

# *Sporting type*

One of the most characterful cars produced in the drab post-war years was the MG Y-type, a saloon with a distinctly sporting flavour. Martin Hodder's been enjoying a 1951 model

Photos by **Martin Hodder**

**B**RITAIN was an austere place in 1947. The war had been over for two years, yet food rationing was becoming more severe and the government had banned the use of coal and gas fires between April and September.

So serious was Britain's financial position that on August 27 the government announced a series of draconian measures. Food was further restricted, petrol for private motoring was banned, and so were foreign holidays.

Most people were desperately short of money, for wages were low and working hours long. Few could think of buying a new car, which was just as well since there was nothing to run them on; furthermore, towards the end of the year the Chancellor,

Sir Stafford Cripps, decreed that only ten per cent of car production could be sold in Britain.

Yet there were some silver linings to the dark, miserable clouds.

The MG Car Company was enjoying quite remarkable success with its TC Midget, which had begun to sell more successfully abroad than in Britain as early as 1946. This lively, charismatic sports car took the minds of those fortunate enough to drive it well away from the dreariness of the post-war days, wherever they happened to be.

Produced from late 1945 to early 1949, some 10,000 TCs left the factory, bringing in crucial foreign currency and helping MG's finances more than a little.

While the TC was earning its keep some important work was going on behind the scenes. In 1939 work had started on a new sporting saloon, using much of the body of Series-E Morris 8, and, when wartime

The resulting car was launched in the spring of 1947, and became one of the few bright spots in that dark year. It was the MG 1 1/4 Saloon, or Y-type.

This compact car, with traditional body lines, was mounted on a welded, box-section chassis, and used a single carburettor version of the overhead valve, XPAG 1250cc TC engine. It was a good looking car, with a pleasantly sporting character, and quite capable of carrying four people.



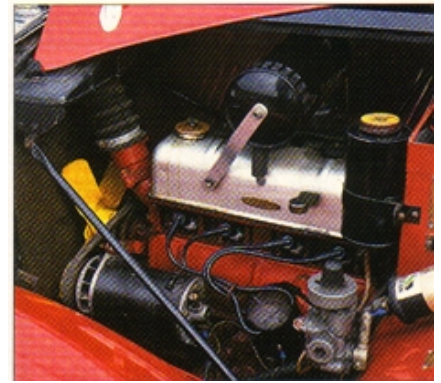
The Y-type is a truly good-looking car, with all the style of pre-war days



There's no mistaking the origin's of this car, loudly proclaimed by this plate.



Superbly elegant headlamp.



Engine almost hides away under the long bonnet.

The motoring public loved it. Even hard-bitten motoring journalists, many of them looking towards much more advanced designs in those post-war years, joined in the songs of praise. *The Autocar* liked it so much they put one on their long-term fleet ... and were still enthusing about it, and using it, four years later. The model was destined to run until late 1953, over which time 8336 Y-types were built (including 877 of the Tourer version).

Few Y-series MGs have survived, and that is a great shame. When I found one luxuriating in the tender loving care of the the Spinning Wheel Car Centre at Chesterfield I just had to drive it, more so because it was one of the original YA models. In fact, it was built in 1951, towards the end of production of the original version, and looks as though it has been well cared for ever since.

It has clearly been restored a number of years in the past and is now showing the slight signs of ageing which put the character back into a restored car ... although character is something these MG saloons possessed in abundance, even when they were new.

The MG Y-type is a car which pleases the eye immediately, and that seems to have always been the case. My reaction on looking over the car in September 1993, was an echo of comments made by *The Motor* in September 1951, when they reported on it for the second time since its launch.

'There are many who will rejoice that the appearance continues a long tradition,' reported *Motor's* man. Which is more or less what I was thinking, 42 years after those words were written, and 46 years after the model was launched.

It stood in front of me looking beautiful, and perfectly proportioned. The distinctive MG grille sits on the front of a long bonnet, which is flanked by elegant wings, flowing back into running boards. The windscreen, which can be cranked open from the bottom, is about the only flat surface on the car.

With the beauty there is a sense of purpose. Something in the way the MG sits, with its flared wings and large wheels nestling well into their recesses, tells you

that this is a car with a sporting heritage. Yet the Y-type MG shared its body shell with the pre-war Morris and Wolseley 8 models, certainly not sports cars, although there actually *is* a suggestion of sportiness in the lines of the Series-E Morris, despite its rather mundane purpose in life.

Connections with more ordinary cars are

'Even hard-bitten motoring journalists joined in the praise'

forgotten once you open the driver's door — it hinges at its rear edge, on the B post, while the rear doors hinge at their front edges. Greeting you is an abundance of wood on the door cappings and the fascia which would do credit to an antique dealer's best furniture, gorgeous red leather upholstery, and black carpeting.

If you've long legs you ease yourself into the seat, taking an open-legged position with the lower part of the steering wheel between the knees, and with the left leg making loose contact with the gear lever. Once installed, the driving position is remarkably comfortable. The seats are supportive, with a pleasing angle of rake to the back rest, and the large, sprung steering wheel falls pleasantly to hand.

Brake and clutch pedals require normal footwork, but the accelerator pedal's position means you have to bring the right foot towards you a bit in order to operate it without applying the brake as well. That's if you've got size tens, like me; people with daintier feet probably don't have a problem.

Many older cars show their age in their

gearboxes. Not so this particular MG. It has a conventional H gate, and all gears engaged with the smoothness of a much, much younger vehicle. First gear, like reverse, was rather noisy, giving off good groaning sounds, but it was probably always that way.

