

Olds Healey 60th Anniversary Recollections

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June 2017 will mark the 60th anniversary of my Olds Healey 100-4. Since my short-term memory is going fast, I thought now would be a good time to recall my long association with this car and document some highlights while my long-term memory is still mostly in tact.....Tom.

I bought this '54 model in January 1957 for \$1600. Nice little car but gutless. Within a month I started work on the transplant of the big block 1949 303/348ci original Rocket Olds from my 1949 Plymouth fastback coupe street-sleeper. I rented a stall at a commercial garage in Inglewood CA that was leased by some local hot rodders.

CONCEPT...

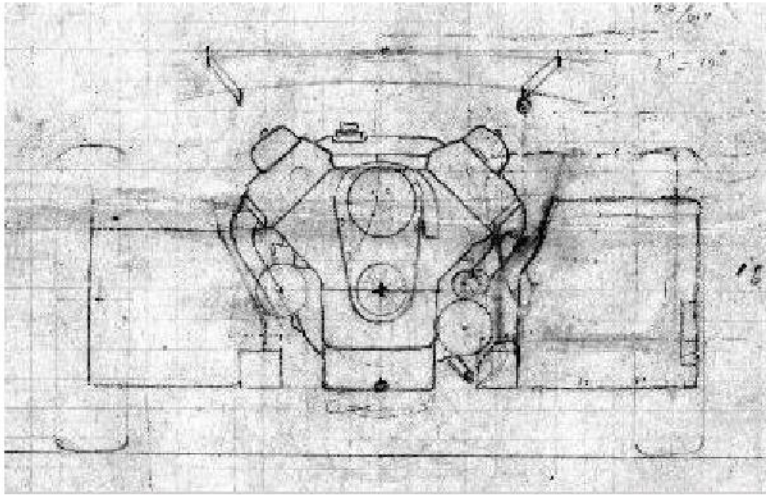
So why did I do this? Because nobody would sell me a small block Chevy (SBC) like the other rare V8 Healeys were running. They were scarce at the junk yards therefore ridiculously priced and my hotrod friends wanted to keep theirs for themselves. Besides, at that time I considered a SBC conversion a simple drop in, no challenge there. Max Balchowsky of "Old Yellow" fame would do one for \$500! When I asked Max how far back I would have to place the big block Olds to retain 50/50 weight distribution he replied without hesitation ... "You could put that #%#@# Olds in the trunk and the car would still be nose heavy!". His smartass remark was the motivation I required to get my project moving, thanks Max. In retrospect, being forced into a big block transplant in 1957 was pure serendipity. I never regretted that decision for an instant: "Torque Wins Races" (Carroll Shelby).

I was 22 and worked as an electronic engineer at RCA, West Los Angeles. Typical of that age, nothing was impossible and I considered this, my second Olds swap, was going to be no big deal. Big engine in little car, as exemplified by my Olds Plymouth, was the no brainer way to performance. 348cid in a 2450lb Healey should hold off most everything on the street in 1957.

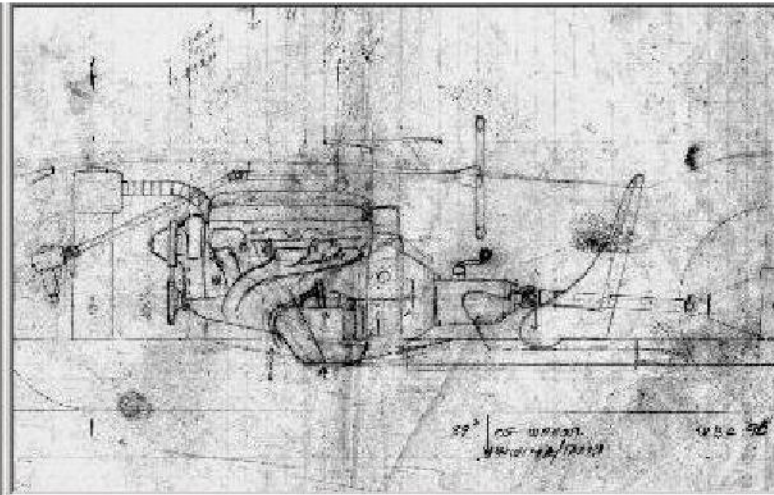
DESIGN...

The first thing to do was determine the amount of Olds setback required to retain the stock Healey's excellent 50/50% F/B% weight distribution. I did this by pulling engine/trany out of the Plymouth and the Healey and measuring the weight and center of balance of each engine/trany combination using an old driveshaft as a lever arm and two bathroom scales. Then I weighed each corner of the Healey without engine/trany. I then pulled and weighed the stock Healey rear-end and weighed the '55 Chevy rear-end I intended to narrow down and used these numbers in the computation.

All drawings presented here are scanned originals I made in 1957 and 1964.



Determining engine fits thru hood opening



Setback required for 50/50 F/B weight distribution

Bottom line: The Olds engine/trany weighed 120lbs more than the stock Healey, the Chevy RE added another 60lbs but was all in back so it lessened the required setback. This meant the Olds #1 plug location would have to be moved back from the Healey #1 plug location some 11in to retain the car's 50/50 weight distribution. Since the Olds and Healey engines were roughly the same length, almost half the Olds would be under the cowling! The most prudent thing to do was remove all the Healey's sheetmetal ahead of the cockpit molding and work on the bare front chassis rails with no restrictions.

