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Autoist

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How a '64 Bug got its original seating updated





Autoist

Since 1955

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ABOUT THE AUTOIST

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Driver's Seat

BY CLIFF LEPPKE ✉leppke.cliff@gmail.com

Was VW's 411 a luxury car?

If that vintage *Hot Rod* magazine throwback piece on VW's forlorn 411 left you puzzled (March/April AUTOIST), you're not alone. It's quite a leap to claim this auto was VW's first luxury car and last stab at the segment until the ill-fated Phaeton.

VW's American advertising proclaimed the 411 was a "big sedan full of extras at nothing extra." After you saw what the 411 had to offer, VW argued, you'd think it "silly to pay a lot of money for a big car full of nothing." In other words, the officially named 3-Door and 4-Door 411 Sedans offered value and VW's quirky nomenclature — as the 3-Door was a station wagon, a 2-Door Sedan arrived later.

In the '60s, VWoA employed Squareback and Fastback as names for its 1600cc Type 3 models. By 1971, VWoA called Fastback the Type 3, emphasizing its sporty nature, whereas the Squareback continued as Squareback. In Europe, though, Type 3 and Type 4 wagons were both dubbed Variants.

VW's ad agency until 1972 didn't use "station wagon" for the Type 3 Squareback sedan or 411 3-Door sedan. Instead, it called them sedans. It dubbed the Microbus a Station Wagon. For 1972, VWoA switched its naming strategies; the 411 3-Door Sedan became the 411 Wagon.

And as we'll see, those who road tested the 411 found VW's 411 MSRP was comparable to a deluxe

domestic compact — that's far short in price and stature from what Americans thought as luxurious.

VW's 411 model, introduced in the United States for 1971 — the same year as VW's Super Beetle — was, indeed, the brand's first American "sedan"

priced north of \$3,000 (\$3,300 per *Consumer Reports*; \$3,074, *Road and Track*) but it wasn't the first luxury VW — most claimed the Karmann Ghia deserved that status — especially the early ones, which *Road and Track* claimed was a "glamour model" (sic) for "richer folks" in October 1955. And as late as 1972, a Karmann Ghia convertible cost more than \$3,099, as tested by *Car and Driver*. Some carmaker prices included dealer prep fees and import taxes, while others outboarded these charges. Thus, the price comparison, here, is a bit like comparing apples and oranges.

And let's not forget the Campmobile. VW's transporter equipped for the great outdoors cost more than \$3,150 (*R&T*'s

figure) back in December 1956. So, despite VW's penchant for advertising low-cost auto-mobility, it dabbled in higher-cost vehicles before the 411 arrived. And then there's the Type 3 Karmann Ghia, which pushed VW pricing even higher than the other Karmann Ghia—\$3,990 in Australia.

(Factoring inflation, but not including safety features, standard equipment that once was considered

► TURN TO PAGE 28

VW AUTOIST 3

**NOW! A luxury touring car
for the price of a Volkswagen**

VW 411 The Big, Good Looking Volkswagen

Thought it would never happen? It's happened! A great big, beautiful Volkswagen. With all the luxury features of an expensive touring car. Four doors if you want them. Oh yes. Five-throw ventilation. Hot and cold. Automatic or manual. Radial ply tires. Spacious interior, with no hump on the floor in the back. Dual braking system. Big, padded seats. Whisper new suspension. Spacious comfortable seats. But the engine will out-pace any other in the back. Just like a Volkswagen. There are some things you just can't improve on.

Available in a range of four: 2-door, 2-door de luxe, 4-door de luxe, 4-door de luxe automatic. Priced from \$2,350 (including Sales Tax).

VW 411
THE BIG VOLKSWAGEN

A 1971 British ad for the VW 411, featuring "all the luxury features of an expensive touring car."

Small Talk

VW + AUDI AT A GLANCE

NEW & IMPROVED

NEW MANTRA: 'USA, USA': VW's America Group CEO Scott Keogh (right) was a popular interview subject around the rollout of the ID.Buzz in New York, and a common theme emerged: After years of malaise, VW is making an effort to be relevant in the U.S. The company is committing \$7.1 billion over five years in its drive to electrify America with new EVs, the centerpiece of which is the ID.Buzz, which made its world premiere at the New York show. The vehicle could be built eventually in the U.S. Keogh said at a media briefing that demand here for the Buzz is "through the roof."



EV NEWS

TRUCK TALK: VW executives continue to drop hints about building an electric truck. Keogh called the truck idea "the chance of a lifetime in this segment because electrification gives you a reset moment. It gives you a chance to bring some, let's say, alternatives and some new ideas into this great segment."

STATION UPGRADES: New "human-centered" charging stations in several cities in California and New York, complete with solar panel awnings and a lounge-like waiting area, are in the works for VW-owned Electrify America stations.

MONEY MATTERS

EV SALES SOAR: Volkswagen AG re-

ported sales of its all-electric vehicle models increased 65 percent in the first quarter of 2022 compared to the same period a year ago. The ID.4 was the group's most popular EV by a comfortable margin, outselling the second-place ID.3 by more than 17,000 units.

AVERAGE PRICE SOARS: The average price of a new vehicle in the United States is up 13% in the past year, to \$45,596, according to Edmunds.com. Average used prices have surged far more: They're up 29% to \$29,646 as of February.

COMPANY NEWS

DECLINE OF VW'S ICE CARS: VW announced it would halt production of dozens of models of internal

combustion engine cars by the end of the decade. Without signifying which models will be cut, the company plans to discontinue 60% of its gas- and diesel-powered models in Europe by 2030. VW still plans to invest \$59 billion by 2026 to launch new lines of electric cars.

RECALLS

FOUR MODELS: Certain 2021 and 2022 versions of the Tiguan and Taos have been recalled because they may have been fitted with defective rear suspension knuckles that can crack or break. In addition, 3,404 2022 model year GTIs and 865 Golf R's are headed in for a loose engine cover that could potentially melt and cause a fire.

AWARDS

MULTIPLE WINNERS: The 2021 ID.4 EV and 2021 Taos, have received 2022 MotorWeek Driver's Choice Awards. The ID.4 was named Best EV, while the Taos received the title of Best Small Utility. Auto-trader has named the 2022 Golf GTI to the website's annual Best New Cars list. The 2022 ID.4 has been named the Top EV Pick for Value by Cars.com, winning over editors with its range, starting price and wealth of standard features.

Retro Autoist

FROM THE VWCA ARCHIVES

10 YEARS AGO

MAY/JUNE 2012: The E-Bugster's removable hardtop seen at the North American International Auto Show in



January in Detroit has given way to a roofless version at Auto China in Beijing. It gives the best

hint yet of the look of the future Beetle Cabriolet and also shows the potential for VW's future all-electric drivetrains. *Post-script: The future Beetle cabrio didn't get a hardtop, but the Eos did.*

MAY/JUNE 2012: VW will begin to test 20 prototype E-Golf battery electric vehicles over a nine-month period in select U.S. locations. By studying E-Golf use across multiple geographical regions, VW will monitor the effect of climate, driving patterns and energy performance; the data and insights gained will be used in the final development of future EV technology applications.

20 YEARS AGO

MAY/JUNE 2002: VW has signed distribution agreements with Sirius Satellite Radio and XM Satellite Radio to offer VW and Audi customers in the United States a choice of services in the coming years. XM and Sirius are each offering 100 channels of digital audio entertainment coast to coast for a monthly fee. *Post-script: The two merged in 2008 and became Sirius XM Radio in 2011, now widely available in most makes.*

30 YEARS AGO

MAY/JUNE 1992: VW plans to lease 20 of its City-stromer electric cars to the



state of Bavaria in Germany in a two-year test of the vehicles on public roads. Sixty of the Golf II-based cars have been sold, at \$46,000 each (equivalent of \$94,200 today), to corporations, but none of those cars are used on public roads.

MAY/JUNE 1992: Ferdinand Piech, grandson of legendary Ferdinand Porsche, inventor of the Volkswagen, will become chief executive officer of Volkswagen AG next year. Piech, 54, will replace Carl Hahn, 65.

40 YEARS AGO

MAY/JUNE 1982: Customers taking delivery of new Volkswagens in Europe can now enjoy saving nearly \$1,000 on the purchase of a Jetta, Rabbit Convertible, Scirocco or Quantum and up to \$1,500 on the Vanagon Camper L with Deluxe interior.

MAY/JUNE 1982: Following the lead of VWoA, Volkswagen Canada has announced a service program designed to reduce hydrocarbon emissions and to improve oil economy. The program is being made available to owners of 1977-79 Rabbits and Sciroccos and consists of replacing original equipment valve stem seals with new VW versions.

50 YEARS AGO

MAY 1972: Steel belted radial ply tires, once the exclusive domain of Michelin, are gaining popularity in Europe. Every large tire manufacturer there is offering this version. It is estimated that 20% of all German-made cars are factory equipped with such tires.

60 YEARS AGO

MAY 1962: The top door prize that will be awarded at this year's convention will be a Model 221 Volkswagen Station Wagon. Donated by VWoA, this wagon will be awarded to a lucky member after the Saturday banquet. Anyone in attendance and in good standing is eligible.

1964 BEETLE



NEW UPHOLSTERY BLOSSOMS

VW's advertising made the air-cooled Beetle's anachronistic body shape a virtue. In an era where Detroit annually rolled out new wrappers on its chassis, VWs, in contrast, looked startlingly the same year to year. As such, buying an evergreen Bug supposedly assured you a ready supply of parts and an opportunity to drop out of the rat race.

The latter notion hit a nerve as many Americans were concerned about planned or forced obsolescence. The issue wasn't shoddy products, which is how some experts interpret these words. Instead,

How a Bahama Blue Bug's interior returned to its original harmonizing hue



At bottom, the original corded seat underneath its blue-green vinyl re-cover.

designer Brook Stevens, likely the foremost planned-obsolescence apologist, claimed the goal was planned product improvements, often stylistic, which served as inducements to buy new items before the old ones wore out. This design philosophy lured you into trading in your formerly fashionable car because it appeared dated. It was about keeping up with the Joneses.

