

Special Bodied 'Y' Types

1948 'Y' type chassis fitted with special convertible bodywork by Reinbolt & Christie S.A. Photo by owner Ernst Kengelbacher.

Before the Second World War all but a very few types of car employed the use of a separate strongly built chassis onto which a body was bolted. The body was invariably either 'coach-built', that is to say it was constructed by having metal panels affixed to a wooden framework, or, towards the end of the thirties, it was of pressed steel construction. It was therefore comparatively easy, given this method of construction, for different types of body to that offered by the manufacturers to be fitted to chassis. Indeed, coach-building businesses who did just this abounded and the variety of 'special-bodied' derivatives of both mass-produced and of the more up-market cars of the period was very significant. After the war, however, as the unitary construction methods which had gone before, the opportunities for these often once renowned coach-builders declined until, today, the ability to simply 're-body' a factory-produced car to one's liking or design is virtually impossible.

The 'Y' type MG was basically a pre-war design and employed a separate chassis onto which was bolted a pressed-steel body. Thus, production had not been underway long before various concerns began to look at the car with a view to offering different body styles for different markets, particularly as this had often been the case with pre-war MGs.

One of the more noteworthy coach-building firms who had carried out very elegant re-bodying work on a number of pre-war MG SA saloons was Reinbolt & Christie S.A. of Basle in Switzerland. A Mr Emil Frey imported three early 1948 'Y' chassis and Reinbolt & Christie gave them very distinctive two-door convertible bodywork. The three cars so converted were given dark blue, maroon and dark green paintwork respectively. All three had beige upholstery. It should be remembered that the factory-produced YT convertible was not available until the autumn of that same year. On reflection, it is certainly this author's view that the Reinbolt & Christie convertible (which has since come to be referred to unofficially as the 'YRC') is by far the neater and more handsome of the two convertible offerings.

An article in 'The Autocar' for 14th May 1948 suggests that there were to be Zagato-bodied 'Y's for the U.S. market. Apparently, this design exercise was undertaken by the Italian coachbuilders at the behest of Mr Roger Barlow, president of International Motors of Los Angeles. Open two-seaters and drop head two- and four-seaters were to be built. Neither were the changes to be limited to the provision of a different style of bodywork for Zagato had plans to make one or two modifications to the chassis, engine specification and instruments also. There were plans to produce up to seventy of these cars with bodywork by Zagato, Castagna and Farina but evidence has only come to light of one, with coupe bodywork by Zagato, having been actually produced and it is not known whether or not this was released to the public. Indeed, the Abingdon Works Export statistics would seem to suggest that this project never really progressed further than the prototype stage as, listed therein, we find only eleven 'chassis only' delivered, nine in 1948 (three of which would be the 'YRC's referred to above) and one each in 1952 and 1953.

Not so much a special body but more a modified standard saloon body that was prepared by

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University Coachwork Ltd for an American customer in 1951. The rear quarter lights were blanked off and in their place were fitted dummy hood irons to give the impression of a drop head arrangement. Wheel covers were also fitted to the rear wheels, increasing the depth of the rear wings to a point where only the hubcaps of the wheels were visible. Flashing trafficators were fitted to comply with the latest U.S. lighting regulations and the bumpers were raised and the fixing points strengthened, the bumper blades being fitted with large 'TD' type over-riders.

The last YB chassis made, 'YB1551' was fitted with a special coupe body. This car was prepared especially for Dick Jacobs who raced MGs extensively at the time; the car was registered '982VWL'. Its very modern 'full-width' bodywork was a whole generation in motor car bodywork design ahead of the standard factory offering (which, it should be remembered, was designed in the late thirties).

Undoubtedly there must have been several more special-bodied 'Y' types prepared whilst the car was still in production. One example which has come to light appeared in the 'cars for sale' columns of 'The Autocar' magazine of 4th March 1949. It is described as follows:

"Tankard & Smith Ltd. offer MG 1 1/4-litre fitted with very attractive and special 2-door saloon in black with beige leather upholstery and black carpets, many extras including windscreen spray, exterior and interior as new, mechanically 100%, moderate mileage; £735; 3 months' written guarantee . . . 198 Kings Road, S.W.3 . . .

At the risk of offending the so-called 'purists' it might even be said that the famous MG TD started life as a 'special-bodied' 'Y' type. Works manager Cecil Cousins recounted some years ago how at Abingdon they took a 'Y' type chassis and cut five inches out of the centre of the frame

and put a sleeve up inside it. Then a TC body was placed on the chassis, various modifications were made and in about three weeks the TD was born.

Since those days when the 'Y' type was in production many private individuals have probably had a go at fitting their own specially designed bodies to the 'Y' type chassis. After all, the chassis was of quite advanced design when it appeared in 1947 and gave good handling coupled with excellent rigidity and durability. By the time the sixties and early seventies arrived there were a great number of neglected 'Y' type saloons around which could be acquired very cheaply indeed and thus lent themselves to conversion or re-bodying by those whose interest lay in that direction.

One re-bodied car which came to light a few years ago in Gloucestershire was 'NTV298'. This had been given a fibreglass low-slung sports coupe body with square headlights and was fitted with an 'XPEG' engine taken from a TF 1500. Unfortunately no further details of this car's history are known.

In Australia it seems that there is a 1947 'YA' which during its life has acquired a YT body and in Holland there is perhaps the most ambitious rebodying project of all. For there, an enterprising owner has built on the back of a cut off saloon body which has suffered an accident, a tow-truck flat bed complete with towing crane!

Lastly, in our review of special bodied 'Y' types, there are the TF replicas, at least three of which are known to exist. Given what was said above about the way in which the TD was developed and also bearing in mind that nowadays there are many people who would like to own a 'T' type but who are unable to afford the high prices which genuine 'T' types command, it is perhaps not surprising that several of these 'conversions' have appeared. What is perhaps unfortunately is that at least one of these 'Y' type chassis with TF bodies was, back in 1979, being passed off by a car dealer as being a genuine TF! So, beware! That TF which you may be about to buy may not be all that it seems.

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