



Fast forward to the future

Taking a whole new look at the concept, Maggie Kirk's Volks Rod bucks established trends and looks to the future rather than the past

Words: Mike Pye. Photos: Dan Pullen. Studio: www.ctpimaging.co.uk

Not everyone 'gets' the Volks Rod phenomenon. Perhaps some see it as a waste of a Beetle, others maybe don't like to see non-VW parts on a VW, while others might simply not like the look of roof-chopped Beetles or Beetles without wings. Fine, each to their own, but one thing I have noticed over the last few years is how rigidly the vast majority of Volks Rods owners have stuck to the more traditional side of the Hot Rod movement from which they draw their inspiration, favouring wire wheels, matt paint and an anti-billet ethos.

"We were at The VolksWorld Show in 2005," explains Mark Dryden, the builder of this car, "and there was a part-built Hot Rod Beetle there with an unfinished chop. I said to Maggie [Kirk, the owner] 'That's a nice chop, shall we build one?'" So that's how this car started, but it was always to be Maggie's car, right from that point. "I really liked the shape of the cars," she added, "but I wanted to get away from all the matt black and red wheels thing..." Admittedly, these styling cues are very much in vogue (again) right now, but there are still plenty of people who are into Street Rods and the more high-tech side of the hobby too, and Maggie's car is the first Volks Rod to successfully blend the



▼ An NOS Volvo 240 brake fluid reservoir saved having to find somewhere to mount a remote one



▲ Mark's favourite bit is this neat manifold into the framehead that takes all the brake lines and wiring



▲ Our favourite bit is the brake lines that run from the crossmember, through hard lines in the A-arms...



▲ ...and pop out the other end near the heavily reworked VW hubs. Front brakes are Tarox six pots

Fast train to the nut house please!

Anyone who chooses to detail the underside of a car in white surely needs their head looking at, but check the detail work that's gone into the normally greasy dirty bit that's full of oil and petrol – it's nuts. Under the paint and polish is a strong-running Dan Simpson-built 1914 with CB Performance CNC port heads. That neat carb linkage is from Gerd Weiser in Germany (GWD) and operates a pair of 441DF Webers. Smooth billet aluminium top, bottom and idler pulleys come standard with a BMD pulley kit and, combined with a billet ally dizzy, give the engine a modern twist that fits with the rest of the car. But how 'bout those smoothed and polished manifolds, or the fully smoothed and colour-matched tinware? And who'd ever have thought a colour-coded dizzy cap would look this good again? This, boys and girls, is custom engine detailing at its best.

set up for zero bump steer. Tubular upper and lower A-arms are standard practice, and the whole thing necessitated rack and pinion steering too, but to neaten everything up further, the centres of all the main fixing bolts have been bored out and Allen-head dome caps have been fitted into them, so there are no ugly bolt heads on show anywhere. This doesn't just apply to the front suspension – it's been done everywhere possible, and where it couldn't be done, the fixings have either been replaced with stainless steel or chromed.

One of the main ideas with the car was to hide as many as possible of the nasty-looking but necessary items that make a car work, so nothing detracts the eye from the main visual elements. Can you see any wiring anywhere? Or any fuel lines or brake lines for that matter? This is what blew us away on this car. In line with modern racecar practice, all the brake lines have been routed through the suspension members, so they appear to magically disappear and then reappear. This means that there are no ugly lines between the hub

powerful visual elements of that style of car with a fenderless Beetle. Others in the States have fitted billet wheels, some have even used a similar treatment around the front and rear valances, but somehow they'd lost the raw aspect of a Volks Rod along the way.

Independent day

The nearest we'd seen to a more radical, modern, Beetle-based Volks Rod were some drawings on paper, but they never got any further than that. So when Mark casually mentioned independent suspension systems in a conversation we were having about this new car he was putting together, we knew he was the man to pull the concept off and move the Volks Rod idea forward. Although Mark's made his name building show-winning Beach Buggies at his Flatlands Engineering shop in Norfolk, his taste and experience with cars and bikes are far more wide-ranging, and he's also got some great people close by with whom he shares his work and ideas.

