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## MIDGET GT

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EXCLUSIVE | TIFOSI JEM

# MIDGET JEM

*Only three aluminium bodied Jacobs Midgets were built, and all were used in competition. Rumours at the time that it may go into production as a road car came to nothing... but 56 years on, you can have one in replica form.*

Words and pictures: Adam Wilkins



**A** visit to Hall's Garage isn't like a visit to most kit car companies. This busy workshop and MoT station has sat on the same site next to the A15 in the village of Morton for 70 years, and made the transition from regular service garage to MG specialist when Steve Hall took over from his father and company founder 35 years ago. Modern and classic MGs line the forecourt, while the workshops are split over several different rooms, all of them a constant hive of activity.





A Jacobs racing in period at the Nürburgring 1000km race.



Only three original Jacobs Midgets were built, all as racing cars.

Hall's came onto the kit car industry's radar when it took over the Tifosi marque seven years ago. Its MG Midget based Austin-Healey 'Frogeye' Sprite replica and the Sebring Sprite replica dovetail with its more conventional MG work, but Steve had ambitions to create an MG replica of his own long before he took on Tifosi. In fact, it was when Jason Elliot joined the company some seventeen years ago that they first discussed creating a replica of one of the Jacobs Midget fastbacks. It was eighteen months ago that they decided to make a concerted effort to make it happen, and lots of after-hours work saw it reach fruition to be revealed at the Hall's 70th anniversary open day last month.

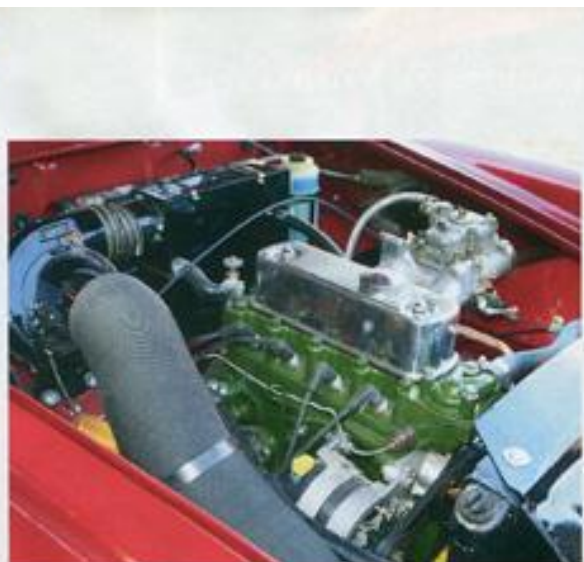
The Jacobs Midget, as it was known, was a semi-works project and the eponymous work of Dick Jacobs. He was an MG works driver whose racing career came to an end following a crash at the ill-fated 1955 Le Mans 24-hour. He wasn't involved in the crash that infamously killed 84 people, but a separate incident that left him trapped in his upturned and burning MGA.

Inspiration for the Midget coupé came when Dick had a magazine road test of the then-new Midget alongside a sales brochure for the Aston Martin DB4. He transposed the shape of the latter over the former and took the idea to his contacts in Abingdon.

The MG Development Department made the concept a reality, and three race cars were built, their bodies formed from aluminium by a local coachbuilding company. Jacobs Racing campaigned them for the 1962 to '64 seasons and clocked up numerous class wins and podium finishes. A 136kg weight reduction and improved aerodynamics when compared to a Midget roadster gave them an edge.

At the end of the 1964 season, the cars were returned to the MG factory before being sold off to privateers. Rumour of a production run of Midget coupés got many enthusiasts excited at the prospect, but in the end the arrival of the MGB GT put paid to any plans to build a fixed roof Midget in volume. The whereabouts of all three Jacobs Midgets are known, and their reputation is in inverse proportion to their limited numbers. Rarity and desirability make it ideal for replication, then, and given the affordable donor car it certainly makes a lot of sense on paper.

Steve Hall wasn't the only person to identify the Jacobs car as a prime candidate for replication. Brian Archer was one of those who had been eagerly waiting for MG to put the car into production in period and, decades later, began working on a replica. Sadly, he passed away but MG historian Martin Ingall, who had been working with him, continued to work on the project.



Tidy engine bay. Donor was restored as well as being converted.



## “THE JEM REALLY IS A MINIATURE GT CAR, AN ASTON MARTIN DB4 THAT SHRUNK IN THE WASH”

He reached a point at which he couldn't continue due to a house renovation, and put the project up for sale.

It's now called Tifosi JEM, the name standing for Jacobs Evolution Midget. It was the perfect starting point for Steve and Jason to make their idea a reality. Some framework was done, there were lots of detailed drawings and work had been started on the donor car, but there was still a lot of hours' work needed to get it finished. Jason spent his lunchtimes, evenings and weekends to make it a reality – in usual work hours, customer cars always come first.

