

Black Beauty



Brian Cox outlines the £5,000 rebuild of an MG saloon which has provided pleasure for three generations



Flashback: - The MG pictured in 1995 at the former "Golden Apple" Fruit Farm (now known as Hill Farm) at Roughton near Cromer. After purchase by Harry Jeynes. We returned to the same spot with Dennis and the newly restored car 36 years later. Notice how the tree has grown. The UMG number indicates that the car was supplied by University Motors in London.

The post-war 1¼ litre MG sports saloon was a cut above the average family car, with better handling and being exceptionally well equipped – attributes fully appreciated by three generations of the same family, whose car is destined to continue providing pleasure for years to come after a £5,000 rebuild.

The car is a 1951 MG YA saloon, which was acquired from a London judge in 1953 by Norfolk fruit grower, the late Harry Jeynes. The car had only 5,000 miles on the clock and was purchased

for £660, the price when new being around £880, including purchase tax.

Harry used the car for business and pleasure until 1971, clocking up 51,000 miles and always had it serviced every 3,000 miles at Allens Garage in Cromer.

After his death in 1972, the car passed to his widow, May, and was stored in a garage until a year after her death in 1979.

Deterioration had occurred through not being used, although Harry's son Dennis, to whom the car was handed down, had put Redex down the bores regularly and turned over the engine — an action he was to appreciate more fully later.

Apart from the black cellulose having become dull, there was a damaged wing and running board, severe rot round the rear boot and spare wheel compartment and its floor, as well as the sills; and there was a hole in the nearside chassis member where it swept under the rear axle. But the true extent of the corrosion was not to be revealed until the car was dismantled and shotblasted.

Dennis had acquired a 1949 YA for spares in 1983, but as it turned out, it had to be robbed of very few parts, and he and his son Mike have decided to sell this car.

Dennis continued to store the 1951 car until 1987, stripping off parts when time allowed and storing them in his loft. He also had the foresight to buy new spares ready for the day when the car was to be reassembled.

Therapy

Following a heart attack, Dennis took early retirement in 1987 from his job of telephone engineer and his 'therapy' was to get stuck into the YA, which he continued to strip down until there was little more than the engine and bodyshell left on the chassis.

He then called on Cox and Perry of Horstead, near Coltishall, Norfolk (Tel: Coltishall 01603 737195), restoration specialists who spend most of their time working on MGs, Austin Healeys and TRs.

The remains were trailered away from Dennis's home and Dennis made regular

trips to Horstead to see and photograph how the work was progressing.

Once at their premises, Cox and Perry removed the engine and gearbox for steam cleaning, then separated the body from the chassis and sent them off for shotblasting. On return they were both given a protective coat of David's 180 zinc primer while awaiting attention from the MIG welder.

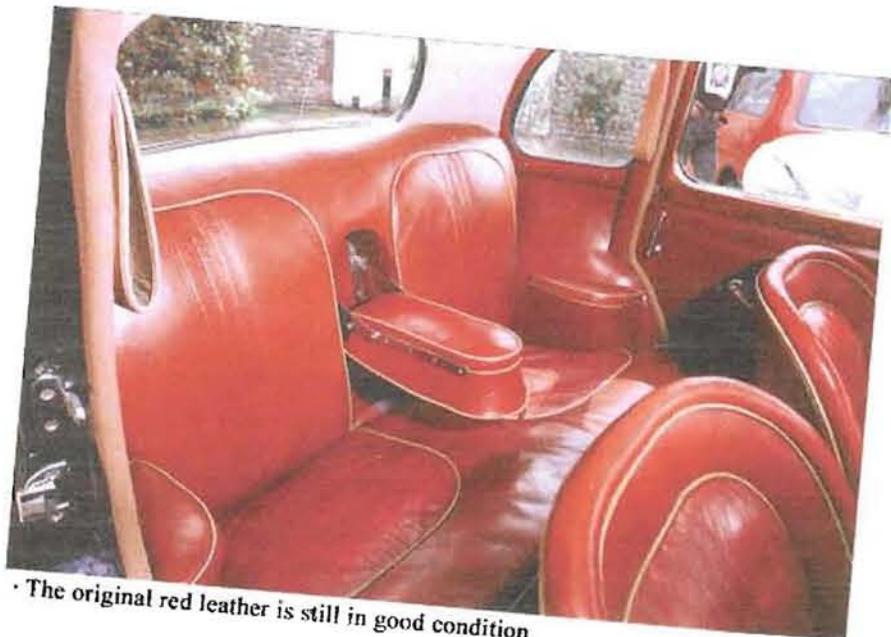
Keith Battle, of Cox and Perry recalled: "It became apparent that a new section would have to be fabricated in 20 gauge steel to replace the moth-eaten section around the boot and spare wheel compartment and its floor. "(Replacement panels are available for the later YB models which are slightly different design).

