

THE CAPE RESTORATION OF MY HEALEY



Text: Carl Florman
Photos from: Steve Norton

The whole story started in 1957, when my parents moved from Sweden to Monaco. I was only 7 years old at the time.

My first years in Monaco were not happy ones. It took me several years to settle in and I only really started to enjoy myself when I got my first moped at the age of 14. It gave me the freedom to move about freely, without having to wait for the bus.

But there were two big events every year that my friends and I looked forward to: The Monte-Carlo Rally in January and the Monaco Grand Prix in May.

My interest in motor sport was awakened, and my friends and I skipped many hours of school during these events.

We followed the competitions zealously, and at that time you could get very close to the cars and the drivers, whom we admired enormously.

Datsun (now Nissan) had rented parking space in the garage in the building where I lived for several prior to the Monte-Carlo Rally. I saw Hannu Mikkola every day and

spoke with him long before he became a world champion.

Many English rally marques, such as Austin Healey and later Mini Cooper, had their cars at British Motors in Monaco, who are still the agent for British cars. We kids knew where we could find them. Every day we went around to different garages to look at the cars and speak with the drivers and the mechanics.

I saw my first Monte-Carlo Rally in 1958, and my interest in motor sport kept growing as the years passed. The 1960s and '70s were golden years for Swedish rally drivers, and I was very proud of being Swedish. Some of the big names were Erik Carlsson ("Carlsson on the roof"), Bosse Ljungfelt, Tom Trana, Harry "Sputnik" Källström, Ove "the Pope" Andersson and Björn Waldegård. I was most impressed by Bosse Ljungfelt, who drove a big Ford Falcon one year and drove "the pants" off

race and overtook each other every other lap, until finally Ronnie won. When Ronnie Pettersson died in a crash in 1978, I lost much of my interest in Formula 1.

Because I grew up in Monaco, I have always been very interested in motor sport, but only in recent years have I been able to afford the cars I dreamt of as a child.

I now own a Lotus Super 7 (Caterham) and an Austin Healey 100/6 from 1956. I bought the Healey in 2002, at which time it was in mediocre condition.

I later discovered that I knew two of its previous owners in Monaco, both former schoolmates. The first time I saw my Healey was in the late 1960s in Monaco, at which time it was owned by my Norwegian pal Magnus Konow. The car was then black with red upholstery. He drove it hard and was unfortunately not careful with it. A subsequent owner carried out a minor restoration (which did not include the engine) in the late 1980s, when the car was painted Colorado red.

I enjoyed driving my Healey for many years, even though it leaked oil like a sieve,



My Healey before starting the project

always smelled of petrol and was difficult to start when warm.

Because the car leaked a lot of oil in my garage, I placed a large collection pan on the floor underneath it (the kind you mix cement and concrete in). I used to check the dipstick every time before using the car. But once I forgot to check the oil level, and suddenly there was a big "bang" from the engine, which kept on running, though not as well of course. Something had broken, and I realised it was time for an engine overhaul.

I had read articles about Cape in British motor magazines and in the Swedish Healey club's magazine "Entusiasten". Cape had rebuilt an Austin Healey 3000 for its own account into something the journalist called "the beast" – a fast and somewhat upgraded Healey that was also reliable. The article got me dreaming that "I would like to do that kind of restoration with my car". I saved the article and contacted Steve Norton at Cape International.

My engine needed to be overhauled in any case, and the old electrical system was in very poor shape with a risk for short-

circuits that could cause a fire in a car that furthermore smelled of petrol fumes. I agreed with Steve Norton to ship the car to



Coventry in England.

Steve took the engine apart and analyzed my car, which was free of rust since it had been driven on the Riviera the whole time.



After a few days I bought a plane ticket to Birmingham to meet the crew at Cape.

I got to see several cars Cape had restored and I was over the moon. What cars! My eyes lit up, and the sound of newly reconditioned engines gave me goose bumps.

From the start I had planned a small, "inexpensive" restoration (everything is relative). But after having seen how fantastic these cars can be, I decided to do a total restoration with a long list of specs, which naturally kept getting longer and longer.

To understand my choices, you have to know that I drive historical hill climbs in the mountains around the Riviera with my Healey. I have a lot of fun, even though

the engine has not been reconditioned, and I have drum brakes on all wheels. In these hill climb events the cars start every 30 seconds. The distance is often about 6-8 km, and if there was a Lotus Elan that started 30 seconds after me, I often got overtaken before crossing the finish line, which of course annoyed me no end. I was happy if it was a Jaguar XK 120 that started after me, since they are clumsier on these winding roads and I could keep them behind me.

