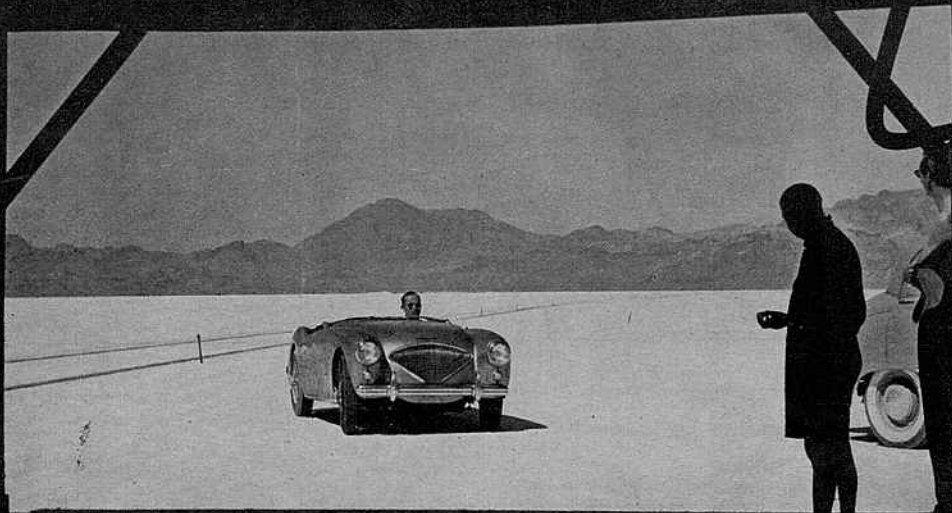




**THE AUSTIN HEALEY 100**  
**IS IT REALLY THAT GOOD?**

**Its beauty of line and record-smashing performance make this new sports car a natural for enthusiasts and housewives alike . . .**



## **IT'S REALLY THAT GOOD!**

**W**HEN A CAR like the Austin Healey "100" comes along, when its maker publicizes it as a car "for the enthusiast who wants quality," and when an enthusiastic press lauds it in glowing terms, you begin to wonder, "Is it really that good?" We (MOTOR TREND Research) were doubly curious: We wondered not only if it could be that good, but, if so, why was it so comparatively reasonable? (Austin Motor Company Ltd., England, quotes a price of \$2985 FOB port of entry.)

To let us get the answer to these questions, the Southern California Austin representative turned over to us his personal car (then the only Austin Healey 100 on the Coast).

"A word of caution," Bob Botwinick noted. "This car's a pilot model, one of

### **BY WALT WORON**

the two assembled in a big hurry for the International Motor Sports Show in New York earlier this year. I'd appreciate it if you'd keep that in mind, since it may have a few bugs that production cars won't." (That explains why we give our driving impressions and not a full-scale road test report. Providing sufficient reader interest warrants it, we will publish our own performance figures later.)

Most people at Trend Inc. had been anxiously awaiting their first look at the car. When we drove it into our parking lot, questions were tossed at us hot and heavy.

"Is this it? Looks even better than it does in its pictures."

"How soon can you get one?"

"Can I take a ride?"

That was the immediate reaction. But now we'd like to put down various personal observations about the car. We're setting them down like this (each of us had a chance to drive the car a good number of miles over a three-day period) since a sports car must be evaluated in a light totally different from a stock car. Here are my notes:

It's fast, has lots of punch at any speed and in any gear, including high. Austin claims it will do from zero to 60 mph in 10.5 seconds, get through the quarter-mile in 18 seconds, hit 80 mph in 20 seconds and give a top speed (in racing trim, windshield down, tonneau covering the passenger's side, full bellypan) of 110

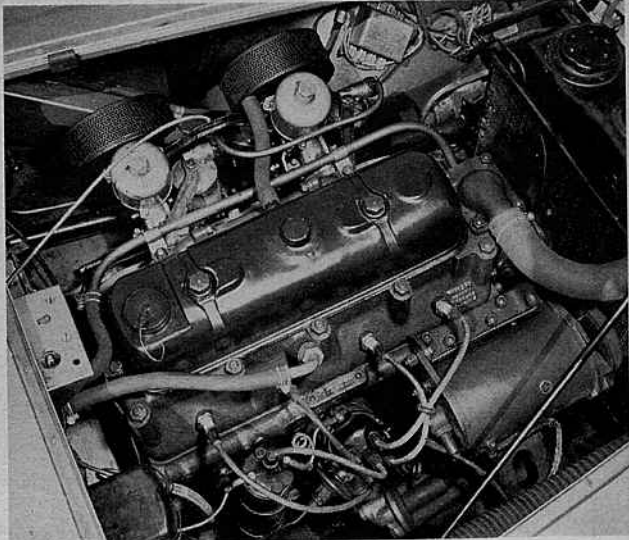
mph. The best possible demonstration of British conservatism in performance claims is the Austin Healey's record smashing at Bonneville in September: A modified model (8.5 to 1 compression ratio instead of the standard 7.5 to 1, higher valve lift, smooth tires) hit 142.6 mph, later averaged 123.75 mph for six hours and 122.9 for 12 hours, and broke sundry records for light (International Class D) cars. A stock equipped car averaged 104.3 mph for 24 hours.

