

HIT-PO SILVER

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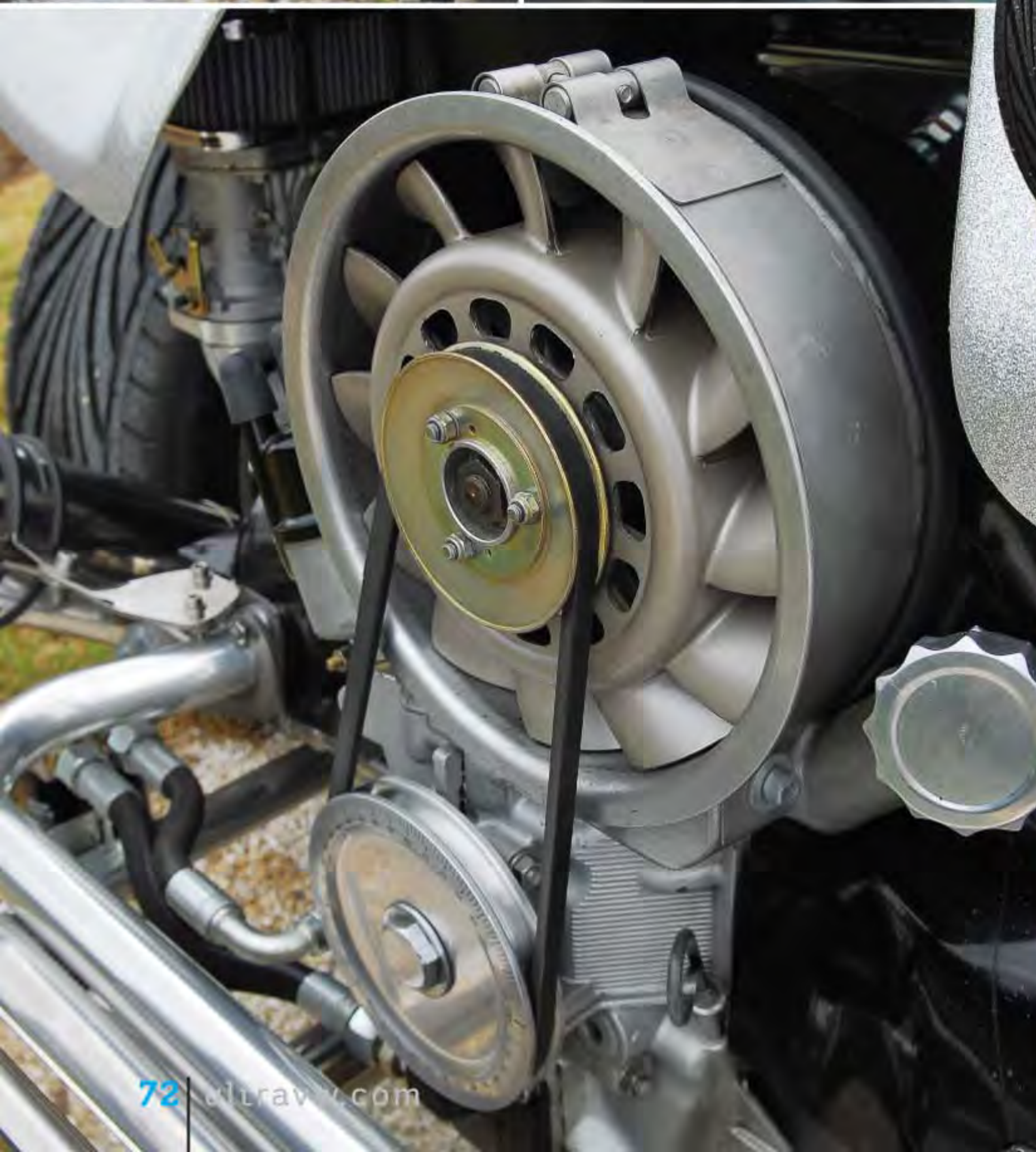
James Hale takes a look at Peter Buller's awesome street Manx - a buggy for the next century!





Left: Interior is clean and simple. Note the lack of a normal dashboard and the clever way the windscreen has been incorporated into the stainless roll-cage - innovative stuff!

Right: Large-diameter wheels and low-profile tyres really suit this street Manx and bring it bang up to date



Peter Buller is no stranger to the world of buggies and the air-cooled scene. Having owned different models in the past, then mixed things up during a brief flirtation with Porsches, he was ready to build something new. Like many other builders before him, though, the problem was time. Northumberland-based Peter just didn't have any to spare. The odd free weekend wasn't going to see through the creation of his dream buggy, but the idea wasn't simply going to go away, either.

Fortunately, for visionaries like Peter, help was at hand in the form of professional buggy builder, Mark Dryden. Mark is a well-established engineer, based in Kings Lynn, Norfolk, and more than a few show-winning buggies have rolled out from his Flatlands Engineering workshops. Peter and Mark met at Bug Jam '06, and plans were soon afoot.

Peter explained what he wanted, and

the project rapidly evolved, with regular changes incorporated as things progressed during the build. A classic Manx buggy kit was ordered from East Coast Manx in a smaller, more subtle silver Metalflake, rather than the 'large flake' option so beloved of the buggy-building brigade. A pair of glassfibre front seat shells in the silvery hue were made at the same time, and the kit was delivered to Mark's workshops.

