

PRESERVING THE PAST

VW Commercial's Oldtimer Restorations

Text: David Photography: David & Press photographs courtesy VW Oldtimer

After seeing the overwhelming emotional response to the 60th anniversary bus celebrations at Hannover in 2007, Volkswagen Nutzfahrzeuge (Commercial Vehicles) decided to set up its own team and dept with the specific brief of preserving the heritage of the VW bus

The Oldtimer Collection was the first part of the project, gathering together examples of different models, special bodies, one-off prototypes, and original condition campers. Many of these vehicles required extensive restoration, so a dedicated workshop area was created where a bus could be totally stripped and rebuilt, with parts from VW's own store as well as business partner VW Classic Parts. Starting with only a handful of buses, three years later this impressive collection now numbers over 100, and includes T1 to T4 generations and models!

Such has been the success of the project, that earlier this year the collection and workshops were relocated to a new 7,000sqm premises, adding dedicated bodywork, paint

and engine build areas, as well as housing and storing the Oldtimer Collection and projects all in one place. As well as mechanics the team of 13 includes an archivist and events co-ordinator; some of the team used to actually work on the older buses on the production lines, and they are passing on their expertise to a new generation who are working alongside and learning from their experience, ensuring the skills are not lost.

And now, this expertise and skill is being made available to anyone who wants a full or part restoration on their own vehicle! Imagine – a full on VW Hannover Factory restoration, with original VW parts, carried out by trained VW mechanics and specialists, and coming with certificated ex-works documentation and warranty... plus a folder with full photographic and detailed description of all the work

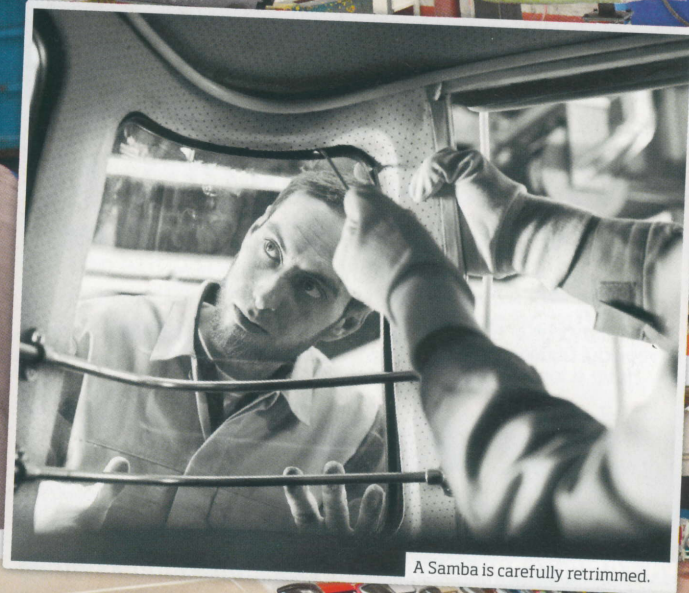


Passing on the skills: expertise from older workers ensures a new generation will preserve the bulli tradition.





Last checks being made to a T1 before it joins the collection.



A Samba is carefully retrimmed.



Part of the Split bus collection including a ladder truck, fire truck, Samba and various Westfalia campers.



Classic T3s include an ambulance, a Tristar, a Carat, Syncros and several Special Editions.

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carried out! Harald Schomburg, the driving force behind the whole Oldtimer project, says: "To us, the VW bus is an icon of great value. It is the emotional heart of the Volkswagen Commercial vehicles brand and thus a heritage which needs to be preserved. And with each restoration we are preserving a piece of living history. With our new team and new premises we can now offer this exclusive service – a factory restoration with authentic and unique works certificate."

As well as a ground up, full bare metal resto, the Oldtimer team will also carry out partial restorations, mechanical work, engine builds and repainting; each case will be tailored to a customer's needs. The first stage in this process is a full inspection to see the extent of the work required and a discussion with the customer about how far they

wish to take the project. Vehicles for customers are already underway in the workshops, including a T2 panel van for the Herrenhauser Brewery in Hannover, and a T2 Microbus for a Hotel chain. Of course, it will not be cheap and a complete utter rotbox could cost £80,000 to restore, but the end result will be an as new VW factory stock bus, rebuilt by VW – something that will definitely appeal to more than just corporate clients with deep pockets, whilst the rest of us still get to see beautiful buses driving and being used!

The Oldtimer Collection itself continues to expand, but it is not, and never will be, a museum open to the public. In fact the only people lucky enough to see it in its entirety will be restoration customers. However, select vehicles do come out for special events, motor shows and

promotions; a recent acquisition, the Becks Brewery mobile pub bus, along with the Currywurst Bus, is also available for use by VW partners and dealerships. TV and film companies have also made use of the collection, and the idea of making some vehicles available for hire/ use on a wider basis is currently being explored.

Whilst Bullis and Bays make up the majority of the collection, it also features an impressive range of T3 and T4 models including a fully restored Tristar Doka, a prototype T3/ Porsche B32 with a 911 Porsche engine, and a prototype T4 California Exclusive from 1995 with the first VW sat-nav set-up, auxiliary engine boost, and a built-in bath! Special Editions, one owner classics, special models, prototypes, good, honest, clean stock examples of campers, buses with stories to tell – the Oldtimer Collection has it all. ☺