

'Y' Type Competition Use & Successes

The 'Y' type, of course, was never designed to be a competitive sports car but, nevertheless, it had its moments with those drivers whose preference is the racing or rallying of saloon cars. And it was particularly useful and popular at club level.

After the Second World War the competitive world of motor sport took some while to regain its feet. Italy, however, was relatively quick off the mark and re-introduced the famous 1,000-mile road race, the 'Mille Miglia' in 1947. 'The Autocar' magazine sent John Dugdale and another staff member with a brand-new 'Y' type, provided by the factory and registered DRX 557, to cover the event.

In the British public's eye, the Monte Carlo Rally was the major European rallying event. Before the war cars had started from points all over Europe to finish in that most attractive and affluent area of the Mediterranean. No doubt the glamour and wealth associated with Monte Carlo accounted in part for the public's interest in this event. To seasoned rally drivers, however, the 'Monte', whilst attracting a great deal of welcome publicity, was never the most demanding, nor the most rewarding rally event. There was no Monte Carlo Rally after the war until 1949. On that occasion Glasgow was the only British starting point and the average journey which entrants, from whatever starting point, had to make to reach

UHK 111, the YB which won at Silverstone in 1952, 1953 and 1954 in the hands of Dick Jacobs. Photo: Alan White

Monte Carlo was 1,995 miles. In 1950, an extreme winter, only five cars made it to Monte Carlo without penalty. In that year OWL 543, an Almond Green 'YA' was entered for the rally, driven by experienced rally and racing driver Betty Haig with Barbara Marshall as co-driver. In 1951 Major and Mrs A. Pownall entered their 'Y' in the rally and appear to have made it to Monte Carlo, coming 45th in the final test. In 1952 only 15 cars made it to Monte Carlo without penalty.

Meanwhile, on the domestic scene, that other prestigious event, the R.A.C. Rally had been reinstated. In the 1951 R.A.C. Rally 'Y' types were successful (this time in the under 1500cc closed cars class). First in class was J. Readings, with Len Shaw third and a little further down the field a Mrs L. E. Grounds, in 23rd place, is also thought to have driven a 'Y'. Also competing in a 'Y' was F. M. Baker.

The 1951 1,000 mile Circuit of Ireland Trial saw at least five 'Y' types competing, known drivers being J. M. McCaughan, R. J. Caldwell, J. E. McGrath, D. A. Wilkins and Mrs J. J. Flynn. Mrs Flynn won the Ladies' Trophy.

Another famous lady rally driver of the times was Lady Samuelson. She is known to have owned a 1950 'YA' (registration number LPO 900) but there is no record of it having been entered for any competitive events.

The dashboard plaques of UHK 111 showing details of the three Silverstone wins. Photo: Alan White

In 1953 three specially-built and prepared YBs (HMO 908, 909 and 910) were entered for the R.A.C. Rally of that year. They were crewed by R. E. Holt, J. L. Shaw and G. R. Hold respectively. At the end of that season Len Shaw bought HMO 909 from the manufacturers and retains it, in rally trim, to this day. He and the car came sixth in the General Category and won class and team prizes in the 1953 Rally and, more latterly, the car took part in the commemorative R.A.C. Golden Fifty Rally in 1982, again driven by Len Shaw!

Len Shaw had previously been sold OWL 543 after the 1950 Monte by John Thornley, the then General Manager of MG, and had raced and rallied it quite successfully. The names of Shaw, Readings, Baker and Grant (the latter referred to later) etc appear again and again in reports of competitive events during the early fifties (for example in the British Rally of June 1951). In many of these events these gentlemen drove 'Y' type MGs. Regrettably, HMO 908, HMO 909 and



OWL 543 have, in the intervening years, all been scrapped.

