

JABBEKE - October 1952

The "Real" Launch of the Healey 100?

Jabbeke. What is it? Where is it? Why is it significant in the history of Healey and many other UK car manufacturers? In short, why is it's name interwoven into the 1950's British Motor industry and, particularly into the Healey Story.

The Healey 100 was launched into widespread acclaim, at the 1952 London Motor Show. We all know the story of DMH's dislike of the large sized grill on the front of the new 100 - and so his insisting that it be parked, nose in, facing a pillar at Earls Court, for the show. Of course, his concern was unfounded, as the launch was followed by well, the rest is history, as they say.

Beforehand though, and to allow time for publication before the show began, a left hand drive UK registered 100 was taken over to Ostend, by DMH. He met with John Bolster (an upper crust aristocrat of automobiles and Autocar correspondent) - and allowed him to "Test" the car along the famous Jabbeke Motor Road - now a part of the A10, which runs from Ostende, in-land and past the town of Jabbeke, and on past Bruges to Ghent and Brussels.



Bolster, already a Healey fan, and his Editor, armed with stop watches, ran the car along this straight and flat stretch of newly constructed concrete motorway, in Belgium - his very positive report of which helped to cement the position of the Healey 100, into UK (and US) car culture.

Although there had been an "Autosnelweg (a car fast way), covering the route between Brussels and Ostende, from the late 1930's, the road had been all but destroyed, during the second world war. In 1950 a bold plan had commenced

with work on a new group of motorways, to re-connect Belgium's road ways "into Europe" - commencing with the stretch from Jabbeke, inland to Wetteren. This was later followed, during 1954, with the completion of the stretch at each end - Jabbeke to the channel port of Ostende and from Wetteren, further east to Brussels.

This meant that, at the end of 1952, the Jabbeke stretch was state of the art - and was open. If you've ever driven along it, you will know how flat the land is there.

Why couldn't the test runs have been carried out in the UK, though. Healeys wanted to prove the car on normal public roads - this was important. It wasn't a question of speed limits preventing the car's "demonstration" in the UK - these were not applied, outside of towns, until 1965. It was the roads. Lets not forget that the first UK Motorway, the M1 would not be completed until seven years later, in November of 1959. OK, I know that a short stretch - the Preston Bypass (now a part of the M6) - opened in 1958.



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During the late 1940's and the decade of the 50's, Jabbeke became an important spot for many UK Motor manufacturers, who used the Jabbeke Motor Road to demonstrate the straight line speed of their performance cars - both production and prototype - in front of the adoring press. Healeys had used a stretch of the original Jabbeke Autosnelweg to demonstrate their Healey Elliot back in 1947. Jaguar tested the XK120 there, Triumph, the TR2, and Rover it's Jet1 turbine car, to name a few.

By the time the E-Type Jaguar arrived, in early 1961, it's "testing" could be carried out, in the UK, on the M1 and the heyday of the Jabbeke Motor Road was nearly over.

Next time you are driving to Brugges, Ghent or Brussels, stop off at Jabbeke, particularly if you are in your Healey, and soak up some atmosphere.



ED - See John Bolster's original Autocar road test, of the Healey 100, from October 1952, also in this issue.
