

THE WAY WE see it, for the money involved, one can either have a boss street buggy, or a pretty routine sporty car," said Alex Dearborn of the Dearborn Automobile Co., Marblehead, Mass. The money involved is about \$3,500, and the boss buggy is the Deserter GS. A cold, New Jersey wind blew across Orange Airport, a lonely group



DESERTER GS

**dbm driver
impression**

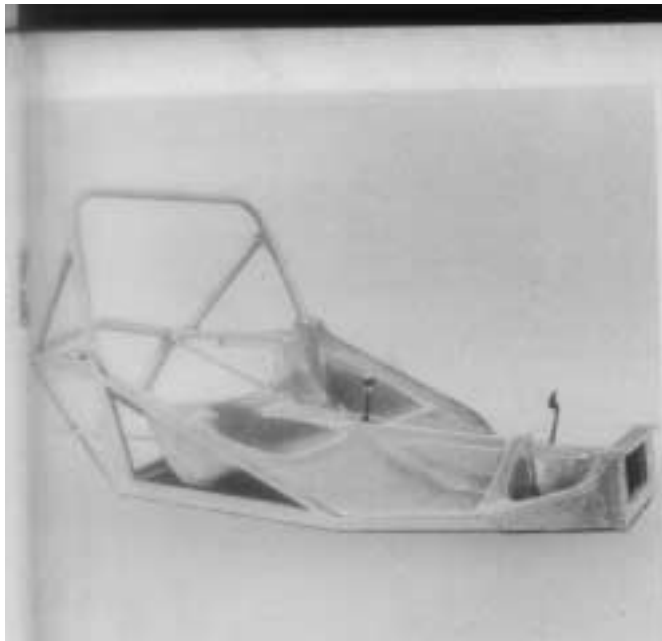


of sports car types were engaged in preliminary tuneups for the next day's autocross, and we were at this minor-league event to check out a rather aggressive-looking street buggy.

Bright orange, squat, and with fat road-racing rubber, the GS was the center of attention as soon as it arrived. Various young college types from the sponsoring MIT Sports Car Club, and a scattering of more middle-aged sports car fellows abandoned a rather ordinary array of street sports machinery to ogle this most businesslike buggy. Questions were numerous, of course, and a few who knew Alex were quite openly predicting a new course record 'round the approximately one-mile autocross circuit laid out on the cracked, sandy, and rubber-coated old runway also used by the dragstrip crowd.

The GS sported all street-legal equipment, save that the mufflers had been swapped for some straight pipes. When the Corvair mill was started up, a most pleasing bellow erupted from these pipes—even noisier than several rather cutup old Volvo sedans involved in the day's events, and infinitely more convincing in appearance.

The Deserter GS sports a center-mounted Corvair engine, with the VW transaxle turned end-for-end, and the whole covered over with a standard Deserter dune buggy body shell. Underneath is no cutdown VW chassis, though, but a stressed monocoque type frame/body construction. Two side rails from the rear suspension mountings have an aluminum bellypan riveted across them, and another pair of upper rails are boxed to this with more aluminum. A fiberglass floor on top finishes off a very strong, but light, chassis. Up front, a VW front end bolts on. In back, a trailing arm suspension is provided, with Koni shocks.



That floor is quite interesting, for it sweeps back from the foot pedals and up to join the top edge of the engineroom in back. Molded into this slope are two bucket seats, snug, and useful for holding one in place, as we were soon to learn—this car can get away with fantastic cornering.

The Corvair in Alex's demonstrator was well-modified, and built up by a professional engine builder. Alex estimated about 200 bhp. The car weighs in at around 1100 lb. Will it go?

Alex gave us a trial trip around the course. All eyes of the outclassed entry field were on the GS as we roared away. We were busy just staying in place as Alex slammed the car round pylon after pylon. With no sway, and not much wheel breakaway, the side forces on a free-mounted passenger are pretty extreme. Only once did we get sideways in a "U" turn, on some sand, but Alex pulled it out easily enough. Our run was timed at 93 sec. Course record, 86 sec., has been set by a Can-Am SCCA race-prepared, 427-in. Ford Cobra—about \$10,000 worth of car.

Alex wasn't happy with the engine, as it was not turning over 4500 rpm—we thought it was still very impressive.

The GS was heavily decambered and, with those 10-in. wide tires, it really sat low and squat—no wonder it wouldn't lift or slide on the abrasive asphalt. A Z-bar in the rear was part of the suspension setup to discourage tuck-under but, with all that negative camber, it would be hard to tuck under a wheel anyway.

"No car here worth competing against, but there is a record that those who follow New England autocross are aware of," said Alex, as we ventured to suggest the unassuming collection of used sports cars on hand seemed to offer little competition. "Autocross is for street drivers with a racing yen," Alex explained. It seems that the Deserter GS admirably suits this market—a street-legal car, with a stock Corvair in good shape, would be an awful terror at any autocross circuit, and in the daily highway grind, what sport! And attention!

The GS comes in kit form—the body/chassis and rear suspension, plus all necessary controls, windshield, etc. The price? About \$1500. Add on another \$2000 for new Corvair engine, VW suspension, transaxle, etc., and one has a boss street buggy. No engine hanging out in back—it's up in front of the axle. Put on mag wheels, reasonably wide street rubber, and one is ready for those weekend semi-races, or some fun-type, back-road driving. Handling on pavement is so stable that it's uncanny, with the engine weight in the center and no light-feeling front end. Throw it into a hard turn, and one needs those sunken bucket seats to hold himself in place. Response to the throttle is immediate and breathtaking.

Alex went out solo later on, and cut a lap in 88 sec., two seconds off the record, but still was unhappy with the new engine. Next morning, before racing began, the engine builder would be there, as this was the first outing for the just-completed car in full competition trim, with the engine mods. The excitable young men of the MIT Sports Car Club now loudly predicted a new record.

Over on an empty turn with a few other fans, we watched the bright orange GS approach in flat, water-bug movement round the pylons. "Here comes that monster again," called the sentry, and the others roused themselves off the grass as the bellow of those pipes announced the GS' arrival at the turn. Smallest car on the grounds, it was the "monster" to the aficionados of this offbeat sport.

The Deserter GS was the "monster" the next afternoon, also, when Alex Dearborn set a new Orange Airport autocross track record of 78 sec., eight sec. under the previous record, and one which should stand awhile—at least until a faster driver, in a faster Deserter GS, comes along.

Photos by Herb Hicks, Ron Cardone