PROVEN ON THE DYNO

SCG 115 HP SUNBEAM ALPINE

SPORTS CAR GRAPHIC

IND

SEPTEMBER 1962

50c

COMPETITION

MONTE CARLO GRAND PRIX

BRIDGEHAMPTON

DUTCH GRAND PRIX

Nurburgring 1000 KILOMETERS

INDIANAPOLIS

TRACK TESTS:

COMPETITION E-JAGUAR

MOSS SEBRING SPRITE

ROAD TESTS:

ASTON MARTIN DB4 GT

ROLLS ROYCE SILVER CLOUD

CUTAWAY: 1962 LOTUS FORMULA 1

TRACK TEST AND TECHNICAL REPORT

BY JERRY TITUS

THE GT SPRITE OF STIRLING MOSS

THOSE WHO OBSERVED the three-hour race for one-liter GT cars at Sebring last March were amazed by the lap times turned up by these mighty mites. One comes to expect these things from Abarth, but when Sprites not only compete with, but run off from the muscular little Torino twin-cam machines it wants looking into.

There were four of these Sprite GTs driven by Stirling Moss, Innes Ireland, Pedro Rodriguez and Steve McQueen. The car Moss drove was geared fractionally lower, at 4.22 to one, than the others due to the discovery that they wouldn't peak in high gear on the long straights with the taller cog. Time ran out before all could be switched over. During the race, run partially in the rain, all four cars were competitive but the Moss machine was outstanding. For the first two hours Stirling stretched his lead further and further until he had piled up better than a minute and a half over Bruce McLaren and Walt Hansgen, who were Abarth-mounted. As the track dried off this lead shrunk a bit, but not much. Then, two laps from the finish, Moss ran out of gas and had to make the pit stop that dropped him into fourth place from what looked to be a virtually certain win.

After the Sebring outing, the little car was purchased by BMC of San Francisco and shipped to the West Coast. Knowing it to be a "wolf among sheep," SCCA National made it very clear that it was not, repeat NOT, a production race car, thus eliminating any misguided hopes of slipping one into a Class G Production go and coming home with not only all the marbles, but the track record as well. After our test, we heartily concur that, in terms of performance, it is far removed from anything like a small-displacement production car. The basic body configuration is Mark II Sprite, but this has almost entirely been duplicated in aluminum. The interior is stripped and a pair of fiberglass bucket seats installed. A 15-gallon gas tank reposes in the trunk area, so the spare tire is moved up behind the passengers. The hardtop, which is removeable, extends back some five inches beyond where the normal top would be positioned, obviously to enhance streamlining. Instruments include an 8000-rpm tachometer and a Smith gas gauge carefully calibrated to read in gallons. The speedometer has been removed completely. A wood-rimmed, alloy steering wheel replaces the stock unit.

The engine compartment appears stark and the powerplant itself, except for the bigger SU's and spun-aluminum velocity stacks, looks deceptively tame. It isn't. Internally it's been reworked in the best Formula Junior tradition to produce 80 strong horsepower. Bored out to 998 cc, the engine also bears a head with a four-port exhaust layout and much larger valves. Geoff Healey stated that this was not to be made generally available at this time but it would seem logical that such a sensible item would not lie on the shelf too long, especially since the molds and patterns for the current three-port head have long been amortized. In any event, the result is a power plant that produces power and torque curves that rival many of the Formula Junior engines.

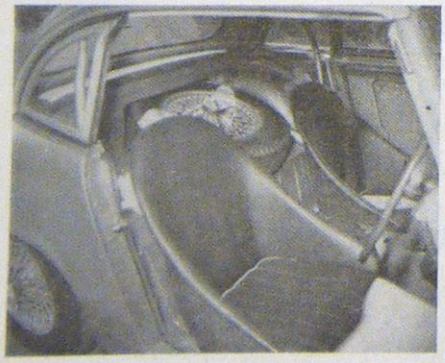
Combine this with a super-light car and things have to happen . . . and do!

Further supplementing performance is a *very* close-ratio gearbox. Exactly what gears they were, we didn't determine; suffice to say that there is less than 500 rpm spacing between the two top gears, less than 700 between the lower three. The competition Sprite disc brakes in front and drums in the rear proved very potent with the lightened car, and their cooling was supplemented by the use of wire, knock-off wheels. Standard springs and a moderate anti-sway bar up front produced a very soft, comfortable feel; not unlike, but much improved on a standard Mk II with competition options. Because the majority of steel had been removed from the integral body/chassis, some twisting was noticed in hard cornering. Once expected, it was far from disconcerting, tending gradually to turn a drift into a slide, but it's a mild, relaxed type of action that can easily be played with and controlled by the driver. We found we could round a corner either by picking up the inside front wheel or leaving it on the ground, and either way seemed equally as fast.

Frank Morrill, standing on one of the Cotati corners, was shaking his head. "I've seen a lot of Sprites go around this circuit, but *nothing* ever looked like that. Lemme drive it!" He was still shaking his head in disbelief after a trial spin.

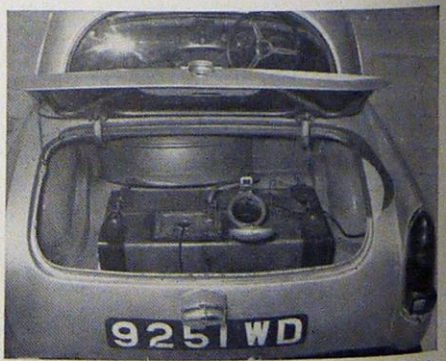
It is a fantastic machine, requiring little in the way of driver effort or skill to be driven at competitive speed. Far from practical for street use, due to the noise level (it sounds like the sheet metal is ripping apart at 6500 engine rpm), it's doubtful that the four "Sebring" GT's in the country will see much useage. If we owned one, however, we'd be tempted to see how many G-Modifieds it'd gobble. Quite a few, we suspect.

PHOTOS: PETE BIRO



Deep, vinyl-covered, fiberglass buckets replace the standard seats for comfort and weight-saving. Note spare location.

Dash has speedo removed, 8000-rpm tach installed. Fuel gauge is calibrated in gallons. All rugging has been removed.



Installed in trunk, 15-gallon tank has a quick-release cap, in-tank pump, and extra large line. Body is all-aluminum.

More like a Junior than a Sprite with its 80-hp engine, the drastically lightened car really flies through any type corner.

At right, some chassis-twist made it easy to lift the inside front wheel in cornering, with little or no effect on velocity.

Big carburetors, velocity stacks, and a very light battery are the few under-hood clues, below, to the car's hot performance.