

BACK IN FASHION

*Suddenly, it seems the world has remembered just how
desirable the Big Healey is as a classic buy.
Here's why everybody wants one*

WORDS Mark Dixon // PHOTOGRAPHY Paul Harmer





SOME CARS JUST make you feel more alive. Big Healeys are definitely in that category: you have to engage with them in a physical way that's quite alien to the owners of today's sports cars, but they reward with a visceral thrill that's the very essence of driving. Less 'obvious' than an MG, more glamorous than a Triumph, the Healey is the epitome of British '50s and '60s style. It doesn't hurt, either, that the fairer sex loves them – if ever there was a car to make a girl look good in a head scarf, it's a Big Healey.

No surprise, then, that the world and his dog are after Big Healeys at the moment and prices have strengthened, in line with the general market. But the supply is still good and there are always cars available for sale. Surprisingly, the Healey was still selling well right towards the end of production; in 1966, its penultimate year, as many Big Healeys left the showrooms as during any previous year.

All Big Healeys are quick, but some are quicker than others, notably the four-cylinder 100s and the late six-cylinder 3000s. The character of the car changed significantly over the years as it was made increasingly more luxurious and the looks changed too; whether you prefer the lozenge-shaped grille of the 'fours' or the oval of the 'sixes' is a matter of personal taste, and most enthusiasts will veer strongly towards one or the other. If you dislike the shape of the earlier grille, then you're not alone – Donald Healey had serious doubts about it when the prototype was finished!

What remained consistent was the Healey's gorgeous profile, and it's not too fanciful to see in this car, conceived just a few years after the end of World War Two, echoes of some of the RAF's most beautiful fighter planes, such as the Spitfire and Mosquito. It has a shape that will never date.

The Big Healey went through several evolutions during its 15-year production cycle – turn to page 76 to see all of them – but all you really need to remember is that the sequence goes 100 (2.6-litre four-cylinder), 100-Six (2.6-litre six-cylinder), and then 3000 (2.9-litre six-cylinder, MkI-III). We gathered together and drove three key models: a 100 from 1955, Pat Moss's 1960 Liège-Rome-Liège Rally-winning 3000 MkI 'works' car, and a last-of-line 3000 MkIII. They are more different than you might suppose. ➔

1955 AUSTIN-HEALEY 100M

THE B4100 between Warwick – the spiritual home of Healey and now of specialist JME Healeys, which has sourced our feature cars – and Banbury is prime Big Healey territory. Running parallel with the M40 motorway, it's lightly trafficked and a pleasing mixture of long straights and fast, sweeping corners. It won't have changed much since this metallic green Austin-Healey 100M was built in 1955, and the freshly restored car is revelling in it.

A dawdling delivery truck hoves into view. He's seen you in the mirror and pulls tight to the left. Check your sightline and flick out the overdrive (standard fitting on all 100s). The needle on the silver-gold rev counter jumps slightly, the blare of the 2.6-litre engine increases and you spear past the truck, raising your hand in salute to the driver for his thoughtfulness. Make no mistake: the 100 is still a quick car, especially in this 'M' spec, a kind of halfway house between the standard 100 and the ultra-rare 100S.

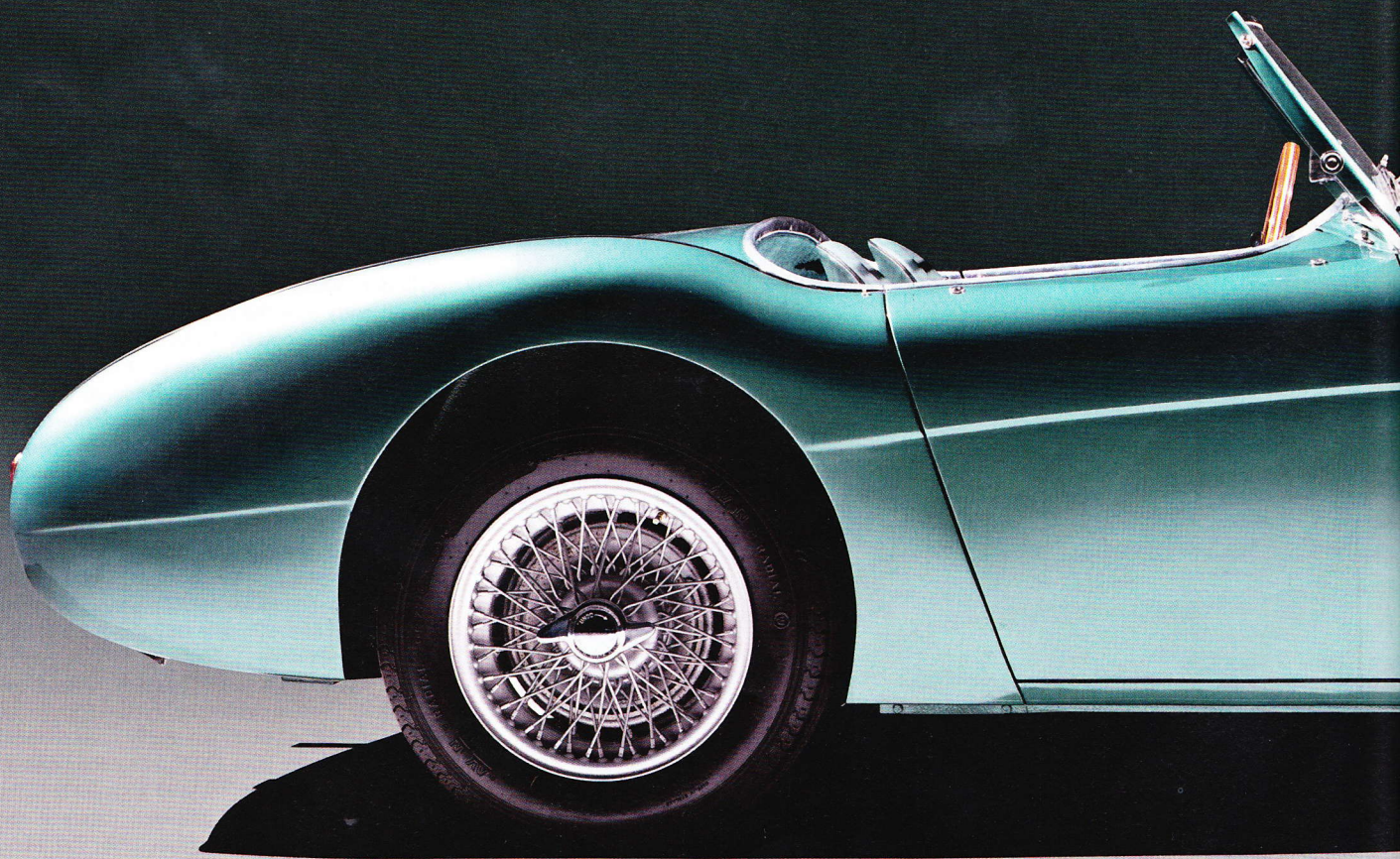
That was the great appeal of the original Big Healey, launched at the same 1952 London Motor Show as its soon-to-be competitor, the Triumph TR2 (née 20TS). At £750 plus tax when it hit the showrooms, the Healey was more expensive than the Triumph – £555 – but a lot cheaper than a Jaguar XK120 (£1130). And its performance wasn't that much inferior to the Jag's, taking one second longer to

