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WELCOME TO THE Y TYPE NEWSLETTER

The joys of classic car ownership and driving are well documented. We have a couple of owners who have let us know why they really appreciate and love driving their Y Type. Our Newsletter this month covers Jo Birkbeck's joy of both owning and driving

Ys and especially her YT. In next month's issue of *Safety Fast!* Ian Pattenden recalls tales of his YT that he has owned since 1970, and his subsequent experiences with the wonderful Y Type.



The smile says it all, Jo and her beloved YT

ME AND 'MY' MGS

My involvement and love of cars was developed by a motor obsessive, my Dad. He had a passionate affair with cars from an early age and as a schoolboy in London would regularly visit car showrooms and outlets on his way home, to drool over the latest offerings from Rolls Royce, Alvis, Jaguar and MG!

Growing up, I too became interested in cars, playing with my younger brothers and the Dinky and Matchbox cars and garage as well as a fort, farm, model railway and the doll's house my father had constructed. We all enjoyed trips to Silverstone to watch the Grand Prix in the 1960s. A neighbour who worked for a

Jaguar distributor even brought home an E-Type to try when it first came out, and after that I learnt about new models of every marque and was determined to learn to drive as soon as I was 17. However, this story is about MGs!

While training to be a teacher in London during the early 70s, I moved into a house with several other students in Greenwich. One day, returning from teaching practice, I saw this chap looking under the bonnet of a Triumph Vitesse Convertible. I commented, "That's a great looking car!" He agreed, though added that he could no longer afford to keep it and sadly it would have to be sold.

The next time I saw him he was poring over a rather different car. We chatted and

he explained that he had sold the Vitesse to a dealer and that after the HP was paid off, he had a cheque for £35 and a crooklock with no key! He then went on to explain that he had always wanted an MG, though preferably a two seater like a TC. This saloon, he informed me, was an MG YA. Although tatty round the edges it had something special about it, reminding me a bit of one of Dad's earlier cars, a 1940s Standard 10. It also ran and had an MOT!

After a long chat I discovered that he lived just five doors down the road. He invited me out for a drink, sensing I might be more interested in the car than him. It was the beginning of a new life for both of us!

A few weeks later he invited me up to Warwick, where his mother owned a house and where he had a room for an occasional base. He explained that he played rugby for a local club not far from Warwick and that he had a match on the Saturday, and would I like to come up with him for the weekend. I naively asked how we were getting there and he responded, "In the MG of course!" So on a Friday evening in late October 1972 we gradually made our way on an epic journey. The seats were comfortable and although there was no heater, the heat from the engine quickly warmed the car up. We had just reached the Elephant and Castle and it began to rain. Jerry turned the wiper knobs on, only to find that the wipers weren't working. He blithely added they can be worked manually, so suddenly I had an unexpected task, which in fairness I grasped quite easily.



Jo's YT with some of her grandchildren having fun



Ready to head off on an adventure

We were making our way out of the City and onwards North. The car seemed to be going quite well... famous last words. We came to a traffic light junction and the gears seemed to have jammed. We managed to get going and stopped at a small garage. We asked the obvious, "Can you help?" The mechanic just laughed and suggested that we come back on Monday. Somehow we got the car running and eventually made it to Warwick. The journey back to London went without a hitch despite awkward gear-changing, and the following weekend he found a copy of the Workshop Manual in the boot and came across an item 'Adjusting the Clutch'. This turned out to be a very simple exercise.

I was then invited to drive the Y up to my parents' home in Suffolk. Although Jerry started the journey through London, I then took over and drove on the A12, and found the car surprisingly easy to drive now that it was easier to change gear. The brakes were primitive compared with Dad's modern car, but the steering was okay and I gradually began to enjoy driving this 22 year old car, though designed in 1939 I was informed.

Mum and Dad had a large old storage facility, fortunately waterproof, and the Y rested there whilst we took the opportunity to enhance the car. Parts were available from NTG and they were based only a few miles from my parents and proved to be an excellent source for spares (and of course still are!).

In the summer of 1973 we were married and the Y became our wedding car, and with a good polish it looked very fitting. By this time I had graduated as a teacher and had been appointed to my first post in London's East End. My mother-in-law mentioned that she knew of a 1959 Morris Minor for sale for £40 and so we bought it and drove down to Cornwall for our honeymoon. It then acted as my daily transport to my school in Stepney from our flat in Blackheath and under the Blackwall Tunnel, hardly a suitable journey in the rush-hour for the old MG!

Jerry decided that whilst we couldn't afford a re-spray we could hand paint the YA using Halfords *Repaint*. He chose the most difficult colour – Old English White, which showed every brush mark when

viewed close up. We did spend a long time rubbing the car down and Dad helped too. When finished it looked good – from two or three metres away. It was nonetheless an improvement.

In 1974 we moved to Warwick and after more trips back and forth to Suffolk, brought the Y Type to Warwick in 1975. I finally began to use the Y for my daily school run for the next four years, turning many heads and responding with the honk of the horn when they saw me coming, especially the school children! I then became pregnant with our first child. We couldn't justify running two cars with me not working, so sadly sold the Y in September 1979 to a Belgian dealer after advertising it in *Classic Car*, which never had any Ys for sale, though on this occasion there were three! We made the asking price with a deal early one Saturday morning at Felixstowe Docks. I was given £1,350 in notes, and as we walked around Ipswich with the cash in my handbag I felt very vulnerable!

