

# Why the **Y**?

When Bruce Wyre dipped his toe in the classic car pool, chance steered him towards a Y-Type. It was an unusual choice for a first timer, but 15 years on he doesn't have any regrets.

**Words and pictures: Simon Goldsworthy**



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n 2000, Bruce Wyre had £4000 to spend on a new car. Clearly he could not afford anything brand new, but he wanted something that was practical and which he could drive on a daily basis. He looked at various cars including four-wheel drive vehicles, but it would take a real stretch of the imagination to include the MG Y-Type in his search criteria. After all, the design stretched back to the pre-war years and even though the cars weren't built until after hostilities had ended, the production run of 1947-53 still meant they were some five decades old.

However a work colleague and friend, Jim Spooner, suggested that Bruce should look for a classic car. 'The idea had never entered my head,' says Bruce, 'and though I quite liked the idea, I really had no idea even of what make or model to consider.' Fortunately Jim was an enthusiast with a few classic cars, and he proposed the MG YA. Most people would have come up with something more mainstream like an MGB or a Morris Minor, but as Bruce says: 'It was in the price range I could afford. Some classics are a lot more than that and others are a lot less, but at the time the Y-Type was bang on target. And Jim said they were reliable cars and quite easy to maintain.'

The problem was that Bruce didn't even know what a

Y-Type looked like, something of a disadvantage when making a decision of this magnitude. However, after seeing a few pictures he was persuaded that yes, it was a very attractive car and the search could begin.

It was a search that would last for two long years. Just as Bruce was starting to lose hope, Jim called to say there was one for sale in Bidford-on-Avon. The friends drove over to have a look and were shown a red and cream 1949 YA. It was tatty, but they took it for a drive and although it was a bit rough, it did at least run. The owner was asking £4700, but Bruce and Jim persuaded him to knock over £1000 off the price. That was good going because some years previously the car had been restored and sold for £9000, but it had deteriorated a long way since then and as Bruce was to discover, the restoration had not been overly thorough.

However, at least now he had his Y-Type, and Bruce was happy to take on a bit of a project because he has worked in the car trade for 20 years and is mechanically minded. So he got it home and went on a few local runs. One or two issues soon reared their heads, most urgently a lack of power. 'The engine was running so roughly it would hardly go up a hill,' Bruce recalls. 'It was reasonably OK on the flat, but any hill and it didn't want to know. However another friend of mine, Phil Reckless, has had a YB for 30 years, and he said that if I took





**Above:** Although originally painted Gunmetal Grey, two-tone paint suits the Y-Type's lines perfectly.

the engine out, he would rebuild it.'

When he dismantled the engine, Phil found the reason why it was running so badly – the timing was 30 degrees out. That was sorted, along with a number of other maladies. 'The rebuild cost £1500 in parts and machining, which was a little bit of a shock but not a huge one in view of how badly it had been running,' says Bruce. 'And besides, I thought that whatever needed to be done, should be done properly. My wife Joy loves going out in the car, and was on board with the decision to invest in the rebuild.'

Bruce did get a little more practice at taking the engine out of his Y-Type though, because although the engine was fine, they could not get the clutch pressure plate centre to sit level. They adjusted it as best they could and fitted the reconditioned engine, but after about 12 months it was getting harder to select the gears even when the clutch pedal was adjusted. So the engine had to come back out and this time Bruce fitted genuine Lockheed pressure and drive plates. After that, it was perfect. He also had trouble with the core plugs. After driving it to work one day, he noticed a drip from the rear core plug. This cannot be accessed with the engine in the car, so it had to come out again. Happily, since then it has been very reliable.

That was not the end of the work however, as we have already mentioned that the YA was red and cream when Bruce

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bought it and that is clearly not the case today. What happened was that every time the MG went out in the rain, it would develop big white blotches on the roof. It even developed these while sitting under a cover in the garage over the winter. The only long-term solution was to strip the car back to bare metal and repaint it, but as Bruce says: 'At least I didn't have to take the engine out again...'

It took Bruce and Phil two years to complete the body overhaul, partly because stripping and preparing for paint is such a slow process, but also because they found some problems from the previous restoration that had to be put right. For example, in the boot there should be a strengthener across the back that the board in the boot sits on. For some reason this was missing, so they had to cut the back out between the boot and the spare wheel opening, weld in a



Original trafficators work, but have been supplemented with flashing lights.



Bruce's Y-Type has a rear blind that can be raised and lowered by the driver.



Chromed bear mascot on the radiator cap is a personal touch - from T.K.Maxx!



The spare wheel lives in its own compartment underneath the boot.



Rear seat passengers probably enjoy more space than those in the front.



The 'Goddess' name was suggested by the new green paint replacing the red.



**Above: Bruce Wyre with his practical classic.**



**Right: Engine has now been thoroughly overhauled.**

strengthening piece and put it all back. And although this car had been totally restored and sold for £9000, when Bruce stripped the back end he found that it was full of filler because the restorer hadn't bothered to knock out any of the dents.

