



THE MG 'ONE AND A QUARTER LITRE' Y SERIES 60TH BIRTHDAY

Illustrations from the original Y Type Sales literature.

The MG 'Y Series' is sixty years old this year. Both it, and I, arrived in March 1947 though I was three weeks earlier so therefore older. But the Y Type began its gestation some nine years earlier in about 1938 on the drawing board of the Morris Motors design office. Unlike the vast majority of earlier MGs this model was to be a Nuffield design. This followed the introduction of two much larger MG saloons in the SWW ranges. The first Y Type was to be the MG Ten, this referred to the then horsepower rating of the engines for tax purposes, and it also sported a solid beam front axle mounted on leaf springs. By early 1939 the smallest MG saloon had gained independent front suspension and rack and pinion steering. Some very famous names in the motor industry had been involved in its development, such as Gerald Palmer who later designed the MG Series, the big Wolseley 6/90 and the Riley Pathfinder,

having earlier produced the Jowett Javelin. Alex Issigonis was involved with the Y's suspension. Alas, the situation in Europe deteriorated into a World War and the 1939 London Motor Show did not take place, so the 'new' MG Ten was not put on the market. That is, not until March 1947.

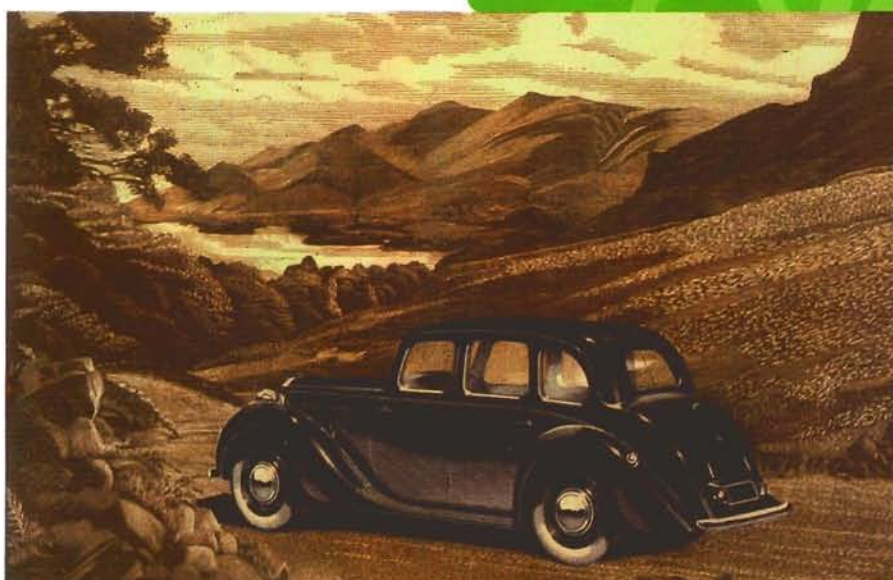
The little sports saloon is a very interesting little car, cloaked in a late 1930s skin. The styling did not help its sales in late 1940 and into 1950. What was up to date in 1939 was very, very old fashioned by 1950. So the Y Type never enjoyed big sales. It was a very nice and well-appointed car for its time. The body of the car was a straight 'lift' of the 1938 Morris Eight Series 'E'. The engine, gearbox, brakes and rear axle came from the Morris Ten series 'M'. But although the Morris Eight Series 'E' was a chassisless monocoque, the Y Type was endowed with a very stiff and strong 'underslung' chassis. The term 'underslung'

simply means that to keep the cars height down, the chassis goes underneath the rear axle. Even today a Y Type parked amongst very modern cars is hard to find, as its roofline is very low. Its small size is also shown by the massive proportions of modern cars.

