

The Story of 'HBJ8L40603' – My '67 Healey

I guess we all can remember our first loves, whether it's a girl, a woman or even a car. In my case, the car came first. I clearly remember the first time I saw or noticed an Austin Healey. The summer of 1967, I joined Cleveland Wheelman Bicycle Club in Cleveland, OH. Since I didn't yet drive, I would ride 20 miles to meet them for group rides in Cleveland Metropolitan park several times a week. Two of the club members owned AH's, one a '60 and the other a '66. Both of these cars were Healey red, with black interiors. Besides their obvious great lines, the other attraction was their unmistakable exhaust 'music'. That low growl was a really pleasing sound that seemed unique to the Austin Healey, especially the 3000 model. I never got the opportunity to drive the Healey, but I rode in it several times, and it was beyond 'cool'. I guess you could say I was smitten, love at first sight.

Fast forward 32 years. After school, the Army, meeting my real love (29 yrs.), my wife Sheila, two kids, and college, I realized I still was in love with the AH 3000, and it was time to do something about it! After making inquiries in the New York and Long Island area and chasing cars in the classified ad's, I realized I needed to broaden my search. Hemmings Motor news became my bible, as I searched for a '67 Healey. My goal was to find a driver that had not yet been restored, that I could enjoy for several years, before I had it restored myself. I was eventually drawn to an ad in Hemmings that advertised just what I was looking for—a '67 Red Healey, 70K miles, new top, SS exhaust, good driver, \$12,500 or BO. Perfect, sounds like just what I want, just two small things – the car sported a blue (?) interior, and was located in Rochester, MN. I contacted the owner, and after He answered my questions about its condition, we agreed on a price. We further agreed to have a Minneapolis repair shop go over the car and determine if it was up to the rigors of a 1300 mile trip back to NY. Quality Coaches felt a tune-up, some brake work, and wheel alignment would make the trip a little safer. They also suggested I purchase an extra SU fuel pump, condenser, points, rotor, and cap. A set of plugs, several qts. of oil, and a can of brake fluid wouldn't hurt either. I wondered if I was buying a car, or a parts store. Welcome to the world of British sports car's! I wondered if there would be enough room in the Healey for me, my luggage, and my traveling "parts store". That trunk was beginning to look awfully small. I better leave the golf clubs home.

I flew out to Minneapolis in November of '99 to pick-up my long awaited 1967 Austin-Healey 3000 MK III BJ-8. I was excited. I arrived at Quality Coaches just as they opened, and spotted my car. It wasn't hard to miss, those sleek lines, shiny red paint, and the blue (?) interior. After several minutes of checking it out and admiring my new purchase, I sat in the drivers seat and realized I didn't have a clue what to do next. I had never driven a Healey. After a little trial and error with the choke, accelerator pedal and everything else I could touch, I succeeded in flooding the carbs, and draining the battery. Not the dream beginning I had envisioned for so many years. I had driven lots of foreign cars in my life, what is making this so difficult to start? The Quality mechanic, sensing my dilemma, offered his assistance in getting the Healey to fire. After a 'jump', and some quick instruction on the use of the choke, the accelerator, and the affect of cold weather on the SU carbs, we got it running. There was that familiar exhaust music. It sounded just as beautiful today as it did almost 30 yrs. ago. After thanking the mechanic, and hoping I could remember all his 'words of wisdom', I started off on my way home, a very proud, excited and naïve Austin Healey owner.

The journey home was going to be by way of Cedarburg, WI, home of Tom & Kaye Kovacs of Fourintune Restoration. My idea was to visit their shop, meet Tom, and see about a

future restoration to my new car. I drove the roughly 350 miles without a problem, enjoying every minute of the feeling that comes from driving a Healey. Tom was kind enough to meet me on his day off – a Saturday. After going over my car carefully, and pointing out all the rust and pop-riveted, aluminum patchwork under all that shiny red paint. Tom did uncover the mystery of the blue interior. The car was originally Healey blue, and hence, the blue seats and panels. The carpet had been changed, at some point, to red. Quite an eye-catching combination. After showing me examples of his work, and replacing my non-working rear license plate light, I explained to Tom that I planned to have him restore my car. I wanted to spend some time getting to know my new set of wheels, and decide what direction I wanted to go with the restoration. Little did I know it would be almost five years before I would be back.