

WE DRIVE



A Slice Of '38 in '53

The MG Y-type was the last traditionally styled Nuffield saloon. David Overeod recently drove one and found practical fillies motoring in a quaint thirties package.

The late forties and early fifties were times of major change in the motor industry, not just in Britain but worldwide.

Technology aside, the diversity of automotive styling during the first post-war decade was at its most extreme. Cars like the Jowett Javelin and the Studebaker Commander were, in 1948, selling alongside Citroen's Light 15 and the Ford (Pop) Anglia. To the uninitiated observer, a Jaguar XK 120 and an HRG 1500 would certainly seem to be cars of two completely different eras, yet they sold to the same market during the early fifties.

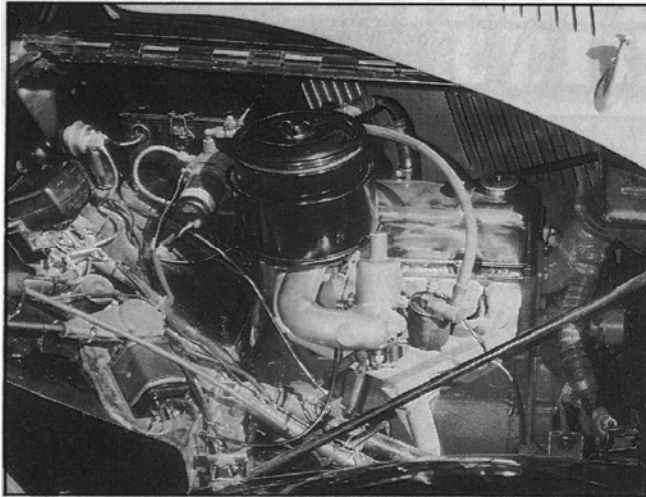
MG was one of the "traditionally" styled marques, seen by those who drove them at

the time as being quintessentially English without compromise, a last bastion of sensibility during a passing phase of meretricious coquetry.

Upright radiator grilles creating narrow tapering side-opening bonnets with large pod-mounted headlamps, flanked by rounded mudguards that flowed back down to the running boards, upright opening windscreens and acres of wood and leather within were seen as the essential ingredients of an upmarket gentleman's car. After all, Rolls-Royce persevered with what was conceived to be "true British" styling, or at least a very-close compromise, right up until 1965.

MG didn't last quite that long, as the formation of BMC tended to "Austinise" most Nuffield products. The sports car line remained traditional until 1956, but the last upright saloon by the marque was the Y-type of 1947-1953. This was based on an a boxed chassis (underslung at the rear) later adapted for use in the TD/TF and even shared some parts, such as the front doors and wind-screen, of the ubiquitous E-series Morris 8.

Known as the 1¼ litre Saloon, the Y-type bore a close family resemblance to the Morris 10 M that had appeared just prior to the war and was due to be phased out the following year in the wake of the new MO series Oxford. The 1141cc ohv engine used



(Above Left) An engine that will be familiar to many MG enthusiasts – the 1250cc overhead-valve XPAG unit in single carburetor form.



(Above Right) Boot space was typically thirties - barely enough room for a weekend away's luggage. More could be strapped to the open lid though.

in the Ten was in some respects the prototype to the XPAG unit used firstly in the MG TC, and later in the TD, TF and Y-types as well as the Wolseley 4/44. There was however very little else in common between the two, starting with the fact that while the Morris was of monocoque construction the MG was constructed on a good old-fashioned box-section chassis.

The Y was, under the shell, right up with the times. Like the TD sports model it had coil-spring independent front suspension and rack and pinion steering. The 45bhp 1250cc engine (rated at 10.97hp RAC) was a single carburetor version of the 54bhp TC unit (or 57bhp TD), but even with 2,240 pounds of car to lug around the Y was still capable of 70 mph. Acceleration could not be described as brisk though - getting up to 60 mph took a full half minute.

The 4-speed gearbox, although similar to the TB unit and using the same housing as the Morris Ten, was internally unique to the Y-type. The ratios were spaced in such a way that 50 mph was possible in third gear in the saloon.

