

Bug's Life



"It's one of my favorite kind of cars."
West Virginia Volkswagen Festival Promoter Greg Stanley



Fredis Showalter of Parkersburg inspects a 1963 Beetle owned by Mercedes Phillips at the West Virginia Volkswagen Festival. Phillips bought the car new for \$1,959.36.



Mark Williams and Jan Stevens of Marietta, Ohio, view the show's lone VW camper.



Spectators were taken with an original Kugelwagen, complete with a dummy MG-34 machine gun, that was entered in the show. The German army used the utility vehicle in World War II.

By Rusty Marks
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I FELT I had a good chance at winning in the Kermann Gila class at last week's West Virginia Volkswagen Festival in Parkersburg.

It didn't hurt that I had the only Kermann Gila entered in the show.

Sleek and swift, with curves that would put Jayne Mansfield to shame, the Kermann Gila was VW's entry into the sports car world in 1955. Volkswagen, creator of the lovely but dependable Beetle, built the Kermann Gila virtually unchanged until 1974.

Volkswagen's introduction of the New Beetle, with lines reminiscent of the renowned "People's Car" designed by auto genius Ferdinand Porsche, has spawned a resurgence of interest in the cars that first made VW a household name in the 1950s and '60s. Parkersburg promoter Greg Stanley thought it was high time West Virginia paid its homage to what has become the most popular car in the world.

"I go to these [VW] shows in Columbus [Ohio] and Milwaukee [Wis.] every year, and they draw all those cars," said Stanley. "There was just nothing like that in West Virginia."

"It's one of my favorite kind of cars."

Stanley is restoring a 1971 Super Beetle he saved from a car crusher in Charleston. He paid \$65 for the car in April, which was complete when he bought it except for the carburetor. He hopes to have the car ready for next year's show.

As far as he knows, the VW Festival on Sept. 11 was the first all-Volkswagen car show in the state. Stanley hopes the festival will become a yearly event, and plans to hold the show the second Saturday in September every year.

About 50 cars registered for the first show, a figure Stanley doesn't think is bad for a brand-new event. There were several of the staid Beetles, some just as they left the showroom floor, and some modified into gleaming hot rods.

There was also a VW bus camper, a rare pickup truck based on the bus chassis, and an even rarer Kugelwagen, a slab-sided, bony Jeep-like utility vehicle the German army used during World War II. Volkswagen used the same basic design when they introduced the VW Thing in 1972.

The lovely Beetle was the brainchild of Porsche, who, along with Adolf Hitler, was searching for a car cheap enough and dependable enough that the average German citizen could afford. When the car was envisioned, most Germans could barely afford a bicycle.

The Beetle design, with its air-cooled engine in the back, was finalized in 1934, and the new Volkswagen company geared up for mass production. But Hitler's invasion of Poland and the war got in the way and VW went into high gear producing the Kugelwagen and other vehicles for the vast German war



Four-year-old Brittany Lowers gives Katelyn Gates a spin in her pint-sized Bug.

machine.

After the war, British and American military officials saw the promise of the cheap, simple little car and helped German industrialists put it back into production. In outward appearance, the basic Beetle design changed little for 40 years. Germany stopped building Beetles in 1973, but air-cooled Beetles with the motor in back are still being built in Mexico and other South American countries.

Mercedes Phillips bought her Beetle brand-new in 1963 for \$1,959.36. She found the canceled check a few weeks ago, and displayed it with the other documentation when she entered the car — still in its immaculate factory paint — in the Parkersburg show.

Stanley thinks the humpbacked little car has a universal appeal. The car appeals to the artistic and creative side of motorists, he said. "It seems like everybody has a VW story to tell. Either they owned a Volkswagen in college or their friends did."

For many years and models, parts are also still fairly plentiful and reasonably cheap.

"It allows a person to get a nice car without spending a total fortune," Stanley said.

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Photographs by KENNY KEMP