

by Bill Emerson

### A Trip Back in Time to When Sprites were New

# 2006 Goodwood Revival

**E**very so often, we get the opportunity to do something very unusual that relates to our beloved Austin-Healeys. In my case, I was invited to attend the Goodwood Revival that is held in the southern part of England the first weekend in September. I've been to a lot of vintage events as a driver, crew member, and spectator, and I can tell you without hyperbole, Goodwood is not like any other vintage race weekend.

#### Appropriate Dress Required

The heart of the Goodwood Revival is the paddock inside the racing circuit where the vintage cars are on display when they are not being raced. In order to obtain access to the paddock it is necessary to be "appropriately dressed" as one would have been when attending one of the race weekends that were held on this ex-World War II airfield in the

late 1940s through early 1960s. The stewards at the gates insist that gentlemen wear a coat and tie, and skirts or dresses are required for the ladies (no blue jeans, shorts, or other casual dress are permitted).

But most of the spectators go further, taking the suggestion of the Earl of March, who owns the Goodwood estate on which the event takes place, and dress in 1940s, '50s or '60s clothing of either a civilian or military form. Try to imagine almost 100,000 automotive enthusiasts dressed as they would have been in that bygone era of racing. The English press refers to the event as "the fastest costume party on wheels."

I looked in my closet and nothing appeared to be appropriate. A phone call to the local theater costume department resulted in the loan of one very correct thin pin-striped suit with black fedora. In addition, I was provided with a black double-breasted, wide-lapel sport coat, and pair of gray slacks with wide cuffs. Oh yes, a wide striped tie appropriate for the era was also included.

Reflecting on the need for period clothing I remember the days of my youth and went to the very back of the closet where I found an old blue Dunlop driving suit and a cork helmet left over from a misspent youth

Sprites and comparable race cars were featured in the Fordwater Trophy race. Leading at this point is Michael Wiley in an Austin-Healey Speedwell Sprite. Tony Wilson-Spratt driving a beautiful WSM Sprite follows him. Tony is being followed by James Willis in an MG Midget "Jacobs Coupe." Almost touching James' rear end is Jack Wheeler in an Austin-Healey "Sebring Sprite." Even the rainy weather was no deterrent to the spectators on the edge of the circuit; they just put up their 'brollies and stayed to cheer the cars.







in the 1950s. I was now ready for a Healey adventure.

The Goodwood Revival is held on the palatial estate of Lord March about 10 miles from the south central coast of England. I had been watching the weather report for the area and it indicated sunny weather with temperatures ranging around the low 70s during the day. *Never* believe in an English weather forecast! Having spent some time in England, I packed cold-weather gear, rain gear, umbrella, and suntan lotion.

### Tea and Cricket on Thursday

Thursday is reserved for drivers, mechanics, and special guests. It allows the drivers a free practice day on the course before the qualifying and racing that fills the formal Friday, Saturday, and Sunday program which is open to the public. As a guest of

one of the participants, I was told to be sure to be there for Thursday since after practice, a cricket match would be held and tea served at the Manor House. What an English understatement that was.

The car park was a grass area adjacent to a line of trees dating back hundreds of years. I thought I had been transported to a concours d'elegance looking at the cars randomly parked on the grass.

Turning away from the beautiful automobiles, I saw a group of men dressed in white doing something totally confusing with a ball and some form of bat, while a very typical English announcer provided commentary that evidently concerned the activity that was occurring on the field. The only things I could understand were the names of a number of Formula One and well-known rally drivers who were partaking of the activity.

I was told that tea was being served in a large white tent adjacent to the field. Again, an English understatement.

Tea consisted of a bar serving tea, champagne, beer, and mixed drinks. Of course, adjacent to the bar was a large table set with piles and piles of English sandwiches, you know, the kind with no crust and filled with things that you probably haven't tasted before. I declined the tea, accepted the champagne, and tried numerous kinds of small sandwiches. I highly recommend this activity. It was a taste treat surrounded by people deep in conversation about the cars they loved.

### Healeys at Goodwood

Goodwood is about the cars. Healeys were very well represented. There were two 100S cars in the familiar white over lobelia, one of which was to be driven by the ex-Formula One driver Johnny Herbert. Having raced a 100S for a number of years, I was pleased to see these cars representing the Healey name. (Special points will be given if you can correctly identify car number 12 in the photograph at left).

A type of Healey that we do not see here in the States very often was also very well-represented. These are the "WSM" cars built in the early 1960s by Douglas Wilson-Spratt. They are composed of an Austin-Healey Sprite engine/chassis, with an aluminum or fiberglass coupe body. Douglas himself at age 82 was in attendance to watch his beloved "children" do their thing on the racecourse. The fact that his son Tony would be driving one of the other children was an added bonus. Three WSM Healey racecars were represented at the Goodwood Revival. There were three other WSM bodies in the



Scenes around the Goodwood Estate, snapped during the event. *Top to bottom:* this isn't a car show; this is just the car park for visitors who had driven over from the circuit to attend the afternoon tea at Lord March's manor house. The manor house itself, with a cricket match in progress pitting the professional drivers against the amateur drivers in this most traditional of English lawn sports. The Austin-Healey 100S, #9, to be driven by F1 driver Johnny Herbert is brought up to the scrutineering station for technical inspection on Thursday morning. Note the proper period garb of officials and spectators alike. Our author gives bonus points for anyone who can identify the car being driven off at the right of the picture.





race, but MG engines powered those. Externally there is no difference between the Healey or MG-powered cars. Both are beautiful. Car #28 is a Healey-powered WSM.

