

MG & Riley

Tourer Twins

I have just received my first issue of *British Car* and have found it most interesting. In particular I would like to make several observations on James Taylor's article about the Riley Roadster. These points will, I think, add weight to what you say in your editorial to the October magazine, namely that we should perhaps not be so 'blinkered' about the particular marque we specialize in or enthuse over; we can often learn a lot by venturing out into 'enemy' territory.

At the same time as Riley Roadster production was getting under way at Abingdon, across the floor MG were just about to introduce their own four-seat tourer, a version of the Y-Type sedan. This 'YT' which was launched in October 1948, was also destined to be a commercial failure. It was not, of course, nearly so large as the Riley but, even so, only 877 were to be built before production ceased, like the Riley in 1950. The precise reason for the YTs failure have long been debated, but may I venture to suggest that, also like the Riley it regrettably fell between two extremes.

On the one hand, the eccentric floor-shift sports car appealed because it was so unlike anything the Americans had ever seen or driven. For their family motoring, however, they had their home-grown big luxurious sedans and convertibles, and so very few would want a relatively small, old-fashioned, quirky, uncomfortable foreign tourer, would they?

Like Riley, MG were only too aware that the ex-Empire countries, and in particular, Australia, would absorb most of the production. And I would venture to suggest that the records Mr. Taylor has consulted were not at fault in revealing that the majority of Riley Roadsters sold in the USA were right-hand drive for, even though a left-hand drive MG YT had been available from the start, most of those four-seat tourers sold in the States were actually RHD.

The very day after reading the Riley article and noting what was said about the supposed two-tone colour schemes caused by the (erroneous) application of cellulose paint to the bodies and synthetic finishes to the wings, I received a

letter from a chap who had just purchased a 1951 Y' sedan. With this car came several old letters, one of which was written by that doyen of MG tuning and service, WE. Blower, on 27th November 1956, to the car's first owner. Mr.



Blower states "we would be of the opinion that the car in your possession is finished in what we would term Almond Green, the reason for the apparent duo effect being that the body was originally finished in cellulose, whereas the wings were finished in synthetic."

This was the first I had heard of such an occurrence (in fourteen years of specializing in Y-Types) and the end result should not, of course, be confused with those Y-Types which were genuinely finished in the two-tone colour scheme of Almond Green (body) and the much-darker Shires Green (wings and running boards). Mr. Taylor relates that Cliff Baker of Nuffield Exports puts the whole unfortunate turn of events across as something of a 'mistake,' but I would venture to suggest that if it was happening with Y-Type MGs as well, it was probably being caused by there being two different sources of supply for the bodies on the one hand, and the wings and running boards on the other.

Therefore it was not so much a one-off mistake as something that had an on-going inevitability about it. The YT body was 'coachbuilt' probably within the Abingdon factory whereas the wings and running boards in all probability came from another Nuffield plant (Nuffield Metal Products in Birmingham, or Morris at Cowley, Oxford).

There, I hope that's added somewhat to Mr. Taylor's obvious profound knowledge of Riley RMs; his article certainly has helped me understand a little more about the YT's place in the scheme of things.

-John Lawson
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