

Local businessman converts classic VW Beetle

- By [Victoria Marty](#)



Photo by Darrin Phegley

The traditional motor in Steve Champion's 1971 VW Beetle has been replaced with a high torquing electric motor. Champion teamed up with Peter Hansen, from Evolve-It Motors out of Colorado, to turn the car into a fully electric vehicle. Champion plans to use the car in his business, Green River Publishers. (Gleaner photo by Darrin Phegley • 831-8375 or dphegley@thegleaner.com)

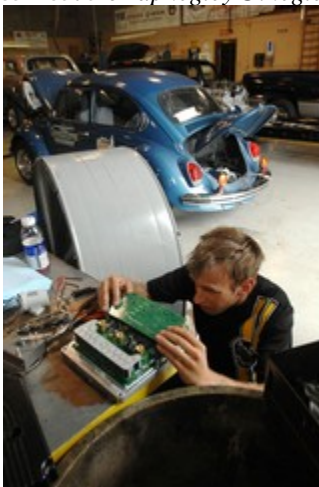


Photo by Darrin Phegley

Peter Hansen, Evolve-It Motors, out of Colorado, works on the current conversion box that will turn the DC power from special batteries into AC current for Steve Champion's totally electric car Monday morning. Champion bought the 1971 VW Beetle in California, drove it to Hansen's shop in Salida Colorado where Hansen installed an electric motor, replacing the gas engine. They then brought the car to Henderson to finish the installation process, with the help of students from the HCHS career & technical unit. (Gleaner photo by Darrin Phegley • 831-8375 or dphegley@thegleaner.com)

Ordinary VW Beetles scuttle and scamper. Their hard metal shells encase the fossil fuels that could drive their evolutionary hulls straight to the exterminator.

Then there are those that continue to transform. These Beetles run on a fuel that sends all the real, pesky beetles scurrying for the darkness: Electricity.

And local resident and beetle enthusiast Steve Champion has it, right here, right now, at Henderson County High School. That's where he's been working, with the help of an expert, to make his gas-powered VW all-electric along with the additional assistance of automotive students who are interested in learning about the process.

"These aren't pie in the sky technologies that we hope will happen some day," he said. "These are technologies that are happening right now. All you have to do is put the parts together and you can build one just like it."

In fact, Champion expects that if not today, then on Wednesday, local residents will be able to see his blue VW Beetle tooling around town as he markets both his own business and his ability to be as self-sustainable as possible. But the goal is also to help others see what is possible with their own vehicles.

This Saturday, for instance, the transformed beetle will be available for viewing at the Henderson Farmers Market on the corner of Second and Main streets from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Champion owns a small business called Green River Publishers Inc. along with his family, and the marketing merge of homegrown vegetables and green technology is not by accident. He's been wanting to operate his business as environmentally responsibly as possible since the beginnings of his Coffee News publishing franchise in 2006. But he thought that was at first too expensive.

"So, we started looking for ways to take baby steps," Champion said. "We started trying to find simple ways to either save a buck or two, recycle, or reduce waste and accepted that a small effort was better than none."

Those small efforts included using renewable soy-based ink, moving the family's printing operation and offices to its farm property to reduce overhead, and using extra copies of Coffee News as compost in its vegetable garden, among other things.

Then came the work on Monday. That's when Pete Hansen with Evolve-IT Motors, based in Colorado, could be spotted creating Champion's all-electric VW beetle in the automotive garage at County High as automotive technology teacher Scott Herschelman watched.

"This is pretty much the simplest installation," Hansen said of the 12 batteries and recharging motor that are just portions of the equipment necessary for the vehicle to function.

For those who aren't that familiar with what is needed for an all-electric car to work, here are the basics, at least for Champion's beetle: He'll plug it in to any wall outlet, where a full 9-10 hour charge will net him a 70-mile travel range.

In all, he estimates, the \$14,000 it would cost to transform a car his size will be paid back with no more long-term need for oil changes, oil filters or replacement spark plugs, and, of course, no trips to the gas station.

In dollar figures, Champion estimates he will be able to save around \$200 per month on gas and that his trips to transport Coffee News will only cost him about two cents per mile.

At this point, his immediate limitations come in at least two forms: Accessibility to mechanics who know how to service all-electric vehicles, and air conditioning.

While he has a heater, Champion joked that he's getting ready for a long hot summer. Still, the effort and cost involved in creating what he calls a commuter car that will deliver Coffee News is something he firmly believes in.

"We are taking responsibility for the things we do and leave behind," he said. "People don't do what they hear about. They do what they see."

That means that Champion's beetle will be able to show people what all-electric cars can achieve and how long they last.

But also, he pointed out, it allows people who don't have the money to purchase new hybrid or electric cars a chance to convert their current or older vehicles into something a little more environmentally sustainable.

And that goes for fleet vehicles as well, Hansen said. For instance, even the U.S. Postal Service is looking at possibly using all-electric cars to deliver mail, he said. Businesses that have older model vehicles have another option now, too, Champion said.

For those worried about maintenance costs, Hansen's goal is to establish a network of dealers that can convert and repair all-electric vehicles.

"This car spent 38 years as a regular car," he said of the beetle he purchased from a VW specialist in Costa Mesa, Calif., about a month or so ago before the beginning of its transformation on Monday. "I'm like a 9-year-old kid. I'm really excited about this."

For more information, contact Champion at 270-993-5255 or at steve@greenriverpublishers.com. Hansen may be reached at evolveitmotors@gmail.com.