

keeping up appearances

Who says growing up and settling down means you need to throw in the modifying towel completely? Certainly not this pair of serial offenders – Welcome to modifying for grown ups, lesson one.

Words: Elliott Roberts Photos: Dickie P



Despite their devilishly good looks and receiving much critical acclaim throughout the 2008 season, who'd have thought both these Mk4s were built with practicality in mind?

Some people simply can't stop modifying. Fact! However, everyone that chooses to customise, personalise, whatever you want to call it, isn't the same. There are a number

of ways to modify your car, some good others quite frankly terrible.

While it's perfectly acceptable for folk to get their kicks watching the big match – effectively a group of over-paid ponces kicking a leather ball around – every Saturday down their local boozer, and no one blinkers an eye lid when others waste an entire weekend sat on a river bank (usually in the rain) in the hope they might just catch a fish (only to throw it back again), you mention car modifying and sooner than you can say neon lights (or tumbling dice), you're tarnished with that same, multi-coloured, *Fast and the Furious* brush that automatically assumes you own a Halfords loyalty card and have a subscription to *Max Power*.

I guess in the same way not every football fan is a hooligan, just because you like to set your car apart from the rest it doesn't make you a boy racer. And if ever there were a shining



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"You start thinking 'Oh I'll just do wheels and suspension', but then one mod leads to another..."



example of what tastefully modified cars were all about, then this would be it. But then the chaps behind these two cars should know a thing or two about modding, they've been doing it long enough after all.

Now, they may be very easy on the eye and between them have picked up more than their fair share of recognition at this year's shows (along with a number of trophies to boot), but believe it or not, there have been a few compromises made along the way. In fact, practicality was the order of the day when both of these Mk4s were being built. Well, at least that's the line we're being sold by their owners.

Modifying cars is one thing, keeping them practical at the same time but still making an impact, is entirely different. To master it is nothing short of an art form, and two people that have had over 30 years experience between them are Richard Baron (of Venom

Motorsport) and Tim Saunders (The Phirm) – both familiar faces in these hallowed pages.

One quick glance at Richard's silver R32 and you'd be forgiven for thinking Stuttgart had tried its hand at the hatchback market. In the same way, if Crocket and Tubbs ever drove a Veedub, then to earn any sort of respect on the streets of Miami it would no doubt bear more than a striking resemblance to Tim's white TDI (yes, it's a diesel). Come on, admit it, 'Miami style' wasn't the first thing that sprung to mind when you saw it?

If you haven't heard the names before then, well, welcome to the world of modified Dubs. Richard and Tim have been running their own successful VAG-related companies, for longer than some readers have been alive, yet only really became friends quite recently.

As you can probably guess, they've both produced a number of high-profile cars over

the years, not just through their customers, but as a result of their obsession with all things Veedub.

With Richard's mail order parts company and recently opened shop being located in Lancashire, and Tim's workshop situated just south of Guildford in Surrey, the pair's paths had never really crossed until a couple of years back. It was only after Rich, having had a string of disappointments from local VW 'specialist' firms, read about Tim's work in the magazine that he made contact, entrusting Tim with his Polo S3 project (PWW 05/07) and the rest, as they say, is history. Well, almost.

Despite being a match made in heaven on paper, Rich supplying the parts and Tim doing the spannering, the pair's friendship has only made their addictions to modded Dubs worse. And having both recently started their own families doesn't seem to

have made much difference, although they tried to make us believe otherwise on numerous occasions. Sensible? We're just not falling for it boys.

Seriously, I'd like a fiver for every time the word 'practical' came up in conversation during our photoshoot. I guess there's only one sure way to find out if there's any real truth in it and that's with a damn good grilling. Right, who's going first?

