

Illogical it may be, Captain, but Volkswagen's folding-roof Golf refuses to stop selling.

DAVE POLLARD discovers why.

I searched everywhere! In drawers, in the loft, you name it. Eventually I discovered it had been mistakenly placed in the wrong cassette box. What's that? Oh yes, my much loved and used *Beach Boys Greatest Hits* tape, essential to serious Cabrio driving. Volkswagen should provide one with each car sold, in a leather-covered case, perhaps, like the Instruction Manual.

Let me tell you, there is nothing like rolling along a winding country road, top down and sun shining, listening to some of the Wilson brothers' finest. You don't need to play it loud for the magic to work. It even works on the Golf Cabrio's standard and fairly basic Blaupunkt Melbourne.

After an hour or so's drive in the open-top Golf, you pull up at your destination, convinced that the air you are breathing is fresh from the Pacific, that surfing really *is* as much fun as it looks, and that the only reason the song was called *Little Deuce Coupe* and not *Little Golf GTI Convertible*, is that the latter

wouldn't fit the metre and it was one hell of a rhyming problem!

As an aside, I had spent the previous week with VW's latest offspring, the Corrado, as great a contrast to the Cabrio as you could pick from the current range. It looked The Business, in flaming Tornado red, but it was so antiseptic, and the powerful 16V engine sounded like a Nissan Micra as the revs rose. One assumes that's the effect of the catalytic converter, likewise the temperamental throttle response when cold. I suspect it also highlights the 16V's predilection for low-revs sluggishness.

It reeked of sophistication (and the Passat!) but was sadly lacking in character. Stepping into the Cabrio, however, restored my faith in the lads at Wolfsburg. The exhaust burbled and barked like a racer (delightful, especially with the hood down) and it supplied power, torque and a glorious howl whenever and wherever required.

The impressive engine in the GTi model is,

of course, the legendary 1.8litre, 8-valve, fuel-injected unit used in Mk 1 and Mk 2 cars since 1983. I have this terrible, recurring nightmare that it will get sidelined when the Mk 3 gets here, Freddy Kruger, come back, all is forgiven...

The test week wasn't the best ever for Cabrio motoring (80 degrees in the shade would suit Yours Truly), but it didn't rain and the car has a heater, so who's complaining? It was also fairly sunny for the most part, and I discovered the reason why most open-top drivers wear those ridiculous, blacked-out sunglasses (the real *Miami Vice*): the sun almost invariably comes over the top of the windscreen and into your eyes! Cool or not, shades are essential kit if you want to see where you're going.

With the lid off, you can never get away from the fact that some torsional strength is missing. The car flexes noticeably (though not worryingly), particularly on twisting, bumpy 'B' roads. Unless you're really desperate to know what lives in the bottom of ditches, you have to accept that the Cabrio cannot be hustled around like a hatchback, despite that glorious motor.

The roof, like the rest of the car, is excellently made and totally waterproof. It's noisier inside than the tin-top version (either

FUN IN IT



Despite its age, the Cabrio still looks great, especially with the hood down.

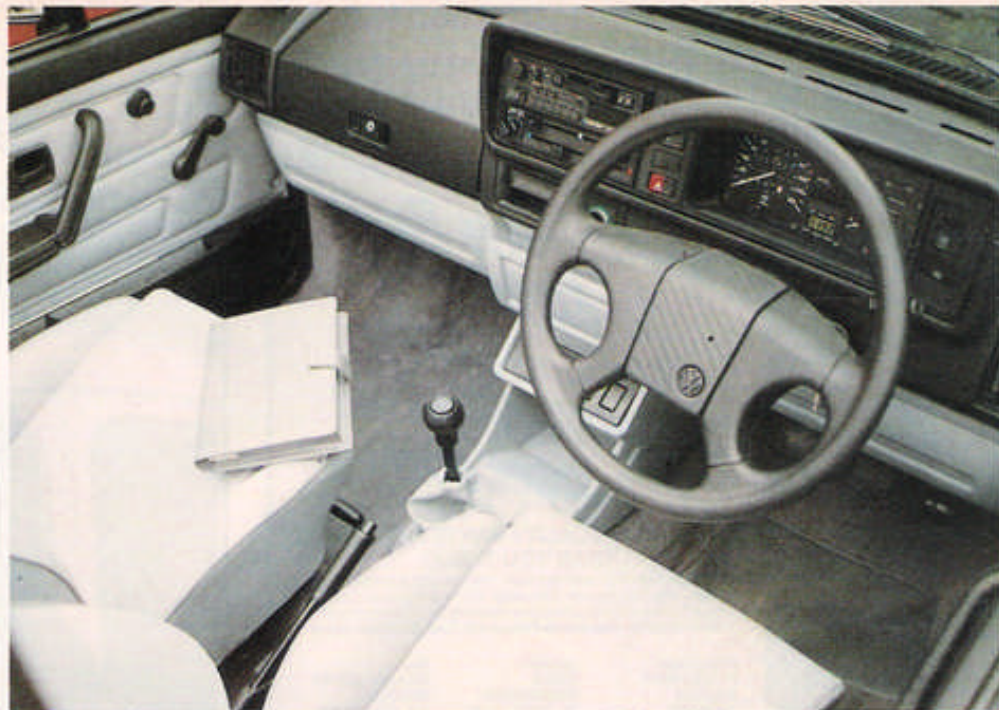
Mk 1 or Mk 2) but not unduly so. This year's cars have an electric version which only works with the ignition off, but takes its time. If you're going any distance, you'll have to get out to put the hood cover on anyway.