Braking was Lockheed hydraulic, and like the Morris 8 the Y-type rode on 16" bolt-on steel disc wheels. A useful feature on the car was the Jackall jacking system.

Every model of car has its Achilles heel, and with time Y-type this was the back axle. Most Y owners would not contemplate a long journey without taking along spares. The Issigonis-designed independent front suspension is also known to wear badly if regular lubrication is not administered, and the other main recognised fault, as with the T-types, is that the engine is nearly impossible to make oil tight.

The YA ran for four years from 1947 until late 1951 before being replaced by the

(Below) A well-equipped interior in all the best materials, combining a sporting heritage with luxury appointments.



YB, similar in appearance but with hypoid rear axles, a front anti-roll bar and leading shoe brakes. These can best be spotted by their deeper rear guard valance and fifteen inch wheels. YB production ended in 1953 with time introduction of the Z-type Magnette. The export-only Morris-bodied YT 4-seater tourer, sharing the same tuning as the T-type, was produced only from 1948

to 1950.

We didn't have to look far to find a good Y-type to test-drive. The Goodall family of Taradale are proud owners of a YA saloon first registered in 1949. Bill Goodall, a committee member of the Olde English Car Club, was happy to assist us with our story and unhesitatingly handed his keys over to us for the morning of April 10th.

Bill's a keen MG man, and there's always been at least one in his life continuously over the last twenty-three years. His first was a TF which he totally restored from the ground up. This was followed for about five years by an NA Magnette, while an assortment of mid-fifties ZA and ZB models came and went at the same time.

Around eight years ago Bill and Laura made the switch to a "family" MG. The previous owner of their YA was an Aucklander who kept the car at his Christchurch address for use as a South Island car.

"The kids weren't too keen on travelling long distances in the NA, being a tourer," Bill told us, so the switch was made. "The sale of the N put a couple of extra rooms onto the house as well as buying the 3-owner Y-type." The NA is now believed to be somewhere in Auckland. totally restored.

The YA was bought sight unseen. I knew of the car, although I had never actually seen it", Bill admits. The condition of time car was then as good as it is today, if not a little better. The paint, upon close inspection, is much in need of a respray, although the car still appears respectable from a stand-back perspective. It has had a fair amount of use under the Goodall's ownership, and has even gone through periods of everyday use. The mileage now

age now still isn't particularly high though. "It shows 96,000, but it did around 2,000 on a broken speedo cable so the figure's probably closer to 98,000".

This YA could be described as reliable. A trip down the east coast of the South Island to Dunedin, across to Queenstown then back up the west was undertaken more recently without the slightest hint of trouble.

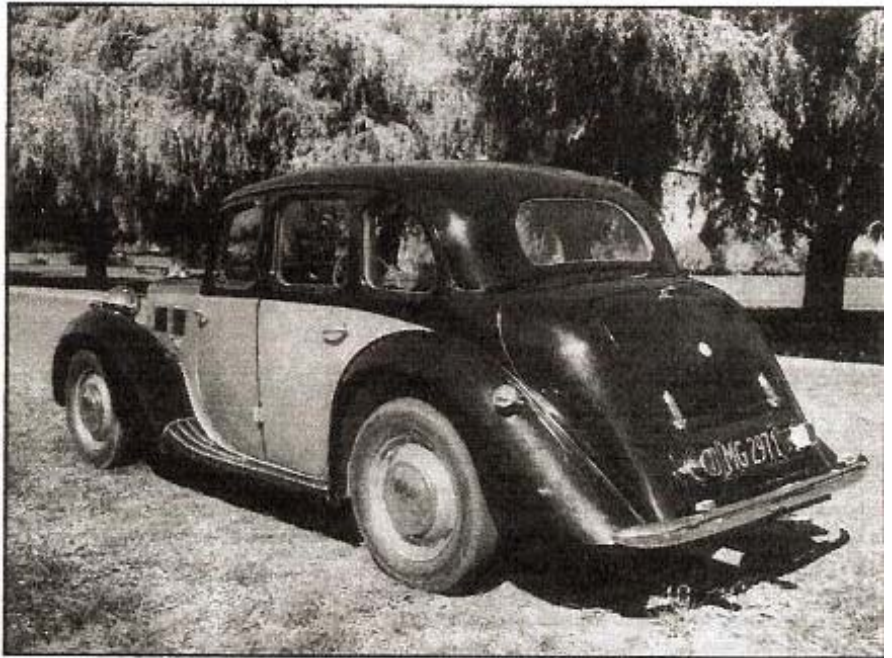
"The only major job we've had to do was the clutch, and most of the brakes have been done". Although Y-types are famed for breaking back axles, according to Bill "We've never had to do one yet".

