

## Finally In Tune! The Greener BRG Healey!

By Edward Vanderspar



I got to know HLW fondly known as Bertie, on a wet May evening in Watford in 1977. It was memorable moment for several reasons; getting to know a car I would have contact with for years to come and nearly writing it off in the first minute of the test drive! I now know a bit more about tyres, but come on I was 18 then and having fun, and the car went extremely well round corners. Too well. Turning right in to a fairly slim side road I managed a 90 degree skid, which left me side on to oncoming traffic, with six inches of manoeuvring room at either end of the car and parked cars on both sides of the road.

Dented ego aside and no damage done, I had learnt an early Healey lesson and how heavy the steering can be!

£850, new tyres and the Healey learning curve was in full swing. I was a student at the time and HLW was destined for a great friend in Germany, who cared for and later restored the car to its present fantastic condition. The restorer, famous and infamous in Germany, was Gunter Matis, a master craftsman with no idea of time or money!

The testament to his workmanship is that 20 years after the restoration and over 100k miles the car looks and goes as well as ever. Over 60lbs oil pressure when hot and no rust!

My 'old friend' in Germany and I met under strange but perhaps typically Healey circumstances. To fund my music studies in Switzerland I had to sell 'Hotlips' (my first Healey named by my Dad, a MASH fan) that I had bought with fire damage, and restored. I had placed an ad in Exchange & Mart and sold Hotlips to a local friend who had always hankered after her. Too late I got a call from a German Student, Wolfgang, visiting London on a quest to find a Big Healey. Decadent as it may seem I had another 3000 which was not for sale; the current term would be a 'running restoration'. In truth it was a drivable wreck! Having chatted for a few minutes on the phone, I invited Wolfgang over to see what not to buy. We met at New Barnet Railway station, Wolfgang recognizable not by a carnation pinned to his lapel, but an Exchange and Mart nestled under his arm. Having restored one Healey with very limited funds, I was able to show him the good and the very bad points of Healey ownership and car search.

After several cups of tea followed by several pints, Wolfgang suggested I find him a car and drive it over to him on my way to Switzerland.

Six years ago, 25 years on from our initial meeting, I received a reluctant call from Germany; my old friend had decided to sell HLW after all these years because he had no time or opportunity, with 2 small children, to drive it. Could I help find a buyer? I told him he was daft. Frankly, I made little effort in helping to find a buyer, hoping that with time Wolfgang would have a change of heart. To my delight my tactics worked, in that we decided I should have HLW and I would find a MKII Jag for his family use.

I had four Healeys as a student, one of which led me astray all over Europe, namely Dennis (the drivable wreck). Tied together with bits of wire, no oil pressure for much of the time, and costing the princely sum of 100 pounds. The only way I could afford this madness was to service and care for the cars I, much to my parent's horror as I was studying to be a classical musician!!

Being someone who had a cylinder head in pieces on the kitchen table as my wife was going into labour with our first child, I now have (alas) career responsibilities as a musician and I can't afford to damage my hands. Indeed the days of full scale "engine out" type jobs are over.

I needed to find somebody with knowledge and experience of Big Healeys to do the jobs I couldn't or maybe shouldn't do anymore.

My son Jim and I went to collect HLW from Germany and although in great shape it was obvious that lack of use had taken some of the sparkle out of its life. 500 miles without problems, including its first rain and windscreen wiper use in

10 years or so brightened things up, however it was clearly in need of a serious tune up (pinking like mad) and a new clutch.

With some research I decided to try Rawles. There I found a real passion for Healeys combined with knowledge through racing and experience of rebuilding and caring for these old beasts, driving them in modern road conditions.

Over the years I had driven HLW, now Bertie from time to time, I had always thought the engine didn't feel as good as it should. Although gutsy, there seemed to be real flat spots in the power delivery.

Over the last 6 years I have tried to do something about it. Castrol Valvemaster Plus with Super Unleaded has helped, a new twin point distributor and carb rebuild at Rawles dealt with the pinking; to me there was still something lacking. Bertie was not breathing properly. This may have been exacerbated by a slightly hot camshaft, the only one available 20 years ago, when the engine was rebuilt.

Being an engineer at heart (but not in practise) I had always thought the standard inlet and exhaust manifolds were agricultural, to put it politely. The 'racers' have used Webbers with bespoke inlet manifolds and a 6-branch exhaust manifold. If the engine is built with this in mind great performance can be had. For those of us who want to keep to 150 bhp, SU carbs and a really tractable road going setup, despite 100k miles on this 'fresh' engine, there has not been a proper balanced solution. Fitting a free flow exhaust manifold with a constipated inlet manifold has always seemed daft to me.

There has 'been talk' for years about producing a civilised inlet manifold for the common 2" SU carb setup. Andrew, the leading light and owner of Rawles has finally got a workable design and got it into production.



I had a great Healey trip to Europe recently, France, Alsace and southern Germany. I really should know better, but driving through a gateway, having visited a colleague at Schloss Gottesau in Karlsruhe, the exhaust hit a gate

centring post bending the down pipes and partially ripping them off the flange to manifold. I felt like a noisy idiot, how long have I been driving these cars?

After a loud but short trip to my friend Wolfgang, chastisement and many beers, I realised that this was the excuse I needed to deal with Bertie's breathing. A local workshop produced a temporary 'get me across Europe' fix, and on retuning home I booked the car in at Rawles for an exhaust and manifold treatment.

The exhaust that had been on the car was a standard exhaust modified to side exit, less prone to ground clearance problems!!! (If competently driven) A few days after having taken the car to Rawles, I got a call from Andrew asking if I would like Bertie to take part in an experiment. Namely Rawles in Partnership with Piper wanted to produce a road and track legal side exit exhaust that wouldn't split eardrums (or set off any number of car alarms) and balance inlet and exhaust manifolds. "Yes".

Installation is fairly straight forward, slight modification to throttle linkage, different air cleaners, (carbs are slightly higher) but now plenty of space for the exhaust manifold due to the shape and space given with the new inlet.



It's at this point I may have lost some of you!! 'Big Healeys are not civilised, they never will be and shouldn't be' Bertie is not civilised, but through judicious use of a rolling road and careful design by Rawles and Piper the car is more efficient, with smoother torque delivery and very satisfying to drive. Raunchy without earplugs and responsive with grunt!



The fuel to air ratio is more stable, which translates as smoother power and more stable torque across all revs of the engine, this will make the car more economic and dare I say it for a Healey, a little greener and cleaner. The rolling road also measured more peak bhp.



Well "green" maybe not, but as a body, we must as classic car nuts look ahead to potential legislation against us. The current MOT tests for excessive smoke and holes in the exhaust, but nothing else. I believe this will change, or the freedom of use we enjoy will be restricted. If we can show we care about environmental issues as well as have the passion for these wonderful machines we will have a stronger voice to resist either punitive taxation or future restrictions of use.

Finally I thought it wise to let my insurance company know about the inlet and exhaust manifolds, and the quiet side exhaust. They were very easy about this.

Bertie, is used come rain or shine, in London, on country lanes, Welsh hills or cruising down a motorway all day. This is a truly great car.

For more information about Rawles Motorsport Ltd please contact



Andrew Cluett,  
Rawles Motorsport Ltd,  
Units A,B,C, West End Farm, Upper Froyle, Alton,  
Hampshire UK.  
Tel +44(1420 23212),  
email: [Andrew@rawlesmotorsport.com](mailto:Andrew@rawlesmotorsport.com),

[www.rawlesmotorsport.com](http://www.rawlesmotorsport.com)