

March/April 2023 | No. 526



Autoist

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2024 ATLAS
UNWRAPPED



Autoist

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ABOUT THE AUTOIST

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Driver's Seat

BY CLIFF LEPPKE ✉ leppke.cliff@gmail.com

In Chicago, cars and sideshows

This year, the City of Big Shoulders hosted the 115th Chicago Auto Show. With 1 million square-feet, this automotive extravaganza, the nation's largest, inaugurated America's 2023 motor-show season in February; Detroit's annual bash didn't precede it, a first. Organized by the Chicago Automobile Trade Association, the show filled two of McCormick Place's halls — one more than last year. The venue's indoor "drive ways," such as the Chicago Drives Electric track, showcased EVs, including VW's ID.4.

The experiential rides, however, deflected attention from omissions. As Dr. Geoffrey Scott, a gala attendee observed, there's an auto issue — were not talking about an automobile magazine. Instead, his eyes noticed that Mazda, Mercedes, Mini, Infiniti, Cadillac and Audi were missing. He wondered, where were the cars? The latter bit might be the lemons but show organizers turned it into lemonade: those indoor test tracks. One, contrary to the Second City's boastful bigness, was in miniature — VW's remote-controlled video game-like driving simulator. Its driver's seats were gaming consoles at VW's exhibit. You could pilot one of two model electric cars, at the North Hall's entrance, worming through a diorama aping VW's American assembly plant's roadways.

Chicago's show is important due to the throngs of people who attend this spectacle. Carmakers choose Chicago when revealing face-lifted models, new

trims and attention-grabbing concept cars. As such, you see and put your seat in the seats of vehicles you'll find at dealerships.

Because the Windy City's show is a people pleaser, moves vehicles from factories to dealers and then into a traffic jam called the Loop, carmakers stage their wares in branded, bright islands of desire.

Moreover, during the media preview, you'll find automaker reps. Unlike international shows, you're less likely to rub shoulders with a firm's entire executive board. Chicago isn't that kind of town. But don't discount it.

The fashion-forward/backward Stellantis concept BEVs, Dodge Daytona, Chrysler Airflow and Ram Revolution (three-row pickup), were displayed. I

saw them on Feb. 8 at the Concept and Technology Garage, 24 hours before the show's Thursday onsite media preview. Before I trekked to the Tech Garage, I headed to Nissan's media reception; I could smell the tomato bisque with tortellini. Food first! Add a salad, sandwich and chocolate cookies with a buttery baked taste, crunchy edges and soft centers. Divine!

The Daytona channels several vintage Dodge design motifs. The sleek, clean exterior suggests the original Charger (open space between trunk and the back seat), is vaguely 1968 Charger, a bit of 1971 Challenger, too, and the deltoid-curve-inspired graphics package sports Dodge's 1962 Polara logo, known as the Fratzog. I didn't see the current dou-



Though several carmakers skipped Chicago, show organizers added test tracks like this one from VW, a remote-controlled driving simulator in miniature.

►TURN TO PAGE 26

Small Talk

VW + AUDI AT A GLANCE

NEW & IMPROVED

TRUCK HINTS: VW officials dropped more hints at the Chicago Auto Show that it wants an all-electric pickup for America, signaling that a decision could be made later this year. Though several platforms are available that could be leveraged to get the vehicle into production quickly, one option would be to base it on the coming Scout platform, *Autoblog* suggested. Meanwhile, VW's off-road ID Ruggedz concept, which was scrapped in 2020, could return as a seven-seat electric SUV/truck based on the Ford Ranger's T6 ladder frame chassis, *Autocar* reported.



EV NEWS

SMALLER SUV: The ID.4 may be getting a smaller SUV cousin at plant in Chattanooga. German business newspaper *Handelsblatt* reported that the new model would be produced in mid-decade at either its U.S. plant or the one in Puebla, Mexico. A VW representative confirmed such plans to the publication.

E-TIGUAN: VW announced that its best-selling SUV will go electric as the ID.Tiguan with production targeted for 2026.

E-GOLF?: According to reports, VW is scrapping its cheapest EV, the ID.2 in favor of an all-electric Golf. Company reaction to the ID.2's styling was said to be "less than

lukewarm."

BATTERY PLANT: Ontario is being mentioned as a potential site for a new VW battery cell factory, *Handelsblatt*. VW confirmed in December that North America was targeted for a new plant.

CHARGER GOALS: The VW Group has plans to install up to 25,000 EV chargers globally along with its partners this year, part of a goal to hit the 45,000 mark by 2025. That total breaks down to 10,000 charging stations in North America, 18,000 in Europe and 17,000 in China.

MONEY MATTERS

CORPORATE SALES DECLINE: Supply-chain issues were cited for VW's

lowest global sales in more than a decade, a dip of 7% to 8.3 million vehicles. VW said it partly offset the lower sales with a 12% increase in sales in the second half, as plants came back online and supply chains began to ease.

EV SALES SOAR: Despite the overall decline, VW reported EV deliveries of 572,100 globally, a 26% boost over 2021. Volkswagen of America reported that the ID.4 sold 20,511 units in 2022, up 22.5% year.

"The reaction from customers has been incredible — amazing — we have over 20,000 orders in backorder for 2023," VW Group of America President and CEO Pablo Di Si told Yahoo Finance.

EXPENSIVE: Would you spend \$192,500 for an original 1961 23-window Bus, upgraded with a 1,600cc engine mated to a four-speed manual transmission and a 12-volt system? In January, an eager bidder paid just that for actor Will Farrell's two-tone turquoise and white beauty.

RECALLS

ID.4: In late January, VW announced a recall for 20,904 MY2021 ID.4s built between May 26, 2020, and Jan. 20, 2022, to address issues with the battery management control module and the pulse inverter control module.

Retro Autoist

FROM THE VWCA ARCHIVES

10 YEARS AGO

MARCH/APRIL 2013: Volkswagen has confirmed that its XL1 Super Efficient Vehicle, the most fuel-efficient production car in the world, will go into production at the company's Os-nabrück factory in Germany. Designed and built using the latest cutting edge technology and engi-



neering, the two-seater XL1 with its plug-in hybrid diesel-electric system consumes the equivalent of 313 mpg, based on UK measurements. *Postscript: Only 220 of the cars were produced and in 2015 one went on the auction block with a six-figure price tag.*

20 YEARS AGO

MARCH/APRIL 2003: Volkswagen of Mexico launched a new special limited-edition Beetle onto the home market last fall called Sedan Summer. The car is limited to just 800 examples and is available in two exclusive colors: Azul, a pleasant shade of mid-blue, and Amarillo, a light pale green. The Summer has color-coded seats, much like the Colour Concept versions of the New Beetle and Golf.

30 YEARS AGO

MARCH/APRIL 1993: In a wide-ranging interview with *Automotive News*, retiring VW chief Carl Hahn admitted that the company has made errors in the way it sold its cars in the United States. “The new Golf and the new Audi show that we do worry about North American needs, and it will be reflected in our future volume in the market,” Hahn said. “It is most important that we succeed in America. The better we are in America, the

more successful we will be in Europe.”

40 YEARS AGO

MARCH/APRIL 1983: Volkswagen’s flagship model, the Quantum (later, named Passat), is now available with a five-cylinder engine that offers 35% more power. It’s the largest, most-powerful engine VW has ever offered in America. The new powerplant displaces 2,144cc and produces 100 horsepower. It joins the standard four-cylinder, 74-hp gas and optional 68-hp turbocharged diesel engines and can be ordered on either the Quantum Sedan or four-door Quantum Wagon.

50 YEARS AGO

MARCH 1973: When a young Texas couple sent out a birth announcement recently, the card featured a picture of a bright red VW. Inside the card were the baby’s vital statistics and place of birth —the rear seat of the family’s Beetle. The child was one of 29 born in VWs last year. Each received a savings bond. The 1972 figure of 29 brings to 244 the total of all babies born in VWs since 1964.

MARCH 1973: Magazines in Europe are suddenly publishing series of photos of what is said to be the new front-wheel drive medium-size VW with a water-cooled engine. This new fastback style is expected to be introduced in the spring of 1973.

60 YEARS AGO

MARCH 1963: Power Stik: the cross country driver’s friend! Pre-set the speed, sit back and relax as Power Stik does the leg work. Need to slow down? A touch of the brakes releases Power Stik — setting is retained. Ready to resume pre-set speed? A touch of the accelerator — Power Stik takes command. Need to pass a car? Merely depress accelerator — after removing your foot, the pre-set speed is maintained.



CENTER STAGE

Chicago's Revel Motor Row, one-time Illinois Automobile Club headquarters noted for its Art Deco embellishments, played host to Volkswagen's premiere of its 2024 Atlas and Atlas Cross Sport as part of the 115th Chicago Auto Show.

After we wined and dined on tasty bits of catered bliss, VWoA's CEO Pablo Di Si took the stage. His pitch commenced with his vita sheet, not VW's new vehicles. While he's from Brazil, he went to school in Chicago and is an American citizen.

His presentation focused on the Atlas' revamped style, lustier engine and lovelier interior. A new rear spoiler spiffs up VW's otherwise boxy vehicle. We

knew the Atlas' front and rear sported new signature LED lighting bars and illuminated logos. Those luminaries shined through the silvery wrappers draped over these SUVs. Their silhouettes looked familiar despite the gift wrapping.

