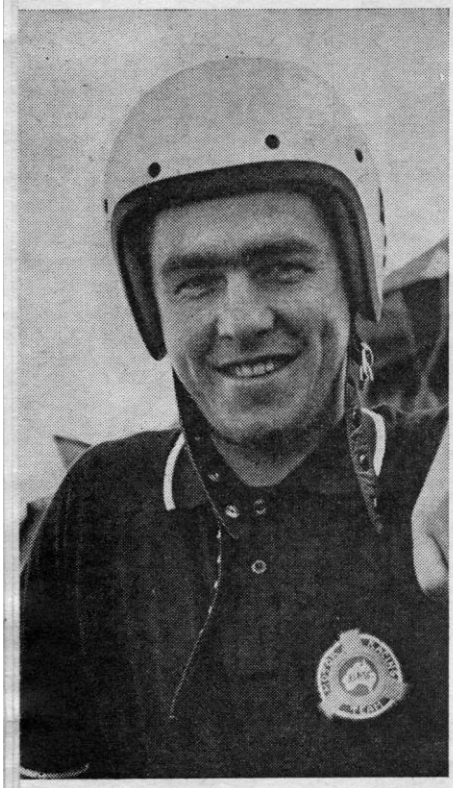
MIKE KABLE DRIVES . . . . . FOLEY'S



Wearing the BMC Motor Racing Team badge, Foley pauses at Phillip Island during the Armstrong 500.

IF you were among the crowds at Warwick Farm one day earlier this year, then it's more than likely that you joined in those first thunderous bursts of applause and then those hoarse, unbroken cheers during the running of the Australian Grand Touring Championship.

You might also be excused for thinking that Brian Foley was gathering inspiration from them as he strove to get his tiny dark-green Austin Healey Sprite into a place.

Of course, Foley couldn't have heard them above the scream of his engine and being tucked away as he was in the cockpit of his coupe. But then, who's to say that he didn't sense them and that they helped encourage him to drive the race of his life . . . ?

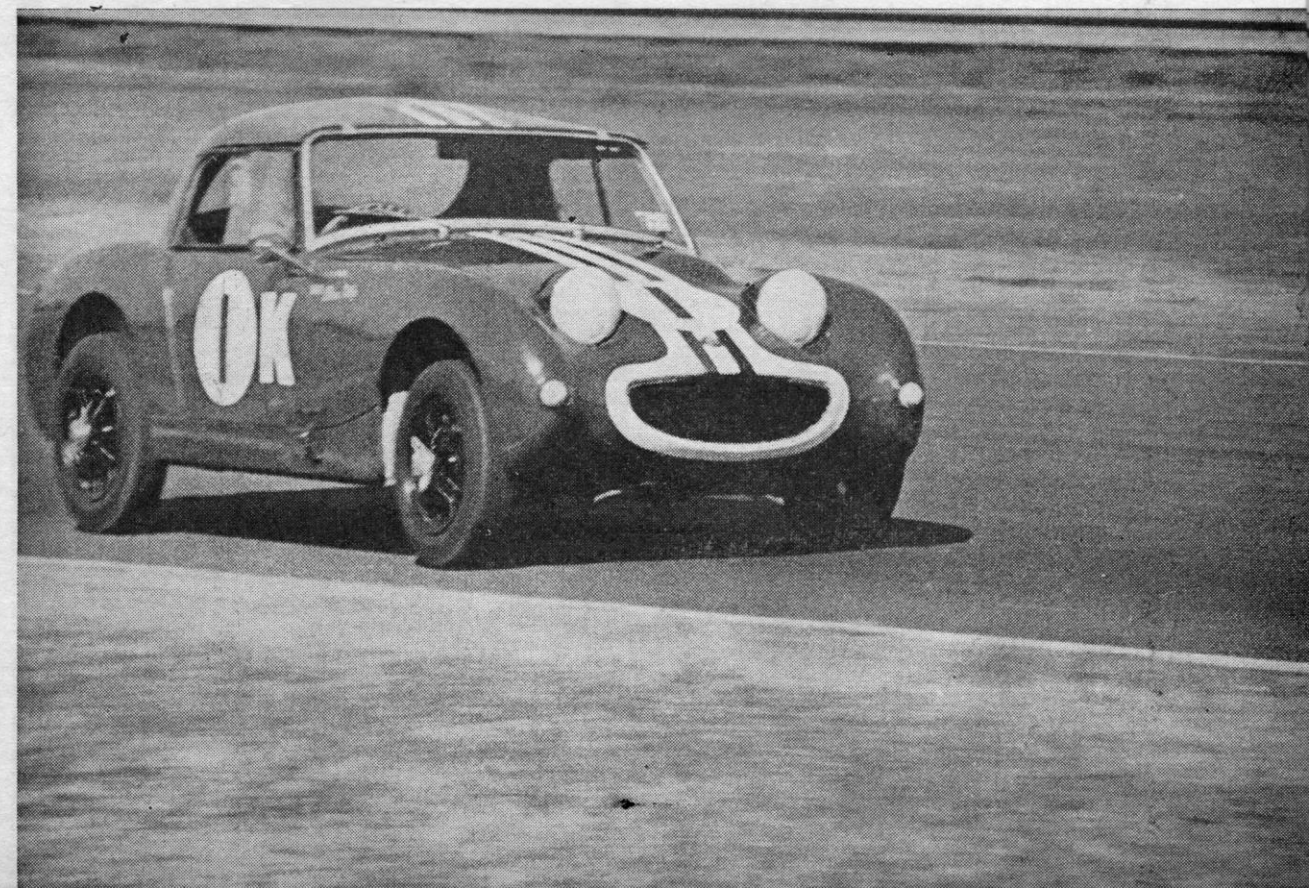
Foley's inspired drive to outright third place in the championship will be the favorite topic of Sydney's motor racing community for many a long day to come. As an example of fierce cut-and-thrust dicing, it was as good as many diehards had seen.

