

Aviation History and Sports Car History Meet

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HEALEY MARQUE CONTRIBUTORS

In 2011 the Aviation Museum of Kentucky (AMK), a 501c3 non-profit organization, inherited a unique 1956 Austin-Healey 100, series BN2 (BN2L230999) with an equally unique history behind it. Now you might be wondering what a museum devoted to old aircraft is doing with an old little British car?

The car was purchased second-hand by Hugh Lee Grundy in Taiwan (China) in 1957. Grundy, who was born and raised on a farm in Kentucky, was a World War II aviation veteran. Soon after the war ended, he went to China where he served in managerial-level positions in several aviation enterprises during a very tumultuous period in Asia. When he purchased the car he was serving concurrently as president of Air America, Air Asia and Civil Air Transport. All were in support of CIA "covert" operations during the Cold War and the war in Southeast Asia. Grundy's duties in Southeast Asia were so secret that even his wife did not understand his true role until Congress and the CIA recognized him in 2001.

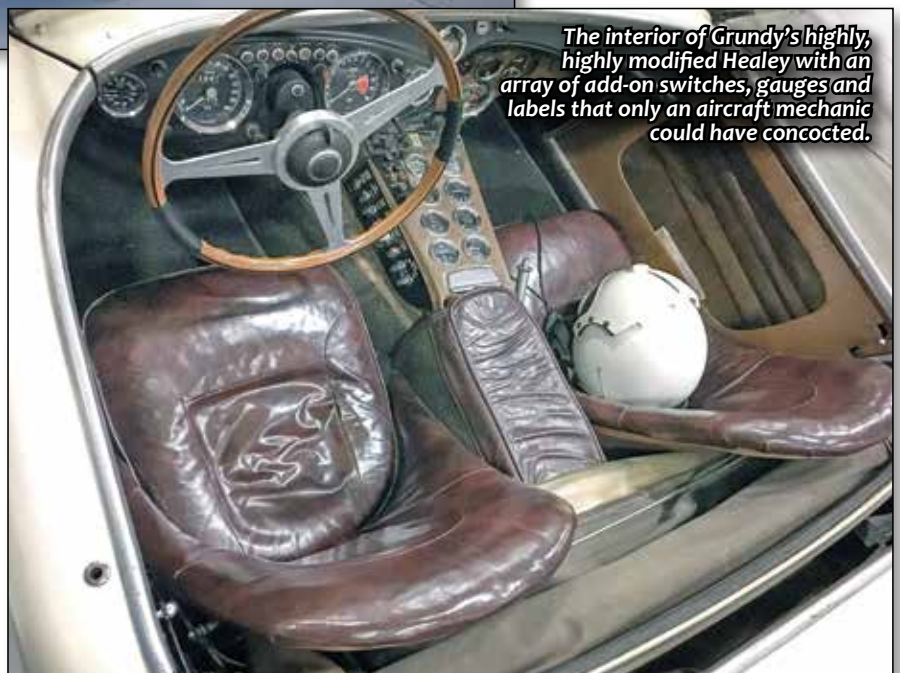
Grundy's love of aviation was equaled by his love of British cars and car racing. With access to his aviation shops and a skilled workforce in Taiwan, he extensively modified his Healey. Most notably, he replaced the stock four-cylinder engine with a specially modified Sebring racing engine with an alloy cylinder head. He also modified the electrical system, cockpit display, fuel system, brakes, exhaust and chassis.

Electrical modifications included an alternator with two 12-volt batteries. He had the harness rewired for added instrumentation and fuses for most all circuitry. His cockpit display add-ons included numerous additional gauges, illumination, switches, warning indicators and an altimeter and accelerometer. The dual pump fuel system employed a solenoid controlled fuel regulator.

Chassis modifications included a "submerged" exhaust system routed *through* the frame outriggers for added road clearance, Koni shocks, custom 72-spoke wire wheels with Borrani magnesium alloy rims and an armor plate protecting the fuel tank. He converted the front brakes to a Girling servo-assisted dual system



Grundy's Healey in its new home, the Aviation Museum of Kentucky.



The interior of Grundy's highly, highly modified Healey with an array of add-on switches, gauges and labels that only an aircraft mechanic could have concocted.



