

Restored Vintage Vehicle Sounds As Good As It Looks

Mechanical engineer modified his car to make it an everyday driver.

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By Amber Hair

Note: Don Day is a devoted member of The Villages Motor Racing Fan Club as well as a member of the Antique Automobile Club of America.

In September 1978, Don Day saw a newspaper ad for a 1967 Austin Healey 3000 BJ8. It was going for \$1,000 or best offer by that Sunday night.

Day reached out on Friday with an offer of \$1,000, and he was told he'd have to wait until Sunday – in case there was a better offer.

He learned there had not been another offer when he called back Sunday afternoon.

And he has had the car ever since.



Don Day, in front of his home in the Village of Polinciana, stands with his 1967 Austin Healey 3000 BJ8. Because of Day's experience with his car, other British-car owners in The Villages have turned to him when their cars have broken down. *Photos by George Horsford | Daily Sun*

"I've always been a motorhead," Day said.

He drove the Austin Healey for a few years, but then put it aside while he focused on raising his family.

Though he stored the Austin Healey in a barn he built, Day never forgot about the car and planned to one day restore it.

"Every birthday, every Christmas, whenever anyone asked, I'd give my family members a list of parts that I wanted," he said.

After his youngest daughter graduated from college, Day started restoring the car. He worked as a mechanical engineer and was able to fix everything under the hood. He documented the restoration as he went.

"I can do anything mechanical, but I can't paint," Day said.

There wasn't any real timeline to the restoration.

"When I wanted to work on (the car)," he said, "I worked on it."

He made modifications as he went along. To support newer electronics, he took out the generator and gave the Austin Healey an alternator instead. Day replaced the ignition with an electronic breaker to give the car a hotter, more reliable spark. He took out the 50-year-old radiator and gave the car a new one, as well as an electric cooling fan.

There also were a few changes Day made, less for convenience and more for necessity. After the car broke down in the Tampa Bay area, he had the car brought back to his home in the Village of Poinciana on a flatbed truck.

Day replaced the driver's side front suspension, and he rebuilt the suspension on the passenger's side. He also has replaced several engine components.

"I just made a lot of modifications to make (the car) more reliable, so that I could drive it every day," Day said.

Because of Day's experience with his car, other British-car owners in The Villages have turned to him when their cars have broken down. With Austin Healeys, it's easier for him to repair the cars, because he can get all of the parts from England.

"There's four of these (Austins) in The Villages, and I maintain every one of them," Day said.

Day is a member of the Antique Automobile Club of America and has made friends through the organization.



He attends – and wins awards at the Cruise In monthly car show at Spanish Springs Town Square, where he and a few other British-car owners often will group together.

"I like to sit and talk with people about the car," he said.

At the Cruise In, Day encourages people to touch the car, and he'll let others climb into the front seat. If someone requests it, Day will even crawl in himself and turn on the motor so its roar can be heard.

“It’s a very overpowering sound,” he said. “But it’s a very unique sound. It’s what people remember about the car. It doesn’t take very much to get me to turn it on because I love the sound, too.”

Together, Day and other British-car owners he’s met at the Cruise In have formed an unofficial club – the British Car Club. On the first Monday of every month, approximately a half-dozen of them will meet at Eisenhower Recreation Center and drive together to a restaurant.

Other than that, Day will take the car out once or twice a week to have fun. But when he does use the car, he can’t go to the gas station to fill up.

Gas at modern stations is unleaded, and has ethanol in it. Day’s engine needs leaded gas without ethanol, or else he risks ruining the older rubber components in his engine. Because of that, Day buys his own ethanol-free gas – which he finds at the Marathon station on County Road 466A in The Villages or a golf cart store – and purchases lead additives for it.

“I have a shot glass in the trunk,” he said. “I add about an ounce every time I fill up.”