

CLASSIC ROAD TEST

THE HISTORY OF THE MG YT

1921 Cecil Kimber starts to work for William Morris at his Morris Garages chain of dealerships in Oxford.

1922 Kimber, now general manager of Morris Garages, begins to order chassis from Morris to which special bodies are fitted.

1928 By now, MG as Morris Garages has become, moves to Abingdon, which is to be its home for the next 52 years.

1935 William Morris, now Lord Nuffield, sells MG and Wolseley to Morris Motors, which he has so far kept separate from the smaller companies. As such, there is much greater co-operation between the companies.

1939 The Midget TB is launched, with an XPAG engine shared in essence with the Morris and Wolseley Ten saloons, albeit with a few more CCs. MG have been working on a new sports saloon too, featuring the XPAG engine allied to a curious mix of Morris Eight basic structure with independent front suspension. However, this year is famous for rather more dreadful reasons, and production will have to wait.

1947 Right, where were we? Back to building cars and the pre-war YA design finally makes it into production, some six years late. Press reports are kind to the new car and while it is very much a Thirties machine, it still boasts independent front suspension, rack-and-pinion steering, hydraulic brakes and valves which are overhead.

1948 Now comes the YT. So far after the war, MG has only built small YA saloons and traditional T-Type Midgets so in an attempt to extend the range, the YT is launched – a full four-seat Tourer. However, it is not all that well received and a mere 877 were built. With exports key to the country's survival, it was a brave attempt to latch on to the success of the T-Type, but sadly buyers just weren't there for the car and by 1950 production was over.

INTRODUCTION

Go on. Admit it. As flops go, this is a very attractive one. It seems a shame to label it as such really, but while MG TCs and TDs flew across the Atlantic, the YT was a bit too much of an anachronism, aiming for a market sector that arguably wasn't there anymore.

After the struggle of the war years, certainly British buyers would be few and far between and the generally accepted 'export only' status of the cars would tend to back this up. While a few did stay home, the vast majority of the 877 built headed to Australia and America, with a few more headed to such exotic places as Singapore. So, the YT was always a rare sight on British roads and as time has passed, the few built has become a tiny pool of survivors – there are thought to be less than 100 remaining worldwide, and probably not more than five or six in running condition in the UK.

So, you can see why I was amazed when a metallic green example came tearing past our convoy of 2CVs on Drive It Day this year. Incredible!

Even more remarkable is that a chance discussion on another Kelsey title enabled us to track down the mysterious YT to its Norfolk home, so after all that, it would be rude not to enjoy a little wheel time.

The car belongs to Glenn Whitehead, who brought the YT back to Blighty from its original home in Australia a few years ago. However, he's sadly admitted that the car is up for sale now, as he rarely gets to make use of it and he dislikes seeing it sitting around unused. Anyone with a spare £19,500 is welcome to get in touch.

A mixture of pre-war charm and post-war sales-flop, the last Abingdon Tourer gets a thorough testing by **IAN SEABROOK**



The YT may have not been a success, but it's certainly attractive

IMPRESSIONS

The YT is nothing short of stunning. The metallic green paint is superb, courtesy of a full body-off rebuild carried out in Australia. As I approach it, the MG is still wrapped in its full weather gear, but it's a lovely day (fortunate, as it rained heavily the day before and after) so the side-screens are removed and we fold the roof back behind the front seat.

The looks are 100% pre-war and perhaps that was the weakness of the car in the immediate post-war years. After all, it had the misfortune to be launched in the same year as that little Morris upstart, the Minor MM Tourer, which offered similar space with a much smaller price tag and much more modern looks.

But the YT remains an attractive machine, especially in this colour, with the neat contrasting vinyl interior looking like it has resisted the passage of the years very nicely indeed.

A quick unscrew of the MG-topped bonnet locks and the centre-hinged engine cover can be unfolded



to allow a peek at the XPAG unit. The YT had TC tune, which means twin-carburettors and 54bhp rather than the 46bhp of the YA saloon. However, it's still only 1250cc, and this seems like quite a lot of car to move about with so small an engine.

