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The Life Cycle of the Beetle

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I INTRODUCTION

A motor car is a superb instrument, powerful, instantly responsive. At the touch of the hand, a ton and a half of gleaming steel begins to purr with the power of more than a hundred horses. The feather like movement of a short lever makes it roll backwards and forwards.. cruising at 60 m.p.h. it generates about the same amount of kinetic energy as a 75 millimetre artillery shell. Yet, with the touch of a foot on the break pedal, this hurtling mass can be stopped in six seconds. (1)

Since its development at the turn of the century, the automobile has been welcomed by varying reactions. It has been worshipped as the god of engineering and condemned as the deadliest of designs. In his book, "Design for the Real World", Victor Papanek points out the high price paid for the luxury of automisation both in terms of lives claimed by these 'steel coffins' (2) and the continual destruction of the environment to which car fumes are a leading contributor. Irrespective of the arguments raised for and against the automobile it has become an intrinsic part of modern society, as Papanek acknowledges,

A cultural object in its own culture and time is no more noticable than the gear lever in our automobile; its use becomes as habitual as breathing. (3)

Not only has the individual become so dependent on the automobile as a means of transport but the entire structure of society relies on the automotive and subsequently the petrochemicals industries for support. As a result, the automobile has played an important role in social attitudes down through the years. The car industry has been a telling factor in the shaping of the world.

This dissertation focuses on one car in particular; the Volkswagen Beetle. It traces the historical and social attitudes which led to its creation and which it, in turn, transformed. I have established the philosophies or inspirations which were the foundations of its design. The technical and visual aspects which, in conjunction with the skilful manipulation of social attitudes, led to 20 million VW Beetles to be manufactured. Finally, this thesis examines the role of the VW as cult object, how it acquired this position and its significance in the world today.

II EVOLUTION

Before we trace the origins of the design of the VW Beetle, it is beneficial for us to first appreciate the technical features which eventually became standard.

The VW is powered by an air cooled, four cylinder horizontally-opposed engine (Fig.1). Being air cooled the engine is subject to neither boiling over or freezing up and, as a result, performs satisfactorily in various climatic extremes. The engine is rear mounted and so eliminates the need for the long power shaft, typical of other cars, which is required to connect the front engine with the rear drive wheels. With the engine at the rear, the traction of the drive wheels is improved by the distribution of weight. The VW suspension system incorporates rear swing axle type with independent torsion bar suspension at the front although revolutionary at the time this arrangement has become a popular feature in car design in general.

Even more revolutionary in its day was the VW girderless chassis. The girder frame chassis was a solid, welded base which supported all the components including the passengers. However, the VW dispensed with this using its pressed steel body as the structural unit of the car.

Through the many years of its production, the VW essential form remained unchanged. Many changes did occur: the rear

Der Motor (1)

Vierzylinder-4-Takt-Vergasermotor. Je zwei Zylinder gegenüberliegend (Boxermotor). Automatisch geregelte Luftkühlung durch Gebläse.

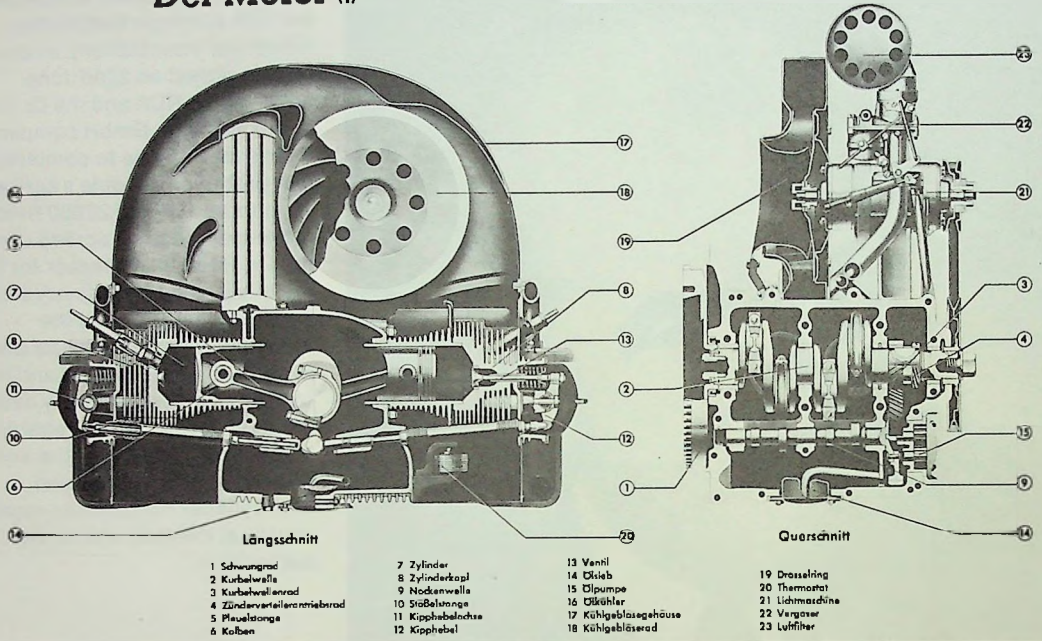


Fig. 1: The Volkswagen Engine.

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window was enlarged and the engine capacity was increased from the original 1,000 cc. to 1600 cc. The VW Beetle that we see persisting on our roads today is quintessentially the same as the one designed before World War II and so we must return to that apprehensive era in order for us to establish its design origins.

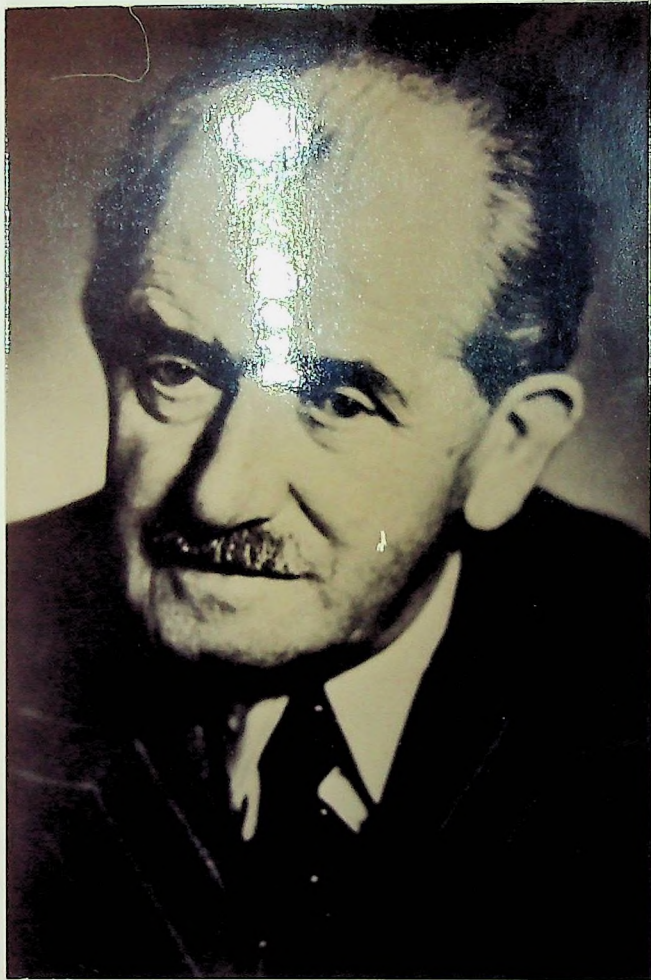


Fig. 2: Dr. Ing. h.c. Ferdinand Porsche.
Father of the Volkswagen

PORSCHE AND THE SMALL CAR

Ferdinand Porsche (Fig.2) was an automotive engineering genius who is credited as being the Father of the Volkswagen, his dream being to design a mass-produced, economical small car. This dream was not unique since the success of the Model T. Ford (Fig.3), 15,007,033 having been sold by 1927, others had also tried to emulate this achievement. The small car was a development of the cycle car (Fig.4) which enjoyed popularity from 1900 - 1920. However, the cycle car was primitive and unpractical while the only alternative was the larger 'horseless carriages' which were the reserved luxury of the aristocracy. Porsche sought to make a small automobile to bring the luxury of driving to the masses. Granted small cars became more popular; Austin, Morris, Standard and Jowett were all producing moderately successful cars. However, Porsche recognised one underlying error made in their design, they were merely scaled-down versions of the larger coaches (Fig.5). Porsche felt that the small car had to be designed from first principles, akin to the Bauhaus theorists he felt that the form of the small car should be dictated purely by functional requirements and not serve as a small imitation.

Porsche was widely renowned in the automotive industry, not least for his contribution to the industry while working for the larger car manufacturers but also due to his significant successes in the International Racing Circuit. Porsche had



Fig. 3: The Model T. Ford was in production for 19 years but held the record for production levels for 45 years.



Fig. 4: Cycle Car, by Daimler, 1889.

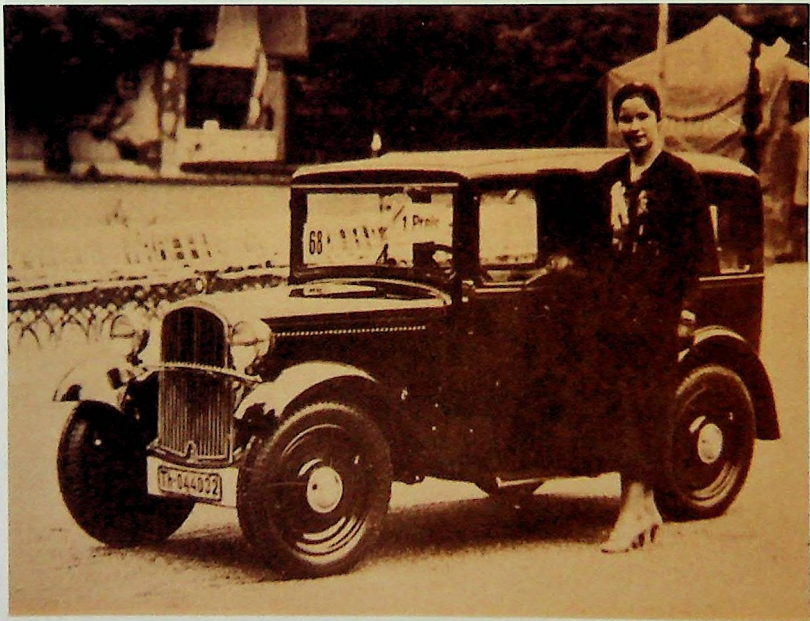


Fig. 5: 1930s Small Car Design,
BMW AM4

seen the way to promote the idea of a small car via the racing car when in 1922, he designed the 1 litre 'Sascha' sports car (Fig.6) financed by Count Kolowrat.