At high speeds (70 and above) due partially to the extremely light all-aluminum body, there is some wind wander. Production models will be slightly heavier than the test car's 1900 pounds because steel fendersides and door panels, less susceptible to damage, will replace the aluminum ones. For a 90 inch wheelbase car, the ride is good, and it takes dips reasonably well.

Bucket seats are exceedingly comfortable for driver or passenger; the back of the seat is shaped to hold the passenger in during hard cornering. Steering wheel position is comfortable and you can rest your left arm on the doortop while driving. The column is adjustable. There's plenty of legroom.

Steering is not stiff (like that of an MG, for example) but it is much quicker (2½ turns lock to lock) than American stock cars. The "100" corners like a sports car should: When you're powering through a very sharp or wet turn you can break the rear end loose, but you correct the wheel slightly and the car's back under control. Going through gentle to fairly sharp-radius turns at 45 to 55 mph, you won't normally drift. If you do, you feel confident about the car's ability to power out of it.

Neither the gearbox nor the engine is temperamental. You can treat both of them like those of an American car; you're not constantly shifting gears to rev the engine to its peak. The electrically operated overdrive (it has a toggle switch on the instrument panel) gives you virtually



*Austin Healey uses long-stroke, ohv "four" that puts out 90 bhp. It gives good low-speed torque, one of many reasons why the new car should succeed here in the U.S.*

six speeds forward, any one of them instantly available.

And how do some of the other staff members feel about the Austin Healey "100"? Well, here's what normally unexcitable Jim Potter, our six-foot, one-inch, 200-pound managing editor says:

"It has looks, power, compactness, easy handling, and precision. Everything fits: doors, hood, deck lid. They gave a lot of attention to comfort details, such as the side curtains, the hollowed-out door panels, the sloping two-position windshield, the bucket-type seats, etc. My frame fits with plenty of legroom and space to maneuver controls. The gearshift, though di-

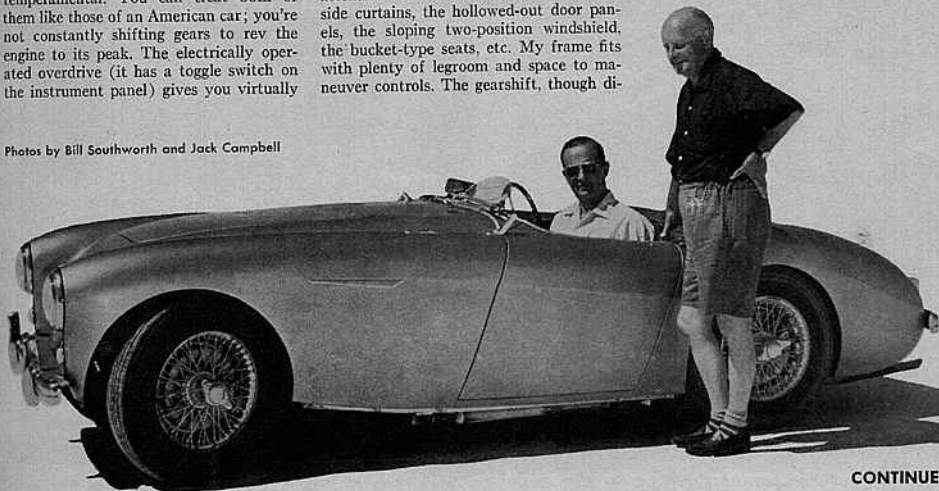
rectly opposite to American cars, is easy to get onto and also easy to manipulate.

"Of all the small cars that I've driven, the Austin Healey is tops. I like its size; I like its looks; I'm comfortable driving it."

