

SPRITE REPLICA FIRM UP FOR SALE



Clockwise: the genuine Mk1 Sprite remains an entertaining choice; Brading's premises include chassis jig and (below) bucks for his replicas



Conceived as a budget buy for impecunious sports-car fans unable to afford more sophisticated offerings, the Austin-Healey 'Frogeye' Sprite must surely rank among the most entertaining of late-1950s British roadsters. Unfortunately for those impecunious drivers, however, decent examples now command serious prices. A cursory glance at online classifieds reveals nothing worthwhile for less than £15,000, while a superb example recently sold for £35,000 (see *Market place*, January).

That said, such values do mean that now could be the moment to invest in Frogeyes. Far from advocating the purchase of an early

Sprite simply to squirrel it away, we're talking about Keith Brading's glassfibre replicas. And we don't mean just one, either.

Serial Big Healey enthusiast Brading – he owned eight at one stage – rose to fame in the late 1980s when his firm, The Frogeye Car Company, launched a glassfibre facsimile of the Sprite. Based on a rigid galvanised-steel chassis, the roadster initially employed the same A-series powerplant as the genuine article, but progressive development led to the 16-valve K-series SuperSprite, as well as a fixed-head Sebring replica.

The cars, which were hand-built by a small team on the Isle of

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Wight, were thoroughly engineered and warmly welcomed into club circles – no doubt helped by Donald Healey's approval of the project (Geoffrey Healey going on to officially endorse it in 1989).

Despite a high level of interest from the press and healthy demand from buyers, Brading was unable to capitalise on the car's success, the firm struggling to find sufficient investment. The company eventu-

ally ran aground in the late 1990s.

The Ryde factory has been mothballed ever since and Brading, who is now 77, has decided that the moment has come to part with the tooling and remaining components. Included in the sale are a jig, a complete SuperSprite chassis that was retained as a production pattern, plus numerous body and hardtop moulds and plugs for both the standard roadster and the Sebring coupé.

With original Sprites fetching significant prices today, could now be an opportune moment for the car to re-enter production? For further details, contact Brading via louise-brading1@hotmail.co.uk

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