Stevens argued planned obsolescence stimulated demand, grew the economy and benefited everyone, as your not-very-old chariot found a second life. A less affluent motorist acquired your heavily depreciated

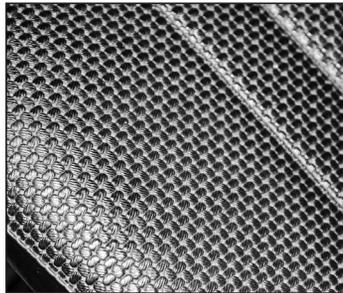
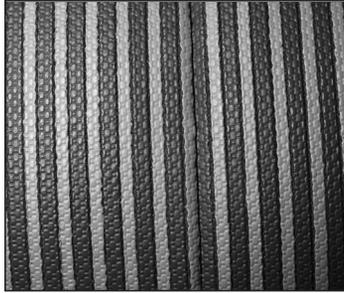
By Cliff Leppke ✉ leppke.cliff@gmail.com

car as bargain transportation. This process kept Stevens, manufacturers and others employed. VW's amazing success in the USA, in contrast, proved, so it seemed, that Americans wanted sane design, not Detroit's dizzy fashion-forward fetishes, such as cantilevered tailfins.

Or did it? Look closely at the 1964 model-year Bug. You'll see evidence that VW, contrary to the ads, shifted aesthetics, yes fashion, from year to year. For example, VW color-keyed/coded exterior and interiors in harmonizing hues. Sometimes these combos were year specific — more on this complex twist later. Fender welting, for example, matched the body color. And that's just the start. A Bahama Blue sedan (fresh color for '64 and used through 1966) came with color-keyed wheels. The discs or wheel centers were Black (L41) surrounded by Blue/White rims (L289). A Black Beetle, in contrast, wore Pearl White (L87) rims with Black centers. Bahama Blue came with Alpine Blue running board mats, whereas a Sea Blue car wore Satin Blue mats.

Inside, a 1964 Bahama Blue Bug sported bright, easy-to-clean, vinyl upholstery, a (74) Blue Cord pattern with subtle basket-weave emboss and indented grooves (not the same basket-weave that arrived for 1966). Those items updated the car's image. This striped look lasted one model year. Several more cord colors — 70 Grey, 73 Red and 71 Brown — complemented exterior shades. Those who shopped for Black Bugs could, according to VW's color booklet, select gray or red-cord seats.

Door cards and rear quarter panel covers, likewise, varied. The '64 Bahama Blue car donned something close to Light Blue centers flanked by Dark Blue outer bits. A Sea Blue VW wore a different combo, a two-tone gray scheme. Some sources say the 1965 model-year cars featured revised card-color schemes. A blue 1965 Beetle I dismantled, however, shared my



TOP: The new cover design made by West Coast Classic Restorations. **BOTTOM:** A larger black basket-weave style from the early '70s, called leatherette.

1964's hues.

For 1965, VW switched to mesh-patterned vinyl seats. It also altered how the contrasting side panels fit. For '64, the VW covered the entire top surface of seat bottoms and seat backs with a corded pattern surrounded by welt piping. For '65, the mesh material truncated below the seat-back's upper edge. Here, VW attached and wrapped solid-color vinyl over the seat's top and down the back. Welting no longer ran transversely along the seat's top.

Then for 1966, VW changed the look, again. It chose a simpler monochromatic interior scheme where, say, a white car came with red interior trim and a Bahama Blue was all black — two-tones were out. VW, furthermore, introduced a larger basket-weave vinyl or leatherette seating surfaces, a VW staple, as this leatherette style was a “mandatory” option on most VW sedans until at least 1973. Leatherette upholstery and often white-wall tires, which upped the car's modest price, were outboarded (extra cost options). This let VW advertise a low base price.

Back (seat) to the future

One functional seating change, which many don't understand, was the 1965 Beetle's folding rear seat. While it's true you could fold the aft seat's back on earlier models, the '65 Beetle's rear seat-back's redesign allowed it to fold flatter. And its back side sported durable material meant to support weighty cargo. And you could strap this section down, forming a sturdy platform. This was useful but, alas, access through the car's doors remained awkward.

VW's interior and exterior color trends stabilized toward the early 1970s. It simplified the Beetle's appearance — black running board mats, regardless of exterior color and eventually Chrome-colored wheels (L91) or what many call Argent Silver, again regardless of exterior color. >>

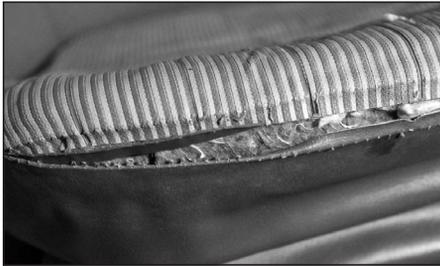
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Under the covers

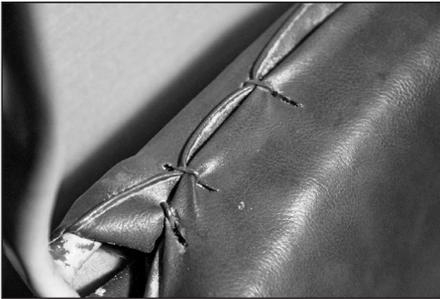
The subheading sounds like a romance novel title. And like those mass-produced fictions, you can find intriguing things inside an unrestored vintage VW. For instance, I found my 1964 Bahama Blue VW in Little Rock, Arkansas, nearly 40 years ago. I bought it from its first owner. I saw it on a downtown side street with a for-sale sign in its window. I knew from first glance it was a 1964 Bug — the only year squirted this color shade that bore the late-1950s small side windows. Yes, dear reader, there was a time when I played car spotter, demonstrating an uncanny ability to peg car models and model years — an unexpected planned obsolescence fetish.

This lonely VW got my attention because the exterior paint was mostly original. Plus things like the deteriorating color-keyed running board mats, with wide stainless steel trim caught my eyes — as I never saw a Wisconsin Beetle sporting these pieces due to rust. All wore newer black running boards with thin side moldings.

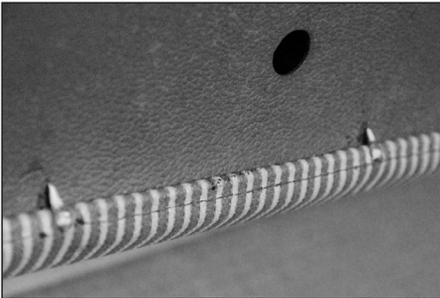
Inside my Bug, a “fasten seat belt” sticker modified the painted dashboard. The door cards and rear quarter covers were two-tone, light green centers (VW called these Blue) with dark gray upper and lower sides (VW called this Dark Blue). The front seats were re-covered with



Failed stitching on the original upholstery.



Hog rings used to replace the original upholstery.



Original barbs attached to the hardboard cover.



Seat back cover torn from barbs.

blue-green vinyl surrounded by sparkling chrome-like welt piping — *tres chic!* Hog rings, round, nail-like, C-shaped metal fasteners, attached these around the seat frames.

VW didn't use hog rings. Instead, it employed barbs or cleats, which perforated the seat upholstery. The original covers' lower regions were neatly finished with wires sewn into a loop formed by rolling the fabric around them. After one worked these covers over the seat padding, springs and frames, you pulled the wires tightly, which wrapped the covers around the frame. Then, you attached this, pulling it over the barbs, poking through the looped fabric where the wire reinforced the material.

Thus, I knew the front seats weren't factory items, but the soiled rear seat with its ripped and floppy cord pattern cover caught my fancy. I'd never seen a VW with such loud “Yikes it's Stripes” upholstery. And as I learned, nearly no-one knew about this style. One reason, according to *Road and Track's* survey of Beetle owners, was “a rash of bad upholstery stitching in 1964.” Simply put, the 1964's problematic seating material exploded. The set cover stitching unraveled alarmingly quickly and the vinyl seating surfaces split. Side panel material, however, was robust. And the contrasting plastic welting usually

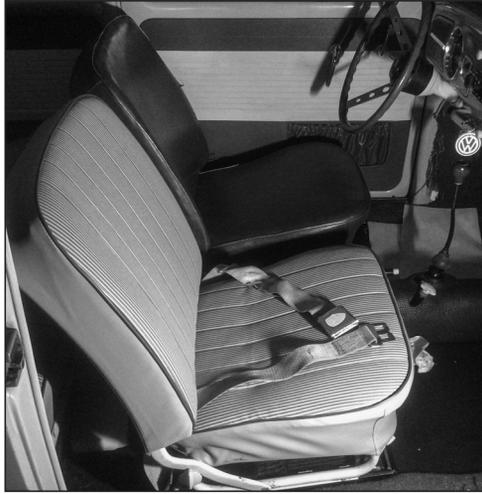
lasted, although not attached to its mates.

I left my Beetle well enough alone, fixing the worn floppy front suspension, correcting brake repair mistakes and solving cylinder 4's (not 3!) leaky sparkplug hole. I did, however, repaint the wheels, which someone had recoated in bright white. I used the spare-tire's untouched wheel as my guide (found under the front lid's cover). My local paint shop's staff knew the color codes. They didn't even look them up!

While my car's ratty looking interior had its own special vibe, I searched car shows and upholstery stores seeking someone who sold cord pattern material suitable for fabricating new seat covers. About four years ago, I connected with Lenny Copp at West Coast Classic Restorations, a VW specialist, and asked whether he could make my car's seats look their original best. Copp said he had enough of the original German blue-cord pattern for the project but made me promise not to hog-ring his handiwork. He reminded me that his covers, which slide over the seat frame, padding and springs like pillowcases, are sewn to fit like items in a department store's domestic section. They were, he claimed, "Wolfsburg approved."

