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 stalling 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.

SPECIFICATION

1965 Sprinzel Sebring Sprite evocation
Price £16,250
Contact RetroMarques, Stronsay, Worbroughs CR8 7UG, United Kingdom, 07684 207698
Engine 1275cc, inline-four-cylinder, ohv
Power 58bhp @ 6000rpm
Torque 72lb ft @ 5000rpm
Performance Top speed: 95mph; 0-60mph: 16.8sec
Fuel consumption: 29mpg
Length: 3465mm Width: 1346mm

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