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7-page Essen tuning show report



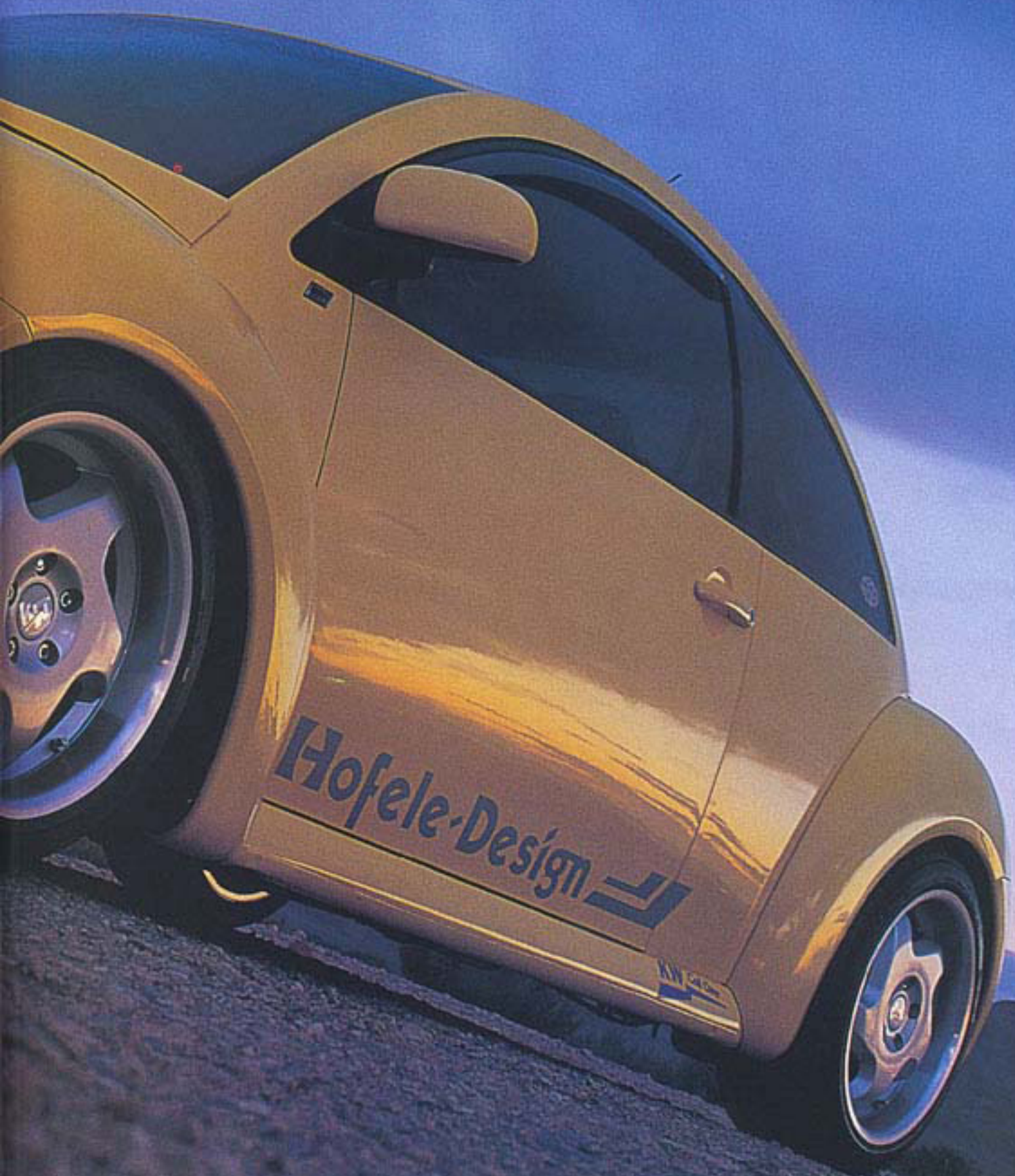
SEVENTH



Words & Photos: Isaac Mion

When Canadian tuner HPA Motorsports decided to create the world's seventh VR6-powered Beetle, a whole new driving utopia was discovered...

HEAVEN



SEVENTH



It's a tough life, being a journo on the road

Power is considered an aphrodisiac by many. It's caused millions of deaths, and electricity companies charge an outrageous sum for it. But it's now firmly in the grasp of the new Beetle.

Just months after the rotund reincarnation hit the streets of Canada, HPA Motorsports has hit the scene with a streetlegal, VR6-powered Beetle.

