

## HISTORY OF THE CLUB

### The First Eight Years

AHSTC had a tentative beginning with a group of five enthusiasts getting together at the home of Larry Verdekal in Camp Hill, Pa in September of 1976. Larry Verdekal set up the initial meeting by the simple expedient of stuffing his business card under the wiper blade of any Healey that he saw and organizing the gathering at his place. The Austin Healey Club of American and the Austin Healey Club, Pacific Centre existed but did not have events that could be regularly attended by people in these Northeast states. A monthly newsletter was initiated almost immediately as a means of tying the various people together and promoting new memberships through complimentary copies to interested parties.<sup>1</sup> The newsletter consisted of a few typewritten, corner-stapled Xeroxed pages, consisting of “last meeting” and “next meeting” notes. By the end of 1976, John Morrison was the President of AHSTC (the club name was official at this point, proposed by Jeb Boyd), the club was meeting once a month at the Morrison residence, dues had been established and a preliminary set of bylaws had been written.

In March 1977, the club (comprised mainly of Harrisburg and York residents) was meeting at Dante’s Restaurant and had officially approved the bylaws. Those bylaws defined the structure of the club, set up provisions for memberships, an annual participation award and set the club goal as one of preserving the Austin Healey marque. There was some discussion as to whether the club should be for the “big” Healeys alone but that idea was quickly overruled by a sense of commonality and comradeship for the Sprite owners who shared their admiration for the Austin Healey name. About this same point in time, the need for an official Parts Manager was identified and Jeb Boyd was volunteered for the position.

April 1977 saw the first “official” club event, consisting of a driving tour of about 55 miles from Harrisburg to the Hunt Valley Inn in Maryland. The “Hunt Valley Inn Tour” became the “Hunt Valley Inn Attempt”, after inclement weather and mechanical issues forced a midway reversal in course.

Unbeknownst to those involved in AHSTC, another group of Healey owners was getting together in the Wilkes-Barre area of Pennsylvania during the latter part of 1976. That group had similar ideas in mind and called themselves the “Tri-State Austin Healey Club” since they planned a “regionalized” club servicing Pennsylvania, Jersey and New York, AHSTC was likewise unknown to Mike Delevan, the force behind this new group. Mike and Ron Seferyn had talked about a club and actually got started with the help of George Null and Joan Null whom they contacted as the result of their mutual attendance of the “Healey East” meet at Cherry Hill, New Jersey in the summer of 1976. George and Joan, along with Mike, Don Olsen, Roger Ninotti, Lee Guth and a few others met in the fall of 1976 to kick off the club. At this point, the Nulls were traveling from York and were not aware that they lived right around the corner from the fledgling AHSTC. By the end of 1976, the Nulls had discovered Morrison and AHSTC; John Morrison and Mike Delevan soon began to exchange correspondence. Both groups seem to have gotten inspiration from that Cherry Hill meet of Pacific Centre’s where the attendees saw Donald Healey, Fred Horner (then VP of British Leyland America) and Mike Dale (President of British Leyland).

June of 1977 saw the Tri-State club and its 35 or so members become a second “Region” of AHSTC which forced some major changes to the bylaws which did not then account for any group beyond Harrisburg. The region concept was adopted and Wilkes-Barre joined Harrisburg on the masthead with Mike Delevan as the region president. Wilkes-Barre continued to meet at Delevan’s house. The newsletter, which had been a handy vehicle for information, also received a format change to include regional new inputs well as some standard columns like “Healey at Large”.

July saw a change in the Harrisburg meeting place to the Knights of Columbus Hall in Camp Hill where it remained for an extended period of time. Also in July, the second tour event of 1977, to the Bavarian Summer Festival in Barnesville, PA was undertaken. The was renamed to “The Teutonic Torture Tour”, due to the high temperatures, slow-moving traffic on rural roads, and consequent over-heated Healey cooling systems.

