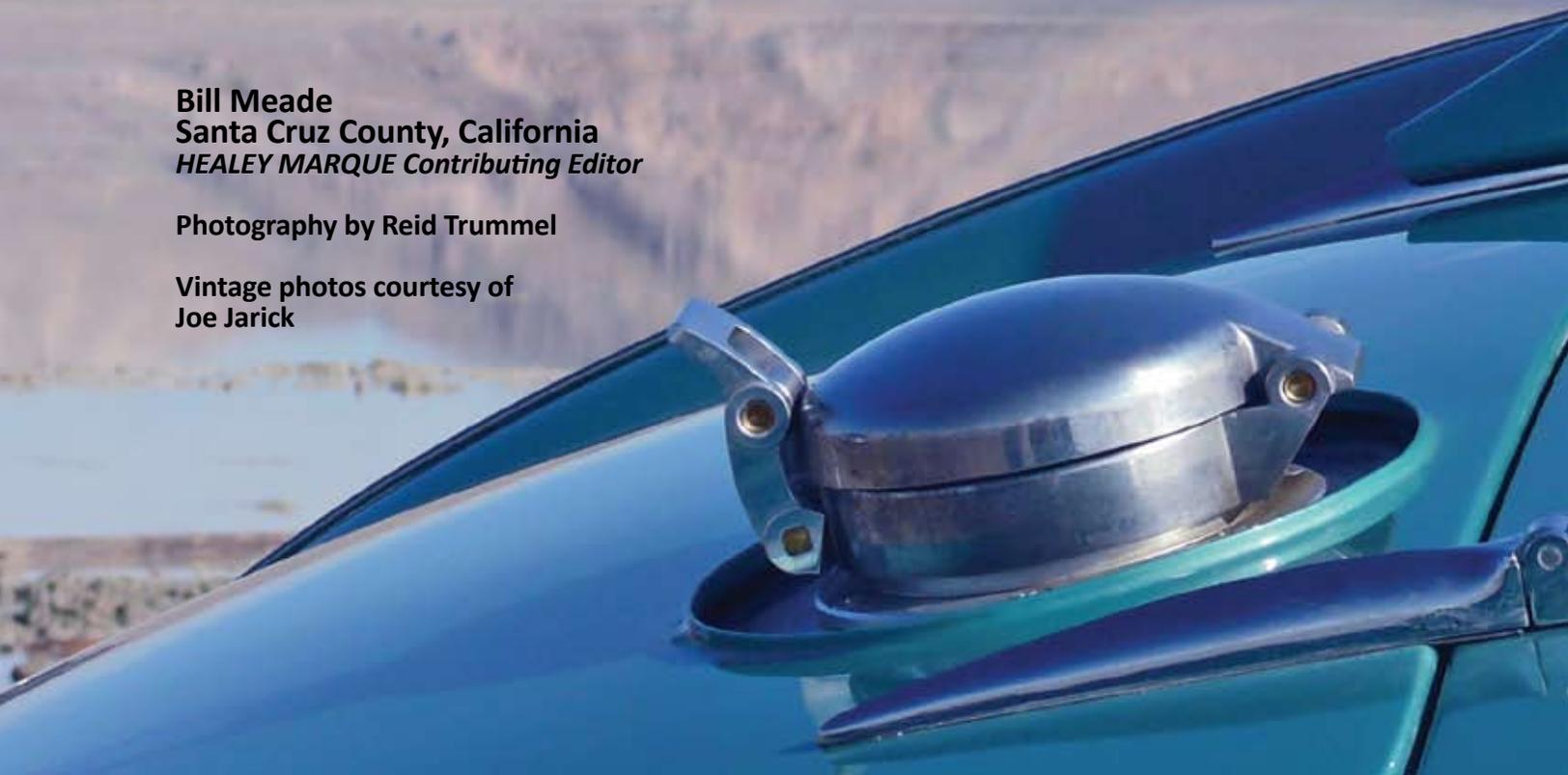


The date was September 17, 2009. The replica Austin-Healey record-breaking cars had arrived in Bonneville to commemorate the running of the original cars 55 years ago. A major effort to replicate these high-speed racers was undertaken in Australia over the past many months.