The Beetle in stock form is a fun car. With a quirky shape reminiscent of our parents' love-mobiles, you can't help but be entranced, even before squeezing into the cockpit. However, when compared with older hand-grenade engined Beetles with less weight and tarmac-grabbing rear-wheel drive, the performance of the two litre, 115bhp petrol version seems lethargic. Even the tremendously torquey TDi runs out of steam just as most people might start to enjoy the power.

Enter the VR6 conversion from HPA. Although every good body can benefit from a new heart, some need it sooner rather than later.

This was never more true than for the new Beetle. The VR6 Beetle, or GT6 as HPA calls it, feels like a TDi at first. But it surprises you by pulling with the same torque all the way to 7000rpm. The handling is super-steady with the longer wheelbase, but not lightning quick due to the extra weight of the big block.

At present, the transplanted motor is in stock tune, except for HPA's 2.5" fully polished, stainless steel, cat-back exhaust system. This replaces the original system, but matches the tune of the VR6 more appropriately, while retaining a burly growl reminiscent of the Porsche Boxster. Never one to forego the thinking part of a motor, owner Gary Natividad opted for a remapped ECU to go with the free-flowing exhaust.

Sadly, long gear travel detracts from the driving experience. Other than that, driving the Beetle with the hefty new powerplant is nothing but a pleasure, especially while gazing at the more rapidly rising needle with its luminescent red and blue dials.

This transplant project started in September of 1998, when Gary contacted HPA to discuss its GT6 conversion. It just so happened that the ground-breaking tuning

company had a spare '98 Golf VR6 with 600 miles on the clock. You see, Americans love their torquey sixes – and they also seem to enjoy crashing them. As a result there's a plentiful supply of spare powerplants for power-hungry Beetle owners like Gary.

Shoe-horning the larger block beneath the Beetle's bonnet was not a huge endeavour. In fact, we all know Volkswagen is probably planning to do it, so the



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manufacturer has made it as simple as possible. It took HPA's head technicians, Jordan and Darren, three days to complete, but with the help of their crew fabricating the alternative mounts, they were able to play mix and match with the wiring harness for about 35 hours. When they'd finished, the seventh VR6 Beetle on the planet was a living, breathing entity, ready to put the other big name tuners to shame a day later at the SEMA show (the American version of Essen) held annually in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Whereas international players like Toyo had new Beetles (with closed bonnets, but claiming that nitrous systems had been fitted), HPA and its Canadian staff were there with open arms and bonnets, explaining to all how they got the VR6 stuffed in – never

failing to mention the yellow, powder-coated Mk3 Golf VR6 transmission, installed to cope with the extra power on tap.

Even prior to its power hike, the Beetle wasn't exactly a stock unit. Our man Gary had experience of modifying everything from a Super Beetle to Japanese street-racers.

His idea for the project was simple: it should be fast and elegant. Though elegance is mostly external, it needs its roots in the mechanicals.

So to start, a KW coilover system for the new Beetle replaced the standard suspension set-up. This enabled a 3" lower stance, while also allowing the 8.5x17" wheels to tuck up under the relatively big arches. According to KW, the coilovers will have you thinking: 'M-class Mercedes in the straights, and F1

racer in the corners. Train tracks become pebbles and questionable roads have an answer.' Very philosophical.

Adding to the understated elegance of the Beetle's exterior is a package from Hofele Design's Beetle programme. This front package includes Cup-style spoilers, a rear wing and a natty chromed front grille.

With the exterior decked out in style, it was time for some additions to the interior. Again Hofele's expertise was called

upon, and a black and grey leather interior was chosen to match Gary's other personal additions of carbon fibre and the like.

Whether or not the new Beetle GT6 breaks any track records with its planned Schrick intake manifold and Quaife differential remains to be seen, but it's one of the rarest cars in the world. With a drag coefficient superior to the Mk4, one thing's for sure: Gary Natividad of Redmond, Washington, can definitely feel the power ●



Mad grille (above left). Heart of the matter (below and above right) is a 2792cc, six cylinder, DOHC, fuel injected, 12v VR6



Gary's muscled Beetle uses KW fully adjustable coilover suspension, lowered 3" all round on the Bug's 8.5x17 wheels



DUB DETAILS

ENGINE: 2792cc, six cylinder, DOHC, fuel injected, 12v VR6 with custom ECU and custom engine mounts. Mk3 Golf VR6 gearbox with powder-coated yellow housing, Sachs racing clutch, 2.25" HPA cat-back polished stainless steel exhaust system with twin tail-pipes

CHASSIS: 8.5x17" KW alloys with 215/45 R17 Yokohama A520s. KW Variant 2 fully adjustable coilover suspension, lowered 3" all round

OUTSIDE: Hofele Design Cup-style front spoilers, rear wing and chromed front grille

INSIDE: Hofele Design black and grey leather retrim, carbon detail

SHOUT: HPA Motorsports (001 604 530 3715)

