



PART 1 – The VW engine era (written back when I had the VW motor, before the V6 transplant...)

To me a VW is a bit of a girls car. On movies or the TV your typical low income / student female will be driving a beetle. That's the VW's stereotype, a good first car for a chick.

A Baja (Mexican, pronounced 'ba-ha') however, is different. It has more testosterone pumped into it. Bigger tyres, higher suspension, and generally beefed up in everyway possible. It has more of a mad max stereotype, the sort of car you'd expect to find jumping dirt mounds, roosting through mud holes or hacking your front lawn. And that's what I love about them.

I fell in love with Baja's when I was a little ankle biter living up at Tewantin, the gateway to 40 mile beach, Baja heaven for Queenslanders. I used to see a lot of cool Baja's around Noosa, with or without paint, and thought they were cool.

Since then I'd always wanted a Baja, and as you can see I got one. It drove past my house when I was 16. I thought "look at that awesome Baja!" and set off after it on my pushie. To my surprise it pulled up at a house around the corner, and had a for sale sign on it. I was in love. After

some extreme sucking up to my parents, the Baja was mine. That was in January 1995.

So the Baja has been mine ever since. At high school it was swingaxle and had an 1835cc engine. There was a nice grassy vacant block of land next to my school. By mid year it wasn't so grassy (it wasn't me, I swear!), and I got banned from parking on it. But I got the grasshacker of the year award at my formal so it was worth it. A police car even followed me home on my last day of school to make sure I didn't have one last go at it.

Part way through uni, and after I had my third swingaxle gearbox failure, I decided to convert it to IRS. I managed to get all the pieces I needed for the conversion out of a rusted out L bug that I bought for \$50 from a hippy at MT Nebo (came with free rats under the seat). The bug IRS box proved to be a lot stronger than the swingaxle boxes, as I didn't manage to break it before I upgraded again, more on that later...

The 1835cc engine was also getting a bit tired (the blow-by melting the foam in the oil breather was a bad sign), so I decided to rebuild it too. A

low budget 1776 with a mild cam was the finished product. It still used the stock carb for a while, but later was upgraded to dual kadrons. That stayed in for a couple of years until a better engine at a great price from a friend came along.

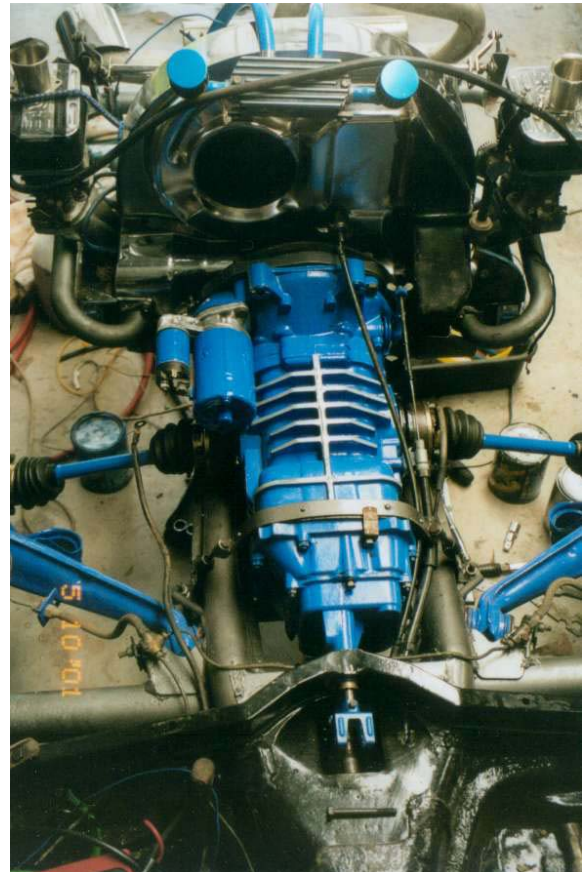
The engine is a 1915cc type 1 engine. The flywheel was lightened and the bottom end balanced. A hotter cam was installed along with chrome-moly pushrods, frogeye adjusters and 1.25:1 ratio rockers. In the interest of longevity, expensive 044 heads were installed. With long reach spark plugs, 35.5mm inlet and 40mm SS exhaust valves they will easily outlast the standard heads. In my friends L bug this engine used to beat his mates VL turbo to 100kph. In the heavier less aerodynamic Baja it is a bit slower than that, but still not too shabby.



