

Allen Hendrix Practices “Black Art” of Taking the Shake Out

Story and photos Glenn Hudson

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

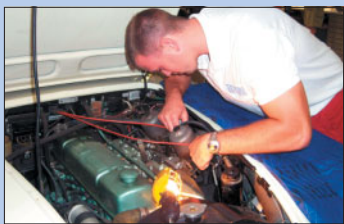
But Allen Hendrix never believed it, and he sure as heck never liked it. So he decided to do something about it.

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



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

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 mounter 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,



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.

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

up and down and in and out – that’s off the assembly line. We get it down to perfect. Everything is adjustable. You can do it. You gap your points to 15,000 of an inch, so there is no reason you can’t get the wheel perfect.”

The spinning razor blade that is affixed to the tire shaver is one of the most important tools in Hendrix’s shop. It is used to take the high and spots off tires, whether they are used or new, and the difference is amazing on the highway.

“You will feel the highs and lows in a tire,” said Hendrix. “If things aren’t right, you’ll feel a leaf if you run over it going down the road. Most people think there is something wrong with the suspension, but it’s usually because everything is so out of balance.”

Things are going so well at Hendrix Wire Wheel that Allen has expanded the business during the past two years to include service and restoration of Austin-Healeys. Although, his emphasis is on quick service, “just as if you were taking your car back to the original dealer,” he said.

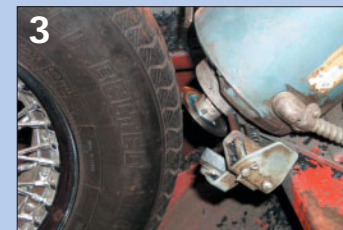
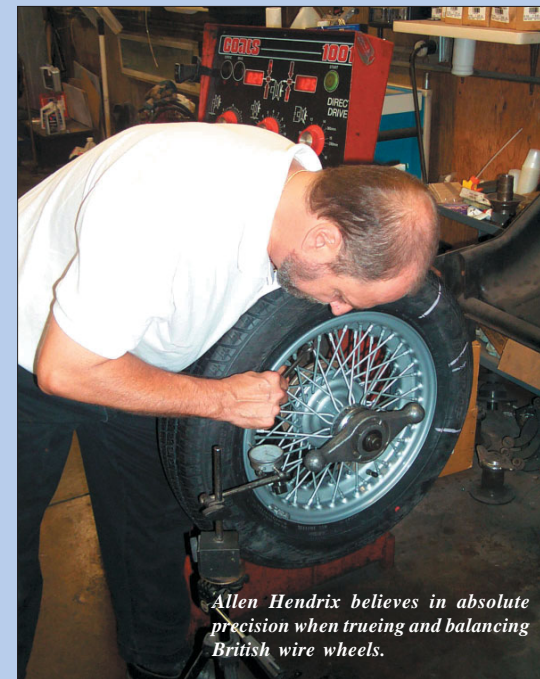
“We saw the need for repairs that needed to be done quickly to get people back on the road. Many shops that work on British cars are backed up for weeks or months and can only do work for you when they can get to it. But we take appointments and try to get minor repairs or service done in a day so our customers can get back on the road.”

His longtime friend and fellow Healey enthusiast Jerry Anderson, 68, who has been working on Healeys for 40 years, joined the company to help with the workload. More recently, Hendrix’s son, Chance, 25, joined the family business to follow in his father’s footsteps.

Allen Hendrix believes in absolute precision when truing and balancing British wire wheels.

“With him coming in, I know this won’t die,” said Hendrix, of the “black art” of getting the shake out of Healeys. “We think we’ve found everything that makes a Healey shake, and our job is to true it out, balance it out or shave it out.”

For more information, visit them at hendrixwirewheel.com.



1. Hendrix Wire Wheel has adapters for virtually any type of British wire wheel. 2. Wheels or drums can be mounted to the balancer using lug nuts to perfectly mimic how they will behave on the car. 3. Shaving the high points off tires is key to getting the shake out. 4. Hendrix Wire Wheel has a European-style tire mounter that won’t bend the spokes on a wire wheel.