



Above and far left: With the roof down and side screens in place, the Y Tourer cabin is a snug place to be. This is Mike's preferred driving mode...

Left: ...but with the hood up, protection from the elements is complete, and the lines still look great.



Above: Mike Silk had wanted a T-Type, but bought this Y Tourer instead. >

# Part of **the family**

Mike Silk has owned his 1949 MG Y Tourer for over 40 years, during which time it's been restored, resprayed and mildly modified. We find out what four decades of ownership have involved.

Words and pictures: Rob Hawkins

It looks a little like an over-sized Noddy car,' jokes Sue Silk, Mike's wife, as we stand admiring and discussing the merits of the couple's car, which has been a member of the family for more years than their own children! Sue is fully qualified to joke about the car – she learnt to drive in it, and both her and Mike have used it as their daily transport for a number of years in the past.

MG's Y Tourer is the equivalent of a ZR or ZS convertible (if

only they had been made), offering family transport with wind in your hair motoring and the performance to match. The design of the saloon on which the Tourer is based originated in the late 1930s and was supposed to appear at the Motor Show in 1940, but the Second World War put plans on hold. The project wasn't solely MG's responsibility, although Abingdon had a part to play. The Morris plant at Cowley was also involved, and anyone who knows a Morris Eight will recognise similarities. The front suspension was designed by Alec Issigonis, who went on to create the Mini, and MG draughtsman Jack Daniels was also involved. They pioneered the first independent front suspension fitted to a Nuffield Group car. The set-up consisted of a hefty, pressed front crossmember welded to the chassis box sections, with coil springs sitting on a pressed steel, fabricated lower wishbone and with the arms on piston-type Girling hydraulic dampers providing the upper wishbone. The basic suspension concept

was then upgraded and fitted to the TD and TF, and it remained much the same for the MGA and MGB, and even the RV8.

Rear suspension was more conventional, with leaf springs attached to the solid, underslung axle, fixed at the forward end and on swinging shackles at the rear, all rubber mounted. The rear axle also carried Girling lever arm dampers, while a lateral control link (also known as an anti-sway bar or Panhard rod) helped to stabilise sideways movement of the rear axle.

All Y Types had a hydraulic Jackall system, comprising four rams to raise the corners of the vehicle. Operation of the rams is from a hydraulic pump unit – with detachable handle – with a reservoir located under the nearside bonnet on the bulkhead.



**Above:** Dashboard has a neat arrangement of Jaeger instruments.

**Above right:** Interior now has a subtle indicator switch mounted underneath the right corner of the dashboard.



The front, rear or all the jacks can be selected as required. The Y Type's engine offered more performance than its rivals of the time. Using the popular 1250cc XPAG engine with overhead valves and a six port non-crossflow head, the single carb version for the saloons produced 46bhp at 4800rpm, whereas Mike's twin carb Y Tourer has the same engine as the two seater TC and produces 54.4bhp.

**Convertible Conversions**

Sales of the Y Type commenced in 1947, but the convertible, or Tourer wasn't available initially. Instead, Swiss coachbuilders including J. H. Keller and Reinbolt & Christé were importing chassis, engines plus some body parts, and transforming them into soft tops. MG soon caught up and in 1948 they revealed their own Tourer, but only available for export in both RHD and LHD form (thanks to rack and pinion steering). MG clearly thought the appeal of an open top was only for warmer climates, so never officially offered it to the UK market,



**Above:** The 54.5bhp/1250cc XPAG engine was considered a lively performer in the 1940s and '50s.

**Right:** Mike has added motorcycle indicators instead of relying on hand signals.

**Far right:** Spare wheel is neatly tucked away in its own compartment, separate to the boot.



although it was exported to Ireland, where Mike's car was possibly sold as a CKD kit.

The Y Tourer was regarded as a practical four seater convertible when it was launched. The hood folds neatly away inside its own compartment behind the rear seats, allowing the side screens to remain in position or be removed and slotted into their own compartment under the folded hood. Even the windscreen folds flat, allowing true flies in your face motoring. The Tourer shared its rear end with the saloon and had a generous sized boot and a separate spare wheel compartment. A forward tilting passenger seat allows quick access to the rear seats, and the driver's seat has the same sliding track arrangement as the saloons to allow fore and aft adjustment. The standard of trim on all Y-Types was very high, with leather seats and a dashboard full of Jaeger instruments along TC lines, but with the added bonus of a fuel gauge.

