

Owning a Y Type

This month's notes are about owning and running a Y Type. Graham Bushnell purchased his YA a couple of years ago. It was a Mot'd and taxed car ready for use on the road. Graham will take you through his adventures using his experience of ownership of many very elderly pre-war Morris cars.

"MG Cars commenced production in the 1920s when Morris Garages refined and assembled Morris parts and added a sporty body. Demand for these vehicles was so high that they outgrew three factory premises in Oxford before settling into the MG works at Abingdon. Their overhead camshaft race-winning sports cars of the thirties made the name of 'MG' famous and successful. To extend their range of products they introduced 1.5, 2, and 2.5-litre Saloon cars in the late thirties, to compete with the successful 'SS' Jaguar. To complete this Saloon range with a smaller car they designed a MG Ten, 1.25-litre saloon in 1938 for production in 1940. It was designed in the Nuffield Organisation central drawing office at Morris Motors, Cowley. The design team included the brilliant Alec Issigonis and practical MG engineer, Jack Daniels who created the first Nuffield independent front suspension (ifs), and rack and pinion steering system. To this was added the body tub from the Morris Eight, series 'E', an updated engine from the Morris Ten, series 'M' with its gearbox and back axle. The car was given a separate MG chassis, bonnet, grill and front wings, with a stylish boot to produce the MG Y Type 'One and a Quarter Litre' Saloon. Due to WW2 this was first produced for sale in March 1947.

It is a pretty car with a late 1930s styling which was time locked in the 1940s. The ifs gives the car a ride and handling characteristics in advance of its time, and the race-bred 1250cc ohv engine provided a sporty performance for the period. Although a basic Morris body, the car is given upmarket luxury with leather seats, door pockets, varnished wood trim, a built in Jackall system, a battery box with a lid and lavish use of chromium plating. The car sells itself to you when you first ride in it. The road holding and comfortable seats give an immediate impression of luxury. The car will cruise at 50mph and happily go faster if required. The drum brakes have good stopping power though not servo assisted. For night use the lights are good for the speed range and with about a 28mpg fuel consumption. The eight-gallon fuel tank gives a range well over 200 miles. The boot and spare-wheel locker have useful space for tools and will carry a small amount of luggage, although for a greater amount the boot lid can be folded out flat and items held on with leather straps. The car is not fitted with a heater but one can be added and the small Saloon body gets quite warm from the engine. (Note: the floor of a Y is wooden boards, Ed.) Hot weather ventilation is by the four door windows, the opening windscreen and the sliding sun roof.

Now, if you have convinced yourself a Y Type is for you, here are some pointers when you go to see the car being advertised.

- Stand back and look how the car stands, is it level on all springs?
- Eye up the panels, are there any ripples or signs of accident repairs?
- Try all the doors, do they shut nicely?
- Are the weather seals in place and do the windows work properly?
- Do the windscreen and sun-roof open and their water seals work?
- Is the roof headlining clean and unmarked by water ingress? A leaking roof will fill the car with water.

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Graham Bushnell's YA.

- Lift out the rear seat squab and check the boot and wheel locker for rusting.
- Are the leather seats and door trim in good order?
- Start the engine, it should fire up immediately.
- When it has warmed up it should have an oil pressure of about 50psi at 30mph in top gear.
- No blue smoke should be blowing from the exhaust once warm though there might be a little upon initial starting up. There should not be any blue smoke blowing from the oil filler cap on the rocker box cover, with the cap removed.
- Drive the car, the clutch should work well and the clutch pedal should not cause the brake pedal to move, and visa-versa.
- First gear is non-synchromesh and noisy but changing between 2nd, 3rd, and top is smooth and easy both up and down.
- There should be no excessive transmission noise or clonks.
- Apply the brakes hard and you should pull up in a straight line, the pedal remaining firm.
- Brakes are not servo assisted.
- Test all the electrical equipment; it should all work if the car passed its MoT.
- Rust is the car enemy, and attacks the running boards, the sills, the boot floor and sides, rear wings, door bottoms and the windscreen pillars. Get the car up onto a ramp or a lift and carefully check all the underside, chassis, brake pipes, king pins, leaf springs, dampers, steering joints, rack gaiters, exhaust system, gearbox rubber mountings, universal joints in the prop-shaft, inner sill panels, and the chassis where it goes under the rear axle. This is about the only place it rusts, other than around the rear spring shackles.