Richard Baron – Mk4 R32

We'll start with Rich, who initially appears to have been affected worse by this rare form of denial, or OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Duborder). For starters, we've actually lost count of how many of his cars have been featured in PWW before (most of which have graced the cover in some shape or form). From his legendary Corrado G60 (PWW 11/97 & 11/98), through to one of the

country's first Mk4 Polo VR6s (PWW 10/99); a Lupo 1.8T (PWW 06/04); Polo 1.8T (PWW 05/07) and more recently his Mk3 Golf VR6T (PWW 11/07), there aren't many Dubs Rich hasn't 'dabbled' with at some point or another.

I think it's safe to say that if you haven't shaken the modified car habit by the time you hit 30, then there's no hope for you. Rich has tried, mind: "You just can't help yourself though, can you?" he said, "I've had so many poncy cars over the years, you just end up going too far and f**king them up!" he said with a massive smile.

It seems around 15 years of Dubbing and running his own Veedub specialist firm has at least taught him something, "My last Mk3 was great but just too low and impractical. That was built for Venom really, but the Mk4 was always intended for me," he said. In the past Rich has, understandably, felt the need to fit a string of the products available

through Venom to help promote his business. It's good marketing, but obviously doesn't allow him to always end up with a car he'd personally build for himself. That, however, was his plan with the R32, "I'd seen Darren Bennett's car (from G Werks) and really liked the fact he'd achieved so much by effectively doing so little," said Rich.

He actually tried telling his long-suffering wife, Ann, that it wouldn't be modified at all, but she's known him long enough to see right through that, "You start thinking, 'Oh, I'll just do wheels and suspension' but before you know it, one mod leads to another, and all of a sudden a supercharger's been added to the list," he said, still smiling. "I knew I wanted something practical and, having sold all my other cars, was just fed up driving around in Anna's MPV."

It's probably only fair to mention at this stage though that, prior to buying the Mk4,

Rich couldn't help himself, snapping up a complete R32 engine that came up cheap, with the view of fitting it into something unusual, like a Fox (we kid you not). This idea was put on hold though while the Mk4 was being built, but the engine is still sitting in Tim's workshop waiting to be fitted, no doubt into something weird and wonderful.

So to the Mk4, which he actually saw advertised locally, "I'm a bit of a silver freak and so couldn't resist a look. The price was right and the mileage was pretty low, it wasn't perfect but then they never are," he admitted. Now, once Rich has made his mind up and found a car he wants, he's also quite adamant about taking delivery on the same day, "I told the guy I'd have the car, but I wanted it sat on my driveway that afternoon," he said. "I've got this issue that once people know a car is sold, they'll rag the living tits off of it until delivery," he said. Understandably, because Rich was paying by cheque, the dealer wasn't too sold on the idea to start with, but eventually he did agree to leave the car at Rich's, but keep the keys until the funds had cleared. Job done!

Luckily, Tim knows Rich only too well, "I knew he'd bought the R32 lump and got an

image texted over three weeks before Inters of the R32 logo embossed into a leather seat and thought, oh, he's bought a trim, too," he said. Obviously, as it turns out, Rich had bought the whole car. Initially Rich decided a set of KW's finest Variant 3s, combined with a set of staggered Porsche 997 rollers and a full Milltek system, would keep his addiction at bay. Yep, he was wrong.

There were a couple of small spots of paint that needed touching up, so Rich decided to meet Tim at the Stonor Park event, where he'd leave the car so Tim could deliver it to his trusty painter, Chris at Phirm FX, to do the honours. Tim picks up the story, "I think he originally asked me to just take a look at a seatbelt clip or something... then I got the call," he said. It was Rich, "I've just bought a full set of Porsche brakes, can you fit them before Inters?" was the first line, followed by, "What do you think about supercharging it? I've bought a kit from the States."

According to Tim it just escalated from there, but having built Rich's Mk3 VR6T in the lead up to Edition 38 last year, Tim wasn't too surprised. As it happens, Rich sourced the 'charger from Nik Saran in the UK, but the rest of the comprehensive kit

came from VF Engineering in the US: "While I was bolting it all on we sent the ECU off to Regal (the UK agent) to be chipped and they got it back to me in no time," Tim said.

