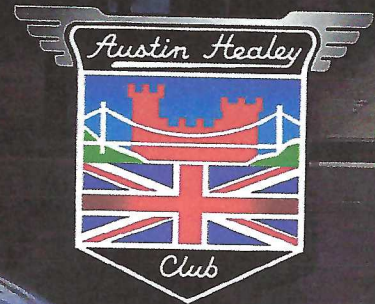


Austin-Healey

M A G A Z I N E

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER
2023



GOING HOME AGAIN



A Coast to Coast Tale in a 1966 Austin-Healey 3000 BJ8

CONSIDERING LUCK AND MORTALITY

By Eric Darmstaedter

PART 2: Panic set in

My wife, Sandy, and I had already driven over 3000 miles in a circuitous route from Gloucester, MA, to seven miles west of Gunnison, CO, on our way to Los Angeles in a 1966 Austin-Healey 3000, named "Miss Austin." We had our share of minor mishaps on the trip so far, but nothing we couldn't overcome with duct tape, tin foil, and tools in the trunk, plus a checkup stop in Denver at Sports Car Craftsmen before we tackled the Rockies. Now we were stopped on the side of a dirt road, without a clutch.

We were still two hours from Ouray, CO, where we had a B&B reserved and planned to rest before driving the Million Dollar Highway the following day. In these circumstances, it's best to remember, "It's too late to panic." Worst case, we ship the car and fly home.

Time to check for fluid leaks and linkage problems and hope the clutch itself was still operable. The concentric reservoir showed the center section was empty.

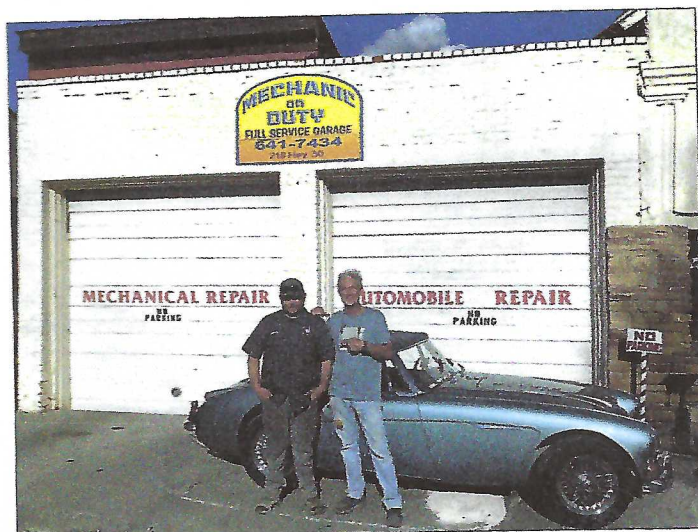
Hopefully, it was just a hydraulic issue, although there was no fluid on the ground under the car, and we didn't have a spare can of fluid in the trunk. As we were weighing the options of calling a tow truck immediately or somehow getting back to Gunnison to look for mechanics, a guy in a pickup truck, coming down the dirt road, stopped and asked if we needed help. I got the ride into Gunnison; Sandy stayed with the car — at least we still had cell coverage.

As I talked with the driver, he asked where I was from and said, "Brah, no way!" He's from Kaneohe, the next town over from us in Hawaii. He was just in Colorado for a couple of days to deal

with some land his family owned. Aloha-luck strikes again, and things were looking up.

After getting dropped off at NAPA Auto Parts, I learned that Darryl at Mechanic on Duty is the guy to see in town, and I walked back a half mile to his shop. The office manager is the former owner's wife, and Darryl had recently taken the business over. If I could get the car back before they closed, he would take a look.

The manager kindly offered me a ride back to Sandy and the car, and I got on the phone with Hagerty Drivers Club. The tow truck is two hours away, but Hagerty is reliable. We return to Darryl's in time and jack up the car.



We confirm pinhole leaks in the small rubber hose to the slave cylinder when I step on the peddle, and Darryl is splattered with clutch fluid while under the car.

It's 4:30 pm, and Darryl usually closes at 5:00. We take the old hose across the street to Carquest Auto Parts. I get a laugh as I ask for a clutch replacement slave cylinder hose, or equivalent thereof, for a 1966 Austin-Healey.