The basis for the buggy was destined to be a terminally body-rotted semi-automatic Beetle. Now, the semi-auto chassis has both good and bad points. The good part is that the chassis design comes ready-made with a ball-joint front suspension and an independent rear suspension as standard. This saves a lot of messing around with fitting an IRS to optimise the handling.

However, the not-so-good bit is that hardly any semi-auto chassis came with a clutch conduit fitted, since there was no need for it. To retro-fit one can involve some

extensive open-tunnel surgery. Mark has got this down to a fine art but, even so, positioning a clutch conduit through the length of the chassis backbone is a major headache, especially when the chassis started life as a left-hooker. The 1972 chassis is now right-hand drive, fitted with a 1302S manual gearbox, shortened to fit the Manx bodyshell and finished in a neat two-pack gloss black paintjob.

The rotted front beam was changed for a fully-adjustable item, fitted with Mark's own design of lowering units and Bugpack shocks, and the brakes were brought up to date with discs all round. The fronts are Porsche pattern drilled rotors from SSP with ATE calipers, while the rears are EMPI items, complete with handbrake units. A Volvo master cylinder brake reservoir sits directly into the top of the cylinder to keep things tidy. The chassis is also fitted with urethane bushes throughout to improve the tautness of the car when driving.

One of the things that can make or break the look of any car is the wheel and tyre choice. Peter sensibly opted for image-wheels that bolt straight up to the five-stud Porsche-drilled hubs. Size-wise, they're generously proportioned at 10x18in at the back and 7x17in up front. Tyres are low-profile directionals to give a macho road-hugging look.

Fitting the new Manx kit was a relatively straightforward job, and it's secured to the 'pan with stainless steel bolts and Mark's own design of oval polished washers. Before the bonnet and steering were fitted, Mark made up the stainless steel roll-cage that is one of the highlights of this Buggy. Before readers point out that a stainless cage is not a safety device, Mark already knows this. The cage is there as much for aesthetics as function, and is not a true 'roll-over' unit. It's what Peter wanted, though, so let's hope he's never unlucky enough to invert this machine.



The cage is a very neat piece of engineering, in a six-point design with two central bars running from the windscreen surround to the main hoop. The front surround uses laser-cut rebates to locate the windscreen, and the hoop also incorporates a forward-facing secondary hoop that supports the steering column running through a stainless boss.

The bonnet also has a lateral bar that forms the mount for the laser-cut stainless dash panel. This replaces the original Manx unit completely, and gives a home to the black-faced semi-auto speedometer and matching VDO oil temperature and pressure gauges.

At the sides, the tubes have been cut and spliced so that they follow the contours of the body tub, but don't actually touch it. They also allow the driver and passenger to enter and exit the cockpit by sliding their weight over the cage, and not the glassfibre body.

The attention to detail on this buggy is amazing. The roller pedal for the accelerator is a Flatlands-made stainless steel unit and looks just great. A CSP T-handle shifter with leather boot looks right at home on the tunnel between the black leather grey-piped seats, trimmed by local company, Brockwells. The minimalist interior is finished off with an oval Billet Specialties rear-view mirror, black Grant steering wheel, 1966 indicator stalk with dip switch, Willans three-point racing harnesses – and not a lot else.

In common with other Classic Manxes that Mark has built, all the switchgear is hidden in one of the rear wells in the buggy

body, and all the wiring is concealed to give an uncluttered look to the interior.

Continuing the minimalist look, the front indicators are positioned within the bowls of the neat, chromed front headlights, and the rear lights are flush-fitting combo units from Hella. To make the car road-legal, the reflectors are positioned on custom-made brackets on the engine.

The engine is perhaps the centrepiece of the buggy, being both powerful and revvy, as our editor, Paul Knight, found out when he took the silver machine for a blast around the Norfolk countryside. The engine started life in Neil Weaver's immaculate blue GP buggy, having been put together by engine supremo, Dan Simpson. A change of plans saw the engine removed and returned to Dan, so he fully rebuilt it for Peter's buggy. The case was drilled for a full-flow oil system and uprated to a kick-in-the-seat-of-the-pants 1776cc powerplant.

The engine had suffered from carb trouble in its original guise, so this time Dan fitted tried-and-tested twin Weber 40IDF carbs, operated by a CSP bell-crank linkage run behind the Porsche 911 fan. The 12-vane fan sits atop the block in its glassfibre shroud, and fits perfectly within the confines of the Manx body shape. The fan positioning meant that the oil filler has been changed,

and the oil now runs through to a remote cooler mounted on a custom-made bracket over the gearbox. A Bosch Blue coil mounted under the body provides the spark, forwarded to the plugs via a 009 distributor.

Neat touches include the ceramic-coated and merged header unit and the custom-made stainless steel exhaust pipes and motorcycle mufflers that give the buggy's engine note a pleasing growl without overly attracting the legal beagles.

'On a hot summer's day, with the wind in his hair, Peter has all the time in the world'

The rocker covers are stainless Scat items, polished to perfection, and the number plate is a laser-cut unit. The stainless steel and laser-cut combination definitely seems to be a Flatlands hallmark, and when it results in buggies like this, who are we to argue?

Peter has got a buggy to be very proud of – and its eye-catching looks certainly drew plenty of admiring glances from onlookers as we drove to the photoshoot. Future plans include possibly adding a one-off stainless steel roof with louvres – but then there's that issue of time again. Sensibly, Peter is just enjoying the buggy for now. On a hot summer's day, with the wind in his hair, Peter has all the time in the world. ●