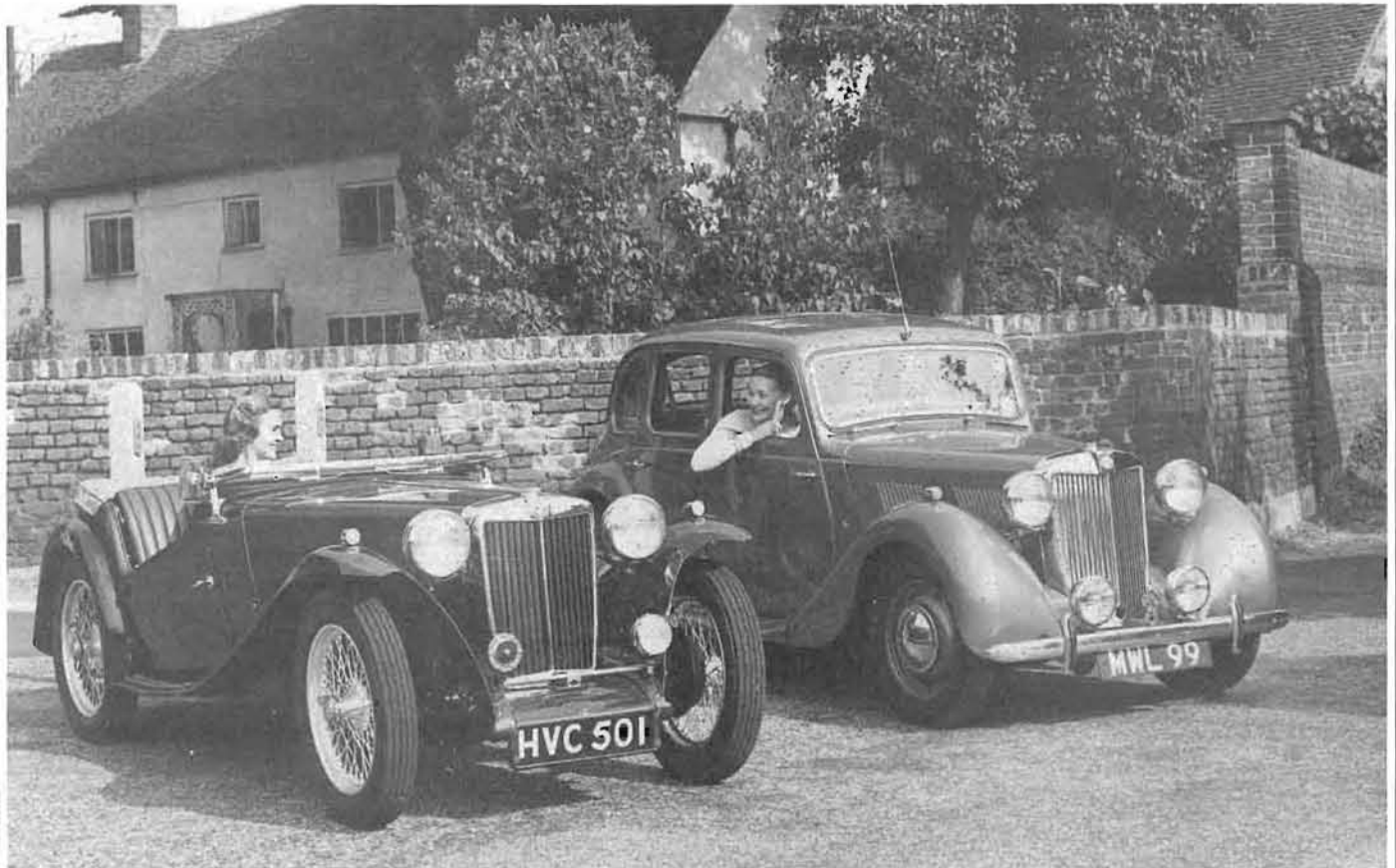


ABINGDON'S FOUR-DO

A confusion of modernity and obsolescence made the MGY...



by Brian Woodward

Even though the great effort of World War Two had stretched engineering imagination to its limit, "hurry" was an unknown word in the British industrial Midlands. To hurry a car, most British engineers thought, was like serving a nubile maiden with nine horny studs in the hope of a child within 30 days — it couldn't be done.

The failure of the British car industry, and the sports car in particular, can be traced directly to the dark post-war days. A mixture of too little capital, highly restrictive engine-size legislation on the home market and design offices unable to get their collective fingers out, meant that post-war cars lacked imagination. Dreary old rehashes of the thirty-niners left a car-hungry world with wheels and very little fun.

The MGY was released in the UK at the start of 1949 and it could have been a great motor car but for its engine.

