

A tour of the MG Factory

The recent discovery of a set of photographs taken in 1947, when production of the Y-type was just starting, made me wonder just what it must have been like to call there at that time and to be given a tour round the works.

Remembering that there was still petrol rationing in 1947, I turned to an interesting little book issued by the MG Car Company that year which gave details on how to reach them by public transport. This publication also listed the times the factory was open – 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday to Friday – but said that cars could be collected up to 6 p.m. The list of personnel in the booklet shows that the sales department was headed by Mr H.G. Cox, the service department by John Thornley and Cecil Cousins was Works Manager. There was a Mr Gardner in charge of all sales catalogues, signs, window stickers, advertising and running the MG Car Club – he must have been busy!

From Paddington Station to the little branch line terminus at Abingdon, the soon-to-be-nationalised Great Western Railway ran frequent trains with the journey taking around two hours. Some of this time would be spent waiting at Radley station, on the main London to Oxford line, to join the branch line train for the short, two mile trip from there to the attractive, brick-built Abingdon station. The walk from the station to the factory was illustrated by means of a map in the booklet.

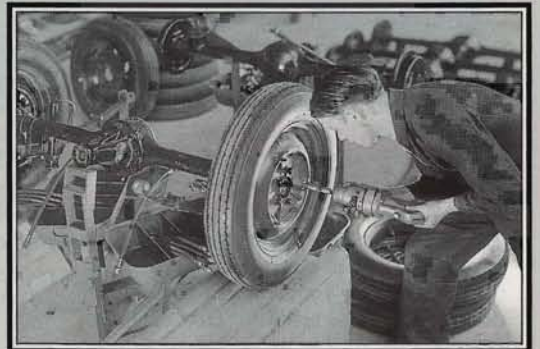
Then the normal entrance for visitors was through the Cemetery Road gate, which is the one near to the current MG Car Club offices, but in later years the more usual way in for parties visiting the factory was the gate in Marcham Road. Anyway, now we are in the factory we can start the tour:-



Although Abingdon was always more of an assembly plant than a manufacturer, the chassis frames were built in the press shop right up to the end of MGA production. Here the body mounting brackets are welded on to a Y-type chassis. After completion, the chassis would be painted with 'chassis black' paint and stored until needed.



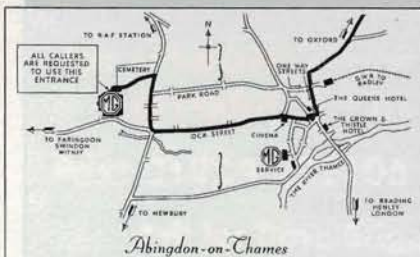
Outside, in the factory yard, completed bodies arrive and await their turn to be hoisted to the 'top deck' where they were readied for fitting to their chassis. Right up to the close of the factory this was the route taken by the Midget and MGB bodies, although only the Midget required trimming as MGBs arrived fully trimmed and with weather equipment fitted.



Rear axles are fitted with wheels before they are rolled over to the production line and attached to the chassis. The axle seen here is the type fitted to YAs. Later the YB was to have a more modern, and quieter, hypoid axle.

