

Approaching the hairpin at the Sevenoaks & District MC Crystal Palace Sprint, May 2011.



Three times a winner – 57 years apart

The former Dick Jacobs MG YB is enjoying a second stint of successful competition life in the hands of its enthusiastic new owner, Marc Hanson, and its re-emergence is delighting MG diehards and casual motorsport spectators alike

Words and pictures: Andrew Roberts



Above: Apart from the timing strut and the Crystal Palace Sprint sponsor's name above the number, the Jacobs MG YB is in the competition trim its original driver would have remembered.

M

ention MG's sporting exploits to most motorsport enthusiasts and it is the Brooklands Double Twelve C-Types, the Mille Miglia K3s and the Le Mans MGBs that will invariably spring to mind. Rarely does the YB saloon enter the equation, yet three of MG's most significant post-war successes came from Abingdon's underrated sporting saloon, in the hands of one of the best-known names in octagon history, Dick Jacobs.

Jacobs was one of the most influential personalities to have been associated with the marque. Special builder, successful driver and team manager, and garage proprietor with the famous Mill Garage at Woodford in Essex, he has left an indelible mark on MG history. Today he is best remembered for the pale green MGA Twin Cams that are still raced in historic events and the MG Midget Coupés – universally known as the Jacobs Midgets – two of which raced under the Mill Garages banner and later the BMC Works team, while an identical third example was raced independently by John Milne. But now very much in the limelight again is the Jacobs YB, which is in the enthusiastic ownership of Marc Hanson and has been delighting spectators as far afield as Goodwood, Silverstone, Crystal Palace and Jersey.

At the end of the 1951 season, Dick Jacobs found himself pondering the future. The days of success with the MG TD MkII were clearly over, with the Lester-MG, Cooper MG and other low volume sports cars now able to qualify for production sports car racing. MG, it seemed, had nothing in the stable, but now the YA saloon had been updated to the YB with an improved specification. The potential of the car with its modified front suspension that considerably improved its handling, changed rear axle and smaller wheels was clear to Dick and he suggested to MG that a team of three cars should be prepared for the Daily Express Silverstone Production Touring Car race. But the difficulty of supply meant that this idea was rejected. And that, it seemed, was that.

However, even if there was to be no Works team, could there be scope for a private entry, he wondered? Nothing ventured, nothing gained so Dick made his request to the then Nuffield Sales Manager, Tom Sangster, and elicited a favourable response. As a normal purchase – and as Dick was to recall, 'through the proper channels and at the correct price' – a maroon YB was delivered to Mill Garage just three weeks before it was due to race at Silverstone. It was duly registered UHK 111, the number it still carries to this day.

Unlike today's cars that can be driven quickly from the moment of delivery, the YB had to be carefully run-in for 600 miles. This was achieved by nightly sessions of at least 100 miles and with the engine thus bedded in, the painstaking Jacobs preparation that had paid such dividends with his previous MG entries could now begin. First, everything was checked. Then the cylinder head was removed, the valves ground in, 'accidentally' substituting 150lbs valve springs and finally increasing the carburettor choke size. That was the extent of the preparation; otherwise the MG scrutineered exactly as it had been sold, even down to the carpets. For the race, hubcaps were removed, tyre pressures changed and headlights twisted around to reduce drag.

There was a strong entry for the BRDC Daily Express 1952 Production Touring Car Race, including Roy Salvadori (Bristol), Ken Wharton (Healey Saloon), Sydney Allard (Allard Monte Carlo Saloon) and Stirling Moss in a Jaguar MkVII. The YB was running in the 1500cc class and facing the Jowett Javelin Works entry of Bert Hadley along with a further two Javelins, the more aerodynamic 1.5-litre cars from Bradford having a decided advantage on the Silverstone straights. Undaunted by the challenge, *Motor Sport* reported that 'the highlight of the race was the manner in which Jacobs 1.25 litre MG saloon vanquished the Javelins... he received applause from the appreciative crowd when passing Marshall's and Bennett's Javelins on the inside of Stowe Corner...'

