

Healey Club of America Conclave - June 24 – 29, 2007

Travels in our BLU HLY - 9th trip

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Our plan is to drive to the Healey Conclave hosted in Burlington, Vermont. We want to include several visits with friends and family along the way in Santa Fe, Virginia Beach, Syracuse, Vermont, a trek west across Ontario, Canada on scenic route 17 dropping down into Michigan on US 2 for Missoula, and Kennewick then onward for home. We are allowing five to six weeks for this extensive trip leaving early in case of weather or repair delays. We hope to improve our comfort and insure success with several improvements since last summer. Charlie installed a new front end, dependable fuel gauge, fuel-pressure gauge, upgraded windshield wiper system, and corrected the headlight wiring. The Wayfinder, a compass, altimeter and thermometer, is now mounted from the dash instead of by suction cups to the windshield, which caused a lot of vibration. I sewed a new cockpit cover. Now we have two, one as a back up. I cut an old style ventilated seat cushion in half making two back cushions to help circulate air between our shirts and the leather seats for the hot humid weather we anticipate.

Day 1, 6/5, Tuesday, Carpinteria, CA to Kingman, AZ, 410 miles, 10 hour day:

We've thought about this trip for months and now we're on our way starting out at 6:25 a.m., 57°. We're in a cool fog that lasts until Santa Clarita. By 11 we're on I-40 which will take us most of the way to Virginia. It's a typical summer ride east. We take advantage of the rest stops noticeable ahead as the only place with trees in this barren desert. We wet down our outer shirts and hats and keep our water bottles full. Charlie even pops the front-hinged hood, while driving, to aid the heater in lowering the radiator's 220° temperature. We stop for breakfast in Mojave at Denny's, topping off the tank at Chevron. We order tacos at Taco Bell in Needles cooling down in their air conditioning. Tomorrow I'll wear khaki slacks! I discover my thighs are mottled due to my black slacks affinity to today's ever-present sun. We gas up at Mobil. To create shade I hold the open atlas over my lap. Desert temperatures peak at 111° and winds are gusting over 50 MPH when we check into Kingman's Best Western at 4:15 p.m. The car is set for tomorrow's predawn start to Santa Fe after Charlie returns from Shell on Andy Devine/AZ 66. Next he adds more tie downs to the car cover that is slapping the fenders in this gale. No one need be envious of us today in this blast furnace weather. We enjoy a nice salad bar dinner at JB's next to our motel. It's a treat to have a computer notebook along although this room's internet-receptacle is broken. It's a comfortable room. We turn in early at 8 p.m.

Day 2, 6/6, Wednesday, Kingman, AZ to Santa Fe, NM, 517 miles, 10½hour day:

We slept well last night. I awoke before 3 a.m. At 4 we're on our way US 40 E. Dressed in double sweatshirts, the outer being a windbreaker on the reverse side to cut the wind, 57° is cold with wind chill. The headlights are great now. Dawn peeks over the horizon at 4:23. We stop for coffee in Seligman, but no shops have opened yet. In Ash Fork at a western themed Chevron Mini-Mart Charlie drinks coffee and I purchase a tube of Lipcare Sunblock to protect my lips burnt from yesterday's exposure. Wow, today is the windiest day I have ever been on the road, especially noticeable in our open car. It's mostly cross winds but we also drive into the wind, which Charlie notices slows our forward momentum. At Flagstaff, 7 a.m., in Denney's I have breakfast, Charlie coffee. I've become accustomed to the looks of bewilderment we get in our travel gear: long beaked white hats with back neck veils tucked into our buttoned up solar shirts, and golf gloves. It doesn't bother me as I stand in line to pay the tab while Charlie drives to the Shell station next door. Joining him I tuck a wool scarf under my sweatshirt and get my winter gloves from the suitcase. A lady in an RV at the next pump seems amused by us. We tie our double hoods tightly at our necks heading off

as the street sign above, nearly blown off its post, clatters in the wind. The winds are so wild at Continental Divide, NM's Chevron, 7275', while Charlie pumps gasoline I hold the boot lid downwards to prevent the blasts from twisting the lid off its hinges. Heading towards the Mini-Mart for a short break we hunch over into the wind. Our nylon slacks flap like a sail in a luff. A friendly cashier inside gazes through the glass door as entertained as though she's watching a cartoon. It's a challenge to just walk forward.

