

'64 Buggy Devil's in the details

“Laminated side pods give a smoother, less cluttered look”

From bikes to Buggies and now full restorations, Mark Dryden, the owner of Flatlands Engineering, has the skill to make your dream come true

Words: Cathal O'Toole. Photos: ctpimaging.co.uk

We all have a dream car garage, don't we? You know, the one where we keep all the usual Supercars and of course a VW or several. But when I saw this Buggy I knew it had to be added to my dream line-up. What makes it even more interesting is that having a car like this in your actual garage can easily become a reality, thanks to Mark Dryden at Flatlands Engineering. And it seems that many of us are now realising that building our own car isn't that far out of reach after all – though maybe what swings it is the fact Mark will be on hand to guide you through your build – as there are more and more Buggy builds going on around the UK today than ever before. Another factor may be that you can build something that is going to be unique, as no two Buggies are ever the same. I recently watched the build of my friend George's Buggy in Galway, which is full of unique touches which are his and his alone. I was so impressed with the individuality of this build that I was delighted when I was asked to write the feature on this truly mind-blowing Buggy.

Kirked into action....

This Buggy was built by the Flatlands Engineering team, led by one Mr. Mark Dryden. Mark has had many of his creations featured within the pages of *VolksWorld* before and we are always delighted to see another one roll out of their workshop. I don't use the word 'creations' lightly, as every one of his Buggies is unique. Mark himself was not always a VW man, in fact he was into (pause for dramatic intake of breath) motorbikes prior to seeing the light. It was his girlfriend Maggie Kirk who was the driving force in saving his soul from two-wheeled hell! Maggie had been to many Bug Jams and always came home raving

about the Mark listened attentively, as good boyfriends do, then eventually had the courage to say that VWs don't really do anything for him but that he would like to build a Buggy. Maggie then turned the tables on him by challenging him to build a Buggy. Mark fell in love with the idea of being able to build unique cars and, as word spread of his skills, the requests to build Buggies grew and Flatlands Engineering was born. That was 2003, and ironically he now has a '61 Beetle in the making with a 356 engine, plus a low-mileage Razor Edge as a daily driver.

Time to get to the feature car here. As with many of Mark's builds, they are only done on request and the one for this one came from Paul Pheysey, who wanted a Buggy as a summer car that he could keep at his holiday home by the sea. He had very specific requirements, and once combined with Mark's ideas the plan was in motion. The base car that was chosen was a 1964 Beetle. The reason a '64 Beetle was chosen was to get around the safety belt regulation, as Paul felt safety belts detracted from the open and free feel of the Buggy.

The chassis was chopped and shortened



“Maggie then turned the tables on him by challenging him to build a Buggy”

▲ Huge 275/60/15 (rear) and 205/60/15s (front) tyres wrap around the Chevy rims. The resulting nose-down stance gives a mean look to this Buggy

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in-house. A new, narrowed beam was fitted, which has had sway-away adjusters and dropped spindles fitted. The shock towers were lowered to clear the fuel tank, as is the case when you narrow the beam. The chassis now sits a massive five inches lower at the front and two inches lower at the back, giving a meaner, more aggressive stance. The front shocks are also adjustable. The standard drums were ditched in favour of some rather tasty looking drilled discs with a Chevy pattern. Drum brakes remain at the back and, like the front, are also a Chevy pattern, which allows the fitment of American Racing Equipment Polished Chevy Cobra rims. These rims are huge: 275/60/15 at the kick ass end while 'small' 205/60/15 tyres are found at the front.

Having talked through the design in advance of the build, white band tyres were chosen as they would complement the interior perfectly. It's all in the planning and detail, folks!

Now, to get this mobile artwork mobile you need an engine, and one of Mark's passions is detailing – and not just shiny bits here and there. Mark likes to think things through and no matter how well something functions he has to figure out a way to do it differently. More importantly it has to be more aesthetically pleasing to him. Have a good look at the photos before you read on and see if you can spot some of his neat touches. I for one found myself repeating "I never spotted that" as Mark described what he had done. Seriously: Stop reading, look at the photos and try to find all the very subtle and clever modifications.

Cannibal run

Firstly, there is no distributor. Mark cannibalised a Ford distributor system (they're good for something!) using a Ford coil pack and ECU. This has a vacuum take off and works brilliantly with the twin Weber carbs. Al the Sparky gets the credit for figuring this out. Using a regular fanshroud, on many Buggies previously Mark always felt that this looked off-centre, so a centre-mounted fanshroud was fitted instead to give a balanced look to the engine. Wanting a tidier appearance for the exhaust, Mark called in Tony Jarvis from Chassis Craft, a company more commonly associated with drag racing. Tony used two replica BSA Goldstar silencers, then crossed them at the back to give a balanced header length. This allows for better exhaust clearance, a more deep-throated grunt and, ultimately, a tidier look to the engine bay. To connect this 1641cc engine to the Chevy wheels, a

stock but rebuilt and detailed 1500 Beetle gearbox was fitted. The oil cooler is tucked neatly under the body, as is the remote fan and you will find the linkage for the twin Webers is from a Porsche. Mark blasted the air filter covers and gave them what he calls a 'special treatment' to give them a cleaner look. The breather is hidden behind the fanhousing.

