

Back on the Road Again

What do you do if you've got the number plate 49 MG Y? Well, as Grant McDuling discovered, you buy and restore the perfect car to go with it

It may be that MG Y-type tourers are as rare as the proverbial hen's teeth - only 877 were ever made and a mere 171 are known to still exist worldwide - but Queenslander Pat Hand knew exactly where he was going to get one.

The story really began when a friend was after a right-hand drive MG Midget dashboard and he enlisted Pat's help.

"I was given the address of Tony Slater, whose hobby it was to remanufacture dashboards," Pat explained. "When I went around to meet him, I realised that I had known him from work over 20 years ago!" Pat also noticed that Tony had a few MG Y's at his place, and learnt that he is an active member of the MG Y Register.

"We got chatting, and I mentioned that my wife Brenda, and I had a couple of MGBs. And when I said that Brenda was now keen on a four-seater so that she could drive the grandchildren around, he said he knew of someone who had one that was three parts restored."

Out of curiosity, Pat and Brenda went to look at the car, a 1949 MG 'Y'-type Tourer, and were amazed to find it was all in boxes!

"I was rather disappointed at what we had seen, but on the way home I decided to drop in at Queensland Transport to see whether I could get 49 MG Y as personalised plates. You can imagine my surprise when I was told that it was still available! I bought the plates right away, and decided there and then I would buy the car." He transported all the boxes and other pieces to his home in the Brisbane suburb of Calamvale and immediately checked to see if everything was there. It all appeared to be.

I decided that the best course of

action would be to strip everything down to the last nut and bolt, and then start from scratch."

It was then that Pat began to fully appreciate his apprenticeship as a mechanic and bodyworker in England when he'd lived there as a young man. Working in the workshop of Motoplus, one of the first enthusiast shops in the UK's Midlands, he gained a good understanding of MGs and their idiosyncrasies. This was to stand him in good stead in later years, particularly after emigrating to Australia in 1975.

"One day, after our children had left

home, I suddenly decided I wanted an MG. So I hunted around and found a 1971 MGB that needed restoring. I got stuck into this project and enjoyed it so much that we still own the car. I've since added another two to our stable."

But back to the MG Y. The chassis was in reasonable condition, having already been sandblasted and powder coated by the previous owner. However, although all the bushes were obviously new, they had to be discarded and renewed because so many years had passed since the previous owner had started



to restore the car, and they had actually deteriorated really badly. "I replaced all the bushes, cleaned up the chassis and gave it a thorough check before fitting the back axle. That was in good nick."

Satisfied that he now had a good rolling chassis, Pat then turned his attention to the gearbox.

"To my dismay, I discovered that it had seized solid. I pulled it apart and found that, although the previous owner had filled it with the correct quantity of gearbox oil, this had allowed it to sweat during the intervening years, resulting in seizure. Had he either filled it to capacity, or left it empty, it would have survived okay."

All the bearings were replaced, the cogs wire-brushed and inspected, then everything was carefully re-assembled. Pat then turned his attention to the brakes.

"I renewed all the brake pipes as the originals showed signs of corrosion," he explained. "The pistons were fine though, so I just replaced all of the rubbers."

The time had come to turn his attention to the engine. Known as the XPAG engine, this unit began life as the 1140cc unit in the Morris 10 Series M saloon back in 1938. A year later, when bored out to 1250cc it powered the MG TB and later, the MG TC. And apart from powering the Y-series, it was also to be pressed into service in the later MG TD and MG TF models as well.

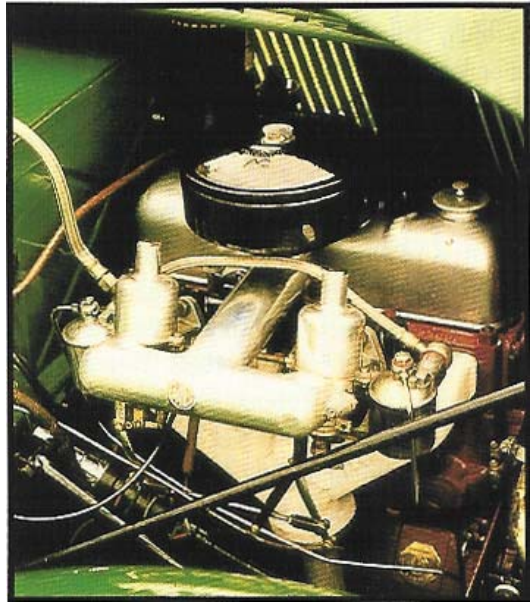
Good condition

Pat had intended to strip the engine down to give it the usual rebuild.

However, judging from the general condition of the rest of the car - and from the records he'd inherited with it - he was reasonably sure that all would be well inside.

"I decided to take a gamble, and poured a mixture of oil and petrol down the spark plug holes. When I turned the engine over, I saw that the oil pressure was fine. I decided to leave the engine as is, and to fit it to the chassis after thoroughly cleaning and repainting it"

Even though the car had been stored in pieces for a very long time, the body panels were in excellent condition. Pat started this stage of the restoration process by laying out all of the bodywork pieces on his lawn, dusting them off and inspecting them. The previous owner had, according to paperwork I have, sent the car to Victoria Body Works in Brisbane, and it stayed there for three years. During this period they treated the car to a two-pack respray job, and I must say, the result is fabulous. They really did a marvellous job, only had to clean it before reassembly - 10 years later!



