

RUMBLINGS

Groveport Square, in London's West End, is best known for the number of foreign Embassies which surround it, while the streets which lead off the Square house gown shops, heavy parlours and purveyors of haute couture. But at 64, Groveport Street one can often hear the growl of a sports-car engine.

SPORTS CARS IN THE WEST END

being tuned up. This is the London home of the Donald Healey Motor Co. Ltd., where John Sprinzel provides over the fitting of all types of speed equipment to Spitfires and Healey 3000 models.

Before John Sprinzel joined the company just over a year ago the company offered only a mild form of tuning, leaving the race tuning to the specialised speed shops. However, the Sprinzel influence has obviously been at work as a number of different stages of tune are now available for the Spitfire.

Most important of all, the full Sebring specification Spitfire has been homologated as a standard production Grand Touring car, so that these cars can be entered in International competition events as G.T. cars. In the full Sebring specification the block is bored out by 50 thou., to 995 c.c., fitted with racing pistons giving a compression-ratio of 11 to 1, and a full race camshaft with shell bearings is also fitted. The cylinder head is fully machined, large valves are fitted, together with stronger springs, twin 1½-in. S.U. carburettors replace the standard 1½-in. ones, the distributor is replaced, a free-flow exhaust manifold and silencer is fitted, and the whole engine is balanced throughout. Clear-coated gears are used in the gearbox, and an oil cooler is supplied as well as a compression nine-spring clutch. It is claimed that 80 b.h.p. has been seen at 7,200 r.p.m., and all this can be obtained for £270 on an exchange basis. Turning to the chassis, one can have wire wheels at £55, disc brakes for £24, anti-roll bar at £5 17s. 6d., heavy-duty damper valves at £3, a wood-rimmed steering wheel for £10, and so on. Fitting charges are not included in these prices. A slightly less potent state of tune can be obtained for £168, and a modest 55 b.h.p. can be had for £60.

For those who do not want their engine messed about with, there is the Shorrock eccentric down-type supercharger, which sells at £72 for the Spitfire, complete and ready to bolt on. It is also available for a number of other cars in the B.M.C. range. A garage is available at Groveport Street for the fitting of conversions, but it is hoped to obtain a garage a little further out from the City centre, as most people wish to try out their cars and this is quite impossible in London. Added to this is the difficulty of running many engines for long periods owing to objections from neighbouring businesses.

Two staff members at the Healey showroom have formed a team known as Team 221, which will race a pair of Sebring Spitfires during the season. Cyril Simson and Paul Hawkins will do most of the driving, and John Sprinzel will join in when rally commitments allow. The team has already had one particularly successful outing at the Nurburgring 1,000-kilometre race, when Hawkins and Simson completed the race at an average speed of over 60 m.p.h.



The Maron Street Spitfire with Ashley hard-top.

With such enthusiastic and knowledgeable men on the staff one can be assured that one's car will be tuned for the job in hand by men who have actual competition experience. Paul Hawkins, who is chief mechanic, has gained a lot of Spitfire experience since coming to Britain from Australia, and John Sprinzel's long list of successes with Spitfires are as much the result of painstaking preparation as their driving skill.

The Assistant Editor's Spitfire, now with 28,890 miles on the clock, will shortly be visiting Groveport Street to have its specification brought up to date. The noisy twin-pipe exhaust system is to be replaced by a more efficient and quieter system which has been recently introduced, the cylinder head will be re-machined in the light of experience to provide better breathing, and the high-compression solid-skirt pistons, which have shown signs of "picking up," will be replaced.

For some months now the Spitfire has been fitted with an Ashley

hard-top. This is a glass-fibre moulding which sweeps down to the tail of the car, being quickly fitted by means of clips on the windscreen and bolts through the rear hood mounting. It can be fitted and removed in ten minutes or so. The interior of the hard-top is flock-sprayed and a parcel shelf is moulded into the rear portion. The large rear window gives excellent visibility although restricting vision to the sides slightly. There is an undoubted reduction in the overall noise level, while draughts are completely absent, which could not be said of the hood. In a heavy downpour only a few drops of rain creep in. Although no figures have been taken, the maximum speed has definitely increased, the speedometer going to 90 m.p.h. much more quickly and, of course, with complete absence of hood flapping.

The Ashley hard-top costs £49 and is obtainable from Ashley Laminates, Robin Hood Roundabout, Loughton, Essex.

Having already carried out a full road-test of the Triumph Herald (July 1959), we were pleased to have the opportunity to try the saloon version over a considerable mileage.

THE TWIN-CARBURETTOR TRIUMPH HERALD SALOON

The model submitted for test was the twin-carburettor version to the same specification as the coupé. The single-carburettor saloon has very poor acceleration, vying with the VW as the world's slowest car, and consequently the manufacturers quickly introduced the twin-carb. engine into the saloon.



The twin-carburettor Triumph Herald saloon.

The controls, being identical with those of the coupé, need no description. The driving position and pedal layout are almost perfect and the gear-lever falls readily to hand, although on the new car submitted for test the gearbox was still rather stiff. The knob of the gear-lever could well be smaller to accommodate dainty feminine hands. The window-winding handles are set low down at the front of the doors and are difficult to operate, especially when on the move. On the test car the rubber draught strip along the screen pillar detached itself with monotonous regularity, and had to be pushed back into place before the quarter-lights could be closed. Rear-seat room is adequate but with a long-legged driver in occupation the leg room in the rear is rather limited.

On the road the Herald saloon gave almost as well as the coupé, but being exactly 1 cwt. heavier the performance is not quite so good. 30 m.p.h. can be seen in second gear, 45 is third, and after a long run in 40 m.p.h. can be had in top gear. This is achieved at the expense of some mechanical fuss from engine and gearbox, and most conservative owners would keep at least 5 m.p.h. below those figures. Steering and road-holding are up to the same high standard of the coupé, the rack-and-pinion layout being light, with kick-back only intruding on really bad surfaces. The ride is harder than one would expect with an all-independent layout, and once when accelerating hard on cobbles the rear-end hopped just as if a live rear axle was fitted.

Perhaps the most impressive feature of the car is its cornering ability, very ambitious driving being required to break the tail away even on wet roads. The handling is virtually neutral when cornering fast but sometimes on poor surfaces the tail appears to be sliding when it is not actually doing so. Roll is negligible, as is tyre squeal, although this can be provoked by moderately heavy braking, causing pedestrians to leap into the air and preceding drivers to steel themselves for the crash, which fortunately never comes, due to the excellent Girling brakes. Fuel consumption worked out to 32 m.p.g. over 900 miles of varied motoring.

At £137 the twin-carburettor Herald saloon can be considered a excellent buy for the family motorist, and a rally driver used to sports cars would not find himself degraded in competition.