After the presentation, I joined Di Si, who invited us to join him and experience the uncovered Drive Bigger Atlases. OK, the Drive Bigger ad campaign is now largely forgotten. But these thing-big VWs have worthwhile refinements and some showroom engineering — VW's 12-inch infotainment touchscreen, not-so-wonderful capacitive touch-centric dashboard and steering-wheel "switches." While I'm not thrilled

By Cliff Leppke ✉ leppke.cliff@gmail.com

with touch sensors, the new infotainment screen is contemporary. Several of us found it difficult to summon the climate control menu though. Knobs please. A two-finger tap on the temp slider is your shortcut to seat heat or ventilation. A heated steering wheel is standard.

Di Si answered my questions. For example, does VW plan an off-road version? Not on the agenda, he says. Does the “new” 2.0-liter, 269-hp turbocharged four-cylinder mill replace both the 276-hp VR6 and the 235-hp 2.0-liter four? Yes. Toyota’s Grand Highlander sports three different power trains — just saying. Di Si says the Atlas has 28% more torque (was 214 lb-ft, now 273 lb-ft) compared to the VR6 and has an added dose of oomph at 1,550 rpm and up. I suspect this torque improvement is rpm-specific, as the 2022 Atlas V-6 is rated at 266 lb-ft of torque at 3,600 rpm. More torque at a lower rpm should equal more scoot. The Atlas maintains its 5,000-pound tow rating and eight-speed automatic transmission with optional 4Motion AWD.

The goal, according to Di Si, is to improve the vehicle’s lackluster (my word, he’s diplomatic) customer satisfaction rating. People want power, and they’re going to get it. Plus, the “B” cycle efficiency trick found on some VW fours isn’t employed here. As VW’s Mark Gillies told me later, the B-cycle engine has a complicated camshaft. It nets slightly improved mpg under certain conditions but seems flatfooted when prodded. VW fans will lament the demise of the VR6 engine, a narrow-angle unit with



Throwback stacked headlights.

single-cylinder head that first wowed us under the hood of the 1992 1/2 Corrado. The new turbo four drinks regu-



Pablo Di Si introduces VW's new Atlas Cross Sport.



Heated and ventilated seats are now offered.

lar fuel, while the former Atlas four required premium.

Inside, Atlas models borrow the GTI’s stubby shift-by-wire automatic transmission controller. This opens the center console with a pass thru under the center stack. And on the R-Line and Cross Sport models it’s covered with soft leatherette — an upscale touch. The quilted leather-clad heated/ventilated seats are double stitched with a diamond pattern — as if they escaped from a Bentley. The passenger’s front perch is height adjustable. The new digs, says Di Si, make the Atlas the brand’s pinnacle. What about Arteon? Colleague Jules Stayton found the renewed Atlas >>

CHICAGO

very comfortable. And indeed, VW's CEO said customer feedback critical of the Atlas' plastic-icky interior, which didn't seem suited to the vehicle's price, led VW to surround the dashboard with soft, stitched leatherette.

Atlas optics embellish the luxu-theme, with a Rolls-Royce-style signature LED lighting peeking through the dashboard's right-side carbon-fiber-effect fascia. Smart! And, of course, LED exterior lighting with de rigueur-stacked LED adaptive headlamps — suddenly it's 1966 — are chic. Designers, these days, drizzle LEDs on their creations much like late-1950s chromium tinsel. I wonder: What does it cost to fix a stone-dinged light bar? Unlike the 2018 Atlas, which debuted in 2017, the lengthy six-year/72,000-mile People First bumper-to-bumper warranty hasn't survived.

A focus on two VW SUVs

Chicago Show's second media day had a different vibe. Ford offered a smartphone photography clinic. Many reporters either tied one on at Sweet Home Chicago at Reggie's on State Street — the first day's afterglow party sponsored by VW — or filed their stories and headed elsewhere; they were conspicuously absent on Friday.

I used this preview day as a photo and interview op. VW's Atlas and Atlas Cross Sport were VW's booth's key attractions — uncovered and ready for photographers. I found my now-vintage and sluggish Pentax DSLR poorly suited to exhibitor stage lighting. I swapped lens filters and changed camera settings. Regardless, fuzzy images plagued me.

Your befuddled correspondent was distracted. BMW, however, offered a respite — a champagne brunch with freshly baked bakery. The Bavarian



brand's exhibit was compact, and BMW didn't hit you with a sales pitch. Smooth.

VW hosted lunch. During both media days, the back side of VW's booth wall was a beehive of activity — with VW's busy rush of executives and guests conducting interviews. VW's staff looked exhausted. This show's

tempo isn't as quickly paced as the city's news radio stations or those motoring on its tollways, but clearly VW's media reps seemed harried. Wouldn't you? They juggled local VW dealer reps, the media, their VWoA bosses and the show's caterers.

Electrify America upgrades promised

I joined VW PR guru Mark Gillies for an American-made ID.4 walkaround. He discussed VW's BEV plans. VW's relationship with Electrify America, he notes, continues. He says EA now knows which suppliers deliver reliable chargers. EA will switch to these units to improve the customer experience, which is regarded as spotty. A week later, Tesla announced it's opening its proprietary charging network to other EVs. Gillies says the upcoming, improved modular electric vehicle architecture (arrives for 2026 called MEB+) will have increased range and battery/motor updates, but don't expect VW to switch to an 800-volt platform from its current 400. VW's Trinity BEV program promised for 2028 will have it.

To counter the faster charging Hyundai BEVs, VW will expand Electrify America's reach and push charging at home. EA, for example, says a five-year partnership with TravelCenters of America means 1,000 new chargers, making road trips more feasible. TA has 200 locations along major highways. Gillies says he's taken trips with the ID.4. He says you can

fast-charge it while noshing. And his wife? She wants an ID.Buzz. Gillies, shrugged, after revealing this factoid — a genuine moment, I'd say. Don't get Gillies wrong. His taste tilts toward the Golf R or e-Golf. A three-row BEV van, well?

I broke this moment. After hearing about his wife's passion for the Buzz, I asked: when will she get one? Journalists around me broke into laughter. I landed a zinger. He says, "next year."

Following this, Hein Schafer, VW's vice president of sales, reintroduced the 2024 Atlas and Atlas Cross Sport. You might wonder why this second reveal — it's for those who weren't at VW's offsite Atlas premiere. This time, however, Schafer emphasized Atlas' importance as VWoA's high-volume, yet profitable vehicle. He says the Atlas has 6% of the midsize SUV market. In 2013, 91% of VW's deliveries were sedans; today 83% are SUVs. Things changed.

Safety is important. VW's IQ.Drive is standard, and now there's multi-seat, seat-belt monitoring. Options include a head-up display and predictive adaptive cruise control. After he extolled the revamped model's virtues, we took a closer look. We didn't see the lower-trim Atlas' front clip. Its grille and LED lighting differ from the



Hein Schafer discusses the new Atlas models.



Danielle Gumro

displayed machines. Move up to R-Line trim and you get a front fascia that's about the same as the relatively sexier Cross Sport's.

VW's brand specialists, who work VW's booth during this and the following days, add warmth. Danielle Gumro, whom I met at the American Passat's Detroit-show launch, is back. She's moved from Chicago to St. Paul, Minnesota. Her children are in school, and she's doing her VW gig/thing again.

The brand specialists will work VW's major shows. If you have a major show near you, go! Say hello to your VW brand specialists. They're happy to meet club members.

OK, you've heard the buzz. Here's my first 2024 Atlas impression: It's a good move. The tidy turbo-four should respond to the long pedal better, while eking out better regular fuel, fuel economy. Those who pick higher trims will find a more appealing vehicle. I'd say it still doesn't match the Hyundai/Kia three-row models feature-for-feature. Many thought the introductory 2018 Kurkuma Yellow Atlas was spacious penalty box. Upper trims didn't seem worth their now nearly \$50,000 MSRPs. In con-

trast, the 2024 model available later this year Drives Bigger. **VWCA**

DASHING DATA

OBD plug-in can reveal a car's deep, dark secrets

Like a baby who cries as her only way to communicate with you to tell you she's hungry, tired, needs burping or a diaper change, your car really has only one way to tell you when certain things go wrong: the check engine light. What do you do when it lights up?

If you drive past almost any auto parts store, you might see a sign for "Free Check Engine Light Diagnosis" or "Free Code Scans." If you take advantage of that service, someone will come out to your car, plug in a handheld contraption under the dashboard that looks like something Mr. Spock would use to tell

you there are no intelligent lifeforms inside that 2002 Pontiac Aztek that just parked next to you, and then the

▶ ABOVE: Amid shades of gray under the driver's side dash, VW makes it easy to find the OBD port: it's purple on an ID.4. Inset shows the OBD-II plug in place.



An inexpensive handheld OBD-II reader available at auto parts stores.

store employee will read the device and tell you that you need a new sparkplug or oxygen sensor, or maybe you just didn't screw your gas cap on tight enough last time you filled up.

What magical properties does that handheld device have to detect what's wrong with your car? The answer is "none." All the "magic" is actually in your car.

Every car sold in the USA since 1996 has a connector under the dashboard called an On Board Diagnostics port (or "OBD" port). We're currently on the second version, so it's often referred to as an "OBD2" or "OBD-II." This port is a 16-pin connector that lets mechanics (or you and me!) read and/or write data to the car's computer.

