

# CLASSIC DRIVER

## From Acropolis to Stelvio - Is this the most original Works Big Healey?

### Lead

Perfectly patinated, with period competition success, a legendary rally-driver owner and a super fan who kept the car for 51 years: This is probably the most well-preserved example of a 'Works' Big Healey on the market.

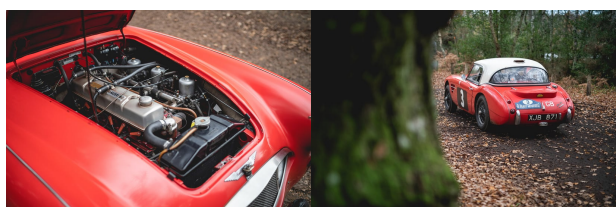
The Austin-Healey, or more specifically the Big Healey, is a car that has always deserved more recognition than it gets. This 'Works' Big Healey is proof alone that these cars were a formidable force to be reckoned with in 1960s motorsport.

Driving ability and technical knowledge is a lethal combination. Donald Healey had both, earning his wings in World War I, performing daredevil night bomber missions. Healey left the Royal Flying Corps in 1917, spending the rest of the war checking aircraft. Shortly after, he took a course in automobile engineering and by 1920 had opened his own garage.



Motorsport was much more interesting for Healey and he quickly realised he was also pretty handy behind the wheel, winning the 1931 Monte Carlo Rally in a 4 1/2-litre Invicta. Healey's talents were soon in demand and he sold the garage to go and work for Triumph. He quickly became the technical director and was designing all new Triumph models.

By now, the bug had really set in and Healey was ready to start building his own cars, setting up the Donald Healey Motor Company in 1945. The initial cars and a collaboration with Nash showed great promise, but they were expensive to produce. Healey wanted to build an inexpensive sports car that would be capable of 100mph, and the Austin Healey 100 was that car. It was first displayed at the 1952 Earls Court Motor Show and a total of 74,000 would eventually be built.



But what you're looking at here is a Big Healey. The original 100 was named as a nod to its top speed, while the 3000 - released in 1959 - was named for its larger engine capacity. Straight away, the more powerful car was successful, with Pat Moss (Stirling's sister) winning the challenging Liege-Rome-Liege rally in 1960.

This 'Works' Big Healey, now available with Henderson Fellowes, was prepared by the BMC Competition Department for the 1961 season and made its debut on the legendary and gruelling Acropolis Rally in Greece, where Peter Riley and Tony Ambrose steered the car to first in class and third overall.



Brake issues on the Stelvio Pass would see them retiring from the Alpine Rally in the same year, but the car had proved its capabilities. One of just 28 works cars built, 'XJB 871' was retired after that first season and perhaps because of that decision, what is offered here for sale today is probably the most original works car that you can buy.

Unlike so many period race cars, this example never succumbed to a big accident or repairs that would see its originality lost. Held in very high regard by Healey experts all over the world, this is a fine opportunity to own a car that's pretty much as it left the BMC factory.



Rauno Aaltonen, 'The Rally Professor' needs no introduction: an incredibly talented and successful driver and one of the first 'Flying Finns'. Aaltonen was the next owner of the car, using it to learn how the Big Healey handled ahead of competing for the marque. It paid off, with Aaltonen winning the Spa-Sofia-Liege Rally in 1964 in a similar 'Works' Healey 3000. He attributed his success to his time spent in 'XJB 871'.

Aaltonen sold the car in 1965 to Caj Hasselgren, a big fan of the Finnish driver, and amazingly 'XJB 871' stayed with Hasselgren and his family for 51 years. Over time, the car was carefully restored, with Hasselgren regularly bringing parts back from UK business trips.



The sympathetic restoration took much longer than originally planned, but after many years it was finally ready to be enjoyed again. Hasselgren competed with the car, chalking up numerous victories and successes on historic events, before retiring it for family road use only.

In discussion, Rory Henderson of Henderson Fellowes said: "We are delighted to offer for sale this historic 'Big Healey' on behalf of its discerning owner. Seldom do we see 'Works' cars publicly for sale and particularly one as original and pure as 'XJB 871'. This car boasts a fantastic period history, and opens the door to a wealth of historic events, whether that be the Rallye Monte Carlo Historique, the Goodwood Revival Stirling Moss Memorial Trophy or alternatively a thrilling drive in the countryside!"





Having been sold on twice more, 'XJB 871' is today offered for sale on behalf of its current owner, a collector with a penchant for fine British automobiles. The car comes ready to go with a valid Historic Technical Passport. This Big Healey is such a fine example that its eligibility for historic motorsport events is almost only limited by your imagination.

As mentioned above, the newly named Stirling Moss Memorial Trophy at Goodwood is an option – in fact there was another 'Works' car entered in this year's event at Goodwood Speedweek. Perhaps you prefer long-distance challenges? The highly regarded Modena Cento Ore and the legendary Tour Auto are also possibilities. It's important to remember that these events do not give entries away lightly! That's really where this car is such a fantastic proposition for its new owner: it will be welcomed at events all around the globe due to its fine provenance.



In recent years, historic rallying has also become hugely successful, whether that's traversing countries over a few weeks or shorter events like the Monte-Carlo Historique. There really are myriad options for this car's use that should see its value hold strong, making it a great investment.

For the last three years, 'XJB 871' has been occasionally enjoyed by its owner as a fun road car and that's an important point – this Healey has many talents, but is still ultimately an incredibly usable car. Road, race or rally, you will turn heads in this 'Works' Big Healey. In those three years, the car has been looked after by specialist Woolmer Classic Engineering, who recently gave it a thorough inspection and full service. As such, the car presents itself raring to go!



It's not often that well cared-for, original 'Works' competition cars come up for sale in such exquisite condition, and rarely have they lived such a cared for life. Being in single ownership for 51 years has undoubtedly helped the preservation of this 'Works' Big Healey and its exceptional originality.

*Photos: Riiko Nuud © 2020*

**Gallery**





























