

1960 Turner Sports Mk 1 Owner's Story



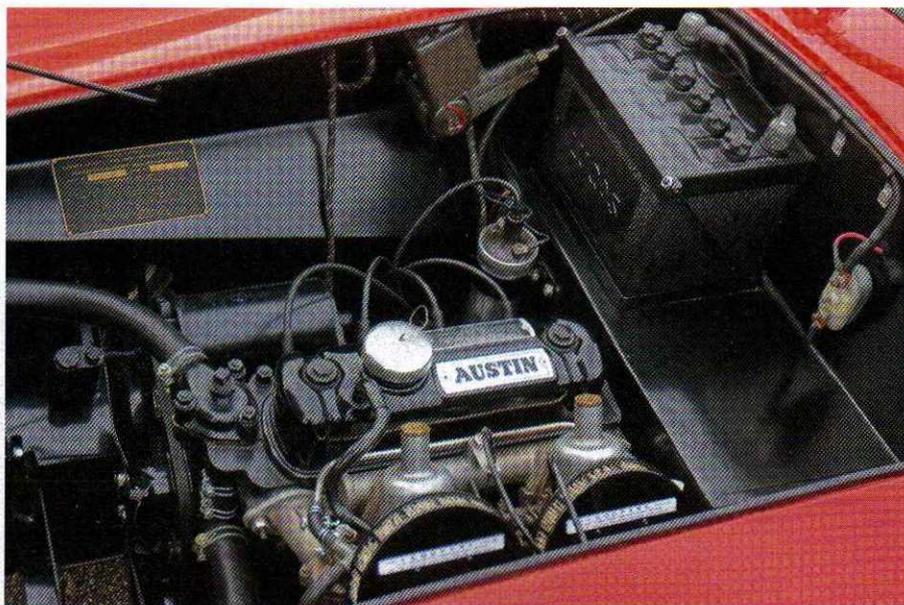
I've put about 1,800 miles on the car in two years. We don't have a trailer. I drove it over in the rain to the EURO [Auto Festival in Greer, South Carolina], it stopped raining, I took the top down, I drove it home in the rain with the top up. I didn't put the left sidecurtain in because I like to be able to see out a little bit. It was fine. But then, when I got it home, I cleaned it up like you wouldn't believe. I take the wheels off to clean them.

I love it, frankly. I enjoy driving it and having people remark about it. It's not a luxury wagon by any means; you're kind of contorted with all the pedals to the left of the steering column, so it's kind of interesting to get used to where the clutch is. But I love to drive it, I really do. It's just fun.

We've taken several trips of 100 miles. I think 100 miles is the most we've done in a day. One hundred miles makes my old bones pretty happy to get out and walk again! -Roy Ivey

At the end of the war, Turner set up shop in Wolverhampton in Britain's West Midlands, where he hung out his engineering shingle and subcontracted his services to Austin. He also pursued his interest in motorsports, competing in sprints and hillclimbs in a succession of MGs. Inevitably, he designed and built his own MG K3-based single-seater, which he raced with some success until retiring from the sport at the age of 37.

But he wasn't done with racing. Experience had taught him that there was room in the market for another sports racer, one based on robust, proven components. He built a prototype, combining a frame fabricated from large-diameter steel tubing,



The 948-cc A-series four, equipped with a pair of SU HS2 carburetors, produces all of 52 horsepower. Its life is made easier by the car's 1,175-pound curb weight.

rack-and-pinion steering from the Morris Minor (a favorite of specials builders everywhere), an aluminum body and a Vauxhall four-cylinder engine. The first Turners won the favor of an early patron, John Webb, heir to his family's lead-crystal glass business, as well as Ken Rose, the son of Lea-Francis designer Hugh Rose.

Building race cars wasn't going to pay the bills, but Turner recognized that when MG halted production of its T-series in favor of the new MGA, it had created a gap in the market for a small, affordable car that was competent on both the track and the street. He responded by building his first series-production car, the Turner 803 of 1954. It was largely based on Austin's bread-and-butter A30 sedan, using that car's 803-cc inline four, four-speed gearbox, front suspension and live rear axle. The chassis was his own design, a tubular steel affair that stopped short of the rear axle, which was suspended by trailing arms and torsion bars. Turner again relied on the Minor's rack-and-pinion steering. Bodies were fiberglass, supported by an internal steel tub.

Turner assumed that his little enterprise was well beneath the notice of a major manufacturer like BMC, and sought his Austin components directly from the maker. How could he have known that the BMC would be salivating over the same slice of the market pie, with Donald Healey's Austin-powered Sprite already on the drawing boards? Turner was forced to buy his parts over the counter, like everybody else, a hurdle that added about £100—a hefty 25 percent—to the price of the 803. (In the U.K. only, the Turner was available as a kit, allowing the owner/builder to avoid the pain of a 60-percent Purchase Tax.)

Russell Filby, the keeper of the authoritative Turner Sports Cars Register (www.turnersportscars.co.uk/), maintains that it was in fact the Turner that inspired BMC to build the Sprite. "Jack Turner always claimed that Donald Healey realized that Turner had hit a niche market, and as the Turner was using Austin components, he had a very good look at a car which was an influence in the conception of the A-H Sprite," Russell says. "Austin would not supply Turner directly, so Jack Turner had to obtain all Austin parts via the dealer network [Charles Clark Ltd. in Wolverhampton]. This, in turn, ensured the Sprite could be more competitively priced, as Turner could not obtain the parts at a 'works' cost without the dealer markup."

Turner persevered. In 1956, the 803 morphed into the 950, when Austin introduced the A35 sedan and its 948-cc A-series engine. In 1959, one year after the introduction of the Austin-Healey Sprite, the Turner was re-launched as the much-improved 950 Sports Mk 1, surrounding the 948 with an upgraded chassis and an all-new body, marked by a wide grille and forward-hinged doors. More power could be had, either through the fitting of an Alexander crossflow cylinder head (creating an Alexander-Turner), or the substitution of a 70-hp, 75-hp or 95-hp Coventry Climax four for the cast-iron BMC unit.

"Back in the day, they were screamers. They were something," recalls Jay Carano, a former Turner mechanic who happens to be deeply familiar not just with Turners, but with the very car on these pages, a pristine 1960 example that belongs to Roy and Peg Ivey. Not only did he carry out its meticulous, seven-year restoration, doing everything but the paintwork, but he was