

MG Y Series

1947-1953

By Robert Penn Bradly

A lovely pre-war design later to be a post-war small sedan, this vehicle was a splendid performer amongst small cars of the era. It is a worthy model for the prestige MG badge. The Y Series consists of three variants, YA, a four door sedan, YB, a 4 door sedan (an improved model), and the YT, a two door convertible. These cars were built from 1947 to 1953 and were finally replaced by an entirely new model being the lovely ZA Magnette Sedan.

I had the pleasure of having a detailed look at and drive in a YA sedan, chassis #Y12924 owned by Mike Stearn of Macarthur, ACT, being a fresh restoration to a high standard and one of only two on the road in Canberra in June 2012. However, thankfully there are others in Canberra presently under restoration as I write.

The MG Y Series followed much the same manufacturing path as the 10hp Lanchester, being designed and largely tooled up by 1939, but never produced as WWII halted all production and new models were to become only a dream until the conclusion of hostilities in 1945.

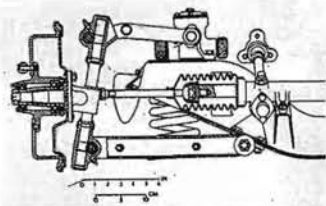
Once the car makers reverted to car production following their wartime engineering projects, it was a case of let us see what we can rescue, update and manufacture quickly. This quest saw a number of re-worked pre-war cars being made and those fresh designs that had been 'mothballed' for the duration of the war were introduced quickly to fill a gap when new cars were in very short supply. The world's car makers grabbed any opportunity to re-start their car production business with whatever they had 'salted away'.

The Y Type series just begged for attention. It was, like all MG cars, created by an arm of the Nuffield/Morris empire known as Morris Garages, (hence the MG nomenclature).

Whilst the Y Type series was essentially a very late pre-war WWII design, many of the engineering lessons coming out of other war time production caused a lot of fresh thinking and improvements. In the case of the subject model it was extensively upgraded from the pre-war design, by the inclusion of independent front suspension with coil springs and wishbone support arms, a prime example of the post-war thinking.

Production levels were relatively low due to factory capacity with the following production levels being achieved:

YA Series, 6,158 (1947 to 1951).



TOP LEFT. The independent front end with rack and pinion steering and forward mounted sway bar.

ABOVE LEFT. The engine bay is tight even with the small 4 cylinder engine, but maintenance is easily within reach. ABOVE RIGHT. Body painted with panels ready to be fitted. Extra care needs to be taken if you choose to restore and paint a car this way.

YB Series, 1,301 (1952 and 1953).

YT Series, 877 (1948 to 1950).

These cars were extremely well made, but far from cheap relative to the general run of the mill cars then on offer. The Y Type was a prestige car aimed well into the upper end of the market. This was relatively unusual, as high quality cars tended to be seen as luxury offerings, with small cars more often found at the economy end. The Y Type changed this perception, as here was a small car with big car panache aimed at the quality level marketplace. Lanchester (LD10) was probably the only other UK-built small car that trod much the same path attracting well off customers in most cases.

Whilst the basic car was developed from both the pre-war Morris 8s and 10s, the Y Type's heritage shows little of its more humble origins. In 1951 a new MG 1.5 litre Y sedan was priced at £950, which was £110 more than a Holden. Some of its new features were as follows.

BODY WORK

All the front body panels and grille. Much of the main boot pressing at the rear. Quality walnut dash and door garnish rails. Much more elaborate upholstery/trim in leather. Quality carpets. More elaborate rear mudguards. Elaborate instrumentation.

MECHANICAL ITEMS

The use of the 1250cc XPAG version MG engine, which is exceptionally well-regarded even today. Fully independent front suspension. Better brakes, still drum type, as disc brakes were yet to be found on production cars until after the Y Type production ceased. Rack and pinion steering. MG were early adopters of this design, which is now close to a universal system today. Remember these MGs were introduced in 1947. Note that the mechanical components were often sourced

from the most successful TD Series MG Sports car.

