



# The DNA of a 'MG Y Type'

With the success in the 1930s of the venture into big luxury saloons, MG found they required a smaller model to complete their range. This was in the late 1930s and firms like SS with the SS90 and SS100 were selling well. SS then began building big, fast saloons and later became Jaguar. Like many very good-looking cars SS used some very ordinary mechanics underneath the posh-looking body. In this case it was an overhead-valve conversion by Weslake of a Standard six-cylinder side-valve engine on Standard's running gear; a sheep in a wolf's clothing built on a chassis then shared with AC Cars. Then, when SS produced their really good-looking big saloons, MG was convinced there was money to be made. So the chassis and engines from the big cars in the Wolseley range were re-styled and produced as MG Sports Tourers. These were the SA and WA, with the VA in the mid-12–14hp range.

The final model was to be the MG Ten. Like SS, MG had to use parts already in production to keep costs down. In the case of MG they had all of the Nuffield Empire components to root about in. As the little open sports cars, for which MG was legendary, were based on the Morris/Wolseley Ten, so the MG Ten would follow suit. Like the SS90 and SS100 the new chassis developed for the car was to be underslung at the rear. This was very popular amongst sports saloons of the day as it meant the car could be built very low. Even today, over 70 years after the prototype MG Ten was shown, a MG Y Type is hard to see in any car park as its roof-line is below the hoi-polloi. This low-build was supposed to indicate a low centre of gravity, hence better road holding and drivability. Being a business that is required to make a profit for its shareholders, it is surprising that the Y Type got a brand-new chassis and did not use something already

in production. Today, the MG would have been grafted onto the monocoque structure of the humble Morris Ten Series 'M'. If you study the photo of a late post-war Series 'M' you can see the family likeness and it would not have been difficult to fit the flowing front and rear wings and the MG radiator grill. That really would have made history, as the Y Type would not only have been the first production MG with independent front suspension and rack and pinion steering, it could have been the first monocoque (chassis-less) MG as well.

The front suspension initially designed for the MG Ten was straight from the Morris Ten, a solid beam axle, leaf springs and complete with worm-and-peg steering box and built-in anti-roll bar from the pen of Gerald Palmer. The new TA/TB used similar components after all. But the body shell chosen for the MG Ten was that of the Morris Eight Series 'E', a much smaller shell than the Series 'M'. Perhaps because the MG was to have a heavy chassis the designer, Syd Enever, was trying to save weight by using a smaller, hence lighter, body? This meant the prototype in fact had the slightly narrower leaf-sprung front axle of the Series 'E' and not the 'M'. It had been thought that the, then new, Series 'M' would have independent Isgonis/Palmer front suspension, but the unit cost was too high even though Vauxhall had

fitted a torsion-bar system to their Ten. The actual MG Ten that was meant to go into production in 1939 did indeed adopt the independent front suspension (IFS) that was once meant for the humble Series 'M'. Allied with rack and pinion steering the IFS Y Type had superb road holding and very accurate steering. So good was it that, along with the chassis, MG soon used the same system on the TD sports car (and the MGA, then MGB right up until the RV8).

Overhead valve designs for mass-produced engines were just getting into gear prior to WW2. Again Vauxhall was well ahead in the field here and MG via Morris was able to follow close behind. The 'X' series of Morris engines were efficient, little, redesigned conversions from their earlier and staid side-valve units. The 1140cc Series 'M' Ten engine was a really good strong unit and bored out to 1250cc found its way into the TB and the new MG Ten. It is very difficult today to realise just how fast the Y Type was when it first appeared as the MG Ten in 1939. With 46bhp moving just over 20cwt the car was about the most powerful in its market for its engine size. A claimed top speed of 75mph was advertiser's poetic licence. As the much lighter and less drag-prone TD was also supposed to reach 75mph as well, allowing for the lower gearing, extra weight and poor aerodynamics a Y



Wolseley XPAW engine



A Cream MG Y Type



Morris Ten 'M'

Type might get up to an indicated 70mph on a good day. But back then the average 10hp family saloon was pushed to do over 60mph, some might get up to 65 on a good day. Quite a few cheap 8hp cars could just make 55mph. The Morris Eight Series 'E' with its 23bhp from 916cc was road tested to 57mph. The Morris Ten Series 'M' reached 66mph from its 1140cc and 39bhp. One road tester did get a Y Type up to 75mph in one direction, but when the 'average' speed taken from both directions was computed, it was 71mph. It was not unknown in those days for a car supplied to a motoring magazine to be slightly 'breathed on' and carefully prepared. Likewise, testers did not want to slate products whose manufacturer placed advertising revenue in their magazine.