Sadly, the Y Tourer was never a raging sales success. The Y Type in general survived in YA and YB versions from 1947 to 1953, but the Tourer had a shorter lifespan between 1948 and 1950. Sales were low at a mere 884 cars, whereas the entire Y Type sales came to 8336, making the Tourer's contribution just over 10% of total sales.

When Mike Silk bought his Tourer in 1971, he was working as a graduate civil engineer in Dublin for a couple of years. He was actually expecting to be able to buy a T-Type, but found that very few appeared to have made it across to Ireland. Importing a car from the UK would have been possible, but funding was very limited. 'The father of a friend there - a friend who had one of the few TDs that were around - had bought the Tourer for his wife as a second car,' Mike recalls. 'She did not really rate that idea, and settled on an MGA instead. So the Tourer was surplus to requirements.'

The Tourer was abandoned, and although Mike passed by it quite regularly (it was stood in the open without a hood but under a part of the owner's house), he never thought to ask about buying it. But when it was offered to him for £90, he



**Above:** Wipers are mounted along the top of windscreen and use a single motor with an external link.



**Above:** The rear screen can be unzipped and folded down to provide good airflow through the cabin even with the hood up. A neat idea for warmer climates, where the hood can be best used to ward off sunstroke.



jumped at the chance. It appeared to be reasonably sound and it was an MG - what more could you want? A bank loan for the purchase was arranged (including enough extra to replace the hood as well) and the non-runner, complete with nearside front wing dent from its initial tow to Dublin, was moved into a lock-up. There the seized clutch was freed after removing the gearbox, and the car got into running order of a sort.

The day after it was finally ready for the road was race day at Mondello Park near Naas. The car was already entered for the MG handicap race, and Mike had obtained a racing licence in anticipation. It was to be the car and driver's one and only race ever. 'The car was driven there on its first significant run, and then stripped of seats, windscreen and everything that wasn't essential,' recalls Mike. 'It passed scrutineering and after practice it was unsurprisingly in pole position thanks to the handicapping. The grid included Dickie Lovell-Butt's K3 (K3006) and the Tourer's original purchaser - Dr. Brendan O'Hara in his Fiat Special. The K3 had a couple of laps to make up and it appeared at one point that it was going to be a close finish until a con rod bearing went on the Y and a return to the pits was made with a lap to go. Altogether it was not the best start to ownership!'

Returning to the UK, Mike continued to use his Y Tourer as his everyday transport. The body was welded up a bit, running boards repaired in the time honoured fashion and it was rewired and resprayed red in late 1973. But by the late 1970s, the Tourer was ready for a restoration. However, by then Mike had a young family, so the car gathered dust and was moved between a series of lock-ups and homes.

Mike recalls his two sons being eager to help to take the car apart, once the decision had been taken to restore it. 'All three got stuck in - for one day! - but after that interest waned and other things seemed to get in the way,' he says. 'Restoration is a slow business and is never going to be as quick as children imagine.' After careful dismantling, the chassis, stripped body, running gear and engine were taken to Naylor Brothers in Shipley for restoration in late 1993.

'The arrangement with them allowed me to work on the car while it was there to carry out many of the more mundane tasks, and in parallel I progressed with all the other bits that needed servicing, replacing or repairing,' Mike explains. 'The two ends of the body tub were not held apart by anything very substantial upon inspection, so the tub was braced before removal and replacement box section structures welded in place. Once completed, it appeared to be a very rigid unit. Other body panels were re-skinned, remade or repaired and

**“Restoration is always a slow business, and never as quick as children imagine”**

lead filled.' All the chrome was re-plated and the instruments refurbished by Vintage Restorations. The chassis required some straightening, and it was then epoxy coated and Waxoyled internally. At some point the external water jacket under the inlet manifold had cracked, and this was repaired using metal stitching. It turned out later that the engine block's drain tap had not allowed all the water out. Severe deposits in the cooling system had caused this, and it required a lot of work to clear them out.

