



The Classic "Y"



Issue No.136 February 1997.

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

Stats Part 1.

	1997	1996
YAs on the Register (of which 15 are left-hand-drive)	637	665
VBs on the Register	256	253
YTs on the Register	223	223
Reinbolt & Christie-bodied cars on the Register	3	3
Keller-bodied cars on the Register	1	0
Other Specials/Composites/Hybrids on the Register	13	14
Unknown (mainly saloons) on the Register	58	50
Total number of cars on the Register	1,242	1,208
Cars identified by chassis number:		
1947	57	55
1948	106	101
1949	287	281
1950	302	195
1951	101	98
1952	30	89
1953	98	97
TOTAL	951	926

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A reply to Neil Cairns' "Comparisons" article from last time....

Dear John,

The last issue of the Newsletter raised all kinds of memories for me and I occupied several wet and windy days in researching some material on "Y" types and their competitors that you are welcome to use in future issues.

Neil Cairns' article on "Comparisons" with "Y" type M.G. cars is fascinating reading and I think he would agree that his conclusions, though perfectly accurate, bear some expansion. The first thing, of course, is that when considering cars that could reasonably be described as competitive with the "Y" everything depends on what is meant by "competitive"!

Although performance is undoubtedly a factor it could be postulated that even more important to the intending purchaser is the matter of price. Anyone who has had anything to do with the motor vehicle manufacturing or selling business - and I had several years working at Vauxhall Motors many years ago - knows that only a small proportion of the customers know anything about performance comparisons. If there is any doubt about that point it is only necessary to remember how monumentally bad cars that were torn apart by the motoring press nevertheless sold in vast numbers.

Other comparison factors that would have been significant in the 1940s and 1950s were fuel consumption, specification and equipment, dimensions, colour and trim availability, reputation and status, road tax, and brand loyalty.

The modest bit of research I have made into this question shows that competition varied throughout the life of the "Y" and this makes the picture more complicated as competitors arrived and disappeared. I have, therefore, looked at the position firstly when the "Y" was introduced in May 1947 and again as the "YB" was being phased out in August 1953. During those six years some quite significant new models were marketed by various manufacturers, almost all the 1930s style cars were dropped and the motoring scene was distorted by the intermittent fuel shortages and the restricted availability of most models on the home market.

A full appreciation of the 1946-50 situation needs a quick glance at 1939 - immediately before the 1939-45 War - when the domestic market was

strongly segmented by horse-power rating. The "Ten horse-power" segment was dominant in the total market and this is significant because the "Y" was designed during that time and was intended for production in the 1940 model year (i.e. from autumn 1939) with the full but easily understood name of the "M.O. Ten".

If the War had not started when it did the little M.O. saloon would have entered a highly competitive but growing segment of the market and would have had to make its way against several other "Ten" models. Leaving out the "Nines" and "Elevens" there were, according to my records, no less than thirteen distinctive "Tens" available in 1939. These, with prices in brackets, were Ford (£145), Hillman (£163), Vauxhall (£168), Standard (£169), Austin (£175), Morris (£175), Jowett (£179), Singer (£195), Fiat (£198), Wolseley (£210), Sunbeam Talbot (£265), Rover (£275), Railton (£299).

As far as I know a price for the 1939/40 M.O. Ten ("Y") has never been quoted but a fair guess would be between £225 and £250 so that it undercut its closest competitor in terms of compact sportiness, the Sunbeam-Talbot Ten. After the War ended in August 1945 it took the car industry some time to get back into production and M.O. put all its efforts into turning out from December 1945 the "TC" 2-seater as this had considerable export potential. By the time the "Y" emerged in June 1947, cars which were initially its competitors were well on the way to being phased out.

At that time the forward planning energies of the Nuffield Group were devoted to new Morris and Wolseley models - the success of the Minor vindicating this policy - and other parts of the group like M.G. and Riley had to soldier on with their more old-fashioned and specialist appeal models.

