



MG YA – PUTTING ON THE STYLE

Exploring the low hills, upland moors and quiet back roads around Chorley in Lancashire from the sumptuous interior of MG's immediate post-war offering for the sporting family man.

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W

hat had promised to be a good day didn't go very well at all, because after climbing into the driver's seat of Roy Clapham's 1950 MG YA, starting

the engine and depressing the clutch to select first gear, the gearlever inexplicably slipped into third. Where it resolutely remained, as immovable as Excalibur, the legendary sword of old.


So ended our proposed Road Trip on a Saturday afternoon leaving Roy with the unenviable task of sorting the gearlever out

after we made it back to Chorley in third gear! But looking on the bright side, it was fortunate the gearlever hadn't jammed in a lower or fourth gear as this would have made progress much more difficult than in third. Or even worse in neutral, as this would then have required a tow truck!

On arriving back at Roy's home in Chorley, he was quite confident that he could repair the car in a matter of hours, which was an issue of urgency, as he'd booked it into a car show on the following day. And true to his word, replicating the fabled success of King Arthur when he took his turn

at pulling Excalibur out of the rock, he phoned me later that day to say that the car was up and running again. He also put my mind to rest by confirming that the fault had nothing to do with a change of driver! So arrangements were concluded for another road trip later that week, a conversation that Roy finished off with the promise: 'This time you'll get to drive the car properly.'

Our chosen route through the low hills and upland moors takes us from the centre of Chorley to the villages of Belmont, Whittlestone Head and Hoddlesden, by unclassified roads to the town of Darwen,



Light and positive steering coupled with good roadholding make the Y-type such a nice drive.

and then completing a circuit by way of the A674 to Chorley passing through the villages of Higher Wheelton and Wheelton.

After leaving Chorley, we first drive eastwards towards Rivington Reservoir, which is crossed by means of a causeway. As we settle into the rhythm of the drive, we chat about the car and Roy provides a few details on his decision to buy a Y-type. 'I owned a YA when I was young and lived in Hartlepool. I was reminded of this car when we were staying in Berwick on Tweed and visited Lindisfarne, as we then came across a Y-type standing by a cottage. It was one of

three owned by Andrew Coulson of Ripon – he also owns a YT and the converted YB pickup truck *MGE* featured recently. So when I got home, I took a look at the Octagon website and came across my car in Bedfordshire. Most of the engine and chassis had already been done, although the body was completely stripped out. Two weeks later, I arrived home with the car on the back of a trailer plus many parts from a donor car, almost burning out the clutch on my Freelander in the process.'

Back to today, and from Rivington, we take a left fork in the road towards Belmont,

which commences an ascent along the flank of Winter Hill. This is a prominent summit that lies to the south, which is surmounted by giant television transmitter masts that can be seen for miles. In the winter months, Winter Hill can be a treacherous place, and this was the scene of an air disaster on 27 February, 1958 when a Bristol Freighter travelling from the Isle of Man to Manchester ploughed into the hillside with the loss of 35 lives – rescuing survivors was severely hampered by snow drifts.

These days, when the weather is fine the area attracts walkers to the terraced gardens



Y-type is perfectly at home visiting the traditional roadside filling station in Higher Wheelton.

on the lower slopes above Horwich established by Lord Leverhulme of Sunlight soap fame. These were developed in the early 1900s with the addition of a few architectural follies, such as the Pigeon Tower. Another local landmark, a squat tower known as Rivington Pike, was built in 1733 as a hunting lodge.

Roy has little difficulty holding onto third gear for most of the ascent of Angelzarke Moor, the flexibility of this gear having proved itself well on our first outing. On that occasion the road surface had been well strewn with newly dug carrots, the presence of which was explained when we came across a tractor bearing a huge load in its front bucket, no doubt to the delight of the local rabbit population.

Just before we reach the summit of the moor, Roy follows through with his promise of a second drive of the car. So after swapping seats and depressing the clutch, I gingerly moved the lever through the 'H' pattern in order to establish the respective position of each cog before

starting the engine. All is well, and although the lever seems slightly stiff, running up and down the gears work out just fine. Roy reassures me that the brakes provide plenty of bite, and a quick prod of the pedal after checking the rear view mirror confirms this is so. As I've previously experienced when driving early MGs, the pedals are extremely close, which I had prepared for after the first abortive drive by wearing leather shoes rather than thick-soled trainers that had a tendency to heel-and-toe when this wasn't the desired intention.

