

V-DUBBER

NEWSLETTER OF THE CENTRAL FLORIDA VW CLUB

APR MEETING CANCELED DUE TO VIRUS RULES



Cheap, plentiful, and simple, the Volkswagen Beetle was the basis for countless variations and spin-offs, most of which are long forgotten. The strange blue roadster pictured above, the Alken D-2, is one of those VW-based oddities that would have been relegated to the history books if not for Jeff Lipnichan's efforts. A long-held fondness for the Alken led Lipnichan to find one and bring it back to what it would have been like in 1958. We caught up with him at this year's Hemmings Motor News Concours d'Elegance, where he showed the car in the European/Import class. Previously the car was singled out as Hemmings Find of the Day but has since been taken off the market.

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CFVWC and VWCA are non-profit organizations and are not affiliated with or sponsored by VWoA or dealer

Local membership includes National Club and newsletters: \$30/ family per year

Meetings normally held at the Mellow Mushroom, Sanford, second SATURDAY of month, 2PM.

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This is not just any Alken D-2, mind you, but the actual car from the November, 1958 Road & Track road test, built by the Venice, California-based brother team of Allen and Kenneth White as a demonstration vehicle. The Alken D-2 was also famous enough to earn a mention in the chapter on Bug-based “Specials” in Volkswagen: Nine Lives Later by Dan R. Post. That’s where Lipnichan first saw the car, and it stuck in his head, his brain already fixated on VWs from growing up on a farm where the only automobiles were Beetles and Jeeps. He’s also the founder of the 56-59 Karmann Ghia Registry, a website dedicated to the early version of the Beetle-based coupe.

Road & Track declared, “...the Alken body is without a doubt the best-engineered piece of fiberglass we have ever seen,” praising the inclusion of parts like the instrument panel, front and rear bumpers, and heater ducts outlets. At about 200 pounds lighter than the standard VW, weighed at 1665 pounds, the Alken shaved 6.7 seconds off the zero-to-sixty time, managing 22.3 seconds. The road test also claimed there were 4000 dealer inquiries and ten times that in consumer requests for more information.

“Forty thousand inquiries doesn’t mean that many sales, but it certainly shows tremendous interest,” wrote Road & Track. At some point that interest failed to materialize. Post’s mention in his book estimates that maybe 50 were made, and Lipnichan knows of only four remaining body shells, two of which were demonstrators built by Alken. The sister car is in Ireland undergoing restoration.

Both factory cars were sold in 1959 to the Nic-L-Silver battery company and converted to electric propulsion. Nic-L-Silver then built its own now-lost prototype. Lipnichan says his car sat in a warehouse until circa 1978 before being sold for scrap. He found it in California in 2012, original red paint worn down in spots to gray primer. That’s when he went down the rabbit hole of a five-year restoration, undoing the changes of the EV conversion and bringing the car back to a period-correct specification. Along the way he found a cache of Road & Track photos in the Stanford Automobility Archive as well as pictures that once belonged to Nic-L-Silver founder George Lippincort. You can see all the painstaking steps in this forum thread.

The restoration kicked off with the acquisition of another kit car, a 1974 Bradley GT, to take its donor 1958 Porsche 356 running gear for the Alken. Later, Lipnichan acquired a 1958 chassis to serve as the underpinnings. The rest of the parts are mid- to late-’50s VW parts, save for a few exceptions. The Alken brochure pictures carryover Beetle taillights, but Lipnichan’s has four from a 1948 Chevy, matching the pictures in Road and Track. The door latches come from a 1956-57 Ford Thunderbird. The hardest part to source is the windshield, which comes from the 1951-55 Ford Consul/Zephyr. When found, the Alken had a Stuart-Warner survey speedometer, which records down to 1/100th of a mile, presumably installed to precisely measure the range of the batteries. Lipnichan replaced that with a Karmann-Ghia speedometer, then went to North Hollywood Speedometer to build fuel and oil pressure meters in an identical font. The paint is close to Porsche’s Azure Blue instead of the original red.

Some new fiberglass was also required to repair where the D-2 was modified by Nic-L-Silver, such as finishing in the battery box and gas tank surround under the front hood, but the overall structure remained intact. One innovation by Alken was to section off the fiberglass body with bulkheads, giving it much more structural rigidity than other fiberglass kits of the time. Lipnichan’s car is a testament to that engineering. The rear-hinged doors open and close with a solid feel, and there’s no flex when you open the rear hood. Even the lip under the wheel-well is rounded and finished smooth. It’s clear the car was built to last, but that wasn’t enough to find buyers for the \$1295 base price of the body, or more than 50 percent more than the going rate for Volkswagen donor cars at the time.

In Lipnichan, the Alken D-2 found a benefactor to save an obscure car from the dustbin of forgotten automotive trivia. His work is an inspiration on many levels: There is always history to rediscover, there are always cars out there to be saved, and there’s always someone willing to pour their passion into keeping automotive legacies alive.

(Our thanks to Saul for this report)



Secretary's Report

The MAR meeting was held 14 MAR 20 at Mellow Mushroom, Sanford. In attendance were: Rollie Walker, Chris Hobbs, Wayne Johnson, Charles Schambeau, Russell Becker, and Bonnie Zietkiewicz.

Minutes by Deborah Van Treuren, Sec.

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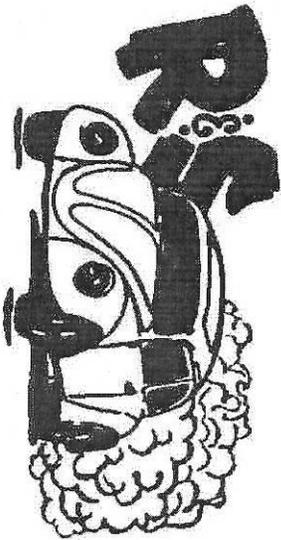
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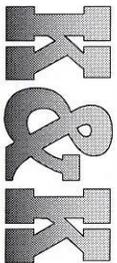
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