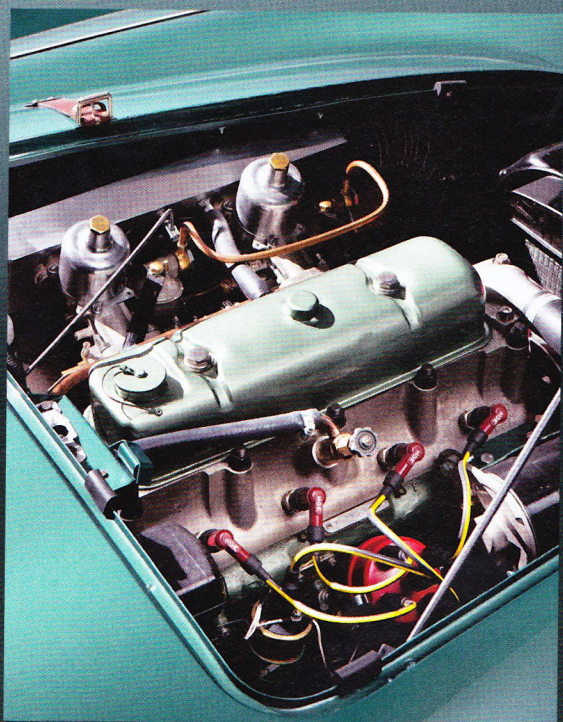
cover the 0-60mph dash and topping out at 107mph.

It was also a beautiful car, particularly by the standards of the time. Donald Healey may have been worried about the distinctive shape of the grille – such that he had the 1952 show car positioned nose-up to a pillar to obscure views of it – but the Gerry Coker-penned shape was timeless. The prototype arrived at the motor show badged as a Healey but, while the show was running, a deal was struck with Austin to produce the car, and Coker hastily drew up and had made a new badge reading 'Austin-Healey'. It was on the prototype by the end of the show.

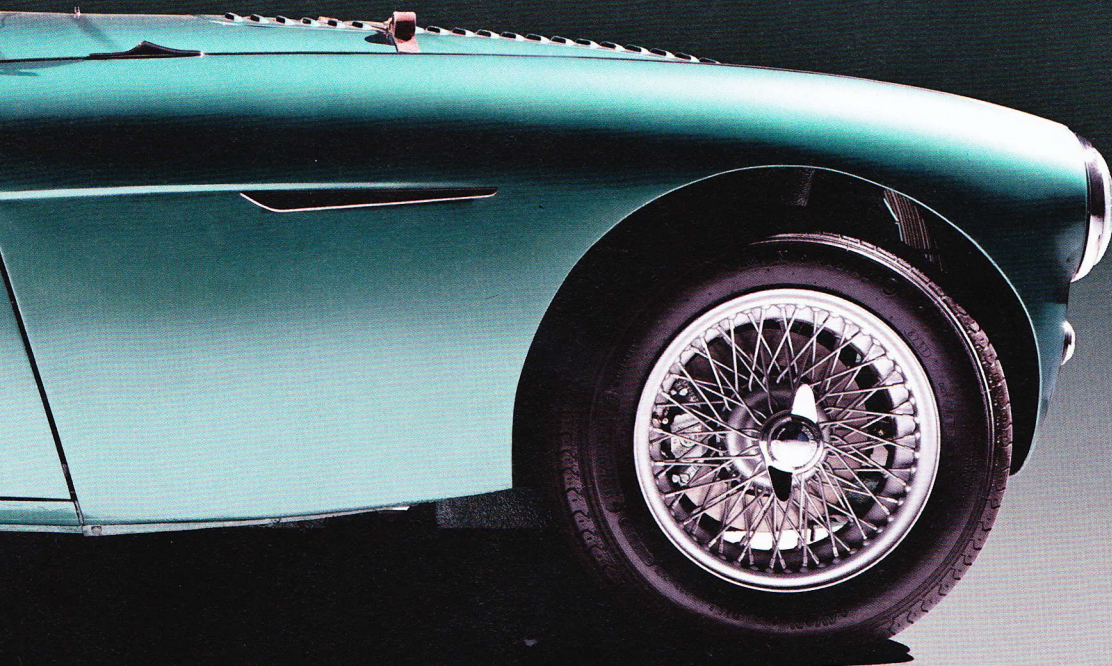
Beyond prototypes, experimental and some competition cars, Healey didn't build the 100 itself. Austin put the cars together, using its own A90-spec twin-carb engines and running gear, and body panels that were produced by its sub-contractor Jensen, just up the road in West Bromwich. One peculiarity was that the A90 four-speed gearbox had ratios that were rather on the low side for a fast sports car, so first gear was blanked off in the 100, turning it into a three-speed. In compensation, a Laycock overdrive was fitted as standard that operated on second and top gears, so in effect the 100 had a five-speed gearbox.

The new car was a hit right from the start, especially in the vital target market of America, where most of them





'It was a
lot cheaper
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XK120,
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BIG HEALEYS

Below

Removing the bumpers and/or overriders from the 100 shows up the purity of its curvaceous lines – emphasised by the lack of doorhandles, which were only fitted to six-cylinder cars.



would be sold. It's estimated that 90% of all 'Healey 100s were exported, and that maybe only 1000 examples were actually sold new in the UK. The situation has changed considerably since then, as Chris Everard – who now runs his late father Jon's company JME Healeys – explains:

'The UK is without doubt now the biggest market for Big Healeys, followed by mainland Europe,' he says. 'They're not as sought-after in the States and a steady stream of them is still returning to the UK, where demand has really taken off. There's also a good supply of parts available from the USA. The very few exceptions include window winder mechanisms and door locks – you can pay up to £200 a side for the latter. But you can still find them.'

The car in our pictures is a 1955 BN2, the second-generation version of the original 100, whose main difference was a new and stronger four-speed gearbox, still with overdrive. This BN2 has been converted to 'M' spec during its restoration, an option that was available from 1954 in tribute to the Le Mans cars that ran in 1953. At first available as a dealer-fit kit, the full 'M' package included tuning parts for the engine – high-lift cam, high-comp pistons, bigger SU carbs on special inlet manifolds – and suspension upgrades, plus the all-important louvred bonnet and leather strap. It's rumoured that some owners specified nothing more than these last two items... From 1955 the 100M was offered as a production model and it's now one of the most desirable 'Healeys, our feature car being valued for insurance purposes at about £65,000.

This just-restored car looks absolutely stunning – the metallic green shade and lack of bumpers may not be period-correct, but they suit the car – and you have to

wonder whether 'Healeys were ever this good when they came out of Longbridge. The answer is, no, they weren't...

'We've seen cars that have remained untouched since new and the panel fit is laughable,' says Chris Everard. 'My granddad was shop foreman at Healey and told stories of panels being stamped out three at a time in the press, which meant the top one was a different shape to the one at the bottom, and it takes a lot of time to adjust front and rear wings so that the gaps are even at either end of the doors. The workers at Longbridge just didn't have that luxury.'

Leaving aside potentially iffy build quality, there wasn't much to complain about with the showroom-stock 100. Overdrive, a tonneau cover, wire wheels and even a heater unit came as standard, which was quite unusual for a mass-market British sports car in the early '50s. OK, so the weather equipment was the usual pre-war formula of sidescreens and a separate tent-like arrangement involving fiddly hood sticks, but we were a hardy lot in the 1950s and no-one would have looked askance at that.

