

Allen Hendrix Practices “Black Art” of Taking the Shake

Story and photos Glenn Hudson

Austin-Healeys shake and rattle when you drive them. That’s just the way they are made.

But Allen Hendrix never believed it, and he sure as heck never liked it. So he decided to do something about it.

Hendrix started learning the “black art” of taking the shake out of a Healey when he was trying to get his own car sorted out. After having some success, he then started doing it for club members in the Triad Austin-Healey Club. Now, it’s a full-blown business in Greensboro, N.C., called Hendrix Wire Wheel.

“It is true that our old cars are made quite a bit differently than cars of today,” said Hendrix, 51, who has been working on Healeys for more than 30 years, most of that time as a hobbyist. “On most cars I see, the spokes or the nipples are not in place, the drive shaft isn’t balanced, and neither are the brake drums.

“A lot of times the tires are not even round. Tires have improved dramatically over the years, but they are still a molded item, and they are not perfectly round. On a new car with a modern suspension, you’ll never feel the difference. But in a Healey with an old suspension, you’ll feel every one of those imperfections.”

About five years ago, Hendrix sold his successful printing company to take

life at a slower pace. At the time, he hadn’t driven his Healey in two years because he was so busy. He wanted a change of pace. That’s when he started helping fellow club members with their cars. But then he got so busy “getting the shake out,” that he decided to start a new business doing what he loved. Now Hendrix Wire Wheel is approaching its fourth year of operation.

While Hendrix had to learn the “old-timers” skills needed to true wire wheels, and to balance drive shafts and brake drums, and shave tires, he discovered that having the right equipment to complete these tasks was one of the biggest obstacles to getting the job done. That’s where fate lent him a hand.

Hendrix has a friend who is in the business of repairing and restoring tire-balancing equipment. He turned out to be a gold mine for all the old “factory” parts that he needed.

“That’s where I got my European-style tire moulder that won’t put too much pressure on the wheel, which leads to bent spokes,” said Hendrix, who became an enthusiastic buyer for all that old equipment that modern tire stores no longer needed or wanted. “He found me two brand new adapters for my balancing machine that were specifically made to balance the wheels on Jaguar 150s. A lot of my stuff came from him.”

Hendrix was also able to modify his equipment so that it was more appropriate for British wire wheels. Not only does he have adapters for British wire wheels, he can even attach steel wheels and drums to the balancer using the existing bolt holes actual lug nuts, so he can balance the wheel or drum the same as if it was on the car. That makes all the difference in the world,

especially when you consider that many British steel wheels from the 50s and 60s had a center hole that wasn’t precisely located in the center of the wheel due to the manufacturing techniques of the time.

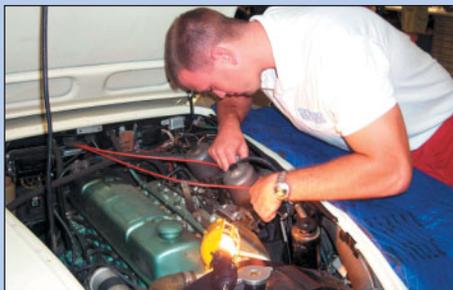
Moreover, Hendrix can be more precise than ever before, thanks to some re-wiring work done to the balancer that enables him to take readings to one-hundredth of an ounce, rather than the typical one-quarter of an ounce that can be taken by current, modern balancers.

“Precision counts, especially with brake drums” said Hendrix. “Plus, I can switch back and forth on my readings with just a flip of a switch depending on what I’m trying to balance.

“The factory used 40,000 of an inch as the factory specs for wheel movement



Jerry Anderson helps prepare new wire wheels to be shipped to customers. Silicone on the inside of the wheel prevents the spokes from getting greasy.



Chance Hendrix has joined his father’s business and helps with the service, repair and restoration of Austin-Healeys.