HOW TO:

SAVE YOUR BUS FROM GOING UP IN FLAMES

Text and photographs **Steve Leatham**

Fitting a 'Fireflex' automatic fire extinguisher system to your engine.

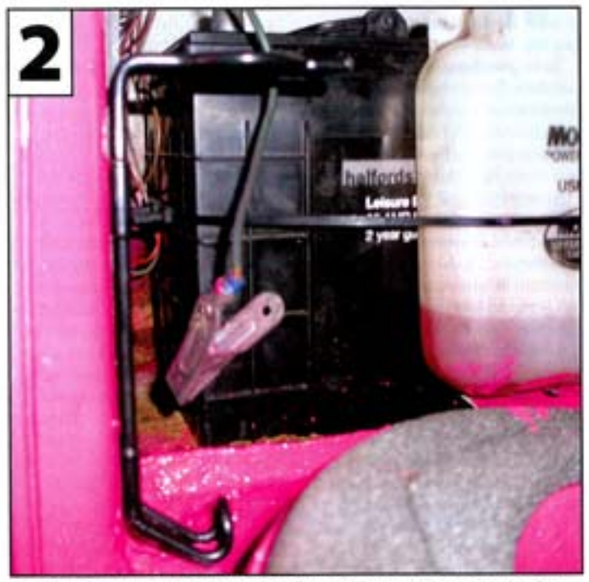
If you own a VW Transporter of any kind, especially one with a rear engine; one of the things we all worry about the most is a fire in your engine bay. Once a bus starts to go up, it's amazing how quick it can take hold, and destroy your pride and joy in minutes!

I've seen newly restored buses go up this way; it only takes a slight petrol leak from somewhere, so your bus doesn't necessarily have to be poorly maintained to catch fire. The system I have fitted to my bus is designed to fit in any VW Transporter, whether you have a front, or rear engine in it. In my opinion it was money well spent for the peace of mind!

The principle is a simple, self-activating system that offers versatile installation options and is completely safe against malfunction as it does not rely on complex electronics or the driver in its operation. Being sited in the engine bay, it automatically detects and deals with any fire before you may even be aware of the problem. There are several suppliers and versions and basically they utilise a flexible tube that acts both as detection and delivery system. The tube is a specially formulated plastic that is heat sensitive and the idea is if you have a fire, the hose will melt at a certain temperature, forcing CO2 or foam all over your engine. It will not go off unless you have a fire in your engine bay. So you don't have to worry about it going off accidentally if your engine is running a bit hot!

The system is very easy to fit; you only just have a couple of things to be aware of. The one I bought was 'The Fireflex System' at a cost of £95.00. I chose this one because it was the cheapest around as they all do the same job. You can contact them by phone:-020 82040200. They have a web site http://www.fireflex.co.uk and the email addy is sales@fireflexsafty.co.uk Firms like Cool Air also stock it. You can get bigger extinguisher bottles for a little more money, but I was assured by the suppliers that the one shown would be ample for putting out an engine fire, although they did recommend carrying an ordinary extinguisher still in your bus somewhere as a back up. They come in foam, powder, or CO2. I opted for the CO2, because you won't have to worry about cleaning up messy powder or foam if you do have a fire. Although all will do the job equally as well.

(Fig 1) shows you what you get in the kit, the bottle and flexi hose, the bottle fixing bracket, screws and sticky pads, and cable ties.



The first thing you need to do is decide where you are going to site the extinguisher bottle. If, like me, you have a big leisure battery in the spare battery compartment, then I found the best place to fit this size bottle was on the post just inside the engine bay as shown in **(fig 2)**. Drill two holes, and using the screws provided with the kit, screw the bracket to the post as shown.

As shown in **Fig 3** clip the bottle and flexi hose combined, to the bottle clamp you have just screwed on. Now this is one of the things you must be aware of, make sure you can see the bottle gauge, so face the gauge where you can see it at a glance so you can check the condition of the extinguisher bottle before you start to tie on the flexi hose.**(Fig 4)**

Carefully unravel the flexi hose without twisting it as you don't want to fracture it! **(Fig 5)**.

Then, as in **Fig 6**, if you have a rear engine like my 1972 Westy, tie the flexi hose with the ties provided to the cardboard grid above the engine, cutting off the ends of the ties when you have fixed them for neatness.

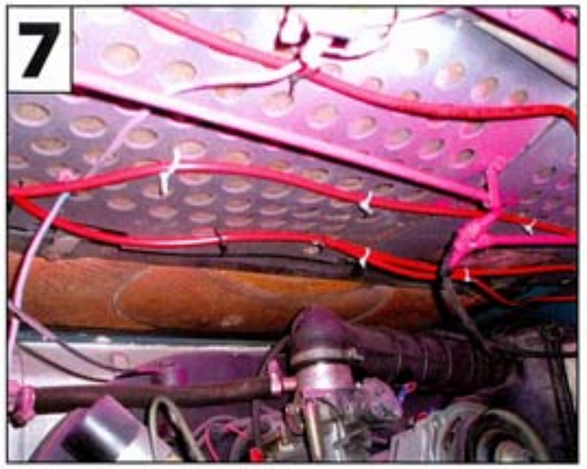


Fig 7 shows what it will look like when you have finished, the flexi hose should be snaked all around the top of your engine. Now the other thing you should be aware of is if like me you have a top engine hatch that you can get too from inside your camper, (some bays like my westy have them, and all type 25's). Then obviously you don't want to fix the flexi hose to this, otherwise you won't be able to get the hatch open! There is still plenty of space you can fix the hose to without having to fix it to the hatch.

Another excellent similar system is that manufactured by Firetec UK, which Jim Merrin profiled for us in a How To back in Issue 18 (still available as a back issue). Firetec units can also be supplied with built-in passive switches, which operate by making or breaking chosen circuits on the dash. For example, they can be wired to set off an alarm, of flashing LED, or even cut the fuel supply to the engine. They also supply a stainless steel plastic tube protector called Chafeguard as an extra. For further information on this system visit the website at www.FiretecUK.com or e-mail info@firetecUK.com. Alternatively call 0870 240 2339 and ask for Tim, who will explain options and costings to suit your needs. Remember to tell him you saw the system in Camper and Commercial!

(Above) The Firetec system offers extra protection for the plastic tube with the optional Chafeguard, shown here. **(Right)** Jim Merrin sited his Firetec bottle by the side of the petrol tank in his Split.