

# BUYER'S GUIDE

## MG YA AND YB

# Express:

The MG YA and YB do tend to get a bit overlooked, but they're a wonderful combination of prewar styling and very much post-war usability. **NICK LARKIN** reports.

A lot of people love the graceful lines of prewar cars, but are put off buying one because they fear unreliability, the needs for lots of maintenance and the likelihood of a tin bath on wheels offering more driving sophistication.

Well, take a look at the MG YA and later YB. From the upright radiator to the flowing wings to the swept back tail, here is nigh on perfect 1930s styling, a glorious wooden dash, complete with octagonal instruments, and a rear Window blind operable from the driver's seat.

The car was designed from 1937-39, sharing some body panels with the Morris 8, and MG had intended to introduce it in 1941. Among those working on the Y-type had been one Alec Issigonis, long before the Mini or even the Morris Minor became the little apple of his eye. But then 1941 arrived and went, and there was no MG YA. The man to blame was Herr A. Hitler, who had been influencing MG's launch programme, so that the new car was shelved until 1947.

Even by then, the styling was rather on the traditional side for a car being launched at virtually the same time as the Morris Minor and Standard Vanguard. But under the traditional metal was a much more up-to-date vehicle than the looks suggested. The front sus

There are no dealers really specialising in these cars but they do sometimes come up through the trade.

We're actually basing this feature on YA and YB saloons, but there was also an open top tourer version of the car, the YT; of which only 877 were built with export markets in mind. Surprisingly, this model wasn't a great success, and was quietly dropped.

### What to look for?

**BODYWORK:** The car sits on an extremely sturdy chassis – so sturdy that it was also used as the basis of the MG TD sports car. Obviously this could see some corrosion in 60 years but don't be surprised if the chassis is rust-free.

The bodywork is also of good quality, but watch for rot both inside and outside the boot. The panel below the boot can rot too. Also watch for corrosion along the bottom of the doors and also around the A-posts. The wings should be looked at too.

**ENGINE AND TRANSMISSION:** The XPAG engine is a tough and long loved unit, though the return scroll on the crank, which basically pushes oil back into the engine, can wear



aren't renowned for their electrical faults, though after more than half a century the wiring may be past its best by now.

### What should I pay?

Condition of those interior bits is so important here, but for a generally excellent car you can

But as a classic to make loving grunts at in the garage or to use on not too stressful trips an MG YA or YB is well worth considering. The car had no real mainstream direct rival when it was new – and in many ways the same applies now!

### The Parts Situation

pension had coil springs and wishbones, this being the first Nuffield car to be so equipped. Excellent rack and pinion steering was also fitted instead of the cam type on the T-series.

Power came from the XPAG engine, and with only 1250cc to play with, the performance was hardly sparkling. Almost 30 seconds of hard work was needed before the MG reached 60mph. The engine was tune-able, but in any case the car was, for its time, a refined cruiser. This feeling of ambience was increased by an interior of true luxury, with sumptuous leather seats and a polished wooden dash, complete with octagonal instruments.

The new MG was well received when it was launched at £671 11s 8d, motorists much appreciating the car's refinement. By 1951, when the replacement YB came along, 6158 examples had been built.

This featured even better handling, thanks to an anti roll bar along with uprated brakes, better shock absorbers and smaller wheels. The YB boosted total Y-Type production to more than 8000 cars by the time production ceased in 1953.

For much, indeed not all, the MG Y- was really without peer as a relatively small but refined saloon, and it's difficult to think of a direct rival for these cars today.

leading to oil leaks. Specialists can supply a modification to solve this problem.

Gearboxes are long-lived, and it is even possible to convert the cars to operate with a five-speed Ford Sierra unit. Not surprisingly, purists don't exactly flock to support this idea. YBs have a hypoid rear axle, a big advance on the traditional MG unit.

#### **STEERING, SUSPENSION AND BRAKES:**

Excellent rack and pinion steering was fitted to these cars but be careful – new racks are not available, so you'd need to have the existing unit reconditioned. Do check the condition of the unit fitted to a potential purchase – it could influence your decision to choose one car over another. Braking systems differ on YAs and YBs but you shouldn't have problems getting parts for either.

The same can't be said for springs, which are apparently in short supply at the moment so again you'd need yours reconditioning. Shock absorbers shouldn't be a problem.

**INTERIOR AND ELECTRICS:** These cars were trimmed to a high standard and a car with a tatty interior really would need other merits to make you buy it. NTG at Ipswich will do you a front seat reconditioning kit at £719, and the same price for a rear one, plus VAT. An interior panel kit is £917 plus VAT and carpets £171, both prices including VAT. The car's

expect to be relieved of around £6500-£7000. It'll have to be good, mind you. Half that for a slightly tatty but MoT-able vehicle. For a restoration project around £1000 will be enough.

## Should I buy one?

If you get the chance to get a go, snap it up. The YA and YB win on so many scores, and there isn't much else offering this combination of prewar character and postwar technology. A Morgan is the only other car to come to mind and those are hardly similar.

The interiors are almost a work of art. There are so many lovely features, from self actuated jacks to a front opening windscreen. It's all saying 'I am a prewar car,' but the independent front suspension and rack and pinion steering tell you otherwise.

The quality of everything here is so high, and you just wonder how MG managed to make money.

The only real minus points are that performance is not brilliant, but once you're hovering around 60mph things are fairly relaxed. The interior is not over spacious either.



There aren't millions of specialists for these cars, but those there are offer some excellent support. You'd be very lucky to get hold of an XPAG engine but one can be reconditioned. Leicestershire based MG specialist Andy King can provide inlet valves at £12.50 and exhaust ones for £12.60 plus VAT. This firm can also supply new and used parts and carry out a wide range of restoration work on MGs. Hurry, they have two second hand front wings available, but both are left-hand ones.

NTG Services in Ipswich have vast arrays of new spares. Log on to [www.mgbits.com](http://www.mgbits.com) and you'll find all sort of things.

You are going to have to take your chance on body panels though.

## Contacts

### Clubs

- MG Octagon Car Club, Unit 1-3 Parchfields Enterprise Park, Parchfields Farm, Colton Road, Trent Valley, Rugeley, Staffs, WS1 5 3HB, tel: 01 8B9 574666. Caters for prewar MGs. Email: [info@mgoctagoncarclub.com](mailto:info@mgoctagoncarclub.com), [www.mgoctagoncarclub.com](http://www.mgoctagoncarclub.com),
- MG Owners Club, Octagon House, Swavesey, Cambridge CB24 4QZ, 01954231125 [www.mgownersclub.co.uk](http://www.mgownersclub.co.uk)

### Specialists

- Andy King, specialising in spares and restoration of pre-1955 MGs, Leicestershire. 01949 860519 or [www.mgsparesandrestorations.com](http://www.mgsparesandrestorations.com)
- NTG Services, 28204 Bamford Road, Ipswich IP1 4AY, 01473 406032 or [www.ntgservices.co.uk](http://www.ntgservices.co.uk)

## What's out there?

Maybe it's because there aren't many around, maybe it's because Y-Types are cars people like to hang on to, but there seems only to be a trickle of these cars coming on to the market at any one time. Of these, a fair number are restored but there are also some original examples coming through, along with restoration projects. Like any other vehicle it is worth buying a good example unless you really want to take on a restoration project for the sake of it...

Originally published in Classic Car Weekly October 9, 2008 and reprinted here by kind permission.