1967 Kombi Restoration : Part 1

And along came…

Through the early peart of 2000, we regularly passed BeetleBest on our way to Moana for a surf. Each time we would admire a split window Kombi which had appeared in the yard for sale. Eventually the attraction grew too large and we stopped to check it out. A few weeks later, after a lengthy period of negotiation (my wife's not mine), the van was mine (ours?). The $1100 ticket price being justified as an early 40th birthday present. Like so many who start a restoration project, I assumed that it would be on the road within a couple of years. Little did I know!

I had been a member of the VEC for about a year by this time and at every opportunity, could be found picking the brains of fellow kombi owners. Shane Hinton and Alf Anderson proved invaluable as both were in the final stages of finishing their vans. I joined the club after running in to Richard Newbury at Volksfactory, while buying parts for a Type 3 Fastback my eldest daughter & son had purchased together as a first car. Paul informed me that if I was a member of a club I could get a discount on parts and then he motioned to Richard and indicated that he was the man to help me (having been a founding member of the VEC a couple of years earlier). Before I knew it I had paid my subs and was regularly attending meetings at the Maid and Magpie. Interestingly enough, fellow Club Kombi key men, Rob Gilbert and Ken Rowlands both joined at much the same time. So after each meeting I asked as many questions as I could. Some of the best tips I picked up at this stage included:

- Work on a small section at a time – that way you can always see signs progress
- If someone made a panel 40 years ago, you can find someone to make a replica today
- Take your time with welding: only weld a very small section at a time, otherwise if the sheet metal gets too hot it will expand and you can kiss goodbye to your smooth finish
- Make a decision early on how much you can do yourself: if you are handy, spend the money buying each tool as you need it. If you are not, pay someone to do the hard work on a piece-meal basis and do the finishing off work yourself.

I could add to this a tip picked up in later years: everything you are doing has probably been done before and if so, someone has more than likely posted details on the Internet. Each year the breadth of VW resto related articles available on the net expands enormously, so make a web search one of the first things you do before tackling any tricky task.

After a couple of months parked by the side of the house, the van was taken in to the garage to be stripped of its trim and running gear. My two sons, Andrew and Steven proved invaluable at

this stage – bagging all the parts and labelling them as they did so. The strip down revealed a pretty normal picture for a splittie: the bottom of the nose was a bit patchy; the bottom of the windscreen was rusted out; the doglegs and box sections needed replacement as did the inner and outer sills; plenty of rust holes in the cab and cargo floor too. The rear quarters had taken a bit of a shunt, as had the driver's side cabin panels: these had been covered with a 6mm layer of bog, but over the years water had got in and there wasn't much meat behind the bog. Nothing bad enough to dampen the enthusiasm though.

Rather than take the van to be dipped & stripped, I decided to strip it at home. This meant countless hours with wire wheels on angle grinders and drills, but it also saved a lot of cash. The boys surprised me by completing the bulk of the outside strip down during a week of their school

1967 Kombi Restoration : Part 1

holidays. The newly exposed metal was covered with a coat of primer to keep the surface rust at bay and then we turned our attention to the underside. For this job, I purchased a small sand blaster to fit to my compressor: you need a good double cylinder compressor to keep up with the flow these things need. I was lucky enough to score a compressor from a neighbour who had given up on it: I fitted a new pressure switch and that baby is still purring away today. Like a mug I

spent hour after hour flat on my back hitting the bus with the blaster (make sure you buy garnet for your blaster as normal sand fragments in to tiny slivers which have been linked to silicosis). For every hour you spend on the blaster there seems to be another hour sweeping up grit again. The stuff gets everywhere. Top make things worse, it tends to full up all the little cavities, so if you haven't blown it out prior to painting, you can guarantee that the jet of air from your spray gun will dislodge it and cause it to settle on your nice new paint!.

At this stage I had not realised that the easiest way to work on a kombi underbelly is to tip the bus on its side, something I ended up doing a few months later.

By Feb 2001, with the bus stripped and primed, attention turned to the rusty metal. At this stage I was lucky enough to pick up a complete rear end cut from Volksfactory. This had been destined for export to the UK but was discarded at the last moment. This gave me new rear quarter panels and battery tray and plenty of nicely contoured filler pieces, which I could fabricate in to replacements for sections of rusty metal I had to cut away.

I also began work on repairing the floor in the cargo area. There were plenty of holes in my floor, but not enough to make it worth replacing the whole lot. I filled the smallest holes with weld then fabricated repair sections – the above mentioned rear cut provided 10cm of profiled floor which proved just perfect for the job.

The ribs which run up from the floor to the roof line tend to rust out from the bottom up – once again a victim of trapped dust and water. I cut out the bottom sections of the rusted ribs and bent up replacement sections. First task was to make up a pattern out of paper, which could be folded around the old section and marked with the outline and folds. This was then traced to flat sheet, which was cut to shape and then beaten in to shape with hammer and dolleys.

To fit all the new panels, I needed one vital tool: on the recommendation of my brother-in-law, I purchased a Ryobi 135A MIG welder. Although you can buy gasless units, you really need gas to weld the thin sheet metal found on cars. Most

MIG welders intended for home use run on disposable gas bottles. This is fine if you use them once a year, but for a restoration project, you need to lash out and buy a regulator to use with a larger gas bottle.

It can be soul destroying as you clean away filler and paint to find yet more rust – this was the case on my sill panels. It didn't take long for me to realise that they would have to be replaced completely. My mental list of jobs to do was growing longer by the week. I didn't have much spare cash to throw at the project, so needed to substitute that for lots of time and effort.

I just love tools and this project proved a great excuse to acquire some really great ones. In the end, the savings from doing the work yourself far outweighs the cost of the tools – and if you never do another resto, you can always sell them off again.

.....To Be Continued in the Next Edition.