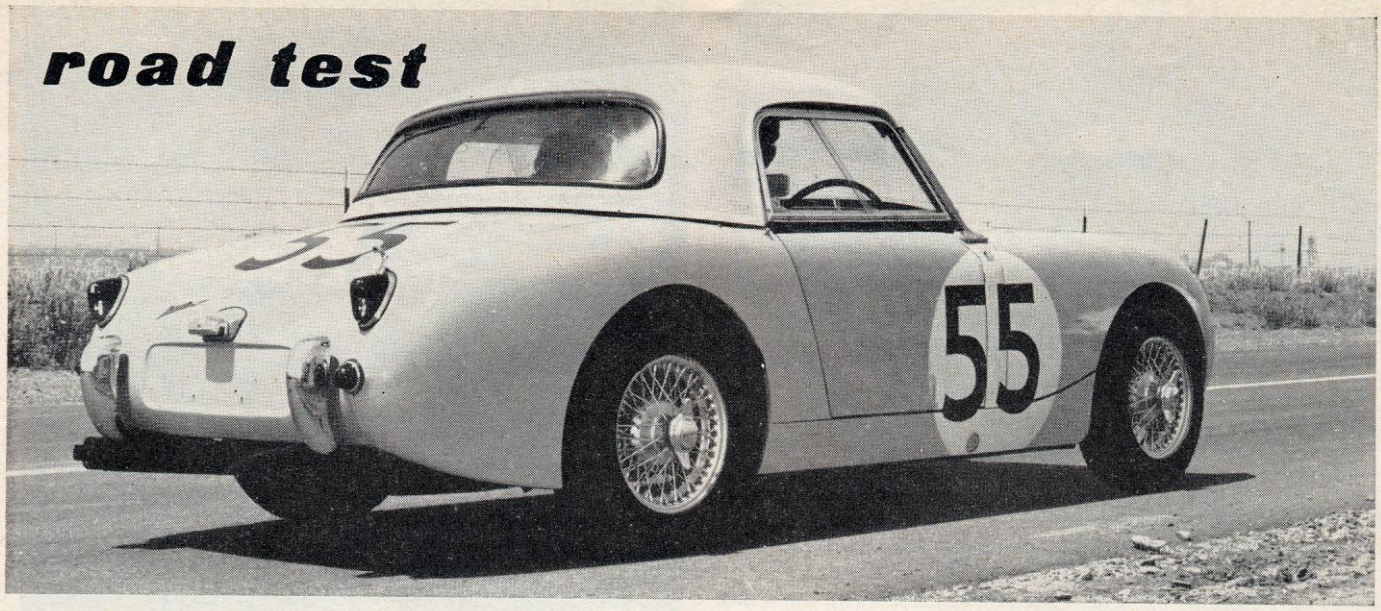
road test



SEBRING SPRITE

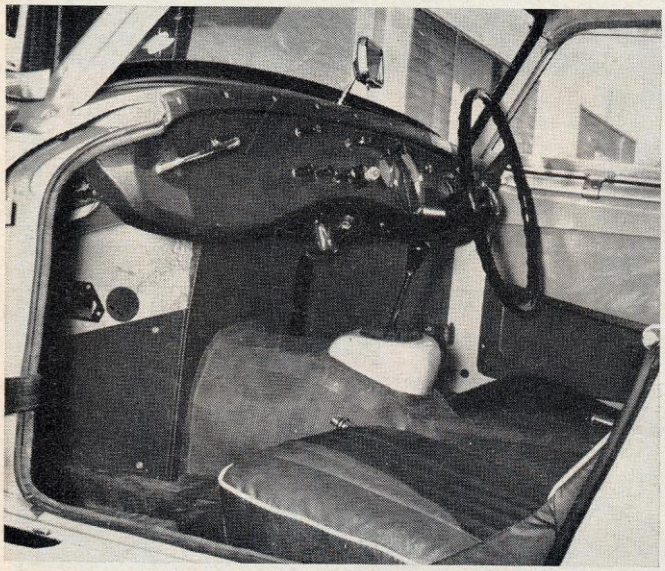
With these changes, it's just a little bit better

IN THE TWO YEARS that have passed since the introduction of the Austin-Healey Sprite, the tiny and slightly peculiar-looking British sports car has taken this country by storm. Even though nearly everyone objects to the Sprite's perpetually surprised look, its jaunty behavior and modest price have made it the most popular first-time sports car since the "perpendicular-period" MG-TD was in its heyday.

