

At first glance, there may not be much to link the Porsche 914 and VW Golf GTI Cabriolet. But as DAVID BOWERS discovers, at least they each boast Karmann-built bodywork



Connected by **Karmann**



The VW Porsche 914 and the GTI Cabriolet are both sporting convertibles that have Karmann-built bodies - but surely they have little else in common? The more flamboyant 914 was a reasonable success among the laid-back baby boomer generation of the 1970s, whilst the more restrained GTI Cabriolet was a hit during the '80s with those who wore pinstripes and who worked in the City. So why have these two cars been brought together in the hallowed pages of *VWm* in 2004?

Well, when it was suggested to Andrew Wilson that he might like to see his 914 featured in *VWm*, he was keen that his mate Jason Robinson should share the glory by bringing along his smart GTI Cabriolet. A nice gesture that was prompted by the many hours of

work that Jason had put into restoring the bodywork on Andrew's 914.

Jason acquired his 1985 GTI Cabrio four years ago, and it has certainly lived up to the Golf's legendary reputation for reliability and flawless performance. So much so, this is the longest period he's ever owned a car - and Jason insists that any plans for a change are on indefinite hold:

"This car runs like a dream and, even though it has done over 117,000 miles, it has never broken down. It was well looked after before I bought it, and it came with lots of service history. I've owned many cars, but after buying a 1986 Jetta GTI I became a Volkswagen convert! That Jetta was a minter and I really shouldn't

have sold it - but I suppose we all make mistakes. Anyway, after using a Cavalier SRI for a while, I made the sensible choice and bought myself a GTI Cabriolet - a car I'd always fancied."

Jason soon improved the Golf's looks with a set of 'old school' deep-dished Mims wheels from Style Dynamics. He has also modified the suspension to improve handling and for a lower look, but he didn't start off with this intention:

"A knocking sound seemed to be coming from the front suspension and I decided new damper mounting cups would be the answer. But the noise didn't go away, so I overhauled the front end and decided that I might as well do the rear suspension at the same time. Lower springs and Bilstein dampers were fitted

Although the Cabriolet has been trouble-free, the front end had to be repaired after a pile-up - which unfortunately occurred whilst Jason's girlfriend, Helen, was driving. The repairs involved jiggling the front to straighten a chassis leg, replacing the front bumper and grille and pressing the bonnet back into shape - all fairly routine stuff for Jason, as he served his time as a panel beater. A full respray was contemplated, but this was only needed to the B post, as the original paint on the rear wings and boot had lasted so well.

Jason takes the car off the road in the winter months, and it's ironic that the collision occurred just days before this was due to take place in 2002. However, the long winter break at least enabled the repairs to be carried out at a leisurely pace. And it gave an

opportunity for the hood to be replaced - by a genuine VW item,

fitted by the Sheffield Trimming Company.

A few engine modifications are under consideration for the future, including perhaps a 2.0-litre conversion. Whatever happens, Jason's determined to keep his Cabrio and to continue enjoying it for a long time to come.

Andrew Wilson is another enthusiast who really likes to get the most out of his beloved machine. His 914 had just arrived back from Newquay and the Run to the Sun when we met up with him - a heck of a long journey from his home town of Sheffield. Not that this worried him, as Andrew reckons his period VW-Porsche is the most reliable car he's ever owned:

"I've run this car for six years in

'Jason improved the Golf's looks with a set of 'old school' deep-dished Mims wheels'



all sorts of weather, covering 25,000 miles in total, including runs to Newquay and Land's End every year. It served me well even before it was restored, despite needing a lot of work to really bring it up to scratch. I was determined to get the restoration work done as soon as I could - driving a classic car that's covered in rust and primer isn't really my style!"

The 914 was bought in 1996 from a classic car dealer in Huddersfield. The mechanicals were reasonably sound, but a cheap respray hadn't done it any favours as the paintwork on this American import was pockmarked with unsightly

microblisters. The only answer was to strip away the paint to bare metal, so Andrew asked the foreman at the Mercedes-Benz dealership where he works for permission to make use of the bodyshop facilities. The foreman just happened to be Jason...!

Andrew explains: "We could only use the bodyshop on Saturdays, so progress was fairly slow. Fortunately though, we found the bodywork was far better than on most European 914s, as these cars can rot quite badly. Removing the paint revealed a rainbow of colours - and while stripping out the interior we even came across a collection of Las Vegas parking tickets! It's

amazing what you find when you start looking..."

Andrew's 914 was built in 1974 as a 2.0-litre model for the Californian market, complete with over-riders on chrome bumpers. "Other features included twin horns, a vinyl covered roll-bar, tinted windows, cloth seats, a centre console and Fuchs alloy wheels," explains the proud owner, who was also particularly pleased with the five-speed dogleg gearbox. "The old-type 911 gearbox, known as the type 901, was fairly hard to operate. Mine came with the later 901/914 side-shifter 'box which boasted a modified casing

and an easier-to-use linkage mechanism."

Buying replacement panels for the 914's bodyshell was ruled out on the basis of cost. In any case, both Jason and Andrew possessed the skills needed to make and replace most of the panels to a standard that would satisfy even the most hawk-eyed VW quality inspector.

The front scuttle had rotted badly where water and mud had accumulated in a rust trap between the inner and outer wings, so the affected areas were cut out and then repaired with homemade sections carefully shaped to achieve a perfect fit.



'The engine was stripped down and all the parts checked and measured'

With this task satisfactorily accomplished, they then moved on to the other body repairs, which included scraping off the old underseal along the full length and breadth of the underside, revealing an urgent need for new front floor pans. The insides of the doors also required attention, as some of the inner skin framework had been chopped out to accommodate a set of speakers -

crazy but true. The battery tray was also replaced, together with a new support bracket, due to acid leakage in the past.

