

AUSTERITY AUTOMOBILES



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Contributor

This year celebrates the 70th anniversary of VE Day (Victory in Europe) when the fighting stopped, but the hardships at home continued. The British motor industry produced a number of diverse vehicles during the immediate post-war years and over the coming weeks we'll be looking at a cross-section of these classics – this week it's the MG Y-Type

Designed before the outbreak of hostilities, a prototype Y-Type numbered EX166 was produced in 1939 with the launch party planned for an Earls Court Motor Show launch; an event that never took place.

The Y-Type would have been the third car in a line-up of MG saloons produced in the mid to late 'Thirties. First was the larger MG SA, based on the Wolseley 18/80, followed by the mid-ranged VA, which was very similar to the Wolseley 12/14. That left the Y-Type as the smallest of the family. This would've given MG a range of cars with 18hp, 14hp and 10hp powerplants, enabling Morris Garages to pull away from its sporty heritage. However, due to the outbreak of war the Y-Type wouldn't be available in reasonable numbers until 1947, ten years after the designs had been signed off.

The MG Y-Type did however feature plenty of new technologies for the time, combined with many more traditional aspects of a car designed in the



An adjustable steering column and independent wiper controls are interesting – note the octagonal clocks.



MG Y-TYPE ONE & A QUARTER

'Thirties. Utilising a Morris Eight Series E bodyshell with four doors in pressed steel, the Y-Type would follow the route of a separate chassis in the early days of unitary construction; this allowed the option of fitting the very clever Smiths 'Jack All' in-built hydraulic rams, operated by a pump on the bulkhead. These allowed the car to be lifted at the front, the rear or both.

The front suspension was penned by a young Alex Issigonis for the Morris Ten Series M. Although never fitted to that model it was adapted into the Gerald Palmer design; this meant the Y-Type would be the first Nuffield product to feature independent front suspension on a production car.

The Y-Type was to benefit from the excellent 1250cc powerplant that was enjoyed by the MG Midget cars of the era, including the MG TB, and then the TC and TD. The Y-Type took other attributes from the Morris Ten, including the gearbox and rear axle, and while it was no sports car, performance was certainly adequate for the times and comparable to rival machines from the likes of Riley and Singer.

Following the Second World War Abingdon returned to car production in earnest and a launch price of £671 11s

8d including tax was announced in the spring of 1947. The first of the Y-Type models were never named the YA; that only occurred when the car was upgraded in 1951 after 6158 examples had left the factory.

The YB benefitted from a front anti-roll bar and uprated heavy duty shock absorbers, while the wheel sizes were decreased from 16 inches to 15 inches. Uprated Lockheed brakes and a hypoid rear axle all contributed to a big improvement in the model's road manners and by late 1953 a total of 1301 YBs had been produced, including the one featured here. 884 Touring or soft-top versions of the saloon were built (mainly for the export market) and their production ceased in 1950, but the export or die philosophy had not bypassed Abingdon with Y-Types shipped across the globe.



The octagon shape is featured across the Y-Type, starting with the radiator cap and badge.



The Y-Type was displayed at the 1949 Motor Show and although at that time it had only been in production a couple of years its design was already over a decade old.

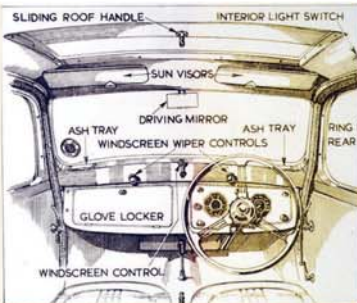
A LIFETIME WITH CLASSIC CARS

Geoff Crowther has a rich history around the classic scene owing to him owning several Austin Sevens, Morris Minors and a series of MGs, including TA and TD models, along with four Y-Types. When Geoff's YB left the showroom in December 1952 the price had increased to £635, plus taxes at £354, and with the options of a radio at £24 and a heater costing £10 these made this a £1000 car.

Supplied by University Motors the MG came with a rather special number plate to match the model, something this dealer was known for, along with a plaque they mounted on the dash of all cars leaving their showrooms. The logbook states this car has just one previous owner who therefore will have retained it in his possession for over 60



University Motors supplied new Y-Types with a special number plate beneath the super chrome grille.



The Y-Type was a pre-war design packed with great features, like the ring-pull rear blind and windscreen opening knob.



The 1.25-litre engine is reliable and lively, but struggles pulling the nearly one ton Y-Type.

years, keeping it not only original but in excellent order.

Geoff's YB certainly doesn't look 63 years old and also belies its 120,000 miles on the road; it fires up readily and once under way it pulls eagerly. With the front suicide doors secured, interior space is 'snug' while the leather seats hold the occupant comfortably and the forward view is very pleasant, as is the wooden dash with chrome surrounded octagonal dials. The performance is perfect for around town but modern motorway driving may not be such a

pleasure as top end acceleration is somewhat lacking, but then that's only to be expected from a 'Thirties design.

