

THERE ONCE WAS AN UGLY DUCKLING

Until recently the Y-type MG saloons of the late Forties were largely passed over. Needless to say interest is now such that these eminently practical cars are now much sought after.

Y-TYPE 1¼-LITRE PRODUCTION CHANGES

Early 1947	Y-type 1¼-litre saloon launched with 46 bhp engine.
Late 1948	Four-seat, two door tourer launched for export with lhd and 54 bhp TC-Midget engine.
1951	YT open tourer dropped and YB saloon launched with similar power output to original – YA – but with semi-floating hypoid, unitary rear axle, smaller diameter – 15 rather than 16-inch-diameter – wheels and larger profile – 5.50 rather than 5.25-inch-tyres. Lower overall gearing. Two leading shoe front brakes. Front anti-roll bar.
Late 1953	Y-type production ends with 6158 YA, 877 YT and 1301 YB – total 8336 – cars produced

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Why buy Y? That's the question invariably asked by owners of more outright MGs. Often referred to as the marques "ugly duckling", the Y-type 1 1/4-Litre cars have long been ignored by the MG buyer - even the MG-saloon buyer passed on the Y-type to show preference for either, the SVW cars that preceded it, or, the Z Series that superseded it, though, more recently, there has been a resurgence of interest in what was for long the forgotten MG.

The Y-type's lot has never been a happy one. Starting life as an uneasy, though nevertheless sound, mixture of Nuffield Group components and placed on the market seven years late by the catastrophe of World War Two, the first rationalised MG saloon came at a time of petrol rationing and general deprivation.

Now, it seems, this Forties-feel appeals to many who seek a coachbuilt car of character that allows a stylish stand against conformity whilst confirming a certain individuality.

The Z Series Magnette is an admirable car but its look and performance place it in an era removed from the styling and constructional divide that breaks the two models into such obviously different categories. The Y-type looks like an old car while the Z-type is not as easy to categorise.

The last MG saloon to be chassis-built went on sale in 1947 and introduced independent front suspension and rack and pinion steering as big strides forward for such a retiring car. 1250 cc pushrod-overhead-valve engine and four-speed gearbox were, basically, contemporary T-type units. Producing 46bhp, the weighty Y delivered 70 mph and 27 mpg — though not at the same time.

It would hardly be fair to say prospective purchasers of the Y were looking for performance so just what do they see in the 1 1/4-Litre? A pocket-sized Bentley perhaps with the emphasis on pocket and the low purchase price and running costs of MG's last coachbuilt saloon?

Quality is synonymous with cars of this era, though, of course, it is relative and surviving old-timers might laugh at this remark. Starting with a substantial traditional platform chassis with box-sectioned main members that now included a forward transverse suspension-holding cross member, progressing to the built-up pressed-steel body and ending with a very accommodating and tastefully finished interior — the 1 1/4-Litre was a honest package. Mechanics — front suspension apart — were all tried-and-tested as reliable. The new suspension proved likewise though, initially, its effects on handling were perhaps not fully understood.

Rear springing — multiple-leaf sprung beam axle rather than coil springs and wishbones at the front — followed the old MG practice of passing the axle over the chassis frame. In the past this had allowed a lower rear body line with improved roadholding. Now it came to be seen as a restriction on axle movement and detrimental to ride quality — particularly important in a saloon car application. At the time the softer-riding benefits of the IFS seemed to annul any rear-ride disadvantage for the general opinion was that the Y rode better than

BUYERS' GUIDE – MG Y-TYPE

anything before. Damping was by all-round hydraulic units and at the front these formed the upper links via their operating levers.

All-round nine-inch-diameter hydraulically-operated drum brakes provided retardation and amazing Jackall jacks provided a, similarly hydraulic, lifting capability activated by an under-bonnet lever-operated pump and valve unit. The new rack and pinion steering housing was held across the front of the suspension cross-member and the Y ran on 16-inch diameter steel disc wheels.

So, just from the mechanical viewpoint, it is clear that the 1 1/4-Litre saloon is a very interesting package. Moving onto the body and interior it becomes more so.