Once every bit of rot had been ground or cut out and replaced with new steel, the bodyshell and panels were resprayed in the lightest shade of Porsche Speed Yellow. Our dynamic duo then turned their attention to the task of reassembling the car. The end

was in sight.

As a smart finishing touch, a pair of one-off, highly polished, stainless steel sill covers were made up by a friend at Olympic Stainless Fabrication of Sheffield. The front torsion bar suspension was dropped by 25mm; also at the rear, which was achieved by fitting lower, heavy-duty, 100lb coil springs made up by Roadstar. Koni dampers added further stiffening, and the brakes were overhauled with Mintex sports pads for the front disc brakes, as fitted to the Mk1 GTI. Future plans include Porsche 911 front suspension with vented disc brakes and a larger-bore master

cylinder - a popular performance upgrade for the 914.

The engine was stripped down and all the parts checked and measured, including the non-standard high-lift cam that Andrew suspects is an American WEB item. As the tolerances were all within acceptable limits, the block crankcase was reassembled with new piston rings and bearings. A bit more effort was needed with the cylinder heads, as the valves and seats needed re-cutting and the ports benefited from light polishing. The valves were all fit for reuse, as well as the valve springs once the pressures had been checked.



All American-spec 914s left the factory with fuel-injection, but over time this can become problematic and cause running faults. One of Andrew's first upgrades after buying the 914, to improve its performance and driveability, was to fit a pair of twin-choke Weber 44mm IDF carburetors, along with short ram pipes and a pair of K&N air filters. A linkage set was required for the carbs; as with so many aftermarket parts though, the quality was far from satisfactory and so the linkage needed stiffening up before it could be used, and the throttle linkage had to be lengthened to match the travel of the accelerator pedal to the travel of the carburettor throttle valve. Next came a Facet Gold Top electric fuel pump and an adjustable fuel pressure regulator.

"With everything fitted, next came the fun part of setting up the fuel system," recalls Andrew. "After a weekend of tinkering around, the settings had been finally settled: fuel pressure 4psi, main fuel jets size 135, air jets size 180, idle jets size 50. The emulsion tubes are F11 and the Venturi size is 32mm. Since then, the engine has started, idled and run as reliably as anyone could wish for."

Andrew has always made a point of dismantling the carburetors and cleaning them out each year to maintain peak performance. A Bursch sports exhaust worked out cheaper than a standard system, with the



From right to left: Andrew, Jason and Helen with the pair of Karmann-built but otherwise very different convertibles.

bonus of an extra 2bhp to boot. The original power rating for the US-spec GA 2.0-litre unit was 95bhp - but with these relatively simple modifications, Andrew's engine is now rated at 120bhp. Impressive, eh?

To prove the point, Andrew achieved a best quarter-mile time of 16.76 seconds at a closing speed of 76.2mph on the Santa Pod strip at 2001's Bug Jam. Andrew concedes: "I took the 'launch' very carefully when I left the start line, as it could have resulted in a long walk home if the clutch or drive shafts had failed!"

Meanwhile, Andrew's thoughts turn to how he would like to develop the engine further when he's gathered sufficient cash together. "It could be taken up to

2.4 litres by fitting larger 96mm pistons and barrels and machining the cylinder heads to fit. Should I be so lucky as to win the lottery, the options would be a six-cylinder 911 engine or a four-cylinder FAT performance 2.8-litre unit, although major internal modifications would also be needed with that capacity."

As the final completion date was approached in March 2002, Andrew and Jason completed the finishing touches, such as re-covering the dash, seats and doors panels and fitting a set of Spirit of the Fifties carpets. There was an annoying setback when 'Mr Nobody' stood on the windscreen and cracked it before it could be fitted, although a replacement was soon found

after phoning round a few specialists.

The Fuchs alloys were painstakingly smoothed down and polished, and a set of alloy centre caps was fitted, as supplied by Bernard Newbury. Andrew explains his choice of tyres: "I went for a set of Michelin Pilots on the front end for good wear, and a set of Pirelli Zeros on the back which provide lots of grip - a mid-engined car handles better to a point and then suddenly lets go at both ends if you overdo things! Obtaining the right tyres was very important, and this combination does work very well." The point seemed well made after driving through Snake Pass in the Peak District for the VWm photo shoot; the 914 took the bends with sublime ease, cornering flatly with no trace of leaning. Unsettling this car under such conditions would be like trying to single-handedly turn over a double bed.

Andrew's understandably delighted with the current conclusion to his toils: "That 2.0-litre engine has great torque, combining practicality with performance. And the handling is better than a 911's of the same age due to the balanced mid-engined layout. I regard the VW-Porsche 914 as a brilliant combination of the best of both companies, with excellent handling and practicality in one package. Try getting a weekend's camping gear in a 911 - it can't be done.

"Even though the 914 is readily accepted by Volkswagen fans, Porsche enthusiasts tend to look down their noses. They say it's not a Porsche because it hasn't got a Porsche engine or chassis. This doesn't bother me in the slightest. I'm a VW fan who has a liking for Porsche products, which makes this car the ideal choice for me." We agree; what a fantastic combination of corporate expertise.

SOCIABLE SHEFFIELD

Andrew Wilson is an enthusiastic member of the Sheffield Air-Cooled Outlaws, a club that meets on the first and third Tuesdays of each month at the Earl Marshall pub in Sheffield. Any passing VW fans are welcome to go along and join in the fun. For further info, contact the club on 07814 997641.