'Healey's Ready-Made Racer

The Austin-Healey 100S shone at great speed events from Sebring to Bonneville in its Fifties heyday — and this example still sees action today.

Words Ben Field Photography Lyndon McNeil

Florida, March, 1954. Lance Macklin and George Hunton are racing an Austin-Healey special test car in the 12-Hour Grand Prix of Endurance at Sebring. Looking like a stripped-down 100/4, the Healey is apparently outclassed in a field that also contains Ferrari, Aston Martin and Lancia. But, six hours in, the Healey finds itself in fourth spot, already a victor against the attrition that’s seen off some of its more glamorous rivals.

Further retirements and hard driving from Macklin put the Healey briefly in second place behind Stirling Moss’s OSCA before a broken valve rocker leaves the 100 limping on three cylinders into an eventual third place (and a win in the Sports 3000 Class).

The special test car was one of a series of prototypes for a ready-to-race production car being developed by Donald and Geoffrey Healey — the 100S. The ‘S’ stood for Sebring, an appellation decided before the great results of the 1954 12-Hours. The production car, like the special test cars, had an aluminium body, Dunlop disc brakes front and rear and a four-speed gearbox. The engine breathed through a handsome oval grille — part of a design makeover to clean up the lines of the 100 and make the S distinctly different from the...
1955 Austin-Healey 100S

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Engine</th>
<th>3.2-litre six-cylinder, ohc, twin down-draught SU carburettors.</th>
<th>Power and torque</th>
<th>180bhp @ 4700rpm; 168lb ft @ 2500rpm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transmission</td>
<td>Four-speed manual, rear-wheel drive.</td>
<td>Steering</td>
<td>Discs front and rear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brakes</td>
<td>856kg (1888lb)</td>
<td>Cost new</td>
<td>£1200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value now</td>
<td>£250,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colour</td>
<td>red and silver</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The likes of the Jaguar XK120 and Aston Martin DB2/4 couldn’t keep up with it. It handled well too

The 1955 Austin-Healey 100S was a four-cylinder, ohc, twin SU carburettors. The car was known for its versatility by competing in track, hill climb and sprint events before EVV briefly in the early sixties it was sold to Austin-Healey collector Arthur Carter and remained in his collection for 42 years until another arid marque enthusiast persuaded him to sell it. 

Shale sold the S to Mike Kellett in 1957 and went on to race a much-modified 100S. Kellett campaigned EVV 106 over the next two years alongside two more 100Ss as part of Team Triple S. The car was rolled at Oulton Park in 1958 and ended up with well-known British driver Tony Lanfranchi for 1959. He only drove the car competitively a few times, but proved its versatility by competing in track, hill climb and sprint events before EVV burst into flames in a race at Bufforth. After West Yorkshire BMC dealer Derek Buller-Sinfelid had bought and sprinted EVV briefly in the early sixties it was sold to Austin-Healey collector Arthur Carter and remained in his collection for 42 years until another arid marque enthusiast persuaded him to sell it.

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London for the next day and went to see Arthur at his farm in Norfolk. The deal was done and I was finally the proud owner of EVV 106.

It was now 2004 and Large was keen to drive his prize, but first it needed careful restoration. Warwick-based Austin-Healey expert JME was chosen to do the work. Large explains: ‘In Jonathan Everard (owner of JME) I had someone who had worked for the Healeys, had spent his entire working life rebuilding Healeys and lived and breathed Healeys.’ The project took two and a half years and was finished at JME’s new home, The Cape Works, where EVV 106 had been born in 1955.

The restoration is stunning, but not in a glitzy, Pebble Beach style. This is a fully-restored car that hasn’t had all the wonderful patina polished out of it. It looks, feels and smells original – a racing car that’s been restored for the track.

It’s a bitingly cold day, but sitting low, clasped in a green bucket seat and hemmed in by the tall transmission tunnel and big three-spoke wheel, the weather barely intrudes. You focus on the simple array of gauges and peer through a windscreen little more than a handspan high. Turn the key and the fuel pump gurgles; press the starter button and there’s an eruption of noise as the twin side-exit exhaust rips out an urgent, bass-laden tune. The clutch bites and the cold rear tyres slither for grip.

First gear is very long – this is one of five 100Ss fitted with the optional Aston Martin gearbox. The rebuilt engine has been modified to improve induction and exhaust for better breathing and a steel crank to withstand higher revs. The result is a unit you can rev to 6000rpm, which puts out 180bhp and a matching amount of torque. So that long first gear doesn’t get in the way as much now, but in David Shale’s day his unmodified S with 132bhp would have taken a while to reach racing speed. No wonder he often ate John Dalton’s dust.

In second and third the S surges ahead, happily hammering towards the 6000rpm redline. Pull the gearstick into fourth and the car will hold high road speeds for as long as you want. It’s perfectly suited to long-distance road events like the Mille Miglia retrospective, in which it has already taken part with Jonathan Everard driving and David Large navigating. More reliability trials and possibly even some circuit racing are in the offing too.

Performance is impressive, but it’s not the only thing you remember about this car. There’s the lightness: it really doesn’t feel much heavier to drive than its Sprite baby brother. Turning into corners you’re never overcome by the inertia of a weighty body that’s reluctant to follow you up the road. This lightness works wonderfully with steering that has none of the slop and wander you usually get with a cam-and-lever set-up.

Today speculators pounce when any of the 38 surviving 100s are offered for sale. These might well be valued in the hundreds of thousands, but drive one and you realise this is still a very capable and enjoyable clubman’s car. If high prices were to stop the 100S being used for what it’s best at, that would be a tragedy.

Thanks to: Jonathan Everard, David Shale, David Large

Want a 100S but don’t have £500k?

JME Healeys builds 100S recreations at Austin-Healey’s old factory. These painstakingly accurate copies of the originals feature all-aluminium panels, Dunlop disc brakes and the S-spec engine. Company boss Jonathan Everard (above) served his apprenticeship at ‘Healey’s Warwick factory, The Cape Works, and in 1969 began working with his father Harold, another former ‘Healey employee. In 1978 he founded JME, specialising in repairing, restoring and competition-prepping Austin-Healeys, and in 2008 he bought The Cape Works and moved JME there from Leamington Spa. Everard is a useful rally driver who’s competed for more than 40 years in Austin-Healeys with notable first places in the British Historic Rally Championship and individual events including the London to Cortina Classic Marathon. Most recently he drove EVV 106 on the 2008 and ’09 Mille Miglia events with owner David Large navigating.

See www.jmehealeys.co.uk for details.