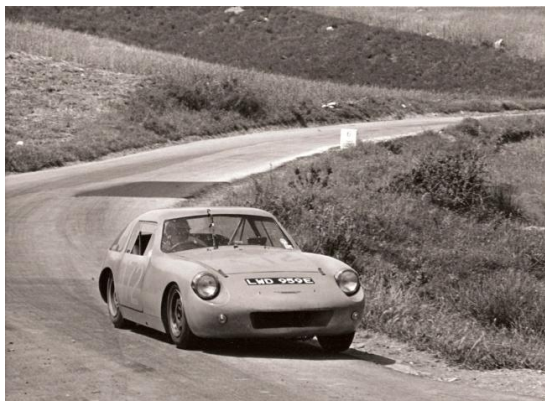


## “A Bit of Detective Work” – Part 2 - by Martin Ingall

The 10 ex-works Sprite prototypes - then, and now.



Practice laps (photo: Karsten Stelk)



Crash came in the opening laps



Clive Baker & Mike Wood on the Tour de Corse



Clive Baker with the car in Japan (2008)

The 7<sup>th</sup> of the streamliners was styled TFR 5 (and UK registered LWD 959E) being designed specifically for the Targa Florio in Sicily. The fast and undulating mountain course demanded a very different type of car. The front end was modified to a single headlight arrangement with a wide conventional air intake, and the fuel filler was fitted to one side of the rear instead of along the side.

The usual pairing of Clive Baker and Rauno Aaltonen was to drive in Sicily but unfortunately, quite early in the event a pedestrian ran across the road in front of Clive who collected him across the bonnet before colliding with the barriers. He was then carted off to a police cell for his trouble and that put paid to their race.

However Clive took the car on the Tour of Corsica later that year and he and Mike Wood were running 6<sup>th</sup> when an electrical failure put them out.

The following year, 1968, the now fuel-injected car was entered in the **Sebring 12 Hours** for Clive Baker and Mike Garton. They lost two hours draining the petrol tank when water was found in the fuel, but brought the car home in 35th place overall (though not officially classified as finishers).

After the car's next race, the Nurburgring 1000 kms, the Healeys sold it to Jim Baker, a dealer in Atlanta in the USA and within a month he had teamed up with Clive Baker & Paul Richards for the Watkins Glen 6 Hours in which they achieved 2<sup>nd</sup> in class, and 13<sup>th</sup> overall.

Back at Sebring for 1969 and repainted in the 'works' Sebring orange, Jim entered the car under the Ring Free Oils banner for a Ladies' team of Janet Guthrie, Donna Mae Mims and Liane Engemann. They were to finish 23rd having completed 182 laps.

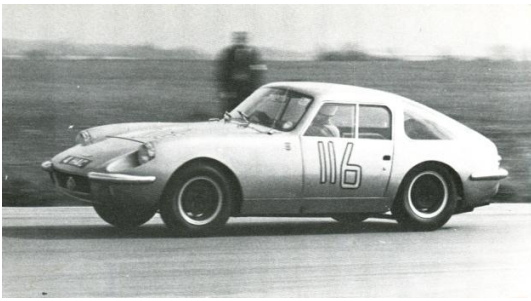
Back in the UK in the early 80's, the car was restored by David Pratley before being sold to Japan where it is now owned by **Shigeru Tanaka**.



TFR 5 is readied for the Ladies' team at Sebring in 1969



## 4 HAC – The Road Production Version



Richard Budd goes racing



Modelled on the Targa car, having the same single headlamps and similar rear window design, was the Healey's next streamliner, registered 4 HAC, which Donald and Geoff Healey conceived as a road version of their successful racing sportscar. With, originally, small front and rear

bumpers as well as the fully trimmed interior it was a smart little car but proved to be too expensive for limited production.

Built to LHD configuration, being intended for the US market, the car was later Anglicised and was sold to enthusiast Richard Budd in April 1968. He campaigned it for several seasons in sprints and hill-climbs and was part of the winning Austin-Healey team in the 1969 Six-Hour Relay race at Silverstone. Richard still owns the car in the UK today.