As for the colour change, Bruce didn't want red. The car had been Gunmetal Grey from the factory, but he didn't really want to change the cream because there was nothing wrong with that. Eventually he opted to change the red to a Jaguar British Racing Green, which is a dark colour and goes well with the cream. He did all the preparation, and Phil sprayed. 'We did it all in my single garage, which was quite an achievement I can tell you,' he recalls, 'but it came out really well. This was three or four years ago, and it is now fine.'

If you recall, Bruce originally wanted a car that he could use on a regular basis. Now he has had it mechanically and bodily sorted for a few years, what is it like to drive? 'The cabin is narrow with very small footwells,' he says. 'It is such a totally different driving experience to a modern car. I used to be a little bit wary of it when I first got the Y-Type because the pedals are so close together and it is very easy to put your foot on the wrong one. It can be really frightening when you put your foot on the brake and hit the accelerator as well. But over time you get used to the car and eventually it comes to you more easily.'

'There is a four speed gearbox with synchromesh on the top three ratios, but I only use first if the car is loaded with four people or on a hill. In normal use it travels such a short distance in first that it is really not worth using. The car picks up very well in second anyway. It hasn't got power steering and it is a heavy car, but it is quite easy to steer and lovely to drive.'

'But old cars don't stop as quickly as new ones. If somebody pulls out in front of you, it can be a little fraught. I would describe the brakes as adequate, but I know now when I come up to a junction, I need to slow down gradually rather than driving up to the line and then putting the brakes on. Don't forget you are talking well over a ton of car. Pick up one of the front wings and you'll be amazed at how heavy they are.'

'The seats appear to be the originals. They are quite adequate for short journeys, though I wouldn't like to do something like 200 miles in them. When I first got the Y-Type, I didn't realise that the front suspension wasn't working properly. I took it to a show and this guy leant on the front and the car bounced up and down. He said the shock absorbers weren't working, so I found a bloke in Selly Oak who refurbishes them. I put them back on the car and it totally transformed the ride. I also put on a front anti-roll bar (which MG only put on the YB) and that transformed the roadholding through the corners. That is why the horns are on the front of the car because they can no longer go underneath where the factory put them. So now it runs very well. The only problem I have got is that one of the back doors doesn't fit very well. Perhaps somebody has done some welding there, but apart from that it is running fine.'

The eagle-eyed will have spotted a couple of other things that Bruce has added to his Y-Type. The horns have been chromed to suit their new position beneath the headlamps for example, and Bruce has fitted discreet flashing indicators to



complement the trafficators, pretty much essential on today's roads. He was also told by Phil that he had to give the car a name, so when they changed the colour from red to green, it just seemed appropriate to call it the Green Goddess. As for the bonnet mascot, Bruce explains this by saying: 'I was in T.K.Maxx just looking at the odds and ends in the household section, picked a box up and found this chromed bear inside. I'd seen mascots on MGs before, champagne corks and rabbits and such, and thought I could put the bear on my radiator cap and see what it looked like. Now it is just my own personal touch. I think it goes quite well with the front of the car.'

Clearly the Y-Type has been a big success for Bruce and at times he has used it as a daily driver. Now, however, he has a Morris Traveller for frontline duties and the Y-Type lives a more cosseted life in the garage, covering up to 2000 miles a year. Many of those are on rallies with the Bromsgrove MG

**Above: The abundance of chrome on its front contributes to the Y-Type's charm.**

**Below: A front anti-roll bar and new dampers all round have transformed the ride and handling.**





**Above and right:** Bruce is now fully at home behind the wheel of his Y-Type, though he says the technique for getting into the narrow cabin did take a while to master.



**Below:** The gracious lines of the Y-Type may have been dated at launch, but they clothed a credible performer.

Club, which Bruce describes as a very friendly group. 'There is a guy in the club with a TD, but everyone else has MGBs and Midgets,' he says. 'At shows, it is amazing how many people come up to me and say they used to have one of these. But I do find there can sometimes be a little bit of snobbery within MG circles from those who have T-Types if you turn up in a Y-Type. I don't know what it is, but I was in another club and just didn't feel like I fitted in. To be fair, they all had sports cars and there

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was not a lot in common between their cars and mine.'

When asked if he would ever change the Y-Type for another classic, Bruce does not dismiss the idea out of hand, but neither does he sound enthusiastic. 'The only reason I would get rid of the Y-Type is to get something slightly bigger on the inside as the cabin is quite small,' he says. 'But I would stick with MGs. I like the Varitone Magnette, but something like the MGB doesn't do anything for me. In fact, with my bad knee I would have a problem getting in or out of any sports car. The Y-Type is quite an easy car to get in and out of once you have learnt the technique of getting in bum-first. All in all the Y-Type has given me an interest and a hobby, and also taught me new skills. It will never be fast or speedy, but it is a lovely cruising car. I would recommend it to anyone.'

