

CALIFORNIA DREAMING

TONY SAGGU MOVED FROM LONDON'S WESTSIDE TO AMERICA'S WEST COAST TO LIVE OUT THE AMERICAN DREAM – HIS SWEET Mk1 CABBY WAS JUST THE ICING ON THE CAKE.

Words: Elliott Roberts Photos: Anna Taylor





The Mk1 Golf GTI might be seen as the ultimate original hot hatch, but what about its offspring, the Convertible? The Mk1 rag-top may not be the best drop-top of all time (if compared with, say, the E-type Jag), but it's one of the first new-wave Cabriolets, and possibly the most successful.

Naturally, there's still a strong group of die-hard Mk1 Cabrio followers that refuse to let the legend fade and continue to relish the car's funky and friendly appeal. Thirty-six year-old Tony Saggu, originally from West London and now residing in Granada Hills, California, is one of many. His example, however, is one of the tidiest and most unique we've seen, but things weren't always this way.

Tony, who's an Auto Insurance Litigation Specialist (whatever that might be) bought the Cabby as a cheap and cheerful runabout in '96, not long after moving abroad. "I found it in a salvage yard as a Q-plate, stolen and recovered insurance right-off," he told us. "The car was pretty much stripped. It was missing body panels, interior, glass, a roof and wheels, but it thankfully only had 30k on the clock and a full dealer history," he said. Oh, and apparently it was dirt cheap, so Tony soon was cruising around in a multi-coloured beater (his words, not ours) with a torn hood and one seat (*You haven't lived until you've driven a single-seater Golf - Ed*).

In the meantime, Tony's wife, Ari, who's not only into Dubs but whose father works for a VW dealer, took delivery of a shiny new Mk4 1.8T. The pair therefore had a half-decent motor to drive while parts were sourced for the Cabby rebuild. To keep up appearances, the Mk4 was soon slammed on a set of FK coilovers and 10x17" Brock rims sourced through Styledynamix located in Hayes, near Tony's old stomping ground. "I literally carried the wheels back through customs in a couple of suitcases," he said. This left the way clear to begin work on the Cabby and in Tony's words, "it was time to introduce the West Coast of America to the original Westside."

As Tony's a member of the Westside Cartel, he wanted to sort the suspension and ride height first. "The KWs were swapped for a set of Weitec coilovers which allowed the subterranean slam I needed," he told us. These again were sourced from his good buddies Rif and Shahid at Styledynamix who always give him a good deal on parts.

For the car cornered as well as it looked, Tony got an Autotech upper strut brace but struggled to find a lower item to clear his automatic 'box. "We had to make one of our own in the end," he said. Tony's excuse for the auto 'box? "I have the LA freeway traffic to deal with everyday, so it's the only way to go."

At the time, Tony was rolling on 13" Revolutions, but the sump was taking too many hits and so a step up to 15" rims was on the cards. "I'd been hunting for a set of BBS RS01s for some time," and after a guy pulled up at the lights in a Beemer on some pretty convincing replicas Tony was on the case. A deal was soon struck for 250 bucks, but now the car was sitting well and running tidy wheels,

Mk1 GTI CABRIO

Tony had to sort the panels and paintwork.

As is the case with most Californian cars, due to the good weather, the base vehicle was pretty solid with no rot. "The body was pretty clean and only needed a new front wing and some minor jobs," he said. The arches, however, needed quite a bit of work to clear the wheels. Tony fancied going the European route, so binned the ghastly marker lights and also de-badged the body, too. He chose to remove the front plate completely and relocate the rear item to below the bumper. Although most fit a Mk3 VR6 chin spoiler, Tony favoured the Mk2 GTI item as he claims it flows much better with the lines of the car.

Unlike most, Tony was pretty much set on the colour and shade for the car from the start. "I wanted a deep purple, nothing too glitzy or loud," he said. That's why you went for the stunning House of Kolor Purple Pearl then, hey Tony? The car was stripped and sent to Joe Arnold Auto Body in Northridge where the guys worked their magic in applying many coats of Purple Pearl, Kandy magenta and violet on the immaculately prepared panels. "Then it was a case of applying gallons of clear to give it a glass finish," Tony said.

Joe usually handles classic cars, but luckily Tony managed to twist his arm. These Cabrio guys are serious about what they want and won't let much come between them and their loved one. Tony thinks it comes alive in the Californian sunlight. "You can almost taste the Ribena in it."