To list Porsche's many contributions and successes in automotive design would be too time-consuming, however, his finest hour must have been the success of the Auto Union racing car (Fig.7). It was with this that Porsche was able to test out his views of rear mounted engines and his newly patented 'torsion-bar suspension system'. With this system, Porsche was able to apply a constant force, keeping the wheels on the road while allowing them to rise over bumps etc. The wheels are connected to a bar in such a manner that as the wheel rises it creates a torsion (twisting) force in the bar which resists the wheel movement. The success of these systems were conclusively proven when Porsche's Auto Union sports car smashed the reign of the Mercedes' cars on the International Grand Prix Circuit. Cars, whose design also owed much to Porsche's time with the Daimler and Benz companies. The Auto Union car subsequently went on to establish speed records on the new Autobahnen which were to remain unbroken for two decades.

The larger car manufacturers gave scant attention to Porsche's small car ideals, they were proud of their reputations of high quality earned by their large automobiles. Unable to contain his erratic nature, so common of geniuses, he left the larger car manufacturers.

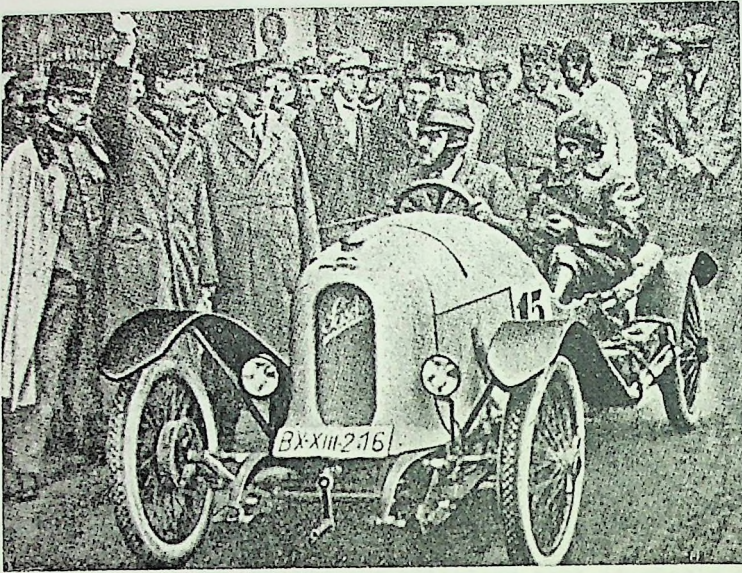


Fig. 6: Sascha Sports Car

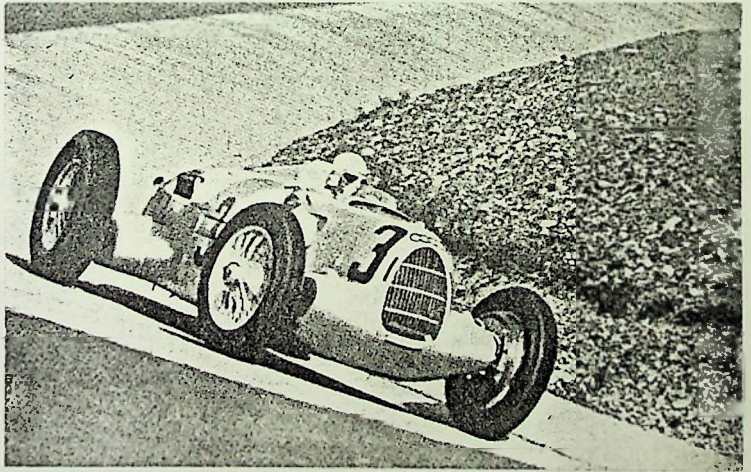


Fig. 7: Auto Union Racing Car

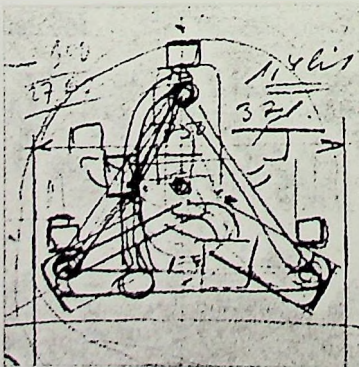


Fig. 8: First Sketch of
Volkswagen Engine.

PROJECT NO. 12

In 1930, after three stormy decades with five firms, Porsche set up his own design consultancy, Konstruktion Ltd., which survived on contacts for automobile designs. It was now that he was able to pursue his dream of producing a small car like no other, a dream he shared with his small core of loyal designers. He already was satisfied that it should have a rear-mounted engine and, with sketches that would bring encouragement to any floundering design student, he expressed some of his ideas (Fig.8).

Despite having no financial backing, Konstruktion Ltd. eagerly commenced work on the small car, which was referred to as: Project No.12.

ZUNDAPP, VOLKSAUTO

Project No.12 first received financial backing from Fritz Neumeyer, the owner of the Zundapp Motor Works. Neumeyer insisted that the car or 'Volksauto' should be powered by a water cooled, five cylinder engine, rear mounted. Uncharacteristically, Porsche consented and produced three Zundapp-Porsche prototypes (Fig.9). On test runs the engine choice proved to be detrimental as the oil and water reservoirs boiled over after 6 miles. The project was discontinued.

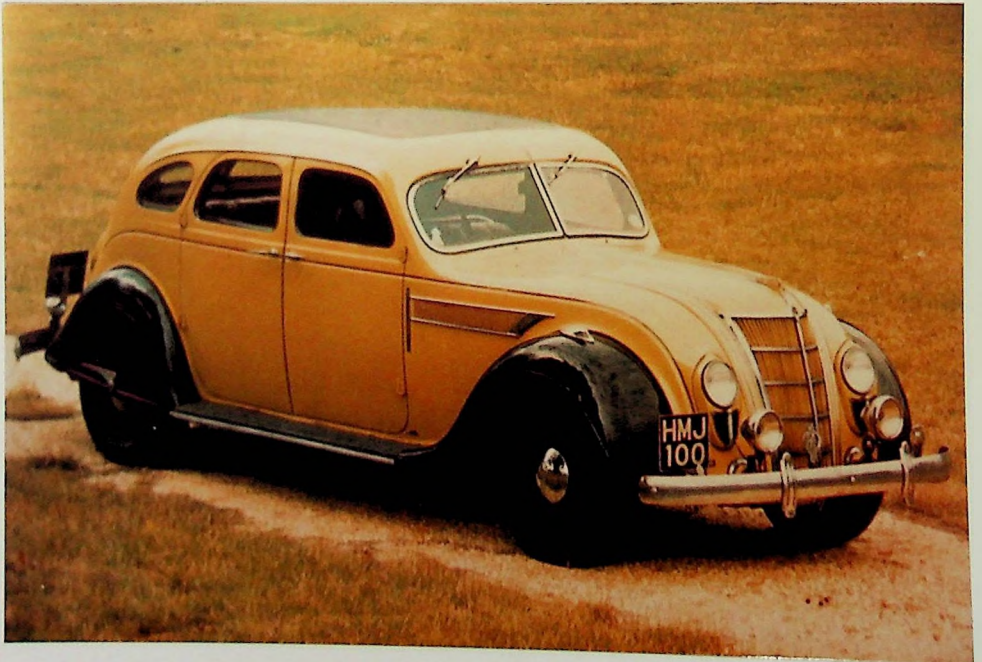
However, the first signs of the Beetle shape were recognisable. In styling the body, Porsche's team had considered the new science of streamlining, thus breaking away from the boxy small car. The Beetle is often attributed to have been influenced by the Chrysler Airflow (Fig.10). However, since this was not launched until 1934 and even then, a veritable failure, it is unlikely that Porsche ever knew of it. Porsche's recognition of the importance of streamlining, in fact, dates back to 1910, when he incorporated a primitive version, or as he termed 'tulip line', in an Austro-Daimler to win the Prince Heinrich Rally (4).

Porsche's jump from the styling of the larger front engine cars is not so radical when one examines the form of his prototype for 'Wanderer' (Fig.11). This car had a 3.5 litre



Fig. 9: Zundapp, Volksauto.

Fig. 10: Chrysler Airflow.



engine in front and so had the long front bonnet typical of the large cars. In looking at the Zundapp prototype it could well be accused of being a scaling down exercise. (Note the box-shaped bonnet as opposed to the familiar VW curves which were already well pronounced at the rear).



Fig. 11: Wanderer, Porsche Prototype.

Fig. 12: N.S.U. Type 32.



N.S.U. TYPE 32

In 1933, Porsche visited Russia where his fame had travelled. He was given a hero's welcome and offered the position of chief designer of motor vehicles, tractors and engines. "A prophet is never recognised in his own country" - this might also be applied to car designers. Porsche, however, refused since the offer necessitated that all links with Germany be cut.

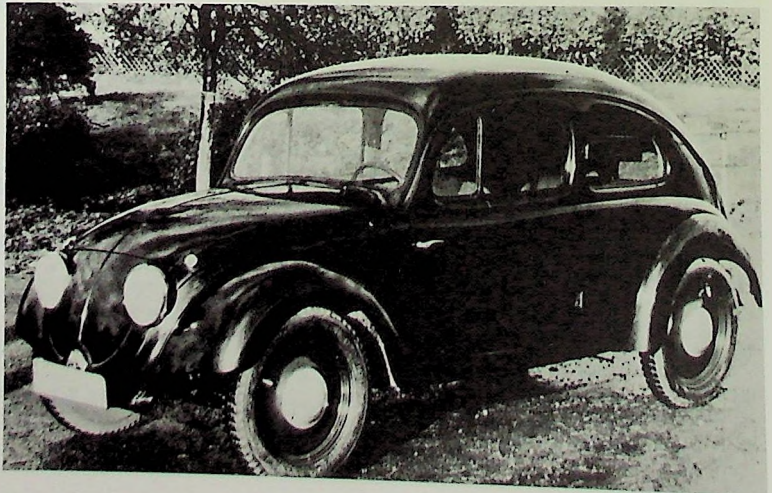
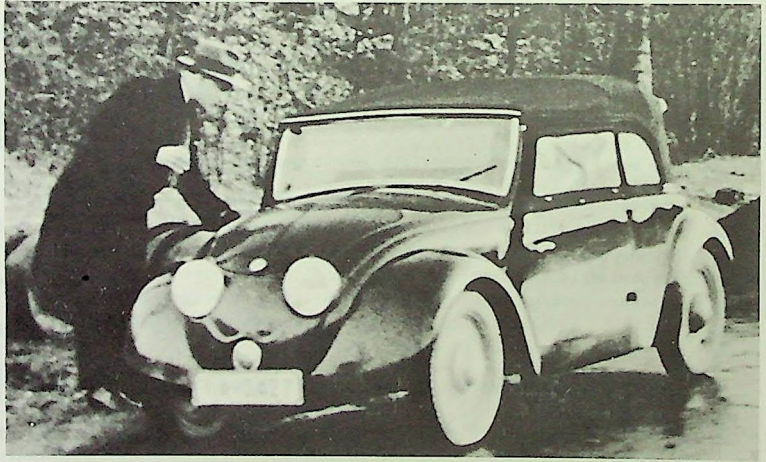
He returned to his beloved Germany to be welcomed by another financial backer, who was interested in Project No.12. The N.S.U. Motor Works were a motorcycle producing concern. However, since the market had slumped that year and the N.S.U. director sought salvation in the small car. Again, Porsche was asked to produce three prototypes. Now, the project, titled N.S.U. Type 32 (Fig.12) embodied the basic VW features.

