

This 1971 VW Beetle still steals the show

Firoz Khimji's 1971 Volkswagen Beetle, affectionately called *Kikere*, has journeyed from Singapore to Uganda. With its classic curves, air-cooled engine, and timeless charm, this vintage icon continues to turn heads wherever it goes.

BY ROLAND D NASASIRA

Firoz Khimji has owned his 1971 Volkswagen Beetle, affectionately known as *Kikere* (a Luganda term meaning "frog"), for approximately 14 years. He purchased this 54-year-old iconic German car from a pilot while living in Singapore. It was love at first sight when Khimji saw the Beetle being driven, and it took considerable effort and negotiation to convince the pilot to part with it.

"After test-driving the car, I made my initial offer, but the seller countered with a higher price. I thought my offer was reasonable, but it turned out to be lower than what the previous owner wanted. It took a lot of haggling before we arrived at a mutual figure," Khimji recalls.

Khimji drove the Beetle in Singapore until November 2020, when he moved to Uganda due to the global Covid-19 pandemic, bringing most of his household items, including the Beetle, with him.

Features

The iconic Beetle is one of the few old-generation cars, notable for having the trunk at the front and the engine at the rear, features that are quite the opposite of both older and modern cars in its classification.

For Khimji's Beetle, the infotainment system includes a CD player with two bass speakers positioned between the engine and the rear seats. True to German engineering, the sound system is well-amplified, providing an excellent auditory experi-

ence reminiscent of a disco hall.

A modification on Khimji's Beetle includes four rims swapped from a Porsche 911, which he believes enhances the car's aesthetics. However, he is on the lookout for the original rounded VW rims engraved with the VW logo to restore the car's authenticity.

Originally, the Beetle was produced with a 1195cc petrol engine, known as the Beetle 1200cc, which Khimji drives on only occasionally. The last time he took it out was in mid-2023 for a trip from Entebbe to Kampala, where it was damaged by a reckless motorist. Since then, it has remained in his garage.

"It is almost ready to be driven again, but I want to ensure a proper restoration first. It still features its original leather seats, dashboard, aluminium side mirrors, and chrome front bumper. These cars are durable, so even after an incident, they do not sustain total damage," Khimji explains.

The Beetle runs on petrol, as most, if not all, VW Beetles were never manufactured with diesel engines. Another distinct feature is its air-cooled engine, sim-

BEETLE'S TIMELESS LEGACY

The Beetle became the most-produced car in automotive history, with more than 23 million units built across seven decades. Its charm and accessibility led to affectionate nicknames around the globe, including *Käfer* in Germany and *Fusca*. Beyond the mechanics, the Beetle achieved pop culture fame through Disney's *Herbie* films and the iconic "Think Small" advertising campaign, cementing its place as a symbol of fun, freedom, and individuality.

Even after production ended, the Beetle remains highly sought after by collectors, especially early 1970s models and rare custom editions. Its combination of timeless design and cultural impact ensures that the Beetle continues to capture hearts around the world, just as Firoz Khimji's cherished *Kikere*.

ilar to the Porsche 911, which was partly designed around the shape and lines of the Beetle.

Maintenance, spare parts

Khimji finds it challenging to determine a maintenance cost for his Beetle because he rarely drives it to the garage for service. Being a purely manual car, he often performs light maintenance and repair work himself, as there are not many electronic components.

"It is purely mechanical with basic technology. If you are tech-savvy, you can easily handle a number of repairs at home. It has a points system for the distributor and four spark plugs. The distributor and points need to be set with the fuel gauge, which I also manage myself," he explains.

If you are considering acquiring a classic VW Beetle, Khimji advises ensuring access to a reliable source of spare parts. However, one advantage of these older generation cars is that they do not require many spare parts for routine maintenance.

Even so, the car is durable enough that once you replace major components, it will be a long time before you need to do it again, as long as you use genuine, durable parts.

"Sometimes, spare parts can be difficult to source due to the scarcity of these vehicles. This also leads to fewer spare parts dealers, as no dealer wants to stock parts for cars that are in

low demand. If you take good care of the Beetle, it hardly ever breaks down. There is not much that can go wrong with the car; you just need to maintain it well, and it will serve you for years," Khimji explains.

In addition to replacing spare parts, you also need to ensure that lubricants, such as engine oil, are the correct type and changed regularly in the right recommended quantities, since these cars can sometimes be prone to oil leaks. However, the only significant issue with air-cooled engines is the potential fire hazard, which was more common with VW Kombis that had design flaws.

When Khimji needs to replace any parts, he sources them from Kenya, South Africa, and Tanzania, which are the largest VW Beetle markets in Africa. International sources for spare parts include eBay and suppliers from Germany, among others.

According to HotCars, an online portal, the Volkswagen Beetle holds the record as the most produced car in history.

When the last of the VW Beetles rolled off the assembly line, a total of 21,529,464 vehicles had been produced.

It is also considered the longest-running production model and the most manufactured car based on a single platform. The figure of 21 million cars produced is equivalent to the combined total annual production of the two largest automakers in the world, Volkswagen and Toyota.

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