In essence, its main value lies under the heading of 'Impress the Neighbours' and, personally, I see it as an unnecessary way to add complexity, weight and price where there's no need.

If you didn't know, the Golf Convertible is a Mk 1-based car which just goes on selling, despite its large price ticket and the fact that it is based on a car which went out of production seven years ago. VW's efforts to bring the beast up-to-date have resulted in an ever more complex body styling kit which is not to everyone's liking.

When you consider that the basic shape of this Golf hit the streets in the mid-1970s, it's not surprising that the kit looks somewhat ill at ease. However, it is well made, well fitted and colour-coded (as are the wheels), and there are far worse examples to be found.

Volkswagen's efforts to retain some credibility in the pricing stakes have seen them introduce the Clipper model, which is basically the same car but features the carburettor engine and steel wheels. To compensate for these losses, it is some £2,500 cheaper. Oh,



Pleasant, if dated, interior features latest VW steering wheel. Use of light grey gives the cabin a much more 'airy' feel. Driver's handbook is leather-bound and so it should be!

THE

Sunshine, uncluttered roads and an open top car - what more could one ask for?



and it doesn't have the bodykit!

The extra weight and aerodynamic drag of the Convertible reflect in the performance figures (especially when compared with the Mk 2 cars), but who cares? With all that torque, it's not going to be left standing in urban situations, and it can clock well over 100mph if such is your wish.

Certainly, few buyers of the open-roofed car choose it for high street drag racing. Indeed, lid-down, high-speed cruising is not that comfortable. Seventy or 80mph is quite fast enough, and even then you have to shout to your companion. Fifty or 60mph is much

more comfortable. Motorways are best avoided unless you smoke, in which case you probably won't notice the air you breathe turning to 90 per cent diesel fumes!

Reasons for purchase include image and fun. I suspect that many of those who buy the car for the former seldom get any of the latter, for fear of damaging their Vidal Sassoon hairdos. Those who buy for the second reason will not be disappointed. Hood up, it is most competent, if a little impractical; the interior is smaller than the Mk 2 cars, and the strengthening makes it more so.

The boot is a joke. Someone commented that if the test car were red, we had better not park it next to the Post Office lest folk use it to dispatch their letters...

The rear screen scores lots of points for being glass, rather than plastic (Messrs BMW/Porsche etc please note!) but it's not that big, which leads to rather thick 'C' pillars and massive blind spots.

The dated ergonomics of the interior wouldn't get past the planning stage today, and the seats would look more at home in a 'fat cat' Mercedes. Luggage space is, erm, limited (Tesco won't make much from Cabrio owners...) and long-legged adults wouldn't thank you for a rear seat ride.

Hood down, you forget such mundane items as practicality. Even in cool weather, you can whack the heater right up and still enjoy the wind in your hair. Or rather, the wind around the back of your neck, something which still remains an odd phenomenon for one who has spent many years on two wheels rather than four.

Power steering is neither fitted nor available, and without it (and with the extra weight of the car) low-speed manoeuvring becomes a muscle-challenging exercise. The steering wheel itself is of the latest design fitted to the VW range and, to my eyes at least, looks somewhat out of place.

The Cabrio driver isn't pampered with toys, electric roof notwithstanding. Driver and passenger have to lock their own doors and,

SUN

likewise, they have to wind their own windows. If I were me, I'd gladly swap the latter two and lose the powered roof.