In the same year as Porsche refined the features of streamlining and rear-mounted engines, the Tatra V8, simultaneously designed by Hans Ledwinka, also incorporated these features (Fig.13) Given complete freedom Porsche's original concepts proved to be correct when the N.S.U. prototype gave better trial performances. However, due to a previous contract with Fiat, selling their car producing rights, the N.S.U. were unable to pursue the project. Van Falkenhayn was nonetheless impressed with this car which was the immediate ancestor of the Volkswagen.



Fig. 13: Tatra V8

Fig. 14: Volkswagen Series 3



CAR POLITICS

Nothing has spread socialist feeling more than the use of the automobile ... a picture of the arrogance of wealth.

Woodrow Wilson (5)

This prophetic statement by the future president of America recognised the political power of the automobile while it was in its infant stage. It was as a vehicle for political propaganda that the Volkswagen managed to take off.

Adolf Hitler was, amongst other things, a car fanatic. In his book 'Mein Kampf', he wrote of his aims of

breaking the motoring privileges of the upper class with the people's car [or Volkswagen] (6)

While incarcerated, he had read Henry Ford's ghosted autobiography, 'My Life and Work', who is also noted for his strong anti-semitic views. The motor trade was never short of its unsavoury characters. Through automisation Hitler saw a solution to Germany's crippling unemployment in car manufacture and in the construction of motor routes or autobahns.

The motorised Utopia which Hitler envisaged also served as good political bait as his speeches earned rapturous, even fanatical responses, as he promised cars for all without any concrete proposals as to how that might be achieved.

That is, until he heard of Project No.12.

When Porsche met Hitler to discuss the matter of the 'people's car' he listened to similar requirements he had established himself:

- 1) The car was to have a cruising speed of 60 m.p.h.
"It was to be the vehicles for the Fuhrer's motorways"
- 2) It was to be economical to run, getting 40 miles to the gallon, so that petrol costs would not exceed 3 Reichmarks for 40 miles.
- 3) It would have five seats, "For we cannot part children from their parents". (All heart!)
- 4) It would have an air cooled engine,
"for not every country doctor owns a garage". (7)

Initially, Porsche must have been delighted that someone else, particularly with such power, shared his aims, but when he was told that the car was to be sold for under 1,000 R.M. (£80 approximately), he might have made one prophetic conclusion, "This man is mad!" There were cars retailing at just over £100 but these were mass produced using sophisticated production techniques. Porsche saw the impossibility of the task but Hitler was not someone to whom one said no. Porsche felt that he would have to exceed the specified cost but he knew the people would benefit more from a realistically priced existing car than a cheap ideal car.

Porsche submitted his memorandum in which he expressed his views as to what a small car entails on 17th January 1934.

This memorandum included the following:

A people's car must not be a miniature version of an automobile with reduced dimensions, likely to affect its handling, performance and operating life, yet with relatively high weight; instead it should be an entirely servicable car of normal dimensions, yet relatively low weight, an object which can be achieved only by completely new methods. (8)

At this stage Porsche knew that by using a stronger, pressed steel frame he could dispense with the heavy girder frame structure. Also, he had by the rear location of the engine dispensed with the need of a long heavy power shaft and through these he was guaranteed a considerable reduction in weight.

A people's car, furthermore, must not be a vehicle with limited range of applications; instead a simple interchangeability of bodies should suffice to render it suitable for all probable purposes - not only as a private car but also as a goods delivery vehicle or for certain military functions. (9)

No doubt this pleased Hitler but this inter-changeability of parts was to allow the Volkswagen to be easily repaired and altered. The VW was designed in such a way that it could be completely disassembled using a couple of spanners. This was a great attraction to those who poured over and 'souped up' their Beetles in the years to come.

A people's car must not be burdened with the complex imagery calling for an increased level of maintenance but instead should be a vehicle with equipment designed to be as foolproof as possible, with all forms of maintenance reduced to a practical minimum. (10)

Here, Porsche seems to have foreseen the scourge of 'planned obsolescence' and professes the VW's firm stance against it. Porsche warns us of the long life which the VW would enjoy to allow it to maintain a strong presence on the roads even to this day.

Safety and comfort features seem to suffer on Porsche's list of priorities but the cost restraints must be remembered however. In Detroit, the car manufacturers were of the opinion that safety belts reflected badly on a car's image and so were often omitted, leading Preston Tucker to make the quip that they should be tried for criminal negligence. Germany did not enjoy the same level of automisation as America and road accidents were not a going concern. However, with its strengthened body frame, the Volkswagen offered greater protection for its occupants than the wooden shells which zoomed around on the girder frame chassis.

THE R.D.A. AND THE CONTACT

As already mentioned, the motor industry is not a collection of the nicest people. They protect their markets like territorial bears. Tucker paid dearly for his affront on the Detroit firms when they starved his production line of materials and manipulated the judiciary system to stop him.

The R.D.A. (State association of motor manufacturers) were equally opposed to Porsche's effort, but now with Hitler giving his support, they were coerced into supporting this project which was in direct conflict with their interests. Should a car, as had been specified, be produced it would completely pull the market from under them. However, they were as equally sceptical of its possibility as they were opposed to it. Herr Opel summed it up, as he reached over the contract table to shake Porsche's hand:

Herr Doktor Porsche, what a wonderful contract. You will be working on a project for ten months, you will be well paid and then you will find out that you are facing an impossible proposition - and all you have to do then is submit a laconic memorandum to the very highest level. (11)

The Volkswagen was to benefit from such a hostile relationship between the contract parties. What with the R.D.A. conducting the prototype tests one could be sure that it would not be an easy task. It took Porsche some time to settle upon which type of power unit that was most suitable considering the cost restraints. It was one Franz Xavier

Reimspeiss who eventually came up with the four cylinder boxermotor which was to go on to power over 20 million Beetles. It was Reimspeiss who also designed the famous Volkswagen monogram. By now, the project which started as Project No.12 was given the denomination VW Series 3, since again Porsche had to produce three prototypes (Fig.14). It was Hitler who provided the finish to the car making it a Beetle in every respect,

It should look like a beetle, you've only got to look at nature to see what streamlining is, (12)

as he sketched out his improvement to the bonnet (Fig.15), resulting in the familiar curve. When Porsche was eventually satisfied they were submitted to the R.D.A. for individual testing of 312,000 miles at high speed along the autobahnen and through the treacherous Black Forest routes.

This Hercules had fulfilled its twelve tasks with flying colours and the R.D.A. were forced to report favourably. Orders were given for 30 more prototypes to be built at the Benz plant, and further resolved with minor improvements. These were titled the VW 30 (Fig.16). Note how the headlights are now modelled into the front bulbous wings and the primitive provision of a front boot - this, of course, was later extended.

These vehicles were tested over a total of 2.4 million km. nothing was being left to chance. Finally, in 1938, the VW 38 prototypes were constructed for testing and exhibition

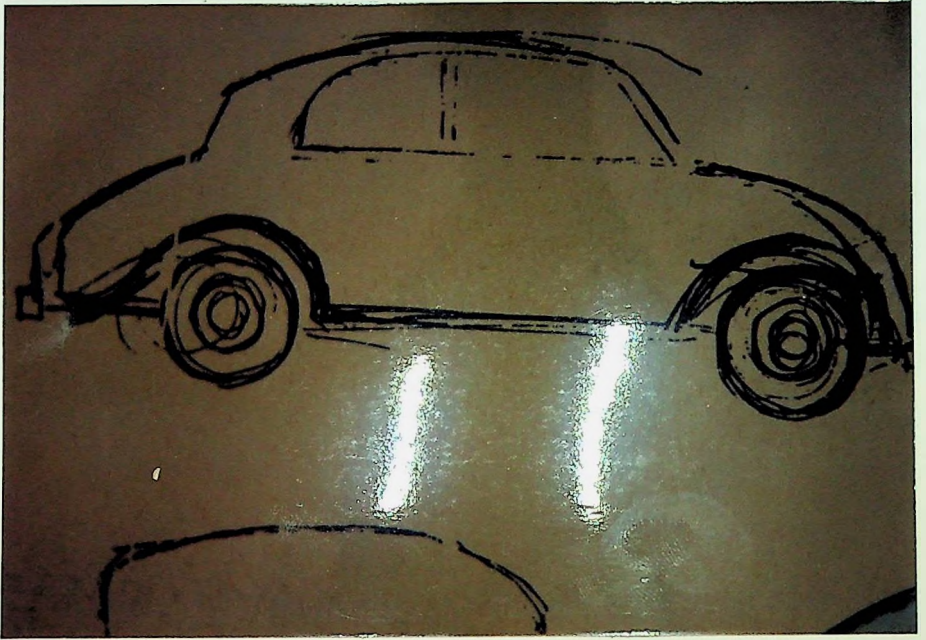
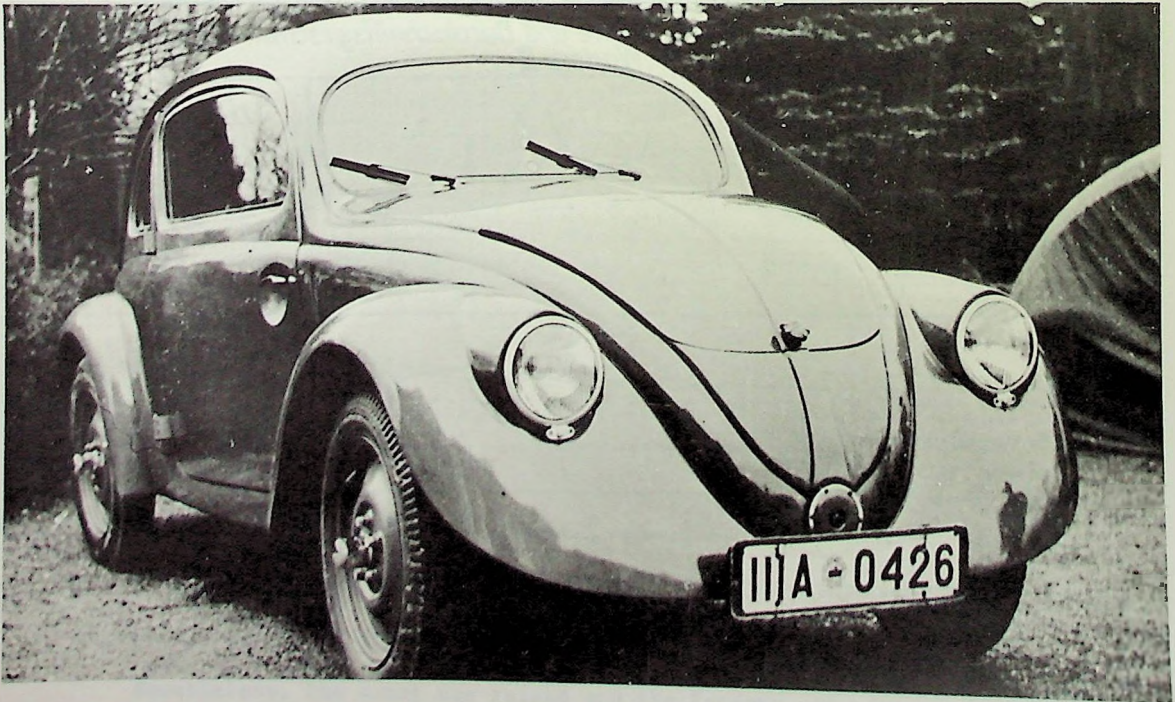