After welding in new metal, the joints were lead filled to form an invisible repair.

New sills

Keith also had to make up new inner and outer sills on both sides and all four doors had new skins up to window level. He also straightened a damaged front wing and made two new running boards, the original offside panel having been badly crushed at some time.

Both rear wheel arches needed new metal on their forward edges and these, together with other unsound areas of the arch, had new metal let in before lead loading. Keith also replaced a narrow strip of metal on each rear wing where they tuck under and bolt to the wheel arches and remade the sun roof and its channels before setting about the paintwork, for which Ault and Wiborg two-pack products were used.



The original red leather is still in good condition

After an etch primer, three coats of Ultra-build primer were applied and left to harden for three days before flattening and application of three coats of black Giggloss, which was left to fully harden before final flattening with 1200 grade paper and polishing to a showroom gleam.

In all Cox and Perry had the car for three months and spent about 300 hours working on the car before returning it with body and chassis reunited and the degreased engine in place for Dennis to fit up — a task which was to take a year. In retrospect, Dennis and his son Mike wish the car had been refinished in cellulose as it was originally, but they have no fault to find with the standard of paintwork, which under the wings and on the chassis has received added

protection of black Hammerite Smoothrite, which Mike has also found ideal to touch in any minor chips. Smoothrite was also used as the final finish on suspension parts, axles and other components originally finished in black.

Sound engine

Having had the car serviced regularly in its youth was to pay off when it came to reassembly of its major mechanical components. The engine, with just over 50,000 miles on the clock, was still in good condition, thanks in part to its regular treatment with Redex during its long lay-up.

It has now covered 56,000 miles, and apart from slight tappet noise at tickover (common to most XPAG engines), it gives every indication of soldiering on



Walnut veneer fascia has been re-varnished



The spare wheel and tools live under the boot



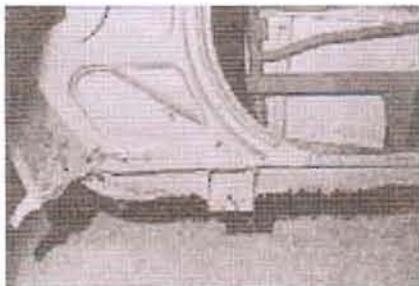
The easy way to jack up all four wheels



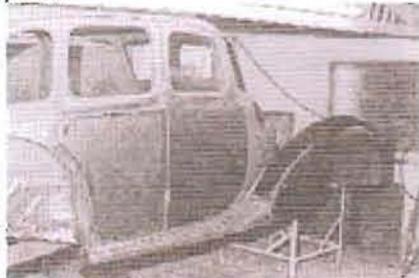
The tool kit is too nice to use!



An extensive rebuild was necessary to the rear panels and boot floor, where there are two chassis mountings.



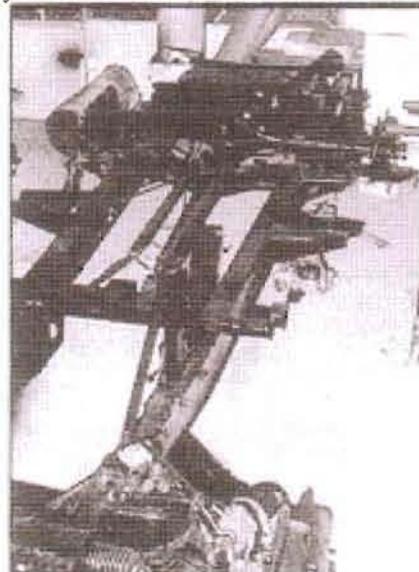
The offside inner sill looks a little ragged after metal spraying and coating in David's 180 zinc primer.



A trial fitting for the repaired front wing, newly-made running board and re-skinned doors.



The rear wheel arches were definitely not a lead-free zone.



The shotblasted and enamelled chassis is reunited with its axles.

for years, having an oil consumption of 800 miles to the pint and holding an oil pressure of 50psi when hot.

The gearbox and clutch were both considered fit for further service. Many Y Types and TDs (which share the same box) get unduly noisy in first and reverse, but Dennis's car is commendably quiet, as is the rear axle,

which like the other two components needed little more than cleaning before being treated to several coats of paint before being reinstalled.

Dennis was not so lucky with the braking system, however. He thought he could get away by cleaning the wheel cylinder bores and fitting new seals, but they soon started to weep and in the end he obtained new cylinders from the Octagon Car Club and fitted a new master cylinder, which came from NTG Motor Services Ltd., 282-284 Bramford Road, Ipswich, Suffolk, (Tel: 01473 406031).

Regular servicing had paid dividends when it came to working on the front suspension and steering. New track rod ends had been purchased but were not needed, as the originals were sound — in fact they're still in use. However, a broken front coil spring has been replaced and new swivel link rubber seals have been fitted.

