

The Y Evans *Special*

What is the best thing to do with an old YA when it's too far gone to restore economically? Thirty years ago, Martin Evans reckoned he had the answer.

Words: Martin Evans. Pictures: Simon Goldsworthy.



I

bought my YA saloon for just £50. Even making allowances for the fact that this was back in 1977, it doesn't take a genius to figure out that at that price, it was in a bit of a state. I bought it largely because I could remember driving one back in the mid-1960s with some affection. The fact that this car was a non-runner and a bit of a wreck didn't bother me unduly, as I had a notion that it would be fun to build an open tourer. And if things didn't work out, then at least I could get my money back by selling it for spares.

As it happened, things did work out although it took 30 years to bring my plans to fruition. The reasons for this are not untypical. After stripping the car and discarding the body (not as easy as it sounds), the boxes of dismantled parts were moved with us a year later to a house which needed almost as much restoration as the car; then came a second child, work and other commitments – there was always something more pressing to deal with, so the Y-type project was effectively shelved.

Some years later my son enquired about the metal ladder in my garage; I explained to him that this was a car chassis, and he suggested we put it back together. A fine idea, but he was only six years old at the time and as the long process began, we soon discovered it was not as simple as building Lego. The fag packet I drew my sketch on had long since been thrown away, but basically the design had to be something simple for a body, with

separate cycle wings. The saloon is a relatively tall car and obviously needed to be re-built substantially lower; I reasoned that the rocker cover was the high point in the engine bay so the bonnet could sit just above that. Following the line back at that level meant that the doors would be very shallow, so I decided it would be easier to do away with them altogether and simply step into the cockpit. An added bonus was that this would save the complication of making doors, and also help to make the body more rigid and less prone to scuttle shake.

It would probably have been easier to make a typically upright slab tank rear end, but as the Y fuel tank is set horizontally in the chassis I thought I would do something different and reasoned that a boat tail arrangement could be built over the top of it. This added some length to the car, but not too much – it ended up being 12ft 7in long overall, some six inches longer than the TD but a full 10in shorter than the YA saloon. I also decided that the body would look better if it was considerably slimmer across the beam, so the chassis outriggers had to be trimmed.

So there we were, no drawings but something approaching a design. But the first real job was a spot of tree felling. A weekend spent helping my father thin the trees on his hillside led to the fortunate discovery of a smallish ash large enough to supply all the timber I would need for the Special. It was cut down, sliced and left to dry for a couple of years while I got on with some work of a more mechanical nature. >





Above: Engine is now running sweetly and enjoying the easy life in such a lightweight body.



Below: YA brakes are also enjoying their new lightweight home. Steering is both light and positive.

Stripping the running gear revealed that both halfshafts were broken, but the rest was in remarkably good order. Perhaps I got off lightly because the car had only covered a recorded 34,000 miles in its first 20 years on the road, though mysteriously it had acquired a Gold Seal engine in that time. The chassis only needed some minor welding below the rear axle, and was soon painted and ready to be built back up. I had the brake drums skimmed by a local engineering shop and the brake cylinders overhauled, but decided to remove the integral jacking system. This was partly to save weight, but also because it would have obstructed the new bonnet valances. That bonnet also meant I had to cut down the radiator shell, silver-solder it together again and have it rechromed. The radiator itself also had to be shortened and rebuilt with a thicker core, while the thermostat housing sat too high and was replaced with a hose connecting what remained to a new small separate pressurised header tank fitted above the new electric fan.

At about this stage we moved house again, but not far so the rolling chassis was pushed to its new home with the help of a few thirsty neighbours. That's when work started on the timber frame; I borrowed the kitchen kettle and using a piece of old drain pipe and a former made from a plank of timber with a neat curve of 4in nails, started to steam and shape the 2in x 1in frame. The rear section was formed round an extended ply parcel shelf, leaving only a small void in the back, while side extensions covered the shortened chassis ends and fuel tank – the neck on the original tank now just protrudes through the body enough to connect directly to a flip top cap. The bulkhead had gone, so I made up a new one in plywood with sheet aluminium on the front side.

With the bare bones in place, it was time to face the challenge of covering the body. With its irregular shape, this would have been difficult for me to cover in fabric or aluminium. As I had vowed from the outset to do as much of the work myself as possible, I decided to apply a layer of veneer first and then fibreglass over it. I know it is the wrong way round but, having no mould, this was the only option and, although it involved much smoothing and filling, the finished paint job has proved successful.

On the inside, I made the dashboard from veneered ply and used the



Above: The cowl deflects air upwards, but goggles or glasses are still a must. Martin may fit a screen for the comfort of passengers.

