RAM35 - 50 YEAR CELEBRATION RE-BUILD from Keith Hopwood



Keith in the pits at Silverstone after first race.

RAM 35 Re-Building the car for the 2008 50 year Celebration of the MK. One Sprite

I had been involved with Sprite's since my first days of driving, after passing the driving test on my third attempt! , I wanted a car of my own, I found a beautiful Healey 3000 bearing SUE on the number plate, and as my girlfriend at the time had that name I was destined to have that car.

However the insurance companies at that time somehow having wisdom beyond perception? Wanted some £1000.00 to insure the car, as the car was some £700.00 the risk factor was beyond my comprehension.

I found 222 NMB a white Mk.1 Sprite at a local car dealer, The car price was beaten down to £220.00 and the insurance price was £60.00, I found both to be reasonable for my income as an apprentice engineer, and made the purchase.

If I had only known how that simple decision would go on to have such an influence on a huge period of my life! Well enough of that.

I bashed about on car rallies and sand races with the Sprite and other cars Cortinas' etc for a while, And then I met Dave Moore, a regular campaigner of A30's 35's and sports cars including Turner's and Sprite's.

Dave proved to be an excellent motor engineer and dedicated enthusiast and we got along very well becoming good friends and remain so to this day.

I also met Brian Murphy a fishing pal of Dave's also a keen amateur racer,

I went along to race meetings with them both and helped out as pit crew etc. But I mainly involved myself with Car rallying, at the time using a Lotus Cortina with some success.

I went to assist Dave at a race at the Silverstone Circuit; Brian Murphy had intended to be there however his work prevented this so Dave and myself made the trip. When we arrived at the circuit Dave suggested that as he had paid for two entries Modsports and Special GT's, for himself and Brian, it would be a shame to waste the entry fee as Brian could not attend and I should step in and race in Brian's place.

I was not aware that this could occur and was reluctant to do this, my driving was considered to be fairly wild and several cars had suffered at my hands, Anyway Dave insisted and I found myself alongside John Gott in his Healey 3000 in the Special GT practice session,

With him knowing Dave and Brian John called over to me as I sat in the car wearing Brian's helmet, John called out "You all right Brian ", To which I raised my hand to acknowledge him hoping that further correspondence would not be needed, He appeared satisfied and off we went, myself being much relieved at having not been found out for my sin's and having to spend an evening at any local establishment of correction.

I got through this session and went on to finish 5th in class "1000cc" and yes you guessed I got the bug to race them.

I raised the money to buy 336 HLR with the help of Dave and the use of my rally Lotus as security, The car had previously belonged to The right Honorable Eric Portman and he had entered the car for races through out its history,

I still have this car along with many others that have for various reasons "stuck "?

Anyway back to RAM 35.

I had a Brabham B.T. 28, a formula ford Hawke along with several Sprite racers,

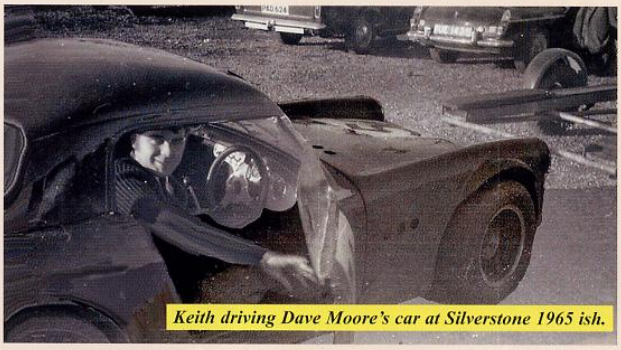
My business partner at that time Kim Mather and I were involved in buying and selling interesting cars but had been able to buy the ex- Nikki Lauda Formula Two Chevron from Derek Bennett who was the Owner of the Chevron Company, we had resourced an engine from a friend Colin Bennett, " No relation to Derek", and I had been able to encourage Bill Dixon Of Compo motive Wheel to make some rims for the car, Kim was doing very well with the car and in fact he won the 1975 Aurora F2 championship title.

