

Meet Sabrina, TD's four door Sister

I have been a petrol head from well before that term was coined for motoring enthusiasts. Virtually from birth I have had oil in my blood. Living in post-war West London there were many fascinating car related places. AC, Lagonda and Maranello Concessionaires, Performance Cars and The Chequered Flag garages all within easy cycling distance but I did not have to travel far to my first passion; Morgans.

Our backyard in St Mary's Square, Ealing backed onto F H Douglass and Son and was always full of Malvern engine and chassis bits. I wanted one! Of course, as a teenager, there was no way that I could ever afford even an antiquated three wheeler. My brother, Peter, and I cut our engineering teeth on these handmade machines. Dougie, the owner gave us little jobs to do and even paid us pocket money. He explained such mysteries as fly-off hand brakes and sliding pillar front suspensions.

Peter carried on after he left school and became an experienced motor mechanic at Nagles Garage in Kew. I joined the Royal Air Force as an Aircraft Apprentice, and went on to work on such diverse types as Comets, Canberras and Vulcans.

Of course, like so many RAF types with worldwide postings, I have had many interesting cars over the years. These include a 1948 Triumph 2000 Roadster with a three speed gear change on the right-hand side of steering column, Peugeot 203 with upside down column gear lever, Citroen DS, Goddess of weird and wonderful, Ford Specials, Imps, Beetles, BMWs and all manner of machines with rear wheel drive, front wheel drive with front, mid and rear engines. Strange how every manufacturer tells you that their design is the ultimate expression of automotive perfection! All these cars had different characteristics and a soul, not like the bland Euro boxes of today that have more or less settled for the Issigonis formula.

Meet Sabrina, my current mistress, whoops, motorcar!



Photo 1 – 'Meet Sabrina'!

We met on a blind date, but from the first moment we connected she spoke to me. On our first

meeting, the last four digits showing on her odometer were exactly the same as my RAF identity number! Old before her time, a 1950s war baby dressed in her mother's 1930s street wear. A timeless charm, some might think she is frigid because she does not have a heater, but the serviless drum brakes are guaranteed to get you hot under the collar at least once every trip. No seat belts, no head rests, just a slight feeling of insecurity so you must give her your full attention.

No wireless, she needs you to talk to her all the time. She answers with rattles, knocks and squeaks just to let you know she is listening. Reliable, of course not, just like any really interesting female she likes to keep you guessing with a mind of her own. Spirits of previous keepers whisper in your ear to remind you that you are not the first.

She will show you up in front of friends, like the time I tried to demonstrate her self-jacking system. Perfect manners before, perfect afterwards but no amount of coaxing could get her to curtsy to an audience.

Does not like the rain, not keen on the dark; happiest when tucked up with a good page turning workshop manual in her carpeted car house. Craves constant attention - check oil and coolant before and during every journey. A handful of grease nipples that demand a squeeze every 1000 miles. Leaves an oily signature on the ground wherever she has been; never discreet.

So who is Sabrina? She is a 1952 MG YB Saloon. 1250 cc, 0-60 in a time to eat lunch; Top Speed, enough to cause tail backs on motorways. One of a small, by modern standards, production run of 1301 YBs built between 1951 and 1953. Some thought she was an ugly baby, unloved at birth. Born in Abingdon on Thursday 28th August 1952 but only registered on the 6th October 1952. Why the gap? In the 1950s few people wanted a saloon with a separate chassis and body bolted on to it when you could buy for less money a snazzy all in one unitary body like a Morris Minor or Austin A30. Only a few discerning professionals that could not aspire to a Bentley VI could have the traditional look for half the price. Lawyers, doctors and businessmen did buy, but there was no big queue of customers. The little MG saloons were often bought out of loyalty to the open sportscar of their carefree, pre-war, single life style. Now in the 1950s, with maybe a new family commitment, there was more choice with the likes of Vauxhall, Rover and Humber to show you the modern way.

However, for the enthusiast, her little sister was a very different character. They shared the same undergarments and even the beating heart was from the same XPAG gene pool, but she was a Hussy, a little wanton, who preferred to go topless. Her name was TD, and the boys could not get enough and loved her from the cradle.

The Y-Type is a very close relative to the TD. When first conceived in the late 1930s, the small saloon had rack and pinion steering, independent coil spring front suspension all new to MG. The YB variant continued the updating with twin leading shoe front brakes. These features were the same as the new TD sports. The chassis of the TD was loosely based on the Y type frame. The major difference being that the sports version had the rear axle mounted under the chassis rather than the saloon's above the frame design. Many components even shared the same parts numbers. Of course, the engine was very similar with the saloon being equipped with a version of the XPAG motor. The main difference for the saloon was the adoption of a single SU instead of the sporting twin carburettor set up for the sports model. (The Y Tourer variant retained the twin SUs so the engine was even more akin to the two seaters).



Photo 2 shows the single SU carb set-up in the XPAG of the YA and YB.



Photo 3 – the Editor just had to show the other side of this beautifully clean engine!

Sabrina is not a car; she is a 'motorcar'. She belongs to an age long gone, but not forgotten. Do I own her? Not really, my name is on the registration documents at DVLA, so she admits to me being her current keeper, but she is a fickle mistress, always looking for a better offer.

Why Sabrina? Bewitched possibly, but gentlemen of a certain age might recall a certain well-endowed British actress of that name in the 1950s. Her name was Norma Sykes. Like the original, my

Sabrina has beautiful eyes, but just look at those hooters!
Mick Bath



Photo 4 – 'Sabrina' showing off her hooters.



Photo 5 – quality interior (none of this moulded plastic Eurobox rubbish!).

Ed's note: My brother owned a YB in the mid 1960s. I remember that it was green with beige interior. As a teenager I used to love sitting in the car and taking in the smell of the leather seats and admiring the lovely dashboard. Alas it had some suspension damage on the front offside and also a crumpled wing. Archway Engineering in Manchester were able to supply the parts but the price asked was beyond my brother's reach at the time and the car was reluctantly sold. I often wonder what became of the YB and do hope that it survived.

To quote Mick "Some thought she was an ugly baby, unloved at birth". Apparently, one such lady was Jean Kimber-Cook. Jean recalled (in the much celebrated DVD "Inside the Octagon 2") how on a visit to the Factory 'Uncle' John (John Thornley) was very keen to show her his new saloon model. However, when John proudly uncovered the new car Jean was so overwhelmed that she couldn't help saying that she didn't like it (or words to that effect) which must have upset him.

Nowadays the Y-Type has an enthusiastic following and most definitely worth a visit is the website of The International MG Y Type Register <http://www.mgcars.org.uk/imgytr/index.shtml>