Grace, the cancer-fighting 1953 Austin-Healey 100, comes to the Simeone Museum

Kurt Ernst



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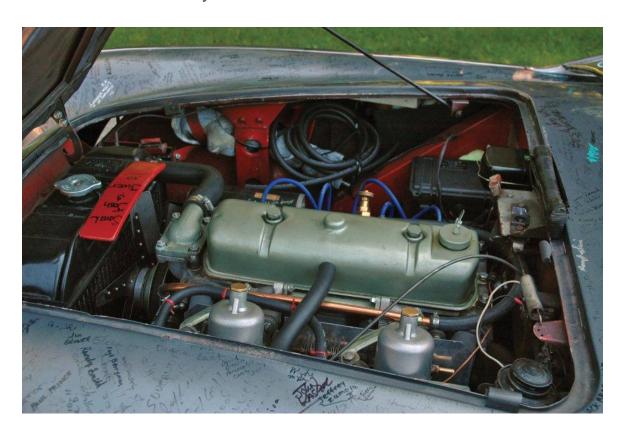
John Nikas behind the wheel of Grace in 2012. Photos by David LaChance.

Mike Newsome's 1953 Austin-Healey 100 should serve as a visual reminder to never purchase a classic car, sight unseen, from an internet auction site. Instead, thanks to the efforts of John Nikas, Andy Reid and others, "Grace," as the BN-1 Austin Healey is known, has served as an inspiration, giving hope to thousands battling cancer over the past five years. Grace is currently making a pit stop at the Simeone Foundation Automotive Museum in

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and on Saturday, December 10 at noon, John and Andy will be on hand to share stories about Grace's exploits.

After buying the battered Austin-Healey, Mike was diagnosed with multiple myeloma, a cancer that forms in white blood cells and accumulates in bone marrow. John, who regularly borrowed Mike's Healey, saw the tired and ailing sports car as a metaphor for his friend's condition, and hastily planned a cross-country drive to inspire Mike to keep fighting the disease.

As David LaChance explained in the September 2012 issue of Hemmings Sports & Exotic Car, the first trip took place in 2011. Volunteers from the Austin-Healey Association of Southern California helped John to prepare the car, ultimately spending eight days to make the British roadster as sound as possible before the journey. It was a tall order, since the Healey's frame had been repaired with bondo and black spray paint, and compression was low in each of the car's four cylinders.



Grace's engine in 2012, freshly rebuilt after the 2011 trip.

The rusted bodywork and frame were left alone, and on the eve of the trip, John named the car Grace. Vinyl lettering identified those who'd helped him prepare, but in the rush to get on the road, John had neglected to include Mike Newsome's name. He corrected this oversight with black magic marker, something that would soon become key to Grace's history.

The journey was not an enjoyable one, but then again, it was never meant to be. Grace had no top or side windows, leaving both driver and navigator exposed to the elements. Between oil leaks and dilution from the gasoline that seeped past the piston rings, Grace took a quart of oil every two and a half hours. The exhaust was loud, the suspension uncomfortable and breakdowns frequent. Each one prompted a response from strangers willing to share advice, parts and mechanical aid, and after 7,241 miles, Grace returned home bearing the black marker signatures of hundreds with their own cancer stories who asked to share in the journey.



Inside, Grace carries photos and mementos gathered on her journeys.

Following the 2011 trip, Grace's engine was rebuilt ahead of a 2012 odyssey that say John travel over 75,000 miles with a new mission – giving inspiration, as well as rides, to children battling cancer and other serious diseases. Sponsors, including Moss Motors, Dayton Wire Wheel, Joe Curto, Inc. and Coker Tire came on board, but each mechanical breakdown was still resolved with the help of others. John and Grace visited Hemmings Motor News during this adventure, about a third of the way through their quest to visit all 50 states.

In the years since, Grace has traveled over 350,000 miles and collected over 75,000 signatures from those impacted by cancer. Over 25,000 children have been visited by Grace, and the journey continues after the stop at the Simeone Museum, expected to last until mid-December, possibly later. To

learn more about Grace's mission, or to support the cause, visit DriveAwayCancerNow.org.

For more on the Simeone Foundation Automotive Museum, visit <u>SimeoneMuseum.org</u>.