

Profile

Malcolm Green profiles the Y-type – Abingdon's first post war saloon

Processed from corporate parts bin

With all the publicity for the new generation of MG saloons, and the reliance placed on the MG marque for the survival plans of the only British-owned volume car manufacturer, it is interesting to look at an MG saloon launched some fifty-five years ago that was in its way just as significant. It is often overlooked that closed saloons and coupés have been as important a part of the MG range as the sports cars. For example, without the MG versions of the Metro, Maestro and Montego in the 1980s to keep the badge in the public eye, the RV8 or MGF may never have been produced.

Right from the beginning there were closed MGs. The early Morris Garages range of special coachwork on the

Morris chassis included four-door saloons and two-door salonettes; there were also 18/80 saloons and a salonette version of the first MG Midget, the M-type. Throughout the early 1930s the company built many fixed-head models on the F, J, K, L, N and P chassis and a look at surviving records shows that overall these accounted for about fifteen per cent of production. In the final few years before car assembly stopped on outbreak of war saloon versions of the VA, SA and WA models far outnumbered tourers, although only a couple of closed TA Midgets were built.

Popular though the traditional sports car was with many customers, for practical reasons there was always a

ready market for sporting machinery providing more comfort, or greater carrying capacity. Family responsibilities often forced a switch from an open two-seater and those keen on driving were always likely to be tempted by a car with sporting pretensions, rather than by something more mundane. For this reason it was obviously important for MG that they should always have a suitable car in their range.

The early post-war period was a time of both difficulties and opportunities for the MG Car Company. On the one hand they were forced to reintroduce as their new two-seater sports car the outdated T-series model designed ten years earlier. Yet, booming markets



Film Star Gene Tierney with a new Y-type she planned to take back to Hollywood when she returned after studio work in England on her latest picture 'Night and the city'



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Although not a large car, there are sufficient projections front and rear to make reversing into tight corners more difficult than with more modern design with shorter overhangs.

and a high demand for new cars meant they were able to sell all they could produce. That situation, however, was unlikely to last long and there was a desperate need for a sporting saloon of modern design to broaden the appeal of the marque.

Had there not been a break in production, a new mid-sized MG saloon would have been launched in 1940. By 1938 work on the car was already under way at Cowley, where the talented Alec Issigonis and ex-MG man, Jack Daniels had designed an independent front suspension layout for the projected new Morris 10. In the end this was not used for that car on the grounds of cost, but the project spawned a prototype of a new MG saloon, provisionally called the MG Ten. Incidentally the British car tax system was based on a form of nominal horsepower rating calculated on engine bore, rather than capacity or power output. The 1,292cc TA engine was rated as ten horsepower and its 1,250cc replacement in the TB at eleven horsepower. Had that 1938 MG saloon gone into production fitted with the TB unit it too would have been an 11 hp car, not a ten. The similar engine in the Morris Ten had a smaller bore



The cabin is attractively trimmed and comfortable, one of the nice things about this model.

strong chassis constructed with welded, closed box section side rails and tubular cross members. At the back the side rails ran under the rear axle, which was suspended on leaf springs and had a Panhard rod to give lateral location. A front cross member welded to the chassis housed the coil springs and provided a mounting for the rack and pinion steering gear. The simple, effective design for the front suspension was to serve the company well and remained to the end of production of the MGB.

Economies were made by using the major body pressings from the Morris Eight saloon. To give the car the 'Abingdon touch' and a greater presence on the road, a longer bonnet, elegant flowing wings, and the MG radiator surround and grille were incorporated. The pressed steel wheels fitted in place of the more usual wire spoked ones seen on all previous MGs was a radical change, but one appreciated when the time came to



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The single carburettor XPAG engine has plenty of room in the engine bay and routine servicing is easy.

By the time the prewar prototype had been readied for production, and the factory space and supplies of the necessary parts organised, they had been building the TC for nearly two years. Sales were good and sports cars carrying the MG badge were being seen all over the world. A good omen for any new product from the same stable. Like most MGs before and since, the Y-type saloon was a confection of parts borrowed from other cars built by the main company and none the worse for that.

Design was essentially unchanged from the original prototypes and the basis was a



The prewar prototype of the YA was the MG Ten, seen here in mock-up form. This picture was taken in 1938 and it was to be nine years before it went into production.

clean them. Overall, the new saloon looked appealing, although to some eyes it lacked the elegance of line possessed by the larger prewar saloons.

When the Y-type was launched in 1947 it inherited from the TC sports car a single carburettor variant of the XPAG engine. Power was reduced from 54.4 bhp in twin carburettor, TC form to a modest 46 bhp and, with over a ton to haul around, the acceleration was not startling. However, the power to weight ratio was better than the average British saloon car of the period and the MG gained good press reviews for the way it handled and performed. Much of the credit for its good road manners must go to the rack and pinion steering gear adopted for the first time on an MG. Even the most avid fans of the IC would admit that the Bishop Cam steering box fitted to that car is not its best feature. Once wear occurs, as it always does, the steering can become very unpredictable; wear seldom occurs with a well-maintained rack and pinion unit.



