

Simple minds

With a genuine Manx and a metalflake show Buggy already in his garage, Steve Collis wanted to go back to basics

Words: Mike Pye Photos: Laurens Parsons
Location: Thanks to Jack Konynenburg and Jan Morgan for their hospitality

Not that long ago, I was sitting here writing a feature on a Flatlands Engineering-built Manx Buggy belonging to Steve Collis. It wasn't the first Buggy Steve had owned, or even the first Buggy Mark Dryden at Flatlands had built for him, for it would be fair to say that Steve is a Buggy fanatic. He's owned countless ones over the years, and currently has two other Flatlands-built cars in his garage, including the Brilliant Golden Orange one we featured in March 2011. If you remember that feature, you might remember Steve saying the car was everything he wanted in a Buggy, so what on earth possessed him to ring Mark up again and ask if he'd build him another one? "It's the same old thing, isn't it? You keep seeing other things, and your mind starts going off on different projects. Mark's got a black plate Karmann Ghia, for example. I wouldn't mind something like that, but with a bit of an Old Speed twist..." Er, back in the room Steve, we're talking about this Buggy.



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"Ah, right, well, I was looking at Volkszone, as you do, and saw this ad for a Buggy in Portland. I wasn't intending to do another one, but this one was a Mk1 GP on a pre-reg 'pan, properly registered with Beach Buggy on the logbook, which is really hard to get, and it was less than a grand. So I gave the guy a call."

Though the advert wasn't misleading, what followed Steve home on an A-frame a few days later turned out to be rough, very rough indeed, so much so that he put the body straight up for sale and then just left the chassis sitting in his garage. A year or so down the line though, he decided he may as well do something with the 'pan, so shipped it up to the Flatlands' workshop near Kings Lynn to have it repaired, blasted and primed, nothing more than that. As if to confirm what Steve already knew, Mark promptly called him up the day after he dropped it off and uttered the immortal words, "Congratulations Steve, you've bought the worst floorpan I've ever seen."

"The idea originally was just to do a nice simple, early-shape floorpan, with all stock running gear. I didn't intend to spend any more money than that, but it sort of went from that to a nice, simple, early-style Buggy – with a single-port motor, banded wheels, no seat belts and left-hand drive. But then of course, things just sort of got out of hand..." explains Steve.

Basic instinct

Though the VW scene has come a long way since the 1960s, if you look back at the old Dune Buggy, hot rod and mainstream motoring magazines that were covering the Beach Buggy craze in its heyday in the mid-'60s you'll see that, in the main, the cars were incredibly basic – single colour, gel coat bodies, banded steel rims, minimalist interiors and essentially stock running gear, with little more than aftermarket exhausts added for aural pleasure. Chrome was limited to a pair of headlights – generally 7-inch, rather than the more common 5.5-inch – a front nudge bar and tail light / number plate light housings. The gaudy, 'flake-painted, chrome-rimmed machines that have become so popular again in recent years didn't start to appear until the beginning of the following decade, in line with the explosion in the automotive aftermarket.

It was just this stripped down, back-to-basics kind of Buggy Steve had in mind. "I wanted a proper original '60's car. Like you'd bought a kit from Meyers in 1964. I wanted it bright yellow [in fact, the colour was matched to that used by Karcher on their pressure washers], with drum brakes, wide steels, a Meyers exhaust and nudge bar and with an interior that looked like it could have been taken out of an early '60's Beetle, right down to the switches and the big-D steering wheel. The one thing I really wanted though was the fuel filler coming out of the bonnet at an angle from a stock fuel tank."

Mark understood exactly what Steve had in mind, and even had some of the parts in stock already, including a set of banded 15-inch steels and a 1200 single port-based 1384cc motor that was slated for his son, Dean's, own car, but which never got any further than a built long block. This fitted the bill perfectly, so was given to Alex Bruce to finish building before Dean detailed it to death.

