



Big Healeys and Jaguar XKs are fantastic machines that, for some drivers, benefit from a few extra tweaks. These two show just how good it can get

Words: David Lillywhite Photography: Stuart Collins

*Double the pleasure*  
**HEALEY vs JAGUAR**



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more inconvenient, uncomfortable or potentially dangerous flaws’

**D**AMN, I FEEL ENGLISH TODAY! Two classic Brit sports cars, in matching British Racing Green. We’re in the heart of car-making country, the sun’s shining down and the birds are chirruping in the hedgerows – though of course they’re drowned out by the rather more stirring sound of two tuned engines breathing deeply through sports filters and tuned-length exhausts. Ah, it’s the country life for me.

You wouldn’t know it from the picturesque surroundings but we’re only a couple of miles from Browns Lane, where Jaguars were made until just four years ago, and 15 miles from The Cape Works, Warwick, once home of the Healey.

It was on these local roads, leafy and winding in the great British tradition, that Jaguars and Healeys were tested and developed in their day. Through almost uncanny natural ability from the likes of William Lyons, Donald and son Geoffrey Healey and their talented teams, both cars had been sketched out on paper and the designs rapidly and successfully made real by talented craftsmen, to be enjoyed by generations of enthusiasts ever since.

The thrill of a Healey or an XK is still as strong as ever, and both give similar experiences in very different ways. As

standard, the Jaguar is much more civilised and by far the better car in engineering terms, but it’s less exciting to drive. A Healey, iconic and wonderful as it is, is deeply flawed, but its more basic structure and those rough edges in many ways add to its character.

Now you can probably see where this is leading. The two cars featured are modified, with the aim of ironing out the more inconvenient, uncomfortable or potentially dangerous flaws, without losing the character. It’s a well-trodden path, but thinking has changed over the last few years on what works and what doesn’t, and the Healey in particular represents a significant advance on modified Healeys of old.

First difference: it’s not a works rally replica! The accepted route to Big Healey tweakery over the past decades has been to go for the lairy side-exit exhaust, whopping carburettors, big wheels, bonnet vents and a works-style hardtop, all topped off with the obligatory red-and-white paint scheme. They look fabulous and are a blast to drive, all noise and oversteer, but the downsides are that they’re tiring and uncomfortable.

The approach taken with the ‘CapeSport 100’ here, built by Cape International, is very different. It’s fast, but sophisticated, at least by Healey standards, to the point that, as Cape’s Steve

**Above**

Not a rally replica, not even a 100S copy, but an S lookalike with clever tweaks that genuinely improve the driving experience.

Norton puts it, ‘You could take your wife out in this one, and she wouldn’t complain about the noise, the smell or the heat!’ He’s adamant that the biggest mistake you can make with a Healey is to over-spec the engine and suspension while overlooking more-useful modifications.

You certainly wouldn’t accuse the XK120 here of being detrimentally over-specced. Unlike the Healey, which is Cape International’s demonstrator and currently for sale, the Jaguar has been with the same owner for more than two decades. Terry Heyes knowingly bought it as a shiny-on-the-outside, tired-underneath-the-paint ’51 left-hooker in 1988. When he moved to Hong Kong the XK went with him, and there he stripped it down to a bare chassis and rebuilt all the running gear, before bringing it back to the UK in 2002.

But by this point Terry felt his Jaguar deserved some special finishing touches, and he sent it to Guy Broad XKs, next-door-neighbour to Cape International, where it was treated to a series of modifications aimed at making the driving experience more comfortable and enjoyable.

I’ve driven Guy Broad’s modified XKs before, and some go much further than this. But Terry’s car has the most important mods, starting with the driving position. Yes, it’s

still enjoyably vintage, with the steering wheel close to the chest, but thanks to the new slimline bucket seats and the Guy Broad-added scallop in the floor kick-up behind the driver’s seat you don’t end up with your knees tangling with the steering wheel. The next option would be to move the pedal box forward, but Terry’s not opted for that and at 6ft 1in he fits perfectly.

**Above**

By starting with a better engineered car, it takes fewer tweaks to iron out the XK120’s inherent flaws – and then what a fantastic machine it becomes!

So you sit (comfortably) in the XK and give the accelerator pedal a little blip, and it responds with a little more gumption than the stock XK. Again, it’s simple but effective stuff: a gasflowed XK140 head on the stock 3.4-litre bottom end, L14 fast road camshafts and 2in sandcast H8 SU carburettors, breathing through a Broadspport performance exhaust. Sweet. The difference isn’t necessarily in the performance (though there’s certainly a bit extra) but in the willingness to rev smoothly to the redline without running out of breath. Oh, and the cooling is improved, a crucial XK mod based around a Guy Broad high-capacity radiator.

