



Healeys of all varieties, including David Grace's much-campaigned green and white 3000. It's not all A-Hs, though: there's a Ford Capri 2.8i in for restoration and a BGT

FOCUS ON THE BIG PICTURE

Bill Rawles Classic Cars

Location Unit 2, Dukess Mill,
Station Approach, Medstead,
Hants GU34 5EN Staff Nine
Specialism Big Healeys
Price £78 per hour mechanicals;
£64.80 for restorations
Tel 01420 564343 Web
www.rawlesclassiccars.co.uk

We've written about Bill Rawles before (in February 2004), but his firm, newly installed in a spacious workshop, is a different iteration of the outfit that went before. Since selling up a decade ago, Rawles worked as a 'man in a shed' until gathering momentum forced expansion. The theme is still Big Healeys, but this time Rawles v3 – if you will – is more organised, more streamlined, thanks to experience learned over three decades.

There's space to move every car without disturbing the others. Each has its own clear job sheet on a large wall board that's the second thing you encounter – after the 'control


tower', a two-storey opticon at the door, presided over by Bill's wife, Rose. The parts store, engine build and fabrication areas have their own sections on the mezzanine; the sand-blasting room plus separate machine room with two lathes and a Bridgeport mill are below.

Bill trained as a toolmaker and his latest acquisition, of which he's very proud, is the jig borer. Healey sixes tend to go porous from the oilways, so Rawles bores them out and sleeves them. It's a job that requires total accuracy, which this Newall can deliver: "It was £50,000 40 years ago and I picked it up for £400. It cost us another £400 to have it transported, mind, and it's too tall to go through the door of the machine room so it's in a corner for now. The tools are mostly to get us out of trouble, in case we need to modify parts or repair components etc."

The expanded parts store means customers will soon be able to buy direct from site. The staff count has grown, too, including Bill's sons Charlie, who heads the bodyshop, Jack, who also races dad's 3000 and Ollie, who is always on hand, plus long-timer, now part-timer Rob.

One other aspect that has changed, Bill notes, is that owners are less likely to be hands-on: "Years ago we never saw 100s, but now the owners tend to be retired and don't want to do the heavy work themselves. We've got three in at the moment. That one's just off to Japan and, with the pound 20% down on the yen, I expect more enquiries from there. We already get work from all over the world, but Brexit has been good for us."

It's not just Healeys, though: in the 'garden shed' years Bill tinkered with Jags, partly as a result of a non-competition clause in the sale, plus there's a Capri 2.8 being rebuilt: "It's for a local customer who knows it's going to cost more than it's worth, but he wants to keep it."

They moved in only two months ago but the workshops are already full. Two 3000 MkIIIs are part way through complete rebuilds: "Nine months if we were on them full time, though they'll likely be here for two years. Working from home initially felt like semi-retirement, but more and more people asked us to do Healeys – and you can't turn work away." Paul Hardiman 



Chief mechanic Adrian Cox fitting exhaust



Boss Bill on lathe: he's a trained machinist



Greg Rogers fettling rebuilt MG TD 'four'