That seemed like a terrible lot of unnecessary work to do on a cherry 3yr old car since my careful measurements indicated that with proper lifting chain placement I could hang the engine/trany assembly at a downward rear angle that would allow the heads to clear the hood opening by 1/4in on each side. Tricky, but doable.

TEAR-DOWN...

Well, I knew what had to be done and almost immediately grabbed the air saber saw and started cutting the Healey's firewall, horizontal box structure, toe boxes and transmission cover sheetmetal out of the car and exposed the frame crossmember. And there the Healey stood late at night, completely gutted from grill to the rear bulkhead of the cockpit ready to swing the huge Olds/trany combo thru the hood opening for a trial fit the following day.

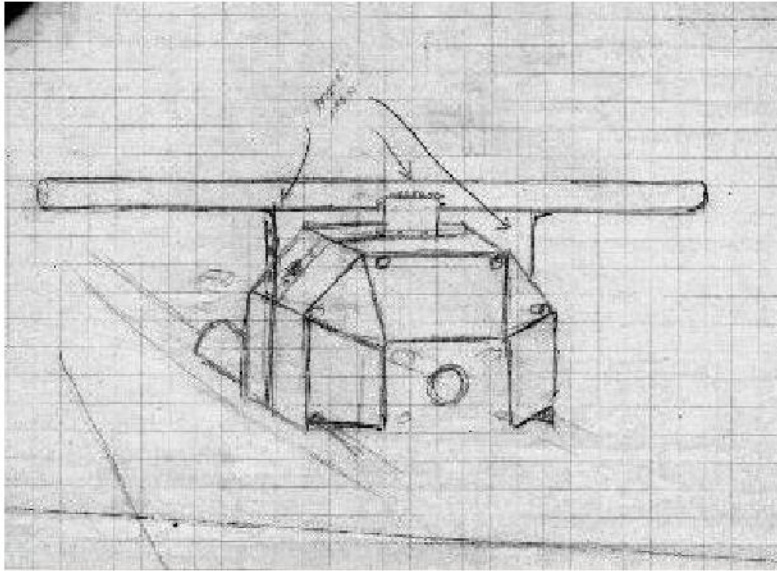
Next morning, with two other guys present, I attached the lifting chain and adjusted it to provide the proper downward angle to the suspended Olds/trany assembly and lifted it so the tranny tailshaft was about 3ft off the

floor. The guys then guided the car under the engine/tranny until the tailshaft almost touched the cowl. I slowly lowered the engine while the car was slowly rolled forward, keeping the engine head's forward exhaust ports perfectly centered in the hood opening. This was quite a sight, that big ol Olds sliding into that cute little Healey's tiny opening. Someone commented that it appeared to be an incestuous act. Unfortunately this was not documented, no one had a camera.

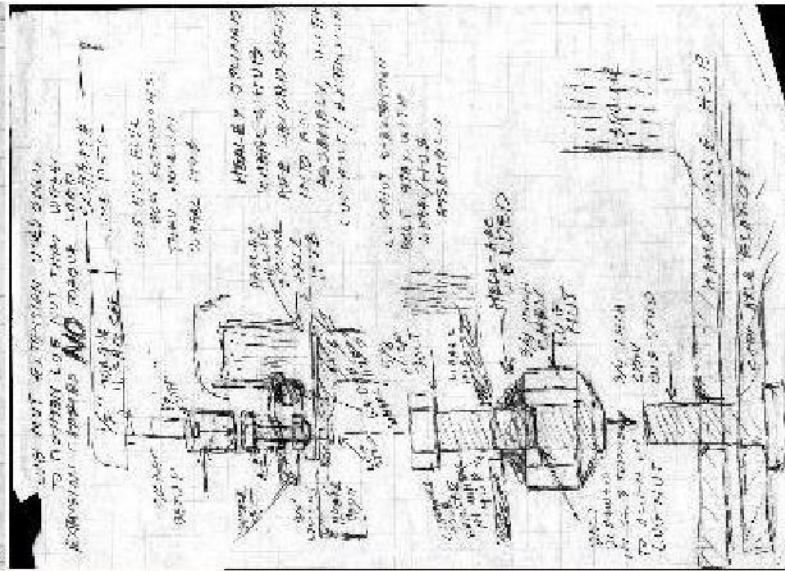
As the engine settled into position under the cowl, the tranny rear case jammed against the crossmember's forward center, about 2in before the engine was properly positioned. Out came the cutting torch as I attacked the crossmember. After some cleanup cutting the engine was at the calculated setback for 50/50%. But then I got selfish. If a 2in notch gives 50/50%, what would a notch half way thru the crossmember produce? A quick calculation showed better than 48/52% so why not? I notched it an additional 3in, producing the final 19in setback spindle to 1st plug or 23.5% WB of the 90in wheelbase. Even with the shortened tranny tailhousing the driveshaft would be only 13in but quite enough to track the limited up/down movement of the rear-end.

RECONSTRUCTION...

