



*Gallery*  
The Endurance Car and Roy Jackson-Moore  
at Bonneville Salt Flats September 2009.  
Photo: Steve Norton

# Healeys return to Bonneville 2009

The Austin Healey calendar is always full of exciting things to do, of course most are memorable but every now and then I think it's fair to say some are more memorable than others, the European meetings are a perfect example.

Text and photo: Steve Norton



Steve Pike from Australia and Bruno Verstraete from Switzerland announced that they, together with a hand picked team of specialists, historians and enthusiasts were re-creating the 1954 Endurance and Streamliner record cars. This announcement would capture the attention of the Austin Healey community around the world, but the fact that the team would run both cars at the Bonneville Salt Flats in Utah placed this future event on everyone's radar.

The team's newsletters posted regular updates with pictures showing the progress being made as the cars neared completion.

Look closely at the photographs and you'll agree building these special cars was no easy task, add the logistical issues involved moving vehicles, spares, tools and personnel half way round the globe and you'll get some idea for the enormity of their accomplishment.

As soon as the dates were announced I started to plan my trip, the only downside was the prospect of making the trip on my

own, but that was until the Swedish racers arrived at Silverstone on their racing tour earlier this year.

## JULY 2009

Your chairman PG e-mailed to say he was visiting the UK to support the Swedish racers at Silverstone and whilst here he thought it might be nice to beat me at golf, but that's another story. In traditional Healey style the racing on Saturday was very exciting and congratulations must go all of the Swedish racers especially Anders Schildt who was rewarded with a first place at Brands Hatch later in the trip.

"what's this got to do with Bonneville" I hear you ask?...well, whilst toasting the racers in the paddock bar with PG and my old friend John Chatham the subject of Bonneville came up, John also intended to make the trip but wasn't looking forward to making it solo so it made perfect sense to travel together. I've known John since he restored my first 3000 back in the mid eighties so this would be the perfect chance to chat and catch up.....I love

it when a plan comes together.

## MONDAY

Fast-forward to September 14<sup>th</sup> and our journey to the USA, its easy to forget how long these transatlantic trips can be, ours would take 28 hours. Tiring but uneventful except for the pigeon we befriended in the departure lounge at JFK (apparently he'd missed his connection!!). Eventually we arrived at our hotel and a much needed night's sleep.

## TUESDAY

Whoever invented sleep should be congratulated, it's just the tonic, John and I started Tuesday suitably refreshed, collected our rental car and headed west on Interstate 80. Ninety minutes later we passed the first sign for Bonneville and although we knew this was our true objective we resisted the temptation to take the exit, however, John did insist on 'testing the surface' before we pressed onwards to Wendover, a small town of basic amenities dominated by huge casino hotels which was the base camp not only



John ankle deep in salty mud!

on this trip but also where Donald's team stay Wendover straddles the Nevada/Utah state line which is a deciding factor when choosing where to stay, activities deemed legal on one side can get you into trouble on the other so needless to say our hotel was in Nevada who's liquor laws are far more agreeable, this seemed popular with bus loads of revellers from Utah at the week-end too! The Rainbow Casino and Hotel complex is pretty big with wall to wall slot machines and after checking-in John and I immediately lost our way, almost every wall is mirrored so everywhere looks the same and this wouldn't be the last time we'd get lost.



