

Driveable Dream

# Saloon Keeper

After more than a half-century of service, this MG YB is rewarding to own and drive



WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY CRAIG FITZGERALD

It couldn't have been more perfect. Here we are at just before light on a misty, uncomfortably raw New England morning, getting ready to photograph Paul Gaynor's 1952 MG YB right-hand-drive saloon. We set the car off to the side of the road—the wrong side of the road, but then Gaynor reminded me that it's a right-hand-drive—looking down toward the Connecticut River. And then, just as I pressed the shutter, the Yale rowing crew sliced through the water. Like magic, with this car, in this setting, I was in a time machine, transported back to the English countryside, circa 1952.

Gaynor was confused when I called him about his car, because I'd left a message saying that we wanted to photograph his 1952 MG for the magazine. "I thought you were calling for my TD, which

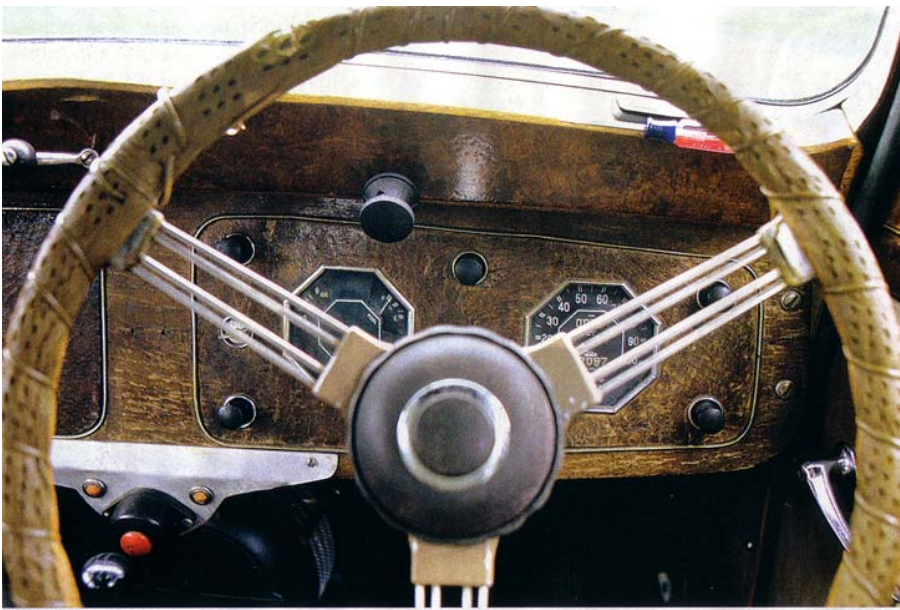
runs in VSCCA under number 52," he said when he returned the call. He couldn't imagine why we'd want to feature a car as tattered, yet completely driveable as his YB. So, concerned that we had the wrong car, he swung by our office on the way home from British Invasion XV at Stowe, Vermont, with the car on a trailer, so that we could see it, "warts and all," as he said.

Normally, we tend to look for the best restored, or cleanest original cars we can find. But for our Driveable Dream features, we love to find cars that might not be perfect to look at, but are no less enjoyable to drive. Gaynor's YB filled the bill completely. Its paint surface is cracked and crazed like an old porcelain salad bowl. The interior is as worn in as an outfielder's favorite glove, and it's showing signs of age under the

hood, too.

Gaynor is no stranger to British cars. His garage is packed with British cars, parts and ephemera. On one side of the garage is the No. 52 TD. In another bay are the remnants of two Austin-Healeys, and parked next to those is an imposing, French Blue Amilcar with a red frame and wheels. The car's aluminum body is swept into a gorgeous boattail, and Gaynor tells me it started life in Australia.

He's been racing British cars for more than 30 years. "I got involved in it years ago, when the MGs were barely allowed into VSCCA," he says. He shows me a photograph of himself and two other MG drivers at Lime Rock Park. "Those three cars were the only three cars in the class." Several years ago, along with the VSCCA, he had his car and 80-some-odd other British cars



A weathered burl walnut dashboard with a full set of gauges greets the driver; crank-out front windscreen makes the car seem older than its 1952 model year



Octagonal instruments reflect long-standing MG design theme



Weathered paint and worn weatherstrip show where driver's arm tends to rest



Leather bucket seats are cracked and crazed, but soft as an outfielder's glove



Stitching on pocket has failed but door panel belies its 50-plus years

shipped overseas for the New England MG-T Register's Lands End-to-John O'Groats circuit of Britain in 1990.