Hall's Garage had access to two of the original three Jacobs cars and, while taking a mould was a definite no-no, they were able to take lots of photographs and measurements. The nature of the handcrafted aluminium originals meant that they actually differed from each other, so this was never going to be a millimetre perfect replica. And it differs from the Midget roadster in more than just the obvious areas.

Working from the front, Jason made a buck from steel for the nose before making the production fibreglass items. The wings are also reworked, with a much sharper crease on the inner curve. There's also a lip to the front wheelarch that the Midget doesn't usually have. The windscreen is bespoke to the Jacobs, and Martin had already had tooling made for that by Pilkington. The windscreen surround gives the car a whole new look, while at the scuttle the windscreen wipers are moved forward. This means the bonnet is modified to suit, and also cut shorter at the front.

To create the coupé roof, Jason cut a hardtop about as a starting point before working the fastback shape. The new roof meets the boot aperture, and the rear panel (together with the rear wings) is stock Midget. There are other details that are easy to overlook. For instance, the rearmost part of the sills ahead of the rear wheels are radiused, as per the aluminium original. This is because the Jacobs team was concerned



ABOVE: Old-school tuning!

LEFT: Steve Hall (right) and Jason Elliott have planned this replica for over a decade.

BELOW: Interior retrimmed. Demo built as a road car, but you could take a JEM racing.





## TIFOSI JEM

**ENGINE:** 1275cc A-series.  
**ENGINE OPTIONS:** A-series or 1500cc.

**BODYWORK:** MG doors, rear panel and sills. The rest is GRP.

**BRAKES:** Front - Discs. Rear - Drums.

**CHASSIS:** Unmodified MG Midget monocoque.

**SUSPENSION:** Standard MG Midget.

**STEERING:** Standard MG Midget.

**BUILD COST:** See text.  
**KIT PRICES:** TBC.

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about sharp edges near the tyres. The wheelarches are also let out slightly to allow for wider tyres.

Like the original, the JEM has no grilles in the side vents or main opening, but it's something that individual builders could add. There should also be a chrome trim on the bonnet, which is in stock and ready to be fitted. One area Hall's has deviated is in the addition of rain gutters. This is a road car, after all.

The decision to build the demonstrator in road trim rather than the race spec of the originals was a good one for broadening the car's appeal. This is the realisation of MG's rumoured plans to put the Jacobs into production, and that's why, unlike the originals, it has the wind-up windows and external door handles of later Midgets - just as it would have if it had made it to MG showrooms in period. Rover Nightfire Red looks the part, too, especially in the bright autumnal sunshine of our photoshoot.



1960s race style fuel cap looks the part.



No grilles, as per the original Jacobs.

The interior is appointed as you'd expect of a road car, with full carpet and headlining. There are also newly trimmed early style Midget seats, which look the part. And adding a coupé body to the Midget has added hugely to the car's practicality. With no roof to store and the absence of a rear bulkhead, there's a huge luggage area behind the seats. It really is a miniature GT car, an Aston Martin DB4 that shrunk in the wash.

It's a really desirable package, and you can't help thinking that there would have been a market for the car had MG decided to go ahead with plans to build it as a production car. Brian Archer was one of those who'd have bought one and, now, anyone who wanted one at the time can have Tifosi's replica. However, it won't only appeal to those who knew of the Jacobs in period: as a Tifosi it stands on its own merit, albeit with a heavy MG influence.

The demonstrator has a 1275cc A-series, but you can use any Midget with wind-up windows as a basis, including the last-of-the-line rubber bumper models. They're less sought after than the earlier cars,

and therefore cheaper to get hold of, but you do lose the A-series engine which, for many, will be part of the appeal of the JEM. Whatever donor you use, though, you want to ensure it's a solid, rot-free basis on which to base the build.

On that note, Hall's currently has no plans to offer kit packages in the way it does for the Rana. Instead, the JEM will be available in either part-built or fully-built forms only. This is partly because of the work involved in the build - the GRP panels are bonded to the Midget bodyshell before being fibreglassed over - but also to stop the car being copied. Part-built cars will be offered with the new panels fitted and the car ready for paint and trim. At the time of writing the pricing structure was still to be calculated, but expect it to be around £6000 to £7000 plus VAT up to the stage of requiring paint and trim.

The fact that the original Jacobs combines rarity with links to the MG factory makes it all the more desirable. The appetite for historic racing cars - in original or replica form - is huge at the moment, and the JEM offers an affordable route into that world.



Wire wheels look the part. Rear arches are slightly flaired out.



## Welcome to the all-new Tifosi J.E.M.

Product of 18 months' Design & Development.

Based on the famous "Jacobs Midget" coupe design.

Brought up-to-date with wind-up windows, locking doors, and of course, fully trimmed interior offering luxury not available to the original.

This kit will not be sold for home fitting, but is available either as a fitted kit to your donor vehicle, or as a complete turn-key car.

Price subject to condition of donor vehicle and specification.



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