Another type of Austin-Healey Sprite-based racecar at the meet was the "Speedwell" Sprite developed by John Sprinzel at about the same time as the WSM was being developed. The #8 Speedwell Sprite exemplifies the aerodynamic coupe developed for rallying as well as circuit racing. John Sprinzel was in attendance all the way from Hawaii to watch his old racecars as they relived the historic days of motor racing.

From the photographs, you can see the difference in the style of the nose section and rear end of these two beautiful coupe styles. The Speedwells were made in fiberglass and provided a very fast and beautiful racing machine based on the engine and chassis of the Austin-Healey Sprite.

### Sprinzel Sprites and Transporters

The variations in Healey Sprites at Goodwood continued with perhaps the best-known style being the "Sprinzel Sprite." Two of the cars that competed in the 1960 Sebring race were in attendance. A young driver named Stirling Moss drove car number 2 at Sebring. The sister car was driven by Stirling Moss's sister Pat. Now, 46 years later Sir Stirling Moss would again drive the Sprinzel Sprite.

Before telling you more about these famous racecars, I think it is



The WSM-bodied Sprite built by Douglas Wilson-Spratt, resplendent in red, and the equally aerodynamic Speedwell Sprite designed by John Sprinzel, in ivory white, were objects of admiration in the paddock, as well as on the track. Both Douglas Spratt and John Sprinzel were in attendance.



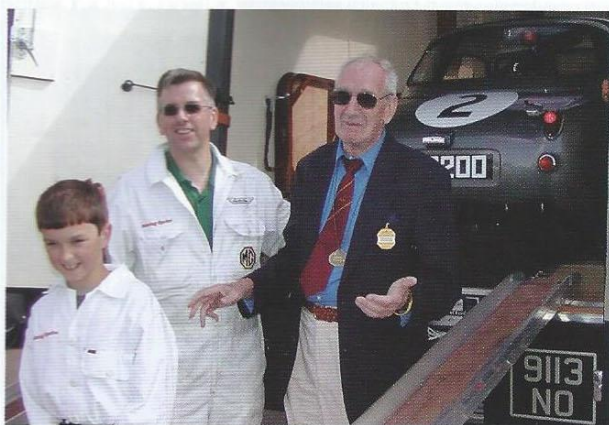
appropriate to say a few words about the BMC transporters. These specially-made and outfitted trucks were used during the early 1960s by the Competition Department to ferry special racecars throughout the continent.

Remember that at Goodwood people are dressed in period clothing. Lord March goes further to set the stage for his event. Every one of the support vehicles, from VIP cars to pit support cars to emergency and ambulance trucks is also from the same period.

As a consequence, it seemed perfectly proper to see a large green vehicle from the 1960s emblazoned with the BMC trademark entering the pit area and coming to a stop in the area designated for Sprites. The rear doors opened and there within was a racecar, PMO 200, the most famous "Sprinzel Sprite" in history.

Within the world of Sprites, registration number PMO 200 is perhaps the most famous. John Sprinzel used this number during his very successful international racing career. The car that raced at Sebring had a long rally and racing career while passing through the hands of a number of owners. Fortunately, Paul Woolmer of England obtained the car a few years ago and began a very careful his-





In accordance with the paddock rules, everything must look exactly as it would have during the period 1945-1960. Hence PMO200, one of the most famous of the Sprites built by John Sprinzel was delivered in a restored BMC race car transport. The "crew" is restorer Paul Woolmer and his son, Rich, and "team manager" is John Sprinzel himself. To the right, Sprinzel briefs driver Sir Stirling Moss on the car's characteristics, and "mechanic/driver" Bill Emerson has his pic taken with Sir Stirling.



toric preservation of this unique Austin-Healey derivative. When the restoration was finally completed in 2005, John Sprinzel flew from Hawaii to be reunited with the PMO 200 Sprite. The story of this reunion is well documented in a recent issue of Octane magazine.

The restoration of PMO 200 has been authentically and beautifully accomplished by Paul Woolmer (shown in the accompanying pictures in the period mechanic's overalls). This was only possible with the full cooperation of John Sprinzel (the gentleman with the tie). John provided valuable insight into the details that abound within this beautiful piece of racing history. Representing the next generation of Healey racers, also in mechanic's overalls, of course, was Rich, Paul's son.

