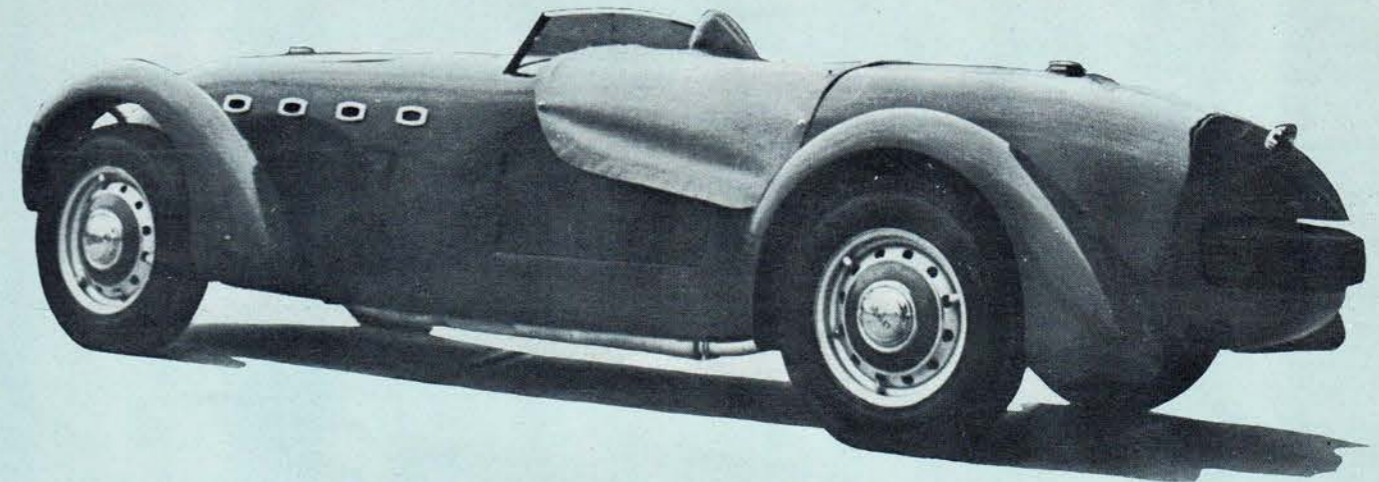


Donald Healey ascending the famous Shelsley Walsh hillclimb, Worcestershire, England, in the Healey roadster which placed him and son Geoffry ninth a few weeks earlier in their first Mille Miglia try—1948. (They averaged somewhat over 100 mph).



This, the first U. S. imported Silverstone Healey—with Riley engine, Briggs Cunningham took one look at it in 1949 and decided to swap Riley for Cadillac mill.

Driver Donald and son in AH at start of '51 Mille Miglia. The Healey chassis/Nash engine wedding came out of chance meeting with Nash-Kelvinator past president, Geo. Mason.

The life of Donald Healey is lived, metaphorically speaking, in cablecar transit from one peak of ambition to another. He had always hankered, for instance, to drive at 200 miles per hour; and in due course he did so, turning 200.9 mph for the two-way mile at Bonneville in August of last year, using a prototype Austin-Healey 100-6 with supercharger and *rennlimousin* body. With this target attained he could quite becomingly have shaken the salt from his feet forever and taken vows to begin being his age. The fact is, though, he *isn't* his age by any yardstick except the almanac, and so, true to temperament, he quietly transmuted yesterday's ambition into today's steppingstone.

Of course, there is some rational justification for pressing on to three centuries. That 200.9 mph, although a spanking clip for a sports car derivative of only 2.6 liters capacity, based upon so unpretentious an engine as BMC's C-type, didn't cause the FIA to bat an eyelid: this because the international Class D record for the flying mile still stands where it has stood these eighteen years — at 248.3 mph, clocked by Rudolf Caracciola (V-12 Mercedes-Benz) on a German autobahn in 1939.

With disarming honesty, Donald Healey admits that sprints achieved with the aid of supercharging and a radically non-standard body shape are practically meaningless as a criterion of his production wares. He undertakes them, he says, simply because in the U. S., where most of his output is sold, they produce a useful publicity impact. The British are less impressionable in such matters, and if a figure isn't specifically a record they just don't want to know about it.

Once you start adding blowers, roofing in cockpits and extending noses and tails to lengths that wouldn't conceivably be acceptable on a road car, you might just as well take leave of the original blueprint entirely, Mr. Healey plausibly argues. Accordingly, the next Austin-Healey migrant to Bonneville will probably have the driver's turret out ahead of the front wheel centers, *à la* Cobb, and be powered by a new engine giving around 450 horsepower and closely crowding the 3 liter limit. This would represent an increase of 150 bhp over the 1956 output with blower.



