

## ... And goes to Monaco in a Sprite

THE Austin-Healey Sprite is now a very popular small sports car. In view of the fashion among owners to modify such machines for increased performance, the makers have very wisely produced a handbook on special tuning. They also list all the necessary components to carry out such modifications, and cars so treated have proved themselves in circuit races.

However, races are one thing, but the sheer battering of 2,000 fast miles on French roads is quite another. So, it was decided that I should thrash a modified car all the way to Monte Carlo, Donald Healey would use it as a hack during the Grand Prix period, and I should bring it home again, via Paris, of course.

Among the special equipment fitted to the test car was the following, though I have left out fitting charges, port polishing, and so on, which are all in the maker's list.

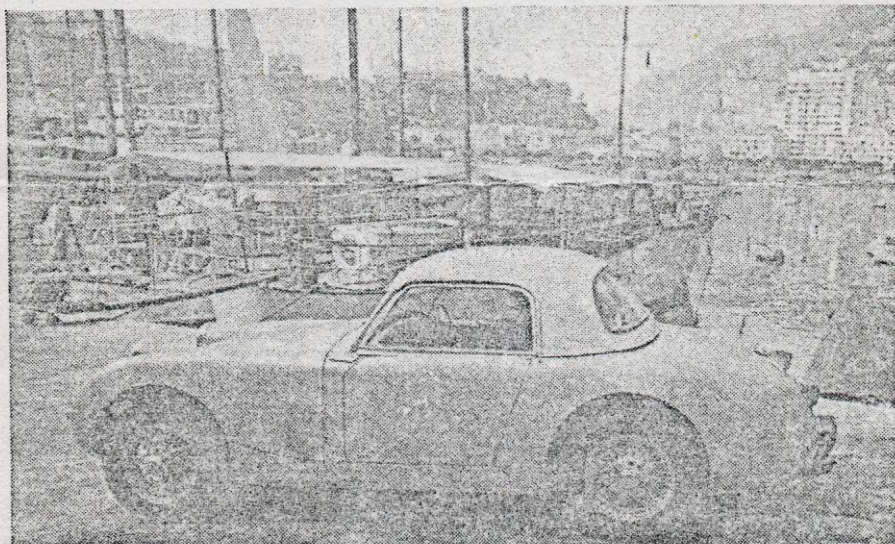
9.3 to 1 pistons ... ..	£9 10s.
Special camshaft ... ..	£6 0s.
Dual exhaust ... ..	£11 0s.

Wire wheels and disc brakes ...	£89 10s.
Shock absorber valves ... ..	£3 0s.
Anti-roll bar ... ..	£8 10s.
Hardtop and sliding windows ...	£46 10s.
14 ins. carburettors, air box, etc.	

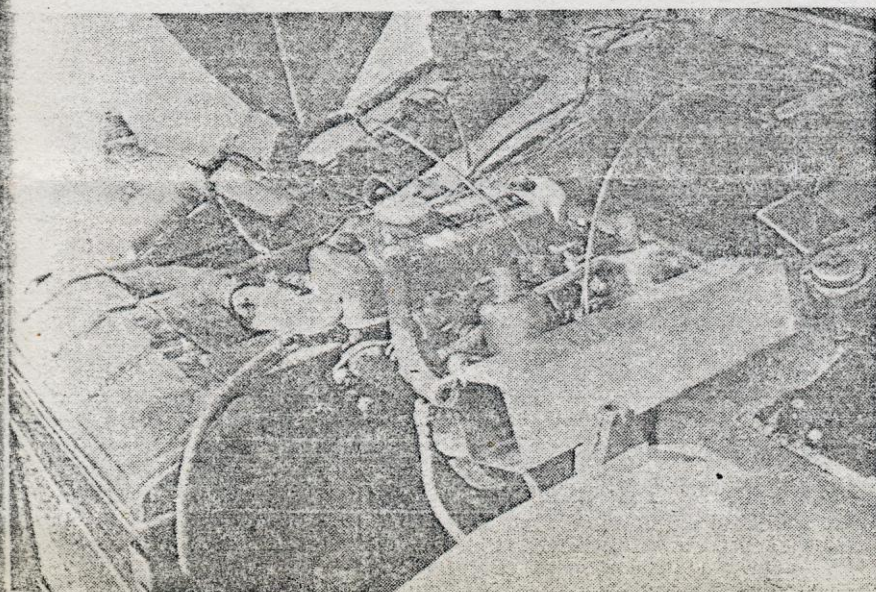
Obviously, I had got myself a Sprite with a difference.

So, with one wife, plenty of luggage, and very little time to spare, I set off for Ferryfield, where the courtesy and efficiency of Silver City were up to their usual very high standard. Once on the extremely rough roads of Northern France, I began to worry. At a cruising speed of 80 m.p.h. the car was taking such a pounding that I felt something must break, and at 90 m.p.h. it was difficult to keep straight on the highly cambered roads. Suddenly I had an idea, and a test proved that the tyres were carrying a high "racing" pressure.

