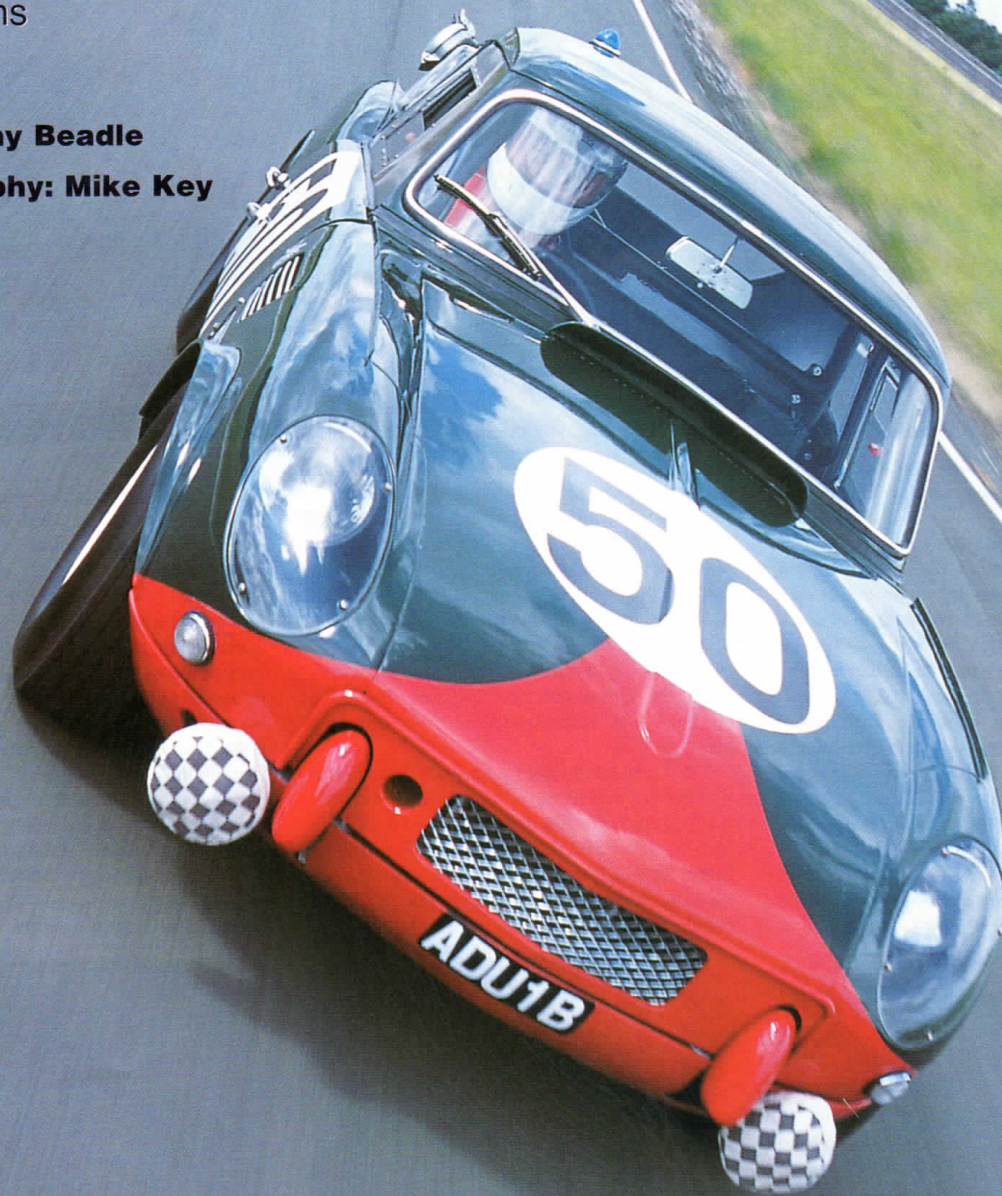


# CLONE RACER

A chance find, made some fourteen years ago, set in motion an incredible chain of events that would culminate in this superb replica of a works Spitfire returning to Le Mans

**Story: Tony Beadle**

**Photography: Mike Key**



Almost to the day, on a bright and breezy Monday morning in June 2004, at the MIRA proving ground near Nuneaton in Warwickshire, an event took place that mirrored an historic occasion in 1964. Four decades ago, it was Triumph test driver Fred Nicklin who was behind the wheel of the works Spitfire; this time around it was Barry Blakeley driving Mark Field's beautifully crafted replica of ADU 1B. But the purpose behind those two days, separated by forty years, was the same – to try out the car in preparation for the world-famous endurance race at Le Mans.