DEVELOPMENT

The outcome of this pre and post-war mixture was a splendid upper market small car with surprising performance, especially so regarded in 1947. Here was a car that was virtually vice free, tough, fun to drive, yet quite small in size (still only just a four seater).

The Saloon versions lasted from 1947 until 1952-1953 with only one minor upgrading en route, while the YT Tourer (which was more like what we would call a convertible today), did not prove all that popular. No doubt MG buyers of yesteryear, if they wanted an open car, selected either a TC or a TD true sports car from MG. Thus, today the YT versions are surprisingly rare amongst the MG fraternity.

My first encounter with a Y Type MG was around 1960, when I was lent one for about a month. It just enchanted me and I told myself I must have one some day. Whilst I have had a later ZB Magnette and an ultra late MG-B (USA specification type) that is as close as I came to owning a lovely little Y Type. However, it is still on my to have one day list. Sadly, one's retirement income seems to largely prohibit such purchases these days.

The Y Type MGs were available from a number of state based and regional dealers, but in spite of their Morris origins not all Morris dealers got to sell them. With the merger of Nuffield Corporation (Morris, Wolseley, Riley, MG, etc) and the Austin Company, around 1952, the MG sales network was in semi-limbo for a time, as there were many corporate structural changes that had to be made with the advent of the combined corporation then known as BMC (British Motor Corporation). This meant that one could say that the Board's eye slid away from an MG focus for a time, which coincided with

the end of the Y Types production. The ZA Magnette, which followed, was a fine car, but not a stand-alone design, the 4/44 Wolseley being more or less a clone.

One of the somewhat quaint outcomes of the model sharing of the MG Magnette and the Wolseley 4/44 was that the MG got a regular BMC ex-Austin designed engine, whilst the Wolseley got the faithful MG engine of the XPAG family. Worse still, was that the new 4/44 Wolseley clone got a shocking version of a column shift gearbox, which somewhat ruined the panache of the faithful MG engine.

I have been unable to establish why more use of the XPAG engine was not made by the new BMC group. I hasten to add that the ZA Magnette that followed the Y Type was a particularly good car as such. I very much enjoyed the one I owned many years ago.

THREE VERSIONS

Whilst there were three versions, in fact it was more like one car available with two styles of bodies and another of the same basic design, but with a number of minor upgrades.

Legend states that only the YA and YT Series were actually marketed in Australia and that the revised YB was not imported. I have this information from a very informative MG source, but I find it surprising, as over the years I have seen quite a number of YB models, which can easily be distinguished by the MG octagon hub cap badge and the bumper bar over-riders. Clearly if the above information is correct, which I believe to be true, there must have been quite a significant number of private imports, most of course being as used cars. Another possibility is that quite a number of Australians visiting the UK chose a new MG sedan for their tripping around the UK and then brought it home with them. This like Rover, P6 and P6B seems a likely reason for the arrival of some of the YB Series. I have little doubt that due to the lovely nature of a Y Series MG, many tourists would have fallen in love with a Y Series car. It is worth remembering that in the later 1940s and 1950s most Australians who holidayed in the UK spent about four to five weeks on a ship to get there, then often spent a month or more touring in the UK and continental Europe.

Production from the MG car plant at Abingdon in England was always relatively low, as it was the company's specialist division and not a mass producer. Just 8,336 Y Series cars in total were built, an average production of only 1,190 a year. This is interesting in itself, as Australia received quite a lot of these vehicles (total not documented) and the public would naturally have thought that the factory's output would have been well above the average of less than 1,200 of these models per year. This certainly surprised the writer, as my guess for Australia's consumption would have been around 2,000 in toto, perhaps I was

just an MG watcher.

My research from the Bureau of Census & Statistics shows that, registered in New South Wales in 1962 were 1,303 MGs of all types from 1947 to 1952, this would include the Y Type sedan and its convertible/tourer version. That figure does not cover written-off or unregistered cars, which by 1962 would perhaps add as many as 500 to the above total.