I met a chap at an engineering company, He was looking for advice on building a Sprite engine as he had purchased a car without one, I was in the process of doing the same task for one of my cars and offered my help,

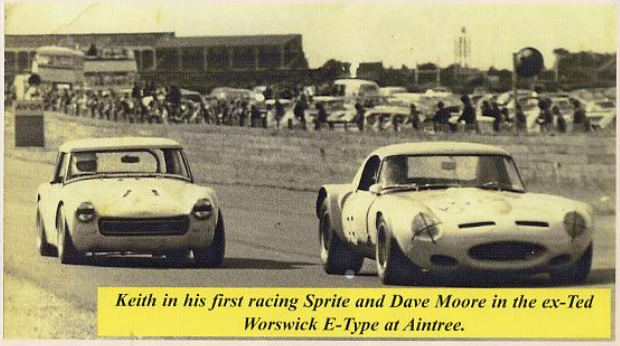
As it turned out he had been helping a chap "Mark Birrell" with the car and after a season's racing with Mark's girlfriend, Allison Davies driving the car he had sold it to his mechanic,

The chap said that his intention was to race the Sprite base car until he could afford a formula ford.

As I had an ex-Rupert Keegan Hawke chassis no. 003, Eddie was keen to sort out some kind of deal, I had no immediate desire to own "another Sprite" however because the chap seemed so enthusiastic, I swapped the Hawke for the Sprite.



Keith driving Dave Moore's car at Silverstone 1965 ish.



Keith in his first racing Sprite and Dave Moore in the ex-Ted Worswick E-Type at Aintree.

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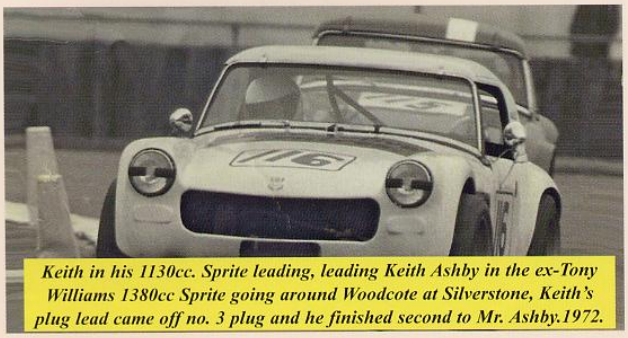
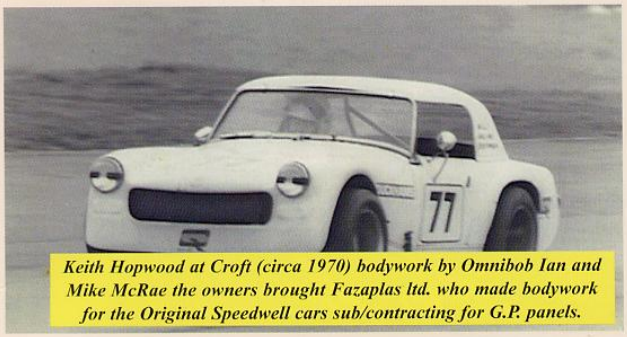


Keith in his 1130cc. Sprite leading, leading Keith Ashby in the ex-Tony Williams 1380cc Sprite going around Woodcote at Silverstone, Keith's plug lead came off no. 3 plug and he finished second to Mr. Ashby.1972.



Keith Hopwood at Croft (circa 1970) bodywork by Omnibob Ian and Mike McRae the owners brought Fazaplas ltd. who made bodywork for the Original Speedwell cars sub/contracting for G.P. panels.



RAM 35 arrives at John Britten's garage in 1965

I later found out that Mark had bought the car off Peter May and it was a car that his partner John Britten had campaigned for years with such good success.

I talked of this to Peter who asked me what value I placed on the Hawke, I replied that it was about £2k to which Peter replied that as Mark had paid him £470.00 for the Sprite, I had been done.

I tried the car at the Aintree club circuit and with an 1150cc. engine that I had achieved a time of one minute and seven seconds, This time was better by over one second than the lap record for the circuit and one and one half seconds better than my previous best timed lap.

