

HOW TO BUY...

MG Y-TYPE



Younger than it looks, the Y-type has period charm and build quality by the bucket load, yet they are still remarkably cheap to buy.

Words and photography: Russ Smith

What you might consider to be the ZR of its day, MG's Y-Type would probably have had a much longer and happier life had it not been for a set of badly timed hostilities. That in effect meant the One and a Quarter Litre sports saloon was seven years old before it even turned a wheel.

Styled by Gerald Palmer around the Morris Eight Series E body and chassis, a prototype was built in 1939 with plans to launch the new Y-Type at the 1940 Earl's Court Motor Show. Palmer's design gave the car more sweeping wings than the Morris, with a longer bonnet and MG's traditional upright grille. He played another tradition card by reverting to separate headlamps when the trend followed by the Series E was to set them into the wings.

There was progress underneath, however, with Alec Issigonis-designed independent front

suspension and rack and pinion steering that was still very much a rarity on British cars. The engine was also Morris based – this time from the Ten M – but stretched to 1250cc and first used in the very short-lived pre-war MG TB of 1939. For the Y-Type (it wasn't called the YA until the YB replaced it) the engine used a single carburettor and milder camshaft, but its 46bhp was considered lively enough at the time. In its class only the 1389cc Rover Ten put out any more power, and that 2bhp was sat on rather heavily by the Rover's extra 4cwt.

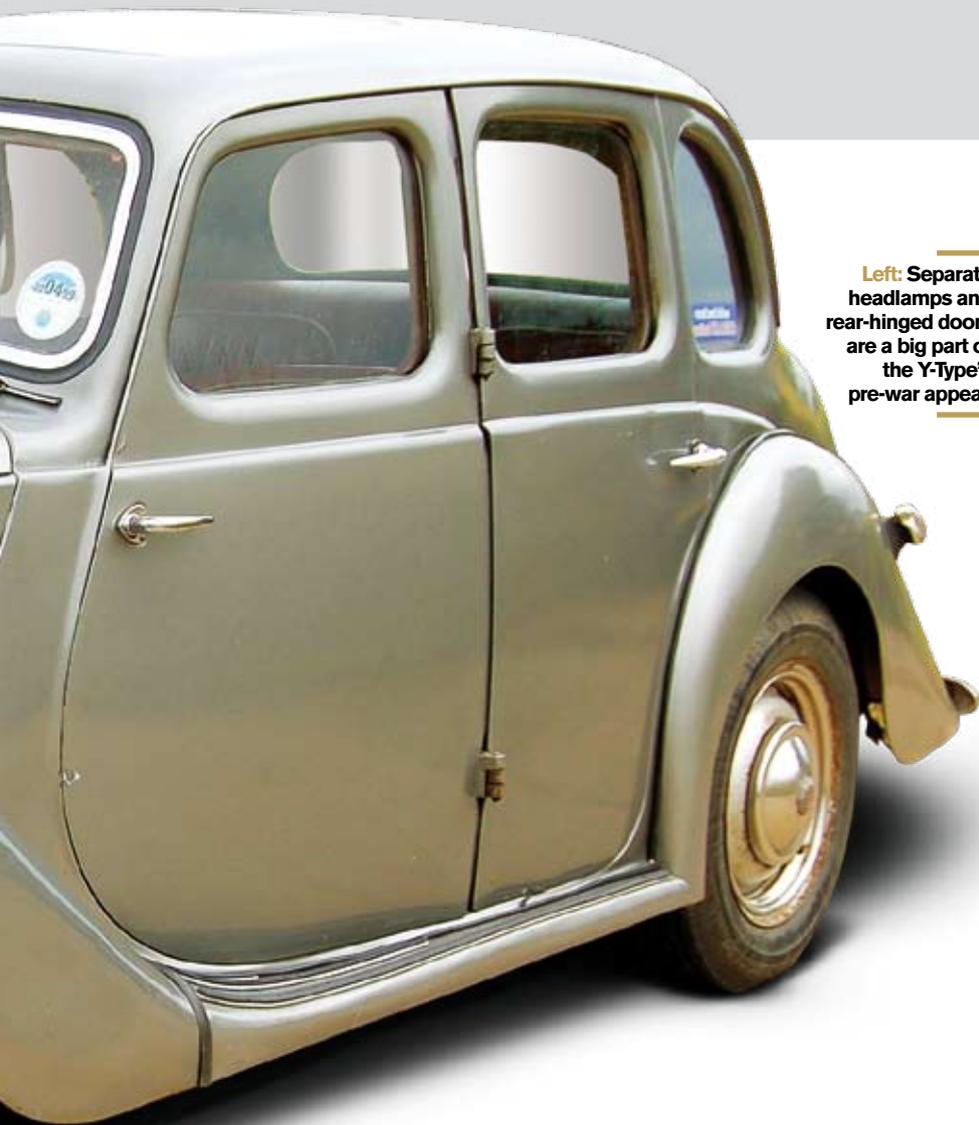
All that, along with an extra helping of wood and leather, plus a steel sunroof and built-in jacking system, made sure the YA was still well received when it appeared in 1947. It might not have enjoyed much straight-line speed, but the well mannered handling and lively, direct steering were the envy of most rivals apart from the Jowett Javelin. Despite a rather stout price at

