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2018 NAIAS REPORT: PART TWO

As we mentioned last month, Volkswagen introduced the all new Jetta at NAIAS alongside its first-generation predecessor, a newly-restored 1982 Jetta. We had the opportunity to talk with the mastermind behind the project, John Bickel, of State of Mind Customs in Pontiac, MI, one of the finest restoration shops in the Midwest.

How did you get this project?

We've done work for Volkswagen Corporate before, the most memorable being the ad campaign featuring the talking black Beetle named Max. (John restored five 1964 Beetles in record time for the shoot and promotional tour - Ed.) So, the Experiential



Marketing group contacted us once again, this time to restore an Mk1 Jetta for the Auto Show in January, just six weeks away. Volkswagen found the car in New York City, and unbelievably, the entire car was rust-free! It must have been very well maintained all these years! But even though they said they inspected it, I still wasn't comfortable enough to commit to the project sight-unseen. I told them to send it to me, so I could see what condition it was in.

We got the car here, inspected it, then did our standard repair path, highlighting everything that needed to be done, and gave them a written proposal. I was glad to see the car was in very good condition. The integrity was there in the unitized body, the strut towers, inner rockers, floor,

frame rails, etc. It was merely a matter of cosmetics and parts acquisition.

Of course, we were also in the middle of our winter restoration schedule, so I had to ask my customers to put their projects on hold, but thankfully, they were fine with it. By the time everything was approved, we had just five weeks to build the car.

Tell us about the restoration!

Parts acquisition was our primary concern on the project. These parts are not something that you can just find easily. Thank goodness for our VW parts network, which helped in sourcing them, whether it was Thesamba.com or eBay or a supplier. I spent days tracking down parts for that car. We had to buy 12 hubcaps just to find four good ones, and then they had to be sent to my metal polisher. The beauty rings were even harder - we found four of them still in their original sealed Audi pack-



aging for \$120. There are only one or two manufacturers in the world that still make parts for that car, and a lot of them have to be modified to be installed. We had to buy rubber window seals from a guy who makes them in California because they were better quality than the Brazilian seals. Other parts, we just had to rebuild. For instance, the bumpers. You can't buy the aftermarket bumpers - they aren't the same. So, thanks to my collision experience, we knew how to restore the original factory bumpers and the moldings that were still on the car.

Same thing with the parking lights

and rear tail lamps - you just can't go out and buy those. So, we either sourced out NOS or refurbished the originals, and some of those had to come from Europe, like the door handle seals. We found two sets locally, but they didn't fit right. I finally found a set of Porsche seals which fit better, but they had to be shipped from Europe, and we were already under the gun on time. But all the parts people we dealt with were awesome.

The interior was pretty good - just a little cosmetic restoration here and there. My trim guy was able to save the original seats. The B-Pillar trim plastic was all cracked, so we made a mold and fabricated new fiberglass pieces, but the dash and door panels were all really good and just needed refinishing.

As far as the paint, UV rays had broken it down. So, we had to strip the whole car and repaint it. We mechanically stripped the paint off the car, which revealed areas

◀ When was the last time you saw such a perfectly finished Jetta? John and his crew did a wonderful job restoring this 4-door sedan, a great survivor found in New York City.

where previous repairs weren't done correctly. We corrected those before repainting the car. Because of time constraints, we did a chassis-on restoration, with the engine out, but the running gear still in. We found the original paint color on the car, LA6V Lhasa Green, a beautiful

teal green, and repainted it to that color.

All in all, there were five of us working nine hours a day for six days a week. I didn't want my guys burned out, so none of us worked on Sundays. But we were still able to bring in the project four days ahead of schedule. VW debuted the car on Day #2 of NAIAS Press Days, and it stayed on the floor for the entire 10 days of the show. It's now traveling the auto show circuit, and then will be used for marketing and promotional purposes.

Thank you very much, John! It looked fabulous and garnered as much attention as its successor!