

Thinking of Buying MG YA or YB Saloons?

Ted Purcell offers a practical, down to earth buyer's guide to these traditional sporting family cars.

The design of the MG YA was well advanced by 1939 and on schedule to be launched in 1941. However, in 1939 when Mr. Hitler embarked on his ill fated great European tour, many things automotive were put on hold. For the next few years the trusty workforce at Abingdon had to concentrate on producing components for bombers and tanks.

The YA was finally unveiled in 1947, but by this time it was already looking a little dated. This was exacerbated, no doubt to save costs, by the fact that the main part of the body and the doors came from the ageing Morris Eight Series E.

Beneath the traditional body styling the mechanical spec was quite up to date. Rack and pinion steering was adopted, along with a new chassis incorporating Issigonis-designed coil spring independent front suspension - apart from the mid-thirties R-Type racer, this was a first for MG.

Later the YA chassis was adapted for the sports TD and used the same steering and suspension.

The car was aimed at the fairly well heeled middle-class buyer, and to attract this type of clientele many attractive features were fitted as



standard. Perhaps the most interesting today was the Smiths Jackall built-in jacking system. This comprised of four hydraulic jacks piped in and permanently attached underneath the car; the pump and reservoir being under the bonnet. By selecting 'front', 'rear' or 'all' on a valve attached to the pump body, the selected wheels were easily raised by operating a lever on the pump.

A metal sunroof, opening windscreen and adjustable steering column were also standard fitments. Leather upholstery, a walnut fascia and a first-class paint finish in a variety of colours added

the finishing touch to this most desirable package. However this little luxury saloon didn't come cheap. It cost almost £700 when a lesser family four-seater could be bought for around £300 or less.

The YB version was announced in 1951, and apart from 15" wheels (they were 16" the YA) there was little outward change from the earlier model. Braking was much improved by the adoption of twin leading shoes at the front, while the addition of a front anti-roll bar reduced the tendency to oversteer. A much stronger hypoid rear axle replaced the spiral-bevel pattern fitted to the YA.

An open four-seat Tourer - the YT - was produced mainly for export between 1948 and 1950. The Thirties styling perhaps was not to everyone's taste and only 877 found customers. Though there are still a few about, they are very thin on the ground.

Most common was the YA, of which a total 6158 were sold.

Production of the YB was discontinued in 1953 after only 1301 were made. It was replaced by the Magnette, a product of the Nuffield-Austin merger.



RUNNING ONE TODAY

Back in the late Sixties when I was racing a Fairthorpe I had, on occasion, the need to quickly find something to get me around white repaired a deranged suspension or blown-up engine, well remember a miserable night being taken by a friend to view a 1949 MG YA on some god-awful estate on the outskirts of Swansea. It was taxed, it

Octagon-themed wooden dash is a thing of beauty, but can be expensive to repair if it's badly damaged. Chrome and paint causes less concern.



had a couple of months of MoT and it ran. I think I gave £45 for it. The next morning, (it had stopped raining!) the full horror of peeling paint, worn out remould tyres and very little compression made me wish I'd haggled a bit more!

I used that car for about six months; after a valve grind and a couple of new tyres found it the most endearing and pleasant of the many stop-gap bangers I have owned. The steering was direct and very positive, it was quiet and comfortable and the engine would whisk it up to 70-plus in no time. Even though the example I had was neglected and well worn it still seemed to exude an air of quality; I wish had it now.

There is no doubt they are a bit cramped inside, but because was rather tall and skinny, the lack of interior space didn't bother me much; however, those of more ample proportions should try one first!

Today, I think a Y-Type would be a most useable and practical classic; the pre-war looks belie inherent good handling, economy and reasonably modern road manners. The pre-war look, of course, was a disadvantage when they were new; today it certainly adds to their charm.

LET'S GO AND LOOK AT ONE

While they are certainly not immune, the Y-Type doesn't suffer from terminal rust as badly as some of its contemporaries.

The sills and the rear wheel arches are the two main areas where rust is most likely to take hold; predictably, they are the most difficult to repair! Sills and repair sections are available but somewhat expensive. A good metal fabricator could make many of these parts and save quite a lot of money. But care must be taken when replacing sills to ensure the curve along their

length matches the running boards. The running boards and the mounting brackets may also be rusty but at least they can be removed for repairs. New replacements are available if they are too far gone.

Rust around the rear wheel arches will mean the wings must first be removed to effect repairs. It will be found that the inner flange of the rear wings where they bolt to the arch will almost certainly need attention. At least with the rear wings off, repairs to the inner wings and surrounding metalwork is made that much easier.

The bottom edge of the boot lid can trap moisture and condensation with predictable results. A repair section or a complete boot outer skin is available. Also check the boot floor, the spare wheel compartment and cover.

Blocked drainage holes will quickly cause the bottoms of the doors to rot out, but repair sections are available. With the doors open, check the lower area of the door posts and the door shut faces.