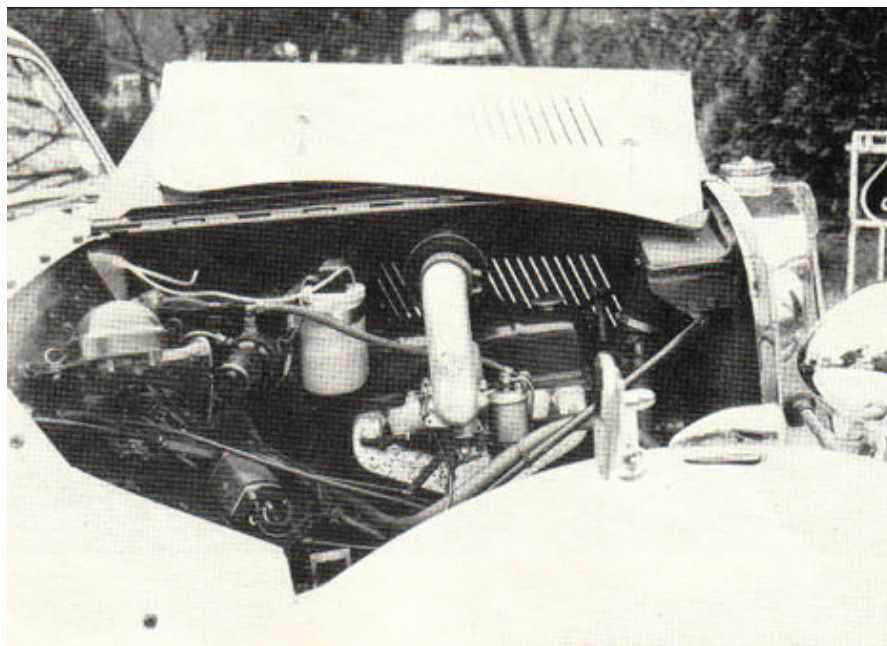
The centre-piece radiator may be a phony but it looks impressive between large tie-bar-mounted headlights and heavily-rounded front wings. Bonnet-side louvres hint at a for-real fully-opening piano-hinged bonnet and they are right. Accessibility is superb and the sight of a clean open-bonneted Y is ample encouragement to keep the engine and its ancillaries spick and span.

Straked running boards, opening windscreen and contrary front doors are all features that have hooked many enthusiasts who are suckers for the Pre-War look. But open one of the four doors and behold the luxury interior — there's leather, wood and fine fabric in all the right places — and a sliding sunroof.

The interior is one of this MG's plus points and one which must be evaluated by prospective buyers. As in past guides emphasis has been placed on the cars' structural integrity this, too, applies to the Y but also look hard at the interior for bringing a sadly neglected or damaged interior to a fitting standard can be quite a job in time and money. Leather seat re-trimming, headlining and carpet can be expensive even if refinishing the wood can be tackled yourself. Having said that, it is still advisable to plump for structural integrity as the decisive factor when considering a prospective purchase. If this is good and the mechanics are reasonable the car can be used while interior fine points may be tackled when time and finances allow. Anyway, most buyers of this type of vehicle tend to plan on a long-term basis and bringing the car up to scratch may be done in stages over a long time span and this favours a structural and mechanical purchase preference; though anybody finding a Y with a good interior has probably found a generally good vehicle.

Still with the interior. All-up the 1 1/4-Litre has 10 opening areas to the interior and any one of them — doors, windows, screen or sunroof — may seal ineffectively. If this is the case and the vehicle has been stored externally, a strange smell may indicate extensive rotting — either that or there is an even bigger gap and stray cats have got in!

As gravity pulls downward, check beneath carpets and the lower edges of the doors for rot and metal corrosion.



Over the 1 1/4-Litre's six-and-a-half-year production run the usual modifications and improvements occurred that led to the YB model's introduction with 15-inch wheels as the visible difference on cars that held brake, suspension and final-drive changes that translated performance gains, though these were marginal as weight had increased.

A rare open tourer version of the Y-type was also produced. Rare because it was mainly for export. The roof-less two-door YT had the 54bhp TC engine and was over one-hundred-weight lighter than its saloon contemporary. It had a left-hand-drive rack to suit its markets and sold 877 between 1948 and 1951. With a mere handful of native YTs, expect to pay for rarity should one come on the market.

Saloon production breaks into 6158 YAs and 1301 YBs which is not really that many compared with the later Z Series that followed towards the end of 1953 when Y production ceased. However, at this time there seems no shortage of cars with prices running from a restoration-needed in the region of £400. As regards parts, one specialist, Mike Green of NTG at Ipswich caters largely for the Y-type, and as an example of prices be prepared to spend £150 on front wings, YA rear wings at £75, YA

rear wings at £75, running boards at £26 per pair and sills at £35 per pair. Though the radiator grille is only available from second-hand sources, other chromed parts such as door handles, are being re-made.

For general guidance for those with whetted appetites let us say that the more-sorted YB suspension and drive package — front anti-roll bar and stronger shock absorbers allied with a hypoid rear axle — together with a beefed up — two leading shoe at the front — brake system should be a safer bet, dynamically speaking, than the tamer YA. One would expect rear axle and all dampers to be in better condition.

On both models look at the IFS greasing points for indication of wear-defeating maintenance. All but the most studied eye of the Y-type expert would have difficulty identifying the Y's body, A or B, so from its or the chassis's standpoint what we say about these areas applies equally to both models. The chassis was good and can generally be relied upon to underwrite a restoration but look to the areas adjacent to the rear axle and the bolt-on running boards. Box sections are strong but by no means immune to rust.

Chassis soundness is the platform from which we step up to the body and here problems seem to begin from the engine compartment rearwards — the engine's natural drying and oiling influence tending to ward off corrosion in its vicinity. Boot and spare-wheel pressings are prime sites for the advanced development of rust as are the hidden, rear-wing-to-body bolting faces.

Undeniably, the 1 1/4-Litre has an olde worlde charm and pre-War fashion that allows buyers to get in touch with the marques golden years for a modest outlay that wouldn't buy several tea chests of T-type bits.

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder but the Y-type holds the right credentials and the MG stamp of quality.