Although this is their main club car, the Goodalls have a few other vehicles in their shed. There are two Moms Minors, one a saloon in good going order and the other a tourer undergoing a slow restoration, while a 1925 Swift sits in pieces at the back of the shed awaiting its return to the road one day. Bill uses an old Hillman to get to and from work at the moment, and out of all their vehicles, that is their "modern".

I was mindful on the day of my test run in the Y-type that I was about to take my first ever drive in a pre-'56 MG saloon. Although not one of the celebrated T-type Midgets it was still a significant chapter in the history of the marque, and in light of the small number of survivors in this country this was not an opportunity afforded to many. With only around 8,300 Y-types built against a total of over 50,000 post-war T-types alone, I was about to sample the rarer of the two lines.

The first reminder I had of the age of this vehicle was when I opened the rear-hinged driver's door and found myself looking for something to grab hold of as I climbed in behind the enormous telescopically-adjustable spoked steering wheel. The second was, once I had squeezed myself into place, the view over the bonnet. A shorter person than I would not have had the large rounded mudguards within their forward view and the sight of a long tapered bonnet with a large round lamp either side gave the impression of a very narrow car.

Not in too much of a hurry to move off I took note of the interior fittings, and found them to be pleasingly comprehensive for a car of this era. All upholstery, including the door trim, was in brown leather, and the wood cappings on the doors and over most of the dash gave



the car a considerable upmarket lift. The wool headlining also reflected the status of the car, while the carpets, still in serviceable condition, were of a quality stock.

The interior of the car was narrow in the usual thirties style, and rear vision was very restrictive with the tiny back window and thick pillars all around. A convex rear vision mirror assisted here, giving a wide angled view of where one we had once been.

Two octagonally-shaped gauges directly in front of the driver carried the MG badge theme through to the car's interior. The left hand side octagon carried instruments for the reading of amps, oil pressure and fuel content, while the right hand side one was a combined odometer/speedometer (plus tripmeter) with a small round clock at the base. There was no temperature gauge -

perhaps these things never ran hot?

Switches were spread around the immense wooden fascia for the functions of lighting, starting, wiping and choking, while a central lever at the base of the windscreen served to wind the screen in and out. Later in my travels I was to combine the use of this opening screen with the opening of the sliding head, and the resulting ventilation was every bit as pleasant as the air conditioning in my wife's Jap import Galant. So why did we ever do away with opening screens anyway'?

Back seat passengers were well catered for in the posterior comfort stakes, if not in the legroom department. Armrests on either side of the rear bench were complemented by a fold-down centre piece and the seats themselves were better than many of the

period. In the front the two individual bucket seats (with handbrake mounted centrally between them) were slightly offset in position and although the backrests were firm and uncountoured, these seemed to be comfortable enough for short journeys. Bill and Laura complain however that since they had recent repair work done on the seats the driving position has been a little less upright and rather less comfortable on long trips.

The pedals were rather on the small side and on the odd occasion I did manage



MG YA Specifications:

Engine: 4 cylinder ohv, 66.5 X 90 mm, 1250cc. Bhp: 45 @4.800 rpm. Compression ratio: 7.2 to 1.
Weight: 2,240 lb. front wheels 48.5%, rear wheels 51.2%. Bhp per ton: 45.0.
Tyre Size: 5.25-16 inch, bolt-on steel disc wheels. Tank capacity: 8 gals. Consumption: 27-34 mpg.
Turning Circle: 35' left & right. Lock: 234 turns. Electrics: 12 volt. Minimum ground clearance:
6'

Wheelbase: 8'3", Length:13'S", Width: 4'10", Height: 4'9", Track: 311" front, 4'2' rear. Max.
speeds in gears: 1st - 24 mph, 2nd -41 mph, 3rd - 62 mph, 4th - 70 mph.
0-60mph: 29.3seconds. Production figures: YASaloon-6,158. YB- 1,301. YT-877.

to fowl a neighbouring pedal with my clumsy feet -something I could have avoided with practice I suppose.

