

AN MG YB CALLED PRISCILLA

By Chris Adamson



Chris Adamson &
Patricia Lodge with
Priscilla at the
National Motor
Museum

Fifteen years ago an elderly aunt died and left me a small legacy in her will with which my partner Patricia and I purchased our first MG - a 1972 MGB Roadster, which featured in *Enjoying MG* in 2003 when we took it to the Spa circuit in Belgium.

This was one of several overseas outings which threw up a serious deficiency with the MGB, a lack of luggage space for week long excursions (especially with black tie dinners included in the programme) and this set us on the hunt for something a little more spacious to add to our collection.

Our search in the MG catalogue initially centred on the Z Series which is just classic enough to qualify and has a generous boot plus an additional two seats. Unfortunately at the time all the available Magnettes were either well past their best and required lots of TLC or fully restored and beyond our budget.

Then on a visit to the Spring Autojumble at Beaulieu in the New Forest in 2005 we spotted this unusual 1930s looking Old English White 1.25 litre saloon wearing an MG badge being sold by well-known MG dealer Terry Bone.

It transpired the previous owners, who had spent a lot on having it refettled, had emigrated to Cyprus and didn't fancy the 300 per cent import duty they were being asked to pay to take it with them.

Pat immediately fell in love with Priscilla (that's the name which is written on the rear window but its origins are lost in the mist of time) and after a chat to a friend, who owned both a YB and a YT we took the plunge and not a '30s but a 1952 saloon was ours.

With its running boards, extended wheel arches, wind-out windscreens, suicide doors, centre split lift-up bonnet and exposed headlights, the Y Series looks almost 20 years older than it is and distinctly old fashioned when put alongside the 'modern' ZA which arrived just a year later in 1953.

The Y Type (originally called the MG Ten) was conceived in the late 1930s and was based on the Morris 8 and Wolseley 4 with an engine from the Morris 10. Its shared components philosophy being dictated by Leonard Lord, managing director of Morris Motors, who insisted that all MGs should be based on the corporate parts bin.

It should have made its debut at the 1939 London Motor Show, but World War Two intervened and it wasn't revived until the Abingdon factory ceased its military production and needed to put a car onto the market.

It was only later after some research that we discovered just how seemingly rare the YB is. While there were 6,158 YAs built from 1947 to 1951, just 1,301 YBs were constructed between 1951 and 1953 and of these the Y Register says just 180 are still known to exist.

It takes a while to spot the difference between the YA and YB, the latter features fuller rear wings to accommodate the wider 15 inch wheels and has hub cap medallions while underneath it gets an uprated braking system, improved rear axle and stiffer front shock absorbers plus a front anti-roll bar.



Priscilla - her name



There was also a YT open-top four-seater tourer version made between 1948 and 1951 some 877 being built, even fewer of these exist although the numbers have grown over the years as some people have taken to chopping a saloon to create a drop-top which is not especially successful.

One of the reasons that so few survive is that many were scrapped for their running gear as most of it fits the more desirable pre-war MG TB and post war TC,TD,TF sports cars.

Reading the documentation that came with Priscilla (including the original log book, a Shell, Lubrication Service booklet and handbook) I learnt that the car was first registered to a Mr Albert Hyde from Harrow in July 1952.



Engine Bay showing servo brakes



Engine Bay showing two carburetors

It also threw up a small surprise in that when new, Priscilla was painted, not in white but black and green a popular colour combination at the time. I have yet to discover when the colour change happened but I suspect sometime in the early '90s judging by later documentation.

The distinctive UMG number plate has nothing to do with Morris Garages but represents the University Motors Group of Piccadilly who were the London retailers for MG at the time and you often see the UMG plate on cars of this period.

Mr Hyde retained the car for 15 years before selling to another motorist in Harrow and then it went to a lady driver in North London before being acquired by the Arnold family who moved



Interior



from London to Cambridge and kept a mass of receipts for parts and servicing.

Among the fascinating items is a receipt from the Northern Automobile Repair and Service Station Ltd of London for £10 that includes a 6,000 mile service, supplying and fitting a new wing mirror, making good the driver's door shut and removing and repairing the clockwork mechanism on the trafficator system.

