



Jerry Birkbeck's impressive MG YA can often be seen supporting events organised by the MG Car Club's Y-Type Register. Jerry himself is arranging a major Y-Type Cotswold Run on Sunday, March 22.

Family Sports

Think of MG and you think of two-seater sports cars. And yet the company has a fine history of sporting saloons too, not least the now rare 'Y' series introduced in 1947. JERRY BIRKBECK describes his forty year following of the 'Y'.

My interest in MGs evolved during my school days in the 1950s, when I became entranced by the MG 'T' series. At about the same time, I also became aware of an elegant MG saloon that a friend's father owned and which, I learned much later, was known as a Y-Type. However, it would be another fifteen years before I came across that model again.

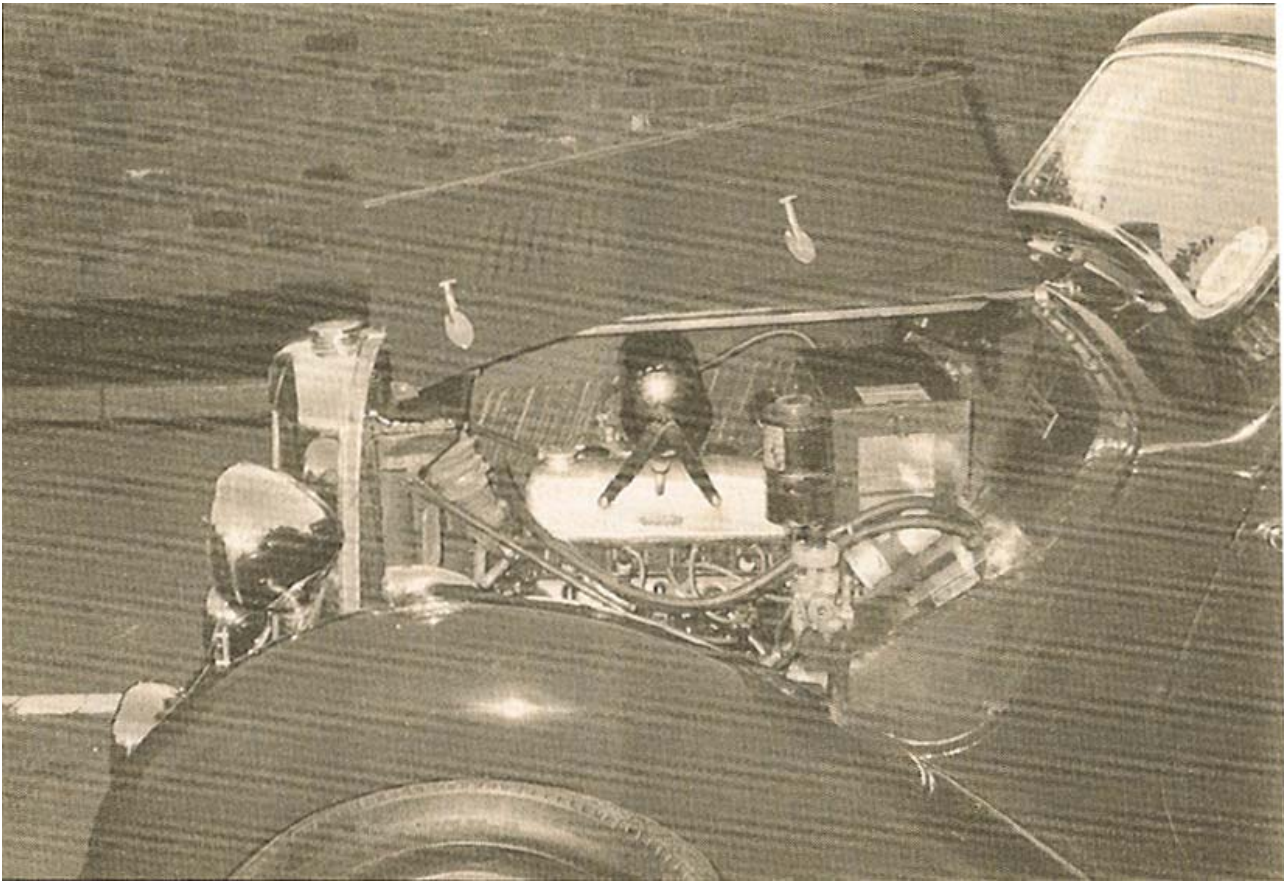
The 'Y' was apparently a throwback to the 1930s. Designed by Gerald Palmer in late 1939, it would have been introduced in 1941 had it not been for World War II. It was eventually launched in 1947 as a small, stylish sports saloon, using the Morris Eight Series E four-door bodyshell with a

specialty swept tail and rear wings, separate front wings and running boards, a vertical MG radiator and a longer wheelbase. It also employed a separate chassis.

