



Ace in the hole

Believe it or not, the Van in front in this feature is a Toyota. Some times you really can't judge a book by its cover



On first impressions, the Bus you're looking at here is simply a tidy Early Bay and most people would think nothing more of it. However, a little closer inspection would reveal that all is not as it should be. Things just don't add up – for a start, where are the rear air vents? And a glance underneath reveals a prop shaft and gearbox... Open the sliding door and you'll notice the floor is several inches higher than usual. Oh, and there's no engine in the engine bay either!

Mystery machine

So, what exactly is this enigmatic Bus? Well, it's a 1970 Bay Window – sort of – because it's also a Toyota TownAce as well. Confused yet? Probably.

The story starts with owner, Simon Sparrow, having always hankered after an Early Bay Window. "I've been into VWs and Buses in particular for years", he explains. "I was always the one welding and repairing them for others, but could never afford my own." Five years ago, Simon

finally got his wish, having sold his then-current classic (don't tell anyone, it was an MG), he put the funds towards this Bay Window. It was at this point that things departed from the more well-trodden path of VW modification. The lunacy started thanks to Simon and his family wanting to cover some serious mileage in the Bus and tow their caravan. As good as old VWs are, this was a bit much to expect and so a plan was hatched to create a hybrid monster that could fulfil these needs while still looking awesome. The result is all Simon's handiwork and consists of a mid-mounted TDi engine driving the back wheels that propels the Bay to speeds that would make a T5 Sportline blush.

But why not do what every one else does when faced with the old, slow, thirsty Bus conundrum; simply put a VW diesel or Subaru engine in the back? Because Simon is a man who believes that if you are going to do something, you may as well do it properly. "The reason I chose this layout was because of weight. For me, I wanted it to tow my 27ft caravan »



To the casual observer this looks like any other interior unit, but it hides a dark secret...



The only bit Simon farmed out was the interior to Fingers Furniture

It can be a touch 'lively' on wet roundabouts with no kids on board

while also carrying my five kids." If he had simply bolted a TDi in the back, the Bus would have been too rear heavy. As anyone who has driven a powerful diesel or Scooby-motored Bus will attest, things can get a bit hairy fully laden at motorway speeds. By plonking the engine in the middle, the weight balance evens out when loaded, though Simon did mention that it can be a touch 'lively' on wet roundabouts with no kids on board.

To give an overview of the under floor antics; the mid-mounted section is chopped straight out of the Toyota, while the back of the frame is all

custom made, as is the front. The Toyota also donated its double wishbone suspension while the rear suspension is based on a Vauxhall/Lotus set-up. Amazingly, when Simon first started to measure things up, he found that the difference in width was only about half an inch between the import oddity and the Bay. "When you open the door," says Simon, "and look at where Toyota meets Volkswagen, there really is nothing in it." The result is a mid-mounted engine and gearbox with a prop shaft, combined with suspension that makes the standard torsion bar set up seem archaic, all mated together in one

harmonious platform.

It sounds like a mammoth undertaking, which there is no denying it would be for most people, but Simon makes light of the effort required. "I built a chassis for it that I could actually drive around. It sounds difficult but it is all just welding really. I had the chassis on the floor and the body hanging from the garage roof and just mated the two together." Some people may get highly upset about all this chopping and changing on a sacred VW but at the end of the day, it is not as if he has taken a grinder to a Barndoor, is it? In fact, Simon has had some »



34 CAMPER&BUS

What the heck is this under the cargo floor? A five-speed gearbox and prop shaft!



The Toyota donated its front suspension to the cause too





Not your average Bay Window bulkhead



We've seen Bays with hobs behind the passenger seat, but never an engine



2.0 litres of TDi goodness in the cab





To some, this creation may be heresy of the highest order, but to us it's a work of art

hassle from purists (who probably own slammed VWs with big motors anyway!), explaining "some people have got quite angry with me for chopping up a Bay, and would say 'It's just another Subaru conversion', until I explained what it actually is."

Regardless of your take on the ethics of it, the engineering skill that has gone into this conversion is awesome. The choice of base vehicle has also helped no end in making this something of street sleeper. The problem with many Frankenstein conversions is the fact that the chassis of the two vehicles are normally worlds apart in terms of wheel base and track width. This means that you are either left with wheels sticking out beyond the bodywork, or expensive fabrication of custom axles and drive shafts. By doing his research, Simon was able to find the perfect base and thus save

himself a world of hassle when it came to making everything sit right. The only real giveaway that something is amiss (beyond the aforementioned prop shaft), is when you open the door. As the body was completely removed from the chassis, Simon was able to 'bodydrop' the shell when it went back on. This means that the floor sits four inches higher than usual, but allows for decent ride quality while still retaining a suitably lowered appearance.

Outside the box

The engine itself is an absolute corker. Displacing just over two litres it pumps out over 140bhp, endowing the Bay with somewhat sprightly performance. Coupled to a five-speed 'box, this Bay has enough poke to surprise many a modern T5 owner. This complete transfer of the Toyota running gear has also netted Simon fully servo-assisted brakes and even

power steering. To say he's pleased with the way it drives is an understatement. "I drive it everywhere, driving at 80-90mph and getting 60mpg. Every other weekend we drive it down to Cornwall and it is just a total driving machine. It is just like driving a modern vehicle."

To some, this creation maybe heresy of the highest order but to us it's a work of art. You wouldn't catch me going to all of this effort, I would simply slap a Scooby motor in the back and be done with it. But Simon has struck his own path and created something that fits his needs perfectly and, more to the point, is different. In a world where a narrowed beam and Fuchs are the required uniform for most VWs, it's refreshing to see something that pushes the boundaries of creativity, without ending up looking like and escapee from *Pimp my Ride*. Top work. 🏆



Cabin is a mix of Bay and Toyota and we've never said that before



Stand by
your van

Simon Sparrow
Toyota / Bay

Simon is a VW man through-and-through and earns his living working for the highly respected Johnson's Autoworks, restoring and rebuilding all manner of aircooled machinery. When not tinkering with cars, he loves loading the family into the Bus and making a beeline for Cornwall.