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Photography by Reid Trummel

Vintage photos courtesy of
Joe Jarick



Hundreds of people came from far and wide to see these cars just as they looked back in 1954. Although the week was to have setbacks, the goal of having these cars running on the salt at Bonneville for the 55th anniversary was successfully met.

HEALEYS RETURN TO BONNEVILLE

HISTORIC RACE CARS RETURN TO THE SALT FLATS

The two cars in question are the "Streamliner," a highly modified Healey designed to attack high-speed records, and the "Endurance Car," a less-but-still-significantly-modified car designed to attack endurance records.

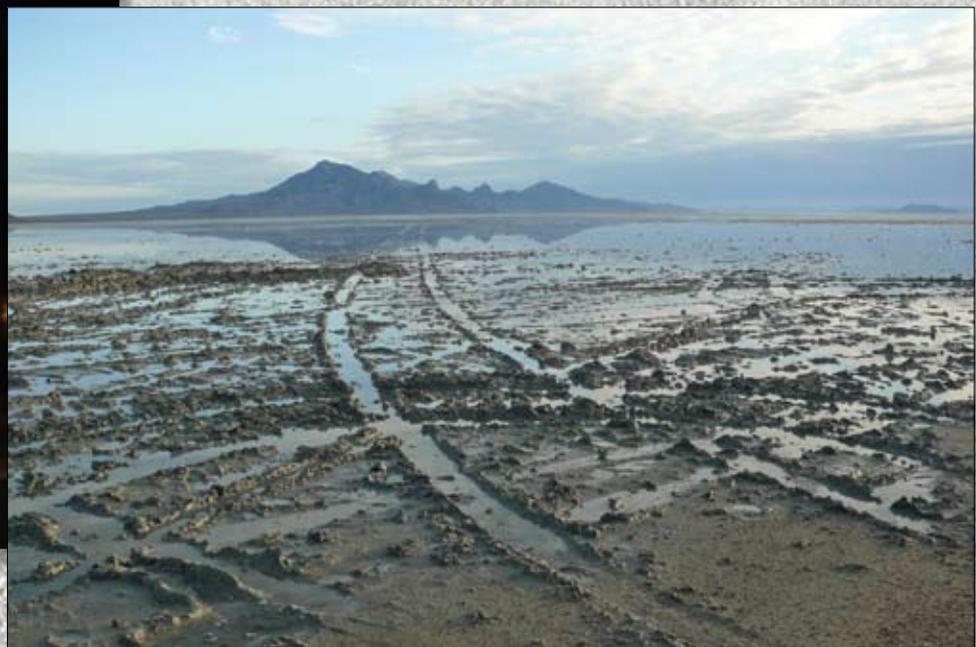
Both of the cars were built by Steve Pike, owner of Marsh Classic Restorations in Victoria, Australia. The task of building one car was enormous, but to build two at the same time was a monumental undertaking. Steve is to be commended for the effort to recreate these history-making cars and provide Austin-Healey owners with

the opportunity to actually see the cars, just as they would have appeared 55 years ago. The beautiful workmanship in the cars is a tribute to Steve and the other craftsmen, contractors and suppliers of Marsh Classic Restorations. Steve is also the owner of the Streamliner. Bruno Verstraete of Zurich, Switzerland, is the owner of the Endurance Car and also handled website development, event sponsorship and project funding for the team. Bruno is also President of the



"Wendover Will," the world's largest mechanical cowboy, is still welcoming visitors to Wendover, just as he has since 1952.

Heavy rains the day before "The World of Speed" flooded the salt flats causing a one-day delay. The orange cones define the route from the end of the pavement to the pits, and for two days after the rains it was under an inch of water.



300-member Austin-Healey Club of Switzerland.

Other members of the "Healeys Return To Bonneville" team are Charles Matthews, Team Manager from North Cotswolds, England; Joe Jarick, Historical and Technical Advisor from Brisbane, Queensland; Patrick Quinn, Team Public Relations, who resides west of Sydney, Australia; and Marco Trevisan, Technical Advisor from Switzerland.

