



The 2½-litre four-cylinder Healey, world's fastest production car, which won the 3-litre class in last year's International Alpine Rally, shown crossing the line in the Maloja hill-climb.

Complete Achievement Of An Ideal

WHEN, some months ago, a little streamlined saloon car sped along a Belgian road to record a speed of more than 110 miles an hour, fastest ever achieved by a production type touring machine, it was the culmination of many years' work and thought.

For years Donald M. Healey, ex-R.F.C. pilot, international trials driver of note and practical engineer-designer, and I had discussed the sort of car desired by the sporting motorist, that strange type who doesn't want to race, yet will not be satisfied with a mass-produced "buzz-box" or a woolly-engined American.

During the war, while he was testing armoured cars, he put his ideas on paper; a colleague named A. C. Sampietro, young Italian engineer who was on war-work here, helped.

Last summer I was shown the prototype of the Healey, the touring car for the enthusiast. I was captivated, and soon after I set off with this car to cover some 4,000 miles of the most rigorous testing I have ever undertaken.

The little car was run first of all in the Maloja hill-climb in Switzerland, and then taken to the French Alpine trial, toughest of the international tests now held.

The car won its class with ease, and made the best performance of any British car; it added to its popularity by winning also a trophy for comfort and good looks—something we have not associated with the typical sports car.

HOLDS LIKE LEACH

That is the basis of the considerable fascination which the Healey will exert on the enthusiast. The old-type sports cars, with their highly-tuned, and therefore unreliable, engines, harsh springing and complete lack of driver and passenger comfort bear no comparison with the Healey.

Here we have a softly sprung model that holds the road like a leech, a very fast car that still can trickle through traffic smoothly and quietly.

The car is essentially small (8ft. 6in. wheelbase); while four seats are provided in both the tourer and saloon versions, most owners will regard it as a two-seater with a deal of luggage accommodation.

Brakes are two-leading-shoe Lockheed hydraulic, the brake area per ton coming out at the highly satisfactory figure of 153in. The saloon model weighs 22½ cwt. Fuel capacity is 16 gallons. Headlights are built into the body, and are not up to the speed of the car—a post-war falling with many cars.

Here are some performance figures which will show you the measure of the Healey's success:—0-100 m.p.h., 46.2sec.; 0-50 m.p.h., 8.1sec.; 10-30 m.p.h. in top gear, 8sec.

Surprisingly, but logically, of course, the saloon is faster than the roadster model. The streamlined saloon, with an engine certified by R.A.C. engineers as a standard model and running on pump-type fuel, was officially timed to average 110.8 m.p.h. over the mile in both directions. The roadster model which I drove in Europe was frequently timed at over the 100 m.p.h. mark.

LIVELINESS

While the figures are impressive, the general handliness and liveliness of the machine are the secret of its appeal. I know of no car I would rather drive quickly down Alpine passes—a far more difficult process than going up!—and the International trial of 1947 consisted of this sort of thing for six days on end.

The steering, sufficiently direct, but still not heavy, the first class front-wheel independent suspension and the coil springing at the rear it would be difficult to better. The Lockheed brakes are first-class—and brakes are a most important accessory to-day. In that gruelling six days of Alpine testing, when acceleration, road-holding, and powerful brakes were tried to the utmost the brakes required adjustment but once.

The Healey is an exciting, joyful machine to drive. In the Alpine trial we took on the fine products of Italy, France and America and beat them.