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MIKE FABERY, of North Syracuse, poses with his 1976 Sterling and two dune buggies.

Stephen D. Cannerelli/Staff photographer

IT'S AN OLD CHILDHOOD FRIEND

Owner was 8 when he watched his neighbor build Sterling in 1976

By Kenn Peters
Staff writer

Now here's something different: It's a Sterling built from a kit in 1976.

Mike Fabery, of North Syracuse, has owned the car since June 2006, but he was around while it was being built in 1976 by Jim Lapp, a next-door neighbor. Fabery was 8 at the time.

"I used to go over when he was working on it. I probably got in his way, but he was always glad to see me," Fabery said.

The Sterling is built on a 1971 Volkswagen Beetle platform and is powered by a '73 VW Bus engine. The Bus engine was chosen because its head design is flat and it was easier to fit into the Sterling's engine compartment.

Fabery remembers that the Sterling kit was \$3,300 and included the body, interior, windows, seats, dashboard and gauges. It arrived with the gelcoat

yellow finish it has now, although the black on the bottom was added later.

During the build, Fabery remembers an old Rambler nearby was used as a donor for its hydraulics.

"The top on the Sterling is pushed up by hand, but we used the Rambler's hydraulics so it can be raised automatically," he said.

Fabery recalls that it might have taken six to eight months for his neighbor to build the Sterling, a project that consumed nights and week-

ends.

Fabery said he always told his neighbor that if he ever wanted to sell the Sterling, he would be waiting. That day came just a few months ago when the former neighbor decided it was time to let it go. Fabery was waiting.

"I bought it and had it trucked here," he said.

Fabery said one of the reasons he wanted the Sterling is because it's part of his childhood memories.

"It was always part of my life," he said.

When the neighbor moved to Atlanta in 1998, the Sterling went with him. In fact, it was the neighbor's daily driver for a few months.

Back in North Syracuse, it will be an occasional driver, driven when the mood strikes Fabery, and then driven carefully. The Sterling isn't his only outlet for fun. He also has two dune buggies, one built by the neighbor and another, called a sandrail, that Fabery built. The sandrail resembles a race car.

In the meantime, there's some work to do. The hydraulic system is leaking, the interior needs to be replaced and the car needs a general going over. Fabery thinks he's going to add a touch of luxury with an air conditioning system.

"This is 1976 technology, so there are things that can be changed and updated," he said.



Stephen D. Cannerelli/Staff photographer

THE INTERIOR of Mike Fabery's 1976 Sterling is accessed when the top is raised.

1976 Sterling

Owner: Mike Fabery
Chassis: 1971 Volkswagen
Engine: 1973 VW Bus
Height: About 3 feet
Weight: 1,600 pounds
Transmission: Four-speed standard
Equipment: Heater, radio
Owner's Web site:
www.seemysterling.com