

THE COMING OF

THE ANTI-CAR

BY DENISE McCLUGGAGE

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In spite of the increasing number of car owners—or probably because of them—driving for pleasure has dropped below walking for pleasure on the list of fun things to do, or so the surveyors of our leisure tell us. In short, people are driving more now and enjoying it less. The car has become a household appliance in the driveway, no more pleasurable than a washing machine.

There was a revolt against this trend a decade or more ago called the Sports Car. But now most sports cars, too, have been civilized into dull mediocrity. The emphasis has become less on "sports" and more on "car"; and sports cars have become comfortable transportation, much like any other car. Those traits that set the sports car apart from other cars are often unusable—legally, anyway—on the drive-a-day roads today, and Man the Driver has become bored again. Bored enough to—ugh—walk!

Now something else has appeared to alleviate driving boredom—the anti-car, the raw-vehicle side of cardom. Wheels and engine in the rough; anti-road as well. Pleasure driving may yet make a real comeback.

There has been a sudden upsurge in anti-road feeling lately, anyway; witness the boom in four-wheel drive and other off-the-road specialists. Even when getting really off the road is largely academic. (The Kenya-anyone look of the Land-Rover in the game preserves of Yonkers; the Universal Jeep slogging hardily along through the wooded complexities of suburban Chicago.)

But it took a Californian to set the anti-car movement really going, and a young man in Marblehead, Massachusetts, to civilize it just enough for Eastern tastes and Eastern licensing requirements. The Californian is Bruce Meyers, of Newport Beach, who first put together bits and pieces of an old Volkswagen, wrapped them in a beautifully made fiberglass semi-body (anti-body?), and called the result "Meyer's Manx." He made the little two-seater available in kit form to anti-car lovers who would, please, rather do it themselves. The venture was a considerable success.

In the East, the Dearborn Automobile Company makes the conversion kit that turns tired Volkswagens into the anti-car known as the "Deserter," a name that sums up perfectly the whole anti-car movement.

Dearborn, in this present case, is a person, not a place, regardless of that other geographic Dearborn known for automobiles. H. Alexander Dearborn is a handsome young man given to turtleneck sweaters and racing cars. He lives in Marblehead and is associated with a company called Autodynamics, known for its "Formula Vee" racing cars, which also happen to be made up of bits of Volkswagens. Autodynamics is responsible for the engineering and construction of the Deserter; Alex Dearborn designed it.

The Deserter differs from the Manx in that it is a little wider at the back and a little longer, thus permitting a back seat of sorts (perhaps an anti-back seat). Anyway, the Deserter (Continued on page 79)

holds—if that's the word for it—four people.

The Deserter also has fender skirts, again of sorts (Alex calls them "mini skirts"), but they meet licensing requirements. The Deserter, being Massachusetts born, in addition has facilities for a heater and for side curtains, thus making it an anti-weather anti-car.

The Deserter, although anti-car, somehow becomes more car than most cars. Weighing less, it is sprightlier than the standard VW, whence it sprang. It will accelerate with a Porsche Super 90 and cruise nicely around 75 miles per hour. (Some people have put Porsche and Corvair engines into the Deserter, which is probably a flagrant case of lily gilding). But this is cataloguing the highway virtues of the Deserter, and that's not what it is all about, really.

Anti-roadwise, the Deserter, when fitted with the optional wide tires, can feather-foot across soft sand or snow where real cars—even four-wheel drive ones—fear to put their tread. The Deserter exerts nine pounds per square inch pressure (a walking man normally exerts about six).

The Deserter will also climb steep hills, clear tall boulders at a

single leap—well, not exactly, but it does have a ten-inch road clearance. And along with its heavy-gauge underbelly, its low center of gravity, and tricky dual hand-braking system—which operates on one hind wheel at a time (handy for slippery maneuvers)—this anti-car can shun pike, path, or post road with alacrity. It's a ball.

You can build the Deserter yourself or have it done. If you like building models but keep losing parts in the shag rug, this is for you. All the parts of the Deserter can be ordered from a list: \$1 for a Deserter nameplate to \$498 for the stronger-than-scratches, color-impregnated fiberglass body. (Which comes in anti-color colors such as "Fountain Blue, Bowling Green, Debit Red, Yellow Pages Yellow, and Pitch Black." The entire Deluxe kit comes to \$695. You furnish the de-bodied VW.

The possessor of a battered old Beetle can turn it into a proper anti-car in a few weeks' work—or let the pros assemble one for you in as little as two days. A complete Deserter—Autodynamics-selected chassis and factory-rebuilt engine—can be had for \$2,500. The antidote for driving boredom is an anti-car like the Deserter.



The Deserter, the family Volkswagen, is the brainchild of H. Alexander Dearborn; takes sand, snow, and rocky terrain in its stride

