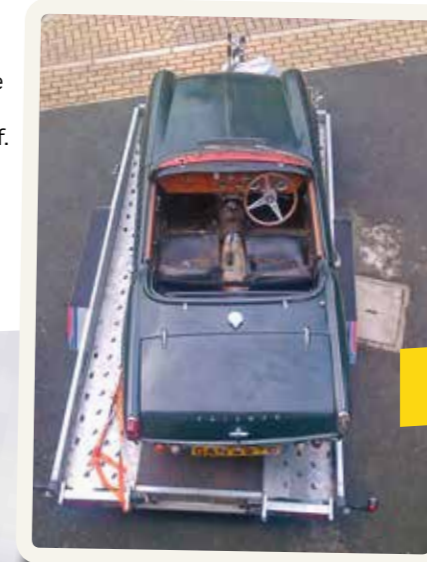


It started with a Frogeye. Danni Barron saw one and fancied a classic Sixties soft-top as her summer runabout, so in 2013 she looked around to see what the choice might be. Up popped a 1966 Triumph Spitfire, apparently well preserved after 30 years in a garage. Danni and her husband Andrew went to see the car, one the vendor had described as 'pretty solid'. It even ran... sort of. 'I had a look over it and it did seem reasonably sound, apart from the battery box,' says Andy. 'So, we did the deal and the car arrived at our house.

Then, as I started pulling up the carpets and looking at it more closely, I discovered the truth.'

Andy and Danni's son, Khoby, was busy polishing the car while this was going on. Kind of him, but a doomed effort. Much worse – from Andy's point of view – Danni had posted their new purchase on Facebook and declared that this car would indeed be her summertime transport. 'I was mortified... I really wasn't planning a restoration project,' says Andy. ➔



AS FOUND

Three decades in a garage had left the Spitfire 'pretty solid' according to the vendor – Andy discovered the truth within half an hour of getting it home.

Spit and POLISH

When Andy Barron took this Spitfire's body tub to a welder, it was so far gone the bodyshop said 'No'. So Andy fixed it himself

WORDS NIGEL BOOTHMAN PHOTOS JONATHAN JACOB



THE RESTORER

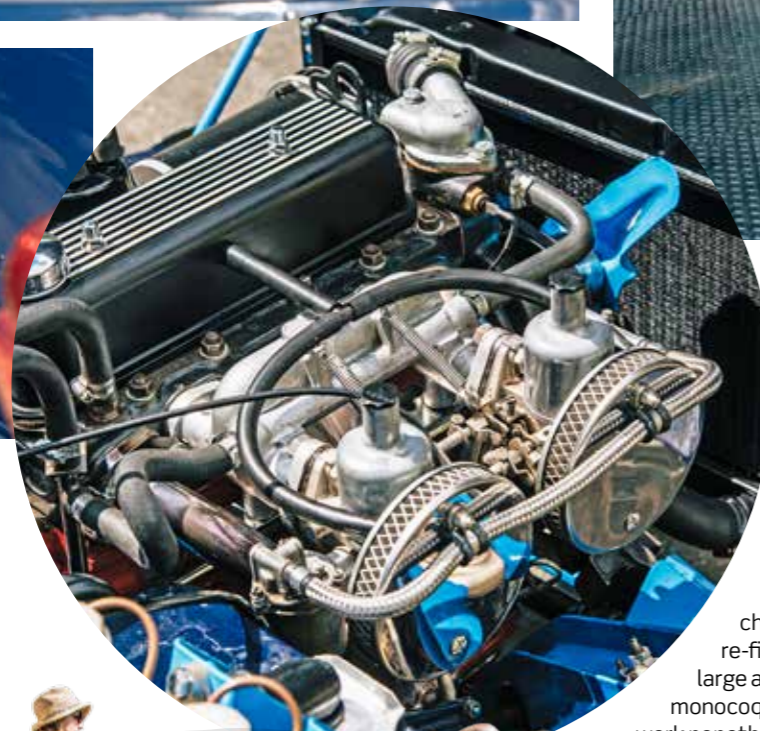
Andrew Barron's only previous classic was a rusty Mini bought for £20 when he was 15, but he and Danni have done a lot of miles together on two wheels. Andy is currently restoring the Lambretta you can see below for his father.



