

YB meets B. Why?

When Alan Rothwell opens the bonnet of his MG YB at car shows, he's never sure what reaction the car will receive from onlookers. Some express reservations about the appearance of a non-original engine, but others recognise the value of a conversion which neatly fits in with MG's sporting heritage in more ways than one.

WORDS AND PICTURES: DAVE BOWERS





Extra performance was the objective of converting this YB to a more powerful engine, and adopting a 1972 MGB engine helped to preserve the car's Abingdon lineage. However, the origin of the engine swap is something Alan cannot explain or comment on with any degree of certainty. The previous owner told Alan he had engineered this unusual transformation, but when Alan looked back at a picture which he was given when he bought the car, this

clearly revealed an MGB engine was already in place some time earlier than the seller had suggested. Perhaps there was simply some confusion with dates, or perhaps the engine changeover was a more complicated affair that was done in stages by various owners.

Alan commented: 'I don't know much about when or how the engine, gearbox, propshaft and rear axle from an MGB went into the car, but you can see it was a tight fit with the engine mounts located on the front crossmember, so

the fan is very close to the original YB radiator and the propshaft has had to be shortened. The original YB rear leaf springs and dampers have also been adapted to fit the MGB rear axle.'

Alan continued: 'I came upon the YB by pure chance when I was looking for a car which was built in 1953, the year when I was born. This car complied with that requirement, and it was bought to celebrate my 60th birthday in 2013.

'I had been looking for an Austin A30 or a Sunbeam Talbot like those my Dad once owned, but I couldn't find either, and this MG YB saloon kept flashing up on classic car sales entries on my computer. So I went to take a look when it came up at an auction held by Brightwells in Leominster. I'd set myself a budget of £5000 because I could see the car needed some work doing to it. The hammer dropped at £4800 after my last bid, but it hadn't reached its reserve. So the auctioneers contacted the owner, who agreed to accept my last bidding offer, plus commission.'

Pottering along at slow speeds never held much attraction for Alan, as he liked to get the best out of his cars by travelling in a style that recalled the old »



LEFT: *The Y-Type didn't come with much info about the engine conversion, but there were some old pictures.*



« *Safety Fast* MG motto, so the fact that the car had a twin carburettor 1798cc engine capable of 98bhp compared to a single carburettor XPAG 1250cc engine that produced 46bhp was a strong selling point. Alan added, perhaps with a comment aimed at detractors: 'This car could quite easily go back to its original format with a 1250cc engine, but then the problem would be finding an XPAG unit at a reasonable price as these are much sought after as engine replacements for T Series sports cars.' So maybe this was why the XPAG engine was removed in the first place – perhaps the original motor now provides sterling service under the

bonnet of an MG T-Type?

However and for what reason it was converted, the YB was trailed to Alan's home in Pilling, Lancashire, close by Morecambe Bay. He recalled its first drive there, saying: 'This went well. I was quite impressed with it, although I spotted a few teething problems. The suspension was quite low at the back, so one of the first improvements was to have the rear leaf springs re-tempered by a firm called Rossendale Road Springs. I also had new rubber bushes and bearings fitted throughout the front and rear suspension.'

This car had the original YB wheels at the front, but it had MGB wheels at

the back to suit the MGB rear axle. As I wanted a full set of matching wheels, I bought another pair of YB wheels, but these couldn't be fitted at first because the YB wheels are five-stud whereas the MGB are four-stud. So I asked an engineering firm to make up a set of spacers which allowed for four-stud on the inner MGB surfaces and five-stud on the outer YB wheel surfaces. This added to the width of the car's rear track, but as the YB wheels and tyres were thinner than the MGB ones which had been removed, these wheels fitted within the rear wheelarches with only an increase of 20mm each side.'

As Alan worked his way around the car, he noticed that the original built-in Jackall lifting system had been removed, perhaps to reduce the car's weight, or maybe because it got in the way of the engine conversion? Certainly although fitting the MGB engine did not look all that difficult, accommodating the non-overdrive gearbox had called for lots of work as the width of the transmission tunnel had needed to be extended all the way back, almost as far as the rear passenger seat.

Attention to the engine involved the removal of the cylinder head after the gasket was found to be leaking, and this opportunity was taken to fit hardened valve seats so unleaded petrol could be



LEFT: The B-series engine is a snug fit in the Y-Type's engine bay, but doesn't look like it was fitted with a shoe horn.

RIGHT: Despite the more modern performance, this Y-Type's pre-war origins are quite clear when sitting behind the wheel.

used in preference to a fuel additive. Alan drives on Superplus petrol whenever he can, as he says the engine seems to run a lot better.

Alan was rather disappointed when fitting Sparkrite electronic ignition resulted in the car breaking down, however this seems to have been a one-off failure and the company promptly replaced the item under warranty. Certainly the MGB engine pulled very readily during my visit, which in part was due to the twin SU carburetors benefitting from a rebuild by Ed Biddle of EB Engineering in Malvern.

It was anticipated that the car's cooling system was potentially its Achilles' heel, as with an MGB engine matched to the original YB radiator, the extra demand for cooling under stress could result in overheating when traffic ground to a halt. This was a situation that could have been even worse as the MGB engine lacked an oil cooler, which Alan considered fitting until lack of enough space effectively ruled it out. However, a much easier solution presented itself when he heard about a product called Penrite race coolant, which has had the desired effect.

In the early days after Alan's car first arrived, he was wary about taking it out whenever rain threatened, as he had



noticed the underside of the sunroof and the roof lining soon became damp following a downpour. At first this was held to be due to the drainage pipes having perished or becoming blocked so that the water had nowhere to go. This is a common problem for cars with sunroofs, but it wasn't the issue on this occasion. After the sunroof had been removed to ascertain the source of the problem, it was found that the steel runner channels which allow the sunroof to slide back and forth were badly rusted, so these needed to be replaced. This task was entrusted to Pilling's local blacksmith, Peter Richardson, who made up a new set for Alan using the originals as patterns.

