

Y-type

MG's Small Saloon at Sixty

Malcolm Green

As one ages anniversaries of one kind or another seem to come thick and fast and the desire to celebrate each and every one diminishes as the years pass. Nevertheless, one should mark the major occasions and anyone born in the same year as the launch of this month's featured model will soon qualify for a free bus pass, even though they may still prefer to travel in their MG. However, had the MG one-and-a-quarter litre sports saloon appeared in the Nuffield Group dealers' showrooms when originally planned, rather than in May 1947, we would soon be celebrating its seventieth anniversary, not sixtieth.

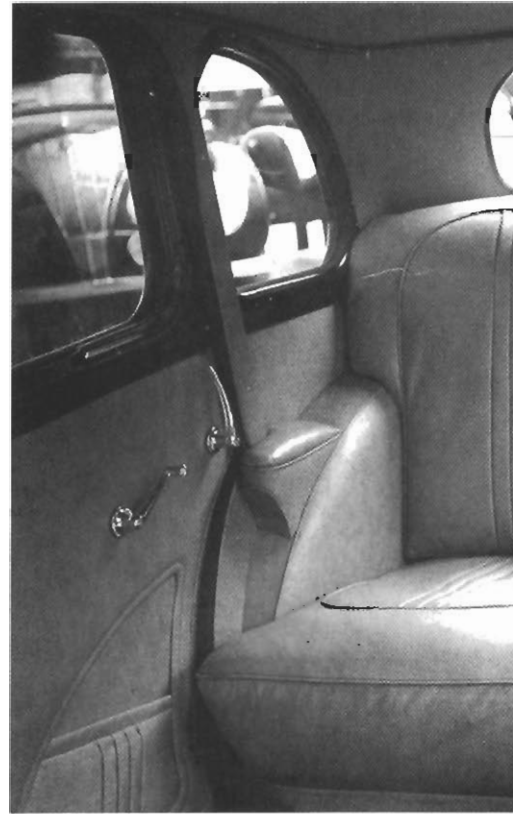
British sporting cars in the 1930s, both open and closed, used a simple chassis design that often relied on a degree of flexibility to ensure that stiffly suspended beam axles maintained some contact with the road. Damping was usually mechanical,

rather than hydraulic, and acted equally on both bump and rebound, further hardening the ride. This produced excellent road holding on smooth roads but rather less grip when the going was rough. Not surprisingly, the occupants put up with the hard ride as a trade off for a lack of roll and general precision of steering and roadholding.

Some designers in those pre-war years, especially on the continent, had different ideas and cars with a more sophisticated chassis design, such as the BMW 328, started to appear. They had realised that a more rigid chassis allied to softer springs and independent suspension, especially on the front wheels, was a better option. In 1935 with the R-type the MG Car Company had experimented with an all independent car, and had also designed a similarly sprung road car, but the sale of MG later that year by Lord Nuffield to the parent Nuffield Group killed that project



The original Y-type prototype, or MG Ten, at Cowley in 1939. It is just a mock up at this stage, with supporting blocks underneath, but the design was closely followed for production cars

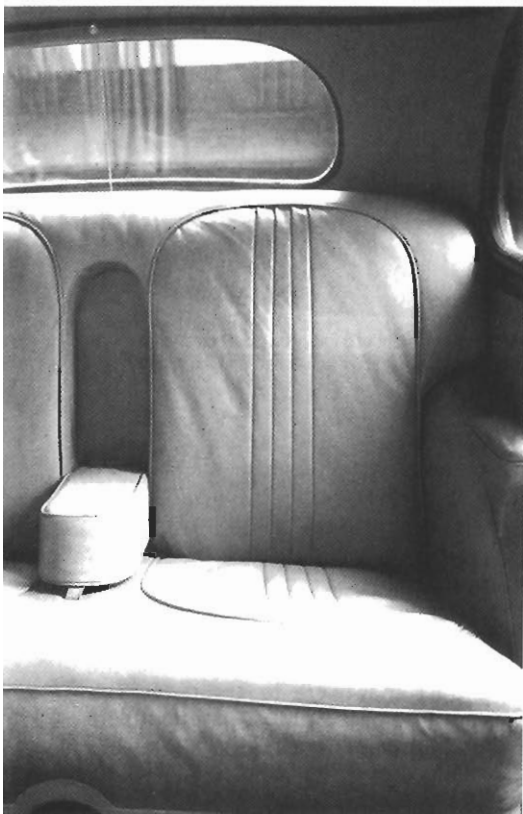


The interior of a pre-production car, although the cars sold to the public differed little

and future models were consigned to use more standard components sourced from within the Morris empire.

