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JANUARY 1980 • \$1.50

What happens when an X-car takes on the world's best sports sedans?

BUICK SKYLARK vs.

Honda Accord • Saab 900 • Audi 4000

RAGTOP RABBIT

It's fresh-air time again at Volkswagen



Even More

KIT KAR KRAZINESS

At last, the true facts about building and driving our Kelmark

Volkswagen Rabbit Convertible

Sparkling with good humor, perfect for a ticker-tape parade.

• Hi there, this is us in our automotive zoot suit. The one with the whitewall spats and the padded shoulders. For our formal informal photography session, we've slipped into our silver threads, but the outfit we've spent most of our time in has red pants and an off-white jacket. If you're not right off fond of its cut, you'll find it grows on you. Maybe it will even change your personality. It will certainly change what everyone else thinks of you. Your Volkswagen dealer is offering you the chance to become instantly in. And, somewhat less obviously, very clever.

These German cars are almost prov-



ing an embarrassment to us. They're getting too good. When we say so, it gets us a mountain of mail complaining we've sold out our objectivity and our credibility, and in turn probably gained grotesquely swollen bank accounts. No

such luck. But there's no way around it, the Rabbit convertible will once again bring the postlady to her knees with hate mail. She will come to loathe this car for the burden it will bring her, but she will be all alone.

Volkswagen has everyone else in the bag and loving it. It's happened before. Last time we tested a VW convertible, it was the time-honored and dearly beloved Beetle version. More peculiar-looking cars existed only in the minds of drug-addicted individuals and in deepest France. If there was a more universal love in the world of automobiles, we don't know of it. Leering perversity was





loose in the world in the form of the Beetle convertible. David E. Davis, Jr., said it was a compelling argument that automotive progress isn't everything. Patrick Bedard admitted he was intrigued by a car shaped like molded Jell-O when everything else looked like

*You'd swear you have
\$20,000 worth of machinery
at your beck and call.*

a block of cheese. Don Sherman called it the fastest four-place lawn chair he knew of. Volkswagen sold more than a quarter of a million of its lawn chairs, and somewhere people are sitting in them today, taking the sun. When the Beetle convertible disappeared recently, the demand clamored on.

Volkswagen boxed up the demand and wheeled it off to the Karmann coachworks along with a bundle of Rabbit mechanicals. Karmann, of course, was the birthplace of the sleek-lined Ghia of yore and the aforementioned topless Beetle. With such VW experience at hand, it didn't take VW long to pull an open-air Rabbit from Karmann's magic hat, and the car is a dandy mechanical entity. It makes you want to play ticker-tape parade, a national hero waving, standing behind you with forearm on roll bar, surrounded by the Thirties bulges of the folded top, getting the ride of his life in one of the neatest of all little cars.

