

Fiberglass Flashbacks



By Jennifer Sikorski,
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CF: How many employees do you have?

SD: There are three of us now, and we're looking for a couple more. We're about the lowest we've been. The last three years have been a little tough on us; been tough on most people I think.

CF: What is the nature of your business?

SD: We manufacture custom body parts for the old Volkswagen Beetle. We do the fenders in both stock and widened versions with different types of headlights and taillights. It's basically after-market components for the old Volkswagen Beetles. We do some other odds and ends, but that's our primary source of income. Although you don't see many of them on the street, they're gaining more and more in popularity and in value.

CF: They don't manufacture the older models anymore, correct?

SD: The last ones that were imported into the U.S. were convertibles in '78 or '79. The last year for the sedan was 1977. They did manufacture them in Mexico until just a couple months ago. They're like the old Model A or Model T Ford, in that there were zillions of them produced, and they're still popular. When I started this business in 1974, people said, "You know they're going to stop making these things pretty soon. Then what are you going to do?" And I referred back to the old Fords in that there are companies that then—and probably even more now—made a good living out of doing after-market parts for both restoration and street rodding. That holds true for us now. I don't see things falling off. There are two publications here in the U.S. that cater strictly to the enthusiast of the old Volkswagen. And the publications have more advertisers now and more pages now than they did years ago.

A couple months ago we had some local TV coverage here because they got

wind that we were building an entirely fiberglass Volkswagen body for the Ringling Bros. Circus for a new clown act they're putting together. That was a neat deal.



CF: What is your company's background?

SD: I started in Hollywood, Calif. I had an auto body paint shop, and I personally liked customizing ever since I was a young guy. I was always interested in cars or anything with wheels on it. I had a girlfriend then that needed transportation, and I got a good deal on a Volkswagen Bug that had been wrecked in the front. Not able to leave things alone, I started customizing it and put rectangular

headlights in the front fenders. So many people said, "Wow, that looks neat. Is it a new model?" and I said, "No, that's just something I did." And they recommended I go into production because that might be a marketable item. So I did a little research and found that there were a couple publications that catered to the Beetle enthusiast, and I found out what their ad rates were. Then I did a little research on what it would take to make molds and fiberglass parts. I thought it might be a neat side project.

A friend of mine's dad built fiberglass racecar bodies, and he said he could build the molds. He wouldn't do production, but he could build the molds. That's pretty much where it started. We began to get business trickling in, and then people began asking for other items, and as we got more requests for a certain item, we'd develop that and put that in production.

I really wasn't interested in getting into the fiberglass business. I had done some corvette repair in the body shop business, and I didn't like all the itch involved with it. But I had a difficult time, even though I was in the Los Angeles area, finding employees who could

build the product to suit my standards of quality. I got to know the composites business because I couldn't find anybody who could meet my standards of quality.

That's pretty much where we are now. This is our business—the body shop business is long gone—and I spend much of my time in designing and production. Unfortunately lately, because we are short handed, I've been spending most of my time in production, and I haven't been able to design the new products people have been asking for.

CF: Did you face any problems when starting in the composites industry?

SD: Finances are an issue with anybody. Of course there also was an oil shortage in 1974, and there were rumors about resin availability, but I didn't find a ("Pulling Strings" continues on p. 53)



One of Creative Car Craft's most unique products is the Water Bug, a VW Beetle made entirely of fiberglass—even the wheels—that can drive on water.