

1951 MG Y-type

1 ¼ litre Saloon

A third generation love affair ...

There are many marques where a particular model is regularly overshadowed by its more glamorous relatives. Jaguar's 2.4 litre series, Riley's 1 1/2 litre cars and Triumph's 'Renowns' were all excellent cars in their own right, but seem to take a back seat to their sister models.

The MG company's first post-war saloons fit into that category also. The contemporary 'T' series sports cars have always held the limelight, as they were so economically successful for the company in their heyday, and historically for the impact they made on the sports car market, particularly in the United States, where they are credited with igniting the post-war sports car boom. It was in 1939 that plans for the 'Y' series cars were put on paper. The MG was to share its bodyshell with the Nuffield group's Morris and Wolseley Eights, but underneath was a strong, box-section chassis, and significantly, independent front suspension and steering by rack and pinion. The advent of hostilities put back the introduction of the model until 1947. The 'Y' series was the first MG produced to feature the Issigonis-designed front suspension, later adopted for the TD sports.

The engine was the XPAG unit, basically identical to that of the MG TC, though fitted with only one SU carburettor rather than the TC's pair.

By 1953, when it was replaced by the much more modern Magnette, 8336 Y types had been built at the Abingdon factory. It would, of course, be easy to be critical of the apparent lack of vision in its design. Forty years on, it's hardly relevant whether MG introduced the car prior to the war or immediately after it – we can appreciate the car on its merits now regardless of when it was marketed. Andrew Totham's car has clocked just 60,000 miles, but it's not some freakishly low mileage car that spent its life cloistered away in a warm garage. Except for a few years in storage, which Andrew says actually did more harm than good, it's been used regularly. Now

it's being enjoyed by the third generation of the Totham family to own it. Andrew's grandfather George bought the MG from the Hobart agent HG Heathorn & Co Ltd on 27th July, 1951. The original receipt shows he paid £9851/6/S. Perhaps his purchase was influenced by the overseas road tests, published in reliable British journals like 'The Motor' or 'The Autocar', or a local report from the 'Australian Motor Manual.'

Contemporary reports

'The Motor' road tested the MG in September 1951, commenting that the MG had a distinctly old-fashioned appearance, but that "there are many who would rejoice that the appearance continues a long tradition."

Their writer found that "after a few miles at the wheel of the car, one becomes very deeply impressed by the retention of many old-fashioned [those words again!] virtues which have in large measure been washed into the sea of time by the inexorable flow of progress."

Commenting on performance, we were told "a glance at the test data shows that it was not outstanding either in maximum speed nor in acceleration." The figures were qualified by poor weather

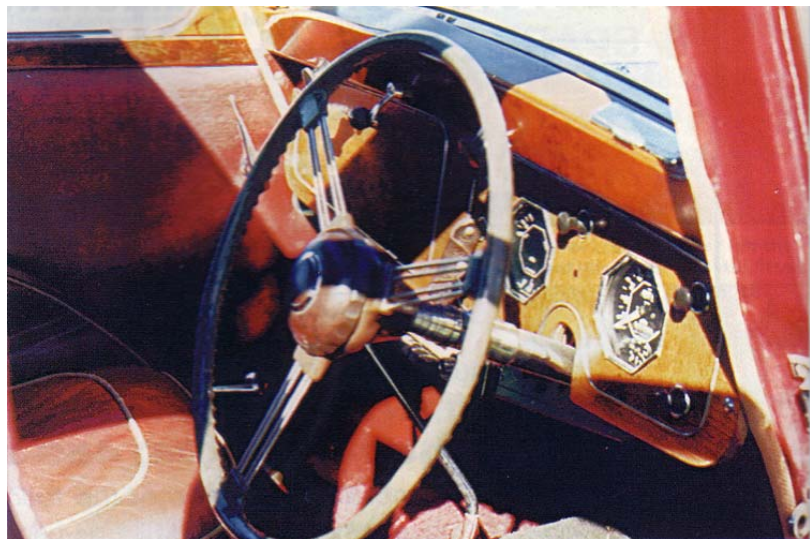
conditions at the time. The test data found a top speed of 69.6 mph, and acceleration times of 0-50 of 18.8 seconds and 11.1 seconds to reach 60 mph.

In summing up, the MG was regarded by 'The Motor' as "notably attractive in respect of owner and passenger convenience, economy, and ease of maintenance."