We stop the car occasionally to adjust to the weather. I pull out from the boot the bath towel we've fashioned with Velcro to hook to the underside of the dash in cold weather. It reaches from the dash to our waists, covering our laps, containing the heater's warmth to our legs. It feels good. Later we shed jackets as temperatures fluctuate replenishing our ice water supply when we can. It is interesting traveling today. High profile vehicles wisely pull over, mainly the deluxe RV's, clustering together on the paved shoulders. Most 18-wheelers continue on even though they are being pushed sideways without steering there. We drive through horizontal red dust storms all day. Tumbleweed sails by luckily not into our cockpit. There are two bizarre incidences. We are climbing a long slow hill behind a semi. Ahead we see a brown wind driven haze extending across US 40. When we reach this area it is as if we're inside a blender of dirt and cinder mulch especially with the extra turbulence the big rig in front of us creates. Chips are literally bombarding us from all directions leaving a mess in the cockpit, our pockets, creases in our clothing, even our mouths. This happens twice, the first time being the more dramatic. Quite a bit of roadwork is being done along I-40. The workers continue their job even in today's extreme conditions of heat and wind, which the news later reports actually registered 70 mph. Road work warning signs are leveled on their springy posts by the wind's constant gusts.

Something is beeping somewhere in our luggage. I check our cell phones for low battery and we try to think of any electronic device that would give off a signal. 107 miles into New Mexico we take our outer layer off, 87°. Several flashing Amber Alert signs warn of *statewide extreme wind conditions*. At 2:30 p.m. we're in heavy Albuquerque traffic. Taking I-25 N traffic and winds lighten. Temperatures are basically 57°, 80° and 98° as we proceed east. The wind stresses me a bit, but Charlie doesn't mind the challenging drive commenting, "It's pretty exciting out here!" Our car handles well with its low profile. It's great to finally arrive in Santa Fe, 3:30 p.m., 93°. The internet-hook up at this hotel is in the lobby. We send an email and better acquaint ourselves with the computer. Our friends drive down from their mountain home taking us to a favorite restaurant, Zia Diner. After a great evening visit we go to bed early falling asleep immediately after a long day of sun and wind.

Day 3, 6/7, Thursday, Santa Fe, NM, 1 mile:

We move leisurely on this scheduled day off. After breakfast in the lobby we plug into the Ethernet receptacle to check the weather we'll be encountering as we continue east. Thunderstorms are forecast all the way. Our progress would keep pace with this fierce weather pattern. We look at each other shaking heads negatively and agree to cancel our journey to Burlington. It would be just too hard to cope with such inclement weather in our open car. Then I think, why not go north instead and preserve the last leg of our original plans. Again the weather forecast is for thunderstorms to Montana, even snow in high elevations of Colorado and Wyoming. With rain also predicted in Santa Fe Saturday we decide to head back home on Friday. Since no one's waiting to use the computer hook up we linger choosing our motel for tomorrow night. Looking over our Rand McNally road atlas we decide to vary our return route traveling in new territory to us to Four Corners and the scenic Monument Valley in the Navajo Nation. I return to our room to do hand laundry, hanging it to dry on the shower rod while Charlie uncovers the car. We find a wand style do-it-yourself car wash, removing the seat cushions to vacuum up all the mulch chips deposited by yesterday's swirling winds. Using the soft scrub brush, cockpit cover on, we eliminate the fine red dust deposited

throughout the car. Once towed dry our Healey sparkles again. Next, at 11:40 a.m. we gas up at Smith's Food King. Across the street we lunch at a soup and salad buffet we've enjoyed before. Back in the hotel we spend more time on the computer. I cancel our Conclave Sheraton reservations in Burlington, VT, and phone my sister. Our abbreviated trip is worthwhile just to enjoy another evening with our friends, tonight at Guadalupe Café. We hear more details about their ongoing construction and the theory of their self-sufficient home, an earthship they've named Glenhaven, in the mountains of the Sangre De Cristo Range above Pecos. Next time we'll get up there to see their labor-intensive progress.

Day 4, 6/8, Friday, Santa Fe, NM to Kayenta, AZ, 396 miles, 10½hour day:

We slept fine, wake about 5 a.m., shower, have a light breakfast in the lobby, pack the car and set off, taking I-25 S, temperature 55° at 7:30. We see an attractive, unusual mobile home being transported. It resembles a traditional single story adobe, earth tones with a flat roof and silhouette copied from pueblos. It certainly will fit nicely into this landscape. Before Albuquerque at Bernalillo we head NW on US 550 relaxing into a lovely day, good temperature, scenic, scarcely populated with low traffic on a divided road. We're getting a lot of attention, which makes it fun. New Mexico is really pretty. Just before 10 we pull into Cuba for a tasty breakfast of eggs and biscuits at the Cuban Café. High shelves around the dining room display an impressive collection of toy trucks belonging to the owner's sons when they were youngsters. Framed photos celebrate some special family events. On one wall a December '05 newspaper article shows a locally selected tree loaded on a long flatbed truck wrapped in a sign "Nation's Christmas Tree". Native Americans on horseback escort the truck through Cuba as it starts its journey to Washington D. C. Cuba seems a friendly place. Our sun gear and Healey initiate rewarding conversations, which wouldn't occur if we were in our modern Toyota or Dodge. Our Healey trips are so much more memorable because we step back into the past. We've driven 1035 miles so far this trip, 78°. At Bloomfield US 64 W changes tempo to a populated corridor of towns and businesses with increased traffic. 11:54 a.m., in Farmington we top off the tank at a busy station where I'm charged for ice for our water bottles. After a slight detour south on US 491, due to my missing a road sign at Shiprock, we cross into the open spaces of Arizona. Shiprock is named for a massive jagged boulder formation, which dominates the plateau for miles resembling perhaps a tall schooner. Shortly we're at Four Corners, US 160 N. In the whole country this is the only intersection of four state's corners. We park and immediately tourists from several countries inquire about our transportation. Navajo sell handmade art from shaded booths. We eat an apple, chat with onlookers and take our turn standing on the Four Corners Monument for a photo op. We intend to visit the Cameron Trading Post tomorrow so no need to shop here.

Continuing on our scenic drive we're just briefly in Colorado, on the Ute Reservation, and nearly miss the turn to CO 41 NW; in Utah UT 162. The road here is fair with scant if any shoulder, one lane each direction. The vegetation is still quite bleak, elevation high. It's 27 miles to Montezuma Creek, a very small settlement. A jog in the road at the intersection with UT 262 makes us slow down to negotiate a corner turn. Just then the car's engine quits for no apparent reason. The car has gas and fuel pressure. Charlie and I push the Healey out of the westbound lane. Fortunately there is some sort of hauling business here and the 18-wheelers need a broad expanse of gravel to make their wide turns in and out of the facility, which is beyond our view. Immediately Charlie opens the bonnet to investigate. His tools are stored in a homemade circular box, which snuggles into the hub of the spare tire. We unload some luggage placing it in the passenger seat and onto the back shroud providing Charlie access to his tools. Fortunately the temperature is just 89°, bearable considering the 100° plus we had a few days ago. Traffic along this isolated stretch of 162 is steady but not busy. Several semis enter and exit the gates just behind us. Locals, travelers and

even the Navajo Police pass by a few feet away as though we're invisible. Our cell phone has zero reception here.

I attempt to follow Charlie's instructions holding a tool just so, using my body to create shade so I can look for a spark while he turns the ignition key and pushes the start button. As a man in a pickup approaches from the west Charlie raises a hand drawing his attention. This Good Samaritan stops and immediately offers help. Tom's "Fox Pumping Service" maintains equipment in the reservation oil fields. He's determined to get us driving again or else towed for repair. There are no auto parts stores for many miles. First standing beside Charlie they look in the engine compartment. Then he reassures us that he'll be back, not leave us stranded and takes off to borrow some tools from an acquaintance down the road. No luck, he's out of town today, but Tom has a few tools in his truck so working together they change the Pertronix, a module in the distributor, with the spare from Charlie's toolbox. Still no spark, therefore it must be the coil. As they continue working a white Mustang convertible coming south on UT 262 stops. Two gentlemen from Switzerland laugh as they take photos of our distressing situation. They find humor in our predicament only because they are relating to their own past troubles with vintage cars, an old Bentley and a Jaguar. Charlie and Tom are absorbed with the necessity of solving the Healey's electric problem, no time for small talk. I chat with the Swiss who wish us luck then continue on their nostalgic trip driving what remains of old Route 66, Chicago to Los Angeles. Tom takes off again. Another fellow isn't home either, but to get us on our way Tom scavenges a coil from a junk car parked there to improvise a fix for us. The insulation from the ends of a wire found in Tom's truck bed is stripped. Our coil's removed. The copper strands are twisted with the ignition wire to the non-threaded positive terminal of the borrowed coil. Electrical tape is used to secure the connections. Then this larger coil, designed for electronic ignition, which the Healey doesn't have, is attached with cable ties against the coil mount since it's too big to fit properly inside the bracket. The engine is ready to test and YES, we have ignition!

