

Congers man loves Beetles

Christina Poletto, For The Journal News Published 7:00 a.m. ET July 17, 2017 | Updated 1:09 p.m. ET July 17, 2017



(Photo: Tania Savayan/The Journal News)

It's been nearly two decades since Chris Vallone first got the bug for a Volkswagen Beetle. But since then, the 40 year-old from Congers has turned his auto infatuation into a thriving business and a dedicated brand recognized by auto enthusiasts worldwide.

"It was the summer of 1999, I had just graduated from St. Thomas Aquinas College and I was looking to purchase a car for myself that fit my artistic personality," he says.

His parents offered a used Crown Victoria. "I felt like an artist should have a Beetle," he says. "I looked in the classifieds of the Journal News, and, sure enough, there was a '71 Super Beetle convertible for sale in Peekskill. It was red with a white top and white wall tires."

It was the animated nature of the car's facade that drew Vallone. As a trained artist who specializes in illustration and animation as well as a filmmaker with more than a dozen projects to his credit, Vallone says even then he was taken by the "smiley face" and cartoonish persona that Beetles exude through their one-of-a kind design.

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Detail of a 1962 Volkswagen Beetle convertible at Classic VW Bugs in Congers July 11, 2017. (Photo: Tania Savayan/The Journal News)

The car needed some work.

Vallone says he didn't know anything about restoring cars. "I really cut my teeth on that one. Anything that could've gone wrong with that car went wrong," says Vallone, who later sold it. But the itch was born. He began transforming cars and the restoration business evolved.

He recruited his father, also named Chris Vallone, to join him.

"Ten years ago, when I was first starting out, I worked out of a one car garage at my parent's house in a local gated community, and that got very old quickly as all of the Volkswagens would be parked out on the street," he says. "Eventually, I realized that I had to get a shop."

Today, he holds court over a 2,000-square-foot facility in Congers where, at any given time, a half a dozen or more VW models are in various stages of historical refurbishment.



A 1967 Volkswagen Beetle, left, and a 1967 Volkswagen Beetle with a sunroof at Classic VW Bugs, a vintage Volkswagen Beetle restoration business in Congers July 11, 2017. (Photo: Tania Savayan/The Journal News)

His customers are far ranging. Comedian and car collector Jerry Seinfeld worked with Vallone. "One family in Ohio connected with me and shared a great story about their father's beloved VW Beetle. Two years later, we're almost done with our work on it," .

In addition to working with his father, Vallone has a small staff to help with the restorations. The projects, which range from full restorations to Build-A-Bug custom jobs often take at least two years because of the investment of time involved in sourcing materials, custom paint jobs and managing the specialized rebuilding process.

Vallone's filmmaking and photography skills have helped expand his Beetle-centric business ventures, too. He makes YouTube videos featuring his tips and tricks for bringing VW models back to life, restoration reveals and much more. He also keeps detailed photo libraries for each of his projects.

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The emblem on a 1958 Volkswagen Beetle ragtop at Classic VW Bugs in Congers July 11, 2017. (Photo: Tania Savayan/The Journal News)

His work is a natural for social media. Between a newsletter and his YouTube following, Vallone get 2-3 million hits a month. He has thousands of followers on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook, too.

Thinking of having him restore your classic VW Beetle? Vallone currently has a two to three year wait list.

He owes his success to his precise focus on this beloved car.

"It's the only car we work on and I'm the only guy across the country who only restores Beetles. I think fans see the passion," said Vallone.

Vallone loves taking road trips and discovering lost Beetles in old barns and tucked away in garages, but the best part, he says, is connecting with people about their cars. "We'll do the road trip, we'll find the car and then I'll show the process (in a video) and restoration process that follows," he says.

As for the dad who first pushed a Crown Vic on his son, Chris Vallone Sr. says the Beetle appeals to so many people for good reason. "It's a global car, and not just limited to one country," Vallone Sr. said. "It represents a certain nostalgia and moment in time for people, especially Baby Boomers. It represents the best of times and the worst of times."

While the Beetle might appeal to the masses, these restored models aren't meant for everyday commuting.

"These cars, which generally cruise at 60-65 miles per hour, have to be driven with the intention of maintaining momentum," said Vallone Sr. "It's an all encompassing experience, and when you're behind the wheel, you really have to pay attention to driving."

For those looking to invest in a Beetle, Classic VW Bugs often publicizes restored cars for sale on their social media sites. And for those that just like to look, you can catch Classic VW Bugs at area car shows, including a classic car showcase that operates at Bear Mountain throughout part of the year.

The Vallones occasionally do car gatherings at their shop in Congers, too. This fall, they're looking forward to hosting another fall foliage convoy cruise, which should see over fifty open air Volkswagen Beetles covering sixty miles up and down the Palisades Parkway and throughout the Hudson Valley.

"It's a great experience and we can't wait to do it again this year," Vallone said.

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Want to learn more about Classic VW Bugs? Check them out online.

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YouTube: [Chris Vallone and Classic VW Bugs](#)

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