Our Y Type sold itself to my wife and I, with its comfortable ride, its good looks, and its very attractive red/black colour scheme. The price at £4,000 (in 2005) I considered a little high for the tc it needed, but it was near my home and with its new MoT we bought it. I wish now that I had spent more money on buying a lower mileage car with fewer previous owners. Sadly our car has been in the hands of 'Mr Bodger' and time has revealed his work, which had to be rectified together with the shoddy MoT pass. However, help is at hand from many sources. NTG of Ipswich produce an excellent catalogue and sell most parts by post, closely followed by the spares available from the MG Octagon Car Club. I am still a member of the Morris Register from my previous cars and here is a source of reasonably priced authentic body parts. Workshop manuals, drivers handbooks, the *Let There Be Y's*, *Living With The Y Type*, *Living With The XPAG Engine* books and technical leaflets can be had from the MG Car Clubs Y Register, (contact David Hague on 01 730 266362), so your Y Type will not be short of spares or knowledge to keep it running. Also, the Y Register's website on www.mgytypes.org is an invaluable source of data, friends and advice."

Graham Bushnell

Y TYPE

Back in 1947...

When the Y Type was released to the public in 1947, the country was in a similar condition to the present times. We were broke and trying to pay back huge dollar loans, no one had any money and getting loans was all but impossible. About the only difference was that in 1947 some vital commodities were still rationed where as food is plentiful today. Few people were buying new cars or motorbikes. Few had the ready cash and anyway, you had to go on waiting lists for some cars as we were trying to export the majority of our production to service those loans mentioned. The MG Y Type, later to be dubbed the 'YA' once the 'YB' arrived, would have cost you £525 plus purchase tax of £146.56, making a total of £671.56 in 1947. The MG TD sports car would cost you £569.36 with tax in 1949. The Y was over £100 dearer. Inflation was just as rife then as now, and by 1951 the Y's total price had risen to £880.36, of which £315.36 was that purchase tax. By 1952 the price has risen again to £989.27 of which £354.27 was tax. In just five years the price had almost doubled! The following model, the Z Magnette (later called the ZA after a ZB arrived) cost £645 plus £269.87 tax, making it £914.87 in 1953. By 1954 this had risen to £1,072.35.

Well, what else was there available of a similar specification to the little ohv Y Type? From the same Abingdon factory we have the Riley RMA 1.5 which in 1946 would have cost you a total price inclusive of tax of £709.91, which had risen to £913.07 by 1949. The bigger brother of this Riley, the RME 2.5, would set you back £1,224.86 the same year. But there was always the bottom end of the market. You could buy a brand-new BSA Bantam of 125cc for just £80 inclusive of tax in 1950. A slightly more weatherproof LE Velocette of 149cc was £148. It is the cost of this very basic transport that underlines the very high cost of any car just after the end of WW2. Wages were also low. A labourer might make £7 a week with a senior bank clerk getting £10 after long service. People walked, bussed or cycled to work. We all lived within such short distances of our workplace. Those who were better off lived out of town near to railway stations and went into town by train. Everyone dreamed of having their own home and personal transport, but the dream was not to materialise until the 1960s.

Because of the recent war, many car manufacturers were still making the models they had been in 1939. But by 1950 things had improved a little and new cars were arriving with modern air-flowed, full width styling. Many were miniature versions of USA models or copies of them. So the arrival on the market of what looked then to be a throw-back to the mid-1930s meant the little MG 'One and a Quarter Litre' was never to sell very well. By the time the 'updated' YB arrived sales were falling off at an alarming rate; the total sales of the YB being just 1,301 proving the point.

Today the Y Type has a loyal following. Its styling is very elegant and cars at shows always attract attention; especially from those who had no idea MG ever built such a car. However, few of these admirers realise just how small the car is. My guess is that about 30% of our current oversized population would be unable to get through a rear door into the rear seat. Today's cars are huge. Just park your Y in any modern car park and see just how these so-called modern hatches, MPVs and 4x4s tower above it. On housing estates built in the 1930s to the 1950s all over the country people are moving out one of their brick gate posts to

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Advert from 1947 for the little Y Type.

widen their driveways. The reason is the modern car is much wider than of old. Possibly only today's little FIATs and some Suzukis are still 'small'. I doubt if I am the only Y owner to nip through a narrow gap in the traffic successfully, only to see a modern MPV or 4x4 skid to a halt behind me once its driver has realised his steed is over a foot or more wider than mine.

