THE EMAIL MECHANIC

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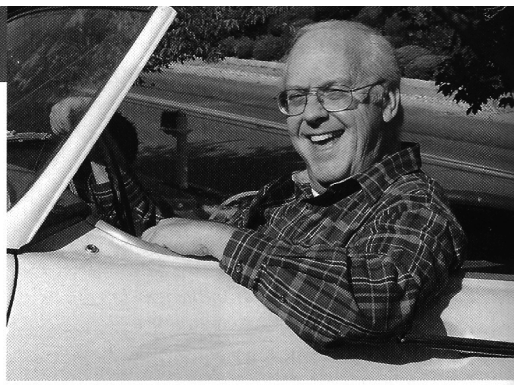
BACK TO BASICS



For some time I have been writing a column for various publications and now have the opportunity to contribute to *Healey Marque* magazine. In the early 80's, after a lapse of some 20 years, I purchased my second Austin-Healey with stars in my eyes and did not fully contemplate the fact that it was a real basket case. Hey, I wanted a Healey! I quickly found that there were few information sources readily available, other than a Haynes workshop manual that was in the car when I bought it. The car needed considerable work mechanically as well as cosmetically. And, when I woke up, I found that the frame sagged worse than a mattress retrieved from a house of ill repute. After some frustration in trying to source parts and otherwise get information, I located a person who had been interested in the car when I bought it, and I ended up selling it to him. My not being aware of the national and regional clubs had handicapped my efforts to rejoin the Healey fraternity.

By the time that I purchased my latest Austin-Healey eleven years ago, the Internet was in full bloom and the first thing on my mind was to access it for information. A search led me to the "Healeys Mail List" (also know as "The List"), which has proven to be a great source of information, tips and news. Equally important, there were copies of several club magazines in the boot of the car I bought.

There is only a small percentage of club members who use The List and, because of this, it was and is my belief that excerpts from The List may prove to be valuable to the membership of the Austin-Healey Club of America through *Healey Marque*. Many of the items discussed on The List cannot readily be found in books or manuals; rather, they are the result of years of experience in Healeydom. It is always refreshing to read emails where you see a problem described, and, within a few minutes, hours and days, see responses come in from all around the world from Healeyites who have had the same, or similar problem.

Recent exchanges (called "threads" on The List) run the gamut of specific problems, general ones or information requests as follows:

Dominos anyone? Often a solution to one problem can clear the way for another. In the following scenario, once the car was running, other problems cropped up. Sound familiar? Read on!

Simple Problem, Difficult to Fix

Bill Moyer wrote about a problem that again demostrated the value of The List when he emailed that:

Well, now I've had two mechanics work on the intermittent start problem. It's time for The List. The latest fellow installed a standard ignition switch in the dash which takes the ignition key function out of the steering wheel lock (Euro model BJ7). That didn't work as the same problem came up yesterday after a short drive. This doesn't mean the old switch wasn't bad as there could be more than one thing going on at the same time, but maybe that's just my suspicious nature. Before I turn myself into a pretzel working behind the dash, I'd like to get some ideas about where to start.

Here's the problem. Turn the ignition on and fuel pump clicks. Press button, nothing happens: no clicks, buzzes or whirls. Press the solenoid starter button and it starts right up. One complication is that it doesn't happen all the time, but so far it hasn't happened from a cold start.

It's not the distributor ground, fuses, battery switch or terminals, I'm pretty sure as I've checked those. I'm hoping that it's the starter button on the dash, but I can't find that on my wiring diagrams. The ignition switch is there, but no separate button.

Is there some way to test the button without having to take out gauges to get to it? What wires go to the button? Can I assume that it completes the white/red circuit to the starter solenoid? How can I get at the connection to the solenoid? It looks way back in there from the engine bay perspective.

I'd like to get an idea before I crawl under the dash. It's been a decade since I rewired the dash, I don't have happy or specific memories of the process and I'm a good deal larger and less flexible than I was then.

Any guidance as to how to check the steering wheel lock switch with a volt/ohm meter? It looks from the diagram that when the key is turned on, the connection should be made between contacts 2 and 3 on the wiring

diagram. If that switch isn't bad, I'd like to wire it back into the system, but I'm not sure where the wires should go as that switch isn't on the wiring diagram.

