

# The Pearl Redemption

Brian Laine 12/23



In 2013 I bought a non-running '67 VW Beetle and lavished it with a lot of love to make it really nice. It was a California car that was cosmetically good, but needed work mechanically, resulting in me giving her a rebuilt engine, transaxle, and many other things. In 2019, I felt the need to clear a spot or two in the garage, so I sold her on BaT. I almost immediately regretted that move, but the new owner was a really nice guy, and appreciated “Pearl”, the name she was anointed with when I purchased her. But the regret of selling her never left.

Fast forward to this Thanksgiving when we were visiting the Bay Area. I glanced at Marketplace one day, and low-and-behold – I found Pearl for sale! Just listed the day before. Turns out that the buyer had passed away from Covid shortly after he purchased her, and his widow was finally ready to let her go. I jumped on the opportunity to get her back.

Only problem was that Pearl was now in the central valley of California, and I live north of Seattle – about 1,000 miles away. And it's December, with a mountain pass between us. Never one to turn away a road trip, I decided to drive her home. And my wife volunteered to come along.

I reviewed a manual to remember how to run things like the heater, fuel capacity and so on. And we packed a lot of warm clothes – VW heaters aren't known for their warmth. We arrived via plane and a Uber ride to pick her up.

The seller, Karen, was assisted in the sale by her nephew Joe. Really nice people! Pearl looked as lovely as the day I sold her. They had equipped the front trunk with tools and supplies that might be necessary on the way home, including some books. Joe had checked the oil, filled the fuel tank, and aired up the tires. Here they are...



So – off we went, heading north. We started out cruising at 65-70 to keep up with traffic. She ran fine, but when we stopped to get fuel, the engine compartment had oil all over, even dripping on the ground. Hard to tell where it was coming from since everything was oil – but I presumed from the breathers. I decided that motoring a little slower might help. And added half a quart or so.

Along the way I tried the wipers. Blades were a little hard from being in the sun over the years, but worked. And worked – I can't shut them off! Control turns really hard and knob starts to unscrew before they shut off. After fiddling some more, I finally got them to turn off. Went to a parts store and got Rain-X. Then I discovered that the problem was the knob bottoming on the bezel. I found a 5mm nut (and bought a corresponding wrench) to install the jam-nut under the knob – worked great! Two speed wipers now – plus the control includes the off position.



Otherwise, all went well – first night was in Sacramento. The next morning, we headed over the pass to Medford Oregon. She went over the mountains easily, even passing trucks on inclines. We are getting about 30 MPG. Another successful day, other than I put in more oil to fill her up. She's taken a quart now. We spent the night in Medford.





This is in the middle of a huge rain storm all along the northwest coast. But we had enjoyed two days thus far with sun and temperatures in the 60's. We decided to head east up to Crater Lake, and go north inland, where it was still dry. Nice roads with little traffic and some snow along the way – regardless, the heater was keeping us warm, even when not turning on the rear outlets. And it's keeping us defrosted. Glad I installed new heater boxes and exhaust when I first owned Pearl.





Pearl hummed along these beautiful back roads, when all of a sudden, as were entering LaPine Oregon, she started to sputter and then died completely. Fortunately, we were able to coast into a grocery store parking lot before the kinetic energy was gone. I found a new fuel filter in the spares given to us, so replaced that with the idea that the