YA's original dials and switches, plus a Smiths RVI rev counter (which I gather saves one bhp compared to driving it off the dynamo) and a temperature gauge. But it was when I made up brackets for bolting the finished body frame to the chassis that some problems started to emerge, most notably that the steering column would not flex low enough and there was absolutely no room for the throttle peddle.

I got around the steering problem using a Vauxhall joint salvaged from a scrap yard, though the steering rack had to be angled up first so that the lowered column cleared the starter motor. The pedal issue was resolved by cutting both brake and clutch pedals at the base and welding in steps to the left (although narrow fitting shoes are still essential). Other slight problems were that Ys do not have the gearbox extension as fitted to T-Types so the re-shaped gear lever is slightly difficult to operate in the confined space, and obviously a smaller 13in steering wheel was needed to fit inside the narrow passenger compartment.

Finishing off the body included fitting motorcycle wings – bolted on with tubular steel from recycled picnic chairs! I made up valances and sides for the bonnet in aluminium, cold hammered to create hinges and a bulge for the forward air cleaner; luckily I found a local man with louvre punches, while the original bonnet tops were trimmed down slightly to fit and needed a new centre hinge as a result.

On the lighting front, separate amber indicators match the replacement rear lights but the torpedo side lights double up as indicators at the front, where white flashers are allowed. Another trip to the scrapyards armed with tin snips relieved an old Montego of its wiring loom, and I took this apart to wire in everything on my Special following the colours from the original wiring diagram where possible. The bucket seats are the originals, cut down at the base of the ash trays in the back to shorten them, then bent round to make them narrower and the bases cut and welded to fit; the leather work was done by a man who used to work at Jaguar and remembered how he made bucket seats for E-Types.

It is quite remarkable that after strapping every last nut and bolt, and

after years of being stored in various boxes and moved around the country, it was possible to find and identify everything that was not to be replaced with new (and perhaps more important, that nothing much was left over afterwards). I finished off the interior with new varnished marine ply floor boards and carpet, trimming the panels in British racing green leather cloth (offered cheap as

the man did not have any black at the time). I also preferred a floor-mounted dip switch and late additions included making up a double duck tonneau and fitting a luggage rack for the spare wheel – which then looked ridiculous on the narrow back so it is retained inside.

Starting the engine after so many years should have been one of the highlights but, even after overhauling the starter motor and a good deal of swearing, it failed to fire properly. I took the engine to pieces again, but never did find anything wrong with it. Still, while it was apart I took the opportunity to have the head shaved (raising the compression from 7.2:1 to 9.3:1) and fit larger valves. This time it ran, irregularly at first but pulling the lightweight body with ease.

Surprisingly the car passed its MoT first time, but driving it soon showed up further problems. For one thing, the springs were far too strong so, remembering an article I had read about a rolled Y that was turned into a convertible, I took the two smallest leaves out of the rear and bought softer coils for the front. The engine has been back out a few times as well, providing opportunities to deal with low oil pressure, failed core plugs and to fit a Crane fast road camshaft – on closer inspection, the old cams were

“It is flexible at low speeds and accelerates quickly to 70mph, with more in hand”

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Above: That boat tail was a labour of love; Martin was persuaded to go for it by the horizontal position of the YA's fuel tank.

found to have worn considerably and to differing degrees, which undoubtedly caused the erratic running beforehand.

Once the engine is properly run-in, I will have the power output checked; I reckon it should now be 65bhp or more, compared to the original car's 47bhp. At the moment it is still very tight, so starting from cold is tiresome. It obviously spins rather more freely once mildly warm, though it sounds very tappetty. On the move, first to third pass quickly, being so low geared compared to modern cars, but once in top it is flexible at low speeds and accelerates quickly even up hill to a road legal 70mph, with apparently plenty more in hand. The acceleration above 3000rpm is surprisingly rapid. The steering is light and positive, the suspension now much improved, verging if anything on being too soft but making for a pleasant ride; cornering is a delight on the open road at speed, but tight bends are a screeching affair on the narrow crossply tyres. One has to make allowances for the brakes of course, the YA not even having the twin cylinder front brakes of later models.

There is still work to do. I will have to fit a windscreen (for the benefit of passengers) and consider changing the back axle to gain a higher cruising speed, but at least it is on the road and running well. I have apologised to the chairman of the Y Register for the loss of another of their saloons but as he commented, better on the road than broken for spares.

They say that half the fun of owning an old car is doing the work yourself – well I am looking forward to the other 49% and joining in a few club events. Mind you, I very much doubt that it has been an economic solution to the original question of what to do with a rotten Y. ©

"I had vowed from the outset to do as much of the work myself as possible"



Above: There are no doors, so a 13in wheel helps provide enough room to climb into the leather-clad interior.



Below: Spare wheel was first mounted on the rack, but looked daft on the narrow body and now lives inside.