The 1967 Le Mans Sprite poses before the start

For Le Mans in 1967, Geoff Healey entered only a single car - for Clive Baker, paired this time with Andrew Hedges and it was once again Chassis 144, or HNX 456D. It was now fitted with small triangular front wing vents to combat overheating problems and, for the first time, used a 5-speed gearbox created from an MGB one modified by attaching an additional 5<sup>th</sup> gear at the back.

Clive and Andrew were to finish 15th overall at an average speed of 100.8 mph and won the 'Motor' Trophy for the first British car home, though not before Clive had had a minor collision in the Esses necessitating some patching up of the rear bodywork in the pits.

However the car was soon fully repaired and looking immaculate when it appeared on the Austin-Healey stand at the London Motor Show at Earls Court that autumn.

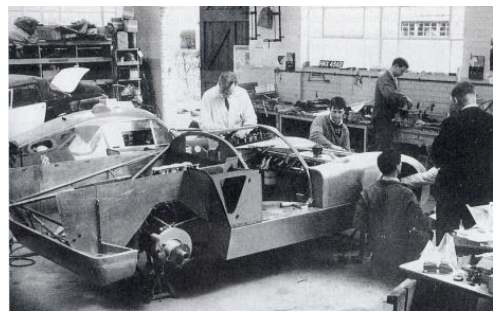


A busy pit-stop for HNX





At the beginning of 1968 the Healey team still retained the car they had run twice at Sebring and twice at Le Mans, in '66 and '67 - Chassis 144, seen in the top right photo, behind the new SR. Its registration no. HNX 456D had now (officially at any rate) been returned to the licencing authority. They also had the Targa car, TFR5, and the standard-bodied Sprite LNX 629E, while under construction were the all-new mid-engined Healey SR, another new Sprite Coupe seen in the background of the 2<sup>nd</sup> photo here, and a new roadster planned for the Targa Florio.



In the February issue of "Safety Fast" it was announced that there would be 2 Sprites entered for Le Mans - the intention presumably being to run both the old car as well as the new one. However, the Le Mans regulations only permitted a car to race twice! This must surely explain why at this point Chassis 144 disappeared, to be replaced by HAN9-R-237 – in fact the same car rebuilt with the fuel-injected engine which necessitated a new bonnet, and with a rear spoiler.



This caused us a lot of head-scratching over a lengthy period, with some books on the subject referring to the single car which actually ran in le Sarthe that September as a new car while others stated it was the old one re-worked. Obviously Geoff needed everyone to think it was a new one which was why on September 1<sup>st</sup> it received a new UK registration RUE 714G, and was taxed for just 4 months.



The photo , right, shows Donald Healey with sons, Geoff and Bic' inspecting the new mid-engined Healey SR while it was under construction. Lying just behind them is the new coupé HAN9-R-238, the ninth of the 'streamliners'.



The 'new' car - 144 becomes 237

### Le Mans 24 Hours – 1968

As things turned out the '68 event was postponed at the behest of the de Gaulle government due to social un-rest, and wasn't held until September. The Healeys only fielded the one Sprite after all, perhaps due to their need to concentrate on completing the SR rather than the new Sprite coupé (HAN9-R-238). The rebuilt Sprite now had a fuel-injected engine with the necessary bulge in its bonnet and a small tail spoiler – the latter suggested by Andrew Hedges after the 67 race to improve rear-end grip. The drivers this time were Roger Enever and Alec Poole. Clive Baker and John Harris were to drive the SR but unfortunately it retired with clutch failure after only 20 laps. The Sprite came home 15<sup>th</sup> (as in '67), but was timed at 154 mph on the Mulsanne Sraight.



A daylight pit-stop



John Harris testing the SR with Alec Poole in HAN9-R-237





Earls Court Show, October 1968



HAN9-R-238 awaits restoration in 1999



The newly-built roadster HAN9-R-250 or TFR 7



Immediately after the Le Mans race, Peter Browning announced that this had been the last event in which the Sprites would be supported by BMC. Nevertheless, the Le Mans car appeared once again on the revolving platform at the London International Motor Show in October. Meanwhile, Geoff Healey wrote to all those who had previously bought ex-works Sprites offering them the remaining Sprite racing cars and spares. As a result Jim Baker purchased a second car, the new un-raced HAN9-R-238, which was shipped out to the USA in mid-December.

