

The Classic "Y"



Issue No.128 October 1995.

The Newsletter of The M.G. "Y" Type Register

EDITORIAL:

Spot the "deliberate mistake" last time? Shame on me, I left the Union Jack out of the heading! That's what comes with not preparing "TCY" as regularly as I used to. Modern technology (well, seven-year-old technology actually) should ensure that this won't happen again....

I was reminded recently by Tony Slattery of the Australian Y-Type Register that 1997 will mark the 50th Anniversary of the start of Y-Type production. Our Y-Type friends in Australia hope to plan something special. How many of the 300+ Y-Types in Australia can they get together in one place?

Meanwhile, and selfishly I know, I had my eye on 1998, as the 20th anniversary of the Register....

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Ramblings on the MGF

Now, the only reason the new MGF gets to appear in these pages (apart from the fact that I'm short of material for TCY!) is that Y-Type owners Paul and Joy Rundell attended the official launch of the new M.G. in Geneva last March (see below). Not only that, but they drove their Y-Type there and back. Well done!

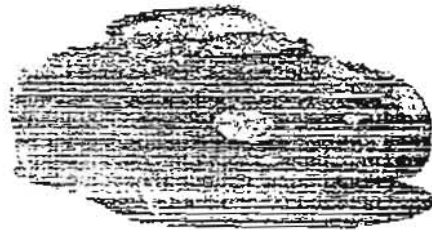
So, what of the new MGF? Well, it seems some things never change. Remember the bad old days of British Leyland when cars like the Maxi etc. were announced in a blaze of publicity and then it turned out they were not available for delivery to the buying public for many months hence? Well, the same thing is still happening, and this time with the MGF. It may have been unveiled in March but it was September before the first deliveries were made to the public. Problems with overheating and the fuel filler (remember the Metro and Marina?) and inadequate production facilities have not helped. In a further aside, the MG RV8 is said to suffer water penetration into the floor area (à la 1100/1300, Mini, Marina, Allegro, Maxi, Princess etc., etc.).



PAUL and Joy Rundell, from Camberley, Surrey, have a collection of MGs, including an MGA, an MGB roadster and an MGB GT V8.

"I love the MGF's sporty, bang-up-to-date image," said air-traffic controller Paul. "I think it looks wonderful and am tempted to buy one, but I'll wait until I've driven it properly. What worries me a little is that the car is still not available so long after its launch in March. I think the MGF could make a killing for Rover, but it needs to get the cars on the road as soon as possible. If it doesn't, the marketing drive will run out of steam before people can get their hands on the cars."

Receptionist Joy admitted they were both impatient to spend longer with the new hi-tech roadster. She added: "I love the little car's styling and we've already put in for a test drive in August."



The cutting aside first appeared in "Auto Express".



cont'd....

Still, it was good to see that around the time of the launch, Cecil Kimber's daughter, Jean Cook, had the courage to express a feeling perhaps held by many of us - that it was a great shame that Rover is now German-owned. Now, I personally have nothing against the Germans or B.M.W. B.M.W. make very good cars, as do the Japanese. But why, when Rover had just begun to cast off the years of bad feeling quite rightly brought about by the insane carryings on at B.L., could we not have kept this manufacturer for ourselves, as a national asset? And this goes for so many more of our industries too. The disposal of Rover by British Aerospace was, of course, only part of a greater "shake-out" by BAe of several of its component parts (the sale of the BAe 125 corporate jet production line to Raytheon in the U.S.A. and the attempts to dispose of the third-level airliner production facilities at Prestwick being examples). But how much truth was there in the stories, expressed in some quarters, that all this was done not with the welfare of our country and its workers as the prime concern, but with an eye to quickly more than doubling the BAe share price so that non-U.K. resident chairman John Cahill, who was only in the post 20 months, could benefit from share-options to the tune of around £3.1 million?

Then again, the recent admission that profits-wise everything at Rover is not as rosy as we'd been led to believe these last couple of years perhaps suggests that BAe opted for the wisest course of events for the soundest of commercial reasons.

Whatever, back to the MGF for a moment. Although, in my opinion, the frontal area is attractive (but not as good-looking as the current Toyota Celica), from the rear the car looks excessively bulbous and the waist-line seems far too high. And I know the era of the amateur home mechanic has all but disappeared as regards new cars, but I would be a bit worried about engine accessibility too. You might be able to afford to pay someone to carry out your servicing, but you will obviously be paying for more hours of labour with a mid-engined layout. Will those spark plugs really last 60,000 miles?

All of which, of course, has nothing whatever to do with the Y-Type!

John Lawson.

