



SIX *on* *the* BEACH

Beach buggies are back! We met six owners on the beach to see how fashions have changed over the decades.



NO OTHER GENRE of kit car says 'summer' like a beach buggy. In their heyday, they summed up a carefree, fun-loving generation – and their popularity is growing once more.

Whatever the decade, though, individuality has been a key part of the buggy scene. To prove the point, we brought together six owners of various buggies, from a retro detailed Sidewinder to another, slammed Sidewinder via a Kango that's been used as daily transport for 21 years, to an almost mainstream long wheelbase Doon.

Each owner has a clear idea of what a beach buggy should be, and each has created their own unique interpretation of the theme. Let's take a closer look...

Darren Hill's and Ruth Chipperfield's Sidewinder

DARREN HILLS, CREATOR of this Sidewinder, is no stranger to buggy projects. He's built around 15 of them over the last couple of decades, and also has over 10 Beetle restoration projects to his name. He now runs Retro Buggies (www.retrobuggies.co.uk) as a hobby business alongside his day job, where he offers floorpan shortening, fabrication, wiring looms and even full builds.

He built the car pictured here for his girlfriend, Ruth Chipperfield, and the brief for the project was to show that buggies can still be built quickly and



- ▲ One of Darren's other buggies – with a V8!
- ▲ Interior retains donor Beetle's seats.
- ▲ Ban the Bomb a nice '60s touch!
- ▶ Sidewinder exhaust and Empi fuel filler cap maintain the retro feel.

cheaply. He did just that: it was assembled within a month (with the help of his mate Craig 'Fat Bloke' Kemp) at a cost of £2300 (a further £500 having been spent since it was on the road).

The couple decided to go for a '60s feel, which explains the high ride height, single roll-over hoop, 7in chrome headlamps and banded wheels. Retaining stock Beetle parts like the seats, front indicators and tailights from the donor also maintains the retro look, as well as helping to keep costs down. Stretching the budget a little is the



Bruce Meyers Sidewinder exhaust, a design which has been in production since 1964. The bodyshell is called a Sidewinder, too, and is available from Mel Hubbard of Manx Buggies (01945 430604).

Like all buggies, the kit comprises a bodyshell and a windscreen... and that's it! The rest is up to the builder to source, which explains why all the buggies over



Des Cooke's Lolette

WHEN DES COOKE replaced his Peugeot 205 rallycross car with a 206, he quickly realised that motorsport was about to become a lot more expensive with the newer machine. He sold it pretty swiftly, leaving a gap in his garage for a new toy. Des had always fancied a beach

- ▼ Blue and white colour scheme better than the old green and beige it had when Des bought the car.

buggy, so this was the ideal opportunity to get his hands on one. He knew roughly what he wanted, so didn't carry out too much research before finding a Lolette on the Vee-dub website www.volkszone.com, which had been imported from South Africa.

In its previous life, the buggy seems to have had some heavy use: Des has been digging sand out of it for the last few years, and the Beetle floorpan is slightly misshapen, indicating some heavy off-road use.

It has been transformed since being bought in 2004. When the original 1835cc air-cooled lump dropped a valve, he had the perfect excuse to start a rebuild. The engine was replaced with a new one built from scratch, the suspension has been upgraded with Gaz adjustable dampers and the green body



I REBUILT THIS...

- Owner:** Des Cooke
- Age:** 35
- Occupation:** Software consultant
- Favourite tool in your garage?** Sledgehammer!
- Are you a member of the club?** Yes, the Southern Dune Buggy Club
- Best bargain?** The rocker covers
- Favourite suppliers?** Cool Air, GSF
- Fastest car you have ever been in?** My dad's old Peugeot 206 rallycross car
- What other car do you own?** VW Golf TDI
- Lottery win car?** A Peugeot 205 T-16
- First car you owned?** Mini
- Favourite film?** *Leon*

the following pages look so different – there’s no such thing as a standard kit.

Ruth’s buggy first hit the road in March 2006 and she used it almost daily from April to October last year, the highlight being a trip to the Lake District in the summer. With the weather turning good again (well, apart from the day of our photoshoot!), it’s being released from hibernation, with a planned trip to Germany and Austria in convoy with other buggies later this year.

We really like the authenticity of this

I BUILT THIS...

Builder and driver: Darren Hills and Ruth Chipperfield

Age: 35 and 42

Occupation: Self-employed electrician and self-employed cleaner

Favourite tool in your garage? ‘Fat Bloke’ (see text)

Best thing about your car? The driver!

