



# Making a Driver Out of a Tourer

## A Y-Type MG On The Road

BY MICHAEL COOK PHOTOS BY DENIS TANNEY

There can be a certain sameness to the Ts and TRs and Bs and Bentleys and Healeys, if you've gone to a lot of shows. So you look for something to spark your interest. Sometimes you find it, sometimes the cars just blur into a colorful mass of cellulose and Connolly. And sometimes, one calls to you.

At the Greenwich concours on the first weekend of June, 1998. I walked on to the show field, early on a foggy Sunday with a glass of champagne under my belt and a cup of coffee in my hand. Approaching a display circle of British cars I seemed to hear a little British-accented voice that kept saying "Look at me ... look at me".

The source of that siren call was an MG in rich dark blue with ivory leather, an upright TC-like grille and four seats. It was a Y-type, officially a "YT", for "Tourer" which was sold alongside the TC and TD from 1947 through 1950. According to Flam-mang's Standard Catalog of Imported Cars, only 877 were built from 1947 through 1950, all for export. Though equipped with the TC twin-carburetor, 1250cc engine and TC gear-box, the YT shared the YA sedan chassis with its 99-inch wheelbase, independent front suspension and available left-hand steering vs the TC's solid front axle, 94-inch wheelbase and only right-hand drive.

The concept of a family sports car never caught on. Despite sporty cut-down doors, TC lovers scorned the Y-type styling. Price was a problem. The TC was \$2238 in 1948 while the roomier but slower YT was \$2875. TC sales were more than ten times the YT's.

This Y-type, built in 1949, bears the serial number 3030T



and is titled a 1950. John Friedler, its owner, gave me the story of the little MG in detail.

**J**ohn was raised in Mexico and started to learn about MGs when his father imported a TF. He remembers driving the TF to Acapulco on the dangerous old two-lane highway, an exhilarating drive punctuated by breakdowns. Mexican mechanics, unfamiliar with the famous octagon, made what repairs they could while John's father lost his enthusiasm. John, however, was hooked and resolved to own his own MG one day.

That goal was attained in the 1980s when he bought a TD in excellent condition with only 18,000 miles on it. John and his wife became members of the New England MG T Register, enthusiastically participating in the club's famous tours. Even after the birth of their daughter, they created a special, safety-belted seat over the transmission tunnel so that the whole family could enjoy the tours. Finally, daughter outgrew the center seat and it was time to find a four-seater.

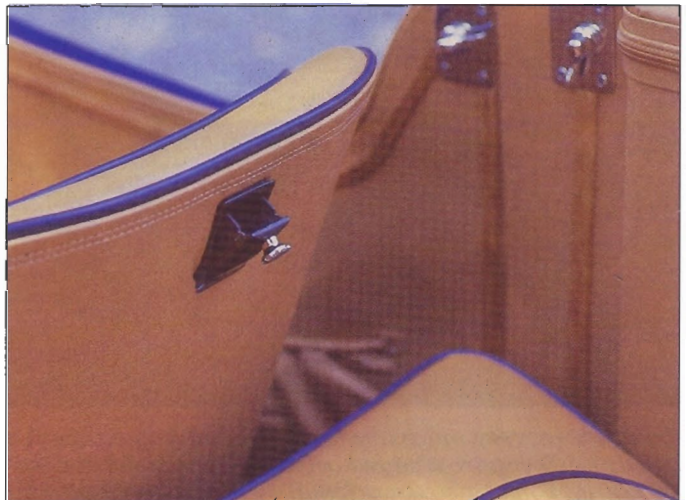
**T**hey heard in 1992 that a Y-type tourer was for sale in Attleboro, MA. Not running and painted what John describes as "grass green", the little four-seater was priced right and became a member of the Friedler family. They can trace the car back through three previous owners in Massachusetts and Rhode Island but the original owners and selling dealer remain a mystery.

