

“A Bit of Detective Work”

a presentation by Martin Ingall, delivered at the Spridget Meet at the Healey Museum in the Netherlands on Saturday, 27th September, 2014.



Good evening ladies & gentlemen.

I would like to begin by thanking Hans, Albert, Claudya, Rinus and the rest of the team for inviting us, the Sprite and Midget contingent, to come here to witness the fruits of their labours in establishing this Healey Museum.

It is a great privilege to have been invited to speak to you tonight.



The museum's name **Healey** is a reminder that it was Donald Healey who, way back in 1956, came up with the idea of building a cheap and economical two-seater sports car using production parts.



As I'm sure you all know, Donald (seen here in the centre) asked **Barry Bilbie to design a chassis, organised the assembly of an initial small batch and then arranged for Gerry Coker to design the Frogeye or Bugeye body shape.**



Whether you drove here in an Austin-Healey Sprite, an MG Midget or even an Austin Sprite you will appreciate that its underpinnings come directly from Donald's original concept.

The same basic chassis design was carried on right throughout the entire 22 year production run of Sprites and Midgets which are, **first and foremost, a Healey product.**

But I'm sure you know all this.



Allow me to introduce myself to those who don't know me – Some of you will have visited my Sebring Sprite website - but let me tell you a little more.



I was fascinated by cars from an early age and this is me with my first one!!!



Not long after this my Dad introduced me to motor racing by taking me to the Crystal Palace circuit in South London, a few miles from where we lived. I was quickly hooked, and it was there that we saw famous names like Roy Salvadori, Stirling Moss, Mike Hawthorn, Tony Rolt, and even Colin Chapman racing.



Our family car at that time was an A30 which, believe it or not, ferried my parents and we 4 children around for several years. One day while Dad & I were out in the country we heard a lot of engine noises in the distance and decided to investigate. It turned out to be a 500cc race being run at Brands Hatch.



We soon became regular visitors there too and thoroughly enjoyed watching a certain John Sprinzel who, in his red A35, ran rings round Mark 1 Jags and Austin 105s with engines 3 or 4 times the capacity.



Of course my first Real car had to be an A35.and although this was painted grey.....



.....I grew up in the knowledge that cars were meant to be painted in the National colours of Italian red:
(As on my first Spridget)



or French blue



Or BRG



I may not have always got my nationalities right



though the Cooper...



and the PA were correct



My racing Frogeye was blue, BUT



.... imagine my horror when, much later, I saw what some Yank (sorry, American) had done to his ex-works Sprite!

[With apologies to Steve Coleman as I only found out later that he had painted his coupe in the identical colours to those it wore at Sebring in 1970]

Which brings me on to the subject of my talk today.



After some 10 years or so compiling my website – nearer 15 now – I came to realise that I was very unclear as to which of the later ‘works’ Sprites raced when and where and with which drivers. So a couple of years ago I began to try to sort this out, assisted by some of my regular contributors - especially Neil Anderson in the States, Pete Taylor, Ian Turner and others.



But first a quick look at how, following the Sprite’s introduction in 1958, Donald’s son Geoff began to prepare Sprites for competition events such as the 12 hour race at Sebring in Florida, the Le Mans 24 hours and the Targa Florio in Sicily.

Over a 10 year period the car was developed from its standard 43 bhp at 5,200 rpm and top speed of just over 70mph to the final Le Mans Sprite which consistently lapped Le Mans at over 100 mph, and was recorded at 154 mph on the Mulsanne straight, its engine by then producing some 110 bhp at 7000 rpm.



For Sebring in 1959 the standard-shaped Sprite was tuned and fitted with 4 wheel **disc brakes and wire wheels**. The 3 cars entered finished 1,2 & 3 in class which effectively gave rise to the title **Sebring Sprite**.



The following year Roger Menadue acquired a lightweight **fibreglass Falcon body from a Ford Special**, supposedly purchased through Exchange & Mart, and fitted it on to a Sprite chassis. It was driven by John Sprinzel and John Lumkin at Sebring, and later by 2 more Johns Colegate & Dalton, in the Le Mans 24 hours.

Stirling Moss drove a more standard-looking Frogeye in the 4 Hour Sebring race that year.



At the 1961 Sebring event they tried another form of lightening, panelling several Sprites in fibreglass, and one with ..