Worst thing about your car? The carburettor at the moment

Best bargain? The front bar

Fastest car you have ever been in? A Westfield V8

What other car(s) do you own? A V8 Prowler buggy, Meyers Manx, Bugle, 1966 Beetle, Ford P100, Peugeot 309 and a Golf cabriolet

buggy, from the basic specification to the Ban the Bomb logo on the nose, it’s got a 1960s flower power vibe going on that instantly transports you back to the heady days when the beach buggy was king.

▼ A 2005 buggy that looks forty years older!



OWNER RATING DARREN AND RUTH (OUT OF TEN)

THE BUILD (DARREN)		ON THE ROAD (RUTH)	
Kit quality	10	Performance	8
Factory back-up	10	Handling	6
Build manual	n/a	Brakes	8
Ease of build	10	Value for money	8
Ease of SVA compliance	n/a	Smile factor	12!

(with beige stripes!) was treated to a coat of metallic Ford Imperial Blue with white stripes.

The Lolette is a strict two-seater, but features a large boot making it reasonably practical. During the summer, Des tends to lock his regular car away at weekends and use the buggy as his primary form of leisure-time transport. His favourite aspect of buggy ownership is tinkering with the engine, and the only downside is the handling. “It’s an old Beetle, so it will never be brilliant,” he says. “It’s no worse than you would expect, though, and there’s nothing I really dislike about the car.”

If Des embarked on buggy ownership for a second time, he would build his own car from scratch. For one thing, a new gelcoat finish is a lot less hassle and, in the long run, less expensive than respraying an existing bodyshell.

Not that he’s finished with the Lolette yet. He has plans to fit an engine cage, change the wheels and remove the side panels to reveal the side impact beams, which will be painted to match the roll cage. The changes will be carried out in

such a way that it can always be returned to the current look, though. The evolution looks set to continue...



OWNER RATING DES COOKE (OUT OF TEN)

THE BUILD		ON THE ROAD	
Kit quality	8	Performance	9
Factory back-up	n/a	Handling	6
Build manual	n/a	Brakes	7
Ease of build	8	Value for money	8
Ease of SVA compliance	n/a	Smile factor	10



►► Porsche Fuchs wheels look superb! ▼▼ Two-seater cockpit features a large, covered boot in the back. ► Empi exhaust is a work of art. ▼ Des with girlfriend Clare Pointer.

Robert Wren's Manx Mk2

THERE WERE TIMES during Robert Wren's build when he almost threw in the towel and placed an 'abandoned project' classified ad.

Let's rewind a little. Robert first got into buggy ownership with a Vulture. Built in the 1970s (it's guessed), it was a

▼ Manx Mk2 body gives this buggy a classic appearance. Detailing is inspired by the hot rod scene.

little worse for wear so, after running around in it for a while, Robert stripped it back and bought a Manx Mk2 body from Manx buggies to replace the ageing 'shell' – essentially using a buggy as a donor for a buggy.

Once stripped back, the full extent of

the rust was revealed: tin worm had seriously got the better of this 1947 Beetle floorpan. In fact, only the centre spine and wheels remain from the original Vulture. The full horror of what Robert had taken on left him feeling out of his depth, and the project languished for a couple of years.

Fortunately, his friend Mark Gosling offered a helping hand and, together, they returned the buggy to the road in its current, head-turning standard. Robert is a hot rod fan (in fact, you're as likely to see his Manx at a hot rod show as you



I BUILT THIS...

Owner: Robert Wren
Age: 46
Occupation: Horologist
Favourite tool in your garage? The lathe
Are you a member of the club? Yes
Best thing about your car? Its stance
Worst thing about your car? Trying to get reverse gear because the gearknob has to go under my knee
Best bargain? The chronograph out of a Russian aeroplane
Fastest car you have ever been in? Aston Martin
What other car do you own? A new Beetle 1.8 Turbo
First car you owned? Austin A30

Keith Taylor's Kango

IF THERE WAS some kind of lifetime achievement award for buggy ownership, Keith Taylor would be in serious danger of winning it. He bought his first buggy fully built in 1975 (before passing his driving test) which he modified, but then wrote off. He then built one, which was pressed into service as his regular transport. By 1985, Keith was on his third buggy, each one having been used as his



▲ Keith takes a look at Des's Lolette.
 ◀ Tailgate can be removed, as can doors, for that summertime feeling. ▶ Angular styling brings buggy up to date, '80s style.

daily driver. But the time came for him and wife Vicky to start a family and it looked like he might have to buy something a little more sensible.

Coincidentally, at the same time Dave Fisher of Kingfisher Kustoms launched the Kango – a buggy designed for everyday use. Keith jumped at it, and was amongst the first to buy one of only 13 kits ever made. Of those kits sold, this

is the only one to have been in continuous daily use for 21 years. That's dedication!

