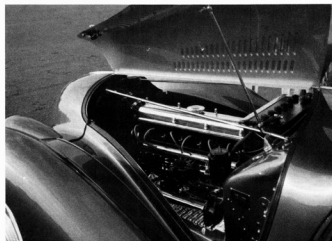


1939 Talbot-Lago Type T23 Teardrop Coupe, Figoni & Falaschi  
Owner: Sam Mann of Englewood, New Jersey



In the mid-thirties the Anglo-French conglomerate of Sunbeam-Talbot-Darracq fell with a mighty thud. The man who picked up the pieces in France was an Italian named Antony Lago who had spent much of his career in England.

Lago's resumé read well. His experience in the automobile industry had been widely varied: selling Isotta-Fraschinis in London, assisting Wilson in the perfection of the preselector gearbox, driving with the Armstrong-Siddeley factory race team, serving on the management team at Sunbeam in Wolverhampton. It has been said that during the S-T-D era, with the exception of yearly financial statements, the British hand never knew what the French hand was doing. That the situation at Suresnes was more critical than Wolverhampton had become apparent by 1933, however, when Lago was dispatched to France to help. Following the collapse, he fell natural heir to Société Anonyme Darracq cum Automobiles Talbot. What he had inherited was almost a corpse.

A luxury car with a performance image was Lago's prescription for revival. Another Italian living in France had been using the same formula successfully for years. It was at Ettore Bugatti that Tony Lago took aim. In 1936 he enticed René Dreyfus, the former Bugatti factory driver then competing in Alfas for Scuderia Ferrari, to become his team captain. "Your job will be to stay ahead of the Bugattis for as long as you can," Lago told Dreyfus. "That's all I want." In race after race René had the fastest lap but failed to finish. That point made, Talbot-Lago reliability became the priority of the engineering department. Victories would follow.

The heart of Tony Lago's car was



its engine, redesigned from the Talbot-Darracq K78 into a brilliant four-liter 140 hp six with seven-main-bearing crankshaft, hemispherical combustion chamber and overhead valves operated by cross-over pushrods. This same engine was installed in touring cars capable of better than 120 mph and competition machines good for more than 130. "It is essential to maintain a close and constant tie between the *bolide* and the customer's car," Tony Lago declared, "... high performance has no true worth unless its results can be passed on to the average driver." A contemporary put it more succinctly: "Bugatti builds what he

races, Lago races what he builds."

The coachwork which surrounded the Talbot-Lago engine and its formidable cross-braced chassis (which featured independent front suspension and, of course, the Wilson preselector gearbox) was memorable. Like Bugatti, Tony Lago was perpetually broke. Production of prosaic and lesser-powered sedans helped the exchequer. The cars Lago himself preferred were the cabriolets and coupes which lent themselves more readily to the coachbuilding art.

"A piece of sculpture on wheels," says Lindley Locke of his Figoni & Falaschi Lago SS Coupe. "This car has the most gorgeous, voluptuous,

sexiest styling imaginable. Someone once remarked that its lines are positively indecent."

"Very fast, terrific performing," comments Sam Mann about his T23 Teardrop Coupe. "And, with all that, an incredibly elegant car too."

Tony Lago's Italian nationality prevented the Third Reich from seizing his factory during World War II. Afterwards, production was resumed. The Talbot-Lago formula didn't change, but the times had. Talbot-Lago held on longer than most exclusive French manufacturers, but by 1959 the company had been quietly absorbed by Simca. One year later Tony Lago was dead.

1939 Talbot-Lago Type T150C Lago SS Coupe, Figoni & Falaschi

Owner: Lindley T. Locke of Fallbrook, California

