

Baja Bunny

BY JEFF HOLIFIELD

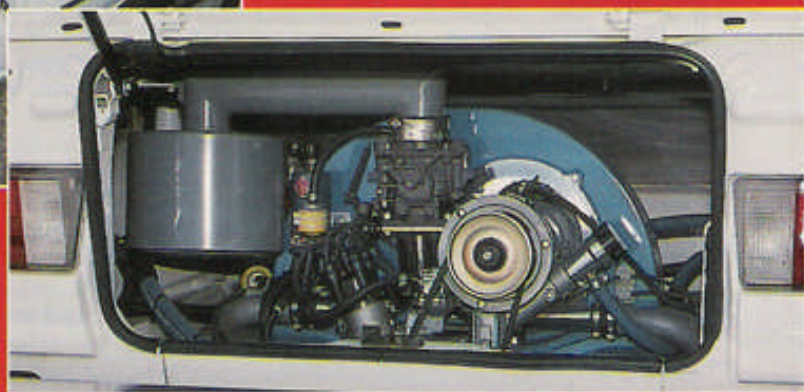
This is one Rabbit that makes all others pink with envy!



In case you have never personally had the pleasure of finding a wiring short under the dash of a late-model VW, let us just say ... it's not worth it! One of many people who agree with us on this point is Bill Mathes, of Capistrano Beach, California.

After his wife's 1981 convertible Rabbit's fuse box and wire loom self-destructed (due to water damage), Bill opted not to spend the enormous amount of time, or money, to fix it. An off-road enthusiast who is actively involved in racing, he had always believed a Rabbit 'vert would

Completely wild, car owner Bill Mathes teamed up with the crew at Tubular Concepts to create an off-road buggy that features a unique blend of early and late model VW technology. Motivation comes from a German Auto-built 1915cc engine that resides in what was once the trunk. Note how nicely the upright engine fits, almost looks factory. The top panel over the engine bay is easily removed for maintenance.

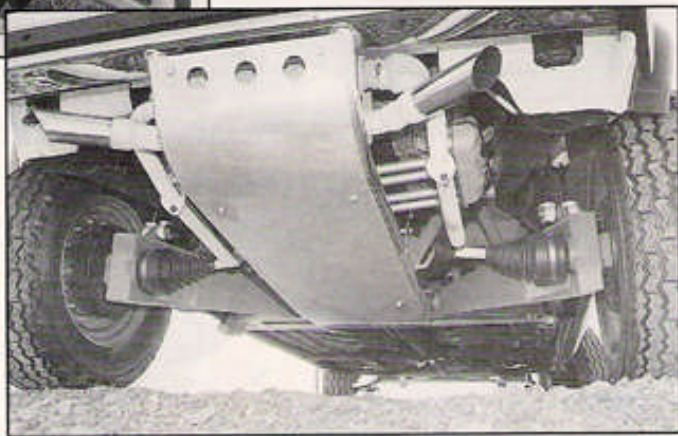
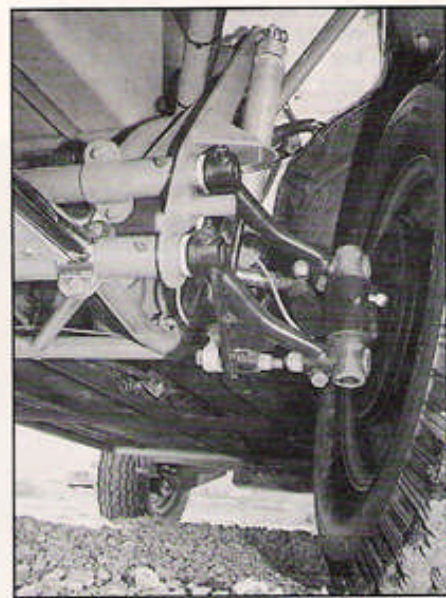




ABOVE, the dash is stock Rabbit except for a few slight modifications here and there. Note the Bug shifter and CB radio mounted to the tunnel. RIGHT, it's a whole new world under the front hood! 16-gallon fuel cell and ice chest fit neatly where the old powerplant once resided. Check out the PIAA driving lights behind the stock, late model Cabriolet front grille.