Reading further on, 1989 was a big year for Priscilla as an extensive parts list supplied by NTG Services of Ipswich (who are still the go-to people for YB parts and a gold mine of information) to a Mr D. Penny backed-up by an undated letter promoting it for sale showing a bare metal restoration.

Among the replacement parts were body sills, inner and outer door skins, a boot floor and wheel arches - most being bolted on and off.

Elsewhere rust was cut out and new steel welded in place or else bead blasted back to bare metal before a

primer re-spray and the engine and transmission were also removed and overhauled.

Inside the cabin was re-trimmed in green leather seats and door trims as well as beige headlining matching the original components and the instrumentation and switches replaced.

At the time the restoration cost £6,250 - yet the owner was selling it for £3,000.

Portrayed in the advertising of the post-war period as a sporting family saloon this seems to be wishful thinking on two counts, one the size and two the speed.

Although a four-door four-seater the Y Type is best described as snug, especially with the huge steering wheel, solid upright seats and rear hinged front



Original 1953 advert for the 1.25 litre MG Saloon



Original 1952 advert for the 1.25 litre MG saloon



Abingdon manufacturing plate



Boot lid doubles up as a seat



Five point puller needed to remove the rear hubs



doors which makes getting in and out something of a challenge, especially for the driver.

And, for me to get comfortable up front, leg room in the rear shrinks to nothing. However, we have gone four-up on occasion but unless they are small children I wouldn't recommend it for long journeys.

Surprise therefore to relate that I have used Priscilla as a wedding car for several friends, the solution is for the front passenger seat to be removed. This is a quick task as it is set on runners and simply slides and pulls out in a matter of moments, this leaves a space that even a bride in a mild meringue dress can access, although dad behind me does find life less comfortable.

When it comes to performance, the statistics say 62mph should be reached in a dizzying 28 seconds - this sounds an age and is. But it does pull away from the line to 30mph surprisingly quickly and I have caught more than my fair share of fellow drivers unaware at traffic-lights.

Despite the family image, the Y Type did prove itself in motorsport contesting the Monte Carlo Rally in the early '50s and it won the team award on the 1953 RAC Rally.

Cruising is best done at about 50mph where the YB is happiest although it can keep up with motorway traffic when it has to.

Under the louvred bonnet is a 46bhp XPAG 1,250cc four cylinder engine, the mainstay of the pre-war MG production line and by the early '50s a tried and tested unit that still runs well today.

The YA and YB models were fitted with a single carburettor while the later YT was fitted with twin carburettors and, as a result, power was upped to 54bhp, Priscilla is also fitted with twin carburettors which gives it an extra kick, something I am very often grateful for.

Originally the Y Type was installed with a four-speed gearbox, but one of the popular conversions is to fit a modern five-speed transmission to give better flexibility and more relaxed high speed motoring.

Priscilla arrived with this conversion but rather than the normal Ford Sierra unit the aluminium casing suggests that it is of Japanese origin, possibly Toyota, but no-one has yet been able to give me a definitive answer to this.

While the lift-over bonnet can be a bit of a pain to unlock every time, it does have the advantage of providing all-round access to the engine and makes working on it relatively straight forward, not that I have had to do much as it has run without a murmur now for over eight years.

If I could go back and redesign the YB one of things I would do is relocate the heavy duty battery. It sits in a box across the front bulkhead which means the bonnet has to be unbolted and detached to get it out. You also have to remember that it has a



positive earthing electrical system which can limit accessories.

An almost unique feature of the Y Type, one that put it ahead of its time and still hasn't been replicated, is the on-board jackall system. This is an internal hydraulic jacking set-up that allows the car to be raised at each corner. It seems such a simple but effective idea I am surprised no one has copied it.

Sadly the jackall had been removed from our car before we acquired it but I suppose we should be grateful as the reduced weight does make it lighter and more nimble.

One of the times the jackall would be useful is when changing a wheel which has highlighted one slight problem, the spare wheel. This is housed behind the detachable rear number plate but, as I found is impossible to remove fully inflated because it fouls on the rear bumper.

The explanation appears to be that modern radial tyres have a broader shoulder than the original crossplys. There are two solutions: carry the spare uninflated and take a foot pump with you or find a modern run flat that fits the wheel size, I have opted for the former to keep the originality.