I did however only use the car for fun as I was fairly committed to other pursuits "Sailing, Flying and water skiing at that time and my Business required a fair amount of attention,

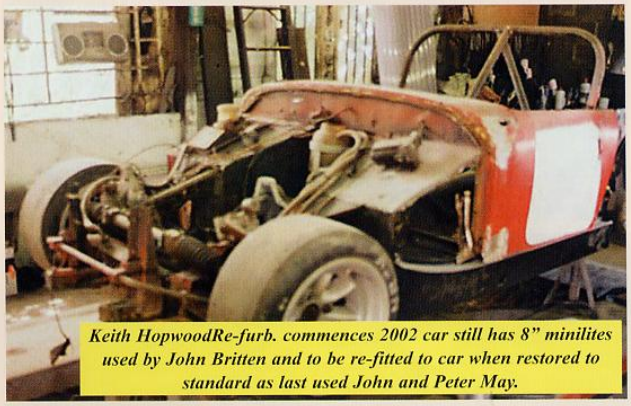
I did in fact employ Eddie at my business and built a "rally" car for him, "a 2.ltr. Escort Mk2" in which he won his first attempt at the sport.

I decided to build the car as it was when John Britten first received it from Paddy Gaston in 1965.and took the entire thing to bits and renovate everything, the various changes of the chassis and parts in the car making it very apparent that many knowledgeable racing engineer's had paid attention to the construction.

I believe that the whole project has been carried out and has achieved an accurate and correct refurbishment of the car as it was in 1966.



1965 showing the 6" minilites fitted by John.



Keith HopwoodRe-furb. commences 2002 car still has 8" minilites used by John Britten and to be re-fitted to car when restored to standard as last used John and Peter May.



Keeping it straight!



Keeping it straight!

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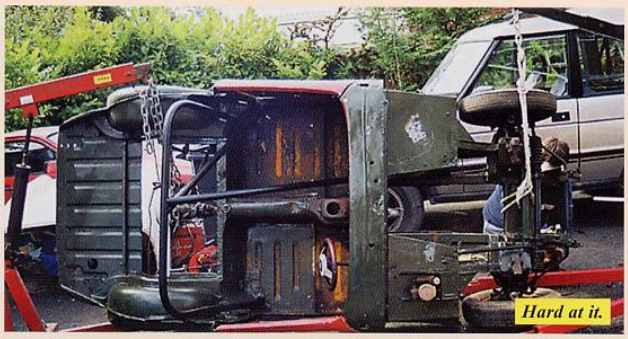

Hard at it.


Will it get finished?


Hard at it.



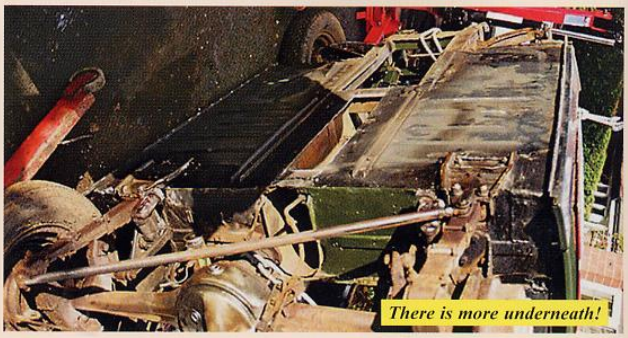

Look at what you are doing not the camera!


They still look happy! "Not working hard enough".


Plenty of work still to do.


50 years old but still sturdy!


Hold it there I have seen another bit!


There is more underneath!