Fig. 15: Hitlers Sketch. Note improvement to bonnet.

Fig. 16: Volkswagen Series 30.



purposes (Fig.17). These were now ready for manufacture complete with the split screen, oval shaped, rear window which was subsequently enlarged and modified in production years. The VW 38 was now referred to as the K.D.F. Wagen (Strength-through-joy-car) as Hitler seemed partial to such meaningful, tongue-torturing names.

Armed with the K.D.F. for his propaganda, Hitler proceeded with plans for the construction of the VW plant and town, which he saw fit to baptise, "the town of the Strength-through-Joy Car". These must have been somewhat cumbersome on addressed envelopes and it was fortunately changed to Wolfsburg after the war.

The town and factory were constructed using the finance acquired through the Kdf Saving Scheme. This was a hire purchase scheme with a difference, that instead of receiving the car on the first installment, the car was to be handed over when the final payment was made.

The Kdf philosophy was explained at the laying of the foundation stone of the VW plant (Fig.18) as follows:

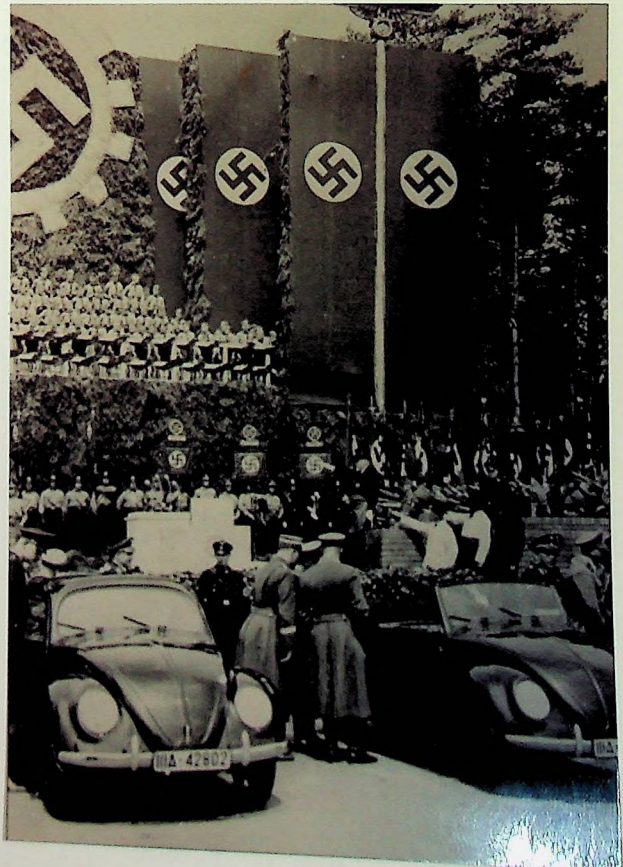
This great work will be achieved through the strength of the German people and it shall give joy to the German people. (13)

As it turned out not one of the 336,668 investors experienced the joy because Hitler invaded Poland and started World War II, while the German people were busy licking stamps. Nonetheless, the money was raised and the factory, complete



Fig. 17: VW 38. "Kdf wagen"

Fig. 18: Laying the Foundation Stone
for the Kdf Factory.



with town, was built. It is interesting to examine photographs of these as they appear to epitomise the Bauhaus ideals - 'Machines for living in' with walkways in the sky (Fig.19) - ordered structures derived from geometric shapes. It was ironic that while Hitler financed such an exercise, at the same time, he was persecuting the followers of the Bauhaus School.





Fig. 19: View along front of factory.

WAR TIME

The Volkswagen did not shirk from its war time responsibilities. This fighting machine, made from a pleasure vehicle, gave new meaning to Hitler's Strength-through-Joy theme. In fact it adapted so well to the war effort that one wonders whether there had been an ulterior motive behind the haste with which the project was executed. Though ready to produce Volkswagen cars before the war, the entire plant was turned over immediately to producing for the war effort.

During the war, only 640 VW cars were produced while the more aggressive version, the Kubelwagen numbered 50,435 (Fig.20). The Volkswagen took to the water in the form of the Schwimmenwagen (Fig.21) as Porsche produced a most successful amphibious car. Although the VW was on the losing side, the war served as a further test of its endurance and versatility, virtues which earned the admiration of its conquerers. The significance of the VW and its role in determining the course of the war was recognised as the Volkswagen plant was consequently destroyed by Allied bombing raids.

The days of the VW's political career were over, with two-thirds of the factory destroyed and Germany a crippled nation there seemed little hope for this war veteran.

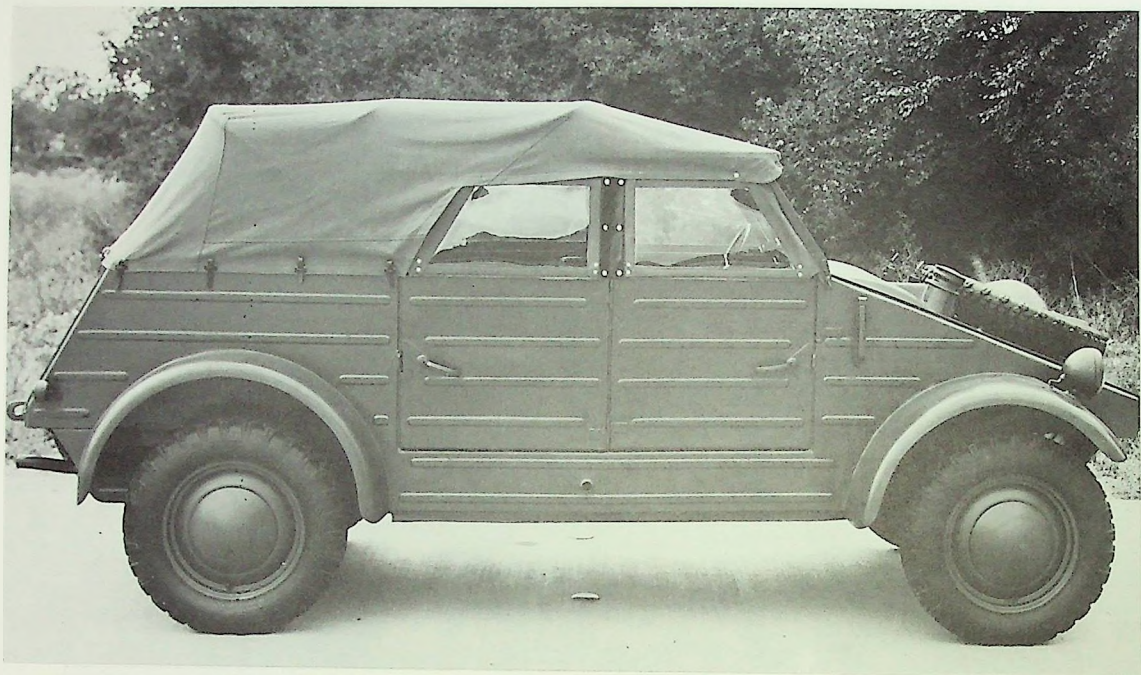
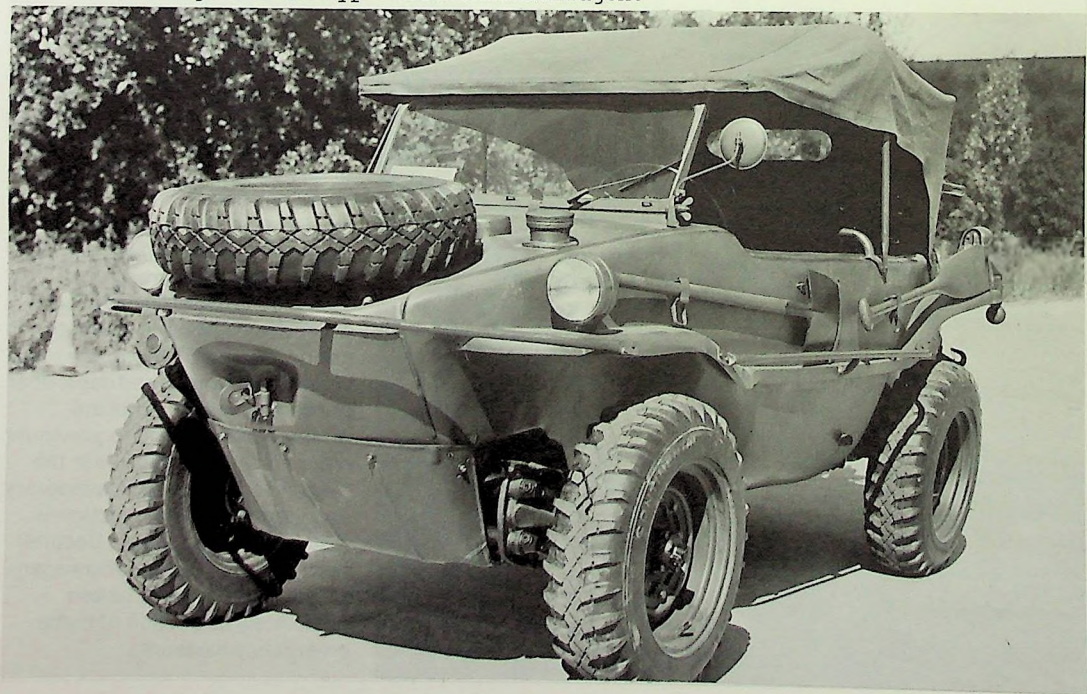


Fig. 20: VW Type 82:Kubelwagen.

