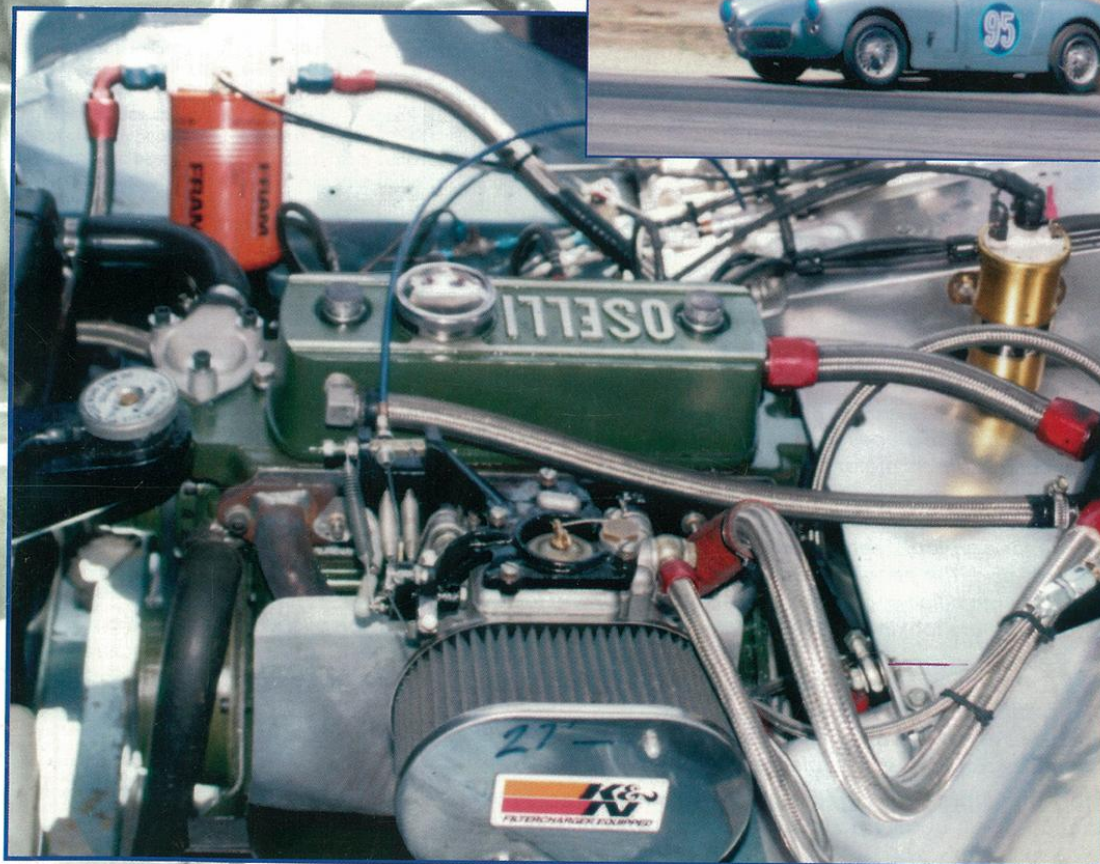


CHATTER

MARCH 1996

THE AUSTIN-HEALEY CLUB OF AMERICA, INC.



Moss at Monterey

Moss at Monterey!

Stirling Moss is Reunited with Sprinzel Sprite

by Rocky Santiago

Photos by Rocky Santiago
Oklahoma AHOC

Legends

The description "legend" has been used very loosely in recent years. But Stirling Moss is unquestionably one of the genuine legends of sports car racing; and the automotive event held in Monterey, CA, on a weekend every August, is considered by many as legendary, including as it does the Annual Monterey Historic Races at Laguna Seca and the Annual Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance.

Every year a different marque (and occasionally, a driver) is honored by the Monterey Historic Races. In 1995, Lotus was the featured automobile, and being a vintage automobile fanatic, when I heard that Stirling Moss would be driving an Austin-Healey Sprinzel Sprite at the event, I decided that I had to attend this automotive extravaganza on the Monterey peninsula.

