



A Gaggle Of Karmann-Ghias

You can never have too many....

story Bill Holden
pics Bill Holden & Neil Fenelon



Ahh, my little RED Karmann-Ghia Cabriolet. Well, this car re-started the love affair for Karmann-Ghias for me. My first Karmann Ghia was a 1971 Bahia Red Coupe, which was handed down

from my parents to me when I was 15 years old, and while I was working as a VW, Porsche, and Audi apprentice mechanic in Dallas Texas. I kept that car for 10 years, and amongst having many other exotics and classics, this was the best car I have ever owned. Even my flirt with Porsches, Mercedes, Jaguars, and Panteras never really stacked up against the Karmann. So, in December 1999, around my birthday, I got the urge to find another Karmann Ghia, but this time I wanted a Cabriolet.

Many people may not be aware that there is a difference between a Roadster, a Cabriolet, and a Convertible. For most, a car with a folding roof is simply called a convertible, but there are distinct design differences. A Cabriolet, has a folding top that incorporates a headliner on the



inner side, and it's usually padded and sound proofed. Typical examples are the Karmann-Ghia Cabriolet, Porsche Cabriolet, or Peugeot Cabriolet. A Convertible is a folding down roof in which there is no padding or headliner under the outer fabric. If you sit inside the car with the top up, you can see the convertible folding top frames, and the under side of the outer fabric of the convertible top, such as in the Ford Mustang Convertible. A Roadster, on the other hand is usually a vinyl top over a frame which must be assembled and snapped on, and disassembled by hand - they do not merely fold down like a cabriolet or convertible. The MGB Roadster is a good example of this type.

In my search for a Karmann-Ghia Cabriolet, I looked Australia wide, and couldn't find a Ghia I liked. All I could find were early model coupes which were either rusted out, molested, involved in collisions, or 'hack job convertibles' (a coupe that someone has cut the roof off to make a crude convertible). From a mechanic's point of view, I prefer the later model Ghias, which came standard with IRS rear end, larger motor, improved braking and safety features, factory Karmann Cabriolet top, better basic creature comforts, and a petrol filler access in the right hand front fender, rather than inside the bonnet. So, after not finding anything worthwhile in Australia, I began searching the internet around the world.

I chose to visit the usual internet for sale sites and various Karmann-Ghia classified web sites around the world, and on any given day, I could find on average 450-500 Ghias for sale. 70 percent of the them weren't worth having, or would have required too much restoration, but there was certainly plenty to look at. Finally, in May 2003, I found a very nice 1974 Semi-Auto LHD Karmann-Ghia Cabriolet on a classic car website at a Florida used car dealer. I called them and asked the important questions about the car, and requested some photos via email. After receiving the pictures, I called them back and negotiated the price, paying for the car halfway across the world on my credit card. It's amazing how we do impulse things in our life. That was the easy part, now I had to get the car home to Australia.

First stop would be my parents home in Salt Lake City, Utah. Ivan at Karmannghias.com collected the Ghia from Florida and delivered it to my parents house within a week and without a hitch. My dad took an immediate interest in the car and found a local VW mechanic in Salt Lake to do a full check over, including oil change, tune up and brake job. Then my Mum got in and cleaned the car up, and gave RED the full beauty treatment. My parents then

registered the car so that I could drive it around when I came over for a visit, although I suspected my dad had ulterior motives when he called one day to say that the car drew lots of attention from the opposite sex when he drove it to the local shops! The little Red Karmann-Ghia was capturing the attention of every person who passed by.

I now began investigating the very expensive cost of shipping my car to Australia. I found out that a 40 foot container cost the same with one car, or five cars in it. Hmmmm, more Karmann-Ghias? Instantly, my next hair brained idea was to buy another 4 cars to fill up the container. My excuse - to cut the cost of shipping, of course! So, off hunting I went for more Karmann-Ghias.

I was primarily after Cabriolets, as there was such a shortage of them in the Land Down Under. Volkswagen Australia only sold the Karmann-Ghia Coupe in Australia from 1960-1969, which makes the 1970-1974 Karmann Ghia Cabriolets very rare cars indeed, especially with IRS rear end and a Semi-Auto trans. Needless to say, I found four more cabs, and their story will be told in future issues of VW Magazine Australia (ED: a story on Gumby, the green cabriolet, was featured in Issue#9).

On the very day RED arrived in Australia, Channel 7 asked if the car could appear on their morning breakfast show. Literally an hour separated custom clearance and RED's debut on Australian television, but we made it. The media dates then included a stint in the Sydney Mardi Gras Parade, followed by the VW Nationals. I then scheduled RED in for a bit of R&R, Rest and Restoration.

First up was a new set of floor pans, as the only rust in the car was just under the drivers seat where most Ghias typically rust. The body came off the chassis, and two new German floor pans were grafted in. A new Stayfast Canvas roof, with headliner, was fitted, and the interior received a full new black leather fitout, including the optional rear seat with seat belts. New factory Perlon carpet was laid, along with a new stereo. Custom chrome VW Wheels with modified offsets and 205/60R15 Hankook tyres went under the guards, and some of the paint work was touched up. New Hella H4 headlamps brightened the night time cruises, and new very rare OEM rubber impact strips were put on the bumpers.

All these improvements have made RED a real pleasure to drive, and I currently drive RED to a variety of car shows. He still turns heads wherever he goes.