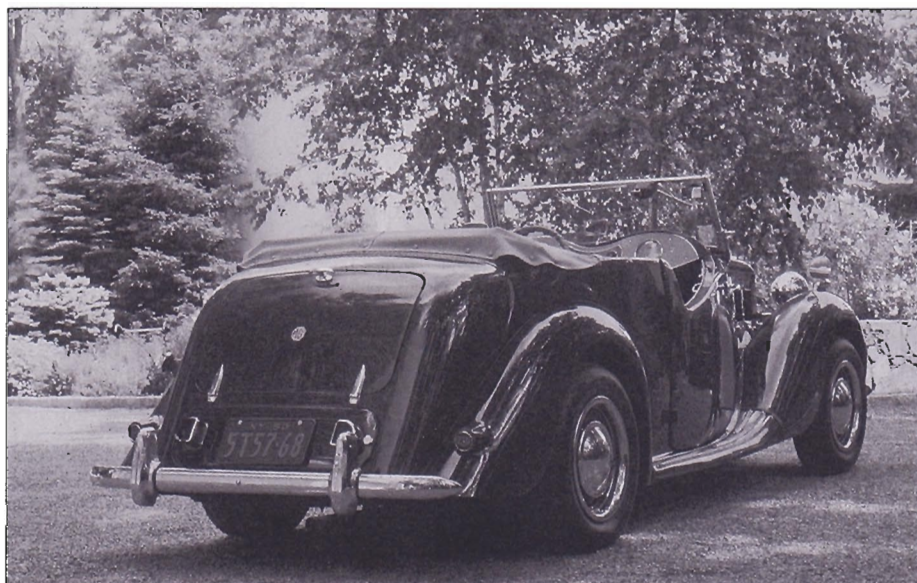
The engine was rebuilt by Steve Hardy of the Boston MG Shop and some minimal additional maintenance was performed before the family tackled a fourteen-day T Register trip on the Skyline Drive and Blue Ridge Parkway in 1993. The family survived but learned a great deal about what needed changing or repairing on the MG while reaffirming what they already knew about the friendship and support of fellow T Register members.

Brakes came first. The original drums were the same as the TC and, with the heavier body and three passengers, could not stop the car safely. First, normal TD front drums were tried, then racing drums which helped but did not completely solve the problem. Handling was the next project as



*The dash of the Y-Type is the same as the MG-TC but the TC was never available in left-hand drive. Like the TC, the windshield folds. Hardware such as door handles and top clamps is original, and has been re-chromed. The contrasting upholstery piping is correct; period photos of new cars show it.*





the original cross-ply tires "planed all over the road." John found 16-inch radials which improved the road-holding but looked way too wide. To keep the body from falling apart, new rocker panels were fabricated.

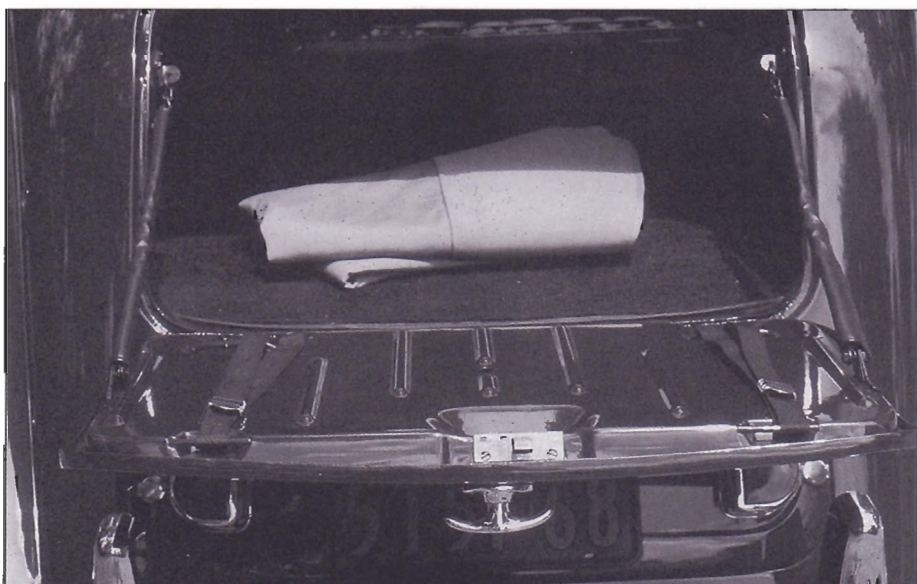
**W**ith that, the Friedlers were set to go on the T Register Calgary Stampede, an event which started in Calgary, crossed the Rockies and finished in Seattle. In their 44-year-old MG they had to go nearly 3000 miles from Westchester County, New York, just to reach the start! Fortunately, recognizing that members' enthusiasm often outdoes the mechanical capability of members' cars, T Register people always convoy so the Friedlers had company; Dick and Ann Knudson in their TC and two other cars.