Once it was established that the sunroof was completely waterproof, Alan decided to replace the water-stained headlining, and this was conveniently timetabled with having new black carpets fitted. The rear seats were re-covered due to the old leather being very stiff and cracked (and finally ripped beyond repair when his grandson put his foot through the worn surfaces!). This work was carried out by West Coast Trim at Blackpool, a company with three staff members who learnt their trade working for TVR.

Taking the car for a run out into the country seemed like a good idea which would allow Alan to demonstrate his YB's performance and handling characteristics. A route was duly chosen that we both knew well, which would take us from Alan's home in Pilling to the Quernmore Valley on

the edge of the equally scenic Forest of Bowland. Setting off from Pilling towards Cockerham while following the southern coastline of Morecambe Bay allowed Alan to demonstrate that this car is no sluggard, soon reaching the legal limit as we came across a long section of road that runs as straight as a die. Just before reaching Cockerham, a couple of tight bends slowed things down. As Alan had warned me seconds previously, the car did assume a rather extreme angle at the rear as the suspension met the challenge and started to rise at one corner, but happily with no loss of control!

'It's my intention to upgrade the rear dampers as my job for the winter,' Alan explained. He also commented that fitting a new set of radial tyres had been essential to his way of thinking, which enables the car to be pushed into bends with no loss of control.

Passing through a 30mph limit required a sudden loss of momentum. Alan had mentioned the brakes had been uprated in the distant past by fitting a servo – most probably from the same source as the engine and gearbox – and it was easy to sense this car's braking performance was up to scratch even though it still had drum brakes at all four corners. 'The brakes were alright after I fitted sets of new shoes, as well as new rear brake cylinders because one had started leaking,' said Alan. 'The car had been stood a while, and the pedal was virtually on the floor before the brakes started to act.'

Since buying the car, Alan has



B-series Y-Type

« taken to attending many MG events, particularly Y Series themed occasions. These have included taking part in the Round Britain Relay event as part of the Y-Type's 70th anniversary celebrations in 2017. This entailed owners covering two circuits, one in the north and the other in the south of the country, both of which terminated at Abingdon.

'I took over from a bloke called most appropriately John Thornley who owns a YA saloon, and I did the section from Kendal to Garstang,' Alan said. 'On the way, I had to take a detour as I'd previously agreed to take a bride to her wedding, which was rather out of the way at Glasson Dock.' Which I suppose demonstrates how much faith Alan has always had in his car's reliability.

Another Y Series event was arranged at Shelsley Walsh, and the opportunity to drive in succession up the famous hillclimb course was something not to be missed. However, with quite a lot more power than the car in front, Alan soon had to curb his speed! In addition, the car is a regular at Preston and Fylde MG Club events, while at MGs in the Park held at the Cotswold Wildlife Park at Burford two years ago, Alan was as proud as Punch when he received the Pride of Ownership award.

'I have no problems taking the car as far away as the Cotswolds,' Alan explained. 'With the MGB engine and running gear, I have no difficulties on the motorway as this car keeps up with modern traffic. I am also a member of Pilling Old Car Club locally, and we regularly do 20-30 mile runs on summer evenings.'

Alan often likes to take the car out through the Quernmore Valley to the



east of Lancaster, and this location provides easy access to the challenging hilly, single track road through the Forest of Bowland which crosses the Pennines. Or he takes the car on local routes by way of the small villages of Oakenclough, Dolphinholme and Quernmore. The scenery and varied driving conditions of these routes is well recognised by other classic car enthusiasts, as demonstrated by a Volvo Amazon and a Ford Mexico we saw that day being driven enthusiastically in the opposite direction.

After we had stopped to take some photographs of the car at the summit of a hill that overlooks the Quernmore Valley and the Parish of Littleedale, Alan detailed some of the work that went into improving the car's appearance. The paintwork was stripped down and resprayed by Carl Dean of Thornwood Auto Body Repairs in Thornton Cleveleys, the Almond Green colour being used once again although Alan decided to pair it with Country Cream rather than the pale shade of grey which the car

had been wearing. Complementing the shiny new paint, many of the chrome items – including the radiator grille, headlights, sidelights and even the ash trays – were recoated to an impressive standard by Walkinshaw Chrome Plating of Coventry.

With its MGB engine Alan's car made light work of climbing the single track road beside the edges of the moorland reaches of Clougha Scar and onwards on the steep ascent towards Littleedale. On returning back to the crossroads in the valley, Alan kindly allowed me a turn at the wheel. So after settling into the driver's seat, it was time to search out the foot controls which, as this was a car of essentially pre-war design, wasn't as straightforward as it may seem for someone with size ten shoes.

Moving off in first, it was evident that this car had plenty of torque, and as the speed built up on a long straight I could appreciate Alan's comment that this car was easily capable of 70mph or more, and that with the engine still having plenty of potential at 3500rpm, a cruising speed of 60mph was quite within its capabilities.

On reaching the entrance to Quernmore Park by the estate lodge, I steered round a corner and was very relieved to discover how much the Y-Type was up to date in featuring rack and pinion steering. After completing the drive back to Pilling, Alan commented with a wry grin: 'This car can go round corners just like a modern car if you are brave enough to put up with it swaying a bit as the tyres get a grip. And there's nothing I like better than when I am at traffic lights and some young lad comes alongside me in a hatchback. You can see them smirking or laughing, but when the lights change to green, I select first gear as normal and gently pull away quite slowly. Then, after selecting second, I'll floor it and leave them far behind.'