Australian motor racing crowds are usually restrained in their appreciation, but this was one notable exception to the rule. Not one of us who saw the race will deny that it was not justly earned.

By now, the story of the championship is fairly well known, but for the sake of this story and because they're worth recounting, we'll repeat a little of Foley's efforts, beginning with the official practice session the day before.

Foley and his mechanics, Johnny Corcoran and Digby Cooke, had rebuilt the motor after a piston collapsed during the previous week and ran in the car the night prior to practice. Meanwhile, the half-worn Dunlop R5 tyres from Tom Corcoran's FJ Lola had been switched across to the Sprite.

"Those tyres really worked the trick," says Foley. "We did three or four quiet laps, Digby took a plug reading and tuned the engine, then I did a lap in 1 min 59 sec—



That epic dice at Warwick Farm: Foley in Cusack's slipstream just before taking him in the 15th lap. Cusack could do nothing about it—neither could Ralph Sach, whom Foley passed earlier! (Photograph: N. A. Conlon)

An inspiration to all Sprite owners with aspirations to go motor racing.

FABULOUS SPRITE

five seconds better than ever before."

Without experimenting further, Foley packed the Sprite away ready for the race the next day. Overnight, the team planned their strategy which Foley recalled thus:

"We wanted to conserve the car for the first half of the championship and wait for the opposition to tire itself out. Of course, we'd change all this if the opportunity came about to get into a major place.

"When we got going, I wasn't worried about catching Sach's Twin-Cam or Cusack's Super 90, as I knew the Sprite had enough steam to get up on them."

And catch them Foley did! From lying seventh in the opening lap, he moved up to fifth with the retirements of Thomson's Monza and Geoghegan's Elite and first caught Sach in his sights. He hounded him so hard that the crowd first disbelieved it. But Sach knew better and had a few strenuous laps trying all he knew to keep ahead. As anyone in the sport will agree, he knows a lot, but even his experience couldn't prevent the inevitable . . .

After this flawless exhibition of braking, cornering and accelerating, Foley took Sach on the 11th lap. You might call it a rather desperate manoeuvre, but nevertheless it was skilfully done. As Sach lined up for Polo Corner, Foley nipped through on the inside—and literally brought the house down amongst the thousands in the grandstands. Then he set out after the Porsche, running steadily along a bit further on.

Another four laps later, amidst much clapping and cheering, Cusack saw the Sprite scream past. There was simply nothing he could do about it, just the same as Bob Jane couldn't when he finally tamed his 300S Maserati coupe and gave it everything in a grim bid for Foley's third place.

At the end of the day, the Sprite was whisked away in all its glory to the showrooms of P. and R. Williams for a couple of weeks. When Brian agreed to let me drive it, the car was still in exactly the same shape as when it had left the circuit—except for a muffler hurriedly wired into place.

Actually, the Sprite has a much older history than one would think considering its age. Or rather, parts of it have. The engine and gearbox are from Brian's former and equally amazing mount, the Farina-era A40, which Peter Wherrett tested and wrote about in SCW's March, 1960 issue.

