



# A TRADESMAN'S TAIL

MG never made pick-up trucks, but if they had, they'd probably have been the best pick-up trucks in the world. Perhaps something like this unique creation on a Y-type theme...

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The MG badge has been proudly worn by all manner of vehicles over the years, from the first warmed-over Morris saloons to the very last SV-R supercars. In between there have been sports cars and scorching hatchbacks, rally monsters and ponderous saloons, record-breaking specials and endurance racers. There have been estate cars and four-seat tourers, diesel motors and turbochargers, there's even been a van. But through all this variety, MG has never sold a pick-up with the famous octagon on its nose.

Which, given that the vehicle pictured on these pages is very clearly a Y-type pick-up, means that we have a bit of explaining to do. Commonsense tells us that the Y-type saloon would have been an unlikely candidate for any kind of factory experiment along these lines – aimed squarely at upper-middle class buyers, it was far too expensive to sell as a builder's hack. Mind you, that wouldn't have saved cars from being converted later in life as the combined onslaught of newer designs and the Ten Year Test for road-worthiness decimated both the number of pre-war designs on Britain's roads and the value of any survivors.

Yet this vehicle survived far longer than that as a green YB saloon. In fact, the story really begins in the 1990s, when it was owned by Mervyn Davis in Shrewsbury. Mervyn had used it as a donor vehicle for some of his other restoration projects, as a

result of which most of the rear panels were missing. That still left a sound chassis and panels from the cabin forwards. No doubt you can see the way that this is developing, and it was just as obvious to Mervyn. He extended the chassis some 15in rearwards to ensure the finished article remained visually balanced, then set about building an MG pick-up.

The first step was to make up an ash frame behind the front seats, creating an abrupt cut-off to the Abingdon cabin. Two scrap rear doors were sliced down the middle and welded in place to fill the gaps on either side between the front doors and the new rear panel, with simple mudguards covering the rear wheels. The sills were cut and blanked off just ahead of these mudguards to complete the sheet metal changes.

To support the front of the pick-up bed, a 5in box section of steel was bolted on top of the chassis, followed by a 5in U-section running across the vehicle. Further back, 4x2in wooden beams run above the main chassis rails, themselves topped by 3x2in beams across the car. Right at the back, upright angle irons rise from the chassis extension, the whole lot being crowned with a shallow wooden bed and a neat drop-down tailgate.

The original XPAG engine had long-since been cannibalised for other projects, so Mervyn put the A-series engine from a Marina under the bonnet to get his new creation mobile,





through the MoT and on the road. Unfortunately, tragedy struck soon afterwards when both Mervyn and his wife Mary were killed in a coach crash while on holiday in Thailand. The pick-up subsequently passed through a number of short-stay owners, before disappearing from the Y Register. It finally reappeared in November 2004 with a car dealer in Northamptonshire, advertised as a 'Magnette pick-up'.

And this is where the current owner, Andrew Coulson, enters the story. Andrew owns not only a YB saloon, but also a YA *and* one of the very rare YA Tourers. He recognised the car for what it was immediately from the picture on the website and had to go and take a look. The Y was in a bit of a state, back to rusty metal in places but still clinging to a current MoT. While he was checking it out, a trimmer arrived to put a vinyl roof over the sorry paint. This would have been totally inappropriate for the vehicle, and Andrew was desperate not to let it happen. So while the glue pot was bubbling on the forecourt, he was hurriedly negotiating its purchase.

Thankfully, it was a race that Andrew won. When he declared his intention of driving it the 160 miles home to Yorkshire there and then, the dealer called down to the workshop and got them to put an extra gallon of both water and oil in the back, not exactly inspiring Andrew with confidence. But with his wife Arlene following behind they made it back to base at a steady 65mph, the only scary moment being when another driver pulled out in front of the Y necessitating an emergency stop – old cars might not go as fast as new ones, but few drivers seem to appreciate that they don't stop as quickly either!

Back at base, Andrew was able to take better stock of the project he'd just gotten into. Lots of Y-type bits had gone missing as the vehicle was passed from one owner to the next, so the first job was to make up a shopping list of parts to source. Fortunately, being a long-term Y owner meant that many of these were lurking in Andrew's garage and he knew where to go for most of the rest. And there were

some real bonuses as far as those components left on the car, such as a radiator surround which is quite possibly the best that Andrew has seen. In fact the front end has survived in remarkably good condition, even the headlamp mounts retaining their original mounting studs – these rarely come off without snapping, which is why so many cars have theirs modified with machine screws and the like.

That is not to say we should underestimate the amount of work that Andrew has put into the project. As well as taking the whole vehicle back to bare metal, he decided to make a more professional-looking job of those rear quarter panels. Originally the glass quarterlights ended in an abrupt right angle where the rear doors had been simply chopped to fit. Andrew had them replaced with ones made from front and rear edges of scrap doors welded together. This gives the glass a curved corner both ends, and a much more polished profile.

As well as a thorough mechanical overhaul, Andrew had to replace the side-exit exhaust, which was so close to the mudguard that it was burning a hole in the panel. The YB now sports a straight-through pipe that lends an almost straight-eight burble to the engine. Ah yes, that engine... Power is still supplied by the ex-Marina 1.3 A-series lump and transmitted through its four-synchro gearbox. So many XPAG engines have been snapped up by the T-type boys that there are no longer enough to go around, at least not ones that are circulating in the marketplace. He's not in a tearing hurry, but eventually Andrew would like to convert back to MG power, so if anybody has a suitable XPAG motor for sale, he would love to hear from you.

