

THE Y-TYPE EXPERIENCE

Designed in the 1930s but not introduced until 1947, MG's Y-Type was an advanced pre-war car that was rather overtaken by world events. Add another seven decades to that equation and we wondered what this stylish saloon is like to drive today

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Gibraltarian Andrew Alcantara (left) took on this Y-Type as his first classic car after brother John (right) replaced it with a Triumph TR6.

The MG 1½-litre saloon, better known to most people as the Y-Type, was the car that MG would have launched in 1941 had it not been for the intervention of the Second World War. With car production suspended for the duration of hostilities and production turned over to the goods of war, the factory at Abingdon had to wait until 1947 before the car could be finally released to the public.

The Y-Type was in essence MG's version of the Morris Eight series E four door saloon that Syd Enever and Alec Issigonis had been working on between 1937 and 1939. Enever had been with Morris Garages since 1921, and by the time he retired in 1971 was chief designer and responsible for cars like the MGA and MGB. Issigonis, who

was later to achieve colossal fame with the Mini, came to Morris Motors from Austin in 1936. He was responsible for the independent suspension system initially designed for the Morris Ten, which latterly was to benefit this YA saloon.

Naturally the Y-Type was not initially referred to as the YA by the factory, but enthusiasts attached this name to it after the revised YB arrived in 1951, the most visually obvious change being the smaller wheels on the YB (down from 16in to 15in) and a changed rear wing profile to suit.

The MG's body styling closely resembled the Morris on which it was based, but the front was modified to include the traditional upright MG grille, while the rear wings and tail appeared somewhat more



swept. Underneath the car's steel bodyshell, however, the MG's chassis was quite different and comprised welded steel box sections which were underslung at the rear and suspended by quarter elliptic leaf springs. Furthermore, whilst many cars were still being built with a live front axle, the Y-Type had an independent front end with wishbones and coil springs, plus rack and pinion steering.

This resulted in considerably more accurate steering than the earlier pre-war MGs and was a first for a Nuffield Organisation production car.

Although the YA was hardly a ground-breaking design by the time it finally reached the market in 1947, at a price of approximately £670 including tax, the new MG seemed good value and was welcomed by customers and motoring press



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alike. Powered by a detuned version of the engine fitted to the 1939 MG TB though, the car's one problem was its lack of power. At 20cwt it was around 440lb heavier than the TB two-seater, making it rather overweight for its 1250cc engine's power output of just 46bhp. On the plus side it was particularly well-appointed inside, so although performance was somewhat mediocre, the car did offer a certain degree of luxury. Essentially it made for a rather good touring car.

The example in our pictures is a resident of Gibraltar. John Alcantara bought it from a fellow Gibraltarian classic car

enthusiast in 2013. John told us: 'Although the car had been in regular use, it had become somewhat tired and was not running very well. There was a problem with the electrics for example, which was particularly irritating as it was a nightmare to find out just where the fault lay. We eventually traced it back to a faulty cable leading to the distributor that was shorting out intermittently.'

'Having dealt with that, I then took the engine out and restored the complete cooling system. I replaced the core plugs as they were leaking, and fitted a new radiator. I also fitted a new fuel pump in the

interests of reliability. It was obvious that the rear springs needed attention too as the car was sitting low at the rear and would sometimes bottom out on bumps, so I removed them and had them re-tempered. It made all the difference – now the ride height is correct and the car feels right.

'One of the very useful things about the MG YA is the fact that it is equipped with the Smiths Jackall four-wheel hydraulic jack system. This consists of a hydraulic jack adjacent to each wheel, operated from a hydraulic pump on the lefthand side of the engine bulkhead controlled by

a hand lever. When lowered, the jacks will support the car horizontally above the ground. Alternatively, either the front two or rear two jacks can be activated alone. The system makes for exceptional ease of servicing, and if you do happen to have a puncture, it makes wheel changing a doddle.'

When John purchased a TR6 last year, the MG became surplus to requirements. His brother Andrew had never owned a classic car and was rather keen to do so – in August 2019 Andrew took over ownership of the MG.

'John brought the YA over and left it in my garage,' he

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MG Y-TYPE



Engine in the Y-Type was a 46bhp 1250cc XPAG, which had a lot of weight to lug about – including an in-built Jackall system.

« said. 'Up till then I'd had no experience with classic cars at all. After warning me not to expect the car to stop like a modern vehicle, John gave me the keys and left.

'The first time that I took the car out, I drove about 200 yards down the hill outside my house and almost had heart failure when I discovered that the MG did not want to stop! I turned back immediately and when I got home, I started looking for the brake reservoir to check the fluid level. I couldn't find it, so I went inside, took out the manual and discovered that the filler cap for the brake reservoir



lives underneath the pedals. My next problem was that space was so restricted down there, I could not actually see how much fluid was in the reservoir. I topped it up as best I could and then carefully set off once again. To my considerable relief, the brakes came back to life and actually worked quite well. **[We would always recommend**



bleeding the brakes after an event like this – Ed]

'I now use the car at least every other weekend. I have really got to like the car and enjoy driving it. People on the road are always asking to take pictures of the car and treat me so courteously.'