Many others played important roles in the initiation of this special project. Gerry Coker, now residing in Florida and North Carolina, was an employee of Donald Healey and the original body designer of both the Austin-Healey and the Streamliner. He assisted in refining the reconstructed shape of the Streamliner to be sure it was as close as possible to his original vision and design of the car. Additionally, Dutch Healey enthusiast Wiet Huidekoper gathered and developed parts and drawings from the original cars to get the project underway.



In recent months, excitement developed around the world over these two cars being recreated for their appearance at Bonneville. The "World of Speed" at the Bonneville Salt Flats in Utah, organized by the Utah Salt Flats Racing Association, was to take place September 16-19, and Austin-Healey fans came to Bonneville from far and wide to meet in the small town of Wendover, Nevada, where Donald Healey and his crew had originally stayed during their 1954 speed runs.

The cars were first spotted by enthusiasts on display in the

Wendover, Nevada, hotel parking lot, and a crowd spontaneously gathered to check out the racers on this day before the speed runs. The reaction of people upon first seeing the Streamliner was a combination of amazement at its beauty and an almost disbelief that here sitting in front of them, was an identical copy of the car that had been lost to history. Gerry Coker, the car's original body designer, did an unbelievable job of using a standard 100 and by redesigning



Steve Pike, Joe Jarick and Bruno Verstraete with the Utah Salt Flats Racing Association tech inspector (yellow hat) inspecting the cars the day before racing. Note that a roll cage that had to be installed in each car to meet modern requirements. This was just one of many engineering challenges met by the "Healeys Return to Bonneville" team.

only the front and rear of the stock design, created a futuristic, streamlined look that has captured people's imagination since 1954.

However, as the dates drew close, the weather on the weekend before the World of Speed week had been unusually rainy. Wendover streets were flooded and the Salt Flats were largely under water! As the starting day of Wednesday rolled around, it was clear

that the salt was still flooded and conditions would not allow cars to run. Officials tried to calm everyone with assurances that by Thursday the salt would be dry enough for speed runs.

To help keep all the Austin-Healey fans happy despite the delay, Joe Jarick and Charles Matthews quickly arranged on Wednesday for the two cars to be taken by Steve Pike and Bruno Verstraete to the nearby airstrip that Donald Healey had used for testing in 1954. Here everyone could see the cars in a setting similar to the Salt



Flats. Bruno started the Endurance Car and made several passes at speed just to give everyone a little sample of its sound. Probably no two cars have been photographed more in anyone's recent memory! Roy Jackson-Moore, one of the original drivers, was present and enjoyed being photographed with the recreation of the car that he had helped to pilot to a 24-hour average speed of 132 MPH in 1954.

On Thursday morning the Salt Flats had dried enough for speed runs to begin. Unfortunately, the public road into the Salt Flats was still flooded

and every spectator car and transporter truck had to plow through salty water to get to the pits and the race course.

The Bonneville Salt Flats of the past was much bigger than it is today. During the 1954 runs, a ten-mile oval course was painted on the salt for the endurance runs. Today the

Salt Flats are no longer large enough for that ten-mile course and the salt surface had been growing thinner each year until



With a one-day delay caused by rainfall flooding the salt flats, Charles Matthews and Joe Jarick arranged to display the cars and to drive the Endurance Car at the Wendover airport. This made for a great photo op, and the sound of the Endurance Car during owner Bruno Verstraete's drive was inspiring!



1995 when local fans began a "Save the Salt" campaign. Industrial impact and climate changes were slowly eroding the salt, but now a progressive effort to rebuild the Salt Flats adds one million pounds of salt a year. Hopefully, this effort will be enough to keep high-speed runs possible into the future.

After an early morning drivers' meeting, race cars began to proceed, one by one, towards the starting line. A long line quickly formed

as each car's speed run took approximately five minutes making for a slow, day-long process.

The Healey team was busy in the pits making final adjustments and preparations for the two Healeys' runs. The first car to the starting line was the Endurance Car with Bruno at the wheel. The beautiful light green metallic finish of the car glistened in the hot, mid-day sun as Bruno fired the engine and pulled to the starting line. The officials ask that each driver, new to the salt, make a series of rookie qualifying runs to first become familiar



with the course. These required rookie runs would graduate from a run at a maximum of 150 MPH to one up to 175 and finally a run up to 200 MPH.

