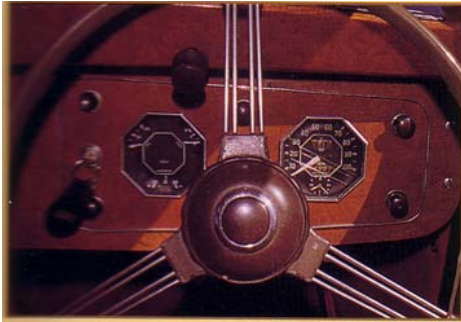


Telling Y



MG Y Type 1949 1 1/4 Litre Saloon

***Text and Photographs by
Malcolm Robertson***



When I sent your Editor the story about my old Two Litre M.G. which was published in the August 1996 issue of the *MG Magazine*, I suggested to him that American readers might like to hear about the post war Y Series cars in a future article. This suggestion was accepted so I had it in mind to prepare an article about one of Australia's finest Y Types, residing in Canberra, a fully restored car in which meticulous attention had been paid to originality.

So you can imagine my surprise when I read in your Coming Events column that the search was on for The Best Y-Type in the World as part of the New England MG T Register's 1997 Gathering of the Faithful Mk 64 being held in Binghampton, NY, next September (see page 46).

Australians, great gamblers and sports that we are, are always ready to take up such a challenge,

so I thought that in addition to a serious article about the Y Type our challenger in this unique competition could be presented in the pages of the *MG Magazine*. I somehow suspect that, no matter how much we would like to, we will not be sending any Y types in the flesh and steel to Binghampton in 1997! (Ed note: at past "Search For The Best . . ." Gatherings, there have been cars from Australia.)

So first the serious material:

By the time the Second World War again shattered the uneasy peace in Europe post the Great War, the M.G. Car Company had emerged from nothing to one of the most successful sportscar manufacturers in the UK. Many articles have been written about the motoring successes of the Company's amazing small overhead camshaft racing cars and the successful sports and trials cars based on the same chassis and

mechanical componentry. What is generally less well known is that M.G. produced more saloon and touring cars than they did sports and racing cars.

By 1939, with magnificent sporting saloons such as the Two Litre SA and the 2.6 Litre WA, M.G. had established themselves as a worthy competitor among the more traditional saloon car manufacturers such as Riley, Alvis and Armstrong Siddeley. Using the advertising theme of 'for grace ... for space ... for pace', later plagiarised by the then emerging Jaguar Company, M.G. Saloons were beautifully appointed, a delight to drive and competitively priced. Their styling by Cecil Kimber assured their good looks and they were featured in films and sought after by discerning buyers for continental touring.

World War Two, and the take over of Riley by the Nuffield Organisation, put an end to M.G.'s luxury sporting saloons and after the War the Company concentrated on small saloons, again based on the contemporary sportscar mechanicals and chassis.

The first postwar M.G. saloon was the little one and a quarter litre car, designated the M.G. Y series, introduced to an expectant public in 1947. The car was based on the all steel Morris Eight body with the redesigned front and rear styling Nuffield had already trialed briefly just before the War on an interim Riley Twelve 1.5 litre and the Morris Ten.

This stylish saloon was mounted on an all new chassis destined, with minor modifications, to carry the new M.G. TD sportscar. It boasted independent front suspension using coil springs, wishbones and integrated shock absorbers, and new rack and pinion steering. The chassis members were boxed sections of extreme strength, especially in comparison with the flexible open chassis rails used on the then current TC sportscar, and provided

a sound platform for the new saloon. It was underslung at the rear with half elliptic leaf springs providing the rear suspension.

The engine was the tried and tested XPAG series overhead valve pushrod 1250 cc unit which had been introduced on the TB sportscar in 1939 and was mated to a four speed manual gearbox through a single dry plate clutch. Synchromesh was provided on top, third and second gears. Final drive was through a propellor shaft with a spiral bevel differential and the car was mounted on fourteen inch pressed steel wheels with chromed hubcaps sporting traditional octagonal M.G. badges.

Inside, the new saloon was trimmed in leather and cloth with cut pile carpets and lashings of timber on the door caps, dashboard and surrounding the windows. The instruments carried over the theme started on the prewar WA and were mounted in octagonal bezels. Unlike the WA, however, the new saloon had the instruments directly in front of the driver and all other controls fell ergonomically to hand. A small handle in the centre of the dashboard provided the convenience of winding out the windscreen in the event of extreme heat if you lived in the Colonies or of fog if you owned the car in old Blighty.