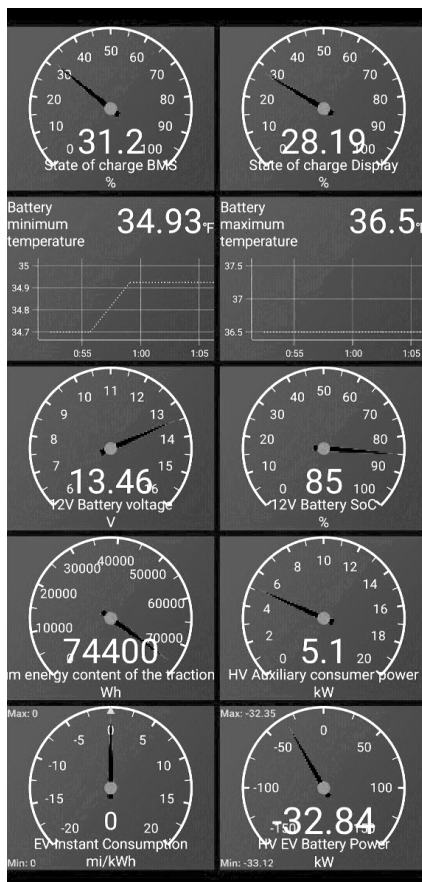
But the OBD port has more uses than simply telling us why the check engine light comes on. With the ap-

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propriate device, you can read data from the car that you can't see in the instrument cluster, read other (less serious) errors that don't light up the check engine light, and in some cases, alter settings or functions in your car that only a dealer or mechanic could normally access.

So, what would you use this for? You can read the trouble codes and reset the check engine light or monitor systems the car itself doesn't let you. While what you can see varies by car, virtually all cars let you monitor the state of your 12V battery, oil pressure, coolant temperature, plus give you stats like how long the car has been running, how long since you last cleared the check engine light, and much more.

This can come in handy for diagnosis or troubleshooting if you're a backyard mechanic, or just want to keep your mechanic "honest." For example, I had a Subaru that was taking forever to heat the cabin on some cold days but quickly on others. The car temperature gauge that went from "C to H" wasn't very informative, but with an OBD module and app I could read the exact coolant temperature, which confirmed the thermostat was getting stuck open intermittently. That same Subaru also would (very occasionally) trip the check engine light with a code telling me the oxygen sensor was failing after running for several hours on long road trips. This error would stop the cruise control from working, so I was able to reset it while on the road and deal with replacing it after the trip rather



Todd Allcock's custom screen created in the Car Scanner app to show useful information about his ID.4's lithium-ion drive battery and lead-acid 12V battery. From top to bottom, left to right, it shows drive battery level, both including the unusable buffer and the level reported on the dashboard; battery temperature of the coolest and warmest cells; the voltage and charge level of the 12V battery; the total usable capacity of the drive battery; power used by the climate controls, current efficiency in miles/kWh; and current power output of the battery.

than be stuck without cruise control for another 1,000 miles!

Now that I've gone all electric with the VW ID.4 and a Nissan Leaf, the EVs also offer a bunch of useful information from the car, like more accurate battery level data. EVs tend to underestimate their range on the dashboard display when the battery is low to encourage you to charge sooner rather than later. When the dashboard says my battery is empty, it's good to know I actually have a few more kilowatt hours of power in reserve to make it those last few miles to my house or to a charger, much the same way you still have a gallon of gas left when the gas gauge hits "E" and the yellow light comes on.

I can also read the battery temperature to help figure out if it's the car's or the charger's fault if the car is charging more slowly than usual (cold batteries charge more slowly.) One of the most popular apps for EV owners, ABRP (A Better Route Planner), calculates where you'll need to stop and charge on road trips, can read the car's battery level "live" from the ID.4 via the OBD-II module and update itself while you drive.

What would a device like this set you back? Handheld units like the guy at Pep Boys brings out to read your car run anywhere from

about \$25 to nearly \$500 depending on features and capabilities, but there's a much cheaper option, and you probably already have most of what you need in your pocket already. The same device that already replaced your camera, your dashboard GPS and your »

OBD

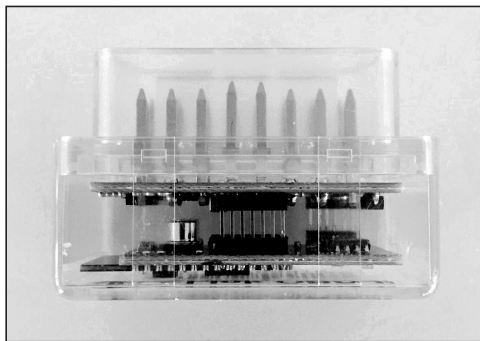
Walkman — your smartphone.

If your smartphone could plug into the connector under the dash, you'd have everything you need already, but it can't. You need a device that plugs into the port under the dash and communicates with an app on your smartphone or laptop wirelessly via Bluetooth or Wi-Fi. These devices, OBD-II modules or "dongles," start at less than \$20. (The cheapest Bluetooth units work with Android phones and tablets or Windows laptops; iPhones need slightly more expensive units that use Wi-Fi or BLE/"Bluetooth Low Energy.")

Now that you have the module, you just need an app to "talk" to the car computer through the OBD-II reader. There are dozens available for Android and iPhone, but probably the two most popular are Torque by Ian Hawkins for Android and Car Scanner by Stanislav Svistunov (aka "OvZ") for either Android or iPhone. Both are excellent and offer both free and paid versions (with more features.)

There are even car specific apps with extra features for some vehicles. For Volkswagen/Audi Group car owners an app called OBDEleven ("OBD-II", get it?) requires a special OBD-II device the app developers sell allowing you to change all kinds of settings mere mortals like us wouldn't (and perhaps shouldn't!) have access to.

Different options are available depending on model, like performance/tuning options,



This Bluetooth Low Energy OBD-II module connects to Android phones and iPhones and sells for \$30 at Amazon.

changes to brake light or turn signal light behavior, the ability to let the power windows work when the ignition is off, and even the ability to create your own programs to change the car's behavior (which, unfortunately, comes with the ability to really mess the car up and requiring a dealer to get things back to normal! You've been warned!) OBDEleven can be expensive — you need the proprietary OBD

device, ranging from around \$70 to \$95 on Amazon.

Ross-Tech (ross-tech.com) is another source for VW Group cars, offering both professional and enthusiast diagnostics that can be quite pricey. VW's official list of diagnostic scan tools vendors also include Shade tree Software, Samstag Sales and Zelenda Automotive.

And Bentley Publishers (bit.ly/3HWGzmW) offers guidance on working with a VW scan tool for 1990-95 models.

If you're curious what OBDEleven can do for your model of car, just download the free app for your phone and check out the options for your model. If you then decide to use it, you can buy the device and any credits you need for the individual mini-apps.

So, if you like to "wrench" your own cars, want to know a little more about what makes your car tick, or just miss the good old days when cars had more gauges for pressures and temperatures instead of "idiot lights," you can gain a little more insight to what's going on under the hood with an OBD module and smartphone app. **VWCA**



Gauges displayed in the Torque app. Users can customize the display to show whatever info they prefer to see.

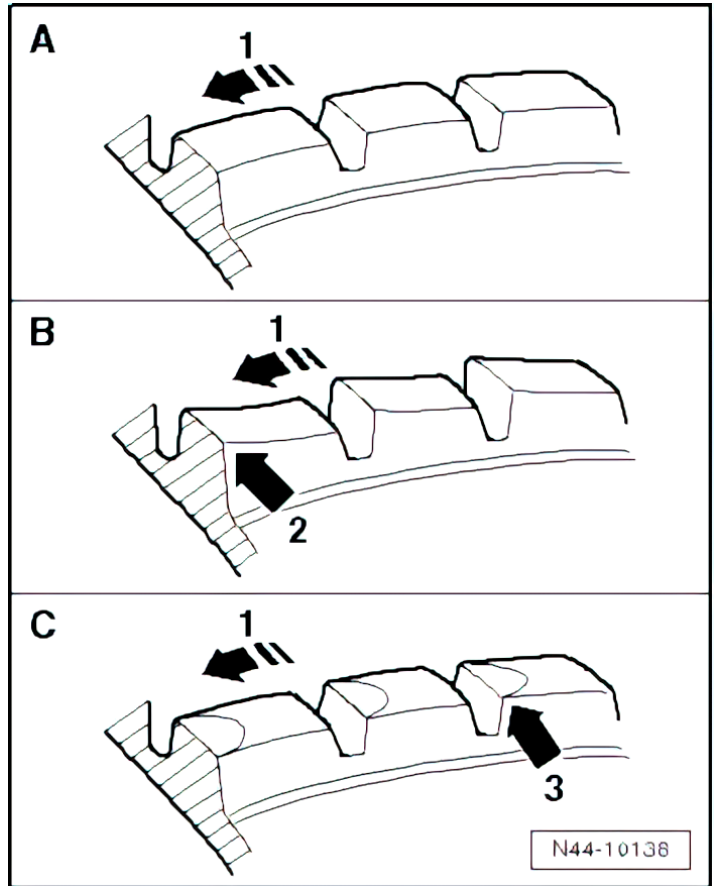


THE RUB ON RUBBER

We tread deeper into the way tires handle, flex, skid and squirm on the road

You could write a dissertation on tires. In fact, scholars have. Their words are Freudian; they talk about slip angles and micro slips. They discuss topics suitable for Dr. Kinsey — tribology or rubbing. And finally, scientific illustrations make learning the fox trot's steps seem simple.