Roy retained crossplies for the reason that's well recognised by YA owners; these cars have 16in wheels, and the thicker tread of radials means the spare cannot be accommodated in the boot's wheel well. Owners of the later YB model aren't restricted in this way, as the smaller 15in wheels fitted to these cars can be accommodated in the boot when fitted with radials. Riding on crossplies, I do notice a slight tendency for the car to swap from under- to

oversteer through any sharp corners, although a quick and instinctive flick of the steering immediately puts the car back on track. One of the delights of driving a Y-series is the responsiveness of the steering, and this one is definitely on form as the car bowls along the single-track road, before my drive comes to a pleasant halt beside a small pond just outside the village of Belmont lying 900 feet above sea level, where we momentarily joined the A675.

Nearby lies Ward's Reservoir, a popular sailing venue, and near to here is the locally well-known Potato Pie Path that villagers once used to carry peat taken from the moors. When landowners tried to block the path, the villagers held a sit-in, during which time they were sustained by potato pies that well-wishers brought from the village.

From Belmont Reservoir, we head east along another unclassified road that sweeps up and down through rough upland pasture and wooded glades before meeting the A666



"The semaphores can stop out – the answer is to give the door pillar a good thump."

Blackburn to Bolton road. We follow this north for a short distance, and then turn left along the B3961 towards Edgworth. Since leaving Chorley, this is the first real opportunity for Roy to show off the car's performance at speed – 50mph is quite fast for a car of this age, but the suspension copes quite adequately on revitalised lever arm dampers.

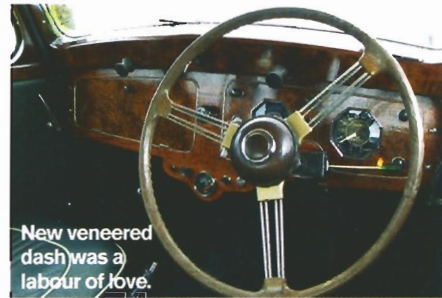
One of the delights of owning a Y-series is the quality of the interior appointments, and Roy clearly took a lot of care fitting a new plywood dash, which he re-veneered in burr walnut. 'The dash was riddled with wood worm, so I had no option but to make a new one,' he elaborates. 'The veneer was all creased and cracked when it arrived, so I flattened it off using steam and kept it under pressure until it was ready to cut and glue onto the plywood.'

Roy welded up the floor beneath the rear seat and then arranged for the upholstery and side panels to be recovered in green leather by Kew Coach Trimmers of Southport. This then

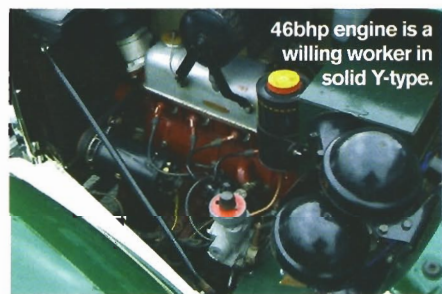
THE ROUTE



Seats retrimmed to match exterior.



New veneered dash was a labour of love.



46bhp engine is a willing worker in solid Y-type.

matched the exterior duo-tone green and cream livery applied by Weldbank Garage, Chorley.

At this point, I am alarmed to note the temperature gauge had reached its stop beyond 100 degrees on the small panel which Roy has added to the bottom of the dashboard. He reassures me this is inaccurate and the gauge is over reading, as the cooling system has been thoroughly overhauled by flushing the radiator, fitting a new water pump and hoses. Other engine improvements include electronic ignition to prevent the points burning out, along with a new starter and dynamo.

Safety has been a most important consideration too, as driving along in a 50-year-old car does put you at somewhat of a disadvantage when it comes to braking distances and getting the message across regarding your intentions to turn left, right or stop. So Roy modified the new wiring loom so there are now two rear brake lights rather than just the one, and he also fitted indicators to supplement the

original semaphores. Roy comments after we turn left at a junction: 'You have to watch the semaphores as they have a tendency to stop out, particularly when moving rather quickly as wind pressure holds them up. You can always tell whether they've dropped back down as they make such a distinctive 'clunk'. The answer's to give the door pillar a good thump if they don't.'

Roy also fitted hazard light circuitry and a discreet looking brake warning light to the rear window. 'Front seatbelts were a priority,' he continues, 'and due to the closeness of the seats to the B-post, I had to weld plates to the underside of the roof to provide strong anchorages.'

