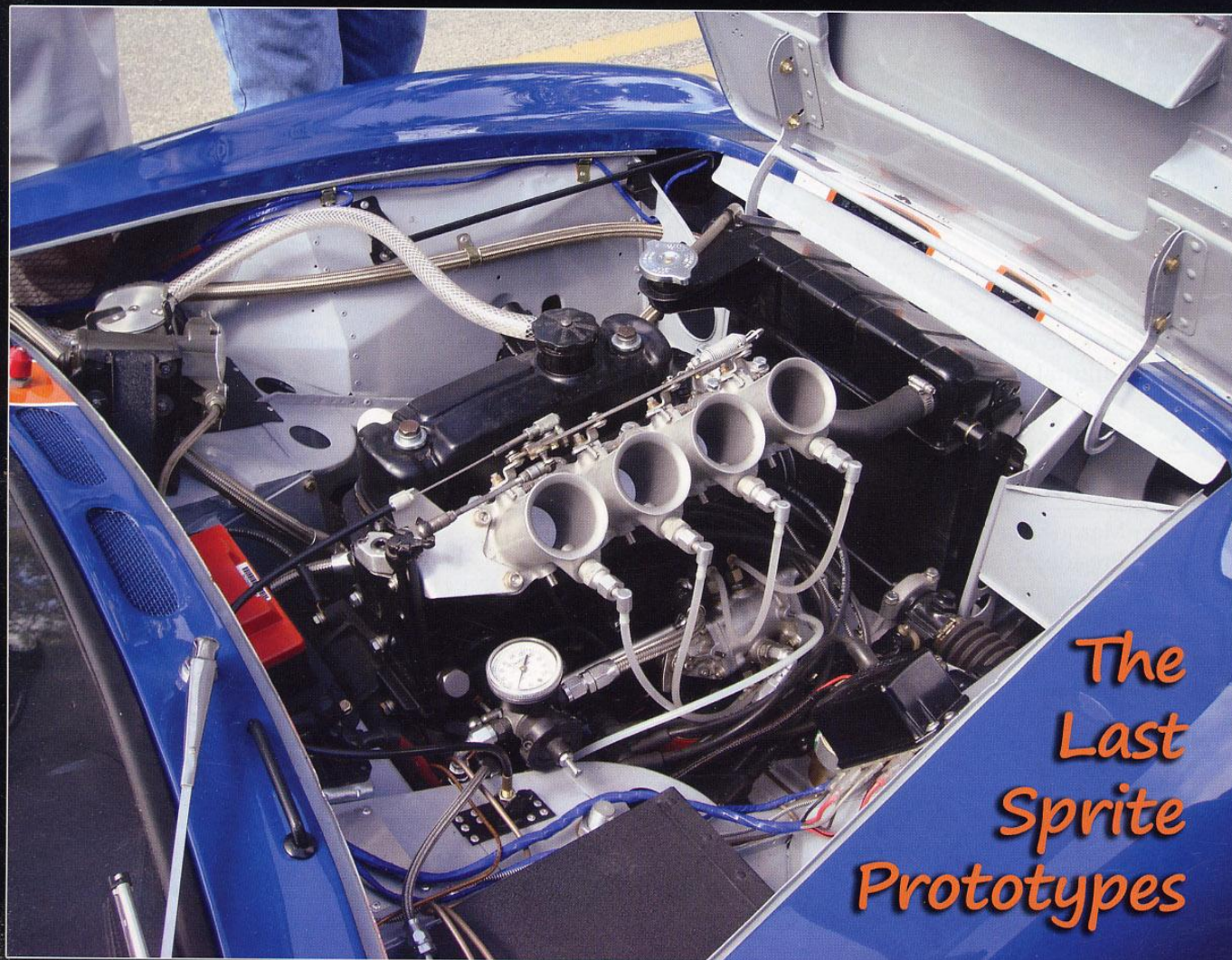


Healey MARQUE



*The
Last
Sprite
Prototypes*



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Sprite Prototypes Return to Sebring

The 1970 Sebring 12-hour race is known as "A Race to Remember." It was won by Mario Andretti and Arturo Merzario driving the #19 Ferrari 512S Spider, narrowly beating the #48 Porsche 908 driven by Steve McQueen and Peter Revson by just 23 seconds. It was the closest Sebring finish in history and is still today considered one of the most exciting races contested at Sebring.