Using "The Motor Guide to 1945-50 Models" as a base, TABLE 1 shows the position from mid-1947 to late-1951 when the "Y" was replaced by the "YB". The prices quoted are averages calculated by "The Motor" and, for comparison purposes, I have assumed the competitive boundary is the "Y" price plus/minus £100. It is unfortunate that the Guide does not give acceleration figures - these could be obtained from "The Motor" and "The Autocar" road tests of the period - but it does give bhp and dimensions including weight which will give some idea of potential performance.

As Neil rightly points out in his article poor power-weight ratios were often disguised by low gear ratios. In other cases adequate performance was only extracted at the expense of clumsy bodywork - Ford, Vauxhall, Hillman and Standard - or by fitting multiple carburettors to an unnecessarily large engine in a heavy frame and incurring considerable petrol thirst as a result - Wolseley being a good example of the latter.

In the early years of the "Y" there was quite a lot of price competition but a glance at the table suggests that the "Y" was considerably different in character to almost all of them. It has to be remembered that in the late 1940s new cars were very difficult to buy on the home market and most customers either had to wait a long time or pay an

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under-the-counter premium. Price was still important but it was in a market subject to artificial restriction. From memory, several of the cars in the table had better acceleration and hill-climbing ability than the "Y" but this was usually achieved at the expense of heavier fuel consumption or indifferent handling or both. It will be noticed that several of the competitors were larger cars that could accommodate five people and this may have been important to some buyers.

It is interesting to note that the Sunbeam-Talbot Ten, also a compact four-seater sports saloon and, despite its miserable Hillman 1185 cc side-valve engine, probably the nearest competitor to a 1939/40 "Y" had, by 1947, been priced at an average of £799 - well above the "Y" - and was phased out in June 1948.

Production figures for the "Y" have been published before so do not need repeating. They do suggest, however, that the "Y" was a bit slow to sell in 1947 and 1948 when there was quite a lot of competition about. Another reason may have been factory bottlenecks or quality problems. Some of the articles on the "Y" give hints that the "Y" had its share of problems including starter motor and dynamo unreliability and a tendency to overheat. No doubt some readers will be able to amplify the point.

By 1950, one of the best years for "Y" sales, the competition had dwindled to just seven using my criteria. These were the Austin A40 and A70, the Vauxhall "L" Velox and "E" Wyvern, the Morris Oxford, the Hillman Minx and the Ford Consul. All of these were post-war designed bodies but, with the exception of the Consul, initially had pre-war type engines.

Neil puts his finger on it when he refers to the surprisingly sluggish performance of some apparently highly competitive new-style vehicles. The fact is that motor manufacturers often used (and still use) a fancy new body to dress up an ageing chassis and engine they are not ready to replace, knowing full well that most customers are unaware of technical aspects of performance and buy the car on its looks. The converse doesn't apply, of course, and no manufacturer that I recall has ever found success by using an old-fashioned body to clothe modern mechanicals.

It is almost certain that Nuffield and M.G. were well aware that the days of the "Y" were numbered and that customers were demanding so-called modern stages while being less impressed by walnut panelling, leather upholstery and sunshade roofs. More recently, of course, those features have become popular once again. With the organisation nowhere near ready to introduce the Z1 Magnette the only answer was, rather like it did later on with the PP/TP, to cobble up some modifications to the existing "Y".

The trouble with the "Y2" was partly that the changes were all under the skin and, unlike the "T2" for example, were insufficiently different from the old model to revive slackening sales. So, if we look at Table 2 it can be seen that the rest of the motoring world had moved on and some very interesting alternatives to the "Y2" were available to anyone with £923 (the average price of the "Y2") plus/minus £150 to spend.

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The "YB" was seriously uncompetitive by 1962-63 notwithstanding the nostalgic reports in the relatively small circulation motoring press: an analysis of the age profile of first time "YB" purchasers in those years would, at a guess, show a predominantly middle-aged, middle class and traditional group. Even if a prospective "YB" owner turned up his (not many 'hers' I'll be bound) nose at Morris Six, a Singer SM1500 or a Vauxhall "E" Velox, there were some very tempting alternatives like a Jowett Javelin, a Citroen Light Fifteen or a Riley 1½ litre

The "YB" may have filled for several years a small and declining niche market for a compact, well-finished and deliberately mid-style car with moderately good performance but, as a President of General Motors once said, "The market is governed by fashion not function". Thus by 1961 the traditionalists - and especially their wives - were almost certainly cooling off a car that may have attracted nostalgia but no longer impressed the neighbours. Time had caught up on the "YB" and saloon car buyers must have given X.O. the cold shoulder in a major way until the Midget appeared and, despite means from the traditionalists, sold like hot cakes.