The engine is fed by twin 44IDF webers, with the scat air cleaners converted to a bolt-on design to ensure no sand finds it's way into the engine. I usually run the engine on 98 octane PULP which is ignited by a 009 mechanical dizzy running electronic points. Vacuum dizzy's cause high performance engines to knock while offroading at low rpm. The exhaust gases are fed out through thunderbird 4-1 extractors into a SS genie turbo muffler and 3x4" oval exhaust tip.

The entire car underwent a full rebuild last year. One of the major modifications was the installation of a 5-rib 1800 type 2 kombi gearbox. To adapt the kombi gearbox to the beetle pan, I opted for the Sharpbuilt soft mount kit. I got a friend who works for Paul Morris Motorsport to machine my axles and stub axles to suit the larger type 2 CV's. The gearbox is basically standard, with beefed up shifter plates and back-cut gears (to prevent it popping out of gear).

To make room under the body for the much bigger and stronger kombi gearbox, I installed a 2inch body lift kit. I made the lift kit from 25x50mm RHS. Instead of trying to form RHS to the shape of the front of the pan, I opted to buy a Sharpbuilt cast aluminum front yoke. Due to the extra height of the kombi gearbox, the nose cone passes through the lift kit. The shifter rod then steps back down into the tunnel via 2 standard shifter couplings welded on top of each other.



The front suspension has twin adjusters welded into the beam. I also seam welded the towers and fabricated my own hook and pin suspension limits (a necessity on a ball joint front end). The brakes are beetle discs with the later twin pin calipers off an L bug. The front wheels are 235/75R15 mud tyres, currently Goodyear Wrangler MTR's.

The rear suspension is basically standard with notched spring plates to allow a maximum 18 degree CV angle. The rear brakes are bigger type 3 drums. The rear tyres are 31x10.5R15 mud tyres, also currently Goodyear Wrangler MTR's.



The hood lining and carpets were installed by Rod. I made the custom door panels and speaker pods from mdf and covered them with a black velour. The seats are late model Honda Prelude seats, mounted such that they are 2 inches higher than standard, to suit the body lift kit. I've updated the electric features of the car by installing a full featured vision car alarm, electric windows and a Sony Xplod sound system. The sound system consists of a 4x50W head unit, 6.5in front speakers, 6x9 rear speakers and a 12inch 800W subwoofer. Plenty enough for the little VW cabin space.

Since the rebuild I have been out enjoying the car as much as possible. I have been doing heaps of offroading at places like 40 mile beach, Mt Mee SF, Benarkin SF, Sundown NP, Nanango old coach road, Canungra quarry, Stockton sand dunes and of course Fraser Island. The lower kombi gearing allows me to more comfortably keep up with my mates in their Range Rover's. Now I can crawl up hills with them instead of having to slip the clutch or keep heaps of speed. Some of the hills I've gone up recently have amazed even me. I always get plenty of comments from 4wd guys out on the trails, especially when I get up stuff they can't or are too scared to try.

Other unique features to my Baja are things like the taillights frenched into the engine cage. I did this to give the guards that smooth look, and to take weight off of them to prevent the fiberglass cracking. I also built some heavy duty running boards. They are steel framed with aluminum checker plate on top, and are strong enough to stand on. They prevent the front wheels from stone chipping the rear guards, and from family cars opening their doors into mine in car parks. Protecting the paint was important as the car has been repainting in a strange Suzuki metallic blue that varies from blue to violet.