Unlike the Series E Morris, the 'Y' was powered by a detuned MG TB-type 1250cc engine and was fitted with a modified version of the gearbox used in the Morris Ten. The specification also included independent front suspension and rack and pinion steering which, at the time, had never before been used in an MG.

Fast forward now to 1970, the year I started work. I needed a reliable car and this was perhaps the only time in my life that I could have afforded an MG TC, even if it meant I'd have to keep the Mini Van that I'd also bought by then for daily transport. However, I opted instead for a 1966 Spitfire (HBO 630D) and, over the following two and a half years, enjoyed over 40,000 miles, shared between the Spit' and a '68 Vitesse 2-Litre Convertible that I also acquired.

I moved to London in 1972 and sold the Vitesse. The need for a modern, reliable vehicle was less pressing, as London's public transport, together



The MG Y-Type used a detuned version of the 1250cc engine installed in the MG TB.

with a bike, was the ideal means for moving around the city. Once again, my thoughts turned to MGs and a search through *Exchange & Mart*, *Motor Sport* and *Veteran & Vintage* proved interesting reading. TC5 had moved well and truly out of my grasp, with prices of between £500 and £1000 even back then being the norm. MG Y-Types, on the other hand, although not that common, were vastly more affordable.

I finally came across a Y-Type in Dulwich, advertised at £165. Described as having no rust and with an MoT, it had to be worth a look. After some haggling, a deal was struck at £95 and I became the proud new keeper of a 1951 green MG YA (JGD 208) in October '72.

Driving the car home, I gingerly tackled London's notorious South Circular – but not for long. The car expired. I got out, opened the bonnet and stared at the twin SU5 attached to a high compression Laystall-Lucas head – very useful, of course, if the car had been in a peak state of tune, but it obviously wasn't. I had no success in getting the MG going and so decided to leave her awhile, wondering what on earth I'd bought as I walked

away.

On my return, the car started first time; I'd evidently flooded the carbs (easily done). Quite how that MG had got through an MoT test, I have no idea -the steering was extremely stiff and the brakes felt very, very primitive, particularly after the disc brakes of the Vitesse.

I was to keep that Y-Type for a full seven years, and in many ways it proved to be a turning point in my life. I met my future wife, Jo, over the car bonnet, and the MG became her daily transport for nearly four years when we moved to Warwickshire. I also came across MG specialists NTG, who have continued to be a very supportive supplier of parts for all Y-Type owners over the years - and long may the good service continue.

During our ownership of JGD 208, the sills were replaced, the engine was rebuilt, the halfshafts renewed and the car resprayed. The 'Y' had several stablemates, including a Morris Minor (YCR 872), Austin-Healey Sprite (MWO 43SF), a Herald Estate (ANX 714J) and a Citroen GS (WKV 592S). The birth of our first child meant a reassessment of our priorities, and the MG was

sold in October 1979 to new owners in Belgium. It was the end of an era and, we thought, the end of an enjoyable relationship with MG's stylish Y-type.

For several years, we were to rely solely on our Citroen GS, until we were given a ten-year-old Morris 1800 'Landcrab' in 1983. This was followed by a down-at-heel 1971 MkII Vitesse Convertible (GAB 656J); new sills and a respray made it presentable. The Vitesse was fun to drive, although it felt much 'looser' than my previous model, no doubt due to its extra age and harder use. This, too, was sold and replaced in 1986 by a more modern Citroen.

I continued to follow the classic car scene with interest, and noted that prices being asked for T-Types had gone 'through the roof'. My interest in 'Y's' remained. The humble 'Y' was largely forgotten during these boom years. Few firms, with the notable exception of NTG, provided support and the model had no separate register within the MG Car Club. Although the Octagon Club gave help, the principle champion of the Y-Type's cause was John Lawson's 'Y' Register, so it was to him that I turned for some advice about buying a Y-Type for restoration.