.....a fastback hardtop by Les Ireland – all in the search for more speed. This was the car which subsequently became the Ecurie Ecosse car **1413 WD** and unfortunately crashed at Le Mans.



Also there at Sebring was the Healeys' first attempt at a full aluminium-bodied Sprite – the Roadster,

and of course, the two Sprinzel Coupes driven by Stirling and Pat Moss..

In the 4 hour event Sprites came 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th overall driven by: Walt Hansgen, Bruce McLaren, Stirling Moss, Ed Leavens, Paul Hawkins, Pat Moss and Briggs Cunningham.



The 2nd aluminium bodied works car built by the Healeys appeared at Le Mans that year. **1411 WD** ran in the hands of Paul Hawkins and John Colegate but unfortunately failed to finish.



Here you see its original rounded rear end



But later it was sold to one Mike Garton who, perhaps unintentionally “re-modelled” its tail to create the Bobtail Sprite.



By 1962 we had the Mark 2 Sprite and 4 of them were clad with lightweight aluminium panels and fibreglass hardtops for top-line drivers Moss, Innes Ireland, Pedro Rodriguez and film star Steve McQueen to drive at Sebring. There was no Sprite entry at LM that year but the same Mk 2s went to Sebring again in 1963.



Also at Sebring in 63 was this new aluminium coupe driven by Clive Baker and John Colegate and later at Le Mans by Bob Olthof and John Whitmore. It was sadly destroyed when Bob crashed it during the night.



693 LAC was another aluminium bodied car which Paddy Hopkirk and Tommy Wisdom took on the Targa Florio in 64, but not before Geoff and Margot had driven it all the way down to Sicily complete with their luggage, before the start .



and yet another aluminium coupe was KNX which appeared at Sebring 2 years running in 64 & 65 as well as at LM in 1964 where Clive Baker & Bill Bradley came 24th overall.



EAC 90C was another alloy Targa car which evolved from a roadster in 65 into a coupe for 66.



Geoff Healey didn't make the researcher's task an easy one, inclined as he was to swap registration numbers and chassis plates from car to car.

An example of this was the number 7080 AC which started life as a Targa Florio car for Tommy Wisdom.....



then appeared on another Sprite assembled in the States for Stirling Moss to drive in the 1960 Sebring 3 hrs.



and a little later on Jack Wheeler bought a Sprite bearing that number which he will tell you he believes had had a chassis change after an Alpine Rally mishap, so by then we knew of 4 versions.....



and Jack still has two cars bearing that number today! – but that's another story.



Tom Coulthard once told me he had briefly seen a little exercise book in which Geoff had kept a record of all his cars but sadly none of us has been given access to it and it wouldn't surprise me if Geoff's widow, Margot, sleeps with it under her pillow!



So let's look at the streamliners. It is almost exactly 50 years since the Healey work force were preparing the first of these aluminium-bodied Sprites for the 1965 Sebring 12hrs in March the following year



These photos show the car which was to be registered DAC 952C – the one now owned by Marc and Bruno Verstraete and housed here in the museum. Rauno Aaltonen and Clive Baker took it to a class win, and 15th overall at Sebring.



Here it is about to set out on its first shakedown. It is distinguishable from the other cars by its smaller inner headlights, lack of a vent at the back of the roof or side vents in the front wings, and originally had just a simple elliptical air intake beneath its nose.



And here is the car during the race...this photo showing the way on this early car the side panel continues up around the fuel filler.



Some years later in 1969 the car appeared again at Sebring – but more about that later



.and here. the car looks...more or less as it is today

I was surprised to find that after the Sebring race DAC was sold off as might have supposed that after all that development work it would run in more than just one race. However the Healeys had built up long experience of the American sales market and it was clearly important for the car to remain on US soil for publicity purposes, as well as to recover some of the money spent on its development.



However they had two more cars at home, being readied for Le Mans that summer and they were registered ENX 415C and 416C.



Due to the great speed differential at Le Mans Geoff had the cars painted in a fluorescent lime green but the French scrutineers rejected them as being a hazard to other drivers!



They were hastily repainted in a barn in a darkish green but in some photos you can clearly see the lime green showing through.



Identification from black and white photos is made difficult by the same race numbers 48 and 49 being used on these cars as well as on those of the following year, but the lack of rear roof vents is the clue.



No 48 was driven once again by Rauno Aaltonen and Clive Baker but unfortunately their engine broke on the Sunday morning.



