Cars Worth Keeping

MGYB

When it was finally back on the road, Philip Reckless had spent £1683.45 on restoring his 1952 MG saloon

It was more than two years ago (June, 1979) that we last featured the 1952 MG YB saloon of Philip Reckless, of Ludlow, Shropshire.

He had run his car (which had two previous owners, one of which had tuned the engine to MG TD standards with twin carburettors) for several months and some 2000 miles during the summer before, having coaxed it back to life after freeing of rusted cylinder bores, replaced rotted brake pipes, etc.

In the autumn, he commenced a lengthy restoration process, pausing briefly for Christmas.

Once the festive season was over, I got back to work. With the sills completed I decided that it would be better to start at the back of the vehicle and work forwards. First, I jacked the body about a foot clear of the chassis, but still leaving the front of the bulk-head bolted to the chassis brackets.

With that accomplished, I started jacking the chassis up as high as the body would allow to the ceiling. It was then lowered onto a firm set of ramps, the idea being to remove the back axle and the rear suspension, check all seals and replace bolts and perished rubbers, remove road dirt. de-rust and paint it the original colour — black

The brake shoes were OK (as were the seals), so I cleaned and refitted them to the repainted black plates. The back axle was perfect, needing nothing more than a clean.

De-rusting the chassis was not so easy. It needed hard work and plenty of elbow grease with 'Jenolite' but, fortunately, it was only surface rust. With the chassis finished, from the gearbox right through to the rear, I refitted the axle, propshaft, springs and petrol tank. For once I was overcome by satisfaction, another 12 months of this, barring delays, and I should be home and dry (or so I thought at the time).

pipe work

I then concentrated my efforts at the front of the car, that is from the rear of the gear-box forward. As the pipes from the petrol tank to the engine, and the pipes for the brakes, were still attached to the chassis by string tied round the appropriate strategic points, these had to be removed before I could get to the inner chassis near the engine. Accordingly, I removed the brake pipes — easy because I had assembled new pipes to the car the previous spring. The petrol pipe was very awkward, especially near the bulkhead where there wasn't any room to manoeuvre the pipe out of the way, so left it until a later date when the engine was removed.

I started with the front suspension, by first disconnecting the front brake pipes from the wheel hubs. Next, I removed the bolts to the swivel pins, shock absorber and wishbone plate. On dismantling the wishbone, I found to my horror that, on the nearside, the coil spring had fractured at the base. This was not visible when the car was being used. On closer examination I realised that the spring had been in this state for some time, as the break was old and dirty.

Fortunately, I was able to purchase two new springs from my supplier, who responded to my pleas for help in double quick time. Full marks to Motobuild of Hounslow. It is advisable to fit the coil springs in pairs as, after such a long time, the originals will have reduced in strength. On mine, the reduction was nearly ¾ in.

While waiting for the correct parts to arrive, I removed the engine. The gearbox was taken out first, then the engine. I engaged my father for help with a log and rope. We both lifted the engine, which weighed over three hundredweight, but fortunately it proved to be an easy task. With the power unit out of the way dismantling the pipes and parts around the engine was easy. The chassis was then derusted and painted completely.

Brian Poole, a motor factor in Kidder-minster, reconditioned my two front shock absorbers and, at the same time, shot blasted and painted them black.

I removed the swivel pins with wheel hubs from the car and, when I took the top and bottom swivel pins apart, I found there was very little wear to the swivel pin threads so, after cleaning everything, I painted it all and re-fitted them to the front suspension. What had been replaced was wishbone arms, coil springs, all rubber joints and bushes and, most important, was the renewal of all bolts, where possible.

All the chrome, which I had taken off the car gradually during the dismantling period, was collected together and was then taken to Sports and Vintage Motors, at Shrewsbury, for rechroming. I received a quotation for £160 covering the total which amounted to 55 items including radiator grille surround, slats, side light bodies, rear bumper, door shut plates and head lamp brackets with odds and ends. In the event, the final cost was £130, which I considered to be very good value.

Three items were missing — the D' lamps, which were being done at a later date. The work was well done in my opinion.

The steering rack was taken off and cleaned up; the gaiters were perfectly sound but I replaced the clips.

Cleaning the caked mud and grease off the front of the car, I had got myself very dirty and 'smelly' but, on reassembly of the painted parts, it was smashing to come away with almost clean hands. The most satisfying part of the rebuild was to see the shine on the reassembled parts.

Having replaced all the front suspension, the rack and pinion steering and anti-roll bar, I renewed the brake wheel cylinder rubbers and derusted the back plates, painted and replaced them. I also renewed the inner wheel oil seal.

