

Old Gold

Jon Pressnell recalls the day when he sampled the hottest Y-type in the country - and takes a look at the rather more staid standard car

much as for the challenge to myself. I'm happy if I have a good dice with some of the T-types and manage to progressively reduce my lap times."

Frank bought the 'Y' in 1971 for £25, and progressive modification led in 1993 to the final state of tune, evolved - as he has always been keen to acknowledge - with much help from blower expert John Bibby of Supercharge. "I started out using the car to commute to work," Frank recounted. "The first stage in tuning it was to go from a 1¼ in SU carb to a 1½ in unit, and raise the compression ratio from 7 to 1 to 8.6 to 1. That made it quite a bit more viable. I then got bitten by the MGCC racing bug, and ended up running an 11 to 1 compression ratio, twin SUs, and a wild cam.

"This was quite a high state of tune, so my next step was to fit a Shorrock supercharger running at a 5psi boost. With the blower I could drop the CR to 9 to 1 and use a standard cam, and the result was a lot more low-down torque". One replacement blower later, and Frank was ready for a re-think, and the move to the current J100 Marshall blower - which is bigger and more efficient than the relatively run-of-the-mill Shorrock unit. The Marshall runs at a high 15psi boost, fuelling is by a single 1¾ in SU, and there's a toothed-belt drive, needed to cope with the power. Capacity remains at 1250cc, although obviously there's the scope to take the engine out to 1500cc.

"The intercooler means I can blow to a higher pressure without getting too high a temperature - and in any case there's no way I could boost that high on the current 9.3 to 1 compression ratio without suffering detonation and pinking," Frank explained, as we examined the crammed but tidy engine bay. "As things are, air comes out of the supercharger at 140 deg C and the intercooler takes it down to 80 deg C - and the engine actually runs a little too cold."

Running gear has always remained surprisingly un-trick, although when we met Frank had just fitted £200's worth of gearbox from a pre-war MG VA. "It's no slower than a YA 'box, and it's substantially stronger," Frank told me. "I don't like destroying things, and it was clear the 'Y' gearbox was on the limit". For similar reasons, Frank



Frank Vautier with his YA

"It's the fastest Y-type you'll ever drive," said owner Frank Vautier as I strapped myself into the tatty part-stripped cockpit of his gold-coloured MG YA. Ten years on from the experience, I'm not going to argue: few notions are more sublimely ridiculous than finding one of these prim, perpendicular little saloons hiding 134bhp of blown intercooled engine under its stubby bonnet.

Now retired to Wales and with the 'Y' taking a rest from competition, Frank was long a charismatic presence on the MG Car Club racing scene, fighting through the hordes of T-types in the Minilite-shod YA. An ideologically-unsound hot-rod, do I hear the purists say? Well, not quite. Frank always tried to keep everything 'period' - which is why by the time of its last race, 1997's BDC Silverstone, the MG still didn't have electronic ignition, didn't run a limited-slip diff, and didn't have ally or grp panels.

That could explain, of course, why it tended not to come more than half way up the average T-type field in which it competed: above all, the car was simply too damn heavy. "I'm not too bothered," Frank told me when I paid him a visit for a *Classic & Sports Car* feature. "I don't race for success in the championship so



Low stance, wheel arches nicely filled, no bumpers; one mean-looking Y-type...





"Bullet" rear lights not original, of course

changed very early on to a rear axle from a ZA Magnette: YA halfshafts wouldn't have stood up to the power, and the stronger back axles used on the later YB were few and far between.

At the front there's an anti-roll bar, lowered and stiffer springs, longer lower wishbones to increase the camber, and MGA stub axles and disc brakes; the dampers remain lever-arms. The rear is even less altered: lowered leaf springs and telescopic dampers are the only mods, and Frank says he doesn't get any axle tramp. And those Minilites? They were a necessary modification after the original steel wheels cracked up.

