

## **The Saga of an old Race Car**

Another 100S has been advertised for sale. This one, AHS 3804, is more interesting than some cars because there is controversy around the race history claimed for the car.

Any 100S is a very special car by the very nature of it being purpose 'built for racing'. What can further add to its value is any significant race history (its successes and failures) combined with race drivers and varied characters involved with the cars life. Some are therefore more special than others.

For a long time confusion has reigned over the true identity of the 'production' 100S, chassis number AHS 3804. Claims have been made for AHS 3804 with regard to the early racing history of a Donald Healey Motor Company (DHMCo) prototype 100/100M/100S, - in particular, chassis number SPL 224B, better known by its registration number, NOJ 391. In particular this cars race history has been claimed through 1953 & 54. Additionally, there are claims as to events where Special Test cars OON 440 and OON 441 were documented as the legitimate entries.

Here I should take a moment to explain 100S chassis number terminology as this will assist readers to understand the significant difference between production 100S and Special Test cars. The production cars were built in five chassis sequences from AHS 3501-10, AHS 3601-10, AHS 3701-10, AHS 3801-10 and 3901-10. Whereas Special Test cars, maintained and campaigned by the DHMCo, their chassis numbers were prefixed SPL. In the case of NOJ 391, the chassis number is SPL 224 B.

It is no secret I have always had a different view as to the identity of AHS 3804. Indeed I always have maintained that NOJ 391 and AHS 3804 were entirely separate cars. This was reflected in the 100S Register compiled by me and released in 1975. The 100S register was the first time the original DHMCo records were united with current and historical information known about the individual cars up to that time.

Certainly AHS 3804 is a very special 100S. My interest is only to ensure all involved have access to the full facts to make their own judgement on the race history attributed to a particular Special Test chassis number. This will be done by providing comment on, and interpretation of, the DHMCo's own documentation from the period, combined with evidence from a range of sources which will be quoted.

My belief is some people when considering the race history of AHS 3804 have not viewed it in the context of the entire four year 100S program. Rather they just focussed on one car and scanned Special Test car race entries for similarities - as if to find a rough fit - much of it illogical as I will show.

When looking at the DHMCo's race programs what needs to be factored in is the operating environment. This was of a small, motivated team retaining a high degree of flexibility to allow rapid responses to competing on two continents. All this was achieved with a limited number of cars, often within very tight timeframes, while based on an island somewhere in between.

How can AHS 3804 claim most of the early history of SPL 224 B (NOJ 391) when NOJ 391 existed as its own separate identity up until at least 1964? Bill Emerson's recent book 'The Healey Book' features DHMCo documentation, copies of confidential internal memos, on pages 120 and 125, showing AHS 3804 and NOJ 391 existing independently in the Special Test program. NOJ 391 was retained by the DHMCo late into 1956 before being sold off. The fact NOJ 391 had an active race career at club level in England after disposal by DHMCo should be well known. Photos have regularly featured in American Austin Healey Club magazines and more recently in a number of books on Austin Healeys in support of this. Furthermore, documentation shows that NOJ 391 sharing the same race event with AHS 3804 at the end of NOJ 391's career as a factory entry! (There is evidence supporting the view this event was in fact AHS 3804's international debut). This would be clearly evident to anyone conducting proper research.

*By way of background to my own 100S research I need to go back to 1971 when I owned AHS 3701, the first 100S to race in Australia. The car was purchased completely disassembled and there was very little information available locally on the cars. To remedy the situation I started a 100S Register to locate and record all the cars and document their histories. I wrote to the DHMCo seeking any assistance they could provide. For me this was the logical place to start.*

*In 1973 I went to England on a working holiday and lived in London. By September 1973 I managed to find my way to Warwick visiting Bic and Geoff Healey. It was around three on a Friday afternoon and I was lucky enough to spend time with them both and a number of the staff who had been there for years such as Geoff Price. We spent time discussing the 100S Register as it had progressed somewhat over the two years I had been working on it.*