In addition, Lenny, as he's known, wanted me to hire an auto upholstery expert to tackle the front seat bottoms. He sewed a loop of fabric under these covers. One tacks this loop to the horse hair (coconut, actually) seat padding to prevent the cover from shifting. It also produces a taut, indented fit. My 1972 Squareback's original seats have the same bottom attachment concept, but VW simply looped a row of threads over the seat cover and around the padding below it. Yes, you can see the threads, no buttons or material hides them — apparently VW needed to shave a few pfennigs.

The next part went aesthetically askew. I asked for



View of the newly covered passenger seat and the yet-to-be completed driver's seat.

the blue-cord pattern with dark piping meant to match the darkest cord stripe with side panels matching that dark hue. That's the original look. And this shade matches the dark door card stripes. Instead, I received light-gray side panels. Lenny used this hue for another 1964 Bahama Blue car whose owner requested it. This person wanted light gray because he used reproduction two-tone gray door and quarter panel cards meant for a Sea Blue Beetle. The Bahama Blue car's running board mats, seat cov-

ers and door cards haven't been reproduced — Wolfsburg West, for example, doesn't offer them. Neither does Mid America Motorworks or TMI, a popular vendor.

Because Lenny charges a mint for his covers — his workmanship is lovely — I didn't return his seat upholstery kit and request a redo. Instead, I went forward with my car's interior restoration using Lenny's "master pieces."

Before I began my seating redo, I consulted VW's 1200cc Beetle service manual. One chapter covers re-covering VW seats. I'd later discover VW's manual depicts at least one corded seat cover but doesn't show changes VW made to the 1200cc Bug's seat frames. For example, my '64 Bug's front-seat back covers don't attach via barbs. Instead, you pull the seat covers over the springs, padding and frames and then tuck the reinforced front and back ends of the covers into grooves in the frame's bottoms. Lenny's covers fit this perfectly — well, almost perfectly.

Next, I ordered seat padding. I opted for Wolfsburg West's reproduction hair-type padding, as I wanted that OEM feel and smell. I tried in vain to locate OEM seat wadding or batting. VW covered the horse hair with wadding/batting — usually the sides. This does at least three things: one, it creates softer, smoother seat corners; two, it reduces chafing; and three, the >>

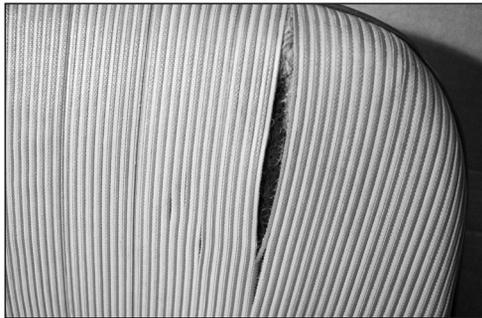
BEETLE

pillowcase-like cover slides more easily over the padding — a boon to anyone doing this task. Neither the Wolfsburg West's nor Mid American Motorworks' wadding matched the OEM stuff, which looks like thin felt composed of various fabric bits.

So I bought cotton batting from Jo-Ann Fabrics, which better matched the original material's thickness. I also bought a mesh-like spring cover material (described as pet screening) meant to prevent the seat springs from gouging the padding. This was thinner than the material sold by Mid American for this purpose. Thin for this purpose is better.



Hair padding fails to conform to the shape of the springs.



Typical vinyl seat cover split.

Bodice ripper?

After I assembled this collection of materials or “materiel,” as this was more like fighting a war, I began the process of uncovering my car's old seats. I either removed hog-ringed covers or pried up barbs, released wires and tugged off the seat covers. Talk about a bodice ripper! This is where the intrigue began as I found remnants of VW's original seat covers under the re-covers. And that's not unusual as car upholstery shops often fabricate new covers, add some new padding and then slide them over the old ones. Then they hog-ring them in place.

The best example was the front-right seat bottom. All OEM bits were under the re-cover. This showed a big change from Lenny's bottom cover — the original corded material ended at the seat bottom's back edge. There, VW sewed a panel in a color matching the front and side panels. The original cover's bottom was reinforced and tugged tightly around the seat frame. Wires, sewn into all four sides, let you cinch

the cover's open end. Then you attached it via those barbs.

Lenny, however, extended the corded material, wrapping it over the seat bottom's back and then, because his creation was inches longer, it didn't align with the seat barbs. Instead, I hog-ringed; his creation to the spring frame a few inches forward from the frame. That's the same spot the previous upholstery outfit picked. Lenny sewed a nylon tie string into this cover's side and front panels. This lets you cinch three sides of the cover. I fashioned a metal rod from an old coat hanger, slid it into a slot Lenny provided in order to affix the corded back section to the seat spring assembly.

Another deviation: the original front seat bottom wasn't tacked to the hair padding. This step, which Lenny and VW's service manual recommends, wasn't extant on my car — likely another 1964 change.

The blues

I ran into an assortment of seat-covering woes: one, the molded hair padding fits ever so tightly over the seat spring assemblies. Nonetheless, sometimes padding corners are squared off rather than rounded. This causes lumps at the seat edges; two, this padding sometimes didn't fully cover or conform to seat springs or frames. For instance, the front seat back padding doesn't bow inward and the bottom doesn't wrap around the spring frame. I ran into the same issue with the rear seat-back padding. It didn't wrap around the bottom edge. Plus, like the front backs, the padding didn't fit the contours accurately.

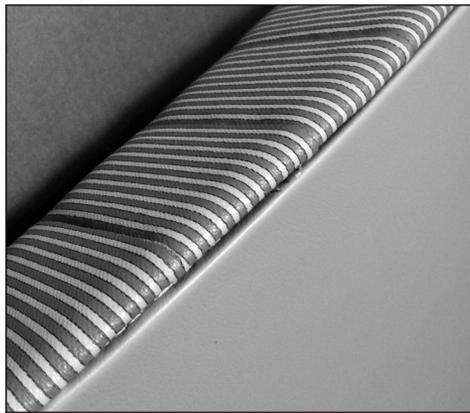
Therefore, I tacked the horse hair padding in place

using wax-coated nylon thread. This improved the padding's fit — a tad less fight with compressing the padding while sliding the new covers over it. A third issue was Lenny's rear seat back cover — VW attached a hardboard panel to cover the seat's back. You place its bottom edge over the seat's barbs later used for the front fabric's attachment. Lenny's softer material for this purpose was neatly sewn and had punched holes in it matching the original design. But because this piece was soft, the tension required to pull the rest of the cover over the seat and then onto those barbs ripped it at each attachment spot. I'll have to fabricate a repair at a later date. Fourth, Lenny created the OEM seat-cover groove by pleating the cord pattern fabric. This, however, creates lumps at the seat cover edges. In addition, this extra thickness makes it very difficult to insert the front seat back covers into their attachment grooves. I had to pry that slot wider, which worked.

One thing Lenny doesn't include: rod-like reinforcements you slide into some covers. These thicker wires hold the material taut under and between the barbs. You must repurpose the original rods.

While I think my written words might sound like I'm unhappy with WCCR's upholstery kit. That's not true. These covers are nicely made, fabricated to ape the original look. They're fantastic.

Besides the new material fit issues, I ran into several unhappy bits of this car's history. While the passenger's front seat bottom was simply over-covered,



Note the tight fit of Lenny Copp's covers with no rings.

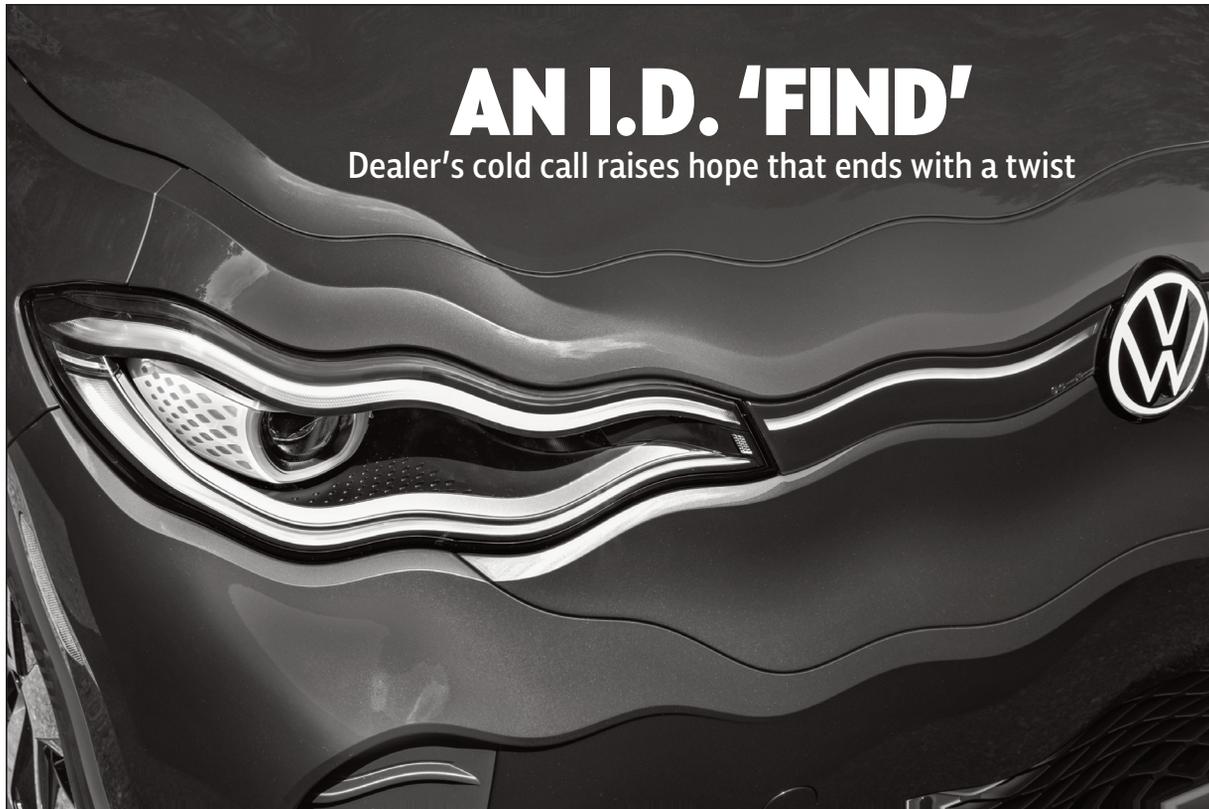
the driver's seat didn't share that happy fate. Instead, someone removed that OEM upholstery, smashed the barbs flat, put thick padding over the worn original horse hair

and then hog-ringed it. Thus the barbs broke. WW sells new barbs — they're larger than the originals. You can weld them to the seat frames. And on the seat back, the original hardboard cover-fitted between the seat frame and the spring assembly was missing. You want this cover as it protects the cover and a rear passenger's knees from unhappy encounters. WW sells a reproduction.

