

# ALTERNATIVE MIDGETS (AND SPRITES) LENHAM CONVERSIONS: "GT" "Le Mans Coupe" "Lenham GTO"

report from David Matthews



acknowledgements to The MG Owners Club

In early February 1962 The Vintage & Sports Car Garage Ltd was founded by Julian Kingsford Booty, in the village of Lenham, behind the Dog & Bear Hotel in Lenham Square, near Maidstone in Kent. Very quickly the Co. became known as Lenhams by the motoring public, and even after they moved to Harrietsham (1967) - a few miles along the A20 in Kent, where they still have a sales dept. - showroom and workshops - preparing historic race cars, as well as a sales dept. with a high number of MGB's Midgets & Sprites, passing through their hands - and are still going strong after 42 years, - they are still referred to by the public as Lenhams.

In late 1962 early 1963 a GT aluminium body was hand built, and fitted to a MK 1 Sprite, this car was then used as a master mould to make the Fibre Glass kits known as the Lenham GT. The early catalogue photos show XBE 340 in the snow of '63 (which went on until March of that year). XBE 340 was a fictitious registration, and the whereabouts of this one off alloy bodied car is not known - unless of course this article produces some response.

The early bonnet for this car was also manufactured by the Lenham Motor Co. and was later replaced by the Superfast Bonnet with the bulge to allow for the larger Carburettors fitted to the 1275 cc engines on the later Midgets and Sprites.

Having been employed in 1964 by The Donald Healey Motor Co. Ltd at the Cinema workshops and showrooms in Leamington. I had an early introduction to Sprites, Midgets, MGBs and big Healeys,

mainly carrying out pre-delivery for export to USA and Canada, before moving to BMC at Oxford and working in the Tuning Dept. on the end of the production line until 1966 (redundancy came with a hammer blow with 16,000 cars

Healey Weekend at Brands Hatch, I had been asked to road test for Classic Cars, with Roger Byford and Philip Young, the Lenham Big Healey, comparing the 100/4 - 100/6 and 3000 version of these cars which I believe some 26 were built, and very nice they were too, and it renewed my interest in their other conversions for Midgets and Sprites.

I was able to purchase my first Lenham - a Le Mans Coupe' - from the late Dick Mullis - FVK



stored at Oakley airport unsold for over 18 months).

From 1975 to 1995 I was very involved with the Austin Healey Club and spent 20 years competing in Rallies, Hill Climbs, Sprints, Production Car Trials and Auto tests, and eventually Club Circuit Racing in the road going section of the Austin Healey Club Championship.

In 1985 after the International

203C. This was a tame 1098cc car which needed an implant in order to be competitive in Sprints and Hill Climbs and Longmans provided a very powerful 1293cc road going specification with about 90 b.h.p. After a season competing in this, it was decided to modify a MK2 flat screen Sprite to a GT for out and out circuit racing, but utilising a refurbished MK3 body which gave the stronger suspension set up, with half elliptic rear

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springs, for auto tests, sprints, hill climbs etc. We transplanted the bulkhead of the Mk2 Sprite on to the Mk3 body thereby enabling us to fit the early GT body, doors and screen.

Thus 411 TMA (Silver GT) was built, and competed successfully through '88 '89 '90 obtaining three 2nds, (Snetterton, Brands Hatch, Silverstone) a 3rd at the DMH memorial race at Silverstone (Oct 1988), and a 4th at Mallory Park and FTD at Brands on the short circuit in the summer of 19-8 (1 mm - 0.07 sees). The following season saw a less successful year and Doddington, Lydden, Snetterton, Brands Hatch gave the driver more experience including "offs" and near misses. After a few Rallies of the Norwich Union type the car was sold in 1990 and is successful in Japan, in its class.

A lot of these kits were sold to privateers as well as Lenham carrying out conversions for customers. One or two Dutch/German owners still have FIA papers on cars with Lenham conversions, and are racing in Historic race and rally events. I managed to race my GT at Spa, at the 3rd Trophee Des Ardennes in May 1989, after some blustering with the race officials who wanted FIA papers, but none were forthcoming.

During 1989 and 1990 two other projects regarding Lenham conversions were carried out, on a Mk3 Sprite and a Mk 3 Midget. A Mk3 Midget was converted into a Le mans Coupe' and a MK3 Sprite was converted to the first GTO.

### 37 ARK

This was a MK3 Midget which an enthusiast advertised as a Lenham,



but was in fact a standard Midget with an Ashley Laminates Hardtop fibreglassed to the body, and had been purchased from a guy in Leeds who had no idea (and nor did I in 1984) what it was, and it remained in a front garden just rotting away, so Martin Ingal was given the task of restoring it - with the help of another donor car with an Arkley body and the registration as above.

