

WJB 707 IN HEALEY MUSEUM

The Healey Museum recently welcomed a legendary Sprite to its collection on display : ex-Ian Walker Sprinzel Sebring Sprite WJB 707, currently owned by Stephen Bowen.

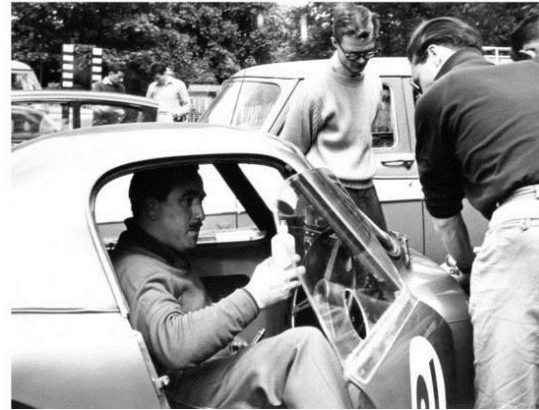


This car eventually formed the base for the Sebring Sprite Replica as we know it today. Originally it came off the production line on September 21 1960 as a standard car in Old English White. Immediately thereafter together with an also white production sister Sprite, it was to be prepared as factory rally car. With expert advice of John Sprinzel both Sprites were equipped with Healey Speed Equipment Parts and modified to Sebring specifications.



In November 1960 Pat Moss together with Ann Wisdom, took part in the Tour of Corsica with this meanwhile as WJB 707 christened Sebring Sprite. Unfortunately they had to quit with a malfunctioning gearbox. After that, BMC sold WJB 707 to Ian Walker, who had the car refurbished by Williams & Pritchard with a light weight Sprinzel coupe body.

Ian Walker was a successful driver and a good friend of Colin Chapman and Graham Hill. Starting in 1957, Ian booked many wins with Lotus and was an active factory navigator for Ford and BMC. Under the colors of John Sprinzel Ltd., Ian took part in more than a few important national British races in which he almost without exception finished first in class including fastest lap time.



The record he set on May 22 1961 on Crystal Palace still stands, while the circuit shut down in '72. All in all Ian claims to have won 15 races with WJB for the year 1961.



He was also part of team Sebring that in 1961 won the Silverstone Six Hour Relay Race.



After the '61 season Ian quit as active racer and went on as team boss of Ian Walker Racing. He then successfully toured Europe and North America with famous racing drivers Jim Clark and Graham Hill. Ian passed away in 2008 at age 82.

After the very successful racing year 1961 WJB 707 was sold by John Sprinzel. Very little is known about the years after that. The story goes that the car was bought by a lady in Kent as a present for her husband, a railway employee.

In 1966 the car again emerged and was bought by Stephen Bowen. At that time Steve is working for a tuning company called Nerus and later for Weslake. He used the Sebring car as daily transport and later on also for rallies, sprints and rallycross.



To attract more attention Steve painted the car in dayglo lime with a pink stripe!



In '69 Stephen took the car off the road and disassembled the Sprite meaning to completely restore it. But, busy working for Weslake in Germany withheld him from working seriously on that restoration. In 1973 Steve moved to the Netherlands and started his own business.

In 1987 WJB was brought back to the UK from the Netherlands and ended up with Len Prichard, the original builder of the lightweight body who did some repairs to the roof. After that, the car went to Brian Archer of Archers Garage who – on the base of WJB – manufactured the molds with which the meanwhile well known Sebring Sprite Replicas are being build. Also the WJB bodywork was used as an example to rebuild

some other original Sprinzel coupes which did withstand the ravages of time less well.

Actually, these cars have been build according to the unique specifications of WJB 707 as commissioned by Ian Walker; although with a somewhat lower windscreen than the other Sprinzel Sebring coupes had.



In 2007 Brian Wheeler, on behalf of Steve, started total restoration of WJB. In May 2008 the restoration had advanced to the level that the car, sprayed gunmetal grey, could be shown at the Sprite 50 year event at Goodwood.



Later on the car was finished and provided with the right 998cc engine. Stephen saw to it that the car kept its pure lines without a modern roll cage and that it especially was kept very light; exactly like Ian Walker imagined originally. No doubt this must have been the key to the many successes in the glory days of 1961.

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Albert Voogd