

RACING A BIG HEALEY AT LIME ROCK PARK

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The track was a little wet and slippery that morning after an early September downpour, but the Healey felt stable going downhill into the turn, even with the hard tires I'm required to use on this vintage racing weekend. This turn at Lime Rock Park in the sleepy hills of Connecticut sweeps to the right, and as I passed a red Elva and a blue Morgan on the inside of the sweeping downhill stretch, I pressed my foot to the floor and the triple Webers sucked up the 110 octane Sunoco and the Healey flew down the straight, veering toward the left hand side before Big Bend, the track's double-apex turn. I was chasing a silver Marcos that got a better start and has been about two car lengths ahead of me since.

This was the Historic Vintage Festival at Lime Rock that I have raced in every year since 2000 in my Big Healey. It is my favorite race on the annual schedule and it is the equivalent of a five-day vacation at the track, with racing, taking in exotic cars and socializing with other racers. For the past few years, the event has been exceptionally well run by Skip Barber and Murray Smith. The track encompasses three locations for the event: an upper area with vendors and two paddocks. "A" paddock seems reserved for the big-money cars and double-decker trailers with their catered lunches and uniformed mechanics, and the "B" paddock is for those of us with more mundane English, Italian, or American vintage race cars. I

have to admit, though, that I brought my mechanic, George Squire, to the track, as the Healey never ceases to find some mechanical excuse for attention.

In the past, we've done many on-track repairs on the Healey, including installing a new clutch there, welding together broken suspension parts, strapping the side muffler back on, or rebuilding the Webers. This year, the car was perfect, perhaps a testament to the preparation it received by George and his two kids, who make the trek from Maine for this event. We decided that it was going to be too hot that weekend to use the matching hardtop. I splurged on a new battery and the crew put in new wheel bearings and replaced various rear suspension bushings.

We got to the track late the first day, but found a tech inspector willing to sign-off on the car and my racing equipment (helmet, suit, socks, shirt, etc.). I added his tech sticker to the colorful collection of racing stickers on my rollcage. He grumbled a little about the fire suppression system not having a testing port, but let it go.

I was assigned to Group 6 the next day, consisting largely of British and Italian cars from the 1960s. With that infamous

Healey torque, I usually get off to a good start. At the start of this race, I watched the flag at the top of the tower carefully. The BMW pacecar pulled off the track to the right, the green flag went down, and now in 2d gear, I floored the Healey and it passed four or five cars on the left, settling into third place, when alas, I missed a shift, going from 2d gear to 4th instead of 3rd. Argh. I finished the race in 6th place out of 30 cars, but I still had my fastest time in several years.

I am not, of course, a professional racecar driver, but a lawyer (one of whose specialties includes





Jonathan and mechanic George Squire, kneeling by car.



representing plaintiffs in automobile accident cases). I have managed, however, to enter the Walter Mitty land of car racing, where my Austin-Healey and I dwell for several weekends each year. It is a fantasyland where men never age but their toys metamorphose in Kafka-esque fashion into life-size projects that devour their bank accounts. Previous accidents when racing with the SCCA have mandated that the present incarnation of my car is exclusively of fiberglass bodyparts, but moving to vintage racing allows me to avoid the endless armada of look-alike Miatas that inhabit SCCA races.

Next to the sole left turn and with a beautiful mountain background, the track has placed a large billboard quoting Ernest Hemingway as saying that there are only three true sports: Mountain climbing, bull fighting and car racing, because those are the only sports where death is a possibility. I'm hoping he was wrong, because so long as I am physically (and financially) able to pursue this sport, I can be found at the track about six weekends a year. When I do retire from racing, at least I'll have the official track photographs purchased from photographer Dan Tooker to remind my grandchildren that for a brief time, their grandpa could leave his paper-cluttered desk at the law office, forget the arrogance of judges or the demands of clients, and risk life and limb by throwing his 50-year-old English car, tires screaming, sideways around a racetrack in northwestern Connecticut. **HM**