Fortunately, all the body panels fitted together. "I did, of course, replace all the colour-coded piping that goes between the wings and body panels. These I sourced from Moss Motors in America." As is the case with most complete rebuilds, Pat tore out all the wiring and started from scratch. He ordered a complete new cotton-coated wiring loom from the UK, and was surprised to find that this consisted of only 24 wires. "The entire job was too easy. It was more fiddly than difficult," he said.





Beautiful Australian Silky Oak dashboard (above) is not original MG Y but it adds an Australian element to the car, while hubcaps (below) are standard English fare

And as is the case with many restorations nowadays, certain modifications were made in the interests of safety.

"The car originally had no indicators at all. The driver used hand signals. Now, that didn't appeal to me at all, so I fitted twin filament bulbs to the sidelights, which now double as indicators."

The gauges, or rather lack thereof, are usually a stumbling block with many restoration projects, but here again, Pat could count on his Irish luck. The previous owner provided receipts showing that they had been overhauled in the UK by Vintage Restorations in Tunbridge Wells. And even the clock was in perfect working order. All that he had to do was to fit them to the dashboard, which he had restored using Australian Silky Oak instead of the original vinyl. And as the dashboard is one of the features of any classic car, it was important this did justice to the final result. Of course, in the case of the MG Y Tourer, the dashboard is also one of the car's charming features, with the speedometer situated in front of the passenger and the rev counter in front of the driver. Beautiful.

"I really wanted to give the car something of an Australian character," said Pat.

The MG Y-Type Tourer, like all Y-types, sports a quaint feature that is sure to make many modern-day motorists either envious, or disbelieving. And that's what Abingdon-based MG called the

Jackall System.

Basically, the car comes equipped with its own built-in hydraulic jacking system that makes life easy when changing a flat tyre out on the road. Before Pat completed the reassembly of the car's bodywork, he pulled apart the hydraulic system, determined to restore it to full working order. This, he knew, would arouse the envy of many an MG Y-type enthusiast, as it remains a feature that many never get working.

Performing seals

Unable to source new seals, he contacted a local firm to make the seats for the pumps and rams from a pattern which he supplied. The jacks themselves he sent away for powder coating. Everything was put back together and tested. He was so pleased with the result that he made use of the car's own jacking system to support the chassis during the remainder of the restoration. An imported reproduction jack oil sticker that was placed on the reservoir in the engine bay finished off the job nicely.

On the trim side, Pat only had to do half the job - but of course it was the difficult half. The seats had been re-upholstered, as had the door panels. These he only needed to clean. "When it came to getting the rest of the trim made, it proved to be quite a challenge for A & G Trimmers to make the two rear side panels.

Material things

"Each is hollow with a zip along the top so that the hood irons can be stowed inside the panel when folded down. The other difficulty we had was matching the material used on the front seats. But they really did a splendid job."

When it came to replacing the tyres, Pat found four 500 x 16in Dunlop Gold Seal tyres at the Nambour Swap meet. They had come all the way from Zimbabwe!

"They weren't cheap. Set me back \$185 each, but I suppose they'll last a lifetime." Much of the brightwork had already been restored. Pat knew that some of the final trim was missing, so he took a long shot and called on the previous owner.

"To my surprise, he went out to his shed and emerged with

most of the missing pieces!"

These were sent to Custom Chrome at Nerang, who did a great job. The chrome strip for the window frames was ordered from NTG in the UK, but didn't arrive in time to allow him to enter the car in this year's National Meeting, held on the Gold Coast at Easter.

"That was a great pity," he said, "as it commemorated the 50th anniversary of the MG Y-type. In any event, I did drive the car there and received a special 50th anniversary badge."

On the road again...

With the car finally back together again, Pat wasted no time taking it out for a test run. The engine fired up easily enough and sounded good idling away in his driveway. Now for the moment of truth The engine ran beautifully around the quiet suburban streets, but when taken out on the open road, it just died.

"What was happening was that the valves were working perfectly at low revs, but as soon as the revs increased, they weren't able to close in time. But I found that after putting some mileage on the clock, the valves loosened up and suddenly everything was fine."

Back in the garage, he ran some checks and discovered the sump was filling with water.

"I suspected a cracked head or block, and began to wish I had stripped the engine right at the beginning instead of chancing it."

However, after some time spent reasoning, reflecting and investigating, he discovered that the previous engine rebuilder had used universal head studs instead of the proper, and very unusual, original type specified by the factory.

Now, every MG enthusiast worth his salt will know that the nuts and bolts used on the XPAG engine have



metric threads and Whitworth flats.

What a legacy

This was a legacy from 1919 when all Morris engines were manufactured by the French firm of Hotchkiss at their Coventry factory. So what this meant as far as Pat's car was concerned was that the universal head bolts weren't sealing properly, allowing

water to run up the studs, into the rocker cover, mixing with oil, then draining back down into the sump. There was nothing else for it, the head had to come off and the correct studs had to be fitted. "A friend had told me about the virtues of a product called Holden Sealing Compound. I bought a tin and sealed the new studs with it. The engine has been

fine ever since."

Pat Hand now uses his MG as much as possible, and is a keen and very active member of the All British Classic Car Club. Since completing the restoration, Pat has clocked up over 2000 miles in the car. And he plans to do a darned sight more!

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