Paul Hawkins and John Rhodes took the No.49 car to 12th overall and 1st in class.



After the race both cars were sold to Richard Groves Racing whose team competed with them in a number of international events over the following couple of seasons.



One car ended up on display in a museum for a number of years....



...while the other disappeared to Scotland where it sadly deteriorated to a very sorry state before being rescued in 1988 and restored by Denis Welch. His firm also later restored the other car, and both of them are now owned by Kazuo Maruyama in Japan.



416c soon after restoration and back in lime green



And on display recently in Japan



Those first 3 cars were fairly simple to identify, but then we come to 1966 and 2 more new cars, painted initially in Dayglow orange for the Sebring 12 hours. Registered HNX 455D and 456D they also had consecutive chassis 143 and 144 and engine numbers in the opposite order of XSP 26044 and 043.

This is the Hawkins and Makinen car which came 18th at Sebring and **won the class**.



Baker & Aaltonen were No.66 and finished 29th,

In these photos from the rear the little roof vents are clearly visible.



66 in the pits with one of the MGBs



For LE MANS in 66

Presumably to avoid the problems experienced the previous year the cars were repainted in a darker, more sober, red.



and they were also fitted with MGB overdrive gearboxes – the only time these were used.



Hedges and Hopkirk drove 455D (No.49) while Clive Baker shared 456D with John Rhodes (No.48).



Unfortunately both cars suffered engine failure within just 4 hours to go to the end of the race.

We discovered that the registration HNX 455D was returned to Warwick Council immediately after the LM race, and that car was apparently sold to Fred Royston, a BMC distributor based in Florida in the USA, who, according to one of his staff, Ron Light, repainted it in BRG before selling it on. The other car remained with the Healeys.

So, up to this point identification of the various cars appeared simple enough....



BUT then we learned of another car in the States which Jeff Brenner had owned for some 15 years and which he believed had raced at Sebring. It had the No.67 on the doors and was painted BRG. When I first questioned Jeff about its chassis number he told me it had a HAN9 prefix which suggested it was built post-October 1966 when the 1275 Sprite and Midget were introduced.



We initially started looking to see if it might have been the No.67 entry for Sebring which would have entailed giving it the 455D number plate. But it had no roof vent. Further enquiry led to Jeff correcting the chassis number to one with a HAN8 prefix and confirming he could find no evidence of any roof vent having been on the car.



It was fitted with an XSP engine but had a standard MGB gearbox. Its headlights and exhaust had been changed and the interior civilised for street use. Ron Light told us that having had one car go through his hands Fred Royston wanted one for himself and painted this 2nd one in the same green. He also told us that Royston converted the car for street use so his wife could use it for shopping – some shopping car!



To help us try to fathom out where this car might have raced Neil Anderson prepared some spreadsheets showing all the Sebring, Le Mans and Targa Florio entries along with all the information we had on each car. We pontificated about whether this mystery car might have been substituted for another on some occasion but none seemed to fit. In doing so I upset Jim Prentice the current owner of 455D who worried that I could damage the provenance of his car.



Although the Brenner car had some Dayglow orange on parts of its suspension and had may originally have been painted in Sebring colours we eventually came to the conclusion that this car was not raced by the 'works' at any of the major events. Exactly when it was shipped out to the US remains unclear.



We decided that having briefly owned one of cars before, Royston must have bought this one purely for display purposes and applied the No.67 to give it the credibility of a class-winning Sebring Sprite. Very much later we received some photos of the car in its earlier days including this one of the car in a showroom, dark in colour with the No.67 on its doors plus other decals exactly as it is today – the photo is dated March 1968! So the Mystery car finally became the Display car. Unfortunately my conclusions were a big disappointment to the car's owner Jeff Brenner.



On to 1967:

The remaining car HNX 456D went once again to Sebring and in the capable hands of Clive Baker and Rauno Aaltonen it finished 13th in the Prototype class.



It ran alongside the standard-bodied Sprite LNX 629E – the car recently sold at auction in the UK.



The 7th of the streamliners was styled TFR 5 being designed specifically for the Targa Florio in Sicily. The fast and undulating mountain course demanded a very different type of car. The front end was modified to a single headlight arrangement with a wide conventional air intake, and the fuel filler was fitted to one side of the rear instead of along the side.



