

Survival Course

In 1972 the MG YA was the sort of ageing saloon which was often purchased cheaply, driven until something major failed, and then scrapped without a second thought. Fortunately for this particular YA, Brian Hunt was the first person to respond to the advert for it in his local paper. Now, some 16 years later, the car is still going strong. Kim Henson tells the story.



The beginnings of the Y-type MGs date back to the mid-1930s, when the open, two-seater T-type Midgets were introduced. The 1939 version – the TB – used what was essentially the 1250cc XPAG Morris 10 power unit. This engine was due to be used in a four-seater saloon version of the TB – to be designated the Y-type – in late 1939. Of course, Hitler had other ideas and the project was shelved until May 1947, when the YA saloon was introduced to a car-starved Britain.

The YA was a four-door, four/five-seater saloon, with a separate, box-section chassis, an overhead-valve engine developing 46bhp, rack-and-pinion steering, and hydraulic brakes. A pretty little open tourer version, with twin carburetors – the YT – was introduced in 1948 and sold only in export markets, and the YA was developed into the YB saloon, which was introduced in 1952. The new model had over-riders, a repositioned battery box, smaller wheels (15-inch instead of 16-inch), a

front anti-roll bar and other detail differences, and continued in production until 1953.

Performance from the Y-type MGs was reasonable – and very good compared with many family cars of the time. Despite weighing over a ton, it was capable of over 70mph, reaching 60mph in 28 seconds or so on the way, and would return between 25 and 31 miles per gallon in general use.

The cars were well-finished, and the interior trim was impressively luxurious by today's standards, featuring, for example, leather seats, fold-down armrests and walnut in abundance.

ELEGANT

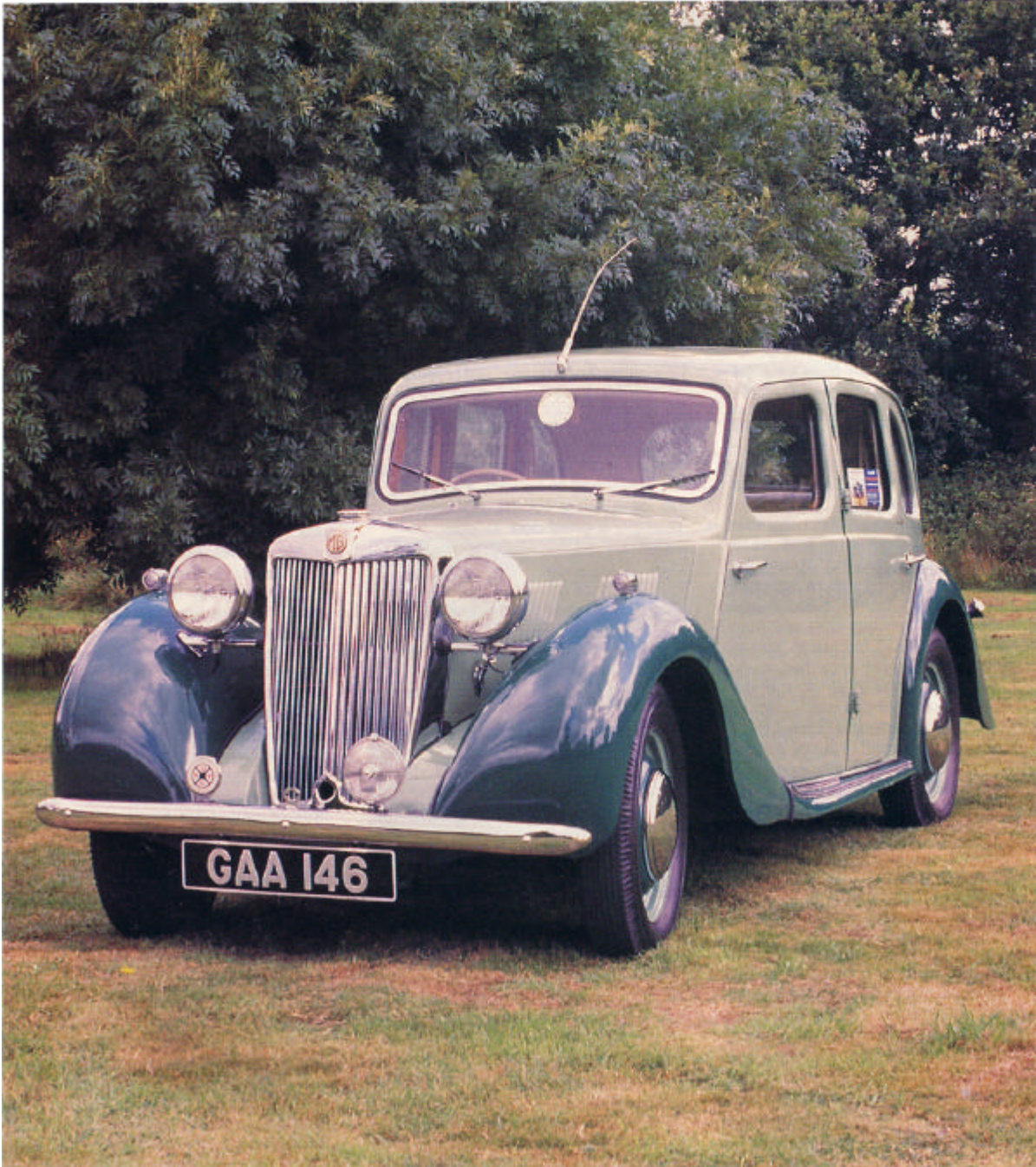
Brian Hunt was attracted to the YA by its pleasing shape – rather more elegant than some pre-war designs, in his opinion – so when, in 1972, he saw an advertisement in his local evening paper describing an MG YA at just £90, he viewed

