



# CELEBRATING THE LIFE OF GERRY COKER

## BODY DESIGNER FOR THE HEALEY 100

### By Bill Meade, Founder & Registrar Worldwide 100M “Le Mans” Registry

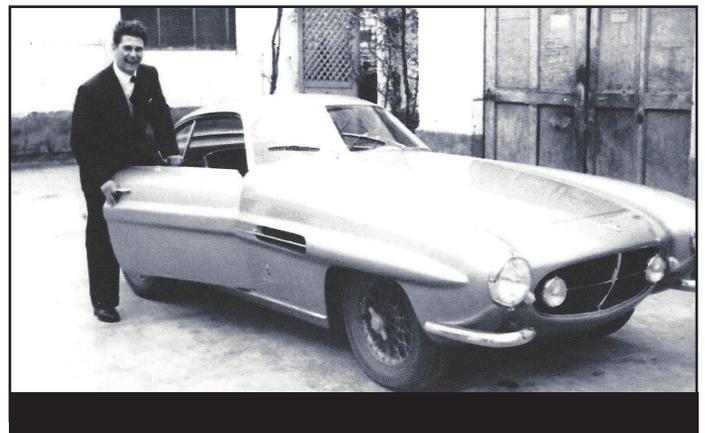
**T**he Austin-Healey world has lost the last surviving member of the automotive team responsible for building the original Austin-Healey automobile, sold from 1954 to 1967. Gerry Coker, the car’s original body designer, passed away peacefully at his home in Sarasota, Florida, on November 13, 2020 at age 98. He is survived by his wife of 67 years, Marion Coker, and his daughter Faye and son Adrian.

Gerry Coker was born on June 24, 1922 in the small village of Duston in Northampton, England. As a youngster, Gerry loved drawing and making models. Nothing made him happier than building models of boats and ships and drawing cars and planes.

In 1939, at age 17, Gerry joined the Humber Motor Company as an apprentice design draftsman. This five year period also included continuing education for Gerry at Coventry Technical College in engineering science. This apprenticeship covered everything relative to the design and manufacture of the automobile.

After two years, Gerry was offered the opportunity to complete his course as designer with the Humber Experimental Department. He needed to show project designs, pictorials, and finished clay models to Sir William Rootes, which he successfully accomplished. The Humber company produced Hillman cars, Sunbeam, Humber, and Talbert vehicles.

Before working for Donald Healey, Gerry worked for the Humber Experimental Design Department in London. Gerry was under the direction of an Italian Engineer named Dr. Sampietro, known as Sammy. In 1948, Gerry accepted a



job offer to be chief draftsman with the new consulting firm which Dr. Sampietro was forming in London.

The new job in London lasted only about two years before Sampietro's engineering firm closed. Gerry then returned to Coventry to undertake look for new work and ran into his old boss Dr. Sampietro, who told him that Donald Healey was looking for a body engineer to run a new Nash-Healey body program. He arranged an interview for Gerry with Donald Healey at his home in Leamington Spa, and Donald was quite impressed with the young man. And so, in 1950 Gerry began his career with Donald which would lead to the designing of a car that would be famous for decades to come.

1950 was to be an important year in the life of Gerry Coker for reasons beyond his new job. During that summer he met his future wife, Marion, at a church badminton club. At the time, Gerry owned an old, used Austin Seven car he used to take Marion on their first memorable dates. This was the beginning of a relationship that grew and served as the strong anchoring force in both of their lives. Gerry and Marion married on June 13, 1953, and they were so fortunate to have celebrated their 67<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary this past June.

Gerry was only twenty-eight years old at the time he started work with Donald Healey Motor Company as a body engineer. After proving himself to Donald through his work on the Nash-Healey, Gerry was given the task of designing the body for the new Healey 100 Donald was planning.

Over the course of his career, Gerry was responsible for the body design of the Austin-Healey 100, the 100M, 100S, the Bonneville Streamliner and the original prototype Sprite. Although Gerry moved to America during the time the majority of the six cylinder Austin-Healeys were built, he helped design its new front grille—which was about all that changed—along with stretching the body for the rear jump-seats. The new six-cylinder car continued with the basic body shape of the original 100 car (53 -56) from 1957 until 1967, a total of 15 years for this body style being produced.

Gerry and Marion's life was kept full during their more recent years of retirement. They had established and maintained their own home in Sarasota, Florida. Over the last several decades, Gerry and Marion were invited to many national and regional Austin-Healey gatherings for enthusiasts to hear directly from the body designer about the colorful history that surrounded the development of the Austin-Healey. The Austin-Healey has certainly been recognized as one of the outstanding au-

tomotive body designs of the last nearly seventy years. In article after article discussing the best car designs of the past, its name seems to appear in every list.

Donald Healey has been described by friends as a man who knew the automobile business inside and out. His successes in rallying and high-speed record runs gave him the knowledge to build cars that performed like race-breed thoroughbreds. All of that being said, one of the most fortunate business decisions Donald made (and the one which made his fortune) was hiring a young, talented designer named Gerry Coker for his new Austin-Healey.

The world feels a deep sense of loss with the passing of Gerry Coker. There is also sincere gratitude for Gerry Coker, Donald Healey, and all of the original team at Healey for their amazing accomplishments in the automotive world.

*If readers would like to obtain personal DVD copies of the two short films which were produced, highlighting Gerry's story, request, "Coker's Life, presented at Open Roads 2002" and the second DVD, "Gerry Coker's Welcome to Attendees of Monterey International 2017." Order the two DVD's by sending an e-mail request to [billmeade@100mregistry.com](mailto:billmeade@100mregistry.com) (you will be invoiced by Paypal for \$23 to cover reproduction costs and postage)*

There will be an outdoor Celebration of Life on Jan 9, 2030 at Twin Lakes Church in Sarasota FL at 12 noon. To attend, please contact Walt Mainberger at [waltm@comcast.net](mailto:waltm@comcast.net).



Gerry Coker and his wife Marion accepting the custom built model of his Sprite design at the Sprite 50th Anniversary meet in San Diego, CA 2008