Other mods? Well, the rear suspension has radius arms, plus the telescopic dampers that the later 140 received as standard, there are discs not drums at the front, still unservoed, and most important of all there’s a Getrag >>

‘It’s impossible to resist nipping up and down the gears, accelerating and braking hard, bowling into corners at hooligan speeds...’



five-speed gearbox in place of the recalcitrant old Moss four-speeder. Yes, you lose a bit of character by ditching the four-speeder, but in this case character is hard work and the five-speed transforms long-distance runs.

And that means that we’re comparing the Healey with a car that was already better at touring, and is now better still. Mmm, it’s lucky then that the Healey has a few tricks of its own up its intake.

The modifications to this CapeSport 100 began at ground level because when Cape start with a basic Healey shell they add the touches that, if we’re honest, the factory should have sorted in the first place. But then they had been stretched to capacity in moving from prototype to Austin production line in a mere eight months (and that’s in addition to preparing cars for Le Mans and the Mille Miglia as well as a Stateside promotional tour). Some going for a tiny team.

An extra bulkhead comes first. By welding in a second skin between engine and cockpit, and sandwiching high-tech heat insulation in-between, the notorious heat soak that can

**Above**  
CapeSport Healey interior is significantly better trimmed than original; double bulkhead reduces noise, heat and clutter.

make long-distance Healey drives so uncomfortable is virtually eliminated. Extra heat shields around the engine bay are added later, along with a Derrington exhaust system that has heat shields built in, louvres are cut into the bonnet to allow hot air to escape and there’s a 100S-type front shroud that provides extra air intakes.

The extra bulkhead layer also hides the bulk of the wiring loom, making for a remarkably tidy-looking engine bay. The theme continues with the custom-made alloy air box and cold air feed, alloy catch tanks, Aeroquip hosing and the remote reservoirs for brake and clutch systems mounted neatly on the bulkhead.

Now if you’re Healey through and through you might have spotted a discrepancy in the statement above, because the standard clutch is rod and lever-operated. Cape converts it to hydraulic operation to make it lighter and smoother to use. The brakes are converted to dual circuit for safety – you’ll just spot the twin reservoirs in the corner of the picture above.

It’s these relatively minor touches that make all the difference, and they continue throughout the car: cable-operated throttle in >>

‘Sitting higher in the cockpit, with a torquier engine up front and a little more weight to keep in check, you don’t get quite as silly in the Jaguar’



place of the sloppy old rod linkage; alternator and high-ratio starter; lockable stowage boxes behind the seats where the twin six-volt batteries used to sit; and a collapsible steering column for peace of mind.

A typical rally replica Healey wouldn’t have these touches and we wouldn’t have had to wait this long to have mentioned its engine. But of course we all like a bit of extra power, and the secret to power in the four-cylinder Healey is to make it spin faster, so Cape’s first step is to lighten and balance the bottom end and fit a high-volume oil pump. The camshaft is based on the profile of the six-cylinder works rally-spec cam, while the carburettors are H6 M-spec twin SUs, not a gulping great Weber. This being the ultimate CapeSport, it’s been topped off with a gasflowed alloy cylinder head.

The tweekery continues onto the brakes and suspension, with discs all round, negative camber front wishbones, a front anti-roll bar, a stronger Panhard rod and anti-tramp bars at the rear, and telescopic dampers at all four corners.

Clearly it’s time to see what difference all these modifications make. It’s certainly an evocative car to sit in, with Cape’s neat

**Above**

XK cockpit is made comfy with slim seats and cutaway behind driver; engine mods sensibly concentrate on torque and cooling.

bucket seats and exact replicas of 100S aeroscreens and steering wheel providing all the right cues.

It feels so together, so much sharper than a stock 100. Everything seems unusually precise, and the responsiveness of the engine just reinforces the immediacy of the experience. It’s impossible to resist nipping up and down through the gears, accelerating and braking unnecessarily hard, bowling into corners at hooligan speeds and emerging with a fast-beating heart and a fly-splattered grin. In short, it’s a lot of fun!

The XK120, on the other hand, is altogether more gentlemanly. Not boring by any means, but sitting up higher in the cockpit, with a torquier engine up front and a little more weight to keep in check, means that you don’t tend to get quite as silly in the Jaguar. But what a lovely car, a fine example of how intelligent modifications can notably improve an already fine machine.

Wouldn’t it be great to own both? 

Thanks to Cape International, [www.cape-international.com](http://www.cape-international.com), +44 (0) 1676 542292, Guy Broad Parts, [www.guybroad.co.uk](http://www.guybroad.co.uk), +44 (0)1676 541980 and Terry Heyes.