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### PART 2

The first anniversary of AHSTC passed with some significant changes in the club. A new region was formed in the Philadelphia area by John Morrison's brother Pete; meeting at Ye Old Beef'n'Ale in Fort Washington. Don Hoffer was busy working on an Austin Healey Repair Manual to supplement the published information with the experience of the home mechanic. There were now 21 paid members of AHSTC and another 27 individuals getting complimentary newsletters but procrastinating on the dues. An outing was organized in September by Hoffer and consisted of a camping trip to Avalon, New Jersey. As the club grew, the workload of the organizers had increased and offices for an official Newsletter Editor as well as Events and Membership Coordinators were defined in September. Some members of AHSTC attended the Pacific Centre sponsored gathering in New Market, Virginia. They saw the car show and watched Donald Healey present awards from a fire escape with bullhorn in hand so he could be heard. By the end of 1977, there was talk of putting on the car show to top all car shows on the East Coast and the idea for an ENCOUNTER was born.<sup>ii</sup>

At the close of 1977, club officers were as follows:

	<u>Harrisburg:</u>	<u>Wilkes-Barre</u>	<u>Philadelphia</u>
President:	John Morrison	Mile Delevan	Pete Morrison
Secretary-Treasurer:	Barbara Boyd	Ron Seferyn	Rob Morrow
Parts Manager:	Jeb Boyd		
Membership Coord:	Don Olsen		
Events Coordinator:	George Null		
Newsletter Editor:	Don Hoffer		

AHSTC continued to expand its horizons in 1978 and grew in membership to 74 by May. Don Olsen staged the first of a series of Healey retrievals in February with number two following shortly thereafter. That same month, the first official membership cards were issued.

Although not listed as such by Mr. Webster, retrieval is a noun which is "a collection of individuals working as a unit to claim an Austin Healey from the scrap yard operators and the ravages of rust." Many, but not all, of the retrievals made over the years were recorded in minute detail by our overzealous editors and reported in the newsletter. Some of the cars were actually in the "as advertised" condition which some were not; but they all had a good story attached to them.

George Greenwood became the first Philadelphia region Parts Manager in March. Under the care of Joan Null as Chairman, ENCOUNTER '78 became a reality in the summer, showed a whopping profit of \$2,250 and was deemed to be an annual event of AHSTC. The name for the event was proposed by John Morrison, inspired by both the "encounter group" concept of psychology and the movie "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" released in November 1977. Events proceeded rapidly at the end of the year; Wilmington and North Jersey regions were added with Bill Oberholtzer and Wayne Wirta as the respective presidents. Philadelphia changed its meeting place to the American Legion Post in Willow Grove where it remains to this day. Don Hoffer spearheaded Retrieval Number 3 and a decision was made to have a contest to pick an

official logo for the club. November saw a major change in newsletter production, with the acquisition of a mimeograph machine by the club. This was the direct result of membership growth and the consequent difficulty in surreptitiously producing the newsletter on company time using the company Xerox. Thus was the infamous “Ol’ Yeller” born. <sup>iii</sup> In December, the club got its present Post Office box in York, PA. It was toward the end of 1978 that Pete Morrison challenged the other regions of AHSTC to a Philadelphia Invitational Teamkane event – and as is usually the case, the host lost.

Paul Helgesen headed the fourth Healey retrieval of record in January, 1979. Thanks to the artistic talents of Bob Pense, the club had a logo (same as the one used now) on its letterhead and newsletter by March. March also saw the first annual Rat Factory Rallye staged by Doug Reid in Maryland. During the early part of 1979, we had also made some contract with the Austin Healey Club Pacific Centre and they agreed to help fund ENCOUNTER ’79 which was by then in the planning stages in Harrisburg. By May, Mike Haran in New York was making serious progress on a Long Island region of the club. Sure enough, George and Joan were there to lend a hand and kibitz.

John Morrison hosted Retrieval #5 in June, 1979 just prior to ENCOUNTER. In July, we were invited by the Sports Car Club of York to co-sponsor a Young Handicapped Peoples Rallye. AHSTC had helped in the event in 1977 by taking a number of handicapped youths along as navigators on a rallye. We couldn’t help in 1978 because the membership was pretty well engrossed in putting together ENCOUNTER ’78 which occurred at the same time. It was in July that Bill Murtha of Philadelphia received the T.B.B. Award (Tacky Beyond Belief) for his display of purple spark plug wires at British Car Day in Bowie, MD.

ENCOUNTER ’79 was held at the Penn Harris Motor Inn at Camp Hill, Pa. Geoffrey and Margot Healey along with their daughters, Kate and Cecil, were in attendance for the event thanks to the support of the Austin Healey Club, Pacific Centre who footed the transportation bill as part of their meet on the West Coast. Keith Rochelle of Pacific Centre showed up to see how we were spending their monies and seemed pleased with the results. The Capital Area region of AHCA also helped by supplying able bodies to work registration during the event as well as helping organize the show. Las Vegas Night was added to the agenda for something to do on the first night of the event while registrations wandered in. That same month saw the introduction of the “Mr. Finespanner” column in the newsletter (which was a community effort by members of AHSTC and AHCA, Capitol Area) and a change in the name of the Wilmington region to Brandywine as it is now known. “Mr. Finespanner” contributed a wealth of supplemental information on the nuances of Healey repairs. During the three or four years while it was a semi-regular column, “Mr. Finespanner” provided information on subjects ranging from oil and filters to complete engine rebuilds.

