

Healey

MARQUE MAGAZINE



JAN. 2017



Stunning PMO 200 tribute, another 100S goes to auction, a 60th anniversary, lots more about the Texas Conclave, and a Datsun 5-speed gearbox for Sprites

Healey

MARQUE MAGAZINE

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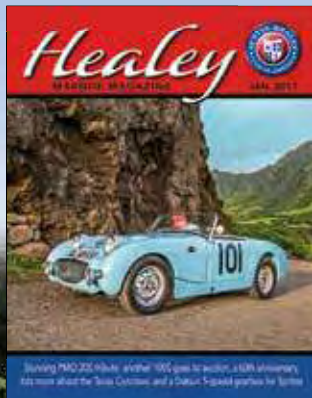
FEATURES

- 6 Too Good To True *by Rob Caveney*
- 19 2017 Conclave: Return to Texas
- 23 Austin-Healey 100s, in the Same Ownership for 50 Years, Joins Bonhams Scottsdale Auction
- 26 Pressed Steel Company 60th Anniversary *by Rick Neville*

COLUMNS & DEPARTMENTS

- | | | | |
|----|--------------------|----|----------------------------|
| 3 | Marque Matters | 35 | Healey Calendar |
| 5 | President's Byline | 36 | Healey Marketplace |
| 28 | Healey Chatter | 38 | Technical Service Bulletin |

COVER



PMO 200 rides again! Well, it's not the Sprite originally registered PMO 200, but this one was also owned by John Sprinzel and restored as an exact-as-possible duplicate of the original with John's help. See the story beginning on page 6.

Photo by Barry Maier

Read about this fabulous Sprite, beginning on page 6.

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MARQUE MATTERS

Reid Trummel
Editor

Cool cars, like ours, & cool dudes, like us

I was fascinated to read Rob Caveney's story and to see those terrific photos for our cover feature this month. I knew that John Sprinzel drove a Bugeye as his only car on the Hawaiian island of Molokai where he and Caryl live, but I didn't know he'd sold it and I certainly wasn't aware that it was being turned into an exact-as-possible duplicate of his original Bugeye, registered PMO 200. By the way, the action shots of the car – the cover, pages 6-7, and pages 14-15 – are by Barry Maier, with the help of a drone in the case of the aerial shot across pages 14-15. In any case, what a fabulous result they achieved with the restoration of Sprinzel's Bugeye. Congratulations to all involved. Every Bugeye is a way-cool car, but this one has my nomination for coolest.

We've also got lots more good scoop about the Texas Conclave in July. I'm planning to be there in my own way-cool Bugeye, and I hope you'll consider it among your top must-do Healey events in 2017.

Then we have a press release from our friends at Bonhams about yet another 100S that will cross the auction block. The climbing prices for the model have smoked out a few of them and this one goes soon and you can be there to bid, observe, enthuse, or all three. It's been two years since I last made the trip to Phoenix/Scottsdale for auction week in January, and I'm considering the trip myself, if only to observe and enthuse. It's quite a celebration of collector cars where you not only see hundreds and hundreds (and hundreds) of collector cars, but you also get a chance to learn about them via the signage and auction company catalogs. You also get to see exactly how much they sell for (or fail to sell for). It all adds up to quite a spectacle and some real, quality entertainment, even if you go just to spectate. And enthuse. Don't forget to enthuse.

Following that, on pages 26-27 we have a story brought to us by our investigative reporter, Rick Neville. It's another fascinating look into Healey history, and I'd never seen those photos. Good work, Rick!

Turning now to our columns and departments, you've



probably noticed that the new club president, Gary Feldman, appears in words and picture on page 5. Greg Lauser brings us his summary of chapter activities in the "Healey Chatter" column that begins on page 28, Jamie Daggett has the latest in his "Healey Calendar" feature on page 35 (if your chapter's major event is not listed there, it's because no one has sent him the factoids he needs to include it!), Bill Schellhaas's "Healey Marketplace" on pages 36-37 is full of post-holiday temptations, and Mike McPhail's "Technical Service Bulletin" has it's own version of temptation in the form of advice about installing a five-speed in your Sprite.