At least that is what most people remember about the 1970 Sebring 12-hour race. And now, *the rest of the story.*

Enter the Austin-Healey Sprite Prototypes.

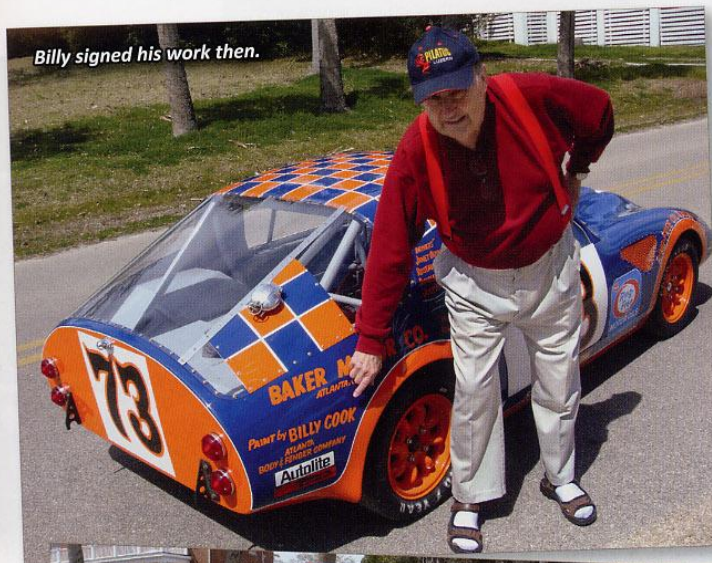
Coming off a Manufacturer's Trophy win in the 1969 Sebring 12 hours and a very strong showing at the 1970 Daytona 24 hours, Janet Guthrie, Rosemary Smith, and Judy Kondratieff piloted their Ring Free Racing Team entry, a 1968 fuel-injected Austin-Healey Sprite Prototype Coupe, in the same 1970 Sebring 12-hour race as Andretti and McQueen. These "Motor Maids" started 50th out of 83 entrants, finished 19th overall, and took their first class win in P-2. Quite an accomplishment!

Forty years later, in March of 2010, the Guthrie "all-girl team's" Ring Free Sprite Prototype was going to Sebring again. Joining the party was also a sister car that ran in the 1970 Sebring, a

Austin-Healey Sprite Prototype roadster. These two cars, with chassis numbers HAN9-R-238 and HAN9-R-250, were fresh from a 20+ year restoration journey. The stage was set for quite a reunion.

First on the agenda was a stop in Apalachicola, Florida, on the way to Sebring to visit Billy and Elizabeth Cook. Billy had been the Crew Chief for the Ring Free Team and his name was on the side of the car: "Paint by Billy Cook". Billy has a rich history in IMSA on both sides of the pit wall. He not only crewed on various teams, he was also the IMSA Tech Official for many of the races in the mid 70's and 80's. Billy was also responsible for, of all things, preparing all the cars for the "Smokey and the Bandit" movie. Now, at 82 years young, he and Elizabeth live a well-earned relaxed lifestyle in this quaint and historic Florida fishing community.

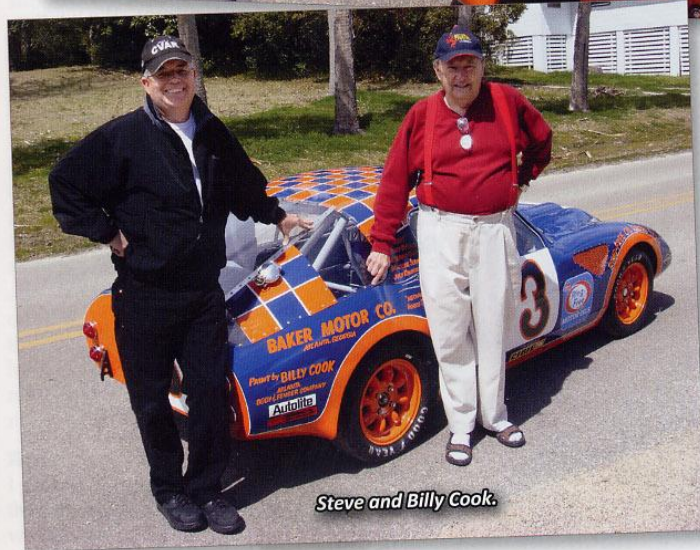
Billy's reunion with the Sprite was priceless. When asked about how the Sprite ran at the 1970 race, Billy said "We just unloaded it out of the trailer and drank beer! We never had to do anything to it! It just ran and ran!" No doubt a testament to the car's race preparation and the Healey's design. We had made a new friend, and Billy had been reunited with an old friend: the 1968 Le Mans/Sebring Healey Sprite Prototype



Billy signed his work then.