Not once they were on the open road on a fine spring day, anyhow. The 100 accelerates crisply with characteristic gear whine, the gearlever – positioned way over on the left of the transmission tunnel – moving from slot to slot precisely if not slickly; and the steering, which is heavy at low speed, feels beautifully delicate and accurate when you're barrelling along. Only the stiffness of the rear suspension – which is likely to be due to the vagaries of modern leaf spring manufacture; it seems to be a dying art – detracts from the experience.

But brimming the tank will help tie the back end down, and what better excuse do you need to go for a long drive? ➔

1955 AUSTIN-HEALEY 100M BN2

ENGINE 2660cc four-cylinder, OHV, cast-iron block and head, two 1.75in SU H6 carburettors

POWER 110bhp @ 4500rpm

TORQUE 160lb ft @ 2500rpm

TRANSMISSION Four-speed manual with overdrive, rear-wheel drive

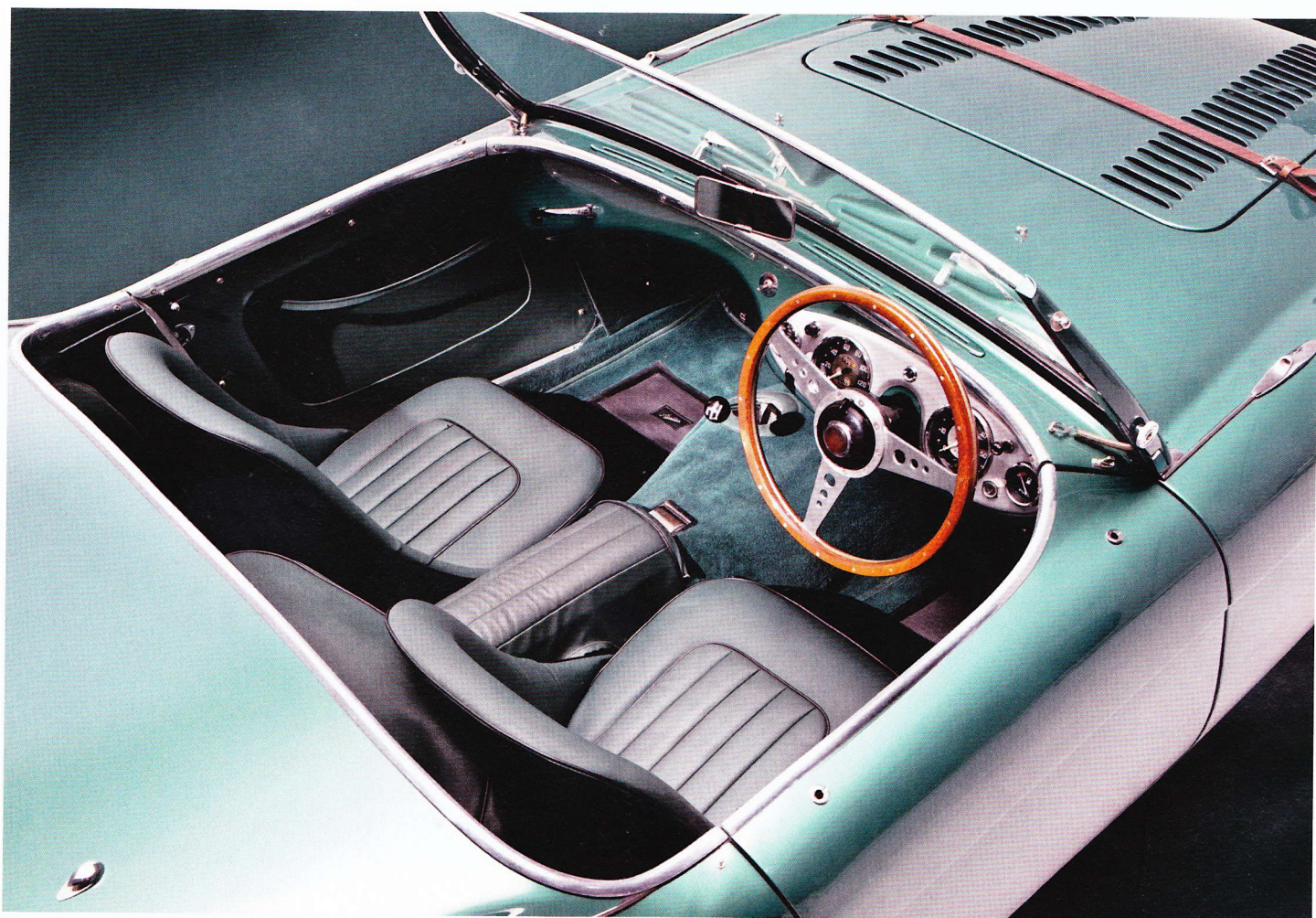
STEERING Cam and peg

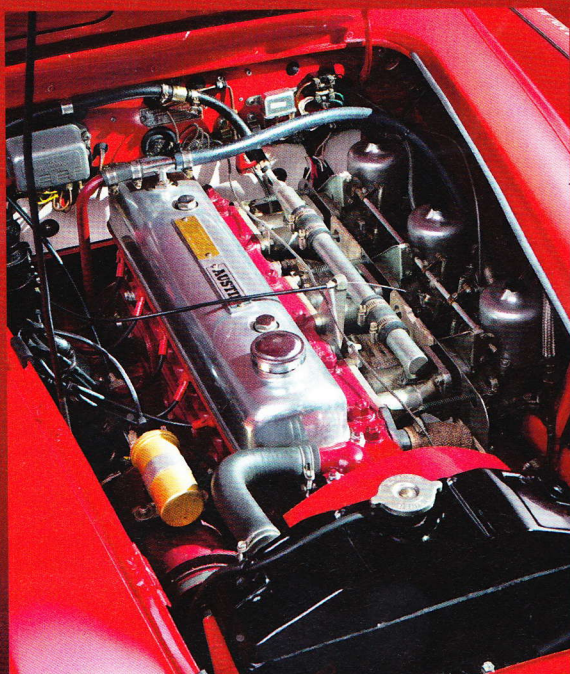
SUSPENSION Front: double wishbones, coil springs, lever-arm dampers, anti-roll bar; Rear: live axle, semi-elliptic leaf springs, lever-arm dampers, transverse Panhard rod