Once the engine was placed properly, I dropped a seat in and sat down. It was somewhat disturbing to realize that the flywheel was next to my knees. I would have to incorporate an integral flywheel shield into the superstructure from rail to rail and across the bellhousing top. A 1/4in steel strip 6in wide was formed and welded in straddling the flywheel/clutch and additional 1/8in steel plates made up the remaining bellhousing shield.



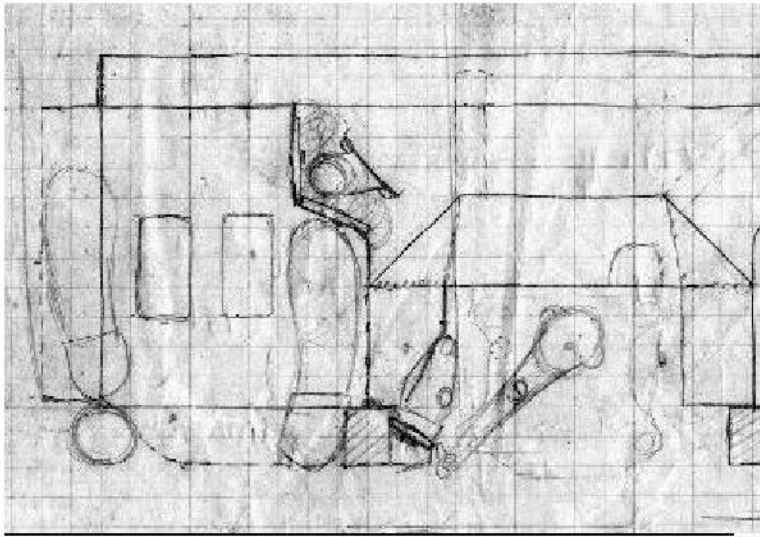
Superstructure and flywheel shield detail



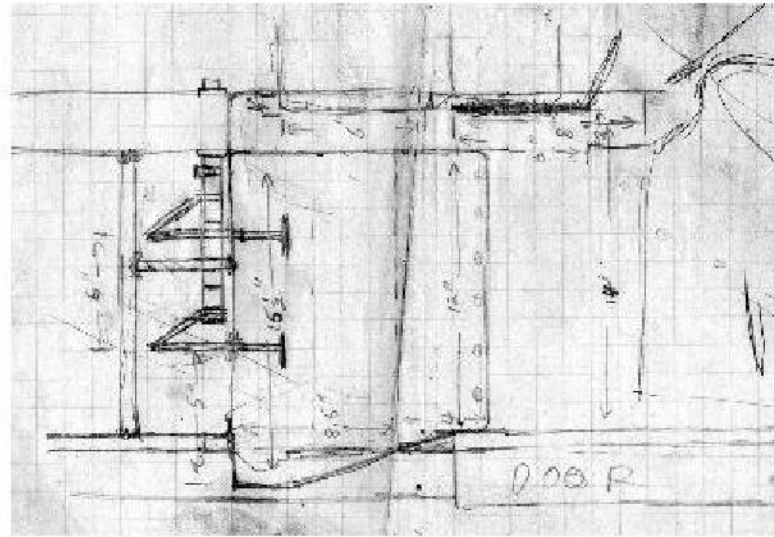
Scheme to lock up rear wire wheel splines

With the shield in place, I cut a 3X4in rect steel tubing the length between the side bulkheads, even with the shield. Once welded in place from side to side, I used a floor jack between the shield and rect tube to lift the car's front body at the doors back to its original position to remove the sag that occurred when the car's horizontal box structure was cut away during the internal gutting operation. Angle stock was cut and welded between the shield and horizontal tubing and the jack removed. Rear bellhousing motor mounts were located and installed and a 4X4in angle stock was welded inside the frame rails at the engine's center motor mount and a 1/2in rubber block served as the front mount.

The notched crossmember was boxed welded with 1/8in steel for strength and the major engine install effort was now completed. Since the big Olds was so wide and mounted so low, I had to lower the floor and widen the driver's toebox to have room to move my feet around. This meant that all three peddles had to be moved over 3in and lowered as well. I kept the original brake and clutch peddle pivot bar support but added two more zerts



Working out the driverside toebox pedals



Altering driverside toebox floor

grease fittings to keep them moving freely. The accelerator activation remained thru a series of rods and bell cranks up to the carbs. I never did like the feel of a cable system.

All that remained were the small details like mounting the narrowed rear-end, work out the mechanical clutch activation, modify the steering shaft with U joints to get around the left side of the engine, mount the oversized radiator, determine where to mount the original Lucas dynamo, rewire the dash and engine electrical etc, etc. Since I wanted to retain the original 48 spoke wire wheels with splined knockoffs I had to strengthen them even before I applied the first torque. I welded four trapezoidal shaped 3/32in steel plates from rim to hub. If I hadn't, the spokes would be spun right out of the rim.

Also made rearward running traction bars out of 1in conduit with ends from old tubular shock absorbers. These light weight bars worked fine since they were in tension on rear-end windup. I mounted heavy duty tubular shocks from the lower A arms to the upper coil spring perch using threaded bar stock, crude but they worked. I made a panard rod rear end stabilizer out of 1in conduit with an adjustment bolt that ran from left rear-end spring mount to right frame rail.