Students of BMC products will realise that the basic A40 and Sprite engines are identical, except that the later has more power than the former. The Sprite was purchased new last year and hardly ran a mile on the road before being prepared for racing and made its competition debut by taking off a class win in the 1960 GT Championship at Bathurst's Mt Panorama. At Orange's Gnoo Blas the following day it was pipped by Les Howard's supercharged Sprite.

After this satisfactory outing, Foley sent a letter off to London to Paddy Gaston, who conducts a flourishing "hot-bits" establishment and has the reputation of having the quickest Sprite and Mini-Minor on the English shores. Back came a kit comprising four genuine oversize three-ring Hepolite pistons, an extractor exhaust, a special inlet manifold, lightweight pushrods and a camshaft ground to Formula Junior specifications. The bores were ground .060 in oversize, which takes the capacity to 990 cc (not 1100 cc as



some would have it after the GT championship) and the head worked over and fitted with bigger inlet and exhaust valves.

All the remaining modifications had been carried out earlier on the A40 engine, including twin 1¾ in SUs.

Meanwhile, the bodywork was considerably altered—but not the basic shape—as Foley had decided to have a crack at GT racing. The J and S fibreglass hardtop was moulded into the bodywork and a fibreglass replica bonnet fitted. Light-alloy doors were panelled up. This resulted in an original saving of 1¼ cwts, the car weighing 11¾ cwts, but this has since been reduced to 11¼ cwts.

Foley did not fare so well first time out with the Gaston motor. The crankshaft, which had carried on faithfully through in the A40 and the early days of the Sprite, tossed it in, cracking one piston. This was replaced with a locally-made product, but the Sprite had further piston trouble before things were sorted out.

On 10.5 to 1 compression and pulling a 4.5 to 1 differential ratio, Foley can wind the engine around to 7300 rpm, but doesn't exceed 7000 rpm unless necessary. The theoretical maximum speed is well over 100 mph, which certainly makes it the fastest Sprite in the country, if not a big slice of the world. With a 3.7 diff—impracticable on most of our circuits—the top speed would be really impressive.

Finished in BRG with a red, white and blue tricolor stripe and with its optional triple-laced 13 in wire wheels sprayed jet black, the Sprite is a most attractively purposeful machine which exudes character.

Abandon any ideas here that this car in its present form would be an absolute joy to have for open road use. It is strictly a competition machine. You step in through the paper-light doors to a spartan cockpit mostly finished in matt black to cut down dazzle to grip a wooden-rimmed wheel and see a tiny aluminium dash panel into which only two gauges—a combined water temp and oil pressure and a 7500 rpm electric tachometer—are set.

Your left elbow rests on a plated fire extinguisher mounted on the transmission tunnel. There's not a skerrick of unnecessary weight inside—not even a carpet on the floor or trim over the tunnel. This is a very functional car, as you soon realise when you get under way to the accompaniment of all the genuine racing noises—a bark from the exhaust, a growl from the gears, a howl from the diff and a roar from the engine.

Forgetting occasional rattles from the doors and perspex side-screens, this high-powered Sprite is really pleasant to operate. The close-ratio gearbox invites use and the lever has a satisfyingly short movement between changes, although like the normal box the synchromesh can be beaten.

The Sprite's step away from rest is fairly phenomenal. Its best time through a quarter in Foley's hands is 17.6 sec and as this was recorded some time ago a better figure could now be expected. At about 4500 rpm we noticed a flat spot which felt like a plug fluffing. This could have been caused through the car having boiled in traffic on the way to the de-restricted area. With a meeting at Catalina just a few days off, we shelved the taking of acceleration figures, just in case . . .