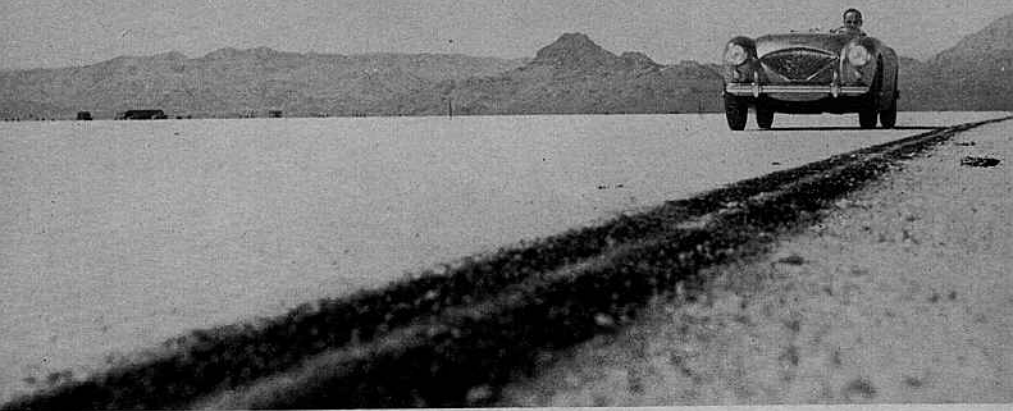
How about our new Technical Editor, Dick van Osten, who has some trouble squeezing into tight spots?

"The '100' is light and short, making it easy for both the sports car enthusiast and

Photos by Bill Southworth and Jack Campbell



*Gordon Benett (in cockpit) and Donald Healey at Bonneville with the Austin Healey that broke International Class D records*



The Austin Healey roars down the salt-floored track just before it established a new production car record: 142.6 mph

the housewife to drive. Its handling is good enough for even the most ardent driver.

"Visibility is good, and although the seating position is a little low for the average driver, I personally like it. When the top is up (and it's easy to handle) it's still easy to see out the back because of the large rear window.

"High cruising speed of the car appears to be around 80 mph in overdrive (3000 to 3500 rpm). The proved long-stroke A-

90 engine gives it good performance and dependability.

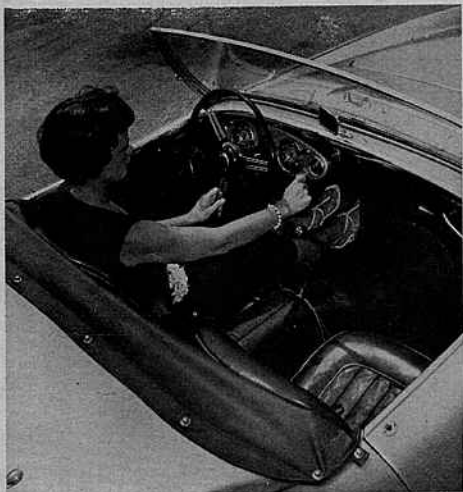
"There's very little or no wind blast for driver or passenger (my wife reports). I agree with her.

"Overall impression: It's elegant and sporty in appearance (an unusual combination in British design) and has good workmanship."

And what does our lanky (six-foot, two-inch) assistant managing editor, Pete Molson, have to say?

"An extremely appealing little car that would get my dough if I were planning to get anything anywhere near its price class. It's the right size, a great pleasure to drive, has plenty of room for driver and passenger with the possibility of taking a third along for a very short haul." (The driveshaft is well padded.)

"The combination of responsive steering, plenty of reserve power, and the best transmission setup I have tried yet is what makes it such fun.



Frankly a two-passenger car, it has room for one more on the padded driveshaft. Cockpit, controls show top design sense



There's room for luggage in this sports car. Gas filler, inside trunk, is artfully concealed but not too satisfactory



Walt Woron tests the first Austin Healey to reach the Coast. Docile handling on curves and straightaway impressed MT staff

"The instruments, upholstery, windshield and side curtain workmanship all show real care in design and construction. The car needs an outside door handle, though, especially with the top up. Why not a pushbutton at the top rear edge?"

Another member of our Research Staff, Fred Bodley (who is average in height and weight) had this to say:

"Instrument panel placement is fairly good and there's a nice contrast in faces. Seats give good support to thighs; would

like to see quicker adjustment for seats." (It is necessary to remove and re-locate two bolts to move the seat.) "Excellent storage room for such a small car. Steering is lightly loaded and fast. Takes turns quite flat. Handling is all you could ask for in a car of this class."

Photo Editor Jack Campbell, highly critical of cars, waxed enthusiastic:

"The Austin Healey '100' is a real automobile. It has power, excellent handling characteristics, comfort, speed, and beauty

of line. It's an example of a car that combines high performance with utility. Its road-holding qualities are astounding. It's about the greatest little car that I've ever had the pleasure of driving." (You'll have to take our word for it that Jack doesn't ordinarily talk that way.)

And so the one question of whether it can be that good is answered. We're still at a loss to explain why it sells for so little. But more power to Austin if they can hold the line. We like it at that price!



Straightforward in design, its front fenders visible at all times, the car combines the best features of British and U.S. design. It looks "stripped for action" even on a city boulevard, but you don't need a degree to drive it