Once all this was accomplished there remained the messy job of fabricating in place all the panels and toeboxes cut out with abandon during the interior gutting operation. Not complicated, just messy chicken wire frames with boat fiberglass cloth and resin coverings. I laid in asbestos cloth covered with aluminum sheeting into the toeboxes along the side where the headers run to keep the boxes from burning up. Since the big Olds was so wide, I had to lower the floor and widen the driver's toebox to have room to move my feet around.

FIRE-UP & TRIAL-RUN...

Work progressed another few weeks until the Olds Healey was ready to fire-up. After some distributor rotations it fired and exhausted out the headers since no exhaust system was yet installed. The engine had a four dual Stromberg 48s intake and only 348ci but it made much more noise than any thing else in the garage, being various SBCs. Most impressive was the way the whole Healey would rock back and forth on ever lobe of the engine at idle. When I winged it, the car would twist to the right maybe 10deg! I drove it gently to the muffler shop and got 30in glasspacs installed that exhausted out the side ahead of the rear tires, it was really quite subdued sounding.

REDESIGN...

Once on the street I had a few problems sorting out the car's weak points. Going over some streetcar tracks, there was a crack sound and the left wheel lost traction. Since it had Positraction, I got it home by driving very gently. Turned out the guy that narrowed the Chevy RE cut the axles and had to buildup the end diameter with weld to cut the new spline. Since he didn't heat treat the welded buildup before cutting the spline, the weld completely

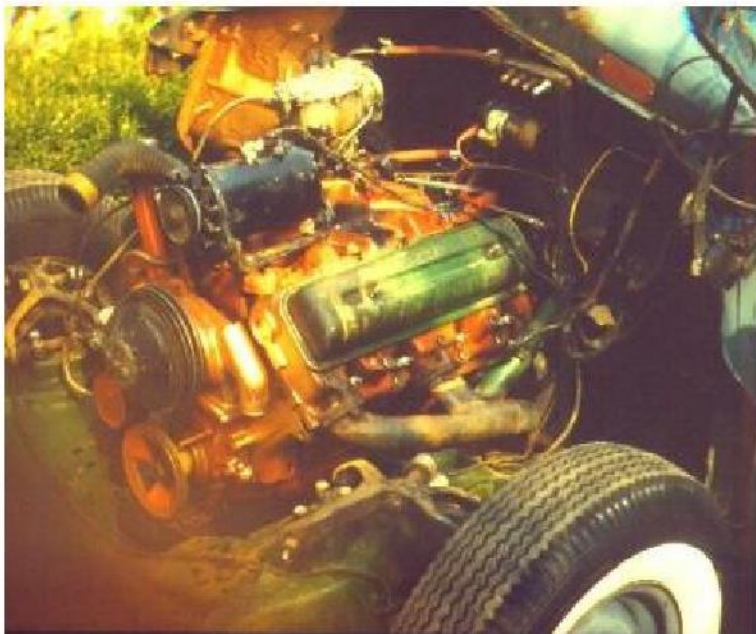
failed and the spline was ripped clean off. I got some six lug Chevy truck axles that were plenty meaty to take the spline with no problem. Required lots of machine work to fit the RE bearings though.

After the wheels and axles were strengthened, the spline hubs began to loosen no matter how tight I hammered them on. The slight back and forth rotation was wearing the splines into pointed triangles that threatened to shear off. I solved this problem by welding the wheel hub to the axle hub and drilling holes in the wheel hub so that the lug nuts could be tightened on the axle lug studs from outside the wheel. A rather hatchet scheme but it has worked for 50 years without losing a wheel yet.

COMPLETED...

I completed probably the first Big Block V8 Healey 100-4 ever configured in mid June 1957, approximately five months after I started. Curb weight of this big block V8 Healey was 2486lbs with a full tank, only 186lbs greater than stock and all of that was on the rear wheels. Apart from the dual sidepipes, the car had ordinary G670X15 rear tires and looked perfectly stock and innocent. I had lots of fun at night going off with everything on the street, local unfinished freeways and other long, straight deserted back roads. Could this car be the ultimate sport car street-sleeper? It certainly had torque and stealth.

The following two ancient photos are the only ones I have of the 1957 engine swap. My Mom took both of them since she had the only camera in the family. I couldn't borrow it because I was performing this project off site in a secret location without their knowledge and didn't want to raise any suspicion.



This 348 '49 Olds in '49 Plymouth pictured in 1955, went into this 1954 Healey 100-4 in 1957

PERFORMANCE...

And so it was. With a 47/53 F/B% due to 23.5% WB engine setback nothing could pull it across the intersection. The first night on the street a Triumph bike with rider pulls up at a signal. This was the hot bike in '57, good for a 100+ in the quarter. All he sees beside him is one of them little Brit sport cars that don't go. When the signal goes green, he eases out with indifference. I give him about two lengths before I get on the Healey. He sees me coming up, goes WOT and I nail by him easily and shut off. I watch him behind me pull over, kick his rider off and come up at the next signal. He sits there revving his big bike up waiting for the green, while I sat there at idle. We get off head to head with me in 1st while he goes thru at least three gears while falling back. I go for 2nd at about 60mph got rubber and leapt ahead another couple car lengths and immediately shut down. He barrels by and keeps going flat out. I went back to the garage so I don't know if he ever went back for his rider.