Event baseball cap en-route to salt



The teams welcome party

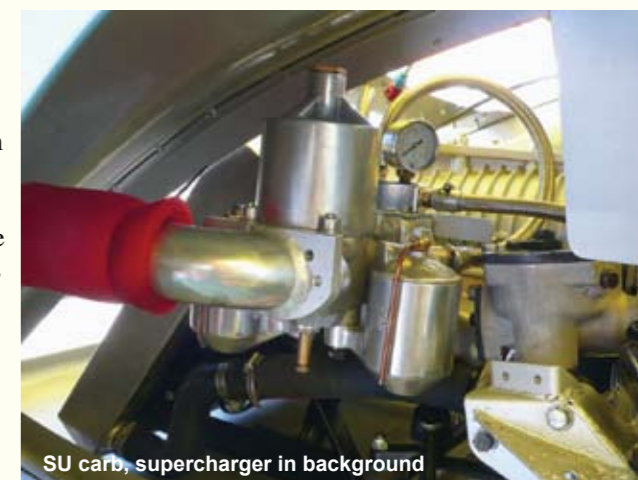
Eventually we found our room, unpacked and with our room looking out over the parking lot we could see the crowd gathering around the Austin Healey's. It was a lovely hot afternoon with a clear blue sky, what a perfect day for a car park party with the team welcoming supporters from all around the world.

This was truly a team effort and not purely a male affair, wives and girlfriends were soon promoting the exclusive event regalia. Gazebos offering shade to the wide range of embroidered polo shirts, baseball caps, tee shirts and posters. Every day enthusiasts would queue for a memento of this unique occasion, the girls worked very hard indeed.

The team had arrived in the USA earlier in September and travelled via numerous club events enabling as many enthusiasts as possible to see the cars, but to fully appreciate their journey I recommend you visit the team's blog at <http://healeysreturntobonneville.blogspot.com>. Their diary also features some superb photographs, I'm pretty pleased with mine but I know this is only a minute fraction of the total taken during the trip and I know Bruno is trying to make as many as possible available via a devoted database so watch the blog for details as this develops. You should also seek out the pre-event newsletters which chronicle the development of both cars at Steve Pike's workshops in Australia.

Upon seeing the cars for the first time it dawned on me not only how superb they

were but also how quickly the guys had worked, and now we had the opportunity to examine their technical details especially the Streamliner's supercharged



SU carb, supercharger in background



Streamliner cockpit

engine. As you can see in the pictures with the left hand front wheel removed you get a clear view of the huge 2.5 inch sand-cast SU carb with its dual float chambers sitting alongside the massive Wade supercharger, inlet tubing and manifolds. The unique nature of this car is not just skin deep, the superstructure is equally as impressive but nothing prepares you for the cockpit especially when Steve suggested I try it out for size! Once I'd squeezed into the bucket seat it was obvious no detail had been overlooked with the instantly recognisable steering wheel, 'FIRE' button and the boost gauge



Parachute, push pads and unmistakable steering wheel

straight from a WWII Spitfire!

The cars are visually identical to the originals except (some might say unfortunately) where they are forced to comply with 21<sup>st</sup> century safety regulations, but roll-cages are a small sacrifice when driver safety is paramount.

The streamliner is also equipped with rear push pads which I didn't appreciate at first sight but it soon dawned on me that due to its high gearing it would need a push to get rolling just as the original car it did back in '54.

Talking to the team as the afternoon turned into evening we realised that due to un-seasonal rain the previous day, it would be Thursday before the cars could run but the race officials were positive that 85 degree temperatures would evaporate the surface water in time – fingers crossed.

### WEDNESDAY

With the salts off limits today might have been wasted without some quick thinking by Joe Jarick who suggested using the local WWII airstrip for some demonstration runs, quiet ironic really when you remember the works enlisted the use of Gaydon airstrip for their testing! So, assembled next to the runway at Wendover airfield everyone was desperate to hear and see the cars in action. Bruno would run the endurance car along the main runway at speed, albeit slower than we would have liked due to limits agreed with airport officials, they also insisted on scrambling their impressive fire tender which thankfully was not needed. The quiet airstrip also presented the perfect opportunity to take pictures of the team with the cars. As you can clearly see Roy Jackson-Moore looked completely at

home standing next to the endurance car and you can only guess what was going through his mind..... Being part of two teams with the same purpose at the same venue with the same cars.....just a simple matter of a half century in between!