The engine was one of the best Morris Engines ever made. It was used in various sizes in Nuffield and BMC cars from 1938 until 1956 (Morris Ten series 'M' to Wolseley 4/44). MG first used their version of the engine, strengthened and bored out to 1250cc, in the 1939 TB Midget. In its Morris form it was a tiny 1140cc, but it had a counter-balanced, forged steel crankshaft fitted with modern shell bearings. The stroke was the smaller Morris 90mm giving safer higher rpm than the staid 102mm stroke of the majority of the Nuffield units then in use. This 102mm dated back to the vintage Morris Bull Nose Cowley and

Oxford ranges. With its overhead valves, good head porting and shorter stroke it proved to be a winner, not just in sales but also in many MGs used for sport. It was this 1250cc XPAG engine that went into the MG YA, giving the car a 70mph top speed with good acceleration and excellent economy, for the time. I can remember getting into fights in the Junior school for boasting that my father's Daimler could cruise at 50mph, few believed me. At a time when asthmatic side valve Ford Populars and equally decrepit sv Hillman Minxes were hard pushed to get up to 50mph, my boast was very brave. Not many boys had fathers who owned cars then, so an MG saloon that could cruise along our awful winding 1950s British roads at 50mph was indeed fast. (When the ZA arrived in 1953, it was one of the fastest 1500cc production cars with its 85mph top speed.) Today, the Y Type's performance is very pedestrian indeed, running at 50mph on the motorway network can be dangerous, with virtually everyone else doing over 80mph in our 70mph limits! But on the A and B roads that are now becoming so grid-locked, the Y Type can easily keep up with the flow.

Inside the saloon of the car there can be found all those really British trimmings: the seats are leather, the headlining of Bedford cloth, the dash and door window frames are of polished and varnished walnut wood, the carpets were of wool. Remember cars of this age often have wooden floors. The faces of some of today's public have to be seen when I tell and show them, the wooden floorboards of my YB. But the Y Type is not coach built; the wooden interior trim is just that, trim screwed to the pressed steel frames. The windscreen can be opened, meaning that under modern motoring laws windscreen washers are not required. The wipers can be operated either driver's side only, or both sides. There is an opening sun roof, identical to the Morris Series 'E', as is the windscreen. The front doors open on their rear edge; both rear and front door hinges are mounted on the 'B' post. The doors are very narrow compared to a modern car and the interior is narrow. The front doors are called 'suicide doors' because in days of old, if one were to open them on the move, the wind would rip the door out of your hand and probably you out of the car. But they do have proper door latches that close with a solid clunk! There is a rear window blind, to give privacy and to reduce glare from following cars who do not dip