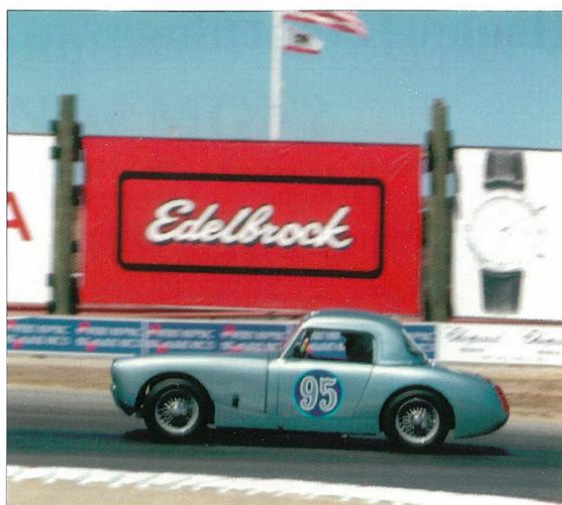
I knew from experience that if you plan to attend this event you must make travel, lodging, and transportation arrangements months in advance, which I did—including getting official AHCA press credentials from *CHATTER*, in exchange for a promise of Stirling Moss pictures and a story. Good deal, huh?

Race Time Trials Begin

Time trials for the Monterey Historic Races begin mid-week, with the actual races taking place on Saturday and Sunday. Imagine the delight of seeing hundreds of historically significant racing automobiles ranging from the early 1900s to the 1970s—an incredible array representing millions of dollars of the finest examples to be found anywhere on the planet! The best part of this event is that every car is there with one purpose: to WIN in its class. Vintage racing at its finest.

I arrived at the track early Saturday morning and picked up my press passes and prized media VIP parking sign. The awesome Bugatti, Lotus,

Top: Sprinzel Sprite rounds turn 11 at Laguna Seca Racetrack with Stirling Moss behind the wheel. **Bottom left:** McLaughlin's race-prepared Sprinzel Sprite. **Bottom right:** The BBC interviews Moss; note the British Racing Driver's Club (BRDC) emblem on Moss' driving suit.



Allard, and Ferrari race cars were everywhere, but I had specifically come to watch Stirling Moss drive Peter McLaughlin's 1960 Sprinzel Sprite (see June, 1995, *CHATTER*, pp. 15-16). As I strolled through this maze of rolling automotive history, suddenly there it was—the Healey Blue Sprite—and there he was, Stirling Moss, attired in a vintage blue driver's suit.

Show Time Arrives

It was almost show time, and Stirling Moss was checking out the Healey. The moment he puts on the gloves and helmet and latches the belts, the smile is gone. Stirling Moss's competitive nature is immediately apparent to all watching.

For those fortunate few who have the privilege of racing against Mr. Moss, a wonderful opportunity is presented. First, just being able to claim that you raced against Stirling Moss would make a great episode when you recount your race-driving exploits or show off your scrapbook. Second, if you and your car hold up, you could conceivably beat him. Either way, it would be one of those rare win/win situations.

The race began, and armed with my AHCA press pass, I positioned myself at what I considered to be the absolute best spot on the track, turn 11, the last turn before the straightaway to the checkered flag. Moss took the early lead, but the race was far from over. He continued leading his heat, then dropped to second late in the race. It came down to inches as he attempted to pass for the win at turn 11 on the last lap.



Unfortunately, Stirling and the Sprite came up just short and were nosed at the finish line by the slightly more powerful 2-litre Morgan. The law in racing that there is no substitute for horsepower is true. Nevertheless, it was a remarkable and memorable driving exhibition, soon to be followed by an exhibition of another kind.

Moss Meets Media and Fans

As the race ended and the cars entered the pits, the fans, mechanics, other drivers, and the media were waiting. I never remember seeing so many items, books, posters, helmets, you name it, presented with the hopes of receiving an autograph. Mr. Moss was now in his element, and the smile was back. He absolutely delighted a group of ladies from Japan when he unzipped his driving suit and tied the top loosely around his waist; they responded by burning up roll after roll of Fuji film!