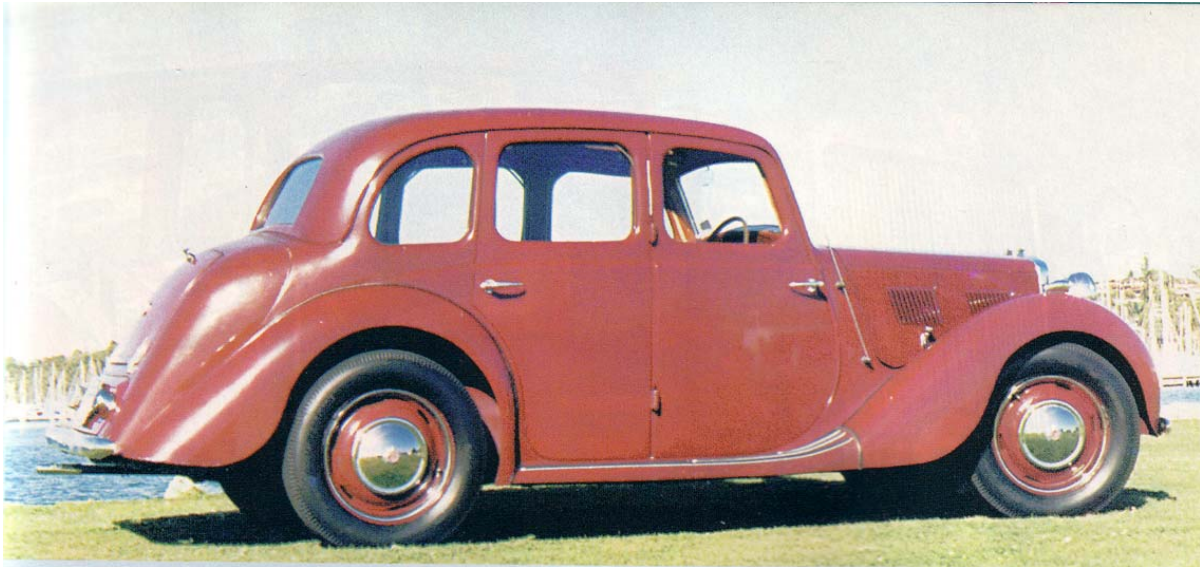
One can understand the influence these reports might have had on a potential buyer on the other side of the world, who was looking for a car offering a good level of comfort, but also concerned about economical ownership. British workmanship was renowned world-wide in those days, and if 'The Motor' was impressed – well who could argue?

A family affair

The MG was suited to George Totham's needs. Andrew remembers the pride his grandfather had in owning his MG. Fortunately, in retrospect, Mr Totham had the car properly maintained, and used it rather sparingly. After he passed away in 1970, the MG's speedometer showed just 15,407 miles had been covered since 1951. Andrew's father Lindsay took the wheel then, and drove it



In a superbly-finished burred walnut dash with distinctive octagonal instruments



The MG had a distinctly old-fashioned appearance even in 1947, but many “would rejoice that the appearance continues a long tradition.”



daily until 1976, clocking up the largest portion of its mileage. Andrew’s grandfather had left another legacy: as a small boy, Andrew had been privileged in being allowed to sit behind the wheel of the garaged car, something he remembers as quite a treat! In his early teens he learned to drive on the MG, and by then had developed a strong interest in motoring – and the MG in particular – so it was quite natural that the car would be passed over to Andrew. It had been newly repainted, and Andrew remembers spending nearly as much time looking after the car’s appearance as he did driving it. He joined the ranks of the MG Car Club in Tasmania, and in 1977 his Y became the first saloon to win a club concours.

But an ageing MG saloon didn’t quite, then, fit his image, so it eventually gave way to a MG ‘B’. Lack of use saw it go into storage, but in 1991, and now living in Queensland, Andrew collected it from the family home in Hobart.

Rejuvenation, not restoration!

After its storage valves had stuck, so the head was removed and repairs carried out. With little other preparation, it was driven to Launceston, sent over on the ferry, and trucked to Brisbane. At its age, it was evident some work was needed. The extent wasn’t quite clear to start with, but it led to the motor being removed, mainly to allow detailing of the components and engine bay.

Andrew’s wife Cathy became worried then, wondering if he was going to totally strip the car down and embark on a major restoration. As it turned out she needn’t have been concerned, as the engine itself was sound – the only work it has ever needed was those valve repairs! A new clutch was fitted, and the distributor, generator, and starter motor were overhauled. In the interests of safety, the brakes were totally reconditioned, and new tyres fitted. One component did give difficulty – the horn slip ring on the steering column just didn’t want to work reliably. A Lucas part unique to the Y Series, the horn slip ring is simply no longer available. Finally, using some ingenuity, the contacts were built up with braze and the problem has been solved.



