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1989 Volkswagen GTI - eurotuner magazine

Originally built for road course domination, Andrew McDermott's [Volkswagen](#) GTI Mk2 16v has evolved into something very special through hard work and determination.

writer: Brad Beardow

photographer: Sam Du

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Some automotive relationships take years to develop. Over time the modifications come along and a spark ignites. Before you realize it, you're knee-deep in an actual project. For other people, though, it's a love-at-first-sight kind of thing and there's never a question about whether the car will be a money-pit.



Andrew McDermott from Chico, CA is one of those love-at-first-sight kind of guys, and back in '93 he dumped his two month-old Corolla for a used '89 GTI 16v. He admits he paid way too much for it, but even then a clean GTI 16v didn't come along often, and what price can you put on instant love?

Andrew's a wholesale manager for Costco and quintessential Mk2 lover; for him there's no other [VW](#). The combination of OE capability and available mods means that even after 13 years of ownership, his love affair with the Mk2 is still strong.

Shortly after purchasing the GTI, Andrew had the opportunity to take it to some road course events and found the experience intoxicating. Although the GTI was down on power compared to other cars, he felt its nimbleness gave it an advantage. So his first plan of action was to exploit those advantages further.

The 1.8 liter 16v powerplant received a fair amount of attention, but Andrew limited himself to proven accessories, such as a pair of Autotech cams and a CIS-E Power Module, 50mm intake manifold, ITG filter, underdrive pulleys and a Tectonics Tuning cat-back exhaust. He also commissioned VL Enterprises to outfit his O20 tranny with a 0.71 fifth gear and 3.94 final drive, along with a Velocity lightened flywheel.



Andrew felt that if he could maximize the GTI's cornering ability he'd be able to keep up with more powerful cars, so custom-rate H&R springs combined with Sachs shocks offered additional poise and control, while a pair of 25mm front and 28mm rear Neuspeed anti-roll bars ensured all four tires remained flat on the road.

Speaking of tires, here's an insight into Andrew's obsessive nature, and the trial

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and tribulations he encountered during the life of this project. Early on, Andrew decided he needed the biggest tires he could find to maximize grip. At the time, many in the Miata crowd were running 245/35-15 tires and Andrew figured this would be good for his GTI as well. He knew that such wide tires wouldn't fit without a fight, so he spent time researching a solution. After quite a while he discovered a fiberglass flare kit for the Mk2 and purchased it.

He found a bodyshop to do the work and they asked Andrew to provide the wheels and tires so they could check for clearance. His first big setback came when he discovered that 245/35-15s were no longer available. Disheartened but not beaten, Andrew bought a set of 16x7.5" Team Dynamic wheels wrapped in sticky 225/45-16 Toyo T1S tires.



Setback two arrived when Andrew stopped by the bodyshop to pick up his car. Rather than trimming the flares to cover the wheels, they'd simply grafted them on full-size, and according to Andrew the car looked "Ridiculous. All four flares stuck way out, and even if I'd wanted to use 5" spacers on each wheel, there was no way the flares were going to look right. I was devastated," he said.

Andrew mentioned his dilemma to Ben Libby of Highway Motors and Ben agreed to fix the mangled flares. "I always imagined a set of enlarged G60 flares, so I drew an outline on the fiberglass flares to show how I thought they should look, and Ben made it happen."

The 225/45s did the trick and Andrew had the grip he wanted. He added some VW Motorsport front control arm bushings, upper and lower stress bars and a pair of Corrado G60 11" front brakes. He could then carry more speed through corners than even some of the full-on sports cars he was sharing the track with. "I remember at the end of one session this guy in a 911 came up to me and apologized for holding me up in the corners. Life was good."

Life has a funny way of sneaking up on you, though, and it wasn't long before Andrew found himself with a new wife and three lovely step-daughters. There was no getting around it - the GTI had to be transformed from racer-king to soccer-practice-shuttle. In went the back seat and out went plans to make the GTI even more radical.



Andrew chilled and ensured that his new wife and kids understood they were his priority. But in his new wife he also found a great friend, and Tina understood her husband found joy from building his car and wanted him to continue.

So next on his list was a color change. He'd always wanted an Oak green GTI, but it was never offered here, and finding the paint code proved harder than expected. So Andrew went with a similar color from a [Ford Explorer](#).

The right wheels make or break a car, and since the GTI was no longer destined for hardcore track duty it was time to add a bit more show. Andrew craved a set of wheels nobody else had, and it wasn't long before he selected 15" Compomotive THs. The problem was, Compo had stopped making these and a different company had the rights to reproduce them. He then learned he could get a set custom-made, and the cost would be 'reasonable.'

Even though his wife was supportive, she was hesitant about spending more money on the car. So Andrew suggested he take a second job to pay for them and would ensure the hours didn't interfere with family time. Tina had to agree to the plan, and for an entire year, Andrew woke at 3.30am every morning to deliver newspapers.

Setback three was perhaps the worst. After a year of trying he gave up on the THs when the manufacturer didn't come through. His second choice was another Compomotive wheel, and fortunately the 15x9" CXN wheels he wanted were still in production. Wrapped in 215/40-15 Dunlop tires, the CXNs suit the GTI's wide flares and stance perfectly, and we can't imagine the car with any other rims.

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It's been an interesting 13 years for Andrew and his GTI. Originally built for faster lap times, this aggressive Golf now finds itself in a more leisurely suburban setting. We suspect this could get a little dull for both owner and car, and Andrew hints he may find a way to bring the project full-circle: "Although talk of spending large sums of money could lead to divorce, I'm not giving up on the idea of something special for my upcoming 40th birthday. If all goes well I'll be taking the car to Dynamic Racing Solutions for a fully-built 2.1 and maybe a set of HTN wheels," he said.



Tech Spec
 Andrew McDermott
 Location: Chico, CA
 Occupation: Wholesale Manager for Costco

'89 VW GTI 16v
 Engine: 1.8L i-4 16v with Autotech cams, header and CIS-E Power Module, 50mm intake manifold, Euro Sport ITG intake, Techtonics Tuning exhaust, Magnaflow muffler and tip, Unorthodox Racing pulleys, Velocity lightened flywheel, AIS custom 160 amp alternator, Hella relays, Turn2 solid front engine mount

Drivetrain: VL Enterprises O20 transmission with 0.71:1 fifth gear conversion and 3.94:1 final drive, Neuspeed short shift kit

Suspension: H&R Ultra Low coilover kit with custom springs (512 lb front, 467 lb rear), Neuspeed 25mm front and 28mm rear anti-roll bars, Neuspeed front upper strut bar, Autotech front lower stress bar, VW Motorsport control arm bushings, Autopower half rollcage, VR6 upper strut bearings

Brakes: Corrado G60 calipers, EBC 11" slotted/dimpled rotors, EBC red pads

Wheels & Tires: 15x9" Compomotive CXN wheels ET8, 215/40-15 Dunlop SP8000 tires

Exterior: European small bumpers, Mk1 duckbill front spoiler, Abt rear wing, shaved side markers, rear emblem and C-pillar swage line, European 7" round headlight conversion, Hella red tail lights with integrated foglight, Mk4 side markers

Interior: Corbeau seats, SWG center console, Momo F1 steering wheel and shift knob, VDO gauge package (oil pressure, oil temp, water temp, gas pyrometer, air/fuel, voltage, vacuum, co-driver tach)

Audio/Visual: Blaupunkt Casablanca head unit, Polk and JL Audio speakers, Lightning Audio four-channel amp

Thanks: Tony Gestri, Mark Bittroff and Willy at Chico VW, Ben Libby at Highway Motors, Tina