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### PART 3

The closing months of 1979 saw more changes in the club. The membership roster stood as 280 and we lost the services of our newsletter editor of the previous two years as the Hoffers left for Indonesia. The Wilkes-Barre region changed its name to Lehigh Valley and got a new president by the name of Lee Guth. As a final note for the new year, the club decided it must request a dues increase of \$6.50 after holding the line at \$5.00 for two years.

The new year (1980) brought with it a new region in Maryland called Potomac with Doug Reid as President, meeting at Bruce and Inan Phillip's residence.<sup>iv</sup> John F. X. Fenerty assumed the Presidency of the Philadelphia region as did Chris Haislett at Brandywine. Lehigh Valley changed their meeting place to the Mansard Inn in Catasauqua, PA. About June of that year, Don Hoffer reappeared in the newsletter as "Our Man in Jakarta" and sent some pictures taken of the Healeys (people) during a side trip to England. John Morrison had to step down as the Harrisburg President due to work schedules and the job was assumed by the VP Dave Bayne. Harrisburg changed their meeting place to the Timberlodge Tavern and the first annual All-Region Picnic was hosted by Philadelphia.

In addition to other changes, the club's accounting methods were modified to keep separate ledgers for the regions and set up an operating fund for the yearly ENCOUNTER. These changes made solvency a little easier to monitor and reduced the frustration of the treasurer.

ENCOUNTER '80 was again held at the Penn Harris Motor Inn and sported a bright new idea, thanks to Jane Helgesen and Dave Bayne, called a RegaliaStore. It seems that Dave told Jane that part of her job as Treasurer was to think of ways for the club to make money (prior to the elections, he said that the job was simply to keep track of the club funds). Anyway, the resultant brainstorming session came up with the store idea and everyone thought it was a great one that had not been tried. This was the year that the Austin Healey Cookbook was published by Joan Null and the first time that ENCOUNTER was set to cover a four day period so the events could be spread out a little. The Philadelphia Invitational Teamkana was made a standard event call the Teamkana complete with a huge traveling trophy for the winning regions. Del Border and his "stock" 3000 immediately installed the trophy on the Harrisburg mantle that year and succeeded in keeping it there until 1984.

Since the early part of the year, negotiations had been in the process with AHCA to hold a joint event. George Null attended the AHCA Conclave in Toronto to help present the proposal with a date of mid-1981 and a tentative site in Fredericksburg, VA. At the same time, there were louder rumblings of a jointly sponsored national meet in 1982 coincident with the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Austin Healey. The start of this idea seems to have been back in 1979 (at ENCOUNTER) with Geoff Healey, Keith Rochelle, the Nulls and the Morrisons.

Retrievals numbered 6 and 7 occurred in June and July of 1980 with #7 being sponsored by George Null. August brought with it a separate Austin Healey class of the famed New Hope Auto Show thanks to the persistent efforts of Joan Null.

AHSTC became a Pennsylvania non-profit corporation in the summer of 1980 with the passage of the bylaws and paperwork submitted by John F. X. Fenerty. As required of a corporation, a Board of Directors was elected. Each of the region presidents automatically becomes a member of the Board per the bylaws.

September saw an end of the season clambake at the Jersey shore sponsored by the Philadelphia region with Paul and Trish Woglom pulling it all together. The Board of Directors gave official approval for Conclave-Encounter as a joint meet with AHCA Capitol Area prior to the end of the year.

January 1981 arrived with the results of both the regional and corporate elections for officers. Corporate officers were John Morrison (President), John F. X. Fenerty (Secretary), Jane Helgesen (Treasurer), and George Null (Newsletter Editor). The Presidents of the various regions were Dave Bayne (Harrisburg), Bob Miller (Lehigh Valley), John Fenerty (Philadelphia), Dave Ehret (Brandywine), Ben Cohen (North Jersey), Mike Haran (Long Island), and Doug Reid (Potomac).