At Easter, I was unable to spray the body because of the cold weather, so I took the radiator to a local specialist for recondition-ing. This radiator was very grubby and it

leaked where the previous owner had fitted a water temperature gauge plug. The repairer agreed to clean up the plug and braze the seam from which the leak was coming.

All pipes were replaced to the chassis during this period; these were mostly brass which made them easy to clean. The brake pipes were renewed previously so they were cleaned and painted.

While working on the chassis, I had asked several friends if they knew of any person who would re-veneer my dash, which had been removed completely. This constant asking it seems had the desired effect because I was told of a music shop in Ludlow which restores pianos and, when I approached them, they were glad to do the job, subject to the availability of the walnut veneer, which they obtained soon after.

Also, at this time, a friend's sister had just started up in business as an upholsterer. The two front seats were duly shown to her and, again, the work was undertaken subject to the leather being available from Connollys.

During a burst of summer weather, I again made an attempt to spray the body. I managed to spray three undercoats, with rubbing down in between each application, before the rain clouds burst and, for three weeks, I was unable to paint anything apart from one good day, when I had fetched everything off the bulkhead with a view to spraying later.

The old wiring loom was replaced and a new one substituted but, before I removed the old loom, I made sure that the new one had the original colour code, that is to say, the colours were as the wiring diagram in the handbook. Everything was correct, so I derusted the bulkhead and battery box and sprayed three undercoats and four top coats, again rubbing down between each coat. This was left for a week for the paint to harden before all the electrical parts (which, in the meantime, had been reconditioned) were put back on the bulkhead.

As the engine had been overhauled previously I set about cleaning it and decided that, as the engine and gearbox together weigh 3cwt, it would be easier to take as much as possible off the engine to make it manageable to lift. Even so, with the head off and all the accessories, it still weighed a hefty 1¾ cwt.

One day was needed to put in the engine and gearbox with the help of a friend and my father. Had it not been for this occasional help, I would not have managed all the lifting and holding.

In order to put the engine into the chassis, the body had to be moved back afoot to allow the bell housing at the rear of the cylinder block to clear the lower bulkhead which, by this time, had been painted.

New mountings were used under the engine and gearbox. All the rubbers that I replaced were coated with Finnigans Waxoyl which, besides being a rust-proofing agent, should protect the rubber from perishing.

With the power unit in the chassis I set about cleaning the cylinder head prior to fitting new seals on the valve stems. When ran the car previously I found that my oil consumption was about 350 miles per pint, normal consumption being 500 miles per pint. Wear in the piston bores was negligible but, as I hadn't decoked the cylinder head, I presumed the rubbers on the valve stems were worn or missing. I found out later that this was the case.

The finished head, newly decoked and painted MG red, was then put onto the engine, all new gaskets being fitted where appropriate.

Having acquired the original manifold from the previous owner I had, in the meantime, had it enamelled by Sports and Vintage Motors Ltd at Shrewsbury, the same people who did all my rechroming.

The manifold was duly fixed to the cylinder head with the single carburettor which, incidentally, had been cleaned and fitted with new seals.

The starter and dynamo were in a very good serviceable state, needing only a clean and paint. I had renewed the brushes in the dynamo the previous year, so these were okay. The starter brushes were also good.

All the equipment was on the engine as original when new in 1952 — a pleasing sight, the engine was red and the rest of the car was black.

The wiring loom was fitted round the engine bay on top of the front crossmember and chassis sides. These wires were connecting the dynamo, coil, distributor, fog lamp, side and head lamps. The first three items were connected up but the latter were left until I put the front wings on the car.

Brake pedals needed to be replaced next and what a difficult job it turned out to be. Having to operate in a confined space, knocking the pedal shaft into the pedal box proved time consuming. I spent a full day on just this operation, which included connecting the clutch rods and cable to the side of the sump, fitting the master cylinder and stop-light switch, plus various springs which had broken. The stop-light switch was found in a very sorry state, having been repaired previously with Araldite.

Other jobs done at this time included bleeding the brakes, re-fitting the steering wheel and connecting up the indicator and horn switches to the new wiring loom and fitting a new exhaust system, made to the original design by NTG Motor Services, Ipswich.