The car was a well-constructed package in postwar England still in the grip of privations and its introduction in 1947 was well received by the public and motoring press alike. With only a single SU carburettor and 47 bhp available, the 1250cc engine had a fair job to do in pulling the well-appointed saloon along but it achieved its task well and received glowing road test reports. The new independent front suspension and the extremely accurate rack and pinion steering provided additional security in handling and M.G.'s traditional powers of braking, by hydraulics on all four wheels,

justified the continued use of the company's Safety Fast slogan with the release of the new saloon.

Roadtesters in 1947 were full of praise for the new saloon, especially the new ifs set-up to which *The Motor* attributed 'much of the credit for the cars comfortable riding and precise handling'. Both *The Motor* and *The Autocar* spoke highly of the car's ability to cruise readily at high touring speeds on continental motorways in all weather conditions and of its equal capacity to 'potter delightfully around country lanes at 20 to 30 mph'. As a car for the family, both magazines felt it offered a high degree of motoring interest for the driver and significant comfort for the front and rear seat passengers.

In due course, the car achieved certain prominence. One was driven by Betty Haig and Barbara Marshall in the 1950 Monte Carlo Rally and another, in supercharged form, was taken to the Jabbeke Motorway in 1948 at the time of Gardiner's record attempts in the amazing Gardiner M.G. where its private owner, Dick Benn, organised for Gardener to drive the car as fast as he could. History records the car at 104.7 mph before the engine blew up!

I regret that I don't have available any contemporary road tests on the Y Type in America where I suspect the motoring journalists may have been less kind to the lithe car. Then, as now, Americans are partial to cars with the capacity to cruise at comfortable highway speeds for hours on end and while the Y will do this at modest speeds, it would have been unlikely to meet the needs of most American families in 1948!

And now for Australia's entry in the search for the Best Y Type in the World:

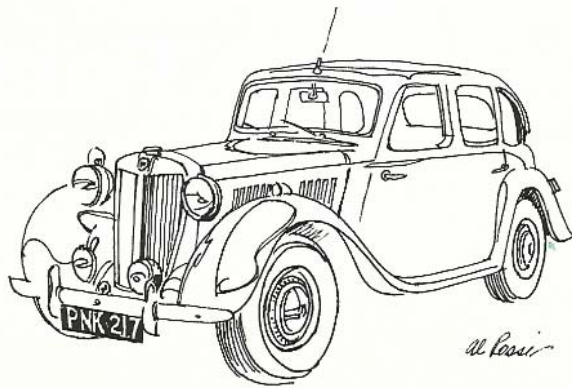
The beautifully restored YA saloon featured in this article (engine number XPAG 12912-SC-X, chassis number 2833, body number Y3095) belongs to Bruce

and Shirley Kennewell from Canberra, but was restored over many years by well-known Canberra car enthusiast Trevor Clarke. Trevor bought the car to restore and for several years the body sat on a six by four trailer to be towed regularly from his home to the Canberra Technical College where, along with other like minded souls, Trevor honed his panel beating and spray painting skills using the Y-Type as his experimental project!

His first task was to bring a severely rusted boot and spare wheel compartment back to life - a weak point on these cars - and to breathe carefully the original shape back into rounded mud-guards badly misshapen after years of abuse in car parks and garages. At one three hour lesson per academic week, this task took Trevor four years before he was happy with the finished body shell.

Painting was quicker but it took another year to perfect the lead wiping and final surface preparation before the Old English White top coats could be applied and work begin on the red leather interior. All the interior work was by the late Bill Phillips who has done so much of the restoration work on Canberra's finest classic cars over many years.

Work had also been progressing on the mechanical components of the car and its chassis. The engine was fully rebuilt, the gearbox inspected for wear and bearings replaced, all the wheel bearings and brakes overhauled and worn components replaced. The only variation from original was the fitting of twin carburettors using the manifold designed for the YT, the four seater tourer version introduced in late 1948, which will have boosted power to a useful 54.4 bhp.



From when he started the project in 1983, Trevor spent much of his spare time on the M.G., including searching swap meets and other M.G. owners' garages for crucial missing parts such as the chromed headlamps and the fly off handbrake, hub-caps and the like, which, while not unique to the Y were certainly harder to find than some mechanical components that were common to many Nuffield cars of the day. Much inspiration for the project came from fellow Y Type owner Bernie Midway, and I seem to recall several visits from Trevor to my own garage.