Bill had already warned me not to expect sports car performance, and considering a 1¼ litre engine in a car as heavy as this I wasn't. Having past experience in Austin A40 Devons and a 1171cc Ford Prefect I judged the MG against these performance-wise and was thus fairly pleased with the progress. I wasn't too keen on the gearbox though - gear changes were not the sort of thing one could conduct in a hurry, especially down-changes, which were often orchestrated by an unhappy crunch. In all fairness to the Y, the synchro and selectors were probably getting reasonably well worn with age and perhaps with a thousand dollars or so thrown at the gearbox we might have a rather smoother change.

There was once a rotary control for the semaphore indicators built into the steering wheel boss. It's still there now, but inoperative - Bill has had a set of flashers fitted, with a toggle switch mounted under the dash. "Drivers today just don't look out for semaphores", Bill asserts.

If I might be allowed to have a good moan about something, I found the window winder handles on the front doors to be in the most ridiculous position. These had been placed about as far down the door as was possible, and also as far forward. Consequently when one wishes to open their window one ends up with their nose practically pressed against the horn button in an effort to facilitate such a dangerous act. Had seat belts been fitted, which in this case they weren't, the manouvre would have been

impossible without unbuckling. Daft if you ask me.

In modern traffic the Goodall's Y-type with its upright thirties styling really stands out, much the same as a Light Fifteen Citroen of the same era does - admiring glances with the occasional wave are all part of a day's motoring. Aside from some fading in the silver paintwork the car looks every bit as good as it would have back in the early fifties, when a quality motor car such as this would have even then earned its fair share of attention and admiration.

It hasn't always looked this good, though - an unfortunate altercation with a BMC land-crab two years ago resulted in some unwelcome rearrangements to the rear of the car. Thankfully Bill had full comprehensive cover with Sun Alliance and was able to have the car trailered down to Rod Brayshaw Panel Repairs, MG specialists in Palmerston North to be fixed.

This MG doesn't sit in the garage month in, month out awaiting its next special outing. Instead the car gets occasional day use, along with the regular Olde English Car Club outings, including several outside the Hawke's Bay region. With Bill behind the wheel, the car has also scored well in club gymkhanas and trials. I could go so far as to say that it has almost become part of the family, but with the kids now in their teens and not too far away from nest-flying I have my suspicions that the day will come when the Y will be offered up for a new home. Bill is unashamedly an open-topped touring man, and it wouldn't surprise me if one day we will see him back behind the wheel of another TF.

Summing up the Y-type isn't such an easy task - it really was an anomaly of its time, and aside from the Sunbeam Talbot 80, which I have never had the pleasure of sampling, there wasn't much in the same league to compare it with. When new, the car would obviously have been aimed at the MG enthusiast whose -needs were no longer catered for by the impractical two-seaters the company had built their name on - in other



(Above) Suicide front doors, and the window winders you are just not supposed to be able to reach without honking the horn with your nose!

words, the sports car man with a family, The Bill Goodalls of the day.

So here is a car that enjoys a demand for the same reasons today that it did forty five years ago. But to be brutally honest, there are many other classics from this era that are far more user-friendly and enjoyable to drive than the MG Y-type. Few of them can match it for olde-world charm, though - as when you consider that the whole purpose of our coveting old cars is more to do with the nostalgia trip than the pursuit of a comfortable and quick journey you begin to realise that an old car's idiosyncrasies and shortcomings are more often than not its endearing attributes. Here then the Y shines as an archetypal exemplification of a bygone era of motoring. Sort of a slice of the latest thirties from the early fifties, really.



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