Andy with Danni, Spitfire and a few other 'obsessions'.



TOP Andy decided to keep the non-original, but nice, wooden dash and door cappings.



TECH SPEC

1966 Triumph Spitfire Mk1
Engine 1147cc/4-cyl/OHV
Power 67bhp@6000rpm
Torque 67lb ft@3750rpm
Gearbox 4-speed manual
0-60mph 15.5sec
Top speed 94mph
Fuel economy 30mpg
Weight 1635lb (742kg)



TOP The engine was in relatively good nick. The head had to be rebuilt, though.

With the seats and carpet removed, Andy slid a torch under the car and turned the garage lights off. Sure enough, there was light coming through everywhere. Only the bonnet and front panel were any good, which meant the easiest fix was going to involve finding a new body tub.

The Spitfire has a separate chassis so removing and re-fitting the tub isn't quite as large an undertaking as re-shelling a monocoque car, but it's a serious piece of work nonetheless. And it can only happen if you're lucky enough to find what you need.

Plan B was to pay someone to fix it. Andy took the tub to a local welding business and to his horror they declined the job. This was grim news, but Andy had been gifted a MIG welder by his father and he thought he remembered how to use it. Off went the tub for some blasting, which allowed Andy to postpone these worries and crack on with the chassis.

A Spitfire is a gratifyingly straightforward thing to dismantle, as long as it hasn't got so damp that all the fixings have rusted solid. And here Andy's luck changed – after a thorough prod at every chassis rail and outrigger it was clear no welding was needed to the frame.

Andy stripped it bare and began the to-and-fro of taking boxes of suspension bits for blasting and then powder-coating. He equipped himself with lots of polyurethane bushes and even a set of wire wheels.

'They were one of the first things I bought, actually,' remembers Andy. 'The car came with horrible rusty steel wheels and once I'd got the wires sitting in the corner of the garage, I knew I had to keep going.'

The denuded chassis also went for blasting, after which it was first galvanised and then powder-coated. Andy thinks it had been painted with something special when it was young to ensure its survival, and with the coatings now applied it's sure to be one of the longest-lived Sixties Spitfire chassis left anywhere.

Panels and mechanicals

And then the hard part began. The tub came back, freshly blasted and coated in a protective dip but more like a doily than ever before. With only one bay of a garage in which to work, Andy had to hide the chassis on the drive under a cover, or inside, tucked into the garage rafters. 'I braced it, but with what I had to remove it was still floppy – luckily I could check it on the chassis frame.'

Both the boot floor and the floorpans were in a poor state so Andy drilled out the spot-welds and started pulling things off. He soon discovered another advantage to Danni's wise choice of car: panel supply for Spitfires is pretty good and Rimmer Bros (01522 568000, rimmerbros.co.uk) ended up supplying so much it's a wonder Andy didn't buy shares in the company. Almost everything from half way down the car and below had to be renewed, with some trouble further up too – Andy fixed holes in the windscreen frame and rear valance and installed new rear arches, the rear panel and door skins.

Eliminating rust was only half the battle. Some areas could have been allowed to remain if previous welded repairs had been done right the first time. After months of hot sparks the mechanical work felt like a holiday, even after Andy pulled off the cylinderhead.

'Two of the pushrods were bent and it was clear the head needed a rebuild. But the bores and pistons actually looked OK, and after removing the sump to check the bottom end, I reckoned we'd even get away without replacing any bearings,' he says.

The cylinder head went away for unleaded valve seats and a skim while Andy de-coked the bottom end and

Here's how Andrew did it



1 Starry, starry night
 No, it's not the heavenly firmament, it's the floorpan of the Spitfire with a torch shining through from underneath. More holes than a string vest.



2 She's not there
 Look carefully – this is the back end of a Spitfire. With all the rust taken out. Not much metal left after a good blasting session, is there?



