

Long Range Survival

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

When I was young, in the late 1970s, I saw an Aston Martin Lagonda displayed at the Detroit auto show and was mesmerized by it. The car was behind velvet ropes, and no one was allowed to touch the car. At the time, the car cost \$150,000 and was the most expensive car of its time. In comparison, you could buy a Rolls Royce for around \$65,000. This car was on an entirely different level.

The square-jawed man, who was behind the velvet rope with the car in an expensive-looking suit, told me and a group of awe-struck Detroiters how exclusive it was:

- The car had the first ever digital dashboard
- The car went 150 miles per hour (extremely fast back then)
- The car was handmade out of aluminum (very rare back then)
- The car was very luxurious inside
- The car had two sun roofs

Moreover, the car was visually striking. It was an amazing looking car with a low hood and pop up headlights.

Despite what looked to be a very formidable car, it quickly gained the reputation of being one of the worst cars ever made. It was overpriced, and very few things in the car ever worked properly. The digital dashboard was famous for never working. It would frequently break down, windows would stop working, the battery would mysteriously drain overnight, and in a ghost-like fashion, the digital dashboard would somehow turn on, even when the car was not on, displaying speeds that seemed impossible.

Notwithstanding all of the reported issues with the car, it remained a dream of mine to one day own one. For years I browsed ebay and various automotive collector sites looking at pictures of Lagondas when I saw them for sale. While the cars had sold for astronomical amounts when new, due to the amazing amount of problems with them, they sold very cheaply used. In fact, the used market for them ranged between \$10,000 and \$30,000.

About 10 years ago, I ended up purchasing one from a seller in Florida. The ebay listing spoke in glowing terms about the car, and its celebrity pedigree included not one, but multiple, celebrity owners. The car was apparently in excellent shape and was "museum quality." Not only did everything work, but the car was immaculate.

The car arrived on a flatbed truck and was nothing like the seller promised. Instead of being a "pristine car," virtually nothing on the car worked. The hood needed to be repainted. The car did not start for weeks. When I finally managed to get a new battery in the car and got it started, the interior filled with exhaust fumes because there were holes in the floor boards and the muffler. The digital speedometer and dashboard flickered on and off, and there were various strange problems with the car that defied explanation. For example, you might be driving down the street in the car and, all of a sudden, the air conditioning would turn off and the heat would turn on, making the inside of the car feel like a sauna. Other times, you might be driving down the freeway, and the car would not go more than thirty miles per hour. It was anyone's guess how fast you were really going, though. When the speedometer did work, the digital readout could be anywhere between 0 and 150 miles per hour.

You could not count on anything with the car ever working. Door handles fell off. Locks stopped working. Lights sometimes decided they were turn signals and flashed like turn signals. In fact, there were so many strange things with the car that I stopped telling people about the problems because people did not believe me.

I told myself that I could fix the car up and made a major effort to do so. I shipped it off to someone who was supposed to be the best Aston Martin mechanic and restoration expert in the country. Once he returned it, six months and \$30,000 later, I continued to make an effort to restore it for years. I had the paint touched-up and waxed. I had the tires replaced. I repainted the rims. I had the motor for the power windows replaced many times. I steamed the engine. I put in a fancy satellite radio. I purchased new floor mats from the factory in England where the car had been made. I had a custom wood interior made. I replaced the headliner. I had the engine tuned, and then retuned, and then rebuilt.

My proudest moment came the time I drove the car into the Beverly Hills Hotel, and the valet opened the door and said: "Evil Knievel used to drive one of these here all the time."

Despite all of my efforts, however, the car never ended up functioning properly. The car was so poorly made that even Aston Martin dealers refused to work on it. I do not remember all of the explanations the dealers gave me for not working on the car, but they were numerous. One dealer flat out told me that when they fixed something wrong with the Lagondas, they would often mysteriously break again before the customers could pick them up.

One time, I got a mechanic on the phone from a local dealership to discuss his unwillingness to work on the car.

"Those are the worst cars ever made," he told me. "Even if you fix them, they are so messed up that a bunch of other stuff will end up going wrong."

One time, I met someone from none other than the Royal Family of England at a retreat in Napa Valley, California. I proudly told them that I owned this important piece of English history.

"You're kidding?" the man told me. "My father had one of those when they first came out. When he used to go driving, he would have two mechanics follow behind him in a Rolls in case he needed a ride home. I remember him coming home in the Rolls quite often when he tried to take the Lagonda out driving."