The tendency to start stiffening up the chassis was already established at Abingdon with the SVW range of cars. These models used hydraulic shock absorbers better able to cope with longer suspension travel but, because of the need to use components already in production, retained the beam axle front suspension. By 1938 work on a new smaller saloon car was already under way at Cowley where the talented Alec Issigonis and ex-MG man, Jack Daniels, had designed an independent front suspension layout for the Morris 10, which was not used on that car on the grounds of cost. A prototype of a new MG Ten saloon was built based around a new chassis with the Issigonis independent front suspension and fitted with the body from the Morris Eight and engine from the Morris Ten. It was this model that after the war was launched as the one-and-a-quarter litre, or Y-type, saloon.

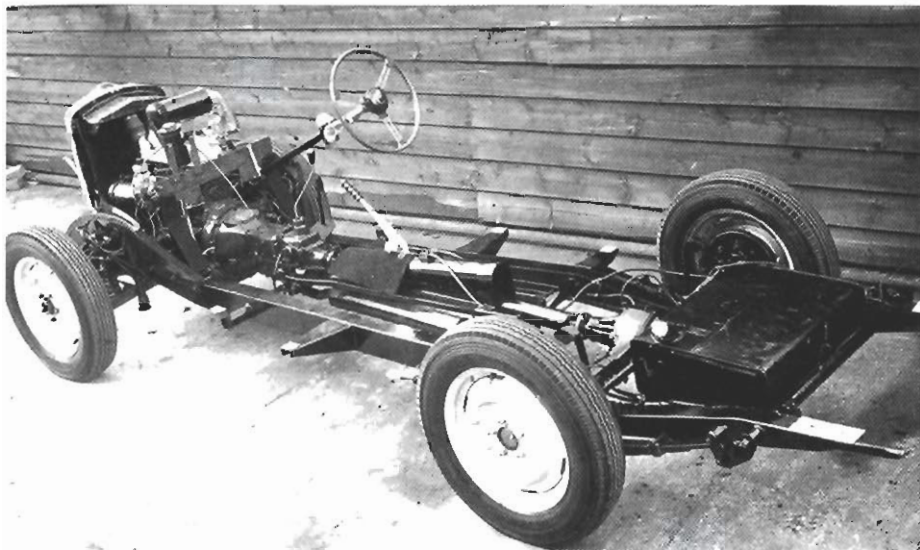
The Y-type chassis comprises welded, closed box section side rails and tubular cross members. At the back the side rails pass under the rear axle, which is suspended on leaf springs and has a Panhard rod to give lateral location. At the front a cross member houses coil springs and provides a mounting for the rack and pinion steering gear. The lower wishbones and the shock absorber arms provided the upper and lower mounting points for the swivel pin. This front suspension was an altogether neat and workmanlike arrangement that in modified form was to give service right up to the end of MGB production.



numbers built, the TC was starting to gain new friends for MG all around the world and this was to benefit the new Y-type when it appeared. The TC, however, was even then old technology. The simple chassis and rigid axles were still recognisably the same design as that used for MG's first purpose-built Midget chassis, which had appeared in 1931 when the C-type

compare this power to weight ratio to that of the average British saloon car of the period and one can see why one magazine reported of the new car that *it is lively, it is fast, but it is also genuinely quiet running, most comfortably suspended and light as a feather to drive.*

In addition to the chassis improvements, the Y-type was also more modern in its



The YA chassis showing the rear axle mounted above the side rails and the Panhard rod



A launch party for the dealers was held at the factory and rows of newly-completed cars were lined-up prior to their being driven back to the showrooms

As already mentioned, the body was closely based on the then current Morris Eight but the addition of a longer bonnet, flowing front wings and the Abingdon radiator give it a much improved appearance. A first for MG were the pressed steel wheels, rather than the wires fitted to previous models, but no doubt the average motorist at the time would have blessed the ease with which they could be kept clean.

By the time the car was launched in 1947 the TC Midget had been in production for a couple of years. Although reorganisation of the factory for the transfer from wartime to peacetime production, and a shortage of materials, had limited the

Montlhéry Midget was introduced. The Y-type was certainly the first of the more modern MGs.

