

A series on Concours
Part III
Car Shows – Concours & Popularity
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Now it's time to shift gears and get into what car shows are about and how all this might relate to your car. An underlying theme is still *information*. I will also describe Concours judging and how a Concours event is planned.

Everyone likes their car to be admired. Shiny paint and chrome are the most obvious attention-getters, and any older car will garnish attention from passers by wherever it shows up. But at an Austin-Healey event the primary audience is other owners like yourself, and these folks are more sophisticated (in varying degrees) than the normal pedestrian off the street, so their "approval" means even more to you.

So car shows at Austin-Healey events receive a lot of attention and a high degree of participation. Unfortunately many Healey owners don't fully appreciate the nature of these shows and become discouraged when they don't win an award.

Two types of displays have existed for decades: Popular Choice and Concours. Popular Choice is just what its name says – people vote for the car they *like* best. Quality of workmanship will certainly be a factor in the voter's selection, but accuracy or originality will not necessarily matter that much. Also, some colors, such as Red, Healey Blue, or the darker shade of British Racing Green are more numerous so they don't stand out as much as less common colors such as Pacific, Florida, or Spruce Green, the early more yellow shade of British Racing Green, Primrose, or Golden Beige Metallic (not to mention Coronet Cream on some 100s).

And if cars in these more unusual (but still original, on certain models) colors also have well done trim, they create an even stronger attraction for receiving votes. In fact, at the extreme, a carefully-done car in an eye-catching combination of non-standard colors of paint and trim can easily stand out to its benefit.

Thus, you could have the most accurately and perfectly restored car entered in Popular Choice and not even come up with third or fourth place, depending on how many other really nicely done cars are entered in your class, and the colors they are done in.

Concours, on the other hand, focuses attention on originality *and* quality of restoration. Certain period accessories are allowed (if documentation exists to show they were offered when the car was new), and an individual car's provenance and well documented condition prior to restoration are acceptable means to validate any details that are unusual or differ from the way most versions of that model were made.

However, "glitz" and over-restoration are not rewarded, and may even be penalized. The truly fine examples are cars that not only have the more obvious items done correctly and

to a high level of quality, but which can also serve as encyclopedic references for how most, if not all, of the many obscure little details were done when they were new.

The scoring system weighs points 60% towards originality (meaning the part matches original specifications – not that the actual part was on the car when new) and 40% towards condition (read quality or workmanship, and maintenance of condition).

Concours Judging policies recognize that, while some exceptions do exist, production of each model was intended to be and was, for the most part, carried out with a high degree of consistency. This is validated by the existence of parts lists that describe each bit, how many were used in each application, where they went, and often illustrates the manner of installation. Inspection of many original, unrestored cars over the course of many years has borne out this consistency in manufacturing.

Thus, Concours is not really the place for a beautifully done car with alternator, 72 spoke chrome wheels with 185-15 tires, air conditioning, and many other non-original customization features, even if it is beautifully done. It is true that given the way our score sheets are laid out, such cars can score fairly high even after standard deductions for non-original items (assuming the balance of the details are done correctly and with equal quality). However, since the purpose or intent of Concours is to preserve and recognize the heritage of the marque, these modified cars probably won't score high enough to qualify for Gold .

Cars that have been restored to suit personal taste, and not in an original manner, belong in Popular Choice, and unfortunately in that venue, even if they are immaculate, will not necessarily receive the full appreciation and recognition that they deserve.

What to expect in Concours

In order for a car to be eligible for Gold, Silver, or Bronze certification by the Austin-Healey Concours Committee, it must be judged according to the process outlined in our Organization, Policies & Inspection Guidelines which were updated in February 2003. Each car is judged by a team of three: a Head Judge plus two others. Only one of the judges can be new to the judging procedure, but by having new folks in training we add to our resource of experienced judges.

Judges on a team need to be quite familiar with the details of the model they will inspect – 100s, 6-cylinder roadsters, or convertibles (BJ7 and 8), and Sprites. Often folks can be fairly knowledgeable about one of the four groups, and sometimes two, but rarely three and I suspect never in all four. Thus, there should probably be at least one team of three judges for *each* of the groups that will have cars in a Concours event. And more than one team in any group where a large number of cars are entered.

The score sheets for each of the Big Healey groups consist of about 18 pages, including details on specific standard deductions and other supplemental information. Scoring is done on a possible total of 1000, with ½ point the smallest deduction increment

permitted. The total is then divided by 10 to arrive at a final score. The sheets list many specific items to be judged, but not all, and those not listed will be scored using the closest available category.

It is suggested, but not mandatory, that entrants obtain a copy of the Concours Guidelines (contact George Marinos – Gmaari58175@aol.com) to use as a resource during their restoration. If they have a copy that is over five years old, it would be wise to invest in a current version, as updates and corrections are made annually, including both addition of new material and photos as well as fine tuning of the scoring system. Using the included score sheets they can “pre-judge” their car and get a fair idea of how they will do and where they may need to invest more effort.

The length of the score sheets is a result of our making the scoring system more objective. Points for both Originality and Condition for each line item are listed, and there is a column for recording why points were deducted. Going through the sheets and recording judging comments takes a long time – typically 1 to 1 1/2 hours, but the resulting document provides the owner with a good list of what to work on for the future.

It is important for entrants to be aware that ALL items presented with the car are to be the property of the car’s owner. Loaning or borrowing of any item for temporary display is not allowed and is contrary to the spirit of fairness and ethical behavior.

How to hold a Certifiable Concours

The process for including a certifiable Concours event at a meet is fairly simple. The meet organizers need to assign a Concours Liaison or committee person who will be responsible for the logistics – setting a time and place, budget, fees, announcements, entries, meeting rooms, lunches for judges, supplies, land coordination with other meet events. This person needs to contact the Concours Committee Chairman, presently Curt Arndt (CNAArndt@aol.com), who in turn will arrange for a Chief Judge to oversee the inspections. The Chief Judge will then be responsible for lining up all other qualified judges and augmenting their numbers from other knowledgeable attendees at the event. If a Chief Judge cannot be found for that event, or he cannot line up a sufficient number of qualified judges, then the Concours Committee will not be able to organize a certifiable inspection at that meet.

Hopefully, with time, sufficient numbers of experience judges will be developed that certifiable Concours events can be held more often than just at the major Healey Club meets. In the meantime, the Committee is willing to consider and discuss specific situations with those individuals who have special circumstances and are not able to travel long distances to the few large events held each year, so as to try and work out a solution which will permit their cars to be judged.

What all This Means

To summarize, Popular Choice show selections are really subjective, reflecting what catches the viewer's eye (though winning cars do also reflect excellence in workmanship). Concours, on the other hand, is more objective with focus on originality (to the way the cars were produced and sold when new) as well as quality and craftsmanship in the restoration.

For those who don't achieve Gold in Concours judging, receiving Silver or Bronze can still be quite valuable. First, you usually will also receive a list of items to address if you wish to improve your score in the future. And second, while you may receive significant deductions for deviations from originality, after reviewing what each deduction was taken for, you will still be able to assess your restoration from a quality perspective and might well discover that it is indeed to very high standards.

This leaves an obvious gap for those owners of customized or non-original cars who wish to have their restoration efforts recognized in a more objective manner than is done in Popularity voting, yet don't feel they belong in Concours. Setting up a formal judging program for these cars would require a large effort, involving setting a purpose/objective for this type of show as well as establishing specific guidelines so that entrants would know what to expect and how to prepare their cars. There is no reason why those interested in having a judged program for non-original cars cannot establish one, but this category of evaluation falls outside of what the Concours program is all about.