

THE BRITISH CAR

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MG SERIES Y: THE FORGOTTEN JEWEL



The whole world knows about the MG Series T, which incarnates the quintessence of the small British sports car. 53,000 copies of this two-seater roadster were manufactured between 1936 and 1955. But MG also issued a domestic and extremely rare variant of this great success: the Series Y which can accommodate four passengers!

The YT, a convertible version, was produced in 877 copies between 1948 and 1951 (today, there remains only 168 known roadworthy examples out of 295, including 7 in Canada). On the other hand, the Saloon version was much more widespread: - 6,158 YA Saloon between 1947 and 1951 (381 known roadworthy examples out of 957, including 3 in Canada) and 1,301 YB Saloon in 1952 and 1953 (205 known roadworthy examples out of 372, including 1 in Canada).

Its antiquated appearance has a very comprehensible historical origin. Right before the Second World War, MG planned to supplement its range of Saloons, made up until then of the "SVW", with a small-engine car, which used elements from the Morris series 10/4-M and 8 which were released in 1938. Conceived at that time and intended to be launched for the 1940 Motor Show, it had to wait the end of the war and the reconstruction of British industry before finally being born. Its basic price was of £525 but, in addition to an aura of pre-war grace and charm, the interior was of a very high level of quality: the dials are octagonal, the steering column is adjustable, the windshield opens

from the bottom by means of a small crank on the dashboard, the sliding roof is standard, upholstery is leather, the dashboard and the frame of the side windows are mahogany, the rear window has a blind and fabrics of quality are employed at the right places.

On the mechanical side, the owner enjoyed rack and pinion steering, an independent front suspension and a transmission with 3 synchronized speeds (excepting first). A curiosity: the Y can be raised, front, back or both, thanks to the "Jackall System", consisting of 4 hydraulic jacks permanently attached to the chassis and operated by a pump located under the bonnet. As for the engine, it is the four cylinder XPAG of 1,250 CC (76 CI) with overhead valves, as used by the Series T from 1939 on. When equipped with a single SU carburettor, it will develop only 46 HP at 4,800 RPM. The maximum speed of the car is 70 miles per hour and its consumption can easily reach more than 30 miles to the gallon... but never simultaneously!

All this can give an impression of boredom according to today's standards, but the behavior of Y is astonishingly spry for its time and this small sport Saloon was the VW Golf Gti of its time. It is astonishing that it can accommodate four passengers comfortably although it is as compact as a Triumph Spitfire (145 X 59 inches)!

Of course, we are speaking of British mechanics, infamous from time immemorial for its lubricant losses. To such a point that basket-cases are only seriously rusted in the rear, the front end having been liberally sprinkled with oil during the course of decades. A leak is "normal*" near the timing chain cover and the back seal of the crankshaft. In the



The author visits with his old British friend Winston



same way, a small blue cloud is not unusual when starting up. Lastly, a consumption of one liter of oil every 1,000 miles should not make you lose sleep.

*An English car never loses its oil. It marks its territory. This idiosyncrasy of the race is always accompanied by unspoken failures of an electrical nature (Lucas - Prince of Darkness) and a magnetic rear bumper proves to be an option not to be scorned at if one wants to recover all the parts of the car which detach themselves in the course of normal use.

As for the YT Tourer, its dimensions are hardly different from the Saloon and one can find there some of the characteristics of the TC/TD series: cut-away doors, folding windshield, etc. Its engine is also the small XPAG, but equipped with twin SU carburetors, which gives it a power of 54 HP at 5,200 RPM. The dashboard is less luxurious than that of the Saloon and is inspired by that of the convertible. Contrary to the Saloon, intended exclusively for the British and Australian markets, the YT was specifically conceived for export throughout the world, with steering on the left or on the right.

In 1952, MG improved the Y Saloon and introduced the YB. The improvements relate to several mechanical aspects. From now on, the engine was equipped with twin SU carburetors as it was the case for the YT Tourer, which now also enables it to reach 54 HP. The differential more modern, the suspension improved and an anti-roll bar installed in front. Moreover, the use of 15 inch wheels, instead of 16 inch, further improves road handling. Some modifications of interior finish are also made (round dials for example), all the while preserving an excellent general level of quality. The YB continues to give an impression of unusual luxury for a small Saloon.

When you drive a Y, the windshield offers a surprisingly similar spectacle to that which offers a Ford Model A: a charming small muzzle flanked by large chrome headlights. But there the similarity ceases: you are surrounded by the warm environment of a British Saloon and the design features of the car are clearly at the avant-garde of its time. When emerging from the cockpit, you enjoy the charm of a line typical to 1935 and a classic profile suggesting that of a Rolls. Appropriately, the Y's nickname is "Pocket Bentley"!



The Jackall system in action

This small sport Saloon is curiously unloved. Although it is essentially a TD in Sunday clothes and even if it is in perfect condition, the commercial value of a Y is never very high, which dissuades many owners to invest in an expensive restoration. Beautiful specimens are thus relatively rare and the owners, faithfully and affectionately devoted to their cars, refuse to separate themselves from them.

After its restoration in 1996, the author's car lived out the following ten years on one of the tiny Shetland Islands, where its elderly owner disposed of only a few kilometers of road in order to exercise his Y. On its return to Albion, it was immediately snapped up by an enthusiastic MG aficionado who proudly presented it to his wife... who was positively horrified. The poor fellow confided his sorrow to the MG Y Club Registrar, who alerted me at once. After a year of searching, the deal was finally concluded in the hours that followed the receipt of the message and the beauty arrived in Canada a few days before Christmas 2006.

Epilogue: Recently, Mario Boies (the largest MG parts distributor around here) did not have in stock the correct sparkplugs for my Y. After studying the conversion charts at length, I discovered that the sparkplug recommended by the 1951 Technical Manual was still manufactured, but under a different model number. I easily found it at Canadian Tire (the largest car & hardware store in Canada)... in the LAWN-MOWER department!

Today, the value of a Y of this period is as follows:

Series	Passable	Good	Excellent	100 points
YA/YB 1947-53	\$5,000	\$ 8,500	\$16,000	\$20,000
YT 1948-51	\$7,000	\$12,500	\$23,000	\$28,000
TD 1949-53	\$9,000	\$15,000	\$28,000	\$34,000

To know some more: <http://www.mgcars.org.uk/mgccy>