Despite being basically a hatchback (i.e. not a sports or 'sporty' car), the Convertible still attracted a good deal of attention during the week. People would wander up and start chatting about it, offering opinions about the bodykit, ragtops in general, and the good old days when they used to drive an MGB/TR6, etc, etc.

One question frequently asked was whether the production would continue next year with the introduction of the Mk 3 Golf. It's a fair question, too. In truth, it would have been reasonable to expect that the design wouldn't have stood a hope of getting into the mid-80s, let alone the 1990s.

One assumes that Karmann are working as hard as the VW factory in order to produce a Mk 3 Convertible. If so, it will certainly be a larger, more practical and even more expensive car and, doubtless, we will soon be seeing special 'last of the run' models as production is wound down.

Doubtless, too, it will be those who saw the present car as an upstart when it was first introduced, who will proceed to decry the Mk 3 as modernist nonsense.

Verdict

Ignore the price and the verdict is simple: every home should have one, preferably with another car for days when practicalities rule.

But, unless Daddy is stuck for a birthday present idea, price is most definitely a factor and it's one which was raised on many occasions throughout the week. The price list shows that the topless GTi is the most expensive Golf you can (or maybe can't) buy - albeit a mere £1.24 dearer than the next one down, the 5-door GTi 16V.

In fact, taking into account any deals you could manage, you could just about buy two basic Golfs for the price of one Convertible! On paper, it makes you wonder why any are sold. When you drive one, you know; all you need to know *then* is how to afford one. When you know that, give me a call and tell me. And I'll lend you my Beach Boys tape!

Second Opinion

In our 'Driver of the Year' contest (report 1989 issue) reader Nicki Stimpson came a strong third. Apart from being a good driver, Nicki is a Golf GTi enthusiast, treating her Mk 2 version with large amounts of TLC.

However, she has long had a yearning for driving with the wind in her hair and so, when we offered her the chance to test the GTi Cabrio for a day, she was not backward in coming forward. At just 21 years old, she is very much of the age group that VW want to attract in order to give that fun-loving free-as-a-bird image some substance.

So, the questions begin. Would the sun shine? Would the reality match her dream? Would her dream car have wheels of clay? Would she return it...?

First of all, we asked her 'Why the Cabrio obsession?' 'I've always had this thing about open air motoring. My dad had a succession of convertibles and motorcycles when I was younger and I used to be a motorcyclist myself. I don't know what it is. Intangible, I suppose.'

Our first surprise came when Nicki actually did return the car (we had visions of having to

alert Channel ports! - but return she did, beaming broadly and looking as if Vidal Sassoon would have to put in some overtime. She had, presumably, enjoyed it?

'I'll say. It was great! It was sunny all day and so the hood was down right from the start. It wasn't awfully warm, though, and I'm glad I took my jacket. (Note: a VW Motoring jacket, available from us at just £39.95 - Ed.). And the electric hood...! I'm not exactly known for my reticence in my own car, but I found that the wind noise meant that I was often travelling 10 or 20mph slower than usual. Although the engine is basically the same as that in the Mk 2, it felt very different to drive. There's no getting away from the fact that it is an old design.'

How about the image - did she find that it attracted attention? 'Oh, sure. Lots of people look, especially when you park, and more so with the electric hood.'

'I did find myself getting a bit paranoid when parking, though, worrying whether it would be damaged, or even there, when I got back!'

Practically? 'Well, it's not going to win any prizes for load space, now, is it? Seriously, it wouldn't really be much good as an only car for a family of four. But I'm single and don't have to worry much about getting four people inside or carrying tons of groceries.'

Nicki was as impressed as we were with the fuel consumption. A 400-mile round trip saw the digital readout on the MFA computer indicating more than 37 mpg.

Verdict? 'Given the cash, yes, I'd buy a new one today, and when it comes to replacing my Mk 2 GTi, I will seriously consider a (used) Cabrio, especially as the Mk 3 models will probably shoot up even further in price. The problem is that the Cabrio resale values are quite a lot higher than the hatch, and you have to pay more for the same year, if you see what I mean.'

Still, once you're on the bandwagon you're away. Yes, I've definitely got the bug - I'm hooked! □



The alloy wheels get the colour-coding treatment.

After a day driving in the sun, the grin says it all. Nicki Stimpson tries to think of legal methods to stomp up fifteen grand!



