



ME AND MY MG

Frank Vautier and his Y Type
'The Golden Rivet'



Before the first race 1971



Ilford 1972-The convoy to Wiscombe

When I took my Standard Eight down for its annual MOT failure, there on the ramps was a Sun Bronze YA. £25 changed hands and it was mine. "Come for a ride," I said to my brother, and off we went for about two miles when it stopped. I should say at this point I knew nothing about engines. I waggled every wire in sight and thumped the carb. The car started and with supreme if misguided confidence I decided to carry on further from home. Shortly it stopped again the same treatment failed so my brother set off for home to get some tools. Whilst awaiting his return I idly pulled the starter – the engine ran and continued all the way home. I subsequently found a ring of rust around the carb needle that was sliding at random down to block the jet. Thus started my love affair with the YA.

I decided to rebuild the engine since the garage man had said it was "a bit endy". Down to the library for several books on the theory of the internal combustion engine followed by the purchase of a copy of Blower's workshop manual. Negotiations with my wife allowed that two inches of newspaper on the dining room table was adequate protection and thus the engine was wheeled in on a wheelbarrow to commence the surgery. In those days I could lift an XPAG without mechanical assistance.

Running in was a chore that did not fit with my personality, but a map and pair of compasses showed that a return trip to Longleat house would take the required 500 miles, and off we went. Amazingly the car ran there and back without any problems.

Thereafter the daily commute to Dagenham and a monthly outing to the Danbury Natter filled its duties until someone said, "Let's go racing". Six Natter cars were entered for Silverstone 1972 and I called round to see Dick

Jacobs at the Mill Garage to ask for advice. He was very supportive and told me that when the XPAG was really wound up on the bench you could see flames from the head gasket. I'm still not sure if he was joking. He suggested several suspension and engine mods but couldn't offer much in the way of racing lines because when he raced the YB the Silverstone layout was very different – but how hard could it be, I thought.

So the first race with single H4 carb, opened out manifold, no seatbelts and a



MG Silverstone 1997 couldn't quite out corner Paddy Wilmer. Photo: Richard Wright

nervous driver clad in jeans, sweater and crash helmet, led to a special award in the high speed trial and a distant last in the T type race. The bug bit and led to entries at all the T Register rounds including sprints and hill climbs. It also led to a large overdraft that the friendly local bank manager allowed to be repaid over each winter. Even so it seemed to be more affordable then than now.

The car came to be called the Golden Rivet at a sprint in Duxford when the driver's seat frame collapsed and I used a drill and pop rivets to effect repairs. Scrutineering there was a bit relaxed; if you could lock the wheels – you passed!

Glyn Guisti was compsec in those days and in his hilarious newsletter christened me Super Y, undoubtedly for my super driving technique, although to be fair Woodcote taken fast in a YA inevitably ended up with a rear wheel several inches in the air. The commentator Barry Simons loved it though and when I disclosed on the commentators form that we drove to and from the meetings and it was our (only) everyday car, referred to us in commentary as "the fastest pound



Pushing the Y Type hard during a Snetterton race meeting. Photo: Steve Jones

of Brussels sprouts". I also happened to mention that I was the founder member of the Barry Simons fan club (omitting to mention I was the only member) which I am sure led to the disproportionate amount of commentary we got.

Over the next 20 years the car was steadily developed whilst retaining the steel bodywork to become competitive with at least the back half of the T race grid; and I learnt how strong the body shell was with a roll at Wiscombe Sawbench corner and another much later at Silverstone entry to Luffield. The latter was whilst attempting to overtake Paddy Wilmer's full race TA around the outside, and the Wiscombe roll by deciding I could take the corner flat out in second gear – I couldn't. There was one other off and that was at Bugatti Prescott hill climb. The lads told me the semicircle corner was a semicircle and I entered accordingly, only to find a sharp bit in the middle. I left the track and plunged down the steep grassy bank towards the wood below. Luckily I picked up a fence that stopped the car about half way down. After the marshals cut away the wire I was able to carry on to the bottom and rejoin the paddock. The moral, never believe your mates.

In its final incarnation the car was enormously powerful with a J100 Marshall supercharger blowing through an intercooler and through the carb; it could pull onto the trailer on tickover and rev in excess of 7000rpm all on a 40thou

under crank. It retained its tractability though and also served as a road car, the only downside being the howl from the supercharger when it was wound up.

After the first roll I returned the body to its correct shape by raising it on its hydraulic jacking system, building a bed frame inside and packing with wood before releasing the jacks - the car's weight did the rest. The Silverstone roll was a bit more dramatic, allowing six shots to be taken during its progress (one of which made the cover of Autosport). On this occasion there was some lozenging and I had to borrow some body jacks from the local garage and with the exception of the gutters managed to get its shape back. The fact that all the doors remained operable testifies to the strength of the body. I never did finish the respray though because a couple of weeks later I raced at Bentley Drivers Silverstone and didn't have time so we raced in a mixture of primers and part original top coat.

We then moved to Wales, I retired from work and the car was stored in our barn until last year when I decided I should sell it. It had stored remarkably well and needed only refurb of the brakes hydraulics and the fuel system to run and pass its MOT. It still needs completion of the respray though!



Frank and the new engine 134bhp fitted to the Golden Rivet



SPONSORED BY MEGUIARS