It's a recipe that Frank found surprisingly effective. "With the standard front suspension the car was very much like a dog at a



The powerhouse: intercooler sits in big square housing on bulkhead



Interior is endearingly tatty: modern rev-counter fits behind octagonal speedo aperture



lamp-post - it would lift its rear wheel if you threw it into a corner, and you had to wait until the wheel came down before you put the power back on. The stiffer front certainly keeps the rear down, and it now corners in a 'square' roll, with both front and rear nicely dug in..."



On the road the car is an unforgettable experience

Throughout its 'combat' years the car was definitely active, in hillclimbs as well as in MGCC racing, and at the time we spoke Frank had only had one 'moment', when he rolled the 'Y' at Wiscombe in 1974. "I did two competitive runs afterwards, and then went on holiday in the car - admittedly with it taped up a bit. It's quite a strong body..."

As the photos show, this was not to be the sole blot on the MG's copybook. At 1997's MGCC Silverstone meeting Frank was caught by the camera of Richard Wright as the 'Y' went through a full acrobatic sequence. "I'd just fitted new tyres that were particularly grippy," he recalls. "I was enjoying myself and went in too fast - it was that simple." After this little bit of crowd-pleasing, the slightly lozenged body was straightened and resprayed in time for that final race with the Bentley Drivers' Club a bare

levels you actually experience.

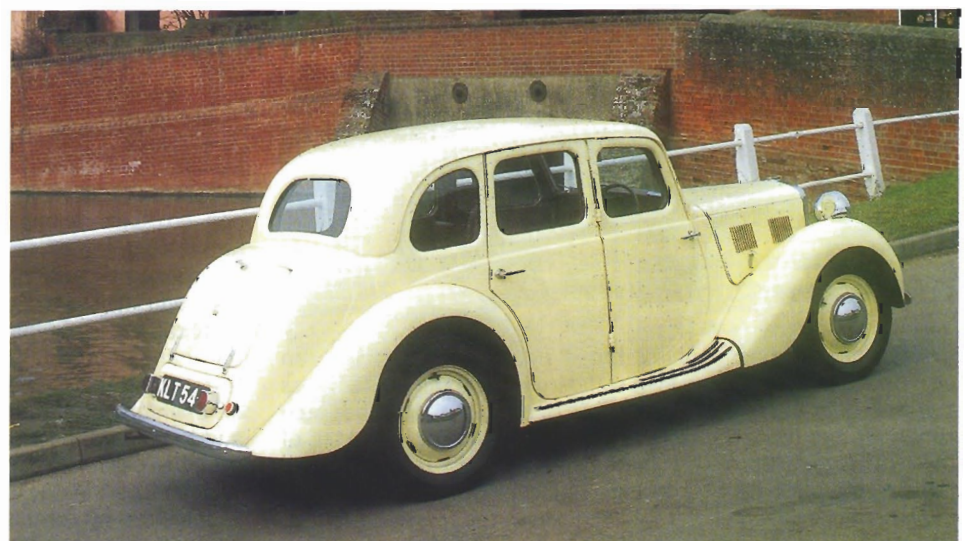
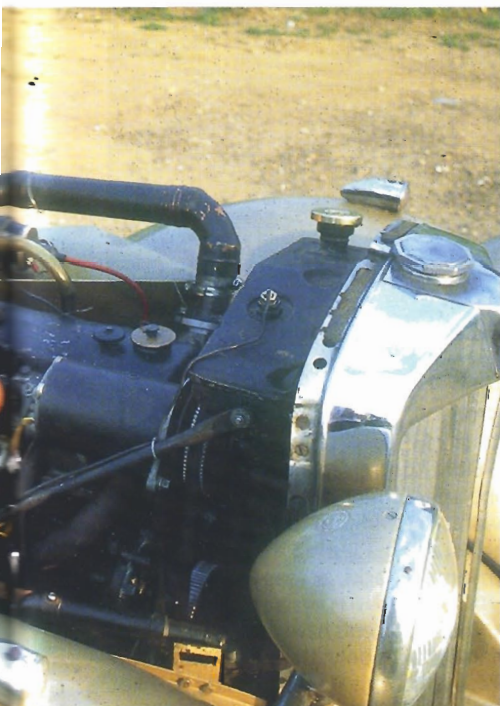
Sounding like a close-packed swarm of demented hyperthyroid bees, the MG powers down the road with solid wads of torque, as the engine screams up the rev range and you snatch your way through the loose and under-synchronised 'box. At 4000rpm the engine really comes alive, and from 5000rpm it's howling its way towards an intoxicating crescendo; it'll rev all the way to 7000rpm, corresponding to a white-knuckle 113mph in top.