Fig. 21: VW Type 166:Schwimmenwagen.



POST WAR RECOVERY

With the war damage to Volkswagen plant totalling 156 million Reichmarks, the subsequent success of the VW in pulling Germany out of economic depression is all the more remarkable. The VW plight surely seemed at an end with its designer, Ferdinand Porsche falsely imprisoned in France for war crimes. It was in an effort to raise the money to free him that his son, Ferry, designed the Cistalia racing car for a wealthy Italian, thus giving rise to the Volkswagen's perfect cousin, the Porsche sports car.

Regarding the Volkswagen factory, it was the British Army who kindled the flames from which this phoenix was to rise. The VW plant originally served as a repair depot but aware of the merits of its war time version, the army instigated the production of the post war Beetle. In the year following the war the VW plant produced 10,000 cars. This venture served as a means of providing transport for the Army as well as a diversion for idle soldiers other than soccer and 'frauleins'. But most importantly, it served as an economical and psychological boost for the demoralised German people.

In 1945 the Army, eager to harvest the fruit of their soccer sacrifices, offered the factory to representatives of the Automotive Industry as a viable car-producing concern. In the light of what was to come, the comments of these representatives have become famous. Ernest Breech reported

back to Ford:

Mr. Ford, I don't think what we're being offered here is worth a damn! (14)

Lord Rootes, head of the English contingent was equally impressed:

A car like this will remain popular for two or three years, if that. To build the car commercially would be a completely uneconomic exercise. (15)

Such blind condemnation of the Volkswagen may be attributed to post war snobbery and having scant regard for the defeated opponent and their efforts. There would also have been a conflict of interests, being themselves competitors in the automobile market, they did not welcome favourably any competition as they paranoically professed the superiority of their own products. Thus, when the British Army withdrew, the VW plant was left for many years without an owner, being neither State nor private property. Rejected, it was left ownerless and unwanted.

Such rejection in the light of its ultimate success led the Volkswagen Beetle to be regarded as the 'Ugly Duckling' of the automotive industry.

II DEVELOPMENT

NORDHOFF

In 1948, before their withdrawal the British Army appointed an ex-Opel man as director of Volkswagen. In Heinz Nordhoff the Volkswagen Beetle found another powerful ally. Nordhoff was not impressed with his first encounter with the Volkswagen:

I regarded the Volkswagen with utmost scepticism. It was tarred too much with the brush of political trickery and the way it looked, it was anything but a beauty..... But its designer, Professor Porsche had worked something into it which made this diamond very much worth our while to polish. (16)

Already the VW had merited export; in the previous year 56 VW sedans had been exported to Holland. The first export agents were the Pon Brothers of Amersford (See Fig.22). Under Nordhoff's direction VW exports rose dramatically to 4,464, to Switzerland, Denmark, Luxemburg, Sweden and Belgium, and constituted 23% of VW production in 1948.

Nordhoff quickly established a strong relationship with the work force as he addressed factory meetings with true oratory skills: "My dear workmates...". He insisted on a one model policy with a high quality of paintwork. He continually improved the organisation and layout of the factory, optimising the available processes. He also was successful in securing raw materials through means of barter and hard bargaining as well as establishing contracts with international dealers.



Fig. 22: The first VW exports.

Fig 23: The One Millionth Beetle.



As a result of these measures, Nordhoff considerably reduced the production costs. No one had tried this since the Germany currency was effectively worthless.

On the 20th June 1948, Nordhoff proved to have had great foresight when the German currency was reformed. Had it not been for his earlier efforts, the VW may not have survived the transition. The Allied Military Government handed the plant over to the German Federal Government in Bonn, in 1949. The VW with Nordhoff at the wheel was now ready for attack in the battlefield of the international car market. Since the war-defeated Deutschmark was still comparably low, the VW benefited in currency changes with a low selling price.

In 1950, the deliveries of completely knocked down cars had arrived in Brazil and Ireland. By 1953, "Volkswagen Do Brasil S.A." was established as Volkswagen's first subsidiary abroad. As the Volkswagen plague swept the world, its source, Wolfsburg, flourished and by 1955 it had produced its one millionth Beetle (See Fig. 23). Since neither state or privately owned, the Volkswagenwerk had no obligations other than to its own employees. Nordhoff took great care of them, funding construction, municipal services, organising social evenings and art exhibitions, the first of which displayed the work of Franz Marc. Nordhoff was a noted art collector.

The fact that the VW was neither state nor private property also contributed to its low selling price, compared with other cars. By 1955, with 1,000,000 Volkswagen, Porsche's dream was at last seeing realisation so much so that the Volkswagen company were on the strength of Beetle production, to produce 100,000 VW vans. The evolution of the van, however, was not as laborious as that of the VW Beetle. The VW van was not the result of hundreds of engineering drawings but rather a coffee break sketch by one of the Pon Brothers.

The sketch (See Fig. 24) is uncannily descriptive of the final product, (so much for concept generation and development). Mr. Pon, probably unknowingly, has left a significant mark on the urban landscape as this van became phenominally popular as a commercial vehicle. The simplicity of form which the van adopts, rectangular, may also display Bauhaus characteristics of ordered society, as were put to good use in an advertisement for it (See Fig.25).

It was a more concerted effort which led to the launch of the VW Karmann Ghia Coupé (See Fig.26). The Ghia was intended to meet the requirements of that section of the market which the Beetle and van did not meet. Designed by an Italian designer, the Ghia was a sporty two-seater, and again, rear engined, aimed at the American market which was still impervious to the Beetle's advances. The Karmann Ghia was only moderately successful, overshadowed by the success of the van and the Beetle.



Fig. 26: Karmann Ghia Coupe



While America resisted the VW, the car flourished elsewhere, with its range of climatic tolerance (See Fig.27). The Volkswagen was used in the Antartica and in the Sahara. It was at this point that the Volkswagen, as an important economic factor, was most notable. Having been described as the economic miracle which saved Germany, it played an important role in the economy of foreign countries, particularly Brazil and Mexico. Its immeasurable value to the economies of thse countries is evident in Fig. 28 and Fig. 29.



Fig. 27: From the hot, dusty Sahara
to the cold Antartica.





Fig. 28:
Brazillian Beetles.



Fig. 29:
Mexican Beetles,
Taxi stand.



Fig. 30 Harley Earl's Dream Car, 1938.

Fig. 31: Ford Edsel.



HOW THE WEST WAS WON

The success of the VW in America was not without its teething problems. Since the war a small steady flow of VWs had been reaching the United States, similarly, in England, many soldiers returned with this remarkable car they had encountered while away. However, it was not until 1953 that Nordhoff geared up to overtake the American car market. This car did not at first appeal to the requirements of the American consumer. One Detroit automotive expert said that it was preposterous to expect

the fastidious long-legged Americans to squeeze themselves, with the aid of a shoe horn, into these rolling sardine tins. (17)

These were the great days of the Detroit car manufacturers - 'the Big 3', Ford, Chrysler and General Motors (GM). It was a time when greater emphasis was placed on a car's styling than on its performance; image was all important. Cars were lavishly embellished with several pounds of chrome trimmings. Each year they grew longer, lower and wider. The imagery of aeroplane features in car designs had been instigated by Harley Earl in 1938 with his GM "Dream Car" (See Fig. 30). Aeroplane fins and rocket blast rear lights were the order of the day.

Wheels, for example, were often hidden or de-emphasised in the overall design, which helped to strengthen the overall illusion that the car was made to hover or fly. (18).

These cars were expensive to buy, uneconomical to run, devouring gallons of fuel and were not long lasting. The short life span of these cars was intentional on the part of the manufacturers. It was referred to as 'Planned Obsolescence'. A short lived product has a greater turnover and so produces a constant market. Since the car was not intended to last long, little attention was paid to the durability of its components.

Once in my life I would like to own something outright before it's broken! I'm always in a race with the junkyard. (19)

The American consumer was conned into the vicious circle of obsolescence by the styling changes. Car styling changed as rapidly as the fashion trends. What was in one year, was out the next, and nobody wanted to be seen driving around in last year's model. It was not until the smaller more reserved European cars were introduced, including the Volkswagen, that the American consumers realised that they had been taken for a ride!

Volkswagen did not approach the market haphazardly. In 1954, Nordhoff flew over to America to engage ambitious young American dealers to found the 'Volkswagen of America Inc'. Nordhoff drew up his plan of campaign.

- 1) First he sent VW technicians with Volkswagens into the countryside to comb the American market.

"Show the car to young dealers who still have some

ambition left in life" (20).

- 2) He then established a complete, nationwide aftersales service. No car would be sold until the spare parts for its maintenance were available.
- 3) He then directed the VW, aided by its considerably low selling price, towards the American market as an affordable second car.

It was here that Nordhoff had hit Detroit where it hurt, as a Seattle housewife testifies:

At the time of crowded streets and filled up parking spaces, we are taken aback every year by a longer and wider model from Detroit. While the price of oil and petrol shoot up we were invited to buy a car of 300 horse power which soaks up the petrol. We were told that every family should have a second car and for twelve years the prices went up yearly. Well, we shall follow Detroit's advice, but it's going to be a Volkswagen. (21)

It took some time for Volkswagen to overcome the psychology of the American car consumer, a psychology which had been nurtured and exploited by the Detroit firms. It was yet again to rely on Porsche for assistance. The VW gained access to the American market through an exclusive backdoor as it was recognised by engineers and members of the intelligentsia as a fine example of Porsche engineering.

The Porsche sports car had already made its name in the American market. It was in an accident in his Porsche

Spyder that James Dean was killed. Porsche dealers in Hollywood and New York were the first American Volkswagen agents. This was how the Volkswagen came to the attention of the well off Americans, who started to purchase this quaint little Porsche. The VW became the symbol of inverted snobbery and an appreciation of engineering. The Volkswagen had made its first foothold in the American Market.

THE DETROIT RESPONSE

In 1955, when 35,851 VW cars were sold in the United States, it was passed off as a "novelty or curiosity success" by the Detroit firms. When this figure doubled the following year, Detroit knew that something was happening. By 1957, import arrangements could not cope with the demand, with a year's waiting list for VWs. In consequence to this the VW became profitable on the Black Market, a sinister element in its role as an economic factor.