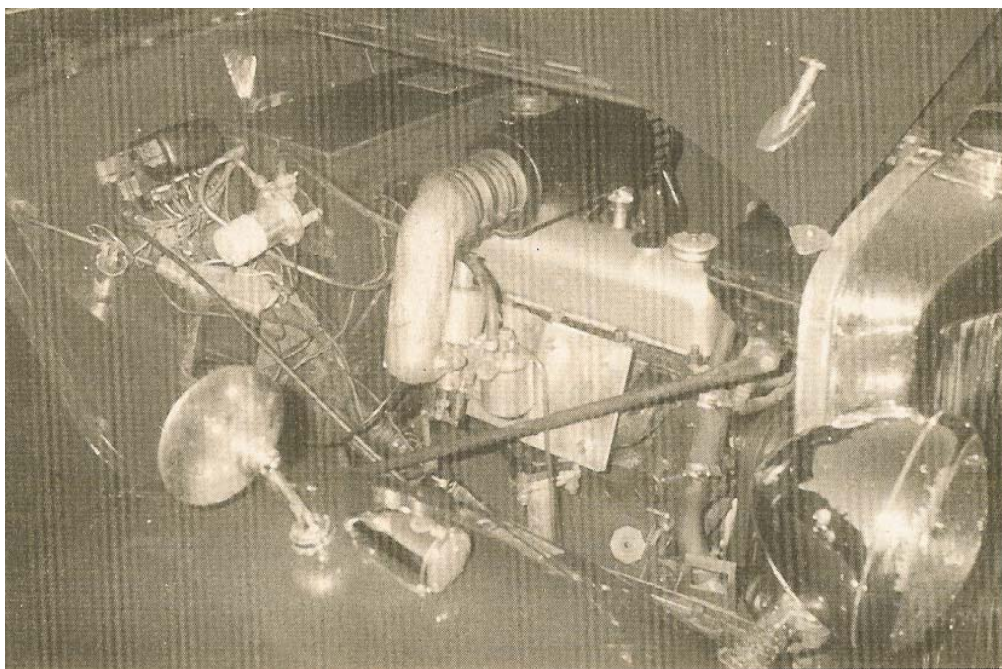
Family support for my project was not very forthcoming and repairs to the house were, quite rightly, seen as the priority. Eventually, in January

1992, amidst some rumblings of discontent from all the family, I acquired another MG 'Y', this time a very original 1950 YA (RVW 761) that had sat unused since 1985, although it had at least been dry stored. It had had four previous registered keepers, each of whom, with one exception, had kept the car for long periods – thirty years for the first two and then ten years for the last owner, prior to the sale to myself.

The YA came with some history and the 121,000 miles on the 'clock' seemed correct when matching it up against earlier MoT certificates.

It was to be some time before the 'Y' took to the road again (not that there was a huge amount of work to be done to get her roadworthy). I enrolled on a part-time MA course which, combined with work and family commitments, meant that the twelve months between mid-1993 and '94 saw no progress at all on the MG. However, previous to this I had already managed to undertake a fair amount of work, including a rewire, a new floor and a complete new braking system, as well as having the sills replaced. The car passed its MoT in December 1994 and was finally on the road for the first time in nine years.

My first run did not bode well when, within three miles from home, the car expired. As I 'phoned the AA I recalled a similar experience 21 years earlier with my first 'Y'! This time, the problem was a cracked rotor arm and, with a lot of luck, I eventually got home. Overheating was an additional problem, but this was simply due to a blocked radiator which was duly dealt with by a



Jerry's YA had 121,000 miles on 'the clock' when he bought it, a mileage that he believes is probably genuine given the condition of the engine and back-ups from lots of previous MoT certificates

local factor.

Over the last two and a half years, I have made further improvements to the car, including a respray last May, rechroming of the fog lights, headlamps and front bumper and a brand new carpet. Much work, of course, remains to be done, and I aim to gradually tackle the interior over the next six months and probably convert the cylinder head to enable the engine to run lead-free.

When driving the 'Y', I appreciate the sensitive steering and the close-at-hand gearchange. The brakes are effective but require the occasional heavy-foot application. Cornering on crossplies is not brilliant, although I gather that radials (which can only be fitted to the smaller-wheeled YB) greatly improve handling. The YA manages between 30 and 35 miles per gallon and will cruise along happily at between 45 and 55mph.

