

1946 HEALEY 2.4 ELLIOTT

This is where Donald Healey's sports cars started, long before the Austin-Healey or Jensen-Healey. He was a Cornish-born engineer, former RFC pilot and winner of the 1931 Monte Carlo Rally, and in the months after the Second World War he set out to build a British sports car capable of exceeding 100mph.

During the war Healey worked at Humber, forming partnerships that would shape his post-war venture. In 1945 he teamed up with former colleagues, designer Ben Bowden and chassis specialist Achille Sampietro. With £50,000 backing from investor James "Jimmie" Watt, Healey founded the Donald Healey Motor Company in 1946.

The first prototype, a roadster, appeared that year – an impressive feat in a Britain still facing material shortages. The second prototype, the car displayed here with chassis number A1502, soon followed and became the development car for the Healey Elliott saloon. Elliott of Reading was the firm that built the ash wood body frames, while Westland Aeroparts in Hereford produced the chassis. The engine, gearbox and running gear were installed in Healey's Warwick workshop, before the car returned to Westland for final assembly.

Powered by a tuned 2.4-litre Riley engine, the lightweight Elliott could reach 60mph in around 12 seconds and easily beat 100mph. In fact, in November 1946 Healey himself drove A1502 across Europe for endurance testing and recorded 104.65mph in Italy, briefly making it the world's fastest production car.

From this chassis grew not just the Elliott but the entire Healey story. Cars from the marque soon competed in events such as the Mille Miglia, Targa Florio and 24 Hours of Le Mans. The car before you, then, is more than just a prototype; it marks the beginning of the Healey company, founded 80 years ago, and the origin of a name still celebrated today.