

# LANCHESTER LD10

If you want something obscure, well-built, luxurious and affordable, few cars fit the bill better than this tasteful British four-door saloon

WORDS: RICHARD DREDGE PHOTOS: TOM WOOD

1946-1951

**IS IT FOR ME?** Most family cars of the post-war era were cheaply finished to keep the purchase costs low. However, Lanchester pitched its cars at an altogether wealthier clientele who didn't mind spending £761 on a small family saloon when most rivals were asking a lot less.

This premium strategy ultimately led to the company's downfall thanks to a dearth of customers – but for five years the LD10 was an upmarket alternative to a Vauxhall, Morris, Austin or Ford. The high cost was necessary because the LD10 was more thoroughly engineered than cheaper rivals. There was an overhead-valve engine in place of rivals' side-valve units, while the transmission was a pre-selector unit with fluid flywheel.

The cabin was luxuriously finished – later cars were fitted with real wood and leather, while earlier examples featured a scumble dash (metal painted to look like wood). Bedford cord was an alternative option to the more usual hide trim. However, while this wasn't a car for paupers when new, it's eminently affordable now.

**WHAT'S THE HISTORY?**

Lanchester was taken over by BSA in 1931, which initiated development of a new car in 1938 with production planned to start in October 1939. But the Second World War meant no LD10s were built until April, 1946. Lanchester reckoned it would make 2000 LD10s annually, but in a five-year production run just 3005 examples were made – the car was too costly for cash-

**THANKS TO:** Adrian Hanwell, LD10 registrar for the Daimler Lanchester Owners' Club, 01277 227708.

**SPECIFICATIONS**

- **ENGINE:** 1287cc/4-cyl
- **POWER:** 40bhp@4200rpm
- **TORQUE:** 60lb ft@2000rpm
- **TOP SPEED:** 69mph
- **0-60MPH:** 34sec
- **CONSUMPTION:** 28-32mpg
- **GEARBOX:** 4-spd manual – pre-selector
- **LENGTH:** 13ft 2in (4.01m)
- **WIDTH:** 4ft 10in (1.27m)
- **WEIGHT:** 2576lb (1170kg)



**FRONT** From the front, the LD10 looks like many of its rivals, but it was superior to all of them.

strapped consumers in the post-war era. The prototype bodysells were produced by Barker, but the first production editions were produced by Briggs – a six-light saloon that looked smart but anonymous. By 1949 the LD10's cost had risen to £927 while there were now bodysell supply problems. The last Briggs car was made in November 1949, and it wasn't until June of the following year that production restarted.

From this point, bodysells were built by Barker, which produced a redesigned LD10 with a four-light design, no sunroof and a fixed windscreen. The £927 price tag was retained, but after just 579 examples had been built, the LD10 was killed off. Along the way there were a few rarities, including an Avon saloon, dropheads by Hooper, Wentworth and Abbott (two survive), and at least two vans – one of which survives.

**WHAT'S IT LIKE TO DRIVE?** The LD10 is comfortable, but its bulk blunts the engine's effectiveness and ensures you have to give the brakes a good shove to pull up. The steering is also a double-edged sword – it's directly geared at 2.5 turns between locks, but it's heavy. With compliant suspension, the ride quality is superb and there isn't as much roll as you'd expect, thanks to an anti-roll bar at the front – an unusual fitment for a car of this vintage. It's the Wilson pre-selector gearbox that's the eye-opener. To engage a gear, you pre-select the next cog you want



**For:** Classy, solid, unusual, cheap, comfortable  
**Against:** Hard to find, Fifties performance

by moving a lever on a quadrant behind the steering wheel. When you're ready to engage the ratio, you press the gear-change pedal (sitting where the clutch would usually be), release it and the car is in the desired gear. If you forget to pre-select, you push the gear-change pedal, select the ratio and release the pedal, as you would in a manual car. It's just slower. The big advantage comes in the ease of change.

If you're sitting on an uphill slope waiting to turn at traffic lights, you can be in first gear with the brake on, with second gear selected and the fluid coupling acting like a slipping clutch but without any wear occurring. When the lights change, you release the brake, accelerate and the car moves forward. As you turn, you're gaining momentum and you can stamp the gear change pedal and be in second gear, without releasing your hands from the steering wheel.

**HOW ABOUT MAINTENANCE AND UPGRADES?**

Although the LD10 has 18 greasing points, some needing attention every 1000 miles, the maintenance schedule isn't too onerous. You don't need any special tools – even a gearbox rebuild can be performed with a simple tool kit. Servicing is made much easier by removing the front end of the car. It's a 45-minute job.

The rest of the bodysell is easy to remove, which makes a full restoration relatively straightforward. Upgrades aren't necessary because the cooling system and wiring are fine if properly maintained. The lighting isn't great, but the trend has been to keep these cars to original spec. As a result, flashing indicators and sealed-beam headlamps already fitted are usually swapped back to semaphores and open reflector lights. Who needs progress?

**WHAT SHOULD I LOOK OUT FOR?** Lanchesters were always well-engineered and strong, and even 60 years on, the LD10 is a durable machine. But there are corrosion hot spots that need inspection such as the

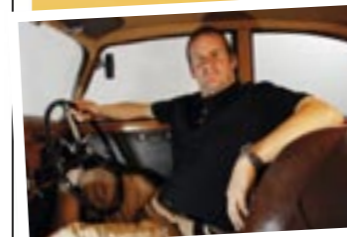
**Chris says...**

LANCHESTER WAS a true British motoring pioneer. Its original 1895 model was remarkable in that it was designed as a motor car from the ground up rather than as a horseless carriage.

The Lanchester brothers went on to make some fine vintage tourers but after their acquisition in 1931 by BSA, which also owned Daimler, the cars were squeezed into the gap between these two disparate marques.

The post-war LD10 is a curious mix. It has that good old fluid flywheel transmission, mechanical brakes and coil spring independent front suspension. The original Briggs-bodied car is the more numerous with 3050 units produced.

This compares with 575 of the later Barker-bodied version like the car featured here.



**VERDICT:** The LD10 is Arthur Lowe – post-war middle-class pretension personified, but loveable.

jacking points and the rearmost chassis sections. It's also worth checking the steering box mounting bracket, which can crack as the metal is thin. But all repairs are straightforward as it's just a question of plating the affected areas.

Panels can also corrode, but (apart from the rear wings of the Briggs cars) they're single-skinned so it's easy to see whether they've been filled or plated. Just about any used part is available from the Daimler Lanchester Owners' Club, including some panels – but bear in mind that the Briggs-bodied LD10 has integral rear wings while the Barker has bolt-on items.

**HOW MUCH?** Where you buy your LD10 can make a huge difference. Buy through the club and you'll pay far less than through the typical dealer. The rarity of these cars means traders don't know what to charge, so they ask plenty and usually get it. You can find a restoration project from £500. Slightly tatty running cars fetch about £1500. Buy the same car through a dealer and you could pay as much as £6000.

It's the same where mint cars are concerned; through the club you can purchase one for just £3000, whereas a trader will ask £8000. The problem is tracking one down. There only 100 or so examples left in the UK, and only three or four come on to the market each year.



**INTERIOR** Real wood and leather give later Lanchester LD10s a typically high-quality British feel inside.



**REAR** This Barker-bodied car features a more modern, curvy-booted rear end than the Briggs version.



**ENGINE BAY** The 1287cc engine is willing, durable and very easy to maintain. No special tools are required.