Michael Salter of www.precisionsportscar.com responded:

The fact that everything works fine when you press the button on the solenoid isolates the problem to the starter button or its wiring, or the solenoid itself. When the problem next occurs, with the ignition off, touch a jumper from one of the big terminals on the starter solenoid (the one which comes from the battery and is live all the time) to the small starter solenoid terminal with the white and red wire. If the starter turns, the fault is in the starter button or its wiring, if it doesn't, the fault is the solenoid which you should change.

In the former case, where the starter does turn, check the white wire which runs from the ignition switch to the start button and then the white and red wire which runs from the start button to the starter solenoid. I find it is often easiest to install a temporary wire with alligator clips to see if things come right. The starter buttons are pretty reliable and even when faulty, wiggling the button as you press it will usually make it work.

Bill then followed up with:

OK, I'm trying the easiest solution first since I don't have a spare solenoid. My much limberer daughter and I pulled the starter button. She did the behind the dash part. Curiouser and curiouser, there is a white wire as Mike said, but the other one is green with purple stripe. I should say this is a replacement harness, and it's given me agonies before as my car has stuff added and subtracted for the European market and the harness wasn't "correct" from the beginning. The ends of both wires were corroded, so on goes the battery terminal spray, sand them a bit and trimmed them up. Then I put the starter button on the ohm meter and pressed it about 100 times. No failure there. While the wires were out, I carefully turned the power back on and manually touched them. The starter turned over; disconnecting the coil probably would have been a good idea so the car wouldn't actually start. Reinstalled the button, ran the car around, everything still works. While I was poking around I looked at the solenoid and the wire going into it is white with purple stripe, not green/purple as above. Just amazing, the harness isn't even consistent with itself. I'm hoping the contact cleaning works, if not, it's solenoid time. Thanks for everyone's help!

Another problem solved by The List in about three hours! What appeared to be a difficult problem turned out to be something rather simple to fix, as long as there is someone who is slender and limber to get behind the dash!

P.S. Bill wrote a few days later:

Well, the ending isn't very dramatic. I had the Healey out today and stopped and started a few times and no problem. I'll be happy if it was just dirty contacts at the button, but I'm keeping the new solenoid in the boot. I figure I can do that repair with a screwdriver and a wrench anywhere it decides to go kaput. As long as it's not dark out, and I figure out how to get at that lower bolt. Maybe I'll just check out that situation beforehand.

However, it just goes to show that if it isn't one thing, it's another. All of a sudden during my journeys today there was a nasty vibration at about 2000 rpm along with a tic-tic-tic noise. No rattle or big noises. The vibration smoothed out above 2000 rpm. Didn't matter what gear I was in, same symptoms. Sitting still and taking the engine up to 2000 produced nothing.

Since the engine/transmission has just been taken out to get at the seals, I immediately thought something there was wrong with the new mounts, and/or the drive shaft was messed up somewhere and rubbing against something. I was depressed. I don't have a lift and just hate getting under the car even with jack stands and cinder blocks everywhere. Plus the older I get the higher I need to jack the car up to fit under it. Wonder why that's happening? Is the car getting lower?

I once again tried the easy solution and got my little lead hammer out and gave all the knock-offs about 20 whacks. The right rear moved maybe an eighth turn. Now, no vibration. No little tic-tic noise. Healeys, always an adventure. Never a dull moment. Keep those tools in the boot. I also stash in the boot a spare fuel pump, a gallon of water, upper and lower radiator hoses, fan belt, distributor cap and rotor, a set of spark plugs... you get my drift. I figure I'm actually driving about 1.25 cars with all those spare parts.

Bill Moyer, BJ7 aka Chimera, starting and not Parkinson-afflicted. For now."

The wild wonderful world of Healeydom!

Vital Statistics

These messages and others can be found in the Healeys Mail List Archives at http://www.team.net/archive/healeys

If you are interested in joining the discussion on the Healeys Mail List, all that is necessary is to send an email message to: majordomo@autox.team.net and in the text field enter **subscribe healeys** and send the message. Leave the subject line blank. Then follow the instructions in the automated email message that you will receive in return. You will not be disappointed. ***HM***