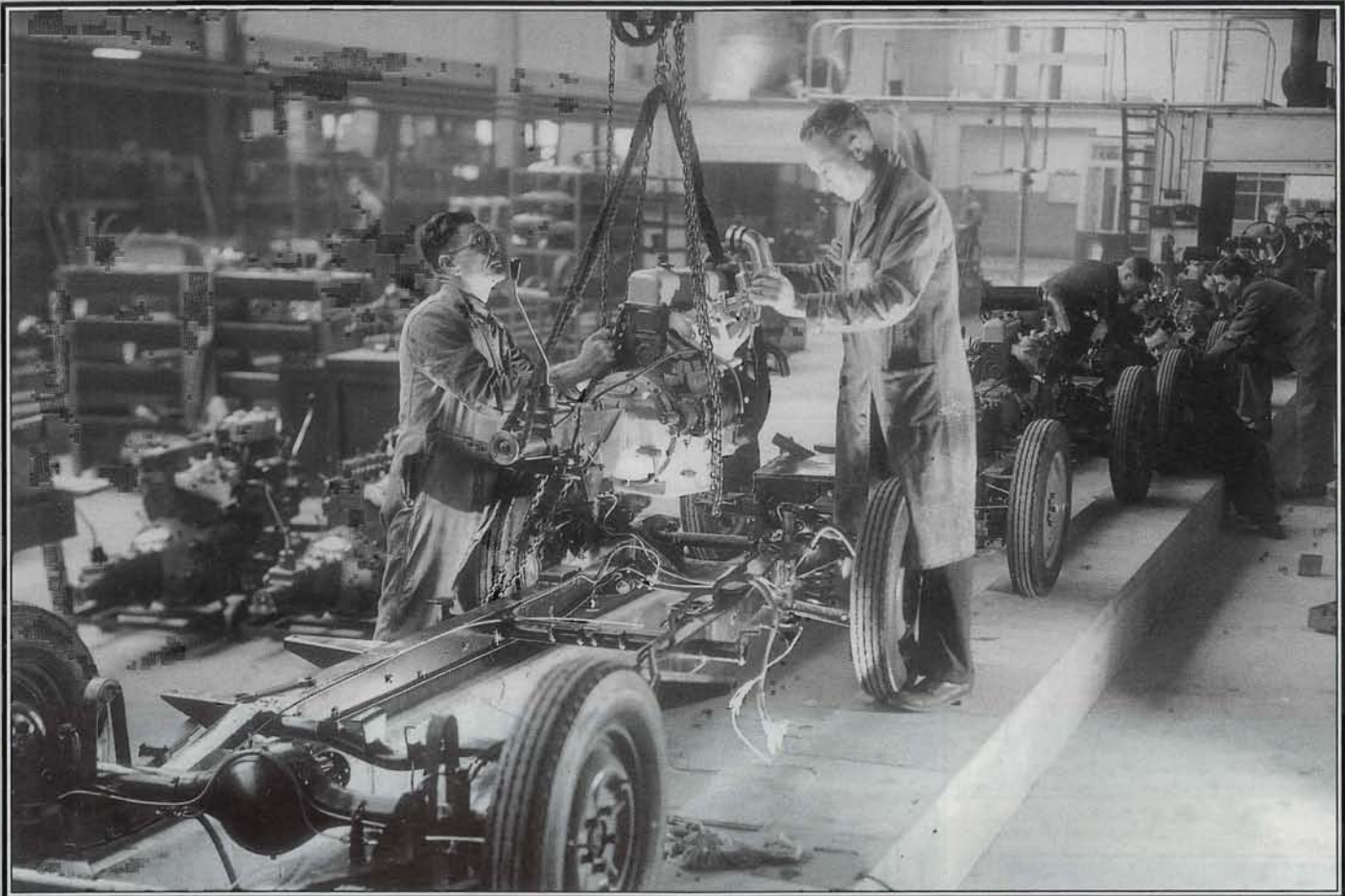


The construction of every new car starts with the chassis. The assembled and painted chassis frame was brought to the line and clamped to this rig which allowed the worker to fit the front suspension and hydraulically compress the front springs, enabling him to fix the swivel pins to the shock absorber arms, which act as a top links on with this suspension design.