The wonderful thing about all this is that the 'Y' is gloriously tractable at low revs, with no stuttering or even momentary hesitation when traffic slows you to a 2000rpm tootle - and then you can pull away smoothly in top, picking off the cars in front without the need for a down-change.

Sure, using all the car's performance on the road is fairly



As they left Abingdon: this fully-restored example is a YA, identifiable by having 16in wheels rather than the YB's 15in rims



Morris origins of body are well concealed: front, rear and wings are all different

month later.

Driving the Vautier 'Y' is a complete blast, as I remember only too well. You expect the board-firm ride, the ultra-stiff clutch, the short-travel brakes, and the accurate turn-in. You expect serious performance and serious noise, too - but not quite to the beserk

hair-raising, and accelerating up to 95mph on the straight, with the bolted-down-tight suspension hunting for surface irregularities, calls for a wodge of faith-in-the-machinery courage. "It won't go anywhere," Frank reassured me...

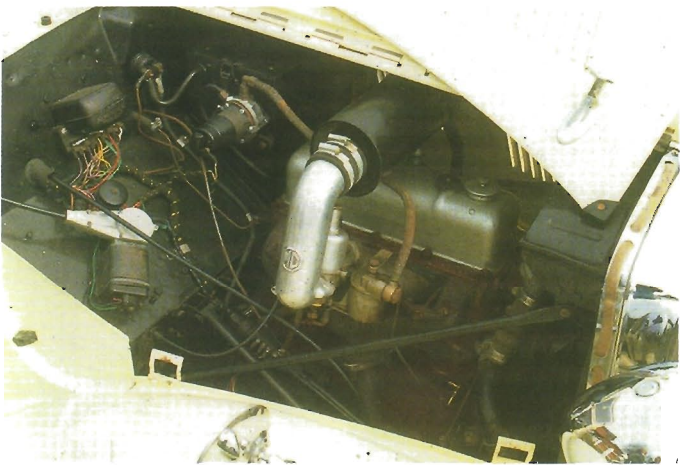
The Vautier 'Y' is certainly way over the top as a road car,



Simple and tasteful standard YA cockpit is well equipped; below-dash indicator switch not original



Rear is adequately roomy, thanks to high seating position



The rather less exciting under-bonnet view of the production YA

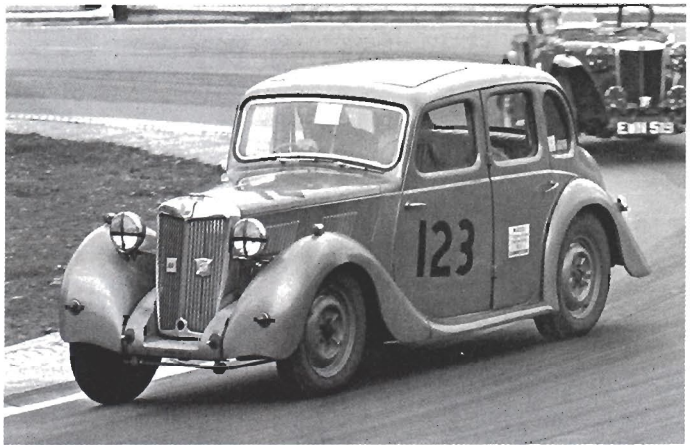
despite its surprising usability, but it does show what you can achieve with a Y-type. Even in its standard form, though, the 'Y' has this ability to deceive: it has the air of an old maid's shopping runabout, yet hides the reflexes of a sports car. For a cocktail of MG T-type and Morris Ten mechanicals, topped by a modified Morris Eight body, it's a surprisingly seductive package.

