



1937 Riley 12/4 Special Sports Special POA

Overview

Mileage	1,000 miles
---------	-------------

Fuel Type	Petrol
-----------	--------

Engine Size	1.1 l
-------------	-------

Bodystyle	Roadster
-----------	----------

Transmission	Manual
--------------	--------

Exterior Colour	Red
-----------------	-----

Previous Owners	2
-----------------	---

Registration	DUW655
--------------	--------



Description

The 1937 Riley 12/4 Sports Special sits at the intersection of two important British motoring traditions: Riley's sophisticated pre-war engineering and the long-standing culture of building "specials" from older chassis.

The Riley 12/4: An Advanced Sporting Car

The underlying Riley 12/4 was introduced in 1935 as Riley's new 1½-litre model. It replaced the older six-cylinder 12/6 and featured a remarkably advanced 1,496cc four-cylinder engine designed by Hugh Rose. The engine used twin camshafts mounted high in the block and was known for producing impressive performance from modest displacement. Many cars were equipped with the famous Armstrong Siddeley/Wilson pre-selector gearbox, allowing rapid gear changes that felt almost futuristic in the 1930s.

The 12/4 range included:

Falcon saloons

Kestrel sporting saloons

Lynx tourers

The more competition-focused Sprite sports model

By 1937, Riley offered one of the most diverse and sporting ranges in Britain, drawing heavily on the marque's success in rallies, trials, and racing.

What Is a "Sports Special"?

A Sports Special is usually not a factory body style. Instead, it is a custom-built sports car created from an existing chassis and mechanical components.

In Britain, especially after World War II, enthusiasts often removed heavy saloon bodies from worn but mechanically sound cars and replaced them with lightweight two-seat sports bodies. Riley chassis were particularly popular because they offered:

Strong ladder-frame construction

Excellent engines

Good handling

Competition pedigree

Pre-selector gearboxes that gave a unique driving experience

As a result, hundreds of Riley-based specials were created from the 1940s through the 1970s. Many survive today and are highly respected in the vintage racing and rally world.

The 1937 Cars That Became Specials

Many surviving "1937 Riley 12/4 Sports Specials" began life as ordinary Kestrel, Falcon, or Adelphi saloons.

For example, documented cars have been traced to:

1937 Adelphi saloons later rebodied with aluminum sports coachwork.

1937 Kestrel chassis shortened and lightened to create competition cars.

Wide-track 1937 Kestrels converted into long-distance touring specials inspired by the factory Sprite.

Because each special was built individually, no two are exactly alike.

Influence of the Riley Sprite

Many 1937 specials imitate the appearance of the factory-built Riley Sprite.

The Sprite was Riley's dedicated sports model, introduced to capitalize on the company's competition success. It used the 12/4 engine, lightweight bodywork, and sporting chassis modifications. Only a small number were built, making originals rare and valuable today.

Consequently, later builders often created "Sprite-style" specials using more common saloon chassis. These replicas captured the look and spirit of the factory sports cars while being far more affordable.

Competition Heritage

Riley's reputation in the 1930s was built on motorsport. Factory and privateer Rileys competed successfully in:

Monte Carlo Rally

MCC Trials

Brooklands events

Hill climbs

Endurance races

The 12/4 engine became especially prized because it responded well to tuning. Competition versions could produce substantially more power than standard road cars, and many specials were built specifically for VSCC racing, hill climbs, and historic rallying.

Why Enthusiasts Love Them Today

A 1937 Riley 12/4 Sports Special offers something unusual:

- Authentic pre-war engineering
- Strong performance for a 1.5-litre car
- Lightweight construction
- Distinctive vintage styling
- Eligibility for many historic events

Unlike a factory-restored saloon, a special often reflects the personality and craftsmanship of its builder. Some are faithful recreations of period competition cars, while others are unique one-off creations.

In that sense, there isn't one single story behind "the" 1937 Riley 12/4 Sports Special. Most are individual machines built upon the excellent foundations of Riley's 1937 12/4 chassis and engine—a combination that has remained popular with vintage enthusiasts for nearly ninety years.

Location

Classicmobilia

Braystone House, Salford Road, Aspley Giuse, Milton Keynes,
MK17 8HY

Monday	Appointment only	Tuesday	Appointment only
Wednesday	Appointment only	Thursday	Appointment only
Friday	Appointment only	Saturday	Appointment only
Sunday	Appointment only		

07889 805432
