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## Little bit of ingenuity gives polio survivor new horizons

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Jean Hartley guides her scooter into her car with the help of an automatic hydraulic lift. (Hawaii 24/7 photo by Karin Stanton)

Karin Stanton | Hawaii 24/7 Contributing Editor

Jean Hartley likes to get out and do things. The 70-something former college teacher is not one to sit at home and crochet or do crossword puzzles.

For Hartley, however, each excursion has to be carefully planned. From grocery shopping to covering the Ironman World Triathlon Championships as a freelance writer, she has to plot and prepare.

Hartley is a polio survivor and lately finds it more difficult to walk more than a few dozen steps. She relies on two other modes of transportation – a red VW Bug and her shiny red Go-Go Ultra X electric scooter.

Recently, Hartley found a way to take full advantage of both four-wheeled vehicles. With a little help from a couple of local mechanics, the scooter now can be stored in the trunk of the shiny red VW, attached to a hydraulic lift and easily taken out so Hartley can zoom around shops and along Kailua-Kona's streets.

"This island is not disability-friendly if you have a physical limitation. The geography of the island makes accessibility a big issue," she said. "I'm just an example of a person who solved my unique transportation needs. The application here is, if I can do it, others can also search for any options to being house-bound."

Hartley is used to asking "how many stairs?," "can I please have an aisle seat?" and "is there an elevator?"



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"I'm good for walking maybe 30-40 feet," she said. "Even going to the movie theater, the movie I want to see is always in the theater furthest away from the entrance. By the time I get there, I'm just pooped."

Now, with her new scooter-in-a-bug invention, Hartley's world has opened up.

"It's bought such great independence and freedom. It's really all about confidence" she said. "I can go to movies by myself. I can shop by myself. I can go to Kahaluu Beach Park by myself."

Hartley really likes to use those words: "I can."

"If you've been disabled a long time, it's so easy to get stuck in the negative," she said. "It can be such a huge shadow over everything you are and everything you do."

Even a manual wheelchair isn't the answer for people like Hartley, who want to be in the thick of the action wherever it is.

The Big Island presents a long list of barriers, including sand, lava rock, and uneven or non-existent sidewalks. Many homes are two-story post-and-pier structures. And, of course, on an island made up of five volcanoes, everything is on a slant.

Surviving the polio that struck her down in childhood was just the first battle. Every day since has included some up-hill obstacle. Until now, Hartley has taken it as it comes, raised her children, taught her classes and shopped for her groceries.

All the while, she has fought off the muscle weakness, the pain and the energy loss each day metes out.

Traditional medicine has few answers for the 80 percent of adult polio survivors who experience these symptoms. Hartley relies on physical therapy, massage, acupuncture, vitamins and supplements to keep herself fit.

Just being fit is not enough for Hartley. She created and maintains a Web site that connects disabled visitors with accessible sea, land and air activities along the Kona Coast.

Then she started looking at her own challenges.

She already had her beloved little VW Bug, which is not compatible with a manual wheelchair.

"That was not the answer for me. I had no one to push a wheelchair and I could not lift it into my car," she said.

With donations from the Kona Mauka Rotary Club and Hilo and Kona Adult Care, as well as private gifts, Hartley was able to purchase her scooter from Bannix Medical Supply.

A team of auto wizards worked to complete the conversion. Waimea Auto Center/Thunder Alley Auto installed the hitch and hydraulic lift on the back of the VW.

They were able to install the hitch and hydraulic lift to the back of the VW without having to make alterations to the car. They devised a way to safely, carefully and easily get the scooter into and out of the car at the touch of a remote control device.

Ron Meyers at Big Island Upholstery and the team at European Auto put on some finishing touches and the scooter-in-a-bug was complete.

"Those guys were just fantastic," Hartley said. "They really made my dreams come true."

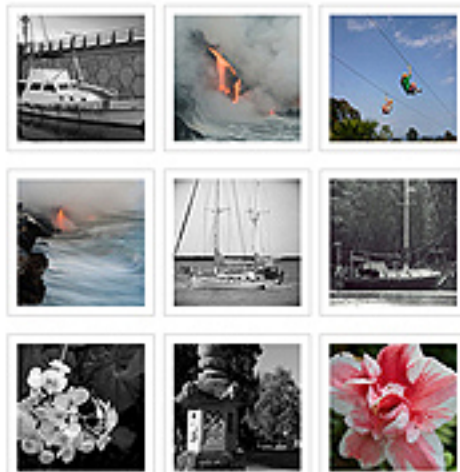
Within five months of the idea, Hartley and her wheels are good to go ... just about anywhere.

Check out Hartley's Web site at: [www.disabledadventureshawaii.com](http://www.disabledadventureshawaii.com)

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*Jean Hartley uses the hydraulic lift to stow her scooter in her car. (Hawaii 24/7 photo by Karin Stanton)*