

# Bug Invasion

*If nostalgia is what you are seeking, you need to look no further than a Volkswagen Beetle to evoke memories both funny and warm*

Story and photography  
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I was the proud owner of a 1972 cabriolet Beetle in my 20s. I had a whole load of fun in that bug. I was the envy of my friends and family. Beetles still make me smile when I pass them on the road. The Volkswagen Beetle holds such a special place in many people's hearts, leading to its recreation in the late 90s. It was a shinier more modern take on the classic, but a Beetle, nonetheless.

#### **The People's Car**

The Volkswagen Beetle was developed in Germany in 1937 when only the rich could afford a car. A car was a luxury. The German Labour Front established the brand and Adolf Hitler ordered that the

cars be produced so everyone could have one - a basic car that could carry the average family and travel at 62 mph.

#### **Kombi Vans**

For many, growing up in Australia in the 70s and 80s meant Kombi vans and road trips. The Kombi van was the transport of choice for overseas backpackers, with vans sometimes changing hands numerous times and completing many road trips. They were often seen abandoned on the roadside in remote locations when they broke down, or they were adopted by a collector who restored them to their former beauty. Who didn't long to hit the road in one of those pop-top vans? Well, it turns

out you still can.

#### **The Volkswagen Club of WA**

The Volkswagen Club of WA has 465 members and was formed in 1955, a date that coincides with the year that the millionth VW Beetle was produced. The club consists of families with Kombi campers, university students with an old Beetle or a Golf, or the mechanic who has customised his VW ride. The Volkswagens include both air and water-cooled versions.

#### **"Volksville" at Fairbridge Festival**

The club holds members-only events at least once a month. You can catch them camping together at events such as the annual Fairbridge Festival, in Pinjarra. The



*The Volkswagen was seen everywhere as they arrived like bugs.*

Volkswagen club is allocated their own camping area, "Volkville", and they return year after year. The colourful assembled campers certainly catch your eye as you walk past. The music festival is a family-friendly event which takes place at The Fairbridge Village in Pinjarra on a weekend in the April school holidays. It has been operating since 1983 and is described as "three magical days of music, camping, art and entertainment".

#### Movie Stars

The VW Club of WA were featured in Ben Elton's funny take on the folk music scene "Three Summers" which was set at Fairbridge Festival in 2017. The music

festival holds a special place in club president, Jamie Barrett's heart. Jamie met his wife Jan on one of the club trips to Fairbridge. They were fellow Volkswagen lovers who met and fell in love and the rest, they say, is history.

#### Jamie Barrett

Jamie Barrett originally joined the club to meet like-minded people. When he arrived in Australia in 2000 from the UK, he bought a 1965 split screen Kombi and started going to events. This was when the split-screen Kombis were still cheap. A restored VW split-screen Kombi fetches upward of \$60,000 today. When he first joined the club, it was struggling and only

had around 100 members. He is now the president of the club, and has been for 10 years. He is a diehard Volkswagen enthusiast who has owned around 8 Volkswagens in his lifetime.

Jamie, like most members, has a couple of Volkswagens "You need a couple, so you have one to use while the other is being fixed", he chuckles. When asked what type of person owns a VW, he answers "a patient one".

It appears that being a Volkswagen owner requires a sense of humour and a deep love of the sometimes-problematic automobile. Jamie and Jan's pride and joy is a custom Kombi that sports the



number plate SN4IL (snail). Snail, like its namesake, is not known for speed and like a snail, they can carry their home with them. The Snail is a regular at Fairbridge Music Festival and it is guaranteed to turn your head.

### The Day of the Volkswagen

The Day of the Volkswagen is the biggest event on the Club's calendar. On the first Sunday in December the members assemble at South Beach in Fremantle and inspect each other's vehicles. They vote for their favourite vehicle and there are prizes and showbags for everyone. In 2020 the club went with a retro 70s theme and members dressed accordingly.

### Club Events

In addition, at least one club-run event per month is organised. This could be a cruise with a picnic, a country town visit, a camping trip to Margaret River or Dwellingup, a car show, ten pin bowling or any other event that members request.