The Y-type is powered by a single carburettor variant of the XPAG engine fitted to the TC. Developed pre-war from the 1,100cc Morris Ten unit for use in the short lived TB Midget, the engine earned a reputation for strength and reliability, as well as being able to stand a considerable degree of tuning to improve the power output for racing. Reversion to a single carburettor reduces the power output from 54.4bhp in twin carburettor form for the TC to just 46bhp for the Y-type. The saloon weighed over a ton so performance is adequate rather than sprightly. However,

bodywork construction. Previous MG saloons had been fitted with traditionally constructed wooden framed bodies clad in separate steel or aluminium panels. Although not following the most up to date practice of the time in using a unitary body/chassis unit, the car was of all-steel construction. As the basic structure was shared with a volume car, there were obvious economies that allowed this method of construction for what was in factory terms a model produced in small numbers. Even by the standards of 1947, the overall styling employed was still conservative, indeed the Morris Eight itself was soon to be replaced by the new and now familiar post-war, Issigonis-designed Morris Minor. The Y-type, however, satisfied those who favoured the traditional styling made popular by the pre-war MG models.

The main appeal of the Y-type, then and now, comes from both its upright 1930s styling and from the standard of trim and interior appointments. There is something very appealing about leather covered seats finished in the most tasteful of colours and polished walnut woodwork. Anyone brought up in a period when leather interiors were the rule rather than the exception, will recognise the smell inside any Y-type. That mixture of leather, wood varnish, warm Bakelite and musty carpets is very evocative of an earlier era. A dashboard layout that used octagonal surrounds for standard round instruments was an obvious attempt to give the car a definite identity, although the badges on the boot lid and on the traditional radiator certainly gave sufficient clues. The windscreen could be wound open on hot days and for the small



A publicity shot of the saloon taken outside Buckingham Palace - try stopping there now!



Placing a car in front of a fairly new up-market home perhaps was meant to show to what the owner of such a vehicle could aspire

dawn of a real boom in British car exports with much of the rest of the industrial world, outside of the U.S.A., still building up capacity after the destruction of the previous years. It was the time when British cars were exported in greater numbers than ever before and sold on all continents. Unfortunately, the quality of many of these was poor and not really suited to the conditions they were to encounter. This was not true of most MGs, although there were still some difficulties with quality, especially of electrical components, but the small Y-type saloon soon found friends around the world.

Although the Y-type was popular in many markets as a saloon car, the factory felt there was a demand for an open version which would give buyers rather more passenger room than was available in the strictly two-seater TC. Pre-war the company always offered four-seater open tourers, often as alternative bodywork on the same chassis used by the two-seater cars, and it was to satisfy some of the demand in this market sector that an open version of the Y-type was designed.

Handsome styling had



This car has been fitted with a number of popular extras. Twin windscreen heaters to supplement the poor de-misting available, a radio and twin spot lights

rear window a remotely operated blind was fitted to avoid dazzle at night from the lights of following cars. Inside the roof had twin sun visors and a central reading light, as well as a metal sliding sunroof.

Exterior paintwork was both traditional and attractive, with some cars being finished in two tone colour schemes where wings and running boards were painted in one of the other standard colours. When launched, the basic colours were: Black, Almond (light) Green, Shires (dark) Green, Autumn Red, Sequoia Cream and Grey. The duo-tone cars were usually supplied with the lighter colour for the body and darker for the wings.

As we have already intimated, motoring press received the car well. The initial announcements were followed up by full road tests where *The Autocar* reached

50mph in 16.9 seconds and 60mph in 28.2 whilst *The Motor* took 16.7 and 27.3 seconds to reach the same speeds. *The Motor* reached a top speed of 69mph and both magazines reported that around 60mph was available in third gear. Of course, petrol in 1947 was of poor quality and modern Y-type owners should easily manage to match these figures.

At Abingdon the production lines had started rolling, streams of fully painted bodies arrived daily on transporters and in time batches of completed cars were readied for delivery to their new owners around the world. By 1947 the Nuffield Export Organisation had recovered from the wartime interruptions and a dealer network was well established. This was the

THE MOTOR - May 4, 1947

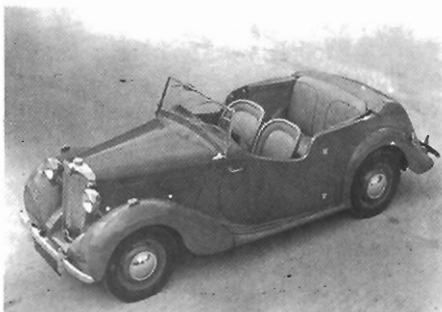
Three Thoroughbreds

These three P.E.C. cars—Pilot, One-and-a-Quarter Lite Saloon and Tourer—ride the road with mastery assurance. Good handling is built into their every line. In looks and performance they equal the high standard of comfort and road-worthiness that has been set by their fore-runners.

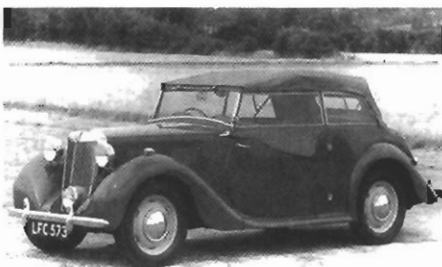
MG Safety first!