Then the faxes began, "I'd get these faxes daily with various instructions on," said Tim. Obviously Rich's creative side was working overtime now. Chris had already smoothed the bumpers and modified the rear exhaust cut-outs to accept the larger Milltek pipes, and Tim decided the roof would look good black, but after initially doing it matt they settled on gloss, which stood out much more.

Next on the list of 'daily mods' was the smoked Xenon headlights, "They must have taken me two days to do from start to finish; removing the bumper, splitting them, removing all the silicon and then painting." While the bumper was off it was decided in order to make them flow, that the grille should be painted black and badge silver... "The list just grew," said Tim.

It just shows how subtle the mods are though, as they don't jump out straight away; you kind of spot them as you walk around the car. The single wiper is another mod you won't see on many Mk4s, but one that works really well with the clean lines. Both Tim and

Rich fitted new mirrors from SWG, which have been designed and produced completely in-house by SWG director, Steve Cruz. According to Tim they're without doubt the best aftermarket mirrors he's installed, "I've fitted some crap in the past but these fit so well, there are no air gaps or wind noise and they're fully functional, too," he said. The best bit is, the majority of people mistake them for the legendary Projektzwo items, which are rare as hens' teeth and were never available for the Mk4 either.

"It was pretty much non-stop at one stage but I really enjoy doing it," said Tim. And joking aside, Rich is usually quite reserved but you can tell he's genuinely chuffed to bits with this one, the constant grin during our shoot kind of giving the game away.

"I have grown up, I did get to the stage where I thought 'I'm too old for this shit' but the Mk4 has shown you really can have the best of both worlds. For example I took Ann and Molly down to E38 with all the luggage, pram and a trolley jack in the boot and it didn't even rub then." Ever since his Corrado days, Rich has always had a major thing for low cars, and despite 'only running 18s' his R32 has so much presence out on the open

road, especially when you're following it. Using 'all' of the aftermarket chassis gizmos meant Rich could dial in plenty of camber to get it squatting just the way he likes.

"It really has been brilliant, I think it's my favourite car I've owned. I've never been a big one for show 'n' shine, but entered it at GTI International this year just so I didn't have to park in the regular car park." You can appreciate his surprise when he scooped Best Mk4, especially after all the effort Tim had gone to turn it round in just three weeks.

It might have taken him over a decade to build a car totally and utterly for himself, but at least he got there in the end. He's not even brought up selling it yet, which is a first, although we shouldn't even mention that in jest – not with his track record. At least he does usually sell them before starting the next one, unlike certain other individuals...

Tim Saunders – Mk4 TDI PD130

Which brings us quite nicely on to the subject of a certain Tim Saunders. Where do we start? Well, if you thought Richard had a few issues, then you ain't seen nothing yet. Tim's not only addicted to modding, he's of a slightly different disorder, being something

of a hoarder, too, "I've always said I'd like to have every generation of Golf in my collection." The thing is, Tim's hoard of Dubs has never quite grown quick enough to keep up with the latest platform being launched. Already in his collection is his original NOS Mk1 project, a Mk1 Caddy running air-suspension, his infamous 300bhp turbo'd Rallye G60 (PWW 03/07) and his wife Sam's Hot Rod-inspired Mk3 VR6T (PWW 09/06).

The Mk4 was obviously the natural progression; we'll give him that. Especially with the birth of baby Ellis last Summer. But how does he explain the full repaint, air-ride, wheels, trim and engine mods? "I'd been hankering after a Mk4 for a while, but the trip out to the States for H2O last year kind of sealed the deal," he said. It also answered the question of what colour to opt for, "It just had to be white and a TDI as I haven't got one of those in the fleet, oh and it had to be a three-door, too," he said. Not fussy then? You don't know the half of it.

If you haven't already spotted the plate, then it's fair to say Tim's OCD condition, which has been festering for a few years, certainly came to a head when building the Mk4. Where do we start?