This article explores tire/road/vehicle variables. Netherlands-based Marzieh Salehi wrote a 267-page thesis about a method for measurement of rubber friction under laboratory conditions, noting how the tire interfaces with the road makes it an “elaborate task to predict tire behavior.” I’ll cover several tire topics informed by Salehi’s dissertation, VW’s engi-



A depiction of heel-and-toe wear on a VW Tiguan, a step-like wear of individual tread blocks, due to which an increased rolling noise can develop. Such wear is caused by the uneven distortion of the tread blocks in the contact patch. **A:** Tread blocks of a new tire, viewed in direction of travel 1. Tread blocks have the same height in front and rear. **B:** Heel-and-toe wear, viewed in direction of travel arrow 1. The tread blocks are higher in front than in rear, arrow 2. **C:** Viewed in direction of travel arrow 1. Tread blocks exhibit significant wear in forward area of “heel-and-toe wear,” arrow 3.

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neering communication, Continental’s published work and Douglas Love at *Consumer Reports*.

Let’s place an asterisk on common tire advice, those supposedly time-tested bromides focused on one tire dynamic. For example, many sources recommend installing just two new tires on your car’s rear wheels (no asterisk). The reasoning is new — >>

By Cliff Leppke ✉leppke.cliff@gmail.com

TIRES

deeper treads hydroplane less easily than your worn front tires. This unqualified rule is problematic. You haven't tested whether the new tires, indeed, adhere better or work well for all wet or dry tire/road scenarios. Continental, for example, warns "deep tread" isn't always a good thing. Actually, tread "works better slightly roughed up. Until broken in, tires don't have the best grip and handling." Thus, those new rear tires might have less traction and more squirm, upsetting your vehicle's handling.

Those who engineer your car say your vehicle will handle and stop the best if it has four tires of the same brand, model, speed rating and tread depth. Think of them as married for life. Uniformity is a virtue. Equal tread wear, for example, is important for your car's anti-lock braking, vehicle stability control or all-wheel-drive system. Each system monitors wheel speed. Car manufacturers, therefore, limit variations in tire circumferences due to their effects on vehicle systems.

VW, for example, recommends a 3mm maximum difference in the Tiguan's tread depths. Moreover, VW recommends always using "tires with the deepest tread depth on the front axle." And with the rear sport differential, "always" replace tires on "both sides of the rear axle." VW says its "limitations are due to thermal pressure for the transmission due to large differences in the rolling circumferences of the tires."

Should one wheel or two wheels spin at a significantly different rate, ABS will try to slow the faster wheel(s), potentially overheating brakes and disabling the ABS or electronic stability program. I've experienced an ESP shutdown after a wheel hazard on a 2009 VW Rabbit.

Even if your vehicle doesn't have ABS, uniform tire wear is important. Because tires are an elastic medium, the amount a tire flexes on its wheel and the way it generates its contact patch with the road are related to tread depth. Uniformly worn tires, therefore, impart safer handling.

Managing tread wear

A tire, says Salehi, is constructed with many elements. This complex construction interfaces with the road under diverse operating conditions. Therefore, a variety of factors influence the interaction between the tire and the

pavement, commonly called tire grip, traction or skid resistance. Tire grip is the key consideration for driving safety.

So, let's examine tire wear. You cannot avoid it. There are several reasons for uneven wear, such as wheel alignment, drive forces, braking and vehicle weight. Often front-drive cars wear their front tires



more rapidly.

There's another wear problem. It's called heel-and-toe wear. It afflicts heavily grooved winter tires and low-profile tires with freestanding tread blocks meant to protect against aquaplaning. The science behind this is complex. We can describe it as normal wear caused when a rolling tire contacts the road. Tread blocks deform as they approach the tire's contact patch. They're compressed, as they touch the pavement. After they lose road contact, however, these blocks snap back into their original shapes, rubbing the surface.

VW says heel-and-toe wear is visible. It is a step-like, uneven distortion of the tread blocks. Often, each block is higher in the front; indented at the back. VW says "elastic" new tires tend to heel-and-

toe wear. Whether this will be problematic varies due to tire design and how you drive.

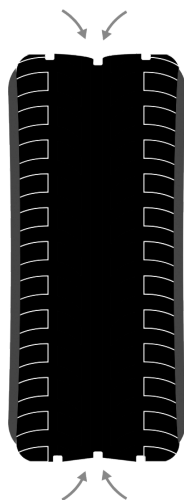
One salve, meant to equalize tread wear and cut tire noise, is reversing a tire's rotation direction — as long as it's an omnidirectional donut. Reversing tire direction before excessive deformation leads to a quieter, less fatiguing long-term relationship. I perform this task myself — often seasonally when I switch from winter to summer tires.

The racer's shaved tire edge

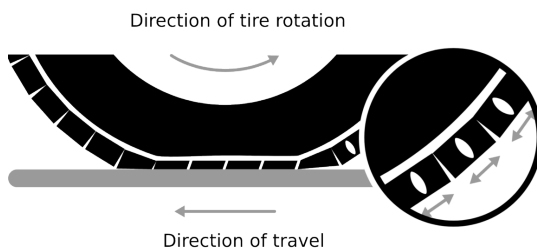
Now, let's explore new tires. Continental's advice might surprise you. Most people assume new tires have better grip, less slide and more traction. Chances are they will not — until broken in. Continental says three factors cause new tires to behave less precisely: lubricants used to help new tires pop out of their mold reduce traction; antioxidants applied to prevent tires from breaking down make tires feel slick; and tread depth ... acts like a thick cushion between you and the road. This latter item causes squirm.

Tread squirm is excess movement you feel when steering a vehicle recently fitted with new tires. This movement comes from the flexibility in the rubber between the tread surface and the carcass. Until you've broken the new tires in, lubricants, antioxidants and tread depth can create less grip and more squirm. This is one reason why sports car drivers often shave tires. New street tires are not first on race day.

Because we know new tires behave differently and perhaps less competently than expected, you can understand why it's not good to mix old and new tires on your vehicle.



Continental
You can find this center wear pattern on the driven wheels of highly motorized cars. During energetic acceleration, in stop-start urban traffic, or when accelerating away from traffic lights, these high torque levels can quickly increase wear of the tread center.



"Snap-out" effect

tire pressure, dynamic forces, wheel width and vehicle weight. According to VW's Mark Gillies, VW's German engineers staggered the ID.4's tires (wider rear) "because of the increased weight of the 82-kWh battery and trying to keep similar driving dynamics throughout the lineup."

When one or two must do

There are situations where you might not want to purchase four new tires. Let's say you lose a tire to a road hazard. I have. The ideal single-tire replace- >>

Cornering grip, vehicle stability

Slip angle is another reason you want a set of uniformly worn tires. This trait is not a measurement of tire slide. Instead, this slippage occurs when the steering wheel is turned from straight ahead. It is the angle between the direction in which the tire is pointed and the direction in which the vehicle is heading. The leading edge of the tire points in steering direction while the trailing portion ends up lagging in the old heading's direction. Thus, the tire's contact patch distorts.

Manage slip angle, as the vehicle maker intends. If you mix and match old/new tires or different makes/models, you vary slip angles. This can induce more understeer (car corners more widely than expected) or more oversteer (the car turns more tightly than expected). On some vehicles, squirmy new rear tires cause tail wag — a transient overswing of the rear

end of a fast-moving vehicle after the steering wheel is turned and returned to its neutral position. Sometimes this produces a series of disconcerting rhythmic rear-end oscillations.

Lots of factors affect slip angles: tire width, tire pressure, dynamic forces, wheel width and vehicle weight.

TIRES

ment should be the same brand, model and speed rating as the other three. *Consumer Reports*, moreover, recommends shaving the new tire if the other three are worn more than 30%.

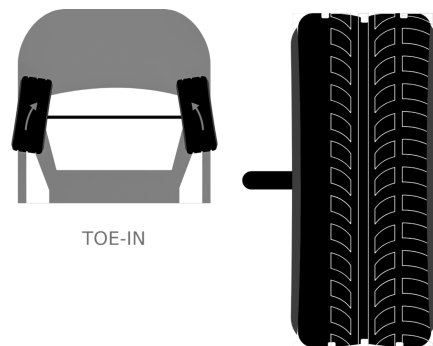
Here's why. I've replaced one tire on my 1983 Scirocco after the right-rear Michelin MXV4 struck road shrapnel on the Oklahoma Turnpike. I studiously shopped for a new one when I reached Albuquerque. There, a tire dealer ordered one. Because the other tires were less than two years old, we » expected good things. Instead, the new tire caused the vehicle to pull to the left. My normally straight-heading vehicle now deviated from its lane. In turn, I hit a traffic cone, smashing my car's left fog lamp to bits.

Due to pulling, I moved the new tire's position to a less problematic position. Michelin's explanation was simple: the new tire's production batch wasn't the same as the other tires. Thus, the new tire behaved differently. Two new tires would have worked better.

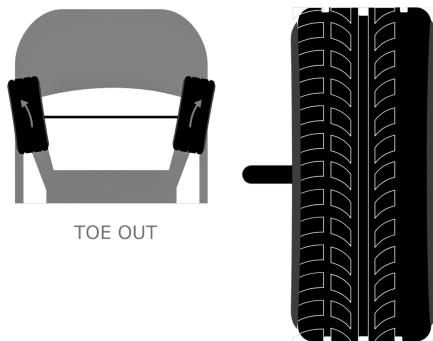
Let's say you want to buy just two new tires. *Consumer Reports* cautions you. If you're replacing two, the worn tires should have about 60% of their original tread depths. CR says place the new ones in the back. But as I have experienced, tire-related pulling or rear-end sway can be troublesome. CR thinks tire shaving is worth trying to match new and old tire-tread depths.

