



Trying to define heaven and hell is probably simpler than attempting to draw up the parameters of what makes a classic car. Often in our earnestness to classify this or that car as part of the genre we overlook or quickly dismiss something that has a lot going for it, at the times of its conception and in the grand scheme of things today.

Let's take the MG Y type of the late '40s and early '50s. Considered by some as too prim because of that rather angular exterior, it hid some fascinating aspects which elevated it above others of its time. In a period when austerity was the norm, it married a bit of old with the new and offered the buyer something a little bit more exciting than appeared at first sight.

The fact that it is a sedan might be a little off putting. Many articles have been written about the motoring successes of MG's small overhead camshaft racing cars and its successful sports and trials cars based on similar chassis and mechanical components. What is gen-

erally lost sight of is that MG produced more saloon and touring cars than they did sports and racing models. The Y was born at a time when separate chassis were the go and wood and leather were integral (should I say essential) parts of the make up. It had adequate performance for its time (handling and get up and go) without resorting to complex engine set ups.

By 1939 with magnificent sporting saloons such as the Two Litre SA and the 2.6 Litre WA, MG had established itself as a worthy competitor among the more traditional saloon car makers such as Riley, Alvis and Armstrong Siddeley.

The Abingdon outfit hit on a catchy slogan 'with grace...with space...with pace' to

Story and pictures by Malcolm Robertson

Y - FRONT

THE PRIM & PROPER MG

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match its beautifully-appointed and competitively-priced saloons. Designer Cecil Kimber assured that discerning buyers patronised the dealerships by endowing them with good looks which were also sought after by film producers. By the way, the slogan was also sought after – Jaguar adopted it after the war.

Of all the car makers, MG probably produced the best of the immediate post-war crop of cars, certainly in the more popular sedan range. The takeover of Riley by Nuffield put an end to MG's luxury sporting saloons and the concern concentrated on smaller contemporary sports car mechanicals and chassis.

But if the Y-type which emerged was a hybrid, it could also be described as heady, too, being a cocktail of no-nonsense engineering and a potential that far outstripped its commercial aims.

The sneering set will tell you the car was based on the all-steel Morris Eight body which had been trialled by Nuffield prior to the war. Those looks were carefully camouflaged by a new front and rear and, for its time, looked quite stylish. It was mounted on a new, less flexible box-section chassis which was destined, with minor modifications, to become the frame of the new MG TD sports car.

There was nothing carried over as far as the front suspension was concerned: It was independent and comprised coil springs, wishbones and integrated shock absorbers and crowned by a new rack and pinion steering system with a sharp 2.75 turns lock to lock. The designer was that esteemed automotive entity Alec Issigonis. By the way that arrangement saw its way into MG's sports jobs all the way from TD to B. Semi-elliptic leaf springs looked after the rear.

The engine was the tried and tested XPAG series overhead valve pushrod 1250cc unit introduced on the TB of '39 mated to a four-speed manual gearbox through a single dry-plate clutch. Synchromesh was provided on top, third and second gears and final drive was through a propeller shaft with a spiral bevel differ-

Plain Jane or hidden surprise packet? The sneering set have always dismissed the MG Y as nothing more than a Morris, but beneath its sedate lines there was plenty of MG excellence giving levels of performance more than enough to win it plaudits from critics of the time.

ential. The car sat on 14in pressed steel wheels with chromed hubcaps sporting traditional octagon badges.

Inside, the new saloon was trimmed in leather and cloth, with cut-pile carpets and lashings of timber on door caps, dash and surrounding windows. The instruments carried over the theme of the pre-war MG WA with octagonal bezels. Unlike the WA, they were directly in front of the driver and all other controls fell easily to hand.

The package was well received by public and motor-

ing press alike in a post-war England still in the grip of privations. With only a single SU carburettor and 47bhp the 1250cc engine had a fair job

to pull the well-appointed saloon but it achieved its objective well and received glowing road test reports.

The new suspension and accurate steering provided additional security in handling and MG's traditional prowess in braking, by hydraulics on all four wheels, justified continued use of the company's Safety Fast slogan.

Road testers were full of praise for the new MG, especially the front end to which The Motor attributed 'much of the credit of the car's comfortable riding and handling'. Both it and The Autocar spoke highly of the Y's ability to cruise readily at high speeds on Continental motorways in all weather conditions and of its equal capacity to 'potter delightfully around country lanes at 20 to 30mph'. While top speed was 112kph (70mph), it's cruising forte was in the region of 88kph (55mph).

The beautifully restored YA saloon featured in this article (engine no. XPAG 12912-SC-X, chassis no. 2833, body no. Y3095) belongs to Bruce and Shirley Kennewell from Canberra but was restored over many years by Canberra enthusiast Trevor Clark. Trevor bought the car to restore and for several years the



body sat on a six by four trailer to be towed regularly from his home to Canberra TAFE where, along with other like-minded souls, Trevor honed his panel beating and spray painting skills using the Y-type as his experimental project.

His first task was to bring a severely rusted boot and spare wheel compartment back to life – a weak point in these cars – and to carefully beat the original shape back into rounded mudguards badly mis-shapen after years of abuse in car parks and garages. At one three hour lesson per academic week, this task took Trevor four years before he was happy with the finished body shell.

Painting was quicker but it took another year to perfect the lead wiping and final preparation before the Old English White top coats could be applied and work began on the red leather interior. The interior work was done by the late Bill Phillips, one of Canberra's leading restorers.

Coinciding with that was progress on repairing mechanical and chassis components. The engine was fully rebuilt, the gearbox inspected and



bearings replaced while wheel bearings and brakes were dutifully given an inspection and worn components changed. The only variation to the original was the installation of twin carburettors using a manifold designed for the YT, the four-seater tourer version introduced in late '48. Power is now a useful 54.4bhp.

Once complete the Y-type had its first showing at Canberra's annual Wheels Show in 1989 where it drew many admiring glances and appreciative comments. But it

wasn't just a pose car: It was soon on an inaugural trip with Canberra's Antique and Classic Car Club on a 3000km tour to the Great Ocean Road in Victoria on which it performed faultlessly.

Other projects beckoned the car buff of many tastes and after five years with the fully restored car he decided to sell it and focus resources on other car projects. At the 1995 Wheels Show he reluctantly placed a 'for sale' sign discretely on the front seat where it was spotted by the Kennewells.

MG enthusiasts many years ago, the Kennewells had drifted away from owning a car when life required resources be directed towards more practical matters. In 1994 the Octagon lured them back and they bought an MGB. A year later they bought the Y. This year they added a MG TC.

I have always enjoyed the early post-war Nuffield saloons so I was really looking forward to taking the Y for a drive.

It is a lovely little car to settle into. By modern standards it is quite compact and the styling of the period means that for the overall width of the car, you don't get much shoulder room.

However, the seats wrap nicely around your upper back and you can settle in to enjoy the view along the well shaped bonnet over the polished timber dash. Y

All instruments are easily seen from the driver's seat and although reasonably comprehensive, no tachometer is a bit of a surprise. The four speed gearbox provides plenty of flexibility so that the car is not a handful in modern day traffic. It will cruise easily at 90-100kph and is a delight to drive.



Twin carburetors (top left) have boosted this Y's output to a very useful 54.4bhp, making it easy to drive in modern conditions. The one surprise in the wooden dash (below left) is the lack of a tachometer in the stylish Octagon instrument set-up. The doors open to display a plush leather and wood interior.