the time of £671 11s 8d including purchase tax, the car sold well enough.

It was joined the following year by a four-seater tourer version, the YT. This got the full twin-carb and hot camshaft TC engine with its extra 8bhp, but sadly MG exported all but three of the 891 that were built by the time the model was discontinued in 1950.

The following year a very mild facelift and some mechanical improvements (though sadly not including more power) gave us the YB. Distinguished by deeper rear wings to cover the inch-smaller 15in wheels, the YB also got a front anti-roll bar, heavy-duty rear dampers, a stronger rear axle and much improved twin-leading-shoe front brakes.

So definitely a better car, but the rest of the world was advancing fast and only 1301 YBs (compared to 6144 YAs) were sold before the Y-Type was replaced by the Magnette in 1953.



Left: Separate headlamps and rear-hinged doors are a big part of the Y-Type's pre-war appeal.

INITIAL CHECKS



Below: You won't find a rust-free original car, so carefully assess the quality of any previous repairs.

The following checks all need making so you at least know what you are getting into, and can avoid a car that's bad in an area that you don't want to get involved with. But your findings must be tempered by the fact that you aren't going to find a lot of Y-Types to choose from. There are rarely more than a couple for sale thanks to rarity and owners tending to hang onto them, which should tell you something in itself.

As the last Y-Type was built over 55 years ago, you'll struggle to find any that have escaped being restored to some extent, possibly several times. A car's history file should tell when any major work was carried out, but only your eyes and fingers can decide the quality of what was done. Bear in mind that full replacement panels for these cars are all but non-existent, though NTG Motor Services do carry a good range of repair panels for the areas most commonly affected by rust. As ever with partial panels though, fitting requires some degree of skill. Despite being based on them, the only panels shared with Morris Eights are the doors.

For most people, a good body is going to be your highest priority. Rather than list all rot spots, it's easier to advise looking at the lower six inches of every panel on the car. Also look for bubbling where the rear wings bolt to the body, the base of the bootlid and at the bottom of the spare wheel compartment. The chassis tends to be pretty robust, and oil escaping from the engine (we'll come to that) keeps the front half well protected. Do check the rear though, especially around spring mounts and below the spare wheel well.

YA bumpers differ from those used on the YB and YT, but neither type is available new. NTG's solution is to use the rear bumper of a TD and replacement bumper irons. The bumper is slightly longer, but can be used either at the front or the back and only concours judges will spot the fact that it is not original.

“Well-mannered handling and lively steering were the envy of rivals”

TRIM

The value of a Y-Type is greatly affected by the condition of its leather seats. Work on the basis that a retrim of these will cost in the region of £1500, though if you've bought right, you should recoup a large chunk of that outlay when you come to sell the car. By the same token, expect to pay more for a car that's already had the job done.

There's plenty of wood in there, too, which must also be evaluated. Faded or cracked lacquer is quite straightforward to refurbish, but if there's any water damage or lifting and peeling veneer, you quickly get into hundreds of pounds, and a lot more

if it's all bad and you need specialist help.

The rest of the interior coverings are quite basic and easy to replace, but do be wary of a headlining that is damp or stained around the sunroof aperture. This means water's getting in (for how long as this been happening?) and can usually be traced to blocked, split or perished drain tubes, which are not easily accessible.