I blessed the Austin-Healey handbook, for it gave tyre pressures in pounds and kilogrammes. The garage man who let out the air exclaimed with joy at the *freins disques*, and we set off again in a transformed car. Not only was the ride much more tolerable, but one could



**SPRITE AT MONTE:** J.V.B. (lucky man) says: "It was decided that I should thrash a modified car all the way to Monte Carlo ... we cruised at a steady 5,000 r.p.m.".



take fast corners in a slide instead of a series of hops. We cruised at a steady 5,000 r.p.m., and our date with Donald did not seem so difficult to achieve.

The next delay was due to two *gendarmes*, who accused me of the speed excessive and the conduct dangerous which, they said, would set me back 2,700 francs. I remarked loudly that all coppers are asterisks, which was luckily misunderstood. "In that case, monsieur," said the *flic*, "it will only be the 900 francs for the *dérapiage* over the yellow line." I paid, and drove at 5,500 r.p.m. to make up for lost time.

Hour after hour, the lovely country of France unrolled itself, and as the French so-called "super" petrol replaced the British, the gearbox had to be used more and more to combat pinking. Still,

**FAST AND RELIABLE** was Bolster's verdict after battering the Sprite over 2,000 miles of French roads. Although this engine was tuned for competition work it coped extremely well with the requirements of fast touring.

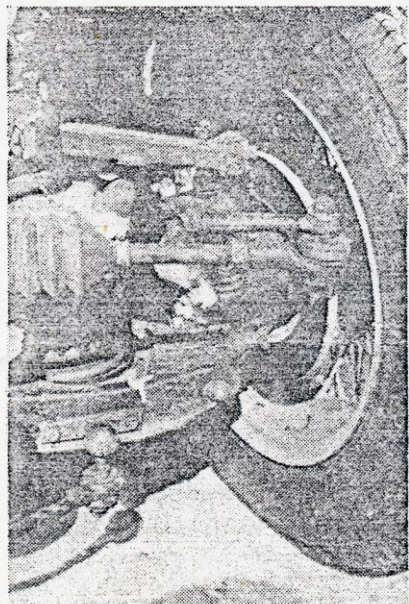
**THE SPRITE WITH A DIFFERENCE**  
*seen against the imposing background of Monte Carlo harbour. In the distance can be seen the royal palace of the Grimaldis.*

the French *garagiste* is a splendid fellow, cheerful, efficient, and ever ready to clean dead flies off the screen. The Sprite never dropped below 32 m.p.g., and if some oil was consumed, one may blame the continuous high speed and the very hot weather.

The farther south we went, the better the roads became, and as the Sprite entered Monte Carlo it was running as well as ever. Here I must take back my remarks about coppers, for the Monte Carlo variety, in their splendid uniforms, are first class fellows. Two of them became my particular friends, and I sang with them in César's restaurant a number of *chansons pailardes*, finishing with "Tipperary" which, as every good Monegasque knows, is the national anthem of the English.

A few words on the racing: I was disappointed with the Juniors. 500 c.c. racing gave us the modern lightweight Grand Prix car and the modern driving style. Most of the Juniors have out-of-date chassis, and there is nothing to learn from them. The whole thing is too much like the Monomill circus, and though it may produce good fun at Club meetings, the sophisticated spectators at Grands Prix will not be amused. I may be in a minority, but I am sorry to see 500 c.c. racing give place to this.

The Grand Prix itself was an epic, and the excitement almost unbearable. After watching the practising, I put my money on Jack Brabham, which was better than losing it at the Casino. I feel that Jack's record lap, when there was oil all over the course, was as fine a piece of driving as I have ever seen. I was also enormously impressed with the roadholding of the Porsche in practice, and it is a great pity that von Trips "dropped it"



**"FREINS DISQUES":** The disc brakes fitted to the Sprite were masters of the situation under all conditions and their high speed behaviour was beyond criticism.



before he had settled down. There is little one can say about the bad luck of Stirling Moss and Rob Walker, for the cup of victory was dashed from their very lips.

So, the homeward trek began, and after a day of recuperation in Paris, I returned to England's shores. That tough little Sprite was still on full song, and had proved both fast and reliable. The disc brakes are, of course, entirely masters of the situation under all conditions, and although one needs to press the pedal at 30 m.p.h., the high speed behaviour is beyond criticism. For long-distance driving on Continental roads, a softer suspension setting could probably be found which would not impair the roadholding. For my taste, the special twin exhaust system is too noisy, and I think it could be made quieter without appreciably affecting the performance. The present compression ratio could be retained for French petrol if a light alloy cylinder head were made available.

Continental motoring is a specialised subject, but more and more sports car owners are taking their cars abroad.

That this Sprite, which had been specially developed for an entirely different purpose, should come out of it so well, is indeed a tribute. Perhaps a "Continental suspension kit" could be added to that already impressive list of special parts? Finally, for those who really enjoy "having a go" in the Paris traffic, a tuned Sprite is just about ideal!

#### A B.R.M. FOR B.R.P.

ALFRED OWEN has given a 1959 Grand Prix B.R.M. to the British Racing Partnership to race independently. There are no strings attached. Bourne will continue to develop B.R.M., and will, of course, supply the necessary spares for the B.R.P. machine. The car will be painted light green, and will be driven by either Stirling Moss or Ivor Bueb, whichever is available. Preparation and maintenance will be under the direction of Tony Robinson at Lots Road. First appearance of the car will be in the French Grand Prix (Grand Prix d'Europe) on 5th July.