Personally I have always thought of the MG YA as a

Bentley Mk6 in miniature, so when John and Andrew offered me the chance to drive it, I was delighted. Walking around the car, the front looks quite imposing with its rather upright grille flanked on either side by those two large headlamps and twin chromed hooter units just below them.

Opening the suicide front



Interior was well appointed and luxuriously finished – very much a grand tourer rather than a sports car.



door and sliding into the leather covered driver's seat for the first time, it is comfy and supportive and I felt I could sit there for many hours without concern. The steering column is telescopic and adjustable up and down, but with the sprung steering wheel resting nicely in my hands, the driving position felt absolutely perfect just the way Andrew had it.

The leather seats, whilst showing a certain patina in places, are still in very good order. There is an armrest between the rear seats, and the cloth headlining is in perfect condition. The interior appointments are certainly luxurious for a car of this size – the window frames have veneered wood sills and surrounds, and the veneered dashboard before me exudes an air of quality. The front screen of the YA opens forward on a winding ratchet arrangement and there is also a sunroof, so good ventilation on even on the hottest Gibraltar days is assured.

Winters in Gibraltar are never that cold, but on the rare occasions when temperatures do drop, there is a period accessory heater fitted below the dashboard. For oddments stowage, the Rexine door trims have capacious pleated map

pockets, plus there is a good size glove box on the left in the dash. Oddly the YA has just one wooden sun visor, for the driver of course. There is, however, a blind that can be pulled down to shade the rear window.

The instrument cluster before me includes the usual octagonal MG speedometer to the right of the steering column

(calibrated to a very optimistic 110mph), with a clock in its lower quadrant. In an octagonal cluster of three instruments to the left of the column are gauges for fuel level, oil pressure and amps.

There is a cigarette lighter which is handy these days as a socket for sat-nav of course, whilst the light switches are conveniently placed to my right. According to the odometer, the car has done just 16,282 miles, but both Andrew and John agree that it must have been round the clock at least once.

I press the starter above the key switch – there is no need for the choke that is bottom left as the engine is nice and



From the octagonal instruments to a myriad of MG details, there's no mistaking a Y-Type's provenance!

warm. The XPAG engine starts instantly and idles smoothly, so I press down on the clutch (which proves relatively light) and select first gear. I signal that I am about to pull out using the working semaphore arms that are operated from a lever on the steering wheel centre, release the centrally mounted hand brake and point the MG's nose into the traffic.

The view looking down the bonnet is a time warp vision back to the 1940s. Andrew warned me that the pedals are extremely close together as the pedal box is very narrow, and he

was dead right – this car is not built for drivers with hob nailed boots, and you really do have to take care to avoid pressing two pedals at the same time.

Whilst the chassis feels strong and rigid, the ride is remarkably smooth for a car of this era and undulations in the road are ironed out with ease. Even though the YA is endowed with an independent front end, it does roll a lot and can lose its composure all too easily if one enters corners a little too enthusiastically. This is an inherent fault that was rectified to a large extent in the later YB with the addition of an anti-roll bar up front and beefed up shocks. I am sure that must have made a very

READERS' CARS

MG Y-TYPE

« positive difference, but as long as you respect the limitations of the car and don't get too enthusiastic through fast turns, it is safe enough. The trick is to pick a line, stick to it and remember there is no great reserve of throttle to get you out of trouble.

All in all, I found this YA exceptionally pleasant to drive. The gear lever is the perfect length, and there is synchromesh on the top three ratios so that double de-clutching is quite unnecessary. The gearing is such that the car remains tractable in any ratio, and as John pointed out, you can easily pull away in second if you so desire. There is the typical gearbox wine expected on cars of this period, but there is no noise from the differential. When I did have to brake unexpectedly hard as I approached a hidden junction, the drum brakes proved quite adequate in an emergency. Having said that, you quickly learn that in the hurly burly of modern traffic, it certainly pays to anticipate well head and be



ready to react quickly.

In all, some 6158 MG YAs were built between 1947 and 1951 and it is quite easy to understand the appeal of a car like this today. With its separate front wings and their chromium headlamps mounted atop, it harks back to an era now long past. Many cars designed before the war were rather uncomfortable, with the driver forced to sit bolt upright behind an overly large and rather vague feeling wheel, having to steer from the elbows

and often unable to straighten their arms at all, not to mention having to struggle with a difficult gearbox. The MG YA does not fall into that category at all though, offering as it does a dose of pre-war motoring that was not outclassed in the immediate postwar era.

My only problem is that the car should have been endowed with another 20 or so horse power. Requiring more than 29 seconds to reach 60mph from standstill in 2020 makes it a little bit tedious when trying to stay with the rest of the traffic. Furthermore, when making longer journeys

the YA's claimed top speed of 71mph is a tad pedestrian for a sporting saloon. On the other hand, cruising along smooth B roads, taking in the views whilst experiencing how it was to travel in a past era can be most satisfying. The MG YA may not be the most exciting car that MG ever built, but all things considered, more than 70 years after it was born, I reckon that it is still a really pleasant car to own and drive.

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www.gibraltarclassiccar.com

