

# 40 YEARS IN THE MAKING



by Bob Elliott

With some of the hottest days of summer upon us, the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Deserter Dune Buggy was held on August 4<sup>th</sup>, 2007 at the VolksVair Fair in Shrewsbury, MA. In the mix of more than 30 dune buggies at the show, twelve vintage Deserters huddled together representing all four variations (see sidebar) of Deserter Buggies originally produced in Marblehead, MA starting in 1967 by the Dearborn Automotive Corporation and it's founder, Alex Dearborn, who was present at the show.

I'm sure those at Autodynamics and Dearborn Automotive had no idea that the little car from Marblehead would have such a long life and a strong following 40 years after they dove head first into the dune buggy craze started by Bruce Meyers on the west coast with the original Manx.

The VolksVair Fair has been held on the first Saturday in August for the past eight years with great success sponsored by The Bug Club ([www.the-bug-club.com](http://www.the-bug-club.com)) and Colonial Corvairs two active local clubs. It's an air-cooled event only and that limits the cars on site to just about 100 VWs of all types and 50 Chevy Corvairs each year. The grassy and shaded

## The Deserter Owner's Group Reunion

*Just some of the dozen Deserter dune buggies that showed up at VolksVair Fair to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the marque.*



*Mike Ragonese's highly modified, turbocharged GT/GS was a popular car to look at during the show and rightfully garnered first place in the Dune Buggy class.*

grounds of the Hebert Candy Mansion along with the gift shop and the build-your-own ice cream sundae bar is sure to please any family member. A DJ provided sounds with food vendors on site, avail-

able for all.

With a substantial vendor/swap meet, you probably can find that unique part you've been looking for, or that next project. I noticed a pretty clean dune buggy



*John Coutinho brought along his GT and parked alongside a new-generation buggy, the Manxster.*



*Dune buggies of practically every persuasion and performance level show up at the VolksVair Fair in Massachusetts.*



*Buggies like this nicely tricked out original Manx provide about as much fun as you can have on four wheels.*



*Sam Dearborn's green GT/GS is about as smooth and sleek as they come.*

body that sold for \$200 with a windshield and roll bar as well as a Type 3 project car, also very cheap.

When it came time for the awards for the dune buggy class, always the largest class in the show with awards going to the top five cars, two Deserters could be found receiving awards. Mike Ragonese and his awesome turbo-powered red GS took first place, while Ken Hoffman's beautiful blue GT took a third for the day.

Some familiar old names from the original days at Autodynamics and Dearborn were there including both Alex Dearborn and Reeves Callaway who both enjoyed the outing along with the rest. All that attended remarked how they enjoyed the laid-back atmosphere of the show and commented how great the quality of the cars and facilities.

This event organized by the Deserter Owners Group, ([www.deserterownersgroup.org](http://www.deserterownersgroup.org)) is sure not to be the last and the VolksVair Fair is a show that should be on any vintage VW fan's list of must see events.



*Ken Hoffman's GT.*

Two different Deserter body styles existed, both mainly marketed for the rear engine VW dune buggy application so popular at the time: The Series 1 produced from '67-'69 was a Manx clone adapted to suit the Massachusetts DMV and the way cool at the time Deserter GT with the pointy nose and curved windshield whose production ran from '69 to '73 is what most people remember of Deserters. Either one of these bodies could be used



*Tony Chione's Series 1.*

with the specially designed Autodynamics mid-engine chassis intended for the SCCA track races and autocross events. These versions were raced with much success by many talented amateur race drivers, some of whom went on to leave larger marks in the automotive industry.

You can find more information on the Deserter buggies on the Deserter Owners Group website and their discussion forum linked from the home page.

**KCB**