



Sebring's FIA-spec roll cage makes it difficult to climb into the well-trimmed but noisy cabin



Post-1969 1275cc A-series was recently rebuilt with an unleaded cylinder head

1965 Sebring Sprite lookalike £16,250

This conversion's Sprinzel-approved panels evoke the original at a fraction of the cost, says **Richard Gunn**

THIS CAR STARTED LIFE as a standard 1965 MG Midget. Its conversion to a Sprinzel Sprite replica was commissioned by a collector who wanted a faithful evocation of WJB 707, said by John Sprinzel – who helped to develop it – to be the fastest of the Sebring Sprites. The real thing came to auction last year with an estimate of £80,000-£100,000.

It was rebuilt using body panels from Archer's Garage in Oldbury, which were copied from an original Sprinzel coupé and approved by John Sprinzel himself. They are a mix of steel and glassfibre; there's no rust on the former and no stress cracks or starring on the latter.

The Jaguar Opalescent Gunmetal Grey paint extends beneath the car – there's no underseal – and is generally excellent, though the curved nose has a few stonechips in it. The removable bolt-on perspex sidescreens don't fit the profile of the door apertures as snugly as they might. Small tubes attached to the windscreen wipers with plastic ties serve as screen washers.

The painted wire wheels have a few isolated rust streaks but the Marshall KR11 155/80 R13 radial tyres have plenty of tread left on them.

The post-1969 1275cc engine has a spin-on oil filter and retro-fitted dynamo and bills in the disappointingly sparse history file show that both it and the gearbox have

been rebuilt and the cylinder head converted to run on unleaded petrol. It's all clean and well detailed with no sign of any oil leaks.

The FIA-approved roll cage looks great but makes the car tricky to climb into and runs so close to the steering wheel that your right knuckles brush against it. Bordeaux Wilton carpets are complemented by period red leather racing seats and there's very little discernible wear anywhere. Some of the gauges look almost new but the fuel gauge doesn't work and a flashing indicator stalk means the dashboard blinker lights have been blanked off.

The overriding impression when driving this car is of how fast and noisy it is. Carpets aside, there's little in the way of soundproofing so you hear every stone thrown up by the wheels.

Keeping the 1275cc engine idling when cold is tricky – the idle speed is set too low and the choke lever refuses to stay out – but it feels strong, willing and extremely lively once it's warmed through, with a healthy 70psi oil pressure reading. Super-direct steering adds to the enjoyable handling and the gearbox is slick in operation. The recently replaced clutch feels light in operation and the brakes work well with no pulling to either side.

This distinctive and well-executed replica is great to drive and certainly stands out from the regular Spridget crowd.

CHOOSE YOUR SEBRING

- BMC enters three Geoffrey Healey-modified Austin-Healey Sprites into the 1959 Twelve Hours of Sebring race in Florida. They finish first, second and third in class, prompting Healey to offer similar modifications to its customers' own cars. These cars are known as Healey Sebring Sprites.
- John Sprinzel of tuning firm Speedwell independently develops a streamlined alloy-bodied Sprite coupé, known as the Speedwell GT and is lured away to work for Healey in 1960. Later that year Stirling Moss drives a Sebring Sprite to second overall and a class win at Sebring.
- Sprinzel sets up on his own and in 1961 launches his own Sprinzel Sebring Sprite. Stirling Moss and sister Pat drive one at Sebring to great effect; Sprites occupy six of the top eight places.
- The aerodynamic Sebring Sprite look becomes a popular Midget and Sprite modification, though the various kits offered over the years provide varying degrees of accuracy and faithfulness. Archer's Garage panels are considered to be the best.

SPECIFICATION

1965 Sprinzel Sebring Sprite evocation
Price £16,250
Contact RetroMarques, Strensham, Worcestershire WR8 9JZ (retromarques.co.uk, 01684 297698)
Engine 1275cc, inline four-cylinder, ohv
Power 65bhp @ 6000rpm
Torque 72lb ft @ 3000rpm
Performance Top speed: 95mph; 0-60mph: 14.6sec
Fuel consumption: 29mpg
Length: 3485mm **Width:** 1346mm

HAGERTY

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