The car sounded excellent as it accelerated down the course, but air intake problems were restricting its top speed. After some adjustments and several more runs, the car's speed had reached nearly 130 MPH. The Endurance Car will clearly be capable of even faster runs once additional development and test runs are done. Healey fans should keep in mind that these speed runs were the

first opportunity for either car to truly test its top speed, and although everyone had hoped for perfect performances, fate doesn't usually grant perfection without some trial and error. Bruno stated that he felt the day had been successful even with the problems because they had accomplished their primary goal of getting the cars to Bonneville for the 55th anniversary.

The Streamliner was finally ready for its first run later in the afternoon.



Finally the day arrived when the cars could be taken out to a bare patch of salt where the pits would be set up. The caravan of competitors still had to cross a water-covered portion of the route to the dry pits area, as seen in the photo taken at dawn.

"The pits" consisted of claiming a patch of salt and setting up a canopy as well as ground-covering plastic tarps. This photo was taken right after set-up, before arrival of the crowds that surrounded the cars for most of the day.

From the pits the cars queued for the start, again providing great photo ops. The expanse of white salt gave the whole scene a surreal feeling, as if on another planet.



Steve Pike assists his son, David, to settle into the Streamliner in preparation for its first run.



Once it arrived at the start line the excitement and crowds around the car were intense. Steve Pike's son, David, was the driver for this first, slower qualifying run. The car fired up with a loud staccato exhaust created by the supercharger. The announcer was busy informing spectators and radio listeners about the car's famous history as the starter raised the flag. The flag dropped and the Streamliner headed off with a loud roar. Then the unthinkable happened. The engine quit just

a short distance from the start. As the car was coasted to the side of the track you could sense the disappointment everyone felt. A quick examination of the engine showed that a supercharger pressure hose had blown and after getting back to the pits a closer check revealed that the supercharger gear drive mechanism had damaged a part. An intense effort was immediately undertaken to get repairs done. Because of the long wait for a starting line position, time lost doing repairs would mean that the car would not be able to run again that day. The next day the critical repair had been completed and the



Bruno Verstraete settles into the Endurance Car in preparation for the first speed run with assistance from Joe Jarick.



Bruno Verstraete and Steve Pike, owners of the two cars, confer while awaiting the first opportunity to drive the cars at speed on the salt flats.



supercharger was ready to run. Officials do not allow the first qualifying run to exceed 150 MPH, and as the car thundered down the track, its speed was carefully monitored by the driver and held back just under the allowed 150 MPH.

On preparation for the next run, which would likely have gotten the car near the 200 MPH range, the unthinkable happened for the second time. As the push vehicle was helping to start the Streamliner, the pushing and parachute

apparatus collapsed, moving the Streamliner sideways and damaging the rear edge of the car. Again, everyone was discouraged and depressed by this turn of events and all wondered if the runs were over. The sad decision was made that due to the limited time available, the car should not be run with the damage and that ended the day's efforts to reach speeds similar to those Donald Healey had

Spectators mingle freely with the cars and crews right up to the start line. Cameras were of course everywhere in this most-photographed Healey event of the century.



Steve Pike confers with Ken Freese while awaiting the first run down the course.

The Utah Salt Flats Racing Association steward gives David Pike last-minute instructions at the start line while Steve Pike and Udo Putzke look on.



achieved in 1954.

Although everyone had hoped to see both cars reach the speeds that Donald had accomplished, the reality is that additional future runs will be needed to realize the car's full capabilities.

It had been an exciting, exhausting, wonderful and

sometimes discouraging several days. Those who attended will never forget the sights and sounds of these Austin-Healeys and the excited crowds. Even with the setbacks encountered, it was amazing to see these famous cars brought back to life. The builders and owners of the cars, organizers of the event, and all who traveled to Bonneville to experience this commemorating event, should be proud of their efforts and of the beautiful, historic Austin-Healeys that have been reborn.

HM



Bruno Verstraete crosses the start line for the first time.

