

**AUTObiography:** Next up is VWvortex reader: **Stealth\_TDI**

**Stealth\_TDI's  
'98 VW Jetta TDI**

**How long have you owned this car?**

I bought this car brand new on January 31, 1998.

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VWvortex member  
Stealth\_TDI



**Is there anything unique about the history of this car?**

I've driven this car over 380,000 trouble-free miles through 41 states on various road trips. I also haul half-ton loads with my utility trailer, autocross regularly, and I still have no qualms about driving my car across the country at the drop of a hat. In fact, I drove 5400 miles round trip to and from Texas just last August. I'm not sure if that's really unique. But perhaps the fact that the engine has never been opened beyond the valve cover, shows virtually no wear on the cam shaft, and still holds over 570 psi on each cylinder qualifies as unique?

**Why did you choose this car to purchase?**

I wasn't even considering another VW because of all the troubles I had with my second-hand '89 Golf GL. But the then-new 90 hp TDI had 149 lb/ft of torque at just 1900 rpm and it was rated for 49 mpg. The test drive went well, so I took the plunge and have never regretted it. And I didn't even know about modding VWs at that point!

**What other cars did you consider?**

I considered another Nissan since I had driven my '88 Sentra for 11 years with only minor trouble.



**What was your objective with this car?**

My goal was to enjoy an improved car while maintaining a nearly stock appearance. I even drove on the original steelies with wheel covers for seven years. When I finally acquired some VW alloys, I opted for several sets of the same 14" Le Castelletts so the look of my car doesn't have to change between summer, winter, and race. Later, I did the same with sets of Ronal LS's. :-)

**What tuning style best describes this car?**

Econo-Autocrosser. How many autocross cars pull off over 50 mpg on the highway without being the slowest car on the course? I have prepared my car for a compromise between comfort and handling since it's my daily driver with a 500-mile weekly commute.

**Who helped you build this car?**

I had trusted mechanics install the suspension, clutch, Peloquin TBD, and the exhaust work. I did the rest myself, notably the significant electronics suite and several turbo, intake, and injector swaps.

**What makes your car special?**

My car has so much more than meets the eye. From the outside, it looks like an old bone-stock VW that doesn't warrant a second look. The wheels are a little blingy since they are polished. But they're "only 15s" so no one cares! ;-)  
Beneath the skin lies a car with 136 whp and 263 lb/ft (dyno proven), vastly improved handling through suspension tuning, stereo upgrades for pleasant travel, and a hidden communications suite that supports one of my other hobbies. I also love the fact that I can drive this modified car across the country on less than \$250 in fuel, even with today's fuel prices!

**What is your favorite part/feature/function?**

My favorite feature is the hidden electronics. Although my "antenna farm" blows the stealth look when viewed from behind, the antennas are flat black for discretion and are quickly removed when I park away from home. Why the attraction to ham radio? The "ham radio vs. cell phone" debate is similar to the "A1 vs. A5" debate. Both get the job done with different types of style, levels of commitment, and avenues of support. Communicating via ham radio is sort of like honoring one's roots. Regardless, my combination of radios and antennas allows me to communicate via voice, code, or data without the use of external service providers such as the Internet or paid cell phone towers (the providers that are likely to be unavailable during major blackouts). My equipment and the atmosphere provide everything I need to talk across town or across the Atlantic. Also, my modest stereo upgrade with 16GB flash drive provides me with hours of entertainment when I'm not on the radio waves. :-)

**Who or what inspired the direction of modifications on this car?**

Cops and criminals! Those who mimic what they saw on "The Fast and Furious" give police a reason to pay extra attention to blingy cars. Sometimes one doesn't even need to be violating any laws to win a date with "Johnny Law." Criminals also notice flashy cars. If it isn't those who want to steal your stuff, then it's those who want to mess it up. I've opted for discreet mods since justice seldom prevails. No one pays my car any attention beyond a quick look inside for goodies.

**What don't you like about this car?**

I often long for a car that's so powerful it'll scare the crap out of me (can I say that here?). ;-) My car is a pleasure to drive and surprises many at autocross events. However, I don't try to fool anyone by claiming to have a fast car (although I do like the term "surprisingly quick"). I'll eventually want a "better" car to be faster on the autocross course. Only time will tell if I'll wind up giving into my desire for super-power or if I'll yield to prudence and stick with hopped-up diesels.

**What was your biggest obstacle in building this car?**

At first, it was a fear of voiding VW's fragile warranty by modding. Then it was a lack of trust in a then-new TDI tuning industry. Then money was an issue.