The usual pairing of Clive and Rauno were to drive but unfortunately, quite early in the event a pedestrian ran across the road in front of Clive who collected him across the bonnet and collided with the barriers. Clive was carted off to a police cell for his trouble and that put paid to their race.



However Clive took the car on the Tour of Corsica later that year and he and Mike Wood were running 6th when an electrical failure put them out.



Modelled on the Targa car was the Healey's next streamliner 4 HAC – which Donald and Geoff conceived as a road version of the same basic design.



They hoped BMC would produce it mainly for the lucrative American market .



With (originally) small front and rear bumpers and a fully trimmed interior it was a smart little car but failed to interest the powers that be.



Its original LHD configuration was later Anglicised and the car was sold to enthusiast Richard Budd who used it in sprints and hill-climbs and still has it in the UK today.



At Le Mans that year (67) the Healeys only ran a single car for Clive paired with Andrew Hedges and it was once again Chassis 144, or HNX 456D. It now had small triangular side wing vents to combat overheating problems.



This was the first time the 5-speed gearbox was used, being an MGB box with the additional 5th gear bolted on at the back.



Clive and Andrew finished 15th overall at an average speed of 100.8 mph and won the 'Motor' Trophy.....



.....but not before Clive had a minor collision in the Esses which involved patching up the rear of the car in the pits.



However the car was soon fully repaired and looked immaculate on the Austin-Healey stand at the London Motor Show that autumn.

1968



At the beginning of 1968 the Healey team still had Chassis 144 seen here behind the new SR. It had raced twice at Sebring and twice at Le Mans, though its registration no. seen here on the bench had now been officially returned to the licencing authority.



They also had the Targa car TFR5 and LNX 629E, the standard-bodied Sprite. Under construction were the all-new mid-engined Healey SR and another new Sprite Coupe seen here in the background. A new roadster for the Targa Florio was also in the pipeline.



It was stated in I think the February issue of "Safety Fast" magazine that there would be 2 Sprites at Le Mans - from which we must assume that the intention was to run the old car as well as the new one. However, the Le Mans regulations only allowed a car to race twice which must surely explain the disappearance of Chassis 144 and the arrival of 237 as a 'new' car. [In this photo the HNX 455D plate is visible on the window ledge]



and here is the SR sporting the 456D number plate!!



Geoff always referred to the '68 LM car as a new one confirming this in his book "More Healeys" but Chris Harvey, in his book "Spridgets" says "the Le Mans car was rebuilt with the latest engine to run alongside the Healey SR prototype".



We wondered why the Targa car TFR5 was chosen for Sebring that March and it seems likely that neither the reincarnated 67 Le Mans car, nor the additional new coupe were ready or available. It may be that the alliance between the Healeys and BMC was

already beginning to unravel as pressure was brought to bear on the Healeys to run an MG Midget at Sebring resulting in LNX being re-badged for that race.



So Clive Baker took the now fuel-injected Targa car to Sebring, this time accompanied by Mike Garton. They had the misfortune to be delayed for 2 hours in the pits with water contaminating the fuel, but Truitt and Canfield brought the Midget home to a class win.



As things turned out the 68 Le Mans race was postponed at the behest of the de Gaulle government due to social un-rest and wasn't held until September. However, the Healeys only fielded the one Sprite, which now had a fuel-injected engine with the necessary bulge in its bonnet.



Drivers this time were Roger Enever and Andrew Hedges [*This is wrong – 2nd driver was Alec Poole*] and it was Hedges who, having driven the same car there the previous year, had suggested that a spoiler be fitted to give more down-force at the rear.



I'm not sure what Geoff is up to here – with the lady in red



A daylight pit-stop



And seen here with the SR which unfortunately suffered clutch failure after only 20 laps



As in the previous year the Sprite finished 15th overall, in a slightly slower time but recorded a speed of 154mph on the Mulsanne Straight.



I think I am right in saying that it was immediately after the LM race that BMC told the Healeys of their decision to terminate the link-up between their two companies. Nevertheless the Le Mans car appeared once again on the revolving platform display at the London Int Motor Show

So now we just had to identify the car as it is today.



I had raced in the early 80's against Ian Polley in his red ex-prototype car (seen here at Silverstone)so was familiar with that car which by this time had been sold to Joe Armour in Australia.