Jacobs now had to catch the flying Hadley, and help came from an unexpected quarter. Moving over to let eventual



Above: Dashboard plaques proudly confirm unique competition history of MG YB UHK 111.

winner Moss past in the Jaguar, Stirling indicated that the MG should get into the car's slipstream, towing it to Stowe Corner. As a result the YB closed up on the Javelin and with a lap to go, overtook the Jowett to win its class by 10 seconds, the luckless Hadley suffering engine problems.

For 1953 the regulations for the Production Touring Car race were eased, with Stage 2 tuning allowed. Dick Jacobs therefore decided to fit twin SU carburettors, manifold and twin fuel pumps of the MG TD MkII, in addition to bigger valves and springs. There were 28 entries in a well mixed field that included Stirling Moss in a Jaguar MkVII. This time the Jacobs YB was not the sole MG, for the well used YB of *Autosport* founder and editor Gregor Grant – this same car being part of the themed display in the main marquee at this year's *MG Live!* – was also entered,

driven by Dick's old team-mate and later the accomplished motorsport photographer, George Phillips.

Competition appeared to be strong, the class also including two Simca entries, an Austin A40 and a Riley 1.5 in addition to MG's strongest opposition, the three-car Jowett Javelin team. In a spectacle long denied to modern racegoers, the well-practised Le Mans style drivers' sprint across the track to the cars saw the Jacobs YB quickly away, and with the help of another friendly Moss slipstream the opposition was left in its wake, a gap of eight seconds between the MG and the quickest Jowett. With George Phillips finishing third in the other YB, this was another dominant Abingdon performance. *Motor*

Sport opined that 'Jacobs drove his MG very well indeed.'

For the 1954 Daily Express Touring Car Race, Dick Jacobs had hoped to run the new ZA Magnette, drawing on his long relationship with MG's John Thornley. But delays to the model's introduction saw this a non-starter and Dick told him that he would again enter the YB, with Abingdon offering support. While the essentially pre-war design had achieved back-to-back class wins, could the faithful old YB still remain competitive? This was the question now exercising the Jacobs mind, but a careful reading of the regulations gave cause for optimism. Now, virtually any modification to the engine was permitted, provided the bore and stroke remained unaltered.

Mill Garage became even more of a development hive than usual – a special Y-Type Coupé using the last YB chassis was also being built for a customer – and it was decided to follow a similar course to the MG development shop who were working on the 1500cc XPEG engine. A 30-thou overbore of the cylinders fell inside the regulation parameters, and Martlet pistons with raised crowns to provide a higher than standard compression ratio were selected. The XPAG 1250cc engine was now fitted with the 1500cc camshaft, but it retained the TD manifold and the twin 1½in SU carburettors.

Dick Jacobs was to recall that 1000 miles of running-in were required, the task falling to him in nightly stints at the end of the working day. However, the anticipated performance increase proved disappointing. The maximum revs in top at 5800rpm were always identical, with a recorded speed of around 84mph. This was clearly insufficient, given the strength of the potential Silverstone opposition and despite experimenting with different carburettor needles and changed ignition settings, the best that could be achieved was 6100rpm in top gear, which delivered 88mph.

Then came the breakthrough. As a desperate last measure the TD manifold was removed and replaced with the 1500cc one from an XPEG engine. Additionally, twin 1¾in SU carburettors were fitted, with their jets unchanged. The results repaid all the hard work; 6900rpm in third was good for 70mph while 6600rpm in top meant over 95mph. The only downside was less acceleration below 3500rpm, but this was not judged to be an issue at Silverstone.

