

ROADSTERS FOR THE '70s

HOT ROD

EVERYBODY'S AUTOMOTIVE MAGAZINE

BUGGIES-
New Generation
of Street
Roadsters

SEPTEMBER 1970

Sweden 5:75 Inkl. moms

75c

UK 5/9



5-SPEED DRAG TRANS

HOW TO WIRE A CAR

E.J. POTTER:

**HAVE CHEVY BIKE,
WILL TRAVEL!**

INSIDE AN INDY FORD

USAC DOUBLEHEADER:

CHAMPIONSHIPS & STOCKS



SEXY OR SPARTAN, IT'S DEALER'S CHOICE AS A MULTITUDE
OF STREET-LEGAL DUNE BUGGIES AND KITS HERALD THE ...

REBIRTH OF
THE

By John Thawley ■ In an age of mass consumerism, a generation of young Americans conduct a constant — almost frantic — search for individuality. This quest is reflected in a life-style punctuated by extremes in dress, social behavior, entertainment and personal transportation.

Since the early thirties, the mechanically minded young at heart of this country have been deeply involved in changing the motor car from a piece of drab functional hardware to a gondola offering fashion, freedom and limited function.

By the late forties, the practice of do-it-yourself personalizing had come close to an art form. The showing was on the streets and the shape was the '32 Ford roadster. Drag racing and customizing served the street roadster gang as

continuous influences on styling and motive power. A significant influence was even exerted on Detroit. By 1963, when Bruce Meyers built the first Manx, small cars were "in," Volkswagens were already as plentiful as fleas on a three-dollar dog and the street tribe was throwing in the towel in attempting to locate '32 Ford hardware. Overnight, fiberglass kit cars offered the verve, the availability and the practicality of construction never reached by the '32 Ford.

There was a certain allure to the thought that the dinged and dented VW body could be yanked off and replaced by a fiberglass shell. Low cost, availability of VW components and a minimum of work produced a lot of sales — which are bound to continue for (Continued on following page)

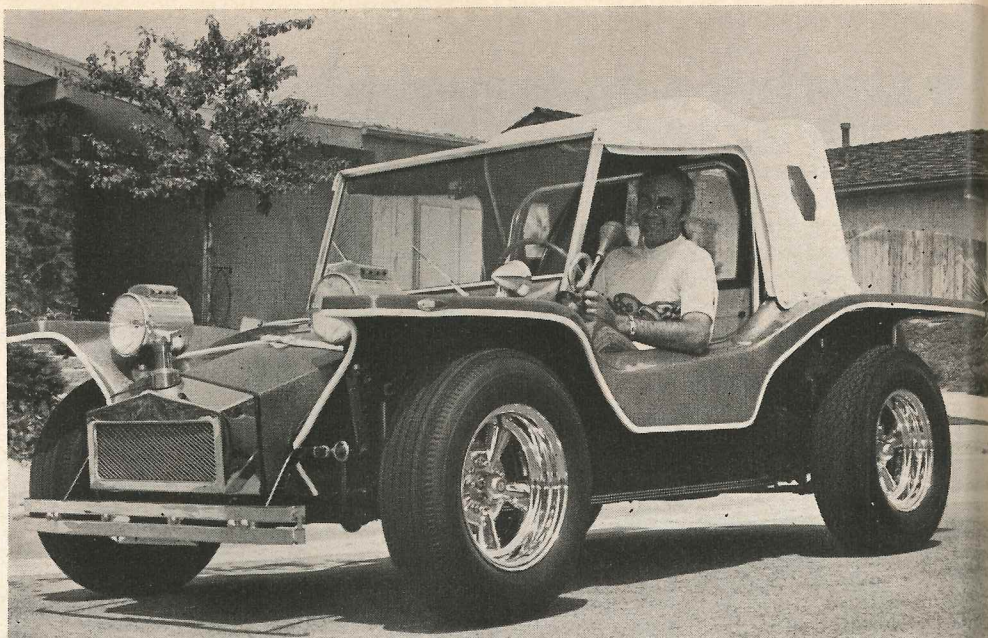


ROADSTERS

some time. The appeal of the '32 roadster was based on appearance, a gurgle of noise and recognition within a wide-based peer group. All of this carried over for the dune buggy.