Once the car rolled out of the paintshop, it looked a million dollars. However, there were a couple of external mods needed before Tony could hold his head high while cruising Sunset Strip of Santa Monica Boulevard. And there was only one man for the job. "Originally, I only wanted to swap the headlights for tinted InPro cross-hairs, but Matt at Tuning Zuebehor insisted I buy the Mattig de-badged grille, too." In fact, he wouldn't sell Tony the lights without the grille. An interesting sales pitch, which is probably why the chaps at Zuebehor are so popular.

Next, the rear lights received a quick coat of Kandy red – a cheap mod that worked well. Tony was lucky enough to get a virtually brand new hood that came from a crashed car. "I bought it dirt cheap. The previous owner had only fitted it a week before their car got totalled." Unlucky for them, lucky for him.

Things were going well for Tony, but luck has a habit of turning around and biting you when you least expect it. This happened pretty much as the car was put back on the road. "I basically drove through a huge puddle and wrecked the engine," he said.

Not great, but this meant the engine would get a spruce-up sooner than he had planned. Luckily, his father-in-law stepped in to take care of the oily bits while Tony could get busy chroming virtually everything visible under the bonnet. "I didn't want anything too crazy like a turbo or supercharger, just a bit of polishing and porting to the head and the odd trick here and there."

Tony wanted everything blinging and

DUB DETAILS

ENGINE: Block bored to two litres, four-cylinder Bv with Digifant injection. Head ported, flowed and polished, 40mm inlet and 35mm exhaust valves, Kent mild-road cam. TSR throttle body, APC air filter, gas-flowed inlet manifold, custom big-bore exhaust system, high-flow cat and centre box, GTI rear box with DTM tip. All alloy parts hand polished including gearbox, cylinder head, diff, bell housing, inlet manifold, throttle body, airflow sensor, servo, AC compressor (over 100 hours work). All other parts chromed including high power, 120A alternator, cam cover, timing belt cover, engine and gearbox mounts, Trimsport dipstick, polished oil cap and battery cover, Allard polished header tank, braided hoses, polished radiator cover and bonnet lifters, chrome hood hinges, lock and catch

CHASSIS: 7.5x15" BBS RS replica wheels with 195/45 tyres. Adjustable WeiTec coilovers, chromed Autotech upper strut brace, custom lower brace, Trimsport strut caps, heavy-duty bushings, Mk2 GTI brakes

OUTSIDE: House of Kolor Pearl Purple with Kandy violet and magenta top coat. Mattig single-lamp de-badged grille, InPro smoked headlights, Mk2 GTI front spoiler modded to fit, clear front indicators, front number plate and carrier removed, full Clipper kit (metal wheel arches removed), plastic arch trims modded to clear wheels, tinted red rear lights. Badges and marker lights removed, smooth bootlid, new light-grey hood and cover

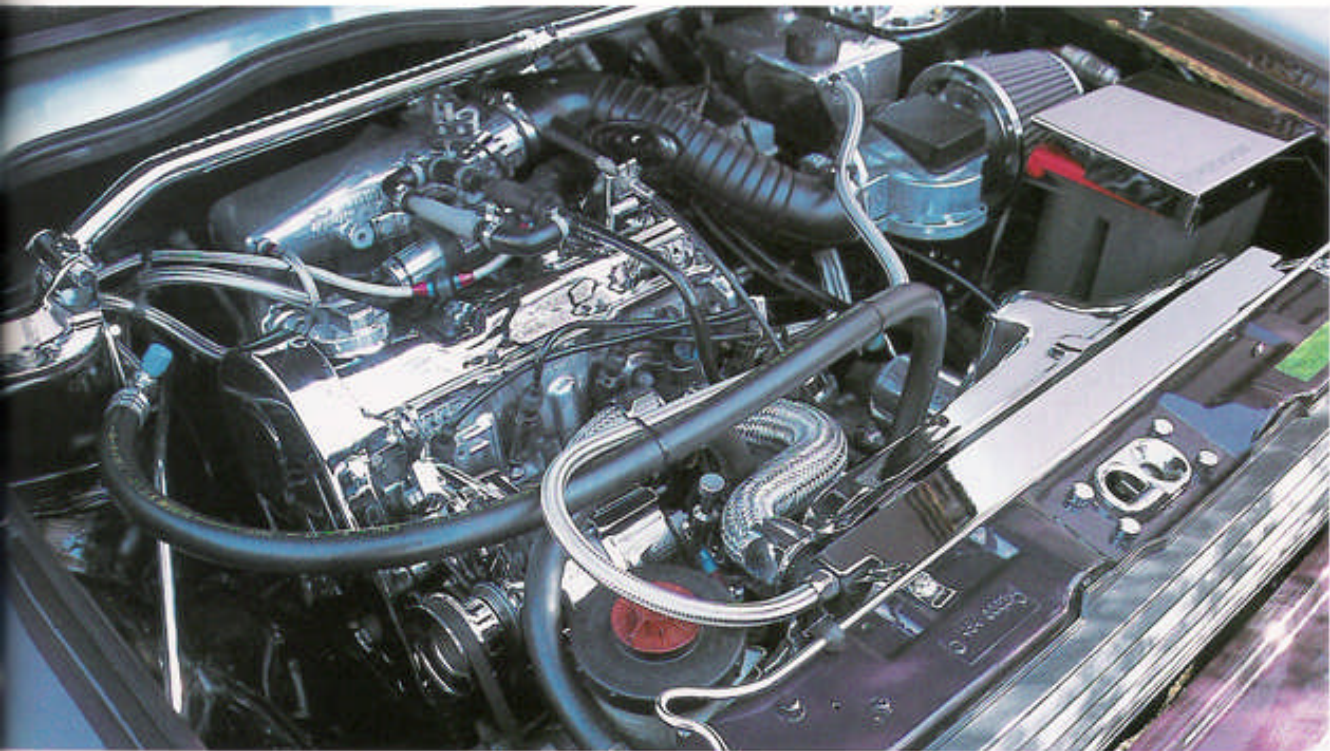
INSIDE: Dream leather retrim with black piping, electric Racaro seats, Momo Millennium steering wheel. Rear seat removed and replaced with speaker enclosure

