



How to Buy **CLASSIC SPORTS CARS**

The ins and outs of finding your dreams for less than \$20,000

BY PETER BOHR

ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN BERKEY
PHOTOS BY DEAN SIRACUSA

IF YOU'VE EVER pictured yourself peering over the cowl of your own vintage sports car from the Fifties or Sixties, you'd better buy one now . . . because these cars are quickly disappearing.

It's as though the usual ravages of elderly cars—fire, flood, rust, accidents and deferred maintenance plans—weren't bad enough. Now there are foreign buyers and speculators who are scouring the western U.S., where rust is the exception rather than the rule, for the best of our vintage sports cars.

While researching this article, we learned of a shipment of 15 Bugeye Sprites destined for Belgium. We met a German who last year spent \$56,000 on newspaper advertising to obtain some 300 collectible sports cars from American sellers for his German clients. We met another fellow hoarding MGBs because "they're going to be worth a lot some day."

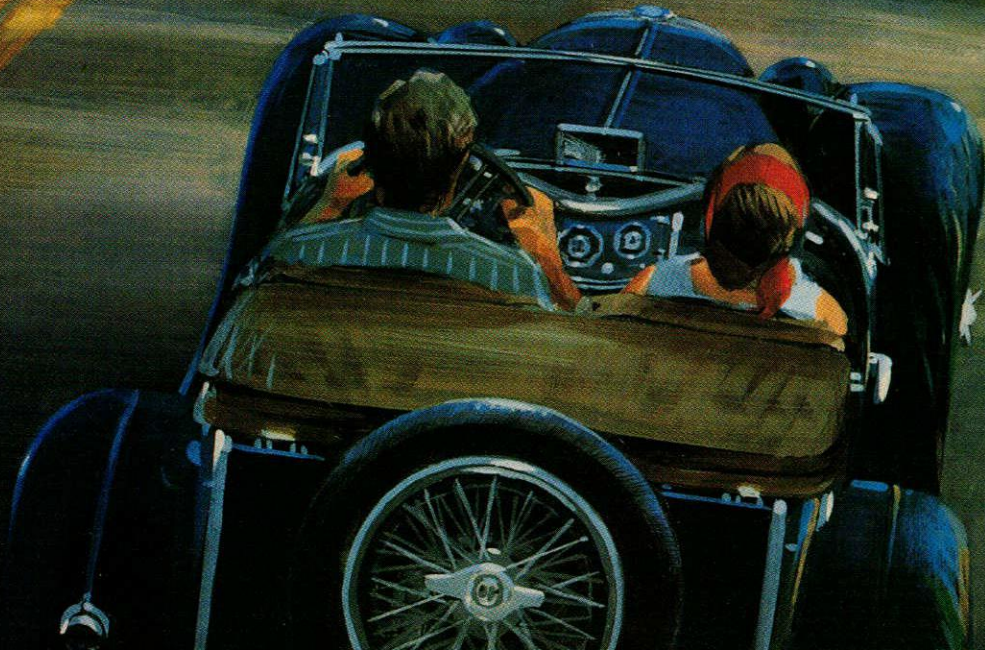
That "some day" is soon. Though the market for six-figure Aston Martins, Ferraris, Jaguars and Mercedes-Benzes has declined precipitously in the past year, inexpensive collectible cars are more popular than ever. Even in a time of economic uncertainty, there are always those who, for no more than the price of a modest new sedan, are willing to buy a clean vintage sports car.

Fortunately there's still time. Inexpensive Alfas, MGs and Triumphs are still around. In the following pages we've profiled a dozen of our favorite sports cars from the Fifties and Sixties, all currently selling for less than \$20,000. And that's for cars in excellent, rust-free—though probably not from-the-ground-up restored—condition.

Grab 'em while you can.



Austin Healey



1964-1971 Alfa Romeo Sprint GT & GTV

"An easy, safe and enjoyable car for the novice, as well as a source of continuing exhilaration for the skilled driver."—R&T, July 1967

From its finely finished alloy engine to its 4-wheel disc brakes, from its slick 5-speed transmission to its Giugiaro-styled body, the GTV has all the trimmings of the best Sixties'-vintage sports/GT cars. Why, the car even has a decent-size trunk and a rear seat of more serious proportions than a Porsche 911's.

The only problem with Alfa GTVs, as one wag said, is that they were built by Alfa Romeo. That's rude, perhaps, but these Alfas are indeed typically temperamental Italians if unloved and unappreciated. Leaky seals, blown head gaskets, failed 2nd-gear synchros and worn valve guides are all hallmarks of the Alfa ownership experience.