Looking around the airbase the landscape was dominated by a huge decaying hanger obviously built to house some of the largest planes stationed here during WWII and everyone's interest was heightened when we learnt that one of the planes was none other than Enola Gay so we all visited the airstrip museum to learn more about this famous connection.

The airstrip is in Utah so John and I headed back to Nevada for a beer when it dawned on us that the cars had not returned, it transpired that the team had gone to the salt for a 'secret' photo session and the second we realised we were soon en-route to gate-crash the party! Security at the end of the Bonneville road is pretty relaxed and when the guy in charge waved us down I thought he was being friendly so I waved back and kept going, off the end of the tarmac straight into a fairly deep stretch of very salty water (I hope Alamo Car Hire don't read this!) To our great relief we soon reached dry salt and

tagged onto the end of the AH convoy as it snaked out onto the flats.

The scenery takes a while to sink in, flat white salt as far as the eye can see in every direction, only terminated at the horizon by a mountain range stretching virtually 360 degrees around us. The only man-made feature was a highway-wide strip of smoother salt, the organisers prepare a strip for high speed runs by dragging a fabricated frame of heavy 'H' beams which takes off any lumps and bumps, the natural surface is already pretty smooth, in fact it looks like rippled ice but extra smoothness is important....imagine how bumpy the slightest ripples will feel at 300+ mph.

We were being escorted by Monte Widderson, he's the Vice President of the Utah Salt Flats Racing Association (USFRA) and Official Starter for Bonneville during our stay. He had very kindly allowed the Austin Healey team exclusive access to the salt to not only run the cars in a relaxed atmosphere but also



Bruno gets ready (Enola Gay hanger in background)



Bruno at speed – Wendover Airfield



The team on the salt

get pictures of the whole team together on the salt with the cars. It was also the perfect opportunity for one or two 'guest



JC pleased as punch!

owner of the Streamliner, Bruno Verstraete – owner and driver of the Endurance car, Joe Jarick – team historian and co-

driver of the Endurance car, Marco Trevisan – technical advisor and Charles Matthews – team manager. Believe it or not some of Donald's original team were also on stage, Roy Jackson-Moore drove for the DMHCo team in 1953, 54 & 56 and Gordon

Whitby who assisted in a technical capacity in 1954 and 56.

Also on stage was Ron Christensen who witnessed Donald's record runs in 1953, Ron is the USFRA historian and event commentator and his first hand experience witnessing record breaking up close for over fifty years was invaluable to the discussions. Joe Jarick was also responsible for technical authenticity which enabled him to quench the audiences thirst for technical data. Joe also illustrated the similarities and differences between today's cars and those built at the Cape and the hurdles both teams had to clear. Monte from the USFRA was in the



Charles Matthews and Steve Pike

drives!' in the endurance car and it wasn't long before JC got his turn, "be careful" was the cry but I don't think John was listening as he left a plume of salt quickly followed by the 4x4 chase car being rapidly left behind. John returned smiling from ear to ear and I'm sure this moment was the highlight of Johns trip, he's raced at many circuits in his career but never on the salt flats.....needless to say he was pleased as punch.

We shouldn't forget that this story is also about the historical roots of the project and the parallel journeys of Donald's original professional team and today's enthusiasts. To open up this debate and answer questions in an open forum the team had hired the Wendover Community Hall and had laid on a superb buffet for this evening, the room was packed.

The panel of team members included, Steve Pike – builder of both cars and



Joe Jarick (blue shirt) and Marco Trevisan with Bruno

audience and enjoyed contributing to the discussion, it was clear that the efforts of the AH team had gained serious respect from the organisers.

Although still within the town of Wendover, the village hall was on the 'dry' side of the state line and as soon as the charity auction was concluded the evening continued back in Nevada – on the 'wet' side of town!

