

# It Takes Five Months and \$20,000, But It's the Perfect No-Wax Shine

By ANN MONROE

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

NEW YORK—Eric Staller's 1967 Volkswagen Beetle—a car never known for its elegance—is in some ways worse than most. Because of the wiring and fixtures crammed inside its body, the windows no longer roll down. And when the generator behind the back seat begins to roar, conversation is practically impossible.

But when darkness falls, it's indisputably the flashiest thing on the road.

With the help of an assistant, Mr. Staller spent five months and \$20,000 of his own money trimming the VW from bumper to bumper with a stubble of light bulbs—1,659 of them. Controlled by a computer mounted above the windshield, the lights flicker in 23 patterns, delighting and astonishing pedestrians and passing motorists. "It's the most fun I've ever had in my life," says Mr. Staller, "and certainly as an artist."

## 'One Step Further'

Mr. Staller, a former architect and photographer whose fascination with light and movement led him to sculpture, says the idea for the car evolved from his earlier, immobile works. "They were forms similar to rockets and space vehicles covered with lights," he says. "I decided to take it one step further and create my own un-

identified flying object. I wanted it to look like NASA gone berserk."

Since the car's completion four months ago, it has been to Chicago and back, and Mr. Staller is thinking of driving it to the West Coast—a risky proposition, given that no one will insure it. He says that he now has a commission for a light-covered pickup truck but is dreaming of a project that will really get his aesthetic endeavors off the ground. "An airplane might be dangerous," he concedes. "Maybe a blimp."

## But Is It Legal?

There are still a few bugs in the Beetle, though. The lights, for example, sometimes fail because of the incompatibility between the computer and the generator. Also, the car's status under New York City traffic regulations is questionable: Mr. Staller is pulled over frequently (most often just for a closer look) and has been ticketed twice.

Popular opinion, however, seems to be on his side. When one policeman insisted that Mr. Staller turn off the display while he wrote the ticket, the crowd that had gathered around the car began to chant, "Light it up. Light it up." When Mr. Staller obliged, they applauded.

That's as it should be, Mr. Staller believes. "Something that makes this many people feel good," he says, "should be above the law."