

So You Want To Vintage Race a Sprite

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Vintage racers working hard at having fun.

where you race for time against yourself at speed and being on the limits of tire adhesion. That is a good step up on the evolution curve to racing. It is not for everyone and some have found it too intimidating. Vintage racing is perceived by some looking in from the outside as drivers stretching their legs in the intended purpose of their sports car. There are many different personalities and abilities in vintage racing, but like most competitions it becomes serious for most, and having good equipment and focus on driving training is part of success.

Over the years I have had some Austin-Healey owners ask what it is like to vintage sports car race one of Donald and Geoffrey Healey's favorite rides. I have been vintage racing myself since 1984 with four different vintage sports car racing organizations with a 1960s-prepared SCCA racing Bugeye Sprite I purchased in 1969. I have seen many different approaches and abilities over that time and thought I would share what I observed.

Introduction to Vintage Sports Car Road Racing

The experience of being a race driver is like lots of things you do for the first time, except for more initial costs with driver safety equipment. For most who attend their first driver's school it is a dream of a lifetime that usually gives you a peak under the tent of a long-term or short-term interest. You have very little ability to know if you will be comfortable in this arena until you go wheel to wheel with another racecar. You do get a little taste if you have done track days or solo events

Picking a Sprite to race

There are several approaches of how to pick a Sprite to race:

Street Sprite Modified for Racing. This is a good way to have an introduction to vintage racing at a lower initial cost. If you continue to race you will realize that the competition is more serious than you anticipated. Your option at that time is to have fun developing your skills and remaining at the back of the pack, or start learning more about how to improve your personal ability and hardware. This is usually costly and would have been cheaper to have bought a more serious race Sprite in the beginning ("the sum of the parts is greater than the whole" applies here).

Competitive Vintage Racing Sprite. This is a higher initial cost, but probably will cost you less if this becomes your passion. There is a whole new learning curve of being a racing mechanic with high-end parts. Rebuilds of engines can take two to three times longer for engine rebuilds and more expensive parts are required from specialty builders. Sprite racers typically do their own builds. However, you can work



Spridget Racing Heaven.

with other race support businesses that will take care of your car and even drop it off at the track, for a price.

Picking an organization to race with

Vintage racing has many different organizations throughout the US with different rules and regulations in each group. Generally, racers will attend racetracks nearby. It is good to get on the Internet and explore different vintage race groups. Your first stop should be at the Vintage Motor Sport Council site. In that site they have a map that identifies the vintage race groups in the US. From there you can see what is available and then go to those individual sites for more details. You typically can race with other groups after passing your drivers school. There are several good publications for vintage racing that allow you to better understand the sport. *Victory Lane* is one of the best magazines for understanding the grass roots.

Mentors

Knowing someone who currently vintage races Sprites can be very important and a less costly way to gain knowledge by showing you the ropes. A great way to get an introduction if you do not know anyone is to show up at a vintage race and introduce yourself to a Sprite racer. Most of the time you will find that racers are glad to talk to you and invite you to be a crewmember, which is a great introduction to behind the scenes.

Drivers School

This usually happens for most vintage race organizations at the beginning of the season in the spring. "The Ace Factor" by E Paul Dickinson is one of the great references for racing sports cars and is highly recommended for a general understanding of the whole

process of being a race driver and mandatory for anyone wanting to attend a driver school. Typically, vintage race group driver schools are a good deal less expensive introduction to racing and in some cases you can even use a street car. Driver schools are mostly two-day events with class learning the first day, and the second day on track practicing safety and with the last session being the driver school race where you are evaluated on your ability to be safe and alert enough to have a permit to race. After graduation you will be required to have an "X" on your car identifying you as a new driver, which allows

other racing with you to recognize that you are new to the safety learning curve. You can have that X removed after your second to third race if you have no incidents.

Sprite Midget Race Series

This group has the largest gathering of vintage racing Sprites in the US with six different classes of Sprites to race in. Their vision is to have safe wheel-to-wheel racing and enjoy each other's company on and off the track. They gather in the paddock together to help other Sprite racers mechanically and emotionally and thereby become the ultimate mentors. They have an annual driver school through Vintage Sports Car Drivers Association (VSCDA) at Gingerman Race Track, Michigan, in April each year.

This VSCDA Spridget race series is held at Gingerman, Blackhawk Farms and Grattan. We will be celebrating our 10th year reunion with a Grand Finale at Grattan Raceway where we will have world-class race and street Sprites. The Sunday exclusive Sprite Midget Race will be opened with a street Sprite Midget lap prior to race.

Additional information and updates can be obtained through StanBMason@aol.com 



The Spridget paddock at sunset when the theme shifts from competing to partying.