

Spa Bug Show

2006



by Andy Esling

For the last few years I have been making an annual trip with one of my friends from the Kentish VW Club to a VW show on the continent. We have come to look forward to our European trips however as we have been going over for a couple of years now we have got to the stage where we have visited most of the large annual shows held in Holland and Belgium so we are now looking at revisiting old friends rather than making new acquaintances.

Having visited Holland for a couple of years we decided to visit Belgium again and the obvious show to go back to was the Spa Bug Show, organised by the Belgian Buggie Club at the Belgian Formula 1 track at Spa Franchamps. This is a wonderful venue, although it is some time since I camped and I now think I am a bit past queuing for a shower at 7am!

The show is always held in August which means it is always peak holiday season however I was able to book a return passage through Norfolk Line from Dover to Dunkerque for a very reasonable £50 return. This was especially good value as this year the show was being held over the UK August Bank Holiday weekend. So at a very unsociable 5.30 am on Friday 25th August Mike & I set out from Tonbridge in Mike's 1970 1200 Beetle. We arrived at Dover just before 6.45 am and joined a long queue to check in for the 8 am sailing to Dunkerque.

After a very calm crossing and breakfast on the ferry we started our journey to the show at 11.20. After a good run with a couple of short stops we arrived at the Hotel in Liege just after 4pm. The journey from Dunkerque had been 175 miles. After a nice meal in a local restraint we headed off for an early night.

Saturday morning was rather overcast and the forecast for the day was not very good but we headed off to the Spa Racetrack which was about 20 miles away. When visiting VW shows on the continent you soon realise that the use of signs is an Anglo Saxon tradition that has yet to find its way across the channel! So after a few wrong turns we eventually found the right entrance road and picked up our weekend passes for the show. As day visitors we followed the vehicles heading for the car parks above the pits area which means you have to go through the tunnel which goes under the formula 1 track near the main stands. Having parked with the 100's of other VW's we headed off to look around the show and the sun began to shine!

When I first went to the Spa Bug Show the swap meet area was very small however a couple of years ago extra areas were developed behind the pits used for the Formula 1 races and the Swap meet now cover this area. In common with the other larger continental shows the swap meet has traders selling not only new and second hand vehicle parts but also high quality original and restored vehicles. To cater for the large number of enthusiasts who attend the Bug Show

and are interested in performance parts there are also traders who specialise in performance engines including fully rebuilt Type 4 engines costing up to E 10,000! Specially fabricated stainless steel exhausts are also available for these performance engines which use the standard exhaust cut outs to be used thereby avoiding the need to have the exhaust box being visible.



In the carpark there was an all black German registered 1303 Cabrio with a Type 4 engine, Porsche fan and performance exhaust that I took a couple of photos of. This car also took part in the timed sprints that are run in front of the main visitor stands later in the day.





In the Auto Jumble area there were a number of Cabrio parts including a new nearside door. There were also some useful second hand parts on one stand which appeared to have all come off a metallic blue 1302 that had gone to meet its maker. There was a smart complete hood in beige at a very reasonable E 500. Had this hood have been from a 1303 I would have snapped this one up! From the same car there were also two good complete doors and a nice and when new probably expensive interior in navy leather with dark blue piping at E 800. As always the problem with these large items is getting them back home in an already full beetle!



As usual there were a large number of very smart VW's to look at. There is no formal concours so the best in show cars are picked out by the judges from the cars in the main car park and in the club display areas. Unlike UK shows there are always plenty of torsion bar Cabrio's on show, most expensively restored and some uprated with performance engines. In the club display area there was a very nice cream Belgian registered early 1960's and an orange car of similar age with Porsche wheels. Whilst in the ordinary visitors car park there were a number of very nice 1960's Cabrio's my favourite being a metallic brown car with a tan hood.





The Belgian specialist BBT had a large unit in the pits area with a number of vehicles for sale inside. There were two Cabrio's the most interesting of which was an original low mileage Ottenger tuned 1302 model which if you liked the period colour was a very nice car. The other car was a late 50's or early 60's Californian restoration project, which was in good original condition but would have taken considerable expenditure to realise its potential.



There were also many other interesting VW's to look at. There were a couple of very smart customised VW Trekkers, the two that stood out being orange and brown. There was also a very scruffy split window van which had the bottom 6 inches eaten away by the metal moth but which sported lettering advertising a VW restoration business – hopefully an example of "work in progress" and not the finished article! In the club display area there was also a Rat Look Cabrio, probably with the original hood, the back window of which had fallen out of the hood and was standing upright in the rear luggage area! Finally for the VW enthusiast with everything what about the motorised bath complete with shower attachments – some people just have too much spare time.

After another look around the show on Sunday morning we set off just after 1pm to make the most of the Lorry Free roads and arrived at our hotel in Dunkerque at around 6.30pm after a leisurely drive.

If you have never visited a foreign VW show I would thoroughly recommend that you visit one of the larger shows sometime in the next couple of years. The larger shows are on a completely different scale to those in the UK and the entry prices are very reasonable however unless you are on a very tight budget I would avoid camping as the sites are very crowded and if you are going in a Beetle there just doesn't seem to be enough space for all the kit.

Andy Esling