In an effort to put more weight on the rear wheels, and in turn boost tractive ability in the sand, the wheelbase of the VW was shortened by roughly 14 inches. As wider tires became available, the discovery was made that the floorpan kit car was not the plan for the sand or other than casual driving. So on the street they went by the thousands — complete with shortened pans. Now the only valid reason for shortening the pan for a kit car going on the street is that the vast majority of bodies offered today are copies or mutations of the original Meyers Manx and thus fit only a shortened floorpan.

Some will argue that the shortened wheelbase gives greater maneuverability. No doubt. But too often a hasty



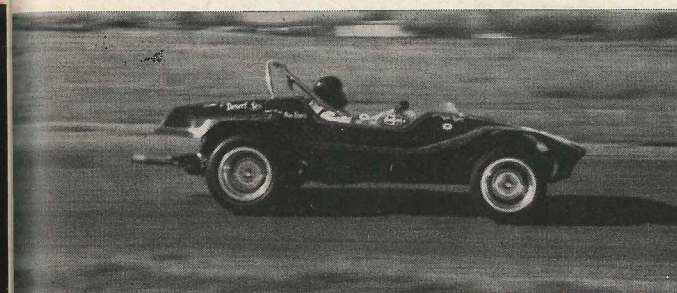
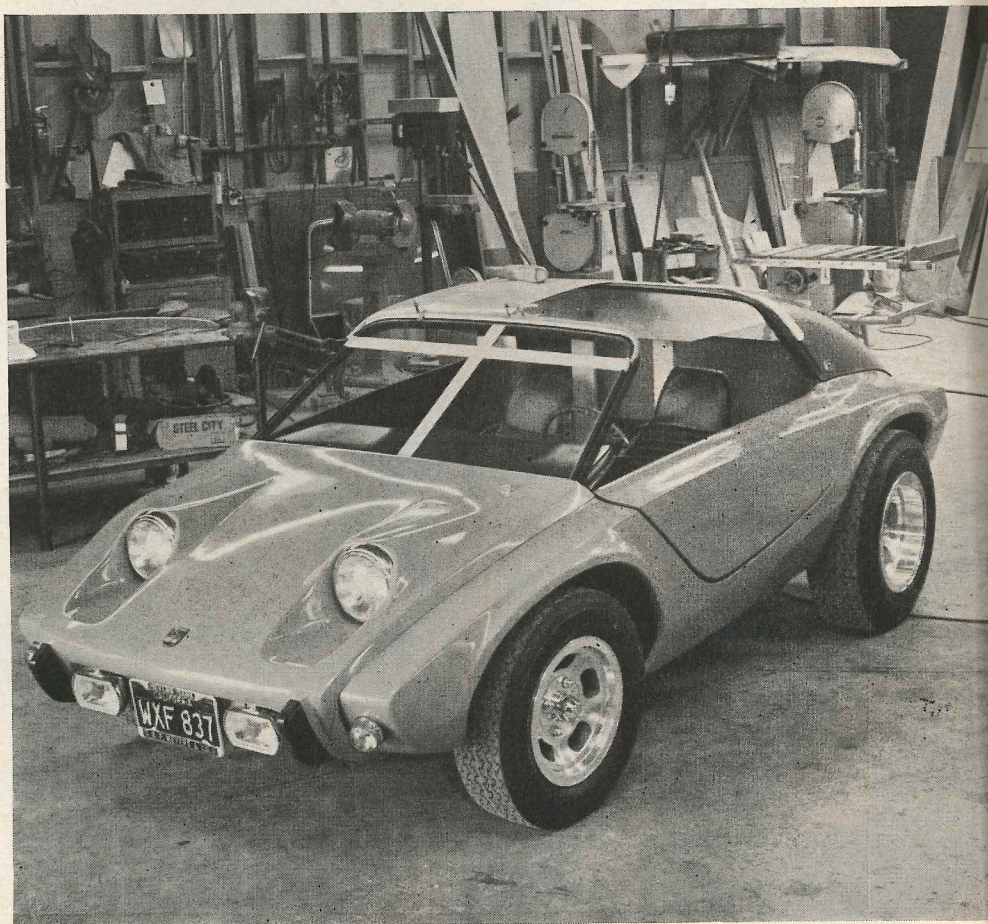
ROADSTERS

combination of light weight, short wheelbase, swing axle and bulbous tires results in a quick-steering vehicle which is capable of understeer and oversteer at the same time. For an individual who can't drive a nail, stabbing a buggy without caution can produce unpleasant results.