By now, Darryl understands our dilemma and is determined to solve this problem. He gets behind the counter, picks up a piece of brake line with some compression fittings on each end, and gets an adapter fitting from the service tech and another hose with the correct pipe threads. He returns to his shop, cuts the brake line, puts the adaptor on one end, re-flares it, adds the hose, and gets it back on the car, tying up the extra length in a pigtail. We bleed the line, and we are back in business. Darryl is *the man*. Our luck is back. We pull into Ouray five hours late but in time for dinner, wine, and our overnight reservations.

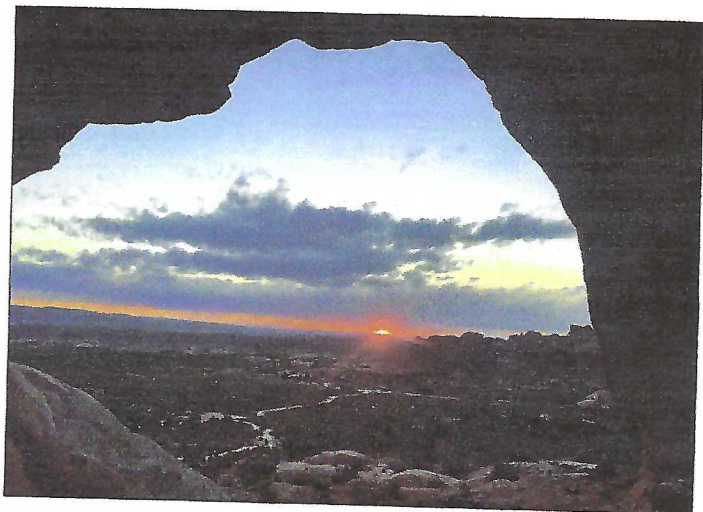
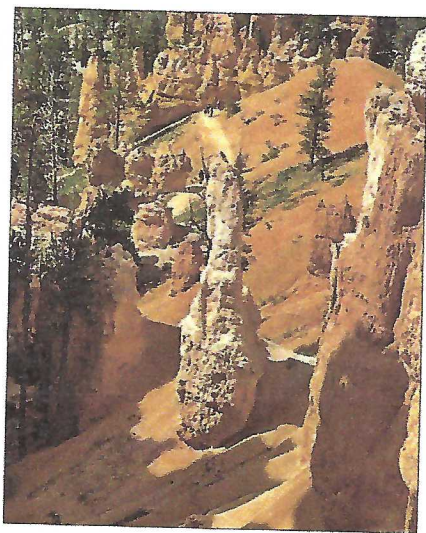
We started out the next morning at 55°F onto Route 550, otherwise known as the Million Dollar Highway, between Ouray and Silverton, CO. It's twenty-three miles of narrow two-lane

road with switchbacks, hairpin turns, tunnels, and areas with cliffs on one side and straight drop-offs on the other, with no guardrails. In other words, perfect for Miss Austin.

Sandy, who is afraid of heights, to begin with, begs to differ and can be heard in the background while taking videos out the passenger side on the outside curves yelling, "Oohhhh sh*%!" It was stunning.

We rolled onto the flats of Moab, UT, a few hours later in 95°F weather. Over Margaritas, we realized how lucky we were in Gunnison. We wondered what would have happened if that clutch hose had ruptured one day later while downshifting around a hairpin turn with no guardrails on the Million Dollar Highway.

That evening, we made our reserved entrance time slot into Arches National Park. With guide David, who must have been part mountain goat, we hiked through a half dozen arches until we reached the ultimate sunset photoshoot. The next morning, we drove the exciting Route 12 along the top of the mesa ridges through Escalante and into Tropic, UT, on our way to Bryce Canyon. Miss Austin was doing well, but more unexpected noise was in our near future.



A planned three-hour hike down into the Sunrise Point Canyon loop and back up the challenging Navajo switchback loop trail had us huffing and puffing. Awesome views were at every turn as we hiked through the Hoodoos. We were done by 2:30 pm and stopped for a root beer float reward at an ice cream shop in Bryce Canyon City. Driving back to our B&B, we took a sharp right-hand turn and were rewarded with sudden loud metal-on-metal screeching. I hate when that happens.

