

JustKampers

Buyers Guide to:



Volkswagen Beetle

Useful Info

Also Known As

Type 1 (T1), Super Beetle, Bug, Käfer, Salon

Manufactured

1946 to 2003

Fuel Type

Petrol

Engine Sizes

1100cc, 1200cc, 1300cc, 1500cc, 1600cc

Engine Type

Air-Cooled

Drive Configuration

RWD

Volkswagen Owners Club of Great Britain

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Background

Iconic is a much over-used word when it comes to cars, but the Volkswagen Beetle - the original 'People's Car' - surely qualifies for such a term. The brainchild of Adolf Hitler, it was designed and built by the legendary Ferdinand Porsche and was intended to get the German population moving on the newly-built Autobahns. The first were made in 1938, but it would be 1945 before mass-production really got going and by the time the last had rolled off the line in July 2003, more than 21 million had been made. Simple and robust, the Beetle was available with a range of engines from 1100cc to 1600cc, all of them air-cooled four-cylinder units. And while most were saloons, the Cabriolet proved hugely popular.



Corrosion Hotspots

1. Chassis frame head beneath the luggage compartment
2. Spare wheel well
3. Front and rear bumper mounts
4. Edges of the luggage compartment lid
5. Inner and outer front wings
6. Bottom of the A-pillar and windscreen surround
7. Sills/heater channels, and surrounding floor section
8. Rear quarter panels and inner rear wings
9. Floorpan, front to rear
10. Door bottoms



The Checklist

- That the model you're inspecting will suit your needs. Very early examples lack power, and the later models with larger engines will probably be better as a daily driver
- That you're happy with any modifications. Modifying Beetles is a popular pastime, and it depends on whether you value originality, but you need to ensure any work has been done properly
- The underside for lots of fresh underseal as it could be hiding corrosion. Beetles rust just about everywhere, and despite great parts availability major bodywork restoration is unlikely to be economic unless you're handy with a welder
- That you're not looking at a bodged restoration. Check the bodywork carefully and ask for evidence of restoration work. The sills/heater channels are a major rot-spot and need to be repaired properly
- The window rubbers for perishing. Water leaks into the cabin will accelerate rot in the floorpan, and it's expensive to eradicate
- For engine wear by pushing/pulling on the crank pulley. Lots of movement indicates excessive crankshaft end float, requiring a re-build, although the engines are great for the DIY mechanic to work on
- For excessive exhaust smoke, and for signs of oil leaks from the rocker cover gaskets. Leaks between the engine and gearbox point to a failed crankshaft oil seal which requires gearbox removal to remedy
- The tin ware around the engine, and ensure it's not too tatty, or missing altogether as it affects engine cooling. It's easy and cheap to replace, though
- That the engine doesn't overheat. The thermostat and cooling flaps could be corroded or seized. Corroded heat exchangers aren't uncommon, either, and will allow exhaust fumes into the cabin
- That the engine runs cleanly. Lumpiness or flat spots under acceleration could mean fuel or ignition systems are due an overhaul, or indicate worn valve-gear
- The gearbox for worn synchromesh or jumping out of gear. Difficulty selecting gears indicates a worn linkage, although it's easy to refurbish
- The brakes for wear, seized components, and perished hoses. An overhaul is cheap, though, and a DIY proposition
- The suspension for leaking shock absorbers, and more importantly for corrosion around torsion bar mountings. Rust also attacks the front axle around the shock absorber top mounts
- That the steering doesn't have excessive free play between the steering wheel and idler arm. The steering box may have no adjustment left, and the rubber coupling can perish, too
- That the cabin isn't too shabby. Replacement parts are plentiful but budget accordingly
- That all electrical items are working. Early models could be suffering from aged wiring and poor connections, which can be time consuming to sort. And additional electrical items could have been badly fitted. 12-volt electrics were adopted in the 1960s, and earlier cars may have been converted
- Whether a convertible model is an original Karmann car, or a later conversion. The latter is common and not a problem as long as the work has been done properly, but a specialist check is advisable. Ensure the hood and mechanism are undamaged