BRAKES Drums

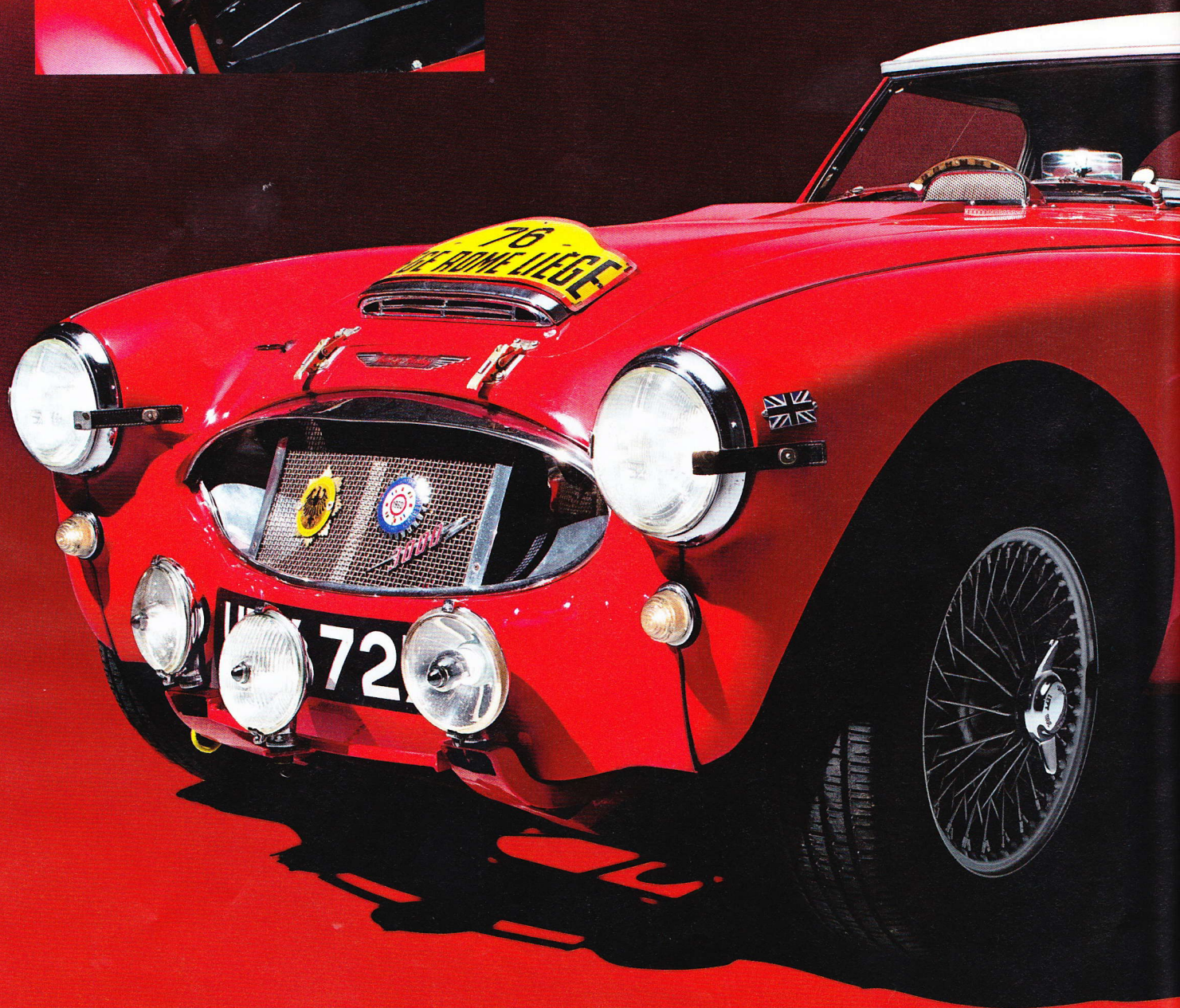
WEIGHT c1090kg

PERFORMANCE Top speed c115mph. 0-60mph c9.5sec





'The 1960
Liège victory
is regarded as
the greatest-
ever drive by
an all-female
crew in the
history of
rallying'





1960 AUSTIN-HEALEY 3000 RALLY CAR

DON'T BE AFRAID. That's the best approach to take when getting behind the wheel of a full-house, balls-out 3000 works rally car. Even one that's valued at the thick end of half-a-million quid.

The reason this car is so special is that it was driven by Pat Moss to first overall on the 1960 Liège-Rome-Liège rally, navigated by Ann Wisdom. That involved 96 hours of near-continuous driving over the worst roads in Europe, in some of the most taxing weather conditions, much of it with a slipping clutch that there was no time to stop and repair. It's still regarded as the greatest drive by an all-female crew in the history of rallying.

Now restored to period-perfect 1960 condition, URX 727 provides one of the most evocative experiences it's possible to have in a classic car. You sit low, peering out through that wraparound screen across a bonnet that's punctuated by a priapic air scoop. The dashboard is much like a standard 3000's but across to your left is a pair of Heuer stopwatches; not just any old stopwatches, but Pat Moss's very own pair.

Press the starter button and the response is instant, a sexy straight-six rasp. Straightaway you notice that the pedals are set just right for heel-and-toeing, unlike the 100M's, although the gearchange is no slicker and moving into first or third brings your knuckles perilously close to the bottom of the dashboard. But such niggles are soon forgotten when you let up the clutch and forge off down the road; instantly, you *are* Don Morley or Rauno Aaltonen or Timo Mäkinen on a 1960s international rally, and the Oxfordshire countryside has mysteriously turned into a Yugoslavian valley or Alpine pass. A works 'Healey is the ultimate fantasy fulfiller.

What's really surprising is how well balanced the 3000 feels in the twisty bits; you'd expect it to be a heavy old understeering thing, but it turns in a lot more willingly than you'd have believed. It's noisy and claustrophobic under that close-fitting hardtop, however, and after just a few minutes on a mild spring day the heat from the engine and drivetrain is starting to permeate the cabin. 'Relaxing' is not a word you'd use to describe a drive in a works 'Healey.

Healeys had been successful competition cars long before the advent of the first 3000 model but they only started to make their mark in rallying once BMC's competition department at Abingdon took over prepping of the cars from 1958. By then, assembly of all Big Healeys had been transferred from Austin's Longbridge work to Abingdon, so it made sense to build the rally cars here, too. The Healey works in Warwick, meanwhile, concentrated on cars intended for endurance racing and record-breaking.

It was on the race circuits rather than the rally stages that 'Healeys first won their competition spurs. In 1953, two lightly modified 100s finished 12th and 14th overall in the Le Mans 24 Hours, and in 1954 a special disc-brake-converted 100 came third in the Sebring 12 Hours. This car, driven by Lance Macklin and George Huntoon, would inspire the low-production 100S, the most valuable of all factory 100s; only 50 were built and they could do nearly 125mph. On the record-breaking front, a prototype 100S set averages of 132mph over six and 12 hours respectively at Bonneville, while Donald Healey himself took a special supercharged and streamlined version to 192mph...

But in rallying, it wasn't until the disc-braked 3000 appeared in 1959 that the Big Healeys started to have a real impact. The new 2.9-litre engine and the introduction of front disc brakes unlocked the potential that had been evident in the 100-Six, and turned the Big Healey into a real contender in the 3 Litre class of international rallying. ➔

Left

One of the most famous of all the works rally cars, URX 727 has been restored to exactly the condition it was in when it won the 1960 Liège – right down to the rally plates.



A works 3000 in bright red warpaint, with white hardtop, is without doubt the defining image of a Big Healey and it's one of the most popular 'looks' with would-be rallyists today. The sky's the limit when it comes to developing a 3000 for competition; power outputs of the works rally cars ranged from 160bhp at the beginning to 210bhp by the time new regulations ended their careers from 1965, but the late Jon Everard's historic rally 3000 was probably developing nearly 300bhp, thinks his son Chris.

'A full-house engine – steel crank and rods, aluminium big-valve head, hotter cam, high-lift rockers, competition manifolds, triple Webers – won't leave you much change out of £20,000,' he says. 'But the car wouldn't then be something you could go down to the pub in. For road use, triple SUs are much better. They are more progressive in action and drink a lot less fuel!'