The smaller wheels on the YB are not easily noticeable: more prominent are the deeper section front and rear wings.

framed bodies clad in fabric, steel or aluminium. Although it did not have the monocoque body/chassis of its successor, the Z-Magnette, the Y-type body did have the advantage of all-steel construction. As we have said, the main body frame and doors were shared with the contemporary Morris Eight, which itself was soon to be replaced by the Minor which was of unitary construction. Using body pressings from the Morris made the comparatively low-volume MG saloon an economic proposition. However, to avoid the cost of additional press tooling when they later decided to build a tourer version, this did have some timber in its construction.

Much of the special appeal of the Y-type came from the way the cabin was appointed. There were leather seat covers and acres of polished woodwork, all tastefully designed to give the car an up-market feel. To add marque identity the layout of the wooden dashboard incorporated octagonal bezels for the ordinary circular instruments. There were separate front bucket seats in the front and for rear-seat passengers a central armrest was fitted; upholstery could be covered in maroon, beige or green leather. The windscreen could be wound open on hot days and a remotely operated blind could cover the rear window. There were also twin sun visors, a central reading light, and a metal sun roof.

When TC production started in 1945, shortages meant that all the cars were painted black. However, by the time the Y-type arrived there was once again a full range of colours from which to choose. Two tone colour schemes were on offer by the simple expedient of installing wings and running boards painted in one of the standard colours to the body shell finished in another shade. Basic colours were: Black, Shires (dark) Green, Almond (light) Green, Autumn Red, Sequoia Cream and Grey. The duo-tone cars were usually supplied with the lighter colour for the body and darker for the wings.

The new MG saloon was deservedly popular and sold well in both the home and overseas markets. It was to the more modern Y-type chassis the MG designers turned when looking for a replacement for the TC and the result was the popular TD Midget, which went on to be the best selling of all the traditionally-shaped MG sports cars. By

late 1951 the Y-type had been in production for over four years, but the mechanical specification was inferior to that of the TD then produced alongside it at Abingdon. For the 1952 model year the saloon was up-dated to mechanically more closely resemble the contemporary TD. The revised model was called the YB, the outgoing cars being designated YAs.

The alterations were extensive. Most important were the modifications to the braking system and running gear, which now had a twin leading shoe system and the front brake drums were integral with the hubs, rather than separate as on the TA. Furthermore, the YB now had a more modern hypoid



The attractive woodern dashboard with octagonal bezels for the instruments.

The modernised chassis design was not the only innovation. Until the Y-type was produced, all MG saloons had traditionally constructed wooden



The rear seat has a neat, pul-down arm rest, leather trimmed, like the rest of the seat.



There is plenty of room in the luggage compartment. However, if required, extra items can be carried on the open lid

back axle which was potentially much quieter. The wheels were reduced in size from 16in. to 15in. diameter and



The spare wheel sits in a compartment beneath the boot floor. On the YB this was an inch taller to accommodate the wider-section tyre on the spare wheel.

the tyres increased in width from 5.00/5.25 to 5.50 section to improve the roadholding. A front anti-roll bar and heavier duty rear shock absorbers were also fitted. The front and rear wings had to be altered to disguise the fact that the smaller wheels took up less space; they were made slightly deeper, something which is quite apparent when viewed from the side of the car. Additionally, the wider tyres would not fit in the spare wheel stowage compartment so this had to be made an inch taller on the YB.

Although the YB was much improved, it was becoming outdated in comparison with the modern cars that were by then in production. It still had charm, and appealed to a particular type of buyer, but it was really a prewar car competing in the postwar 'Jet age'. The only answer was a completely new design, and this came with Gerald Palmer's Z-Magnette launched at the 1953 London Motor Show. The Y-type was built in comparatively small numbers, 6,158 YAs, 1,301 YBs and 877 YT tourers, so survivors like the attractive YB pictured here are fairly rare.

Despite modest performance, a T-type is still capable of providing interesting, family transportation for modern owners. They are comfortable to drive, and sufficiently different to attract attention in any company. Mechanical spares are readily available, although repairs to the steel body can be difficult and costly. Prices of restored survivors have been climbing in recent years, but sound examples are still available for less money than most open T-types fetch.

The YB has better brakes and roadholding, but both models can benefit from mild engine tuning and an easy change is to convert to the TC/TD twin carburettor arrangement; incidentally this was used for the YT tourers. Raising the rear axle ratio, or even fitting a five-speed gearbox, could help tuned cars travel at motorway speeds, but most owners are happier using their cars on the type of roads for which they were designed.

Despite the small numbers built, the Y-type was a vital part of the MG Car Company's strategy to stay in the sports saloon market, and a worthy predecessor to the modern cars carrying the MG badge.



Despite borrowing major body panels from the humble Morris Eight, the Y-type looks every inch an MG, thanks mainly to the impressive radiator grille.

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