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1 Is it the right car for you?

– marriage guidance



Essentially, there are two types of potential purchasers. Firstly, those who have owned a Midget or Sprite before and are now looking to recapture the happy memories of their motoring youth. Almost certainly, they will want the same version, maybe even the same colour, as the one they fondly remember. Secondly, those who have never owned one, but think it might be a good idea. This second group may be far more receptive to the choices available, but how to decide?

The first step is to thoroughly do your homework (by reading this book) and understand what the choices are. You then need to do your field work by seeing as many Spridgets as you can. Joining the appropriate club, such as the Midget and Sprite Club, is highly recommended before you begin your search. You can meet highly experienced owners who will be only too happy to show you their cars, and maybe even let you have a drive if you speak to them really nicely.

If you have never driven a Spridget before then this latter point is really important.



This 1964 Midget MkII (GAN3) has the original steering wheel. Most owners soon replaced this with something smaller with a leather or wood rim. An original wheel is now a sought-after item.

The driving position is fine for most people, but you do need to see if you find it comfortable. The doors on all versions are quite short, and you need to have good mobility of your knees to get in and out. None of the controls have servos or powered assistance. The driver is in direct communication with the item being steered, disengaged, changed, or applied. All the controls are very precise and sharp in feel; likewise, the suspension communicates very precisely with you, so check out the ride comfort if you have back or neck problems. Worst case scenario: purchase a restoration project having never driven an example, spend bundles of time and money on your project, only to find that your maiden voyage is a nightmare.



Driving

A good example is pure joy to drive, once you have got used to it. If you are new to the experience, the low-down driving position, slightly offset

Foot pedals are offset to the right, whilst a foot-operated dip switch doubles as a foot rest. The black oblong bung nearby provides access to the clutch slave cylinder bleed valve.



The Sprite MkIV and Midget MkIII were announced in September 1966. These versions received many minor revisions over the years. In October 1969, the face-lift version virtually did away with any small differences that remained between the two. The Sprite was discontinued in July 1971.



The round rear wheelarch Midget is the most sought-after version after the Sprite MkI. Other than the obvious alteration to the rear wheelarch, only a larger fuel tank was of any practical benefit.



The Midget 1500 (GAN6) appeared in October 1974 and was instigated to comply with the latest North American safety and emissions regulations. Plenty survive and represent a bargain buy if good.



Check the VIN plate just behind the front left-hand shock absorber. If it's missing, then it may fail a UK MoT test. Performance air filters, a tubular steel exhaust manifold, and an alloy rocker cover are typical deviations from original specification.



The rear edge of the sill and surrounding area within the rear wheelarch are prime areas for corrosion. The rear spring attachment point is highly stressed, and any corrosion here can be difficult and expensive to repair properly.



Check the oil pressure at idle speed when the engine is up to temperature, as well as at higher engine speed. Instruments can fail, or give inaccurate and unstable readings. Check the operation of the trip odometer – a common item to fail.

look loved? Most important, check the main frame rails and inner wing panels for signs of damage. Most mechanical shortcomings can be fixed, but leave major damage for someone else. Run the engine whilst you are looking to check for noises and leaks.

Underneath

You are not going to see much on such a low car without raising it. Just about everything underneath can suffer from corrosion, so spend some time on this. Check especially around the rear spring attachment points. An example with a lot of plates, and joins where there should not be any, is best avoided. Thick undersealing may just be a precaution, but could also be hiding poor repair work.

Interior

Check condition of seats, trim panels, and dashboard, and operation of all controls and instruments. The Smiths instruments can fail and give inaccurate readings when this old, but they can be reconditioned – at your expense? Check also the soft top condition, raise and lower it so you know how it operates and stows. Is there a tonneau cover and storage bags for the earlier side screens or later tonneau rails? Weather equipment varied over the years, so make sure you know what should be there. Is a hardtop included in the deal? There are various different types, so check that it is correct for the model and that all attachment devices operate correctly. Interior noise level should be assessed with soft top raised or hardtop fitted. You could easily miss untoward noises from the engine, transmission, or suspension – general creaks and rattles that become lost in the wind when open-topped. Always try the car in a closed configuration, regardless of the weather.

9 Serious evaluation

– 60 minutes for years of enjoyment



Score each section using the boxes as follows:

4 = excellent; 3 = good; 2 = average; 1 = poor. The totting up procedure is detailed at the end of the chapter. Be realistic in your marking!

Returning to any examples that have passed the 15 minute evaluation as described in chapter 7, you must now enter super critical mode. Time spent on careful examination now will certainly pay off, as missing anything at this stage will surely be regretted in the future. Even small faults may become much larger ones that will need attention during your ownership. Now is the time to identify all those 'tip of the iceberg' problems and niggles that will require some attention in the future. This serious evaluation begins with a repeat of your previous journey around the car, only this time you will be stopping for more critical sight-seeing.

Bodywork

4 3 2 1

Serious bodywork corrosion could affect any Sprite or Midget within ten years of it being built. Hence, it can be assumed that most examples that survive today have received major bodywork repairs at least once in their lifetime, and possibly more. Early repairs were most likely of a patchwork nature, as the then value of the car

would not be great enough to warrant a lot being spent on it. Indeed, some examples ended up with more patchwork in the floor than original floor. Patches on patches not only weaken, but speed up future corrosion of structural panels.

The Sprites and Midgets were the first mass produced sports cars to have a monocoque constructed bodyshell. That is to say, there was no separate chassis or subframes to which to secure the main running gear. All the strength derived from carefully designed box sections such as the sills, transmission tunnel, front and rear bulkheads, jacking point rail, and various other strengthening box-sectioned rails. As carefully as these were designed for strength, most are vulnerable to the ingress of water and condensation. Due to the quality of steel and paint processes then used, corrosion would very soon begin to occur. In just ten years, the lower edge of a sill could disappear and seriously weaken

The box section in front of the toe board has completely rusted away, allowing even more water to penetrate. The sill closing plate is also allowing water into the sill cavity.

The base of the door pillar is a common rust point, as is the rear corner of the front wing and sill panel.