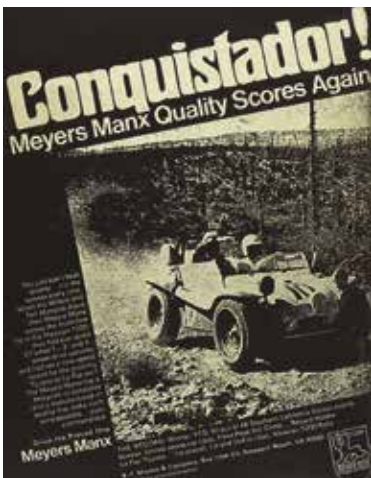




Buggies became stars of big and small screens very quickly. The original 1968 United Artists film *The Thomas Crown Affair* starred Steve McQueen and Faye Dunaway, and an awesome 180bhp Chevrolet Corvair-powered Manx. (Courtesy Kobal Collection)

The Thomas Crown Affair Manx was specially built for United Artists in just eight weeks by Pete Condos and Eckley Tur at Con-Ferr Manufacturing in Burbank, California. Features of the buggy included sunken headlights, a boat windscreen, and lowered sides. (CourtesyUA/Mirisch/Simkoe/Solar/Pictorial Press Ltd)



The Manx proved a serious off-road competitor, with drivers Ted Mangels and Vic Wilson beating every type of vehicle to win the first organised Mexican 1000 race at Baja in 1967.



The Manx helped open up the American back-country to thousands of enthusiasts and explorers. Here, Bruce Meyers and fellow off-roader Ted Mangels plot a race route through Baja, California. (Courtesy Meyers Manx Inc)

The newly-formed BF Meyers & Co factory began turning out more and more kits a day, but production still couldn't keep up with demand. Motoring journalists loved the buggy, and wanted it on the front cover of their magazines; young people loved it because it was cheap to build and looked great, and TV producers and film makers scrambled to get it into shows and films. Chuck Connors used a Manx in the 1960s show *Cowboy in Africa*, whilst big screen stars Paul Newman (*Winning*) and Elvis Presley (*Live a Little, Love a Little*) drove them in their movies. However, it was the modified, Corvair-powered Manx driven by Steve McQueen in *The Thomas Crown Affair* that really fired the imagination of the buggy-buying public and further increased demand.

Many of these newly-built Manxes were destined for use purely on the street, with no pretention to serious off-roading. However, the kit soon proved its competition worthiness at Baja, winning the first organised 'Mexican 1000' off-road race. The Manx also set a new speed record for the gruelling Tijuana to La Paz run, showing its durability and manufactured-in quality. The Manx went on to dominate US west coast slalom racing, and, in the capable hands of Ted Trevor, won the under 3-litre class at the 1966 Pikes Peak Hill Climb with a 140bhp Corvair engine and Crown-adapted VW transaxle fitted.



Don Wilcox puts in an unmatched qualifying time at practice for the Pikes Peak Hillclimb in 1966, in a blue Manx with turbocharged Corvair engine, built by Ted Trevor of Crown Manufacturing. (Courtesy Don Wilcox)

DESERTER SERIES I, GS & GT



DATA PANEL



Production dates

US: 1967-1971

Germany: 1975-1983

Numbers built

1250 (approx)

Export markets

Worldwide

Wheelbase

GS: 85in GT: 84in

Identification tips

Originally a Manx-inspired body (Series I) with greater engine and tire coverage. The GS added a mid-engine configuration and full space frame. The GT was an updated Bounty Hunter design with VW or space frame chassis

Having been refused a Manx dealership on the grounds that a VW agent had already been given the licence in Massachusetts, skilled engineer and sportscar enthusiast Alex Dearborn decided instead to manufacture his own buggy. Called the Deserter, the design was developed in 1967 for racing at SCCA (Sports Car Club of America) events in 1968. Similar to the ubiquitous Meyers Manx, but with a longer 84in wheelbase to the VW chassis, and a certain amount of road legalisation to meet strict eastern US vehicle codes, the Series I car began to sell well.