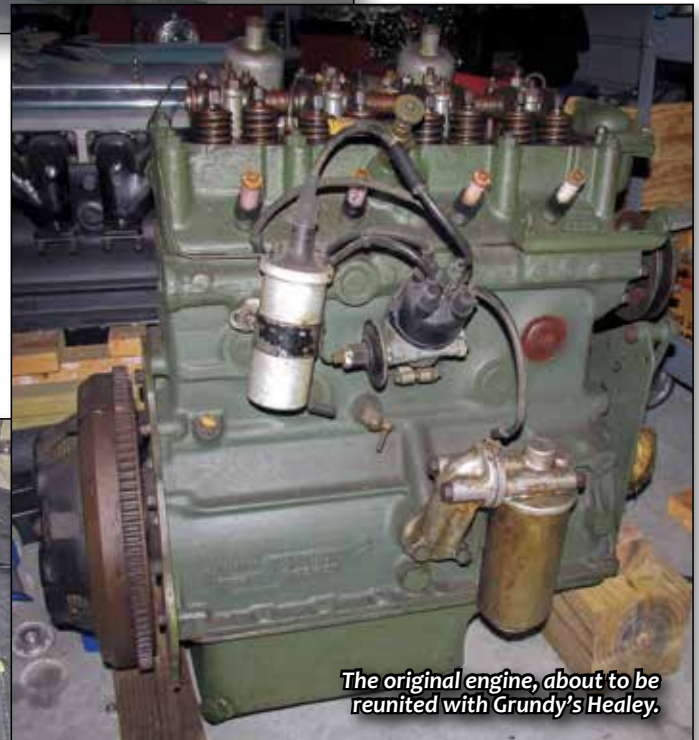
Springfield where his family had lived since 1780.

Fortunately for AMK, Grundy kept his Healey and he also kept the original engine that was maintained as a spare. Grundy was proud of his Austin-Healey and showed it in local car shows and drove it in at least one Springfield parade. He was said to like to take it out on the nearby Bluegrass Parkway and let her fly.

Hugh Grundy was inducted into the Kentucky Aviation Museum Hall of Fame at AMK in 2003 for his service to his country and his many achievements in aviation. When he passed away in 2011 at the age of 95, he

with stainless steel brake lines. Lastly, the interior includes customer leather upholstery and floor matting.

Grundy was a licensed racing driver and he entered races including the Macau Grand Prix held in Portuguese-controlled Macao. The Macau Grand Prix was a sports car event until 1961. Unfortunately, by the time he completed modifying his Healey, Grundy believed it was no longer competitive so he was content just touring the back roads of Taiwan in his Healey. He returned to the United States in 1975 where he worked in senior aviation positions in retirement. Finally, in 1996, he came home to farm the Grundy Plantation in



The original engine, about to be reunited with Grundy's Healey.



Engine installation is the opposite procedure of extraction. Simple, right?

bequeathed his Austin-Healey to the museum.

After AMK took possession of the car in 2012, the AMK Board of Directors declined several offers to purchase it and proudly put it on display as a tribute to this great but not well-known Kentuckian.

AMK is no different from many museums with funding issues. In 2014, with the agreement of Grundy's widow, the museum accepted a substantial offer of cash for the Sebring engine with the intention that the engine would be replaced with a stock engine. After sitting for several



Right to left, Charley Sither, Ed Robie and Mike Malone with the English patient.



Just imagine the wiring that feeds all of these extras. Not a project for the faint of heart.



The project is a proverbial head-scratcher for sure.

years without an engine, the museum was fortunate to locate the original engine that was in the possession of a Springfield enthusiast and Austin-Healey owner. AMK was able to purchase the original engine, which appears to have been well preserved, to restore it to Grundy's Healey.

AMK volunteers Charley Sither, Mike Malone and Ed Robie are now working diligently to restore the car. Although the chassis is in perfect condition, addressing the modifications supporting the Sebring engine have proved to be challenging and tracing the electrical system wired by the aviation mechanics in Taiwan has been "a learning experience."

As expected, finding some of the needed OEM parts has been difficult. Mike Gassman of Gassman Automotive in Waynesboro, Virginia, has been very helpful in locating parts. Another challenge is that the "hot" and "cold" sides of the Sebring engine are opposite from the stock engine, and to return to the original engine will require relocating the exhaust system, redoing fuel lines and carburetor linkage, and some rewiring. Fortunately, AMK doesn't have a time deadline (you get what you pay for with volunteers!). Please wish Charley, Ed and Mike luck. We'll keep you posted.



Hugh Grundy, left, and Claire Chennault, another storied player in the Cold War in the Asian theater.

If you would like to see the car, you're welcome to visit the museum which is located at Blue Grass Airport, 4029 Airport Road, Lexington KY 40510; phone (859) 231-1219. Please visit AMK's website www.aviationky.org for current operating hours. Please inform the docent you've read this article, as this will be your "pass" to see the car as it is in a restricted work area.

*Charley Sither is a member of the Bluegrass Austin-Healey Club. **HM***