

'Junk-pile' turns out to be hero's Sprite

Speedwell GT Sprite Leatherhead, Surrey

AN HISTORIC AUSTIN-HEALEY Sprite has been discovered by two enthusiasts who thought they were buying a 'piece of junk'.

Dave Grove and Bill McDonough had been obsessed with Speedwell GT Sprites for years, fuelled by the book *Sprites and Midgets* by Anders Clausager – and particularly by a photograph taken at Silverstone in the Sixties of a Speedwell GT Sprite owned by Keith Grant.

Incredibly the 'junk-pile' turned out to be the Grant car.

The story began when Brian Martin, a Rolls-Royce restorer, offered them, on behalf of a customer, a derelict modified Sprite, described as a 'piece of junk'. The duo went to view it, and bought it.

At some time the rear end had

been heavily modernised with bodywork reminiscent of a much later Austin-Healey built for Le Mans. On removing the large aluminium fuel tank that was loose in the back, they found that the original rear end had been covered in glassfibre. Beginning to think that they might have a genuine car, they stripped off the glassfibre to reveal the numbers 585 MY – the Keith Grant car.

The Speedwell Gran Turismo Sprite was announced in December 1960 and first offered the following month at the Racing Car Show. Grant, who hailed from Farnborough in Kent, bought one for road use, but being a keen member of the Sevenoaks and District Motor Club he was soon persuaded to enter it into compe-

tion. He had a hot Formula Junior engine fitted and was successful in various club events.

The car survived being rolled at Castle Combe 'by a friend' and Keith fitted an even hotter engine and much more modern fibreglass bodywork supplied by FGR of Shortlands. He then competed in a number of international events: the 1000km and 500km at Brands Hatch, and the 1000km at the Nürburgring, where his co-driver was Graham White, formerly General Secretary of the BARC, now with the Historic Sports Car Club. The car was sold at the end of the 1966 season to Tim Baker, who used it to great effect in the BTRDA Autocross Championship.

Dave and Bill are restoring the Sprite to its original glory.