Photo shows the car and family outside Lenham Motor Co.(The Vintage and Sports Car Garage Ltd) in the Spring of 1990. This car was finished to a very high standard, and maroon carpeted interior, but with a growing family and three Lenhams it was very quickly sold and was last heard of in Northern Ireland - but separated from its registration plate.

### CYR 7C

This project was finished in May of 1989 in time for the Welsh Weekend run by John & Jill Bowman.

I had visited the Austin Healey Club of America in 1987 and met a member of the AH Club out there who had a dossier on Lenham conversions, Hardtops etc. very detailed stuff, and amongst it was a reference to a GTO open body conversion, which I knew nothing about - until I returned and contacted Lenhams'.

It appeared that some 16 of these conversions were carried out in 1966, the design based upon the Aston Martin DB6 Volant' for inspiration, but due to racing, preparation commitments, at the time, these Grand Touring Open kits were not pursued.

I managed to persuade Julian Booty to break out the moulds and





rework the square wheel arches into round wheel arches and also to rework the boot opening so as to improve security by going through the rear squab etc. In addition new Buck Moulds were made in order to remanufacture the Perspex headlight covers for the Superfast Bonnet.

Lenhams carried out all the work inhouse including the fitting of the body to a new MK3 Leyland body shell located by Martin Ingal and the photo shows the completed conversion and paintwork ready for Orchard Engineering to complete the fitting out of the mechanicals and trim.

The car is fast road specification with 1340 cc engine, balanced, lightened flywheel, gas flowed head 286 Kent Cam 2 x 1.5, SU's, a 10 Gallon tank with 3.7 Riley Duff and a Servo fitted, it is a very nice cruiser with a reasonable turn of speed/acceleration, together with good economy. The car was sold in 1992 following a house move and in February of this year it was located in Edinburgh and had been stored in a car coon for several years with barely 3000 miles on it since 1992!! I purchased the car and it is back with me at present. However, following early retirement and selling my business the car is for sale elsewhere in this issue.

#### UON 535H

By 1995 I was able to consider building another GTO and a suitable donor car (MK3 Midget) was purchased and again Lenhams did the full conversion and paint in BMW Moreno Green metallic, this car was finished in May 1996 and was used purely for domestic and social purposes, never raced or rallied, it led a quiet life until it was sold through the Lenham Motor Co. to John Goodwin in Essex in 2002. I recently met up with John so that the cars could be photographed together for the first time, after all there are only two in



the world!!

The Moulds for the GTO and Perspex Covers for the Superfast Bonnet headlamp covers are with the red GTO, so it is possible to build another GTO should anyone wish to do so - the remaining conversion Moulds and Superfast Bonnet are with Classic Cars of Kent Ltd in Tonbridge.

Advantages to these conversions:

- 1) Lighter body by 100Lbs (Bonnet and rear conversion)
- 2) Streamlining
- 3) Body shape - style- looks etc.
- 4) Better economy
- 5) Dreaded metal Termites







*GTO with David's previous Lenham GTs*

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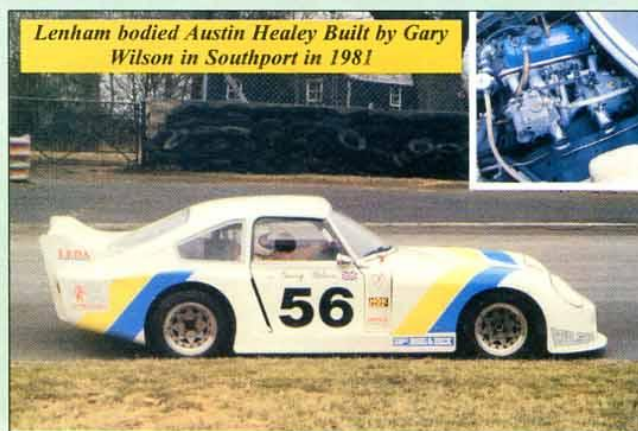
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*Lenham bodied Austin Healey Built by Gary Wilson in Southport in 1981*



### A Chance to Buy CYR 7C

If you would like to be the proud owner of a unique Lenham GTO built on new Leyland shell 1989, in superb condition, having been awarded a past concours place, and been an overall champion winner Austin Healey Club. This GTO is one of only two built and is offered for sale together with GTO rear end moulds headlamp moulds and also a revolving chassis stand (Total costs £25K) for £9,950 ono. For more information telephone David Matthews on 01892 783135