So the MG Y Type has standard Morris running gear shared with the bread and butter 8hp and 10hp models of both Morris and Wolseley. This is not really surprising as this certainly kept down the development and production costs and it made spares supply easier for the franchised garage. The use of the Morris Eight body tub had been well disguised by extending the front and rear of the car. A Wolseley Ten/40 also

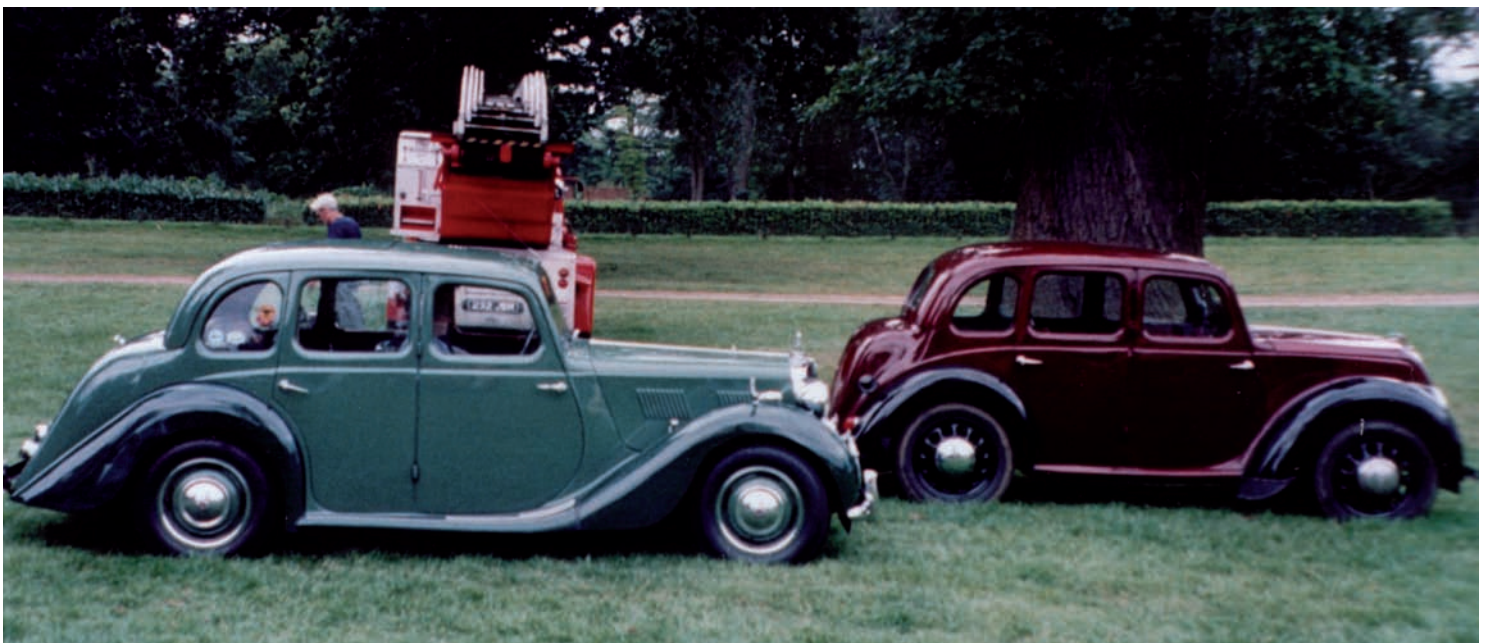
used the Series 'E' body, but it just had a Wolseley radiator grill grafted on (and oddly this was mounted upon a heavy cruciform chassis!). Study the photo of a YB parked alongside a Series 'E' and note how much more elegant the MG looks. Even though they do look very similar, anyone trying to fit a Series 'E' rear door to a Y Type will find the door's rear edge is too deep. The Series 'E' was almost a monocoque (chassis-less construction), the pressed steel body was all spot-welded and bolted to a pair of full-length floor-runners inboard of each sill. This gave the structure great strength with lightness, so having a Y body bolted to a very stiff chassis gave the little MG a very strong structure indeed. Today we humans are built a bit larger than our forebears were in the 1930s so sitting in a tiny 8hp body now means shoulders will touch. Perhaps using the wider Series 'M' body might have been a better bet had they known the cars would still be around in 2010?