Paying attention to the front suspension and steering will pay dividends whether you use a 'Healey on road or track. Polyurethane suspension bushes, available in various stiffnesses, will sharpen the steering noticeably, as will a higher-ratio steering box that reduces the number of turns lock-to-lock from three-and-a-quarter to two-and-a-half. Disc brake conversions are an excellent idea for the 100 BN2, using remanufactured 100S brakes; the earlier BN1 has a different hub design

and the most cost-effective option here would be to fit a complete set of suspension uprights from a later car.

As with the six-cylinder cars, you can upgrade a four-cylinder Healey engine with steel crankshaft and rods, and fit an aluminium cylinder head, in addition to the Le Mans-spec mods (carbs, cam etc) that Healey itself offered in the 1950s. Cooling can also be improved significantly by adding a plastic fan and better shrouding.

Owners who are not too worried about originality – which will obviously be a consideration when taking part in historic racing or rallying – can now buy five-speed gearbox conversions for Healeys (see *Gear*, page 156). The advantages are an improved shift quality and the total elimination of any potential overdrive maladies; the drawback is the aforementioned loss of originality – which to some buyers will be important.

While on the subject of buying cars, now is a good time to mention that Big Healeys do rust – badly. The front and rear shrouds – the horizontal panels inboard of the wings – are aluminium, but everything else (except on the 100S and late rally cars) is steel. 'Chassis tend to rust from the inside out,' says Chris, 'and the outriggers and sills always corrode; we replace the latter as a matter of course. Watch out for rust in the front and rear crossmembers, too – and for damage caused by careless jacking, or accidental knocks.'

1960 AUSTIN-HEALEY 3000 RALLY CAR

ENGINE 2912cc straight-six, OHV, cast-iron block and head, three 2in SU HD6 carburettors, competition exhaust manifold and side-exiting pipes

POWER 160-180bhp

TORQUE N/A

TRANSMISSION Four-speed manual, overdrive, rear-wheel drive

STEERING Cam and peg

SUSPENSION Front: double wishbones, coil springs,

lever-arm dampers, anti-roll

bar; Rear: live axle, radius

arms, semi-elliptic leaf

springs, lever-arm dampers,

transverse Panhard rod

BRAKES Discs front,

drums rear

WEIGHT N/A

PERFORMANCE (with low-

ratio diff used on 1960 Liège)

Top speed c90mph. 0-60mph

7.5sec (est)



REAL HEALEY MEN – IN THEIR OWN WORDS

The story of the Big Healey is an ongoing one, kept alive by successive generations.

Paul Hardiman interviews five Healey men, past and present



THE 'COMPS' MANAGER

Stuart Turner

...on running Big Healeys for the Abingdon Competitions Department

STEVE HAVELOCK



THE WORKS DRIVER

Paddy Hopkirk

...on rallying Big Healeys for BMC in the 1960s

IRISH RALLY legend Paddy Hopkirk – pictured, below, about to jump into a 3000 for the 1963 Sebring 12 Hours – is happy to admit that he came to the BMC team to get his hands on the proven winner: 'I'd been driving for Rootes and all their cars blew up on the Acropolis Rally and Pat Moss said I should try her 'Healey. I only drove it around the block but I couldn't believe the power.

'People were a bit frightened of them – I was! Especially downhill on the loose, they were scary, and could get away from you. Downhill they'd understeer, as there was a lot

of weight in the nose. The Scandinavian boys could cope with it better with left-foot braking and stop them going off. I could do it, to demonstrate, but it didn't come naturally to me, and it was hard on the cars. But uphill, you could hang the tail out on the power if you were a sideways man. When we got the three triple Webers that was a big jump forward. I don't know how much power we had... maybe 180bhp, when the Minis had 90.

'Apart from the power, they were very strong and reliable – solid, a bit of a tractor, and quite light, especially with all the aluminium panels. The steering wasn't heavy, and the brakes were good. They did get hot inside and I remember on one of the Liège rallies, in Yugoslavia, on terribly rough roads, when the rear spring mounting came up through my seat and the mechanics said they couldn't fix it, I was quite relieved. We looked like lime delivery men, there was so much dust about.

'I think the best moment with a 'Healey was winning the Austrian Alpine rally, the Alpenfahrt, with one; then I went back the following year in a Mini and won it again.

'The worst? Setting FTD on the first hillclimb on the Coupe des Alpes, and then going off going down the other side. I didn't need to be going quickly as the section had finished, but hit some gravel and went over the edge.

'But up a steep hill there was nothing to touch them...'

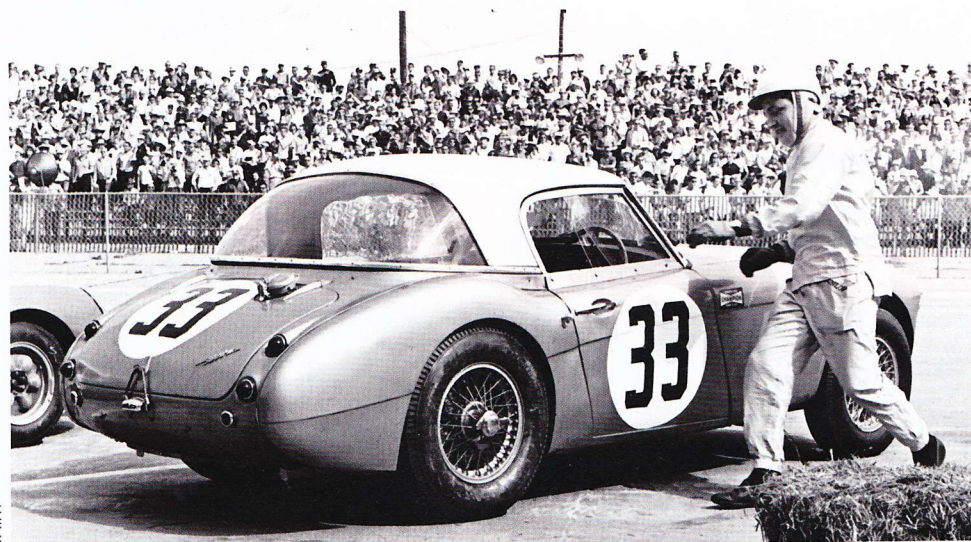
STUART TURNER arrived at the legendary Abingdon Competitions Department as manager in October 1961 – a daunting task for the 27-year-old former sports editor of *Motoring News*, though he was already an accomplished navigator who knew the rally ropes. It was prime time for the 3000, as the Mini had only been launched a month before and had yet to become a serious rally weapon.

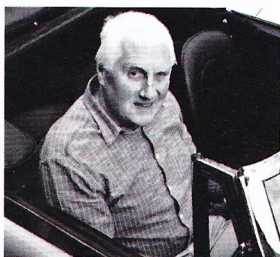
'I arrived with a soft spot for the 3000 because I'd done one or two rallies in one. My most lasting memory was of being one of a convoy of three 3000s hurtling back from an Alpine. We were stopped by a motorcycle cop in full drag – leather gear and angry sunglasses. Luckily John Gott was leading our trio and must have had something in his passport identifying him as a Chief Constable because the cop took one look and said: "200kph? That is not for cars, that is for aeroplanes. Allez!" So we did.

'The 3000 was very much a mainstay for the BMC team, even though it was regarded by some drivers with slightly fearful respect. Donald Healey almost always attended our annual Competitions Committee meeting at Longbridge to ensure he had a budget for North American activities such as Sebring as well as European events like the Targa.