Other issues included bent left front seat spring assemblies. And the bottom edge of the rear seat bottom's cover tended to bow be-

tween the barbs. Blame new softer vinyl for this. Lenny reinforced the bottom cover "wrap" with a flexible nylon string rather than stiffer wire. I improvised. I employed binder clips to hold the fabric taut and then tacked it in place with clear nylon thread. Binder clips proved helpful when fitting the spring cover material in place. Used them to hold it tight while using wax-coated nylon thread to attach this protector to the frame. Some might use hog rings. I didn't go that route as I wanted Wolfsburg smooth.

I've included a few shots of the my 1964 Beetle's new look. The seating surfaces now pop your peepers due to their fashion-forward motif. Judge for yourself. This car's seats have an authenticity often missing in the usual VW restoration. And now you know how seat fabric design sets the 1964 VW Beetle apart — even if it came apart. **VWCA**



About a year ago, when the ID.4 was beginning its slow ride from Germany into US showrooms, I'd gotten one of those cold calls from my dealer inviting a trade-in.

I mentioned that, way down the road, I was interested not in any VW but specifically an ID.4.

Months later, in early March, I got another call with a premise that would have earned an "A" in a marketing class.

Anyone paying attention knows that choked supply chains, worsened by war, have led to a shortage of new cars — and parts — and increased demand for used ones. So the pitch made sense: We need to maintain a certain level in the used-car stock, and the owner doesn't want to rely on auctions to sustain that level.

So our 2017 Passat was a tasty target for a hungry

used-car sale. And because I was a longtime loyal customer, a VIP program was established for people like me who would get an unbelievable trade-in allowance in exchange for a new model.

Well ... OK. But I was interested in the ID.4 and noted that they weren't going to be available in any numbers for months.

But we have one you can test drive.

Oh. ... Well ... why not?

So I was given (if memory serves) a five-digit number (are there that many VIPs?), agreed to a specific time to show up, and when I did, I was to ask for the VIP manager.

This must be a very big deal.

When I arrived, clutching my number securely, the greeter looked around randomly for the nearest

By Fred Ortlip ✉ VWAutoist@icloud.com

salesman and asked him to take care of me.

Hmmm, this didn't sound like the start of VIP treatment. I stashed my number in a pocket just in case.

He went out to fetch the RWD ID.4 model and off we went. (More on that later.) I'd mentioned that I was more interested in the AWD model that I knew was in the pipeline but ... wait for it ... he said two AWDs were arriving in three weeks!

Huh, I thought to myself. How did I, Mr. VIP get so lucky? Was I such a loyal customer who could make a big jump on a long waiting list to get a heavily sought-after car in short supply? Or maybe it was the Passat trade-in that burnished my status.

That must be it.

So we sat at his desk and discussed options. I had checked KBB.com for values on the Passat, and also my wife's 2011 low-mileage Corolla.

Yet his quote on both were about 2 grand under KBB's estimate. (And no mention that the Corolla would be out of trade-in consideration.)

Huh, I thought to myself. That didn't jibe with the original we'll-knock-your-socks-off phone call I got.

So, OK, we'll see what happens. I didn't want to jinx this by asking about any waiting list.

Later that day, I emailed questions that included leasing details. *Three days* later, the salesman responded that he'd get back with me.

Ten days later, with crickets still chirping, I emailed again. Anybody home there? The plot thickened when the mail arrived that day with one of those semi-generic dealer come-ons seeking a trade-in of ... wait for it ... the Passat.

Ah, ha! So that's the catch, and I mentioned as such in a prompt email to my salesman, who actually responded this time: We don't care which car you trade in, and I'll run some leasing numbers.

And the next day, he called with the numbers!

Huh, I thought to myself. Maybe this is legit after all.

In a week or so, the cars would arrive, and it looked like this might actually happen.

Then the cars arrived. But the call didn't.

As the weekend expired, I decided to call him. Wasn't in, left a message. Texted him as well. "What's up?" Crickets.

I called the sales manager and explained the situation and rather than getting an explanation, I was shuffled to "our ID.4 specialist, who will take care of you."

Huh, I thought to myself. This was turning out the way I expected and more oddly than I imagined.

The specialist apologized for the confusion, explained that those cars were, indeed, ordered for other customers, a fact that the salesman apparently wasn't aware of that.

Head-slap. How could this happen?

Specialist pitched the RWD as being great in snow and that with more than two dozen customers in line for AWD models, he suggested that ordering an RWD might expedite matters.

But for comparison, he also offered a brief drive of the AWD. He seemed knowledgeable about EVs, mentioning how the BMW i5 and Tesla models had superior software to the ID.4 but inferior build quality. He hears the complaints about the effects of those cars' "one-pedal driving," in which brake regeneration kicks in as the accelerator is lifted.

The ID.4 offers an on-off option of such braking, in which battery power is recuperated as the brakes create friction. Driving the ID.4 in such "B" mode offers a more abrupt version of downshifting a manual transmission to slow the car.

So, while a lot of critics have complained about the lack of true one-pedal driving in the ID.4, I rather like the option. It does take some getting used to. When you're just barely on the power, you can feel the weight of that virtual refrigerator you're about to drag. But you're getting a bonus: free fuel.

ID.4's brake regen doesn't bring you to a dead stop, but coming software promises that it will. And, yes, with regen turned off, the brake feel is unnervingly spongy, as critics have noted.

But what an experience to drive! The less perky RWD model reminded me of how my Passat performs, which is perfectly adequate in almost all situations.

But the 5.5-second 0-to-60 AWD is a GTI-like beast in straight-ahead mode — the headrest comes in handy during an energy-sucking blastoff. And as someone who has owned GTIs, that has some appeal.

But I'm hardly a lead-foot driver, so I felt a bit >>

ID.4

torn on which one to order. I decided to exercise the Amazon technique — “select a medium and large and return the one that doesn’t fit for a refund” — and ordered one of each, a Pro S both in Moonstone Gray. The ordering scheme requires a refundable \$100 downpayment, and when the lock-in date arrives, an additional \$400 is due.

My uneducated guess is that the RWD might have a better chance to be the first to reach lock-in status and that I could live just fine motoring from 0-to-60 in 7.5 seconds.

The two versions are essentially identical, and the “turtle” has more range.

It’s a win-win either way.

A steep learning curve

The ID.4 has earned plaudits for offering a comfortable transition for new EV drivers. With key in pocket, simply get in, press the brake pedal, select the driving mode and off you go. Press a button for park.

But make no mistake, the car and its associated charging apparatus and safety features are chocked full of technology, and the learning curve can be steep. Remember fumbling through your first smartphone? The owners manual is available online, comprising more than 400 pages (it’s for the UK market). Much of it is boilerplate info, but there’s more tech stuff to get familiar with than you’ve probably ever seen.

Among the numerous online “communities,” I found two that are excellent: VWIDTalk.com, a forum of more than 6,700 ID owners and enthusiasts who have created nearly 100,000 posts, all related to the growing number of ID vehicles worldwide.

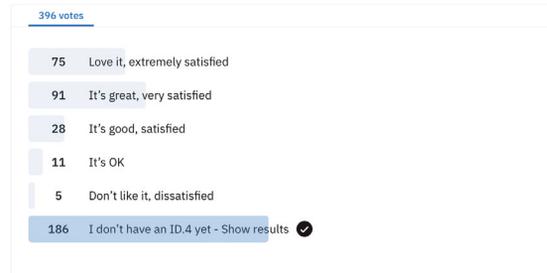
The social media bulletin board Reddit.com is another good one, and VWiD4Owners is the largest of the ID.4-related “subreddit” communities. The community was created last September and has topped 5,000 registered members and growing.

Both sites cover a wide range of topics, often with revealing feedback. Topics include dealer price-gouging, quirks and faults of the car, the sluggish and

r/VWID4Owners · Posted by u/Intrepid-Working · 731 4 days ago

How’s your ID4? Improved poll

I’ve already posted and now deleted a poll previously, which had a few big flaws. Same thing, I have a reservation and am wondering how you all like your ID.4



A poll in an ID.4 Reddit community reflects great feelings about VW’s new EV and a hefty number of members in waiting.

briburt · 2 days ago · edited 2 days ago

It’s a bug in the app on phone screens of a certain size. There’s no workaround except to use the app on a different device like an iPad or phone with a different sized screen.

They also screwed up the login process (FaceID no longer works for PIN entry on iPhones) and the data refresh function, which always throws an error when you pull to refresh (you have to force quit and re-log in to refresh the screen).

It’s embarrassing that they let this turd of an app even be released. I didn’t think they could make Car-Net any worse, but somehow they found a way.

I imagine a new version of the app might fix these issues, but knowing how incompetent the VW app devs and QA engineers are, I’m sure that they’ll break something else.

5 ↓ Reply Give Award Share Report Save Follow

A typical response to a gripe about the myVW app’s inability to moderate the climate control remotely, among other normally routine tasks.

somewhat complicated touchscreen as well as the re-viled myVW app. As expected, you’ll hear of the months-long angst of just waiting for that first milestone, the lock-in date, when the next of seven sluggish steps in the ordering process is reached. Or the lottery-winning joy of someone who was able to snap up a canceled order.