At this point Steve, having enjoyed the process of showing his second Flatlands-built Buggy at The VolksWorld Show in 2011, decided he'd like a better standard of finish on the 'pan than



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▲ To get the all-important matching tread rubber rake in period correct tyres, G60-14 and F50-15 Firestone Wide Ovals have been used on 8-inch wide 15-inch steels and 5.5-inch wide 14-inch Trekker steels up front.



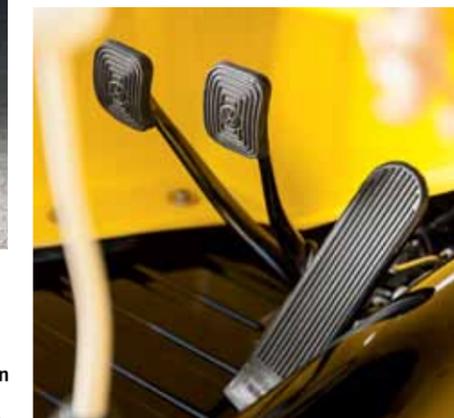
▲ The deceptively simple looking dash belies the amount of work, or "fannying about", as Mark put it, that went into modifying dash trims to sit straight, and to continue the line between the speedo and the fuel gauge.



Behind the wheel

"To be honest I haven't driven this one much as we've had such a crap summer, but it's the same as any old car – you have to think a bit more when you drive it, but that just makes it more of an occasion when you do.

The minus, I suppose, is getting caught out in the rain, but that's not yet happened to me in this one. The thing about Buggies though is you can't do anything wrong. If you want to blend into the scenery, don't drive a Buggy!"

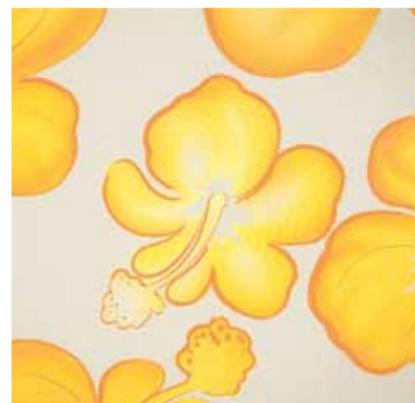
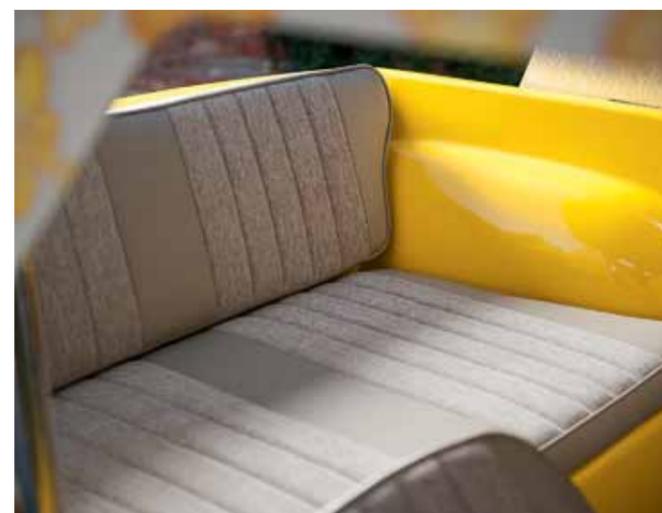


◀ Chris Lyons at Trimming Tonic is responsible for the trim, the material being carefully chosen to look like that used on early '60's Beetles.

▲ Running gear is all stock. In fact, the whole floorpan is stock, just shorter.



◀ All the cream parts on the Buggy were matched to the stock ivory dash switches but, in the search for perfection, Neil Melliard at Prosign repainted those as well.



▲ The only hand-painted flower roof in Europe?

he had originally asked for. "No problem," came Mark's reply. "It'll cost a little more, but not a lot." And so it went on. The next person to throw their spanner in Steve's works was long-time Buggy aficionado, Robert Wren. "I saw Rob at Slough [swapmeet] and was telling him my plan. He said, 'You're going to put flowers on the roof, aren't you?' I wasn't sure at the time, but said I'd think about it."