'Of the marque's many successes, two stand out for me. First, Timo Mäkinen's drive to a class win in a 3000 on the '63 Monte Carlo Rally. There could hardly have been a more unsuitable car for the conditions, and Christabel Carlisle, who sat alongside him telling him to go faster...downhill, on snow and ice, at night, with sheer drops... really should have had some award for bravery. Timo's electrifying performance in the 3000 in the mud of the Autobog at Brands that Raymond Baxter thought up when an RAC Rally had to be cancelled was undoubtedly a kick-starter for what became rallycross.

'The 3000 win, of course, has to be that of Pat Moss and Ann Wisdom on the Liège. Ninety-six hours – four days and nights – with just one hour's official break during the whole event, mostly on rough, dusty roads. Think about that and I'm sure you'll agree that that drive was as iconic in motor sport terms as Pat's brother Stirling's win on the Mille Miglia.'





THE FACTORY EMPLOYEE

Paul Hunt

...on being an apprentice at Healey's Warwick works

PAUL HUNT has spent a lifetime in the Midlands motor industry, and in the 1960s he was an apprentice at the Healey works.

'There was a real family atmosphere,' he recalls. 'The Healeys themselves were always around – Brian was involved with sales, and while Donald mostly lived in Cornwall he would appear from time to time – and they were approachable people. At lunchtimes we would go to the Millwright Arms, across the road from the factory, and with all the Healeys in the pub car park it was like a club outing.

'I joined Healey's in 1963, while I was still a teenager. Initially I worked in the service department, maintaining and repairing cars; most of the rally cars were looked after at Abingdon but we had John Gott's 3000 in once and I took it for a test drive along the Emscote Road when I was still only 19 or 20. Unfortunately I happened to pass Geoff Healey driving the other way and when I got back he gave me the shellacking of a lifetime!

'It was a friendly place to work and quite a bit of practical joking went on. For example, after I'd rebuilt and refitted a gearbox, one of the older mechanics left a spare synchro ring on the workbench, just to get me worried; and someone else drilled a hole in a workmate's tin mug and screwed it to the bench. I also have a vague memory of a colleague being towed around the car park on a crawler board...

'In 1965 I moved to the Experimental shop, which was housed in an old cinema at the back of the works – the bodies for prototype cars were built on the cinema's stage. I was still an apprentice, and occasionally we'd be allowed to go down to the Earls Court Motor Show where Healey had a stand. A chap called Ted Worswick lent me his 3000 to get home to see my fiancée, and I vividly remember doing "the ton" back up the M1 in the days when it had no speed limit. On another occasion I delivered a 3000 on Christmas Eve to a Captain in the US Air Force at Mildenhall – I had a hell of a job getting past the gate guard!

'The Big Healey really was something to aspire to, although I didn't manage to own one until 1969, the year after I left the works. It was a 100-Six and for me those early six-cylinder cars were the best of all. They seemed like proper muscle cars.'



THE SALESMAN

Derrick Ross

...on selling Big Healeys when they were new cars

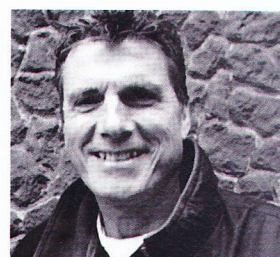
DERRICK ROSS has been involved with Austin-Healeys most of his adult life, having started as a student apprentice at the Austin Motor Co in January 1954 before moving into sales in January 1958. Part of his duties was the allocation of Austin-Healeys around the UK dealers. A former chairman of the Austin-Healey Club, he remains the chairman of Healey Driver International, the overseas competition side of the Austin-Healey Club. He owns a 3000 MkI, one of the last MkIIIs and a Frogeye, just like the first 'Healey he owned.

'One of the Austin-Healey retailers was the Donald Healey Motor Co,' he recalls, 'and inevitably the call came from Geoff Price the sales director: "The Skipper wants to see you." It was always first-name terms, except for Donald Healey who was "DMH" or "The Skipper". When I told one of the directors of Austin that I had been offered a job at Healey's he said, "Go – you'll have a great time!"

'We used to sell cars to American servicemen in the UK, which was good business until 1961, when John F Kennedy insisted they bought American cars. We had a showroom off Grosvenor Square, near the American Embassy. We also had two salesmen covering the American air bases in the UK, and we even used to sell them to the Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean. Mort Morris-Goodall would drive them down there.

'One time, Geoff Healey was preparing four 3000s to race at Sebring, the famous UJB-registered cars. Since I was commuting to Warwick from Bromsgrove he asked me to put some miles on them – well, as a 23-year-old I thought that was alright! I'd take them back and forward and give Geoff a daily report and then we drove them down to Silverstone for Jack Sears to appraise them. In 2004 he drove UJB 143, later re-registered DD 300, on the Stelvio and Gavia passes during our second European Healey meeting and since then I've continued to meet up with him regularly.

'The first Healey I had was what I reckoned was the first Sprite ever registered, PBL 74, a left-hand-drive demonstrator. I kept it about six months and then got my first Big Healey, a 100-Six, then a 3000. It was a wonderful time – and people I met when I worked for Healey I'm still friendly with today.'



THE HISTORIC RALLYIST

Mick Darcey

...on demonstrating and competing in his works Big Healeys today

MICK DARCEY believes in using his 'Healeys – and they include some of the most important cars, some owned jointly with friend Steve Hutchinson. A Goodwood Festival of Speed rally stage regular, he's enthusiastic to the point of evangelism about these legendary cars, and says: 'The important thing is to get them out there and get them used, so people can see them.'

The first 'famous' Healey he bought was XJB 876, in which Don and Erle Morley won the 1961 Tulip Rally – and he's still got it, 33 years on. 'What got me into them was watching them race and rally when I was a boy. Back then they weren't a lot of value and I swapped XJB with Sid Segal for my standard 3000 MkIII. I started to get the feel of it, a fantastic car, and it's been well campaigned.

'After that I bought BRX 852B, the '64 RAC Rally car that Timo Mäkinen drove to second overall. I later sold it to Jonathan Turner.'

Then there's ARX 92B, which he bought from collector Arthur Carter. The Morleys took a second on the '62 Alpine Rally in this, and it's the sister car to ARX 91B in which Paddy Hopkirk reckoned he had his best-ever win on the '62 Austrian Alpine.

More recently, the duo acquired 67 ARX at auction for a friend. It's been re-chassis'd, but that kept the price down and makes the car more usable: 'ARX 92B and XJB 876 only get used for demos now. You've got to be a bit more selective as they're worth so much.'

There are two 100Ss: SNX 172 – 'which has done loads of races in period, all over the place; Dundrod and the Nürburgring in its time' – and OON 440, that did two Mille Miglias and two Sebrings, currently in the metallic green in which it finished the '56 Sebring. And, just in case you thought this small but blue-chip collection was too competition-orientated, there's OAC 1, one of only two 100 coupés built. Donald Healey used the other one as his personal car but they didn't see production.

Surely Darcey doesn't get time to use them all? Not at all: 'I've collected them because I love them and they aren't a lot of money to repair mechanically – bodily, yes. I'm in construction and sometimes I get back from work totally hacked off, so I get in one of the cars and go for a blast – and that sorts me out!'