Not for a moment do I want to appear nit-picky or to do anything but admire Neil Cairns' excellent analysis, but my "Motor" information is that the Morris Oxford S2 and Cowley, and the Hillman Minx Mk.2, were not contemporary with the "Y" or "YB".

Tables 1 & 2 are on pages 6 & 7.

Trevor J. Austin,

Stats Part II.

Number of cars in each country:	(35 countries)	(33 in 1996)
	1997	1996
England	574	569
Australia	316	313
U. S. A.	121	118
Republic of South Africa	46	47
Scotland	34	31
Wales	25	18
Switzerland	19	12
Eire	16	16
Canada	15	15
New Zealand	11	11
Netherlands	10	9
Northern Ireland	9	9
Denmark	7	5
Singapore	5	5
Belgium	4	4
Germany	4	2
Channel Islands	3	3

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Table 1. Competition for M.G. 'Y' Type, 1947 - 1951.

Price	Model	Engine	bhp	Weight (cwt)	Length	Width	Max. Speed	mpg	Comments
£572	Austin 12 h.p.	1535cc SV4	40	24 1/4	14' 3"	5' 7"	63 mph	28	Until Oct. 1947
£587	Austin A40 Devon	1200cc OHV4	40	19	12' 9"	5' 1"	70 mph	-	
£588	Standard 14 h.p.	1776cc SV4	49	22 1/4	13' 9"	5' 3"	70 mph	26	Until July 1948
£598	Wolseley 12/48	1548cc OHV4	44	26	13' 7"	5' 7"	60 mph	21	Until Oct. 1948
£612	Singer Super 10 h.p.	1193cc OHV4	37	19 1/4	13' 0"	4' 10"	-	-	Until June 1949
£622	Austin A70 Hampshire	2199cc OHV4	67	25	13' 7"	5' 6"	82 mph	-	Until Feb. 1951
£641	Vauxhall 'L' Velox	2275cc OHV6	54	20 1/4	13' 8"	5' 2"	72 mph	26	Until Aug. 1951
£645	Austin 16 h.p.	2199cc OHV4	67	26 1/2	14' 3"	5' 7"	75 mph	24	Until Mar. 1949
£649	Wolseley 14/56	1818cc OHV6	55	27 1/2	14' 4"	5' 7"	72 mph	18	Until Oct. 1948
£651	Morris Oxford 'MO'	1476cc SV4	41	19 1/4	13' 9"	5' 5"	71 mph	31	From Oct. 1948
£654	Hillman Minx IV/V	1265cc SV4	37 1/2	17 1/4	13' 1"	5' 2"	60 mph	33	From Dec. 1949
£671	Ford Consul	1508cc OHV4	47	20	13' 8"	5' 4"	73 mph	26	From Oct. 1950
£672	M.G. 'Y'	1250cc OHV4	46	20	13' 5"	4' 11"	71 mph	29	May 1947-Dec 1951
£693	Rover 10 h.p.	1389cc OHV4	-	25	13' 7"	5' 2"	65 mph	32	Until Feb. 1948
£716	Wolseley 18/85	2321cc OHV6	85	28	14' 4"	5' 7"	80 mph	-	Until Oct. 1948
£753	Rover 12 h.p.	1496cc OHV4	-	26	14' 4"	5' 3"	70 mph	28	Until Feb. 1948
£765	Vauxhall 'F' Wyvern	1442cc OHV4	35	19 1/4	14' 4"	5' 7"	60 mph	32	Aug. 1951 - Mar 1952
£767	Singer Super 12 h.p.	1525cc OHV4	43	23	13' 6"	5' 2"	-	-	Until June 1949

Table 2. Competition for M.G. 'YB' Type, 1952 - 1953.