At first, I thought (or, more likely, hoped), I had driven over some wire, which had gotten caught in the undercarriage. With a clearance of 4-5/8 inches, it's not unusual. Unfortunately, we didn't find anything.

We made it back to Tropic with intermittent scraping, cringing every time. The noise didn't seem tied to brakes, left or right turns, or anything in particular, except the left front wheel. We had two glasses of wine and walked to a good dinner at Stone Hearth Grill. We decided to worry about it the next day, which, luckily, was a catch-up day.

Miss Austin was parked on gravel. Ed, the B&B owner, was a former long-haul truck driver and had a shop in the back with a floor jack. I banged on a pry bar to loosen the knock-off hub before moving the car onto the concrete. Once on the concrete, we used my expansion jack to get the car high enough to use Ed's floor jack and got the wheel off.

I compared a Moss Motors blowup diagram of a wheel to the wheel in front of me, trying to see what's missing or making the noise since turning the wheel is not doing it. Just then, Sandy, walking along the gravel, finds a large bent cotter pin and says, "Hey, are you looking for this?"

The pin is one of two holding the brake pads in. It must have come partially loose, lost a fight with the brake disc (the noise), bent, and finally fell out at exactly the right time and place for us to find it!

We used Ed's vice to straighten it out (sort of), cleaned up the small hole with his drill press, reshaped a small cotter pin to fit in the hole, and voila! Working again!

Thanks to Ed, who saved the day. Our good luck was still holding, and we took the rest of the day off.

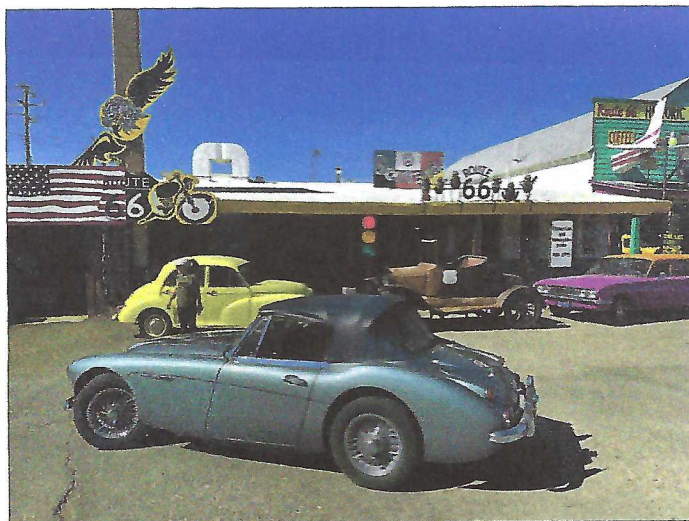
We visited Antelope Canyon and Grand Canyon over the next few days; both were spectacular. Route 66 through Seligman, AZ, hit all the appropriate nostalgia buttons.