THE CAR COMPANY LTD., ABINGDON-ON-THAMES

Advert for TC, YA and Y-tourer



On overhead view of the YT tourer



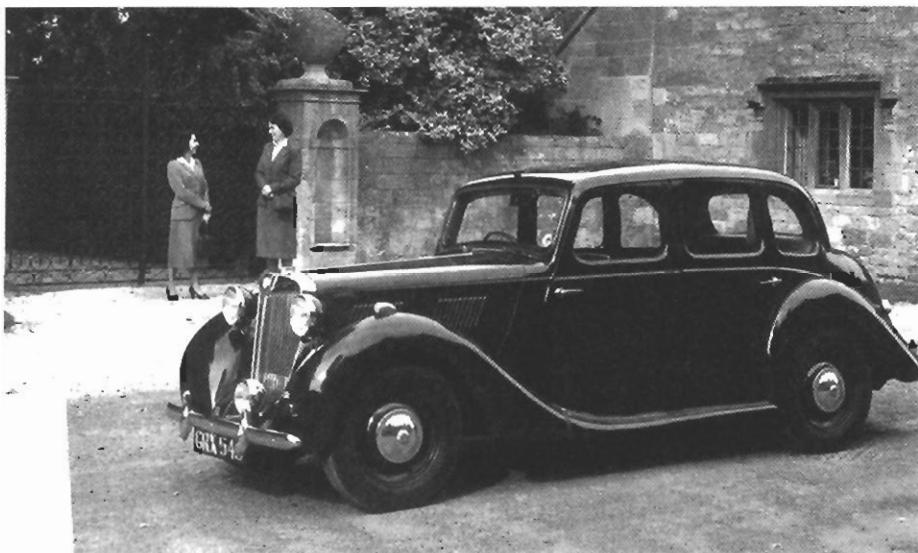
The hood on the Y-tourer was of the traditional type utilising detachable side curtains, but was nevertheless pretty good at keeping the weather out

been a hallmark of the pre-war MG tourers and, in particular the late 1930s SVW range of tourers and Tickford DHCs. In contrast, the Y-tourer, known by the factory as the YT, was rather more workmanlike than handsome. One motoring writer described it as a *bathtub on wheels*, perhaps a little unfair as the styling grows on you and it is certainly a useful machine for the club member with a need for a roomy four-seater open car.

Whilst the standard saloon has to make do with a single carburettor



Betty Haig, right, and Barbara Marshall prior to the 1950 Monte Carlo Rally. Unfortunately an accident put them out of the running early in the event



A 1952 picture of the YB saloon with its smaller wheels and deeper-section rear wings



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version of the XPAG engine, the open tourer was felt to need something a bit more sporting so was fitted with the engine in its TC guise, complete with twin carburettors. Another feature transferred from the sports car was the dashboard. Although not identical to the one used on the TC, essentially it looked the same, using a similar fabric covered board with a large tachometer in front of the driver and matching speedometer placed in front of the passenger. The minor dials and the switches were all contained in a TC-style central panel. This dashboard made more sense for an open car with sporting pretensions than the polished, walnut-veneered wooden one used in

the saloons.

As the export market was to be the prime target, the car was designed to be built in either right- or left-hand-drive form. About this time all Y-types were modified under the bonnet to make fitting left-hand-drive steering easier. The battery box was moved and the oil pump altered to allow room to accommodate the steering column. The tourers for sale in some parts of North America were also fitted with flashing direction indicators. These were incorporated within the front sidelights, using double-filament bulbs, and at the rear by means of relays that interrupted the brake light circuit when the indicators were operated. However, the other major export market was Australia where right-hand-drive models would be needed and here the flashing direction indicators were not installed.

The coachwork design was based on



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A superbly-restored Y-type owned by John Rowe



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The upright styling of the Y-type Saloon is very 1940s, perhaps a large part of its appeal



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The boot of the Y-type isn't large, but the lid in the open position can be used as a luggage platform



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The spare wheel compartment can be accessed without disturbing the luggage and on the YB version is taller to accommodate the wider wheels

that of the saloon but fitted with just two rear-hinged doors that were constructed differently. At the back, the boot was virtually unchanged giving adequate luggage capacity and retaining the ability to carry additional suitcases on the lowered boot lid. The doors were cut away at the top, in the then current sporting fashion, and the windscreen could be lowered if required.