The ohv engine might have its origins in the Ten Series M unit, and its single-SU-fuelled 46bhp can't be expected to give stunning performance; but it's an engine with infinite tuning potential, from a simple twin-carb conversion to the 219bhp achieved by the supercharged 1517cc engine prepared in 1953 for MG's record-breaker.

The chassis is unique to the 'Y', underslung, and has a rugged and well-designed coil-spring ifs by Minor and Mini creator Alec Issigonis, complete with quick (2.75 turns lock-to-lock) rack-and-pinion steering. In later and better-braked 1951-53 YB form there's a front



Early days: the 'Y' at the Ditcham hillclimb in the 1970s



Brands Hatch, 1974: dicing with Sonia Gill in a TC

anti-roll bar, too. The whole set-up was good enough to be used on MG sports cars from the TD to the MGB.

With its Morris Series E Eight centre section the MG is not a large car. But in equipment and appointments it has everything the discerning motorist could want. In addition to the wood and leather, and the sliding roof, there's an adjustable steering wheel, an opening screen, in-built hydraulic jacks, a rear-window blind, and a standard spotlamp.

It's all beautifully done, too. The instruments have octagonal-shaped surrounds, the leather (wearing-surfaces only: this was a cheap car) is enhanced by contrasting piping. And if it's cosy inside, it's not cramped, for four average-sized people; indeed, wedged between rear side armrest and central armrest, a rear-seat passenger feels as if he's in a comfy London-club armchair.

If you're short, you may not get on with the reclined backrest of the otherwise comfortable - if not over-dimensioned - bucket seat, but you can't fail to be ever-so-slightly stirred by the vista down the bonnet to the chromed headlamps and the (functional) radiator filler-cap. Traditional styling does indeed have its virtues...



Well dug in, during an MGCC event at Snetterton... (Steve Jones photo)

accustomed yourself to the tall, narrow feel of the 'Y', you realise you have a friendly chassis underneath you, the MG cornering accurately and with relatively limited roll.

No, it's not fast. In the same way as a 1 1/2-litre RM Riley, though, it just manages to avoid being classed as slow. In other words, the little 1250cc pushrod engine gives an adequate and pleasingly-delivered performance - helped, it has to be said, by low-ish gearing.

Thus the 'Y' is happy at 50-55mph, doesn't feel as if it will self-destruct at 60mph, but clearly is approaching its ceiling once you push towards an indicated 70mph - a speed surprisingly easy to attain with a favourable slope. Third-gear acceleration confirms the low-down torque promised by the 58.5 lb ft at 2400rpm figures, as do the MG's anything but breathless hillclimbing capabilities. All the while, the engine feels sweet, contented, good-natured - just as I remember it being in the much under-rated Wolseley 4/44.

Tone up those reflexes and a crisp little sporting saloon can only become even more of a delight. Just don't get carried away, eh? Because, as Frank Vautier will tell you, with such promising raw material it's all too easy not to know where to stop...

All non-racing photos by Tony Baker, Classic & Sports Car magazine



A slightly unorthodox line at Paddock Bend, Lydden Hill, 1973



Wiscombe hillclimb, 1974, with the MG just about to reach the point of no-return

Move away, and the clutch is sweet and judder-free, the non-remote gearchange stiff-levered, tight-gated, deliciously snappy. It's a real sports-car change, and it's not marred by half-hearted synchromesh, although a slight pause in neutral on a down-change from high revs helps. The front brakes are only single-leading-shoe on the 1947-51 YA, but are short-travel and more effective

than legend has it; they're also complemented by a substantial chrome pull-up lever for the handbrake - no pistol-grip nonsense here!

The chassis gets off to a head start with that Issigonis steering. Devoid of play, it's taut, quick, instantly informative and perfectly weighted; few cars can have better. Matched to this is a chassis that's not going to win prizes for cossetting comfort but at the same time isn't brutally firm: reacting sharply to bumps, it's just what you'd expect on a sporting saloon of the era. Once you've



...and rather less so, at the 1997 MGCC Silverstone meeting, caught on camera by Richard Wright