MG gave you synchromesh on second, third and fourth — which was somewhat more generous than was the norm in the late forties — and I was amazed to find it worked satisfactorily on such a venerable vehicle. Throughout my drive the quality of the gear change, both up and down, impressed me.

But then, I was driving an impressive car. *The Autocar* quoted a power figure of 45bhp (others made it 46) in their report published on August 3, 1951, when there was no alternative to low-octane, poor-quality Pool petrol. They commented that, despite it being a heavy car, this modest power output produced surprisingly fast journey times when required, helped by excellent steering and roadholding.

Again, I can only echo their observations. As always, I respected the age of the car and didn't even try to extend the engine, but found it more than capable of cruising at 55mph. At this speed there was a surprisingly low level of wind noise; indeed, the car was extremely peaceful. There was some vibration at 50mph, possibly from the propshaft, which I would have thought a future owner would be able to sort out.

It kept pace with pushing, thrusting, modern traffic on the network of country roads I enjoyed it on, trying hard to recreate the conditions it would have been driven under in 1951. I found it a real joy, and not at all the hard work on twisting roads like many cars of its era.

I felt I was driving a sports car with saloon bodywork, which, presumably, is what the designers wanted. The excellence of the rack and pinion steering, the delightfully taut body, courtesy of that hefty chassis, and the modern feel of the coil-sprung independent front suspension translated into pure pleasure.

Only the way the body leaned under modest cornering forces served to remind me that I was driving a car originally



This 1951 Y-type was driven in the 1953 Monte Carlo Rally by Gregor Grant and George Philips

designed in 1939 — the year of my own entry into this world. Having said that, it was no more unnerving than the body roll you'd find in a ten-year-old Range Rover.

For the first few miles there had been some engine hesitation, possibly through recent lack of use, but after that it cleared and ran without fault. The brakes were not too good, either, for the first few miles, after which they sorted themselves out and behaved well. MG were great believers in hydraulic systems, and the Lockheed arrangement on the Y-type was more than a match for the 42-year-old car I was driving.

The MG saloon was particularly well equipped, and I was reminded of this by the eight controls positioned mainly around the instrument panel directly in front of the steering wheel. Among the knobs are switches for panel lights, fog lamp and individual windscreen wipers, plus a handle for cranking open the screen.

There are matching eight-sided dials on opposite sides of the steering column. One contains an ammeter, oil pressure gauge and fuel gauge, and the other is the speedometer. However, there's nothing to

‘I felt I was driving a sports car with saloon bodywork’

tell you your water temperature.

Although the fuel tank contains only eight gallons, the Y-type saloon is good for anything up to 35mpg in normal use, so the car's range is well within the standards of its day. The 280 miles this can provide would not be at all arduous if completed non-stop, which certainly cannot be said for

many other cars produced around 1950. In some of them, a hundred miles without a break was too much!

With its side-hinged bonnet, access to the uncluttered engine bay is good, making routine servicing quite uncomplicated. Inside the bonnet, too, is the Smiths Jackall hydraulic jacking system which operates on all four wheels. Punctures are no problem when your car is fitted with one of these.

But you don't think about punctures and maintenance when you own an MG Y-type. You get out and enjoy your driving, savouring the time capsule qualities of a car dating back to the thirties, made into the fifties and which turns heads at every corner.

*Thanks to Spinning Wheel Car Centre, Sheffield Road, Sheelbridge, Chesterfield (01246-451772) for the loan of the MG featured here. It is being offered for sale for £6750.*

### SPECIFICATION

#### MG Y-type

<b>Produced</b>	1947 – '53
<b>Engine</b>	4-cyl, ohv
<b>Capacity</b>	1250cc
<b>Bore/stroke</b>	66.5 x 90mm
<b>Max power</b>	46bhp @ 4800rpm
<b>Max torque</b>	63.75lb ft @ 2600rpm
<b>Transmission</b>	4-speed manual
<b>Suspension</b>	Front: coil springs, Wishbones Rear: leaf springs
<b>Brakes</b>	Drums
<b>Length</b>	13ft 5.25in
<b>Width</b>	4ft 10.25in

### SPECIALISTS

There are a great many MG specialists, but of particular interest to Y-type owners is **NTG Motor Services**, 282-284 Bramford Road, Ipswich, Suffolk IP2 4AY (01473 211240). The company has been involved in Y-types for 30 years and is able to supply a great many parts for the cars, ranging from the rubber grommet for the petrol filler to repair panels.



Hodder goes back to the fifties for an MG picnic

## *Y-type quotations*

*After only a few miles at the wheel of the car, one becomes deeply impressed by the retention of many old fashioned virtues which have in large measure been washed into the sea f time by the inexorable flow of progress*

**- The Motor, Sept 12, 1951**

*It represents the style of car which can still be regarded as typically British, that is, before fashion dictated slab isdes, faired in lamps and radiators disguised to vanishing point.*

**- The Autocar, Aug 3, 1951**

*Again postulating free use of the gear box, really high average speeds can be accomplished and, even when driven very hard, the fuel consumption falls below 30mpg by a decimal point only.*

**- The Motor, Sept 12 1951**

*No hard words can be levelled against the braking system; in fact, the reverse, for these Lockheed hydraulics do their job extremely well without needing heavy pedal pressure, and have the high asset that on the great proportion of braking occasions there is ample margin.*

**- The Autocar, Aug 3, 1951**



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