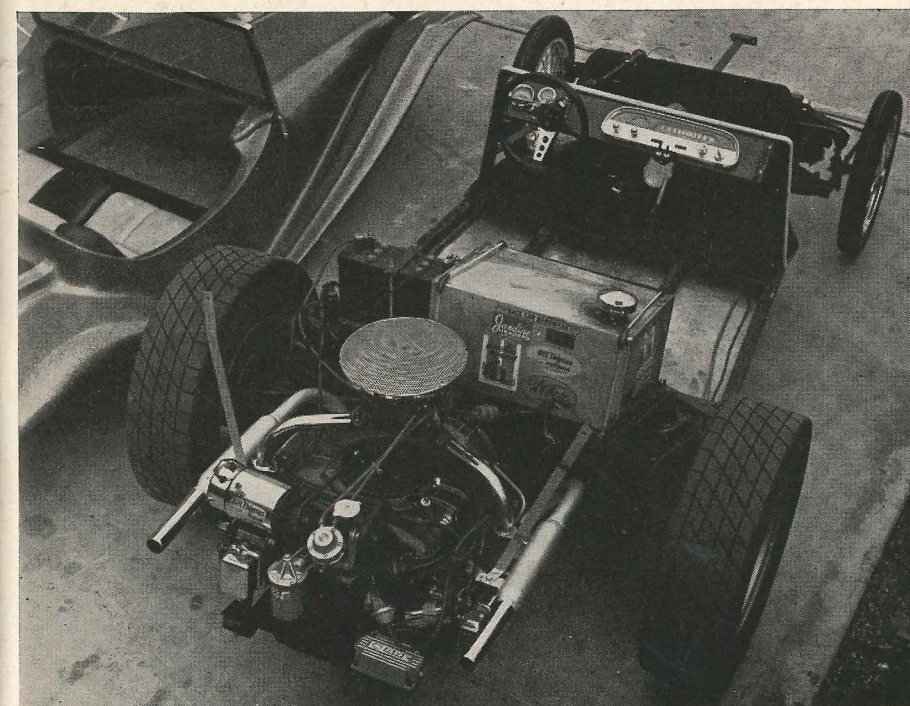
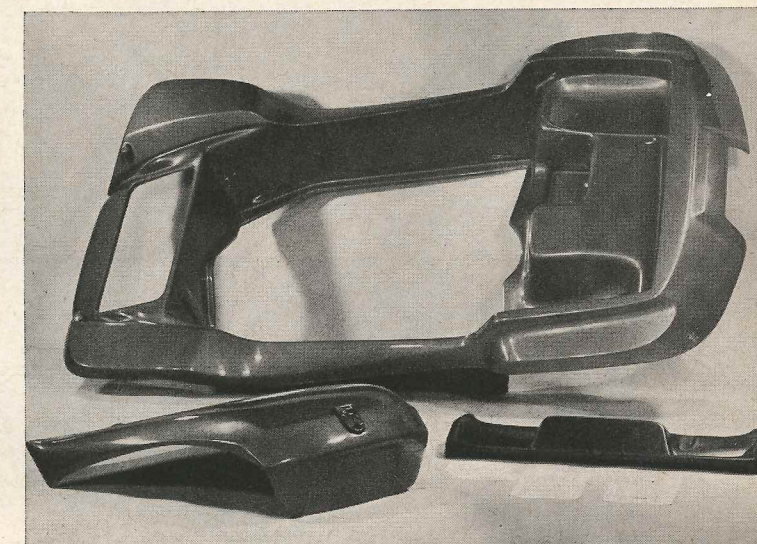
On the other hand, when properly set up, a kit car with only a "mild" engine can take care of a 912 Porsche in a slalom situation; with a kamikaze VW or warmed-over Corvair for power, a kit car can take care of anything on four wheels that you're ever liable to meet. Ted Trevor and Don Wilcox took a couple of Corvair-powered Manxes to Pikes Peak in 1966 and annihilated the record in the sports car class with their practice car. USAC saw the handwriting on the wall and quickly eliminated the class.