Continental, moreover, warns you cannot assume the new tires have superior grip and less squirm than old ones. Continental states some car-makers recommend installing the new tires in the front. VW's Tiguan tire communication buttresses this contrarian advice. Regardless, VW and CR place limits on how much you can vary tread depths.

In sum, the scientists say it's safer to motor with a matching set of tires. You might find cross rotation equalizes tread wear. When it's time to replace them, it's best to buy a new set. If you must mix old and new tires, you introduce variables. To control hydroplaning,



TOE-IN



TOE OUT

Continental

The single biggest reason for one-sided wear is because of axle geometry. Deviations can develop over time and are the result of, for example, aggressively mounting a curb.

you might cause other chassis dynamics problems, especially if the new tires haven't been broken in or there's a big difference in tire diameter, wear and tread depths. **VWCA**



VWClub.org

Add value to your VWCA membership by registering at VWClub.org to take advantage of discounts on exclusive Club Store merchandise and to renew your membership, using either PayPal or your credit card.

POSITIONS AVAILABLE

Yes, there are still some key positions open waiting for volunteers to help with the various functions needed to make our club operations run smoothly. If you've been hesitating, consider one of these:

CLUB STORE MANAGER: Responsible for maintaining Club Store merchandise, receiving and fulfilling orders, and providing the treasurer of an accounting of goods sold at the end of our fiscal year (March 31).

AUTOIST BUSINESS MANAGER: Provides a mailing list file (compiled by the membership secretary) to the printer upon request, and sends foreign and recruiting copies to the appropriate members.

SAFETY DIRECTOR: Maintains the club's safety program, promoting safe practices for club events — both static and driving — and managing the Woodbury Dunn Safety Award competition, which is currently inactive. This is an important aspect of our club that should be rekindled.

ADVERTISING MANAGER: Handles both classified and display type advertising for the AUTOIST and on the website.

ACTIVITIES DIRECTOR: Monitors and encourages car shows, cruises, rallies and other such events and offers advice when necessary to novice event chairpersons regarding scoring, classifications, entry forms, etc.



RECRUITING DIRECTOR: Promotes the acquisition of new members through advertising, handouts or personal contact. This appointee maintains the club's recruiting literature and assures that it is distributed wherever it is needed.

T.I.N. DIRECTOR: The Tourist Information Network is intended to be a nationwide group of VWCA members who have offered to provide fellow members with information about their area. Such information might include area attractions, suggested lodging, road construction delays or reliable repair facilities. Because there is no current TIN Director, this program has no host members, so this must be re-established as one of our member benefits.

LOCAL CLUB REPORTER: As you have noticed, we are in need of a Local Volks columnist for the AUTOIST. Information about local club activities is provided by the local clubs themselves or gleaned from their newsletters or websites.

Well, how about it? Did you see something that piqued your interest? You can obtain a more complete description of these and other positions by mail or email by contacting vwclub@aol.com.

And don't forget – the current term of the VWCA president expires in September of 2024. It's not too early to be thinking about that!

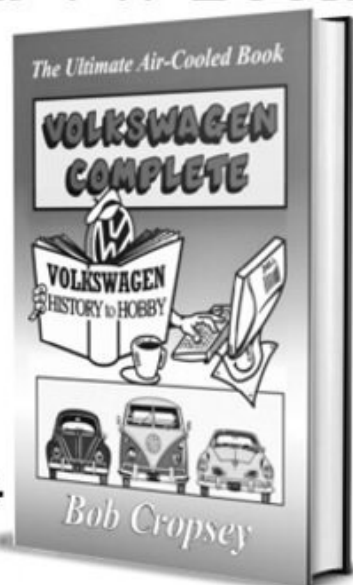
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Local Volks

Activities of VWCA affiliates

Super time in Milwaukee

We've always said that participation in local chapter activities is a huge part of "enjoying your VW to the fullest." It is the purpose of this column, therefore, to highlight these events and activities, give the planners and organizers a little recognition for their efforts and perhaps inspire other chapters to try some of the unique and fun ways we enjoy our VWs.

If there is no local chapter in your area and you'd like to start one, contact our vice president, Tom Janiszewski at Volkstom@sbcglobal.net, or the club office at VWClub@aol.com.

Here's what some of the locals are up to of late:

BADGER BEETLES AUTOFUN CLUB, MILWAUKEE: With their Christmas theater and dinner party still in recent memory, the Badger folks quickly turned their attention to the annual Super Bowl Party – with or without the Packers. This is always a favorite in Milwaukee. Can the Memorial Day Campout be far behind?

NORTHEAST ILLINOIS VW ASSN., LISLE: NIVA's annual Christmas banquet became their "Winter Banquet" and moved to Moretti's Restaurant in January, due to the sudden closing of their traditional venue. It all worked out, as the food was wonderful, the service was welcoming and the turnout was great. NIVA's calendar is getting full with the annual indoor swap

meet, several cruise nights, at least three car shows and some camping weekends scheduled. Keep in touch with nivaclub.org or facebook.com/nivaclub.

STATELINE VOLKS FOLKS, ROCKFORD, ILL.: The Stateline calendar is under development with a Fix-It day, car shows, camping trips and a few cruise nights in the plan. Visit statelinevolksfolks.com or watch the "Events" posts on our website for the latest details.

CENTRAL FLORIDA VW CLUB, ORLANDO: Water damage remediation suddenly became an important topic after serious flooding hit areas of Florida. And they've decided to alternate meeting places for variety. To keep up with the latest details, visit centralfloridavwclub.org and click on "Newsletter."

Check our website, VWClub.org, for listings of these and 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. Occasionally, photos and videos of these events appear live as they happen on our Facebook page, facebook.com/vwclubofamerica.

And if your local chapter is planning an event, contact us at VWClub.org and we'll post it on our site.

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**



Club Store

Check out the VW Club of America's exclusive clothing and unique carwear at VWClub.org, where you can order instantly online and pay with PayPal or your credit card.

The Frontdriver

BY RICHARD G. VANTREUREN ✉rvant1951@gmail.com

Innocent until proven

So, there we were last September, volunteering and wondering how we ever had time to work, trying to choose the best time to schedule a rear brake overhaul for our '08 Touareg. Then Hurricane Ian blew through central Florida and flooded us.

As reported, last issue, we lost our Eos, but Mr. T, the Touareg, sitting so much higher, appeared unharmed. Starting the big V8 blasted water out the muffler quite a ways, but there was no discernable impairment to his driving habits. As soon as the garage was completely dry, however, there was a confession on the floor — an oil spot, his first in all of his 14 years and 118,000 miles.

Once our shop folks had themselves recovered from the storm, they were, of course, mobbed by other victims needing service. However in a reasonable time our original request for rear brake overhaul was honored. Noticing only a slight improvement in braking, however, our shop folks explained the fronts could not be bled owing to frozen bleed screws. Oh, and that oil leak? VW's own shop directions said step one was, unashamedly, to "pull the engine."

Now, just a damn minute. Mr. T was robust with nothing more than expected wear and tear until Sept. 29, and then suddenly gallop-



Floodwater totaled the Eos as the damaged air bag computer would have made the car too dangerous to drive. BELOW: Mr. T's prop shaft awaits recycling.



ing senility (apologies to Aldous Huxley) sets in? Wondering how could I get the insurance company to accept that the oil leak, and perhaps even the frozen bleeders, were flood related, we continued to employ Mr. T in the house rebuild project, awaiting our turn for another shop appointment. Then on one Home Depot run we felt a thump, followed by flap-flap-flapping noise as if a CV joint boot had been torn asunder. Unable to see anything underneath ourselves, we elected to wait — and have him towed to the shop when it was our turn.

Turned out the oil was escaping by a seal in the cooler, sort of a foundation part on which the rest of the V8 was built upon. This was reflected in the labor charges to reach it. Lucky for us our shop actually had a replacement prop shaft ordered but not used, because that flapping noise was revealed to be Mr. T's prop shaft blown apart.

A rather stiff repair bill later, Mr. T is as strong as ever and every bit the massive, comfortable SUV he



always was. Seems like too much of a coincidence all this happened after sitting in a couple feet of water for a few days, but without evidence, there is no point in making an insurance claim.

Not as it seems

Building a home office back in the 00's, we'd paid top dollar for "all wood" furniture. Solid and heavy, no one would have suspected floodwater would reveal it was actually just veneer-covering-particle board.

Old trophy on a new Taos

This was also illustrated in the garage, when a few days in the ocean-like atmosphere revealed similar construction in the Dogwood City VW Club's choice of award suppliers. My 1975 Rabbit, dubbed Ol' Blue, won the trophy 10 years into a 10-year run with us.

How many years you are supposed to keep such awards after you no longer have the car is not published. Nonetheless, it was no fun discarding these parts of our VW history. **VWCA**

Facebook.com/VWClubofAmerica



ID. Insight

BY TODD ALLCOCK ✉ tallcock@aol.com

Managing 'range anxiety'

Anyone considering the purchase of an EV like VW's ID.4 has probably heard the term "range anxiety" — the fear that an electric vehicle has insufficient battery capacity to get where its driver wants to go.