As well as thoroughly revised styling, the Kango differs from more typical buggies with its removable hard doors, solid roof and hatchback-style tailgate – which, again, is removable. It also has a heater and radio, adding to its practicality. On the day of the photoshoot, Keith set off from home at 4.15am – you wouldn't want to do that in a 'normal' buggy!

At the time of the build, the Beetle donor Keith used was only ten years old but, despite its youth, he still opted out of Beetle engine unreliability for daily use. During his search for an alternative, he came across a Fiat 1.8-litre unit, which gave reliable service until its demise around eight years ago. Keith then sourced a 2-litre version of the same engine which set him back £100 – exactly the same figure he had paid for the 1.8 in 1985!

The Kango's longest period off the road was four days when some of the floorpan rusted away. In its place now is a semi-spaceframe arrangement fabricated by Keith.



▶ Interior boasts a heater and radio. Positively luxurious by class standards!



are a Beetle event), which really comes across in his car's appearance. That funky hard-top, for instance, defines the look of the car. It's the second one he's fitted after the original fixings proved inadequate and the first roof became airborne! This one's going nowhere, though: Robert has made his own aluminium brackets.

There is a lot of bespoke detailing throughout the car, such as the aluminium tachometer mount and one-off speedo surround, which Robert has made himself. Another neat touch is the way he's hidden the bolts holding on the body, so they don't show through the bottom of the floor. This has been done by adding an extra tube to the floorpan



to which the bolts are mounted.

Looking at this car now, you'd never guess it was almost given up on – it's been assembled with care to an exceptionally high standard. Top work!

▾ Dash features chronograph from a Russian 'plane, big tacho and deep dish wheel. ▴ Bug Pack ceramic exhaust is typically shiny! ▴ Number plate sub-line hints at the 1947 Beetle origins.



OWNER RATING ROBERT WREN (OUT OF TEN)

THE BUILD		ON THE ROAD	
Kit quality	10	Performance	9
Factory back-up	10	Handling	6
Build manual	n/a	Brakes	6
Ease of build	7	Value for money	10
Ease of SVA compliance	n/a	Smile factor	11!

He has resisted the temptation to fit shiny aftermarket brightwork, knowing that daily use in the winter would soon turn it dull. This is one buggy that's built for the daily grind rather than show 'n' shine!

The worst part of driving the Kango day-in, day-out, says Keith, is the excessive noise. While it may be a lot more civilised than the other buggies here, it still makes a racket, even without the help of a Volkswagen flat-four! But driving something out of the ordinary is compensation enough.

The car has now covered a stout 146,000 miles since being built. That's good going for a car which stands its owner in at just £4000. Best of all, after 21 years of regular use Keith still gets a kick from driving it. Who would have thought a beach buggy could be such a sensible choice?

OWNER RATING KEITH TAYLOR (OUT OF TEN)

THE BUILD		ON THE ROAD	
Kit quality	5	Performance	10
Factory back-up	9	Handling	10
Build manual	n/a	Brakes	10
Ease of build	8	Value for money	8
Ease of SVA compliance	n/a	Smile factor	10

I BUILT THIS...

Owner: Keith Taylor

Age: 50

Occupation: Vehicle examiner for MoD

Favourite tool in your garage? Welding kit

Are you a member of the club? Yes – beachbuggy.org.uk and Death Trap Dubs

Best bargain? The donor car – it was only 10 years old and cost just £90

Favourite film? *Easy Rider*

Lottery win car? I'd probably spend it on the Kango!

What other car(s) do you own? A 1970 Beetle and my wife has a 2000 Volkswagen Passat estate

First car you owned? A beach buggy



Chris Jordan's Doon

CHRIS JORDAN'S WIFE'S old Beetle had been peacefully sitting in a barn waiting to be restored for their son, Andrew, to use as his first car. But when he postponed driving lessons in favour of riding a motorcycle, tin worm took hold of the old Dub to such an extent that a straightforward resto was no longer a viable option.

There was only one thing for it: chop off the body and build a buggy. Having built an NG TA back in 1979, this isn't Chris's first kit car build, but it's certainly been a long time between projects, the buggy being built between 2003 and 2005.

To avoid the SVA test, Chris wanted to

build a long wheelbase buggy that wouldn't require the Beetle floorpan to be shortened. He considered a few options, but settled on the Doon because he liked its styling.

Doon's boss, 'Chad', has been involved with buggies for many years and, when he embarked on designing his own kit, he wanted to iron out some of the wrinkles he'd experienced. One example is the neat front bonnet which opens like a conventional car's to reveal easy access to the fuel tank, battery, fuse box and other parts, all neatly fitted into the GRP moulding.

Chris has kept his Doon mechanically standard, the engine being unmodified.

▲ Chris Jordan with son Andrew. ▲ Unshortened floorpan means interior is big enough – just! – for four adults.



I BUILT THIS...