Price	Model	Engine	bhp	Weight (cwt)	Length	Width	Max. Speed	mpg	Comments
£787	Standard Vanguard II	2088cc OHV4	68	24 ¹ / ₄	13' 11"	5' 9"	75 mph	20	From Jan. 1953
£799	Morris Six	2215cc OHV6	70	24	14' 9"	5' 6"	70 mph	20	
£816	Vauxhall 'E' Velox	2262cc OHV6	65	21 ¹ / ₄	14' 4"	5' 6"	78 mph	22	From Mar. 1952
£878	Wolseley 4/50	1476cc OHV4	51	23	14' 2"	5' 6"	75 mph	26	To Jan. 1953
£882	Citroën Light 15	1911cc OHV4	56	21	14' 7"	5' 5"	75 mph	25	
£889	Austin A70 Hereford	2199cc OHV4	67	24 ¹ / ₂	13' 10"	5' 10"	80 mph	23	
£893	Jowett Javelin	1486cc OHV4	50	19	14' 0"	5' 0"	79 mph	28	
£923	M.G. 'YB'	1250cc OHV4	46	20 ¹ / ₂	13' 8"	4' 11"	71 mph	29	Dec. 1951-Aug. 1953
£934	Wolseley 4/44	1250cc OHV4	46	21 ¹ / ₄	14' 5"	5' 1"	72 mph	30	From Oct. 1952
£962	Singer SM 1500	1497cc OHV4	48	23 ¹ / ₄	14' 8"	5' 3"	71 mph	29	
£970	Humber Hawk IV	2267cc SV4	58	25	14' 6"	5' 10"	71 mph	25	To Oct. 1952
£1027	Riley 1 ¹ / ₂ litre	1496cc OHV4	54	24 ¹ / ₄	14' 11"	5' 3"	81 mph	28	

Register News

Last time I brought news of Y/5190 EXLU, thought to have been owned by a famous fashion designer. Owner Tom Cox recently wrote to me again, however, to say that we had got the wrong Ann(e) Klein. The first owner of the car was reasonably famous though, but as a supplier, with her husband, through their business Universal Tire of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, of tyres for antique cars. Of more interest, perhaps, is that Mrs. Klein says that the car was two-tone brown when purchased from dealers J.S. Inskip, in New York. This led me to look up details of the several two-tone brown Ys I have heard about or seen over the years, for, although we maintain that this was not an original, ex-factory, colour option, the following cars do exist:

In 1982 I saw a two-tone brown 1951 Y in California. No further details are known, as to chassis number etc., but the colour split was in the manner of that of the factory-supplied Almond Green/Elizabeth Grey cars, i.e., wings and running boards dark brown, remainder of body light brown (possibly Sun Bronze metallic). Split the same way was "LXV342", which took part in the first Regency Run in the mid-1980s. Again, no chassis number etc. details are held, and the main body of this car seems to have been more of a beige colour than Sun Bronze. Two further two-tone brown cars we may be able to discount: Y/6554 ("FRV272"), last heard of in Hampshire, was possibly two-tone brown in colour; and Y/5393 ("UMG226"), owned by a U.S. serviceman at Greenham Common, was more properly brown/cream. I venture to suggest that, as far as the U.S. cars go anyway, importers such as Inskip resprayed some cars either to individual customer order or to enhance the possibility of a quick sale (two-tone cars were very much in vogue in North America at this time). Another feature of Y/5190 EXLU is that it has a set of tools made by "Shelley" in England. Does anyone know whether this make of tool was original to the Y?

I had hoped to bring you a photo of Y/5190 EXLU this time but, as you'll gather, I am a bit short of space this month. Perhaps next time. I have also heard that the very first Y/T ever built, Y/T/EX(U) 1922, is presently in [redacted] Switzerland, having been delivered to the U.S.A. originally. It has body number 19523/? and, although said to be in good condition mechanically, its exterior and interior finish seem no longer to be original. Maybe I'll have more news on this next time.

Stats Part III!

Two cars each in Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Portugal, India and Norway.

One car each in Madeira, Japan, Zimbabwe, Cyprus, Hong Kong, Bangladesh, Macau, Namibia, Austria, Finland, France, Uruguay and Sweden.

(Uruguay and Sweden are new entries for 1997. Germany (2 in 1996) has moved up the table, now having 4 cars).