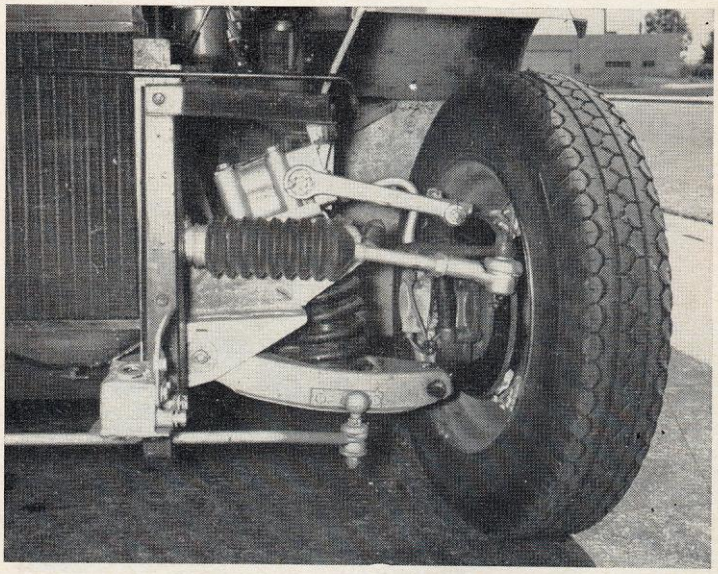
Although the Sprite and the MG-TD are totally different in design and construction, they have (or perhaps we should say that they are lacking) one thing in common: Neither car has enough power to satisfy some owners. Owner dissatisfaction can, if allowed to run unchecked, bring about serious economic repercussions and no manufacturer wants that. MG offered satisfaction in the form of the Mark II, and BMC—which makes the Sprite—now has available to Sprite owners the equipment used on the "Sebring" Sprites, which have put up such phenomenal times at the circuit for which they were named.

The Sebring Sprite that is the subject of this test comes to us through the courtesy of its owner, Jim Ling, whose use of the car includes both racing and ordinary around-town puttering. Though the Sprite would be run without its muffler in races, we were more interested in the street

Cozy, but quite comfortable.



The front suspension and disc brake.



performance of the car and so conducted our tests with the muffler in place—though this probably reduced the performance fractionally.

Externally, the Sebring Sprite is most noticeable for having knock-off wire wheels and a detachable hardtop, and, if you peer closely enough, you can see that it has disc brakes. These items do nothing for the car's speed but come under the heading of "refinements." To be quite fair we should say that while the disc brakes will not make the car go any quicker in a straight line, they are invaluable in working up good lap times.

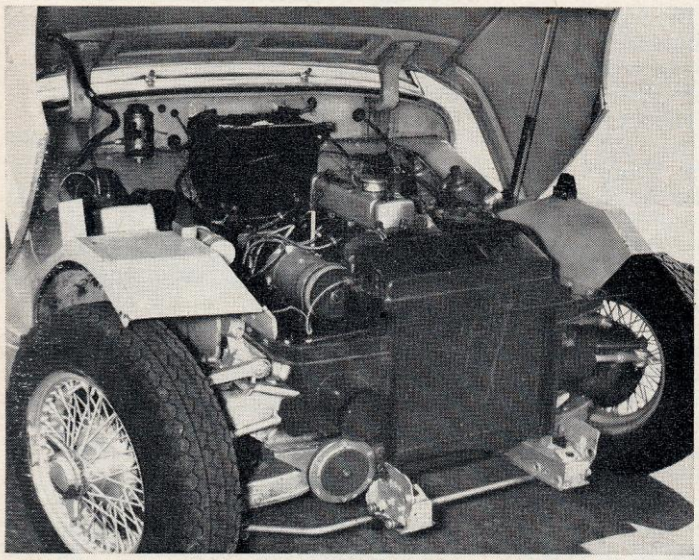
The internal modifications, while done very conservatively, are extensive in their scope. The engine is carefully balanced and has special pistons, camshaft, carburetors and manifolding. A special flywheel and clutch take the power to a standard transmission filled with close-ratio gears and then to a numerically higher (4.55 in place of the stock 4.22) rear axle ratio. The suspension is almost unaltered, the only change being a slight modification of the shock dampers.