Speaking of temptation, Laurie Wilford has once again rounded up the commercial ads and we have a new advertiser that we want to welcome this month: Abingdon Spares, a

Connecticut-based supplier perhaps better known for T-series MG parts, but they are highlighting Blockley tires that may be an alternative you'd like to consider for your Healey when the time comes for new tires. Their ad appears on page 9.

One rule of thumb I have often heard is that for safety and best performance, your tires should be no more than seven years old. Of course I've heard many rules of thumb – you might say I'm all thumbs – but now, in the winter, is a very good time to take a look at your Healey's tires and read the date code on them. If you don't know where to find the date code or how to read it, try a web search for "tire date codes" and you'll find everything you

need to know. Bear in mind that these date codes are molded

always seem to be on the inside of the tire where it is much more difficult to see.

I want to wrap-up this January column with a cool picture of a cool dude with a cool car, just to keep you in the mood for better Healey-driving weather in the days ahead. That's Clint Eastwood and his first wife folding the top on his Healey Hundred while his mother-in-law looks on, apparently somewhat aghast. Only the coolest dudes drive Hundreds.

Cheers!

Reid

TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE

Creation of a Tribute to a very historic Sprite

Rob Caveney
Kailua, Hawaii
Board Member, British Car Club of Hawaii



We have all heard the phrase, "If it seems too good to be true, it probably is." However, every once in a while an opportunity comes along that is worth a second look. Just think of all the opportunities lost through an over abundance of caution.



At some point while growing up in the UK, John Sprinzel decided never to turn down a good opportunity. Not to say that he threw caution to the wind, but rather, he would follow the sirens' call of whatever promising opportunity crossed his



path. To say he has been successful in life with this strategy would be an understatement.

This story begins in 1958 when Sprinzel was an up-and-coming driver and rookie member of the BMC race team. He was mostly racing Austin's small saloon car, the A35, and finishing regularly at the top of the podium. It was in May of that year that BMC introduced to the world press their new, affordable, sports car at the Monaco Grand Prix.

Donald Healey, and other British car company owners at the time, believed that winning races was the best publicity. Combined with the prestige it brought to the marque, it could also prove a car's reliability. Long-distance international road rallies were the perfect venue as they pitted the top rally



drivers and their cars against thousands of miles of mountain roads.

The first test for the new Austin-Healey Sprite would be the Alpine Rally, also known by its official name, "Coupe des Alpes." This 2,400-mile rally would start in Marseille, France, and wind its way through the unfenced mountain passes of the French and Italian Alps. *Autocar* magazine wrote that year, "With out a doubt, the Alpine Rally is one of the most formidable motoring events of any type on the international calendar."

There would be a three-car Sprite team to tackle the Alpine. One car was from the BMC Competitions Department at Abingdon. This car would be driven by Ray Brooks. According to Sprinzel, this drive was a partial reward for Brooks winning the Tulip Rally in a BMC car that April. The second car was prepared by the Donald Healey Motor Company for driver and sometimes auto journalist Tommy Wisdom. In an effort to stretch his racing budget, Marcus Chambers, head of the Competitions Department at BMC, loaned a third car to Speedwell Engineering to be prepared for Sprinzel.

Speedwell was a tuning shop for privateer racers headed by Sprinzel and Graham Hill. Hill would later become one of Britain's greatest drivers and a Formula One champion. Speedwell specialized in squeezing more power out of BMC's "A series" engines for their customers, and with a little over a month to prep a brand new but untested car for a grueling 2,400-mile rally, Speedwell went to work.