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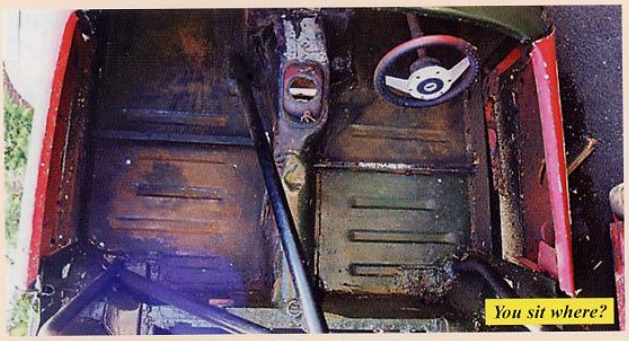
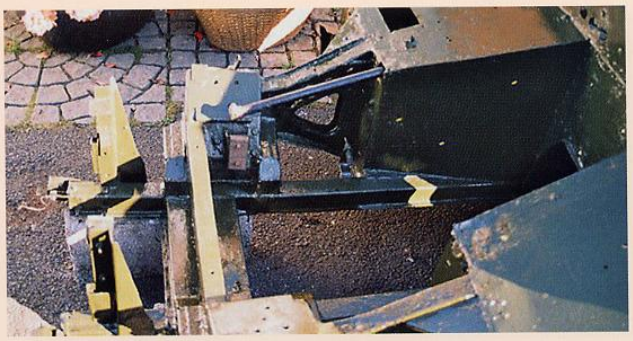
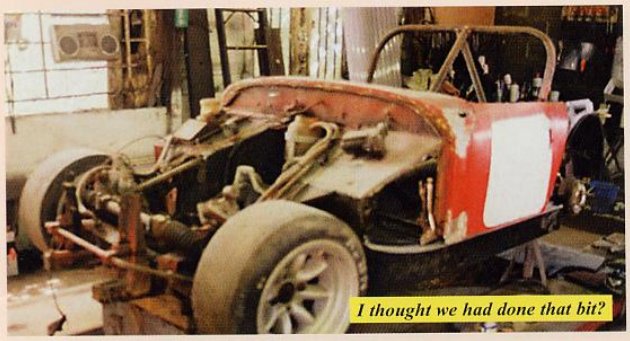


You sit where?





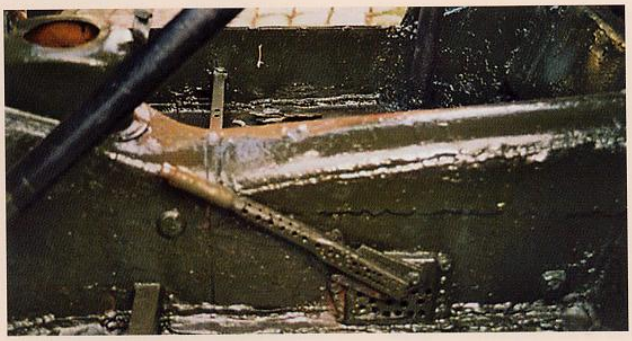
I thought we had done that bit?



There are holes in everything?

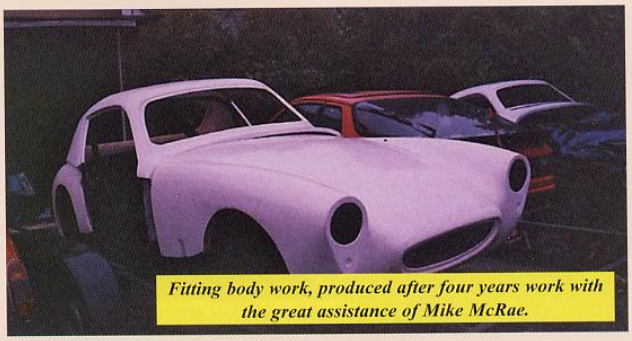


Gently!

