



MG for Four

Contemporary for its time, the 1947 YA was MG's primary saloon of the postwar era

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One of the most popular British car brands in America has long been the MG. Ask any car enthusiast to state which MG they know best and invariably you'll

hear them mention the ever-popular MGB. The pint-size Midget of the 1960s and '70s also had universal appeal, as did the MGB's predecessor, the sleekly shaped MGA. And who can argue that the vintage-styled TD remains one of the single most popular sports cars ever created.

Unbeknownst to many, MG produced more than sports cars. In fact, some of the most striking saloons ever made had MG's signature Octagon badge on their radiator shroud. One such example is the stately YA.

During the days immediately following World War II, while Detroit began creating more modern-looking automotive designs featuring integrated fenders, headlamps, and radiators, and were about to introduce state-of-the-art overhead-valve engines, MG was still producing cars that looked just as if they had been built in the 1930s. Being a small manufacturer, and one with limited financial resources, MG had no choice but to maintain its traditional ways of building cars with upright radiators, separate fenders, freestanding headlamps, flat windshields, and rounded trunks. Outdated, perhaps, but they were chock-full of British charm.

MG's closed-car lineage harkens back to the 1920s with the 14/40 and 18/80 two-door saloons. Then came the striking K Magnettes of the early 1930s with their pillarless four-door bodies. In 1936, MG introduced a larger-than-usual-sized four-door car, and truly one of the most beautifully shaped automobiles of all time—the SA; the equally stunning VA saloon followed in 1937. Then shortly after the conclusion of WWII, MG introduced its first “modern” saloon: the 1947 YA.

Known as the MG Y-Type, the first iteration of this series quickly became known by car owners and enthusiasts as the YA shortly after the follow-up model, the YB, was introduced. It had also been referred to as the “1¼-litre saloon.”

At the time of its introduction, the YA was fairly advanced, as it was one of the first automobiles fitted with the then-new rack-and-pinion steering system that was so much quicker acting than previous steering systems. In fact, the Y-Type's chassis was so well engineered and strong that it formed the basis for the soon-to-be TD and TF sports cars. Its suspension was designed by Alex Issigonis, father of the Mini, which is perhaps why this stylish four-door MG rides and handles so well.

But because it was designed prior to the outbreak of World War II, the YA looks like a traditional prewar car, yet its underpinnings are distinctively way more modern. Instead of the time-honored method of constructing bodies atop a wood frame, the YA sports an all-steel body, and an independent front suspension system with unequal-length A-arms and softer sprung coil springs in place of the old-fashioned-style, hard-riding solid axle setup; leaf springs remained in the rear.

The Y-Type's other features, which were unique for cars in its price range, included an adjustable steering column, a sliding metal-panel sunroof, a windshield that opened with a hand crank, and privacy screens on the interior. Yet its most interesting standard feature was its Smiths Jackall System, an arrangement that contained four built-in hydraulic jacks, fitted to each corner of the chassis, which made changing flat tires a breeze. Oddly enough, the heater was optional.

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The interior features extensive use of wood, adjustable steering wheel, upright leather-covered seats, and the MG's signature octagon-shaped instruments.





Inspired by his better performing MG race cars, George tweaked the YA's original XPAG OHV four-cylinder engine for added power. He installed a larger 1½-inch H4 SU carb, higher-lift Crane camshaft, an alternator, K&N air filter, and had the engine block bored out to 1,350-cc.

The four-cylinder engine of this 2,240 pound car is just about adequate enough to get the stately saloon up to speed, although it will take a while. Known as the XPAG engine, this overhead-valve unit originally displaced 1,250-cc, and with its fuel fed via a small SU carburetor, with its 7.2:1 compression ratio, it generated 46 horsepower at 4,800 rpm.

MG never sold its YA saloons Stateside, but thanks to the efforts of renowned MG historian and champion of the marque Richard Knudson, it was imported to his home in the upstate New York town of Oneonta. Years later, on New Year's Day in 1977, it was purchased by its current owner, George Pardee, a former Connecticut native who now resides in Clearwater, Florida.

"The car was well worn, but complete," George remembers. "Typical of British cars of that period, it had extensive body rust, covered by multiple layers of filler and paint, but it was a fine driver and all the original parts were present, which would be difficult to source had they been missing."

George competes in vintage racing events with other MGs, so it was all too easy and important for him to perform some upgrades to his YA saloon in his quest for more power, which would help it perform better and safer on today's crowded roads. After having the XPAG block bored to 1,350-cc, he had the cylinder head polished for better gas flow, installed a high-lift Crane camshaft, fitted a bigger SU H4 carburetor with a larger diameter 1½-inch bore, and replaced the stock exhaust with a larger diameter 1½-inch stainless steel system, along with adding a freer flowing K&N air filter. More important was the installation of a five-speed Datsun gearbox, which made a huge difference in dropping engine revs at highway speeds; George

purchased this from Skyhook Engineering, but this conversion kit is no longer available, as the company has closed down.

As to the way this elegant-looking MG performs, George told us: "This car is a blast. With its state-of-the-art 1947 suspension and brakes, a skillful driver can keep this MG on the ragged, hairy edge of adhesion provided by the 5.25 x 16 Avon Tourist bias-ply tires, which are mounted on 3-inch wide rims. It handles and steers in a predictable manner, with controllable oversteer; lifting the throttle slightly will calm everything down. The rack-and-pinion steering is almost too sensitive for the tiny contact patch of the tires, but it creates confidence with excellent road feel and response."

George continued his driving impressions by saying: "The original MOWOG gearbox was precise and easy to shift, but required deliberation; impatience would beat the synchros and clash the gears. However, the Datsun five-speed manual transmission shifts like butter, making smooth down/up shifts through sweeping bends a joy. We also upgraded the brakes to Alfin drums, as the original steel drums required a high-friction lining. They were adequate, but the Alfin brakes, with their radially finned alloy drums with iron liners, are the equal to modern brakes, although the pedal effort is higher.

"What we like most about this MG saloon is its style; it's also very comfortable and the performance is most enjoyable. This car has performed exactly as we expected, and done all that we have asked of her. Since we bought this YA back in 1977, we have driven her more than 95,000 miles; in fact, we still average 3,000 miles per year. She is an important part of our family, and the focus of many happy memories. Best of all, I love blowing off MG TDs." 🏁



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Trafficators are part of the YA's prewar heritage; sliding metal sunroof was a standard yet desirable feature.





Similar in style to prewar Bentleys and Rolls-Royces, the YA saloon has a trunk lid that is hinged on the bottom and folds flat when opened. The spare tire hides behind the oval panel upon which the license plate and taillamps are fitted.