Like the Beetle, the Rabbit convertible disregards fashion to start one of its



Cabby-info.com

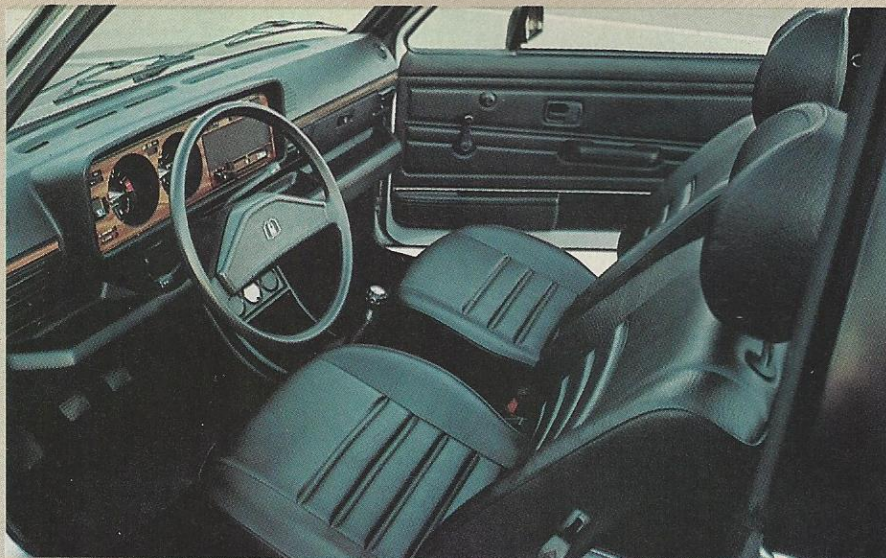
PHOTOGRAPHY BY AARON KILEY

own. It's cute with the top up, and what might be described as . . . interesting with the top down. There's not much visual question that the convertible was an existing car whose top was carved off. The rear fenders are kicked up a little now, and perched atop them is the mechanism for the top. When the top's down, it's down only in the sense of being collapsed, because it still sticks way up, a huge reading pillow with armrests, and a blocker of rear vision. Beneath the folded top is a handy, if shrouded, trunklet that opens to the rear. The back seat folds forward for greater carrying capacity. The remainder of the body is unmistakably Rabbit, its lines otherwise undiluted except for the upright roll bar that provides rollover protection and strengthens the unit-body structure. The bar is padded and trimmed in black, matching the dash and add-on door trim.

The top fits exceptionally well. The outside will never creep in uninvited. Inner and outer layers sandwich smooth, substantial padding that provides weather and sound insulation. The inside of the top is finished like that of a snug sedan, and the back window is real live glass embedded with real live defogging wires. Hot stuff! The two roof-mounted release handles at the sides of the windshield are the only hardware visible.

Now that's just terrific, having an open-air Rabbit and all, but it gets better. We expect Rabbits to be congenitally nice, but the convertible transcends niceness. Extra sound deadening seems to have been poured wholesale into the engine compartment, and the first crank of the engine hints of the refinement to come. Everything about the physical behavior of the car says effortless. It is strong, blithely willing, and very economical. It will return 25 mpg in city driving and quietly requests 90-mph cruising. With less than 500 miles on its optimistic odometer, our convertible ran 0 to 60 mph in 12.8 seconds; more break-in miles will probably get the job done quicker. VW's smooth five-speed overdrive aids and abets the engine with well-staged gearing and feather-light linkage so slick that it defies the rest of the industry. Hooked to perhaps the smoothest and quietest four in memory, it sets a lofty standard.

We are told our car came straight off the boat into dealer and press intros, where we laid claim to it. There was no pre-delivery prep other than a wash job.



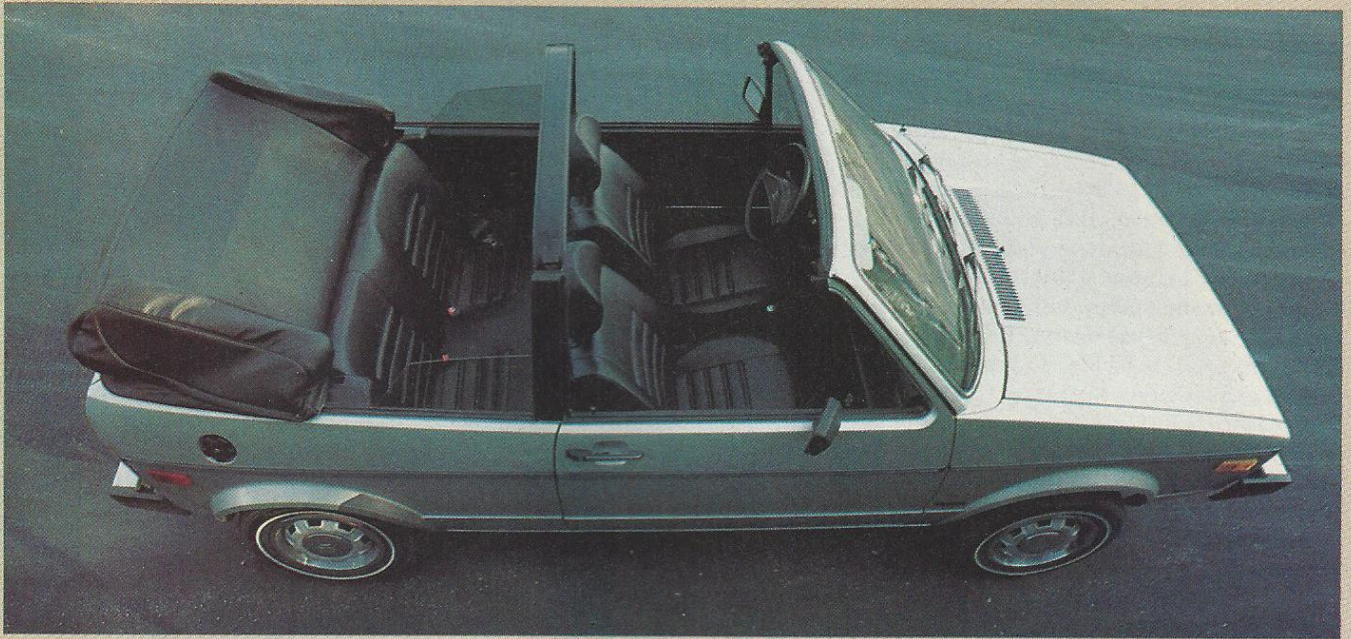
The folded top looks like a big reading pillow with armrests.