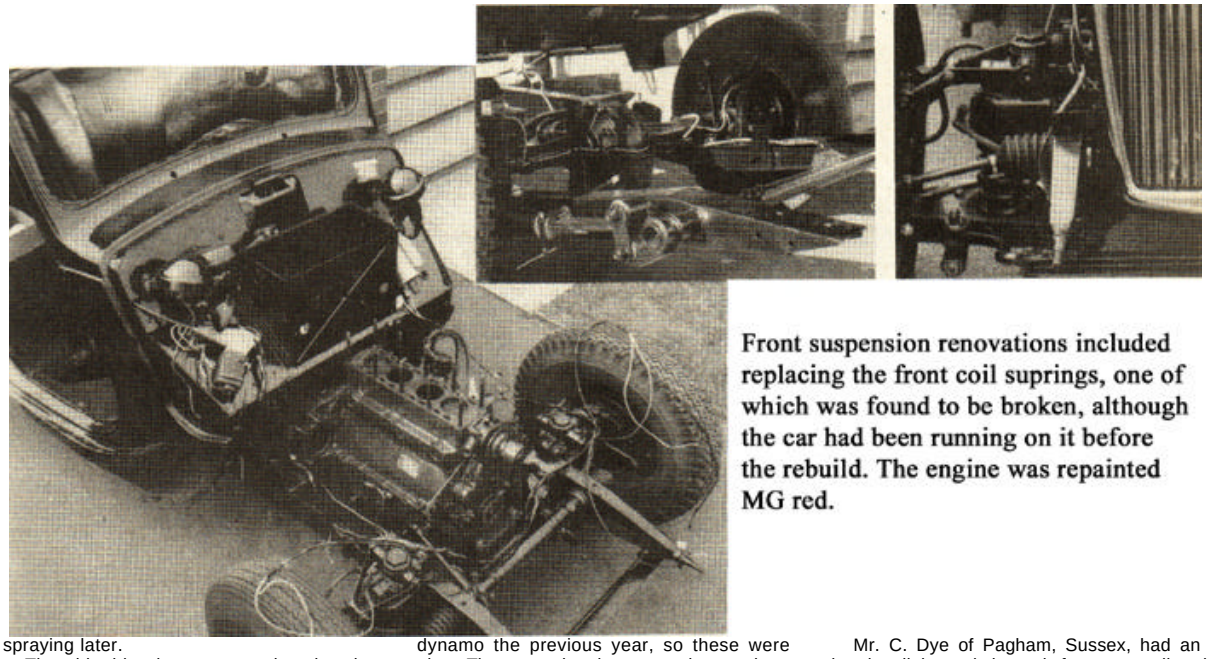
Next, I sprayed and completed the main body — a total of 30 coats of paint now protected this structure. Once the body had been sprayed I started spraying the various body panels, as it is best to spray the small panels off the car before fitment later, the advantages being that they are easier to handle and there is less risk of overspraying other pieces.

One evening was spent reassembling the 22 grille slats to the radiator surround. This job is easier said than done — difficulty was experienced starting the slats on the metal supports but, once I had fixed the two end and two inner pieces, final assembly was easier.

Having just received the radiator from the repairers I fitted it on complete with the radiator surround and grille, then fitted the new top and bottom hoses to complete the engine.

As the chassis was completed, all that was required was for the body shell to be dropped onto the chassis and bolted down, with padding between the fixture points — every MG, at the time of manufacture (before the MGB) had pads between all possible metal to metal contact points, especially on all bolt fixture mounts.

Hydraulic jack and brake pipes were fitted – I made up some brackets to hold the pipes and wiring loom to the chassis.



Front suspension renovations included replacing the front coil suprings, one of which was found to be broken, although the car had been running on it before the rebuild. The engine was repainted MG red.

Mr. C. Dye of Pagham, Sussex, had an interior light switch and four secondhand overriders which needed rechroming. The switch was fitted to the car and the overriders were sent off for rechroming at Sports and Vintage Motors.

The original wooden floor boards had rotted round the edges, so I approached a local woodyard to make replacements in ½in plywood, cut to the original size and this was done, although final shaping was required by me to fit. Both the propshaft and gearbox covers had to be fitted before I could bolt down the new floor, using countersunk bolt screws with wing nuts underneath. This was to help in quicker removal at any time in the future. Incidentally, the handbrake lever and brake cables were fitted, as was the speedo cable. Once the floor was completed an inspection hole was made for the brake master cylinder fluid reservoir, which is situated below the driver's feet on the side of the chassis, as on the Morris 1000.

Carpets were bought from Edgware Motor Accessories, London, and were duly cut and fitted, seat runners were fixed plus the odd missing bits such as rear blind, ashtrays and sun-visors. The seats were ready for collection the following week and were fitted to the car.