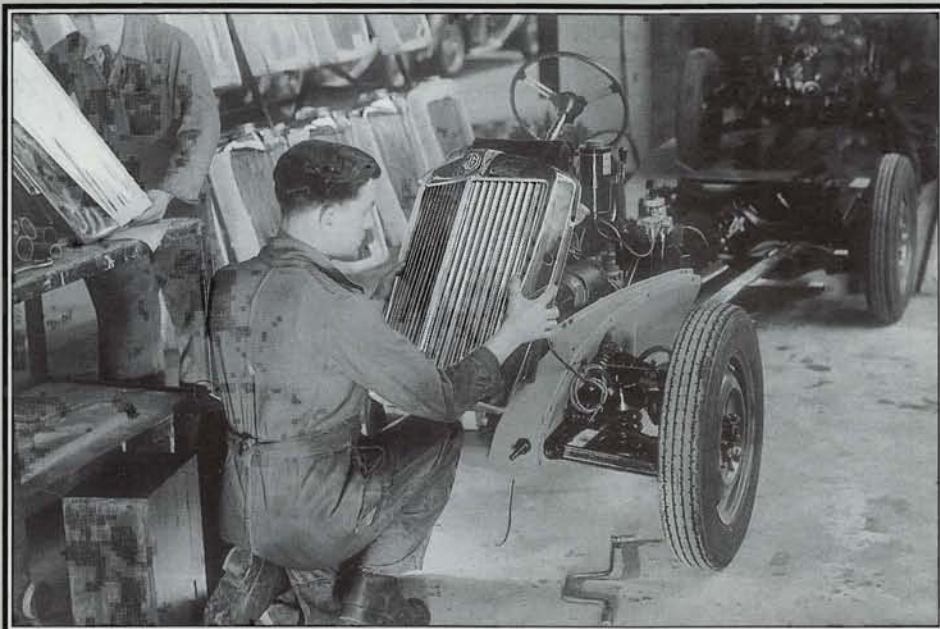


ory at Abingdon in 1947

by Malcolm Green



With the chassis assembled, brake pipes and some wiring in place, the engine is lowered into position. Note the chassis rails pass under the rear axle on the Y-type – a feature shared with many of the prewar MGs. When the chassis was redesigned for use in the TD, the chassis was changed so that it passed over the axle.



With the chassis complete and the side valences mounted it moves off the end of the first production line and the radiator is fitted. The chassis were then moved over to the second line to await their bodies. This system of assembly had been in use at Abingdon right from the time the building of the first Midgets, the M-type, had moved there from Oxford in 1930.



Fitting the headlining is a tricky job on any assembly line and the task in 1947 was entrusted to some of Abingdon's female work force. During the war the majority of assembly jobs had been undertaken by ladies and some of these still managed to find employment here after the men returned from war work.

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With the headlining in place, the trim strips to cover joints and edges are installed. Working inside a car body is tiring and if workers are not to get in each others way it needs to be carefully planned.



Ready prepared door linings are fitted once the winding window mechanism has been installed. Working on the top deck could be uncomfortably hot in the Summer and to add to discomfort there was the smell of the adhesives used to fix the trim in place.



The completed, trimmed bodies are lowered down to meet the chassis. The majority of the work on the lower deck seems to have been completed by male workers. Whether this was because the tasks were heavier and more difficult, or because they were easier, I will leave you to judge!



Once the windscreen wiper mechanism is fixed in place the wooden dashboard can be installed. The under-dash area, with all the wiring loom needing to be tucked out of sight, calls for some nimble assembly workers.



Two people were needed to fix the windscreen frame to the body. This was top hinged so it could be wound open in hot weather. For this reason the windscreen wiper arms were fitted with knobs to stow them on the scuttle, below the windscreen frame



A rear side panel is fitted. The rear seat back closed the gap between the boot and the interior of the car. What look like a pile of rubber sealing strips are lying in the rear seat-base well.



The bodies, at this stage still sitting on the assembly trollies, near the end of the line on the top deck with the finishing touches being applied before they are mated with their chassis.

ry at Abingdon in 1947



With the bodies in place, the carpet fitter completes his task. Quite a few of the jobs undertaken on the 1947 assembly line needed hand adjustments to make parts fit, unlike modern assembly plants where everything should just slot into place.



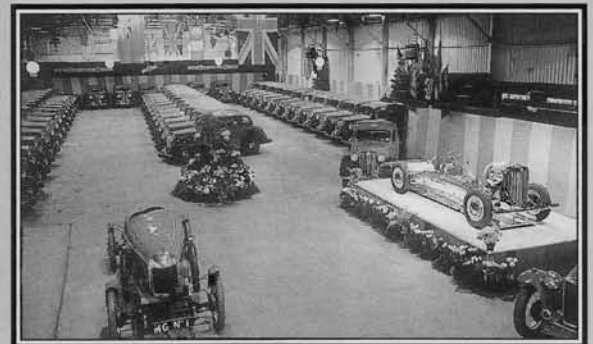
Working towards the end now and with the bumpers fitted the seats are installed. The various trim and colour combinations meant that each car had to carry a job sheet listing the final specification.



Wings were then fitted which in the case of the Y-type could be either the same colour as the body or in a darker shade, light green bodies with dark green wings and grey bodies and black wings being popular combinations.



Almost ready for final inspection and the bonnet and headlights are fitted, the wiring connected up, petrol added to the tank and the car is then driven away for road test. Note the inspector or foreman in his white coat.



A display of the new Y-types, possibly for dealers and distributors, at the factory. A display chassis on the right under banners reading 'The new MG 1/4 litre Saloon' with a TC and rows of new Y-type saloons. Old number one is also on display before it regained its original registration number.



A new Y-type posed for this publicity picture. The car has been fitted with electric de-misters and a radio.