FACTS & FIGURES VW Golf GTi Cabrio

ENGINE

Capacity	1781 cc
Bore x stroke	81.0 x 86.4 mm
Max power	112 bhp @ 5800 rpm
Max torque	113 lbf ft @ 3500 rpm
Compression ratio	10.0 : 1

FUEL CONSUMPTION

Gov't figures	
(Urban/56/75)	25.4/42.8/31.7 mpg
Test overall	35.6 mpg
Fuel tank capacity	12 gals
Fuel type	Super unleaded or 4-Star (Premium unleaded, with dealer modifications to timing)

PERFORMANCE

Max speed	108 mph
0-50mph	6.3 secs
0-60	9.4 secs

TRANSMISSION

Five-speed, front-wheel drive via transverse gearbox. Single dry plate clutch.

BRAKES

Front ventilated disc brakes with self-adjusting drums at rear. Dual-circuit, diagonally split system with servo.

WHEELS AND TYRES

Alloy, 6J x 14 rims with 185/60 HR14 tyres (Michelin MXV2 on test vehicle). Mini 'spacesaver' spare wheel and tyre.

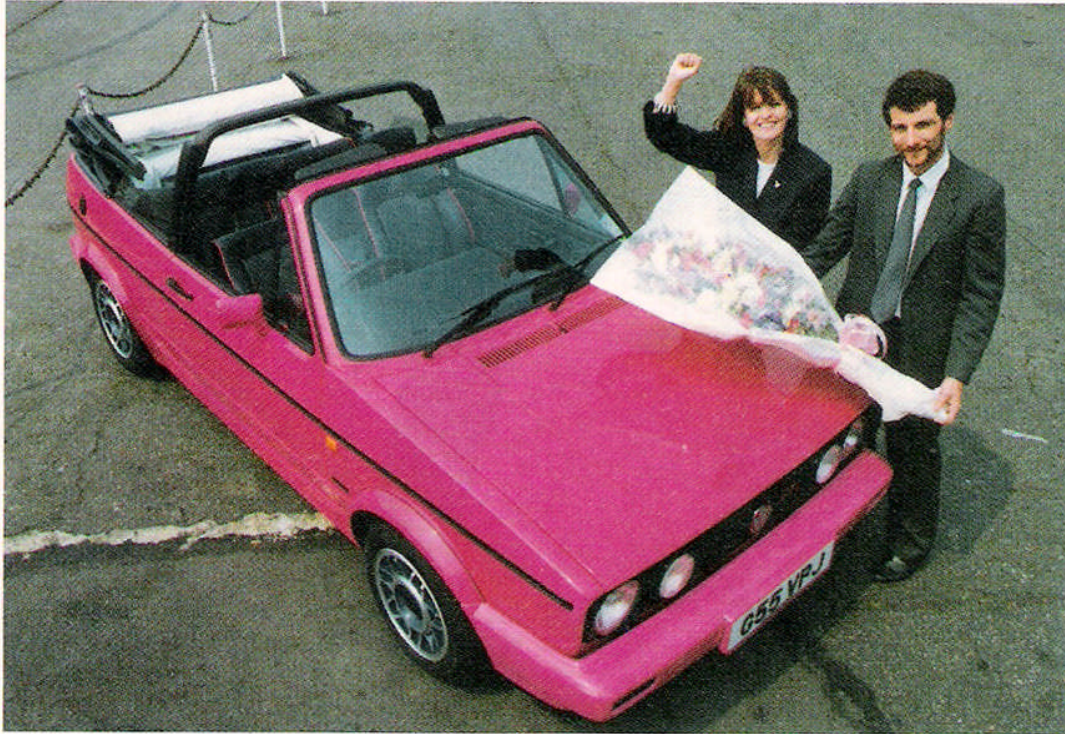
LIST PRICES

(Correct at time of going to press)

Golf 3-door	£7,642
Golf GTi 3-door	£11,429
Golf Convertible Clipper	£11,989
Golf Convertible GTi	£14,450

Test car provided by Volkswagen (UK)

Deepdene in the pink



Volkswagen Audi dealers Deepdene of Dorking recently prepared this Golf GTi Convertible for a private client, to a specification which includes pink pearlescent paintwork, blue leather upholstery with pink piping, and alloy wheels highlighted with blue metallic paintwork.

We understand that the final price of the work, which also included the fitting of power-assisted steering, electric windows, central locking and remote alarm, was getting on for twice that of a standard Golf Cabrio!

Our picture shows Deepdene's senior sales executive, Martin Ashton, handing a bouquet of flowers to Erica Evans who accepted the car on behalf of the client.