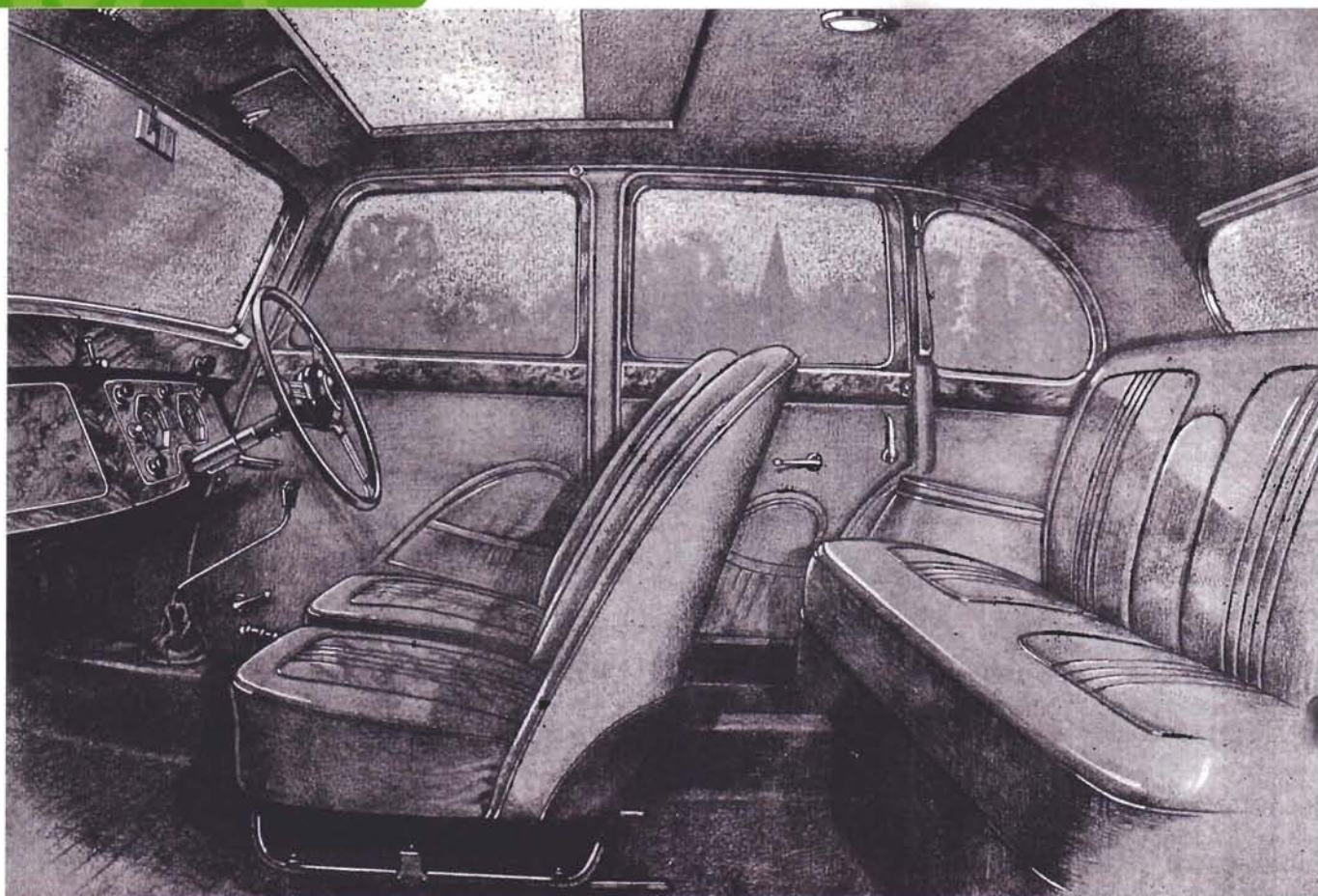
their headlights at night. There is an interior light, mounted above the rear seat but operated from a switch in the roof above the driver. The front seats are mounted on runners and with the steering wheel being adjustable as well, it is easy to get into a comfortable driving position. A floor mounted dipswitch operates the headlamps. The dashboard has what appear to be octagonal instruments. But underneath the wooden dash are mounted normal 'round' Morris Ten instruments, it is the holes in the dash that are 'octagonal'. The speedometer has a 12 hour clock in its face. There are gauges for oil pressure, fuel contents, ammeter, speedometer, trip-meter and odometer; the one missing is a water temperature gauge, they were never fitted. The gearbox even has a reversing light switch. For its time the interior was very luxurious, walnut cappings, sun visors, rear seat central armrest, glove box, ashtrays front and rear and triplex toughened glass completed the layout.

The handbrake is very efficient and can lock both rear wheels easily. Unlike the sports MGs it has a normal ratchet, ie you have to press the button to release it, not lock it 'on'. There is no free play in the steering at all, the rack and pinion system sees to that. The car is a delight to drive, as it is so responsive, with excellent steering and ifs that is not beaten by many modern cars. Only the rear suspension gives away its ancient leaf springs and heavy axle. To drive a sit-up-and-beg Ford Popular of 1950, then drive a 1950 YA would be like swapping a horse and cart for a spaceship.

Built into the car is a jacking system, made by Smith Industries by 'Jackall' (and also owned by Lord Nuffield, as was the MGs carburetter firm 'SU'). The car can be jacked up either front or rear, or both ends at once, from a pump mounted by the battery box on the left hand side under the bonnet. Many MoT assessors assume the oil reservoir for the Jackall system is the brake fluid reservoir, and that the quarter"



Y TYPE



diameter copper pipes it uses are the brake pipes. It is only when they arrive at a funny looking vertical tube thing bolted to the rear axle, or front chassis that they find out their error. The idea that you could change a wheel without getting dirty; after all the intended clientele for the car were the better off middle-classes.

Like all cars of its day, the Y Type carries a starting handle. The art of starting an engine by hand has almost been lost today. Few

know how to hold the handle in such a fashion that should the engine 'kick-back', the handle will not break your thumb (Keep the fingers and thumb together, not with the thumb opposing your fingers around the handle, that way the handle just jumps out of your hand without damage). Starting the car today causes confusion amongst the uninitiated. The ignition key only works the ignition. There is a separate pull-button to operate the starter and a choke to enrich the

carburettor mixture. All these things are done automatically by the ECU (engine control unit) in a modern car; today no one has to think that it is frosty, I need to pull the choke out to start my cold engine, anymore. Quite a few old MG ignition keys have been broken off by someone trying to twist it further round to operate the starter. If you look carefully in many old MGs, you will see an old wooden clothes peg hidden somewhere. It is there to 'lock out' the choke knob by clipping it behind it during a cold start (the friction clamp wore out years ago).