But back in the late 1930s when the Y Type was to take up the 'small sports Saloon' slot in MGs three-saloon-car range (the other two being the VA and WA) the car was ideally suited to its market. There is an ancient rhyme that goes, "Before the Romans came to Rye or out to Severn strode; the rolling English drunkard made the rolling English road". Apart from being a bit wider by the late 1930s and many having metallised surfaces, little had changed with our narrow winding roads. The Y was a pleasure to drive along them with its excellent handling and nippy performance for its day. Note I say late 1930s as the car was ready for the 1939 Motor Show. It did not in fact actually arrive available for the public to buy until 1947. We have already discussed the inflationary prices of the post WW2 period. The Y was aimed at the top end of its market being very well fitted out for its era. If we take a Mars Bar as an indication of prices, back then they were 3d each which is about 1.2p today. They are now 40p each, which is equivalent to 8 shillings then, a rise of 32 times. Multiply the price of a Y Type of 1947 by 32 and we get £21,489.92. Not a cheap car at all. By 1952 this had risen to an equivalent £31,656.64. A new full-width 1953 sv 100E Ford Popular would have been £395 then, equivalent to £12,640 today. The ohv Y Type was nearly twice the price.

Y TYPE

MG had intended to have its three-model Saloon range on offer by mid-1939 ready for 1940. Had this been successful and WW2 not caused chaos, the little Y Type would have been a popular model. Its styling was then up to the minute with its gentle flowing lines, upright radiator grill, sweeping wings, gentleman's club interior and boot bustle. A degree in hindsight is about as much use as one in media studies and the facts are that the model's styling was very out of date in 1947 and positively archaic by 1953. One simply has to look at the full width styling of the Hillman Minx or the Vauxhall Wyvern and Velox, all taking a page out of the USA car market and out selling the Y in the thousands.

Running a Y Type in the early 1950s would have entailed taking it to an MG-franchised garage for its annual service. The fact it needs its suspension and steering greasing every 1,000 miles meant the owner/driver might opt to do this himself. Petrol was about 3 shillings (15p) a gallon, and annual road tax a staggering £12.50. This was over a week's wage for a working class chap. Every winter the roads would be packed with snow and then filthy salt laden sludge for weeks. Every winter morning, unless the car was

garaged, it would be covered in frost and ice. It would be mandatory to wash the car very often if the salt thrown on the roads by the ton was not to rot the car away in a few years. The Y Type was not sold with a heater as standard as very few cars were. For £12.50 you could have a simple recirculatory one fitted but it did not demist the windscreen. To see forward on those foggy autumn nights and morning you would have opened the windscreen to a damp, freezing blast. By the time the car became second-hand, its owner would certainly be doing his own servicing and maintenance. At least once a year the engine would need de-coking and the valves grinding in. This was because the 80 octane pool-petrol then available was awful and the oils not much better. The petrol deposits built up on the back of the inlet valve choking the ports, the oil deposits on the piston and exhaust valve. By the 1960s the car would be classed as an old banger and this is where the majority became scrap, squashed into a one-foot-cube, melted down, rolled and then pressed out as a Ford Cortina. The Cortina then eventually became scrap itself and today is probably a Honda or Kia!

The Y in 2008

What about the Y in 2008? Considering that so very few were built, the numbers surviving is astounding. Today very few people under 50 are able to recognise the model, many confuse it as a 1930s Riley or similar. Because of its construction of pressed steel panels spot-welded together, like many 1950s British cars, corrosion is a serious problem. However, due to the popularity of its sibling, the MG TD, mechanical spares are plentiful, though expensive. Restoring a Y is prohibitive as the cost will not equate to its value once completed, unlike the T series sports cars. You can buy a very tidy Y for about £5,000 (a TD for £12,000) a runner for £3,000 (a TD at £9,500). Very good restored cars are about for around £8,000 (a TD for £19,000) and Concours cars whatever you are prepared to pay. Against that measure, the cost of a full restoration is around £16,000....

