

## Keep warm this winter with a recycled Volkswagen

Old car parts can be turned into a variety of unusual gifts and practical household items, as Franca Davenport discovers

By Franca Davenport

Last Updated: 1:17PM GMT 13 Nov 2008

Even when a car has come to the end of its life, it seems it can do no good in the eyes of the environment. Every year in the UK we send about two million vehicles to the scrapyards and 400,000 tonnes of waste from those cars goes into landfill. In true EU style, the Commission has set targets for the average weight that must be recycled per year per vehicle and for 2015 this figure is 95 per cent. Most of the reclaimed material will go into building new cars, but there are more "creative" ways to use old car parts – not so much recycling as reincarnation.



Dan Harding and partner Lucy relax on a Cornish beach with a Hotpod and his trusty VW pickup

Tyres are an obvious and popular choice of material, especially since the rubber from inner tubes provides a nice soft leather substitute. PlanetSilverchilli makes a range of bags and belts, whilst the footwear label Worn Again incorporates tyres and seat belts into its shoes. Moving under the bonnet, the American designer Steven Shaver creates one-off pieces of jewellery such as bearing bracelets and cambelt necklaces while the KI company uses old battery plastics and safety belts in its Daylight chair. Probably one of the most environmentally friendly and functional ideas is the Hotpod: a wood-burning (and therefore low-carbon) stove that incorporates recycled Volkswagen engine parts.

The Hotpod is the brainchild of Dan Harding, who is an avid fan of all things VW; he refers to the source of his materials as "retired Volkswagens". He reckons he must have owned more than 50 VWs in his lifetime and currently has two VW vans and his grandmother's Beetle, "Florence", which is waiting to be restored — a work in extended progress, according to Harding. "I think I have a definite love of VWs and German engineering," he says. "I've taken apart other cars but I'm just not inspired to do anything with them. It's really only the VWs I like. Or maybe Porsches..."

The main Volkswagen element of the Hotpod is the cylinder, which makes up the flue – a logical choice since the function of both is to emit energy. And, like all good designers, Harding is a man who combines function and aesthetics. He uses cylinders with a large enough capacity (usually from a 1,600cc engine) to make sure no smoke escapes when the door opens. The hinges on the doors are made from conrod small ends while the hinge pin is a specific section of Golf suspension damper strut. Initially he used a gudgeon pin but they tended to stick. "There was a flaw in my plan," he admits. "I thought the bronze bush would have done that

action billions of times before, but then I realised it had been bathed in oil, not in a dusty stove."

The main body of the stove is an old gas cylinder. The top is cut off and inverted to make the ash collector below while a hotplate is welded to the top: essential for making that bowl of organic porridge. Other parts are sourced from old dairy fittings and, to accompany the Hotpod, Harding also makes a set of fire tools called Hotrods. He reckons these are more than 98 per cent Volkswagen. The poker, brush and dustpan are made from Beetle and Golf suspension and engine components, while the pièce de la résistance is the tongs, created from a range of VW parts such as the ballcage from a CV joint, Beetle engine tappets and yet more dampers. The "grippy bits" are two halves of an oil pump cog, which, according to Harding, were the result of a eureka moment in the workshop.

But although he has a clear love of VWs and appreciates the benefits of recycling, Harding's creations were born of necessity. Being a keen surfer he has spent a fair amount of time in camper vans and his first VW masterpiece was a roof extension to his original Combi, which involved welding the roof of a Beetle to the top of the van. "When it passed the MoT I realised people appreciated my ideas," he says. "The purists hated it but, for me, it was about function with an eye on the aesthetic – I wouldn't have done it if it looked minging." He went on to build the Hotpod Mk1 when he was wintering in his van and, from there, the Hotpod evolved into the multi-fuel stove it is today with the help of the BBC2 programme, *Pay Off Your Mortgage*.

"I think the recycled element is a big selling point," says Harding. "When we started it was just becoming vogue, but I've always recycled because I've never had much money. The lifestyle element is also a big asset. People like the Hotpod because it is recycled, green and hand-built by a beach-bum in Cornwall – except I don't have time to be a beach-bum any more!" Harding estimates that he makes about one Hotpod a week and he has to be careful not to be distracted by other projects. During the last year he's avoided having a car or van in his workshop to prevent him from tinkering with it.

For the future he's got plenty of ideas: candlesticks made from flywheels, crankshafts and conrods, and a Hotpod development that will burn recycled oil from old engines and dampers. "I've got a whole rash of ideas to put through the mill," he says. "And I will be as happy as a pig in muck making them into reality in my workshop."

Perhaps with a few more Dan Hardings on the case we could meet that EU recycling target after all.

**\* Andrew English reviews the latest VW camper in the *Daily Telegraph Motoring* section this Saturday, November 15.**

For more information on the various products mentioned above, go to:

[www.hotpod.co.uk](http://www.hotpod.co.uk)

[www.planetsilverchilli.com](http://www.planetsilverchilli.com)

[www.terraplana.com/wornagain](http://www.terraplana.com/wornagain)

[www.stevenshaver.com/](http://www.stevenshaver.com/)

[europe.ki.com/daylight.asp](http://europe.ki.com/daylight.asp)

---

Related Content

## More on Environment

[Back to top](#)

© Copyright of Telegraph Media Group Limited 2008