With the chassis and running gear good to go, Mark then moved onto the body, which in this case is a Manx 2. As with the build so far, this was not going to be a simple plug and play fitment. The first of many modifications was in the rear seat area. This was grafted from a Prowler Buggy as both Mark and Paul felt it had a nicer shape. This was carried out by Rob Kilham at East Coast Manx. Rob also laminated the side pods to the body to give a smoother, less cluttered look.

Mark's next job was to modify the dash to make it appear deeper and to better accommodate the

► Red-tinted windscreen is a break from the norm. No gloomy days driving this Buggy! The Bikini Top is made from Nirox and curves over the two-inch Buggy Hoop made by Flatlands Engineering



“Nirox is water-proof and mould-proof, so perfect for a Buggy”

“The chassis and all of the components were shot in House of Kolor Diamond Black”



▲ No carpets here, just clean and detailed. What more do you need? Note the '56-'61 rear light housing now being used as an instrument cluster



▼ Diamond-pattern upholstery covers the front and rear seats. The rear seat is from a Prowler Buggy



▲ Beam is held in place with Flatlands' stainless bolts. Vented discs are detailed with House of Kolor Diamond Black

► Just look at the quality. It's stunning!

The details...

When it comes to innovative ideas, you can rest assured every single vehicle Mark Dryden works on has something new, trick and original. This Buggy is loaded with ideas from the fact it doesn't have a distributor to the use of an 1960 Beetle taillight housing for the switch gear. However, it's the attention to detail that really makes this vehicle so special.

'64 Buggy

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speedo. The body and chassis were then taken to Simon Emery and the team at the Paintbox. Once Paul saw the body sitting on the chassis, he thought it looked like a Noddy car with the narrowed beam and the wide rear tyres, so Simon widened the rear arches to give more coverage to the tyre. Next up, the team smoothed the entire underside of the Buggy – this is the first time anyone had asked them to go this far with the detailing!

Apple-tising

They then covered the Buggy body in Candy Apple Red over a gold base from top to toe. Neil Melliard from Prosign was drafted in to add some pinstriping as only he can. Did you notice the very subtle flames? Everywhere you look there are trick details. Next on the list was the chassis, and here the standard is so high, it's as good if not better than the body. The chassis and all of the components were shot in House of Colour Diamond Black which, if you look closely has a sparkly finish that works so well with the Candy Apple Red of the body. And when I say all of the chassis components, I mean *all* the components.

Now, back at Flatlands' the body was mated to the chassis for the final build. Holding it to the chassis are Flatland's own stainless steel domed nuts and fasteners. The front beam is held in place by Flatlands' own beam bolts. Grahame Smith from Whiffs Trimming used Nirox material for the seats and the Bikini Top sunshade. Nirox is used in the yachting industry and is both waterproof and mould-proof. The diamond pattern on the seats gives a 1970's hot rod feel to the interior. The two-inch stainless steel Buggy Hoop is by Flatlands'. The rear view mirror is billet, as is the gear knob, which sits on top of a standard but chromed 1960's gear lever. The windscreen is tinted red. The one-off cluster in front of the gear lever, which was made from an Oval Window rear light, now houses the wiper and washer switch,



◀ Centre-mounted fanshroud gives a more balanced look to the engine bay. Laser-cut number plates are a neat touch while the BSA replica exhaust gives a beefy grunt!

▼ So much thought went into this build, where clean lines were the order of the day. The remote oil cooler and fan is out of sight under the body

lights and ignition switch. Chromed Oval rear lights are used at the back and work in the same way a 1960 light works, by cancelling out the rear light when indicating. Front indicators are LEDs and are hidden in the 5 3/4-inch stainless steel front lights. The steering wheel is a Mota Lita in woodrim finish.

I'm sorry to say you won't see this Buggy at any shows as the owner, Paul, prefers to use it to go to the marina at the weekends and when not being used it stays in an air-conditioned bubble.

Mark is now truly bitten by VWs and is now working on his own '61 Beetle. Flatlands Engineering has now branched out into full VW restorations and has numerous projects on the go, such as a '54 Ragtop Beetle and a German Look Beetle, so if you want the king of detail to take your pride and joy to the next level give Mark Flatlands on 01553 828868. **VW**



Thanks: To girlfriend Maggie Kirk for kick-starting Mark's interest in VWs and ultimately his business Flatlands Engineering, Simon, Shane and Bob at Paintbox, Al the Sparky for rewiring the Buggy and fabricating the exhaust, Grahame Smith at Whiffs Trimming and Rob Kilham at East Coast Manx.

▼ This gorgeous Flatlands' Buggy took an award at this year's VolksWorld Show – you can see why!



“Paul prefers to use it to go to the marina at the weekends”