

# Report from the tomato house

My impressions from TEHMIS 2008

By Steve Norton



LOTS OF HEALEYS AT THE CONCOURS AT NORRE KATTS PARK

**For those not familiar with European Healey Meetings they are held every four years or so usually based at luxurious locations lasting roughly a week with each day crammed with interesting and enjoyable things to do. This years European Healey Meeting in Sweden continued a spirit started in 1999 at Luxemburg and St Moritz in 2004.**

Everyone I had spoken to about the meetings in Luxemburg and Switzerland raved not only about the luxurious style of these events but also the quality of the cars and the unique mixture of nationalities attracted from Europe and beyond!

Obviously I wanted to attend a European Meeting but with a busy business, a young family and a calendar already crammed with weekends away and family holidays I was worried I simply couldn't spare the time to make it to the Swedish event.

The fact that it was Sweden meant that this was a real problem, some of my dearest friends are Swedish, I love the country and had watched the Austin Healey Club of Sweden plan this event over the past four years. I'd met their chairman Per-Gunnar Johansson (PG) at Thrupton in 2002 and had been impressed by his irrepressible personality. It was this quality which would shortly rearrange my calendar to include a weeks visit to Sweden coincidentally right about the date of the forthcoming European Meeting!

He simply insisted that I attend, and please do not get any false impression

of my importance, this is simply how PG operates! Initially I had planned to save my marriage by flying in on Wednesday, watch the races on Thursday and attend the Gala Dinner on Friday. Whilst mentioning my marriage you must appreciate that when asked what her husband does for a living, my wife usually replies "he plays with old cars" so there was no way I could excuse it as a business trip she knew it was a petrol-festival!

PG dismissed my half-hearted itinerary simply telling me to get my credit card ready as he'd already booked me a room for the whole week, my wife knows PG so she wasn't surprised when I told her. PG had also mentioned that he had one or two jobs I could help with which raised the anticipation a notch and I don't mind admitting that I couldn't wait.

I've been involved with these great cars for almost two decades and yet you can count the times I've driven an Austin Healey to an Austin Healey event on the fingers of one hand and this trip would unfortunately not break the pattern. My journey to the Hotel Tylösand included a flight to Copenhagen, three trains and

finally to my huge relief a lovely 3000 driven by Kåge Schildt who very kindly drove me the last few miles just in time to hear PG's welcoming speech to the 500 assembled guests.

It was a beautiful Sunday evening completely at odds with the horrible



PG OPENS THE MEETING

weather I had left behind just a few hours earlier. Looking out to sea we all watched a perfect golden sunset, little did

we realise this would be repeated every evening of the event!

I was really pleased to see many familiar faces during PG's welcoming speech but hellos would have to wait as my luggage was still strapped to the back of Kages' car and I needed to check in and register my arrival at The 2008 European Healey Meeting in Sweden. With 500 Austin Healey enthusiasts and 250 cars based at the hotel the reception area became base-camp for the Swedish Club with their registration/help desk, the foyer also has an area reserved for a car chosen each day which would be surrounded as guests paused admiringly on their way to and fro.

Events of this status attract premier sponsors, renowned watch-maker Frederique Constant continued their ongoing association with the European Meetings and their impact on the event marketing was unmistakable, the welcome pack included a fabulous embroidered kit bag, baseball caps, umbrellas and superb enamelled souvenir car badge. The club had prepared a detailed itinerary, route maps and notes to answer every question.



SOME PROMOTION PICTURES FOR FREDRIQUE CONSTANT WERE TAKEN

My room was typically Swedish and comfortable and so, as we say in England – "I was installed". Before bed there was a car to wash and polish but more of this later, a beer or two followed by a few hours sleep ahead of the concours competition in the morning.

One of the key traditions of these European Meetings is to involve other AH Clubs with each day's activities. Derek Mayor needs little introduction when it comes to organising concours competitions and it was he, on behalf of the UK Club, who welcomed us when we all arrived at Norre Katts Park in Halmstad town, a perfect setting with pretty café on the bank of the river Nissan.

Concourse organiser Mats Svanberg is a great mate of mine and he'd asked if I'd like to help with the judging which I jumped at, classes included the broad

spectrum of 100's, 100/6 and 3000 models but equally impressive but maybe a little rarer were the Healey Abbott and Innocenti which also joined the fray! The modified cars were a master class of invention, the large Australian contingent

displayed cars that were equipped with every modern convenience, air conditioning was the norm, cars had been widened and V8's were shoe-horned into Healey engine-bays with great skill. We were also spoilt by the amount of historical models, numerous 100S cars including the home-grown black car of Clas Arleskär and a works rally car originally driven by Rauno Aaltonen that had not been seen outside Finland for many years!