My late March order was projected for mid-summer delivery, obviously a prewar estimate now badly out of date. In the real world, folks with October orders were just getting lock-in notices in March.

The logjam should ease when the Chattanooga plant starts production, which VW has said will begin in September or October, dates that already have been pushed back from a late summer projection.

Maybe Christmas will come early this year. **VWCA**

CHICAGO AUTO SHOW



ROOM TO STRETCH OUT

Mirroring the show itself, VW offers a no-frills display

Two years had passed since I'd attended an auto show, so I was excited to see what was in store at the 2022 Chicago Auto Show. Last year, a scaled-back, outdoor summertime show was held here, which I skipped, but the usual show was back on track in its usual February slot on the calendar.

Chicagoans for decades have looked forward to the show as something to break up the dark, cold days of winter regardless of whether they were looking to buy a car or not. Considering COVID's impact on our lives and the car industry, and the already shrinking list of manufacturers participating in auto shows, I wasn't quite sure what to expect and of Volkswagen's participation. It was markedly different on both fronts.

The Chicago show is typically the nation's largest,

with 1 million square feet split between two massive halls. This year, the entire show filled 840,000 square feet in one hall. The shorter list of participating manufacturers allowed room for six test tracks within the single hall. One could ride in Jeeps, Fords (two tracks at Ford), Ram or Toyota on tracks each had set up within their displays. An additional track was built for test driving an assortment of electric vehicles. While the ID.4 wasn't present at the EV test track, it was prominently displayed within Volkswagen's display.

It was good to see Volkswagen as the only German manufacturer at the show, but its display was much simpler than what I'd grown used to over the 39 years I've attended. As recently as two years ago, VW's display would feature custom flooring, special-

By Tom Janiszewski ✉ volkstom@sbcglobal.net

ized lighting, huge LED screens, displays filled with vehicle accessories and apparel, driving games and phone charging stations to keep people in the VW display. These displays were effective in capturing an image of good design and European flair and provided an attractive environment to compliment the cars on display.

This year's display was different. Architecture was limited to a riser/stage large enough for two cars with a wall behind it, a product specialist desk and the sign with the VW logo at the front corner of the display. Pristine white laminate flooring was replaced with simple carpet. There were no massive LED video screens running B-roll of VWs driving along scenic roads, or current VW commercials (I haven't seen a good VW commercial in quite some time, but that's another article...).

Volkswagen had a wonderful reputation of providing fun displays with all sorts of engaging elements to entertain and educate. Absent this year were computer kiosks to digitally build your VW, and those aforementioned accessory displays. As I looked at the simple display, I couldn't help but remember years where VW would have live demonstrations to highlight features and benefits as it did when the all-new 1985 Jetta was launched. Or the MANY years where an injection molding machine would churn out plastic pen holders shaped like VWs for the taking.

As for the cars themselves, SUVs dominated the display. Taos, Atlas, Atlas Sport, Tiguan and ID.4 models filled 90% of the floorspace. Both cars on the stage were SUVs. Three non-SUV models were on display: a Mk. 8 Golf R, one Arteon and one GLI. All three were parked in a back corner, but at least they

▶ **RELATED:** VW mostly ignores Milwaukee show, Page 32

were along a side aisle between VW and the neighboring display.

Why only the most expen-



Top-selling SUVs were prominently on display in VW's otherwise sparse exhibition space.



The eighth gen Golf R, one of just two Golf models still sold here.

...sive Golf available in the US was on display is anyone's guess. The GTI/R are all-new this year, but there was absolutely no fanfare stating as such. If the GTI/R show presence is any indication of any upcoming

CHICAGO

ing marketing/advertising efforts for those models, sales will be abysmal, and they'll go the same way as the regular Golf hatchback and SportWagen. I'm hopeful VW won't let these cars die due to lack of marketing attention.

Equally as head-scratching was the green vinyl wrap on the Arteon. The wrap job was so good that a couple journalists had to look closely to determine that the car's horrible finish was actually a wrap. Color is always subjective, but the finish was neither glossy nor matte, horribly scratched and simply looked flawed. While the color was attention-getting, it didn't exude quality.

The red 2022 GLI was the attention-getter of the three, and I was happy to see it had a six-speed manual transmission. Front- and rear-end styling is updated for '22 with a new bumper and grille up front, and a new rear bumper and valence. Noticeable interior updates include contrasting red stitching in the black leather upholstery and touch-sensitive steering wheel controls replacing textured physical buttons.

Volkswagen did not send any PR representatives to the Chicago show this year, but product specialists were present to answer questions about the '22 lineup. For me, it was great visiting with specialist Danielle Gumro, whom I'd first met 11 years ago when VW was launching the Chattanooga-built Passat. It was a relief to hear that while auto shows were on hold, Danielle and the other specialists were still working as VW of America shifted its show budget to corporate-sponsored ride-and-drive events. These events focused on ID.4 and resulted in vehicle order spikes wherever the events were held.

After being away for two years, it was good to be back at McCormick Place, walking around the VW



From afar, the green wrap on this Arteon looked interesting, until you got up close (inset).



Manual transmissions are rare, but this GLI has one with six speeds.



The Taos, VW's entry level SUV.

display, despite how pared down it was. As I looked around, I couldn't help but think about how exciting the VW display used to be, but am hopeful that as we continue to move out of the pandemic and the ID.Buzz arrives in the US, the excitement will return once again in the years ahead. **VWCA**

2022

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CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

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Volkswagen's venerable Golf has a special place in "autodom." It's an archetypal econobox and Wolfsburg's sport-motoring platform. The Golf-derived GTI, for instance, set the bar for good design, packaging, performance and fuel economy. As a result, GTIs have a devoted fan base. This review examines the new eighth-generation and relatively stealthy Golf R, a high-output, almost coupe-like Golf hatchback with all-wheel-drive.

VW invites you to rediscover high-horsepower fingerpainting. Choose your canvas, a snaky roadway is perfect. Your paintpot is a turbocharged 315-hp Lapaz Blue Metallic over Titan Black Leather Golf R with 19-inch wheels. Get in. Adjust the shell-like front throne. Grab the steering wheel. Apply the pedals. Press start. Wham! Zero-to-60 mph is yours in less than

five seconds. The \$44,640 R, as tested in Milwaukee's environment, inspires confidence — it's nimble, powerful and stable.

You feel like Jackson Pollock because you can pour the R down the road. Plus, it sticks well, too. Steering effort is splendid, the chassis is seemingly unflappable and directional changes are prompt. You can journey through MKE's high-rise expressway ramps unruffled by expansion joints. In short, it draws a good line. Plus, it creamed my backroad



course, twists, railroad tracks and all. It eagerly tamed a righthand turn with a dip and camber change. This R-tist went to automotive dance school. VW says the R can route power to just one rear wheel, reducing understeer.

The R stops as well as it goes. You modulate effec-

By Cliff Leppke ✉ leppke.cliff@gmail.com

GOLF R

tive two-piece, cross-drilled front rotors clamped by blue calipers via a firm, communicative brake pedal. Two-part discs have braking surfaces cast on metal spokes, which extend from the hub or hat. This manages brake rotor heat, reducing fade and vibration.

My six-speed manual tester lets you stir the gears; the engine's broad power band and idle-speed modulation make clutch-pedal work simple — you can one-foot launch it in second gear without throttle feathering. Shifter gate feel, especially the 3-4 slot, seemed vague. Come to a complete stop before applying the electric parking brake; it's aggressive. Some stick-shift drivers employ the “hand” brake as a driving aid — prevents inadvertent rolling when in neutral or with the clutch disengaged.

VW's hill-hold brakes reduce rollbacks. The parking brake also has a hold-like function; it automatically releases when you generate forward/rearward momentum at the clutch's friction point. The hill-hold feature engages when you meet certain conditions and firmly apply the foot brake. It works. I never stalled the engine. That said, if the car rolls backward while you're in neutral or have the clutch pedal depressed, the backup camera deploys. Motion, not gear selection, triggers camera views — interesting.

Touched by a demon

There's a fly in this car's painterly ointment. Many kids overexpress themselves in their first finger-painting episode — more mess than artwork. Likewise, VW mucked up its motoring artistry with a touch/talk/video display interface, which replaces conventional gauges, buttons and dials. VW places a 10.25-inch digital display in front of the driver. It's part of a black plastic band from the dash's left side to the center stack. On the cockpit's left, you'll find lights and defroster shortcuts. The configurable Digital Cockpit has various graphics for mph, rpm and mpg. One mode creates a horizontal rpm band atop the display, aping a vintage Buick's ribbon speedometer. Its colors vary indicating driving mode — green for the car's special track setting. Farther right is the



The touchscreen interface is the fly in this car's painterly ointment.

10-inch-wide touchscreen infotainment system, sans CD/DVD player.

Further complicating your fingers is the steering wheel's touch-action “switchgear.” It's nicely illuminated day or night — almost gem-like. But it's too much and too wrong. It feels like you're poking at marbles in a bag. Why did VW “fix” something that wasn't broken?

Want another example? Let's say you decide to set the cruise control after deciphering where to touch the left steering-wheel spoke. The next step requires a deft tap on either side of the space for selecting the radar-cruise distance. All too often I “brushed” distance instead of picking speed. Likewise, tapping the virtual home button on the touchscreen is like trying to operate a vending machine while twirling a hula hoop. Furthermore, swiping the display right-to-left to see radio data is flabbergasting, as vehicle jousting causes your finger to wander. This screen has a proximity sensor, so waving right-to-left should rectify this problem.

In addition, VW likely found a loophole in the USA's motor vehicle rules; it doesn't illuminate the temp adjustment touch points or volume controls on a trough below the touchscreen. Instead, at least four lit dedicated touch spots are found a bit lower, where you pick climate, drive mode, drive assist and self parking. These shortcuts summon touchscreen menus. Therefore, you can skip the Apple-like home icon, which lets you survey the app tiles — sometimes grayed out when you're in motion. Should you wish to turn off lane-keep assist, press the button on

► TURN TO PAGE 32

The Frontdriver

BY RICHARD G. VAN TREUREN ✉ rgvant@juno.com

Of Dashers, quantum theory, trade winds

A spot for the Click and Clack the “Tappet Brothers” on NRP radio featured a caller stating she had a Volkswagen Quantum, to which a brother retorted, “and you’re having trouble finding quantum mechanics?”