The Tourer went to Collingburn's in Richmond, North Yorkshire for upholstery and weather equipment. 'After many trials and tribulations - it was no rushed job - the car was ready for the road in late 2004 and went on the MGCC Y Register Spring Run that year, where it won the NTG Cup,' says Mike. 'That made it all worthwhile.'

**Subtle Updates**

Mike has incorporated a few modest modifications to his Tourer to help make it more practical and up to date. At the rear, there are a pair of motorcycle indicators, which are

**Below:** Seating for four - MG's Y Tourer was a traditional convertible for families in the postwar era.





**Above:** Mike's Tourer was black when he bought it back in 1971, and he used it for his everyday transport.

**Top right:** Mike's boys looking eager to restore their dad's Tourer during the 1990s.

**Above right:** Restoration to the current condition involved a complete strip down and removal of the bodywork from the chassis at Naylor Brothers.



controlled via a flasher unit found under the bonnet and activated via a switch mounted under the righthand side of the dashboard. The front indicators use the torpedo shaped sidelights with double filament bulbs mounted on the tops of the wings. Originally no indicators of any sort were fitted to many Tourers, even though the saloons had trafficators – presumably hand signals with the roof down were considered the way to go in a Tourer. However, those destined for the American market were fitted with different rear wings that incorporated mountings for indicator/tail lights. Mike's Tourer has Lucas rear lights on either side of the number plate and these differ from the standard fitment in that they are a one piece red lens offering side and brake lights, with a number plate illumination section on the side.

Inside the Tourer, Mike has plumbed in a water-fed Smiths fan heater, which works very well and provides a sufficient amount of warm air, even with the hood down. Other practical modifications include a stainless steel exhaust with a larger rear bore than the standard system. Originally the car would have come with a half tonneau that just covered the rear seats, but Mike has a full tonneau that he finds is great for driving alone.

Mike has also formulated a temporary solution for catching oil drips from the XPAG engine. Anyone who knows these engines will realise that the only time you worry about the motor is when you don't spot oil drips underneath it. Some owners have gone to great lengths in creating drip trays attached to the underneath. Mike has resorted to a simple answer for now in the form of a small can.

On the road, Mike's Tourer is a capable car, which attracts plenty of attention due to its looks and also its raspy exhaust. Sitting on the inside with the hood up, it's not excessively noisy and the hood provides a draught free environment. However, cars such as the Tourer are best driven with the hood down. Leaving the sidescreens in position, the roofless approach is perfect with the windscreen deflecting air flow away from the cabin. Mike also comments it's the look he favours the most –

**Tech Spec**

- Model:** MG Y Tourer
- Year:** 1949
- Engine:** 1250cc XPAG OHV with twin 1.25in SU semi-downdraught carburettors, alloy inlet manifold, stainless steel exhaust system.
- Gearbox:** Four speed manual with no synchromesh on first gear.
- Brakes:** Hydraulic single circuit system with single leading shoe drums all round.
- Front suspension:** Independent coil spring with integral hydraulic lever arm dampers.
- Rear suspension:** Semi-elliptic leaf springs interleaved with rubber, lever arm dampers and Panhard rod.
- Chassis:** Shaped steel box ladder frame with tubular transverse members and a pressed steel front suspension crossmember.
- Bodywork:** Pressed steel panels and tub with coach built doors.
- Modifications:** Motorcycle rear mounted indicators, twin filament front sidelights/indicators, period style reversing light, stainless steel replacement wide bore exhaust system, oil catch can mounted underneath car and a Smiths heater.
- Wheels and tyres:** Five stud 5.25x16in diameter steel wheels with Avon tyres

hood down, side screens still in position. Mike has owned a couple of MGs including a modern TF, an F-Type Magna 'kit' for a short period and a half share in another Irish Tourer that provided some useful spares. However, after over 40 years of ownership of his Tourer, he appears set to keep this in his family, despite a Volvo estate being his daily driver. The Y Tourer is now a collectible classic and it's a shame MG never followed suit with the Metro, Maestro or Z-cars, but judging by the popularity of new car sales in the 1940s, they were probably wise to resist. 



**If you want to find out more about MG's Y-Type, check out the MG Y-Type Register's website at [www.mgytypes.org](http://www.mgytypes.org)**