

Twin Beetles double their fun

By Nathan Allen

This is actually about OUR favorite cars. My twin brother, Erik, and I have two Volkswagen Beetles: One is a 1970 Beetle and the other is a 1971 Super Beetle.

When we were 13 years old and began to take an interest in cars, our uncle, Dr. William A. Decker, took us shopping for one to restore.

His intention was for the three of us to learn about the mechanics of cars together. Little did Erik and I know that we would eventually be the proud owners of not one, but two vintage cars.

We found a 1971 Volkswagen Beetle with a semi-automatic transmission. Only after having it delivered, did we discover that we could not shift it into gear when the car was running.

In light of this and other glitches, we decided to abandon the project, but kept the car for parts.

Shortly thereafter, we found a 1970 Volkswagen Beetle in Grand Rapids that required little restoration.

We put in a rear floor pan, which was corroded from leaking battery acid, floor mats, carpeting, spark plugs, tires, and, of course, a new battery. We also had the car repainted to its original color: diamond blue.

During the restoration of this car, we found a 1971 Volkswagen Super Beetle with a manual transmission, which required considerably more work.

We replaced the rocker panels (the sheet metal along the bottom of the body), muffler, carburetor, spark plugs, wires, fresh-air intakes, glove compartment, dashboard and upholstery.

We also corrected the front suspension and rebuilt the 1,600 cc cylinder engine, which is equivalent to a 1.6 liter engine. Like the 1970 Beetle, we painted the 1971 Super Beetle diamond blue.

Although one Volkswagen is a Beetle and the other a Super Beetle, the bugs are almost identical to each other —my like my twin brother and me.

One difference between us, which was also visible on our cars, was our loyalties; we always chose sides. Erik was a University of Michigan fan and I was a Michigan State fan, so we adorned the cars with respective license plates.

When we were accepted at Kalamazoo College last year, we changed our university plates for K-College license plate frames, however.

So that we could have reliable transportation during our college careers, our uncle said he would give us the cars when we graduated from high school in 1998, if we maintained straight A's until then.

If we didn't know it then, we know now that we must be the two luckiest nephews in the world to have an aunt and uncle like Greta and William Decker.

Prior to graduation, our uncle was also "bitten by the bug" and was fortunate enough to find himself an original 1970 Super Beetle that required no restoration. All four of the cars are kept in storage during the winter.

As my brother and I learn to shift our manual transmissions this summer without throwing our passengers around, the three of us look forward to many miles of motoring in our bugs and haven't considered trading them in for new ones.

—As told to Tara Marion

Erik and Nathan Allen live in Kalamazoo and attend Kalamazoo College. They drive a 1986 Buick Park Avenue in the winter.