1957 saw the Detroit firms falling over each other to produce compact cars. Cars were taken to the barbers as pounds of chrome were sheared off. Fins and rocket tail lights shrank overnight. The wraparound windscreen was replaced by the conventional windshield with corner pillars. Emphasis was placed on economy and efficiency. The one firm to resist the new direction of the car market trends was Chrysler. Its models still retained the fin and chrome features. The success of this move by Chrysler is illustrated by the drop in its share of the market from 20% to 12% between 1957 and 1961. (22)

The following year, 1958, the Ford Edsel (Fig.31) became another victim to the transition in American car design instigated by the VW. Aimed at the mid range market this car has become infamous as the most disastrous car ever marketed. The Edsel incorporated such features as a nostalgic horse collar in the middle of the front grille accommodated by

a hood bulge. "Gull wing" shaped tails replaced the fins and the rear wings were sculpted out, leaving a concave area in the sides. The front grille, along with more vulgar comparisons, was once described as

looking like an Oldsmobile sucking a lemon. (23)

The Edsel experience was most unfortunate for Ford, it is quite likely that this car might have got away amongst the bizarre collection of the Fifties fantasy cars had the market not received the sobering smack in the face from the Beetle.

Styling itself, in the Detroit sense, seemed to be losing its influence. The automobile as fantasy vehicle was on the way out. (24)

The VW had successfully overcome the psychology of the American consumer and shaped the new social attitudes, the American way of life. The VW heralded the demise of the Fifties "Got to get ahead" frenzy, giving way to the laid back Sixties. With the annual sales of VW at 160,000 at the turn of the decade, the integration of the VW with American society was confirmed.

ADVERTISING

By 1959, the marketing of the VW in America had been successful. It, along with other European cars, had made its presence felt in the American market. However, Detroit manufacturers were not out for the count as they responded in the following years with increasingly more sober compact cars. It was in this time that many of the European cars which had previously enjoyed success began to wither in the presence of home grown competition. It was the implementation of a most successful and popular campaign which enabled VW to brave the storm.

The Volkswagen contract was given to Doyle, Dane and Berback (DDB). The two men directly responsible for the success of the advertisements were Helmut Krone, art director and Julian Koenig, copy writer. Between them they produced a series of ads which were to become daily conversation pieces. Even today, while researching into this area, friends offer assistance,

Remember the one where.....

- it is almost as if they been films. Such was the merit of these advertisements that they have been collected in book form. "Remember those Great Volkswagen Ads? is a book which pays tribute to the VW campaign which was a turning point in the field of advertising.

Information cannot be communicated voluntarily without persuasion, which is the only practical alternative to coercion. (25)

The VW campaign employed informative as opposed to coercive techniques. They did not use the brainwashing jingles or enticing female props to promote the product and the VW advertisement let us know that (Fig. 32). Koenig and Krone were the first to realise that the car driver was not a moron who needed to be bribed or shouted at, nor was he so easily fooled. As a result, the Volkswagen magazine advertisements adopted the unique form of realistic photographs, unenhanced by air brush, accompanied with honest, informative and humorous copy. Honest advertising for a car which the 'Popular Mechanics Car Facts Book' had called "an honest car" (26).

It is interesting to note that the advertising campaign never employed the colourful history of the Volkswagen nor the Porsche name. Considering the finnickiness of the American culture this was probably a wise decision. Even today, VW publicity booklets seem to deny any influence on Hitler's part as he is never mentioned.

One theme of the advertising campaign was the endurance of the Beetle in adverse conditions. T.V. adverts reenacted the true story of a terrible snow storm...



Fig. 32: VW Advertisement.

Fig. 33:
Advertisement.

To close the door, open the window.

Shutting a door on a Volkswagen can be pretty frustrating if you don't handle it right. The harder you slam it, the faster it jumps open again. This happens because Volkswagens are made in a way that's almost forgotten these days. Well,

parts that are supposed to fit other parts fit them. But they don't. And instead of spot welding, we bolt the chassis onto the body. Using a con- tinuous rubber seal between the two. Consequently, the VW is not only water tight, but practically airtight. So when you try to shut the door, you

can't get too much air inside. What you have to do then is let some of it out by opening a window first. The excess crack will be enough. Naturally, we could have made things easier for you.

But we didn't. It would have meant making the VW worse.



VW - where it's at

VOLKSWAGEN VEHICLES ARE AVAILABLE FROM VOLKSWAGEN OF AMERICA, INC.

In the Sierra Nevada Mountains, six months later when emergency crews cleared the road something strange happened. A car was found. A VW buried beneath tons of snow and ice. But even stranger than that - when the crew supervisor turned the key....

the car started first time! (27)

This was a classic example of DDB policy of perpetrating myths in order to advertise the car. Another myth associated with the Volkswagen was its ability to float. By verifying this myth DDB were able to inform us of the great care taken by VW to keep out the corrosive elements. Yes, the car could float admittedly that was of little use to the typical driver other than letting him know how airtight his car was. In fact, the VW was made to such high standards that the passenger compartment was so completely airtight that one had to wind down the window in order to close the door. The VW advert made a feature of this (Fig. 33) and so turned what is in fact a design flaw into an advantage. People were so impressed with the VW quality of manufacture and so chuffed with this clever little solution, they never questioned that this problem should have been solved at the factory.

A similar policy of honestly flaunting the VW shortcomings in the face of the consumer and turning them into successes can be seen in the "Ugly" theme (Fig. 36). The advertisement makes no bones about its appearance but makes the argument that the real beauty of the VW lay within. VW employed self deprecatory as opposed to self congratulatory advertisements. When it presented itself beside an early television set, it

proclaimed itself one "The two ridiculous gimmicks of the 1940s".

The ugly form which the advertisements promoted became universally identifiable and as a result the VW was able to depict itself side by side with the omnipresent Coca Cola bottle and profess itself as one of the "2 shapes known the world over" (Fig.34). Having made such a feature of its shape, which itself served as a mobile advertisement, it created a sticky situation. There was no way that the Beetle form could be significantly changed. While the engineering aspects of the Beetle were improved significantly the form remained constant, despite much criticism,

The design news from this year's Motor Show is that the Volkswagen, that all-German Wonderbug is apparently unchanged. News? This is news like the continuance of apartheid or the Chiang regime on Formosa: news that will be better when it stops. (28)

Banham goes on to make the point that as a result of a guaranteed market due to a low selling price that the VW didn't have to bother much with the consumers' need.

It is arguable that VW were more concerned with the needs of the consumer, than the wants of the design critic in search of new subject matter. More concerned with the service a car gives rather than how well its styling has reconciled the social attitudes of the day or the other abstract aspects which a car must adhere to before receiving that all powerful

critic's blessing. As the advertisement said, "We don't make change, we make improvements" - 50,000 of them.

However, despite any of these changes the VW still maintained its stance against planned obsolescence. Although many improvements were made, the form remained the same and the components from different years could be interchanged and so owners could indulge in a more reserved form of customization. The VW advert championed the car's anti-planned obsolescence policy (Fig.35). In this case using a colourful example of the Beetle reflecting the hippy style of the Sixties. The different colours represent a component from a different year's model. Although changes have taken place on these components, when put together, the overall Beetle form remains the same.

The extent to which the VW advertisements boasted of its form was self destructing. With advancements in automobile technology, to which the Beetle form was not suited and the return of styling trends, the Beetle form itself became obsolete. The Beetle advert persisted:

How much longer can we hand you this line.
Forever, we hope. Because we don't ever
intend to change the Volkswagen shape. (Fig.37)

The only other alternative was to cease production and in the mid Seventies as production of the Beetle ceased in a number of its plants, it was commemorated by the last VW



Fig.34: VW Advertisement.

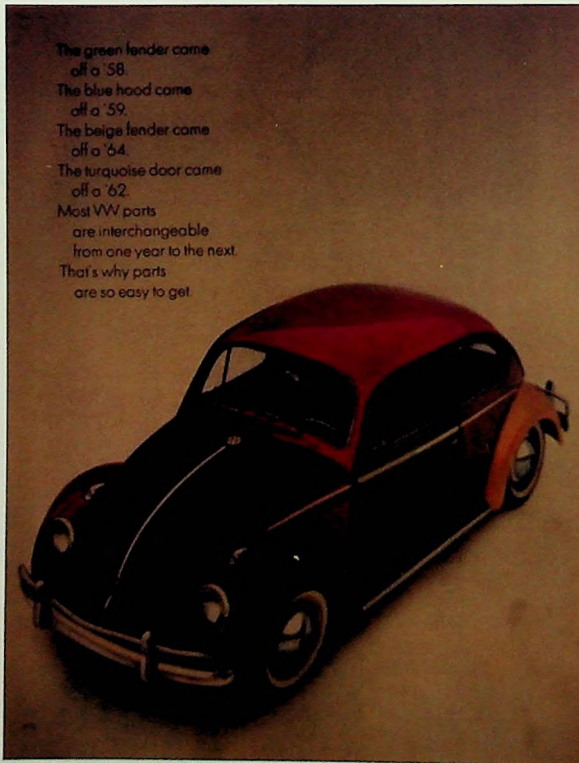


Fig. 35: VW Advertisement.

advertisement (Fig.38). This advertisement is entertainly melodramatic. The reader is confronted with a view of the car, his honest friend, driving off, leaving for good. As the reader wrestles with the lump developing in his throat, the copy finished on a prophetic note:

Knowing how long the Beetle lasts, it will be a long time before you've seen last of them.

'Tis true, as it will be along time before the advertisements which introduced us to the Volkswagen are forgotten.

The success of the advertising campaign was evident in the market figures of 1962. In the wake of the Detroit counter attack European imports dropped from 600,000 to 300,000 in two years. However, VW imports increased to 200,000.

These advertisements are exemplary of a campaign's understanding of its client's product and its audience. The campaign manipulated the product's qualities and the reader's psychology to the full, without abusing them. As a result these advertisements became as popular as the car.



Fig. 36: VW Advertisement.

Ugly is only skin-deep.

It may not be much to look at. But underneath that humble exterior beats an air-cooled engine. It won't belt over and ruin your paint fins. It won't freeze over and ruin your life. It's in the back of the car for better traction in snow and sand. And it will give you about 29 miles to a gallon of gas.

After a while you get to like so much

about the VW, you even get to like what it looks like.

You find that there's enough legroom for almost anybody's legs. Enough headroom for almost anybody's head. With a seat on it. Snag-fittingly. Let some doors get close so well you can hardly close them. If they're so airtight, it's better to open the window a crack first!

Those plain, unglorious wheels are each supported independently. So when a bump makes one wheel bounce, the other wheel doesn't make the other wheel bounce. It's magic like that you pay the \$1425* for when you buy a

VW. The ugliness doesn't add anything to the cost of the car. That's the beauty of it.



