

Post Office Cabrio?

I HAVE RECENTLY REJOINED THE VW FRATERNITY AFTER an extended absence of some 8 years. This absence was not of my making but rather my wife's, who did not like Volkswagens feeling they were heavy to drive and costly to repair. After a divorce, though, I decided to return to Volkswagen - once bitten by the Bug...

I knew the car I really wanted would have been a Karmann 1303 Beetle Cabriolet, but this wouldn't be an ideal daily driver - and a good stock Beetle cabrio should be loved and garaged through inclement weather! Anyway, while enjoying a pint at my local, a friend of mine pulled up on the car park in a 1990 Golf convertible. It was beautiful.

After chatting with her and sitting in it, I started to imagine myself on those long summer evenings driving down country lanes with the hood down... that was it - I was bitten. I had to have one and for the first time in my life since I was a teenager, I was in a position to do something about it.

I did the usual research via the internet and looked up the values that similar cars were fetching. Two great sites I found were Autotrader and Ebay. The price I expected to pay for a reasonable solid average mileage model, of below 100k, would be in the region of £2,000 - £3,000. So I set about finding a low interest rate loan. Once again the internet came up trumps, and I opted for a low-rate loan with Smile.

My friends down at the local pub knew about my desire to own a VW Cabrio and, to my surprise, one of them actually owned one - but he wasn't sure if he wanted to part with it. It turned out that the car had been bought six years ago



for his wife and in that time it had only covered 12,000 miles (having 82,000 miles on the clock).

For the first four years my friend's wife had used to deliver the post (she is a postie...). After all the car was post office red! So it got very little use, only being driven round the village. Later they decided to replace it with a more practical Land Rover as after she also owned horses and a Golf Cabrio is not exactly built for lugging bales of hay and fodder around!

The Cabrio was then given to another friend to organise selling it. It then ended up parked on his drive for nearly two years and, as it was out in all weathers and parked next to a hedge, one side

of the car and the hood got covered in green mould.

After one sunny Sunday afternoon in my local (can you spot the theme, here?) I arranged to view the car. This was in mid July and the weather was gorgeous - perfect Cabrio conditions. Prior to my visit, the Golf had been treated to a long overdue bath. Arriving at the drive, a shiny red Mk 1 GTI Cabrio greeted me. It was on a G-plate and had a bright red hood and a matching interior. Well, what can I say? It was love at first sight. A new battery had been installed and the car started first time.

That evening down my local (!), I spoke to the owner who offered me the car for £1,800. After a few

more pints this went up to £1850 (you seem to have failed to grasp the concept of haggling, Andy! - Ed) as he remembered he needed to recover the cost for the new battery.

So a deal was struck and a local mobile mechanic was charged with sorting the car out for an MoT. It so happens that this mechanic's driveway was also where the Cabrio had been sleeping for 18 months!

A week later and the Golf was sitting on my drive having sailed through the MoT with only minor electrical faults. I spent an enjoyable weekend cleaning and polishing my new love.

One thing the mechanic had cautioned me on was that although the bodywork was pristine and engine mechanically sound, as the car had stood for 18 months it might well suffer a few electrical problems. They weren't kidding!

Thankfully, I had anticipated that a few pounds extra would need to be spent on the car, so I'd opted for a loan greater than the car's value.

It was just as well I had - by the end of the first week the horn had stopped working, and the alternator had given up the ghost! Shane and Richard the mobile mechanics once again came to my rescue and reconditioned the alternator, uprating it from 55amps to 75amps.

I then booked the car in at a local garage, PW Europarts at Colley Gate Halesowen, to replace the fuel filler neck which had gone rusty - a common fault on the Mk 1, apparently.

On the way to the garage, we had the first rainstorm in months and, guess what, the wipers refused to budge! I spent the

YOUR SHOUT

whole journey with my head out the window to navigate, so I arrived at the garage slightly damp!

The fuel filler neck was promptly replaced and a missing retaining clamp for the battery was located.

For the electrics, I was pointed in the direction of a local auto electrical expert and took the car to him two days later. This is where the problems really started!

Not being very mechanically minded, I really am at the mercy of garages. On my first visit to this electrical 'expert', the horn was repaired, but the wipers and heater still needed to be sorted out. I was told that the fusebox had been taken out, stripped and cleaned, and then refitted. I was curious why they hadn't simply replaced it with a new item, but they pointed out that Mk 1 fusebox's were hard to come by and that would be a last option.

So I parted with my £95 and on departure was reminded that the rocker cover gasket was blocked, and timing belt needed replacing - so a new appointment was scheduled.

My second visit cost me £118 and although the work seemed to have been done, I was puzzled why the windscreen wipers and heater still worked while the ignition was off.

Another week went by and Shane and Richard serviced the car, replacing all the belts - apart from the timing belt which was new - and carried out an oil change. New spark plugs that fired three sparks instead of one were fitted and a few other tweaks carried out. The only fault being both rear springs were broken and required immediate replacement. At last I felt I was getting somewhere. Or was I?!

Several weeks later the car refused to start. At my local my friend, who I had bought the car off, said the fuel relay switch had always been temperamental and spraying WD40 on to it would alleviate the problem. Well it did for 24 hours, but then the windscreen wipers, heater and fuel relay all failed. Thankfully this happened on



my driveway and not out in the wilds of Staffordshire, which I have to cross daily to and from work.

So the ever-trusty mobile mechanics were called and Shane and Rich examined the fusebox. They reckoned that it would be better to replace it rather than repair it. I was annoyed to find the fusebox hadn't been cleaned at all and the 'electrical experts' had ripped me off to the tune of £100. Oh well live and learn...

One call to PW Europarts later, and a new fuel relay and fusebox were ordered, together with a pair of rear springs. These all came from Euro Car Parts in Smethwick and were very reasonably priced.

These were promptly fitted, but after a test drive, the wipers failed again. The problem seemed to be with the stalk itself, so this was cleaned and replaced, but this still failed to cure the fault. Thankfully PW Europarts put me in touch with a proper auto electrical engineer.

This chap was Tony from ATC mobile auto electricians and he had the car in for a day. Happily, he spotted the problem. It turned out that the relay switch controlling the wipers and heater had corroded so badly that the contacts had fused together, meaning that the switch remained live when ignition was off - which explained why the wipers and rear view demister stayed on. This relay was of course replaced and, finally, the problem was cured.

I have done a little research on my car and according to my local VW dealer, Trust at Amblecote, Stourbridge, the colour is Paprika



Red. They also reckoned my Cabrio was the rare 'Coco Chanel' model. It also has power steering, which was quite unusual on the Mk 1.

However, after further research on the internet, I discovered that the Coco Chanel model was made in 1985, some four years prior to the manufacture of my Golf Cabrio.

The Golf could be a Quartet, which were offered in a choice of white, red, grey and blue, but the 1989 sales brochure makes no mention of this only detailing the GTI model.

My future plans for the car are to get it ready for the 2004 summer shows. Hopefully, all the minor teething problems have been ironed out and I can now enjoy many trouble-free years of driving the car. To ensure that the car lasts, I have recently had the underside waxoiled.

If any one could give me some more information on this special-edition model I would be very grateful, and if anyone has had similar problems and overcome them, I would be very grateful to hear from them.

Andy Jones, South Staffordshire

No such thing as a Coco Chanel model!

*It's a Quartett!
All Quartetts in the UK were GTIs!*