One of these is Tony Jarvis at Chassiscraft (who, incidentally, built the chassis for 'Bad' Bernie Smith's old 'Industrial Disease' VW rail). "Once Maggie had chosen the wheels, we got the body into the workshop, stuck them where they looked good and then joined it up," he laughs. Of course this is an oversimplification of the engineering work that's gone into the front suspension on this car, but it does kind of sum it up. There's nothing shop bought at all (apart from the inboard coil-overs) and it not only looks good but has also been built right – it's adjustable for both camber and caster and



▲ Unique independent front suspension uses a custom-made crossmember, polished stainless tubular A-arms and cantilever-operated Pro-Tech shocks. Steering is via a narrowed Ford Escort rack and pinion. Note how the crossmember even incorporates a mount for the closing mechanism of a Beetle bonnet



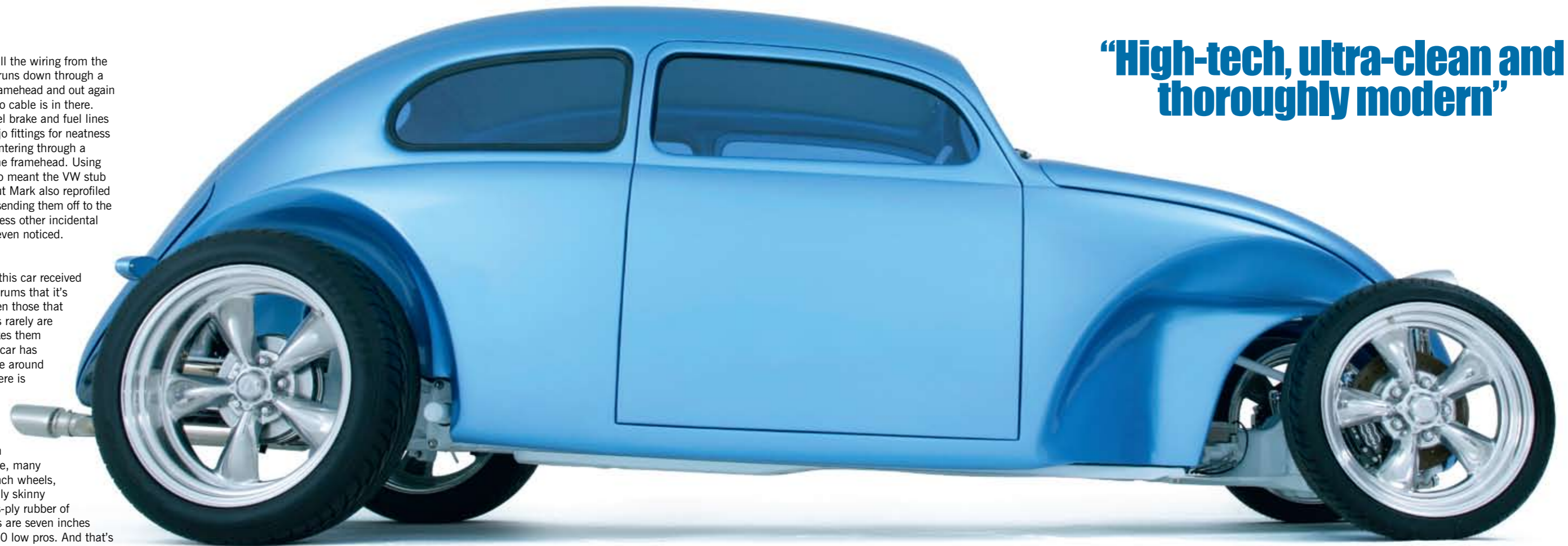
"I wanted to get away from all the matt black and red wheels thing..."

◀ Even the exhaust is a total one-off, made in stainless with laser-cut bends, s/s Cherry Bombs and a cut-down boy racer tip

and the chassis. Likewise, all the wiring from the neatly smoothed dash now runs down through a conduit into the top of the framehead and out again out of sight. Even the speedo cable is in there. The rest of the stainless steel brake and fuel lines have been converted to banjo fittings for neatness and run inside the tunnel, entering through a custom-made manifold in the framehead. Using rack and pinion steering also meant the VW stub axles had to be modified, but Mark also reprofiled them to look prettier before sending them off to the chromers, along with countless other incidental parts you probably haven't even noticed.

Mixed reaction

We know from the reaction this car received on some of the Volks Rod forums that it's not universally liked, but then those that break out of safe boundaries rarely are and that's exactly what makes them ground-breaking. What this car has done for the Volks Rod scene around the world is to show that there is another way to build this kind of car. In fact, it eschews the grungy 'rat rod' style in favour of all that is high-tech, ultra-clean and thoroughly modern. Sure, many other Volks Rods have 17-inch wheels, but whereas these are usually skinny Thirties wires rolling on bias-ply rubber of insignificant width, Maggie's are seven inches wide and wrapped in 205/40 low pros. And that's just the fronts. Big is best in Maggie's world and



“High-tech, ultra-clean and thoroughly modern”

Shoes off at the door, and pants too...

