



VW Thing History...

What Is That THING?!

The Volkswagen Thing (Type 181 & 182) was created from a hodge-podge of Beetle, Bus and even Ghia parts, proving that it was aptly named as the "Thing." Learn the history of this multi-purpose vehicle, from military use to joy rides. You may be surprised by the history of this versatile Volkswagen!

History



While not as pretty, this Thing could go just about anywhere and, as you can see, it did.

Manufactured in Wolfsburg, West Germany (1968–1974); Hannover, West Germany (1974–1983); Puebla, Mexico (1970–1980); and Jakarta, Indonesia (1973–1980), the Type 181 shared some of its mechanicals with the 1966-1977 Standard Beetle and the floor pans of the Karmann-Ghia. It's similarity to the Type 82 Kubelwagen that had been used by the German military during the Second World War is obvious to anyone who looks at it. This vehicle weighed 1,920 pounds and held up to four people comfortably. It had a manual 4 speed transmission that accelerated from 0-60 mph in 23.2 seconds.



LEFT: This rear window was modified for support and to create a split window effect. Note the elongated muffler, as this one has a Type 4 engine. RIGHT: This one is a right hand drive 182.

There were more than 90,000 181s and Right Hand Drive 182s produced from 1968 to 1983. Approximately 50,000 of these were sold to NATO countries between 1968 and 1983. Mexican manufactured 181s were available for purchase from VW dealerships in the United States in 1973 and 1974 only. The 1973 models having an 'eberspacher' gas burning heater located under the hood. 1974 models utilized Beetle heat exchangers with a modified Beetle exhaust with tailpipes at each end. Things sold for \$2,700 to \$2,900 at the time. This was only a fraction less than the price of a modern water-cooled vehicle, making sales limited. In 1974 Ralph Nader introduced a vehicle safety bill to Congress that the Thing would not pass, resulting in the withdrawal of the Thing from the US market.



Stock 1974 1600cc Mexico Manufactured.

Between 1968 and 1970, 181s utilized reduction boxes at the rear as used on the pre-1967 split window Bus and a 1500cc single port engine. From 1971 to the end of their production, the engines were 1600cc dual port with I.R.S. (Independent Rear Suspension). IRS Things are easier to drive on the road, but the early swing axle models have better traction off-road. Military 181s invariably had limited slip differentials in the transmission. Civilian models were available with or without a limited slip diff. Volkswagen utilized as many parts as possible from the Beetle in production, making Things easy to maintain and mechanical parts easy to find. The front brake drums are from a 1965-1967 Beetle; post-1970, the brake shoes are 1968 to 1977 Beetle both front and rear, the wheel

cylinders and master cylinder are all 1968-1977 Standard Beetle. The engine is essentially a 1600cc dual port Beetle (Code is AM or AL) with a larger air filter set to one side using the rubber intake pipe from a 1961-1967 Bus or Karmann Ghia. The engine has low compression pistons to enable the use of lower quality fuel and has a steel grate style sump guard. The wheels are 14" diameter 5/205 Lug pattern used on the 1963-1971 VW Bus. The front axle beam comes from a 1966 Beetle with braces to the floor pan for additional strength. Perhaps one of the few unique features of the Thing, the ball joints are exclusive to Things to assist with ground clearance.



From 1980 to 1983, Volkswagen 181s were for sale solely for government utilities or military use. Their service in the military continued into Operation Desert Storm. Sand rails using 181 parts (not the body) were produced for Special Forces use behind enemy lines. These DPVs (Desert Patrol Vehicles) were produced by independent companies, not Volkswagen, and were intended to be cheap, robust, fuel efficient and disposable.



Today, Things are fetching high prices when compared to more exotic collectible vehicles. This is because they are easy to maintain and incredibly versatile. The convertible top, lift off side windows, lift off doors (a set of doors can be removed in less than 2 minutes) and folding windshield give the vehicle a multitude of options without the use of a single wrench. In fact, many of the customizing and performance parts available for air-cooled VWs will work on a Thing, so that the owner can individualize the vehicle even more.

Perhaps the biggest failing on the 181 is bodywork. It is common for the floor pans and rockers to fail (the rockers are a box section and tend to rust out from inside). While mechanical parts are inexpensive, body and top parts can be prohibitively costly due to the low numbers of units manufactured.

The Volkswagen Type 181 was given many different names, depending on the variation or market. Here are just a few examples of the VW Type 181's names:

- Volkswagen Type 181
- Volkswagen Type 182 (Right Hand Drive)
- Volkswagen Thing (US)
- Volkswagen Camat (Indonesia)
- Volkswagen Safari (Mexico) (Early Mexican Safaris had reduction boxes)
- Volkswagen Trekker (UK)



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