Whether the top end of the projected engine will retain a resemblance to the current Hundred powerplant remains to be seen, but the extra displacement sought cannot be gotten with the existing cylinder centers. In other words, this isn't just an overboring operation.

On and off, Healey has tinkered with the idea of a prone driver position for his short distance record car, and it may be that the 1957 edition will follow this recipe for minimal cross section.

According to him, the aerodynamic shape of last year's sprinter left plenty to be desired, but not all the evidence points that way. Three or four times, it may be remembered, backfires caused the blower drive chain to break at speed. One of these times the breakage occurred a quarter-mile

(Continued on page 60)

# SIXTY FAST YEARS

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By DENNIS MAY

SOON to enter his sixtieth year, and with three decades of race and competition driving behind him, Donald Mitchell Healey has reached an age and a position where many men would be content to let their bellies out-grow their chests and to start thinking in the past tense. But with Healey, designer and co-maker of one of the world's most successful sports cars, it is otherwise. As a businessman he moves so fast that, in the words of one of his staff, "you have to get in his slipstream to keep up with him." In the records field his 1957 endeavors are bent on beating 300 mph with an Austin-Healey of 3 liters displacement — with himself as driver, naturally.

If he brings it off, this will make him the fastest sexagenarian on wheels, easily; and unless Donald Campbell gets in first with the Land Speed Record he's planning, Healey will also be one of only two triple centurions alive. The other is Capt. George Eyston.

Before the '56 Bonneville trials, Donald relaxes in a prototype AH 100-6, with supercharger and lengthened body. In it, he later satisfied speed ambition—turning 200.9 for two way mile.







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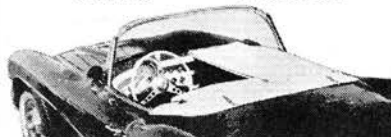
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## Don Healey

(Continued from page 43)

short of the trap. Coasting, Donald's timed average through the mile was better than 150 mph.

In contrast with the man who first drove over the brine at 300 mph (Campbell, 1935), Healey emphatically plays down the danger potential of such speeds on the salt. In fact, he says, it is the inherently high safety factor, and the almost nugatory physical exertion called for, that driving role up to, and if need be exceeding, 300 an hour. His one cardinal rule in this context is to let the car go where it wants to if a side wind hits it. The *lebensraum* is there, and then is the time to use up a bit of it.

The name Healey, originally standing in its own grounds and later hyphenated with Nash and Austin, is identified with such striking success, both commercially and in various forms of speedwork, that it's difficult to realize Donald's career as a car manufacturer only dates back eleven years. But personally, in association with a series of established British marques, he had made a reputation as a hard-headed and resourceful competition driver long before setting up as a constructor on his own account in 1946. As a Royal Flying Corps pilot in the first World War he hoped to make aviation his peacetime profession, but a flying crash and the resulting injuries enforced a change of plan. Instead, he pocketed his RFC disablement papers and returned to his birthplace, a townlet called Perranporth on the coast of Cornwall, England, where he bought himself a garage business. From this base he participated in the leading English trials of the twenties, serving a promising apprenticeship at the wheel of an ABC, a sprightly light car with two horizontal aircooled cylinders, like half a VW. He also drove this little two-banger at the old Brooklands track.

From the ABC, Donald graduated to a Triumph Seven, unrecognizable ancestor of today's TR3, and subsequently rang changes on later and larger Triumphs, Rileys and Invictas. When the Royal Automobile Club put on its first rally in England in 1928, foreshadowing a later British boom in this type of competition, Healey and his Triumph Seven won it outright. Encouraged, he raised his sights and took a bash at the Monte Carlo marathon the following January, getting his wheels in the groove for a run of Monte success that no other Briton has yet equalled — between 1929 and the outbreak of the second war his score in Europe's toughest snowfest included one straight win, one second place, one third, one first in the separate light car category and the only recorded instance of a car being cut clean in half by a freight train. The London *Motor* has described Donald as "all-time's greatest British contestant of Le Rallye . . . an ideal compound of resource, skill, guile and toughness".

In the light of his career on the Monte Carlo trail it isn't surprising that Healey

regards record breaking at multiple century speeds as a tame and sedentary occupation. It may be that he himself has lost count of the number of times he escaped pulverization by a gnat's whisker in the rally, but the most miraculous of these near-misses was certainly his 1935 adventures on a Danish grade crossing. Driving a supercharged Triumph Dolomite straight-eight through a pitch dark night, and with patchy mist for extra hallucination value, his ear caught a sound that he took to denote a seizure of the blower. What he didn't know was that seizing Dolomite blowers sounded exactly like Danish freight train sirens, and vice versa. The impact, when it came, was oblique, and literally bifurcated the Triumph about nine inches ahead of the windshield. The front half, complete with the engine and the rest of the hood's contents, was ground to fragments. The back half, containing Healey and his navigator, was gently sideswiped out of harm's way and didn't even capsize. The navigator shook his head and one tooth fell out. Otherwise nobody got a scratch.