Thank you, thank you Tom! We hate to think of our dilemma if you hadn't been generous with your time, familiar with engines, persistent in problem solving and as caring about our safety as though we're family. The Healey was inoperable from 2 to 4 p.m. Tom helped us for 1½ hours postponing the 70 miles left on his drive home to Cortez, CO. We aren't the first fortunate travelers he has rescued either. Tom told us if we had left our car unattended we may have never seen it again, untraceable. He says our safety would be precarious too, a horrible thought. We hadn't considered our vulnerability when we naively drove into isolation far from cell reception. His wife's *OnStar* Security Service is also useless out here. I must have been shaken up more than I realized because few of the many photos I took and none of the notes I recorded on my small tape recorder during our breakdown survived. Charlie is calling this stop Montezuma's Revenge or are we in a Montezuma (Bermuda) Triangle that causes instruments to go haywire? With much gratitude to Tom we continue east to US 163 S.

Driving into Monument Valley we behold the majestic rock formations, so red and grand, without slowing down. We consider our misfortune and fortune, misfortune to breakdown. Fortune to quit where we did with at least room to pull out of traffic. In many stretches the reservation road has rugged terrain off pavement offering nowhere to park. It may have been even worse were we in high-speed traffic on the interstate when the coil gave out. Oh so fortunate we were to have a guardian angel stop and save the day. We need to remember to pass on a good deed when we have the chance. We reach Kayenta, AZ, 65 miles later where luckily yesterday we reserved tonight's room at Best Western. We look for an auto supply, but no dice. We check into the motel at 6:50 p.m. We made it this far but Charlie worries about the rest of our trip home and wants to purchase a proper coil so he can reconnect the cruise control. After unloading our gear for the night and covering the cockpit we walk next door to a diner for dinner. The motel's only computer hook up is in the swimming pool room. Children enjoy the water but the confines in this small

space and their enthusiasm make it loud, echolike, and difficult for me to concentrate. The father tries to keep his kids from splashing me. Another man seems to be waiting for a turn so I quickly type an email about today's trouble. The motel room is very nice with an excellent bed. We turn in early, sleeping well.

Day 5, 6/9, Saturday, Kayenta, AZ to Kingman, AZ, 397 miles, about an 8 hour day:

By 9:30 a.m. we've packed the Healey and checked out. At Kayenta Chevron, junction US 160 & US 163, Charlie tops off the gas tank. An Englishman remarks it's been 30 years since he's seen a Healey, "Good show!" The local dogs know where to keep cool resting in the shade of the overhead carport, not budging as folks straddle or lean over them to make payments or access the nozzles. The remaining 90 miles of 160 SW are frontier for us. I love exploring the U.S.A. Today's drive isn't spectacular like Monument Valley was, but is interesting. At one point on our left is a coal mining business. We presume the electric train rail on our right, originating here, has been built to transport the coal west for distribution. In Yuba City we check an auto parts shop but because of the coil's inflated price and questionable suitability we drive on. US 89's busy with lots of travelers and big rigs. We park at the busy Cameron Trading Post 17 miles south. The day has warmed up. After placing our breakfast order I get up studying the Navajo rugs displayed around the dining room. I'm pleased because I think our rug purchased in 2002 is the loveliest of them all. Our Navajo Taco order is so large even splitting one provides too much to finish. We quickly survey the craftwork in this fine trading post because we're eager to get back to civilization.

We make it to Flagstaff exiting BR 40/AZ 66 to a Checker Auto, which has the part Charlie needs. Consulting his Austin Healey Resource Book, a reference of national club members, he calls one of the two Flagstaff listings, George Castleberry, who has a BN1. Luckily he's home and will escort us to his house where Charlie can switch coils more conveniently. It's only a short distance to his beautiful home in the hills. Debbie Leavitt awaits our arrival with a long strip of cardboard ready to slip under the car between the wheels. Old British cars are notorious for oil leaks. This nice couple formerly from Chicago generously makes us feel welcome. Folding chairs are opened for us, cold water offered and George's toolbox opened. It doesn't take Charlie too long to complete the repair. They have a 1954 BN1 torn down and partially restored. Meanwhile to keep active in their club's events they enjoy their newer Sprite. Debbie, a graduate of Brooks Institute of Photography in Montecito, CA, knows Carpinteria. This was their first rescue call. It's been a pleasure to meet them, to hear their earnest desire to complete the BN1 restoration and get it back on the road. It will be a nostalgic car for them as it is the same year and model Healey George once owned long ago. Now confident to safely complete our journey home and with the convenience of cruise control we thank Debbie and George. We hope to see them again at some future Healey event. At Shell on 40/66 we gas up then enter the interstate. Flagstaff to Kingman is routine with heavy traffic, loud engine and tire noise, and temperatures climbing into the 100°s as we descend to the desert. I use my cell phone from the rest stop west of Flagstaff to make a room reservation for the same Kingman B W as Tuesday evening. Corvettes from a club show in Williams stream by. It's good to stop in Kingman for the night. We go for the salad bar at JB's again, send email and check the weather back east. It was wise to halt in Santa Fe. Charlie finds a humorous blooper program on television and we both have some much-needed laughs.