A few months later I was driving alone on a balmy, moonless night along the coast by Camp Pendleton CA. It was near midnight with practically no traffic. The road was two lanes each way and divided but no freeway, it was gently undulating up and down. I decided to let the Healey out to see how fast it would go. I had no speedometer but with 3.36 RE and 27in tires, high gear worked out to 25mph per 1000rpm. The fastest the Healey had gone before was maybe 100mph while street racing and it was well behaved. I went thru 120mph at 4800 and the road was rising and falling smoothly as the speed went thru 130, but I noticed a slight hesitation and loss of steering sensitivity. There was absolutely no traffic ahead so I kept on accelerating since the rpm was only 5200 and the engine seemed to have more to go. I could now crank the wheel left and right a quarter turn and the car barely wobbled.

As I rose on a slight hill I noticed the tach at 5600 or 140mph then suddenly my headlights lit up the back of an 18wheeler that was coming up out of a dip dead ahead in my lane. He seemed less than a football field ahead and I got off the gas and started cranking the wheel left with no response from the car. No use hitting the brakes at this speed. Then ever so slowly it started drifting left as the distance closed to a couple hundred then a hundred feet and continue to slowly move left until I went by the truck so close I could clearly make out the lettering in his left mudflap as I went by. Probably missed going under his axle at 80mph differential by less than 20ft. I drove the rest of the way home at less than 60mph. I concluded the stock bodied Healey 100-4 becomes very front light at speeds over 120mph and actually lifts off the road at over 130mph. After this near death experience, I discovered I didn't really like super high speed driving nearly as much as the brutal acceleration of driving on the street.

SUPER DRIVER...

Fortunately one of the guys in the garage was Bones Balogh who was a year younger than me and was installing his first small block Chevy in a '49 Chevy destined to be fast and street legal. He started driving the Olds Healey around town and proved to be a much better launcher than me. Was this due to his natural talent of maybe he could drive it harder since he didn't have to fix it when it broke? I'm betting on his natural talent. Anyway he convinced me to start taking it to Lyons drag strip which opened two years earlier. We would use his '49 SBC Chevy as a tow car for the Healey, then Bones would drive both cars in class competition. We hit all the LA area strips, racing at least a couple of times a month.

The car did well at the Drags with a best of 12.5sec at 112mph in A Modified Sports. After a couple of years dragging, my engine setback was protested and the NHRA put us in A Altered Roadster. These had unlimited engine setbacks, huge slicks and ran 11sec at 140mph. Bones was all for competing in this class which would entail a drastic engine changeout and body rebuild but I wanted to keep it a streeter. Besides, Bones was improving his '49 SBC Chevy and becoming more competitive in the gasser classes. This was noticed by the serious car teams who wanted him to drive for them. He became a legend in the super gas classes and was recently inducted into the prestigious NHRA Hall of Fame. He still runs his blown '69 Camaro in the vintage drag events. Ran a 155.8mph in 8.67sec at Pomona, CA.

COBRAZATION...

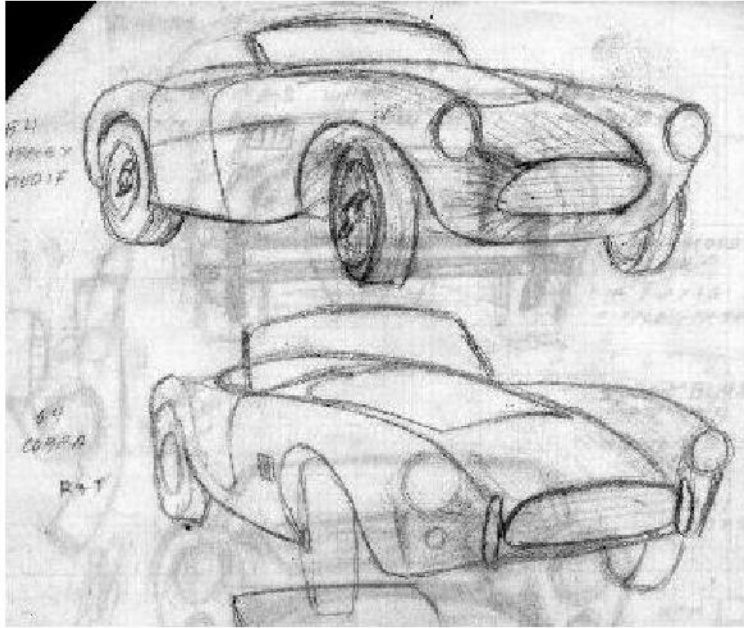
I got out of drags in '59 and ran the Olds Healey as a go-to-work streeter until 1964, when I got wine-d-up one evening and ran into the rear of a big ol sedan. No damage to the sedan but I folded the Healey's flimsy bumper, grill and aluminum shroud sheetmetal. After I got estimates for parts and labor to fix it, I conceived of a truly outrageous project. I would rebuild the Olds Healey's nose to resemble a Cobra!