Harrisburg began a long series of winery tours this year. By April, there were solid plans to have an International Meet in 1982 and questionnaires were published to get inputs from the membership as to what type of events were desired. The Third Annual Rat Factory Rallye was hosted by Doug Reid and Don Olsen pulled off Retrieval #8. Lehigh Valley put on the All Region Picnic in June with a great turnout by all of the regions.

Conclave-Encounter in July was deemed a grand success with over 500 registrations and 390 cars on display. There would have been more registrations but we ran out of registration packs on Saturday and the people kept coming in to see what was happening. The event was made even more memorable for some since it was also the first time that many of the attendees had seen Donald Healey in person. Other notables were Gerry Coker, a former Healey works man, and Louise King who owned the first Austin Healey in the United States. At the Board of Directors meeting, complete support of the proposed International Meet in Snowmass, Colorado was expressed and decision was made to proceed with ENCOUNTER '82, but in a low profile. The Board felt that there had to be a show for those not planning on attending Snowmass but did not want to promote it as an alternative thereby stealing attendance. The Philadelphia region was given approval to host the '82 ENCOUNTER which broke with tradition. Harrisburg, with Joan Null as Chairman, had been doing an outstanding job for four years but Philadelphia wanted to take a crack at it.

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August and September were active months for the club with the New Hope Auto Show and John Zimmer taking on the task of supplying judges and the Wogloms setting up the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Clambake. The August newsletter looked a little strange since 3/8 of an inch was trimmed off one edge. It seems that the postmaster weighed a copy to check the postage and found it to be too heavy for the stamp used. Our quick thinking and harried editor did not want to lick another 380 stamps since he was already late leaving for Conclave-Encounter so out came the paper cutter.

Demands on Jane Helgesen's time by her employer forced her to turn over the duties of Treasurer to Sue Morrison in September; a couple of months early for Sue's elected term in '82. In November 1981, a brand new region entered the ranks and called itself Pittsburgh with Karen and Gene Kline as their founding members.

The results of the regional and corporate elections for officers provided some new names for tenure during 1982. Corporate officers were John Morrison (President), Nina Null (Secretary), Priscilla Hooper (Treasurer) and Bill Bates (Newsletter Editor). The Presidents of the various regions were George Null (Harrisburg), Marv Gordon (Lehigh Valley), Paul Woglom (Philadelphia), Dave Ehret (Brandywine), Ben Cohen (North Jersey), Mike Haran (Long Island) and Gene and Karen Kline (Pittsburgh). Alas, 1982 also heralded the demise of the Potomac region. The people were still members but were too dispersed to maintain any regularity in meetings or events.

1982 brought with it some concern by the corporate leaders for the direction in which the club was headed. A questionnaire was published in the newsletter which asked the members to indicate what they wanted out of the club, what they liked and what they disliked. The intent was to improve the overall benefit to the membership by offering more of what they really wanted. The results of the survey indicated that there was a great desire to additional technical information. Subsequent to the survey, tech articles began to appear on a more regular basis.

Philadelphia was hard at work preparing for the ENCOUNTER they were hosting in August. Technology caught up with the Philadelphia region in February when Bob Ianelli and Jeff Smith presented a slide show tech session on tune-ups. They had gone through a complete tune-up on Bob's care and photographed the entire session to show at the monthly meeting. Del Border sent out a challenge to the other regions to have a gymkana at the York Fair in May. Everyone had been trying to beat Harrisburg at the Teamkana events and they wanted to see if there were really and serious challengers.

North Jersey agreed to sponsor the All-Region Picnic to be held in June. Doug Reid did another great job with the fourth annual Rat Factory Rallye at the end of April.

The International Meet was shaping up to be quite an event based on the reports at the beginning of June. There was a lot of information appearing in the various club newsletters about the International Meet, including an article on tuning the Healey for operation at the high (4-6000 foot) altitudes that would be found in Colorado. There were 335 registrations with people from Guam, New Zealand, England, Australia, Germany, Austria and Canada. There were even tentative plans for the English to bring some their cars. Over 200 people were signed up for the "Rallye to the Rockies" which looked like a treasure hunt requiring participants to purchase a newspaper in each city they passed and then change a spark plug and a tire when they arrived.

