

# IN CONVERSATION WITH - DAVID TOWNSEND

**I know that you live and work in Vermont, in the USA - so how did you find yourself interested in British sports cars?**

My love affair with British cars began at age 14 when I was gifted with a non-running Morris Minor 1000 for my birthday. The "present" came with a shop manual, box of tools, and my father's admonition "When you get it running, it's yours". It took me the better part of a year to get the little Morris road worthy but, 50 years on, I'm still tinkering with—and drawing—all manner of British iron.

**Have you always been an artist? / When did you start Sports Car Art?**

My illustration work began with just a single print and not even the slightest intention of making it a full time profession...it was more of a retirement plan. After a career spent in advertising, design, and web architecture, I wanted to spend time exploring my fine arts interest—something I hadn't practiced with any regularity for more than 40 years...maybe longer if one includes doodling cars in primary school. That counts, right?

**So where did you start? Which car illustration was your first and why that car?**

I started by recreating the famous MGB GT that the Abingdon engineers cut in half, now housed at the Heritage Museum. It was a commission for a client of mine and, on a lark, thought I would offer a limited number of (25) prints of it. I posted up on one of the

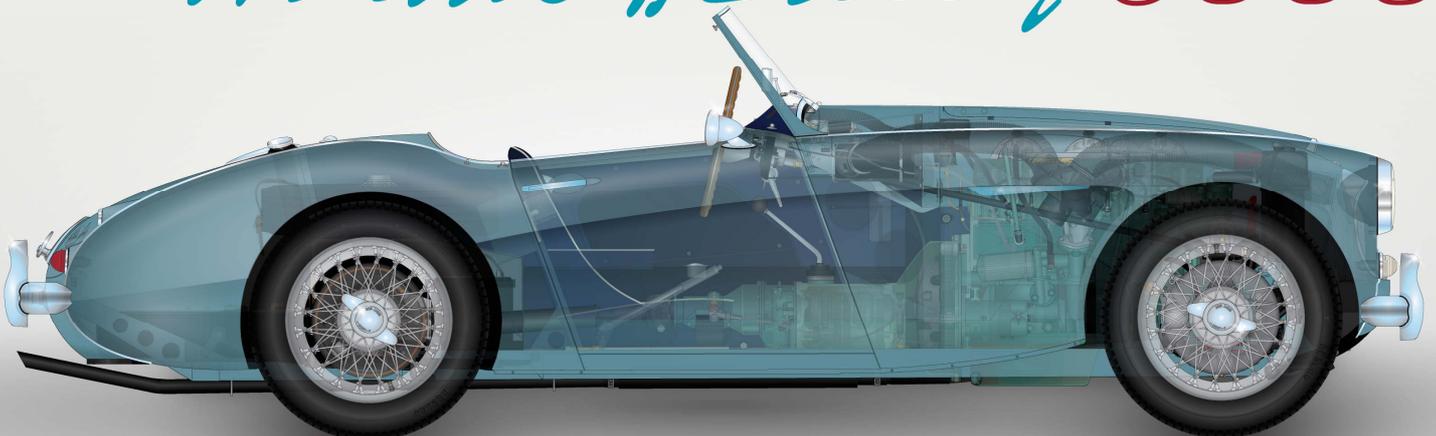


MG forums here in the States and sold them all in just a few hours.

**Something makes you want to produce artwork, to show the whole range, rather than a representative model, of each type, from a particular manufacturer. Why is that?**

Until recently, most of my motivation regarding which cars I draw and why I draw them is simple self-interest. Over my lifetime, I've owned Triumphs, MGs, Jaguars, the noted Morris Minor, Healeys, and several other odds and ends of LBCs (Little British Cars) so, in

THE *Austin Healey* 3000



AUSTIN MADE IN ENGLAND  
WHEN ORDERING REPLACEMENTS QUOTE  
CAR NO. 3399  
ENG. SEE ENGINE

the beginning, it was rather natural for me to illustrate cars with which I had some personal history and whose engineering I was familiar with. At present, I'm illustrating a book by John Nikas, *British Sports Car Companion* (Bentley Publishing) that has required me to draw a number of cars with which I have only passing familiarity such as the Swallow Doretti and Triumph TR7 (among others). The BSCC is expected to be available sometime in late spring and covers some 26 cars including driving impressions, restoration tips, buying guidelines, repairs, modifications, and vintage race preparation. At an estimated 500+ pages, it should be one of the more comprehensive volumes available on British sporting cars.

