

# DR HALDANE? I PRESUME...



*Has the Haldane lost its way, or is it making steady progress? Ewan Scott plays reporter Stanley*

**D**eep in the industrial heartland of Lanarkshire lies Blantyre, the birthplace of the intrepid Scots explorer David Livingstone, that's right, the one who got lost. Blantyre also happens to be the home of the Haldane 100. Last featured in Kit Car of July '88, I had heard little of the Haldane since then, and wondered if it, like the good Doctor, had lost its way.

### **Desirable Cars**

The Haldane is not quite a replica of the Austin Healey first produced in 1953 and a classic of its day. The original





Healey was built at a time when Austerity measures were still in force and materials such as steel were distributed according to the export revenue the end product would achieve. Thus, of the 11000 Healeys produced between 1953 and 1956, some 90% were for the export market where the car became very popular. As a result of this, there was a scarcity of such vehicles in the home market and they have always been desirable cars. Lately the increase in value and collectability of older classical cars has seen the price of second hand Healeys shoot skywards with the outcome that the cars are being bought as an investment rather than as motors to be driven, as few people would risk wrapping their £20,000 nest-egg around a lamp-post.

Enter the Haldane 100. It is close enough to the original to be mistaken for one, and it has sound two seater sports car handling. It is also capable of being put on the road for around £5,000, making it an interesting alternative to the original.

The manufacturers of the Haldane,



Haldane Developments Ltd. are actually Brian Harrison, engineer, boat builder and ex microlite designer, and Alisdair Scott with lots of letters after his name which tend to indicate a slightly more scientific training than is normally associated with those who sink their life savings into kit manufacturing projects. The business has the advantage of being an associate company of John Haldane Ltd. a substantial group of firms which includes amongst its trades a Rover main dealership, and a Unipart distribution centre. This has allowed the Haldane to be developed without the bugbear of every small businessman, cashflow problems; at least it has created a buffer to make life easier.

### Rare longevity

The Blantyre workshop of Haldane Developments is a tidy little unit, furnished with only the tools required to carry out the task of building the chassis and modifying the mechanical parts as necessary. This lack of spurious equipment indicates a planned approach to the building of cars, rather than the haphazard attack which results in workshops littered with 1001 pieces of little used and obsolete tooling.

When I visited the workshop there was a chassis sitting on the jig ready for welding. Close inspection of the chassis revealed that before welding, all joint faces were accurately cut and flush fitting with no gaping holes to be filled with weld. Any single piece of the frame could be removed and replaced with another of the same lot with no difference in fit. The main 'rails' of the ladder frame chassis are fabricated from 80x40mm 3.2mm square section steel, with all the mounting points set up at the jig stage. When the chassis has been welded up it is then galvanised. The combination of 3.2mm wall steel and galvanising must give the Haldane's chassis a longevity rare in modern motoring.

The body is a close relative to the Austin Healey 100, with the addition of a body line running from the rear wing to behind the front wheel arch; that and the addition of indicator lights are the most noticeable differences between the Healey and the Haldane. The semi

monocoque body includes wood/glass bonding in the scuttle area and sills, with areas of coremat, woven roving and uni-directional reinforcement. The bodyshell incorporates three bulkheads for added rigidity, two under the scuttle and one rear of the seats. The whole structure is attached to the chassis by some 32 mounting points, ensuring that it does not sail off at a tangent when cornering at speed. Boot, bonnet and door panels are reinforced for rigidity, whilst you can order your bonnet with a double row of louvres, the rear six of which are open to improve airflow and cooling. The body comes as a shell with doors, bonnet and boot, so there is no problem with panel fit. Turned edges to the body mouldings impart extra strength to otherwise weak areas of the structure. The actual finish to the bodywork appears to be of a high standard with no airholes or thin spots. Taking a grip of the shell by the rear corner and lifting does not cause the body to flex. The body is finished in deflashed white gel coat as standard, although a polished gel coat finish is available as an option as is a two pack paint finish.

In order to keep to the original track and wheelbase the Haldane utilises the Chevette suspension, the front cross member simply bolting in place on the chassis. The rear axle however requires some modification, being adapted to take upper and lower trailing arms and coil-over-shock suspension units. Front spring rates are revised and adjustable shock absorbers fitted, permitting the exact setting of the suspension.

The recommended power unit is a Ford 2 litre engine, and a new propshaft and drive flange to the rear axle are supplied as standard, but can be modified to suit different engine/gearbox combinations.