While the specification of the cars is virtually identical, much else has changed during the intervening years. Unlike the non-stop 24-Hour

race held in June, the Classic Le Mans event is now split into short segments, with competitors from each era given one-hour time slots during the daylight, dawn/dusk and night-time periods. In this manner, the drivers get to experience the full spectrum of conditions without over-stressing the classic sports racing cars taking part. The Le Mans circuit itself has been altered to make racing safer and, while it was perfectly normal for Nicklin to undertake his test driving bare-headed and wearing a collar and tie, Blakeley donned a regulation crash helmet and racing overalls for his stint on the track.

After his first few exploratory laps of the MIRA facility, Barry really began to enjoy himself – so much so, that it took some frantic

signalling to get him to pull off the track for a quick check-over. When asked for his first impressions of the car, Barry replied: "The noise!" The raucous decibel level inside the car was a feature that the Le Mans Spitfire drivers in the 1960s also remarked upon with some feeling. Later on, during the relative peace and quiet of our static photo session, I was able to get a more clinical appraisal from him.

"It bears no comparison to the '69 Spitfire that I race," said Barry (who is the reigning TSSC champion). "The gear ratios are a big difference, for example. In this car I was doing 110mph in third gear down the long straight, whereas mine's flat out at 110. The tyres took a bit of getting used to, as well. I race on modern Yokohamas but the





On its first serious outing at the MIRA proving ground, replica Le Mans Spitfire exceeded 120mph – not bad for an 1,147cc engine developed forty years ago! Racing number 50 was used on ADU 2B in 1964; ADU 1B carried the number 49

tread on these Dunlops moves around a lot under braking and when cornering, which is kinda weird but fun!”

If the purpose behind this latest test session was straightforward enough, the process that led up to it taking place was far more convoluted. Incredible as it may seem, the actual start of Mark Field’s 14-year obsession with the works Le Mans Spitfires can be traced back to when he bought a set of original magnesium alloy wheels for £10 at a local car boot sale one Sunday morning. That afternoon, not being absolutely certain that the wheels he had acquired were the genuine article, Mark scoured through his magazines, looking for photos of the works cars to check them against. With the evidence still inconclusive, he phoned a fellow Triumph enthusiast for help. Three hours later the phone rang and a third person was offering him a

substantial profit on the wheels, an offer Mark had no difficulty in turning down.

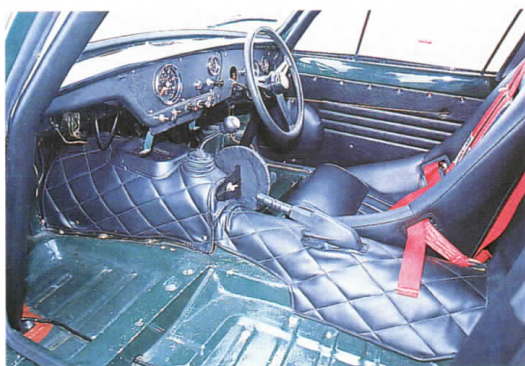
The following week, Mark took the rims to the Triumph Sports Six Club headquarters near Market Harborough, where Bernard Robinson verified that they were, indeed, genuine. Then came the defining moment, when Bernard asked Mark what he intended to do with the wheels. “One day I’ll build a car around them,” was the reply. Given the circumstances, Bernard’s response was understandable: “You can’t do that,” he said.