My intention now was to make the car a fast car for hill climbing, and able to be driven in Monaco's Historic Rally. This made certain demands on the car. I also wanted to be able to use the car for driving to upscale restaurants with my fiancé without her having to be ashamed.

The restoration of the car was begun in October 2006 and is now being finished in June 2008. It has taken time, but it has been very stimulating to visit Cape in the UK and see how the restoration has progressed. I have had long and regular telephone conversations with Steve Norton, where we discussed different



technical solutions. We have always gone for the best solution, without considering cost. I have received CDs with hundreds of pictures of Cape, which has enabled me to see everything in the tiniest detail.

Cape started by stripping the car down completely so that not a screw was left. The chassis was renovated by a company in Coventry (Coventry Prototype Panels), which hand-builds racing cars and prototypes for car shows. I visited them together with Steve Norton and was very impressed. When the company has cut away part of a chassis and welded on a new part, you can't see a new part has been fitted. Their work is absolutely first-class. When I visited the company they were building a copy of a Ford GT 40 (the original that won Le Mans in 1967 was on the workshop floor so that all the dimensions would be right) for a Japanese customer. In another shop they were building a prototype for Bentley, with a body designed by Zagato, that was to be exhibited at the Geneva Auto Show.

The rear axle, gearbox, overdrive and engine were reconditioned.

I decided I wanted to install a differential brake and a competition overdrive.

The engine is what they call a "blueprint" in England, which means they have devoted a lot of care to polishing bores and valves, balancing the camshaft, making sure pistons and connecting rods weigh exactly the same, etc. The pistons are of the highest quality, but not of forged steel. The engine has a 300 degree cam, two 2-inch SU carbs, and electronic ignition. I did not want an engine built solely for racing, since it is then difficult to use it on the open road. Steve figures on about 180 hp.

Disc brakes are fitted in front, I'm keeping the drums in the rear wheels, and there is a rear panhard rod and an upgraded front anti-roll bar, plus adjustable mounts for the front shock absorbers.

A new all-aluminium radiator is being fitted, along with a new fuel tank, also aluminium.

A lot of effort has been devoted to making the engine bay attractive, with a firewall of stainless steel (instead of aluminium, which is harder to keep clean), the throttle has been simplified, all hoses are Aeroquip, and the expansion tank and washer fluid reservoir are handmade of aluminium. The steering column is collapsible. An oil cooler is fitted in front.



A great deal of effort has been devoted to eliminating heat from the engine bay and the exhaust system. The manifold has been replaced by a custom-made stainless steel system (spaghetti type) with a pipe from each cylinder. Cape has altered the silencer suspension and raised it a few important centimetres so it won't scrape the road.

In terms of appearance, the car looks like a "works car", Colorado red and white original hardtop, air vents in the wings, aluminium bonnet with louvers, the grille has scoops for increased air intake and a mesh in front.

The car is equipped with a complete fire extinguishing system activated from the driver's seat, hazard flashers, multi-speed wipers, a new effective heating system, brake lights in the hardtop, and lights on the floor that go on when the doors are opened.

The seats are newly made copies of the Restall seats that were fitted in Healey's rally cars in the 1960s. I have chosen a two-tone interior: bright red mats, graphite leather seats with red seams, and a graphite and red dashboard.

All instruments have been reconditioned, and a newly reconditioned Halda Speedpilot is fitted.

As I write this I have not yet test-driven my car, which I hope will be an unforgettable experience. I have invested a considerable sum of money in this restoration and I am quite aware that I will not be able to recover my investment if I sell the car, but that was never my intention. After such a thorough and costly restoration, with so much thought and effort given to every detail, I will be reluctant to ever part with the car. My great joy is that I can drive my Healey all year round, since I live on the French Riviera.

I have two grandsons and have told them that they will each inherit a car, but that they must never sell the Healey.

It is with the greatest pleasure that I will be taking my restored Austin Healey to the 2008 international meeting in Tylösand to show it with pride to my fellow club members.





Carl Florman's Cape Sport 3000 at the Goodwood Sprint Course on May 18:th 2008. At the wheel is Brad Cobbet, chief mechanic at Cape International. Photo from Steve Norton