

Messerschmitt KR200: The Fighter Plane That Became a Microcar

Presented by Greg Björkman - 11 June 2025 at CHC Seniors Meeting
By Charel Olivier

Tucked into the corner of a Cape Town car showroom, low-slung and gleaming under the sun, sits a machine unlike any other. It's not quite a car, not quite a motorbike - and definitely not quite sane. With three wheels, a throttle on the handlebars, and a cockpit that looks like it belongs in a WWII dogfight, Greg Björkman's 1958 Messerschmitt KR200 is an unlikely star. But, as every show-goer quickly learns, it's also impossible to ignore.

Greg's journey with this eccentric German oddity began, quite unexpectedly, in 1980. Just starting out in the engineering trade, he was approached to inspect a couple of unusual cars owned by a missionary. One of them - a red, three-wheeled microcar with Messerschmitt badging - caught his attention.

"Could be the very same one I own now," he muses. "Same shape, same quirks. Stuck with me ever since."

He didn't get to keep it then. But fate has a long memory.

Fast-forward nearly 40 years. While picking up a brass-era Model T Ford from a freight warehouse, Greg spotted a familiar silhouette in the corner of the lobby: a Messerschmitt KR200. "I made a cheeky offer," he grins. "Didn't expect them to take it. But they did - so I fetched the trailer fast before they changed their minds."

Bringing It Back to Life

Bringing the KR200 home was one thing. Getting it roadworthy was another.

After decades of sitting, the car smoked like a damp bonfire and the clutch refused to grip. The suspension had sagged, the gears wouldn't hold, and replacement parts were rare - and expensive. "Germany, the UK... they charge a fortune," Greg says. "But Argentina? Way cheaper."

Thanks to a parts supplier there, he sourced critical rubber suspension components and clutch parts for a fraction of the usual cost.

But every fix revealed another riddle. The 191cc Sachs two-stroke engine was never meant for simplicity.



Greg entertaining the audience at the Seniors' meeting

"To reverse, you literally start the engine backwards," Greg explains. "Same motor, just running in reverse. Four forward gears, four reverse gears - depending on how you fire it up. One wrong twist and you're launching backwards."

And it's not just the drivetrain that's unconventional. The car's controls, inspired by aircraft engineering, are as unorthodox as its design.

"You steer with handlebars, not a wheel. Change gear mid-turn, and you might change lanes by accident."

No wonder Greg avoids taking it into traffic. "You sit lower than a truck's axle. Delivery drivers look down at you like you're in a toy."

Wartime Roots and Peacetime Ingenuity

The Messerschmitt KR200 was never meant to be a car - at least not in the traditional sense. After World War II, Messerschmitt, the

famed German aircraft manufacturer, was banned from producing planes. Looking for a new direction, the company turned to engineer Fritz Fend, who had designed a three-wheeled invalid carriage for wounded soldiers.

Together, they developed the KR200: a lightweight, affordable microcar built in converted aircraft hangars using aircraft principles. The early models had bubble canopies and motorcycle-style controls. They were cheap, efficient, and - thanks to Germany's shattered postwar economy - exactly what many people needed.

"They called them 'Kabinenrollers' - cabin scooters," Greg explains. "Perfect for two people, and cheap to run. But they weren't practical for families or serious driving. Once people could afford real cars, these faded out."

Roughly 40,000 KR200s were built between 1955 and 1964, with some high-performance "Tiger" versions boasting four wheels and

nearly 20 horsepower. Today, surviving examples - especially the rare four-wheelers - are hot collector's items.

Not Just a Car - A Conversation Starter

At local shows, Greg's KR200 is always a favourite. With its diminutive size, airplane DNA, and outlandish details, it draws attention from kids and car buffs alike. "Everyone wants to know what it is," he says. "Once I start telling the story, they're hooked."

That story includes a lot of late-night tinkering, a couple of botched oil choices, and a steep learning curve. "I had to relearn how to drive it, maintain it, even start it properly. And finding a neutral gear? That's a mission on its own."

Still, Greg wouldn't trade it for anything. "It's not practical, it's not fast, and it's absolutely terrifying to drive in traffic," he laughs. "But I love it."

**Quick Facts -
Messerschmitt KR200
(1955-1964)**

- Engine: 191cc Fichtel & Sachs 2-stroke single-cylinder
- Power: 10 hp @ 6,500 rpm
- Top Speed: 90 km/h (56 mph)
- Fuel Economy: 3.2 L/100 km (87 mpg)
- Transmission: 4-speed with 4 reverse gears (engine reverses direction)
- Brakes: Cable-operated drums on all three wheels
- Total Produced: 40,000 units
- Design Quirk: Bubble canopy, handlebar steering, and airplane-inspired cockpit.



*Is it a bike or a trike or a car?
That is the question.*



*It may not be pretty, but the Messerschmitt definitely
has personality*



The internal body is as extraordinary as the external

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