I was pleased to be sharing the standard 100 class with Peter Dodson, I know he'll be smiling if he reads this because in truth I did very little judging, I would get into numerous conversations whilst he did all the hard work establishing the accuracy of our class entrants. I turned up at the end to offer

my opinion on one particular car which on this occasion would emphasise an age old concours dilemma.

Our class included the type of car I dream of owning, a completely original and unrestored BN1 with under 50,000 kms driven by its two owners from new! I could write a complete feature on this alone and we're only on Monday so I must press on but it was delightful to witness its original panels, door gaps and the chain mechanism to operate the radiator blind which was standard equipment on cars exported to colder climates!

As the results came in a crowd of eager spectators surrounded the concours marquee awaiting the best car in show which was awarded and well deserved by a superbly modified 3000 from Australia owned by Rob and Joy Elliot looking fantastic in its



THE CONCOURS WINNER

works replica livery of red and white, its exhaust reverberated around the park as he drove it away in true concours tradition.

It had been a gloriously sunny day with a lovely atmosphere, people had browsed around the cars taking their choice of river trips and guided walking tours of the town eventually returning to the hotel for a hearty buffet dinner, all in all a very enjoyable day and a great start to the week's activities.

One of the things I enjoy about residential Austin Healey events are meal times, not just because I like my food but because everyone has a chance to get together whether it be at tables or in buffet queues. Breakfasts are the best, everyone greeting each other and looking forward to the day ahead.

Tuesday dawned bright and sunny and as I was attending without a car and wife it was pleasure to be asked to assist with jobs during the week.

The best job turned out to be as chauffeur to VIP guests. A very nice BMW was put at my disposal and I dutifully pulled up at the hotels entrance to learn that today I'd be driving the 'girls'. The guys were being looked after by the lovely Nina Nyblæus who smiled almost non-stop for the whole week. Fortunately all I had to do was follow her as we headed off for the Kosta Boda glass factory, Sweden is famous for many things but glass craftsmanship is part of their heritage and a deserved feature on our itinerary.

Who were the girls? I hear you asking. The girls were Marion Coker, Joy Healey



PG AND RIGMOR FLANKING JOY AND JOHN HEALEY



PG AND ROY JACKSON-MOORE



SKILLFULL GLAS-BLOWER AT KOSTA-BODA

bristled with interesting conversation once again.

Wednesday's dawn was again hot and sunny and confirmed rumours that the Swedish Club had contacts in some very high places! I think the Australians thought it was normal – little did they know how poor our summer had been!

The Swedish organising team were determined to make this event as varied as possible and the Healey marque is perfect in this regard. As you will know the Healey factory made boats and to the credit of a relatively small group of enthusiasts a wide variety of models assembled to enthral the guests at Laholm but it had not all been such plain sailing.

You must appreciate that these boats had been transported considerable distances and the river Lagan was an unknown quantity, add to this the fact that an up-stream power station supplying the local demand for electricity actually controls the depth of water in the river at different times of the day.

During a rehearsal for the display Erik van de Klippe unavoidably clips a submerged rock damaging the rudder and propeller! Can you imagine firstly his huge disappointment at the damage only to hear Kåge Schildt calmly announce that the parts needed for repairs were in his garage awaiting installation into his ongoing restoration – problem solved!

The issue of fluctuating water depth was still a concern and to avoid the risk of further damage a delegate of the committee approached the power station officials to ask if extra water be released. Can you imagine the bureaucratic chaos

this would cause in our nanny state! There would have been 300 reasons why it could not be done, 75 forms to be completed and health and safety arguments to wade through!

Thankfully we were in Sweden, the official pondered the inevitable costs of releasing the energy that would probably waste considerable kilowatts,

he paused for a few seconds and then cheerfully announced that it sounded like a lot of fun and proceeded to allow millions of gallons of water to ensure the Healey boats could be displayed for the enjoyment of all in a safe depth of water.

I'd seen Healey boats at a few major events before - dry and silent! Today was a first, today I watched them hit the plain and turn on a sixpence all the more impressive given that the force of the water being released up stream. Tony Venn was obviously pleased that he had the opportunity to show the full potential of these great craft to an appreciative audience of Austin Healey enthusiasts – well done.

Bill Emerson provided a well informed commentary as the boats slalomed up and down and AH Spares provided an interesting display of products in their marquee.

As if this wasn't enough the Austin Healey Owners Club Netherlands were holding a gymkhana for all those preferring to get their kicks on four wheels and dry land.

Unfortunately I didn't witness the antics at the gymkhana but at the dinner that evening the prize presentation was hosted by the Visser brothers Robert and Ivo and I started to appreciate the fun day they had enjoyed. The prize giving was hilarious and I'll remember the Vissers' not only for their humour but also for their bright yellow Speedwell Sprite with green stripe and Boeing 747 dashboard!