This baffles me. Modern EVs like the ID.4 have a range of 250 miles or more. When I was growing up in the 1970s, my father would drive our family on road trips in big V8 sedans that got 10 to 12 miles to the gallon and had 20-gallon gas tanks. These were gas cars with a 200-240 mile range — less range than an ID.4! Yet never in my childhood did my father worry that our Plymouth Satellite or Mercury Marquis wouldn't make it 220 miles from the suburbs of Providence, Rhode Island, to a campground in New Hampshire's White Mountains, because there were dozens of gas stations to stop at along the way if the tank got low!

So, do prospective EV drivers really have range anxiety, or do they have charger anxiety — the fear that an insufficient number of chargers is available to get where the driver wants to go?

It's really charger anxiety. EV owners who have their own driveway or garage and can plug their car in at home soon realize the only time they need to find a charger outside their driveway is on long road trips.

For example, I've gone 18

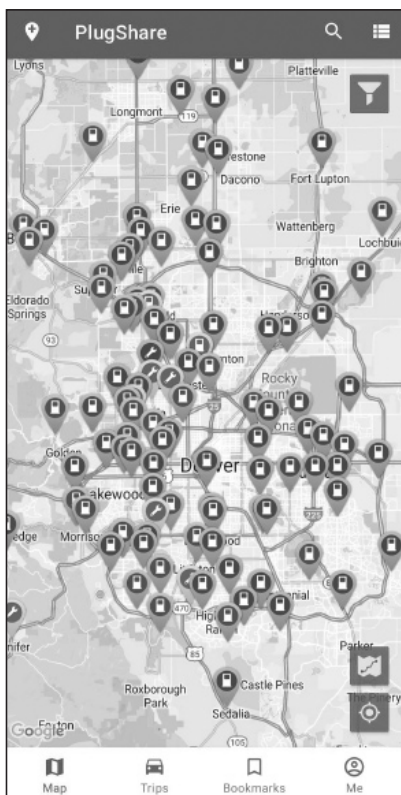
months without ever needing to charge my Nissan Leaf anywhere but at home; the last time it was on a road trip. (Our VW ID.4 has been on several road trips recently and has used public charging stations far more recently!) The only "anxiety" my wife or I could possibly have is not being able to find a charger on one of our road trips.

As enthusiastic as I am about EVs, though, there's no denying charging stations aren't as ubiquitous as gas stations along the highways and byways of these United States yet! They're out there, but they aren't nearly as visible.

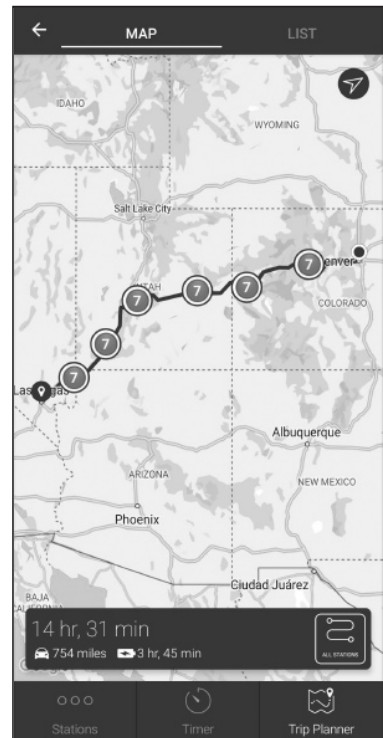
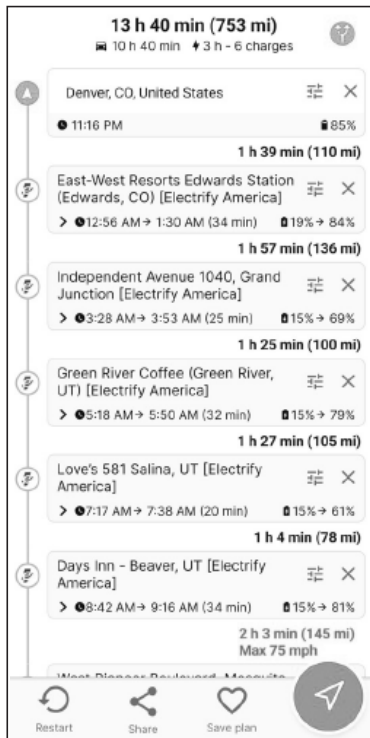
The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act passed in 2021 provides funding to states to help subsidize building chargers every 50 miles along the major travel corridors, but until that becomes a reality over the next few years, how do new EV owners deal with charger anxiety and road tripping? As the old iPhone commercials used to say, "There's an app for that!" Or, actually, a few.

The gold standard traveling apps for EV owners are PlugShare and ABR ("A Better Route Planner"), both of which are also available as websites for those who don't have smartphones or prefer to plan their trips on a computer.

PlugShare is a charger map and database that's also sort of like Yelp for chargers. It lets users rate chargers for reliability and speed and give tips on finding them



PlugShare's map of Denver. Hard to feel anxiety with this much charging available.



Feeling lucky? ABRP's route planner (left) shows that a trip from Denver to Las Vegas will require six charging stops requiring three hours total. ABRP shows the predicted charging locations (center) with the time needed to charge and the battery level needed to charge to so you can make it to your next stop. The same Denver-to-Las Vegas trip in Chargeway's less cluttered interface (right).

(e.g., “in the southwest corner of the parking lot near the dumpsters.”) You tell the app what EV you have and where you want to look for chargers, and compatible chargers show as pins on a map you can tap on for more information, like pricing, speed and reviews. It lets you filter the results by charger speed or connector type, free or paid, charging network, and more. A handy setting lets you temporarily show only chargers at hotels and motels, making it easier to plan where to stop for the night on a road trip. Why not stay at the Marriott with free overnight chargers rather than the one a mile up the road without? It's an invaluable app, and it's free.

A Better Route Planner is the best app for actually planning a long drive. It's like Google Maps, but also tells you where you'll need to stop and charge, and for how long, based on your car model, driving speed, weather, road conditions, etc. For even greater

accuracy in the ID.4, it'll even connect to a Bluetooth OBD-II module plugged into the car to read battery level and power consumption in real time.

If you prefer using your own mapping app like Google Maps, Apple Maps or Waze, ABRP can export your calculated route including the charge stops into those apps. The basic ABRP app is free, but some features (like Android Auto/CarPlay support, and automatic real-time weather updates) require a monthly subscription.

I'll also give an honorable mention to an app called Chargeway. It's sort of like “ABRP Junior” — easier to use than ABRP and has a much cleaner and simpler interface, but it's less customizable and therefore a little less accurate. I often joke that while I use ABRP, I'd probably tell my mother to use Chargeway!

With those apps, most new EV owners should lose their EV charger anxiety soon enough. [VWCA](#)

DRIVER'S SEAT

► FROM PAGE 3

ble-stripe graphic. Thus, Dodge's designers decorated their electrified concept with a motif from Chrysler's 1960s turbine-engine era.

I asked Dodge's rep who poached the Polara's logo. He thought the design with rotor or turbine motif surrounding it was something completely new. And what, he asked, is a Polara? Hmmm.

Nissan's Ariya BEV is striking. It's about the same size/class as VW's ID.4. My initial impression is the Ariya is cut from a nicer rug, as its interior trimmings seemed finer. The promotional exterior's copper hue apes an electrical conductor. Silver and gold are conductors too, just saying.

Nissan capped off its pre-show hospitality with a night-time welcome reception on the 33rd floor of the Marriott Marquis at McCormick Place. Sublime! You view Chicago's cityscape, my kind of John Muir alternative. Some dig mountains, I ogle nature's metropolis and its skyscrapers. Nissan's selfie friendly multi-framed Ariya poster-board was another attraction. The no-tab bar, with cocktail-mixing savvy bartenders, however, was the hot spot. I chose a locally brewed Goose Island wheat beer.

Toyota selected an offsite venue: Morgan Manufacturing (an exhibit space) to debut its three-row Grand Highlander crossover — obviously VW Atlas sized. Curt McAllister, Toyota's rep, says the Grand Highlander's extended size solves a problem: the previous three-row Highlander



Dodge Daytona BEV concept with throwback logo.



Nissan weighs in with its Ariya.

had poor back-row access and a very tight aft-most pew. Toyota's crew extended the third-row area by nearly six inches. For ingress, they placed integrated grab handles/USB charging ports at the C pillars. The second-row slides forward but doesn't do the Atlas' tilt. I found its rear elevated seat tracks wobbly foot holds. And the side door's threshold offers a narrow toehold. It's not a minivan. Toyota's presentation extolled its large, easy-to-use climate-control knobs. VW, please copy.

The show's first media day began with the Midwest Automotive Media Association's breakfast. MAMA presented its Family Vehicle and Luxury Vehicle awards. This year, Hyundai won both: the Palisade for the former, the Genesis GV60 BEV the latter. MAMA's nomination and judging process, I'm a jurist, skews our choices — substantially new vehicles presented at our rallies. The interesting thing is my finalists matched the winners. You'd think my VW-centric thinking would differ from the rest of the pack; it doesn't.

The opening breakfast sets Chicago apart from oth-



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

ers shows — you get an opportunity to meet your peers. I joined Larry Rust (Automotive Writers Group) and Jules Stayton (JulesOnWheelz.net). They're my Chicago-show companions. Stayton knows manufacturer reps and Larry has engineering contacts. By pooling our resources, we gain access to events and facetime with auto-industry experts.

