

## "Healey Frogeye"

By Mike North



What is it? It's a "HEALEY FROGEYE", not a replica Austin Healey Sprite Mk1.

### **What's the difference?**

A replica is a copy made without the original designers approval or involvement. Rams Cobra's, Westfield, E Types, Ferrari, GTO's etc have all been subject to legal action to defend the brand name or design copyright of the original.

The Healey Frogeye was conceived by Donald and Geoffrey prior to Donald's death and taken through to production by Geoffrey and Keith Brading of the Frogeye Car Co. The Healey Consultancy, which owns the trade mark "Healey"©, licensed the car. NB Rover Group owns "Austin Healey" and has no copyright on "Healey". We all remember the Healey Silverstone, Jensen Healey, Nash Healey & Alvis Healey This is just another Healey!



In the early days it was available as both a restoration assembly and a complete car. Both options were based on the running gear of a Sprite or Midget (Geoffrey never differentiated between two as in his eyes the Midget was really just a Mk2 Sprite with a MG badge. The very last cars gained Limited Type Approval, were powered by the K Series and were registered as new cars.

From the outset and due to Geoffrey's involvement the AHOC accepted the car as a Healey Frogeye and it was eligible for all the clubs activity including motorsport. Check the results today and you will find 50% of the leader boards are Island Frogs.

The reality is that as the car mirrors the outward appearance of the Mk1 Sprite and is ALWAYS mistaken for an original steel car or a replica. I and many other owners have long since given up trying to explain what it is! Remember all Healeys started out in Alloy or GRP. Steel was only used as a means of mass production!

***"Why spend all that money on an Island car when you could have had a REAL steel Mk1 car for the same for least money? There are a number of reasons, most of which relate to performance, motorsport or rust"***

I can only relate my own experience . . . .

I had always wanted a Frogeye, but most of the cars I drove were A. Rust buckets B. Very slow or C. Just beyond help. Remember back in 1987/8 Frogeye's were still I relatively unloved and nobody was making a full range of panels let alone a "Heritage Shell!"

However the press was running the odd story of the Healey's involvement in a new project to resurrect the Frogeye. I was interested and began to research the the idea. A "new" shell (no rust), a 1275 engine (suggested by Geoffrey, who was I to argue?) and able to run in club events.



A meeting with the great man himself sealed the deal and I ordered my car.

Late in 1989 I drove up to 'The Cape' in 643 MNP, my Midget based Healey Frogeye for Geoffrey to road test it and sign off. (This practice stopped as production numbers increased and Geoffrey confirmed he was happy with the quality). I finished off the day with tea, "Nardo cake" and tall tales from Geoffrey and Margo.

The model and its development is featured on the front cover of and has a complete chapter dedicated to it in Geoffrey's last book, "More Healeys". It was also favourably reviewed on the BBC's TOP GEAR programme.

My car, 643 NMP was featured in Classic cars, December 1990.

The other major benefit of not buying a steel car has been the freedom to update the car (although I am a great fan of concours car I just couldn't own one).

### The Factory



During the years after Geoffrey's death, Keith Brading, the main driving force behind the Frogeye Car Company has continually updated the car, as it would have been in production.

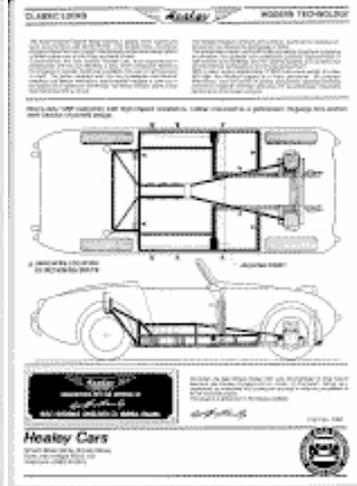
Suspension, engine and gearbox were all changed during its life leading to the latest Type Approved K Series cars. Remember our own Sprites had, first updated and then new engines, gearboxes and rear suspensions.

Over the years have modified my car with every factory modification as they come on line (except the K series engine). The main items being a 5 Speed box and coil over shock rear suspension. I have also updated everything and fitted most of "Front Line Spridget" range of modifications including the new front suspension, 9" discs, kevlar pads, updated halfshafts, long range alloy tank (8 gallons) etc etc. 1380cc, 45DCOE, LCB exhaust, Kenlowe and a MGB oil cooler completes the picture.

Over the last ten years it covered around 30.000miles, been to Le Mans every year, posed in Monte Carlo, climbed the Stelvio and gained more smile per miles than any car I have ever driven.

Tip: If you think your car is a bit "Run of the mill" take it to the south of France. You would be amazed what it will do for pride of ownership (especially if you need to justify some (more) expenditure) The French love them and on Casino Corner or the harbour F1 grid you can even out-shine a 328!

A quote from the man himself . . . "Happy Healeying"



Click on the above images to enlarge The chap with the tache is Geoffrey Healey endorsing Mikes frog btw . . .



Mike North's Speedy Healey Frogeye on his 2000 trip to Le Mans



Another view of the 'team' - trip to Le Mans 2000

**FOOTNOTE** After approximately sixteen years and approximately 250 cars the Frogeye Car Company (FFC) has ceased trading. Some years after Geoffrey Healey died, Keith Brading decided that life had other challenges and sold the assets, moulds and trading name to an investment company whilst retaining the intellectual property rights. That was the last of the real Healey cars! Fate will decide if a 'NEW' FFC rises from the ashes..

**Mike North**