Imagine a car with the sophisticated suspension of a Golf or Alfasud with a body as classy as, say a Mog. A good thing, you'd say. But consider this ideal car

with a Ford Anglia engine and you have an approximate equivalent to the Y when it was released. The suspension and chassis were beautifully integrated, the brakes were perhaps the best in the UK at the time, the body, stylish, was definitely MG and had all the features made a modern car. Yet this stroke of genius was powered by an engine that had been hamstrung for years by half-witted legislation (laws which gave rise to meaningless figures like RAC horsepower and encouraged the production of engines with bore-and-stroke ratios that would frighten a tractor engine designer).

In spite of its totally unbalanced nature, the MGY sold because youth, aged by war and encumbered by war brides and their progeny, could capture something of its innocent past, and still carry the kids.

In 1939 MG flew in the face of legislation (which tried to force cars to have a bore of 10 mm and a stroke of 1.6 metres) by actually reducing engine capacity from 1.292 litres to 1.250 litres. The stroke was decreased and the bore increased, probably so the engine would rev a little harder and the cheaper

DR ENIGMA



Jim Bowman's Y (R. Goldberg photo)

overhead valve system could work correctly. The new model was called the TB, which had nothing to do with a popular illness of the time, and pre-dated the Hitler conflict by a few short months. When the war started, TB production stopped until 1945 when the same vehicle, with minor cosmetic changes, was introduced as the TC. Even though the 1.25 litre engine had been bored and de-stroked in 1939, it was still undersquare at 66.5 x 90 mm. On a clear day the TC engine would run to 5200 rpm when it would generate some 40.6 kW (54.4 bhp).

In its single carburettor form for the Y model, the engine lost 6.3 kW (8.4 bhp) and some torque, but the maximum rev limit also fell to 4800. Compression ratio was mild at 7.2, but fuel was mild too. Although a different cam was fitted to the Y, it is hard to find details of the differences. Contemporary accounts of the Y shows almost identical specifications, but no mention is made of valve lift or cam profile. This must be where the secret was because the Y didn't perform well with the TC cam; it was even more breathless.

The chassis of the Y was developed for a new sports car. Sales in the US (and Australia) probably exceeded the MG Company's wildest dreams, so the TC was left to sell and it was three years after the Y before the TD appeared. The Y is a TD with four seats. The TD is a Y three years late. Double, unequal wishbones were revolutionary in the UK in the winter of 1947, so the Y was hailed as sort of revolutionary. Like Che with a pinstripe suit. To the purist it was more like Idi with an education. The front end was too damn good by half. It rode well, handled well and was strong enough to last forever. King pins, the bane of week-kneed TCs for many years, were duplicated top and bottom on the Y with an unusual system that gave the rigidity and acute feel of a king-pin car (not the sloppy vague system now used with rubber bushed ball-joints). The king pins were about 200 mm (8 in.) apart for extreme strength. This also reduced the load taken by the individual bushes in the pins and reduced wear.

Rack and pinion steering was used. Coupled to the unequal length arms, this made for a most civilised



front end. No wonder the purists, who generally ignored the sedan MGs, later called the TD a "pansy wagon".

The only problem that ever occurred, was occasional wear in the shock absorber bushes. The dreadful lever-arm shocks formed the pivot at the chassis end for the upper arm. Long may the man who designed lever-arm shocks receive the abuse he deserves.

Rear suspension was odd when you hung your head underneath for the first time. The rear axle was mounted over the chassis to keep the centre of gravity as low as possible. The front was held low by arm angles, the rear by keeping the bulk low to the ground. Surprisingly this didn't reduce rear ground clearance to a ridiculous level.

The body on the Y was expensive to make, but it had all the features we can't have now because cars are too cheap. Front opening doors and plenty of window area (the pillars may be a bit thick by today's standards) with genuine wood for the dash and as capping on the door trim. There were plenty of ashtrays and a dip-stick for the gearbox oil level and a

front opening windscreen for colonial summers. The seats were thin but better than the Melbourne tram seats in the wonder-boy 'Olden released here a year later. Carpet, leather and instruments — it was an MG all right, but with all those doors and windows?

The boot lid opened down so the boot area could hold little loads easily, take up very little room when empty and could be used as the deck for large loads. The lid had protective strips and straps to hold your luggage in place for quick junkets to Nice or Cannes

The lack of planning and inability to change age-old production techniques gave the MG — and particularly the Y — a body the envy of everyone on the beach. It was no 97-pound weakling either, at 19.5 cwt registered.

What went wrong? The Y was a good car with a dreadful engine forced on it by brainless legislation. Today we have bad cars with fairly good engines forced on us by legislation. Some things don't change, but the cars of today will never have the charm and charisma for the next generation of oldies. (*Sports Car World Quarterly*, August 1977)