Dub Details

ENGINE: 1.9 TDI (PD130) four-cylinder with The Phirm diesel tuning box (with in-car adjustable control), quick shift

CHASSIS: 8.5x19" (front) and 9.5x19" (rear) Mercedes S-Class AMG multi-spokes (painted body colour) with 18mm (front) and 12mm (rear) custom adapters. 215/35 and 235/35 Kumo tyres respectively. Rayvern air-ride system (custom installed by The Phirm). Mk4 R32 front brakes

OUTSIDE: Fully resprayed factory Candy white. Smoothed front bumper, Anniversary headlights, deleted side repeaters, R Line rear bumper, rolled front arches and pulled rears, SWG electric door mirrors, tinted windows, all new glass, Mk5 boot release, original handle removed, fully de-locked, Hella rear lights

INSIDE: Heated black leather Recaros and R32 steering wheel, Air-ride controls mounted in centre console

SHOUT: The Phirm (0845 4505760/www.thephirm.co.uk), Chris at Phirm FX for paint (01252 794700), Rich at Venom Motorsport (01254 4820005 or www.venommotorsport.com), Wheel-Whores.com for wheel advice, SWG Motorsport for mirrors (01209 613033/www.swgmotorsport.com), Ray at Rayvern for suspension (01945 450150/www.rayvernhydraulics.com) Regal for software (0208 558636) and last but not least, Sam and Ellis for putting up with all the late nights

Dub Details

ENGINE: 3.2-litre 24v six-cylinder with Stage 2 VF Engineering supercharger kit, Milltek resonated exhaust system with Sports cat and manifolds, twin blow-off valves, large front-mount intercooler, K&N induction kit, uprated engine mounts, silicon hoses. Approx 370bhp (320lb ft torque), 0-60: 4.7 secs, 0-100: 11.8 secs, quarter-mile: 13.1, max speed: 170mph

CHASSIS: 8x18" ET 50 (front) and 10x18" ET45 (rear) Porsche 997 wheels with 35mm and 30mm adapters, making final offsets ET 15 all round. 215/35 ZR18 and 225/35 ZR18 Yokohama Prad tyres respectively. KW Variant 3 coilovers, lowered approx 90mm all round. H&R adjustable roll bars, KW rear adjustable tie bar, Eibach adjustable top-mounts, Haldex controller, Powerflex bushes all round, Venom polished strut braces

OUTSIDE: Full respray in factory Reflex silver, roof painted gloss black, Xenon headlights split and highlighted black, black grille with silver badge, arches untouched, Mk5 Golf rear boot release, R Line rear bumper modified to fit Milltek pipes, US-spec rear lights, stubby aerial, SEAT Leon Cupra chin spoiler, smoothed front bumper, single wiper kit, SWG Pro Design electric door mirrors

INSIDE: Factory black leather interior with heated and electric Konig seats, B&M quick shift

SHOUT: Venom Motorsport (01254 4820005 or www.venommotorsport.com), my wife Ann and daughter Molly, Tim at the Phirm (0845 4505760/www.thephirm.co.uk), Phirm FX for paint (01252 794700), Richard at KW, Steve at SWG Motorsport for mirrors (01209 613033/www.swgmotorsport.com)



"I always knew I'd own a Mk4, in fact I sold my old daily Fire and Ice Mk2 – officially the most uneconomical car in the world – to fund it," Tim tells us with a smirk. Even though it was intended to be Sam's new daily (as Tim recently bought the Caddy for himself), the Mk4 was always going to get a few small, shall we say, alterations? "Every car I own is modified, I don't really have a normal car," Tim confessed.

With the arrival of Ellis though, the pair really needed a sensible car between them, "Sam was still using her Mk3 VRT daily and I had the Rallye," claimed Tim. So soon after he arrived home from the States he began looking for white Mk3 TDIs – in three-door form, of course, "I soon realised just how rare they were and what a mission this was going to be," he continued, "at one stage I got so desperate I was considering one for sale in the south of France," he said.