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The attractive interior of John Rowe's Y-type



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The engine compartment is arranged so as to give easy access to those items requiring regular attention

The interior trim was similar to the saloon, as was the interior space, although rear seat passengers had their elbowroom slightly reduced by the pockets used to store the hood irons. The front seats could be tipped up to ease access to the rear seats.

The hood stowage was particularly neat. When lowered, the hood and frame were kept in a compartment that extended behind and round each side of the rear seat and could be concealed by zip-fastened flaps. When the hood was up the rear window could be lowered to provide additional ventilation. Aside from the more powerful engine, the mechanical specification remained unchanged but the bodywork modifications reduced the overall weight by nearly 90 lbs., which must have helped improve the performance of the car. Like the saloon, the tourer had the very useful

'Jackall' jacking system.

The tourers were nearly all exported so although almost eight hundred were built in total very few reside in Britain. From the sales point of view the YT could hardly be called a huge success but it isn't clear whether this was due to there not being the same demand for open tourers as existed pre-war, or just to a shortage of cars available for sale. For most of its life home sales were still restricted, with most of the production going overseas, and perhaps more examples would have sold had they been available in greater numbers on the home market.

By the end of 1951 the Y-type had been in production for over four years and the mechanical specification was inferior to that of the TD then produced alongside it at Abingdon. In an attempt to remedy this, a number of changes were introduced for the 1952 model year that improved the car, which was renamed the YB. Alterations made were extensive but not that apparent to the casual observer. The most important of these were to the braking system and running gear. The Lockheed brakes fitted to the YA had changed little from the first hydraulic system introduced to MG sports cars when the TA was announced in 1936. Basically the same design was used for the post-war TC and when the YA was introduced a similar, but not interchangeable, system using just one hydraulic cylinder for each front brake drum was fitted. The YB, however had a twin leading shoe system, two cylinders for each front brake drum. This was markedly more efficient and the front brake drums were now integral with the hubs, rather than separate as on the YA.

In common with most other cars of the period in the Nuffield Group, the YB benefited by being fitted with a the more modern hypoid back axle which was potentially much quieter in use. The wheels were at the same time changed from 16 in. to 15 in. diameter and the tyres increased in width from 5.00/5.25 to 5.50 to improve the roadholding, helped by a front anti-roll bar and heavier duty rear shock absorbers.

These mechanical changes forced a couple of body modifications. The smaller sized wheels took up rather less of the space under the wings so to improve the appearance of the car these were made slightly deeper, something that is quite apparent when viewed from the side of the car. The smaller wheels and wider tyres would not fit in the YA spare wheel stowage compartment so on the YB this was made an inch taller.

Much improved as the YB was, it still could not be seen as a truly modern car. Even press reports at the time spoke of it as being 'traditional', which was another way of saying it was outdated, and the sales figures for the revised car bear this out with only 1,301 being built before production ended towards the end of 1953. In due course it was to be replaced by the superb ZA Magnette, which was in all departments a more modern car, but in the meanwhile the owners of the few YBs built could enjoy



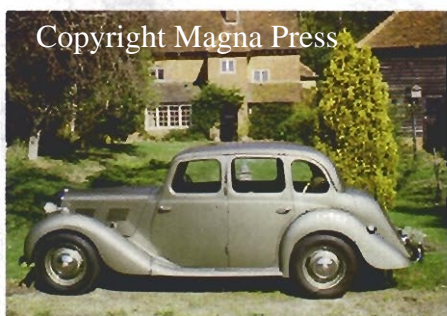
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One of the T-tourers, a rare sight in Britain as most were exported



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A YB saloon in one of the metallic shades available on this model



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Owned for many years by Peter and Susie Arnell, this Y-type is regularly seen at MG events

the benefits of driving an attractive and much improved car still boasting the pre-war style luxuries of an opening windscreen and a sunroof, becoming something of a rarity on 1950s cars.

Although the Y-type has been around for sixty years, it is still a thoroughly practical car for modern conditions. Aside from long motorway trips, something for which these cars were never designed, a well-sorted YA or YB saloon gives comfortable and interesting family motoring, particularly to use when attending any of the many MG

events here and in Europe. The numbers seen at such gatherings are a testimony to the enduring appeal of this 1940s sports saloon.



On the top floor of the assembly building the bodies were attached to trolleys so they could be rolled along this production line. Note the many female workers employed at the time



Painted bodies were delivered from Cowley to Abingdon where they were delivered to the top deck of the factory for trimming



The trimmed body shell is lowered from the top deck to be united with its rolling chassis. From then until it moves under its own power the car remains on the one production line



Almost ready for final inspection and the bonnet and headlights are fitted, the wiring connected up, petrol added to the tank and the car is then driven away for road test