In the summer of 1983 we were on holiday in Suffolk with my parents. I took mum and the girls down to the beach hut on the coast. All went well but on the way home I had an accident. No one was hurt but the front near side wing of our family Citroen car was crumpled. I had no idea what had happened and some months later the doctors decided it was some form of petit-mal. The consequence was hugely significant. My licence was taken away in December 1983 and with three young girls I became totally dependent upon Jerry to ferry the children and myself around. Always the optimist, I thought I would get my licence back within a year or so and tried endless conventional and alternative medicines, hoping that something would work. Several years later, after my 40th birthday I almost became resigned to never being able to drive again and I was not happy when Jerry explained that he was acquiring another Y Type. In fact, I was absolutely furious, not being able to drive it! Nonetheless, he went ahead and in January 1992 we had another MG YA in the garage once more. It took two years for Jerry to get the car on the road again.

It was all well and good having this car, but my frustrations built up. He



Jo driving along the back roads near Llanerchindda during a Y Register tour of mid Wales

then decided to sell it and though I had become used to attending and helping to organise Y Register events – notably the Spring Runs which I enjoyed – I wasn't at all happy when he announced that he was selling the Y and buying a T Type to restore. The Y went and then one Thursday in November 1998 I was invited to go and have a look outside. He had bought a brown and cream open two seater TA, so I was informed. Bob, his friend, said, "It goes really well Jo... " That of course went down really well as I thought, that may be the case but I can't drive this one either!

On the way to organising the 1999 Spring Run in Bourton on the Water, we were driving down one of the wide avenues in Leamington Spa early in the morning when a car shot out from a side road and hit us virtually straight on. Both of us had bruises, although I also suffered with a couple of cracked ribs. The front end of the TA was crumpled and a mess. The car was off the road for five months but was skilfully restored and painted ivory which, together with a new radiator and shell, transformed her from the rather ugly duckling she had been.

Fitted with the correct wings, running boards and second hand seats treated to new covers, and retrimmed with a Moss Kit, the car began to look like a proper T

series car. Helping with the work enabled me to appreciate the car far more. I then plucked up the courage to try driving it off the public highway, first in the local rugby club car park and later at a nearby airfield where, egged on by Jerry, I reached the scary speed of 40mph!

By now my 50th had been and gone and the next decade opened a new chapter: travelling in Europe in an old British classic, even though I was only able to do the map reading – no sat-navs then! Over the next eight years we visited many areas in the UK, Ireland and other countries in Europe.

I soon learnt plenty of technical and mechanical phrases for the odd problems we had, mainly French in which I was pretty fluent. I always found the most amusing question we were asked was, "Combien de chevaux?" – How many horses?! "Douze cinquante!"

It was in late 2009 that Jerry suggested that as we were still members of the Y Register and had organised 12 Y Type Spring Runs, we really ought to own another Y. Although the beauty of the YAs and YBs was a sunshine roof, having enjoyed the TA with the roof down more often than not meant it would have to be a YT! By chance we found one in America and imported it. I got involved again, buying a needle suitable for leather for my sewing machine and



The elegant lines of the YT, with Jo happy to be behind the wheel

making some of the smaller upholstery parts, and off we went to more MG events with the car, even though I still couldn't drive it! My 60th also came and went.

I had grown very fond of the TA and was disappointed when Jerry told me in 2011 that he was selling the TA, yet another MG I had never been able to drive it on the open road. So an MGA was acquired. The A is a lovely car with wonderful lines but impractical for travelling abroad and an extremely difficult hood to put up, which was definitely necessary with UK weather to contend with!

A year later we moved house and after more medical hiccups I saw yet another consultant who changed my medication for the 'nth' time. At a follow-up appointment in June 2014 I was asked by my consultant if I drove. I replied, "I have been banned for over 30 years!" He said to me that if I was still free from any blackouts or petit-mal episodes and continued with the new medication, he would be happy to inform DVLA that it was safe for me to drive again – you could have knocked me down with a feather! August came and went. I decided to give it another month to check all was well, then another month, and finally thought, for goodness sake, just do it! After much form-filling it was sent off

January 2015: There was a loud knocking on the front door. My hairdresser switched off the hairdryer and went to see who could be banging so loudly. In rushed my husband. "Here, you must open this!" he said, thrusting a brown envelope in my hand. I felt it, wondering what the fuss was all about, opened it, and there was a brand new plastic photo card driving

licence. After 31 years, I would finally be able to drive again!

Amazingly no retest was required. Considering that not only had I not driven for 31 years but also had never driven with even a five speed gear box or coped with the huge increase in traffic and speed, I was rather apprehensive. A friend suggested a local instructor who was very sympathetic, and after only five lessons in a modern car she was quite confident in my abilities. Others suggested that if we needed another new car it should be an automatic, but I was adamant it wasn't necessary as I would be driving the YT!

So it was that in April 2015, the Y Register's Spring Run was held near Stone in Staffordshire. We travelled up in the YT and just outside Lichfield we stopped for a break. Jerry handed me the keys and I

eased myself into the driver's seat, my first legal drive in an MG since 1979! Well, it was wonderful, and that was it. The keys and car were with me for the rest of the weekend, driving grandly into Little Moreton Hall, Cheshire and then all the way back to Warwick.

It has been such fun driving the YT for the last six years, not only in the UK but also France, Spain and especially Portugal, where many of the lorry drivers on the motorways were staggered to see a lady putting her foot down in a classic car and overtaking them as they drove in the crawler lane! Superb roads, low traffic volumes, hood down and great weather. Although we also have a TC, I just can't get the hang of the fly-off handbrake. My preference will always be the YT!

Jo Birkbeck



Venturing abroad in the MG YT