

Open-top tourer conjures up the fabulous Forties

BOB WEIR – The Scotsman – 25 November 2005



The lush lines of the MG YT belie its hasty conception amid the disarray of post-war reconstruction. Picture: Bob Weir

IN THE aftermath of the Second World War the British motor industry was engaged in a life and death struggle to attract foreign currency. MG tried to cash in on the act with their traditional tourer, the model YT. Alistair Meldrum of West Lothian owns one of these rare classics.

The Swiss coachbuilding firm of Reinbolt & Christie had already set the ball rolling by experimenting with open-top chassis conversions based on the existing Y-Type saloon.

Then in 1948 MG finally picked up the gauntlet producing a factory-built version of their own. Launched at the Earl's Court Motor Show that autumn, the YT tourer went on sale for £525. The new model was fitted with a 1250cc OHV engine, and twin semi-draught SU carburettors. This gave 55bhp and was a significant improvement over the existing saloon. Transmission came courtesy of a four-speed gearbox with synchromesh on second through top, using a Borg and Beck clutch and giving a top speed of around 70mph.

The front suspension had the latest MG wishbone technology, using independently sprung wheels with rubber-bushed mountings and coil springs. The rear end also had a lateral control link to stabilise axle movement. The dampers came courtesy of Luvax-Girling hydraulics, and Lockheed supplied the all-round drum brakes.

In common with many immediate post-war models, the YT was built with the overseas market in mind, and was designed for easy conversion to left-hand drive. Export cars were also fitted with a more efficient air cleaner.

A lot of thought went into the coachwork, which had significant modifications from the parent saloon. The car was fitted with a folding windscreen of Triplex safety glass, and the two doors were made out of pressed steel fastened on to wooden frames. Both front seats were adjustable, and there were nice little touches like map pockets in both doors.

The boot lid opened flat to form a useful surface, while the spare tyre and tool kit were kept in a separate compartment. This could be accessed even when the boot was fully loaded with luggage.

The dashboard and instrument panel were specially designed, and included a large tachometer. On left-hand drive models this was positioned directly in front of the driver in a throwback to those heady days when serious aficionados preferred to judge speed by reference to a rev counter as against a speedometer.

Direction indicators were omitted on all models except those destined for the USA, although present-day survivors have obviously had them fitted to comply with modern regulations. YT bodies were assembled at Abingdon in Oxfordshire, where they were also supplied with their upholstery.

The launch of the YT also turned out to be the end of an era. Four-seat open tourers had been extremely popular in pre-war Britain, but the MG turned out to be one of the last of the breed. While 877 models ended up in the hands of foreign owners, only 42 cars were earmarked for the British public. The damage to buyer confidence was considerable, and when production finally ended a mere two years later the model was not replaced.

Alistair Meldrum is a retired bank manager, and bought his YT with the distinctive number plate 3YT back in December 2000. The vehicle originally hails from California, and had been completely restored.

"I've always been a big fan of the marque and wanted a tourer," he explained.

Because of its limited shelf life, there are now very few surviving YTs and a recent worldwide poll estimated that only a handful of these are still roadworthy. Since he started showing it on the Scottish vintage vehicle circuit, the MG has picked up several awards, including Best of Class at this year's SVVF Champion of Champions event at Selkirk.

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