Some 23 years later, in 1991, HAN9-R-238 was owned in the States by Dan Miller who also had the last of the streamliners, the roadster HAN9-R-250, both cars by then in poor condition and needing total restoration. Having an idea that chassis 238 could be the one that raced at Le Mans in 1968 he began corresponding with Geoff Healey in the UK. This resulted in Geoff saying more than once that he was *"almost certain that it must have been the le Mans car of 1968"*. Why he should have taken this line is unclear as Geoff had seen the Le Mans car, then owned then by Ian Polley, in the UK in 1980 and also around 1990 when he inspected it with Doug Nye.

This led to a degree of uncertainty being carried forward from owner to owner to very recent days – about which, more later.

The 10<sup>th</sup>, and last, of the Healey Sprite prototypes was HAN9-R-250 (or TFR 7) an open 'roadster' intended for the 1969 Targa Florio. Like the previous 3 coupés it was fitted with a cross-flow head, Lucas fuel-injection and the 5-speed gearbox. Geoff was very sad not to have the opportunity to race the car which was sold, initially to Ed Bussey of Waldron Motors in Florida who entered it for the Sebring 12 Hours in March, 1970. It was to be driven by Smith, Donley and Buttari, and - rather ironically in the circumstances, was entered as a BMC or, in some records, an MG Midget! Unfortunately it managed only a couple of laps before retiring with an engine problem. It was later sold on to Bob Fine who raced it in a number of US events including the American Road Race of Champions, in 1973.

Right: Current owner, Steve Coleman shows the immaculately restored 'roadster' to David Piper at the Silverstone Classic in June, 2014.



**Sebring 1969** - Having acquired the last of the Sprite Coupés, HAN9-R-238, Jim Baker seconded 'works' driver Clive Baker to join him and Paul Richards to drive it in the 1969 Sebring 12 Hrs. Resplendent in the Ring Free Oils livery of blue with an orange tail, the car was No. 71 on the grid while No.72 was Jim's other car, the TFR 5 for the Ladies' team mentioned earlier, and 73 was Art Tuckerman's Sprite, DAC 952C, in the hands of Gregg Cameron and Ralph Kemmerer to make up a 3-car team to contest the Falstaff Brewing Cup.

'238' completed 184 laps, finished 20<sup>th</sup> and came 5<sup>th</sup> in class, while the Ladies team did 182 laps, finishing 23<sup>rd</sup> overall, 6<sup>th</sup> in the class, and the normally aspirated DAC was on 170 laps, 33<sup>rd</sup> overall, and 8<sup>th</sup> in class.

The Ring Free Oils Racing Team beat Ford, Porsche and Ferrari to take the team prize of the Falstaff Trophy. Quite an achievement.



The Baker/Baker/Richards Sprite in the Sebring pits





2 shots of HAN9-R-238 at Sebring in '69



Jim Baker celebrating with his ladies team

For Sebring in 1970, Jim Baker repainted HAN9-R-238 in even glitzier Ring Free colours and entered it for another ladies' team, this time including Britain's Rosemary Smith. It won the Prototype 2 litre class after 187 laps coming 19<sup>th</sup> overall amidst a whole gaggle of Chevy Corvettes and Ford Camaros. Jim was entered in his newly-acquired Chevron B16.



So, you may ask, have we finally resolved which car raced at Le Mans in 1968? Well, yes, I believe we can definitely say we have. I was recently able to examine, for the first time, the entry forms submitted for the single Sprite entry. The "*Identification du Vehicule et du Concurrent*" identifies the car as RUE 714G, Chassis HAN9-R-237, engine no. XSP 306313. The physical characteristics of the two cars are also slightly different with '238' having larger front wing vents, and no rear roof vent or rear spoiler as had the Le Mans car. We know that '238' was shipped out to Jim Baker via New York in mid-December 1968 and that Geoff Healey offered "the ex Le Mans car" to him in March the following year. It was certainly Chassis '237' with all its matching numbers that went to Le Mans that year.



Steve Coleman's beautifully restored '238'



and Joe Armour's '237' in Australia



Where else can you find a full compliment of the 10 ex-works prototypes produced, in A1 condition and 'on the button', 45 years after their heyday? Geoff HEALEY would surely be very proud!