There has long been a problem with cracked steering wheels, but these have recently been reproduced, so scruffy ones can at least be replaced, albeit at a cost of £178.

Right: The front screen opens and the steering column is telescopically adjustable.





Left: Flashing indicators on upright and imposing nose are later additions.
Below: Rear is more flowing. Over-riders were an option on the YB and are dear.

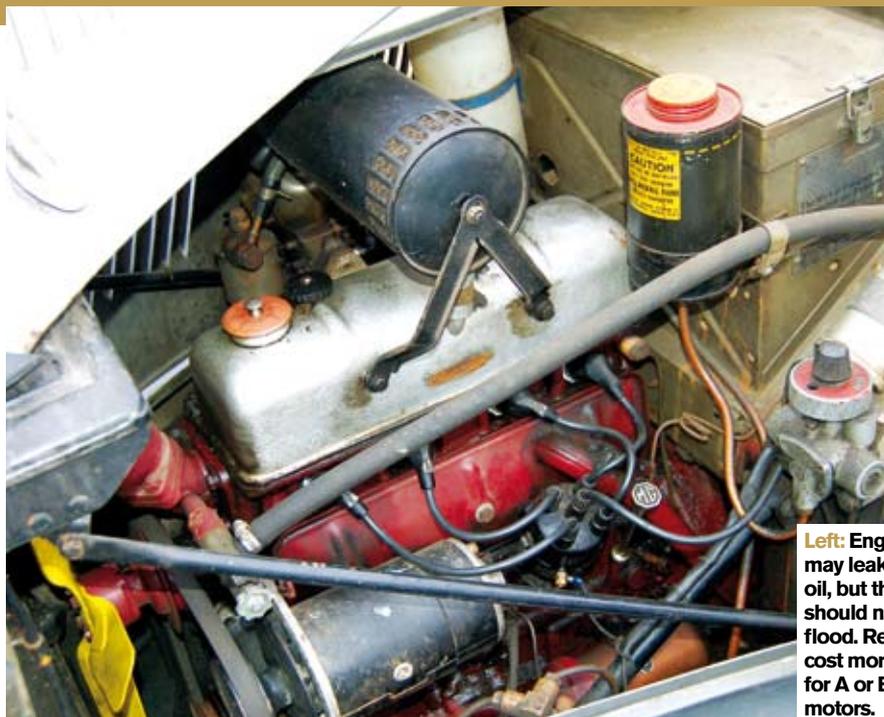


ENGINE

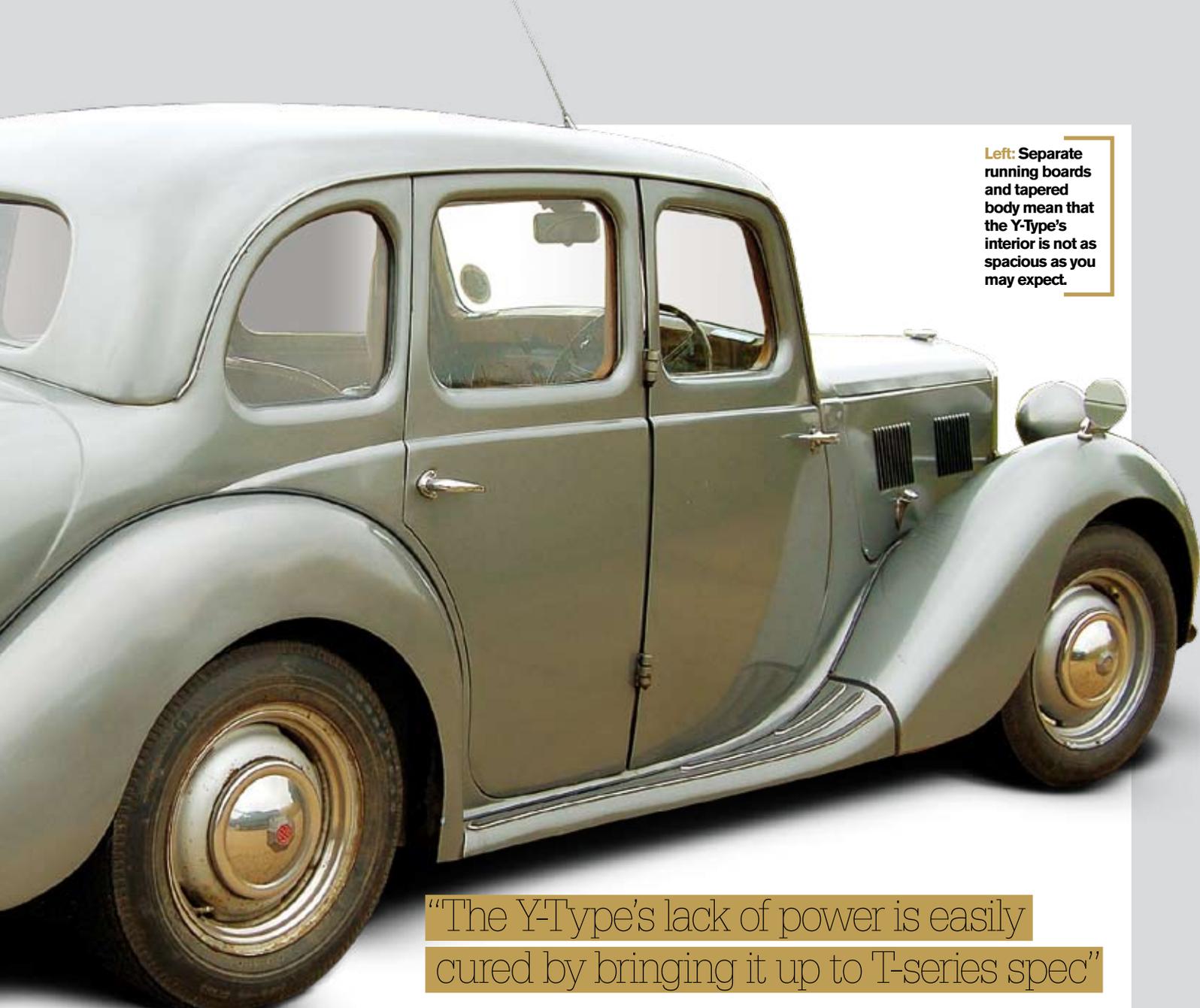
As pointed out in the intro, The Y-Type uses detuned TC/TD engines, so parts supply is not a problem. Keeping oil in them can be tough – it can leak from the crank seals, rocker cover gaskets and side plates, so expect that to some extent. What's of concern is just how much is escaping. A recently cleaned sump is a bad sign as someone may be hiding something, so try and see where the car is usually parked.

Blue smoke from the exhaust is normal on cold start-up, but the engine shouldn't smoke once it's warmed up. Oil pressure when hot should stay above 40psi at 30mph and 10psi at idle. It may well be much higher than this, but anything below those lower limits means engine work is needed. That is also indicated by smoke coming out of the engine breather pipe that runs down behind the distributor. None of it is the end of the world, but budget on spending in the region of £1500 on an engine rebuild.