The 348cid Olds Healey could beat the street Corvettes and 289 Cobras but the 427 Big Cobras were announced and I wanted one but not at the \$8000+ Shelby was asking. But wait! I already had the essentials of a 427 Cobra! Both accommodated big block engines, both had 48/52 F/R% rearward bias, both had short 90in wheelbases, both had the same curb weight within 100lbs, both ran street tires, and probably most importantly both were British interpretations of the beautiful postwar Italian roadster style.

The Cobra had the advantage of 79ci more displacement, disk brakes and other details due to 15 years of evolution over the Healey. The Healey's bodyworks design and detailed finish is far superior to the AC based Cobra's which is crude and unfinished in comparison. The Cobra's bulbous fender flaring to accommodate superwide tires and the magstyle wheels completed the corruption of the classic Italian styling that both Healey

and Cobra sought to emulate. The Olds Healey had no flaring and retained the classic true knockoff wire wheels which were strengthened to withstand the big Old's torque.

The Cobra had a much larger grill opening with no grill to restrict air flow. Heating has always been a problem with V8 Healeys and mine was no exception. The Cobra nose treatment on the Olds Healey would eliminate this heating problem and also the one styling problem of the 100-4, it's nose treatment which Donald Healey "hated with a passion" according to Jerry Coker, it's [designer](#).



Working out the Cobra type nose extension



What the Olds Healey might look like head-on

BODYWORKS ALTERATION...

I started the Healey's "nose job" by cutting all the crushed aluminum shroud off just ahead of the hood opening and down the sides at the fender flair with a saber saw. I then formed the Cobra shaped grill opening oval out of 1/2in electrical conduit, mounted it at the bottom and leaned it forward at the top so it was even with the fender headlight openings. I secured it at the top with a piece of sheet aluminum that ran all the way across to the fender flairs and up to the upper cut. It was attached to the shroud with generous amounts of counter sunk screws and nuts and lots of epoxy cement. I laid fiber-glass cloth over all the new stuff and formed everything into an easy flowing shape I considered acceptably correct in that it didn't convey the appearance of being tacked on. My avoidance of the temptation to extend the nose beyond the fender headlights, Cobra style, benefited this impression.

I bobbed the fender drop below the headlights to blend in better with the new nose. I added an air scoop between the frame rails to simulate the oil cooler of the Cobra. This was all blended in and was fully functional. The Healey side vents were enlarged into the parallelogram box of the Cobra, complete with slanted slot deflectors. The rear fender wheel openings were enlarged by taking a 3/4in cut all around to give added clearance for the tall 70 series tires. Running 205,70RX15 on the front and 225,70RX15 on the rear gives a slight rake to the car which is definitely period '50s. Unfortunately the neat 100-4 adjustable windshield rake mechanism was removed and discarded so the windshield is non adjustable.

PAINT & UPHOLSTERY...

After I completed all the bodyworks modifications, I primed it and took it to a local body shop and had it painted '64 Mustang Burgundy, a very popular color of the day. Unfortunately it was not a suitable color for the Healey or Cobra, I always regretted this color choice.

Then it went to the upholstery shop where it was uncut-pile carpeted in black with maroon, another unfortunate choice. But the end result of this simulation must have been pretty convincing.

On quite a few occasions, approaching Cobra drivers would wave at me until they got close enough to realize it was not legit. They quickly pulled their hand down and looked straight ahead as we passed. Most other people would ask if that was one of them hot Cobras or even a Corvette. Most Healey people thought the V8 conversion was awesome and didn't seem to mind the Cobra look. But that was in the '60s and SO CAL was teaming with Healeys. Healey 100-4s had not yet taken on the aura of sacred icons where it is considered sacrilegious to desecrate the Healey bodyworks in any way.

POWER INCREASE...

So what about the 80ci displacement advantage of the 428 Cobra? My 348ci '49 Olds had to go. Since the Olds Healey engine compartment and cockpit toeboxes were literally built around the engine in order to get the 23.5% setback, the only reasonable thing to do was to stay with the original Rocket and get the biggest displacement made. This was the 394ci that came out in '59, rated at only 315hp. The same engine was rated in '64 at 345hp. I could buy a brand new 394 from a dealer but nobody bought Detroit "crate engines" back then.

I bought a junk yard '59 Olds 394 in '64 and rebuilt it 1/8in overbore that gave 418ci, just 10ci less than the Cobra. It was balanced, had a 274deg (adv), .490in cam, mild ported heads with polished chambers, 2in intake valves and 11:1 CR. The headers were log type made up from big exhaust tubing and were fairly smooth flowing, high volume. They flowed thru a 2.5in exhaust system with 30in glaspacs which exits just ahead of the rear tires. A single 750cfm AFB was mounted on the stock cast iron dual plane intake. Never dyno'd, I suspect it was good for 390hp on a good day. Cobra rates their 428 street version at 425hp.



418ci Olds Healey with Cobra body modifications as it was in 1964. Ran 118mph in quarter

NEW PERFORMANCE...