The Morris Eight and Ten disappeared from the market, being replaced by one model, the 1948 Morris Minor Series MM (with the 918cc side valve engine from the Series 'E' plus a water pump) later called the Morris 1000 in 1956. This is one year after our Y Type 'arrived', being delayed by WW2 and the need to get TC Midgets exported to the USA to earn those all-important dollars. Because the Y Type was so late entering its desired market, other manufacturers had had time to restyle their cars and even bring out newer ones. These cars were post-war products and reflected the American influence in their styling, which was vaguely streamlined if

rather slab-sided. Many also now had ohv engines fitted and all this left the little MG looking very 'traditional 1930s' indeed. Its sales started off well enough but soon tailed off when full-width 'modern' styles arrived with much more interior room. It mattered not that the Y was very up-to-date under its skin.

Arriving in 1947 and then updated in 1951, by 1953 Y Type sales were very low indeed. The YA sold over 6,000 in five years but the YB only sold 1,300 cars in two years, not exactly a money-making product for the investment made. The open Tourer YT version never reached four figures. In comparison the MG 'Sports Saloon' that followed the Y Series, the Z Series, sales topped 36,000 in six years; the later FWD 1100/1300 MG range sold well over 157,000. Oddly there are more MG Y saloons about today in 2010 than there are MG 1100/1300 cars. This says a lot for each car's build quality and type of owner, not to mention the speed at which some cars rusted away back then.

Whereas it is accepted today that the ZA/ZB MG sports saloons replaced the Y Type, had history taken another turn things would have been very different. Had Austin and Morris not merged in 1953 into the huge BMC monolith, then the Y Type's DNA would have carried on for some while. The car that was supposed to enter the market in 1952 as a replacement for the Y was sold as a Wolseley instead. To keep costs down the Wolseley 4/44 used virtually all the running systems of the YB but mounted into a fully welded, steel monocoque and streamlined body shell. Because the option suddenly opened



YB and Series E

up for the 'new' MG to have a 1500cc 'Austin' engine that was new and capable of further development, the 1489cc BMC 'B' series along with the BMC gearbox and banjo rear axle, the introduction of the MG version of the Wolseley 4/44 was delayed.

Had BMC not been formed, the 4/44 was to have the old SC/2 YB 1250cc, single carburettor XPAG engine and the MG 'Z' possibly the more powerful 1466cc MG TF, XPEG twin-carburettor version. The 4/44 had a nice 'soft' 44bhp engine, the MG Z was to have the sportier 68bhp TF unit; an over 50% increase in power. But the XPAG/XPEG engine was at the end of its development, it had begun as a little 1140cc engine back in 1938 some 13 years earlier. The new B Series engine began as a 1200/1489cc unit growing through 1588, 1622cc, 1789cc and up to 1998cc in the automatic gearbox version of the Morris Marina by 1977. Study the photo of the under-bonnet area of a Wolseley 4/44. Apart from an oil-bath air-filter with a different cast aluminium intake, it looks identical to the YB unit. Do not be fooled though, as the sump of the 4/44 is very different to the MGs as a chassis beam runs directly beneath it. The oil dip-stick is also on the opposite side of the cylinder block. But the 4/44 production topped 30,000 cars sold even though its weight meant a pedestrian performance. Its interior was very well appointed after the Gentleman's Club manner. Perhaps it should have been the MG YC? Alas, the 4/44-15/50-ZA-ZB range were renown for their ability to rot out their floors in a very short time. With the huge amounts of salt thrown onto our frost, ice and snow-covered winter roads in the 1950s, very many went to scrap yards early with excellent mechanics. This led to the 4/44 joining the Y Type as engine

donors to TC and TD Midgets in the 1960s and '70s, further reducing numbers.

So did the Y Type have any effect on the MG story? Well, though it was not exactly a roaring success in production numbers, it was a very important milestone in the design of MGs. It was the first MG to have a fully boxed-in, lightweight, steel ladder-chassis. The steel thickness is only 14swg. Prior to this the majority of smaller MGs had chassis that were meant to flex. As already mentioned, it was not long before a version of this excellent chassis found itself under the TD and TF. The design of the Y was done entirely by the Morris Drawing Office, virtually no MG input was given, we are told. But just look at that elegant shape, no one can tell me that Cecil Kimber with his natural styling flair did not visit that office and 'offer a helping hand'.