I mentioned at the start of this report that PG had wanted my help with a few



TOM BARR SMITH GETS INSTRUKTIONER BEFORE GYMKHANA START

jobs. So far I'd helped in a small way on concourse day and I'd thoroughly enjoyed driving the VIP's but you could hardly say that I'd broken into a sweat. My job for Thursday, however, was a bit more involved, PG had asked me to commentate the race day.

As you can tell from this report I am rarely stuck for words but there's a huge difference between typing and speaking and the day would require me to start at around 8.00 and barring a lunch

break it would be pretty much non-stop till late afternoon.

After dropping the girls at the hotel I bumped into Anders Lotsengård and Mats Svanberg co-owners of Syd Segals' famous club racer SID 1. They were leaving for Falkenberg Motorbana which offered me a perfect opportunity to recce' the venue and hopefully meet some of the drivers to get some paddock news to include in my commentary.

Falkenberg Motorbana is a local track with an exciting layout, it holds the fastest average lap time speed for any Swedish track which bodes well for the racing tomorrow.

The race programme included two Classic Mini races for Swedish drivers and some of these competitors had already arrived, SID 1 is unloaded and I say hello to Marc Schmidt and his mates from Holland who I haven't seen for a few years, his car is now a bright orange in contrast to the pale yellow Dutch livery I remember.

Event organiser Nils-Fredrik Nyblæus

usually races his 100 single handed but on this occasion he will be ably assisted by non other than the Finish rallying ace Rauno Aaltonen who I completely fail to recognise until well into a very humorous conversation with him stood next to Nils's car in the early evening sunshine!

Running on neat adrenalin my big day dawns almost boringly hot and sunny again – it's race day!

The assisting club today would be the Austin Healey Club of Switzerland and with such an international audience I was keen to welcome everyone correctly and Marco Treviso took great pleasure in teaching me the correct Swiss greeting "Grutzy Miternand". Thankfully I remembered enough variations of Good Morning to please most nationalities as they arrived.

The facilities at the Motorbana are perfectly adequate but it is not Silverstone, Estoril or Paul Ricard and the commentators' booth was quite small. It commanded a panoramic view of the circuit and was quite easily the best seat I have ever enjoyed at a race meeting, but, it was quite a squeeze at roughly 3meters x 2meters. This small room was also completely glazed with no opening windows, it was 8.00 am and already 25 degrees!

Slowly more and more guests arrived from Tylösand parking in neat lines in the outfield car park with groups of enthusiasts starting to

fill the grandstand as the practice sessions began. You can plan for these moments well in advance but the truth is that the cars and the action write their own script, which was inevitable especially as I had stayed up all night preparing and rehearsing for this moment!

My swivelling chair was proving invaluable as the cars circulated and I must thank the staff at Falkenberg for equipping my tomato house with a TV screen which was being fed with lap times and grid movements which I'm sure made me sound far better informed than I would have if left to my own devices!

Now I know your asking what the heck does 'tomato house' mean?

The day was getting hotter and my commentary

booth had started to feel like a greenhouse, obviously I thought this was hot news (literally) but was concerned that green house would mean nothing more to my international audience than red house or blue house so I offered tomato house as the next best illustration of my sauna-like accommodation.

The other problem with this one-way commentary is the uncertainty that my audience were not slitting their sides at my English humour!



RAUNO AALTONEN



the Water-Bed, and whilst sloshing about I remember some of the tracks features. Lumbering down the start straight the track dives into a right and left combination, dropping down before cresting into a high speed sweeping right hander. The track then straightens towards two final right hand bends back to the start finish line.



The Healey races lived up to expectations, no incidents just full-on door to door action in true Healey style. There were one or two mechanical failures resulting in Anders Schildt 'borrowing' his dad's race car and then putting in a brave performance against more appropriately prepared circuit cars.



As the races unfolded it turned out to be a head to head between Mark Campfield and David Grace and it was only the slightest mistake that separated the two after two races, Mark out-braking himself into turn one and ending up in the gravel trap, David having to take avoiding

action resulting in his second and first places scoring him the overall win with Eric Woolley and Marc Schmidt second and third.

Fortunately during the lunch break a received a few thumbs-up and my seat was still vacant when I re-entered the sauna to get back to the serious business of the day – the races!

You've got to remember that only one or two of the racers had any experience of this track so I was really impressed when after only a few laps some of the guys were posting very respectable times indeed. The front runners included Marc Campfield and David Grace with Mark Schmidts' orange 3000 in the following group. Local racers Anders Schildt and Anders Lotsengard in

SID 1 was also on the pace plus we had yet to see how Rauno Aaltonen would settle into his shared drive in Nils Fredrik Nyblaeus' 100.