The *Motor*, in extolling Healey's skill and guile as a rallyman, wasn't just playing with words. In 1931, the year he won the Monte, his 4 1/2 liter Invicta ran off the road soon after leaving Stavanger, his Norwegian starting point, and cut a telegraph pole down to bumper height. The blow threw the whole chassis out of line, giving the steering a powerful bias a-port and leaving one front brake for dead. Under these handicaps, Donald and his co-driver not only made it to Monte on time over 1700 miles of snow and ice-bound roads, but Healey himself beat the entire field in the decisive eliminating test on arrival. This was, of all things, a braking test.

The following year the decider took the form of a top gear flexibility test. Finding nothing in the regulations to forbid such a manoeuvre, Healey had a pair of dime-size back wheels and tires shipped down to Monte in advance and fitted them to his Invicta before showing for the test. These wheels were so small that with the tires flat the chassis touched the ground. On his trans-Europe performance he was favorably placed to win the rally outright for the second time running, but it transpired that Vaselle, one of the Hotchkiss factory's Monte Carlo virtuosi, had stopped off at his sponsors' Paris plant and switched to an ultra-low axle ratio. This even smarter dodge enabled Vaselle to beat Healey on so-called flexibility and thereby win the rally.

Final tests, in which even seasoned operators are liable to be afflicted with agonizing stage fright, always found Donald as happy as a baby in a pram. His serenity and detachment preceding and during these ordeals was the wonder and envy of mercurial Latin rivals and accounted for much of his success as a rally driver. In addition to his Monte Carlo prizes, he also won both the Austrian and Hungarian alpine trials for Invicta.

Healey returned to his old love, flying, in the second World War — commanding a regional wing of the Air Training Corps in England. During such leisure as his ATC duties afforded, he worked up de-

*continued on next page*



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continued from preceding page

signs for the car that was to carry his name, pooling his own down to earth practicality with the advanced technical and theoretical knowledge of an old friend, Achilles Sampietro. Sampietro had been an associate of Georges Roesch, designer of the classic Talbots in this make's pre-Rootes era, and is now with Willys-Overland.

The Healey prototype, powered by a slightly warmed version of the 2½ liter Riley engine, was on road test three months after VJ-Day and went into small scale production during 1946. In its three variants—roadster, sedan and convertible—this Riley based car kept Donald's little factory busy until 1952, when the need for increased dollar business led to the introduction of the Anglo-U.S. halfcast known as the Nash-Healey.

By dint of a roofline that discouraged the wearing of hats in the back, plus a general contouring that wasn't far behind the Italian thinking of the day, the 2½ Healey sedan achieved a low overall drag factor. This was effectively demonstrated when, soon after the original launching, it hit an independently timed speed of 104 mph on an Italian autostrada of far from perfect surface, thereby establishing itself as the world's fastest stock passenger car. (Stock models had, of course, exceeded this speed pre-war, both in Europe and the U.S., but the ones in question were not still in production).

Healey happened to be in Italy at the time of the first post-war Mille Miglia, in June of 1947, and the fact that the winning Alfa, driven by Biondetti and Romano, averaged the relatively modest speed of 69.58 mph, sent him off into a brown study. Upshot of these musings was that he led a three-car expeditionary force to Brescia for the race in '48. Donald himself, sharing a roadster model with his eldest son, Geoffrey, finished ninth on general classification, averaging over 100 miles per hour for a 150 mile stretch of autostrada; Count Johnny Lurani headed the whole touring category, irrespective of displacement, with a Healey sedan; and the third car in the team broke its transmission. Another closed Healey, stoked by Tommy Wisdom, the well-known British motoring writer, again pulled off the touring class in the next year's MM.

Don has driven in five post-war Mille Miglia—a stoutish effort for a man who was in his fiftieth year before he even learned his way around the mighty Brescia-Rome-Brescia lap. It was in the 1953 race, at the wheel of a Nash-Healey hardtop, that he hit a bridge parapet at ninety, ejecting his co-driver through the windshield. The pane, being fortunately framed in rubber, didn't put up a lethal resistance.