Cars for Sale

"YT. Contact: Roger. A. Burr, [REDACTED], California, U.S.A."

"M.G. 'YA' 1951. Beautiful condition. Body restored, respray to very high spec. British Racing Green/Cream two-tone. Excellent original interior. S/S exhaust. £6,950 o.n.o. Tel: [REDACTED] (evenings) or [REDACTED] (day). Private sale."

"Y 4393. First registered Feb. 1950. Offers to: Mr. Henry Hinchliffe, [REDACTED], Leeds, [REDACTED]"

Register News

As I supposed in the last newsletter, the 1,200th Y-Type has indeed now been entered on our Register. But first we'll start with No.1197, which has been found for us by James Hunter of [REDACTED], Georgia. No.1197 has been allocated to Y/T 2468, a right-hand-drive 1949 Y/T which has engine no. 7R/12036 and is owned by David Leonard of [REDACTED], Georgia.

Next is No.1199 which is a 1952 YB (YB/0711) owned by Mr. Frank Andrew of [REDACTED] Derby. This Woodland Green car has engine no. SC2/17585 and body no. 6341/538. It is registered "MY892" (first registered 1st October 1952). The car is fully restored and in "A1" condition but needs ashtray inserts for the backs of the front seats.

Register No.1201 has recently been purchased by Mr. Neil Cairns of [REDACTED] Bedfordshire. Some of you may have heard of Neil before or may have read his technical articles in various car club magazines on the subject of B.M.C./B.L. "A" and "B" Series engines. Neil is M.G. and Riley Farina Registrar of the Cambridge-Oxford Owners' Club. The car Neil has recently bought is another 1952 YB, this time YB/0322. It has B.M.C. replacement engine no. C76561 (the original engine fitted was SC2/17250) and body number 5963/167. Neil has provided the following short history of the car:

"The car was purchased new in 1952 by a Mr. Bliss of [REDACTED] Cumbria. He ran the car as his, being a solicitor, until his marriage to Ann Bliss in 1962. She then used the car, once a family had arrived, to take them to and from school. By 1983 the car was in need of a lot of work. It was given to Peter Hutchinson of [REDACTED] Cumbria, who is a vintage car restorer. He made an excellent job of the car (the silis and chassis are still full of the Ziebart he injected), and it was used for local rallies and picnics until Mr. Bliss died in 1992. He had run this car for forty years! His wife then sold the car to a Mr. Fox of [REDACTED], who hardly used it. It passed into the car trade in 1995, but did not sell. It eventually ended up at Silverstone this year, but did not sell there either."

One feature of this car which is of interest is its registration number: "438LRM". This, I believe, dates from post-1953 (all YBs on the Register apart from the first and last - YB/0251 and YB/1551, because they were first registered for the road sometime after YB production ceased - have their three-letter-group preceeding the three-number-group in their registration numbers.) So, why the delay in registering YB/0322?

cont'd...

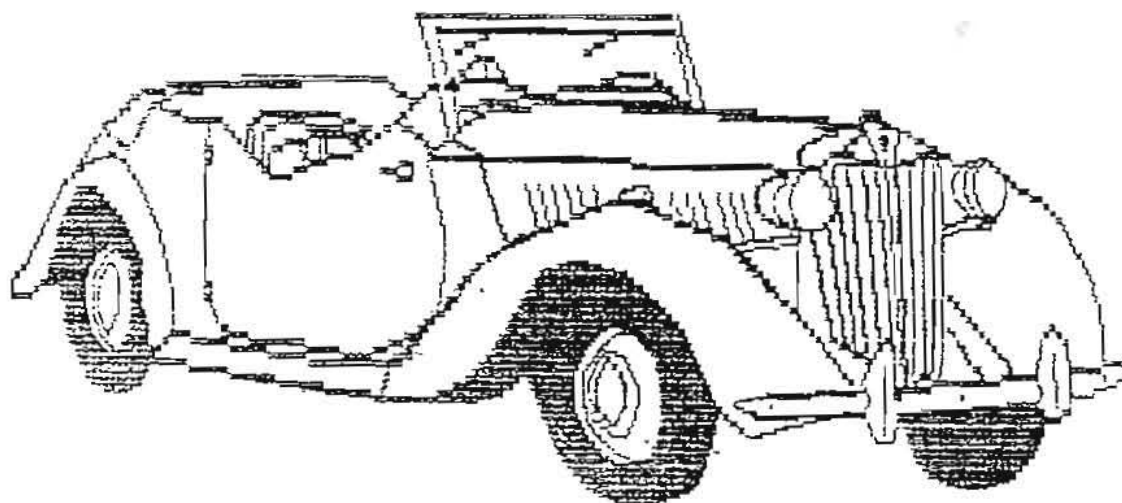
An interesting aside to the registration number query and the short history given above is that on 14th June I had a 'phone call from a Mr. David Penny who said he was looking to buy a Y-Type and that "someone at Silverstone had given him my number" (my number is ex-directory expressly to discourage this type of call). It seems Mr. Penny knew of a YB for sale which had its registration numbers in front of the letters and we agreed that this was somewhat odd. After he rang off I checked the Register database and was left with the tantalizing thought that maybe someone had rediscovered YB/0251 "118HYV". Alas, it was not to be. The car in question was probably YB/0322. But who gave him my number? Eh?