NTG supplied a new exhaust system — the Jeynes' opted for mild steel rather than stainless for originality — and the same firm provided new front and rear bumpers and door handles, while the Octagon Car Club supplied boot hinges to replace the originals, which were too corroded to replate successfully.

New chrome

However, much elbow grease brought up the original chrome grille and slats like new, and Y Type Register secretary John Lawson, of Liverpool, supplied a replacement windscreen which appeared to be new.

The remaining chrome, such as headlights, sidelights and hubcaps were replated to a high standard by GHB Metal Finishers, The Factors', South View, Necton Road, of Holme Hale, Thetford, Norfolk (Tel: 01760 440212). New window seals and channels came from Vintage Supplies (Paul Beck), of Folgate Road, North Walsham, Norfolk (Tel: 01692 406343).

Dennis's knowledge of electrical wiring made fitting a new loom (from NTG) easy, although he chose to leave the original wiring between the instrument panel and control box as this was still sound.

The dynamo and starter were stripped, cleaned and painted and the sender unit in the tank replaced. The tank itself needed major attention from Serck. Rust flakes from the baffles had blocked the outlet pipe and the tank ends had to be removed to enable de-rusting to be carried out.

"Fuel starvation was evident when we first started the car after 18 years hibernation and when I subsequently took it for an MoT, I was forced to rig up a tank inside the car with a supply pipe direct to the SU pump," Dennis recalled.

Mike stressed that wherever possible, they had reconditioned the original components rather than fit replacements which often differed in pattern from the originals, and they had been fortunate that many parts, including the radiators had needed little more than a lick of paint after cleaning.

Work on the interior was left until last. A Wroxham boatyard supplied a sheet of half-inch marine ply for Dennis to make new floorboards, using the old ones as patterns, and Gregory Gedge and Partners of Victoria Road, Great Yarmouth (Tel: 01493 842919) fitted a new headlining.

The original leather seats had survived well, and needed only a clean and leather food, but Dennis and Mike hope to have the seats refurbished shortly. The leathercloth-covered door panels needed only cleaning before re-fitting and a friend of the family refinished the walnut veneer dashboard and window cappings. The original carpet had seen better days and a new one was obtained from NTG.

Dennis was unable to estimate how many hours he spent on his labour of love, but he says overall expenditure has been about £5,000, most of which went on body repairs.

Proof that Dennis and his professional helpers did a good job came soon after the car's first outing when the car won the concours at the MG Owners' Club 1989 national gathering. And the car has been winning awards ever since up and down the country in events organised by the remaining MG clubs — the MG Car Club, the Octagon Car Club and the Y Register.

Road impressions

A short run in the car took me back 40 years. On the narrow Norfolk country roads the car purred along happily at an indicated 55-60mph, despite the low gearing (14.25mph per 1000 revs).

The direct rack and pinion steering enables the car to be placed accurately and there is minimal roll on corners. The 16in Dunlop crossply tyres (from Vintage Tyre Supplies, 12 Dalston Gardens, Stanmore, Middlesex, Tel: 0208-206 0722) were quiet on coarse road surfaces, but as to be expected, the

car is not so directionally stable as a friend's similar car on non-original radials.

With a sliding sun roof and opening windscreen for extra ventilation, it is hard to imagine a more pleasant way for a family to travel on a warm summer's day.

Design features

The Y-Type was on the drawing board in the late 1930s, but the war delayed the start of its six-year production run until 1947.

It was the first MG saloon to have independent front suspension, which necessitated a substantial box section chassis, underslung at the rear, on which was bolted a modified version of the Morris Eight Series E body. But only parts readily interchangeable are the doors.

The MG was introduced as an upmarket well-equipped sports saloon, boasting a built-in hydraulic jacking system, sliding steel sun roof, opening windscreen, adjustable steering column, leather upholstery, walnut veneer facia and door cappings and a rear window blind to cut out dazzle.

Power is provided by a 1250cc XPAG engine, an overhead valve unit well proven in the pre-war TB and post-war TC sports cars. It was slightly de-tuned for the saloon, having a single SU carburettor instead of twins, so enthusiasts of the day often extracted another 4-5bhp by fitting a new induction manifold and T-Type SUs.

The engine is a robust free-revving unit — inclined to sound tappety when wear develops in the valve gear — and lasts an average of 60-70,000 miles between major overhauls.

The threaded steering swivel pins and bronze links need lubrication every 500 miles to keep wear to the minimum. Gearboxes, which weren't so robust as those fitted to the TB and TC sports models, are the same as on the TD and become noisy in first and reverse. Worn synchromesh is another failing. Most parts are available, but a full rebuild will be expensive if new gear clusters are necessary.

Later YB hypoid axles have a long trouble free life, but spiral bevel units fitted to YAs are prone to break half shafts.

The bodies are robust, but are not immune from rust. Sills often need repair or replacement, and the rust bug also attacks metal below the boot, including the floor and rearmost chassis mounting points.

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