Based at Marblehead, Massachusetts, the Dearborn Automobile Co quickly developed a line of accessories for other Deserter owners who wanted to run their buggies in road races. The fiberglass bodies for the Deserter buggies were supplied by next-door neighbour Autodynamics Inc, the largest racecar manufacturer in the US at the time, owned and run by

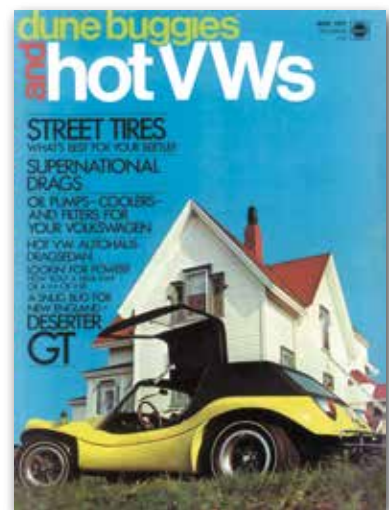
friends Ray Caldwell and Fred Jackson. This allowed Dearborn access to full manufacturing facilities for the Deserter, so its chassis tuning – rather than sheer horsepower – could be developed to outpace not only other lookalike buggies from California, but other sportscars, too. For race events, such as one held at Lime Rock in 1968, the Deserter tore into the competition of bigger

machinery – Lolas and Sting-Rays – and enjoyed considerable success.

In 1970, Autodynamics acquired Dearborn's company and continued with development and production of the VW-based Deserter: plus a new offering, the Deserter GS (the initials standing for 'Grand Slalom.') The GS used an Autodynamics-built tubular space frame, instead of the VW chassis, and had a wheelbase of 85in. The chassis was designed to carry a stock Corvair or Porsche 911/912 engine, giving it a power-to-weight ratio better than any sportscar, yet the bodyshell was virtually identical to the original Deserter. Autodynamics' experience in Group 7 racing, combined with development of the original car, had produced a buggy which



With the addition of an Autodynamics tubular chassis, the Deserter became a serious racing vehicle with mid-mounted Corvair or Porsche 911/912 engine, and was re-named the Deserter GS. (Courtesy Alex Dearborn)



The Deserter GT was a cover star of many magazines, including *Dune Buggies* and *Hot VWs*.



A GT Hustler, at a buggy convention in the 1970s.

Construction of the GT Hustler was slightly more complicated than with the original, and required the windshield wiper armature to be lengthened to ensure a complete sweep of the wiper blades over the larger screen. The petrol tank neck also had to be repositioned to allow a central filler, avoiding the fiberglass headlamp pods. Nevertheless, the GT Hustler looked well finished, especially when topped with a

chrome flip-up racing filler cap, and achieved a separate identity from the basic design of the standard buggy.

The GT Hustler shared the same fate as the original Hustler when EPC went into liquidation in 1972 (another casualty of the buggy boom ending). The GT Hustlers that remain are a unique reminder of one of the better 1970s buggy designs.



The optional side panels, with boxy rear arches, helped legalise the buggy by covering the engine and tires. A pram-effect soft-top gave headroom for two rear seat passengers.

The GT Hustler, like its GP-inspired brother, was a well-made kit, and often found itself used off-road.



The GT Hustler's good looks were admired by many, including Diana, Princess of Wales, who owned a 1971-registered vehicle.



The American Deserter GT buggy was also made in Germany. This one reflects a current European trend; single-color paintwork and high-tech engineering.



John Leso's Manx drag racer is built on a custom tube chassis, uses nitrous oxide for extra power, and Porsche brakes to stop it at the end of the quarter-mile. (Courtesy Mel Baker)



The sleek lines of the Deserter GT were developed from the Bounty Hunter design by Autodynamics in the US.



Bruce Meyers' sophisticated street buggy The Manx SR featured flip-up doors, and removable roof panel. (Courtesy Mel Baker)



Buggies cry out to be customised, and this GP Beach Buggy features frenched rear lights, custom interior and color-coded engine. (Courtesy Mike Key)



Guitar legend Jimi Hendrix played a free concert on the island of Maui in 1970 (included in the 1972 *Rainbow Bridge* film directed by Chuck Wein). Whilst in Hawaii on his 'Cry of Love' tour, Hendrix took time out to drive a Bushwhacker buggy rented from the Hilton Hotel. (Courtesy Ron Rafaelli/Michael Ochs Archive)



Jimi Hendrix tests the strength of the rollbar. Hilton Hotels in Hawaii, Miami, Puerto Rico and Jamaica were customers of manufacturer KDM Enterprises. (Courtesy Michael Ochs Archive)



Elvis Presley (as Greg Nolan) in the Manx buggy used in the opening sequence of the 1968 MGM movie *Live a Little, Love a Little*, co-starring Michele Carey (as Bernice) and a large dog called Albert.



Ken Harrelson (nicknamed 'The Hawk') of the Boston Red Sox baseball team had a special Mini-Volks buggy built by Howard Dunbar in 1970, with wild floral naugahyde top and Fire Flake blue paint job.