What this YB does have in abundance is character, with a charm that attracts waves from pedestrians and an understanding from other road users. Plenty of interesting features, including the rear blind and opening windscreen, offer much for the enthusiast to enjoy; it's a great little MG that somewhat slipped under the radar compared to the far more popular T-Series Midgets.



The 'Jack All' system. Select front, back or both, insert the handle, pump then 'up she comes'.



Double doors at the rear include a boot area and a further compartment below for the spare tyre.



A centre armrest, leather trim and (to keep the sun out the rear window) a shade operated by a cord.

FANCY A Y-TYPE?

The obvious thing to check for with all Y-Types is rust and while the chassis is considered strong and not normally prone to excessive corrosion, the associated panels can suffer. Areas where the body is attached to the chassis are vulnerable, especially from the rear door pillars back. Looking from the outside the rear wings can look perfect but where they bolt on around the 'arch can be rusted quite badly. The boot floor and spare wheel compartment suffer in the lower area, as does the base of the doors, but the article I read advised that, mercifully, the front is less likely to corrode, mainly due to a liberal coating of oil coming from the inevitable engine leaks.

The front suspension is robust and reliable if looked after correctly but earlier YAs didn't benefit from the uprated shock absorbers fitted to the YB and will therefore need replacing more frequently. Bushes, links and pins will all require regular checking and lubrication while the engine enjoys a very long life, assuming

it's correctly maintained.

The article offering technical advice was written in 1984 and I was shocked to find that the article maintained just £1000 would buy an excellent example. Expect to spend £9000 in 2015 or more if you're looking at an immaculate example.

I was also surprised to learn the Y-Type is something of a big screen star having featured in many films, from Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom to The Sweeney 2, Miss Marple and the 1985 hit Dance With A Stranger, plus in the feature film The Iron Lady starring Meryl Streep – a Y-Type belonging to Margaret Thatcher is adorned with posters and loud speakers for the 1959 General Election campaign.



WHY AN MG Y-TYPE? GEOFF EXPLAINS...

"I am the proud owner of an MG Y-Type YB saloon from 1952. Although its original design was first penned prior to 1939, the MG was right up to date at the time with independent front suspension and rack and pinion steering, making it a great handling car.

"I purchased the MG fairly recently and it was originally black but was recoloured in Shire Green some time ago. Although the performance is reasonable it is obviously nothing like a modern car as it is only equipped with a 1250cc engine. The dash and door cappings are in polished wood, it comes with a neat sliding roof and although it enjoys a more modern indicator system (for

safety reasons) the original trafficators still operate, but I doubt other road users would look out for them.

"The hydraulic brakes are very good, even though the overall weight is quite heavy, but should a puncture occur the superb in-built jacking system is available. Synchromesh is available in second, third and fourth and the clutch is light compared to many of the cars of the era. I particularly enjoy the driving position and adjustable steering column.

"Overall the MG is light to drive and handles well with a lively engine making this pre-war design a post-war success. I really enjoy driving the car whenever I get the chance."



TECH SPEC: MG Y-TYPE

ENGINE:	1250cc in-line four-cylinder
POWER:	46bhp
PERFORMANCE:	0-60mph in 29.3 seconds
TRANSMISSION:	Four-speed manual, synchro on second, third and top
SUSPENSION:	Front: Independent coil and wishbone Rear: Half-elliptic
STEERING:	Direct acting rack and pinion
BRAKES:	Lockheed hydraulic with nine-inch drums



There is no doubt where this car was built.



The octagon reigns supreme right down to the hub cap centres.

AUSTERITY ANECDOTES

Slough-built Citroëns included the 2CV towards the end of the austerity years in 1954. The car was not a great success; many believe that because of its basic design and austere look folk were reminded of a difficult recent past. It was also rather expensive at £565, which surpassed the price for a new Ford Popular or Anglia, the Morris Minor and the Austin A60. Its 58mpg did help it sell in its 'pick up' version to the Royal Navy as its lack of weight allowed it to be carried by the new range of helicopter transporters and the Marines could mount an anti-tank gun in the rear.

War-time petrol rationing remained in force until 1950 but from 1942 with the fall of the Far East rubber plantations, tyre sales were banned; so even in peace time you couldn't get much use from your car if you still had one. The world shortage of rubber resulted in the practice of re-treading tyres, something that continued for two decades, and punctured examples were often stuffed with hay to keep the wheels turning. The shortages of parts (clutches, carburettors, etc.) created a climate for ingenious adaptations (otherwise known as bodge). Odd-sized lights were common, crude and dangerous fuel delivery systems were also created; whatever was required to keep the car mobile. Little surprise then that with the number of unroadworthy vehicles increasing the MoT was introduced into the Road Traffic Act of 1956 and came into effect in 1960.