

Making the (Up)Grade by: Paul Greco

Time and Tide wait for no man – or Technology.

When I was a student I never really liked to study ancient history. Who could have known that I would be living (or driving) it! There are many anachronistic types who love and believe that the past was a better time, but I personally like to utilize the best of *all* worlds.

Let's face it, driving a stock bug can be fun and the car is quite adequate and fulfilling as long as I have not experienced anything else. Yes, ignorance is bliss! But with numerous magazines, shows and opportunities to learn more about the automotive world, one cannot help wondering "what if" I applied some of this *modern* technology to MY beloved bug? Wouldn't it be nice not to worry if I'm going to make it over the next hill or plow into the rear end of some idiot making a panic stop in front of me!

So the quest begins to find the "biggest, baddest, bestest, fastest and most beautiful" accessories one could weld, bolt or stick onto our much adored vehicles. Hopefully, when we are finished, our cars will actually be *improved!* As simple as the Volkswagen Beetle might appear, it is actually quite impressive as a feat of engineering, as are all cars really. This becomes most apparent when we try to mess around with it, seeking the Holy Grail of enhancement.

Ahh – where to start! Cosmetics are easy, but what about suspension, brakes, engine, transmission, lighting or gauges? All of the above is available from *after-market*

manufacturers and, as they say, "You's pays yer money and you's takes yer choices." Then there's mix and match, where I utilize components picked from salvage vehicles, even from other makes and models. Most of this requires some level of expertise and ingenuity, not to mention extreme motivation and desire! The human spirit can be both a blessing and a curse when it comes to making changes in both our personal and material lives.



I took the easy way out, a complete modern vehicle with a Beetle body on it. Effective and economical but don't tell anyone!

Probably the most divisive topic is engine performance relative to power output. How much is enough? Why do I need this? Will it be reliable? Do I truly understand that "Speed costs, how fast do you want to go?" I myself believe that *power equals trouble*. Maybe that is why I have been satisfied with the (lack of) go-power available with the stock bug. I know if I have a fast car, I am going to USE it! My cars are slow. Heck, I'm a little slow!

On the other hand, no one could argue against improving handling or braking. Especially braking. The early Beetles suffered from inadequate brakes (compared mostly

to today's expectations of what is needed to drive in traffic!) All it took was a good rainstorm and marginal brakes would become NO brakes! A set of discs on the front went a long way toward correcting this shortcoming. Most of the collision damage I have seen on Beetles was on the front-end, probably the result of over-driving the car's stopping ability!

What about the handling characteristics? Most of us have heard about Ralph Nader and his expose of the Chevrolet Corvair. Well, the Corvair was basically a copy of the Beetle, which suffered the same *camber induced over-steer* until Volkswagon was convinced to advance it's dated *swing-axle* design to an independent rear suspension in 1969. I personally have never experienced this problem with my swing-axle cars, or maybe I just never noticed or cared!

But I think the biggest challenge facing us is how to upgrade the DRIVER! I know my driving skills could always use some improvement whether it be physical or mental! I am really at a loss as to how to improve my *attitude* behind the wheel and I wonder if one of those "high-performance" driving schools could help? I know the 6-hour points reduction course has not worked. I suppose all I can do is press-on regardless, and maybe have another beer!

Next Month:
Hang'n' in the Garage