The Y Type had its first showing at Canberra's annual Wheels show in 1989 where it drew many admiring glances and appreciative comments. Soon after, it was on its inaugural trip with Canberra's Antique and Classic Car Club on a 3000 km tour to the Great Ocean Road in Victoria on which it performed faultlessly.

But Trevor is a car buff of many tastes, and after five years with the fully restored car, he decided the time had come to sell it to allow him time and resources to focus on other car projects. At the Wheels Show in 1995, he placed a For Sale sign discretely on the front seat where Bruce and Shirley spotted it and immediately began negotiations to secure the car.

The Kennewells had been M.G. enthusiasts many years ago but had drifted away from actually owning a car during those years when the rigours of life required

that their resources be directed towards more practical matters. In 1994, the light at the end of the tunnel was in sight and they bought a red MGB. A year later they bought the gleaming M.G. Y. This year they bought a beautiful M.G. TC and all the Canberra M.G. fraternity are waiting with interest to see what they will buy next year!

I have always enjoyed the early postwar Nuffield saloons, having owned both the Series E Morris Eight and the low-light Morris Minor. These of course were the basic offerings from Nuffield and the M.G. One and a Quarter Litre, with its leather interior and polished timber dash and beings, not to mention. Its more powerful M.G. engine, was a considerable step up from these simple cars, I had driven a few in my time, especially one owned by an old friend in Perth back in the days when I used to hoon about in an old TA, so I was really looking forward to taking the Kennewell's Y for a drive.

It's a lovely little car to settle into. By modern standards it is quite compact and the styling of the period means that for the overall width of the car you don't get much shoulder room inside - a fair amount of space is given over to the running boards. But the seats wrap around your upper back nicely and you can settle in to enjoy the view along the nicely shaped bonnet over the polished timber dash. Your view down the road is well framed between the

two chromed headlamps and at night the red glow from the tell-tale indicator buttons of the two Lucas sidelamps provide reassurance that at least those lights are alight.

All instruments are easily seen from the driver's seat - a good sized speedometer and a similar sized instrument cluster containing the minor gauges are directly in front of the driver. Unusually for a sports saloon there is no tachometer. All the switches are neatly placed around the two major dials and the horn and direction indicator control are in the centre boss of the steering wheel. A glove compartment with polished timber door is provided in front of the passenger. A sun-shine roof comes as standard.

The doors close with that satisfying clunk of pre-anti-burst technology and turning the ignition key heralds the chattering of an SU fuel pump eager to be out on the road. Even with a single carburettor, the lively M.G. engine has a satisfying bark from the exhaust and willing performance. The four speed gearbox provides plenty of flexibility to use the car in modern traffic and it cruises easily at 90 to 100 kph. Roadholding on cross-ply tyres is limited but the independent front suspension provides marked advantages over the beam axle arrangements of M.G.'s earlier saloon offerings.

Most M.G. saloons take second place to the marque's well-loved sportscars. With the costs of restoring the saloon well in excess of the two-seater cars, and re-sale prices well below those of the contemporary sportscars, it is often difficult to find a well-restored example of the Y-Type. Bruce and Shirley's car is one such example. It is a credit to both their care of the car and to Trevor's original restoration work and a worthy entry in the search for the Best Y Type In The World.

Best Y Type In The World To Be Chosen

The Y Type M.G. was manufactured between early 1947 and late 1953. There were 7459 sedans made as well as 877 four seat tourers or 8336 in total. Perhaps a third of these actually came to North America.

World wide, the cars in later years were often broken up for T Series parts; thus, the survivors are comparatively rare. In recent years Y Types have been lovingly restored, and they have a special place of honor as collectable M.G.s.

The New England M.G. T Register is paying special homage to the Y Type in their 50th year with a search for the Best Y Type In The World.

The contest will be conducted at the Register's Gathering of the Faithful which will be held the weekend of September 24 - 28, 1997, in Binghamton, New York. Complete details are available from The New England MG T Register, Drawer 220, Oneonta, NY 13820. Fax (607) 432-3342.

Y Owners attending this historic meeting will choose the Best Y Saloon as well as the Best Y Tourer.



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