Gearboxes should be pretty quiet, except in first and reverse, and shouldn't leak oil. Go up and down the 'box a few times to see if there's much synchromesh wear, and lift off in each gear to see if the lever jumps out. Rear axles may whine at higher speeds, which is often accompanied by a buzzing from the gear lever. However, if this buzzing is there without any axle whine, it suggests worn gearbox bearings.



Left: Engines may leak a little oil, but this should not be a flood. Rebuilds cost more than for A or B-series motors.



Left: Separate running boards and tapered body mean that the Y-Type's interior is not as spacious as you may expect.

“The Y-Type's lack of power is easily cured by bringing it up to T-series spec”



MODIFICATIONS

It is quite likely that you've already figured out that the Y-Type's lack of power is easily cured by bringing the engine up to the T-series specification it was detuned from in the first place. After all, MG did it themselves with the YT. You'll need the twin carbs of course, but to make it work properly and add every one of the missing eight bhp you'll also need to fit a TC-spec camshaft, freely available from specialists.

That would also be a good point to fit one of the

spin-off oil filter conversions that are available, for much improved filtration. Engine stress can also be reduced (and cruising speeds raised a little) by fitting a taller 4.875:1 ratio rear axle, as used on the TF. The other option, which also goes well with increased power, is the Sierra five-speed conversion offered by NTG. It's £1128 – and you need to provide the gearbox on top of that – but that's not a great deal more than rebuilding an original gearbox.