**So how wide is your range, at present?**

Having illustrated more than 90 various makes and models of British sports cars, I continue to draw inspiration from the great sporting cars of the 50s, 60s, and 70s—combining the two things I'm most

complete his book and am also committed to providing illustrations for another book with the working title *British Crown Jewels* that will focus on a number of the more seminal cars in the development of sports car like the C and D-type Jaguars, Aston Martin DB5, and similar marques and models. Concurrently I'll be working on a special project illustrating all of the Group 44 race cars (Triumph and Jaguar) from famed racer Bob Tullius (at least well known here in the States).

Additionally, I've been working on a more traditional ¾ view cutaway style of illustration employing my current technique and a few new wrinkles as well. I keep busy.

**Do you have a Classic car of your own, or are you satisfied with drawing them?**

Yes, I presently own an MGB that's been rather heavily modified for unlimited vintage rally. As to being "satisfied" with drawing them, I would answer thusly—having illustration skills and an anal retentive nature

are not enough to capture the detail as I do in my drawings. It is my mechanical knowledge and experience that really make this work possible. Without them, I would simply not be able to understand the relationships between various components rendering me incapable of accurately representing things.

**Are you a "get your hands dirty" kind of Classic owner, or a polisher?**

I may have answered this previously, but the MGB was a "built from scratch" project with all of the required fabrication completed by myself including narrowing the differential. So, yes, I think I would qualify as the "hands dirty" type. That said, I also appreciate a well-kept car so I do a bit of polishing as well. When not tinkering with the B, I help maintain a TD and TF that are local to my area.

**Where do you stand on the originality verses practicality question, on Classic ownership?**

Well now, you really want ignite the fire, don't you? I enjoy nearly anything that has been done well,



passionate about, cars and art. Hard to get better than that.

**We are Healey people, so I am interested to know if your Healey range is now complete - or do you have more in the pipeline?**

"Complete" is something I don't think will ever come to pass if I include the Nash Healeys, the works racers, rally cars and the like but I plan to continue to add to the Healey portfolio as time permits. At present, the line-up includes the frog-eye, MKII and MKIII Sprites, all of the 100-4s, 100S, 100M, 100-6s and 3000 series cars, NOJ 393, AH 3504 (the Jackie Cooper 100S) and the SPL227 Bonneville endurance record cars. On the drawing board are Donald Healey's coupe and the works rally car. After that, things are not as clear although I'd like to pen at least one of the Nash Healeys, possibly one of the race cars.

**What new ideas and projects do you have on your horizon, at present?**

As aforementioned, I am presently involved in helping John Nikas to



including original examples as well as modified cars but have little patience for “originalistas” who feel they must police those who don’t share their perspective. I think it’s important to keep in mind, the cars of the 50s, 60s, and 70s we so revere today, were not, for the most part, held in as high a regard in their time as they are now. Modifications—some practical, others not—were very commonplace as anyone who has restored a “survivor” car can attest. So, while I respect the history and value of original cars, I also appreciate the ingenuity and talent of those who modify them. Am I fan of an MGB that’s been converted into a 4 X 4? No, but I can appreciate the engineering if not the questionable taste.