Owner: Chris Jordan
Age: 52
Occupation: Engineer
Favourite tool in your garage? Racing jack
Are you a member of the club? Yes, www.beachbuggies.org.uk
Best thing about your car? Its smile appeal
Worst thing about your car? Nothing
Best bargain? Rear seat belts from the States
Fastest car you have ever been in? Jaguar Mk7
Lottery win car? Audi R8
First car you owned? Mini

He plans to fit a brand new engine in future – they're still made in Mexico, produce around 50bhp and sell for £900.

Ashley Summers' Sidewinder

IT SEEMS LOGICAL to finish our look at beach buggies roughly where we started. Ashley Summers' Sidewinder is exactly the same model as Ruth Chipperfield's retro buggy, yet it looks

▼ Ashley Summers' Sidewinder is a truly modern interpretation of the buggy theme.

like a completely different kit. The orange bodywork, chopped down roll-over frame, low ride height, side panels, Image alloys and modern lighting make it appear a completely different car, and

illustrate perfectly how the beach buggy theme can be brought bang up to date. And, call us fashion victims, we fell in love with this one!

This is Ashley's second buggy build (he put together a Manx Ray in the early '90s) and things got off to a good start when he sourced a Beetle donor for just £50 – despite the original asking price being £300! After chopping it down to the floorpan, he made a box-section structure from 2in by 1in steel which would run behind the bodywork.



I BUILT THIS...

Owner: Ashley Summers
Age: 39
Occupation: Sign-maker/manager
Favourite tool in your garage? The beer fridge!
Are you a member of the club? Yes
Best thing about your car? Taking the kids out in it – they love it!
Best bargain? The wheels – they should have been £1480, but I got 30 per cent off in a Christmas deal
Fastest car you have ever been in? Ferrari 360
Lottery win car? An original Porsche 356 Coupé
First car you owned? I had a Mk2 Consul at 16, but my first road car was a Mk2 Escort
Next likely kit car project? A Porsche 550 replica

Elsewhere, the car is finished with parts which will be familiar to modern kit car builders: Cobra bucket seats from Europa and checkerplate flooring being typical examples. In the back, though, he's had to think a bit more laterally. The rear seat is a professionally made one-off. They even embossed a 'seat grip' pattern into the surface of the vinyl. And, to match the front harnesses (which were easy to source in yellow), Chris had to order the back ones from America – he couldn't find a single supplier of yellow lap belts in the UK. At times like that, the internet is a handy resource!

Another useful company he recommends is Volksmagic, who made the roll cage. It locates to the body and chassis at ten points and has transformed the car in terms of its feeling of security.

Since getting his car on the road, Chris has used it mainly to visit car shows, splitting his time between kit and Volkswagen events – and finding a warmer welcome at the former, we're happy to report! From Chris's experience, it seems some Beetle fans aren't too keen to see their favourite car hacked about to make something different.

Having had his car on the road for a couple of years, Chris has no plans whatsoever of parting with it – no matter what Beetle owners may think!



OWNER RATING CHRIS JORDAN (OUT OF TEN)

THE BUILD		ON THE ROAD	
Kit quality	9	Performance	9
Factory back-up	10	Handling	7
Build manual	n/a	Brakes	8
Ease of build	8	Value for money	10
Ease of SVA compliance	n/a	Smile factor	10



▲ Low roll bar gives this Sidewinder a wicked stance. ▼ Brake light neatly frenched into the roll-over cage.
▼ Four separate bucket seats look great. ▲ Image wheels add to the modern feel.



Mindful that his two children would ride in the car, he wanted it to be as safe as possible. This meant a bar could be welded across the back of the car onto which the rear belts are anchored – rather than bolting them to flimsy GRP.

Another area where Ashley went his own way was that aforementioned roll-over cage. Using a material called Foamex, which can be heated and bent to shape, he made a mock-up of the

cage and kept cutting and shortening it until it looked right. A local company then bent the metal tubes to shape and Ashley welded it together. He also welded in a piece of angle so that the windscreen could be bonded to it.

All up, the project took 15 months of mainly Sunday afternoons, and about £6500. A little more expensive than the '60s style Sidewinder, but that's inflation for you! ◀◀



OWNER RATING ASHLEY SUMMERS (OUT OF TEN)

THE BUILD		ON THE ROAD	
Kit quality	10	Performance	9
Factory back-up	10	Handling	9
Build manual	n/a	Brakes	10
Ease of build	9	Value for money	9
Ease of SVA compliance	n/a	Smile factor	10

TO JOIN IN

We tracked down these buggy owners at www.beachbuggy.org.uk which is a terrific online resource for owners and potential owners of beach buggies. There's loads of photos, useful info and details of various meetings to be found at this online community.