

The long road to the hills – Part One (by Richard Salisbury)

My interest in cars was undoubtedly kindled and encouraged by my late Father who was an Insurance broker in Hertfordshire. We lived in Garston, a suburb of Watford, and when I was a young lad I discovered the lane we lived on was fantastic for racing soapbox carts. Being the youngest child in the family I had hereditary rights

When I was 12 years old my parents relocated to South Worcestershire. Pleasingly they took me with them. We moved to another hillside location which would have been ideal for more soap cart antics. However teenage coolness was setting in so I had to stop behaving like a kid. Moving forward about 40 years, by which time coolness had left the equation, I did try to start a soapbox cart rally as a charity fund raiser in the village. I gave up promptly

when I discovered that the majority of people wishing to raise money for good causes were very risk-averse. I aborted that and organised a raft race down the River Avon instead!

So to the hills. My parents were keen church goers. Fortunately for me, rather than walk to the local church in the village, they drove 12 miles to one in Cheltenham. Their route took them down the A435 and straight past the turning to Prescott Hill Climb. "What's that

all about?" I asked my Dad. He explained the concept of hill climbing and then told me that he'd take me one day. But not on a Sunday as church was serious business in our house.

1967 saw me attend several meetings at Prescott, mainly I cycled to them. I always made the ride very safely without adorning myself in fluorescent Lycra and with the help of only 3 S/A gear ratios. We had proper legs when I was growing up; probably due to early muscle development stopping soapbox carts.

Car ownership for me started in 1971. My first car turned out to be; yes you've guessed it, a Ford.

It was a very under-powered Ford Anglia, nothing like Harry

Potters. Flying into trees? No chance. Mine wouldn't climb the Malvern hills unless I stopped and stuck it into first gear. I hadn't learnt to double de-clutch at that point. The Anglia came from a friend of my fathers who lived in Aberystwyth and he kindly went on the train to collect it for me one day. On his return we sat down for a family meal, it was a Monday so it would have been Shepherd's pie and for afters the usual rice pudding.

"That reminds me" said my dad as pudding was served.

"What of?" I said.

"Your new car" he said with a wry smile.

"Why?" I asked, confused.

"Well it wouldn't pull the skin off that rice pudding".

He wasn't selling the Anglia to me very well.

It didn't take long for me to break away from paternal guidance and sell the Anglia and replace it with a green Mini. Then a red one. Then a blue one.

And then in June 1972 things got a bit more interesting. Jonathon, who was a friend from Worcester College, wanted to sell his Frogeye Sprite. We did a bit of bargaining over a few beers and shook on a deal at the Bridge Inn at Stanford on Teme, a stone's throw from Shelsley Walsh, for what I felt was a fair price of £125 for 9825 AR. That same car is still



to the Silver Cross pram which had served its purpose primarily in baby transportation then passed to my eldest sister for doll and teddy playtime. I had far more exciting plans for its use by the time I was 7. My father helped me build the first "Sheepcot Speedster" using the wheels from the pram whilst teaching me very basic engineering skills. The problems I had were primarily no brakes and secondly the lane we lived on terminated at a junction with the main St. Albans road. However it didn't deter my love for "speed", despite getting reprimanded by my dear old Mum for scuffing and ruining another pair of school shoes. I had discovered early in life that not all brake shoes were equal. School shoes were made with far better braking material than pumps/plimsolls (insert white running shoes/trainers if born in the last 40 years) and also seemed to offer better heat dissipation. My father loved his cars and rather than offer a long list of all those he owned and I grew up with, I'd like to mention the fact that it took him so long to choose his next purchase that on more than one occasion the model he decided to buy was upgraded to a new version and the process started again. In summary he was a Ford man.

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"... Vernasca ..."

in my workshop today and I aim to have it fully rebuilt for its 50th anniversary of my ownership in June 2022.

When my first daughter Hannah was born in 1997 (yes, I did start late in life) one of the first things I said to her in the maternity ward was "And one day you'll have your very own Frogeye", she gurgled approvingly. She's proved to have an amazing memory though; I'm often asked how her "Lily's" restoration is progressing.

So, I've been an Austin Healey owner for nearly 50 years. I've had a fair amount of involvement with the Austin Healey club in the past 35 years and 9825 AR has done many thousands of miles with me at the wheel. I have also gained many friends through the club. The picture of RevCounter October 1994 shows me far right along with friends Roger and Alex Chamberlain and Hugh Ferris. The Warwickshire based RS Centre was triumphant in awards at the Cirencester IHW that year, winning the Autotest overall (myself), Thelma Segal Trophy (Roger and Alex) and Mk3 - 3000 Concours (Hugh Ferris). Hence our inclusion on the RevCounter front cover. And yes, white shoes were definitely in fashion in 1994.

The long road to the hills – Part Two (by Richard Salisbury)

In June 2018 I received an unexpected invite to attend the Vernasca Silver Flag Hill Climb in Northern Italy. For business reasons I have spent much time in Italy and love the country, the people, the food and of course the wine. So to get an invite to join other car enthusiasts at a historic race meet and spend a week close to friends in Parma was always going to get a positive response.

So finally, to the point. How did I get involved in hill climbing? Well it all happened there, whilst in an Italian bar. I'd been a keen spectator for many years and

but did enjoy a couple of exciting runs up the 9Km hill, as a passenger in a Healey 3000 Mk1.

I wanted to be loyal to the Austin Healey marque but didn't want another Frogeye. Lily would be upset. However a derivation of a Frogeye would be acceptable, I was sure Lily could cope with that. So I started my search for a Sebring Sprite.

