

On wheels

By Lino Martins

My name is Lino Martins but I go by Lino M on Flickr. I run a wildly successful LEGO® automotive club online called LUGNuts, where I propose monthly challenges to our nearly 800 members worldwide, and some of them build accordingly. We've been doing this for six years now so you can imagine there is a vast array of cars, trucks, and bikes in our group pool. You may have seen my recent works such as the outlandish Popcorn Wagon (photo 1) and my Russian Ural motorcycle, (photo 2) but many ask...where do I seek my inspiration and what is my build process, exactly?

I can answer these questions and more by showing you different steps and my thought processes while working on my recent VW Dragbus.

What drives me to build so frequently are the LUGNuts monthly challenges. Even though I write and propose these challenges to all the other members, I like to lead by example, so I always build right along with everyone else. Building so frequently keeps me active so I am constantly learning new things. In August, we had a challenge called Redo And Redemption...



Photo 1



the idea was to find an old MOC from our past-preferably one we were not so proud of and redo it and make it better. We were supposed to provide a link to our old embarrassing flub so that others can see the before and after effects. I found my inspiration in my old and abandoned brickshelf file. I wanted something that would be fun to redo, something different from what I have done lately, and most importantly, something in bad need of redemption. I'm almost too embarrassed to publish it, but here is a photo of my original model built back in 2006. (photo 3)

There was no photo booth, the lighting was horrible, and my build quality had a lot to be desired back then! With new parts and several years of experience, I was hoping to do the old model some justice. The original was inspired by a popular Hotwheels design so for this one, I went right back to the original source and collected photos of the toy car and stored them in a file on my laptop.

The new VW Dragbus needed a more coherent color scheme than my haphazard looking original model. At the Vintage Races a month or two before, I saw a car that had a neat yellow and grey color scheme so I wanted to replicate this design with my new model. Next, I set aside certain curved parts I knew I'd use a lot of. This enables me to see how many of these specific parts I have and if Bricklink orders are needed in order to complete the project.

With my reference photos on my computer screen, I usually begin building a car by laying out a simple modular chassis with Technic beams and pins. This helps me figure out the wheelbase and overall size of the vehicle. If, later on, I realize I have made the wheelbase too short, or too long, a modular chassis helps me to easily expand or contract the design if need be. For this model, I had the good fortune of having the official LEGO® VW T1 Microbus set on hand. This helped establish the correct proportions but usually I would have to rely on photos of a car. Straight on side views, front views, and rear views are ideal for this if they can be found. With a straight side view photo, I can use a LEGO brick to measure proportions of the photo...for example, a side door may translate to 10 studs long, a wheel well 8 studs, etc. (photo 4)



Photo 4

Because my design had no doors, would eventually open like a Funny Car, and the roof would have a radical chop, the official LEGO set would only act as a guide so I could not simply copy it, with the exception of the front face plate, which I replicated with only minor changes. (photo 5)



Photo 5

Much of my work involves lots of trial and error...with the emphasis on error. This design needed the shell to be able to open fully and rest flat on its face while in the fully open position. Clearances were low, so it took about three or four tries to come up with the right hinge configuration that would enable me to do this. Finally I went with three oldschool 2x9 hinge plate assemblies (part # 3324c01) and that offered the right amount of clearance, strength, and flexibility. (photo 6)

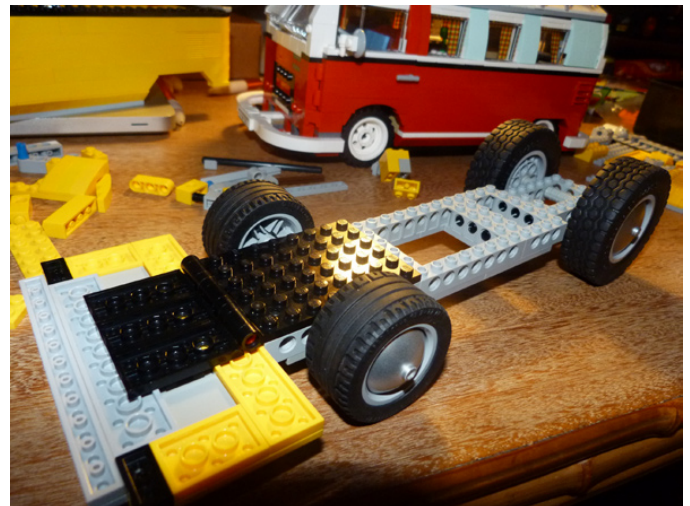


Photo 6

With several reference photos on hand, I continue to build the shell and chassis. (photo 7)



Photo 7

An early trial yielded a roof that sat a little too high. I wanted a radical chop, just like in the original Hot Wheels model, so a different method was later used. I was much happier with my second choice. (photo8 and 9)

Photo 8



Photo 9



Once the shell was built, it still took several test fits to make sure it would still function. An ill-fitting roll cage or a poorly placed oil filter can disrupt its ability to open or close properly. The oversized exhaust pipes also needed to be seen through the back window. (photo10)

Photo 10



Official LEGO® stickers were used to indicate racing sponsors. I was careful to use stickers that only had yellow or black borders. Redo And Redemption was the group's 70th build challenge, so I designed the large "70" logo in Microsoft Publisher, then printed it on decal paper. Careful cutting was needed to get the round shape just right.

Unlike my first attempt in 2006, I now have a portable photo studio, a better camera, and some acquired skill and experience with photography. Here is my typical set up. (photo 11)

Photo 11



I may take 30 or 40 photos from all different angles. After the photo shoot, I load the photos onto my laptop, pick my favorite five or six and do some minor post-production editing in Photoshop or similar design programs. Finally I post my final images onto Flickr for the whole world to see. (photo12 and 13) I redid this VW Dragbus from an earlier, more embarrassing model and I hope that I was able to redeem myself and set the Universe right! What do you think? Did I pull it off? You can find more of my work at http://www.flickr.com/photos/lino_m/ and if you'd like to join our LUGNuts group to participate in our monthly challenges yourself, you can do so at: <http://www.flickr.com/groups/lugnuts/>.

Thanks for reading.
Lino Martins
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VW Dragbus