In 1960 when PMO 200 was taken to Sebring, John Sprinzel was there to oversee the logistics, mechanics, and provide advice to the drivers. The racing effort was quite serious, since good results at Sebring helped U.S. marketing, and John was there to provide guidance to a young Stirling Moss. There is a rumor that Sprinzel and Moss also arranged to attend a few of the parties that were associated with the Healey effort at Sebring. We can assume that 46 years later when these two senior representatives of Healey racing were reunited, they had much to reminisce about regarding both racing and partying.

Thanks to Paul Woolmer, I had an armband that stated I was a "mechanic" for the PMO 200 team. This identification allowed me access to the pre-grid, starting grid and the rooftop above pit lane. Each of these vantage points provided excellent photographic opportunities. The highlight of course was being introduced to Sir Stirling Moss. The last time I had met him was in 1985 when I was racing my 100S at Palm Springs, California and had a brown beard instead of the current gray.

### It's Not Just a Car Show

Goodwood is about racing, and 12 Sprites were entered in the Fordwater Trophy race. The race occurred on schedule, as did the English rain, making the track "just a bit slippery." The spectators made good use of their umbrellas, while the Sprite drivers were all happy that they were in coupes.

The Fordwater Trophy race had 33 entrants with displacements running from the 1098 of the Sprites to 2188 in the very fast Morgan Plus 4 SLR. Other exotic automobiles in this race were a 1600cc OSCA, a 1998cc Porsche-Abarth coupe, and a smattering of MGs and Sunbeams. The Sprites presented themselves very well in the rain, carrying the attack to the larger displacement cars, and with their excellent handling moving up constantly in the field.

The photo at the beginning of this article is typical of the action that took place for the entire 14 laps. Leading at this point is Michael Wiley in an Austin-Healey Speedwell Sprite. Tony Wilson Spratt driving a beautiful WSM Sprite follows him. Tony is being followed by James Willis in an MG Midget "Jacobs Coupe." Almost touching James' rear end is Jack Wheeler in an Austin-Healey "Sebring Sprite" (more about this car in an upcoming issue of the Austin-Healey Magazine). The final car in the photo is David Stubbings in an Austin-Healey Sprite with a Lenham GT fiberglass coupe body.

The photo was taken by the chicane just before the start-finish line. Visualize a video of the cars coming through this corner. As the race progressed and the speeds became greater, each and every car coming through the chicane was sliding out to the white line on the edge of the track ... and occasionally, over onto the grass! Thoroughly fantastic racing!





And now, the rest of the story... We enthusiasts are the custodians of our Austin-Healeys and as such, they occasionally move from us to a new custodian. While living in California I was fortunate enough to obtain a one-owner golden beige BJ8 with only 18,000 miles. I kept the car for a number of years and then sold it to a friend of mine in England. When Anders Clausager was selecting cars for his book *Original Austin-Healey* all the cars are right-hand drive with the exception of the 1967 Mark III BJ8 Phase 2a shown on page 14 (and elsewhere within the book). This same car appears in *The Healey Book* making it the only car to appear in both books.

Her current owner has named this beautiful BJ8 "Marilyn." The owner, who lives quite near the Goodwood circuit, loaned the car to Tony Ash, an active member of the Austin-Healey Club of Perth, Australia. Tony drove her to Goodwood where she was on display just behind the main grandstands for all to see and appreciate. I could not resist having my picture taken alongside my old car with one of the numerous beautifully attired ladies that were attending the 2006 Goodwood Revival. It is truly a very small Healey world!



Above, PM0200 on display in the paddock, with an over-eager young driver all suited up and begging for a ride. (Not bloody likely, unless Sir Stirling takes sick.) Two of the period decals on the hardtop rearlight, marking major rallies in which the car participated. Center, the identifying badge on the doorsill.

I strongly recommend that if possible, you plan a vacation that allows you to partake of this extraordinary automotive event. It is truly a time for "Happy Healeying"...

[For the real British car specialists among our readers, were you able to identify the car pictured at bottom left of page 12 as a Cooper-Jaguar T33?]

**Editor's note:** Every classic car buff should attend the Goodwood Revival at least once in his or her lifetime, and with the variety of side displays and history on display, it's also a great event for long-suffering spouses. Costs are reasonable so it can be cheaper than the Monterey Historics, even with air fare. But you must plan ahead. Start by locating a bed-and-breakfast near Goodwood – there are numbers of them and several websites that represent them – then book your plane tickets, buy your Goodwood Revival tickets ([www.goodwood.co.uk](http://www.goodwood.co.uk)), arrange your car rental (or you can travel down from London by train), search the costume banks for appropriate '40s and '50s civilian or military attire, and have the time of your life.

My best tip: go for all three days. Spend Friday taking in all the various period booths, exhibits, and demonstrations that have been set up to provide the historic context for the races. Get a grandstand ticket near the start-finish line to watch the pageantry on Saturday and walk the perimeter of the circuit during the day to see the races from various vantage points. On Sunday get a pavilion ticket inside the circuit to see the show from the perspective of the gentry, with morning coffee, a proper sit-down luncheon, and afternoon tea provided in your pavilion to break up your day. If you look around, there are several auto-related travel agencies, magazines, and clubs that put together packages including all of these activities. GGA