BRAKES/SUSPENSION

The suspension system is very much like that still found decades later on the MGB, with wishbones at the front using the lever arm dampers as the top link, and a live axle on leaf springs at the rear, so there's nothing to fear there. Make sure the trunnions look like they've been greased regularly – you want to see muck, not rust – and on the YB inspect the lower spring pans for cracks where the anti-roll bar attaches to them.

Steering should feel direct and responsive. Radial tyres will make the steering feel heavier, but the trade-off is much better grip and none of the cornering squeal you get from crossplies. Many owners stick to those, however, not least because the fatter radial won't fit in the YA's spare wheel slot below the bootlid. This was enlarged on the YB, but you can still need to deflate the tyre to squeeze it in. Using a crossply just as a spare is not an acceptable alternative.

Make sure the brakes pull the car up well with no veering to either side, and with no squeals or pulsing in the pedal. It's not a big problem on YBs as these use the same system as the TD so parts availability is good. On YAs, the rear wheel cylinder is the same as a front one on a TC, but the YA's front wheel cylinder is unique and prices reflect this.

DRIVING

Right: Capable and pleasant to drive, Y-Types were designed for a pre-motorway era



You should expect good handling and roadholding from these sports saloons, with direct steering that should feel more modern than you'd expect from the somewhat conservative lines. 'Modern' is something of a relative term here, so perhaps 'more MGB than MGF' would be more accurate. There's not a great deal of urge from the engine,

but if you find it too slow, there's either an engine fault or you really should be looking at a newer model. The brakes are all good for a car of this age, though definitely better on the YB, but with no servo and over a ton to bring to a halt, both need a firm push on the pedal to make them work. These are cars better suited to A- and B-road

use rather than motorway journeys, and on that point the long-stroke engine design means they don't appreciate cruising at over 55mph for any length of time. To do so is to invite accelerated wear to the bores and piston rings, so get used to the idea of planning journeys for entertainment and scenery rather than slog.



Above: The rear number plate panel is removable for access to the spare wheel.



Above: YAs sat on 16in wheels, YBs on 16in items. Both, of course, wore crossply tyres.

YA/YB SPECIFICATIONS

Engine	1250cc, 4-cyl, OHV
Power	46bhp @ 4800rpm
Torque	59lb/ft @ 2400rpm
Top speed	71 mph
0-60mph	28.2secs
Fuel cons.	30mpg
Gearbox	4-spd manual

COST

You might expect the improved and rarer YB to be more expensive than the YA, but in fact both saloon versions can be bought equally cheaply. Considering what they offer, the £6000-£6500 you can realistically expect to pay for a good Y-Type privately represents something of a bargain. Even well prepped and guaranteed dealer cars rarely top £7250. It should be a safe investment too as those prices really only have one way to go.

Tired but still usable examples tend to fall into the £2750-£3000 range, and if you really want a challenging retirement project, they can be had for

around £1500. Make sure that what you are buying is as complete as possible because it's a small jump from project to parts car, and low value means bad ones are still more likely to be broken than restored.

There's not the same sort of choice if you're looking for a YT. Most of those that are in the UK are in good condition. Depending on exactly how good, they range in price from £10,000 to £15,000. Aside from money you also need much patience to wait for one to come onto the market. But whichever variant you want, visit the excellent www.mgytypes.org for both more information and invaluable contacts.

"Considering what they offer, £6500 represents something of a bargain"



Above: Unusual dash uses octagonal clocks. Handle in middle is to open up the windscreen.

USEFUL TO KNOW

- Most mechanical parts are common to the TC and TD, ensuring a healthy supply of parts from their network of specialists
- NTG Motor Services, Ipswich, 01473 406031, www.ntgservices.co.uk
- www.mgytypes.org
- MG Octagon Car Club, Staffs, 01889 574666, www.mgoctagoncarclub.com
- Brown & Gammons, Herts, 01462 490049, www.ukmgparts.com
- J&L Spares Ltd, Lancs, 01706 644210, www.jlspares.com
- IC Woolstenholmes Ltd, Lincs, 01778 347347, www.woolies-trim.co.uk
- Thanks to Brian Cox for providing the car.