Billy signs his work again.



Steve and Billy Cook.

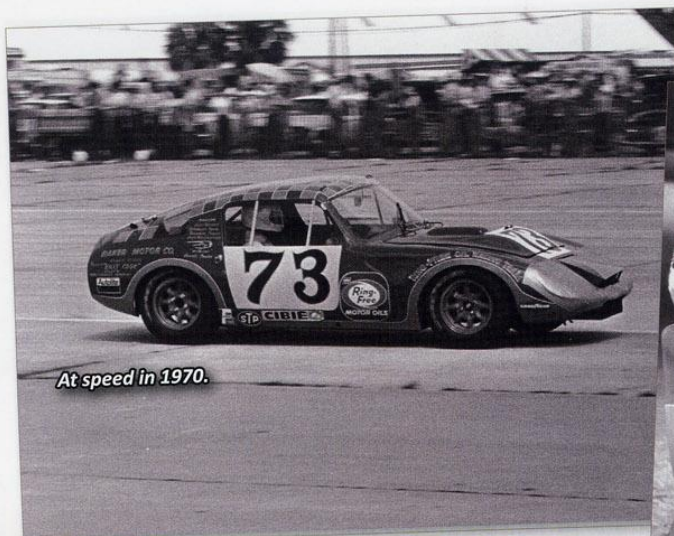
HAN9-R-238. As we drove away, we could see Billy in the rear view mirror standing in the middle of the street watching us leave for what seemed a lifetime.

The next part of the reunion journey was our arrival at Sebring where fate would play a role. We pulled our rig to the gate early, getting in line behind several other rigs waiting for registration to open. We introduced ourselves to the fellow parked in front of us, a Mr. Bob Phillips. After a bit of chatting, he asked what we had in the trailer. Here is where fate kicked in. As it turned out, we had parked behind one of the drivers of a sister car from the 1969 Sebring race: an earlier 1966/67 carbureted Sprite prototype. Bob co-drove this sister car in the 1969 Sebring race with a privateer group and told us the story of how all the Healey Sprite teams, including the Ring Free Team, had joined together in an effort to have all the cars finish the race in hopes of winning the Manufacturer's Trophy. As it turned out, that is exactly what they did, taking home the "Falstaff Trophy."

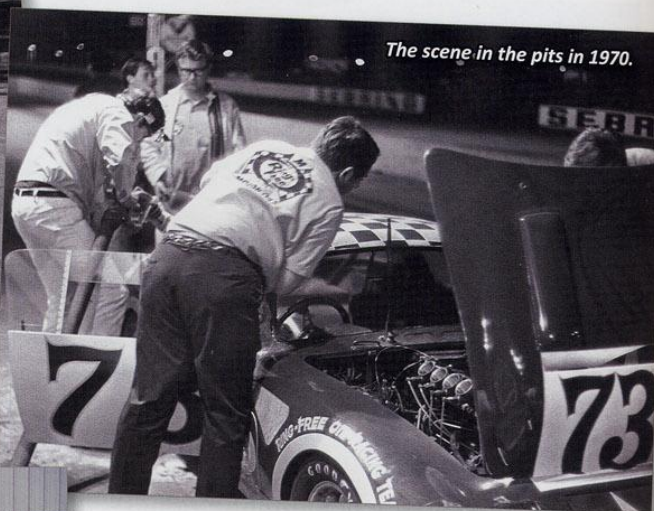
Bob was astounded when we showed him the cars. He was even more astounded when we produced some photos from the 1969 race showing his car. These were photos he had never seen before, and one even pictured Bob clearly, some 40 years younger. Bob had been coming to Sebring for decades, but the 1969 race was Bob's one and only professional race. We had made a new friend and reunited an old one with his memories.