Similar incidents occurred at various slalom events. Cobra and 'Vette owners began driving from the finish tape to the protest desk in increasing numbers as they felt the sting from modified VW-powered dune buggies — increasing the reason to put the bug on the street. Off-road racing didn't really get in gear until 1968, and no small amount of interest has been generated in this direction. Not everyone can go off-road racing, but nearly everyone can build a

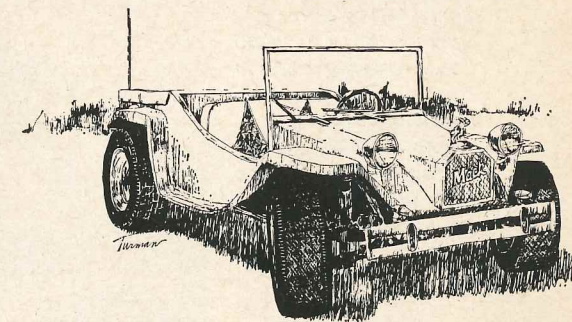
(Continued on page 39)



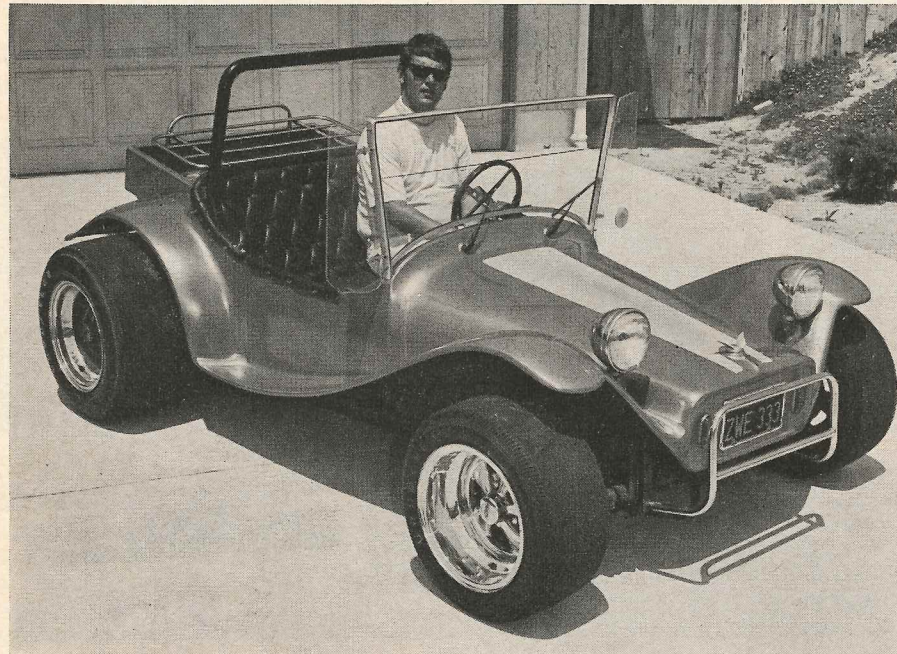
OPPOSITE (TOP LEFT and BELOW) — HRM Editor Don Evans makes Sunset Strip scene in his Barris T. The Meyers SR has styling close to Porsche. TOP — Buckets usually replace stock VW seats for style and weight savings. ABOVE — Desert Fox gets suspension sorted out on deserted road course. BELOW — Dennis Pierce built frame under Kellison 'T' roadster, then added a trick Corvair rear end setup.