In an effort to arrive at some form of semi-realistic statistics, may I indulge you in a series of assumptions in an effort to extrapolate the possible Australian MG consumption figures.

1. The Census of Motor Vehicles in 1962 shows that there were 1,303 MG cars on the road out of the era 1947-1952, being the period for Y Type production in New South Wales.

2. In all probability the NSW total could be grossed up if one assumes the NSW total is a basic starting figure at say 30% of our national total.

3. Assuming you use the suggested total above, Australia's MG survivals out of the 1947-1952 era would total around 4,000 to 5,000, say 4,500.

4. As the total was only of registered cars, one needs to add for write-off and unregistered cars, of perhaps a total of say 500 is suggested as the total in '3' above, thus add say 500.

5. Let us make another assumption on the already assumed all up national total of imports of say 5,000 MGs, it is probable to further assume that say 25% were the Y Type family of models, making a total all-up of Y Type receivables of 1,250. Thus, my guesstimate was somewhat generous.

Whilst there are still a lot of the 'square rigger' era MGs of the TC and TD sports cars surviving, these lovely Y Types seem to have floated out of the MG enthusiasts' focus. I now suspect that Australia's surviving examples would be unlikely to exceed 100 on the road, plus say another 150 either under restoration or awaiting a good home, like a stray cat.

Enthusiasts, it is now a great time to avail yourselves of the opportunity to buy one for restoration, whilst some are still available. Many of those awaiting attention are presently held by elderly owners, who are unable to complete or start a restoration due to older age and/or medical issues. Thus, jump to it while you can!!

CONFIGURATION

These cars were very conventional in layout and typical for the era and in use by very many manufacturers for at least 50 years.

The engine was front-mounted in a north/south position. Behind the engine was a 7.25 inch Borg and Beck dry clutch, coupled to an MG built 4 speed gearbox (synchromesh selection on top 3 ratios, open final drive to a spiral bevel differential assembly driving the rear wheels only).

TRANSMISSION

Gear Ratios Overall. Top (4th) gear 5.143:1. 3rd gear 7.121:1. 2nd gear 10.646:1. 1st gear 18.00:1.

Reverse gear 18.00:1.

DIFFERENTIAL GEARING

7 teeth to 36 teeth.

SUSPENSION

Front Independent by coil springs and conventional 'A' shaped support wishbones.

Rear Half elliptical leaf type springs.

BRAKES

All hydraulic by Lockheed running in 9 inch (226.8mm) cast iron drums. Each brake having one leading and one trailing shoe (disc brakes had not been invented in 1947).

BASIC SPECIFICATIONS

Engine by MG (XPAG Series as on most Y Types built), being an overhead valve push rod design. Bore 66.5 mm. Stroke 90mm. Compression Ratio 7.2 or 7.4:1. Max. Power 46 BHP @ 4800 rpm. Configuration In-line 4 cylinder steel block and head. Capacity 1.25 litres, 4 cylinders. Fuel Supply from rear mounted petrol tank 1 x SU type L electric. Aspiration 1 x SU carburettor type H2, size 1.25 inches, single throat. Note. The TD sports models were fitted with twin SU carburettors and several Y Types are today running the twin system to add a little sparkle as in the subject car.

WHEELS AND TYRES

Diameter 16 inch. Tyres 500/525 x 16.

STEERING

Rack and pinion type, 2.625 turns lock to lock.

DIMENSIONS

Overall Width 4ft 10 1/4 inches (1.32 metres approx).

Overall Length 13ft 5 inches (4.09 metres approx).

Overall Height 4ft 9 inches (1.45 metres approx).

Wheelbase 8ft 3 inches.

TRACK

Front 3ft 11 3/4 inches (1.21 metres approx). Rear 4ft 2 inches (1.23 metres approx). Ground Clearance 6 inches (152mm approx). Mass 19 1/2cwt (just less than 1 tonne).

ELECTRICAL SYSTEM BY LUCAS

Out of their quality era, a 12 volt system. These cars still were equipped with semaphore trafficators, but today most are equipped with winking turn indicators for safety in today's operating environment.