Water leaks from the sunroof may mean that the rubber drain tubes are blocked. This can cause serious internal body corrosion and should never be neglected.

In the flush of enthusiasm to buy, do be realistic about what can be done to reclaim a tatty or neglect interior. If it's not badly damaged, the most awfully shabby leather and walnut can be restored and cleaned. However, if we are talking about reupholstering or replacing the veneer, be prepared to talk nicely to your bank manager.

TIME TO TRY THE JACKS

With the front end safely supported on axle stands, check and suspension for play in the joints, bushes. Just about everything is available to replace worn parts, but allow for quite an expensive rebuild if all is not well. Talking of prices, I find that the price of parts, especially, seem to vary enormously so it does pay to shop around.

Have a look at the chassis for damage or kinks

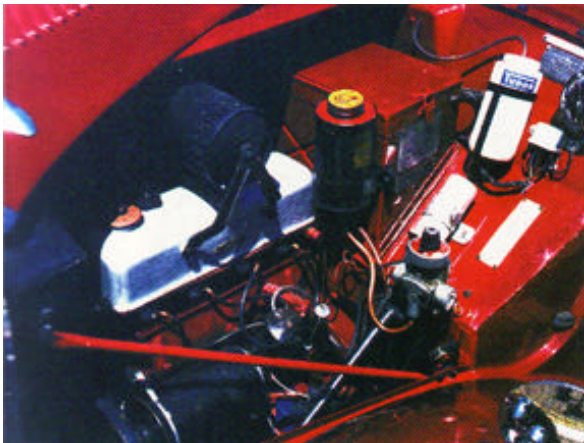




where wishbones mount. Check the sills and the running board mountings; they catch all the muck thrown up by the front wheels.

Next get under the rear end and check the lower edge of the inner wings, the spare wheel tray and rear spring hanger mountings.

ENGINE & GEARBOX



The 1250cc engine is basically the same as that fitted to the sports TD and TF models so spares are no problem, and overhauling is within the scope of most amateurs. That is supposing they have the vital information on clearances and the means to check assembly. Here a word of advice: when parts are returned after machining, take the utmost care to remove any swarf or dirt from oilways. Thoroughly wash everything, clean out oilways with wire and thin wire brushes and blow through with compressed air. I have seen more than one engine ruined by metal fillings left inside after a rebore or crank grind. Cylinder heads modified to run on lead-free are available on exchange and a neat conversion can be bought to cure a tendency to leak oil from the rear main bearing.

The gearbox is pretty robust but after a big mileage, first and reverse (possibly second, too) may become noisy. This is something that can be put up with for quite a long time, but sooner or later the box will have to come out for an overhaul. Though parts and rebuilt boxes are available on exchange — they don't come cheap!



Trouble with the braking system will invariably be due to seized or leaking cylinders. Many people spend a fortune on new cylinders when the old ones are perfectly saveable. As long as the pistons and bores are not scored or pitted there is nothing wrong with stripping them, giving them a thorough clean and then polishing the bore and piston with fine wet-and-dry paper. Then, with new rubbers and a smear of rubber (silicone) grease, they have a new lease of life.

With twin leading shoes on the front, the YB brakes should be more powerful than those fitted to the earlier YA. Both systems work very well but remember, without servo-assistance, far higher pedal pressure is required than on modern cars.

OK, WILL IT BREAK THE BANK?

Maybe not, a restoration project should cost no more than somewhere in the region of £1000/1500. Just make sure that it is complete and restorable!

A useable everyday runner needing no major work can usually be found for around £3000/4000.

A really nice and properly restored example, perhaps only needing minor detailing, will usually be advertised for somewhere around £5500/6500.



As usual, my advise is to buy the best. It is far better to pay five or six grand on something which someone else has invested maybe eight or more thousand. Believe me - it happens all the time!

THANKS

Many thanks to Mr. Don Ace of Bishopston, Swansea who is the owner of the immaculate example featured in this article. Don's father bought the car in 1954 when it was two years old. It has recently been restored to a very high standard after languishing for twenty years in a leaking garage. The restoration, a labour of love, took 600 hours of expert attention — see what I mean about buying one that is already restored?

JOIN THE CLUB

Here we are really spoilt for choice.

Take your pick from the **MG Car Club**, Oxfordshire, 01235 555222. www.mgacrs.org.uk

The MG Owners Club, Cambridgeshire, 01954 231125. www.mgownersclub.co.uk

MG Y-Type Register, J Lawson, 12, Nithsdale Rd, Liverpool. L15 5AX



Clever boot arrangement. Wonder when it will be re-invented?

Originally published in Classic Car Mart, September 2003, subscription can be obtained at Subscriptions@trinitypub.co.uk or by telephoning 0121 223 8737, or fax 0121 233 8715. Reproduced here by kind permission.