The independent-suspension era saw wire wheels replaced by steel disc wheels with hubcaps – which would cause outrage when applied to the T-Type Midget for the TD upgrade. But they look fine here.

Opening the suicide doors allows easy access to the interior and with the floor high and the seat low, I sit with my legs quite stretched out while enjoying a commanding view of the road. The doors are low-cut which does leave me feeling a little vulnerable.

Worth double-checking that the latch is secure.

The XPAG engine fires up promptly, but we sit and wait for a while for the oil pressure to build up. Already though, I can tell that the usual MG trademark rorty exhaust note is part of today's entertainment.

ON THE ROAD

There's enough torque and low gearing to simply pull away in second gear, by-passing the synchromesh-free first. This is one part of what makes the experience feel much less pre-war than you might expect, as there's no transmission whine



Traditional dashboard places the speedometer in front of the passenger

MG YT



from the synchro-blessed cogs.

Another big part of the modern feel comes from the steering. The rack-and-pinion setup means that despite the best efforts of the crossply tyres, the car steers a true course and I'm having to supply very little steering input. Sure, despite the magic Octagon, it's no sports car, but as a touring machine, it's feeling pretty good to me.

It's comfortable too thanks to the sprung seats and the soft suspension. Yes, severe jolts cause the leaf-sprung back end to bounce a little more than is strictly desirable, but the way that the independent front suspension despatches broken sections of road is mightily impressive for a car of this era.

As we reach our favourite National Speed Limit sign, there's an opportunity to enjoy the exhaust note with a prod of the diminutive throttle pedal. I go to change gear but hold on, I'm already in top! Yes, the gearing is far too low really and while the car

allegedly has a top speed of 76mph, it seems fussy at 55mph, so that'll do for me. It doesn't sound like an engine that wants to rev like a race car anyway, so I'll keep it in the middle of the rev band and will simply enjoy my windswept time at the helm.

The gearchange is positive and easy to get used to, though the synchromesh appreciates a slow change, and a touch of double-declutching on the way down. I even try a little throttle-prod going into third, once I get a feel for the close-set pedals. It's worth it both for the crunch-free change, and the rasp of the exhaust.

The brakes are good if you're firm with them but there's quite a lot of travel and squeezing my foot down on the pedal leaves me perilously close to the throttle. Good job I'm not in clod-hoppers today.

It's all very charming and with no side windows or roll bar and the hood furled away, visibility could not be better. Actually, that's not true as it's possible

The lines are very graceful from the rear. Lighting has been upgraded somewhat from the original



Four-seat tourer body looks a little bulky for 1250cc

to fold the windscreen down onto the bonnet, which would remove the thin, chromed frame from my sight-lines. However, the attack on my eyeballs from the wind and its assorted collection of insects could well leave me blinded, so let's leave it in place for now!

At 55mph, the engine is buzzing away at about 3500rpm, but it feels like it'd do that all day and with a comfortable driving position and controls that do not demand fierce concentration just to maintain a straight line, I feel that I could probably sit here all day too.

However, I think Glenn would like his car back, so return it I must, after enjoying what is an incredibly rare and thoroughly enjoyable mix of pre-war charm and post-war comforts.

As I head back, it's no problem for me to conclude that time has been kind to the YT. There's no denying that as a sales-success, it was an outright disaster, but from behind the wheel, that simply doesn't matter. It's delightfully entertaining to drive and a classic that puts a smile on your face is pretty deserving, regardless of how many were sold.



Original tail-lamps a little lacking, but look good



The devil is in the detail - this is a bonnet catch

SPECIFICATION (STANDARD MG YT)

Engine:	1250cc 4-cylinder OHV
Power:	54bhp@5200rpm
Torque:	64lb/ft@2700rpm
Top speed:	76mph
0-60:	28secs
Consumption:	26-28mpg
Gearbox:	4-speed manual

With special thanks to:

Glenn Whitehead for the use of his beautiful YT. If you're interested in buying his MG, you can contact Glenn on 01379 740463.