

# PRACTICAL CLASSICS BUYING FEATURE

## BUYING AN MG Y-TYPE



*The petite 'Y' series saloons have an air of pre-war grace and charm about them coupled with the sporting appeal of the famous octagon. But how practical are they to buy and run?*

*Chris Graham finds out.*

**T**he outbreak of the second world war came at a most unfortunate time for the newly created MG Y-Type, which was due to be launched at the 1940 London Motor Show. The original design was converted into a mock-up model in 1939, with the objective of creating a small, luxurious but at the same time mass produced British sporting saloon. The war years came and went, the scores were settled, and the MG Motor Company resumed normal business at their Abingdon factory.

Early post-war vehicle styling appeared to be divided into two trends, at least on the mass produced side of the business — the specialist companies being relatively free from styling constraints. This split was caused by two opposing influences, one from America, expressed by Ford and the Rootes Group vehicles, and the other based on the more traditional European styling (sweeping wings, running boards, leather and wood etc), chosen by Riley, Lea Francis and MG amongst others. The MG Y-Type series was meant to produce a

traditionally styled family saloon on a modernised chassis and suspension system, with reasonable performance and economy, and this it did.

The first of the Y-Types, the 'Y' (or YA as it is commonly known now) began its production life in 1947, and was current for four years. It employed a greatly modified Morris 8 Series E body

and a 1250cc XPAG engine with a single SU carburettor, a de-tuned version of the T Series sports engine, which itself was based on the pre-war Morris 10 power unit. A year after the production of the 'Y' had started MG put into production the 'YT', which was an open four seater tourer with the same engine but in twin SU form. This new model was aimed particularly at the export market but suffered from competition from its T Series relation and so unfortunately enjoyed little success, a total of 877 being produced. By 1951 the company had decided to upgrade the 'Y' to extend its production life, and the result was the 'YB'. The 'YB's term of production lasted until 1953 and by 1955 the T Series, also ended with the last of the TFs, the new Z Series Magnettes became available early in 1954.

Probably the most notable technical feature of the entire 'Y' Series was that they all featured independent front suspension. (it was designed by Alec Issigonis, who went on to design the Morris Minor in 1948), and this coupled with their rack and pinion steering makes these cars a very attractive proposition even by today's standards, as they provide

a comfortable as well as safe ride. To illustrate this I discovered that one privately owned model was fitted with a low pressure Shorrock supercharger and taken to Jabbeke, where it recorded a top speed of 104.7mph before engine problems became evident

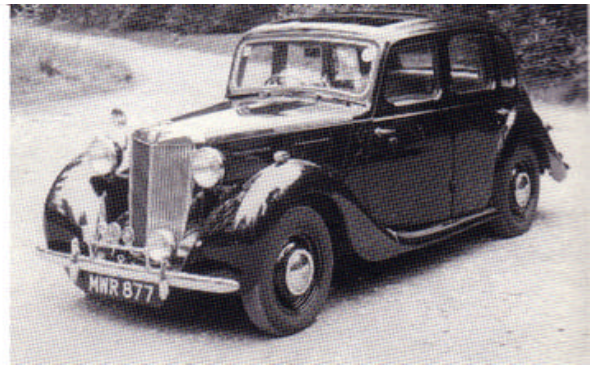
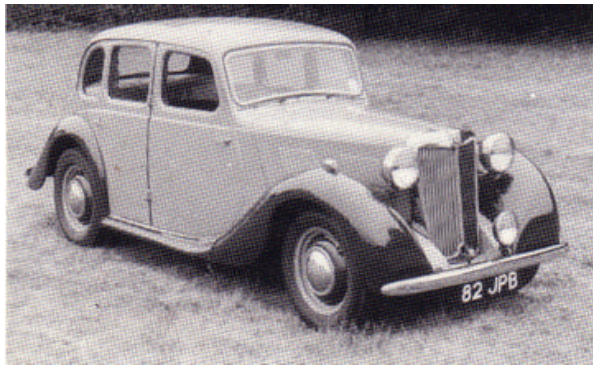
The availability of Y-Types for sale is hard to judge — there are only about 1000 left in existence, which is approximately 12% of the original production figure. Obviously though, 'Y's and 'YB's are far more readily obtainable than the rare 'YT's, as it is estimated that there are only 10 – 12 of these left in this country, and probably only 4 – 5 of these are actually on the road, so they can command considerable sale prices on rarity value alone. There are certain differences between the 'Y' and the 'YB' that for many people make the latter the more desirable of the two. To the casual observer however, both cars look virtually alike, the only obvious difference being in wheel size. The 'Y' (and the 'YT') was fitted with 16" wheels whilst the 'YB' uses 15" ones. Less noticeable differences such