What Bernard didn’t appreciate at that time was that he was flying in the face of a stubborn Field family trait. “My dad always said there is no such word as can’t in the dictionary,” explained Mark, “and if it’s not in the dictionary then the meaning doesn’t exist. The more people said it couldn’t be done, the more determined I was to

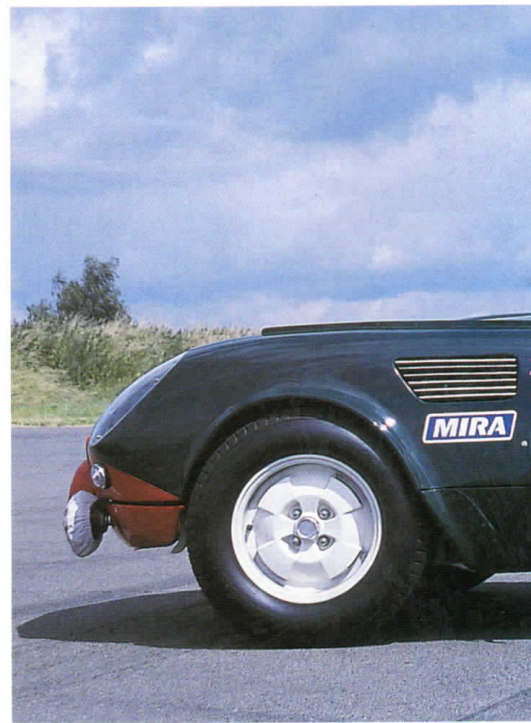
prove them wrong.”

He started researching into the history of the Le Mans Spitfires of 1964 and ‘65, gradually gathering together a whole wad of information, photographs, etc. The next step forward came when Mark’s wife Jo put him in touch with the husband of a workmate who was a panel beater. When Mark approached Karl about making a copy of the special bonnet used on the works cars, he agreed to have a go. By taking dimensions off the photos and cutting up a glass-fibre Spitfire bonnet, seven months later the aluminium front fitted to the car was finished.

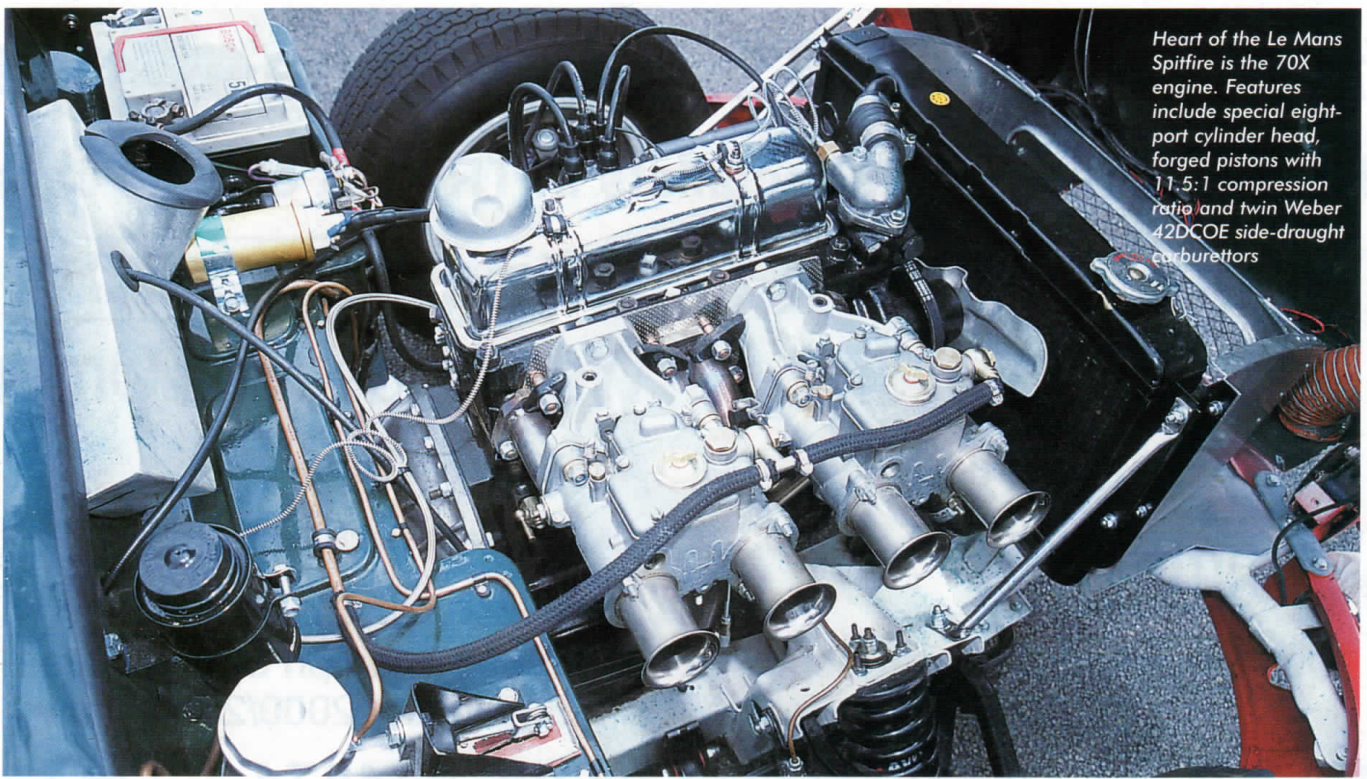
In 1996, Mark and Jo took the decision to turn his motor racing hobby into a full-time business, and Jigsaw Racing was born. The star exhibit at the open day to launch the new company was the Le Mans bonnet, and this brought an invitation to display it on the TSSC stand at the



