

Chad's Custom VW Beetle



By Benjamin Hunting

Photos: John Paris

Volkswagen Beetles are some of the most-loved classic automobiles out there. Their sheer ubiquity makes them a popular choice for builders looking to put together anything from mild to wild, and their simple platforms make them a custom car designer's dream. The popularity of the Beetle sometimes makes it tough for hot rod fans to come up with something truly original when it comes time to put together their own classic Volkswagen ride. It is this particular challenge makes Chad Ross' 1965 Beetle custom that much more impressive.

Chad's Beetle steps away from the trendy rat rod interpretations of the compact car's pint-sized appearance and instead takes the Volkswagen in an entirely new direction. Thanks to his unique gift for fabrication and a definite individualistic streak, Ross has been able to give his 1965 drop top the kind of long and low lines that would not look out of place on a much larger automobile.

By accentuating the smooth curves of the Beetle's design, shaving the vehicle's emblems, door handles and mirrors and dropping the car on an airbag suspension, Chad has created one track Bug that resembles few other examples on the road.

This 1965 Beetle has been the object of its owner's affections for two decades. In fact, it was Chad's father's love and ownership of VW Bugs that lead to him acquiring this very example in order to build it up as his first real hot rod project. Purchased with the express intent of creating a unique street machine that he could drive to shows and enjoy all summer long, Ross set about creating version 1.0 of his Beetle. The end result was a car that would bring him much happiness for many years.

After running into trouble with the vehicle three years ago at a show far from home – a frustrating incident that caused him to park his project for an extended pe-

riod of time – Chad recently decided it was time to completely restore his VW convertible. Approaching the original concept with renewed vigor, one of the first things he did was repaint the exterior color from purple to Centauri Pitch Black. The vehicle's engine, which at 1,776 cc is just a bit bigger than the original stock unit, was left largely untouched, but the Beetle's hand fabricated

air suspension system allowed him to perfectly match its ride height with the American Racing rims which measure 16-inches up front and 17-inches at the rear.

When it came time to re-do the VW's interior, Chad turned to his longtime friend Dave Vos of Vos Upholstery (708-418-7099). Based in Lansing, IL, Vos had the tools and the design expertise required to



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match Ross' vision for how the Beetle should look inside.

Dave stresses that the work that was done to the Beetle custom was a team effort, with the pair working side by side in coming up with both the final plans for the interior as well as putting together the upholstery and paneling that would make it a reality. At Vos, emphasis is placed on making the feel of a car's passenger compartment with the look of its exterior lines. This led to the creation of not only the arched oxblood leather and aluminum door panel trim but also the Beetle's most intriguing interior feature — the curved waterfall tonneau panel that replaces the rear seat and which serves as a cover for the state of the art stereo system installed in the automobile. Wrapped in the same oxblood hide as the other panels inside the Beetle, this impressive panel features a finish so precise that it would feel equally at home in a modern Bentley, let alone a vintage Volkswagen.

The rest of the '65 Beetle's interior maintains the same sleek and simple look that graces its sheet metal. Surprisingly

roomy inside for such a small car — Dave Vos says that he gets a kick out of the reactions of wine sippers when he unfolds his six-foot-plus frame from the VW's passenger seat — the automobile features a plain steel dash devoid of any instrumentation save a speedometer. The oxblood buckets were based on the bare frames of mid-'70's Volvo units, cut down three inches and recovered with new foam and leather. The clean philosophy for the Beetle's insides springs directly from the brain of Ross, who put together the clean-looking dash himself.

The lift-off roof, which had originally been built by Chad and his father 20 years beforehand, also received an update, swapping out its purple hues for a black Mercedes-Benz convertible cloth covering over an aluminum frame. Underneath, the VW's headliner sources the same material used inside Rolls-Royce ultra-luxury sedans. The compartment hidden by the hood offers a similar high-class, yet simple design, featuring a functional luggage rack that perfectly matches the custom car's style.

Needless to say, the 1965 Beetle gar-



ners a ton of attention everywhere it goes, and Chad finds himself constantly fielding questions about what exactly he is driving. The unique, muscular looks of the car set it apart from other Volkswagen hot rods, and with both his father and close friend Dave Vos involved in the build process Ross says that there is a lot of emotional attachment involved in what he has always referred to as a "family project."

Now back on its feet after spending time away from the scene, the '65 'vert is ready to once again grab eyeballs at car shows around the Midwest.



Dave Vos and the Chad Ross family



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