ICE: Kenwood MASK CD head unit, four 12" JL Audio subs in custom enclosure, four 6.5" Infinity mids and tweeters in doors, two Kenwood KAC1023 and two 923 amps all chrome-plated. Two Farad capacitors also chromed. Optima deep cycle battery

SHOUT: Lachman Virdee, Av at Motoroids in Hounslow and all the family back in West London. Joe Arnold Auto Body Northridge California. Marcos at Extreme Designs. Shahid, Anif, Craig and Chris (Beastie) at Styledynamix UK. All members of Renner Performance Group. All the Westside VW Cartel. Marcus, Kalpesh, Gurds and all the London Massiv. Bernie Chacon at www.dub-nation.com. Anna Taylor, www.infrontmag.com for great pics



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Mk1 GTI CABRIO



THESE CABRIO GUYS
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judging by the results he did just that. The responses since have made it all worthwhile. "With the bling handled it was time for the bass," said Tony. He wasn't kidding. As you might well know, South California (SoCal) is the land of excess and Tony was taking no prisoners. He ripped out the back seat and replaced it with an enclosure housing four 12" JL subs. Combined with the custom

door builds and stunning retrim, it's no wonder Tony's bagged more trophies than Tiger Woods. "I went for a classic look of Old English Antique, carried out by Extreme Designs in Alhambra," he told us. This is the same firm that retrimmed his buddy's, Walter Piperno, Vento (featured last month) and is fast becoming the West Coast's answer to MJ Interiors. And with that, Tony had finally realised his dream, and has spent less than \$6000 on it in total. "The real payoff, well, that's the warm Cali weather. Top down, Pacific Coast Highway and crank up the stereo – Westside in a West Coast style." Sound like the dream's become more of a reality. Are we jealous? Of course not... jammy git ●

TONY SAGGUS Mk1 GOLF CABRIO

The weather in Hounslow is obviously a little less predictable than California where Tony now resides. You can reap the benefits of open-top motoring pretty much every day when you can count on sun rather than rain. Unsurprisingly, this is Tony's daily driver and we bet it turns heads over there in Cali. This is also a possible feature car for the future guys and gals so keep your peepers open.



DUB DETAILS

Cabby-Info.com

ENGINE: Stock block bored to 2.0, Digifant injection, Head ported and polished, Kent Mild Road cam, gas-flowed inlet manifold, TSR throttle body, APC open element air filter mounted to custom flange, all alloy parts hand polished including transmission, 100 hours of engine polishing

CHASSIS: 7.5x15 BBS RS-look wheels with 195/45 tires, custom springs and shocks, lowered 120mm, chromed Autotech upper stress bar, heavy duty bushings

EXTERIOR: Pearl purple with Candy violet and magenta topcoat, badges and repeaters smoothed, number plate re-located to lower bumper, metal wheel arches removed and replaced with plastic to clear wheels, modified Mk2 Golf front spoiler

INTERIOR: Electric Recaro Seats, Momo Millennium steering wheel

ICE: speaker stack 4x12" JL Audio sub-woofers, 6.5" Infinity separates, 1" tweeters in doors, 2x Kenwood KAC1023, 2x Kenwood KAC923 Amps, Kenwood Mask CD head unit