**Above:** Racing car interior is pretty sparse. Modern safety harness and specially-built seat are required to meet regulations. Note adjustable knee pad mounted on transmission tunnel and matching pad on door for driver comfort on long-distance event. Hole in dashboard is fresh-air vent







Heart of the Le Mans Spitfire is the 70X engine. Features include special eight-port cylinder head, forged pistons with 11.5:1 compression ratio and twin Weber 42DCOE side-draught carburetors

NEC Classic Car show. Mark, therefore, decided to try to make a chassis to go with the bonnet at the show, not realising quite how different the 1964 frame was.

Help came in the form of a phone call from Germany, when Michael Monstermann offered to scan and e-mail pictures he had of the chassis. "Starting with a Mk I chassis, it took three weeks of measuring, cutting and welding to fabricate the 'cow horn' style front of the '64 car," said Mark. "It was a nightmare, and nothing could be moved in the workshop until it was done." With four days to go to the show, the chassis was sent for shot blasting and then painted white.

With the sort of historic connections this project has, it was bound to throw up some amazing coincidences over the years, but the first happened at the NEC. "I was standing by the bonnet on the stand when I was approached by a

gentleman," recalled Mark. "He asked where I had got it from and insisted that I must have found a Le Mans car. I told him it was a replica, but he wouldn't believe me. He then revealed that he was one of guys who made the original bonnets. Unfortunately, I got distracted for a moment and when I turned back to speak to him again he had disappeared. The next time I saw him was this year at the Standard-Triumph Marque Day at Gaydon, when the finished car was on show, and I discovered that his name was Brian Birch."

Back in late '96, a further conversation with Michael Monstermann revealed that he owned ADU 7B (one of the works rally Spitfires) and an invitation to visit Germany to see the car was quickly accepted by Mark. By this time he was well aware that the most difficult part of the body left to replicate was the fastback roof. Extremely generously, Michael offered Mark the loan of the

roof from ADU 7B to make a mould. "Michael has also been invaluable in tracking down other parts, like the 70X cylinder head, camshaft and so on," acknowledged Mark.

The special eight-port head was actually located in Australia, along with inlet and exhaust manifolds belonging to an ex-Standard-Triumph employee who had 'obtained' the parts prior to emigrating, intending to use them on a racing Spitfire. Fortunately, this never happened. Even more fortunately, the cylinder head was still like new when it eventually arrived in a shabby cardboard box, after taking three months to get here from Down Under.

Starting with a Mk I Spitfire block and crankshaft, Mark has painstakingly put together a storming 1,147cc engine. Jigsaw now offers forged pistons that were copied from an original, as was the camshaft profile, while the valves,



Left: Hard to believe, but Spitfire race replica was built because of a £10 autojumble purchase. Le Mans 5.5J x 13 inch magnesium wheels have since been copied for Jigsaw, tyres are Dunlop 5.50L - 13 radials

## SPONSORS

Companies which have provided invaluable support: Nigel Killerby at AVO, Peter Jones of Jondel Racing, Hayley Jones and everybody at Polybush, Keith of CCE, John at Dave Mac Propshafts and Paul Benson of Phoenix Performance Exhausts.



springs and collets had to be specially made. A set of the original 70X con-rods was found in this country, and ex-works engineer Peter Clarke came up with a pair of Weber 42DCOE carburettors that were peculiar to this engine. He also supplied the disc brake calipers from his stock of rare Triumph competition parts.

