

VW BUS

07-02-2012 by Harry Zirkelbach

The recent June vacation to Durango was made to reacquaint Barbara and Harry with a granddaughter Amanda Nichols now living there. We learn that she works as salesperson down town for the Sorrel Sky Art gallery on Main Street, two blocks south of the train station.

The narrow gauge trains there, makes daily round trips to Silverton Colorado until winter snow blocks the canyon. This steady stream of tourists keeps those two cities alive long after the children of America have returned to school after September's Labor Day. During their long tourist season, awaiting the trains departure and after their return, tourist must be entertained, enticed to purchase food and trinkets.

Vendors show their wares cheerfully, attractively, and always profitably.

To enhance the visits, the locals put on many special shows. While we are there, Main Street was barricaded for four blocks, that roadway giving a static display of vintage cars from near and far.

Most shown with pride by present owners, were in mint condition; probably much improved from that moment they rolled off the assembly line.

Yes, some were for sale reasonably, everyone was assured.

Cars on the roads today are reliable, comfortable, economic.

These attributes had not reached the engineers for these earlier years on display.

None the less, the senior tourists were an eager audience for the wheel was the starting point for chrome, paint, polish, attractiveness of that bygone era.

The eyes of Barbara, Harry and heir daughter Grace were on the 1962 vintage VW bus. It was not in mint condition, but had been reasonable maintained.

The concept was this attraction, a true family car. It was also a vehicle our family had owned, driven for seven years

In 1962, the VW Bus literature bragged of the 10% increase in horsepower, from 36 to 40. It never burned rubber, did pull the loaded vehicle nicely on any paved flat roadway. It was all transportation. The engine was tucked in the rear below the baggage storage. The remainder of all the interior was seats, which our family found comfortable, for both parents and our children.

The exterior of our new VW bus was a light green lower, upper white.

Plenty of chrome trim, inside and out.

There was a separate seat for driver and one passenger in front, then a seat for three, then a seat for four, lastly the baggage area above the engine for storage, games or sleep while driving or stationary.

There were no silly knick-knacks like flower vases, seat belts and air bags, or anything that might prevent any occupant from moving about inside, the VW moving or not. The family re-lived this idyll moment, available to their generation only. It was an historic era where an automobile accommodated a large family, economically, short or long distances, no government interference.

In this perfect family transport, our family covered America for seven summers, two trips to the east coast, visiting relatives and friends along the way and at the destinations of Erie, Pa and Washington D.C. In these journeys, we liked to brag, we got 300 passenger miles per gallon of gas.

There was one complaint. This passenger constantly asked when the VW wheels began to move, "How soon will we be there"? Otherwise, all occupants engaged in one game after another. Teeth were chipped from falls inside, but there was little lasting damage. And on any stop for gas, relief, or refreshments, there had to be a head count to prevent loss of an occupant.

That event was a problem. Asking daughters Grace and Jo if they were ever left behind, be prepared for a detailed accounting of their 15 minutes of abandonment.

It would be our only "family car". In 1968 it was sold to the next generation. The couple who provided the cash, were the early advanced front for the hippy generation. They generously told us of the paintings they would add to the green and white, both inside and outside to announce ownership change.

All eleven of us knew they would love their wheels.

