

Ian Bennett

Feature Sample

Title *Herbie Flies Again*
Pages *1*
Publication *Auto Express*
Type *Glossy Automotive Weekly*
Publisher *Dennis Publishing*
Words *Vic Marelle (Ian Bennett)*
Photography *Ian Bennett*

Off-the-wall take on homebuilt aircraft powered by Volkswagen Beetle car engines - hence the title reference to the Disney film car.

Note:

This feature is provided as an example of Ian Bennett / Vic Marelle writing and photography only. The feature is fully copyright protected and may not be reproduced in any way, whether words or images, in whole or in part, without the written permission of Ian Bennett

Herbie flies again

Next time you hear the familiar thrum of an approaching VW Beetle engine, look to the skies rather than behind you, says Vic Marelle

HERBIE has nothing on Luciano Chiappi, who, in 1970, decided he wanted to take to the skies – in his Volkswagen Beetle. Now, almost 20 years and a wife and three children later, he's realised his ambition and flies the Beetle he once wheeled into his garage in Clitheroe, Lancashire.

He's one of hundreds of enthusiasts who are recycling Beetle engines and making them into beach buggies of the skies.

Originally an aero design adapted for land use, the air-cooled, horizontally opposed Volkswagen engine has come full circle. More than 1,500 home-built aeroplanes are now buzzing around our skies, and a growing number are powered by the Porsche-designed engine.

Lou Chiappi is typical of the builder/flyer. He chose to build the Volksplane – which has the aerodynamics of a brick, gets its power from a Beetle and looks like a leftover from the First World War – because it could be done for less than £3,000, often in a matter of months.

Like most other builders, Lou converted his engine in accordance with plans drawn up by enthusiast Donald Peacock. Gearbox, clutch and other familiar parts of the Beetle were discarded, the capacity increased from 1,600cc to 1,834cc, and a twin magneto system fitted.

It's now one of the most economical ways to go flying. And budding Biggles need no special skills for their self-build projects. Wood or steel tubing covered with fabric



CHOCKS AWAY: The nippy Volksplane is one of life's uplifting experiences



ONE WAY TO BEAT THOSE TRAFFIC JAMS: Herbie, the legendary Hollywood flying VW Beetle, takes off on one of its magnificent flights of fancy

is well within the capability of the average DIY enthusiast. Special conversion parts are manufactured by Popular Flying Association member Barry Smith, designer of the world's only fuel-injected, aerobatics-approved VW conversion.

And recent clarification of Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) rules has come as a breath of fresh air to the flying community. Though still requiring the services of a qualified instructor, the DIY aeroplane builder can now learn to fly in his own home-built Beetle aeroplane.

Since half the 40 qualifying hours are flown solo, that opens the (hangar) door for more budding Douglas Bader types.

All they need is a supply of old Beetles. And with the world's most popular car of all time as a donor, the hobby is set to prosper.



CONVERTS: The sky's the limit for DIY enthusiasts



PILOT: Lou's such a high flyer in the Volksplane

REGULATIONS

AMATEUR, or home-built aeroplane construction is regulated by the Popular Flying Association (PFA). Projects are inspected throughout building and must meet laid-down standards. Aircraft are operated on a Permit to Fly, issued by the PFA on behalf of the Civil Aviation Authority. Similar to road tax, the annual permit fee is £68, though the first after building is double that amount.

CONVERSION

VOLKSWAGEN engines have been converted for aero use for many years. Pioneering conversion work was originally carried out by enthusiasts like Gerry Breakall and Ernie Horsefall, who is now a national committee member of the PFA. Donald Peacock's conversion plans have been available for over 20 years and Barry Smith's conversion components are exported worldwide.

CONTACTS

- **POPULAR FLYING ASSOCIATION**, Terminal Building, Shoreham Airport, Sussex, BN43 5FF.
- **DONALD PEACOCK**, Paradise, Kempsford, airford, Gloucester, GL7 4U.
- **BARRY SMITH**, Aero Engines and Airframes Ltd, 2 Wrentree Close, Recar, Teesside, TS10 4SB.
- **TAYLOR MONOPLANE PLANS** (brochure £1.75) Taylor, 79 Springater Road, Leigh-on-Sea, Eex.