VW’s market research team that concluded consumers here could never connect with a name like “Passat” were possibly influenced by Detroit thinking when the major rework of the car code-named “B2” was being planned to replace the car with the North American name, Dasher.

To help convince car buyers that last year’s car was yesterday’s news, you make a clean break, nothing carried over from the previous model, especially the name. However, we’ve never found anyone to fess up to creating, or even a fair explanation, of “Quantum.”

Even with its sheetmetal screws biting the fenders to secure afterthought side-marker lights, we thought the early Dashers were pretty sharp looking. The bright green ones were real standouts. The larger replacement’s hodge-podge front end looked rather piecemeal, though it was simplified and cleaned up in later years.

Even outdoing Rabbit-to-Golf’s larger, heavier, less efficient and more expensive model revision three

year later, Quantum added a whole cylinder to Dasher’s still-in-line engine. We remember less of an emphasis on luxury marketing, more of an opportunity to carry more using the greater power of the in-line five.

Then came the Audi 5000 unintended acceleration “scandal” reported on CBS News’ “60 Minutes” in

1986 (and widely debunked). I remember carefully starting my dad’s 5000 the next morning, the hand brake ready to pull, wondering if the car was going to launch us through the washing machine, dryer and the back wall of the garage. Later, I wondered why Quantum owners, with the nearly identical five-cylinder drivetrain, hadn’t also jumped on to the unintended acceleration bandwagon. Might have had something to do with the fact that the next clients the lawyers went to bat for were Mercedes owners — this never seemed to trickle down to VWs.

Long after all that boiled down, we noticed some beads of diesel fuel on our high-mileage Jetta’s injection

pump. Fearing the worst, we made a hasty trade for a first-year (’82) tomato red Quantum wagon. (We were not tempted by the notchback version, which unlike the rather odd-looking Dasher, with its bizarre teardrop quarter window, as never imported into the US.) Long before CarFax, we eventually reasoned >>



FRONTDRIVER

it out that the car had been hit from the left front. When the driver's door was reinstalled or reworked, they'd not been able to put in the "vent" window post top screw in place, which made for a nasty whistle as we drove along.

One of our earlier AUTOIST pieces might have run this photo with a caption like, "The shut, open, and open-or-shut gaggle of VWs in our garage." Yes, they all fit!

Several "overheat" lights proved the five-cylinder had a design quirk that allowed any bubble of air in the system to work its way to the top — which just happened to be where the temp sensor screwed in. Wrenching that out, allowing the bubble to escape with a little coolant,



A bump on the road.



ABOVE: Inquiring minds are wondering: how do you fit from left, a Quantum, Rabbit Pickup (an '80 model with unintended blocking mirrors) and Rabbit Convertible in this garage? **RIGHT:** A later model Quantum's cleaner front-end design was an improvement over the previous. **BELOW RIGHT:** Quantum-style camping.



cured each "overheat" episode.

If memory serves, this same malady plagued our next Q-ship, an '84 silver wagon. Most likely never having been in an accident, Long Silver nonetheless had annoying roof leaks owing to aftermarket glass sunroofs the original owner added. We do not seem to have a photo of the '84, save the one taken right after an old man ran a red light and smashed



into our left rear quarter panel. After its Frankenstein-like quarter-rear replacement, it's fair to say both our two Q-ships served rather well for their service lives, which carried us right into the trade winds era, the airy genesis of the Passat name.

Glamping in the Q-ships

Having published an article about Rabbit camping

in *VW & Porsche* magazine, it was only logical to add some spandex to the Caranex tent (from the UK) so it would fit around the larger Quantum bumper. Everything you see with Debbie in the picture is still part of our camp setup — the “TrailCooker,” the chairs-to-loungers, given some re-working, supported us at Sun-N-Fun 2022. Only the “Chable” seems to have shrunk over the decades, now incompatible with enlarged waist-lines. **VWCA**



Debbie VanTreuren poses with a variety of outdoor kitchen tools.



VWCA membership meeting scheduled June 18 in suburban Chicago

Although the VWCA's “annual” membership meetings were curtailed due to the pandemic, the drop in case rates has allowed viable meeting venues to reopen (and restaff). Our meetings will resume, but be prepared that current mitigation protocols will be in place at the time of the meeting.

The 2022 meeting will be held on Saturday, June 18 at Sweet Baby Ray's Barbeque, 800 East Higgins Road, Elk Grove Village, Illinois. You can join us for lunch at noon (on your own), then stay for the meeting, which will start around 1 p.m. To view the moderately priced menu, visit srbqqelkgrove.com/menu.

All members are invited to attend, voice their opinions on club matters discussed and vote on decisions made by the membership. This meeting, previously held in conjunction with our annual convention, will satisfy the requirements of our constitution and by-laws.

No registration is required, but attendees are responsible for their own accommodations for lodging if necessary.

If additional information is needed, write to VWCA, P. O. Box 154, North Aurora IL 60542, or email VWClub@aol.com. **VWCA**



Fix It Safely

BY GEORGE LAMBESIS ✉vwcruzin3rdgeo@gmail.com

Spring garage makeover

This spring I am reorganizing my garage (again). I've been collecting VW engine stuff, and it's getting crowded.

Lately, I've been to a VW garage where a retired engine builder had plenty of parts used to build engines and sell at swap meets. He also taught at a Volkswagen training center.

Lots of stuff new and used but in good condition. As I looked around his garage it was very neat and organized. My garage (see picture) may not look organized, but I know were most things are.

But I have a problem with the excess stuff getting in the way. For example, to adjust the wall clock to daylight-saving time, I had to squeeze between two tool chests, vehicle rotisserie and other objects that if I tripped and fell, I would've banged my noggin' and be laid up for a time.

My problem can be your problem, too. Dangers ga-



In George's garage, everything you need is right there — somewhere.

lore, air hoses on the floor, light cords, reaching for a part on a distant shelf and more can come tumbling down and hitting me. Yes, I've been there. My friends ask, "Where did you get that eye shiner?"

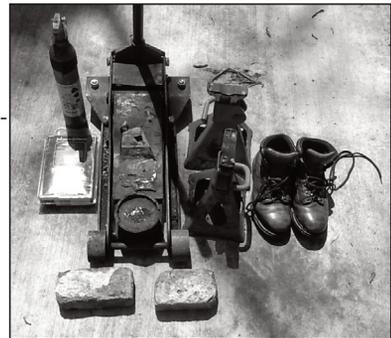
Other dangers include oils, grease, small pieces of metal and the big one: gasoline and electricity. I have three fire extinguishers in my garage, but can't always see them because of stuff in the way.

Batteries on chargers. More cords stretched to VWs on the floor. Oh, my, what to do? The air hose should be elevated, light cords go cordless. Wipe up the oil and grease, kitty litter works well as well as brake clean.

One of my organization ideas came to light: what about the ceiling? I have a 13-foot ceiling, built with 4x4 foot platforms and a pulley system to raise up and down. Yes, that would work. Put VW stuff in plastic bins and label what's inside. That will free up floor space. Right???

Proper attire is important, too. In a garage, tools can slip out our hands and land on feet. Flip-flops and gym shoes are not allowed, and shoes with steel tips are essential.

Eye protection, too, especially while working around rust and springs. Gloves for moving heavy equipment as well as for dirtier projects. That's safety. **VWCA**



Amid the potential toe-crunching equipment, steel-toe shoes are must-have attire.

Local Volks

Activities of VWCA affiliates

Activities are heating up

We've always said that participation in local chapter activities is a huge part of "enjoying your VW to the fullest." Well, these "pandemic years" have meant new challenges for local chapters to keep their members involved and engaged, but events are starting to come back. "Social distancing" has curtailed many events that called for large gatherings in a relatively confined space, but our locals have still found some unique and fun ways to enjoy our VWs.

BADGER BEETLES AUTOFUN CLUB, MILWAUKEE: The usual cluster of campsites has already been reserved at Lazy Days Campground, and the Milwaukee group is just waiting for the warm weather for its annual Memorial Day Campout.

NORTHEAST ILLINOIS VW ASSN., LISLE: The annual Slot Car Race Night helped the NIVA members stay connected over the cold Midwest months. The traditional indoor Swap Meet will return to the Fairgrounds after a "pandemic pause." Several cruises are back on the calendar as well as the usual car shows and a Fix-It Day.

STATELINE VOLKS FOLKS, ROCKFORD, ILL.: The VolksFolks Annual Vintage Picnic also returns this year, but with a different date. Check the website's "Events" listing

for the latest details. Also planned is a group camping event with NIVA members and others at Lowden State Park in Oregon, Illinois.

Camping events have kept the members together at a "social distance" until Covid mitigations are lifted. This looks like an activity that will continue far beyond that.

Check our VWClub.org for listings of these and other future events. You'll always find the latest updates there – and even some events that were announced too late to make the AUTOIST publication schedule. Better yet, tell us how you are enjoying your VW to the fullest. (Isn't that what we're all about?) Drop us a note at VWCA, P.O. Box 154, North Aurora IL 60542 or email us at VWClub@aol.com and we'll add it to this column.

Finally, this column is in need of a member to compile the activities of our local chapters and send them bimonthly to the AUTOIST editor. If you're the one, contact VWCA at VWClub@aol.com or directly to the AUTOIST editor at VWAutoist@icloud.com. **VWCA**

|| **▶ GOT A STORY?** Or a quip, a point of view, a problem, a solution? Let us know! Email VWAutoist@icloud.com ||



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DRIVER'S SEAT

► FROM PAGE 3

optional and technological extras found on today's cars, a \$3,000 model sold in 1970 would cost about \$22,230 today; a \$4,000 car, about \$29,600.)