Rear quarter light windows were fitted with new window channelling.

Rear seats, rear panels and window blind were fitted to the car, trafficators and door jamb panels were also fitted.

My number plates were in a very sorry state so I carefully removed the numerals from the plates and repaired the broken three letters with 'Araldite' and resprayed them with white paint. Now I was stuck with bent plates but new ones were cut from some scrap alloy sheet, using the old plates as a template I marked out the numeral holes and drilled. All that was required then was some black paint and fit M0L848 to them; the cost was about a pound. New ones as original are nearly £18.

Wing piping was fitted between the chassis and the inner wings, the toeboard was positioned correctly and bolted down, the dipswitch was also fitted and connected to the terminals on the wiring loom.

My petrol pipe spout catch was broken. The cap is of the 'flick' or 'pop up' type, activated by a lever on the side of the spout. This in turn releases the spring fixed to the underside of the petrol cap and so pops up the cap. In my case, the lever was missing and the brass spindle was broken. I used 16 gauge steel for a bracket, suitably shaped and welded to the spout. Another lever was acquired and fitted. Fitting was delayed until the rear wings were ready for bolting to the body. The accelerator pedal was fitted to the toeboard and the cable connected to the carburettor.

Sunroof drain pipes were renewed at the front of the roof down between the windscreen and the front door. This job consisted of pushing through ½in rubber pipe straight down to an opening in the sill and out through to the underside of the car. The same was done to the rear of the vehicle but this entails taking off the interior roof headlining, a difficult task.

A week of stormy weather put a stop to almost everything on the car, so I decided to prepare the headlights for respraying. Some early YBs had completely chromed units. Others (like mine) had chromed rims and painted lamp bodies the same colour as the car. I had new chrome rims which had been fitted by the previous owner, the old ones having rusted. The headlights were stripped of all paint and de-rusted ready for a fine day for spraying.

My fog lamp (pass light) was found originally in the spare wheel compartment, complete but for a damaged rim. The chrome was excellent. Lucas were called upon to supply the original type which they did, I am pleased to say. Clips holding the light glass and reflector to the rim were replaced.

The door jam hinges needed to be replaced. These were easy as they had been marked previously, to fit the original mounts.

Next, the windscreen was fitted to the car. This was held by two hinge bolts at the top of the windscreen aperture. The bottom was connected to the winding chain. It is the opening type and because of this, a screen-washer was not required when I submitted the car for its vehicle test. Screen washers need not be fitted, as the regulations state that only fixed screens require windscreen washers.

The main dash panel and dash rail were fixed to the bulkhead, together with the windscreen wiper mechanism. New black beading was made to fit between the dash rail and the windscreen aperture, to ensure that a good seal helped to create a draught-proof and rainproof windscreen.

The soundproof panel was fitted to the underside of the bulkhead, to complete this part of the car.

My rear 'D' type lamps were ready for collection and one evening was spent assembling the lamps. The lighting for the YB at the rear is — nearside: one reverse and one tail light; on the offside: one stop and one tail light. This set-up is within the requirements of the DoE test.

Now that all the car lamps were completed, the rest of the wiring loom was fitted to include remaining electrical appliances.

The spare wheel compartment lid needed to be derusted and welded, especially along the bottom edges, as the lip had rotted away. This was done successfully with a large amount of effort and patience (incidentally, this panel holds the number plate and rear D' type lamps). At the same time, work commenced on the boot lid as the bottom had rotted around the hinge brackets. This was a more complicated job which dragged on for a long period. I had purchased some new boot hinges from NTG of Ipswich, who have started remanufacturing most chrome parts for the V-type saloons. My original ones had pitted from underneath the chrome.

I recommenced work on all the body panels not yet sprayed and these were completed during a spell of warm spring weather. Casual observers said, at the time, that it seemed as if, one minute, the car was in pieces and the next instant everything was fitted to the vehicle complete! Once the panels were sprayed, fitting was soon completed. Originally, the car was painted with 16 coats at the factory but I've protected my car as follows: wings, front and rear, have 20 coats (half undercoat and half topcoat); doors have 20; bootlid, spare wheel lid and bonnet have 18 coats; the body shell has 30 coats.

I experienced very little trouble fitting the wing panels. The front ones were quite easy to line up with the other panels, once the headlamp bar and brackets were fitted through the radiator surround to the wing brackets each side of the radiator.

Front bumper, overriders, bumper irons, number plate and pass light were fitted to complete the front of the car.