Staunchly pro-American, Healey takes pride in the fact that it was his product that first whetted Briggs Cunningham's appetite for racing. Briggs' personal debut in speedwork was made on a Silverstone Healey with a Cadillac V8 engine fitted in place of the regular Riley four-lunger, and prolonged experiments with this combination preceded the establish-

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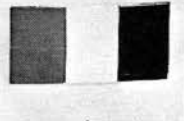
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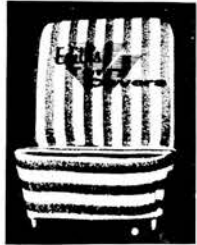
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**Don Healey**

*continued from preceding page*

ment of Cunningham as a marque in its own right.

When the idea of welding a big-displacement American powerplant to his own chassis first occurred to Healey, he had his eye on the Cadillac V8 engine. Tentatively, GMC thought they might be able to make available the few units he'd need, and he was invited to Detroit to discuss the project with Charles Wilson, the present Secretary of Defense, who, at that time was president of General Motors. En route to New York by sea, Donald chanced to make the acquaintance of George Mason of Nash-Kelvinator. Drawn together by common interests, the travelers struck up a friendship, and the object of Healey's trip came out in conversation. Before they parted, Mason made it known that he would be happy to supply Nash engines instead if the Cadillac parleys came to nothing. They did, and that was how Healey came to have his name hyphenated with Nash.

Although the Nash engine, being inferior to the Cad in both displacement and specific output, gave the Healey a performance that in retrospect seems not far removed from the bovine, it served its purpose adequately at the time. High-point of the Nash-Healey's career in sports car racing was Le Mans, 1952, when the one driven by Wisdom and Johnson placed third, several parishes behind the two survivors from Stuttgart's threesome team of 300SL Merces. More importantly from the commercial standpoint, the big advertising noise made in the U.S. by Nash-Kelvinator paved the way for the cut that Healey was later to make at the American cake with his smaller Austin-Healey Hundreds. About 1200 Nash-Healeys were built, all but a handful of them going to the U.S. market.

Without exercising any of the back-slapping winsomeness of a Dale Carnegie disciple, Donald Healey somehow always seems preordained for support from the right friends at the right moment. A case in point was the way Sir Leonard Lord (then plain L. P. Lord) fell into his lap, so to speak, at the crucial moment of the debut of the Healey Hundred. On his own initiative, and without any effort at enlisting outside backing, Healey laid down an all-new chassis and body design in the summer of 1952. For this car, christened the 100, he had negotiated the purchase from Austin of surplus A90 engines, as used in Longbridge's already obsolete Atlantic hardtop. As head of Austin, Lord was of course fully in accord

with this transaction, but his personal interest in it, right up to the time the 100 was unveiled at the annual London automobile exhibition in October, was nothing, net. Then, at the Earl's Court show, it happened. Lord came, saw and was conquered. Convinced that Healey held an ace, he immediately offered to transfer production of the 100 to Longbridge and put Austin's international distributive machinery to work on its behalf. The deal was concluded almost overnight, and the car that had entered the show hall as a Healey acquired its Austin prefix right there on the stand.

This alliance transformed Healey's fortunes and scale of operations, and during its four-year lifespan the four cylinder 100 had the fairly unusual distinction of maintaining a demand that constantly outstripped supply. Fourteen thousand of these brisk two-seaters were exported to the States, nourishing the BMC exchequer to the tune of \$20,000,000. From the moment of the Lord-Healey handshake, Donald's small plant at Warwick, where all his earlier cars had been built, was relieved entirely of manufacturing and assembling processes. It is presently devoted to service, tuning for competitions, prototype development and conversions from stock specification to the faster 'M' formula.

Of late, the marque is busy producing Austin-Healey 100-6's, introduced last fall to replace the four. In February, 160 of them were coming off the line per month, and Donald hoped shortly to step this to 200. Performance-wise, there was perhaps an augury of future possibilities in the speeds put up in Utah last August by a special-bodied variant with three double throat carbureters and a nine to one compression: figures for 200 miles and 500 kilometers, both breaking international class records, were above 152 mph.

As busy as a bird dog from dawn to dewy eve, and therefore a happy man, Healey currently divides his time about equally between his car and powerboat interests. His trans-ocean travels between Britain and the U.S., which weren't exactly desultory when he only had cars on his mind, nowadays approach fanbelt tempo. Healey Marine, his boat enterprise, has beachheads in Canada and the Bahamas, as well as in England, and is growing all the time. This company's products, like those of its car associate, enable Donald to combine a business with a hobby; water skiing, one of the purposes for which his craft are designed, is a favorite diversion of his. Like record breaking on salt, it is, he says, essentially safe because there isn't anything or anybody to run into, which makes it a hand-picked pastime for men of an age past their Monte Carlo prime.

Dennis May

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