However there was also another car in the States owned by Steve Coleman and displayed on his website "thelasthealeys.com". That car's previous owner Dan Miller had had lengthy correspondence with Geoff Healey some years earlier concerning whether his car was the 68 LM entry.



Geoff had concluded that **"he was almost sure" Miller's coupe was the '68 Le Mans car.**



However he did raise a query as to where the fuel filler was positioned. In this shot taken at Sebring in 1969 the filler cap is far more prominent than on the earlier cars, and by the following year it had been relocated higher up -



as it is today



This is the car's condition when the owner before Steve, acquired it,



and initially he painted it Tartan Red like the LM car



And this is Joe's car chassis 237 in Australia recently



As you can perhaps see it has much smaller triangular wing vents,



the regular position of the fuel filler....and when seen in the flesh, orange paint visible around window edges...



Below the rear window, inside the car a small wedge of wood has been introduced between the chassis frame and the rear panel which could well have been done when the car was repaired after Clive's incident at LM in 67



However it is really the car's direct lineage from the Donald Healey Motor Co to Car & Car Conversions magazine, and then via John Sprinzel to Charles Dawkins and on to Ian Polley which convinced me that the Australia car was the one which competed at LM. This photo which Geoff forwarded to Miller thinking it was of his car in the USA was actually found to have been taken outside the Polley's home in Surrey.



Anyway I think Steve must have reached the same conclusion, or graciously conceded the fact, as he went on to repaint his Coupe in the Ring Free Oils livery.



I've thrown in a few shots here which were probably taken at an earlier date but show some of the cars under construction and I thought you might like to see them



This shot shows several of the 5 speed gearboxes, and fuel-injected XSP engines

With the withdrawal of all support from BMC the remaining race cars, with the exception of the SR were sold off and a few months later, in March 1969, three of the streamliners formed a team to compete for the Falstaff Brewing Cup at Sebring.



One was DAC entered by Arthur Tuckerman, now in American colours of white with blue stripes, for **Gregg Cameron** and **Ralph Kemmerer**.



Another was the now orange-liveried **TFR5** was entered by Jim Baker for a ladies' team comprising Janet Guthrie, Donna Mae Mims and Liane Engeman.



And the 3rd was the coupe 238 also entered by Jim Baker for ...



... himself to drive with Paul Richards



and a 3rd driver - none other than



.....Clive Baker .

238 was 20th on 184 laps (5th in cl)
TFR5 was 23rd on 182 laps (6th in cl)
DAC was 33rd on 170 (8th in cl)



Here, a pit stop for the ladies team



and afterwards, Jim celebrating with his gals



The final streamliner, HAN9-R-250 or TFR6 was the Healey's ultimate 'works Sprite', I believe intended for the Targa in 1969. I haven't found many contemporary photos of it but know that it raced for several seasons in the States.



In 1970 it was entered in the Sebring 12 Hours (rather sadly as an MG Midget and in some places recorded as a BMC Roadster), and driven by Smith / Donley / Buttari for Chris Waldron of Waldron Motors a dealer in Florida. Unfortunately it retired after only 2 laps with an engine problem.



Here it is after Steve's amazing restoration



At that same event chassis 238 was again entered by Jim Baker, now in full Ring Free Oils colours as you see it today.



This was for another ladies' team which on this occasion included Britain's Rosemary Smith.



It won the Prototype 2 litre class after 187 laps coming 19th overall amidst a whole gaggle of Chevy Corvettes and Camaros.



So there you have it.

I think I have unravelled some of the mysteries of these 10 little 'works' Sprites – then and now, though whether Donald and Geoff would be pleased with me is hard to know.

Today 3 of the cars live in the States, 3 in Japan, there are 2 in the UK, 1 is here in the Netherlands, and the last is in Australia.

I don't pretend to have researched all 10 cars over their near 50 year lifespan but I believe I have managed to sort out which car did what in period. If you can add or subtract anything to the story please do let me know.

THANK YOU FOR COMING, & THANK YOU FOR LISTENING

Just before I sit down, I would like to bring in the one man who has driven pretty well all of these cars, mostly in anger and that of course is...Clive Baker.

"I was asking you earlier about Roger Enever who is normally associated with the rival MG camp, driving the Le Mans Sprite in 1968 while you were in the Healey SR. You pointed out that in fact it was not Andrew Hedges who shared the car with Enever?"

Clive: "No, it was Alec Poole!" [after which Clive told a few of his many anecdotes].