longer. Today, rear seatbelts are becoming a recurring problem for those of us with kids.

Most of the stuff I like doesn't have them and many cars that appeal don't even have anchor points to fit them. If the Lagonda Rapide is to be even semi-usable it needs belts in the back and, to be honest, some new ones in the front. I knew the only answer was to see Stuart Quick at Quickfit Safety Belt Service in Kingsbury (not far from the old Vanden Plas coachworks).

When Quick's father Bill started the firm in 1960 there were 70 companies manufacturing seatbelts but nobody actually fitting them. "He worked from home in the beginning," said Quick, "and all the fitters were mobile. That became a pain so he got a permanent base." Quickfit has dealt with every development in belts, from early static lap and diagonals to the latest pretensioned devices, which have to be replaced after an impact because they don't work more than once.

New cars have been factory-fitted with rear belts since 1987 but

there is still a lot of work out there for Quick, fitting belts to coaches and MPVs – and even extra large belts to accommodate the more portly driver. Fitting belts to classic cars is an important strand of the business: "With older cars you've got to be sure there is no corrosion. We don't fit belts unless the mountings are safe. Old XJ Jaguars, for instance, have terrible rust problems – I remember trying to put front belts into old XJs and finding the sills coming away. But we can weld-up and make things safe ourselves, within reason."

For aluminium-bodied cars such as Bristols and R-type Bentleys – and, to a lesser extent, the Lagonda – prices escalate sharply for a set of four belts because they don't have a central pillar that is strong enough to anchor them: "The waist rail on a coachbuilt Bentley is too low so we make a framework that bolts to the structure of the car, running parallel to the pillar and trimmed in the same leather, and brings the anchor point to the right height. A job like that might take a week or more, so it isn't cheap, and has to be over-engineered because you can't

really test what you've done." Quick's team did a lovely job of fitting four period chrome-buckled belts in a colour that matches the Rapide's cream seats. The rears are hidden expertly in the back shelf with the wadding disappearing into neatly cut slots that look like the factory could have done them.

You may have read elsewhere about the Lagonda's fuel problems, of which there has been no recurrence, but it now has a leak in the driver's side fuel tank – emanating from around the sender unit – and a working fuel gauge.

I've also had the bumper rechromed by S&T Chrome Plating in Yate, near Bristol. It took forever but they've done a fine job. But the best news is the near-completion of the Lagonda's interior. There are jobs to do but it now has carpets – I reused as many of the original pieces as possible – and door trims, which makes the car vastly more habitable. All thanks, once again, to Frank Dale's trimmer Matthew who also put a new section in the driver's seat. It still needs headlining – it's ripped and looks surprisingly cheap, rather BMC-like – and stuffing for the front seat bases, plus a good clean.

Bob Price, local painter and motorcycle racer, has done a good job of tidying up the paint without going daft and the result is a car that looks very presentable. All it needs now is a set of original wheeltrims – does anyone have a set they could sell me? It's either that or have the wheels painted black, but that would mean taking off the new tyres – huge money from Vintage Tyre Supplies – which would be a pain. I'd also like to find a proper toolkit and jack, plus an original radio and owner's handbook – although I'm not convinced they did one for the Lagonda.

Graham Millard, a DB5 owner and a man highly sensitive to the Lagonda's needs, fitted new bearings in the differential, changed all the engine hoses and strongly advised that the Rapide will need its steering rack rebuilding for the next MoT in January. He also hopes to find some of the proper door seals to get rid of the wind noise.

In the meantime the car is in many ways a joy and I'm hoping it will make the C&SC Christmas lunch this year...

THANKS TO

- Quickfit SBS: 020 8206 0101
- Vintage Tyre Supplies: 01590 612261
- Matthew (interior trim) at Frank Dale & Stepsons: 020 8847 5447
- Painter Bob Price
- Graham Millard for rear wheel bearings, servicing and advice
- S&T Plating: 01454 313162