No. 1202 has been allocated to a Y/T which has recently been unearthed in Canada after thirty years storage. The car turns out to be Y/T2820. At some time in its life, this 1949 Y/T lost its original engine and acquired a 1948 TC unit, XPAG/5012. Owner Mr. B. J. Walker of [REDACTED], New Brunswick, now has the task of putting things to rights (this will include a new interior).

So, those of you who are still with me will have been wondering, "what happened to Register Nos. 1198 and 1200?". An explanation is in order. The new numbers which do not appear in these pages will have been allocated to cars for which at present I only have brief details (for instance, only the registration (licence plate) number or engine number etc.) and they are not yet "worthy" of being reported on.

I had notification in June from Dr. John Scott of [REDACTED] Cheshire, that his car, Y/0674, is now on the road for the first time in 26 years. She is finished in the "original two-tone green" and all rechroming and rewiring has been carried out, together with an engine rebuild. After the first three weeks the car was running well except that the brakes were tending to bind. Well, Dr. Scott, do I envy you living so close to Oulton Park? You bet I do!

Finally, for this issue, Y/7066 recently changed hands. It is now owned by Dave White of [REDACTED] near Mold, North Wales; it was previously with Charles Carrigan of Hereford.



The photo below of "FJB510" (Y/3412) was taken at Kidlington airfield, just outside Oxford, around 1975. This is the car featured in the "Motoring" touring article "Peak of Perfection" (see TCY125). Y/3412 was one of the first Y-Types reported to me for the Register (back in 1978, as Register No. 13). Where is it now? The photo was supplied by Dave Lawrence.



Wanted:

MG Y TYPE spares; interested in all parts. [redacted] fax list

For Sale:

MG GOLD SEAL engine suitable for 'Y' type or 'T' series; also offside rear wing and door, and nearside running board for MG YB. Tel [redacted] (3/10)



BLOTTER


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Dave Lawrence, of South Africa, also provided the illustration on this page. The photo dates from September 1949.

In the last couple of issues I've briefly reviewed the special-bodied Y-Types. The article which follows accounts for the solitary "chassis only" delivered in 1952 and should complete the picture, for now....

Castagna-bodied MG

Taking delivery of the coachbuilder's last carriage

By Roger Barlow

In 1953, after more than a century of producing high-quality carriages and automotive bodies, the renowned Italian coachbuilder Carrozzeria Castagna, whose insignia was a magnificent coach made for a King of Italy, had closed its doors and was in receivership. A sad end to a noble house. And I was there a few months later, on stage, a member of the cast of two in the final scene of this tragedy: The last car to bear the emblem of this firm was to be delivered to its last customer—me.

It must have been late 1952 when I had arranged with MG at Abingdon to sell me a Y chassis (the basis for the shorter TD) and ship it on to Castagna for a one-off convertible to be constructed to my design and specification.

An MG? I can hear readers with long memories wondering now, for this was right in the thick of my CSSA/SCCA combat with MGs when I was at the wheel of the little blue Simcas (AW, June 8 and 15, 1987)! Ah, but it was friendly combat, and I had never lost my respect and affection for the marque MG. So when I wanted a 2+2 convertible with the intriguing Vistotal pillarless windscreen—like the Fiat 1100 coupe (AW, April 4, 1988)—only Castagna was considered for the coachwork and only the MG Y chassis because of its combination of comfort and handling in factory-sedan form that derived from its coil-spring IFS and under-slung half-elliptics at the rear.