Then there's rust, which deserves its own paragraph. In the Sixties, Alfa didn't give a piece of pasta about undercoating or other forms of rust prevention. Check for rust everywhere, but especially in the rocker panels, the front quarter panels and the rear-wheel arches.

When this Alfa made its American debut in early 1964, it was called the 1600 Sprint GT coupe and came with a 1570-cc engine. For 1967, it was redesignated the GTV, or "Gran

Turismo Veloce." Caught off guard by the first U.S. safety and emissions standards, Alfa didn't export any cars to our market in 1968.

But in 1969, the GTV returned with a bigger 1779-cc version of the same engine. Moreover, these "1750" GTVs have fuel injection instead of twin Weber carburetors. In 1970, Alfa once again sent us no cars. But in 1971, the 1750 GTV carried on little changed until 1972, when the engine was enlarged once more, to 1962 cc.

Some *Alfisti* prefer the familiar technology of the 1600 carbureted cars. If you're in that camp, seek out a 1967 model with ATE brakes. Earlier GTs have Dunlops, and parts for them are difficult to obtain and terribly expensive.

The 1750 engine, however, is perhaps the sweetest of all the variants, and the Spica mechanical injection—when properly adjusted—is efficient and reliable. If you live in a state with a strict emissions-control-system inspection, be sure the 1750 GTV you buy still has its *inezione*

(injection); more than a few cars were converted to Webers by distrusting owners. Though the 1969 GTVs have wild-looking seats (unique to that year), they also have a double brake booster system (again, unique to the year) that can be expensive to repair. The 1971 cars are the best of the 1750 GTVs.

Alternatives? Why, the 2000 GTVs of 1972-1974, of course.

1967 GTV

Curb weight, lb	2230
Wheelbase, in.	93.0
Length	161.0
Width	62.0
Height	52.0
Engine type	dohc inline-4
Displacement, cc	1570
Bhp	125
0-60 mph, sec	10.5
0-¼ mile	17.6
Average mpg	23

Asking prices:

1600 Sprint GT, GTV: \$7500-\$10,000
1750 GTV: \$4500-\$7500

1958-1961 Austin-Healey "Bugeye" Sprite

"It offers more fun than anything we have driven for a long time."

—R&T, August 1958

It wasn't meant to happen, of course. Donald and Geoffrey Healey's body designer, Gerry Coker, originally envisioned pop-up headlights. But these would have added far too much cost and sophistication to a car that was supposed to be bare-bones and inexpensive.

And a good thing too. For had it been otherwise, the world would have been deprived of the smiling face of the Bugeye—or Frogeye, as it was—and is—known to the Brits.

Although the oddly exposed headlights and the grinning grille account for much of the car's near cult status today, the Bugeye has other attractive qualities as well. The car's blink-and-you've-changed-lanes quick steering and tossable handling make it one of the most entertaining sports cars ever. It is also one of the most raced; Bugeyes are still winning events ranging from small-bore H Production, to hill-climbs to vintage races.



Alfa Romeo 1750 GTV.



PHOTO BY RICHARD M. BARON



Austin-Healey Bugeye Sprite.

Beyond this, the utter simplicity of a Bugeye is delightfully refreshing. Why, the original-issue Bugeye was so Spartan that the front bumper was an optional extra. But when other new sports cars like Alfa Giuliettas, big Healeys, MGAs and Porsche 356s were duking it out in the \$2500-\$4000 market, the simple Bugeye had its very own market niche at \$1795.

And for years plenty of old Bugeyes seemed to be languishing in sheds or under backyard shade trees, waiting for buyers with \$500 or \$1000 in their pockets. But oh, how things have changed. Would you believe good restored Bugeyes are now fetching \$12,000 or more? Still cheerful they are, but cheap no more.

If you can accept the Bugeye's new-found status as a rather pricey (for what it is) collectible, then be on guard for cars that have been badly damaged; you'll come across a lot of Bugeyes with aftermarket front clips. Avoid cars with unusual welding across the center of their unit body. See that the Bugeye's marvelous lift-up bonnet fits correctly.

The cars aren't notorious rusters, though you should expect that 30 or 35 years will have taken their toll. Look first around the rear suspension take-up points, then the floors, the door pillars and, finally, just about everywhere else.

Parts availability for these Sprites, as with nearly all old British sports cars, is generally as close as your telephone and credit card. But if originality is your goal, bear in mind that many Bugeyes now carry lots of bits and pieces—entire drivetrains, for

that matter—from later Sprite/MG Midget models. In fact, if concours isn't your thing, a Bugeye equipped with a 1275-cc engine, disc brakes and a 3.90:1 rear axle from a later Sprite or Midget makes a more lively, more enjoyable car. All these items bolt in with relative ease.