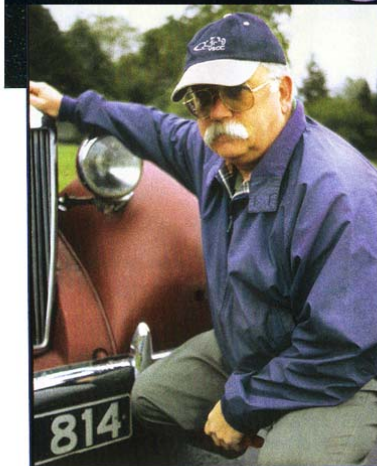
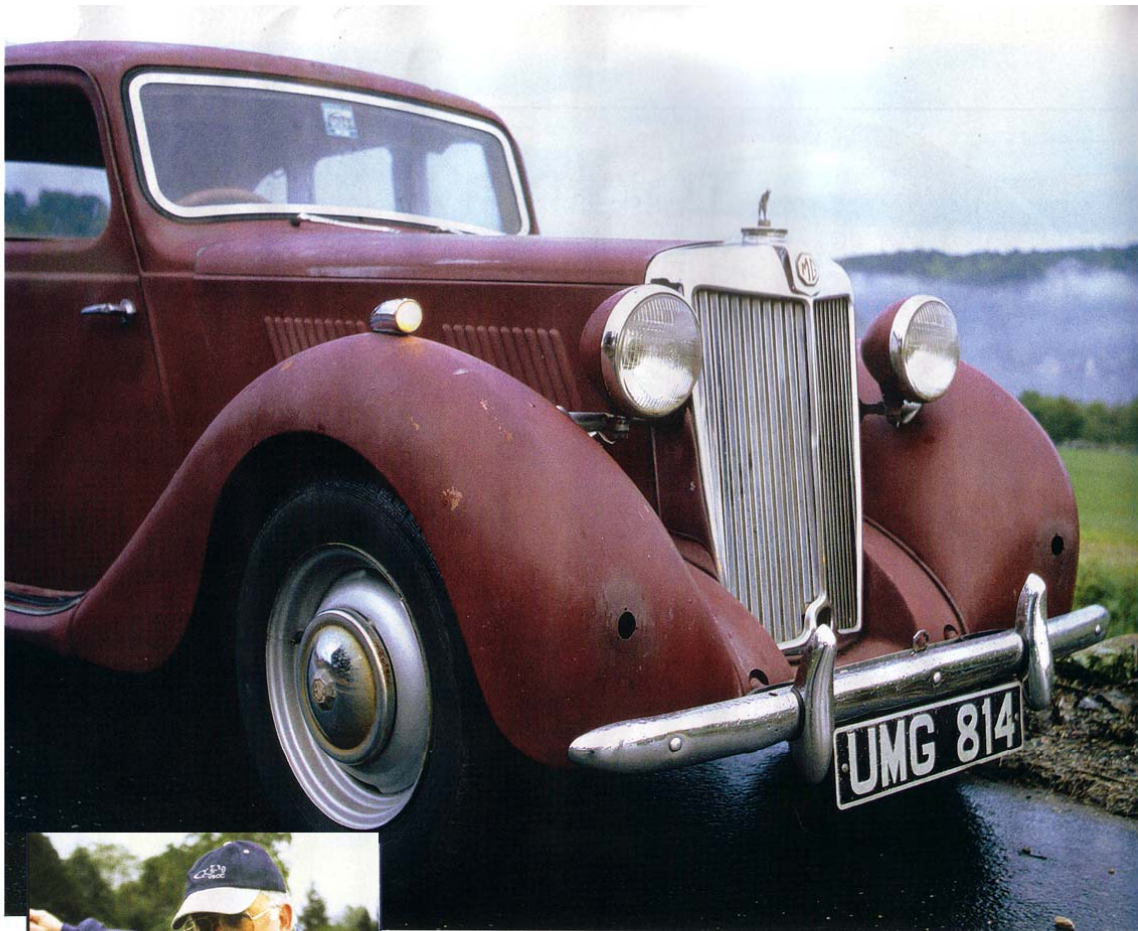
MG has always been synonymous with "sports car," but two-seat roadsters weren't the only type of car the company produced. From the word "Go!" MG was also a producer of sporting saloons, essentially saloon cars given "the MG treatment" in order to become a little more sporty, they provided the family man a fun-to-drive, infinitely more practical

alternative to the wind-in-the-hair roadsters. If you consider a British car on a platform that was thought of an antique in 1951 to be practical, that is.