I had managed a lap the previous night courtesy of Mats and Anders in their American motorhome which I re-named



absolute loveliness! Anders is a very lucky man, Martina was utterly stunning in her Swedish national costume perfectly calm as I introduced her to the waiting crowds.

What happened next felt almost surreal but I will fondly remember her wonderful voice as the perfect expression of national pride, forget the Indianapolis 500 this was simply amazing and as I said it was the highlight of my day.

What had started nervously had finished with a real sense of accomplishment and a few more thumbs-up confirmed that my commentary had been well received, I'd also enjoyed being joined by Steve Pike and Joe Jarick in the tomato house where we delved a little deeper into Healey history to highlight some of the unique cars that had displayed in the gaps between races.

Back at the hotel the race day was perfectly complemented by dinner and a round the table Q&A session with some of the VIP guests.

I'm sure they'd be embarrassed by the term VIP but undoubtedly our honoured guests had all played a Very Important Part in the history of this great marque, Donald's son John Healey, Gerry Coker the designer of the Austin Healey 100, BMC works rally driver, Finland's Rauno Aaltonen, Bonneville record breaker Roy Jackson-Moore and last but by no means least probably the most decorated privateer racer John Chatham, all absolutely at home surrounded by Austin Healey enthusiasts.

Believe it or not I was still talkative so when Wiet Huidekoper our MC opened the floor for questions I couldn't help



GERRY COKER



THE AUSTRALIANS GAVE US A CRICKET-LESSON ON THE HOT BEACH

raising my arm like a keen schoolboy! I had researched Rauno's BMC history ahead of today's races and it mentioned his works outing on the Targa Florio, needless to say Rauno had us in tears with tales of wrecking hire cars on pace notes reconnoitres for the event and picking up on this topic John Chatham expanded about his Targa experience at the wheel of a lightweight MGC GT. Roy revisited his conversations with Donald which must have had a special resonance for his son John sitting just across the table whilst Gerry's unique insight into the history of these great cars had us all captivated.

Wiet skilfully guided the session through a number of entertaining topics leaving us all with loads to discuss as we headed for the bars and as I'd not really slept since getting up on Wednesday morning I was pretty pooped so I was pretty pleased that Friday was my day off!

As Friday was once again hot and sunny I decided the best course of action was to hit the beach and chill out! After a bit of sun bathing I took a lazy walk about the local area and would highly recommend it if you fancy a day at the seaside Swedish style, not 'Kiss-me-Quick' style but far quieter with lovely local restaurants, a fabulous beach and the Hotel Tylosand with its superb facilities – almost a resort on its own.

I was trying not to think about leaving but my taxi was booked for 5.00am and I needed to pack so I returned to my room to get organised, grab a few zeds and get dressed for the Gala Dinner at 7.30.

I hope from reading this story you'll understand some of the numerous reasons why this event was so special for me but there's another reason and he's called Carl Florman. Although Carl lives in the south

of France, he is Swedish and he was at this event in a car we'd built for him, a car we affectionately refer to as the Monte Carlo car.

It's been featured extensively in the Swedish Club magazine and this event

would be its christening. Carl had collected the car from us in Coventry and driven it to the event (one small problem but he's forgiven us!), he entered the concourse competition and come second (well done!) he'd driven all week without incident (phew!) and received compliments from everyone who'd seen his new car (magic!) and tonight I'd get a chance to buy him a pint. On Monday we'd washed the car with nervous expectations in preparation for the concourse competition on Monday and now it was already Friday, the week had flown by!

It had a great final night, the beer with Carl turned out to be champagne, the Swedish committee received their deserved congratulations, plus it was PG's birthday and I'd had a brief dance with Steve Pike which I now appreciate was caught on film. As I left I was determined to say good-bye to everyone I could in person, where I couldn't I managed to grab a passing hand shake, a kiss on the cheek or a wave across the room, I was happy.

I managed a couple of hours sleep before



TEHMIS COULD NOT HAVE FINISHED BETTER - A DANCE WITH STEVE PIKE

meeting Gerry and Marion Coker in reception, they had very kindly allowed me to share their 5.00am cab to the airport. We all had early flights departing from Copenhagen and I must admit they were in fine form even at this horrendous hour!



GALA DINNER

PG has very kindly posted a disc of pictures and the memories came flooding back, he asked me to write my story which you've just read although even I hadn't anticipated how much I'd remember and to be perfectly honest I cannot remember enjoying a week so much.

Here's to the next European Healey Meeting.

Thanks to photographers:  
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