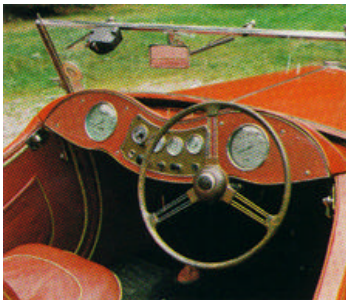
*The YA and YT together, both fine examples of their models*







as headlamp diameter and chroming, the addition of hub cap medallions and the position of the battery box are all pointers to the car's model identity. However in a lot of cases a knowledge of the factory numbering system is required to confirm theories.



The clear flowing style of the 'YT's dashboard illustrates its connections with the 'T' series MGs.

The major differences beneath the surface concern the braking system and the rear axle. The 'Y's are fitted with an early Lockheed braking system (many parts now unavailable), and the 'YB's were fitted with an updated version of the same system. The rear axle fitted to the 'Y's was of a slightly suspect nature and it is widely rumoured (though this requires some substantiation) that the halfshafts had a tendency to break, so presumably with this in mind, the 'YB's were fitted with an improved axle of the hypoid type. A further advantage of the 'YB' was its front anti-roll bar, which significantly improved its handling.

### The Problems

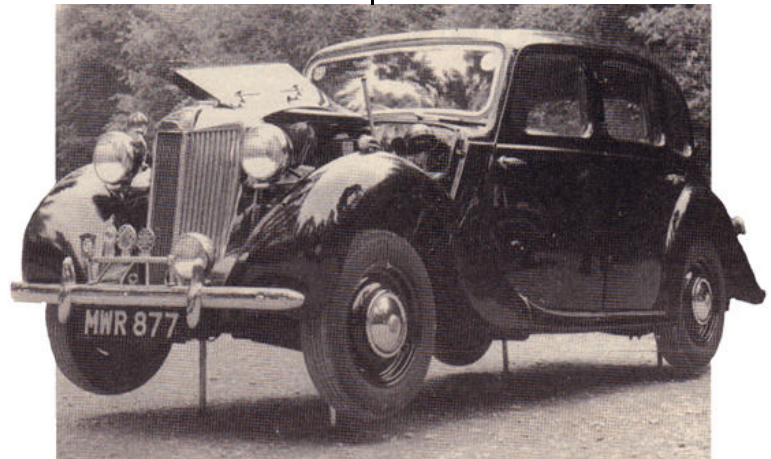
Having talked with several people 'in the know' during the research for this feature, it has become apparent to me that there are surprisingly few problems to be encountered when buying a Y-Type MG. It has been impressed upon me that the chassis design on this car is remarkably sound, with the result that only a few cars suffer

from any deterioration in this area. Perhaps this is what the enthusiast loves about the MG, as whatever state the body is in, with a good chassis to base it upon the car can be successfully rejuvenated.

The body in fact is the main area to watch out for, in particular the rear from the door pillars back. The car may look very presentable at first sight but there are certain hidden trouble spots; for example, the rear wheel arch where the wing is bolted on can be completely rotted away, but still look reasonable from the outside. Another notorious rust spot can be the area in and around the boot and spare wheel compartment — the

water being the cause of most problems here. The front of the car is usually much less susceptible to corrosion than the rear, one of the reasons for this being oil. This particular engine tends to be fairly liberal in its distribution of lubricant around the engine compartment and surrounding chassis members, thus in effect providing its own rust proofing!

The independent front suspension lasts well as long as it is kept well lubricated. However, it is advisable to check the swivel links and pins for wear as these will probably be the first components to go. The front shock absorbers on the 'Y' tend to wear quite quickly as they were



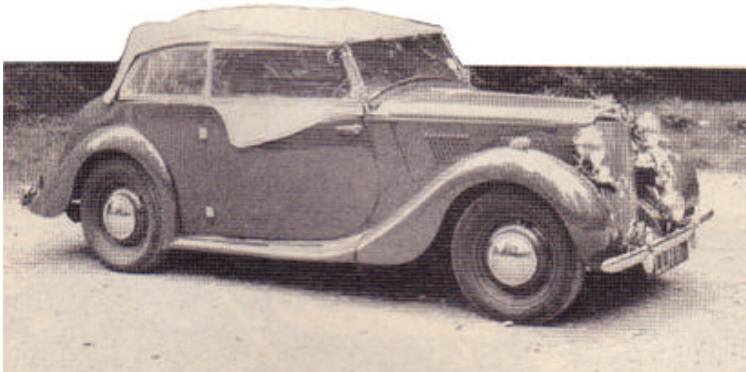
The four point hydraulic jacking system is an ingenious feature of the Y-Type range. The rear two pillars are prone to sticking if not used regularly.

floors of these in particular are prone to bad corrosion so check them thoroughly. Also check the bottoms of the doors as this is another vulnerable area.