**THURSDAY**



Team Pits

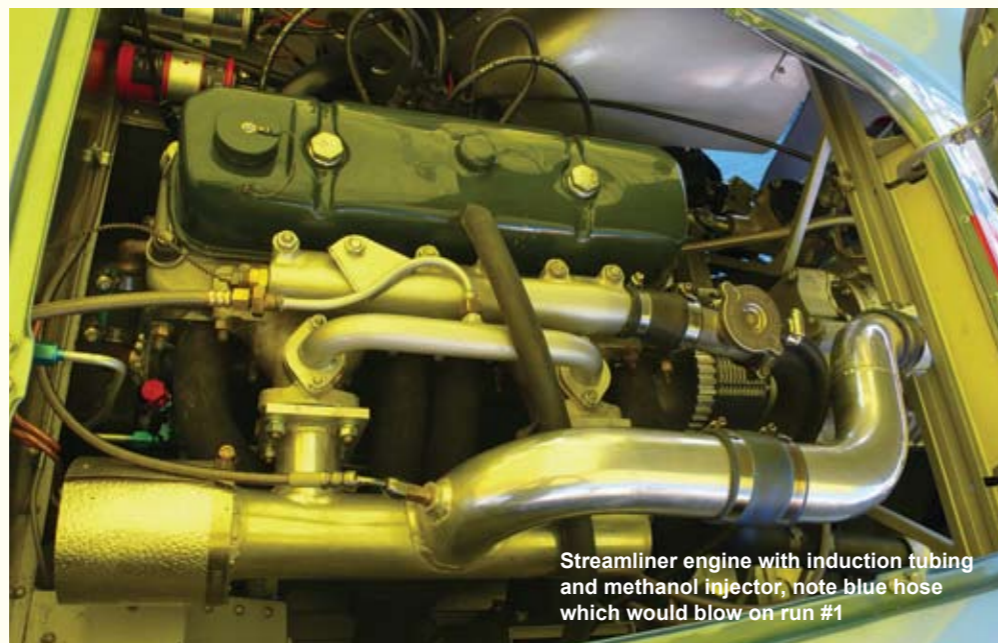
Thursday's blue skies were a reassuring sign that racing would start today and arriving on the salt we all congregated under the yellow tents provided by Dunlop who had helped with sponsorship. Looking round, the Healey pit was surrounded by vehicles of every shape and size with one common purpose.....to reach their maximum speed!

Whilst the endurance car seemed to be running reliably the streamliner was taking longer to acclimatise. Some pre-event testing had been possible but two key factors would be virtually impossible to duplicate before arrival at Bonneville, running on salt, and running at 4500 feet above sea level. The learning curve was getting steeper by the hour but whenever Healey guys are faced with a problem there's no shortage of knowledge and willing

hands. Both cars are based on the factory 100S model with modifications to attain higher speeds, standard 15 inch wires are replaced by aluminium Dunlop peg-drive wheels of 16 inch diameter to increase rolling distances, the lower ratio crown-wheel and pinion provide longer gearing and aerodynamic bodywork obviously helps to reduce drag. Numerous other modifications combine to produce maximum speed from every available horsepower.

The original Streamliner was fitted with a Shorrock supercharger but despite extensive searches Steve had no choice but to fit a Wade unit. It didn't suit the engine bay as comfortably as the Shorrock and the belt

drive pulleys started to complain by



Streamliner engine with induction tubing and methanol injector, note blue hose which would blow on run #1

shearing roll pins - trying their best to jeopardise the teams' hard work! This problem would plague the team until Udo Putzke (well known for his suspension upgrades) made an engine stabiliser and a replacement pulley spindle, but the problem persisted! His final and successful solution was to create a flexible joint using original parts and a section of hex Allan key! This problem could have stopped the streamliner effort so you can imagine everyone's relief when his fix worked, although this wasn't the end of the problems.....

(it was déjà vue....the Healey team experienced an identical problem in the 50's!)

