



Words Ivan McCutcheon Pics Dan Pullen

# Marigold

This lovely 1978 Westfalia Helsinki is the latest in a succession of Volkswagens owned by Ian Harris from East Sussex

**B**ased down on the south coast in Brighton – well, Hove actually – Ian Harris has owned a good few Volkswagens over the years. In his 28-years he's notched up an impressive list that includes a 1956 Split Single Cab that was "on the floor with a four inch narrowed beam," he tells us. He's also had a 1965 Split Screen Panel Van with a sliding door, in show condition, a 1970 tin-top Westy with a narrowed beam and polished Raders, a '78 Westfalia Wide-Bed Pick-Up

with just 47k miles on the clock and a 1967 Type 3 Fastback. Like we say, impressive. However, that's just the VWs he counts as his own. If you add to that the Volkswagens that he's bought and sold to customers, the numbers climbs rapidly. You see, Ian is the classic hobbyist who ends up allowing his life to be engulfed by his pastime and now VWs are his full-time occupation.

The start of the slippery slope was a 1979 Devon Camper Ian bought from a friend as a project. He restored it ("restored used in the loosest of terms," ↻



what about the business-side of the deal – how did that come into the picture? “It was a small sideline business importing mint VW Campers from California,” Ian informs us. It all started about six years ago and during this period he always had a full-time job. “I worked weekends, nights and mornings to run my small business. At the end of 2008 I decided enough was enough and that my passion and enthusiasm for Campers would never die, so I took the move to start VW Kampers Ltd [www.VWKampers.com]. This is a result of my love affair with VW Campers.” Well, they say you can’t beat having a job you love!

### Helsinki for hire

Ian decided to do a bit more than simply buy and sell classic Campers. He can also sell you a brand spanking new Brazilian VW Bus converted to a Camper here in the UK. Along with the sales side of the company, he also offers VW Campers for hire, so you can try before you buy! Once you’ve got a Camper of your own, Ian can supply spares and accessories too. So, what we’re talking about is a one-stop Camper shop.

Now, to quote Ian, “I live and breathe what I do and love to help people get into the scene, this is what makes it all worthwhile”. But surely his keenness

No worries about being cold at night in this Camper

says Ian) in his father’s garage. He went on to say, “I enjoyed it for a year and when it came to selling it I made a few bob so went to California and bought a totally original ’78 Westfalia Deluxe with OG paint. The rest is history!”

So, that’s how he got into VWs, but



Classic Seventies Westfalia plaid trim and dark wood



The high spec Helsinki even has a tunnel inside it!

Ian had no choice, he had to lower this Camper... Good job he did!



Stand by your van

Ian Harris  
1978 Helsinki

28-year-old Ian Harris not only owns this super-cool late Westy, he also runs VW Kampers Ltd – a specialist in new and used Bay Window Camper sales, hire and parts. Being a total VW nut means he is as passionate about the vehicles he sells as the people are who buy them. For more info, email [ian@VWKampers.com](mailto:ian@VWKampers.com)



to please wouldn’t extend to loaning out his own pride and joy to complete strangers, would it? Well, amazingly, yes! As Ian’s pride and joy is the stunning 1978 Westfalia Helsinki Camper you see here and he’s more than happy to hire it out. Now sorry folks, but that sounds a bit too keen to me! Especially when you take into account the fact Ian rates the Helsinki Conversion as the ‘perfect Bay’. This one came into Ian’s ownership back in the last quarter of 2008. He had been wasting an evening surfing the ‘net when he came across this particular Bus. Initially, it looked a bit ropey. It certainly needed a lot of TLC. But it was clear to someone with Ian’s experience that it had a lot of

potential and that was what really got him interested. He wasn’t in a position to buy it there and then, mainly due to the fact he didn’t have the money, so he called to see if he could work out a deal where he put down a deposit on it and got two month’s grace on gathering the remainder. Amazingly, the seller was fine with this and so two months later Ian trundled off to Plymouth to collect the Helsinki. As soon as he saw the Camper sitting there in a barn waiting for him it was, he says, “love at first sight”. It might have been a bit scruffy, but it turned out the Westy was actually a really nice, original example, according to Ian.

And the six-hour long journey home proved that it was on the money mechanically. The 2.0-litre twin carb Type 4 motor honked along nicely at 75mph without any fuss.

### Steaming into it

Once safely home, Ian wanted to get it looking as good as he possibly could, and so over a period of five months Ian threw another five thousand pounds and a whole lot of time at it to turn it into this month’s cover star. When it came to the work, anything Ian didn’t do himself was handed over to specialists he trusts such as The Bus Station, Days VW and Palmeira

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**Late T2B Bay Windows can look really tough**

**It's not often you find a Helsinki that has survived this well!**

Bodyworks in Hove. When we asked him what had been needed in terms of bodywork, he proudly replied, "it's all original, there was no bodywork needed, it's never been welded and has a rust-free chassis!" By this he doesn't mean the usual story of 'rust-free' Bay Window where you get a Van that has virtually rusted away free with the registration document. Ian's really was free from rust! He informed us, "It had a full windows-out respray in the original L20A Marino Yellow by Andy at Palmeira." The classic Seventies colour is enhanced by the white, fat, boxy Euro bumpers, which were both new replacements. Ian added

## The interior is original, bar a few upgrades

clear front indicator lenses as he prefers them to amber units. Westfalia buffers out there may be interested to hear that, when new, this Helsinki was ordered with the optional spare box on the front. Like Marmite, you either love these or hate them. I'm not sure if Ian likes Marmite or not, but he hates the spare wheel boxes and so got rid of his at the time of the repaint. I, on the other hand, really like both Marmite and the spare wheel boxes. I think they make a late Westy really stand out, especially when lowered and rimmed up – I can recall seeing a couple of them parked up at a show in Holland and they had a sort of Euro Look to them, and so I would have kept it! But hey, it's not my Van!

### 80 and counting

Getting back to the refurb, Ian fitted new Genuine VW window rubber all round and then moved to the interior. Having had something like 80 Bay Windows pass through his hands, if anyone should know a really special one it's Ian. He said the first time he looked into this Camper the condition of the interior blew him away – it's in such amazingly good original condition. He got quite excited telling us how everything works just how it should, things open and close like they

are brand new, and then he was so lost for words that we had to have him taken off for a check-up from the neck up! Not really, but you can't help be infected by his enthusiasm. The interior is basically original, bar a few upgrades; there's an iPod head unit, an inverter, a split charging system and a quick shift kit.

The pop-top canvas needed to be replaced, but they all do at some stage or other, so that was no big deal.

The next step was to have it lowered by Mark Walker at The Bus Station in Southsea, Hants. Ian told us it goes against the ethos of the super-clean original Campers he offers, but as he put it, "I had to have it lowered – it wouldn't fit in my garage otherwise!" There's no doubt the lowering job and the Gas Burner alloys really make this Helsinki look the business though!

So, after three months of work the Camper was done. Ian debuted it at the VolksWorld Show in March of this year and has since enjoyed every minute of ownership. He doesn't plan parting with it, and told us he'd be quite happy if he still owned it in 10 years' time. It might not be up for sale, but like we said, if you want to spend a weekend seeing what a really top notch cover car is like, you can hire this very Van. ☺