Fuel vaporisation has been a problem with my YA, especially when restarting the car after a run. To cure this, I have fitted a heat shield and, so far, it seems to have cured the problem. Other modifications? Well, modern day traffic demands that signals are clearly seen and people simply

aren't used to looking for semaphores any more; for this reason I have fitted external flashers to the rear and double filament bulbs in the sidelights.

MG Y-Types have the benefit of good spares availability and are relatively straightforward to maintain. There is a lot of compatibility with not only other MGs but also contemporary BMC products such as the Morris Minor. However, some brake parts on the YA have become elusive over the years and cylinders are very expensive.

I remain convinced that a decent MG YA or YB has a great deal to offer today's classic car buyer. It is a period sporting saloon that combines British tradition with relatively modern mechanicals, as well as offering an attractive, pleasing appearance and quite a nippy performance. If ever there was an underrated classic saloon car, the MG Y-Type is it.

MG 1¼-LITRE 'Y' SERIES - 1947-1953

The MG 'Y' series would have been introduced



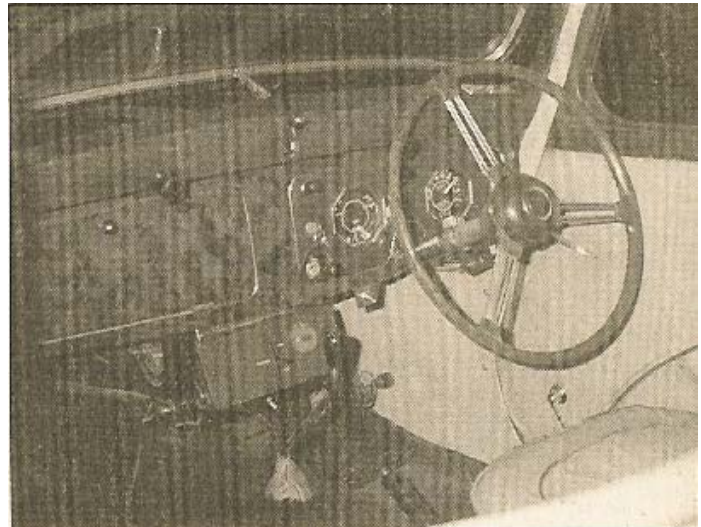
Although proud owner Jerry lives in Warwickshire, he makes sure his much loved YA travels further afield when it comes to classic car shows and rallies.

in 1941 had it not been for the outbreak of World War II two years earlier. It was eventually launched in 1947, using a modified version of the Morris 8 Series E/Wolseley 8 four-door bodyshell.

The MG's powertrain is of interest, for it was fitted with a detuned version of the 1250cc MG TB engine, such as was fitted to the Morris and Wolseley Tens, together with a modified version of the gearbox used in these cars. It also featured independent front suspension and rack and pinion steering which, at the time, had never before been used on an MG or Nuffield model of any type.

In early 1952, the MG YA was replaced by an updated model, the YB. This featured a much improved hypoid rear axle, twin leading shoes on the braking system and other minor modifications, the most visually obvious being an altered rear wing to accommodate the change to 15-inch wheels.

The final YB was built in 1953, replaced by the vastly more up-to-date Magnette ZA. Between 1947 and '51, 6158 YAs were built; just 1301 YBs were constructed during 1952 and '53.



MG Saloons of the period were exceptionally well finished, both inside and out.

Y-TYPE GATHERING

MG YA owner Jerry Birkbeck is organising a 47-mile drive around the Cotswolds, on behalf of the MG Car Club's Y-Type Register, on Sunday, March 22nd, to which all MG YA and YB owners are invited. The run starts from Bourton-on-the-Water at 11.00am and takes in some of the most stunning scenery in the area. It is hoped that up to fifty MG Y-Types will be attending and Jerry is urging anybody interested in taking along their YA or YB to give him a call on 01926 424053, or fax him on 01926 412641.

Jerry hopes to make this one of the biggest gatherings of Y-Types seen in recent years – but he needs the support of YA and YB owners everywhere. If you fancy a good day out in your 'Y' series, contact Jerry as soon as possible for further details.

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