

## AUTO AFICIONADOS

*1961 Austin-Healey better than new after five-year restoration*

**EDITOR'S NOTE** » David Krumboltz's regular column is on hiatus until further notice due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In its place, we're running some of Dave's favorite past columns. This one originally ran in September 2017.

Yes, there were men named Herbert Austin and Donald Healey. One might think the two industrialists got together and agreed to build snazzy sports cars like this issue's 1961 Austin-



**David Krumboltz**  
*Me and my car*

Healey 3000. But that's not the way it happened.

Herbert Austin's first car was built in 1895 and he formed the Austin Motor Co. in 1905. Austin built all sizes of cars, but to increase market share, he introduced smaller cars. England had laws that taxed car owners by engine size, encouraging smaller cars with smaller engines. Austin Motor Co. disappeared when they merged with Morris Motors in 1952 to become the British Motor Corp.

Donald Healey was into racing and a noted auto designer. He formed the Donald Healey Motor Co. in 1945, designing and building expensive, high-quality cars. After World War II, a lot of



PHOTO BY DAVID KRUMBOLTZ

Pete Davies, of Antioch appears with his 1961 Austin-Healey.

U.S. servicemen bought MGs or Jaguars to bring home. But there was nothing in between. Donald Healey saw a niche to fill, so he started producing midpriced cars in the 1950s using the Austin power train. In addition to Austin, Healey also designed the Elliot-Healey, the Nash-Healey and the Jensen-Healey for other auto companies.

Antioch resident Pete Davies had been trying to buy this particular 1961 Austin-Healey for years. It was owned by one of his parents' neighbors in Danville. It had been the neighbor's and his wife's car through

college and there was a lot of sentimental value there. It had been stolen from him twice but recovered both times.

"I found out about it in '85 and went over to ask him about it and told him if he were ever interested in selling it to let me know," Davies explained. "I would ask him once or twice a year if he were ready to sell it. Always 'no.' Meanwhile, the car was sitting outside in the weather deteriorating. The owner had planned to restore it 'someday,' but he didn't have the knowledge, the facilities or the money."

Davies kept asking,

and finally one day the neighbor said he would sell it.

"He went in to tell his wife he was going to sell it to me but came out a half-hour later and said he couldn't sell to me. 'My wife won't let me,' he said. This went on for several more years, then one day I was talking to his son, who said, 'Let me work on this.'"

About two months later, in 2011, Davies bought the car for \$3,000. Three days after the purchase, Davies showed up with a trailer to pick up the Austin-Healey.

"It was a mess," he said.

"Thirty years sitting outside. I opened the trunk, and three rats stood up. The smell was awful. It was disgusting. I brought it home and sat on it for about a year."

This is Davies' hobby. He has restored eight vehicles, but this one is special. He, too, had some sentimental attachment to Austin-Healey.

"I had one out of high school but sold it to a buddy. About three years later, I got another one but had to sell it for financial reasons (a baby). I swore I would have another one someday."

It took him five years to turn a stinking mess into a beautiful car that's now really better than when it was new.

"Other than the paint and upholstery, I did all the work myself. I did all the metal work and all the mechanical work," he said.

And he did everything in his home garage.

"I built a rotisserie, which is a framework that supports the car. You can lift it up and spin the whole car so you don't have work flat on your back." He finished the restoration in February of 2017.

"It's all Austin-Healey," Davies said. "It has a 2900 cc (cubic-centimeter) inline six-cylinder engine). It's a boat anchor for a motor, it weighs more than a small block Chevy V8. The horsepower is

around 135 and it has a four-speed manual transmission with an electric overdrive."

There is a small toggle switch on the dashboard that used to engage the overdrive in either third or fourth gear. Davies and a friend, James Creston, who makes custom guitars, made the spectacular curly maple wood dash and steering wheel.

"I just wanted to add a little richness to the car without losing its originality," Davies said modestly.

He used the standard Austin-Healey gauges and switches so that it looks original but much nicer. After five years, Davies' Austin-Healey is already a show winner. Painted a rich cranberry red with white leather interior, it's also a head-turner. His \$3,000 investment has blossomed to about \$25,000, which doesn't include his five years of sweat equity. He estimates the current market value at more than \$85,000, but he has no intention to sell, which pleases his adult daughter, who has her own plan.

*Have an interesting vehicle? Contact David Krumboltz at [MOBopoly@yahoo.com](mailto:MOBopoly@yahoo.com). To view more photos of this and other issues' vehicles or to read more of Dave's columns, go to [mercurynews.com/author/david-krumboltz](http://mercurynews.com/author/david-krumboltz).*