Trim components for Healeys are still available off the shelf and fitting original parts to a Haldane car adds to the period image of the kit. Mind you, the grille can set you back around £150. If the budget for building the car does not run to original parts, it is possible to do a good look-alike with aftermarket products and a bit of initiative.

Weather equipment includes a tonneau cover, soft top and sidescreens. A new

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hardtop is available for the Haldane; this is in fibreglass and is from a mould taken from an original part, so the end product retains every stitch and slight imperfection of the original, and is in demand by Healey owners, the original hard tops becoming akin to hen's teeth and twice as expensive.

The windscreen on the Haldane is the same as the Healey and is readily obtainable. It is mounted in pillars of cast alloy which come as rough castings and need a great deal of elbow grease to bring to an acceptable standard. A big problem with polishing an alloy casting is that it contains imperfections and often as not little air holes, so that rubbing down the casting can bring these imperfections to light, ruining an otherwise serviceable component and wasting many hours of manpower. The casting does however look respectable enough with a painted finish.

Before building a Haldane you need to collect the required mechanical gubbins to make it go, usually a case of finding a donor car with serviceable running gear. This is not the case when deciding to build one of these machines. The builder is supplied with a complete parts shopping list indicating what is needed and from which car it can be obtained. The game is then a combination of searching scrapyards for bits such as axles and trying to explain to the nice parts man at your local garage what it is that you are looking for. Fortunately, Brian and Alisdair can source most parts for the customer, for the cost plus a once only fee of £30.

## Mechanical gubbins

Customers can walk in and order a car, take delivery and never meet the manufacturer again, but Brian fully expects to have a three year contact with every customer, from first enquiry to complete on-the-road vehicle. That is not to say that it takes three years to build a Haldane 100, but rather that the actual build takes as much time as the builder wishes to put into it. However, Haldane Developments do not expect to sell a car to every customer on first viewing, nor do they expect to sell the kit and forget all about it.

## Fiftie's Style

From a distance the Haldane 100 looks like a '50s sports car, more so if it has a two-tone paint job. The demonstrator fitted with an original bumper just looks the part, and it has the correct line, steel wheels and chromed hubcaps. The design shouts 1950s from all angles, making it one of very few kits in the style of that era. Reaching through the side screen and pressing down on the door operating cable lets the door swing open, giving access to the cockpit. The driver has to step into the car and sit down. Down being the operative word, as, once lodged in the bucket seats, the occupants are given a strong feeling of sitting *in* rather than *on* the car.

Interior trim on the demonstrator is basic, one is tempted to say primitive, but on reflection anything more than basic trim would seem out of place in this otherwise '50s car. Add to this the hard driving that the car has seen and the appearance becomes acceptable. Actually the wear and tear on this car adds to the impression that it is the real thing; after all, who ever drove a 35 year old car that had no sign of use? Storage space, as is usual with two seater sports cars, is at a premium. The boot will hold a sizeable suitcase, but filling the boot with luggage means either keeping the soft top on, or taking the chance of getting wet. On the other hand these are the sorts of things that owners of such vehicles learn to accept, so does it really matter?

## Four wheel drift

The demonstrator is fitted with a silver seal Ford 2 litre engine, the only modification being the fitting of a Fish Carburettor, a rather basic but effective device of American ancestry and sadly no longer easily available. This gives the Haldane 100 an amazing amount of low down torque, so flooring the throttle at low revs sends the Haldane rocketing along the road, taking it easily up to cruise

at 80mph on 4000 revs. Stopping the car courtesy of the Chevette braking is undramatic with no sign of dive, a sign that the suspension set up is correct for the vehicle. The car can be powered round corners with little sign of body roll, the heavy chassis and low slung body ensuring a low centre of gravity. This flat cornering is an incentive to put more power on than is required by anyone driving in normal conditions, but the car takes it well, slowly moving into a controlled four wheel drift, with absolutely no sign of losing grip.

Sadly on this occasion time was at a premium and I did not spend as much time driving the car as I would have liked, although on the taster that I did have I would imagine that a run down to the Borders is the test that this car really needs.

The Haldane 100 has been in production now for just over a year, and some 17 examples have been sold, which in terms of some manufacturers' output is not a lot, but this is a car which really does feel as good as it looks: it has character, feel and style. I am pleased to be able to report that the Haldane 100 has not followed in the footsteps of David Livingstone, although I hope that one day it will be as much an everyday name as that of the happy wanderer.