Produced from 1951 to 1953, the MG YB was a mildly updated version of the YA, MG's first saloon car built following WWII, from 1947 to 1950. The "new" model produced in 1951 was cosmetically identical to the car that preceded it, with a handful of trim changes to differentiate it from the earlier car. Mechanical improvements, however, made the

YB a more driveable machine. Smaller 15-inch wheels gave the car a more modern appearance, while the anti-roll bar mated to the old YA's fully independent suspension made the car a relatively potent handler. The car was finally replaced in 1953 by the MG ZA Magnette, a thoroughly modern machine in comparison.

The car is far from a straight-line performer, though. The 1,250cc, overhead-valve, 46hp inline four is good for only about 70 mph on the best days



Owner Paul Gaynor has been involved with British cars for more than 30 years

*Paul Gaynor*  
12/14/05

Paint has long since lost its shine, but classic MG lines show through; upright chromed grille shell and swept fenders give the little saloon an air of elegance

and takes half a minute to crack the 60-mph barrier. The engine is derived from the TC series, but features only a single SU carburetor.

The bodywork is a rounded four-door saloon style with a bustle-back luggage boot and small windows. Above the driver's head is a metal sliding sunroof. The bonnet is typically long and capped with a tall MG radiator shell, accented on either side with elegant swept wings and runningboards. Despite their stodgy appearance, Y-types were campaigned quite successfully as MG works rally cars throughout the late 1940s and early 1950s.

YBs are the forgotten 1952 MGs, with all the attention lavished on the sexier TDs. These were vintage cars when they were brand new, and have the kind of class, sophistication and character that identify British cars to so many owners. Inside, the well-appointed Y-type features a dash constructed from a hunk of burl walnut, and gauges that mirror the octagonal MG logo theme repeated here and there on the car's badging. The

"suicide" front doors belie the car's early 1950s build date, as does the crank-out front windscreen. The car also features a remote rear window shade that operates via an elaborate pulley system. Y-type MGs feature a hydraulic "jackall" system that allows the car to be lifted off the ground without the need of a bumper or scissor jack. The car also features an adjustable steering column.

Gaynor has owned the YB for several years, after he purchased the car from a friend. "He used to drive it with his wife, who had contracted multiple sclerosis," he says. "It just got too difficult for her to get in and out of, and he ended up buying a much bigger car." I climb into the compact back seat, and Gaynor says, "I always tell people that if you're driving a car like this—even a saloon—with someone else, you'd better be pretty good friends." Sitting in the passenger seat puts you shoulder-to-shoulder with your driver.

Gaynor's YB is completely typical of MGs of this genre. They're largely forgotten and therefore relatively

inexpensive to acquire. But their low value also means that they're not often treated to the full restoration treatment, making them ideal daily driver candidates, especially considering the large market of spares available.

Charging trouble though it may have—we jump-started it in the driveway and bumped it to life when we were finished with photography—the car runs remarkably well. I'm following at close range in a new Lexus GS300, and Gaynor throws the YB around the back roads of his Connecticut hometown at a pace I'm not entirely comfortable seeing a car of such vintage attaining. "Note to self," he says as we stop at another photo location, "bleed those brakes."

As we wrap up our photo shoot, I remove a set of jumper cables from the floor. "You can't take those out," Gaynor jokes. "They're de rigueur for British car ownership, and so is the screwdriver jammed into the dashboard."

As an exclamation point on his statement, I open the boot to find a case of motor oil and a well-stocked toolbox. With its rough paint and tattered interior, it would be easy to pass a car like this by for something that was shinier and prettier. But if driving Gaynor's MG YB saloon doesn't put a big, stupid smile on your face, you must have had a humorectomy at a young age.

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YB's boot holds two necessities: a case of Castrol and a box of spare parts