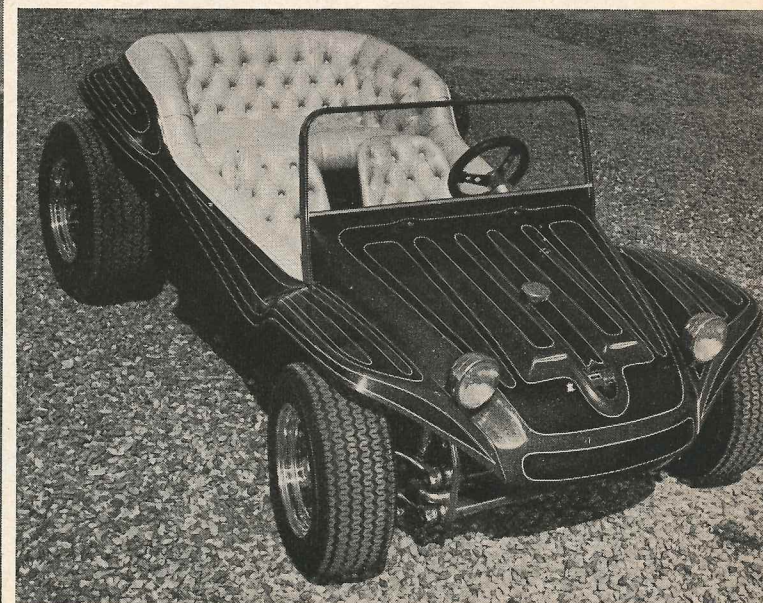
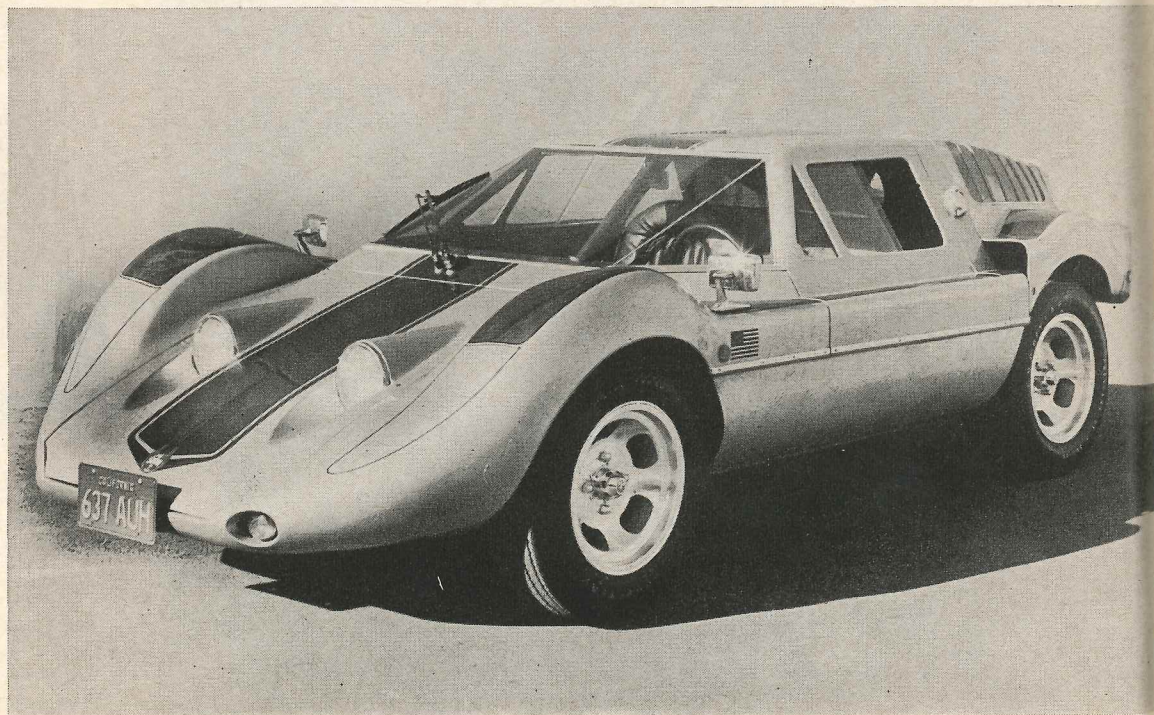
TOP — Vagabond body was one of the pioneers. This car was one of the earliest bodies to fit full-length floor pan. ABOVE — Basic Meyers Manx set an industry standard for fiberglass quality.