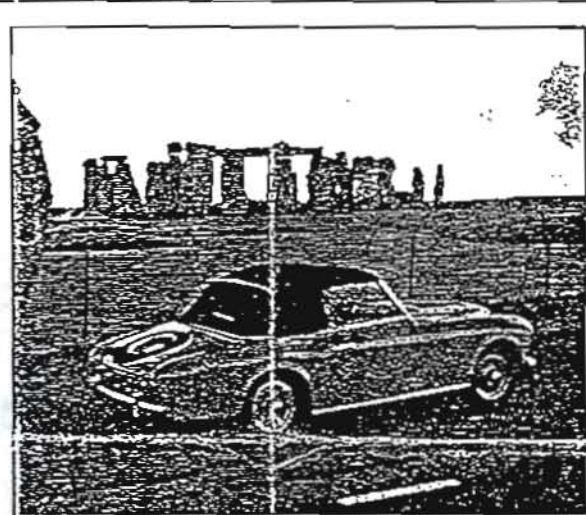
Light rack-and-pinion steering, with only about 2½ turns for a 35-foot circle, and a stiff frame were other factors in its favor.

There would be no concession to aerodynamics, visual or actual. The standard, traditional MG grille was to be utilized. Exposed knock-off wire wheels were specified with the spare to be mounted externally on the rear deck by means of a normal splined hub and nut, thus making more space available in the boot.

The space was to be further augmented by the elimination of the normal gas tank. Fuel was to be carried in two six-gallon tanks, one mounted on each side just ahead of the scuttle. Access to them was by lifting the lowered, one-piece hood of the engine compartment (check the oil while refueling). There was an MG quick-release filler cap

directly on top of each tank, with no piping to impede the flow of fuel from the nozzle, it could be taken on board at full flow with the rising level in the tank fairly visible.

The two tanks were entirely separate, with no balance pipe. Each had its own



The MG and Stonehenge: Posing unanswered questions

SU electric fuel pump brought into action by a switch on the fascia. Therefore one could run a tank down to the last drop (before switching over) for easy and accurate fuel consumption checks. Or consider the second tank as a six-gallon reserve! No fuel gauges were fitted.

The instruments were standard 1952 MG, including a tachometer. Unfortunately, they were round, though the early Y cars had octagonal units.

Upholstery was in black leather, piped to match the warm red of the exterior paint. The fabric of the top was black.

I cannot recollect which parts of the body were in steel and which in aluminum as no specifications in this matter were laid down, other than to say the completed car should be reasonably light yet rigid.

Back to 1954. I had paid a bank in Varese the balance of the \$3,000 contract, due upon delivery of the car, and now, in Venegono Superiore, I was met at the deserted Castagna factory by Sr. Ercole Castagna himself, visibly bowed by the failure of his Carrozzeria and seemingly older than his 68 years. The main assembly shop appeared larger than when I first visited in 1949 because now it was empty except for one car

hidden under a dust cloth—that Last Carriage From Castagna.

Sr. Castagna went forward and slowly pulled the cover off.

I am glad now that he was looking at his last effort with a craftsman's pride and did not see my face displaying a mixture of disappointment and consternation... for, handsome as the MG was, it wasn't what I'd expected or ordered. The windscreen was not a Vistotal, the main reason for this car's creation, but a conventional design with A-pillars!

I never got a satisfactory explanation as to why they had not followed my instructions or their own drawings sent for my approval. In any event, it was a little late for any changes or recommitments. Besides, it was a lovely little machine and I could hardly wait to drive it away.

Which led to the next surprise—my new car was not drivable! That would account for the OM diesel flatbed that had just arrived to haul me and the MG across the nearby Swiss border to a gas station with a work bay where I could complete the wiring. And then I discovered that the starter, voltage regulator and several other items were missing.

So it was off to London by rail (via LeMans, where I was to help Raymond Spottiswoode photograph the race in 3-D for Shell), then back to Chiasso to finally get the MG operative and head for Hollywood via the St. Gothard Pass and Stonehenge.

The Alps, France, England and the trip across the U.S. (my 32nd) enabled me to really get to know my very special MG.

As was rather expected, the sporting character of the Castagna (which was quickly dubbed "Emma" ... "Emma G," that is) really deserved more power.

The 80 mph top speed was acceptable from 1250 cc but not 0-60 in 26 seconds! Rather than resorting to dual carburetors and super-tuning, MG specialist Al Moss installed a blower (Shorrock?) to improve acceleration.

However, as I was getting back into documentary film work, motion picture equipment was more important than driving the most head-turning MG in town and so, with much regret, it was soon sold.

Al Moss tells me that Emma G's new owner, Beth Patrick, had quite a bit of trouble with the car (heaping curses upon me every time she visited his shop) and doesn't believe she owned it for very long.

The Last Carriage From Castagna, the only road car I "designed," must still exist, even if with some other powerplant.

Dear Emma G, we never should have parted. Please forgive me—and do write. ■