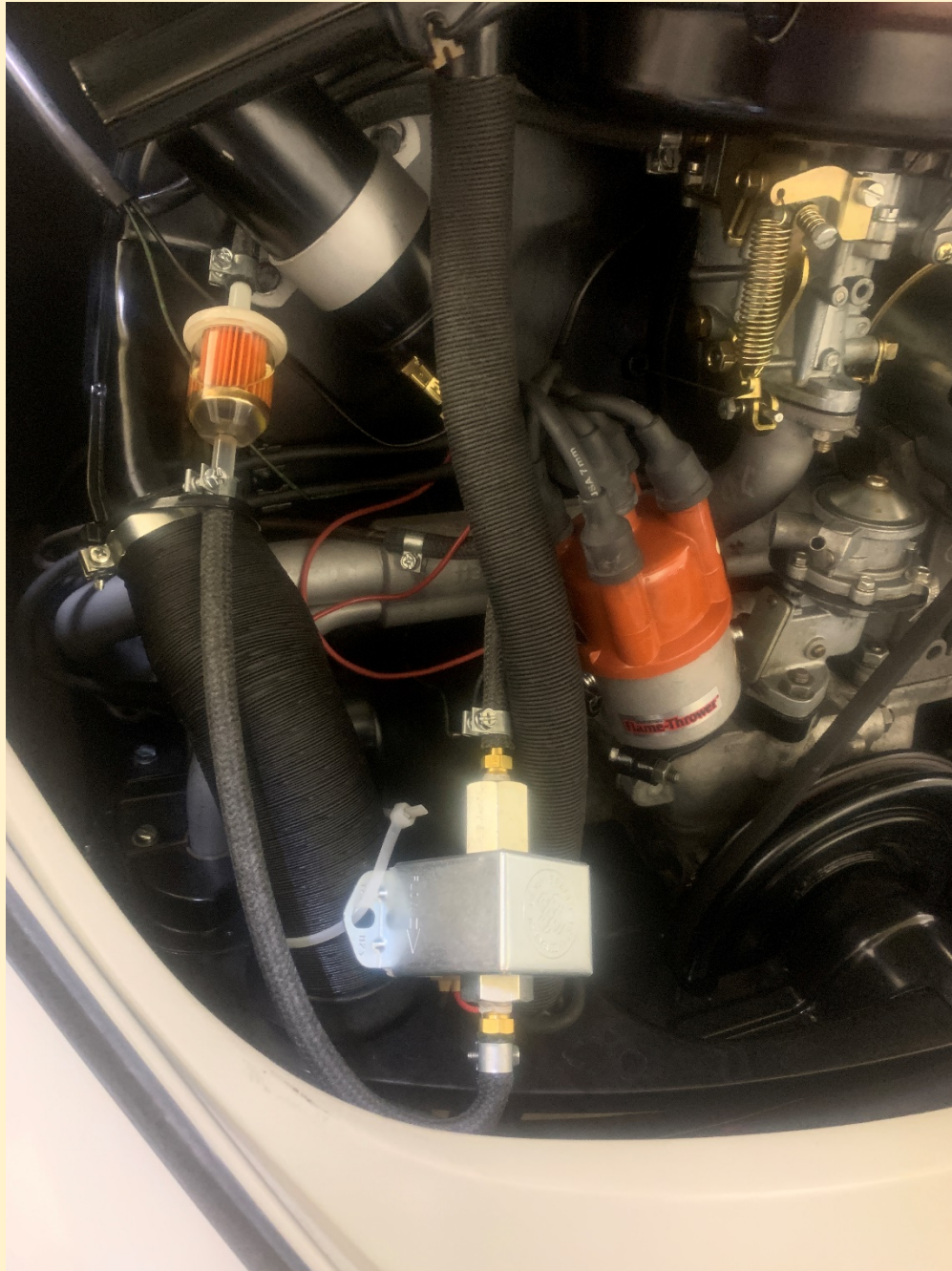


old one could be plugged. No luck – still not running. Only assumption is that the fuel pump failed. Folks kept stopping by to offer us help – really nice folks – an indication about how many good people are among us. We were told there was a NAPA about three blocks away, so we walked there.





At the auto parts store, I found that the nearest replacement pump was a day away. So, I bought a generic electric pump, some hose, ¼" fittings, and wire and terminals to connect it electrically. Another stroke of luck as I was installing this - the day before I had found a nice golf tee in a parking lot, and stuck it in my pocket. Since fuel can gravity feed from the front tank – it was just what I needed to ebb the flow of gas from the hose during assembly. I wire-tied the pump to some hoses in the engine compartment. It worked, and we were off again, heading to The Dalles and a non-refundable room reservation (whew). We felt extremely lucky to have her fail there after a morning of backroad travels with little other traffic, and no cell service in places.



I check the oil and engine compartment at each fuel stop and morning. Still all oily, but the level doesn't seem to be going down. I think that maybe the rebuilt engine needed some breaking in. No more oil was consumed on the trip.

The final day begins in The Dalles, Oregon. We decided to stay east of the mountains to miss the rain in the Seattle area. Along the way, after we stopped for some things at a Wal-Mart in Yakima, Pearl was completely dead. No lights, no ignition, nothing. Back into the store I go to get a voltmeter. Battery was ok. Connection at starter was good (only accessible when laying under the car in a mud puddle). Proper signals at voltage regulator. Turned out to be a blown 16A red fuse – one of two in the fuse panel. One of the odd pointed fuses you won't find at Wal-Mart. But, according to the wiring diagram in the book from under the bonnet, I could replace it with the other red fuse and only give up the interior light and emergency flashers. We're on the road again for the final leg of the journey,





As we drove, we noticed that the turn signals had stopped working. They are routed through the “box” that does the tail-lights and the emergency flashers. I decided to keep driving regardless (we are only about 100 miles from home now) although it was over

the pass on I-90. Turns out that the brake lights were disabled as well. Glad my wife didn't know that – she worries about details like that.

We rolled into home that evening after a wonderful trip. Just over 1,000 miles. One quart of oil. Averaged 31 MPG. Four-day adventure that made for a wonderful vacation! And it's a testament to how good these old VWs are – even when 56 years old. You won't find Pearl for sale again while I'm still around!

#### Post-script:

- I replaced the failed mechanical fuel pump with an after-market one from the local parts store, German ones are no longer available. The new one went seven miles and failed. I replaced it once again with a different after-market pump, and it's still working fine. Regardless, I installed the electric pump under the car in a more permanent fashion and ran a wire so it's ready to plug in if I have another failure down the road.
- The reason for the fuse failure was from plugging in a new USB charger which we had just purchased. It's a double C-type which evidently draws a lot more power than the dual old-style USB charger we had used for the rest of the trip. Can't blame Pearl for this failure – we had abused her electrical system.