Roadsters



Don McCain roars to work in a Berry Mini-T. Notice simulated split-glass windshield. Indy tires hold like glue — till it rains! EMPI Imp reveals stock VW speedo augmented by accessory gauges. Stick-on wood trim is very popular in street buggy crowd. Dick Dean's successor to Shalako is a new "hungry dog" nosepiece. Gas tanks hide under the gull-wing door sills.



Citation bodies are among those that bridge gap in styling between 'T' and traditional Manx. Ted Trevor of Crown built a business on mating Corvair to VW. Power-to-weight ratio is "tidy." Sandwinder started out to build street roadster and wound up with a trophy-taking show car. Finish is flawless.

buggy for street use — and so the buggies proliferate.

If you are interested in such a project, take a close look at the motor vehicle laws of your state before laying out coins on components. Nationwide, the trend in motor vehicle laws makes it increasingly difficult to obtain a license for anything smacking of homebuilt. The vast majority of manufacturers and customers in the street buggy business are located in California where the laws are relatively lenient — so don't assume that each car pictured on these pages will be street-legal in all states.

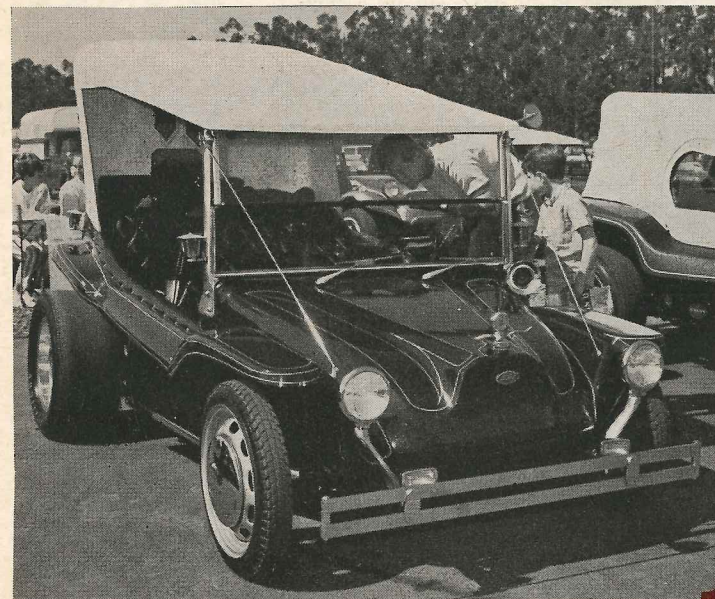
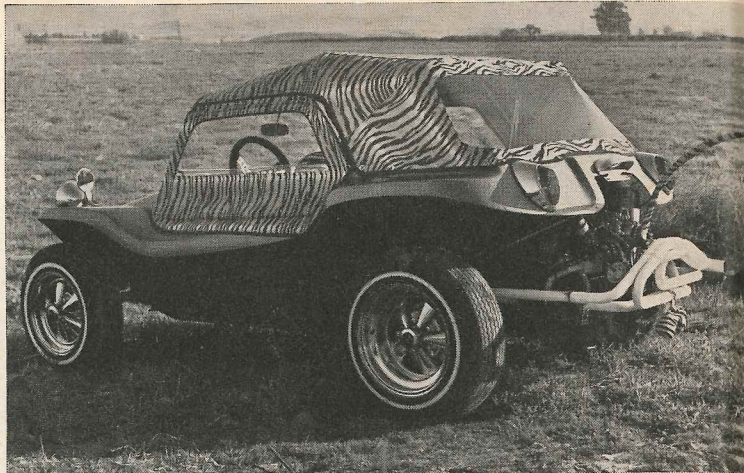
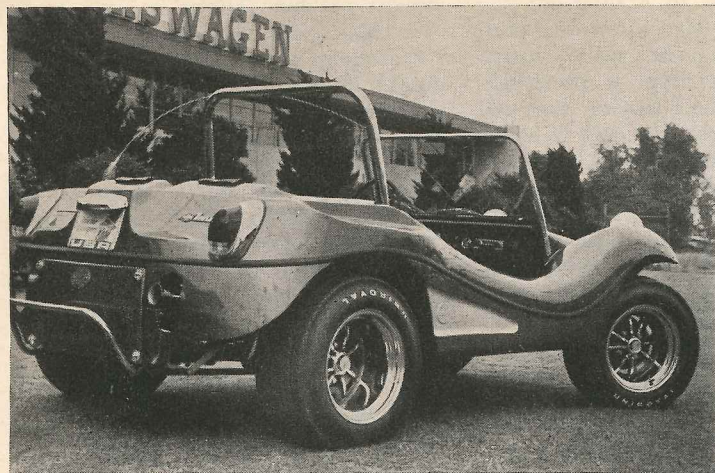
As a guide toward easing the pain of licensing, be armed with a bill of sale for each major component used in the buggy. This would include floorpan, body, front suspension assembly, trans-