In comparison with the regular use and skimpy servicing the car had back in the 1950s, the current fleet of Y Types are pampered and probably over-serviced. People use expensive 'classic' oils where cheap, simple mono-grades once flowed. It is a fact that even the cheap re-claimed multi-grades of today are of a thousand



'OYD932' of Mr Rowe.

times better quality than that post-war mono-grades. Petrol is now of 94/95 octane and very clean. Leadfree petrol means no need to de-coke anymore (my own YB's head has not been off since I had it modified for leadfree nearly 15 years ago). Modern multi-grade oils mean there is no need to change from 20sae winter to 30sae summer oils and visa-versa. Roads have improved out of all proportion. The poor

little 1250cc engine is not really up to running at 60mph for hours on these straight, wide roads. It is a 'long-stroke' engine from the era of vehicle road taxation based on the cylinder bore and RAC horse-power. This RAC formula based tax was out of date when it was introduced back in the 1920s and seriously held back development of UK engine design (manufacturer's stuck to narrow-bore, long-



The Y display at Silverstone 2008.

stroke engines). Virtually no Y Type is now in use as daily transport (the exception being one Ian Hopkins and his YB) and most are pampered hobby cars kept in dry garages. The performance that was once quite good is today simply not up to modern driving. Back in 1947 the XPAG engine produced the highest BHP figures for its size for a production engine. Today 46bhp pulling over a tonne has no chance against even the smallest cars with 75bhp pulling two-thirds of that weight. A maximum speed of 69mph (1947 Motor Road Test) means that today, with consideration for the age of the mechanics, a cruising speed of around 50mph.

When owners of Y Types get together the subject of conversation is obvious. The younger owners who are used to 12,000 miles between services in their modern cars, get a bit of a shock when they find out bits of a Y need greasing every 1,000 miles. A 200-mile trip in their 2008 Clonemobile might only take a morning, but in the Y the same journey will take all day. Whereas, the Clone will not require any checks; a wise Y owner will check water and oil before and after the journey and possibly once *en-route*. The driver and passengers in the Y on that same journey will suddenly notice the countryside and small market towns that would be flashed past in their other car. The reason for that is, many Y owners avoid motorways like the plague and plan their route via A and B roads. No one likes a 42 tonne, articulated, foreign HGV radiator three feet behind their rear bumper, which is what invariably happens on motorways.

Paul Eastburn will now tell us of his first week of recent ownership of his YA:

"The purchase saw me drive it home from Droitwich to the Axminster area about 125 miles on Tuesday of the last week of September; the speedo cable broke at the last turn into home. Whilst being driven by a now embarrassed friend the clutch failed. The friend luckily has a ramp in his garage (yes, a full size two poster), I jump started it in first and made clutch-less changes for the mile to his place and fixed the pushrod on the clutch mechanism. The next couple of days were spent playing around locally, showing off to friends getting my right leg back into fitness for YB brakes. It is in fact a YA but the YB axle and TD hubs and wheels are a recent addition. The TD wires do look smart. With the Pirelli Radials the car handles far better than my old Y 'UMG 426', on its original cross-plies.

By Friday the need to go up to Rugby had arisen and I left in fine weather at about 9.30am. Up through to Chard and the north edge of the Blackdown Hills sweeping bends and the car singing, it was as good as it gets. The rest of the journey was fine and as I was meandering slowly across country it took me another four hours to reach Rugby. This did, however, include a stop over in Gaydon to look at the "Works Rally Y Type", especially the servo set up, the hills in Devon have overworked my right leg already.

Saturday saw Gill (my wife) and I attempt at an early start for a run to Norwich but the fuel pump wouldn't play,

so that was taken off and stripped, cleaned and the points setting readjusted before we could get away. We arrived in Norwich in time for tea and had a fine and uneventful journey, which is more than could be said for the return to Rugby on Sunday. We left in torrential rain so heavy that the roads, footpaths, local streams and the drains on the sunroof couldn't cope. Water poured in everywhere there were tissues stuffed in every corner of the car and this didn't let up for the next two hours, eventually though the sun blessed us with its presence and we arrived back in Rugby mid-afternoon.

Monday saw me leave Gill in Rugby and head off to Uxbridge, RAF Uxbridge to be exact, my son is based there. So in the secure environs of one of HM's military strongholds 'MTB 132' rested herself, whilst son and I celebrated her purchase and my 60th birthday in fine style.

Tuesday and I drove home to Devon initially in heavy rain and later in sunshine, over the five days Google maps told me (remember I still don't have a speedo) I had driven 983 miles which means I averaged 27mpg at a steady 58-60mph and an occasional blast beyond this where permitted. Apart from the leaks and the fuel pump, the car used a little oil and no water. The driver wore out one right leg on the brakes and, with the part-time passenger, consumed too many sweets, the odd piece of fruit and loads of coffee."