Then he received an email from Auto Trader (you can register and it lets you know if a car meeting your criteria comes up) with details of what sounded like the perfect car... in Newcastle! To cut a very long story short, after drilling the dealer (who claimed it was the only one of its kind in the UK) over the phone to make sure it was okay, Tim headed north to check it out, "He said it was perfect. It wasn't. He said it hadn't been smoked in but there was a fag burn in the driver's seat. A previous owner had also owned a dog, as the rear window element was all scratched. He said it hadn't had any paint. It had, the rear quarter had been painted," said Tim. Fun and games, indeed.

The long and short of it was that the guy agreed to reduce the price, but Tim still paid the equivalent of a similar mileage Mk5 GT TDI: "It was a 130PD with heated Recaros and all the extras though, so I decided to bite the bullet," he said, despite the frankly ghastly 18" wheels someone had fitted along the way. "Getting all anal again, it was a late model, so had the aero wipers and ASR instead of your usual ESP traction control," he said. "I had contemplated a white 1.4-litre and doing an engine swap or buying a TDI that wasn't white

and changing the colour, but this seemed like the best route." Once home, Tim's OCD kicked in, "I wasn't happy with the rear quarter as the paint didn't quite match," he said. Can you see where this is leading at all?

Firstly though, before that was rectified he fitted the Rayvern air-ride kit which was already in his possession (after doing a VR swap in Ray's Vento for him). "It took me and Jelly three days to do the custom install but it was worth it, I've not seen another like it," he said. The tank and valves are mounted upside down on the false boot floor, while the compressor is housed in the side pannel where the first aid kit would normally live.

Before the car went off for paint, Tim needed to work out which rollers to fit, in case the arches needed any work. Better to be safe than sorry. This proved to be one of the biggest headaches of the project (yes, it was a full-blown project at this stage),

suspension," he said beaming from ear to ear. It wasn't finished quite yet though.

By the time he'd added erased side repeaters and a Mk5 rear boot release (one of Tim's trademark mods) to the list of body mods, you might as well call it a full respray – which is exactly what Chris did. "As per usual, Chris pulled out all the stops for me, especially doing the wheels at the last minute," he said.

Naturally, Tim added a few other 'bits and bobs' to the list, including a smoothed front bumper, 4Motion chin spoiler, R Line rear bumper and the aforementioned SWG mirrors. "I had to fit a new scuttle panel, too, as the old one was slightly faded," said Tim. Which again brings us around to the plate, which we pressurised him into buying. It just seemed so fitting, given Tim's condition and all.

Final additions included Anniversary lights, Hella rear clusters, tinted windows and all new

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although wheels are now probably Tim's main vice since finishing the car, "I wanted something with staggered fitment and that would fill the arches," he said. 18" rims were ruled out pretty early on, but there weren't many 19" designs he liked, "I was getting really frustrated, so decided to ask the guys on Wheel-whores," he said.

After a few ideas and some images were bounced around, Tim took a real shine to the multi-spoke AMG wheels, optional equipment on the high-end Merc S-Class, "Again, it took me ages to find a set, and they were up north again, but I'm so pleased with the way they look, after we worked out the off-set, tyres and custom adapters," he said. Painting them white the day before our shoot, which was a nightmare in itself (don't ask), was a big gamble, but one we feel really paid off, "I can't believe this is the most practical car I own, a white TDI, with white wheels and air

glass to keep his OCD in check. Oh, and the heated leather Recaros from our very own Project 4Play. Lastly, they installed The Phirm's new diesel tuning box, which Tim's been developing with his friend, Dave Bywater. This effectively acts as a standalone ECU and allows you to adjust the power inside the car. The results were a healthy 182bhp and 302 ft/lb torque: "You can add all sorts of features such as cruise control and shifts lights," he said.

So, is he happy? "Well, it has cost quite a bit, but I've ended up with my ideal Mk4 and if I'd have bought a 1.8T it would've got even more carried away," he said.

To conclude, despite being very different on paper (TDI vs 3.2 V6; air-ride vs coilovers) both cars have achieved the same level of practicality, only in very different ways. The question of which car we'd take home has still got us stumped now? What about you?