After getting through registration, we paddocked our rig and began the car preparation and set up camp. Enter fate again. Another gentleman stopped by our paddock, a Mr. Reggie Smith. He asked if we were the fellows with the Sprites and was interested in seeing the cars. There was no doubt he was a fellow Sprite guy. The Guthrie Ring Free Coupe was already out of the trailer and the roadster was still under cover inside the trailer. Upon lifting the cover of the roadster, Reggie's jaw dropped and his eyes lit up. He said, "I can't believe it. I never thought I'd see this car again!" He was just taken aback and his reaction to the car was, again, priceless. As it turned out, Reggie was the primary driver of the roadster at the 1970 Sebring race. He had come to Sebring this weekend to attend the induction of his dad into the Sebring Hall of Fame. His Dad had been involved in Sebring for several decades, helping to promote racing and building the legacy of Sebring. Reggie had been a race car driver throughout most of his adult life. We had Reggie sign the car and he was truly humbled. We had made a new friend, and Reggie had been reunited with an old friend: the 1969 Healey roadster prototype HAN9-R-250 TFR7.

Both cars were put on display throughout the week in Sebring's "Gallery of Legends." This was an honor. The Sprites were in the company of a C-Type Jag, several legendary Porsches, other one-off prototypes and 20 other very historic and important cars. The



At speed in 1970.



The scene in the pits in 1970.



At the Gallery of Legends.

"Gallery of Legends" building is located right behind the main grandstand at the start/finish line, and many of the 150,000 people who attended the race came through this building. The Sebring Hall of Fame luncheon was held in the gallery building and Reggie's dad, Reginald S. Smith, was inducted during the weekend, along with other notable racing celebrities including Hurley Haywood, Phil Walters, Derek Daly, and John Morton. It was a true honor to have these special Sprites be a part of the induction reception and luncheon, and also be shared with the public in this international celebration of sports car racing history.



On display in the Gallery of Legends at Sebring.

Throughout the week we met numerous former mechanics, drivers, and enthusiasts who had some connection to these Sprites. We even met family members of one of the prior owners (Waldron). We were invited to Europe to participate in the 2011 Le Mans Classic. It was a rich experience in an unbelievable atmosphere.

As a part of the overall ALMS/SVRA Sebring event, we were invited to take one of the cars to the "Taste of Sebring" which was held at the Sebring Town Square. Following a police escort, and with about 50 other SVRA vintage race cars, we drove the 1969 TFR7 roadster prototype out of the "Gallery of Legends" and into the town of Sebring about five miles away. Families, kids, and enthusiasts greeted us and a grand time was had by all.

With the ALMS 12-hour international race looming all week, there was always something happening. Part of the event included putting these and many other historic cars on track for some "spirited" racing. Many memorable experiences evolved from getting on track. Here are two stand-out moments.

First, given the current Sebring configuration is a *very* fast 3.7 miles with 17 turns, which I had never driven before, my primary objective was to just "stay out of the way." The other SVRA drivers were very experienced with the track and they were also very courteous. After getting a few laps under my belt, I managed to have opportunities to "let her run" and what a thrill! Even being passed by bigger cars doing 170-180 MPH while I was doing 120-130 MPH going into "Sunset Bend" was just... AWESOME. I was getting a little taste of what it must have been like in 1970 to be passed by Steve McQueen or Mario Andretti, and I could only feel humbled by the experience. Even almost being rear-ended by a very fast Corvette in a braking zone (OK, maybe I wasn't really supposed to brake there), made the entire experience unforgettable.

The second most memorable thing from the on-track experience came during the one-hour Vintage Enduro on Friday evening before the ALMS 12-hour race. Grover Maurer, who was my crew chief, crew, and team photographer all rolled into one amazing ball, had a plan. After all, this was an "enduro" and we had the Sprite's reputation to uphold. Earlier in the week we had a bit of trouble with several failed distributor rotors. So our plan was to have Grover at the ready with our last rotor in his pocket and if I came in early, that was his signal to put down the camera (and his beer) and to come down from the stands, find me, climb the pit wall, and help me change the rotor. It was a great plan.

But as plans go, this one didn't. About lap three, I got black flagged. When I came in, they told me they thought I was leaking fuel. Well, of course, we had over filled the tank for the enduro be-

Steve with Reggie Smith, who drove the car in the 1970 race. This was the first time he had seen the car in 40 years.



Sure to draw a crowd.



In the paddock at Sebring.