Even so, the only physical faults we could find were of the easy-fix variety: a nonfunctioning fuel-injection cold-start connection (which could be handily overcome even in snowy weather by a solid tromp on the gas pedal); a slight rattle in the exhaust caused by a loose hanger; an optional sport steering wheel rotated one notch too far to the right; and a missing inside rear-view mirror. With a pre-delivery service under the car's belt, we'd have found nothing physical to complain about except a brake-locking problem at the right rear, which added at least 20 feet to our last sedan Rabbit's 203-foot 70-to-0-mph stopping distance. Short of that point of lockup, the brakes have been improved by virtue of better feel and more reassuring pedal action than VWs have ever had. A quick service of the rear brakes should eliminate our problem, and it's not likely to show up in other cars.

The handy trunklet opens to the rear.

The Rabbit convertible's over-the-road controls function with such well-oiled directness and consistency, you'd swear you have \$20,000 worth of machinery at your beck and call. The convertible's inner masses and individual pieces are surpassingly well coordinat-





It is a smooth and stable platform from which to direct the flank-speed passage of a most amusing world.

ed, furnishing the driver with a smooth and stable platform, free of unnecessary harshness, from which to direct the flank-speed passage of a most amusing world. The pop-top's center of gravity feels considerably lower than an everyday Rabbit's. Less body roll, dive, and squat interfere with the sensations of rapid progress through the countryside. The suspension and steering are ideally compromised, resulting in outstanding and soft-spoken control. Slight understeer stabilizes the car, which can turn into corners with surprising ferocity if you suggest it. The car seems capable of more than you could ever reasonably ask, and certainly more delightful than almost any traditional roadster you might put it against. The world will soon be awash with a lemming-run of roadster owners bending their dealers' ears in search of handling fixes to rectify the dirt done them by Rabbit convertibles.

It could happen on any kind of road that changes direction often. Smooth, coarse, or downright cratered, it makes little difference to the Rabbit convertible. The Continental TS771s are flexible enough to complement the bump-adaptive front-wheel-drive layout of the Rabbit, yet they allow you simply to fly into corners, track around, and feed impeccably out the other side. Transitions



Volkswagen offers you the chance to become instantly in.

are smooth, wheel movements small, and the steering among the very best. Place the car exactly where you want it. The light, microscopically correctable steering draws apexes in with a free-wheeling but irresistible magnetism, to brush flawlessly beneath the inside tires. Those apexes pass by, but the art of their passage lingers along.