it, bought it, and drove it home.

His wife's immediate reaction was in the 'What have you bought this time?' category, but the MG was there to stay, for Brian used the car for the next 13 years, giving it nothing more than normal routine – preventive – maintenance, and attending to any bodywork jobs as they became necessary. Brian did, for example, ensure that the chassis and underbody would survive by applying perservative paint some years ago, which has helped to keep the structure of the vehicle sound.

The Y-types often suffer from rot problems in the areas behind the rear axle – especially around the rear body mountings, the spare-wheel compartment and the chassis near the axle. The application of paint before problems show themselves is well worthwhile, as Brian has proved.

By 1985, having escaped the crusher for so long, the car, although still quite sound,

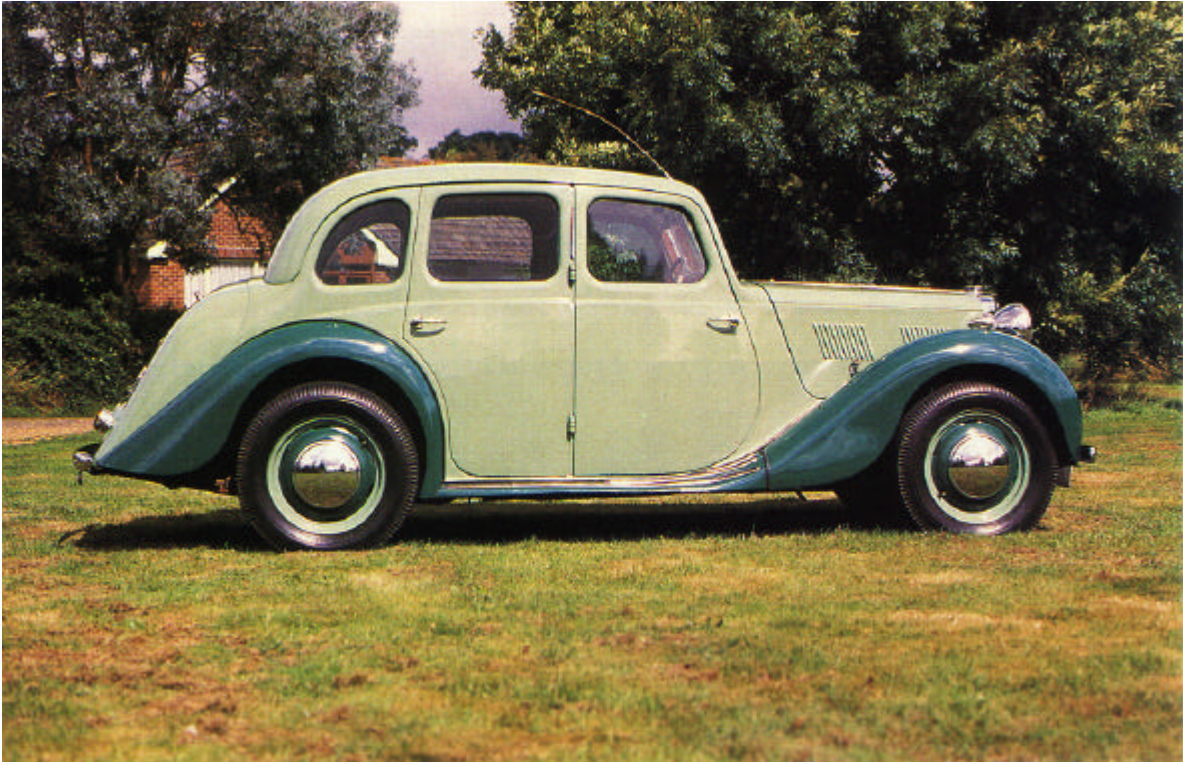


was in need of cosmetic attention, and Brian had to make up his mind which route to take in terms of tidying up or complete restoration. The situation was complicated (as it so often is) since, in the meantime, Brian had

purchased an Austin Seven requiring total restoration.

This car had been partly customised by an earlier owner who had abandoned the project, and Brian had already spent many hours stripping and refurbishing parts of the Austin. However,

after thinking long and hard, Brian came to the conclusion that he really couldn't cope with two major restorations at once, and, on the last-in-first-out principle he made up his mind to sell the Austin. Looking back, Brian is still convinced that this was the



Enthusiastic owner Brian Hunt attracted to the YA's pleasing body styling: rather more attractive, he feels, than many of its contemporaries

right decision. The Austin went to a new owner who had time to devote to the car, and Brian could now concentrate solely on his MG restoration.

STRIPDOWN

Having sold the Austin Seven, Brian kept the MG on the road until after the 1985 Stourpaine Steam Rally, in September of that year, since this event always marks the end of the main events calendar in Dorset. He then systematically stripped the car, having decided in advance that the body was to remain on the chassis throughout. Brian had based this decision on worrying tales from other Y-type owners, describing how the door pillars would spring out of shape upon removal of the body shell from the chassis. Since the chassis and the main body shell were sound on Brian's car, anyway, there seemed to be little, if anything, to be gained by separating them, and possibly a great deal to lose.

So, off came the wings, the running boards, the grille,