Now all was set to take on the opposition in the 1500cc class. Not only was the YB faced with a brace of its Jowett Javelin rivals but a Borgward, a Volkswagen, a Riley and another MG. Practice recorded times similar to the Jack Fairman Borgward, but at the expense of a blown cylinder



Above: Full bore for the MG YB on its way to a class win in the Moonlight Sprint at Victoria Avenue, St Helier at the Credit Suisse Jersey International Motoring Festival. (Photo: www.kandidprints.com)

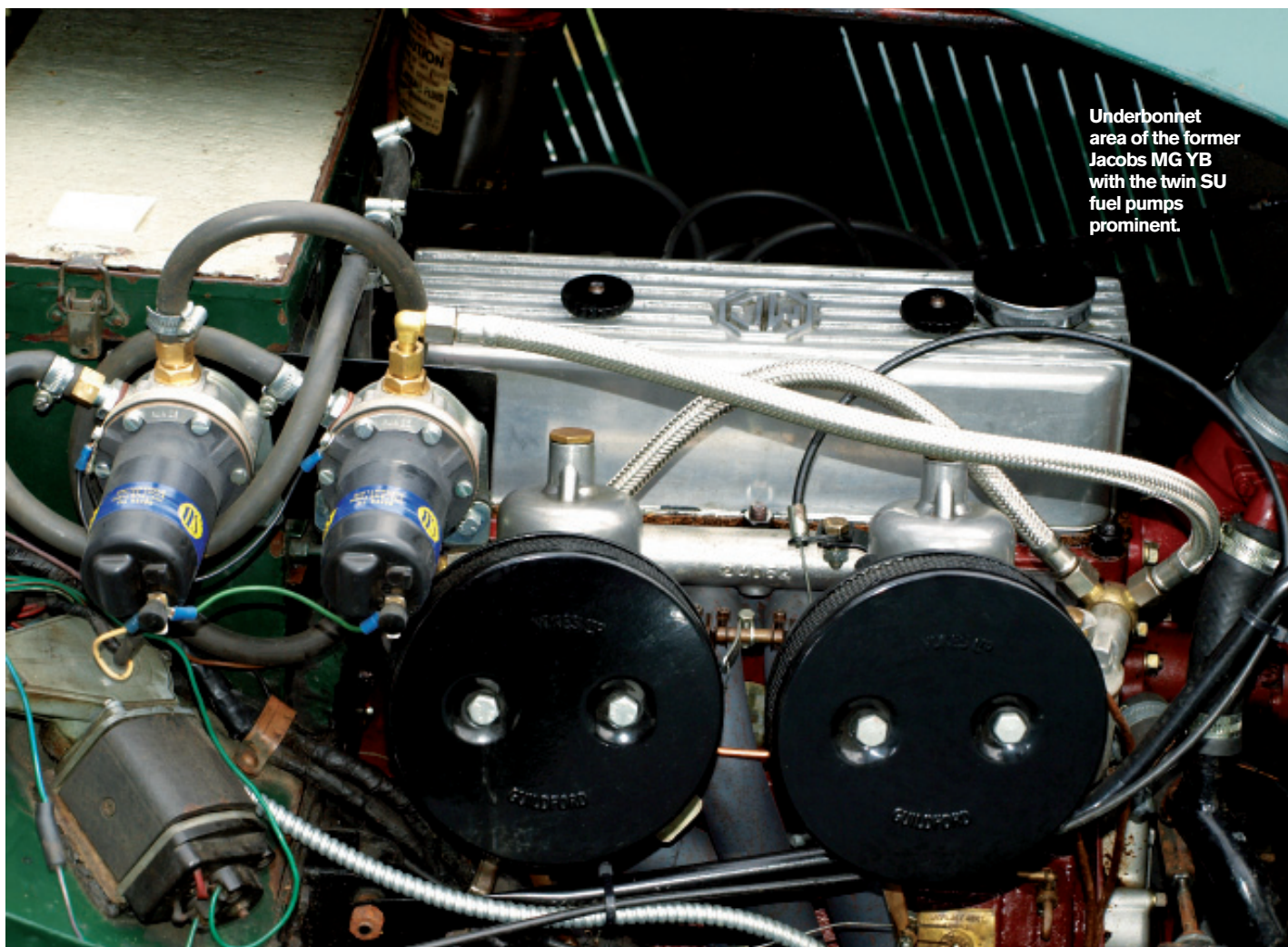


Above: A delighted Marc Hanson at the wheel of the former Dick Jacobs MG YB he's successfully returned to competition.