The optional sport seats (not shown) are responsible, in large part, for the driver's ability to make use of all this excellence. They are deeply bucketed

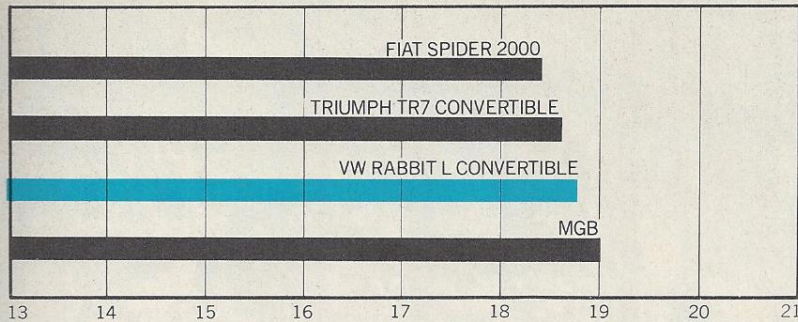
and comfortably bolstered, and they sit solidly among the top three or four factory-available seats in the world. Mounted high off the floor, the angled thigh cushion shores you up for relaxed control, and for comfort that carries you from an early start to well beyond the twilight zone. The back seat offers its lap even to adults, and even though the rear side windows don't roll all the way down, they do fend off the stronger gusts of high-speed turbulence that threaten havoc with anything but kinky perms.

There is no discounting the value of this happy little car. It betters some pretty pricey competition both in its physical functions and in the results it gives in comfort and satisfaction. And its operating economy is up there with the best. The changes wrought by Karmann take the Rabbit convertible way far out of the econobox price range, but Volkswagen hasn't concerned itself with that. Instead, it's concentrated on building a dynamite mini funster that does more things well than most product planners could write on a large piece of paper, let alone blend into something that goes down the road with this car's grace. The Rabbit convertible sparkles with a good humor not one car in a hundred has.