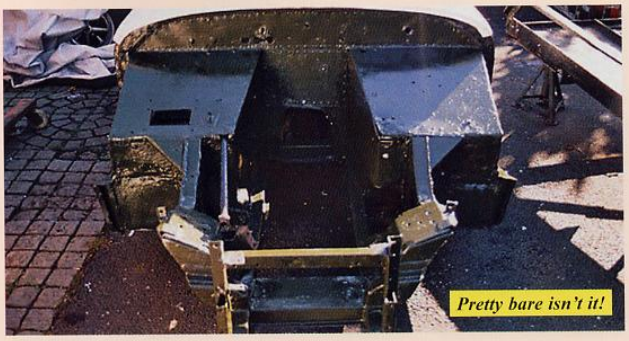




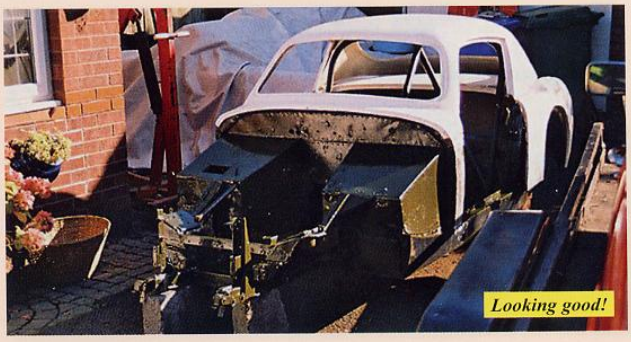
Which way up does it go?



Fitting body work, produced after four years work with the great assistance of Mike McRae.



Pretty bare isn't it!



Looking good!

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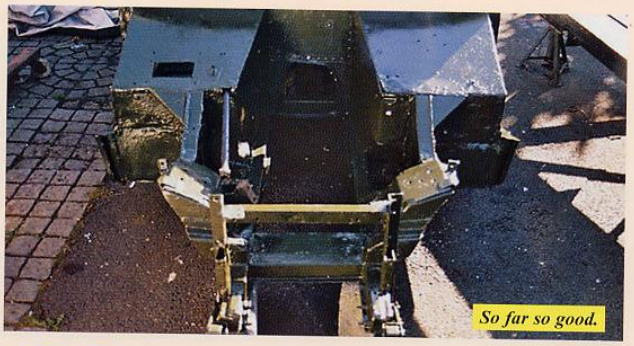
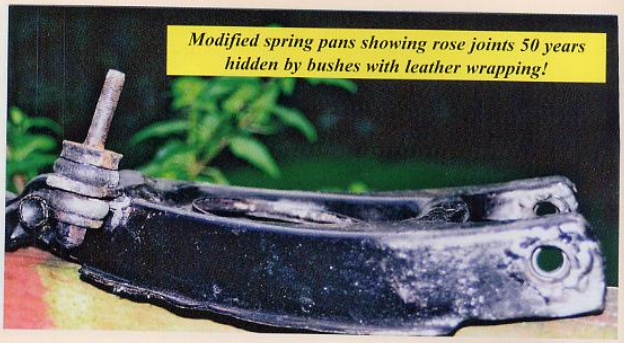
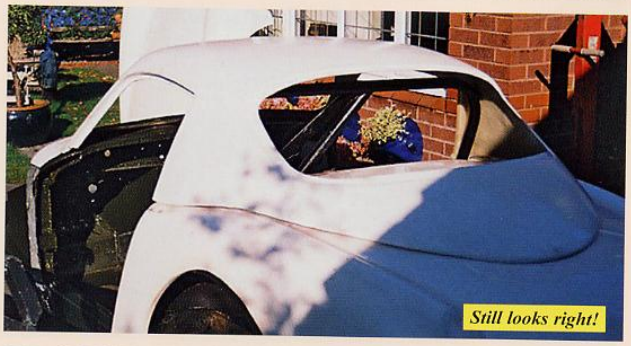

So far so good.


Modified spring pans showing rose joints 50 years hidden by bushes with leather wrapping!


Still looks right!

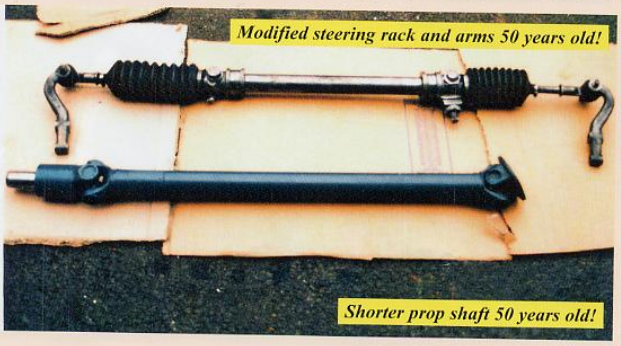

Coming along nicely!