The first week in July 1958, the Sprite, now registered PMO 200, took off from the start-line in Marseille. The little car turned out to be quite tough with Sprinzel and his navigator, Willie Cave, winning first in class in the Sprite's first international race, albeit with a huge gouge cut into the hood due to an encounter with a boulder that left the hood inoperable. This creative bodywork was needed to facilitate constant topping up of water and oil. Keep in mind they were climbing steep mountain passes in a car with a 948cc engine. All in all, it was an amazing result for team Sprite with a 1-2-3 finish in class.



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Fast-forward our story 50 years. Brett Pruitt, president of the British Car Club of Hawaii, meets Sprinzel at Honolulu's "Auto Lunch Bunch" which is a group of like-minded car enthusiasts who meet once a month to talk cars and racing. This informal gathering was started by an old Healey 100-Six racer named Bill Maloney. Brett was so impressed with Sprinzel and his stories of racing in the 50s and 60s that he convinced him to jump on a plane, with his lovely wife Caryl, to share more

brought along a film called *Coupe des Alpes, the Story of the 1958 Alpine Rally*. If you have not had an opportunity to see this, it is a *must see* for anyone who loves British sports cars. You can find it on youtube.com. The Standard Motor Co. (Triumph) also produced a film about the race titled *Against the Clock*. Oddly, you have to search youtube for the 1959 Alpine Rally,



but I assure you the film is about the '58 race. Both films really give you a feel for the rally and what a monumental challenge this was.

In any case, Sprinzel's talk was a big hit with club members as it was delivered with his charming self-effacing humor that has made him a hit with car clubs for forty years. The event had an extended Q&A with lots of questions about what it was like to be a racecar driver in England during the swinging sixties. Questions were asked about his friends Stirling Moss, Graham Hill and Erik Carlson, and how he was able to marry a Ferrari-driving Playboy bunny who just happened to be a PhD. All I can say is that Sprinzel can tell a great story and knows a good deal when he sees one.



A few years later, Brett got a call from Sprinzel explaining that he and his wife Caryl were setting up a collage scholarship fund for the children of the island of Molokai, and he was thinking of selling his beloved Sprite to help fund it. Brett jumped at the chance to own Sprinzel's Sprite that he had registered PMO 200. Arrangements were made to fly to

needed five inches of clearance to be loaded on the boat.



Brett admits there was no real reason for the trip other than an opportunity to hangout with John and Caryl for the day, as it didn't really matter the condition of PMO 200. His plan was to totally rebuild it to the exact specifications of the 1958 Alpine car. Brett recalled, "After hearing the stories and seeing the films, I was so impressed with the drivers of that era I wanted to try to experience what John and the other rally drivers experienced almost 60 years ago by building a period-correct rally car."

Brett and I have shared the experience of driving flat out while sleep deprived in Baja, Mexico. There is nothing like driving

the challenge of pushing ourselves and the car to their limits. Our shared adventure was the Baja 500 and all the challenges it presented. The idea of racing flat-out for 2,400 miles is nearly beyond my imagination.

With the help of friends from the British Car Club, the car was stripped to a shell in one afternoon, then off to the body shop where Scott Banus got out the die grinder and started cutting, and then kept cutting. The floors plus the inner and outer sills were replaced. Lower patch panels were welded in on all sides along with new footwells. Watching Scott seam-weld thin body panels makes you appreciate true craftsmanship.

One hundred percent originality was the ultimate goal. Photos and measurements were used to beat the hump in the bonnet. John said they had to do this to prevent the front carburetor's air cleaner from interfering with the bonnet. More photos and clips from the movie were used to accurately locate and cut the

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“ The first week in July 1958, the Sprite, now registered PM0 200, took off from the start-line in Marseille. The little car turned out to be quite tough with Sprinzel and his navigator, Willie Cave, winning first in class in the Sprite’s first international race. ”

side vents. Sprinzel told Brett that they had to find a way to cool the car down as the very early cars didn't have effective shrouding, and the air coming in would go everywhere except through the radiator.