bumpers, and all the chrome trim, and out came the wiring. Brian planned the first part of the rebuild entirely around the bodywork, and left the engine in place until later.

The removeable body sections, including the wings, boot lid and sunshine-roof panel, were taken to a local firm to be sandblasted. All went well until the rear wings were tackled, and these were so thin that they literally disintegrated when under fire. Fortunately, Brian located another pair of wings in Guildford, and these proved to be encouragingly sound.

Meanwhile, Brian set to work on the bodywork. He meticulously rubbed down the body shell, one area at a time, having first removed the paint using a chemical stripper. As this work was carried out during the winter, he treated each area to a protective coat of aerosol primer, after each working session, to preserve the steel. Eventually, the whole of the body was stripped, rubbed down and primed in this manner.

Brian had already made up his mind that he would not spray the car, since his earlier

attempts with a spray-gun proved to be less than encouraging. He sensibly decided, therefore, to carry out all the work he knew he could tackle himself, but leaving the paint-work to an acknowledged expert.

ROLLING SHELL

By the time the body shell was ready for painting, all the removeable parts had already been painted at his local sprayshop. The proprietor then took the rolling shell of the vehicle into his custody, treating it to a superb paint finish over a period of five months or so, in between other jobs. The MG was returned to its original two-tone green colour scheme, having been brown and fawn when Brian had acquired it.

During the time the car was away being sprayed, Brian dismantled all the chrome components – including the complicated grille assembly – and sent these items for rechroming. He soon discovered that standards upheld by chrome-plating specialists vary considerably –

one firm managed to dissolve two of the radiator slats during rechroming! These were replaced, and the new slats chromed elsewhere.

Eventually the MG returned, gleaming, from the paint shop, together with its (still separate) wings, bonnet, boot lid and so on.

The components were carefully stored while Brian tackled the next job, which was to rewire the car. He had purchased a new loom from one of the leading MG parts suppliers, to discover that the wiring colours as used on his early (August 1947) YA had been altered on cars with later chassis numbers, and that the loom was, in fact, for a YB model, not a YA. As Brian explained, the main parts of the looms are similar, but some components – for example the fuel pump – are positioned in different places on the later cars, and the terminals differ, too. This unexpected problem naturally took some time to sort out.