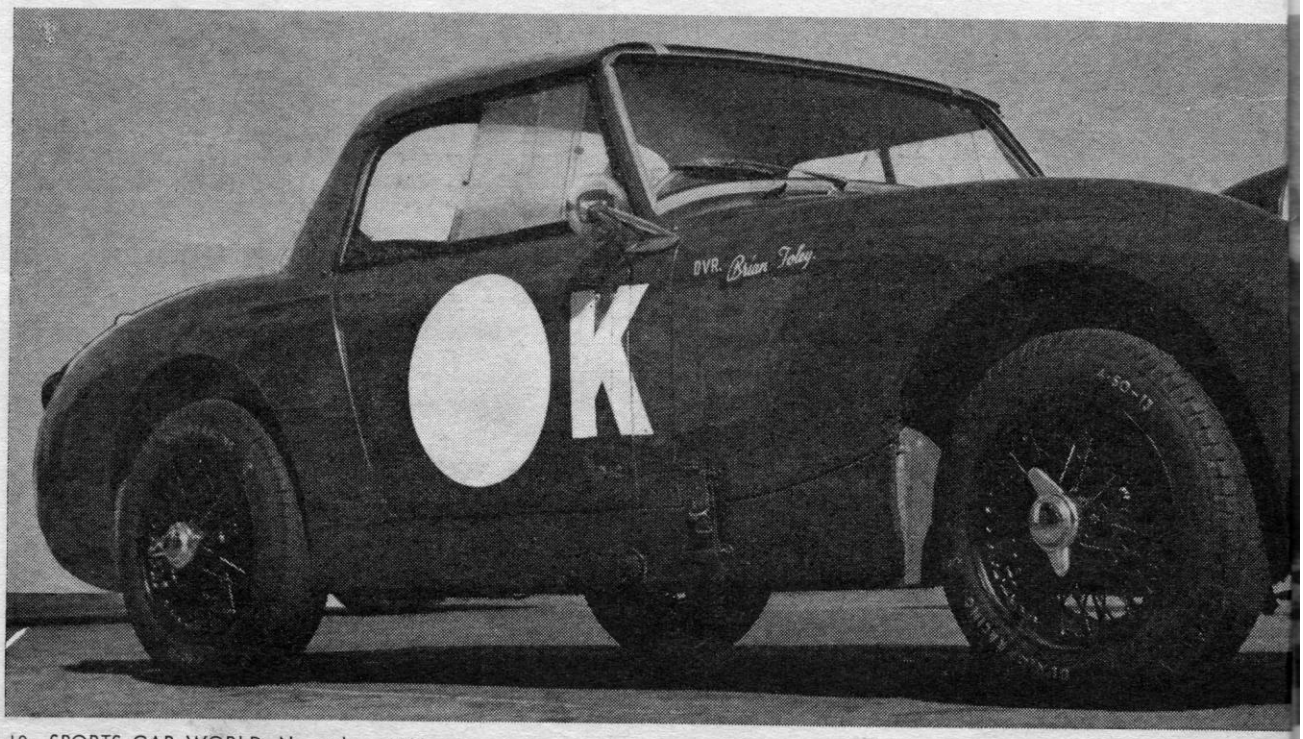
Low down, the motor is naturally quite lumpy, though not annoyingly so. It has a very good range of torque in top cog and will pull away easily from 2000 rpm (about 30 mph) right through to well past 6000 rpm in this gear.

This was the first chance we'd had to drive a car fully shod with R5's and naturally were more than interested in the effect on roadholding, particularly as Foley attributes a great deal of his very rapid Warwick Farm times to them. The tyres were worn, but apparently they'll retain their grip even when smooth, The secret's in the walls . . .

Anyway, whipping the little car around corners at a good 60 and 70 mph proved his point — they hang on indefinitely. In addition, they don't scream. When the immensely invigorating experience of driving this car ended, we dug up a few more statistics from Brian, found he uses BP100 fuel, Corse 30 oil during the winter and Corse 50 in the summer, when the six-pint sump is replaced with a 10-pint one.

Apart from a Pryer anti-roll bar on the front, the suspension is standard and with all the weight off, is very firm, the ride being a good deal harder than a standard Sprite.

Dunlop disc brakes are fitted to the front with bigger than standard drums at the rear. Another braking improvement is



Immaculately prepared Sprite has wire wheels, disc brakes on front as extras. Hardtop is neatly blended into general body contours.

a twin master cylinder.