Once again, they learned that many repairs were still needed. Arriving in Seattle with the engine rattling and burning a quart of oil every 250 miles, they knew the car would have to be shipped home. The engine rebuild had been good, but not good enough to overcome the constant high revs needed to keep up highway speeds with a 5.125:1 differential ratio.

**J**ohn decided that only a complete restoration would allow access to the car to carry out the modifications needed to make their tourer into a driver. He stripped the car himself and, while the MG Shop was rebuilding the engine under warranty, set out to get the bodywork done.

His bodywork adventures included racing the sheriff to rescue the car from one establishment that went broke! Five body shops and many disappointments later, he entrusted the car to concours specialists Twin Brooks Restorations in Sheffield, Connecticut, which reworked the entire body, fabricating new panels as necessary and blending just the right shade of dark blue paint. There is a lot of new metal but items like doors, bonnet, scuttle and portions of the front fenders are original.

New leather upholstery in cream with blue piping and new carpets were installed and then attention was turned to weather-proofing. Creature comfort in a four-seat tourer with side curtains hardly exists but John was not going to suffer freezing drafts and rain dripping on his lap. While keeping the original appearance, stiffening ribs were added so the curtains would hold their closed position and not bow out at speed. Additional snaps and tabs keep the top from gapping to keep water out. With this done, the 1950s aftermarket hot-



*Bumpers are very much like the TD, but luggage space is, to say the least, more generous. The spare is stored behind a door under the boot, but the wider 15-inch tires won't fit, so the original 16-inch wheel and skinny tire are carried.*

water heater keeps the interior quite warm enough, even overcoming the chill of foggy mornings in Newfoundland. Newfoundland?

