

We've driven VW's bright green smile machine, the electric ID Buggy

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- Volkswagen brought its ID Buggy electric concept to Monterey Car Week. And they let us drive it!
Ingo Barenschee
- It's electronically limited to 35km/h, but otherwise the powertrain is the same motor, inverter, and battery as the one you'll find in a production ID 3 or ID Crozz.
Ingo Barenschee
- The market for an electric beach buggy is a finite one, but in places like Spanish Bay you can see the appeal.
Jonathan Gitlin
- VW tried the Buggy out on the sands of Pismo Beach a few days before we arrived.
Volkswagen
- The seats are from the hyper-efficient XL1. The steering wheel adjusts for reach and rake, and the pedals are marked "Play" and "Pause."
Volkswagen
- There's a storage bin underneath the rear deck.
Jonathan Gitlin
- The off-road tires are 255/55 at the front and 285/60 at the rear.

Jonathan Gitlin

- With shocks like this and more than 3,500lbs, the on-road ride is very smooth.

Jonathan Gitlin

- Funky headlight pods and red anodized tow hooks.

Jonathan Gitlin

- The view from here.

Jonathan Gitlin

- The Buggy's charge port is pure production hardware.

Jonathan Gitlin

- The little monochrome display, with turn signals on the left side and drive/park/reverse on the right side.

Jonathan Gitlin

- In a modular architecture like MEB, one of the few set dimensions is the one between the front firewall and the pedals.

Jonathan Gitlin

- There's no infotainment beyond this removable waterproof bluetooth speaker.

Jonathan Gitlin

CARMEL, CALIF.—Do you remember that bright green electric beach buggy that Volkswagen showed off back in March? It's called the ID Buggy, and it's one of a growing number of ID-badged concepts from the automaker that show the way to its post-diesel future. It's a wildly different-looking bunch, yet each uses VW's new modular architecture for battery electric vehicles, called MEB. The ID Buggy is definitely the most left-field of the ID vehicles, even without the bright green bodywork. But under that one-off concept body is a production MEB powertrain, just like the one that will appear in the Europe-only ID 3 as well as the US-bound ID Crozz crossover and ID Buzz BEVs. But the craziest thing about the Buggy isn't the way it looks or that VW let me drive it. No, the craziest thing about the Buggy it's the fact that VW is actively exploring ways to put it into production.

Modular architectures have been all the rage among automakers for a while now. These are much more flexible than the platforms of old and are more like a giant box of parts and components that simplify the design process and the supply chain. VW Group has been all-in when it comes to modular architectures since it introduced its MQB platform in 2011, which provides the bone structure for everything from the diminutive Polo hatchback in Europe to the made-in-Chattanooga, Tennessee Atlas three-row SUV.

MEB is the newest of the company's architectures, and unlike the modular architecture that BMW's developing, this one is just for BEVs. (MEB will provide the bones for rear- and all-wheel drive BEVs for the VW, Skoda, and Seat brands. Meanwhile, Audi and Porsche are developing a separate architecture for bigger, faster, and more expensive BEVs.) As you might expect, at the heart of each MEB model is its lithium-ion battery pack. For the Buggy, that's a 62kWh pack, which powers a 150kW (201hp), 310Nm (227lb-ft) electric motor that drives the rear wheels. VW's press materials say that the buggy will go from 0-62mph (0-100km/h) in 7.2 seconds, reaching a top speed of 100mph (160km/h), with an estimated range of 155 miles (250km) on the WLTP test.

In practice, the biggest number you'll see on the concept's little monochrome instrument panel is about 36, and I'm pretty sure that's km/h, as I passed a speed trap that told me I had yet to exceed 17-Mile Drive's 25mph speed limit. (I did hit 48km/h coasting on a slightly downhill stretch, which I was told might be a new record for the Buggy concept.) Happily, the software-imposed speed restriction doesn't otherwise limit the Buggy's power delivery, and from a standstill, it was certainly zippy enough off the line despite those off-road tires and a curb weight of at least 3,500lbs (1,600kg).

- VW brought its original Meyers Manx to Car Week so we could see how technology has progressed over the course

of more than 50 years.

Jonathan Gitlin

- Like the ID Buggy, the Manx only really makes sense if you drive in the appropriate setting. But then it makes perfect sense.

Jonathan Gitlin

- Like the ID Buggy, the Manx uses VW power—ion this case a flat-four engine from the Beetle.

Jonathan Gitlin

- Bruce Meyers invented the beach buggy in 1964.

Jonathan Gitlin

- The less said about the driving position, the better.

Volkswagen

- Watching the world reflect in the chromed headlight covers.

Jonathan Gitlin

- Will the ID Buggy ever go into production? VW says it hopes so, but it remains to be seen.

Volkswagen

As a treat, VW brought along the inspiration for the Buggy for us to try out, to provide some context for its latest creation. The Meyers Manx is the creation of Bruce Meyers, who started building these VW Beetle-engined buggies back in 1964. It's a much smaller, lighter, noisier, and slower vehicle to drive—and a completely analog one at that. If you're short like me, you have to adapt to the driving position, and it wasn't very happy in first gear, but now I can certainly see the appeal. There's something utterly charming about seeing the car and the scenery reflect on the back of those two chromed headlights, and as a beach transport I can see why they caught on.

If anything, the Buggy was a more polished vehicle, with fancy off-road coilover suspension and creature comforts like a steering wheel you can adjust for reach and rake, as well as turn signals that definitely work. Sadly, my very favorite

design detail—the zippered cubby between you and your passenger’s legs—is non-functional, one of the few elements of concept car theatricality. The interior is still a delight, though, from the “play” and “pause” pedals to the ultra-lightweight seats (borrowed from an XL1).

And yes, VW did tell me that it is seriously investigating whether there’s a business case to put the Buggy into production. If that did happen, expect a slightly longer wheelbase, which should provide room for a pair of back seats. Standing in the Buggy’s way to the showroom is the thorny issue of how much it would cost. However, VW told me it’s also open to other ways of making the Buggy a reality, including by providing rolling MEB powertrains to third-party manufacturers. Just like in the old days.

There’s no getting away from the fact that the cost of a 62kWh battery pack remains pretty hefty. So until and unless VW drives down battery pack costs with some gigafactories, a production Buggy could well cost more than double the price of a decent Manx.

Listing image by Ingo Barenschee

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