

THE PERFECT MARRIAGE

There's nothing like the simultaneous deep rumble of 20 Volkswagen exhausts to stir a girl's thoughts to romance.

Recently I showed up at the monthly get-together of the Volkswagen club in my hometown of Kailua Kona, Hawaii. I definitely did not fit the demographic profile – female, too old, too *haole* (white in a brown culture), and did not “pull wrench”. However I was readily accepted with warm *aloha*. As we started the slow cruise down the ocean-side main drag, tourists gaped at the astonishing display of VW beauties.

But this tale needs a back-story! How did I come to be part of this unique event?

In 2006 I bought an apple red VW Beetle. In the past I had fleeting love affairs with suitors from Japan (my beautiful gold Toyota Celica); Great Britain (the flashy white Morgan 4/4 sports car); and of late, Korea (a modest, used Hyundai). The talking VWs in the Pixar movie “Cars” lit my fire and I soon gave my heart to a red Beetle, just my size and favorite color. It was a short engagement as I soon had a keyring on my left hand. Little did I know how this sweetheart would change my life.

I'm a polio survivor who recently found it difficult to walk more than a dozen steps. A year ago diminishing energy prompted me to seek options for getting around more easily. At first glance a collapsible manual wheelchair seemed to be the logical solution. However I had no one to push it and didn't have the upper body strength to lift a wheelchair into my car. Perhaps an electric scooter? Skeptics tried to discourage me.

“You can't fit a scooter in the trunk of your Beetle.”

“It can't be done.”

“Buy a van with a hydraulic ramp.”

Me, a van? Not the type! I didn't listen to this good advice but took on the challenge to solve the problem my own way.

It didn't take e-Harmony™ to make the right match. The solution was a lightweight Pride GoGo electric scooter (apple red). Although it can be separated into three sections, I couldn't lift each part up into my car trunk. I needed a system that would let the scooter remain fully assembled, yet be lifted in and out with little effort on my part.

I finally found a team of local auto wizards to work a miracle. They installed a trailer hitch, boom and hydraulic lift to the rear of the Beetle without making major alterations to my car. By folding down the back seat, they opened up a 4-foot by 4-½ foot trunk space, ample room for the 19” x 38” scooter. I get the scooter in and out by myself at the touch of a remote control device.

My scooter-in-a-bug invention has brought me greater independence. In 2009 I covered the Ironman World Triathlon race in Kailua Kona as a journalist working on an article about disabled athletes. My special parking permit allowed me close proximity to the race route. There I unloaded the scooter for curbside

viewing of the seven Challenged Athletes who crossed the finish line. This experience appeared in the article "Iron Tough" published in Sports & Spokes magazine. I got the story thanks to my versatile VW.

My red Beetle is also a regular in Kona's Christmas, July 4th and Coffee Festival parades, proudly displaying a banner promoting my Internet business, Disabled Adventures Hawaii.

The adaptability of the VW and the ingenuity of talented auto mechanics created accessibility and exciting new opportunities for me. I encourage others with mobility limitations to explore adaptive options not usually listed in car manuals. There will always be people who will tell you your plans won't work or are too expensive, but don't let them tell you "it can't be done."

The perfect marriage endures. Although my VW is not a modified high performance beast, it is a loyal and reliable companion that has practically become my legs. Distances are no longer dreaded and I can arrive at my destination fresh and alert instead of exhausted and depleted! The shiny red paint job has enough flash to turn heads, but it remains faithful to its vows. No divorce in sight.

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