Alternatives? The later Sprites and Midgets of the Sixties, particularly the pre-emissions-control 1275-cc cars of 1967, offer the driving fun of a Bugeye with more creature comforts. And they sell for a fraction of a Bugeye's price.

1958 Sprite

Curb weight, lb	1460
Wheelbase, in.	80.0
Length	137.0
Width	54.0
Height	48.0
Engine type	pushrod inline-4
Displacement, cc	948
Bhp	48
0-60 mph, sec	20.8
0-¼ mile	21.8
Average mpg	34

Asking prices:

Bugeye Sprite: \$5000-\$12,000

1956-1963 Austin-Healey 100-6 and 3000

"Incredibly rough and solid, yet handsome and amazingly cheap. In short, it was a lovable bastard."

—R&T, April 1972

Rough and solid, yes. Handsome? Certainly. But the Big Healeys (as opposed to the little Sprites) have long since transcended the world of the cheap and cheerful to become

Swift, agile...and FUN to drive!
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While a sports car of great high standards, the SPRITE is even more affordable and exciting when it is in competition. For in where you drive...SPRITE, the little, more luxuriously priced sports car of them all.

Sprite

expensive and serious collectibles. If you haven't checked recently, you may be surprised to learn that certain Big Healeys are commanding prices of \$25,000 and more.

So which Big Healeys—in excellent condition—are within our \$20,000 budget? First, a trip through Healeyland, a most confusing place.

The Big Healey began life in 1953 as a Spartan 2-seater called the 100-4 with a 4-cylinder engine and 3-speed transmission. In late 1956 the Austin-Healey was revised to include two rather inadequate rear seats, if the buyer wanted them, and, more important, a 6-cylinder engine. These 100-6 models differ little visually from the 3000 Mark I cars, which came along in the latter part of 1959. The 3000 Mark I does have more horsepower (124 bhp versus 117 bhp of 1957-and-later 100-6 cars) and disc brakes, however.

The 3000 Mark II cars of 1961 received triple SU carburetors and a still higher horsepower rating—to 132 bhp. These early Mark II cars continued to come in either 2- or 4-seat configuration. The 1962 cars, still called Mark II, came only as 4-seaters, and for the first time had roll-up windows in place of side curtains, and a genuine convertible top in place of a removable roadster top. And by 1962, the Mark IIs had re-

turned to the dual-carb setup.

The Mark IIs of 1964–1967 were the most luxurious of the Big Healeys, with still more horsepower, servo-assisted brakes and a polished-wood dash.

Now back to the question of the budget. The earliest cars, the 100-4s, and the latest cars, the 3000 Mark IIs, are out of our price league. But anything in between, from a 1956 100-6 to a 1963 Mark II is a possibility. The 3000 cars do carry a small price premium over the 100-6s, as do 2-seater cars. And those oddball early Mark IIs with their triple-carb setup are hot items with Austin-Healey aficionados.

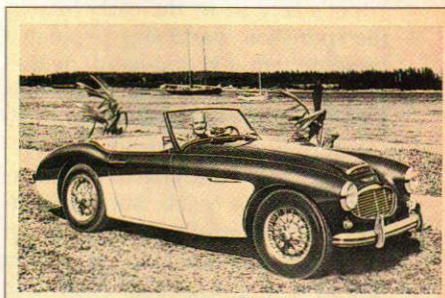
In your search for a Big Healey, keep in mind that the cars are rusters. Even sun-kissed California Healeys are likely to have corrosion in the "dog-leg," the lower part of the rear fender adjacent to the door. Check, too, the rocker panels, inner body sills, outrigger beams, floors and lower front fenders. Body parts, however, are generally in good supply.

The 6-cylinder engines of the Big Healeys are renowned for their longevity, and parts are plentiful. But gearboxes are another matter. Brand-new 1st gears are very difficult to come by, and you can expect to pay \$1500 to rebuild a Big Healey's transmission.

Alternatives? Of later-vintage cars, Triumph TR-6s have something of a Big Healey's character.

	1957 100-6	1963 Mark II
Curb weight, lb	2480	2530
Wheelbase, in.	92.0	92.0
Length	158.0	158.0
Width	60.5	60.5
Height	49.0	50.0
Engine type	pushrod	inline-6
Displacement, cc	2639	2912
Bhp	117	136
0-60 mph, sec.	12.2	11.2
0-¼ mile	18.2	17.6
Average mpg	20	19

Asking prices:
 100-6: \$12,000–\$15,000
 3000 Mk I, Mk II: \$14,000–\$20,000



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