Several members of AHSTC attended the meet in Snowmass, including the Hoffers, Pepes, Joan Null, the Morrisons and Paul Wronski, and agreed that they had never seen so many Healeys in one place before in any condition. They brought back some good stories and a lot of pictures. The people who went to Snowmass ran into Healeys in several states (even found one sightseeing at some hot springs in Yellowstone national Park) and discovered clubs in North Texas and Oregon whose members brought some fine examples of the cars. Joan submitted a detailed diary of her trip and the Rallye to the Rockies with Paul Wronski to the newsletter which was published in August. They were traveling with Healeys from Washington and Virginia and met members of other clubs along the route who offered assistance and otherwise treated them royally. The Morrisons had the dubious honor of setting up and running the Regalia Store at the event with a lot of help from the AHSTC contingent and a few others. The store was a huge success and made a serious contribution to the financial success of the week long event.

One by-product of the enthusiasm of the International Meet was a letter by Carolyn Thompson relative to initiating a North American Austin Healey Club. The subject had come up on several occasions in the past but there had never been such a concentrated forum in which to pursue the idea. Carolyn met with all the club representatives at Snowmass and then published an open letter in all the newsletters with a plea to the individual members. AHSTC Board discussed the subject and decided to get feedback from the membership and hold off on the issue until additional information was available from Carolyn and the other organizers.

Right on the heels of the International meet came ENCOUNTER hosted by Philadelphia and held in the historic Valley Forge area. The overall event had a Philadelphia theme, which was a little different but still retained the cars at the center of attraction. Even though ENCOUNTER publicity was held to a minimum so as not to adversely affect the International Meet, the turnout was excellent with a good showing by all of the AHSTC and AHCA regions on the East Coast. In fact, AHCA members from South Carolina showed up en masse and practically walked away with all the car trophies. It was obvious, to the relief of the Harrisburg group, that other regions were capable of hosting an ENCOUNTER and North Jersey volunteered to co-host the 1984 event with Long Island.

1982 came to an end with a lot of activity within the club. John Morrison resigned as the Corporate President after six years in the office and was replaced by George Null. Harrisburg agreed to host the '83 ENCOUNTER in the Lancaster area. New officers for 1983 included region presidents Carol Hodgman (Long Island), Joe Pepe (Philadelphia), Steve Jekogian (North Jersey), Don Olsen (Harrisburg), Bobbie Jezerowski (Western PA), Bob Messinger (Lehigh

Valley), Sean O'Neil (Brandywine) and corporate officers Bill Bates (Newsletter Editor), Joe Pepe (VP Membership), Mike Haran (Secretary), and Priscilla Hooper as Treasurer. Sometime during 1982, the Pittsburgh region began calling itself Western Pennsylvania which was a little more descriptive of the territory serviced.

Another change occurred at the end of '82 which affected all the membership – the responsibility for maintaining the membership roster which was assumed by Joe Pepe of Philadelphia. John Morrison had been doing that task along with several others but could not continue. In the changeover of the computers, an error was made and the entire list was almost lost. However, by March of 1993, the list was sorted out and the labels for the newsletter were being printed properly.

Philadelphia disappeared from the newsletter for two or three months in 1983 due to some confusion over who the editor really was. Armand Gersbach finally picked up the gauntlet and finished out the year for the region.

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<sup>i</sup> Pacific Centre's Membership list was raided to get additional names for the newsletter mailing list.

<sup>ii</sup> There was some degree of indignation over the fact that the “father” of the Austin-Healey was subjected to such an inappropriate venue. The ‘banquet’ was Colonel Sanders’ take-out. Almost immediately, our members began talking about how much better a job could be done. Joan and George Null, veterans MG club gatherings, suggested that we as a club could do a first-class Healey Meet. Joan Null volunteered to chair the effort. Encounter was initially from a raffle for a piece of Pfalzgraff furniture, arranged by Paul Helgesen. Paul was also responsible for all the Encounter graphics designs, trophies, regalia and tee-shirts. Because of the uncertainty of the turnout for Encounter, it was decided to Not put dates on regalia items, for fear of ending up with a large inventory that couldn't be sold.

<sup>iii</sup> The newsletter continued in this mimeographed format through 1982 with continuing complaints from the membership regarding its' readability and durability, made worse from time to time by efforts to reduce production costs by reducing the type face size. This resulted in a popular movement to have a magnifying glass included in the newsletter mailing. Newsletter costs during this period consumed more than 50% of the membership fee, leaving little for other operating expenses and “regional rebates”.

<sup>iv</sup> The Potomac region was formed by a number of people belonging to The Capitol Area Club of AHCA. There appeared to be several different motivations involved in the formation of this region. Some of those involved were genuinely upset with AHCA policies and personalities, while others felt that cross-membership was the best way to work towards a merger of all the North American Healey Clubs into a single entity.