Ready for a taste of history.

cause we were not going to refuel (part of our plan). That in turn caused a little overflow on the first couple of laps, which had ultimately cured itself. I was instructed by the hot grid official to wait for three minutes (which was mandatory for all cars in the enduro to do at least once) and then go back out. So you can probably already imagine what Grover is doing while I'm waiting to go back out. It would have been nice if I had thought of that too!

Well, when the SVRA grid official gave me the signal that my three minutes was up, I took off in a cloud of dust. Little did I know that Grover was literally only 10 feet away from me about to climb the pit wall. Of course, Grover had no idea what was going on, and I was all caught up in the moment. So, since he thought I might still need the rotor, *he threw it at me!* After all, my 78-year young crew chief/crew/photographer had just scaled countless stairs, spilled his beer, and pushed his way through several thousand people, only to see me drive away just within arms reach!

Well, in truth, he didn't really throw the rotor, he just really *wanted* to. Later, after I replaced Grover's beer and humbled myself with many, "I'm sorry, didn't see you's," he admitted that he really couldn't throw it at me because that would be a

complete waste of a perfectly good \$2.99 rotor. I'm sure I'll be paying for that for years to come. Sorry Grover. Next time we do this, I promise I'll wait (NOT!).

By the end of the race we had successfully upheld the Sprite's reputation by beating all other Sprites in the field achieving an unofficial first-in-class win, again. Grover and I awarded ourselves the "Corona Trophy" at the end of the race.

The Sprite's "Return to Sebring" brought many people and their memories back together, brought old friends and new friends together, and made many new memories. The Sebring and SVRA officials could not have been more helpful and gracious. They fed us, they helped us push cars around, gave us a great paddock slot (near the bathrooms – yeah!), and most importantly they helped us to honor the great history of these two special Sprite Prototypes built by Geoff and Donald Healey. For that we extend a great big thank you.

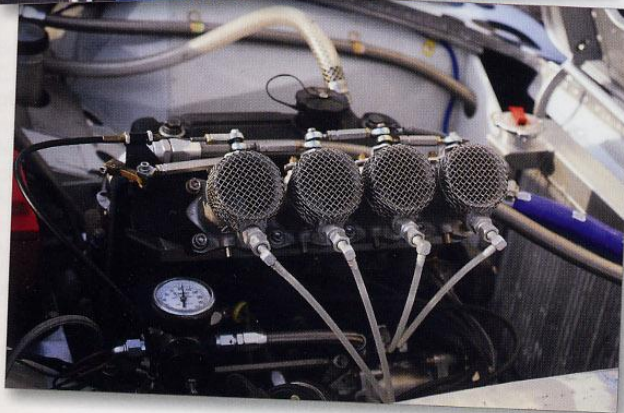
Things consumed on the trip: 2800 miles, 352 gallons of diesel, two blown trailer tires, three burnt rotors, one set of fouled plugs, 547 photographs, 128 gulf coast shrimp, many bowls of gator gumbo and crab bisque, several adult beverages and about a billion memories. Priceless.



Grover Maurer and Steve in the Sebring paddock area after completion of the one-hour historic car enduro race where they won their class.



Fuel injection and no air filters - not your typical Sprite engine bay.



About the Sprite Prototypes

The Sprites in the 1970 Sebring race were at the pinnacle of their evolution. These two particular Sprite prototypes, HAN9-R-238 and 250, were in fact the last two Sprite racing prototypes built by Geoff and Donald Healey. Their design included an evolved aerodynamic aluminum alloy body and a modified steel rear sub frame. The drive train included a dry sumped 'A' series BMC engine with a new cross-flow head and Lucas mechanical fuel injection. This induction system was state of the art for these cars and was found on only three of the 1968 and 1969 prototypes that Healey built (including these two cars). Also included in the drive train were true five-speed MGB gearboxes to allow for the long, very fast straights encountered on the endurance racing circuit. Large dry sump oil tanks were built into the bodies to allow for long runs without oil degradation. These particular two cars, HAN9-R - 238 and 250, raced Le Mans, Targa Florio, Sebring, Daytona, and Watkin's Glen - all very long and challenging courses. In most cases, the cars ran without trouble or incident, placing well in their class and finishing their races throughout 1968-1970. These cars also ran for several years in SCCA, including the 1973 American Road Race of Champions (currently known as the Runoffs). For more on the history of these two cars visit www.thelasthealeys.com.

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