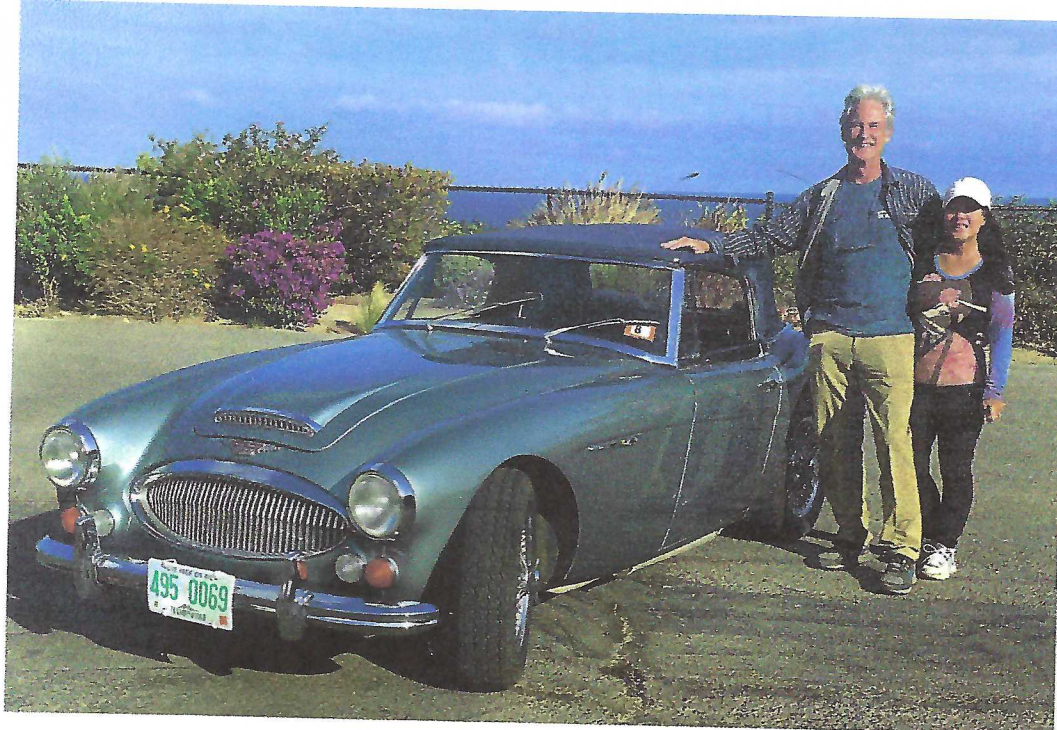
Next was a two-day trip across the desert. We had gone through seven quarts of oil by now. Miss Austin was doing fine in overdrive and holding the road despite being sucked toward 18-wheelers passing on both sides of us at 85 mph down the wide multilane Interstate 15 from Boulder City, NV, toward Los Angeles.

While passing through Victorville, CA, we spotted the Ford Memorial Day Charity Car and Bike Show. We had to stop to look at the hot rods and the restored 1932 Ford Deuce Coupes.

We rode on hilly Route 18, past Joshua trees, traveled down Route 14 to San Fernando, CA, and finally picked up Route 27 through Topanga Canyon to the Pacific Coast Highway. It was Saturday, May 28, Memorial Day Weekend.

According to *Fuelly*, we had traveled 5384 miles on 270 gallons of gas and 8 quarts of oil over 37 days. *Polarsteps* tracked our





Photographs provided by the author
Photo of the *Jean Anne* ship, on page
14, kindly provided by the PASHA
Hawaii Shipping Company

progress. We were ready to fly home to Kailua, and Miss Austin would follow on PASHA's *Jean Anne*.

She had a last stop at British European Auto in San Pedro, CA. We decided we didn't have the experience to do the camshaft surgery necessary for a rear engine seal conversion, and they had done dozens.

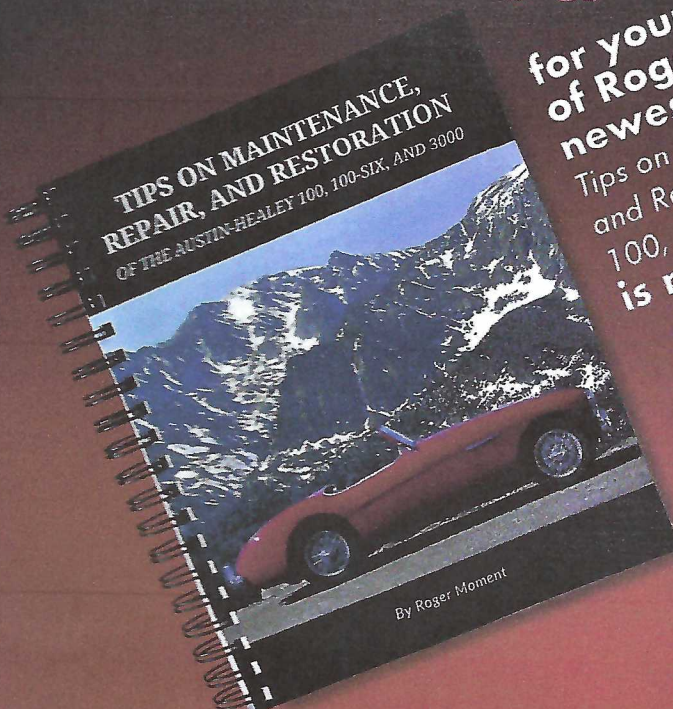
Remember that restoration quality question?

When Dane, from British European, pulled the transmission, he found the perimeter spring had never been installed around the seal.

Now, we are all restored and back in Hawaii.



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