What’s a Hyphen between Friends?

by Patrick Quinn

Once upon a time I was very much into originality, concours and that sort of stuff. To a degree I still am, but I also believe that our cars belong to individuals and therefore there is room for the cars to be as individual as their owners.

However they may be some amongst the readership of the Australian Austin-Healey who would have noticed that I call a Healey a Healey and an Austin-Healey an Austin-Healey. Healeys don’t have Austin engines while Austin-Healeys do (at least when new). You may have also noticed that I refer to the marque as Austin-Healey and not Austin Healey.

At this stage I have to ask myself if I am being a little Freudian and the answer is probably that I am.

Sitting where I am right now I am looking at a shelf of books covering the complete range of Healeys, Austin-Healeys and the Healeys themselves. If I pick up any one of my owners handbooks that range from the 100 through to the BJ8, the marque is Austin-Healey, in other words the hyphen is in use.

Okay, so what? You’re probably thinking, which would be a fair enough. However what about the various badges affixed to the cars. For the four-cylinder cars the boot lid badge (apart from the early cars) was ‘Austin-Healey’ as was the front shroud badge. In fact the boot lid badge depicting ‘Austin-Healey’ continued right through to the last BJ8. However that wasn’t the same for front shroud badge.

The next time you have a look a BJ8, look closely at its front shroud badge and you will see that it has ‘Austin Healey’ up top and below it’s ‘3000 Mk III’. No hyphen! As mentioned the boot badge contains a hyphen. Depending on what year the red surround is either cloisonné or just red paint.

I’ve known about this peculiarity for some years, but at the last NSW concours I had a look at a few cars. As most would know the same badge was fitted from the first of the four-cylinder cars right through to the 3000 Mk1 with ‘Austin-Healey’ recessed into the badge and filled with cloisonné. With the introduction of the BT7 Mk2 roadster came a new raised badge that also specified the model. Within that badge were the raised words ‘Austin-Healey’ within a bed of cloisonné.

The first of the convertibles in the form of the BJ7 was released in January 1962 and what about its front shroud badge? It was the same as the BT7 Mk2, but there was no hyphen. This continued with the BJ8 and to the very last car built.

As a wise old man once said “Why is it so?” The answer to that if frankly I don’t know, but thinking about it there could be a few reasons.

* That BMC was trying to distance itself from the Healey name.
* Some beancounter within BMC thought that the saving a couple of pennies on each badge would no doubt deliver the Corporation from its financial woes.
* Whoever did the ordering just stuffed up or whoever made the badges did likewise.

What do you think? It may have been a deliberate decision, but why wouldn’t the boot lid badge also be changed?