*Because of my interest in all Healey information Bic and Geoff asked if I would be interested in 'sorting out' the DHMCo company records! Many records from the Austin Healey period had just been stored away in boxes. I drove away with a car boot full of boxes containing documents and photographs covering racecars, record breaking, rallying and Sprites.*

*This 'sorting out' work took me some eighteen months and involved regularly visiting Geoff, Bic and the remnants of the original team in Warwick, usually on Saturday mornings. I developed a particular interest in works cars, especially the 100S works cars. A lot of time also was spent following up the 100S team members. People such as Lance Macklin, Roger Menadue, Jim Cashmore and Geoff Price. In fact anyone associated with the 100S program right down to parts suppliers and past owners. In many cases I was able to meet successive owners after Healeys disposed of the cars. All to seek their experiences, stories, photos and details on the cars – any parts were a bonus.*

*At the time I was keen to write a profile on the 100S. However, the more I researched and contemplated the task the more I became convinced it should be done by Geoff or Bic Healey. It is interesting now to look back at the level of detail in my hand written notes. More interesting today than it was then.*

*The fascinating thing about the DHMCo at the time of the Special Test/100S program was the results achieved by a relatively small team. It helped enormously of course to*

*have a relatively free hand with a big parent in Austin with its clout and resources backing them, particularly the strong dealer network. Donald Healey must have thought he hit the jackpot with the deal he negotiated with Austin. He was free to race and sell the brand, with relatively little worries relating to the production side. Naturally, there was an acute responsibility to achieve results and provide feed back into the production line from the race program. There were ongoing ideas for future model development, producing a myriad of interesting prototypes. A forte!*

Let's return now to AHS 3804 and show why here should be no confusion as to its true identity.

Firstly, consider the claim AHS 3804 was a 1955 Mille Miglia entry. The actual records show;

<b>Date</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Car #</b>	<b>Driver</b>
May 1955	Mille Miglia	#700	George Abecassis

The 1955 Mille Miglia entry for George Abecassis is and always has been attributed to SPL 257 BN, (OON 440). This must be regarded as one of the standout drives in any Austin Healey. To **average** 92 Miles an hour for 450 miles on 1955 standard public roads in Italy is difficult to contemplate, even today.

Geoff Healey's own documents show in April, 1955, the chassis which would become AHS 3804 was lying idle in the DHMCo workshop incomplete. Geoff Healey indicated this in a May 1990 letter to the owner, Fred Hunter. Geoff said; "the car was completed as a 100S in October, 1955." Therefore it would have been impossible for this car to run in the 1955 Mille Miglia in 100S configuration. Keeping in mind that if the car was completed as a 100S in October, 1955 it must have been in 100 configuration, as all Special Test cars started life. OON 440 (SPL 257 BN) ran the event in full works trim as evidenced by numerous photographs of the car at the time.

Why was chassis 3804 lying idle in the DHMCo workshop? This was due to it being a reserve chassis - one of two reserve chassis built in sequence with the Special Test cars for the 1954 race program. Note AHS 3804 was sold off, along with AHS 3601, at the end of the program some three months after the last of the 'production' 100S.

Chassis 3804, in April 1955 was clearly in 100 configuration, as were all Special Test cars at the start of their life. They tended to be built into 100S configuration as required. This commenced late in 1954 as the specification for the 100S was finalised. There were only a few exceptions but this is not relevant to 3804.

I received a letter in October 1972 from Bic Healey, on behalf of Geoff, stating in part;

" We did in fact build 52 cars, as at the planned run of 50, we found we has sufficient bits and pieces to build another two cars and sufficient demand to have built another 2,000."

Those two cars built out of 'bits and pieces' were AHS 3601 and AHS 3804. DHMCo memo dated 10<sup>th</sup> October 1955 details both of these chassis; odd for what were otherwise 'production' cars. The basis of these cars was the two surplus early Special Test chassis and in doing so they assumed 'vacant' production chassis

numbers. The reason why those numbers were vacant has no relevance to this story, and is a story to be told at another time. This memo clearly shows NOJ 391 and its fellow Special Test cars happily in existence.