"The YB was faced with its Jowett rivals, a Borgward, a Riley, a Volkswagen and another MG"



Steering wheel and dashboard instruments remain original; the only addition is an electric tachometer fitted beneath.



Underbonnet area of the former Jacobs MG YB with the twin SU fuel pumps prominent.



Above: Side profile of UHK 111 shows what an attractive car the MG YB was in period.

“Class wins in the Moonlight Sprint and in the two St Helier hillclimbs made for a unique hat-trick”

head gasket. Much overnight work that included truing the head and cylinder block before the fitting of a new gasket put everything to rights, and the YB was ready to record what would be a crushing class victory.

From the Le Mans style start the YB took the class lead that it would never relinquish, although the big Jaguars of Ian Appleyard and Tony Rolt were to lap the Abingdon saloon. The similarly mounted Moss had suffered starter motor problems and trailed the leading Jaguar duo, but still provided his customary tow for the YB although, as Dick recalled, it was not really needed. *Motor Sport*, rarely enthusiastic in its reporting, merely said: ‘*Dick Jacobs MG was considerably faster and won its class*’ ...leaving its readers to work out that the margin was over two minutes!


The YB had done everything that had been asked of it and with its racing career over – Dick Jacobs was to return to Silverstone in 1955 for the Daily Express Production Touring Car race and record a fifth consecutive victory, but driving the YB’s successor, the Works MG ZA Magnette – it was returned to standard tune and road going trim to become the family car, used on the school run for daughter Pat and for weekend outings. Ultimately UHK 111 was sold on, inevitably passing through a number of hands over the years but surviving the period when cars of this vintage had little or no value. Happily, she was restored in the 1970s, but then saw little use.

Offered for sale at the MG Car Club Silverstone International Weekend in 2009, UHK 111 found a new owner in Marc Hanson, who immediately set about the car’s mechanical restoration for sprints and historic events. In 2010 the YB was sprinted at both Goodwood and Crystal Palace, acquitting itself well at both of these historic venues. 2011 saw

further speed event activity – returning to the Crystal Palace Sprint, the YB again featured strongly but it was the Credit Suisse Jersey International Motoring Festival in June that saw another triple success for the Jacobs YB – class wins in the Moonlight Sprint and the two St Helier hillclimbs at Westmount and Mount Bingham making a unique hat-trick. The success was even sweeter, for repairing a suspension problem incurred on the final run at Crystal Palace had been touch and go, with just days separating the two events.

Would Dick Jacobs have recognised his former mount? The answer is very definitely in the affirmative, even though the YB’s original maroon paint was lost during its previous restoration when the car was painted green instead. Mechanically, the YB is back in the Stage 2 tune of 1953, ensuring that this remains a very rapid Y-Type that is regularly used on the road and is typically driven to and from events, just as it was in the Jacobs heyday.

Marc Hanson, who regards himself as very much a custodian of a piece of MG history, is determined that the patina of this venerable old competitor should be retained. There is no intention of replacing the well-worn leather, for example, and the original walnut dashboard, still proudly carrying the plaques recording its racing exploits, remains splendidly unrestored. Under the bonnet there are correct period touches that include 1950s antifreeze labels, Tudor screenwash bottle and original chassis and body plates, together with a scuttle plaque identifying chassis number YB 0414 as the BRDC Production Touring Car Silverstone Class winner in 1952, 1953 and 1954, driven by Dick Jacobs.

The impression – and it is an entirely correct and authentic one – is of a well-used competition car that is still being appreciated and doing precisely what its racing heritage suggests. What it also does is highlight just how successful the Y-Type was in period, for along with the rallying examples that were spearheaded by Len Shaw and the much-campaigned YB of Gregor Grant, the model assuredly punched above its weight and kept Abingdon products to the fore. Certainly in Marc Hanson’s keeping, it seems that the Dick Jacobs MG YB will continue in the same vein. 

Below: More road racing for the MG YB at the Westmount Hillclimb, St Helier in the 2011 Credit Suisse Jersey International Motoring Festival. (Photo: www.kandiprints.com)