Day 6, 6/10, Sunday, Kingman, AZ to Carpinteria, CA, 410 miles, 9 hour day:

We enjoy the nice room and fine continental breakfast. While getting gas at Shell across the street Charlie discovers the source of the mysterious intermittent beep. At slow speed we can hear the steering wheel hub squeaking. A little oil once we're home will cure it. At 7:45 a.m., 66° we're off on I-40 W to retrace our first day in reverse dull and hot. At 8:35 it's already 93°. It's going to be one hot day out here in no-man's-land. Temperatures climb 94°, 96°, 98°, 100° and we can feel each 2° difference. We pass long,

long trains loaded with containers and trucks powered by 4 to 6 locomotives. The hot air circulating about as we travel makes us drowsy as though we're under a hairdryer. We exit every rest stop. Once we park other travelers congregate to converse about our car and outfits. We fill up in Barstow at a Chevron then proceed on CA 58. Meager traffic steadily increases. At Mojave we take our usual break in Denny's. Charlie drinks iced coffee. I fill two of my drinking bottles with their ice water. CA 14 S towards Santa Clarita has heavy aggressive traffic compensated for by more friendly attention from passing vehicles than we've had on all of the rest of the trip put together. Genuine spontaneous smiles, waves, thumbs up, and photos taken from cell phones and cameras make us laugh and enjoy even this precarious highway driving. Nearing Santa Clarita we take a surface street short cut to avoid I-5, making our way to CA 126 where the cool ocean atmosphere of Ventura awaits us. 69°, relieved to be home again our next-door neighbor greets us glad we've returned early. Tired and hungry, without food in our cupboards, we go to a popular local restaurant, the Palms, without even cleaning up. Our total trip mileage is 2029. We purchased 83 gallons of gas the highest price Needles, CA at \$4.10 and lowest price Flagstaff, AZ at \$3.40. Our trip average is 24.4 MPG.

The next week:

We learn more each trip. The car packed better than ever. We need even less clothes than I brought this time. The ventilated backrests were effective in the heat. To help restart the car in hot temperatures, after we'd taken a break, Charlie poured water over the carburetors to cool the fuel inside them. This worked each time. In the future when we want to experience a remote place we'll try to caravan there with a friend as a precaution. It was a reality check to realize the convertible top is necessary to handle the variety of weather encountered in a cross-country excursion.

Slowly we're settling back into rhythm here at home. We were tired in the evenings but are in sync now. Charlie is again working on his cars. The BN1 engine has a head gasket leak. He's now installing a heat shield to see if that will solve the starting difficulty on hot days. I went to my monthly quilt guild meeting hoping to win the block of the month drawing. I haven't been chosen yet this year and I'm working on several blocks to increase my opportunity in July. We aren't too disappointed the original trip was canceled. The itinerary was so ambitious and heavy rains would have dampened the drive as well as our spirits. I now understand and recognize the logic to trailer a Healey behind a modern, climate controlled dependable vehicle. It makes sense to get beyond boring terrain on interstates, through horrific weather to scenic wonderlands to then tour in a vintage car. Distant destinations become obtainable in greater comfort.

We hope fair weather greets the Conclave participants in Burlington and wish them a wonderful time. We're enjoying reading a travelogue of two couples headed there from Albuquerque. They've had many similar Healey inconveniences balanced by the reward of amiable recognition as we've also experienced. Even with roof and side curtains they got wet during rain showers from leaks. They need *inside* windshield-wipers, have persistent restarting troubles in the heat, and noisy congested interstates annoy them. Panoramic open roads are their preference. Their itinerary included factory tours, museums and former neighborhoods. I'm noting the routes they've especially enjoyed. Their "Burlington or Bust Blog" is posted on the British Car Forum. It makes me wish we were on the road again making memories in our Healey, at a gathering with friends we've met from former events and meeting car enthusiasts along the way.

Thanks to Debbie Leavitt, a professional photographer, we have a great picture for our album of us in the Healey as we departed. We've mailed the borrowed coil back to Tom Fox and hope the owner wasn't inconvenienced by its disappearance. Preferring the wind and expansive views we'll continue to tour as a roadster, our ragtop to remain at home. We realize a sense of accomplishment and delight journeying the entire distance in the Healey. Northwestern byways remain our first choice for travel in our favorite car, BLU HLY. Maybe we'll go that way yet before autumn! Until next time happy traveling, Carol & Charlie