As well as the previously mentioned transmission upgrade, another popular enhancement is the installation of servo-assisted braking that wasn't available for the car originally, another feature we were lucky enough to discover already fitted on Priscilla.

This is a very worthwhile modification as our friend who has a similar aged YB and who drove it was mightily impressed by its added stopping power.

This enhances the drum brakes which to check-over will require a five point puller for the rear drums and pads unless you are willing to risk using a lump hammer to free it.

One of the few problems I have encountered with Priscilla was the failure of the mechanically operated brake light switch which is connected to the brake pedal under the car, an instant MoT failure.

Everyone tells me that these switches are now impossible to source but thankfully the servo system provides an alternative, a hydraulically operated switch which bolts in and works a treat.

The only other notable distraction has been the intermittent operation of the windscreen wipers. These are engaged using two knobs on the dashboard and the problem was eventually traced to a loose connection. Not that the wipers are up to much, the arm spring tension fights to move rain from the screen at the best of times and needs the windscreen winding out a fraction to get any satisfactory adhesion.

Apart from this, working on the YB is painless, as is servicing because it's very much familiar MG territory of the period and everything is very accessible.

Parts are still in good supply and I have found specialist NTG Motor Services (www.mgbits.com) to be especially helpful with bits and pieces.

The reported Achilles heel of the Y Type, one I have yet to experience thankfully, is the half-shafts which have a tendency to fail, some owners I hear carry a spare unit with them when travelling abroad.

Elsewhere the Y Type, which was the first all-steel bodied MG, uses independent coil springs at the front (designed by the great Alec Issigonis) with a live axle and semi-elliptic leaf springs at the rear so the ride quality is generally comfortable.

Steering is an unassisted standard rack and pinion layout (and who thinks adjustable steering columns are a new idea, the Y Type had it in 1947) which is light on the move but needs some muscle to manoeuvre at low speeds.

While it may not be the most sophisticated or glamorous of classics, the YB is functional and so far has proved to be extremely reliable.

Luxury features of the time include the opening sun roof, leather upholstery and polished walnut interior, while an optional extra I would have liked is a heater which is absent on ours.

As well as being easy to look after, the added benefits of a 61 year old YB is zero rating for Vehicle Excise Duty and due to changes in the rules last year no requirement for an MoT, although I plan to have mine tested every other year.

Insurance, because of its modest performance and relatively strong construction, is very affordable and if you can perform the



routine servicing yourself there is very little more to do apart from add fuel, making a Y Type one of the cheapest classics to own and run.

Although relatively scarce, prices for the Y Type are still very modest in MG terms; however, they have risen in recent years.

Most of the price guides give a range of £1,500 for a basket case up to £7,500 for one in excellent condition, but on a quick internet search I found several early YAs commanding prices as high as between £12,000 and £15,000.

The duo-tone painted versions tend to be more desirable and of course the YT convertible commands a premium so £15,000 for a good example is not unexpected, many went overseas so you can find them by surfing the world wide web.

The Y Type may have its limitations in terms of glamour and performance but since we have had Priscilla she has had more outings than our MGB Roadster, mainly because there are so few around and we are encouraged by our fellow club members to take it along to regional classic car shows to add variety to the MG display.

One of our first outings was to the annual Y Register meeting, that year held in Gloucestershire, which gave Priscilla good airing. I was amazed at just how many Y Types are in regular use and everyone was extremely friendly offering us advice and tips on running the car.

We also joined a classic run that toured East Sussex and Kent and completed the return journey from Tunbridge Wells in a time not far short of that I would expect in a modern car proving just how practical the Y Type is.

Since then we have mainly used her for local shows and club events (we are active members of 1020 Bournemouth & Poole MGOC) and Priscilla is a regular on Bournemouth's summer seafront classic gathering on Sunday afternoons.

If you want more information or advice on buying and owning a Y Type, the Y Register is a very active group - website www.mgatypes.org

FACTFILE: MG Y Type Saloon

Production: 1947 - 1953

Numbers: 8336

Engine: 1250cc XPAG TC / 46bhp / 58lb ft torque

Top Speed: 71mph

0-62mph: 27.3 seconds

Fuel Consumption: 27mpg

Price New: £525 plus purchase tax of £146

Price Today: £3,500 - £15,000

VED : Exempt

MOT: Exempt