Having said that the chassis is in a lot of cases remarkably sound should not deter you from giving it the once-over in the usual manner. The box sections onto which the running boards fasten are one of the prime areas for chassis failure, as is the section around the rear axle —

basically too weak, and this also applies to the rear but to a lesser extent — the 'YB' was fitted with a stiffer system altogether. Also check the wishbone bottom lever as an oval hole can be worn in the outer eye. The inner bushes also wear so inspect these too.

The engine in most cases is very sound, generally lasts for ages. The piston have been known to break in several cases when the con. rods get out of alignment, so if an engine is to be reconditioned, ensure that this alignment is checked carefully. In general it can be said most problems that occur are caused by maintenance or a sloppy rebuild, rather design failures.



The MG YT was designed mainly for the export market; however, not even its twin SU carburettors, its folding windscreen or its four seater open tourer bodywork could make it a success.

### MG Y-Type specifications

	YA	YB	YT
Production Period	1947-51	1951-53	1948-51
Number Produced	6158	1301	877
Bore (mm)	66.5	66.5	66.5
Stroke (mm)	90	90	90
Capacity	1250	1250	1250
Bhp at rpm	46/4800	46/480	54/5200
0-50 mph	16.7	16.7	16.7
Max mph	71	70	70
Typical mpg	27	30	27





*The Tourer's traditional body is based upon the ash frame of the 'Type, and its long single doors provide access via the tipping front seats to the rear seat.*

### Spares availability

The engine, brakes steering and suspension are in most cases fairly reliable, however real problems can occur if spares are needed for the early 'Y's braking system, this being derived from that used on the 'TC'. The availability of mechanical spares generally though is pretty good, although they are expensive. Over the years many Y-Types were 'broken' so that their mechanical parts could furnish the restoration of the more fashionable 'T' Series MGs, two model ranges sharing similar engines. Still being popular sports cars today, the 'T' Series cars fetch high prices on the open market, which unfortunately ensures that mechanical spares for the Y-Types are kept at a correspondingly high level. Most of the chrome attachments — door handles, hub caps and headlamps surrounds etc — have been re-manufactured and are now relatively common, apart from the radiator grille which is only available second hand and so rechroming has often to be considered.

Replacement body panels and repair panels can cause more of a headache, although the situation has improved in recent years. Up until a few years ago the hunt for panels was one of the main stumbling blocks of 'Y' Type restoration, and in some cases the restorer was forced to resort to many hours of laborious welding in the absence of the correct panels. However, it is now possible to obtain repair panels and sections from "Whyparts\*", who specialise in these models. This has I assume been the direct result of an increased demand brought about by a recent upsurge in the Y-Types popularity.

There seems little to worry about when it comes to the interior trim; the Connolly leather/Rexine seats and the walnut dashboard

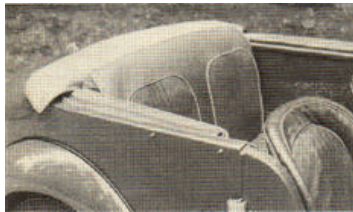
both wear well but obviously the driver's side usually gets the most use, so expect there to be some imbalance between the appearance of the two sides.

### Conclusion

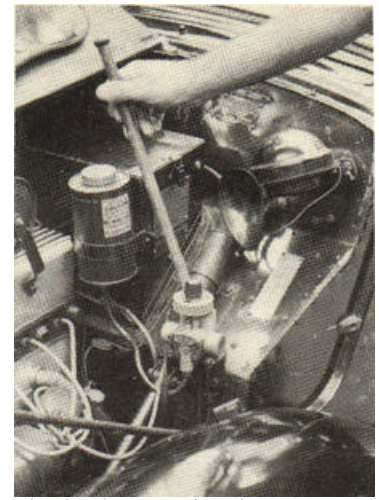
So what does the Y-Type MG have to offer? In the first place you either like or dislike the traditional appearance with pre-war overtones. You have to accept that the interior is intended to carry four in comfort and it is not a particularly spacious car not does it provide a great deal of space for luggage in the boot. However, while there is not a lot of room the interior of the car, when it is in good condition, is most inviting and it has a distinct quality flavour about its appointments.