**You pack a great deal of detail into your drawings. How do you set about a new drawing - to make sure that the detail is accurate; that all of the little differences, between models, are reflected in your work?**

All drawings begin with the original specifications of the car—wheelbase, basic dimensions, and the like. In addition to the illustration work, there are about 20-30 hours of research involved in acquiring photographs of

individual components, suspension and drivetrain details and, especially, all of those little things, unique to each car, that truly make it memorable. Additionally, I have a group of noted restorers and collectors who provide technical review on each illustration. As knowledgeable as I may be of what I draw, the breadth of illustrations is simply too great for me to be able to be intimately aware of every detail on every car. Having a crackerjack group willing to lend their knowledge and experience to the task, truly make this all possible. I would say, that I am more simply the hand that moves the pen.

**Do you only produce large scale prints?**

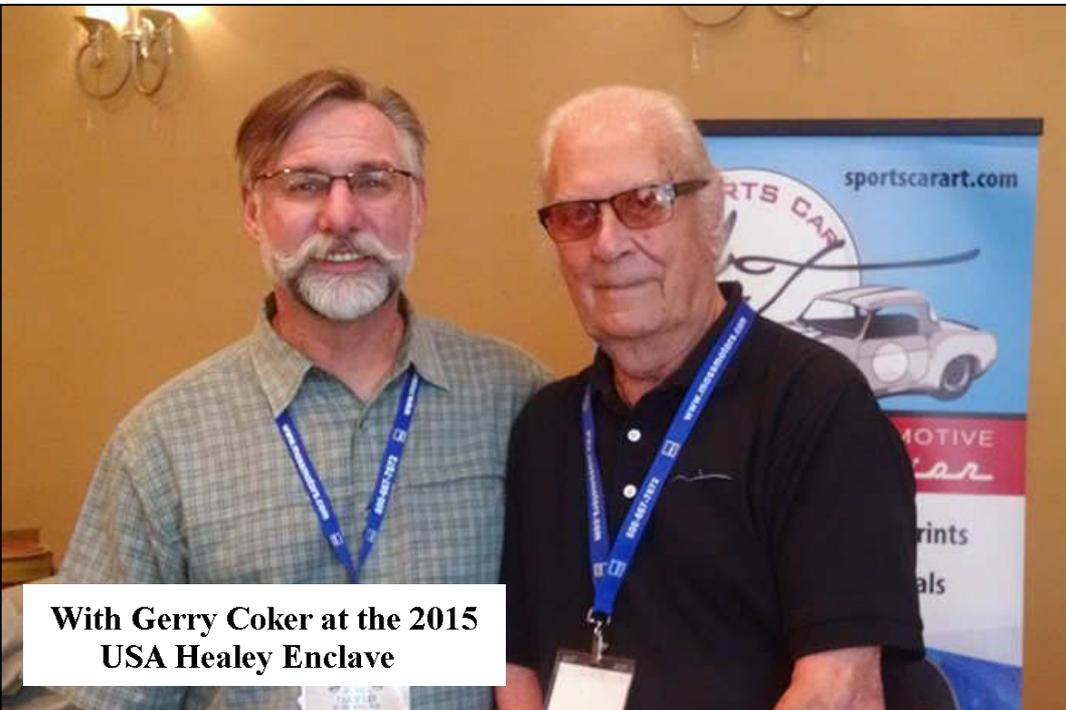
For the most part, yes, I sell only the 12” x 24” and 18” x 36” prints but do offer several series of collectors cards on the big Healeys and have plans to offer these for the other marques as well. My motivation to illustrate these cars is not entirely confined to self-satisfaction. I believe, in at least some small way, the illustrations help to preserve both the heritage of these wonderful machines as well as capture something of the times in which they were created. At some point, those of us who endeavour to preserve and keep

them going, may be gone and, with us, all the knowledge and experience we possess. It is my hope that my illustrations will help record the history of the cars, the people and the era in which they were built.

**Thanks very much, David, for your time. Impressive moustache, by the way.**

Have a look at David's Web Site, to see the full range of Healeys and other British marques covered by David's artwork.

[www.sportscarart.com](http://www.sportscarart.com)



**With Gerry Coker at the 2015 USA Healey Enclave**

THE *Austin Healey* HUNDRED