Moving to the rear of the vehicle, I set about finishing the boot compartment. The floor is half wood and half metal. I had replaced the wood and the metal was derusted and painted. The same applies to the spare wheel compartment. Side boot panels were cleaned and refitted. I ordered rubber matting from Edgware Motor Accessories, London and, on receiving it, I cut this to line the boot floor in place of the original, now badly cracked, lino.

My wheels were rubbed down carefully and derusted. With seven coats of paint they should keep their appearance for some years.

Doors were fixed to the hinges and these made an excellent fit, especially as the tolerances were a tight fit between the doors and door openings. The door windows and winding mechanisms had been fitted sometime previously, having been laid-up in the shed until final assembly.

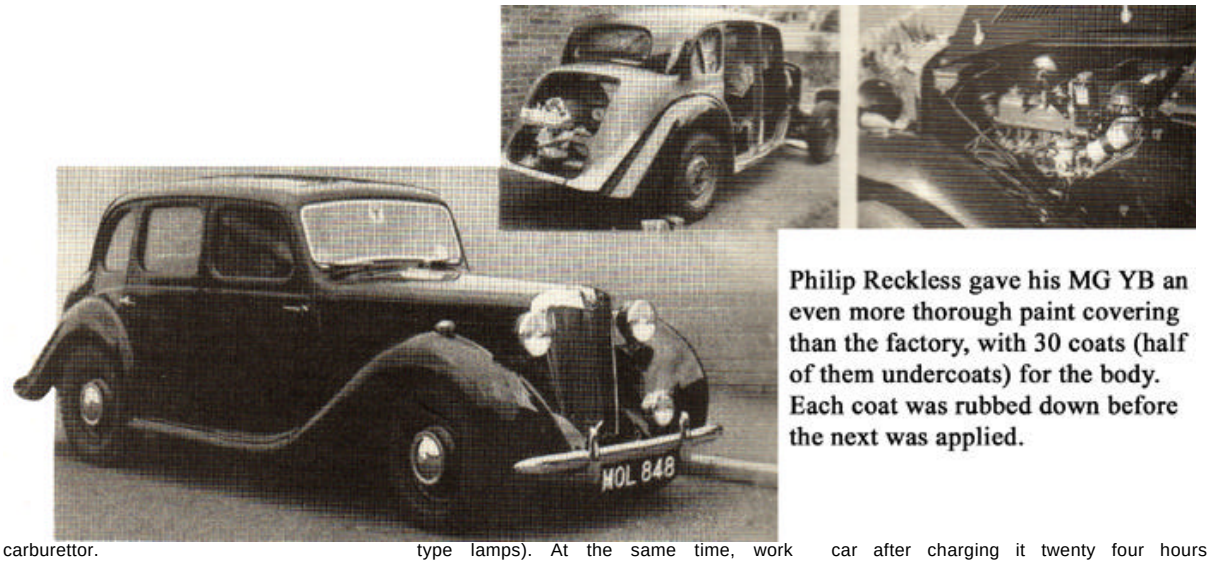
The boot lid required knocking into shape after welding and this was done before sanding down and painting. Badges and hinges had to wait until the paint had hardened. The same applied to the spare wheel cover, which needed welding and painting. The welding having been completed previously, the painting was easy as the panel is quite small. Then fitted number plate and 'D' lamps to the cover.

Once the electrical wires had been connected to the main loom at the back of the instrument panel I fitted the battery to the car after charging it twenty four hours previously. A friend stood by with a fire extinguisher prior to starting the car for the first time since I commenced the restoration. I turned the key and pulled the starter with the choke pulled out halfway and it fired first time. Unfortunately, it didn't run like previously but was mis-firing. The plugs were changed and this made all the difference — needless to say my friend didn't require the fire extinguisher!

My road tax duty was duly paid and I ran 'Molly', as she is affectionately christened out onto the road, 22 months after starting the restoration.

To sum up, I can now say that was anxious to start the rebuild as I had not tackled one before, but had mechanical experience. My frame of mind was that the restoration was to be done properly, meticulously, job by job and stage by stage. I was highly enthusiastic but, as time progressed, after the first year, things got frustrating either from the lack of available parts or finding that I had not ordered parts in time to complete a particular job.

On the whole I found it a rewarding experience. One reason that kept me going was a sense of duty to the builders of this fine car and it has made me an enthusiastic MG owner.



Philip Reckless gave his MG YB an even more thorough paint covering than the factory, with 30 coats (half of them undercoats) for the body. Each coat was rubbed down before the next was applied.

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