When finished, the 418ci was very much stronger than the 348ci as expected. It's only run at the drags with me driving produced a 13.2sec at 118mph after a terrible burnoff launch on old street tires. Interestingly, my 118mph was the same as the street Cobra's. Quarter mile trap speed (TS) is a good indication of peak rearwheel HP and is relatively independent of launch: $\text{rearwheel HP} = (\text{TSmph}/234)^3 \times \text{weight with driver}$.

I weighed the Healey at the local landfill with a full tank of gas to get its curb weight. This came out to 2486lbs, distributed 47/53 F/B%. Definitely tail heavy due to the 23.3% WB (wheelbase) engine setback. The 428 Cobra specs at 2529lbs curb with 48/52 F/B%. The Olds Healey is only 186lbs heavier than stock and 43lbs lighter than the 427 Cobra!

Since both Cobra & Healey weigh around 2750lbs with driver and both have 118mph trap speeds, they each developed an estimated 352 rwHP. Assuming 15% loss, that's 405hp at the flywheel! That's about right for the 425hp Cobra but unbelievable for the Olds Healey?

Now that I had a V8 Healey which not only looked similar but also accelerated like a street 428 Cobra, I had very little competition on the street except for the new Jap super bikes that were becoming popular. With the 23.5% WB engine setback the NHRA would again force me back into the A Altered Roadster class that by then were running in the low 9sec at over 160mph.

INTERMENT...

I also realized I couldn't beat the modern racing Cobra's 428cid engined 4-spd with my ancient 418cid engined 3-spd so I simply completely retired the car in 1967, consigning it alongside the garage where it deteriorated into a decrepit rustbucket. I was now totally out of the modified sportcar scene while pursuing a career in electronics and raising a family.

Sometime in 1998 I happened to pull-up the AHCA (Austin Healey Club of America) web site for the first time and sent them an email inquiring about their attitude towards V8 Healeys. John May replied that after much heated debate the V8 Healeys are recognized as a Healey sub-species and allowed to participate in all AHCA events on a separate but equal basis. He supplied me with the name and address of the "Modified Healey Registry" commonly referred to as "Nasty Boys" by the Healey gentile and never talked about in polite company. Their founder and leader was Leroy Joppa from Wisconsin who welcomed me and the Olds Healey as Nastys.

Well, this was just what I was hoping for, a club with over 200 members who dared to "violate the Mark" in pursuit of performance. I didn't realize that the word "Modified" seemed to be limited to changing the engine and driveline and subtle body tweaking e.g. fender flaring, bumper removal, hood louvers etc. My "Cobraized" Healey was decidedly too much "modified" for some members. However, my "Nasty Boys" membership inspired me to restore the Olds Healey when I retire.

RESTORATION...

In 1999 at 65 I retired from engineering, pulled the 45yr old heap from its 32 yr grave and started a "Period Restoration". With the V8 engine and body alterations (Healey purists call it an abominable desecration) I decided to restore it to its 1964 configuration, complete with its 40yr old engine and 63yr old tranny. I would retain the original '54 Healey knockoff wire wheels and tall 70 series tires all around.

I also decided that in no way would I flare the fenders for wide tires. I would always run full bumpers on the street. Some idiot backing up at a signal and crushing my front end would ruin my whole day at least and possibly my whole month. I got rid of the bumper rods with Healey overrides that I never liked and replaced them with new repli-Cobra kit bumper ovals and kit overrides, front and rear. I got the car painted in '74 Corvette Targa blue metallic and upholstered it in black vinyl and black cut pile carpets.

In 2004 I installed the original centered single hoop rollbar that was NHRA approved in 1957. I made it 3in taller and eliminated the ugly and dangerous hoop-top to right-toebox diagonal strut, replacing it with two rearward supports into the car's inner rear bulkhead member. It may not be super strong, but it looks cleaner and is certainly better in a rollover than no rollbar.



Attaching Cobra kit bumpers with duct tape to see how they look

The engine with dual quads

IMPROVEMENTS...

Another worthwhile improvement was the addition of Outside Air Induction (OAI). I've placed temp sensors at the carb intake and was astonished to get readings of 150deg+ when running on a typical 90deg hot day. This had to hurt acceleration performance and screamed AI. Since I refused to install hood scoops, bringing outside air from the car's nose front opening seemed like the logical alternative.



Engine compartment with 4in OAI ducting

Cockpit with new centered hoop roll bar

I ran two 4in expandable aluminum flex dryer ducts from high up in the nose opening into the carb air box on each side of the engine. They kind of overwhelm the engine compartment but they deliver large quantities of cool air to the carb intake. Even on the hottest days, carb intake temp never gets above outside ambient and is even lower than cockpit temp which is also measured.

Early Olds don't respond significantly to multi-tube tuned headers but require efficient large exhaust systems. I reinstalled a complete 3in system including cigar box sized 3in Spintech mufflers with 3.5in tail pipes outletting just ahead of the tires. Loud, very loud.

During the last couple of years I have been interested in implementing an Automatic Launch Control (ALC) system into the car. The present 225,70RX15 are as big as I want to mount on the original 100-4 wire wheels. This gives me a burnout pattern of only 6in which makes a consistent quick hookup extremely difficult and requires the throttle/clutch action of a skilled driver which I am not. I have a front wheel timer installed that readouts 0 to 30, 60mph, 1/8, 1/4mi ET and TS. On rare occasions when I launch good, I get 0 to 30mph in 1.4sec and 0 to 60mph in 4.1sec which is amazingly good for 6in street tires. This has to be the result of the 47/53 F/B% weight distribution? Obviously this car is severely traction limited, so what to do?