© Volkswagen of America, Inc. *Suggested Retail Price. Excl. Coast P.O.E., local taxes and other Dealer Delivery Charges. If Any. Additional

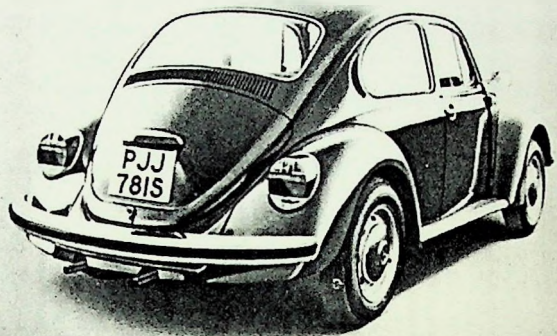
Fig. 37: VW Advertisement.

How much longer can we hand you this line?

Forever we hope.
 But we can't even pretend to change the Volkswagen's price.
 We stay by our own set of rules.
 The only reason we charge the VW is to make it worth your money.
 The money we don't spend on outside things we do spend inside the car.

This system gives us an infinite design life. Time.
 We have time to make the parts and to keep most of them interchangeable.
 Which is why it's so easy to get VW parts, and why VW mechanics don't waste up streamers!
 We have time to put on immense amounts

of hand work into each VW. Time to finish each one like a 1900 machine.
 And this system has also kept the price about the same over the years.
 Some cars keep changing and stay the same.
 Volkswagen stays the same and keeps changing.



Going, going...

So finally the time has come.
The Beetle is about to bid adieu.
For nearly a quarter of a century, it's been
a faithful friend.
In all that time, it never set much store by
the way it looked.
Only by the way it worked.

It revived the honesty of words like
economical.
And reliable. And durable.
With the Beetle, you could believe them.
A lot of people did. More than 19 million
altogether.
If you want to join them, you'll have to

move fast.

Because the very last of the Beetles have
already been brought into the country.

Chin up, though.

Knowing how long Beetles last,
it'll be a long time before you've
seen the last of them.



Fig. 38: The Last Volkswagen Advertisement
for the Beetle.

KILLING THE BUG

In 1974, European production of the VW Beetle was stopped. Technical advancements in car design now favoured front mounted, water-cooled engines and the Beetle design, which had survived 40 years, had become obsolete. Volkswagen was now producing two other models; the Scirocco and the Passat. But it was the VW Golf (Fig.39) which was launched in 1974 that was to become the successor to the legendary Beetle.

Designed by Giugiaro, it became an immediate success saving VW from financial crisis as Beetle production ground to a halt. Two years previously, the Beetle had realised Porsche's dream when it broke the record production numbers reached by Fords' Model T. However, the production of the Beetle continued in Nicaragua, Brazil and Mexico amongst other countries. These eventually followed suit and today only Mexico still produces VW Beetles (Fig.40). This banishment of the Beetle to foreign lands is a clever move as it elevates the Beetle's status to that of a collector's item. The wheel has come full circle and today VW's are imported to Europe. However, the "people's car" now costs more than a sports car. Despite its high cost, these sacred insects are snapped up by bug enthusiasts, the members of the Beetle cult.



Fig. 39: The Volkswagen Golf.



Fig. 40: Mexican Beetle,
1981.

Cult Objects

No testimony to the achievements of the Volkswagen would be complete without considering its most important role as a cult object. Before we trace the VW elevation to a cult object and the devices which it used to gain this coveted title, we must first define the term, cult object, in general.

The cult object is a hybrid or crossover from the cult figures who became prominent in the Fifties. Through the new media of film and Rock and Roll, the like of James Dean, Marilyn Monroe and Elvis Presley became idols. Their effigies were enshrined on mugs, posters and T-shirts. Products were becoming the shrines of cult. Andy Warhol identified the link between cult and product when he mass-produced images of Marilyn Monroe on one canvas. In a similar fashion by which he reduced Marilyn to product status he elevated the popular product, the Coca Cola bottle (Fig. 41), as an art form. The power of the popular product in society was recognised, being relatively newly born of the parents of mass production and the cult figure.

In the nature of things, a cult object has to be mass produced, or at least has to suggest in its shape and finish that it is produced by a machine, even if it is not. It depends for its power on avoiding any impression that it is a one-off, that it is the product of a fallible



Andy Warhol: Coca Cola.

human hand. It must give the impression of the existence of limitless numbers of identical copies, hinting at an ideal universal form that is independent of its creator. (29)

In his book 'Cult Objects', Deyan Sudjic goes on to further elaborate on the great potential of cars to become cult cars.

Every single part of the car, from the door handles down to the transmission has been poured over by a team of experts. Setting up a production line is so expensive it leaves no room for mistakes. Models are made, prototypes built, market researchers consulted and production techniques optimised. Of course the result of all this is as likely to be cautious uniformity as it is to be perfection. In the case of just a few models, however, all these elements come together in a way that amounts to far more than the sum of their parts. These are the cars which have a presence as strong as any ikon. (30)

A true testimony of a car's cult status is in its many manifestations in other products or automobilia. The shrines to cult figures have become the shrines of cult cars. No car has manifested itself so widely as the Volkswagen. Beetle mugs, T-shirts, jumpers, magazines, lighters, toys and pencil holders (Fig.42) have all served as platforms for its popularisation. The VW has even gone on to infringe further on the territory of the cult figure to be commemorated through the medium of film and the music industry. Through these media and the Beetle's inherent characteristics, it has gathered a world wide dedicated following, who gather regularly in its honour. These gatherings are preceded by a ceremonial procession to the altar site (Fig. 43). The Volkswagen is not the only car to



Fig. 42: Volkswagen Automobilia.



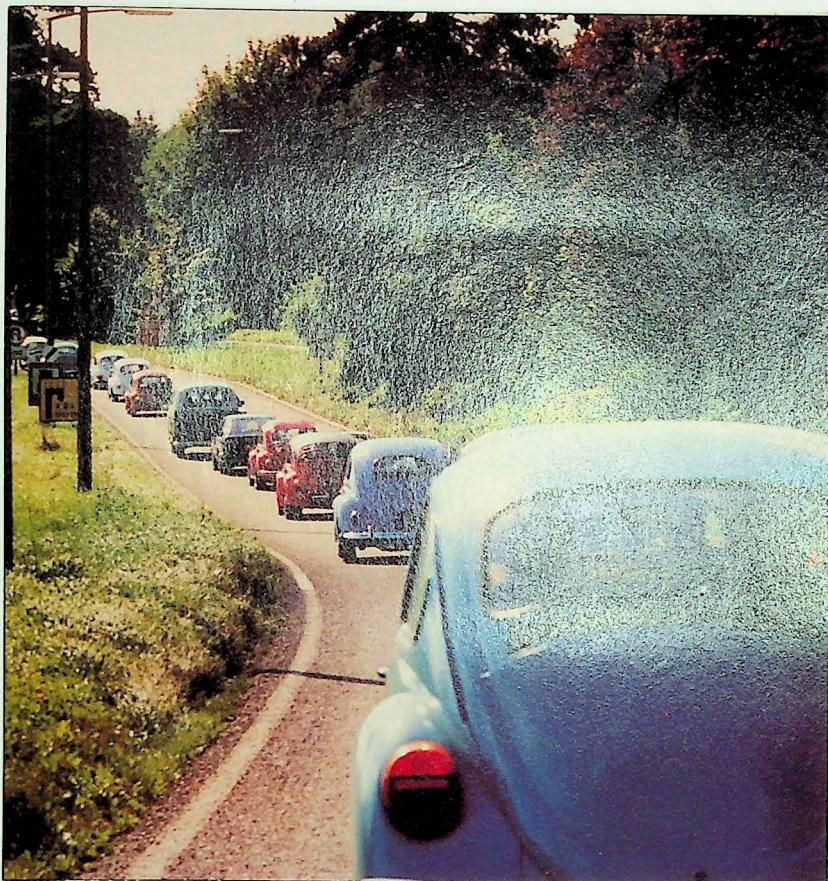


Fig.43: Beetle
Procession.

Fig. 44: Airstream Rally.



be revered with such ceremony. The Ford Edsel enjoys a somewhat perverse celebration of its existence as owners gather annually in honour of this £150 million loss making car. The airstream trailer gives a new meaning to cult worship with mystical and religious undertones as they gather in circular formation like druid stones (Fig.44).

The Volkswagen disciples, however, are not so blasphemous, their rallies do not adopt mysteriously divine patterns. Rather than staying true to the one 'ideal form', they strive to break it. Through the art of customization, the Beetle is pushed to the utmost limits of feasibility. While some are satisfied with modifying the visual styling of the Beetle (Fig. 45), others are compelled to transform the Beetle completely (Fig.46) using super charged engines that require, contrary to Porsche's design, water cooling systems. Some disciples question the ethics of such transformation and are just as happy to stay true to the mere Porsche version. Whatever the preference, one thing is common, complete adoration. Beetle magazines have letter pages where owners profess their allegiance and offer tips or treatments for particular "illnesses" (31) of their baby bugs.

How was it that this German war refugee came to enjoy such lavish care and adoration? The underlying principles of the car, which also contributed to its retail and advertising successes, were its functional and visual qualities. The former helping to overcome the reservations with regard to the latter. The common denominator of all cult objects is

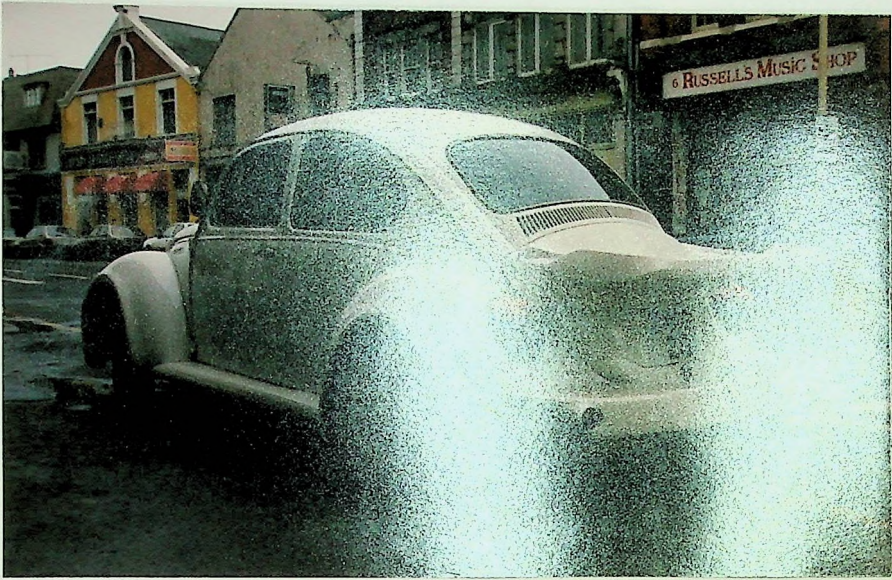


Fig. 45: VW Styling.