The nine inch diameter drum brakes of the YA were good, but the better twin-leading-shoe brakes of the YB were even better. Morris/MG used hydraulic brakes when many were still using cables. We have the Morris MO series to thank for them, and the fact MG pinched them to use on the 1949 TD; the YB's better rear axle came from the same cars. The Morris sourced spiral-bevel axle used on the YA, (from the TC) had a bad name for weak half-shafts. The 'Nuffield' hypoid rear axle from the MO Oxford was much stronger that went into the YB. The 'YB' was simply a YA fitted with the more modern brakes, electrics, smaller wheels, better oil filter and bigger clutch all from the TD.

The 34 foot turning circle of the Y Series is excellent for a car with an eight foot, three

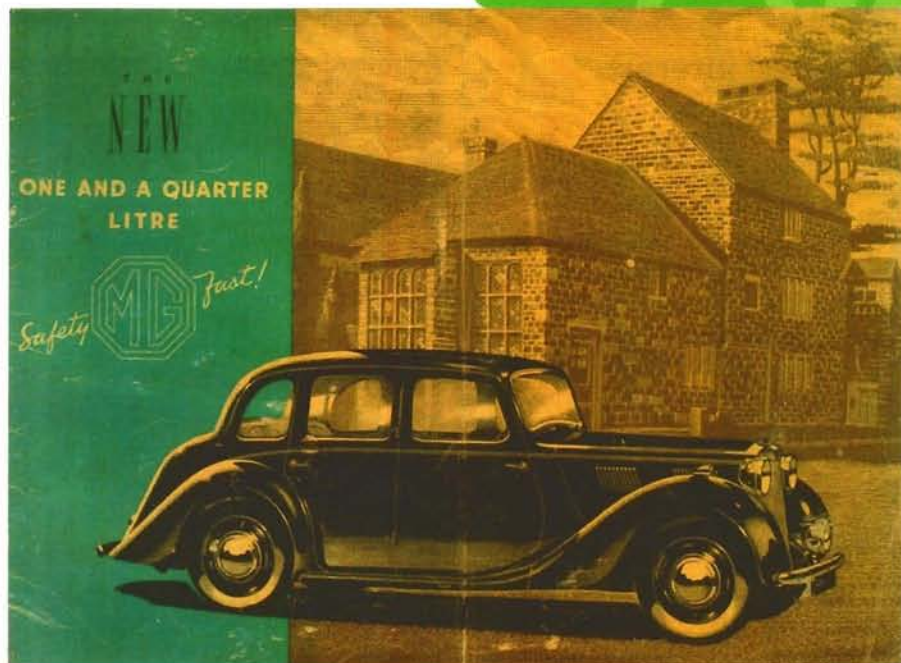
2 he style, dignity and grace of this new Saloon are manifest to a casual observer. Its roominess, comfort, riding and equipment are impressive. In road behaviour and performance, the "One and a Quarter" Saloon is really outstanding. Perfect traffic manners; an unusual capacity to cover long or short journeys at high averages; acceleration and superb braking power, justify the slogan "Safety Fast!"

The "One and a Quarter" Litre Saloon is proudly offered to discriminating motorists—built to the high standard, . . . it "Maintains the Breed".

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inch wheelbase. Very few modern front-wheel drive cars can beat it. The boot is today, tiny. But there are brackets fitted to the strong boot lid for leather straps. The boot lid can be folded down level and items strapped to it. The rear lights and number plate are mounted underneath, so are still visible from behind. As the lid folds down level, it is an ideal picnic table. The spare wheel, tools, etc. are kept in a locker underneath the boot, opened with a carriage key kept in a loop on the front passengers side panel. No Y Type was ever made with rear reflectors. The law that insisted upon fitting rear reflectors came out two years after the last Y was made. Which is why they all have different types of rear reflectors! The same reason goes for the interior mirror not having a frame, that law came out ages afterwards. And no Y Type had seat belts fitted, doing so requires some clever engineering work as wooden floors and the 'B' post are not strong enough.