An ALC constantly measures speed differential between driven rear tires and non-driven right front tire to determine rear wheel slippage. An electronic servo then applies torque reduction to the engine in order to maintain an optimal 12% slip for maximum traction. This action effectively takes the driver out of the launch process, resulting in consistent minimum 0 to 30mph and 0 to 60mph times. ALC is banned in most forms of racing so it must be good.

I am also considering getting soft compound retreads on 225,70RX15 GY Eagle casings that have virtual straight up/down sidewalls. These should provide a full 7in burnout tread width. Trouble is things might start breaking again, oh well. These are now installed, we'll just see.

ACCEPTANCE ?...

In my not so humble opinion and in the opinion of many impartial car people and even some Healey owners, the frontend modifications of 1964 and the Cobra bumper install of 2000 made the Olds Healey a better looking '50s era pure-roadster than the stock Healeys. It also made the Olds Healey into a despised abortion in the opinion of the traditional "Healey Purists".



Olds Healey as it is today in Santa Ynez, CA

Since the Olds Healey is a period retro of 1964, its major systems remain mostly original '54 Healey BN1. In fact, the Olds Healey is possibly the most original of all the Modified Healeys. The "Healey Purist" might be somewhat placated to learn the following, but I doubt it: Wheels are 48 spoke, knockoff 15in BN1 wires that came with the car. Tires are radial 70 versions of the BN1 high profile bias plys. Floor mounted pedal brake mechanism and front brakes are BN1 drums. Floor mounted pedal clutch throwout mechanism is BN1 mechanical activated. Hand brake arm and release latch is BN1. The fuel tank and gage system is BN1. Dash board is unmodified BN1. The

Smiths fuel gage and dual temp / oil gage are BN1 Tachometer is electronic but mounted in a BN1 case. The inoperative mech tach is BN1. Steering wheel remains BN1 as well as the starter button and light switch. Engine generator is BN1 Lucas Dynamotor, probably the only Lucas product that works. Seats, tranny cover and drive shaft cover as well as the covered ash tray are all original BN1. Shock absorbers are all original BN1 lever types with large tubulars added on the fronts. Front suspension, steering box and rear suspension are all original BN1.

Besides the obvious Cobra front and rear bumpers with Cobra overrides, the only major parts that aren't BN1 are the pusher electric fan, '54 Chrysler vertical flow radiator, '59 Olds engine, '37 LaSalle 3 spd tranny, Cad driveshaft, '55 Chevy 3.54 rear-end, MDS/Petronix ignition and Ford voltage regulator. Blatantly absent on the Olds Healey is the 100-4's inefficient little grill. The grill bars are at least half as wide as the space between them. This condition plus the triangular opening shape results in a severe reduction in potential air flow. Donald didn't like the grill for good reason.

CAR SHOWS...

The total rejection of the Olds Healey by the "Healey Purists" and a large percentage of the Healey rank and file was most evident when I entered the local Palos Verdes Concours D'Elegance golf course car show in 2001.

Somehow I

was accepted and placed among 12 concours proven "Original" stock Healeys. Since it was a fluke being there, I requested to be concours judged to have some fun. Actually, everyone there seemed interested in my Olds Healey including the organizers, officials and especially the paid (\$30) spectators. Everyone that is, except my "Purist Twelve" Healey class mates.



Olds Healey displayed with twelve other concours-quality Healeydoms, who exhibited zero interest!

The five judges were completely unemotional, never changing their somber expression even when they requested I start my 418 cid "blaster" engine, they just cringed and stepped back. They then dutifully noted that my car had no turning indicators, no installed top, no original bumpers, no original engine and no original transmission on their generic check lists sheets. Give them credit, I asked to be judged not merely displayed and they accommodated me with at least 10 minutes of their attention. Meanwhile there was a constant group of officials and spectators huddled around and over the Olds Healey, bending to look under the cowling for the rest of the

engine. Some asking meaningful questions, some shaking their heads and many taking pictures.

I made a rule never to fire up the big Olds except when requested by an identifiable official of the event during our conversation. They seemed eager to sanction this annoying distraction, I think they got my drift. A hesitant crank over, a blasting fire up and one or two "wings", always brought a hoard of spectators to the car, sitting there at an 800 rpm idle, gently rocking with every engine lode.

FUTURE...

Any future enhancements to the engine will be limited to items that were available before 1965. These may include my aluminum dual quad intake with rebuilt 600cfm Holley's and a higher lift, slightly more radical solid cam. I realize these restrictions would make it extremely difficult to compete with the faster Modified Healey members but I would give it my best shot if that opportunity ever arises.

And so it is today. I would respect the car as a piece of early Healey history and just make it run well. At my advanced age, I can't start another life consuming advanced car project. I'll just maintain what I got.

If my Olds Healey had a bumper sticker it would read:



<mailto:tomcomm@impulse.com>

