

# REBIRTH OF THE BONNEVILLE STREAMLINER

## BOTH THE ENDURANCE CAR AND THE STREAMLINER RECREATED

**Bill Meade**  
**Watsonville, California**  
*Contributing Editor*

One of the most amazing stories during the exciting years of Donald Healey's development of the 100 and subsequent racing models was the creation of the fabulous 1954 Streamliner.

After great success with the Endurance Car's speed records at Bonneville in 1953, Donald decided he would attempt an even greater challenge. Donald felt he could build a special-bodied 100 that could exceed 200 MPH. This feat would allow him to gain membership in the prestigious "200 M.P.H. Drivers Club" to which only a handful of drivers belonged in the early fifties.

His first thought was that the Streamliner would be an entirely new special and Gerry Coker designed this first version, but after potential costs of a new car were considered by Austin, the decision was made to base the Streamliner around a stock 100. Donald and Geoff began by laying out the parameters of the project. Geoff headed the team that included Roger Menadue and Jock Reid in development of the suspension,

drive train and engine. A supercharged engine running about 9 PSI boost was built along with gearing to allow for maximum top speed.

Gerry Coker was assigned the task in the Fall of 1953 of coming up with a streamlined body that would allow the car to

reach 200 MPH. Gerry met the challenge by removing the front and rear body at the hub line of a stock 100. He then designed an elongated and streamlined front and rear and a finned headrest that transformed the car into a strikingly beautiful, high-speed record setter. A finishing detail by Gerry was the "scarlet character flash" painted on the side to "give a touch of glamor," as Gerry proclaimed.

Lionel Rawson, who ran a small body shop in Slough, worked with Donald and Gerry to construct the modified body. According to Geoff Healey, "The fit and lines were perfect and it

was not easy to detect that the body had been constructed from three sections. When the Streamliner was completed it im-



*The 1954 Streamliner on the Salt Flats.*



*The Endurance Car at Bonneville in 1954.*

pressed everyone with its beauty. The pride of everyone who had created the machine was very evident every time it was pushed outside and spectators would gather."

After about six months of development and construction, the morning of August 22, 1954, arrived. Donald Healey and his team (Roy Jackson-Moore, Carroll Shelby, George Eyston and Mort Goodall) were finally on the Bonneville Salt Flats for runs that would see the Streamliner reach incredible top speeds. Donald started his first run at 6 a.m. in the cool 55-degree morning air. Winds were quiet at less than six MPH. The Streamliner with its whining supercharger and raucous exhaust was a stirring sight and sound as it rocketed past the timing clocks. Donald made a total of six runs by 9 a.m. The last run was the fastest at 193.05 MPH. The average speed was 192.62. Although Donald didn't quite reach his goal of 200 MPH in 1954, he did break many International and National records with these amazing speeds.

The un-blown endurance car, SPL227B, also set many records that year including a top speed of over 143 MPH. It was a thrilling three days of speed and distance runs. The tired but happy crew retired to the Stateline Hotel in Wendover only 500 yards up the road for food and drink.

After its record-setting debut on the Salt Flats, the Streamliner was returned to England and was displayed at the Earls Court Motor Show. Gerry Coker confided that they sprayed some flat white paint on the side of the car to simulate salt spray! Unfortunately, there was also real salt imbedded in every nook and cranny of the chassis and eventually it caused major corrosion and both cars were scrapped, although bits and pieces were known to survive. Nobody at the time could imagine the Streamliner and Endurance Car would become famous and invaluable automobiles (if they been preserved for 55 years!)

Decades later, Dutch Austin-Healey enthusiast Wiet Huidekoper, in a worldwide search, was able to locate some of the actual parts of these cars. Wiet formed a plan with well-known Australian Austin-Healey expert Steve Pike. Their goal was to reconstruct the two cars and relive the speed events of 1954 on the Bonneville Salt Flats. Huidekoper, Steve Pike and Bruno Verstraete are the mainstays in financing the builds with Bruno also buying the Endurance Car. Patrick Quinn, Charles Mat-

thews and Tony Parkinsons have also become part of the team.

Wiet had access to Geoff Healey's personal records and technical drawings provided by Allan Casavant in the U.S. who, at the time, had Geoff Healey's old company files. Wiet prepared full engineering drawings for all the components that are special "one-offs" for these cars. He also made detail drawings of the Streamliner body by comparing many different photographs of the original car and scaling back from known items such as the wheelbase and the size of the wheel rims. In addition, Wiet enrolled Gerry Coker to assist with building of the Streamliner by reviewing the body drawings and confirming that the shape was as close as possible to the original Coker design.

As they were originally, both cars will have highly tuned 100 engines which evolved from the works racing cars and that later evolved into the 100S. The Streamliner will be supercharged and fitted with a variant of the original David Brown five-speed gearbox. The Endurance Car will have an original "angle-faced head" and an early version of the twin-piston brake calipers. As the two cars have been reconstructed around the remains of what has been left, the souls of the 1954 cars have truly been brought back to life.

The plan is to debut the Endurance Car at the historic races at Phillip March 2009. The further plan, if all goes well, is to have the Endurance Car race-tested and the Streamliner completed in time for speed runs on the Bonneville Salt Flats in September of 2009.

For any Austin-Healey enthusiast, to be able to view these two cars at speed on the Salt Flats would be a thrill of a lifetime. Check out the progress on this history-making project by visiting the team's web site. [www.healeysreturnto-bonneville.com](http://www.healeysreturnto-bonneville.com), keep your

September calendar clear and watch HEALEY MARQUE for further progress reports to advise of potential Salt Flats dates as they become firmed up. **HM**

Note: There is another replica of the endurance car, SPL227B, that was recently undertaken by its owner Martyn Corfield and constructed by Jeremy Welch at Denis Welch Motorsport in the UK. This car has been completed and has already undertaken some speed tests in England. It was featured in the July 2008 issue of HEALEY MARQUE.



Steve Pike and John Healey inspect the ongoing work on the new Streamliner.



John Healey admiring progress on the new Endurance Car.



The new Streamliner under construction.