Ruben and Michael Brockwell at Brockwells in King's Lynn made a fantastic job of reupholstering the early Beetle seats and door panels, as well as making and fitting the headliner all in whiter-than-white, wipe-clean vinyl. Custom aluminium rear quarter panels hide the suicide door hinges, while all the rest of the interior is welded, ground smooth and meticulously prepped metalwork. Even the floorpan is a stock '68 semi auto pan painted in white with a hint of blue. It may have had the least work, but something tells us it's going to take the

most work to keep it clean when Maggie starts using the car properly – and it will get used, she'll make sure of that. Steering wheel is a Billet Specialties Banjo with a white leather wrap on a combination of machined Chevy and Mountney bosses that now work with the VW indicator switch. “We wanted that steering wheel, and that's what we had to do to fit it,” says Mark of the huge amount of work involved. Gauges are all repainted to match the car's paint scheme and the dash treatment is both subtle and original.



▲ Re-painted speedo is less modern than you might imagine.



▲ Switchgear is hidden away under the cleverly re-worked dash, and all wiring hidden out of sight.



▲ Simple, early Beetle seats keep the interior uncluttered, while billet rear view mirror echoes the Oval theme at the rear end. Billet Specialties wheel is mounted on a combination of GM and VW bosses

▲ Side view is perhaps the most dramatic angle, really emphasising the chop and those massive 17 and 20-inch wheels

so massive 10x20-inch American Racing Torque Thrust 2s bring up the rear, with suitably impressive 295/40 x 20 tyres.

“There were only two makes of tyre available in this size and they'd have cost half the amount if Maggie had liked the tread pattern on the others,” Mark recalls with a smile. These alone might have been enough to make the desired statement, but they're only a part of the mix. Where every other car built so far has gone with period or Buggy-style lamps, Mark's fitted up-to-the-minute Headwings headlamps (favourites of the Custom chopper brigade in America) and made his own rear light units, incorporating custom motorcycle

LEDs, as they didn't want anything with any colour in them, other than white, blue and chrome. These are probably the biggest talking point on the whole car and one Mark now admits he's not sure about himself, but they show the couple's desire to be different and, let's face it, Thirties tail lights wouldn't have been right either.

Nice, and a slice

We could write a book on the body mods that the '74 shell – that's right, '74 – has had, but we don't have the space here to detail everything. You can clearly see that it has had a few inches sliced out of its height (five, for those who are interested), an Oval rear window grafted in and that it has suicide doors with radiused tops. But did you notice that it has a pre-'64 front roof section too, that the bottoms of



▶ Now that's what we call a custom-made fuel tank! What you can't see from here is the special cut-out in the back to house the fuel pump, or the fact that all the car's wiring is hidden behind the dash and then runs down through a conduit into the framehead



▲ IRS pan had its trailing arms swapped side for side, then the halfshafts chromed



▲ Allen-head machined bolt caps have been used nearly everywhere and where not, they're stainless acorn head nuts. That's attention to detail



▲ Rear view of front suspension gives a better idea of how it all bolts to the pan

“This completely redefines the term Volks Rod”

the doors and the quarters have been reshaped, that it's fully de-seamed or that the sills use Bay Window Bus parts? Didn't think so.

The same goes for the interior. There's not a panel on the car that hasn't been extensively modified in one way or another. As they didn't like the way many Volks Rods are left open at the front and rear compartments, Mark and Tony reshaped the metalwork around the valances, edged them with 4mm steel bar and fitted Beetle release mechanisms so these compartments now lock down.

Under the front, there's no cheap spun aluminium fuel tank lobbed in just to make do either. Instead, there's a beautifully hand-formed tank with welded internal fixings which was purpose-made to house a hidden Carter rotary fuel pump. Unfortunately, it was this that caused a lot of headaches and has stopped Maggie's 'Mod Rod' being out and about at shows this year, so it has now been replaced

by a more conventional item, much to Mark's annoyance, but it gives you some idea of how much planning went into this car.

This car is more than just well thought out, though, or even just well built and detailed. It pushes the boundaries for this style of car further than any that have been built before – and I

believe it completely redefines the term Volks Rod. For where the Volks Rod craze has, in the main, remained firmly rooted in the traditional, Maggie's car has gone the opposite direction and looks to the future instead. It's been a while since a Custom VW crossed the divide and gave the street rods a run for their money, but something tells me this exceptional car is going to be the next VW to do it. **VW**

Thanks: Tony Jarvis at Chassiscraft, Chris at Wisbech American Street & Performance for the wheels and much more, the sadly departed Paul Gibbs for inspiration, Neil at Specialist Polishing Services for being on polishing and chroming detail, Dave Q for painting the white bits, Bob and Lee at Prestige Bodylines for the paintwork, Bernie Smith for the gearbox, Steve Wadsworth for more polishing, Lawrence Jakes for the fabrication work and Alex Jones for all his input – it would never have made it to The *VolksWorld* Show without you!