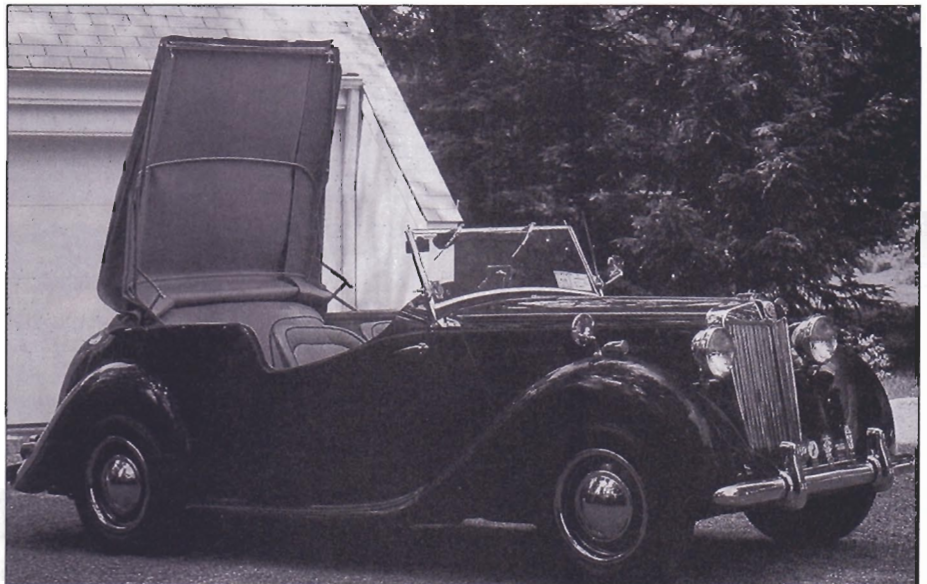
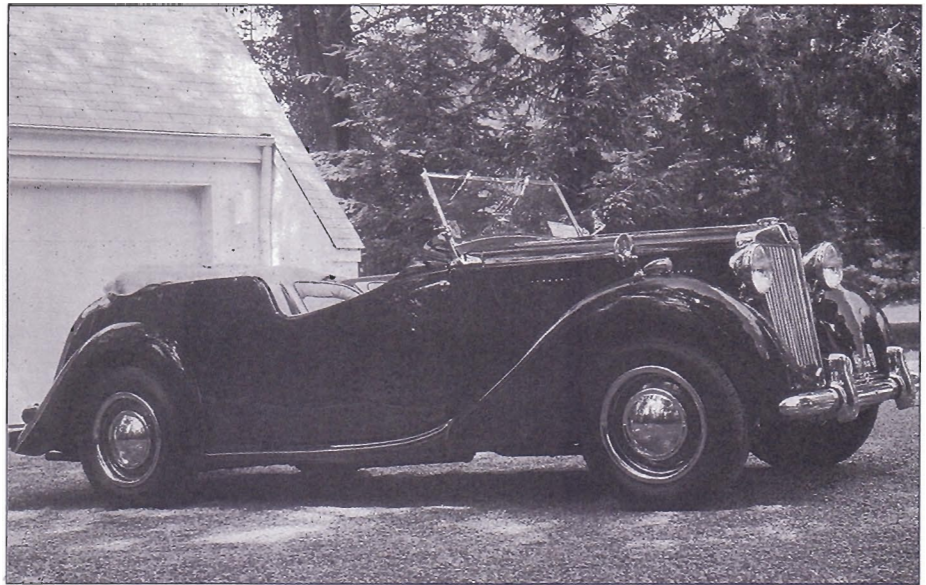
Still using the original driveline, the Friedlers went on a 3000-mile T Register trip in 1996 to Newfoundland and attended the Gathering of the Faithful in Ottawa, Canada. More mechanical kinks in the car were worked out and fixed but it was apparent that the original driveline and TD brakes would never be satisfactory.

To ensure that future T Register tours could be tackled in comfort and safety, MGB front disc brakes were installed with special adaptors to allow use of five-stud wheels instead of the four-stud B wheels. An MGB differential assembly and driveshaft were mated to the T-type gearbox and the Y-type was once again ready for the road.

Immediately John found that while the car had plenty of highway speed, the 3.9:1 MGB rear axle ratio was too tall to allow the little 1250 cc engine to pull the car up hills. Unable to change the ratio, he set to work finding a combination of wheels and tires which would improve the situation. Fifteen-inch TD wheels and a set of low-profile radials provided a smaller tire circumference, effectively making the rear end ratio numerically higher. The car now climbs hills with no problem even with the whole family on board.

Standing back from the gleaming blue Y-type, I could not tell that the wheels were fifteen-inch instead of sixteen-inch. Opening the bonnet, I noted the K&N filter on the rocker cover breather and was reminded by John that the original air cleaner was a one-piece affair painted black. John's car wears a pair of individual filters in chrome-plated housings installed by a previous owner. Other under-bonnet details are original and the original TC type gearbox still serves although it pops out of first gear from time to time. Inside the car, the dash and instruments are correct and original. John's quest to improve driveability while retaining original appearance was undoubtedly successful.

What is in store for the modified Y-type? More driving, with either John or his wife at the wheel. He isn't particularly interested in showing the car, although it has already qualified for the "Premier" class in T Register competition. Winning prizes isn't his thing. Enjoying their unique little MG car on the open road in the company of fellow enthusiasts is what the Friedlers plan to do from here on out.



*Stowing the top was a pretty elaborate job in the days before automatic folding mechanisms. The engine is original and provides adequate power, but the gearing ratios were changed by using an MGB differential and 15-inch wheels.*