

Reinventing the Wheel: Belarus Artist Still Driving His Home-Made Soviet Car

By [Aliaksandr Hoishyk](#)

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Artist Boris Karavkin with his homemade "Fantasy" car.

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It wasn't easy to buy a car in the Soviet Union. Usually, the first thing to do was to sign up on a decade-long waiting list to register your interest in owning a vehicle. Secondly, you needed to save what was then a huge sum of money; a new Zaphorozhets cost the equivalent of about 30 times the average monthly salary.

A few people found a different way, however — assembling cars with their own hands. One such person is Boris Karavkin, an artist from Minsk, who spent five years making one in his spare time. Now retired, Karavkin has been driving his 'Fantasy' for more than 40 years and is preparing the car for an upgrade.

Karavkin says he gained the necessary technical skills to make his car while working at a

weapons factory, and took inspiration for the design from popular science magazines. One of the main problems at those times was a lack of car parts on sale; a problem that affected many goods during the Soviet era.

To solve this, the artist drew posters and billboard signs for a car garage for four years in exchange for the necessary parts. Finally in 1973, when the car was ready, another obstacle popped up: an obligatory police registration of a "handmade" vehicle. As Karavkin says, it only became possible by "some miracle" — laws set such strict standards that self-assembly cars would not usually meet them.

When assembling the car, Karavkin used sliding doors, a swivel chair for the driver's seat and anti-theft nuts for hubcaps (the latter have always been popular with car thieves, the world over).

In 40 years, parts of the car have been replaced several times: the engine has been changed three times, the suspension and the air intake system were improved. But the 'Fantasy' has now travelled 300,000 km, and Karavkin says it has a maximum speed of 140 km/h.

Every year the car undergoes a mandatory inspection, like an MOT. This winter, Karavkin has been trying not to drive the car to avoid corrosion — the chassis doesn't have much resistance to new chemicals used in de-icers.

Though some foreign collectors are ready to pay up to €10,000 for the unusual car, Karavkin says he is not ready to sell "a part of his life".

A TUT.BY correspondent took a ride in the unique car, and asked what advice its creator would give to people keen on assembling their own car today. "I came up with this idea because I was longing to have a car. I could not just buy it in a shop so I had to spend five years of my life to assemble it by myself," he said.

"Therefore, my advice for the do-it-yourselfers who might want to "reinvent the wheel" as I did would be not to waste so much time on this venture. Buy a car from a dealer, now it is not a problem anymore."

A version of this article first appeared on [TUT.BY](https://www.tut.by). It was translated by Yuliana Korniyushko.

Watch the video here:

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