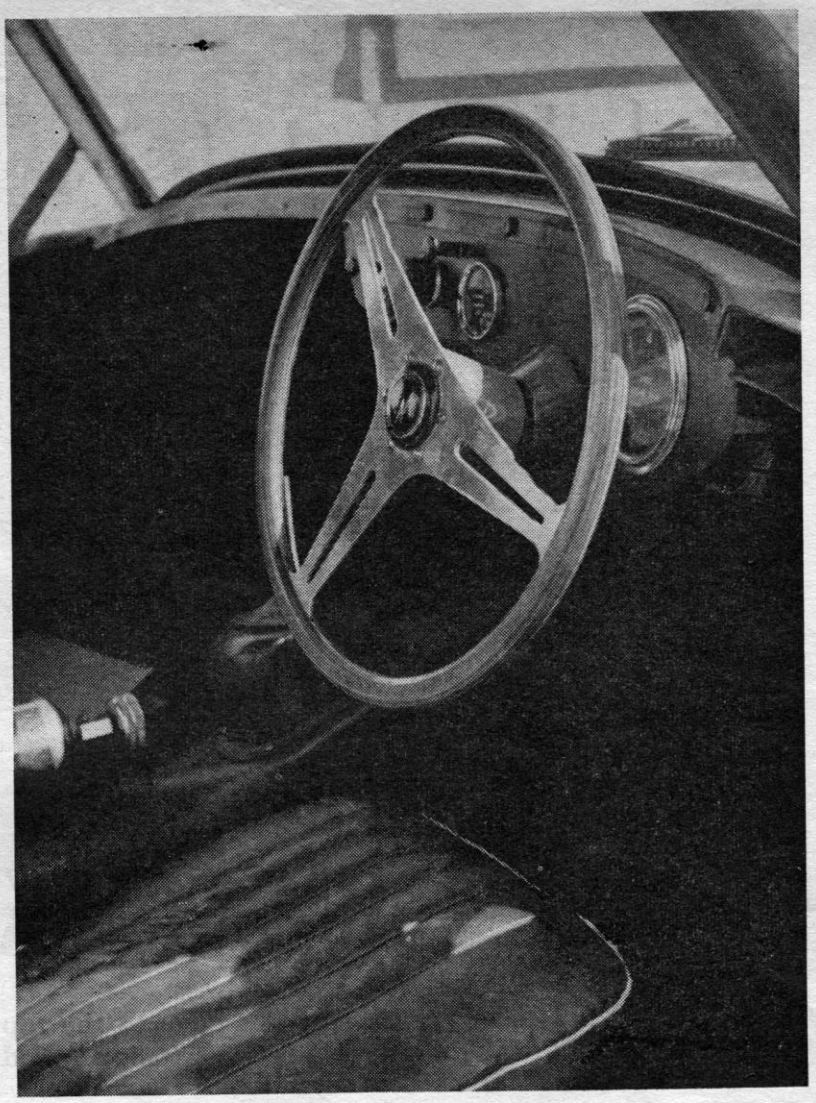
What of the Foley racing future? Brian has teamed with that great enthusiast Arthur Grogan, market development executive of BMC, to form the BRIAR (composed of their christian names) Motor Racing Team, now well towards getting an ambitious project under way.

This includes continuing to race the Sprite in Grand Touring events, preparing a yet-unnamed but assuredly very fast sedan for Appendix J racing, procuring the very best Formula Junior car available for next year's season and running a well-equipped car in the 1962 NSW Trials Championship events. In between all this, Brian will continue to operate his popular radio-controlled taxi-truck business.

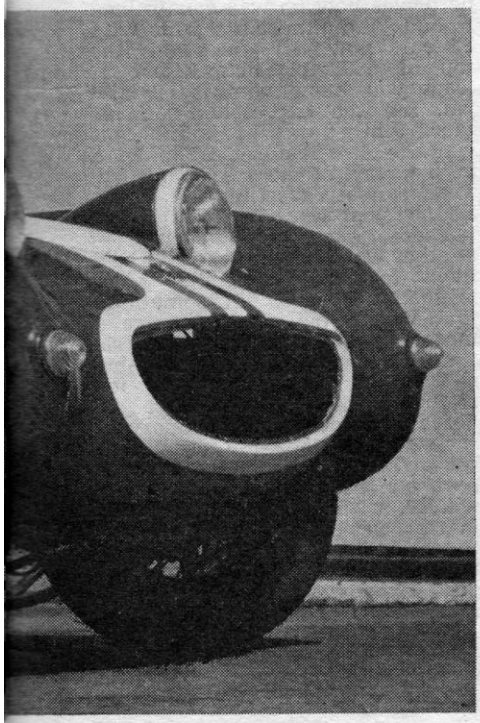
Bearing in mind his mastery of Warwick Farm, I asked him to take me on an imaginary lap, right from a standing start. Here we go:

"Accelerating through the gears, I wind out in third until I'm through Paddock Bend and approaching the Western Crossing. Then it's top and about 7000 revs right through to the hairpin at Creek Crossing, when I go to third and then second. As soon as the car's straight, it's back into third for the Esses and top straight after them. I take the Causeway in third and pull back to top when I'm through. Then there's another quick change to third for Polo Corner. About 50 yards from Leger Corner I take top and then hold it all the way to Creek Crossing."

Right from the very start the car's preparation has been in the hands of Johnny Corcoran, who is with Dent's Auto Service while Digby Cooke also gives frequent assistance as well. #



***Stark cockpit** has not an ounce of unnecessary weight. Note lightweight dash panel. alloy-spoked, wood-rimmed steering wheel.*



Johnny Corcoran (right) has been responsible for most of the car's preparation. He also prepared the Foley A/40.