After breakfast, motoring scribes headed to the exhibit halls. Attentive guides directed us toward each press event. They're scheduled so you don't have to rush or miss one carmaker's pitch to attend another.

Subaru's national park-theme had two tiers. We chose the upper deck. Subaru introduced its re-designed Crosstrek — now the brand's most popular model: 155,142 were delivered last year. The theatrics were as impressive as the vehicle. Artificial snow wafted down coinciding with wintry visuals. Plus, the exhibit's video displays were the floors we stood on, the elevated stage's front, sides and deck, too. Wild! But Subaru's canines garnered the most affection.

Jeep offered a special-edition Wrangler, but my eyes spied the electrified Dodge Hornet's door sticker. The print said Alfa Romeo, Italy. Nearby, Nissan beckoned: the best espresso bar by far!

Subaru of America's CEO Thomas Doll spoke at the Economic Club of Chicago Luncheon. His Subaru history lesson starting with the ill-fated Lilliputian 360. Doll likely represents everything VWoA wished it had — brand loyalty with ever-increasing market share. Subaru's path to success was rocky — not the movie. One rockpile was the Reagan-era car quotas, which restricted its growth but likely led it to manu-



Toyota's Grand Highlander goes head to head with VW's Atlas.



... : manufacture vehicles in the U.S. For the Orion-logo firm, the Outback, with or without Paul Hogan, hit pay dirt.

Auto analysts discuss trends

S&P Global's Stephanie Brinley, Detroit Free Press' Mark Phelan, CNBC's Michael Wayland and Consumer Reports' Jake Fisher were the Automotive Press Association's 2023 Roundtable panelists in January, streamed via Zoom.

The roundtable experts dove into EVs, splashing their introductory talk about battery-electric trends. BEVs were 5.5% of 2022 model-year sales. Tesla's charging infrastructure ranked higher in Fisher's opinion than others. VW-backed Electrify America was uniformly panned as awful, with broken chargers and >>



Cliff Leppke is the backseat driver to colleagues Jules Stayton and Larry Rust.

DRIVER'S SEAT

other problems. J.D. Power data shows failed network charging attempts climbed to 21% last year due to software glitches, payment processing, vandalism and poor maintenance. That's worse than 1 in 5. Nearly three-quarters of those who were unable to charge their vehicles last year blamed out-of-service chargers. Power did not release network reliability rankings.

- What's hot? The Corvette E-Ray, an AWD hybrid, is. Phelan added the Honda Accord hybrid. In cars, our panel noted not much new, except the Ford Mustang, which isn't here yet. Some were impressed with the Tesla-slaying BMW i4. It delivers the luxurious experience missing in Elon Musk's BEVs. Audi's EV efforts, according to the panel, have "not made much of a dent." And VW's MEB-dedicated BEV platform, which Ford shares in Europe, is a one-and-done venture. Blue Oval says it will develop its future EVs.

- What's a hot mess? VW's touch-sensing driver interface tops the roundtable's wrong-trend list. VW's Golf R, GTI and ID.4 use capacitive touch controls. All agreed "they get in the way of what you want to do." For example, one panelist remarked, "while the GTI is a fun-to-drive vehicle, the touch sensors ruin the experience. Its goodness is trashed by tech." Phelan dubbed VW a mistake: "Too much tech for tech's sake." VWAG signaled it is bringing back VW's push-button steering wheels switches. And the ID.7 aero sedan has an illuminated touch bar below the infotainment screen. Currently, the ID.4, GTI and Golf R don't illuminate these spots, which is an obvious but not so obvious sore spot.

- You wonder who's calling the shots at VW. Its touch controls were universally panned by the press, those who sold them and those who bought them. Then, VW announces software upgrades but cannot promptly deliver them. Plus, VW's German executives say various parts of the capacitive touch setup will be replaced with conventional push buttons. Most of these have not made it to the States. Meanwhile, bits of the touch scheme, such as the steering wheels, have migrated to other VW models.

- Toyota's Lexus RZ, in particular, and its compan-

ion Toyota bZ4X received poor scores. Some focused on the RZ's drive-by-wire steering yoke and sluggish charging. Others thought Toyota was indifferent toward BEVs. Many noted glitches, such as Toyota's BEV stop sale due to wheel departures. In contrast, the firm's hybrids, especially those with a plug-in component, which might qualify for a tax credit, often not well understood by consumers, is Toyota's bright spot. And if the new more powerful and yet more efficient Prius is a sign, hybrid motoring might mean a zippier, quieter driving experience.

- Jake mentioned another trend. Automakers have shifted to subscription-related vehicle apps. On some vehicles, these apps, which control heated seating, are too complicated and often don't work unless you have a smartphone subscription. Sometimes, you must have Apple CarPlay because the apps don't work on Android phones. CNN reports BMW offers a roughly \$12-a-month seat-heat subscription in Britain, not the USA. In the States, BMW has tried remote start on a subscription plan. Hyundai's presentation at the Chicago Auto Show addressed this concern. Hyundai's Olabisi Boyle says the brand's Bluelink telematics are standard and transferable; you don't need a subscription to warm your bum.

- While Chinese and Vietnamese vehicle marques haven't made a big splash in the USA, several Chinese-made models are already here: Polestar and Buicks. VinFast (Vietnam) looks good on paper. In contrast, its first batch of vehicles is disappointing.

- One topic got my attention: manual transmissions. Many agreed a BEV with a clutch pedal and gear-shift lever would increase driver engagement. Sudden acceleration isn't enough. Plus, we see news footage of somnambulant Tesla "drivers" in Autopilot.

- Brinley's outfit says VW and Audi didn't fare well in S&P Global Mobility's report on vehicle ownership trends. S&P identifies three major groupings of so-called "nomadic customers with unidentifiable loyalty patterns:" Those who retain their nomads, those who don't and those with low numbers of nomads.

A nomad, according to S&P, is a highly desired car-

buyer type — suburban with high income. They gravitate toward new features and trends. If they find and then are loyal to a brand, carmakers benefit.

VW and Audi are among eight brands with high numbers of nomads, who end up as one-and-done owners. VW and Audi, therefore, face the challenge of keeping their conquest customers from going elsewhere.

Tesla, Subaru, Hyundai and BMW have lots of nomads. But their conquests are likely to return for their next vehicles. In contrast, Ford, Toyota, Chevy and Nissan have fewer first-time buyers and lower one-and-done owners.

S&P Global's three-section chart doesn't say why some carmakers cannot keep their conquests. Dodge, which is the worst, likely doesn't have a varied vehicle lineup to keep them interested. Hyundai, in contrast, offers an expansive lineup from relatively cheap rides to large crossovers. So, you can trade in your rude-riding Accent sedan on a Santa Fe SUV or the Santa Cruz pickup. Subaru, with less breadth, does well too.

- While VW's American lineup is relatively trim compared with Hyundai's, I'd say VW needs a pickup. But a glance at *Consumer Reports'* vehicle satisfaction scores points to another trouble — VW ranks 27th out of 28 in satisfaction. Two VW models were on *CR's* least satisfying, with the Atlas Cross Sport the worst. Only 38% of surveyed buyers would do it again. The other low-rated VW was Taos.

- *CR* received responses from owners of more than 300,000 cars, SUVs, trucks and vans. It asked them whether they'd buy or lease this vehicle again. The most satisfying vehicles were high-performance sports cars. The Chevrolet Corvette scored 94 and Porsche's 911 just a tick lower. The latter brand had the highest satisfaction score at 83. Hyundai's Genesis was second at 80.

Sports cars with modest power scored well: Subaru BRZ, Toyota GR86, and Mazda MX-5 Miata. Energy- and-fuel-efficient vehicles did well. Here we see Hyundai's Ioniq 5, Rivian's R1T pickup and the Polestar 2 — all BEVs. Nearly any hybrid model



VW's display at the Chicago Auto Show.

outscored its conventional cousin. The relatively inexpensive Ford Maverick hybrid pickup scored 88 percent vs. the non-hybrid's 71.

Disappointments included entry-level luxury vehicles — especially Mercedes-Benz GLA and GLB with their frustrating infotainment systems. Some budget cars such as the Kia Forte had unhappy owners. But it was the VW Atlas Cross Sport that scored the worst — its supposedly sexier lower profile managed to be less wonderful than the lackluster regular Atlas. VW noticed. Check out the 2024 Atlas Cross Sport. The engine is gutsier at lower revs and the interior is finer.

- Dig deeply into *CR's* data and you'll discover VW's infotainment systems, especially the capacitive-touch cars ranked the worst: GTI and ID.4. The Taos also dives to the bottom of this list. *CR* says the ID.4/GTI was universally panned. "The infotainment system is laggy, full of bugs, and overly complicated," is a typical owner response. This summarized overwhelmingly negative owner sentiment. The motoring press agrees. *Car and Driver* dropped the Golf R/GTI from its 10-Best list due to VW's lousy driver interface.

And you've heard me grumble about VW's confounding capacitive touch setup. While it might look sanitary — easy on the eyes, don't let looks fool you. Your fingers will discover it's perplexing. VW's Taos, which we've pegged as particularly troublesome in the engine/transmission behavior, scored the least satisfying group in driving enjoyment. What happened to Fahrvergnügen? And the Lexus UX, which I reviewed as not having a luxurious user experience, made the five worse in its infotainment score. >>

DRIVER'S SEAT

VW/Audi/Porsche does have products with high scores. The Audi e-tron did well in comfort. As did the Genesis GV70, which I favorably reviewed last year. Porsche's Macan provided driving enjoyment, echoing a theme I discovered at a Milwaukee Porsche Macan event. Want driving satisfaction? Try Porsche (96), Genesis (95), Tesla (94) and BMW (93).