That quality flavour is apparent to passengers but it is the driver who is spoilt. The controls are pleasing to use and when everything is in good order the steering, gearbox, ride and handling are very pleasant indeed. On paper the car is perhaps a little under-powered but the way the car does everything and its predictable, well-mannered handling make up for this. Without thrashing the car unmercifully it will put up surprisingly good journey times reliably and with very reasonable economy. It is one of those nice cars which manages to be easy to drive yet very rewarding, and its "old fashioned" layout makes it quite an easy car to look after both bodily and mechanically.

To sum up the little MG it is one of those cars which people look at and trot out the timeworn old remark, "They don't make them like that any more"; and it is rather a pity that they don't.



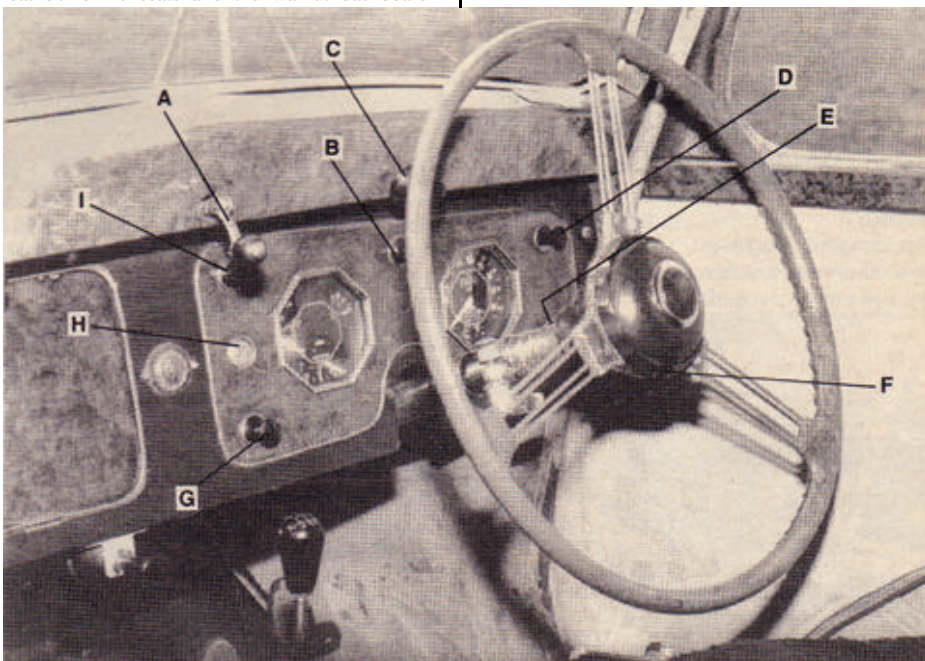
*The hood can be a little tricky to get down especially if the mechanism is worn or distorted, but once down it packs away neatly.*



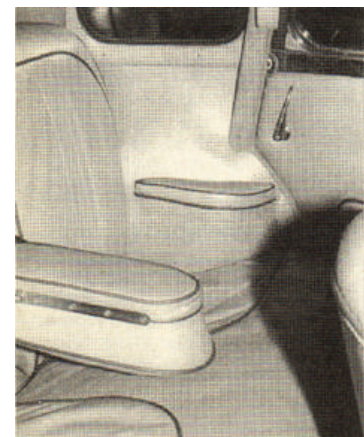
*The hand operated jacking system is housed under the bonnet and has a three position switch that allows either the front, the back or the entire car to be raised. The fluid reservoir is attached to the battery box and whilst the original fluid is still available, it is highly prized.*



*This type of fog lamp was a standard fixture and its chromium plated rear shell can be used as a rough dating clue and as an indication of originality.*



*The simple controls of the 'Y/YB'. A-Windscreen winder, B-Panel lights, C-Screen wipers, D-Side/Head lamps, E-Fog lamp, F-Indicators, G-Choke, H-Ignition, I-Starter.*



*The rear seating compartment of the saloons are a little cramped but being upholstered in leather they wear very well. However, they are expensive to restore.*





The engine can sometimes provide an insight into the car's history, this 'YB' for example having a large air filter because it spent a large part of its early life in West Africa.



This is the area to watch for rust, as the floors of this spare wheel housing and the boot compartment above are often badly corroded; the panel onto which the boot hinges fasten and the surrounding panels should also be carefully checked.

My thanks go to Ron Humphries, Julian Alderton, and John Lawson for their great help with this feature.



The boot area in the 'YT' is significantly reduced owing to the storage space required by the dismantled hood.