The supercharged engine needs methanol to get it firing and give the high octane petrol chance to take over. Methanol is very volatile and corrosive and whilst wafting around the inlet tubes it succeeded in softening a silicon hose which exploded shortly after the car left the line on its first run. This forced the team back to the pits for repairs before rejoining the queue for another run.

Queues are usually boring places but if you imagine the craziest collection of

competitors ranging from a thirty foot long hydrogen powered missile car to a tuned Mini Cooper S you'll get an idea of the eclectic mix.

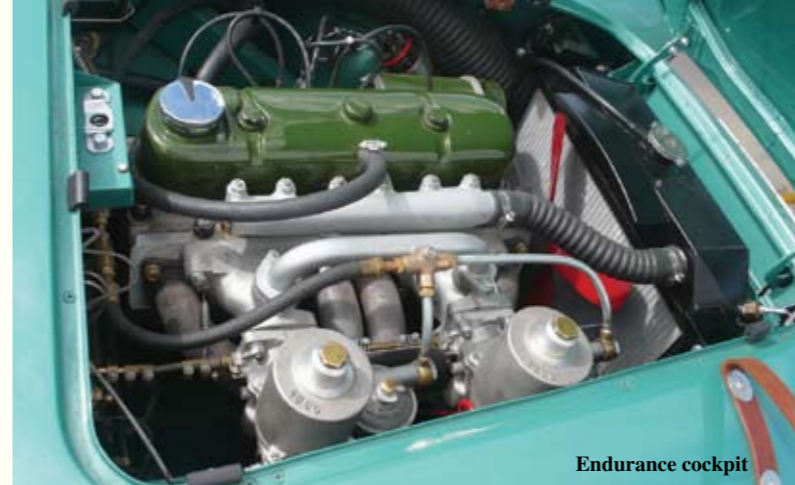
The Endurance car is gorgeous and I'd take it home in a heartbeat, it's less radical than the streamliner and you can recognise the original 100 despite being distracted by its head fairing and alloy tonneau. Technically it's far closer to the factory 100S recipe and the car was proving less problematic which was great news as it was completing timed runs on each attempt even though minor



Dunlop peg drive wheels on Endurance car



Peg drive locating holes on Streamliner hub



Endurance cockpit



Endurance engine bay

ignition and carburettor adjustments were occasionally needed. There can be no doubt that Bruno is immensely proud of his car and with just cause, its impeccably presented and you can see his attention to detail evident in virtually every area

secured his harness and made final checks. Whenever the Healey's arrived at the start line a big crowd gathered, and not only Healey supporters, everyone seemed to appreciate the historical importance of this effort.



David and Helen Pike, an emotional moment

Dave had done his job, New competitors are required to qualify rather than go flat out straight away, the organisers need to know the cars and drivers are safe, David had qualified using part throttle in 4th gear, what would happen flat out in 5th?!

Back at the Austin Healey pit all hell broke loose!....all the preparation and hard work over the months had been rewarded by the streamliners' first official timed run, an accomplishment made all the more special with David at the wheel. Helen was clearly the proudest mom on the planet and as she hugged her son she couldn't contain her tears. To cap a perfect afternoon as the sun started to set the AH Club of USA awarded Steve their Presidents Award for outstanding efforts to add to the history of the marque. When the Queen gets to hear about his efforts he'll probably get a knighthood as well!

"Well Steve, did you drive on the salt flats?" I can hear you asking, and the truth is yes I did drive on the flats every day, it just happened to be in a rental car, however, my claim to fame is slightly more glamorous than this..... The streamliner had to be towed back to the start line for an early start tomorrow morning and a special driver was needed.....and who better for the job than yours truly!

Its official.....I had run the streamliner on the salt flats.....at 20mph!

even his clothing, just take a look at his Simpson crash helmet!

Even the driving was a team effort and each car would be shared, Steve would share with his son David, with Bruno and team historian Joe Jarick driving the endurance car. Another benefit is that two minds are better than one, each drive was a fact-finding mission with a clear strategy for getting the best performance from each run with feedback to improve the next one.