Where the Y Type scores today is its elegant outline. Its styling today looks just right, the Morris Eight body is very well disguised with the long, low bonnet, the upright chromed radiator grill and the boot bustle and flare behind. The front wings flow into the body sides and then the rear wings kick up and flow out by the boot. The radiator cap is real, under it there is hot water, but not pressurised as on modern cars. For this reason the 'hot water' evaporates so requires regular checking for its level; a sealed system does not evaporate. Upon entering the car there is that unmistakable smell of old leather all old cars have. On a poor example there will be the smell of rotting carpets, usually because the windscreen and the sunroof leak. One has to clear out the sunroof drains often as bits of tree soon block them. The seating is very comfortable, if a little



'close' for the larger person. A big person may find difficulty in getting into a rear seat due to the narrow rear doors. With four big people in the car, the performance suffers a bit, the 46 brake horsepower will complain of having to work extra hard.

The Y Types sales were hoping of improvement when MG introduced their YT, an open four-seater version. It was a flop, no one wanted a 1930s open car in 1948. Like the TF the car was ignored, but both now fetch huge sums because of their rarity. The YB arrived in late 1951, but faded away in early 1953 to be replaced with the Italianate Z Series that used Austin running gear. The Y did not totally disappear though, as all its mechanics went into the 1952 Wolseley 4/44 (slightly modified) and that car only finished in 1956 (funny how often one reads that the 1250cc XPAG ended with the last TF in 1955, when 30,000 4/44s used it as well). The film 'Genevieve' was made in the year the Y Series ended, 1953. The star of

that film was only in its thirties, half the age the Y Series now is.

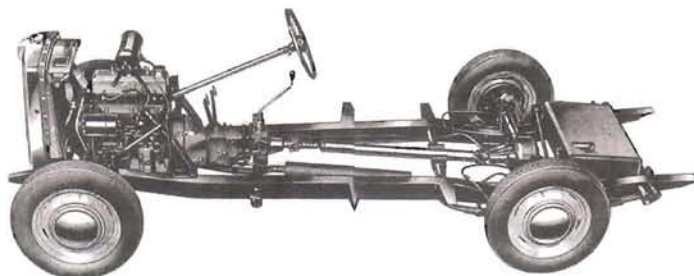
2007 is the 60th Anniversary of the Y Series, as it is mine. I am slowing down and falling to bits, but the Y Type seems to still be a very sound investment and many can still do 70mph. To finish I will quote from the literature MG issued for sales staff:

"There is more than tradition behind the marque of MG, and in presenting this entirely new concept of an MG car, the outstanding characteristics of its predecessors have been faithfully maintained. The "One and a Quarter Litre MG Saloon" has been developed and produced in the 'atmosphere' peculiar to the marque, but with a firm purpose in view. That goal has been achieved by the provision of a car with the utmost luxury per horse power- a new standard perhaps- yet economical to acquire and own."

The Y Type for its day perpetuated the slogan SAFETY FAST.

Neil Cairns

1. Extremely rigid chassis employing fully boxed side members electrically welded throughout.
2. Turbogrip, positive, direct acting rack and pinion steering with adjustable wheel position.
3. Independent wishbone type coil spring front suspension.
4. Unusually long laminated rubber insulated rear springs.
5. Lockhead hydraulic brakes operate on large area drums-a "Safety Fast" feature.
6. Integral jacking jacks operated from rear side of engine.



7. 12 Volt Electrical System with lavish equipment and full set of duct panel instruments.
8. Large capacity petrol tank.
9. Latest model piston type hydraulic dampers all round.
10. Facets on all doors; large easy glove box with door, in face panel.
11. Ample proportioned locker with extra accommodation for luggage on hinged lockable lid.
12. Large impact pump-easy access oil filter.

Details of the One and a Quarter Litre



The arrangement of the independent front wheel suspension is simple, sturdy and mechanically light efficient.

The control lever for the lockhead hydraulic brakes is mounted in the foot rest area, eliminating the foot pressure.



Note the grouping of the 12 volt electrical system (Instruments Panel) under the driver's eye.

The unusually generous access to the oil filter is a "grab-tilt" feature.

