

Bonita's Bygone Buggy Days by Barbara Wyland

bug·gy¹ [buhg-ee] **noun, plural bug·gies.** Older Slang . an automobile, especially an old or dilapidated one.

wheel·ie [hwee-lee, wee-] **noun** A maneuver in **which** a bicycle, motorcycle, or car has its front **wheel** or **wheels** momentarily lifted off the ground

Ever since I was a kid I've had the privilege of riding in a buggy. My earliest memory is having my brother pop a wheelie in the driveway and scaring me half to death. It was awesome!

The first Volkswagon buggies ever built in Bonita were by Donald Smith and James Wyland Jr at Smith's garage on old 41 back in the mid 1960's. They used to drive the buggies to the woods east of Bonita from the garage. Back then Billy Sheffield was sherriff, and he held you to the honor system, as long as you weren't doing anything crazy he would let you drive your buggy on the street to get to the woods since they were so close.

There was no I75 and Beach Rd was dirt past the Cemetary on Imperial St. You could ride logging trails made back in the 1920's or 1930's all weekend long and never run the same trail twice. You could ride way east and south and come out by David Piper's ranch in the Immokalee Rd and 951 area with Cabbage Palms everywhere. There was nothing like the cool breeze on your face on a hot summer day and driving through a water hole that was cool and clean, then seeing an alligator staring at you as you drive by. There was wildlife everywhere. Back then we still had dragonflies, frogs and lightning bugs. Then was a time of freedom we will never have again.

After Donald and James built the first couple of VW buggies, they caught on with the folks around here and soon there were about a dozen people enjoying Bonita's bounty of



James and Susie Wyland somewhere out east Bonita early '70's

beauty. Wes Harvard, Lee and Jerry Pickard, Gene and Mike Tucker, Phil, Tod and Eric Smith, John Wyland, Homer Herrschaft, Steve Crane and many others who's names I don't recall.

The buggies were made by stripping a Volkswagon Beetle's body off and revamping what's left into pure fun, with really groovy names like the "Funky Worm", "The Green Phantom", "The Sneaky Snake" and "The Bottle Fly". The only limit to the build was your imagination and seat height preference. How low your buggy sat was how soon you got your butt wet!

Not only were the buggies used to roam the woods, but James and Donald used to give the kid's buggy rides at the Bonita Elementary School's Halloween Carnival, and the also drove them in the Fourth of July parade on numerous occasions. After the parade they would high tail it to the woods to play and cool off!

THAT That was an era of Bonita's past that is a well remembered and priceless treasure and is still talked about to this day.



Donald Smith popping a wheelie at the 1977 Fourth of July parade in Bonita Springs



6-76 Phil Eric Joe
Betty Smith
San Carlos Park



7-4-77
Parade in Bonita



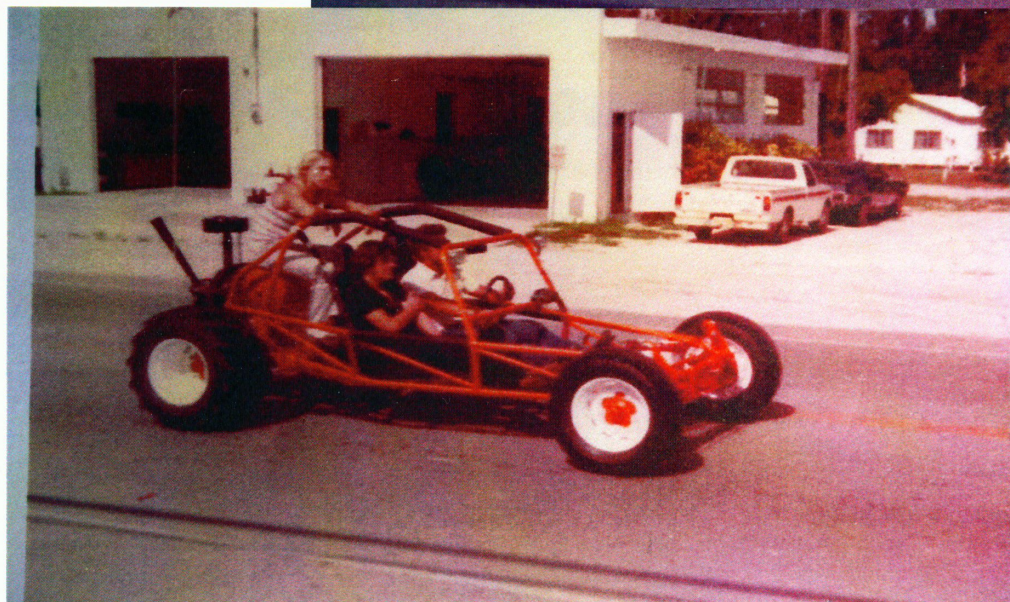
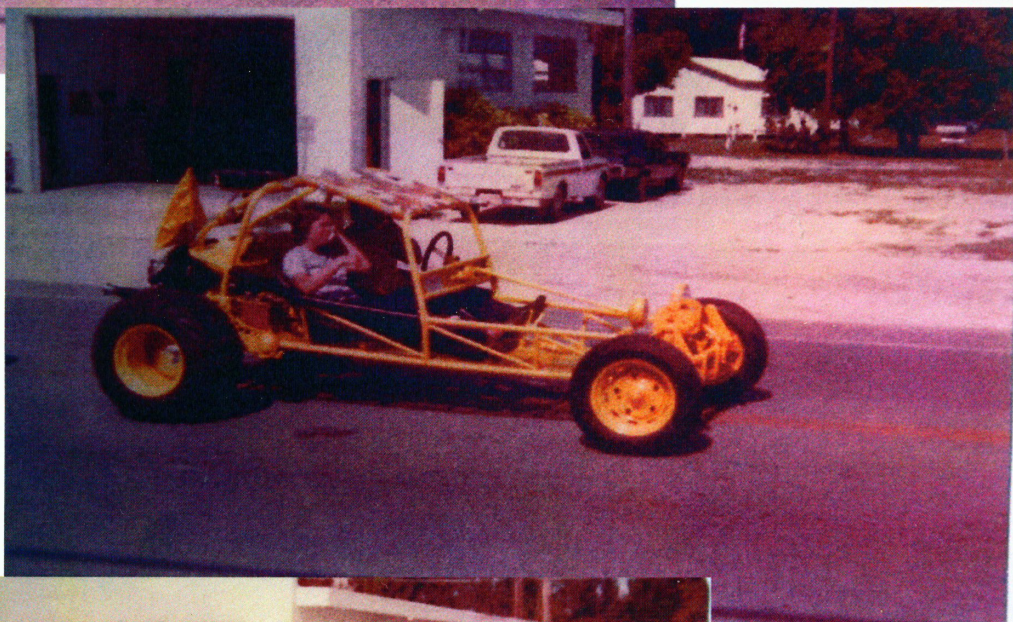
James Wyland in the 1977 parade



ABOVE: Wes Harvard needs his seat higher!

Below: David Wyland on three wheeler and Steve Crane slingin mud







James Wyland
slingin mud in the
"Funky Worm"

Donald Smith and
family getting
ready to head out





ABOVE: James Wyland and Gene Tucker in the parade

BELOW: Taking a break in the shade