After the crowd around Moss had somewhat subsided, I used a clever ploy to get my foot in the door. I held up a copy of the June, 1995, *CHATTER* (with Moss on the cover). He spotted it, approached me, smiled, and asked, "Do you have any extra copies?"

"Only six," I replied. I had him sign two and gave up the rest. After some pictures and a few questions that I hoped had not been asked, I did receive the quote of the day: "Coming in second is like kissing your sister... not very meaningful. But I enjoyed every minute of it." I thanked Mr. Moss, and he thanked me for the *CHATTERS*.

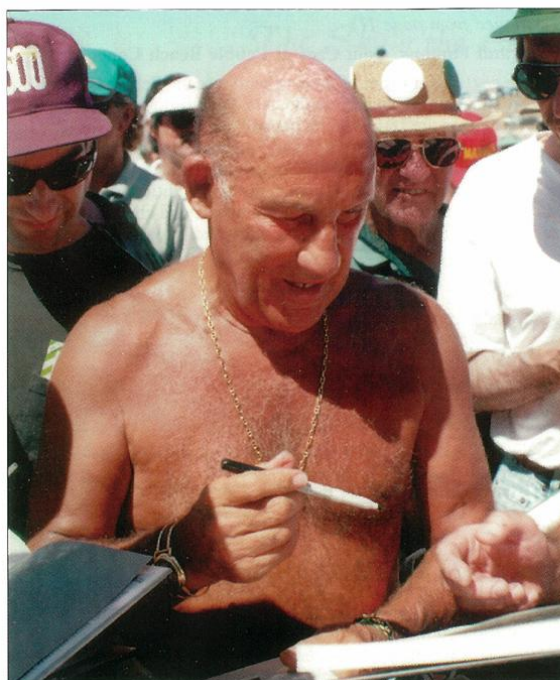
Walking away down the pit row, I felt quite pleased. Was it the intoxicating aroma of high octane racing fuel, the sights, the wonderful sounds or the realization of the events that had unfolded before me? Whatever it was, I knew that I had been at the right place at the right time.

Healeys Sold at Collector Car Auction

More activity involving Healeys took place Friday and Saturday at the World Classic Collector Car Auction on Fisherman's Wharf in Monterey. Here one can, with a simple signature on a check, leave with some of the finest sports and classic automobiles offered at any collector car auction. The event attracts collectors from all corners of the world, and some of these types have really deep pockets.

There were three Healeys in the sale. A just-restored factory 100M sold for \$32,500 plus a buyer's premium to a collector in Germany. A just-restored 1957 100-6 was bid to \$25,500, but the owner would not sell it. (Personally, I thought that this was "all the money" for this model.) The third Healey was a 1961 3000 MkII BT7. It was a nice driver, bravely offered at "no reserve" (high bidder gets it, regardless of price). It fetched a fair price of \$17,110. In my opinion, this all means that nice, correct Healeys are a very good investment, and that in the right situation, the right Healey will attract multiple buyers willing to pay top dollar.

(Continued on page 12)



Above: Stirling Moss practices his penmanship for many autograph-seeking fans of this great driver. Bottom left: (from left) Rocky Santiago, Stirling Moss, and Peter McLaughlin, owner of the Sprinzel Sprite, discuss the car following the race. Bottom right: Stirling Moss (second from left) interviews Phil Hill (at Moss' left) at the Pebble Beach Concours. Below: Moss pushes Sprite toward paddock after the race.



(Continued from page 11)

"Rich and Famous" Join Cars at Pebble Beach Concours

The next major event of the weekend was the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance. This most famous and prestigious car show in the world is held on the 18th green of the golf course at Pebble Beach. Here one sees "Life Styles of the Rich and Famous" in person, with million dollar automobiles, ladies dressed to the nines, champagne—all overlooking the magnificent, dark blue Pacific. In addition to the "by invitation only" Concours cars, many automotive and cinema celebrities are present. The line of the day was delivered by Jay Leno as he was



Morgan (left) leads Sprite at beginning of final straightaway at Laguna Seca.

introduced to the crowd. When the master of ceremonies thanked Jay for attending, Jay replied, "No, thank you for inviting me."