**How did you overcome the issue?**

I took an unexpected assignment in El Paso, TX that subjected me to a 55-mile one-way daily commute and regular 1200-mile drives to see family near Austin. The 100,000 mile warranty was toast in less than three years. The TDI tuning industry made great strides in the meantime. I've also chased a couple of promotions to address the money issue. :-)

**What would you change if you could?**

More power with no loss in low-end torque!

**On a scale of 1 to 10, how satisfied are you with the outcome of this project?**

8. I'd like tighter handling and, of course, more power. I don't mind the Plain Jane appearance. But I'd like more snap and more "Oh Yeah!" However, I recognize the need for compromising between power vs. reliability; handling vs. comfort; styling vs. the law and the lawless, etc. Perhaps the most satisfying part of owning this car is driving 700 miles between fill-ups. This allows me to pick my fill-up day and location instead of being forced to refuel in the rain, freezing wind, or at crowded or overpriced fuel stations. It's also cool to find fuel stations that have a separate "diesel island" with no waiting. :-)



**What would you do to the car if money were no object?**

I'd love to swap in a newer TDI engine and tune it up. Even the second generation TDIs are approaching 200 hp and 400 lb/ft with what are quickly becoming "common mods" for TDIs. I imagine having that kind of power and torque in my 2700 lb Jetta would be a blast! That would certainly cure my need for a spirited autocrosser. Oh, I'd upgrade the interior and add textured bumpers/moldings, too.

**Who has been your biggest critic of this project?** My wife... who else? Every dollar spent on my car could have gone toward... well... JUST ABOUT ANYTHING ELSE! :-D

**What do your family and friends say about this car?**

Since most of them aren't VW nuts, they say, "WHY?" They just don't get it! And most VW nuts say, "Why tune a diesel?" especially back when TDIs were relatively new. However, most think the hideaway electronics and fuel economy are pretty cool. They think I've turned "tree-hugger" on them when I fuel my car with soy-based biodiesel. ;-)  
Oh, I just remembered some friends who hated to see me drive my new TDI as much as I was. They thought I should buy an old beater, put the miles on IT, and preserve the value of my new Jetta by driving it less. NO WAY! This car's for DRIVING!!! Regardless of one's enthusiast position, just about everyone is stunned when they see the sticker under my hood that says, "This car has traveled 802 miles on 14.58 gallons of fuel resulting in 55 MPG!"

**What is your favorite place to drive this car?**

Twisty back roads are fun. I think my favorite road has to be the twisty climb up Mount Hamilton to Lick Observatory near San Jose, CA. I also enjoy trips to Deal's Gap, NC to drive the Tail of the Dragon. THAT'S a great road trip!

**What is your ideal day with this car?**

If there was such a thing, I think my ideal day would be an all-VW show-'n-shine followed by an autocross event on a cool day. I hear WaterFest comes close. But I'd want to show AND autocross (60-second course at least) all without sweating my brains out or driving 350 miles each way to do so. Hey, you said "ideal." ;-)

**Has this car competed in any events? Results?**

1999 Big Bug Shootout in Ennis, TX (1st Place)  
2000 HotWater Blast in Clear Lake, TX (just drools over the "55 mpg" sticker)  
2001 Phoenix Bug-O-Rama #27 (more drools and lots of sweating)  
2004 TDI Fest in Braintree, MA (1st Place)  
2006 BugOut #59 in Manassas, VA (2nd Place)  
2006 TDI Fest in Valley Forge, PA (1st Place)  
2006 H2OInternational in Ocean City, MD (3rd Place)  
2007 BugOut #61 in Manassas, VA (2nd Place)  
2009 TDI Fest in Washington, DC (1st Place)  
2011 TDI Fest in Lexington, KY (paint is too chipped to place these days)  
100+ autocross events over the years (2nd Place Street Tire Class in 2005 Regional Summer Series)  
Three drag days at Maryland International Raceway (15.32 secs @89 mph best results).