The changes do not materially affect the feel of the car; it is extremely tractable without a trace of the splutery idle that so often comes with special camshafts and the like. We were a bit aware of a slight snappishness in the clutch (to which we soon became accustomed) and the marvelous spacing of the gears, which should be made standard on all Sprites.

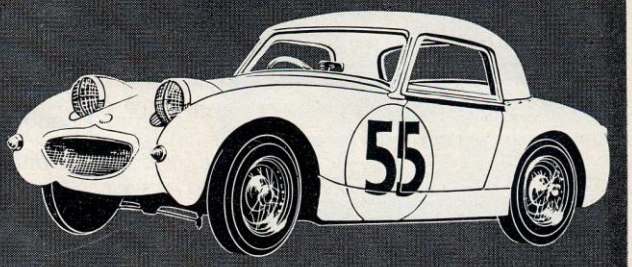
At the owner's request, and with respect for the number of racing miles that this car has covered, we used only 6000 rpm in our speed trials. For this reason the times given in the data panel are not indicative of the car's absolute best. However, the times are a good indication of how the car would perform in the hands of a non-racing owner, who would be using a similar red line in the interest of reliability.

This test is something of a departure for us, as we do not usually test cars which are not for sale and, needless to say, the supply of genuine Sebring Sprites is limited. We present this as a form of encouragement for Sprite owners, who may have wondered what the penalties of such modifications might be. The truth is that there are none, and you can buy all of the parts, tested and proven, from your BMC dealer, along with complete instructions for bringing your engine up to the Sebring car's stage-5 state of tune.

Here is maximum accessibility.



ROAD & TRACK ROAD TEST 257



SEBRING SPRITE

SPECIFICATIONS

List price	n.a.
Curb weight	1475
Test weight	1870
distribution, %	49/51
Dimensions, length	137
width	54
height	48
Wheelbase	80.0
Tread, f and r	46.4/45.8
Tire size	5.20-13
Brake lining area	n.a.
Steering, turns	2.3
turning circle, ft	31
Engine type	4 cyl, ohv
Bore & stroke	2.48 x 3.00
Displacement, cu in.	57.8
cc	948
Compression ratio	9.3
Bhp @ rpm	55 @ 5800
equivalent mph	84.6
Torque, lb-ft. (est)	59 @ 3(00
equivalent mph	52.5

PERFORMANCE

Top speed (4th), mph	87.4
best timed run	
3rd (6500)	70
2nd (6550)	48
1st (6600)	31

FUEL CONSUMPTION

Normal range, mpg	25/35

ACCELERATION

0-30 mph, sec	4.7
0-40 mph	7.2
0-50 mph	10.5
0-60 mph	14.2
0-70 mph	20.8
0-80 mph	30.0
0-90 mph	
0-100 mph	
Standing ¼ mile	20.0
speed at end, mph	68.6

GEAR RATIOS

O/d ( ), overall	
4th (1.00)	4.55
3rd (1.35)	6.14
2nd (1.99)	9.05
1st (3.10)	14.1

TAPLEY DATA

4th, lb/ton @ mph	195 @ 48
3rd	260 @ 40
2nd	370 @ 37
1st	490 @ 30
Total drag at 60 mph, lb	88

CALCULATED DATA

Lb/hp (test wt)	37.2
Cu ft/ton mile	73.6
Mph/1000 rpm (4th)	14.6
Engine revs/mile	4120
Piston travel, ft/mile	2060
Rpm @ 2500 ft/min	5000
equivalent mph	73.1
R&T wear index	84.8

SPEEDOMETER ERROR

30 mph	actual 27.4
40 mph	36.5
50 mph	44.8
60 mph	53.3
70 mph	61.8
80 mph	70.7
90 mph	
100 mph