### Alfred's Burgers

The club members are regulars at the infamous Alfred's Kitchen, a roadside burger joint in Guildford, east of Perth. Alfred's is situated on the railway line on James Street, where you can sit outdoors around a raging fire pit. With or without a Volkswagen, the burgers and hot soup are always worth the trip.

### Camping

So where does a convoy of Kombis camp? The Big 4 Taunton Farm Margaret River is a regular destination for the VW Club members. Taunton Farm Holiday Park is on the Bussell Highway, not far from Cowaramup and the Margaret River wine region. Set in the Southwest, this destination is very popular with weekend trippers and holiday makers. The Park has several accommodation options from unpowered campsites to serviced cabins. Having a camper is not essential if you want to join in the fun.

Dwellingup's Lane Poole Reserve is an hour and half southeast of Perth and it can

accommodate large groups. Nanga Mill is the largest camping area at Lane Poole. The campgrounds are basic with drop toilets, access to drinking water and fire pits. Lane Poole Reserve is set in 50,000 hectares of beautiful Western Australian forest. It has several hiking and biking trails, and the Murray River is suitable for kayaking and swimming in the warmer months. Campsite fees are payable.

Jamie says "Wherever we go, we are well received. People love it, the smiles on their faces say it all," and it's not just the oldies, one day Jamie overheard a 10-year-old boy exclaim to his mother "That car must be over 1000 years old!"

### Classic Car Show

The club displayed their extensive collection of Volkswagens at the 2021 Classic Car Show in April at the Ascot Racecourse in Perth. It was the club's biggest ever display where people poked their heads under hoods and queued up to see the wonders of a VW Kombi interior.

### Family campers

Andrea, Justin and their two children Evie (10) and Alex (8) are club members. Andrea is the events coordinator for the club, and they are a family who camp together, in their Kombis, of course! They regularly camp in Denmark, Dwellingup, Margaret River and beyond. Had Covid19 not happened last year they had plans to do a much longer road trip.

Andrea was in her 20s when she got her first Beetle in Middlesbrough, England. It was bright pink and purple. She loved that car, and she remembers it with fondness. "It was an absolute wreck of a car and it used to break down all the time," she laughs. Andrea sold the car to fund her move to Australia where she bought a red Beetle. Several years passed where she had no Volkswagen at all and then through a mutual interest in Volkswagens, she met Julian, also from the UK, who was a Beetle owner. Romance ensued, following a picnic and first date in his 1960 Beetle.

The family live and breathe Volkswagens. They have a 1975 split-screen Kombi named Nelson, Kermit the green Beetle (a 40th birthday present for Andrea) and a 1983 orange pop-top Kombi, Jaffa. Just in case you were wondering, the family also have a "normal car" (a Hyundai).

The orange "Jaffa" van is the vehicle they currently take on camping trips. Evie and Alex love sleeping in the pop-top. All the kids of their "non-Volkswagen" friends love to climb into the top. There is something irresistible about a Kombi camper.

Nelson the shiny, red and white, split-screen Kombi played a part in an advertising campaign for Dwellingup, top tourism town this year. VW nostalgia is very much alive and well in 2021.

Andrea says there are several people from the UK in the club. Some even brought their campers with them. She says that the club has given her family a way to meet like-minded people who enjoy the same things they do. They have developed some of their closest friendships through the member gatherings and now camp and socialise with people outside club events.

### Charity Work

The sheer joy of seeing these smile-inducing vehicles is not the only way the club likes to give back to the community. They donate to charities that they see as having a need, such as the Royal Flying Doctors Service and Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy Association.

### The VWWA Magazine

The club has its own magazine "VWWA" which is published monthly and provides members with information about events, photos and stories, tips and tricks, and member profiles.

Next time you hear that familiar rumble that could only be a Volkswagen, I dare you not to smile. If you want to join the club and you own or have an interest in Volkswagens contact Jamie Barrett at <https://vwclubwa.com/>