As if to underline the importance of the above points, just after we pass through the village of Edgworth, the driver of a car coming in the opposite direction shows a certain degree of reluctance in surrendering the crown of the road. Roy comments after taking prompt avoiding action: 'It also helps that these cars are so narrow!'

After Edgworth, the road to Hoddlesden dips and climbs towards Whittlestone Head, which prompts the following from Roy on the car's performance in these circumstances: 'The brakes aren't bad when going downhill, although the weight of the car means you can start getting a bit worried. One time, I was going into Pooley Bridge near Harrogate on a notoriously steep hill, and by the time we reached the bottom, I was standing on the pedal. As regards climbing hills, it pays to get a good run up, as the car's weight also starts to tell with only 46bhp pushing it along.'

The car gathers a lot more speed as we reach the top of a rise and continue along a stretch of open moorland where Darwen Jubilee Tower comes into sight, a navigational reference that we then keep on our extreme left all the way down into Darwen, and later on for a while before completing our circuit back towards Chorley. It is rush hour as we crawl through Darwen on the B6231 followed by the A674. Other than when crossing the dreaded speed bumps which cause a few disconcerting rumbles from the rear suspension, however, the car performs well, keeping up with modern traffic. Mind you, Roy remains as reassuringly cautious as ever about maintaining safe braking distances between us and the car in front.

This car guarantees plenty of attention, as demonstrated by a four-year-old who gives it the thumbs up. A short while later and further down the A674, a bloke wearing a cap that threatened to fall off who came reeling out of a pub, clearly

the worse for wear and almost tripping over his feet like a dead ringer for Norman Wisdom, also manages to show his approval. But my attention is caught by the sign that we see just before crossing the roundabout for the M65, which reads: 'Well Rotted Horse Manure, Last Chance Before Motorway'.

A few miles off our route lies Hoghton Towers, a country home that's open to the public where classic car shows are held each year. This had been the venue which Roy had been so anxious to attend the previous Sunday after the gearlever had stuck fast. 'Fixing this wasn't a major problem,' he says, 'as two hours later, I'd repaired the anti-rattle spring sitting under the gearlever. It could have been the selectors; this would have been a major problem. The event was the Lancashire Classic Car and Motorcycle Show, and I was really pleased to get the car there, and even more delighted when it won Car of the Show! We often take a drive out this way in the MG, and I recommend the Hoghton Arms for a meal; particularly their roast beef and Yorkshire pudding which is served every day, not just on Sundays.'

A brief stop at The Boatyard pub on the Leeds-Liverpool Canal provides yet another photo opportunity, which is supplemented a short distance further down the road at a roadside filling station in Higher Wheelton which really fits the bill with its brick-built, 1950s-style pay booth where the petrol pumps are housed; all that is needed to complete the picture with the YA standing on the forecourt

Attractions

Turton Tower 15th century English country house. Chapeltown Road, Turton, BL7 0HG.

The British Commercial Vehicle Museum King Street, Leyland, Nr Chorley, Lancashire PR25 2LE, 01772 451011.

Ribble Valley Classic Car Hire MGB hire, 0845 456 5360 mobile: 07891 537 896, e-mail: enquiries@ribblevalleyclassiccarrhire.co.uk

Botany Bay Shopping and Leisure Centre Canal Mill, Botany Brow, Chorley, Lancashire PR6 9AF, 01257 261220, e-mail: info@botanybay.co.uk web www.botanybay.co.uk

Preston Tourist Information Centre 01772 253731, tourism@preston.gov.uk

Hoghton Arms Blackburn Rd, Withnell, Chorley, Lancashire PR6 8BL, 01254 201083

The Boat Yard Inn Bolton Rd, Riley Green, Preston, Lancashire PR5 0SP, 01254 209841

Hoghton Tower, Hoghton, Nr. Preston, PR5 0SH, 01254 852 986, www.hoghtontower.co.uk

would have been a set of petrol pump glasses bearing a slogan such as 'National Benzol'.

Travelling a few more miles down the A674 takes us past Junction 8 on the M61 and into Chorley once more, so ending a most pleasant journey and a most satisfying finale to a week that had started with that irksome problem with the gearlever mechanism.

"I was pleased to get the car there, and delighted when it won Car of the Show"

Roy was inspired to buy the YA by memories of a similar car he'd owned as a youngster.