411, a math lesson

Now, the joke I heard about the 98-inch wheel-base VW 411 was its name — chosen because that's the number of these peculiar non-Adonis vehicles it built. VW's top brass admitted the car's styling wasn't lovely. Looks aside, 411 didn't meet VW's expected sales volume in Europe. Regardless, VW sold 367,728 Type 4 cars during a five-year span.

Sure, Wolfsburg hatched a dud, as German sales reportedly spiraled downward each month after VW introduced it. Nonetheless, VW sold about 117,000 of them in the USA. Deliveries were 30,473 in 1973, whereas VW sold 29,919 Type 2 vans in 1974 and 22,017 Jettas in 1983. And you must wonder why VW refreshed it for 1973 (the 412) and expanded the line in the USA by adding the 412 two-door fast-



Cliff Leppke, a regular **AUTOIST** contributor since 1993, has upgraded his wheels since getting his first car in the early '60s.



Interior of the 1971 411 didn't exactly scream luxury.

back with a manual transmission — some sources claim VW consulted American industrial designer Brook Stevens' for this makeover. In Europe, the badge-engineered K70 (developed by NSU before VW acquired this brand), looked like the ideal upscale-sedan recipe for middle-class German drivers. But it didn't

fare well — 211,127 vehicles produced (no wagon) between 1971 and 1975.

Was the 411 a luxury car? Everything is relative. Sure, it came with an automatic transmission, gas and regular heaters, front-disc brakes, door-to-door carpeting, four headlights, radial tires, metallic paint and a clock. Conspicuously absent were power windows, power locks and

power brakes. Air conditioning was optional. Its list price was significantly higher than the Spartan non-Super Beetle in 1971. The basic Bug cost about \$2,000. The 411 bumped VW retail pricing up 60%. In contrast, the 2004 New Beetle's MSRP was \$16,330 — increase that tab by 60% and the comparable price is \$27,217. But the W-12 Phaeton's "luxury flagship" according to *Autoweek*, sticker started at \$94,600 or 5.8 times the New Beetle's tab. And a fully loaded Phaeton topped \$100,000. The V-8 model's entry fee was lower, some sources say \$65,215, but anyway you fiddle with the numbers, the 411's MSRP was less startling than that *Hot Rod's* piece suggested. VW's Beetle was a penny-pinching institution. The 411, therefore, seemed expensive for a VW. Nonetheless, its price, size and accouterments were hardly living large.

Juggling air- and water-cooled messages

VW's ad agency, rather than focusing on the 411's premium price, promoted its — get ready for this — king-size interior accessed via the sedan's four doors. They turned VW's think-small campaign around — even employed King Kong as its hyperbolic doppelganger. This was VW's first nearly compact-size sedan (still short of 100-inch wheelbase, though) in the USA with adequate seating space for four adults. VW's front-drive water-cooled 1971 Audi 100LS sedan is another story — must have kept admen busy

with one team touting the virtues of air-cooled rear-engine compact while the other talked up the water-cooled front-drive Audi.

Let's return to 1971 and see whether reviewers thought the 411 was a luxury car. First off, the car launched in Germany for 1969 came in L or Luxus trim (Deluxe in American speak). A cheaper Standard model was offered. Perhaps the Luxus label proved convincing. And VW's 1973 TV spots for the revised 412 called it a luxury car in a voiceover while showing this machine pounding through rough roads, whizzing around a track and screeching to a halt — not the kind of luxury depicted in that famous Mercury spot where we witness diamond cutting performed in its soft-riding cocoon.

VW's more "affluent wagen for more affluent folks" (\$3,109), as *R&T* dubbed it, was according to that publication, "semi-luxury," up against compact sedans from Peugeot, Volvo, Saab and Audi. Despite all of the 411's new ideas for VW — unit body, coil springs, two heaters and an old one — ugly styling — *R&T* didn't see folks other than those who were Beetle or Type 3 owners as likely buyers. The car's performance and accommodations weren't competitive, although the car was nicely finished.

Consumer Reports tested the 1971, 411 sedan and 1972 wagon. It said a satisfied Beetle owner, accustomed to their car's low price, should adjust easily to the VW 411 sedan, confusing controls and all, after they got over the MSRP shock (\$3,382, including 7% excise tax and 10% import surcharge). VWs, *CR* noted, usually sold for full price, whereas Detroit discounted its dishpans. And *CR* concluded that the 411 wasn't an outstanding car; it was merely adequate.

Regardless, *CR* said those who learned to love other VW models and could afford more room and comfort should be happy with it. *CR* reminded readers that the Saab 99 and Peugeot 504 were better performers overall. And *CR* thought 411 shoppers



should consider the compact Dodge Dart Custom V-8 with automatic (\$2,938) or discounted intermediate-size Plymouth Satellite Custom (\$3,330). The former in deluxe form was similar in price to the VW, whereas the fancy domestic intermediates cost several hundred more — for example, the 1972 Pontiac Luxury LeMans was \$3,682; the Olds Cutlass Supreme was \$3,730.

Notice this "luxury" VW wasn't compared with Cadillac, Lincoln or Mercedes Benz — or near-luxury Buicks, Mercurys or Chryslers. It was far less expensive than those rides. One premium both *CR* and *R&T* expected was legendary VW reliability backed by a widespread dealer network. It came with a

"strong" two-year or 24,000-mile warranty with free every 6,000-mile diagnostic checks. Ultimately, the 411, which had very good first-year of

ownership reliability scores, didn't fare well. It dropped to much worse than average after two years of driving. And by 1973's report, the 1972 411 dropped to average. In 1975, *CR* reported worse-than-average 411/412 reliability.

CR wanted to compare the two-door 411 wagon with the Volvo 145, Peugeot 504 and Toyota Crown. It couldn't obtain a Crown. Therefore, the German 411 duked it out with the Swedish and French wagons. The 411 was smaller on the outside and on the inside with limited space for bulky cargo. It had a "plus-feature," however, a front luggage compartment. But the 411's list price (\$3,459) was "substantially" (\$1,000) lower than the Volvo (\$4,506) or Peugeot (\$4,410). Due to the 411 wagon's unpredictable high-speed handling (rear end swung out suddenly) and ride (worse than the sedan), *CR* thought you'd should skip the 3-Door and get the 4-Door. Audi's 100LS sedan, highly rated by *CR*, likely topped \$4,000 as its 1972 four-door model with manual trans was \$3,985 and the automatic an extra \$225. >>

DRIVER'S SEAT

So there you have it. The 411 was expensive for a VW. But it wasn't more costly than a well-equipped domestic compact sedan. It was more economical in its use of fuel, however. And it was less expensive than VW's Audi 100LS. And compared with the quasi-luxury Volvo or Peugeot sedans or wagons, the VW undercut their prices by nearly \$1,000. It was, for a moment, a relatively affordable step into the Euro semi-luxury sedan segment. But it came up short in Euro-style comfort and handling.

In contrast, VW's posh W-12 Phaeton, at 5,101 pounds, was by every measure a big car with a big price meant to join Mercedes S430 and BMW 740iL or Merc's limo-like S600 at the top of the stack of Teutonic luxu cruisers. The Phaeton, according to *Autoweek*, represented high value in this rarified segment, undercutting the competition by about \$10,000. And it proved even more of a dud than the 411/412, as its retail sales missed targets. In this case, the car was less of a problem than the philosophy behind it. The 411 was a relatively small step upward into the compact class, whereas the Phaeton and those who sold it were like Icarus.

Any analysis of a material artifact such as VW's 411/412 should examine more than road tests. For example, letters to automotive magazine editors or dealer-focused trade publications might help us see how others interpreted VW's 411. One thing we do see in these reviews is what's missing — no snappy editorial remarks meant to deflect the VW faithful from sending scores of letters admonishing *R&T* for unkind words about the 411's styling or performance. In contrast, *R&T* as did *C&D* in Beetle and Type 3 road tests, noted these cars, especially the latter, had an enthusiastic fan base — people who wanted all of the VW virtues and didn't mind the vices. In contrast, the 411 seemed out of sync with what VW dealers needed — a new kind of affordable VW. This different kind of VW arrived in two steps called the Dasher (Passat) and Rabbit (Golf).

Family influence

My first 411/412 experience was in a sedan pur-



Fender cuts gave this 411 the appearance of being a four-door model.

chased by a suburban family who ditched their 10-mpg full-size V-8 Ford for an economical VW after the first energy crisis in 1973. VW, in our north of Milwaukee outpost, was about the only imported car with a nearby dealer, promoted by a local department store, with factory parts at two additional stores. Hence, the VW seemed a safe choice for those seeking relief from gas pains — 25 mpg on *CR's* test trip (22 with the wagon).

And family friends bought a used 411. They thought the Leppke VW experience, my brother, dad and myself each drove VWs, was an endorsement of all things wearing the brand's logo. So, they got a six-year-old 411 because it had an automatic transmission suitable for their daughter who didn't drive a stick.

The car was a rusty mess. Its undercarriage was so riddled with holes that no heat made it into the passenger compartment. And despite my ministrations, this family's fix-it men tried patching holes but didn't understand VW's heater duct work, thinking the front fresh-air fan was the defroster. So they botched mending the heater/defroster's rust-related problems.

Another VW 411 anecdote involves VWoA itself. In a "Throwback Thursday" piece, VWoA called the three-door 411 "Squareback" a four-door car. The confusion started when staffers reviewed the car's publicity photos. They assumed that the cut lines near the car's rear wheels were evidence of two more side doors on the three-door wagon model. Instead, VW used rather short "separate" rear fenders. This VW body trait is like the car largely forgotten. **VWCA**



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GOLF R

►FROM PAGE 22

the turn signal and then tap OK on the steering wheel. The touchscreen, in contrast, won't let you tweak drive assists while driving.