axle and engine. In California, the buggy owner may sign a form explaining that tires, wheels, seats, instruments, etc., came from a previously owned vehicle. Don't assume this will be the case in each state, but it might be worth asking about. You can assume that somewhere along the road to getting the buggy inspected and licensed, someone will leave you with the impression that each part of the vehicle was stolen. When this occurs, keep your cool, ask what is required to clear up the matter. If at all possible, move to another inspection station or licensing office in an effort to locate a more sympathetic clerk. This step can often be avoided by talking the licensing procedures over with a local buggy shop or someone who has recently licensed a

street-type dune buggy in your area.

In Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and Connecticut, you'll most likely be required to have the engine completely covered. What constitutes "fully covered" is apparently left up to the inspector, so getting a man sympathetic to your project is half the battle. Front and rear bumpers, which extend from centerline to centerline on the tread, are also required in these states. Fenders also come in for some interpretation, since width and coverage are usually left to the discretion of the inspector. The current California "fender law" is to the effect that they are not required on a vehicle weighing less than 1500 pounds. This allows some lightened VW sedans to run fenderless in California.

(Continued on page 41)



Roadsters

Imp reveals the type of covering necessary in many states for license. Zebra stripes on the top and a tail for engine is one way of showing there is no end to ideas for these cars. 'T' touring body rests on full-length pan. Top is molded fiberglass. Bodies are even made in Mexico — and driven there by actor Steve McQueen.



If the vehicle is registered in California before January 1, 1971, it is apparently legal without fenders if it weighs less than 1500 pounds; but after that date, all cars built will have to have fenders, regardless of weight. So build fast.

If you plan to license a buggy in New Jersey, perhaps you'd better pause before cutting that floorpan. At this writing, we understand that a vehicle with an altered chassis cannot be licensed there. Perhaps we've been misinformed, but you'd be wise to check before you get too far along on the project.