Again, let's look at three other claims for 3804;

<b>Date</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Driver</b>
? 1955	Prescott H/C (Not possible-car incomplete, see notes above)	
? 1955	Shelsey H/C (Not possible-car incomplete, see notes above)	
December 1955	Nassau Trophy	Stirling Moss

The Donald Healey Motor Company entry for the 1955 Nassau Trophy in fact was SPL258 BN (OON 441). This is clearly evident from the Donald Healey Motor Co memo dated 10<sup>th</sup> October 1955 signed by Geoffrey Healey. This memo shows OON 441 as being shipped for the 'forthcoming races' (in America).

Contemporary race reports in Sports Car Illustrated for the Nassau Trophy with colour photos show a dark Spruce Green 100S, driven by Stirling Moss, registered number OON 441. Stirling did not race a red 100S in this event. As for evidence of pale green paint underneath the red paint of AHS 3804, simply all Special Test cars were pale green in 100 configuration. (A major advantage when NOJ 391 was crashed prior to the 1953 le Mans race and the cars identity was switched to NOJ 393 which ran in its place.)

Among my collection of 100S photos from 1955 Nassau I have two of OON 441, the event in question, including one in colour. Both photos were taken at almost the same instant but from opposite directions. There is Stirling Moss in OON 441 limping back to the pits with a collapsed left-hand stub axle - an unfortunate mishap that over the years Stirling has reminded me of on a number of occasions. This failure was due to incorrect heat treatment of the stub axles, a common problem with 100S. When near new in Portugal my own car, AHS 3807, broke a stub axle on the same side resulting in some minor panel damage.

Again, at the Sebring 12 Hour in May 1956 the Donald Healey Motor Company ran two of their own cars - SPL 224 B (NOJ 391) and SPL 257 BN (OON 440). AHS 3804 was the entry for Ship and Shore Motors and for this event would be regarded as a works supported entry. Alec Ulmann's book "The Sebring Story" contains photos of car 29, OON 440 (spinning) and 30, NOJ 391. AHS 3804 is featured in photos I have from this event running as number 31 with a broad white centre stripe on its red bodywork - the only red 100S running in the event. Phil Stiles and George Huntoon in 3804 did well to finish 11<sup>th</sup> overall against much more powerful opposition in this World Sports Car Championship event.

Clearly at Sebring in 1956 NOJ 391 and AHS 3804 were both on the same circuit. Following this event AHS 3804 continued to be campaigned in the USA while NOJ 391 returned to England with the team. Like the other Special Test cars, NOJ 391 was subsequently sold off at the end of the program, some as late as 1957. NOJ 391 was raced successfully in mainly club events through to 1964 when at a Silverstone club event it crashed during practice with fatal results. In 1974 I tracked back through the owners and was fortunate enough to purchase the works engine, Aston Martin

gearbox and eventually the oil cooler - the only items to survive from the wreck of a car with a history of just being plain unlucky, crashing many more times than any other works race car.

So I have shown both cars existed at the DHMCo from early 1954 to late in NOJ 391's career. Also, the chassis which would subsequently become AHS 3804 had remained an incomplete Special Test chassis/body unit from 1954 through to late 1955. At that time it was completed as a surrogate 'production' 100S to be sold off to satisfy latent demand at the end of the program.

NOJ 391 was badly damaged during the 1954 Tour de France resulting in a double fatality. A photo of the wreck appears in the book "Tour de France Auto". The car was at the time in 100 configuration and following the accident it remained at the DHMCo until well into 1955 when it was rebuilt as 100S. NOJ 391 retained its identity throughout its career and appears on DHMCo's race car 'stocktake' documentation for November, 1954, October, 1955 and July, 1956. These documents show there is no credible evidence NOJ 391's identity was assumed into AHS 3804.

As a matter of interest the other early Special Test chassis reserve which subsequently became AHS 3601, was written off in the late Sixties in New Zealand.

Surprising, relatively few 100S were totally written off considering many had very hard lives. The superstitious among us would see AHS 3601 was the only black 100S, and with NOJ 391, the 391 added up to an unlucky 13. Unlucky black for a race car and 13, might be something in it?

**Joe Jarick**