I'd say CR's scores reflect my own road-test evaluations. I found most Genesis models surprisingly well sorted out. In contrast, I dug the new Golf R's handling but hated its controls. Moreover, its interior materials were below par. It seems as if VW has invoked the early 1980s when its Chevy Malibu-boo-esque Rabbit sold well, but disappointed those who wanted a Teutonic car.

Gary's Ford truck

Remember my brother's 2009 Ford F-150 pickup? This built-Ford tough machine's intake manifold cracked, causing a major coolant leak. The vehicle hasn't moved since last summer; his Ford dealer cannot get parts to fix it. Gary says Ford's "no-customer service," which seemed like a godsend, told him how to monitor Ford's parts availability. In the end, Ford obsoleted the part — a key item for America's best-selling vehicle model.


But Gary discovered Ford's dealer communication missed an obvious remedy. His Ford store let him borrow that part's successor, which Ford says doesn't fit his truck. It turns out the only major difference between

the obsoleted item and the available one is the removable crankcase ventilation port. Due to the new part's design, you can remove the new fitting and plug in the old one.



So, \$400 later and a lot of wrenching, Gary's truck is back in service. Unlike the AUTOIST's Richard Van Treuren, who lost his VW Eos to a hurricane and regretted it. My brother, who lives near Van Treuren in Florida, wanted the storm to take out his truck; an insurance claim seemed like the only solution. I found this situation interesting because despite lots of online commentary on Ford's cracked intake manifolds, my brother couldn't find a forum where someone posted the relatively simple solution. Instead, people epoxy these things and hope for the best.

Gary says his 2019 GTI is still fun to drive. But VW's CarNet telematics, which went south with the 3G sunset, still is out of service. VW promised a free hardware/software update to revive this feature on his People First Warranty-covered vehicle. Instead, VW sent him a letter saying CarNet's return has been delayed.

I ended this section with the Ford truck update to put VW's woes in context. They say the biggest room is the room for improvement. VW appears to have hired an interior decorator and then put wall-to-wall carpet in its automotive dwelling. We'll see whether VWoA's new CEO, Pablo Di Si, will contact PBS' "Ask This Old House" and then mend its quarters. **VWCA**



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Letters

Jetta Sport is a great value

As the son of a former auto dealer, I have had furnished, owned or leased over 100 cars. I started looking to replace my 2020 Jetta S base car last summer. With only 20,000 miles, it was in like-new condition, the only downside being the ultra-soft suspension. Surveying dealers within 50 miles, I found almost no Jettas available. It seemed that VW was now only in the SUV business.

Finally, a 2023 Jetta Sport showed up at a dealer about 15 miles south of my home in Boca Raton, and the salesperson LISTENED to my wants and needs. The car was white with a stick shift, with a credit for side camera deletion (lack of chip availability).

The H/D suspension is not mentioned anywhere on the window sticker or online. I picked up that spec on a couple of auto mag reviews at the 2022 model inception. With VW's take on a limited-slip front end, taller wheels and Kumho performance tires, the handling is transformed.

Even the electric steering has some feel, and the brakes are exceptional, as before. More front seat articulation and improved upholstery, as well as lots of new gloss black body trim are new additions. No more suspension bottoming over railroad tracks, and very little brisk front-end cavitation on rapid takeoff



in first gear.

I'm an analog guy, so I guess I'll have to learn the new digital dash. And by the way, with a tenth of a liter more engine displacement, 11 more horsepower, but similar torque, the redline has been dropped 500 rpm on the tach. It also seems to me that there is a bit more juice in the mid-rpm range (perhaps an ignition reprogram).

The 2023 Jetta Sport is a world class value and compares or exceeds offerings of some vehicles at nearly twice the price. And it's not a SUV!

Greg Tibbets

Boca Raton, Florida

▶ HOW TO REACH US: Send email to VWAutoist@icloud.com or by mail to 621 E. Essex Ave., St. Louis, MO 63122.

VWCA annual membership meeting

WHERE: WindMill Grille & Pizzeria, 90 North Island Ave., Batavia, Illinois (suburban Chicago)

WHEN: Noon, Saturday, June 3, 2023

This is the opportunity for all VWCA members to present areas of concern to the national officers. We'll have pizza and a possible visit to a nearby museum. For more information, email vwclub@aol.com.



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▶ **LETTER-WRITERS:** For members with an urge to share any pertinent automotive thoughts, we're happy to print yours here. Send via email to VWAutoist@icloud.com or the other old-fashioned way: 621 E. Essex Ave., St. Louis MO 63122.

Best EVs you can't buy in the USA

Adapted from Teslarati, which covers electric vehicles and all things Tesla and Elon Musk.

While the United States has plenty of great electric vehicles to offer, there is a laundry list of great EVs that aren't coming to the United States any time soon.

While the EV revolution seems to be in full swing in much of the world, it has yet to catch up here in the United States. Many brands, including Mercedes, Volkswagen, and even Jeep, have been forced to sell some EVs outside of the U.S. first or potentially not sell them in North America at all. Here, we will list 5 of the best ones we wish would come across the pond in the next few years.

Considering the incredible popularity of the VW Golf in North America over the past 30 years, many were shocked to hear that the mass-market German automaker would not be bringing its electric equivalent to the new world. Perhaps even more bewildering, despite the VW ID.3's sales success in



Volkswagen's ID.3

Europe, Volkswagen has remained firm, stating that it will not be coming to the North American market.

Starting at 36,900 euros (\$39,046), the VW ID.3 is only slightly under the price of a new Tesla Model 3, but its eye-catching design stemming from the historic Golf makes it clear why the hatchback has garnered such a following. The ID.3 sounds like a blast using a single-motor RWD system, but with its meager 167 horsepower, it won't be breaking any land speed records. Though, as noted by many owners online, this lack of power is more than made up by the impressive range of 265 miles. Charging is a middle of the pack 30-40 minutes from 10-80%.

The four others: Jeep Avenger, NIO es8 (China), Mercedes EQA, Renault Zoe. **VWCA**

BALLOT

FOR ELECTION OF VWCA TRUSTEE-AT-LARGE



The Volkswagen Club of America has three nationally-elected Trustees-at-Large to represent the interests of members-at-large - those not served by a Chartered Local Chapter. The term of this office is three years and the terms are rotated so that one Trustee is elected each year.

This ballot contains the candidates that have placed their names in nomination as well as a blank space for a write-in. Our By-Laws allow one vote per membership.

Completed ballot for the 2023 election must be returned to VWCA Secretary Rick Carlson, 1402 Garden Street, Park Ridge, IL 60068 in time to be received no later than June 1, 2023. Ballots must contain a VWCA membership number and be validated by a blind list of current membership numbers. Ballots are counted and the winner announced at the annual VWCA Convention. Terms of office begin on September 1.

THE CANDIDATES

(Vote for one)

FRED FRANK, Springfield, Illinois is the current Chairman of the Board of Trustees. Fred has been a VWCA member for over 40 years.

WRITE-IN: _____

INSTRUCTIONS: After voting, members may tear out this page, make a photocopy, or print a copy from the complete Autoist on our web site, www.vwclub.org. **Membership number, found on your Autoist mailing label, must be included.**

BALLOT MUST BE RECEIVED BY JUNE 1, 2023

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**Rick Carlson
VWCA Secretary
1402 Garden St.
Park Ridge IL 60068-3802**

Parting Shot

In memory of Carl Hahn

Dr. Carl Hahn, a lifelong Volkswagen mover and shaker, transformed the people-car company. He was VWoA's president from 1959 to 1965. During his U.S. tenure, Hahn played an important role in establishing the VW Beetle as an American icon through deft marketing.

He died on Jan. 14 at his home in Wolfsburg, Germany, at age 96.

Furthermore, he expanded VWoA's number of employees, modernized its operations and cultivated dealer relationships.

Hahn understood the brand's U.S. dealers needed nationwide advertising. But he was "terribly disappointed" with American advertising executives until he met the "honest" folks at Doyle Dane Bernbach. Honesty rather than Madison Avenue puffery suited Hahn's sensibilities. Hahn banned glamorous drawings or paintings of VW's cars. VW even ran an ad without a photograph because VW didn't have anything new to show.

Hahn, who became CEO at VW's German headquarters in 1982, expanded the company's depth. Before 1982, he championed the acquisition of Audi and let that brand have its own identity. He'd guided VW into further breadth by acquiring Skoda and Seat. He spearheaded VW's Chinese ventures.

One thing he didn't like was the American-made VW Rabbit. He fired VWoA president James McLernon, a former Chevrolet engineer, recruited to get VW's Westmoreland plant running. The Rabbit's replacement, the 1985 Golf, although produced in the States,



recaptured the brand's Teutonic flare, but not a large market share. Hahn says one of his biggest regrets was the slide in VW's U.S. sales.

There was a time when Americans dubbed Hahn "Mr. Volkswagen"; he was a key part of

the Beetle's success story. Others say Hahn was a member of Generation Golf. His emphasis on the Golf helped VW strengthen its European-market sales. He also steered VW toward further globalization with a portfolio of front-drive vehicles. — Cliff Leppke

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VW Toon-ups

BY TOM JANISZEWSKI ✉ volkstom@sbcglobal.net