**FRIDAY**

Having joined the queue late on Thursday the Streamliner was well placed for an early run on Friday only to be delayed by gremlins in the official timing equipment which slowed proceedings, so it was sometime later in the day when the Streamliner rolled onto the start line. Steve Pikes' son David was driving today and was doing exceptionally well considering he must have been feeling pretty nervous as his dad

Fingers were crossed and the start button was pushed, the engine fired into life and at this stage we knew two things were fine, the Wade pulley was still attached and the inlet hoses were intact...so far so good. I had managed to sneak a thumbs up to David before the Perspex canopy was secured and was pleased to see the car accelerate away. Four and a half miles later and at a fraction shy of 150mph



Special driver doing his hard job

This called for a celebration back at the hotel but only after a hearty Mexican meal at the Bonneville service station. It would have been unforgivable to return home without sampling the delights of the Salt Flats Cafe and we were not disappointed. I'm sure you don't need a blow by blow account of this evening's entertainment needless to say we eventually left the blackjack tables at 3.30am!

**SATURDAY**

Predictably Saturday dawned hot and sunny and after breakfast (at the Mexican café) we arrived on the salt early (sunglasses on!) Unfortunately we were too late to catch the spectacular sunrise but thankfully others less inebriated than us had taken some epic shots of the cars as the sun rose.

To be perfectly honest Saturday was a day of mixed emotions, happy that the endurance car ran its fastest speed but sad that the opportunity to really stretch the streamliner was thwarted by misfortune, it hesitated during the push start and the teams' 4x4 unfortunately caused the parachute to deploy and the final run had to be aborted. At the end of the day the fatigue in the expressions of the team was clear, they were smiling as ever but they were tired, every day had been hard fought and after packing everything away they returned to the hotel late as usual. Not too late that we couldn't all enjoy a final meal

together washed down by...you guessed it...a few cold beers!

**SUNDAY**

Some team members had left a few days earlier to witness the unveiling of the new Healey prototype at Goodwood, isn't it amazing that history was repeating itself simultaneously on both sides of the world, the re-enactment of Donald's record breaking and who knows, maybe the re-launch of the Healey marque itself... we'll wait and see. The Australian team members were heading west to dispatch the cars homewards, Bruno was flying back to Switzerland and John and I were heading eastwards to Salt Lake, New York and eventually Heathrow and home.

**LATER**

I've been home for a week or so now and I sincerely hope I've captured some of the unique atmosphere we experienced at Bonneville. It was such an unforgettable mixture of emotions and sensations, the craziest was walking on salt when your brain is convinced that its ice! The first time you see a car at 300 mph is pretty impressive too, watching cars disappear miles into the distance then hearing the driver select 2<sup>nd</sup> gear.....and of course seeing JC's smile when he climbed out of the endurance car.

If, like John and I you are impressed by the team's achievements, then good,

because we should be, and like I said at the start, "The Austin Healey calendar is always full of exciting things to do, of course most are memorable but every now and then I think it's fair to say some are more memorable than others!"

This was the diary kept by Steve Norton and John Chatham on their trip to the Bonneville Salt Flats September 2009.



Sincere thanks to Joe Jarick for checking the technical content.

The following table of results show the optimum runs and speeds attained by the team;

**Endurance car**

Qtr Mile	7.31680	123.00451
1st Mile	28.95846	124.31600
Middle Mile	28.50842	126.27846
Last Mile	28.25493	127.41139
Exit		127.70891

The original car ran around a 14 mile circular track, the figures above show the new car was accelerating mile on mile.....who knows the difference a few more miles could have made?

**Streamliner**

Thu – aborted due to blown inlet hose.

Fri

1st Mile	147.99515
Middle Mile	149.06817
Last Mile	119.90081

Sat – aborted due to push start incident

The car made 150 mph in 4th gear at part throttle. There are salt flats in Australia so watch this space!