One name which is very much associated with MG in competitive events, and particularly with 'Y' types, is that of Dick Jacobs. It was he who John Thornley credits as being the driving force in the early fifties in persuading MG to re-enter motor sport, albeit to begin with semi-officially. His specially tuned YB, (chassis number YB414, UHK 111) won its class three years running (1952, '53 and '54) in the B.R.D.C. Silverstone Production Touring Car Races sponsored by the Daily Express. The car was, incidentally, driven to and from Silverstone on each occasion and not trailed to the events. In the 1952 race the YB beat three Jowett Javelins in class 'F' (1100 to 1500cc). It still exists today, in Kent. Dick Jacobs also received the last YB off production line (chassis number YB1551). This car was given a special 'full-width' coupe body and was raced extensively. It was last heard of in 1979 so may still exist.

In the 1953 Silverstone race another 'Y' type, (a YB?), race number 15 owned by Gregor Grant, the editor of Autosport magazine, and loaned for the race to George Phillips, was also entered. It came third in class.

An achievement of a different sort was accomplished by the well-known record-breaker Goldie Gardner in Belgium in July 1950. An MG distributor from Brighton by the name of Richard Benn believed that the 'Y' type might be able to achieve 100 mph if it was appropriately tuned. He thus set about having his car tuned to Stage V with the aid of Syn Enever and Reg 'Jacko' Jackson from the Abingdon factory. Included in the tuning specification was the fitting of a Shor-rocks supercharger giving 6½lb of boost. Furthermore, the underneath of the car was improved aerodynamically and oversize rear tyres were fitted. On the Jabbeke Road in Belgium the car, driven by Major Gardner, made several runs, the best of which recorded a speed

of 107.36 mph. The average came out at 104.725 mph for the flying mile and 104.713 mph for the 5 kilometre distance. All these speeds were officially timed and verified. In relating this story I feel I must put the record straight as regards the state of the car after the several high speed runs had been made. There is a recurrent myth in MG circles that after the runs the car's engine 'blew up' or 'made loud noises'. This myth is repeated again and again in many publications on the marque MG. However, to clarify matters I quote from the article on the subject written by Russell Lowry which appeared in 'Motoring' magazine, the house magazine of the Nuffield Organisation. "Then, having satisfied his own quiet, unshaken argument, Richard Benn stepped into his closed carriage and motored himself sedately home to Brighton . . ."

Although not strictly 'competitive' Sidney J. Perelman's journey from Paris to Peking in his YT in 1978 deserves a mention here. The idea initially was for the 'Sunday Times' to publish a series of articles written by the American humourist and traveller recounting his journey. The black YT had been bought by Perelman in Bangkok in 1949 and for a long time had been stored in the premises of a bankrupt delicatessen in Philadelphia. Before commencing its epic trip to Peking it had only covered 19,000 miles in the intervening twenty-nine years. British Leyland donated a Land Rover to accompany the YT and two other MG enthusiasts went along to look after the car's needs, taking with them a large quantity of spares. Perelman and the car made it to Peking (via France, Italy, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Turkey, Iran, India, Burma and Hong Kong) although, sadly, once the trip was over he became ill and, nine months later, he passed away. His observations on the trip have, alas, never been published. It is worth noting in conclusion, as symptomatic of the world in which we live today, that by the time the YT reached Peking all its MG badges had disappeared; stolen by



souvenir-hunters.

In more recent years Frank Vautier became notable for his spirited performances in what started life as a 1951 Sun Bronze 'Y'. This car was extensively modified with advice from Dick Jacobs during its long competitive life (it still occasionally appears at club events today). Among the modifications carried out were the fitting of larger twin SU carburetors, a ZA Magnette rear axle, two front anti-roll bars, MGA disc brakes at the front, radial tyres and eventually a supercharger. And the car was certainly 'modified' in quite a different way one day in the summer of 1974 at Wiscombe Park Hillclimb when it was rolled onto its roof on taking a hairpin a little too fast! Once the car was righted, the driver took up his position behind the wheel and the 'Y' was able to continue to the top of the hill!

In closing I should like to thank 'Autocar' magazine for giving me their permission to reproduce the advertisement, 'Success At Silverstone' from their issue of 16th May 1952. I should also like to thank the following for their help in researching this article: David Mullen, Colin Dye, J. S. R. Bridges and for supplying the photographs, Harry Chapman and Alan White.

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