Fig. 46: Super Bug.



functionality. The Zippo, Doc Martin and jeep were all functionally orientated designs leaving aesthetics to take care of themselves. Here the military connection with cult objects must be stated. The examples given above along with combat jackets and Ray-ban sunglasses were all designed for military use, yet became the token symbols of cult groups, much sought after by private individuals. The military service acts as an excellent reference - "these were even used by the army and so they must be good!" Considering this, the VW portfolio would have benefited from its war time service (Fig. 20 and 21).

Had the VW not the quality of reliability it would not have endeared itself to its owners, who subsequently became attached to this faithful servant. The other quirky shaped cars, particularly the Bubble cars (Fig. 47) enjoyed brief popularity during fuel and economic crises, however, due to independability and short life span, these soon fell from favour. Having overcome the first raction towards the car's form, people began to see in it a certain character of its own. Along with Hitler's comparison to a beetle or bug, it has been likened to a tortoise, a frog and a ladybird. Thus, the car was treated like a pet, and by definition was petted. Now the owners had become so fond of the car, both for functional and visual reasons that, despite improvements in car design, this car has still maintained a large, loyal following.



Fig. 47: Beetle V Bubble

In a documentary (32) dealing specifically with the Beetle, one devotee said that he owned both a Volkswagen Beetle and the newly acclaimed VW Golf. Despite the Golf being the one of the most efficient small cars on the market today, the interviewee claimed to prefer driving his Beetle more. An interesting point can be made from this and that is with the advancements made in car design, power steering, fuel injection, automatic gear change, plush soothing interiors with walls of blinking lights and effortless controls, inevitably results in something being lost; the art of driving. The driver is being distanced from the engine and is ignorant of the consequences of his actions. The day when a driver understood and optimised the performance of his engine is past. Granted the advancement of safety features is to be welcomed. However, where the driver had previously been alert and aware he is now being lulled into a deceptive ease.

Myths

The cult status achieved by the VW owes much to the skilful perpetration of myths and rumours with which this car was associated. Most notably, the folklore involving the VW having been buried under snow drifts for several months and when dug out, started first time. The other rumour which fascinated the public was that the Volkswagen could swim. In fact, the Beetle had managed, with alteration, to cross both the Straits of Messina and the Irish Sea (Fig. 48). The abilities of this car were remarkable and being so



Fig. 48: Volkswagen traveling down the
river Liffey in Dublin.

versatile as to cross deserts and coldest Antarctica it was able to attract a cult following the world over. Such capabilities were of little use to the typical VW disciple who nonetheless marvelled at such anecdotes.

FILM.

The medium of film which was instrumental in establishing cult figures was no less important in establishing the unchallenged cult status of the VW. The relationship between film and cult objects has developed into a form of symbiosis. First when one sees a product in a film it is instilled in one's subconscious - when Dean used his Zippo lighter he assured the product's immortality. In return, a film might use a product to set the scene. When one sees the Corbusier chaise lounge or the Tizio light on the character's desk you know we are talking 'serious business'.

The film appearances of the VW are innumerable. Its support, cameos and even title roles would be impressive enough for any modest thespian. The VW has used the cinema to perpetuate its own myths. In "Herbie", the VW plays the leading role of a car which seems to have a mind of its own. Not an entirely entertaining film, it did little for the reputation of the Beetle with regard to those over the age of '12's accompanied'. A limp version of the classic "Chitty Chitty Bang Bang" by all accounts. A more cult enhancing performance was in Woody Allen's "Sleeper", who in a clever satire finds himself on the run in some time in the future. In an abandoned cave he finds a dust covered VW Beetle, jumping into it, he says, "I bet it will start first time!" - and to reaffirm the myth, it does. "Well, whadyaknow!" A similar scene can be found in the more

recent film "Gremlins".

This 'starts first time' myth is not purely founded in the imagination of the VW advertisers and film script writers. On visiting an old Volks Home, I raised this issue with the owner of the yard. He subsequently connected a battery to an old wreck near by and, as sure as I write this with trembling hand, it started first time. Standing back from this Lazarus, I realised the myth was fact and Dr. Porsche had not built a car - but a monster.

In its recent film, "Tin Men", the VW's role in cinema took on a new meaning. In this film the car served a more structural purpose than a prop for a gag. It served three purposes. Firstly, it set the date. The film was set in the mid 1950's as one sees the first emigrant VWs on the American streets. Secondly, it serves as a social commentator, concerning the disenchantment of the hero, with the American way of life and simultaneously the Detroit car styling, as his interest in this strange car grows throughout the film. Finally, the VW provides the happy ending with our hero considering marketing these new European cars - Might work! This film acknowledges the social impact of the VW on America.

The recent cult movie "River's Edge", featured a customised Beetle within which many scenes were set. An interesting use of the film medium to share the experience of travelling in a

Volkswagen. Such film performances coupled with the Volkswagen's cameo roles serves to strengthen its cult status.

Even when we see it for a brief moment in "The Killing Fields" as a hiding Vietnamese is wrenched from one or one spots it at a road block in "El Salvador", it manages to register in our subconscious and as a result it has become one of the most known shapes the world over, second to the coke bottle, that is (Fig. 35).

The Morris Minor

It has been as a result of such media manipulation, myth propagation and its many manifestations that the Beetle has secured itself the honorary title of 'Cult Car Supreme'. It has had many rivals but none came so close as the Morris Minor (Fig. 49). Born out of similar aspirations to the VW, the Morris Minor was produced after the war with reinforced body structure and torsion bar suspension. Its styling showed greater influence from American cars. Although generally regarded to be more resolved than the Beetle in terms of performance and space usage, it failed to equal its German cousin on the international market. First of all, the components of English manufacturers did not have the same reputation for engineering, precision and dependability which their German counterparts did. Secondly, it was not marketed with the same enthusiasm that Nordhoff had put into



Fig. 49: Morris Minor.

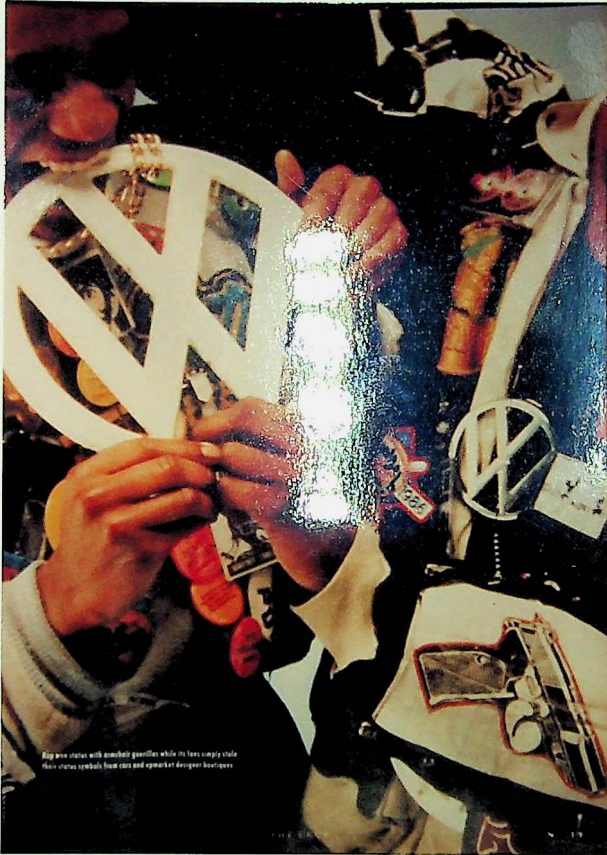
Fig. 50: Abandoned Morris Minor.



the Volkswagen. Although not successful internationally, it was well received in Great Britain and Ireland. It too, has its little anecdotes, such as its designer, Issigonis, is said to have literally chopped out the middle section, to make it smaller. The Morris Minor enjoys a modest cult following, which manages to keep its familiar form on the roads of the U.K. and Eire since its launch in 1948.

I recall seeing the familiar front of the Morris Minor being used as a decorative feature in a public house in Cork, being bolted to the wall. Not all Morris Minors were lucky enough to enjoy such treatment as many more were left as roadside wrecks for the country hedges to reclaim (Fig. 50).

The final saga in the VW cult saga is set in the 1987-88 music scene, that other favoured medium of the cult figures. This time it was the power of the Volkswagen monogram, designed by Reimspies in the Thirties, which was to be the symbol of cult. Amongst the up-market designer labels which adorned their clothes, the infamous "Beastie Boys" dangled the VW logo (Fig. 51). The final crowning tribute to the VW's cult status. This was the cause for both flattery and concern for the Volkswagen company as this cult following carried out subversive attacks on VW cars, depriving them of their cherished jewels. Needless to say, the letter pages in the VW magazines were full of irate letters from Volkswagen owners. VW badges were distributed free by the company until the fad had passed. The Volkswagen had incited a Cult Clash.



Big one status with baseball gasifier while its feet empty state
Main status symbols from cars and speaker design boogies

Fig. 51: Beastie Boys with
VW Logo.

IV CONCLUSION

From Bauhaus to Beastie Boy, the Volkswagen story is complete, from its origins as a functionally designed small car, devoid of unnecessary styling, to universal cult object. While many cars designed at the same time have become technically dated, enough so to merit the title 'antique', the VW Beetle still serves as a viable means of transport for many people. It was the first in a new era of cars. The fact that the Volkswagen is still common on the roads today, even though European production of the car stopped over ten years ago, illustrates the car's remarkable reliability. A reliability that puts many contemporary cars to shame.

However, the significance of the Volkswagen as a design does not stop there. Over the five decades of its existence, the Volkswagen has had a wide ranging impact; politically, economically and socially. As the Kdf wagen the Beetle served as the vehicle for Hitler's propoganda and as his champion in war. After World War II it dragged Germany out of post war depression, contributing to Germany's 'economic miracle'. However, its economic importance was not restricted to Germany, internationally supported the failing economies of Brazil, Mexico and African countries. In its conquest of America it became a social dictator by manipulating the social values and attitudes of American society, it eventually transformed them. Today, the social importance of the people's car is evident in its role as cult

object as it has become the 'sacred cow' for a by no means limited section of society.

Ferdinand Porsches' "Project Number 12" has become the most successful car ever produced and is acknowledged today as a "Design Classic".

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