The traditional radiator – a strong Abingdon presence!

Driving impressions

An offer to experience a low mileage car of this age is a rare treat, and a relatively little-used example of a favourite model is an enthusiast's dream. With these, the word 'restoration' takes on a different meaning, raising questions over the retention of the vehicle in its current condition, or its return to 'as new'. If the latter course is followed, many people feel the car inevitably loses some of its charm, forsaking much of the evidence of the years of past owner's pride of ownership.

The MG makes its presence felt quite strongly with its traditional radiator. Entry to the front is by rear-hinged doors, and they need to be checked carefully for secure locking before moving off. As the width of the car is less than five feet, the passenger compartment is narrow. The front bucket seats, though, are quite adequate, and once inside, the dash and controls can be taken in. Mounted in a superbly-finished burred walnut dash, the octagonal instruments remind the driver of the car's heritage.

In the centre is a handle for the opening windscreen, and above the sunroof slides back to take advantage of fine days, or better still, moonlight nights. The steering column is telescopically adjustable.

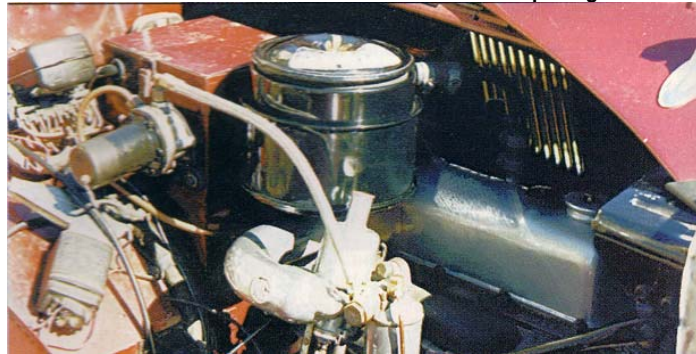
Each of the twin, electrically-operated, windscreen wipers has its own control, and they can be operated manually – handy for the occasional sweep across the screen in light rain. The gear lever is sensibly placed on the floor, ahead of the handbrake.

The seats are upholstered in leather, and along with the rest of the interior, are in sound original condition. The bonnet opens from either side to allow ready access to the engine bay, while the boot lid is hinged at its base: when opened this can be used to carry extra luggage.

Andrew was quite keen to demonstrate



The lux interior – leather and walnut bur and rear opening doors



1250cc four cylinder ohv

the MG 'on the road' so it was on a perfect spring day that we set out for a run around Brisbane's bay side suburbs. The MG runs very quietly, with just a hint of a sporty exhaust note when accelerating through the gears. First gear generates a fairly typical whine of the era, while the other gears are noiseless. The engine is very willing, revving freely, happily pulling up hills. It's in the suspension and steering that the car's low mileage shows, for it's really as taut and quiet as a new car. The kingpins and shackles have been replaced, and Andrew pays particular attention to regularly greasing the moving parts.

As we toured the seaside, sunroof open, the fifties valve radio playing, Andrew indicating his intentions at intersections using the trafficators, the MG somehow reminded me of Rip Van Winkle. It has just rested a little, while the rest of the world went about its business. Andrew is planning to have the car repainted in its original colour, but apart from that, does not anticipate having to undertake any major work for some time. For Andrew, wife Cathy and their children, the MG will continue to provide sporting family motoring. Andrew is confident that it will be passed on to a fourth generation of the Totham family too – though that might be twenty years away!

Ross McGown

Specifications

Back in 1951, the Austin A40 was a big-selling, no frills family car. Its mechanical specifications are comparable to the MG Y Series. Although the two cars were directed at different markets, comparing the MG with another similar sized car of the era is intended to provide a perspective, illustrating its performance against standards of the day. The price difference of £90 may have been substantial back in those early fifties, but in retrospect it seems the MG offered a lot more value for money.

	MG Y	Austin A40
Engine	four cylinders ohv (both)	
Bore	66.5	65.4
Stroke	90	89
Capacity	1250cc	1200cc
Power	46bhp	40bhp
Carb	single	single
Gearbox	four speed	four speed
Brakes	hydraulic	hydro-mechanical
Suspension		
Front	independent	independent
Rear	semi-elliptic	semi-elliptic
Length	13ft 8in	12ft 9in
Weight	2340lb	2128lb
Max Speed	70mph	70mph
Price new*	£951	£860

*Australian pounds in 1951