3 Cornered
 The black-painted bits are all new panels in the passenger footwell, floor, crossmember, inner and outer sills, base of A-post... and so on.

A lucky break

At last, some good news. The chassis had been protected far better than the body and was free of any serious rust. Andy reckons it was treated with some heavy-duty anti-corrosion material way back in its early history.



4 What the heck?
 That's the brake pedal lever, and next to it the new one Andy made. Not far from disaster, was it?



Over the worst

The finished tub is rested on the chassis for a final check, with only paint preparation required before the respray and cosmetic touches.

painted everything to meet the Spitfire's rapidly rising standards. The gearbox needed no more than a visual inspection with its lid off, then fresh gaskets and fresh oil. Likewise, the back axle was stripped, cleaned and reassembled with fresh oil and some cosmetic attention. Andy was confident there would be no nasty whines when the car was back on the road.

Skim, sand, paint and assembly

After the MIG marathon came a major milestone – new paint. Andy decided to give the fun part (actually applying the paint) to a reputable local spray shop, but did the laborious preparation himself, fettling panel gaps and smoothing every surface. Perhaps rather more so than necessary, as he recounts:

'I spent ages skimming and sanding everything, including the bulkhead, sills and front and rear panels. I was assuming they'd all be painted the same beautiful

Practical Classics Restorer of the Year 2018

This car is entered into the Restorer of the Year 2018 competition. You can vote for your favourite in a future issue of Practical Classics magazine.

gloss as the rest of the car, but those areas came back covered in stonechip... I could have asked them to scrape it all off but I decided to bite my tongue.'

Moving on to the interior, Andy decided to leave the non-original though attractive wooden dash that came with the car, but the seats were due for an upgrade. Andy took them right back to bare frames, blasted and powder coated them. They were rebuilt with a leather kit from Park Lane Classics in Tamworth (01827 284957, parklaneclassics.co.uk). As Andy says, 'After all this effort I don't want vinyl seats.'

Andy also made new door cards from 3mm plywood that Park Lane was able to use as patterns for their own favoured backing, before covering them in Andy's specified leather and coloured stitching. They supplied a sheet of hide to finish areas over each rear wheelarch.

Before the chassis and tub came together for final assembly, Andy replaced the brake lines and loom, routing both on the chassis in a far neater manner than Triumph felt necessary. The fuel pipe now runs in Kevlar tubes. That just left the carpets (bought and fitted by Andy) and the chrome.

'The car was missing a rear overrider when I got it,' says Andy. 'I found an original one from America – the postage cost almost as much as the part – so I had a matching set to get re-chromed.'

The plating company Vernon Moss Electroplating, in Brighouse (01484 710153) did a fine job but took several months to get through a backlog of work. Not even their skill could save the rusted front bumper, which had to be replaced by a Rimmer Bros reproduction.

With the car complete and MoT'd, teething troubles were considerable – a new water pump after 100 miles, engine and 'box back out soon after to deal with a significant oil leak from the scroll at the back of the crankshaft. Andy's tip: fit new gaskets and park with the Spitfire facing downhill...

After a remarkably efficient 18 months (Andy uses words like 'obsession') Danni Barron had her restored summer runabout. 'It's so nice to drive,' she says. 'Andy has done an amazing job but if I'm honest, I prefer driving it on my own so he can't tell me what to do!'

Would he dare? Maybe we can't blame Andy for feeling a little protective after all that effort. ■

WHAT'S IT LIKE TO DRIVE

I'm itching to try this car because it's a clone of the first proper classic I owned, a 1966 Spitfire MkII in this same colour. Readers with long memories may even recall GYA 203D from Staff Car Sagas in 2003. As soon as I jump in and pull the door shut, I realise what mine was meant to be like all those years ago. Andy has given this Spitfire new-car feel, with taut steering, supple and silent



suspension and a drivetrain with all the foibles removed. It just works, offering surprisingly willing performance and a genuine sporting character, even if the

speeds at which you enjoy yourself are often well below the legal limit. But why attract attention from the law, when you can turn heads anyway?



Danni loves driving her Spitfire, especially without a passenger!