The engine was the XPAG which had been developed for the TB, though in the Y it sported only a single carburettor. It was the first production MG to be fitted with independent front suspension and rack and pinion steering. This is the car's major contribution to tens of thousands of future MG sports cars up until and including the MG RV8. The TD used it, as did the TF. The MGA and MGB used a modified version of it all, study the picture of what at first appears to be that of a YB, but the disc brake reveals it is in fact that of a MGA. The steering rack went into Morris MO saloons, Wolseley 4/44, 15/50, the MG ZA and ZB, scaled down it was fitted to every Morris Series MM, Series 2, 1000 and the Wolseley 1500 and Riley 1.5 derivatives. In fact the rack was used on millions of Nuffield/BMC cars. It was the simplicity of that steering rack that permitted the open topped YT to be made in left-hand-drive, the first ever production LHD MG. Because the YT was being made in LHD, it was an easy matter to then produce the TD as a LHD car. Alas, even today, you will hear T Type owners claiming the TD was the first MG to be built with left-hand-drive even though the YT beat it by a year.

Another MG was also seen as rather outdated in its styling in 1952. The MG TF sports car did not sell too well as it was up against the air-smooth styles of the Triumph TR and Austin Healey models. The TF looked too old-fashioned then, but today it is one of the most sought-after T Series and carries a price to match. After all, is it not really a two-seater, open-topped, twin carburettor version of a YB? (Under the skin I mean.) The four-seater version, for those new to the Y Type, is of course, the

rare YT, as shown in the photo.

The MGCC Y Register Registrar, Jack Murray, says that there are possibly 230 Y Types up-and-running on UK roads at present. An average price for a good roadworthy closed saloon car would be in the £6,000 to £7,000 range. Since it can cost between double to triple that figure to restore a Y Type, few people are going to make any profit trying to invest in one. But then the enthusiast does not count the cost, only the value of their enjoyment.

Footnote: Just as I finished writing the above article, Francis Smith emailed me with the following question,

Dear Neil,

You and I have met on the Spring Runs and I, together with my wife, Jan, will be on the coming Spring Run May 22/23 and hope to see you there.

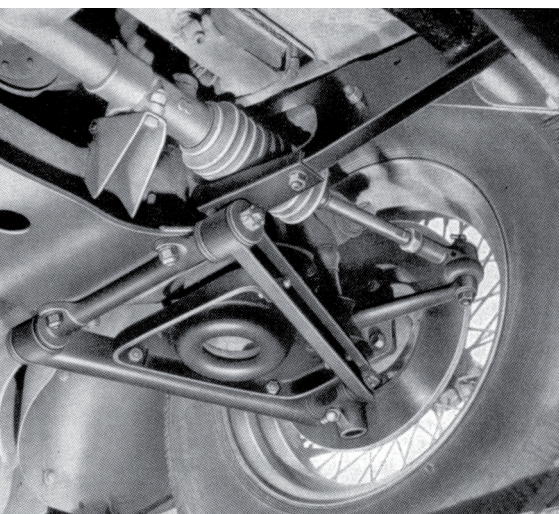
We have owned our much loved 1951 Y Type for eight years GJB576 number Y6658. I have devoured any printed matter re Y Types and am especially interested in Gerald Palmer having previously owned a Wolesley 4/44, a Jowett Javelin and also a Morris 8 Series E.

Re the Y Type, it is known that Alec Issigonis designed the independent front suspension and again and again it is written (Jonathon Wood, David Lawrence, David Pelham and John Lawson) that the Y Type body is derived from the Morris 8 Series, not designed by Gerald Palmer, but the rear swept wings and the bonnet together with the familiar MG Grille was designed by Gerald Palmer, meaning that the Y Type is the only car to have input from both Issigonis and Palmer.

The mystery to me is that in Gerald Palmer's autobiography, *Auto-Architect*, he writes with regard to the Y Type, "I did not, as has been suggested by other writers, design the body. This had been done in the Morris drawing office as an extension of Leslie Hall's design for the Morris Eight saloon". Palmer did say that he designed, as an alternative to the proposed IFS, a traditional front suspension with proprietary cam and lever steering, but due to the onset of the Second World War his design was never used. The rest, as they say, is history. Can you please clarify whether or not Gerald Palmer did indeed design part of the Y Type that eventually went into production?"

I was under the impression that Gerald Palmer was involved in the design of the 'MG Ten', does anyone know any different?

Neil Cairns



YB similarities