Eventually Brian laid out the new loom on the garage floor, using sticky tape to identify the various wires, at the same time translating the color codes from a YB's wiring diagram to the reality of his YA! Brian was very pleased that, when the wiring was installed and a battery connected, the only items not to work first time were the stoplights, and even that little problem was soon sorted out.

PAINSTAKING

The painstaking task of refitting the wings and other bodywork components was carried out next. One of the most awkward jobs, Brian recalls, was that of replacing the sunshine-roof drain tubes. Not only was it very difficult to obtain new tubing of the correct internal and external diameters, but it was also extremely awkward to thread the new pipes through the bodywork pillars, owing to very limited space. However, the

job was, at length, accomplished.

The roof panel and the headlining could then be fitted. Brian chose to let a local trimming firm construct the new headlining, to ensure a high-quality finish. At this stage, Brian decided to leave the seats and the remainder of the interior trim in its sound but original state, for the time being at least. The seats, for example, while obviously worn after some 40 years of use, were still tidy, and a retrim was not considered to be really necessary.

With the bodywork reassembled, it was time to look at the mechanical aspects of the MG. Fortunately, and no doubt due to the regular maintenance carried out on the car over the years in Brian's ownership, the main drivetrain and running-gear components were in generally good condition. The engine, however, had covered a high mileage and was quite noticeably worn. This was duly removed, for future long-term overhaul, and the power unit from an MG TC fitted in its place. This engine is running well in the YA, and burns very little oil, so will remain in the car for the foreseeable future until such time as Brian rebuilds the original motor.

FINE CONDITION

When the MG emerged from Brian's garage it looked (and still does look) superb, and it has won several awards for its fine condition.

In order to keep the MG on the road and to preserve it in good order for the future, Brian has made a couple of non-standard modifications. The first was the deliberate omission of the sealing rubbers around the boot lid and the spare-wheel compartment cover, at the rear of the car.

These rubbers absorb rainwater from the adjacent sloping panelwork, and then hold the moisture against the steel. Brian prefers to leave

these sponges off the car, removing any surface water from the bodywork with a sponge when it is returned to the garage after a journey in the rain.

This approach will almost certainly help to keep the car alive for longer, but has also meant that some so-called concours judges have deducted points when evaluating the MG Brian is unconcerned, preferring to ensure the survival of the car, rather than win some prizes for originality.

The other modification was the fitting of a clutch-rod conversion kit, abandoning the original cable operation. The cables are prone to breakage, and are difficult to replace. According to Brian, the task of releasing the cable from within the pedal box, under the dashboard, is almost impossible.

By converting to rod control, clutch operation is made more positive and, once fitted, the rod should seldom, if ever, need to be disturbed at the pedal-box end. Brian is delighted with the kit, which he obtained from well-known MG specialists Moto-Build in Hounslow and which was simple to fit.

This particular MG, which may well have been scrapped by the mid-1970s had it not been for Brian's intervention, is due to stay indefinitely in his keeping. Of course, some

Concentrating efforts on just one car enabled Hunt to make real progress on MG



spares will inevitably be required to ensure the MG's long-term survival. Since it is obviously a rare car (only 8336 Y-types were built, and many were exported in the late 1940s), spares are not particularly easy to come by. However, Brian has made long-distance trips to Manchester, to obtain a dashboard (and other components) in good condition, and to south Wales to buy a petrol tank, to replace the original which had sprung a leak. These items have since been systematically stripped, refurbished as necessary and fitted to the car.

THE FUTURE

Future projects, as part of the continuing rolling-restoration plan, include the acquisition and stripping of a badly corroded body shell to relieve it of items such as doors and window glasses, reconditioning of the original engine, and — eventually — further work on the interior. Brian is also planning an early assault on the underbody this winter to apply further protective paint. This should help the car to survive almost indefinitely.

In the meantime, the MG, having been saved by Brian some 16 years ago, is providing reliable, comfortable

and economical classic transport although it is admittedly not in everyday use. Brian's systematic approach to maintenance and restoration, coupled with his concentration on just one vehicle, has ensured that the project has remained manageable, and the excellent results have repaid all the hard work he has put into the car — of which he is justly proud.

Finally, it is perhaps worth mentioning — for the benefit of other Y-type owners that spares are available from NTG Motor Services Ltd of 282-284 Bramford Road, Ipswich, Suffolk P1 4AY, telephone 0473 211240.

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