In the end, I ended up selling the car to another guy like myself. He, too, had dreamed of having the car for a long time.

I sold him the car on ebay, and he ended up picking the car up at the shop where it was getting fixed because it was still not

running when I sold it. The man was an electrical engineer who had gotten a doctorate from Stanford and was teaching at a small college in Northern California. He had apparently studied the electrical system of the car in graduate school and looked at it as an “intellectual challenge.”

When I advertised the car, I scanned some \$50,000 in repair bills I had accumulated over the few years of owning the car. In my advertisement, I said that “to the best of my knowledge” the car runs well.

The car broke down again when he was driving it home. A few days after buying it, he started demanding his money back for the car, stating I could not possibly have done all of the work indicated on the receipts because the car had many of the same problems within a few days of him buying the car.

While Aston Martin only made about 500 of these Lagondas, the truth is that there are a lot of Aston Martin Lagondas out there. What is an Aston Martin Lagonda?

In my mind, a Lagonda is something that is “flashy,” expensive, and makes big promises but does not deliver. In the business and work world, you run into Lagondas all the time. There are countless people and organizations out there who look attractive but overpromise and under deliver.

It is easy to get blinded by flashy things. In most cases, however, that flash is likely to mask the lack of substance of what you are looking at.

It is the illusion of value when none is there.

The Lagonda ultimately was something that “tricked” you into believing there was value when, in fact, there was none at all.

The reason there was no value in the Lagonda was because it did not do what it looked like it was going to do. Instead of having a dashboard, it had a digital contraption that did not work. Power windows did not work. The heating and cooling system did not work. The battery did not even stay charged. Nothing worked.

The reason nothing worked was because all of the thought behind the car went into the flash instead of the substance. If more thought had gone into the substance of the car, it might very well have been a good car. When someone spends that kind of money on a car, they expect that they are getting something that is made as well as it can be. They do not expect to be tricked with smoke and mirrors.

Sitting behind a velvet rope and having someone list all of its credentials, however, the car looked extraordinary. Unfortunately, just being attractive, exclusive, and having lots of qualifications on a resume does not make a good car.

Since I am in the career business, I spend hours each day reviewing resumes and speaking with job seekers and employers on the phone. The best employers are looking for people who look like Lagondas. They want someone who looks like they are incredibly special and unique. The problem with wanting a Lagonda, though, is that you are looking for the wrong thing. You should, instead, want a car that runs.

There are a lot of very smart people out there who look good on paper. They may be very good at taking tests (and intelligent), and end up getting into the best school, and get the best jobs. When they get to those jobs, though, it may become apparent that they are not strong at all. For example, they may lack follow through on projects, they may not have the right social skills to get along in a work environment, they may not put their heart into the things they are doing, they may consistently upset the wrong people, and they may not put everything they can into the projects they take on.

In reality, many of the best people on paper do not make the best workers and do not have the best careers. It is what is under the hood that counts and ultimately makes the biggest difference. The best workers typically deliver more value than you expect to be getting for the amount they are paid. It is like this with businesses as well. If something gives more value than you believe you are paying for, you tend to buy more of it.

The problem with the Lagonda was that it gave less value than people paid for. Anytime something gives less value than the amount that is charged for it, something will not sell well, and the company selling it is likely to experience financial problems and ultimately fail. It is like that with everything. If not enough value is given in exchange for what is being paid, the person or thing is likely to fail.

When someone does less than is expected of them for an extended period of time, they are likely to lose their job. When a group of people (a company or firm) does less than is expected of them for an extended period of time, the company is likely to go out of business.

The most successful organizations typically provide a lot of value for what their customers are paying for. They do more than is expected, and people within the companies are taught to not overlook any detail. Because these organizations are delivering so much value, they grow and stay in business.

People and companies need to provide more perceived value than they take in order to survive.

In order to really succeed, you need to concentrate on your contribution and giving more than others do. You cannot constantly keep score, and you need to give more than the next person. People who are constantly keeping score tend to keep score in their favor. Due to this, they are always measuring their contribution very closely. This is not a good long-range strategy for survival.

The long-range survival of any person, or business, depends on providing more value than you take. If you do not give more than you take, you will soon find yourself out of a job. You should make it a practice to always give more than you take. Giving more than you take is the only way to ensure long-term survival.