1965 AUSTIN-HEALEY 3000 MKIII

STEPPING INTO the last incarnation of the Big Healey after some time at the wheel of the 100 built a decade earlier is rather a shock. It's just so *different*. Gone is the oval instrument panel, with its Art Deco-figured dials; in its place a full-width, symmetrical dashboard with walnut veneer and – get this! – a lockable glovebox. Other mod cons include wind-up windows and a radio speaker...

That last item tells you something about the way the 3000 had evolved; no longer the fast but spartan sports car aimed at chaps who bought *Motor Sport* and spent their weekends at Silverstone or Prescott, but more the toy of the middle-aged executive who might have something of a paunch and thinning hair but liked to think he could still cut a bit of a dash with the ladies.


The 3000's key attributes hadn't changed. It was still a relatively fast car, and it was good value for money. But – like some of its owners – it was starting to age. Leaf-sprung rear axles looked distinctly old-fashioned now that Jaguars all boasted IRS. In fact, that didn't seem to worry buyers too much: sales actually went *up* towards the end of production. The problem lay with forthcoming US safety and emissions legislation, due to take effect in January 1968. Making the Big Healey comply with it would have been just too expensive.

Despite its vintage feel, the 3000 MkIII sold in greater numbers than any other Big Healey, and it's impossible to deny the appeal of an ice-blue MkIII like the 1965 example pictured here. Just as with the 100M of ten years →







A high-angle, close-up photograph of the driver's side interior of a classic car. The view is from the passenger side looking towards the driver's seat. The interior is upholstered in a deep blue leather. The dashboard is made of polished wood and features several round gauges, including a tachometer on the left and a speedometer in the center. The steering wheel is black with three chrome spokes. The car's body is painted a light blue color, and the top of the convertible top is visible in the foreground.

'The first turn
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1965 AUSTIN-HEALEY 3000 MKIII BJ8

ENGINE 2912cc straight-six, OHV, cast-iron block and head, two 2in SU HD8 carburettors

POWER 148bhp @ 5250rpm

TORQUE 165lb ft @ 3500rpm

TRANSMISSION Four-speed manual, optional overdrive, rear-wheel drive

STEERING Cam and peg

SUSPENSION Front: double wishbones, coil springs, lever-arm dampers, anti-roll bar. Rear: live axle, trailing arms, semi-elliptic leaf springs, lever-arm dampers

BRAKES Discs front, drums rear

WEIGHT 1181kg

PERFORMANCE Top speed 122mph. 0-60mph 9.8sec

earlier, you sit rather high behind a fixed-rake steering wheel, but the first turn of the key tells you this is a very different animal: the straight six's exhaust note is smooth and subtle, competing with intake hiss from the twin SUs – until you goose the throttle, when it suddenly releases a delightful and hitherto well-concealed snarl. The ride feels considerably less nervous on the road than the 100's, too, helped (from mid-1964) by revised rear suspension that had softer springs.

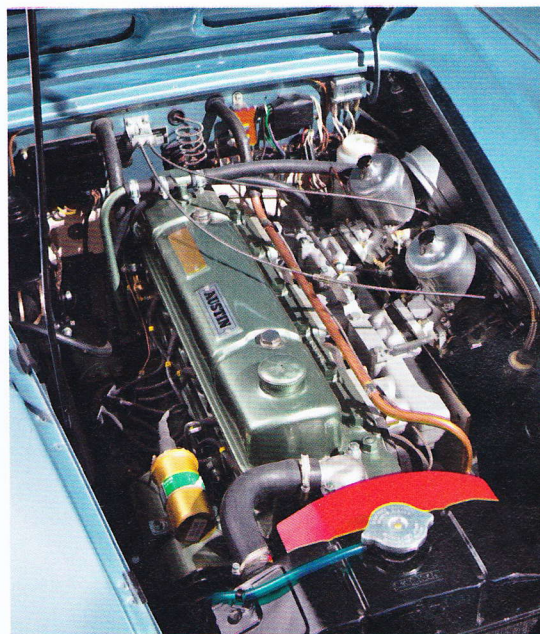
What hasn't changed is the slightly ponderous, deliberate movement of the gearchange, and the heaviness of the steering at parking speeds – but of course, the Big Healey was always a man's car. Wasn't it, Ms Moss...

Which to choose – early 100 or late 3000? Or something in the middle? The latter question is easiest to resolve, according to JME's Chris Everard: the 100-Six is the slowest of the bunch, although it does have the smooth power delivery characteristic of an unstressed 'six'. And there's something very period about the oval-dash style of the 100-Six, particularly when combined with the (comparatively rare) fitment of steel disc wheels.

It's 100 BN2s that are the hot buys of the moment, Chris continues: 'A BN2 built to Le Mans spec is the ultimate car for many. People really like the looks, you can put disc brakes on them and you get the four-speed 'box that you don't with the early cars. Prices for 100Ms have skyrocketed over the last couple of years.' (The example in our feature was valued at £70,000, but that's still cheap compared with the £750,000 needed to purchase an 'S' in similar condition.)

If you fancy a stock 100 or a 3000 – and the 3000 MkIII is as popular now as it ever has been – you should look at spending around £35,000-45,000 for a decent example, says Chris. 'If you go much below that, the car is undoubtedly going to need some work, and the costs will soon add up,' he explains. 'Bottom line is £20,000 for something that drives and runs, but it will be bordering on needing a complete overhaul.'

'Whether a car is a converted left-hand-drive or original right-hand drive doesn't seem to affect its value much.