I searched the internet and found two cars for sale that fitted the bill.

The first was with a private vendor which I turned down because it was built just for racing. It was a lovely car and also had fantastic provenance including having completed the classic Monte Carlo. I had decided I wanted a car I could use on the road as well as the track. More on that decision later. Thankfully the very helpful team at Bill Rawles Classic Cars had in their showroom a bright red Brian Archer conversion which had been built in or around 2010. A deal was struck with the then owner and Jack Rawles kindly delivered the car to me, on 13th July 2018. Just 2 weeks after my decision to compete and my return from Vernasca.

The car had been well built with a 1380cc engine and a type 9 Ford gearbox which had the benefit of being a 5 speed. So the

now felt it was time to get involved properly. After a few beers I agreed I would attend the next year's event in a car suitably prepared for the hill climb. This first year, I had attended as a spectator

car was very usable on the road and with around a 100 bhp felt very quick compared to Lily.

I really enjoyed driving the Sebring and in September that year drove it to the Goodwood Revival for the Friday and Saturday. Then driving over to Berkshire so that I could watch England play India at The Oval on the Sunday, during which Alastair Cook took his leave from test match cricket with a bewitching farewell hundred. Returning home late on the Sunday night driving across the Cotswolds finished a wonderful 3 days of sporting entertainment, it unfortunately was followed by 3 weeks of intensive chiropractic manipulation attempting to replace my



"... a deal was struck ..."

lumbosacral joint. Maybe the car wasn't as well suited to road use as I'd hoped.

However I'd bought the car for hill climbing so I needed to bite the bullet and get my act together. Sadly I came to realise that my planned trip to Vernasca 2019 could not take place as my youngest daughter's 21st birthday fell on the same weekend as the Silver Flag hill climb and I had promised to arrange a garden party for her. So I had to talk to our team organiser, the illustrious David Wood-Roberts and explain my dilemma. He was incredibly understanding and said "no matter there's always 2020". Little did he know!

September 2019 arrived and I'd done nothing about entering any competition but had again become a regular spectator. Happy in my comfort zone.

Shelsley Walsh, 21st September 2019, saw

me in the pits with a friend Roland, who races an OMS single-seater. 3 garages down from him were 3 Sebring Sprites. Was it fate? Or was it fate kicking me up the posterior and saying get your act together? I had no idea that there were

other duties he was running the raffle. Returning home the next morning after a brilliant evening making new friends and re-kindling some old friendships, I found myself sitting next to a very large Christmas hamper and a Peter May rolling

purchased from the great team at Hardy Engineering.

Additionally I converted the front suspension back to lever arm and kept the Frontline telescopic conversion I'd removed for use in the restoration of 9825 AR.

Various other mods and improvements were undertaken throughout the year and the car's first outing was the Members meeting at Shelsley Walsh on 25th September. This is a non-competitive meet organised by and for members of the Midland Automobile Club (MAC). It was a great day where we really enjoyed the atmosphere despite Covid. The biggest surprise for me was seeing that an old friend from Worcester College, who I hadn't seen for over 40 years, was on the drivers list. We got talking and amazingly he is still best friends with Jonathon from whom I bought 9825 AR. What a small Spritely world we live in!

Anyway I'd like to sign off by offering my thanks to all the companies who have helped with the supply of parts and information in preparing my car and to all those Healeysport members who have proved to be so friendly and encouraging throughout the last 18 months. I look forward to seeing you on the hills and tracks in 2021.

If any Austin Healey Club member would like to try their hand at Sprinting and Hill Climbing drop Paul Baker an email at compsec@austinhealeyclub.com and he will call you for a chat. You may also be interested in coming to the Healeysport Test Day at the Curborough Sprint Track near Lichfield on Thursday 1st April. If you are, drop Richard Mason who organises the event an email at aloyblock@gmail.com and he will get back to you.

so many Sebring Sprite replicas in the Healeysport sprint and hill climb challenge. I couldn't believe it.

Nor could I believe the reception I got when I started talking to Phil Gardner, Steve Casson and Paul Baker. Amazingly friendly people and very helpful and encouraging. Even when Paul got a phone call advising him his wife had fallen on the hill and had a suspected broken ankle he didn't leave me unattended (Sorry Mrs. Baker), he handed me over to Steve with an introduction saying I was interested in competing.

Steve (who drives one of the Sebring Sprites) and I had a long chat then exchanged a few emails where I was asking for guidance regarding championship technical regulations etc. It soon became apparent that my car did not comply with regs for the Road Going class due to the 5-speed gearbox and telescopic front shock absorbers. So I had some work to do.

A couple of weeks later I attended Prescott where I watched the Healeysport guys in action and had further discussions and was given plenty more encouragement from the drivers.

On November 8th I attended the Healeysport Awards dinner held at Chateau Impney, Droitwich. I was on the same table as Steve Casson and amongst

road voucher, both which I'd won in the raffle. This was the organisers' way of telling me I was now compelled to competing in 2020. Little did they know!

In January 2020 I contacted Paul Baker, the Healeysport Championship Organiser, and registered for the championship and applied for my Motorsports UK licence. Theoretically everything was in place for me to compete in 2020 however the Corona virus was starting to take its toll on pretty much every event. So rather than sit around waiting for an improvement in the situation I decided to pull the engine out of the Sebring and fit a 4 speed box



"... Shelsley Walsh ..."



"... Sebrings at Shelsley ..."