The climate control's menu contains three folders: Classic View, Smart Climate and Air Care. Yes, Virginia there's a cold-feet setting. If your brain's overloaded by choices, VW's Byzantine climate setup will cause a mental meltdown. Leave it in automatic. And there isn't a dedicated back button on VW's fancy infotainment screen.

Let's return to that prince of darkness climate trough. Simultaneously touch the blue and red areas with two fingers and you'll trigger the seat-heat menu. You didn't see that one coming, did you? Tap with two fingers and you'll cycle through bun-baking levels. That's a tad easier than heading first to the touchscreen for climate and then worming your way to the seat menu. The front thrones chill, too. A steering wheel touch spot on the right spoke enables the tiller's heater. It's too close to the nicely contoured grab spots. So, if you don't inadvertently muck up the cruise control with your left fingers, your right ones might brush the hands toaster.

Fingerwork manages the motorized front seat. A convenience mode slides it back for easier entrance

or exit. Fine. But a stick-shift car requires one to depress the clutch pedal in order to start it. You'll get your morning stretch with this setup. There's a cure. Just press the start button one time and the seat slides forward to your favorite spot. Then, press the clutch pedal and start.

Fingers crossed

There is a blast of sorts: finger-dialed chassis/engine tuning called drive modes. These settings make driving, as with finger-painting therapy, more pleasurable. May I direct you to the blue R logo on the steering wheel's left side? Rub it for good luck. Then, the touchscreen's drive mode menu explodes, expanding your options beyond those found using the center-dashboard touch spot. R enables, via yet more touching, a special mode for the Nürburgring's north loop. Other choices include, race, drift (serious tire painting), sport, comfort and individual. Want Eco? Sorry, Charlie, you're sitting in the wrong ride.

These modes vary engine sound, idle speed, dampers and therefore chassis dynamics. I found VW's sound effects a pleasant surprise as the Arteon's related turbo four gets angry when prodded. Not the R, which appears to rev a tad higher at expressway speeds (3,000 rpm at 70 mph).

VW mostly ignores Milwaukee's 'sellabration' show

Spin Communications, a PR outfit in tandem with Motor Trend Auto Shows, organizes mid-tier consumer car shows such as Milwaukee's. I looked at the early March MKE show and discovered VW wasn't in the main exhibit space. According to Ad-strategies' Curt Van Loon, this show attracts "intenders" — about 46% intend to buy a new vehicle in the coming year or two — and according to his numbers, 45% of them do.

Thus, Milwaukee's auto show is, to coin a word, an automotive "sellabration." But what did VW, the world's second largest carmaker, do at this show? It wedged a sign and three vehicles from a local

dealer into the show's lower level. Of the VWs, only one was a 2022 model — the Taos. The others were used VWs — talk about short inventory. And VW didn't staff its booth.

Other carmakers skipped this event. Toyota didn't have tote bags. And you didn't need them because no one had printed handouts such as full-line brochures. Some of these cutbacks were coronavirus-related.

Yet, there were a few traditional tropes — a woman chatting up Chevy's Corvette, and Ford blasted its turf with blue-light special presentations. — *Cliff Leppke*

The Golf R's snubbed suspension seems resilient despite rolling on 19-inch wheels wearing 135/35R19 tires. Body roll is minimal; the car feels like it's an ingot. A creative driver gets support — switches for power seat controls. The right front seat is the shell style, has power back rake but manual controls for height. The rear seat is upright but supportive for two. It split-folds and has a pass thru for skis. Those in the back get face vents, seat heat — and, yes, a touch panel.

The R's driving dynamics paint a pretty picture. It's a confidence inspiring machine with GT-car provenance. Its driver-control interface, however, muddles the picture, as touchscreens, touchpads and talk replace snickety switchgear. The EPA fuel economy numbers are 20 mpg city, 28 highway and 23 combined. I averaged 27 overall. This VW requires premium fuel, nothing more than E10.

Among the numerous warnings, the lane-keeping assist, when in Travel Assist, flashes a red visual and triggers a chime should it think your hand isn't on the steering wheel. This tripped several times even

though my right hand was on the wheel. I had to flick the hoop slightly to turn off the alert.

Body language: Aesthetics

This VW's thin horizontal ode to a grille punctuated by its rondel looks like a proper Volkswagen Golf. Other front inlets are more than eye candy. Ducts to front brakes, say, route air to the brakes. The LED auto high-beam headlamps with poor-weather mode effectively illuminate scenery.

Inside, VW went hardcore with hard plastics — some with obvious flashing. Items such as cloth-covered A pillars or some soft-door card areas are gone. The overhead eyeglass bin vanished, even the hood's hydraulic lift is missing. VW offsets this with interior ambient LED lighting — often keyed to drive mode — and an R puddle light. There's no spare tire. You can slide a road bike with its wheels attached into the rear hatch and then close it. My dealer says R's fetch \$5,000 more than their MSRPs — and you thought the ID.Buzz was the only hot ticket at your VW store. >>

The Ultimate Air-Cooled VW Book

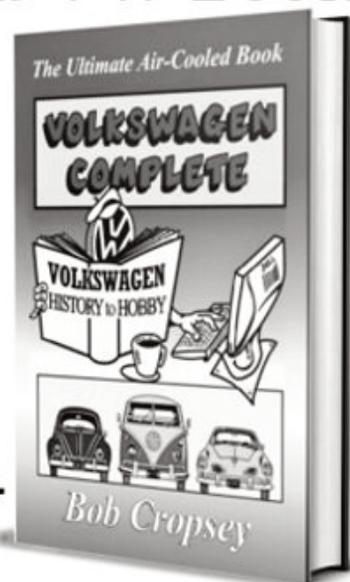
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GOLF R

The R can park itself. Touch a dedicated spot and a menu guides you. Yes, it tells you which direction to move and when to brake while it twirls the steering wheel.

Finger pointing

VW's R offers poise and power. The low-stance sleek profile evokes traditional, practical Golf design language. VW's touch interface, however, feels wrong. You can work around some of this, asking Helga, your onboard assistant, to adjust things. This isn't satisfactory. For example, VW's navigation system is easily stumped. When added, it gets downright stubborn. And the nav menu, which first displays a Tinkertoy graphic of previous destinations, requires a second tap to see the map. Wireless Android Auto and CarPlay are standard.

So it depends on your canvas. The R motors on roadways with competent aire. In contrast, the cabin's touch-sensing controls are an error. **VWCA**



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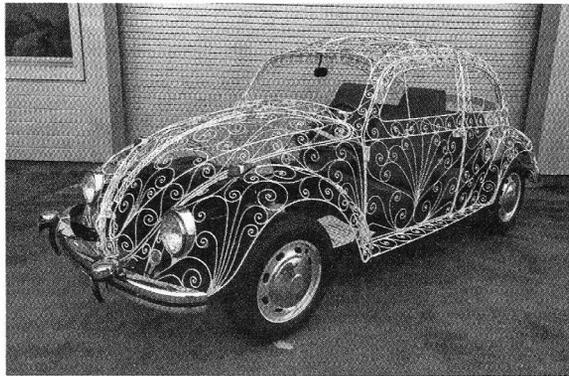
Wedding Beetle is a unique wrought-iron wonder Whimsical design is Mexico's magical metal masterpiece; only 23 said to exist

Have you ever wanted to take a spin in Cinderella's magical coach? Look no further than the Wedding Beetle, an enchanting white, wrought-iron-bodied, coach-built car from the 1960s.

The Wedding Beetle was the creation of Rafael Esparza-Prieto, a talented welder and blacksmith from Mexico City. Coming from a long family line of blacksmiths, he learned the craft first-hand. Esparza-Prieto was reportedly working at a local parts shop in 1968, when his boss asked him to create a one-of-a-kind Beetle shell to display and attract new customers.

Using a Beetle as his base, Esparza-Prieto crafted the skeleton of the vehicle out of white wrought iron and filled in the gaps with artistic floral patterns and decorative swirls. The auto-store owner was so impressed with his work that he displayed the finished product on a rotating platform outside his business. It quickly drew local attention and the eye of Volkswagen executives just down the road at the newly built Puebla plant.

Impressed, Volkswagen commissioned Esparza-Prieto to create two more Wedding Beetle pieces ahead of the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City – and this pair was drivable. The wire shell left the vehicle's simple, yet



GOING DOWN THE AISLE — The Wedding Beetle features delicate wrought-iron filigree. *Image: NewsPress USA.*

sophisticated, mechanics fully exposed so anyone – the driver, passengers and even other vehicles on the street – could see under its hood.

Athletes, artisans and auto-enthusiasts from around the world admired the vehicle's 1.5-liter flat-four, air-cooled engine, which reached up to 53 horsepower. As it gained popularity at the games, Volkswagen commissioned

Esparza-Prieto to build an additional 20-odd creations to display at different dealerships across the globe.

The whimsical white metal designs of the Wedding Beetles evoked images of Cinderella's horse-drawn carriage. As the car's moniker suggests, the cars were sometimes loaned to happy couples as picturesque getaway cars for their special day.

After Esparza-Prieto immigrated to California, he built two more Wedding Beetles on his own. Along with his original creation, there are an estimated 23 Wedding Beetles in total. Several other artisans have since mimicked Esparza-Prieto's work and built their own wrought-iron versions of the car using their own colors and patterns.

It's rare to see a Wedding Beetle in the wild – and not only because their limited number makes them highly sought-after by collectors. While these artistic automobiles are perfect for post-wedding photo shoots, the quirky creations do not include a windshield or sheet metal to protect passengers from weather or from road debris and are not suitable as everyday drivers.

The car's spellbinding silhouette and expert craftsmanship still have the effect Esparza-Prieto intended when he designed the first Wedding Beetle more than 50 years ago: make people stop and stare. This wrought-iron wonder is as much a piece of art as it is a Volkswagen.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Visit AAA.com/Automotive for all things automotive including tips on buying, operating and maintaining a vehicle.

Greg Bucur, a VWCA member "since forever" from Westlake, Ohio, contributed this scan of a story from AAA *Motorist* of a rare Beetle.

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