Despite the interloping powerplant, the rest of the running gear is largely standard YB equipment. That means there is the same basic design of independent front suspension that went on to support the MGA, MGB and even the RV8, as well as a steering rack instead of a box. That is a pretty impressive specification for a design that was originally planned to be launched in 1939, but it also benefits further

from the changes brought in by MG in 1952 in the transition from YA to YB. Perhaps the biggest of these benefits was the switch from single-leading shoe front brakes to a Lockheed twin-leading design and the adoption of Nuffield's new hypoid back axle that was both stronger and quieter than the outgoing version.

So what does this all add up to on the road? Entry into the cabin is easy through the front-opening doors, with the large steering wheel still leaving enough space for all but the chunkiest of legs to slide underneath. Once in position, it is strange how normal the view is when looking forwards. The dash is relatively plain in typical MG style, there is plenty of elbow room but the sides taper in rapidly to push the knees towards the centre.

The A-series transplant sounds optimistically throaty thanks to a slight blow in the exhaust, but with 1275cc and 57bhp available, acceleration is noticeably sharper than with a standard XPAG (47bhp). There's more flexibility in top gear too – step on the accelerator when doing 60mph and you are not exactly pinned into your seat, but you can at least feel it pick up the tempo. The extra synchromesh on the Marina's first gear can also be a bonus if you get caught in traffic, though reverse gear is a bit of a pain to select.

With the rest of the mechanical specification remaining standard, it is no surprise that the overall ride is little changed from the saloon either. That means supportive bucket seats and a surprisingly capable suspension given the vehicle's 1930s origins. There is no excessive bouncing around or harshness that so often accompanies commercial

vehicles when they are lightly loaded, and long distances can be dispatched without incurring any discomfort. The ride is helped by the fact that in turning the Y into the YB, MG deleted the Panhard rod, modified the front suspension to lower the roll centre and added an anti-roll bar. As a result of these changes, the YB leans far less through the corners – Andrew says he doesn't mind the roll on his other cars, but certainly doesn't miss it on this one!

When Andrew originally got the pick-up, it came with a small Marina steering wheel. He has now fitted a standard item and, as ever, the action is direct and with plenty of feedback. With the extra leverage of a Y-type wheel the steering is far from heavy, but you are always making fine adjustments to keep it in line. Only a tendency for the 15in wheels to follow lorry ruts on motorways calls for greater movement to make sure it stays on course. The twin-leading shoes are adequate, but it pays to have a few trial stabs on the middle pedal so you know what to expect from them (and more importantly, what not to expect) before having to call them into emergency action.

Visibility out of the front window is saloon-car excellent, but with what are effectively the car's C-pillars so close behind your head, there is more of a blind spot to hamper those rare overtaking manoeuvres. Wing mirrors would help, but with the rear bed being so wide, these would need to be so big that they would spoil the lines. Fortunately the view through the rear window is spot on, and simply staying aware of other traffic on the road is the route to being a safer driver.

With the pick-up being so user-friendly and easy to drive, you soon

**'ORIGINALLY THE GLASS REAR QUARTERLIGHTS ENDED IN AN ABRUPT RIGHT ANGLE. ANDREW HAD THEM REPLACED WITH THE FRONT AND REAR EDGES OF SCRAP DOORS WELDED TOGETHER'**



**Clockwise from above left:**  
 Few factory pick-ups are as comfortable to drive; A-series power is a temporary measure; chassis was extended by 15in to keep proportions right; spare wheel is a tight squeeze in its carrier below the flatbed.





Y-type was always a great performer, and this pick-up is just as good to drive.

It may be a quality show car, but pick-up is in its element getting down and dirty.

find yourself appreciating the fact that modern cars with their host of electric motors and miles of wiring are not really so much smarter than these older and far simpler designs. Air conditioning on the hot day of our test? Simply wind open the front screen ('Just watch out for swarms,' advises Andrew, 'I once nearly swallowed a bee!'). Keep the windows shut and the heat soaks through from the engine to mask the lack of a factory-fitted heater. Even the wipers are swept back and forth by hand, requiring nothing more than cosy cooperation between driver and passenger to stop them clashing. And at least in this vehicle, there are no back-seat drivers interfering with the process.

Ah yes, that unique rear bed that gives this YB so much character. As the owner of both a YA saloon and a very rare YT Tourer, how does Andrew rate the changes? 'The overall weight and the weight

balance seem very little affected by the conversion,' he says. 'There is sod-all storage space, but so much carrying capacity that this one has been used to shift all manner of stuff. Mervyn did a great job of the conversion, the only thing I would mark him down on is that the spare wheel is hard to get out – the number plate really needs to fold down to get it out of the way. There are a couple of minor quirks, such as the bed being so watertight that it fills with water if parked facing downhill in a rain storm, and the extra 15 inches means that it won't quite fit in my garage. But it gets so much attention. I know of one car in Holland with a crane in the back, but I've never seen another Y-type pick-up, even from Australia. Enthusiasts know MG never made pick-ups, so they all stop to comment, and that makes it special.'

We couldn't agree more.

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