PERFORMANCE

The little 1 1/4 litre engine did a splendid job in these cars, they were quiet and zippy for their era. The top speed was about 72mph, which is around 116km/h, thus they will travel at the 110km/h highway maximum limited speed.

SPEEDS IN OTHER GEARS

1st 24mph (38.6km/h). 2nd 40mph (63.4km/h). 3rd. 60.5mph (97.37km/h).

ACCELERATION

0 to 50mph 16.9 seconds (about 80km/h). 0 to 60mph 28.2 seconds (about 96km/h).

Note. These are historic test figures on the then standard 'pool' low octane petrol. Modern petrol does significantly improve these figures.

FUEL CONSUMPTION

29 to 37mpg.

BODYWORK

These very pretty small cars were designed by Gerald Palmer, being pressed steel with coachbuilt doors. Some panels were made by Nuffield Metal Products, part of the MG family, whilst others were made in house at Abingdon.

CHANGES EN ROUTE

There was very little changed during the Y Type production run and even when the YB came on stream the changes were very minimal. These included a larger diameter clutch plate now 8 inches (203mm) and a very marginally revised XPAG engine for

the Series 2 models. These were changed in 1951 at the tail end of the YA Series and standardised for the YB (or final) Series.

When the YT (convertible) was introduced, the polished wood dash was deleted and a tachometer was fitted. The dash on these models was quite similar to those on the TC Sports.

FIT OUT

These MGs were beautifully fitted out throughout and were definitely aimed at the more affluent owner market. They had leather seats, polished ornamental woodwork, quality carpets, etc.

There were also creature comforts such as wind-out windscreens, in-built hydraulic jacks operated from under the bonnet, very nice door furniture and so on. In true MG style the octagon shape was much re-used from the car's marque badge, with items such as the bonnet catches, radiator cap (yes, a genuine usable one on top of the grille), the instrument bezels and so on.

Overall this was a very nice package.

Being a small car, ingress was not always easy, but the front seat passengers benefited from having rear hung doors making it relatively easy to swing one's legs in and out.

The boot had a drop down lid, which could also be used to carry extra luggage, much like the tailgate on a traditional utility. The boot's capacity was surprisingly good, especially for a small car of the era. Beneath the boot floor was a secondary compartment, which carried the spare wheel, brace, etc.

The engine bay makes working on the engine an easy task, as the side panels are attached to the bonnet's top panels, which when opened, makes the heart of the car easy to see and service. The actual compartment was also nicely finished off.

THE SUBJECT CAR

It was indeed fortunate to be offered access to a splendid restoration by Mike Stearn of Canberra. Mike acquired the car in 1997 after it had been stored untouched in a serious state of being dismantled. It took Mike about three years to actually do a ground up restoration of a high standard, where every nook and cranny was investigated and either spruced up or restored depending on its condition. Mike, a qualified motor engineer now retired, was able to do most of the work himself, including panel beating and rust repairs. The color scheme was changed from black to the two-tone green and black. The interior was beautifully upholstered in a soft green leather.

Whilst Mike was doing the restoration he managed to acquire the twin SU carburettor kit from a wrecked MG TD. This of course bolted straight on and improved the performance markedly. He also got rid of the horrible 'pot scrubber' air cleaner, replacing it

with an oil bath unit, ex a later, very different unit from a ZA Magnette. This item looks rather 'Holdenish' to coin a term and was no doubt an AC brand, being from a General Motors subsidiary. These oil bath air cleaners do a splendid job, after the almost ineffective pot scrubber type, whose almost only use is to keep out low flying aircraft!

The subject car was built in 1949, being chassis number #Y/2924 and has engine #XPAG/SC/X12798 and body #MG 2367/2400. Very little is known about the car since its arrival as a new car aboard the Shaw Savill liner 'Corinthic', which regularly carried passengers and cargo from England (Port of London) to Australia and New Zealand, whose cruising speed was just 17 knots. Mike acquired the car in Kambah, ACT, and it is thought to be one of only two currently gracing Canberra's roads.