He was then asked, "Just how many cars do you own now?" After a moment of deliberation, Jay replied, "My wife thinks I have 17, so let's keep it right there!"

To the delight of the crowd (over 20,000 at \$50 per person), a dapper Mr. Stirling Moss and former world champion Mr. Phil Hill, who drove and won the Bugatti race, were Guests of Honor, presenting the Pebble Beach Concours Awards. It was a fitting end to my weekend.

So Much To Do, So Little Time

The weekend at Monterey offers more than is humanly possible to see and to do. I wanted to go by the Concorso Italiano and to stay over for the sophisticated Christie's car auction on Sunday night. But to be truthful, by Sunday afternoon, I had developed a case of automotive sensory overload. In addition, when in Northern California with spouse, there is the mandatory and equally taxing social life to deal with. Fabulous seafood restaurants, including my all-time favorite, Casanova in Carmel; the wine—especially the wine; the friends and automotive conversations; all are part of this wonderful weekend. Simply put, it is world-class.

Stirling Moss Comments on Sprite

The following commentary is from the January, 1996, edition of *Road & Track*, whose story of the Monterey Historic Automobile Weekend included a two-page spread of Stirling Moss in the Sprinzel Sprite owned by Peter McLaughlin. Moss' commentary is in roman type, *R&T* in *italic*. The story is reprinted with the kind permission of *Road & Track*. -Ed.

Later that week at the track, Stirling is having trouble with one of his drives—a Lotus 23B—but savoring the other; in Peter McLaughlin's 1960 Austin-Healey Sebring Sprite.

The Lotus' battery was flat and, in first practice, its throttle stuck open. I would try to roll back on the throttle to set the car up, then had to use the brakes instead. Very unsettling.

I got back through the crowd to the paddock on the ignition key, and all without a hooter.

A hooter?

You call it a horn over here.

Whose car is it?

That's the trouble—it's mine. I had hoped to bring it over, do well and sell it. But it isn't working out that way as yet. A pity, because the 23B is such a nice car to drive. It can be hustled along without feeling, "My God, this is going to bite me in the backside."

And the Sprite?

The Sprite's a lovely car. It handles so well and, with its modest power, I feel more courageous.

This one has virtually a Formula 3 engine, 990-odd ccs, built up for Chuck Shields. I raced a Sebring Sprite like this for Donald Healey,

and in checking my diary I found I was getting valve bounce at around 7000.

I asked Chuck what revs I could use here and he said, "Try to keep it to 8, but if you need 8 1/2 thousand, it's there."

We never did ask him what revs he used, but Saturday's Race 3A was the crowd pleaser of the weekend. Stirling qualified 2nd, and by Laguna Seca's first corner it was a wonderful dice among pole-starter Dean Watts in a 1960 Porsche Abarth, Brian Howlett in a 1962 Morgan Plus Four and the Sprite. The Morgan and Porsche might have had a power advantage on the circuit's uphill sections, but that adrenaline surge evidently came into play—and not just for Stirling.

The three cars ran like a train for the entire 10 laps, Porsche and Sprite swapping the lead, the Morgan hanging back, but only a little.

Near the end, traffic—not to say the excitement—got particularly hot. Moss and Watts maneuvered to pass several other cars. Howlett saw an opening. The Morgan got by the Porsche going up the hill and out-accelerated the Sprite out of the Corkscrew and into Nine.

Finally, at the last corner of the last lap, Stirling tried all-out to pass the Morgan for the win. He bobbled and dropped to 3rd, as Dean got through and powered his Porsche to the flag.

We saw Stirling in the paddock not long afterward.

It was fun, wasn't it? I don't believe I could have driven the Sprite much faster. The car was running perfectly.

In that last corner, I tried to get by the Morgan. I knew if I could get him to look over at me... but he wouldn't look.

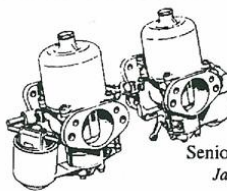
I might have settled for 2nd, but I thought, "No, it's a race, isn't it?"

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