LEFT, linkpin heavy-duty front beam features stock arms, Combo spindles, and Fox shocks for 7-1/2 inches of travel. RIGHT, custom skid plate protects the engine and Bus IRS trans. Rear 3x3 arms work with 930 CVs, SAW axles, and twin KYB shocks.



ENGINE/Type 1, 1600

DISPLACEMENT/1915cc
 BUILDER/German Auto,
 Santa Fe Springs, CA
 CRANK/VW 69mm, counterweighted
 RODS/VW, rebuilt
 PISTONS/Cima 94mm
 RINGS/Total Seal
 CAM/German Auto off-road grind
 HEADS/VW dual port, ported
 and polished
 VALVE SIZE & MAKE/40mm x
 35.5mm, Manley, stainless steel
 COMPRESSION RATIO/8.2:1
 IGNITION/Bosch 009 distributor,
 Compu-Fire module, Bosch coil
 SPARK PLUGS/Bosch W7DC
 CARBURETION/single Zenith 32 NDIX
 EXHAUST SYSTEM/modified Monza
 FLYWHEEL/VW 200mm, 13.5-lbs.
 CLUTCH/Kennedy 1700-lb., 4-puck disc
 OIL PUMP/VW
 OIL COOLER/stock doghouse
 OIL/Valvoline 20W-50
 SPECIAL MODIFICATIONS/full-flow oil
 system, custom air cleaner, SACO
 crankcase breather

TRANSAXLE/VW Type 2

BUILDER/J&G Transmissions,
 Placentia, CA
 RING & PINION/4.86:1
 GEAR RATIOS/3.78 1st, 2.06 2nd,
 1.26 3rd, 0.88 4th
 SPECIAL MODIFICATIONS/4-spider
 diff, welded 3rd & 4th, hardened
 keys, reinforced shift linkage,
 custom 930 CV flanges

make a great base for an open-top desert cruiser. After lots of design time, and careful measuring, Bill came to the conclusion that the dead Rabbit could, indeed, become his dream Baja bunny!

Bill's innovative approach to "have the best of both worlds" required 1-1/2 years of hard work to complete. Much of that work took place at Tubular Concepts, in Buena Park, California. After the original powertrain, suspension, and much of the lower sheet metal had been removed, Dan Mathews and crew created a sub-chassis (from 1-1/2 x .095-inch and 1 x .065-inch wall tubing) on which new suspension, powertrain, and roll cage were mounted.

The front suspension features a

Weekend Warrior-type front beam, VW link pin trailing arms, Wright combo spindles, and a single Fox shock for a total of 7-1/2 inches of wheel travel. The rear is built around a custom IRS torsion housing, and consists of 28mm Sway-A-Way torsion bars and spring plates, boxed 3x3 rear trailing arms, and dual KYB shocks. When used with 930 CV joints, custom SAW axles, modified VW stub axles, and Type 2 gear-box, the rear wheel travel is 8-1/2 inches.

As noted, Baja Bunny runs a Type 2 transaxle. The '73 bus box was fully beefed-up by J&G Transmissions to handle the rigors of off-road abuse, as well as the increased power output of the German Auto-built 1915cc Type 1 powerplant.

Tricks include modified heads, custom grind cam, one-off air cleaner, and a modified Monza exhaust.

The Bunny's interior was trimmed with custom gray carpeting, four Beard Super Seats buckets, Deist 5-point harnesses, and stock white headliner. B&M Auto Body, of San Clemente, CA, straightened the body of door dings, and sprayed the tough coats of white Imron paint. Bill finished his Rabbit with Mickey Thompson tires wrapped around polished SACO aluminum rims, and a pair of CJ-5 rear wheel flares.

After seeing this awesome creation soak up the Nevada desert at warp speeds, we can understand how the Baja Bunny can make the Energizer bunny so pink with envy. ●