ON THE ROAD IN THE Y TYPE

It was almost 40 years in Sydney, since I tried a Y Type, which was also a YA early Series. That car was zippy and fun, endearing itself to me at the time.

I was not disappointed with the subject car, as it went so well bringing all the nice memories of yesteryear back to haunt me.

These cars as outlined earlier, are a quaint mixture of pre and post-war thinking. The addition of an outstanding independent front suspension system, just made the car ride so well. However, I did look at those period 'state-of-the-non-art' lever action shock absorbers, although after re-conditioning they worked well. I have never known any longevity of use and whilst tubular shock absorbers are not original, I would have adapted a set for the subject car.

The ride was remarkably good, it handled well, but exhibited more body-roll than I could remember. It did however, exhibit what MGs are famous for, and that is outstanding road holding. The car also had a good set of brakes and light steering. Not a rattle was to be heard, indicating the painstaking quality of Mike's restoration.

A LITTLE ABOUT THE HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL XPAG SERIES OF MG ENGINES

The engine started as a Nuffield X Series used in Morris cars, developing just 37.2bhp, it also in its original form was used by Nuffield's Wolseley division.

The engine was developed and after the war it was fitted, virtually unchanged, to the MG TC Sports cars.

The engine's XPAG somewhat quaint prefix number code stands for:

X, the actual series nomenclature.

P, push rod operated overhead valves.

A, the RAC rated horsepower of the engine known as the 11hp, but was in fact 10.97hp and the size of 1250cc.

G, used in MG cars.

The crankshaft is a three bearing unit that is fully counter balanced, running on slipper bearing shells.

The pistons were made of Aerolite aluminium alloy, each having two compression rings and one scraper ring. Lubrication was by a gear driven oil pump and circulated via an oil filter, having a throw away cartridge. Strangely, all the threads for the engine's nuts were metric, but had Whitworth spanner head sizes.

Most of us would know, many of these engines were heavily worked over and tuned for racing, even with much hotting-up they stood such use splendidly.

The \$64,000 question is why the new ZA Series MG Magnette was not fitted with these engines, yet the Wolseley 4/44, a nearly identical overall car, was. I will leave you to ponder this quaintness.

A BIG THANK YOU

Before closing the story, I wish to pay a special thank you to Mike Stearn, who has helped very considerably with this story. He has agreed to speak on the phone with other Y Type owners, or intending purchasers, on 02 6291 6030, which is a very nice gesture, and shows once again, the MG enthusiasts' fellowship.

I must also acknowledge the source of much of the technical material contained in this story, having been researched by David Lawrence, the world's Y Type expert, who was the writer of a fantastic book called 'Let There Be Ys', which is a must have if you own or plan to buy one of these cars. 📖

COLOR PAGE CAPTIONS

1. The late 1940s saw the last of many British cars that were designed 10 years earlier. New designs were held up because of WWII.
2. A full-page color ad for the MG, October 29, 1948, in UK Autocar magazine. It showed where the MG range would be located at the big Earls Court Show.
3. The RH side of the engine. SU carburettors on the small 1.25 litre engine, comp ratio is 7.2 or 7.4 to 1, 46hp at 4800rpm. The engine is similar to that used in many Morris cars of the period. Note the electric wiper unit on the firewall, which operates by a back and forth notched cable at the wiper pivot.
4. An attractive walnut dash panel and window trims with sprung steering wheel and a nice set of gauges. This gives the car a British sports car feel. Bucket seats were typical of British cars of this period. Note the door pockets.
5. From the rear, the boot lid folds down like a table or bench, which enables you to carry objects that would not fit in a conventional opening lid hinged at the top. It also serves as a good picnic table.
6. A tip when reassembling a car is to leave off the sheetmetal that gets in the way. Here you can do your wiring without scratching the new paintwork.



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2.

THE MG CAR COMPANY LTD., BRINGDON-ON-THAMES
(Formerly: Morris - Packard Motors Ltd., Coventry, and ex. Packard, London, W.)



3.



4.



5.



6.