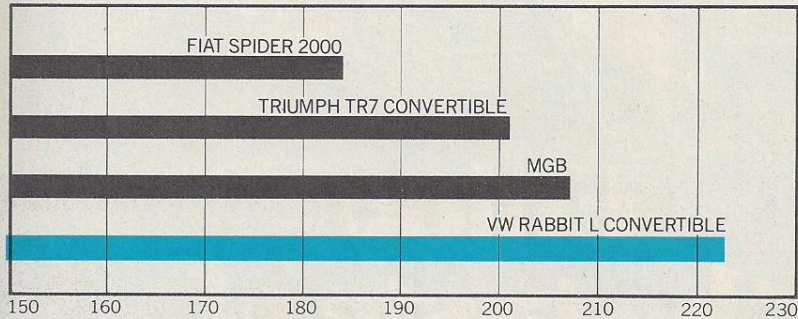
—Larry Griffin

RABBIT CONVERTIBLE

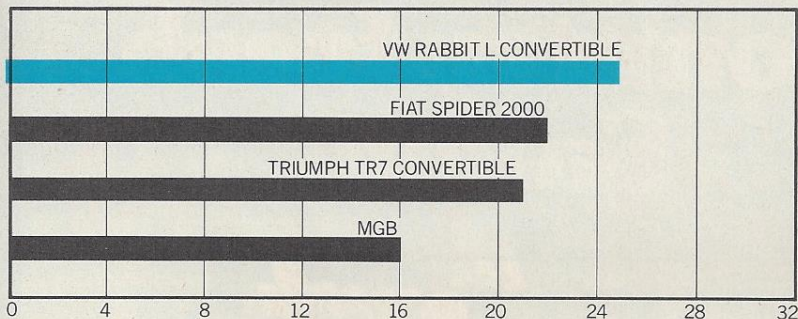
ACCELERATION standing 1/4 mile, seconds



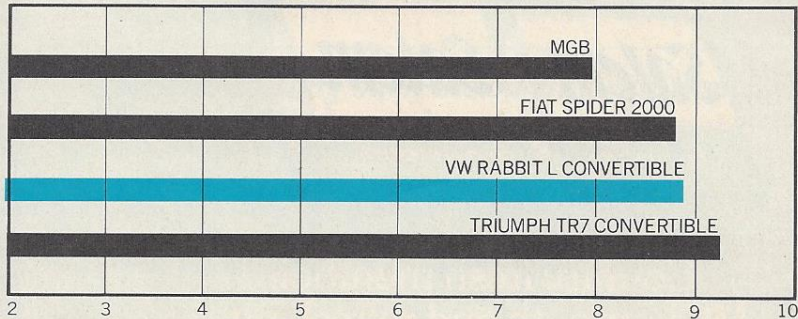
BRAKING 70-0 mph, feet



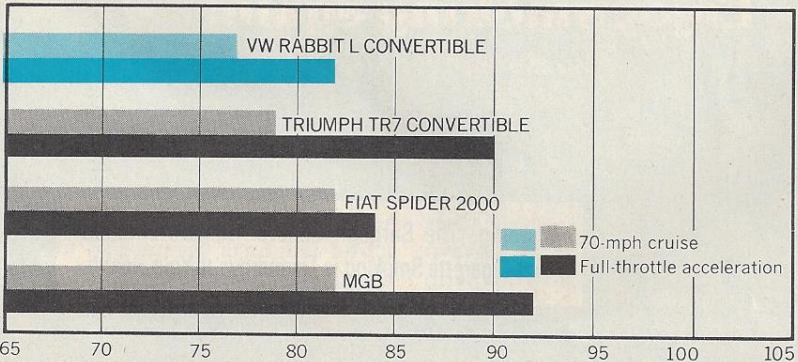
FUEL ECONOMY EPA estimated mpg



CURRENT BASE PRICE dollars x 1000



INTERIOR SOUND LEVEL dBA



VOLKSWAGEN RABBIT L CONVERTIBLE

Importer: Volkswagen of America, Inc.
818 Sylvan Avenue
Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey 07632

Vehicle type: front-engine, front-wheel-drive, 4-passenger, 2-door convertible

Price as tested: \$9105

Options on test car: base VW Rabbit convertible, \$8895; sport seats, \$165; sport steering wheel, \$45.

ENGINE

Type: 4-in-line, water-cooled, cast-iron block and aluminum head, 5 main bearings
Bore x stroke 3.13 x 3.15 in, 79.5 x 80.0mm
Displacement 96.9 cu in, 1588cc
Compression ratio 8.2:1
Carburetion Bosch K-Jetronic fuel injection
Valve gear belt-driven single overhead cam
Power (SAE net) 76 bhp @ 5500 rpm
Torque (SAE net) 83 lbs-ft @ 3200 rpm
Redline 6700 rpm

DRIVETRAIN

Transmission 5-speed
Final-drive ratio 4.17:1
Gear Ratio Mph/1000 rpm Max. test speed
I 3.45 4.5 30 mph (6700 rpm)
II 1.94 8.1 54 mph (6700 rpm)
III 1.29 12.2 79 mph (6500 rpm)
IV 0.97 16.2 93 mph (5750 rpm)
V 0.76 20.6 93 mph (4500 rpm)

DIMENSIONS AND CAPACITIES

Wheelbase 94.4 in
Track, F/R 54.7/53.5 in
Length 155.3 in
Width 63.4 in
Height 55.6 in
Ground clearance 4.9 in
Curb weight 2170 lbs
Weight distribution, F/R 60.4/39.6%
Fuel capacity 10.6 gal
Oil capacity 3.6 qt
Water capacity 6.9 qt

SUSPENSION

F: Ind, MacPherson strut, coil springs, anti-sway bar
R: Ind, 2 trailing arms integral with an anti-sway bar, coil springs

STEERING

Type rack-and-pinion
Turns lock-to-lock 3.9
Turning circle curb-to-curb 31.2 ft

BRAKES

F: 9.4-in dia vented disc
R: 7.1 x 1.8-in cast-iron drum
Power assist vacuum

WHEELS AND TIRES

Wheel size 5.0 x 13 in
Wheel type stamped steel
Tire make and size Continental TS771, 175/70SR-13
Test inflation pressures, F/R 27/31 psi

INTERIOR SOUND LEVEL

Idle 63 dBA
Full-throttle acceleration 82 dBA
70-mph cruising 77 dBA
70-mph coasting 77 dBA

PERFORMANCE

Zero to	Seconds
30 mph	3.4
40 mph	5.8
50 mph	8.3
60 mph	12.8
70 mph	17.9
80 mph	26.0
90 mph	52.8
Standing 1/4-mile	18.8 sec @ 71 mph
Top speed	93 mph
Braking, 70-0 mph	223 ft
EPA estimated fuel economy	25 mpg