Other ex-factory people who got involved included Peter Cox (sadly no longer with us), Fred Nicklin and Ken Tomlinson – the latter building the gearbox and rear axle with a Salisbury differential, as he had done on the original cars.

About four years ago the car started to come together, but Mark's desire to make his replica as close to the original as possible did sometimes delay progress. Take the headlights, for example. Once he discovered that Lucas had made special lamps with 'Le Mans 24 Hours' moulded into the glass, Mark would not contemplate using anything else. It took him three years to find a pair and they cost £380, but he was delighted to get what he wanted.

It was relatively recently that the car went through a slight change of identity. From the outset, Mark had set his mind on building a replica of ADU 3B. "Mainly because it had a white flash on the front," he confessed, "and most people seem to copy the team car with a yellow front, so I wanted mine to be a bit different."

**Right:** The happy crew (left to right) Mark and Jo Field, Peter Shepherd and Barry Blakeley

**Below:** Fastback roof was copied from Michelotti Spitfire GT prototype. It was assumed that the shape would be more aerodynamic, but no wind-tunnel testing was carried out to prove the theory



## THE LE MANS SPITFIRES

In 1964, Triumph entered a team of three Spitfires: ADU 1B, ADU 2B and ADU 3B. ADU 2B finished in 21st place, but the other two cars retired after accidents.

For 1965, a fourth car, ADU 4B, was added to the team. It finished 13th overall, with ADU 3B one place behind, making them first and second in class. The other two cars retired. (The full story of these two races was covered in the October/November 2002 issue of *Triumph World*, No. 46.)

However, once he found out that ADU 3B was still in existence and being restored in France, Mark immediately altered his plans. "It was never my intention to upset anyone who owns a real ex-works car," he stated. "So once I had established that ADU 1B definitely no longer existed I changed my car to copy that."

To be accepted as an entrant in the Classic Le Mans event, Mark had to supply a comprehensive portfolio of documents to the sanctioning body. He was subsequently very surprised to learn that they considered his clone contained enough genuine parts to be classified as original! It is to Mark's eternal credit that he refused to accept this verdict and has insisted that a letter, which states unequivocally that the car is a replica which was built by him, and not Triumph, is kept with the rest of the documents. "Even though it has a lot of the original parts, I always wanted the car to be known as a replica and nothing else," he confirmed. "And, some time in the future, when

I'm not around, I don't want anyone to think it is a real works Spitfire."

A session on a rolling-road proved that the potent little four-cylinder engine was delivering 108bhp at the rear wheels. With a 3.89:1 ratio in the differential and a four-speed gearbox without overdrive this was enough for Barry Blakeley to see over 120mph on the speedo during the MIRA test, with an average lap speed of around 74mph. Considering this was the first time the car had been driven in anger it was a very impressive showing, with the only mishap being a blown core plug, which was soon replaced. As the Classic Le Mans race takes place on the same weekend that this issue goes on sale, we are obviously unable to report on how the team did in France.

Hopefully, Barry and his co-driver Colin Elstrop, together with the Jigsaw crew, will all have a great time and we'll update you on the result in the next issue. 🏁

## THANKS

Mark Field wanted to thank the following people for their help with the project: Fred Nicklin, Bernard Robinson, Ken Tomlinson, Paul Northall, the late Peter Cox, Peter Clarke, Dave Glead, Michael Monsternmann, the late Patrick (Uncle Pat) Lovell, Peter Shepherd, Phil Bradley of *Triumph World*, Neil Bradley at MIRA, and not forgetting Marc, Clara and Ginny at Jigsaw.

He also said that special thanks must go to his wife Jo for putting up with him. "Without her, I wouldn't have the car," Mark acknowledged gratefully.