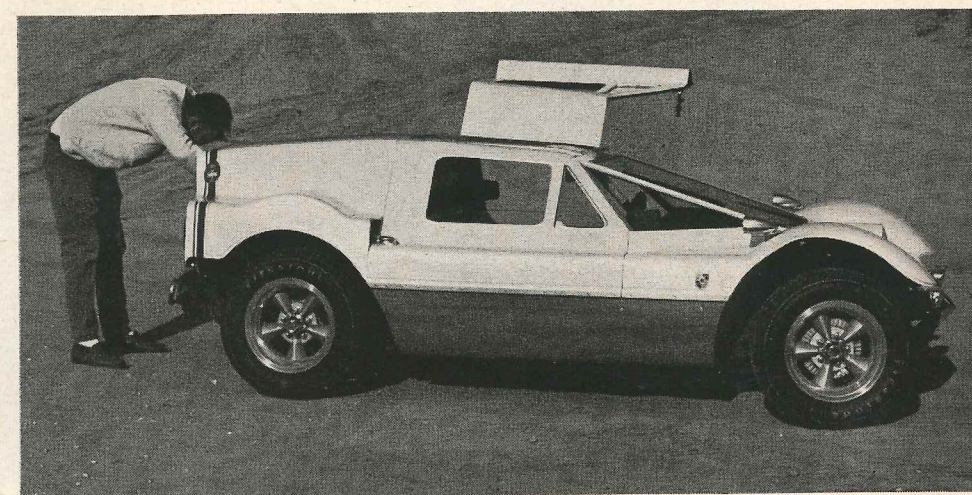
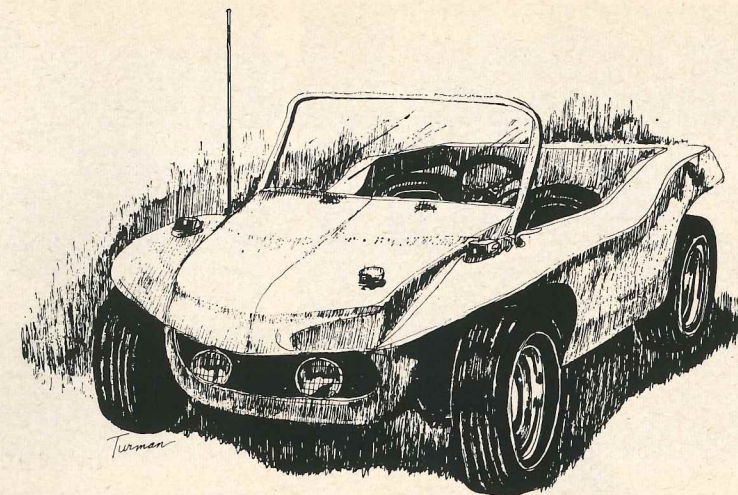
Lighting laws vary from state to state as they apply to special construction vehicles (like a dune buggy), so find out what your state requires before you buy four five-inch lights instead of the required two seven-inch lights. You'll probably need two mirrors — one inside and one outside — in all states. Safety glass is required in all states, and the glass will have to be marked as being safety glass — they won't take your word.

In California, separate certificates must be obtained to verify the existence of a smog device, lights and brakes. Horn, wipers, stoplights and taillights are also included as part of the test.

In an effort to boost eastern sales, several companies (such as Meyers, EMPI, Berry and Jeffries) have tailored models with full-coverage fenders and engine covers. Berry and Jeffries even offer bodies to fit a full-length floorpan. A heads-up accessory store in your state will be able to guide you in the selection of taillights, headlights, etc., which comply with state laws.

While the vehicle is under construction, keep in mind that the ratios in a VW gearbox do not lend themselves to pulling large-diameter tires with enthusiasm. This situation can be remedied somewhat by changing to a close-ratio third and fourth gear, but the easy way out for most street use is to stick with small-diameter tires. Failure to hold this line will usually result in a vehicle which can run as fast in third gear as in fourth. Also, when shopping for tires, keep in mind that large, open-tread, off-road tires may look neat, but they usually give a stiffer ride and are noisy on the pavement.

Still along the lines of handling, rear axle camber should be set very close to zero for best handling on the street. On slalom cars with swing axles, negative camber is the plan — so this should give you an idea which way to lean. Most manufacturers offer bodies in any solid color and in most of the Metallflake finishes. For the most part, upholstery is on a custom basis, with the sky being the limit for an all-out street car. However, like the selection of chrome goodies for buggies, the bucket seat selection goes on and on. On most bodies there is a choice of hard or soft top designs,



ABOVE — Original Shalako had tube frame and hand-formed aluminum body which later became a mold for 'glass cars.
BELOW — Dean Jeffries Kyote takes many forms; Dean now has prototype station wagon. Some bumpers double as engine cover.

and side curtains can be fabricated.

In fact, there seems to be no end to the number of things which can be and are done to a buggy. Ask any owner.

The dune buggy will never replace the '32 Ford, but for a generation seeking a snappy, breeze-in-the-hair fun car, the dune buggy fits the bill reasonably well. On the West Coast, most of the avant garde buggistas — those who built buggies five and six years ago — are now turning their efforts toward the VW sedan. Thoughts are numerous: Flare the fenders, radius the openings, take off the steel components (fenders, hood, deck lid) and replace with glass duplicates — or take 'em off and leave 'em off. Gut the interior to save weight or pad everything in sight and fill the space with stereo vibes. Look for dune buggies to take on a more finished appearance while the sedan group leans toward an increasing number of modifications. At the speed with which the industry moves, both groups will be well satisfied with their highly developed state in short order.

