

A RELIABLE BRITISH SPORTS CAR

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Like many British car owners my wife Diane and I initially put very few miles on our Austin Healey. With work, travel, raising our two kids, and a concern about British car reliability, between 1976 and 1997 we probably averaged less than 500 miles per year in our 3000 Mk1 roadster.

In 1998 we were invited by a group of Austin Healey owners to attend a "Conclave" in Boyne Mountain, Michigan. With three other Austin Healeys we braved the 400 mile drive each way and had a great week. Surprisingly we encountered no breakdowns on the trip. The die had been cast on our future Healey travels.

Each year we drove the Healey further from home with a group of fellow travelers; to St. Louis in 1999, Indianapolis in 2000, Grand Rapids, Minnesota in 2001, and Gatlinburg, TN in 2002. While we had some small car problems like a failed generator in Indianapolis, for the most part our one-week to ten-day trips were mainly trouble free. The companionship with fellow enthusiasts was entertaining and the scenery we enjoyed was far beyond what you ever see in a normal car. The destination really was the trip!

In 2003 we embarked on our first really long drive; a two week 3000 mile Maritime tour with five other Healey couples. Other than having our overdrive fail in Montreal and getting soaked during a storm in Lunenburg, we had a great time. This trip also made me realize how much I wanted a convertible model for these trips rather than the roadster model we currently owned. The roll up windows and easy to erect top, while less sporting, was much more comfortable. We had purchased our 3000 Mk3 in pieces a few years previously and it was ready to drive in 2004.

Our shakedown trip was a drive to Ottawa to see the Tulip festival. While the car ran well, there was a vibration problem that ended up being a bent rear axle shaft. Once we fixed that the car was ready for our next long adventure, a month long 9,000 kilometer (I changed the speedo to Kilometers) drive to San Antonio, Texas via Roswell, New Mexico and El Paso, with a return through New Orleans and Nashville. We had a spectacular, trouble-free trip that further proved how reliable these cars are.

We have gone on long trips every year since, with notable month-long trips to Scotland in 2008 (we drove the car to Baltimore for a roll on/roll off shipment that we picked up in Liverpool), Colorado in 2011, Parksville, BC and Prince Rupert in 2012, Charlevoix, Quebec and the Gaspé in 2013, Alaska in 2015, and Newfoundland and Labrador in 2016.

While we had a front wheel bearing fail outside Tok, Alaska, this is a problem even a modern car could have. We had a spare wheel bearing in the trunk and were back on the road about an hour after the breakdown. Since 2004 we have put over 100,000 miles on our BJ8, usually with 3 to 6 other Healey couples, with very few problems.

I often have British car owners tell me they will not take their cars more than 100 kilometers from home because they are concerned about the reliability. After all these miles I can truthfully say they are as reliable as a modern car. Drive them!