Flower power

As you can see, that thought turned into reality, and into one of the standout features on this Buggy. "Because I'm in the print industry, I bumped into this bloke who does vinyl wraps and asked him about doing a Buggy roof. He said it could be done, but I was worried about creases on the corners," explains Steve. The obvious

answer then was to have it painted and, equally obviously, when it came to choosing someone to do this intricate job, the Prosign name came up. With that in mind, we called up Prosign to find out how it was done. Neil Melliard: "Because we were on a very short timescale, we threw it at Phil at Brickfield Autos, who primed it and put it into a gloss cream base coat, while we started making up the stencils, which originated from the hand-painted flowers we first did on our Split Bus. The roof was then Scotchd off and the vinyl masks laid on in a random pattern. We started by air brushing the flowers in white, then masking 20 or 30 or so off, doing some more in lemon yellow, masking a few more and doing the last few in the rust colour. Then we de-masked the flowers and, just before lifting the outer masks, fogged in the edges with the airbrush.

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It tends to bleed a little around the edges on a textured surface like a Buggy roof, but we then go round and individually stripe the edges of each flower with House of Kolor striping enamel, using various shades, depending on the base colour. That immediately loosens up the edges and, at the same time, we put in the details like the stamen and the dots on the stems. Then we finished it up with some subtle freehand shading, before returning it to Phil to put a satin clear coat over the whole roof."

"As I haven't really used this one much, it's basically an expensive dust sheet holder," laughs Steve, before adding, "but I love it and it really makes the whole car."

Eye for detail

Despite the remit being a simple Buggy, with no tricks, Mark being Mark he couldn't entirely restrain his eye for detail. "The whole thing is pretty basic, to be honest, but to satisfy my need to do things nicely, I had an adapter piece machined up for the fuel tank inlet. Back in the day they just bored huge holes in the bonnets so they could get them on over the fuel caps, and there was always a big gap around the filler. The gap around the filler neck on Steve's car is an even 1.5mm all round, as the filler neck itself screws in after the body is fitted. Now everyone asks how we got the body on." Pretty neat, huh?

The other thing that caused some debate was

"You're going to put flowers on the roof, aren't you?"

the wheels and tyres, and naturally Mark had a thing or two to say about them: "We wanted matching tread front and rear, but a visible difference between the two, and the only tyres I could find that looked period and came in the appropriate sizes were Firestone Wide Ovals. But to get the right look, we had to go down to 14s on the front, which meant finding a pair of Trekker wheels, then having them re-made with wider rims and the right offset."

The all-important colour of said wheels was matched to the stock ivory dash knobs of an early '60's Beetle, and that was carried through on all the cream interior parts, and the base coat of the hood, too. Ironically, when it came to final assembly, those original dash knobs that provided the inspiration for the colour weren't deemed good enough, so were repainted to match all the parts that had been matched to them.

"Because I've been an engineer for 30 years, I'm extremely fussy with what I do outside of work as well," concludes Steve. "I've learnt over the years that with building work you have to accept you can't get it perfect, but with cars you can always go that extra mile and get it right. And that's just what Mark does with

every car he builds. My MoT man takes the piss out of me, and points out the bits underneath I've missed with the polish. At the end of the day, though, it's what I enjoy doing and it's why I've got carpet in my garage." So surely that's enough Buggies isn't it, I asked? "Well, yes, I suppose so. I'm lucky that I've got quite a big garage, but I'd really have to sell one if I was going to do another one. But you know what it's like, there's always something else around the corner... **VW**

"If you want to blend into the scenery, you don't drive a Buggy!"



► The ultimate fun car? Steve certainly thinks so, he's got three of them in his garage. If only that garage was in California, eh Steve?



▲ Engine is based on an early '60's 1200 single port, but fitted with a period big bore kit so it now displaces 1384cc. It's basically stock, save for a 1500cc carb, smartened-up tinware and a Bus oil bath air filter.

► Fuel filler is trick, using a machined insert in the tank neck.

▲ Chrome tail lights and number plate light are *de rigueur* on '60's-style Buggies, and the genuine Meyers exhaust definitely adds to the look. This, and the buggy bar, was brought back from California by Mark in hand luggage!