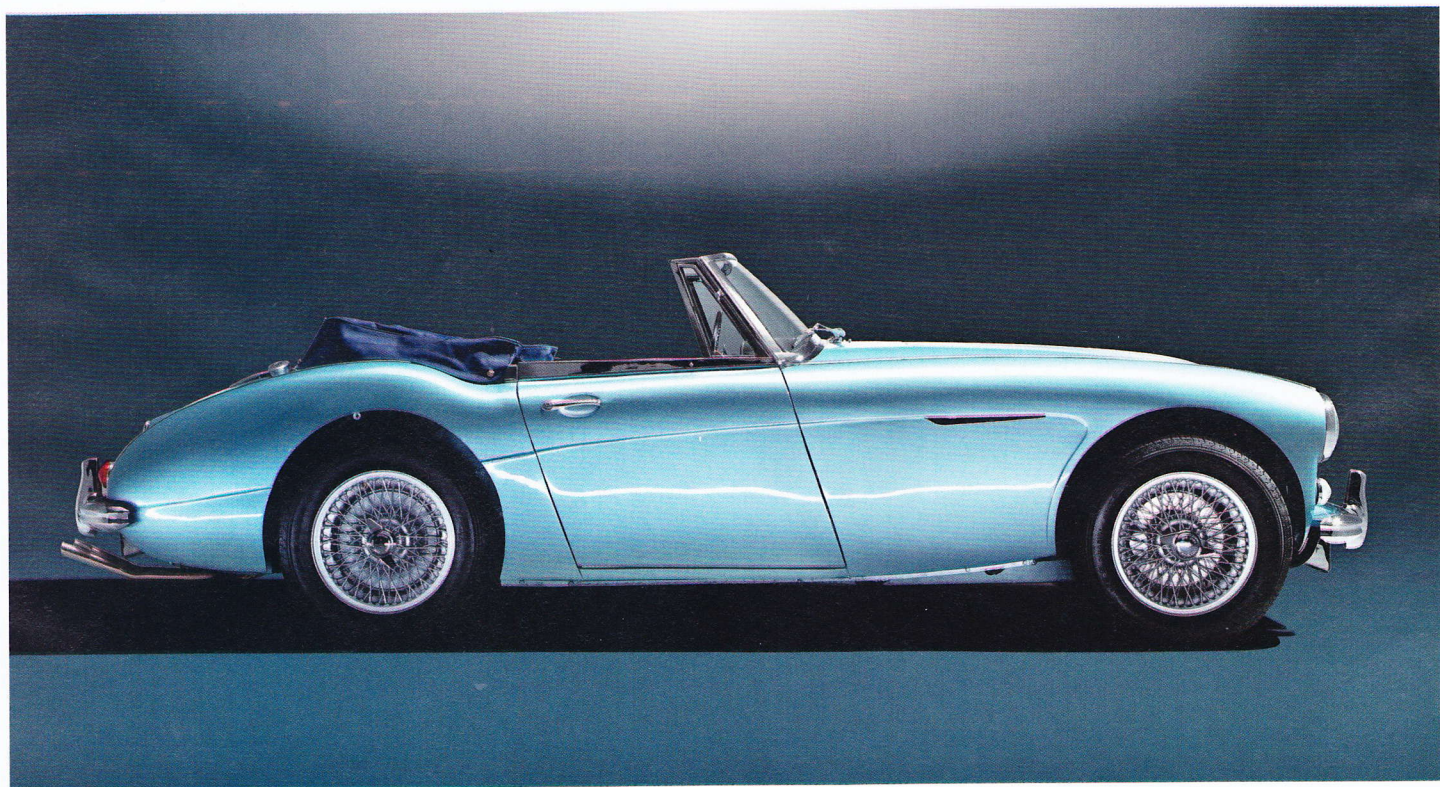


Purists might turn up their noses at the former, but most buyers just want the Healey experience, and don't care too much whether the steering's been moved across.

'Lastly, it's worth remembering that 'Healey prices are very seasonal. They go up in summer and fall in winter. So if you're looking to buy one, you really should try to do it in the months from November to February.'

As the saying goes, good things come to those who wait. It might be best not to wait *too* long to buy yourself a Big Healey, though. The word is out.

THANKS TO JME Healeys, www.jmehealeys.co.uk; and car owners Paul Hancock (100M), Paul Roberts (3000 MkI works rally car) and Sean McCarroll (3000 MkIII).



THE EVOLUTION OF A LEGEND

Austin-Healey was set-up in 1952 and survived 16 years with its joint partner, the British Motor Corporation – and the cars evolved with it along the way

WORDS Keith Adams

JANUARY 1952

Healey Hundred prototype

Donald Healey works with Geoff Coker and Barry Bilbie to create the first 'Healey Hundred' prototype. It's powered by a 2.6-litre Austin A90 engine, and is tested at 111mph in Belgium before being shown at the Earls Court Motor Show. A deal is struck with Austin, and before the end of the show the car is badged an 'Austin-Healey'. It's the beginning of a long and fruitful partnership.

Number built: 1

JANUARY – MARCH 1953

100 BN1 pre-production

The first 20 pre-production cars are handbuilt to Austin's order specifications. These cars feature all-aluminium bodies and are put together in Warwick under the direct supervision of Geoff Healey.

Number built: 20

MARCH 1953 – AUGUST 1955

100 BN1

Full production version, now assembled at BMC's factory in Longbridge. As with the pre-production cars, the definitive BN1 is powered by an Austin A90 engine, using a three-speed modified A70 gearbox, plus overdrive.

Number built: 10,010

AUGUST 1955 – AUGUST 1956

100 BN2

First of many running changes is the introduction of an all-new four-speed gearbox, shared with the Austin saloon range, as well as wider drum brakes. Other than that, it's hard to spot the differences with this evolution, though late BN2s have the swage line continued on the rear wing beyond the wheel.

Number built: 4604

1955-1956

100M BN2

Displayed at the October 1955 London Motor Show, the 100M is the first factory-built competition car you can buy for the road, following a string of record-breaking and racing cars. Main news is a power hike of 20bhp and an improved top speed of 109mph.

Number built: 640

1955 ONLY – 100S

Designated the '100 Sebring', the 1955 special is a bumperless 'Healey with small oval grille that

Right

This very early 100 featured in the 1953 colour brochure. It's a left-hand-drive car in the same NOJ registration series as the three 'special test' competition 100s.



packs 132bhp and is lightened by the extensive use of aluminium (aside from the doors). Handling is sharpened by an uprated anti-roll bar and dampers, and disc brakes all-round.

Number built: 50

MAY 1956 – DECEMBER 1957

100-Six BN4 (Early)

The first Big Healey to feature a 2+2 seating configuration and now with a 102bhp straight-six. Body is changed, with a new oval grille redolent of the Sebring cars' and a new fixed windscreen. Two-tone paint adds style.

Number built: 7053 (all BN4 models)

NOVEMBER 1957 – MARCH 1959

100-Six BN4 (Late)

Production of the BN4 moves to MG's factory in Abingdon and coincides with the arrival of the new and improved 117bhp C-series engine, which adds much-needed performance. There's some blurring of the Abingdon/Longbridge cross-over, though, so some cars receive their engines earlier at Austin's factory.



Below and right

Ultra-rare 100S was first 'Healey to have an oval grille – and Dunlop disc brakes; two-tone paint was always popular on six-cylinder models like this 100-Six.

APRIL 1958 – MARCH 1959

100-Six BN5/BN6

A new 'entry level' two-seater Big Healey, prime motivation being the lowest possible list price. The prototype BN5 was converted into the series production BN6, of which most were exported, a mere 6.6% being retained in the UK.

Number built: 4150

MARCH 1959 – MAY 1961

3000 MkI BN7/BT7

New 2912cc C-series engine ups the power to 124bhp, and flash badges front and rear celebrate the fact. The BN7 designation denotes the two-seater, and BT7 is the 2+2. Styling remains substantially unchanged but a 116mph top speed is impressive.

Number built: 2825/10,825

APRIL 1961 – JUNE 1962

3000 MkII BN7/BT7

The main difference over the 3000 MkI is the arrival of a triple SU HS4 carburettor set-up, boosting power yet again to 132bhp, while the biggest visual identifiers are the vertical bars in the grille and bonnet air scoop. Two-seater BN7 sales are now so insignificant that the model is dropped from March 1962.

Number built: 355/5096

FEBRUARY 1962 – NOVEMBER 1963

3000 MkII BJ7

Wind-up windows and a proper folding hood finally arrive on the Big Healey, along with opening front quarterlights. To simplify maintenance and tuning, the engine reverts to two SU carburettors but still delivers about the same power.

Number built: 6113

NOVEMBER 1963 – MARCH 1968

3000 MkIII BJ8 Phase 1/Phase 2

The last of the 'Healey 3000 line, and outwardly almost identical to the MkII – separate indicators are the new model's giveaway – but with an all-new interior featuring a walnut dashboard and centrally positioned gearlever. With 148bhp on tap, 120mph is the new reality for committed drivers. Several projects involving coupés and alternative BMC/Rolls-Royce engines are investigated, but come to nought, and the Austin-Healey joint venture is disbanded in 1968 during the formation of British Leyland Motor Corporation.

Number built: 1390/16,322 **Crest**

