

WJB 707

Putting the record straight

On 10th April 2015, five days before WJB was to be offered for sale at the H & H auction at the Imperial War Museum, Duxford, **John Sprinzel** sent an email to Damian Jones of H & H: *“How great to see another of the original Sebring Sprites on the block. This one was certainly the fastest of them on the track, and Rob Walker's did a great job of rebuilding it after the level crossing keeper **wrote it off** at Paddock! Aloha”*. This news of an accident to the car, of course, set alarm bells ringing, but on further questioning JS came back with a reply which included the statement *“With such a close circle of folks interested in Sebrings at the time, word got to me very soon that the car was crashed on the first lap of a test day at Brands, and also that he had employed the [Rob] Walker garage to look after the car, as they were close to 'his' crossing/home. And No, I had no personal view of the car after it left the Mews”*. So, Damian concluded that: *“Sounds like the mention of 'WJB 707' being written off was not meant to imply that it had been majorly damaged”*. A note was attached to the auction particulars on the day telling of this early accident. The car's reputation was clearly damaged by this news and it may well have adversely affected the bidding from which no sale resulted. It is known that at least one bidder decided not to offer for the car, and of course there may have been others

On 1st August 2017 I spoke on the phone **Brian Wheeler**, the highly respected engineer, who built that amazing Healey SR replica from the ground up, produced a large number of new Frogeye Sprite body-shells on a jig he designed and built himself, and also restored the body/chassis of WJB 707. Brian was keen to point out that Stephen's car was stored for over 20 years in his yard 'on its wheels' and wrapped in blankets beneath its waterproof covering. When the car was brought into his workshop in November 2007 it was found to require only replacement outer sills, the inner ones being solid, and the outer skins of both 'A' posts. The 'H' frame was found to be in sound condition and Brian says this was clearly the most original of the Sebring Coupés he had seen. Some minor repair was needed to part of the aluminium rear shroud and further aluminium was replaced in the foot-wells. Brian disputes the statement* that he would never weld old metal and would replace it with new. Once he had repaired the shell it was re-sprayed by his son-in-law. I asked Brian if there were any signs that the bodyshell had ever been in a serious accident and he said emphatically 'No'. I also asked if the alloy panels might have been transferred to another shell to which he also said 'No' as the shell retains all its original lightening carried out by Ian Walker including the Dexion petrol tank supports.

[Stephen points out that it had been necessary to renew the aluminium to the foot-wells from time to time when he was auto-crossing the car. *He believes Brian may have actually said he would never weld old metal but in connection with aluminium (rather than steel) which just falls apart if you try to weld it when it is thin and corroded. The condition of the bodyshell

before any welding commenced can be seen quite clearly in the first 4 photos on the webpage under 'Restoration']

'The Most Original of the Sprinzel Sebring Sprites'.

On the sebringsprite.com website I have referred to WJB as being "the most original of the surviving Sprinzel Sebring Sprites". John Sprinzel disputed this on Facebook a little while ago, clearly believing that attribute should be afforded to S221. I wrote to him pointing out that S221 had a new fastback body fitted after it was rolled at the Nurburgring by Peter Clarke in 1961, and had a 3rd body in the 1990's, facts which he now acknowledges. I am now very clear that WJB is in fact the ONLY Sebring with both its original chassis/bodyshell and its original W & P alloy bodywork (with the exception of its bonnet).

The Octane article

In the recent article published in 'Octane' magazine (August 2017) two errors made initially by the car's former owner, the late Ian Walker, were perpetuated. In a letter to Stephen in February 1967 Walker says: "I believe it did in fact win 15 races during the season I had it"; and also: "it also raced in the Nurburgring 500 kms where it finished 5th I think". We now now believe the number of wins achieved by Walker and WJB in 1961 was in the order of 9, and he had clearly forgotten that at the Nurburgring he shared another Sebring (D20) with Paul Hawkins as WJB had already been sold.

Conclusions:

1. It is clear that the accident which occurred at Paddock Bend at Brands Hatch caused no significant damage to the car's bodyshell or the car's alloy panels, and it seems likely that it was the bonnet (whether aluminium or fibreglass) which was destroyed necessitating its replacement.
2. Also there was no evidence of severe corrosion in the bodyshell discovered at the time of the car's restoration, and certainly no major repair or replacement of the 'H' frame was required.
3. WJB 707 remains the ONLY one of the 4 surviving cars to retain BOTH its original bodyshell and its original Williams & Pritchard alloy rear panels and hardtop.
4. It is acknowledged that the car did not race at the Nurburgring circuit as originally claimed by its former owner Ian Walker. His claim to 15 wins in 1961 seems to have been a little exaggerated though the car was clearly the lightest and fastest of the Sprinzel Sebring Sprites in period with many successes to its name.