Another attractive pre-war feature of the saloons was the opening windscreen, controlled by a centralised winder on the dash.

### What to pay

In terms of actual prices for complete cars and mechanical work, it is hard to be precise as they vary widely. Non-runners can be secured for between £300-£400, and for a good runner in reasonable condition you should expect to pay anything from £1,000 upwards, these prices being for the saloons. The rare 'YT' is a different matter and on the infrequent occasions that they do appear on the market, the prices can be impressive or daunting depending on your viewpoint. One example was recently offered for a price of £9,000!, but it should be noted that this car is a top class concours winner. Should your restoration project require a total engine rebuild, the cost will be in the region of £700-£800.

\* NB. This article was originally written in 1984. As a consequence the 'passing of time' numerous changes to the availability of spare parts have taken place. While Whyparts is unfortunately no longer trading, there are numerous other 'new' suppliers who are now able to assist a 'would be restorer'.

➤ All brake parts for YAs & YTs are now available. Indeed the wheel cylinders are now manufactured in bronze with brass pistons—far superior to the originals!

➤ It is also possible to buy Running Boards, Spare Wheel Locker Covers, Stainless Steel Petrol Tanks, Bootlids and a whole range of other body parts.

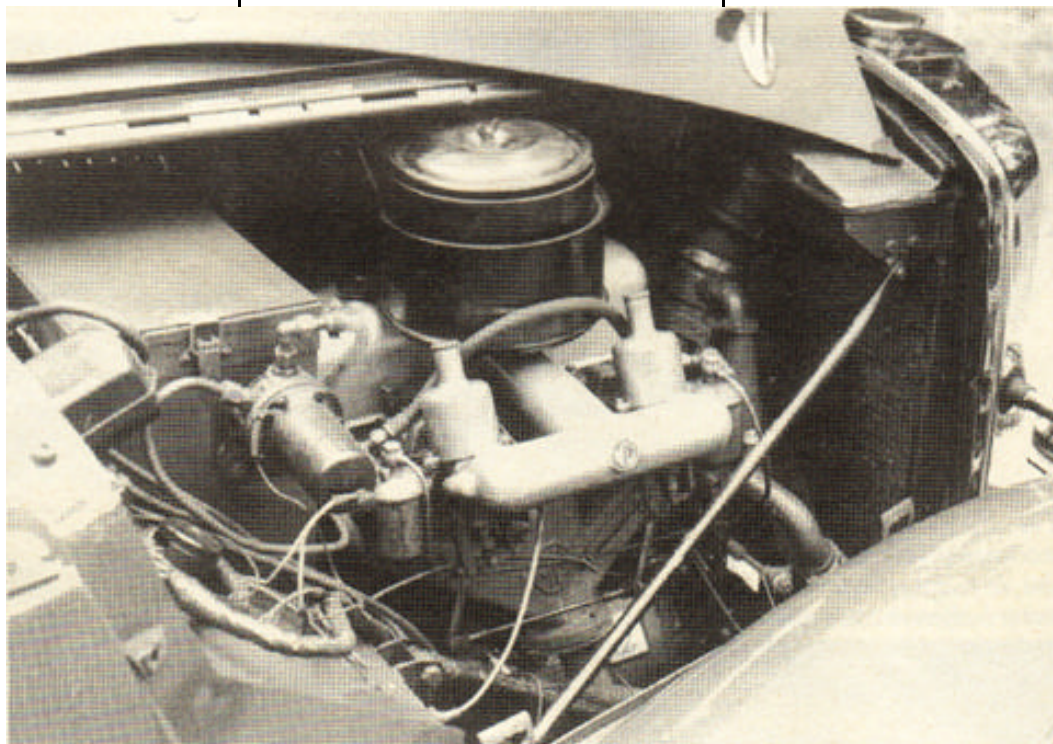
➤ Engine parts are now more plentiful than they were in 1984.

However, there are still some parts that are difficult to get e.g. Battery box covers, Rear blinds and their mechanisms and fittings, and YA/YT half shafts.

If you are contemplating buying a Tourer then it is important that the car is complete—sourcing Hood frames, Windscreen Frames and doors still remain an impossible task!

This Practical Classics' article is highly recommended reading for a 'would be' buyer of a Y Type. The 'passing of time' has had no impact whatsoever on the points to look for.

The Y Register website ([www.mgatypes.org](http://www.mgatypes.org)) has details of most suppliers within the Links Section and the many Y Register Datasheets will be of great assistance to a new owner.



The 1250cc engine of the 'YT' is similar to that fitted in the saloons apart from its brace of SU carburetors.