**What is your most memorable/humorous/embarrassing moment with this car?**

Hmmm. That would have to be my trip to the "NorCalVW Meets SoCalVW" car show in San Luis Obispo, CA in 2002. I took my (then) two-year-old daughter with me since giving my wife some "me time" was about the only way I could get some "VW time." I was driving on a twisty road that cuts through the mountains between I-5 and US 101. My daughter was fast asleep. Although I wasn't speeding, I had passed several slow-going vehicles on the twisty road. Suddenly, my daughter awoke to announce that she needed a diaper. She wasn't kidding! Her little check-valve had let loose an abundance of slime that oozed past her diaper seals like an overstuffed CV boot! Being miles from anywhere and not wanting to mess up my show-ready car, I opted to stop and change her diaper and clothes on the trunk lid. I was working quickly since it was a little chilly (the air, not the contents of her diaper). One of the vehicles I had passed eventually drove by to see me wrestling with an active half-naked toddler, an overfilled diaper, and enough butt wipes to detail my car. I imagine they were pretty amused. What a drive! We enjoyed the show although my car was no match for the beautiful cars in attendance.

**Who gets to drive this car?**

I'm just about the only driver of the car. My wife used to drive it a little before the mods. Now she says it "rides like a jack hammer." Imagine that: My relatively soft Shine springs make the car drive like a jack hammer? She really has no idea! I guess that could be her perception since she prefers the supple ride of her stock 2003 Passat GLS (but she admits my TDI is faster and more responsive).

**If your car had a motto, what would it be?**

Torque's great, less filling!

**What was your previous project?**

I've never had a project car before. I had never considered THIS car a project. But it certainly turned into one! I simply started by upgrading items as they wore out (tires, stereo, struts, clutch, brakes, injectors, turbo, etc.) and NOW look what happened!

**What is your next project?**

Oh, so many choices and not enough money! I bounce between everything from a new Jetta TDI to a GLI to a Dodge Charger to a MB 320 CDI to a Mini Cooper S. Yeah... I can't decide! Oddly enough, I've also considered a Sprinter-based custom travel van. It's no VW, but it's still a European van. ;-) I plan to get a 2009 Jetta TDI for my wife. I may eventually work on that car. Then again, I could just do the TDI swap mentioned above. That alone would make me feel like I have a new car... and a new project. :-)

**What one word best describes your car?**

CLEAN.

**Anything else you'd like to share?**

What? I haven't said enough already? I'm sure everyone's eyes probably need a shot of Visine by now. ;-) Thank you, Cherise, for featuring my car and thanks to everyone else for checking it out!

**Owner Information**

Name: Scott Farrell  
Vortex SN: Stealth\_TDI  
City and State: Newport News, VA  
Occupation: US Coast Guard Electronics  
Club Affiliations: TDIclub.com, Autocross.US

**Vehicle Information**

Year: 1998  
Make: VW  
Model: Jetta TDI  
Mileage: over 380,000 miles  
Original Color: Classic Green  
Current Color: Classic Green  
Engine: 1.9 liter TDI (AHU)

Engine Modifications: Malone Tuning programming, Borg-Warner K03/K04 hybrid turbo, PowerPlus PP520 injection nozzles by Fratelli Bosio, Amsoil Ea nanofiber, Colt Cam, Snow Water/Methanol Injection.

Exhaust Modifications: Custom downpipe with divorced wastegate flange into a 2.5 inch Magnaflow diesel cat, followed by a 2.5 inch straight pipe all the way back.

Transmission Modifications: Peloquin torque-biasing differential; Sachs VR6 clutch.

Suspension Modifications: Ground Control coilover sleeves with Bilstein HD struts, Eibach Spec springs (430#F/340#R), and Shine rear sway bar.

Brake Modifications: Brembo Sport slotted rotors with Akebono Ultra Premium ceramic pads.

Wheels and Tires: 15" Ronal LS with 205/50R15 Falken Azenis RT-615s (three season), 14" BBS RZ with 175/65R14 Bridgestone Blizzak WS-60 (winter), and 15" Ronal LS with 225/45R15 Kumho Ecsta V710 (autocross).

Exterior/Body Modifications: Eurocode headlamps, various CB/MF/HF/VHF/UHF antennas.

Interior Modifications: Isspro boost and exhaust gas temperature (EGT) gauges; and a ScanGaugeII, all mounted on a custom gauge panel that fits in the former cup holder area. I also have a Schroth Quick Fit harness belt (for autocross only).

Audio/Video/I.C.E.: Pioneer DEH-P6900UB head unit with rear USB input (great for MP3s), DEI 10-inch Competition subwoofer in a 0.44 cu/ft box, hidden Rockford Fosgate P200-2 amplifier for the sub, Cobra 75WXST all-in-handset CB, hidden Yaesu FT-90R VHF/UHF ham radio, quick-stowable Yaesu FT-857D 12 band all mode MF/HF/VHF/UHF ham radio, Byonics position encoder, hidden TrippLite 300 watt voltage inverter.

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