After over a year of extensive metal work, it was finally time for paint. Getting the correct color was more challenging than anyone expected. The original color of the Alpine car was "Speedwell Blue." This color was used only on the very early cars, and the search for a modern paint formula for Speedwell Blue was unsuccessful. The PPG research library's formula turned out to be too green, so an educated guess was made from photos.



Having Sprinzel there to help with the details throughout the project was invaluable, but sometimes, even pictures, movie clips and memory failed to fill in the blanks. When trying to recreate a specific car, it's all about the little things that make the difference. Some of those details were just unavailable, so they had to be recreated. The word "un-obtainium" reached a whole new level.

The Delaney Gallay oil cooler was recreated using a modern core. The rally plates and decals were made using period photos as a guide. The Speedwell emblem was recreated by a CAD designer using a 3D printer and then sent out to be chromed by a company specializing in chroming for models. None of this would have been possible without the help of a collector in the UK named Mark Foster of "Mk1 Performance Conversions." Mark had an original emblem and was kind enough to take measurements and send photos. He would not part with his emblem, as he had never seen another like it. The side vents are originally from a 1950-54 Austin A70 Hereford, as plentiful as umbrellas in 1958 England, but not so much in Hawaii in 2015. Unbelievably, through the Austin Counties Car Club in Wendover, UK, Brett was able to track down a pair. The good news was that a gentleman named Graham Potts said he might have a set of wings (fenders) with the vents



in a barn. The bad news was that Brett would have to wait until spring when it warmed up before he could look for them. Eventually, Brett's persistence and patience were rewarded. The vents arrived in Hawaii and they were quickly shipped to Minnesota to be cleaned up and re-chromed. The tax disc was made in Britain by Greg Powell, who recreates them for classic cars. He was able to get the stamp for the correct location and date for PMO 200, another step towards 100 percent accuracy.

The motor was obtained from Tom Monaco, an Austin-Healey specialist in Portland, Oregon. Tom was a friend and great help tracking down other hard-to-find parts as well. The



motor was built by his shop for a racecar project that had stalled, leaving the motor sitting, and available, at the machine shop. Fellow Sprite owner Jonas Lindquist in Sweden helped with the correct cylinder head color that Speedwell used in the day by sending color photos of his Bugeye's motor at the racetrack in 1960. He was very excited about the project and asked if it was possible to get John's autograph which John gladly provided.

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"This way to victory."

Converting the car back to right-hand drive (RHD) required sourcing a RHD dash and steering "plinth" from a California Sprite owner who abandoned converting his car. A Morris Minor left-hand drive (LHD) steering rack was acquired from a gentleman in Arizona by placing a classified ad in a Morris club newsletter. The LHD Minor rack was used on RHD Sprites by flipping it upside down. Lucky the Brits built cars from parts bins! It was not uncommon to use up last year's inventory on next year's model. An easy way to help control costs and use up old parts, but 50 years later it is the source

of endless discussion amongst concours judges. "That item is not correct," declares the judge, docking a point. "But it was on the car when bought new," argues the owner in protest. And so it goes. It isn't correct, but it is original. Building any racecar is full of compromises. Recreating one from the 50s is an exercise in reducing compromise in an endless quest for authenticity.

The rest of the build was straightforward Sprite restoration work with the exception of a couple of suspension tweaks per Sprinzel's specs. Finishing touches were completed with the help of Brett's friends from the British Car Club of Hawaii and a lot of cold beer.

Brett is pleased with the way the car turned out. When asked how it drives he said, "Now I understand the phrase, 'It is more fun to drive a slow car fast.' My 100-Six has twice the horsepower, and the Jag with more than three times, but the Sprite is a totally different animal.

You have to keep the revs way up in the power band at all times. It's a blast to drive being so small and 'tossable' on those skinny tires. I'm really looking forward to someday entering it in a long distance rally."

Acquiring John's car was one of those "too good to be true" moments for Brett, and the opportunity to work on the build with a legend of motorsport, along with many car guys from around the world, made it even more special. **HM**

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