

WORTHY

MIKE WORTHINGTON-WILLIAMS ON HIS LATEST DISCOVERIES

Falcon find

The Falcon Sprite I mentioned in the February issue has surfaced, but not in the hands of rally driver John Sprinzel. Writing from Columbus, Ohio, Roger L. Sieling confirms that he has the car, unrestored, having recovered it from a farm pasture in 1971. At that time he was not aware of its historical significance, simply saddened that it had been left to rot away.

A year later, however, a friend turned up a June 1960 issue of *Motor Trend* which featured an article entitled *Mr Healey's Mighty Sprite*, describing the Falcon Sprite as it had competed at Nassau in December 1959. 'It's a jet-hot little projectile, capable of whipping muscular Austin-Healey 3000s in a drag or road race...' ran the piece, but even then, although Roger realised that his car was a product of Healey's The Cape works, it didn't dawn on him that it was the 1959 Nassau car and the 1960 Le Mans entry. But when, in the late seventies, he read Geoffrey Healey's book *More Healeys*, and was able to compare engine numbers, he realised that he



Rescued in 1971, the Falcon Sprite now awaits restoration in Columbus, Ohio

had something quite important. Detail differences – including a larger nose opening than the photos of the Le Mans car showed – were explained by the fact that alterations had been made during the car's racing life. The Le Mans nose had been made smaller by the simple expedient of riveting a piece of sheet metal (later removed) to the car.

Rivet patterns exposed by inverting the bonnet today also show that the smaller scoop was replaced for Le Mans, and a Sebring pre-race photo in

The Motor for March 16, 1960, shows the car much as it raced a couple of months earlier at Nassau, but fitted with disc wheels. The *Motor Trend* article disclosed that Girling 8in disc/drum conversions had been fitted front and rear (the optional brake set available for 948cc Sprites) and Geoffrey Healey did tell Roger in 1982 that trouble had been experienced with the four-wheel Dunlop discs, and probably only the 1959 Sebring cars had them.

When found, the car had been vandalised, and both the bonnet and boot

lid had been abused but are probably restorable. All instruments had been smashed, the battery had corroded through the floor and stripping the engine disclosed badly-scored cylinder walls.

Since the car is over-bored by 0.060 from a 948cc unit, re-sleeving is probably the only answer. The fuel tank cap had been left off for many years, allowing water to rot out the bottom, but the tank was basically a 'big' Healey type modified to race spec, with large diameter vent tubes (as on the 100-6 Sebring car) and outlets for two fuel pumps.

Meeting Geoffrey Healey (and Donald, Brian and Margaret) at the 30th anniversary event at Snow Mass, Colorado, Roger was also able to obtain confirmation that only one Falcon shell had been purchased and that this, definitely, was it.

The car was registered with Peter Dicks of the English Sprite Registry, and it's surprising to learn now that the Register has no knowledge of the car. After completing restoration of a '67 Lotus S3 Super 7, and a Lotus Eleven S2 Le Mans (chassis No 345, one of three 'B' team cars, ex-Keith Hall) work will shortly commence on the Falcon, and anyone with any photos or knowledge of the car is requested to contact me as soon as possible. Letters can be forwarded.

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Think of Falcon Shells and you think of kit cars of the sixties, but the one you see here was different, and rather special. Nineteen-sixty saw two races at Sebring – one of four hours duration for GT cars using homologated equipment, and the other a 12-hour event allowing prototypes to take part – in which Austin-Healey Sprite team cars were entered. Harry Weslake tweaked the ex-Targa Florio Sprite and, with disc brakes and wire wheels, it was entered in the shorter race.

For the longer event, the 1959 road test car, registered 5983 AC, was prepared with the Falcon shell you see here, and as a result was considerably lighter. Fitted with discs all round, it also boasted a thicker head casting with greater rigidity at the joint face following previous problems in this area. Stirling Moss drove the four-hour car, but was beaten (just) by a far more sophisticated twin-cam Fiat Abarth. Scheduled to pilot a Maserati in the big race, however, his place was taken by John Lumkin and rally driver John Sprinzel.

Head gasket problems dogged them, and caused much loss of time, but nevertheless they finished – albeit

Hunt for a Falcon



Where is this Falcon-bodied Sprite now? It has a Sebring and Le Mans pedigree

41st overall – and had the satisfaction of being sole finishers in their class (and therefore class winners).

Thereafter the car was taken to Le Mans, there to run in the prototype category of the 1960 event driven by Johns Colgate and Sprinzel. A spill in the Acropolis Rally put Sprinzel out of

action, however, and his place was taken by John Dalton. The car was also handicapped in being fitted (at the organiser's insistence) with a full-size screen, which caused a good deal of drag, and with the necessity for the body to be altered to accommodate 'luggage space' – another requirement

of the regulations.

In the event, however, it was a severe oil leak into the clutch housing which caused the greatest problem, and towards the end of the race Dalton was instructed to 'keep the revs down' to avoid clutch slip. Nursing the car in this way enabled it to run consistently and finish first in the 1000cc sports car class, albeit 12th overall in the sports car class. It was also 11th in the index of performance, fourth in the index of thermal efficiency, and had covered 2055.142 miles. Its best lap at 91.15mph compared well with the MGA at 99.46mph. But what became of it? David Balkham of the Falcon Register has so far had no success in tracing its current whereabouts, despite an approach to the Sprite OC.

John Sprinzel, although closely connected with the Healey works team and the BMC works rally team, was officially a private entrant. Did he take the car over after the race, perhaps, and if so did he keep it? I last met John in 1960/61 when he had business connections with Yeoman Credit (who were also into racing), and I worked with Yeoman Credit's parent, Bowmaker. If you're out there, John...