Still fits.


Modified bits and pieces!


Roof fits OK. The aluminum is showing!


Seems OK bump steer is alright but this is better.


Modified steering rack and arms 50 years old!

Shorter prop shaft 50 years old!


It has to connect to something?

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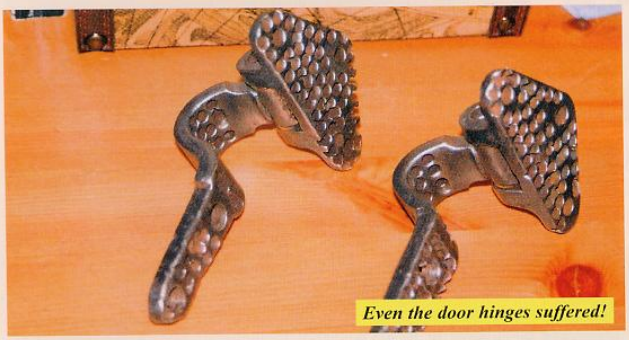
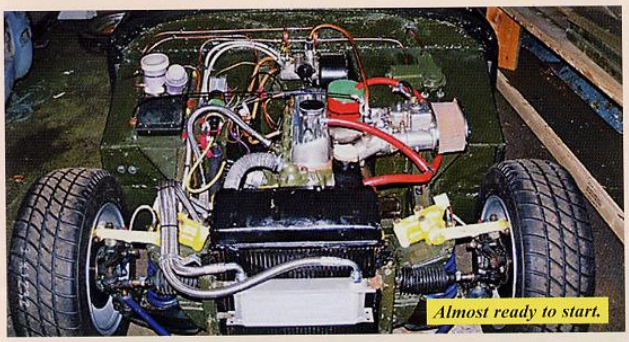


Even the door hinges suffered!



Looks great



Almost ready to start.





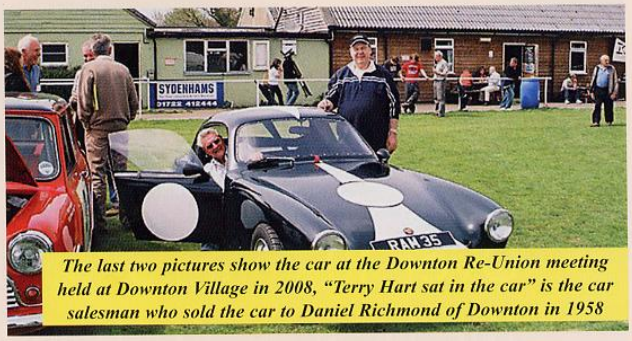
A bit more tweaking.



Keith Hopwood meets Terry Hart 2008 after many telephone chats.



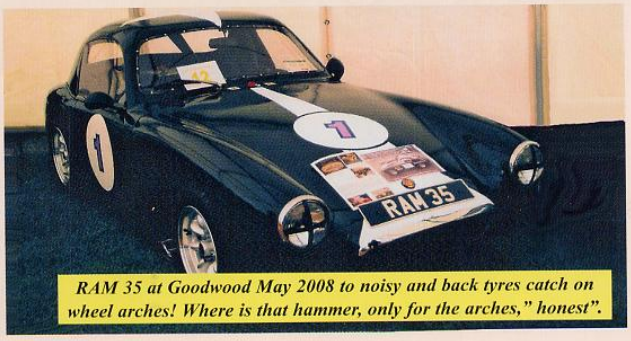
No leaks?



The last two pictures show the car at the Downton Re-Union meeting held at Downton Village in 2008, "Terry Hart sat in the car" is the car salesman who sold the car to Daniel Richmond of Downton in 1958



Sounds great.



RAM 35 at Goodwood May 2008 to noisy and back tyres catch on wheel arches! Where is that hammer, only for the arches," honest".