

Geneva 1979 was the launchpad for the original Golf Cabriolet and heralded the dawn of a new open-top era, not of the more traditional two-seater type but the more practical four-seater variety.

Golf design dates back to 1974, and it is the Mk I body shape which acts as the basis for the latest of the Golf convertibles, the Clipper. The engine is the 1781cc unit with two valves per cylinder, but in carburettored form, not the more famous GTI fuel-injected guise. It produces maximum power of 90bhp at 5200rpm and develops 107lb ft of torque at 3300rpm. The Clipper replaces the 75bhp, 1.6-litre Golf Cabriolet and offers the potential buyer a viable alternative to the GTI Cabriolet, which is more than £2000 more expensive than the Clipper.

The conversion is carried out by Karmann and includes an extensive amount of extra strengthening and the fitment of the hood assembly; it is the latter which is one of the most praiseworthy attributes of the Golf Clipper.

Although of the traditional fabric type supported by folding irons, the hood is a long way from the normal lightweight single-skin sports-car hood. It is much more akin to the sort of hood found on expensive large convertibles. There are four extra layers under the normal waterproof exterior; cloth gauze, a 20mm thick rubberized hair filling, another cloth gauze, and finally a plastic headlining as found on the hard-top.

The reasons for this substantial type of hood are obvious: to provide good heat insulation to keep the interior warm in the winter — we were not able to check this out, for obvious reasons — and cool in the summer when the top is left up. It also provides a high degree of sound insulation to keep refinement levels to an acceptable level for 1987.

The pram-type frame and its multi-layer skin works well, almost eliminating wind roar at speeds up to 70mph. It is only at speeds in excess of this that the seals begin to open slightly to let in the wind. It also provides good sealing against the rain, with no evidence of leaking even during maximum speed runs conducted in the pouring rain.

Volkswagen and Karmann have stuck to their guns and avoided the

PRICE £9686, TOP SPEED 102mph, 0-60mph 10.5secs, MPG 30.0

FOR Hood, fuel consumption AGAINST Boot space, ride

SALE OF THE CENTURY

The Karmann-converted Golf Clipper not only has an easy-to-use hood, it is also a sprightly performer and undercuts many immediate competitors

flexible type of rear window, opting for a solid glass pane set into the hood. This gives good rear visibility in all conditions — and does not become scratched or discoloured with age — and has the additional advantage that normal rear window demisting elements can be set into the glass. The rear side windows do not form part of the hood and can be wound down to a half-closed position.

Raising or lowering the hood is simplicity itself, and does not require the Herculean strength necessary to operate some mechanisms we have come across recently. The top is released simply by undoing two lever catches sited at the top of the screen in each corner. There are none of the fingernail-breaking press fasteners to seal the rear bottom edge of the hood, so once the levers are disengaged all that remains is to fold the whole assembly rearwards — and it can easily be done by one person.

The next stage is to engage the two catches which hold the folded frame under slight compression to increase rear visibility and stop the hood rising up when the Clipper is on the move and the small tonneau has not been fitted. It is a matter of opinion whether the Golf Cabriolet looks better with or without the tonneau, but it seems that most owners dispense with it, in London at least.

One initially puzzling aspect of the two release levers is that the one on the passenger side of the Clipper has a trigger release which has to be depressed before the hood can be disengaged. The reason is one of

safety; the handle doubles as a grab handle for the passenger and the trigger is to prevent accidental release. It does seem slightly strange, however, that the driver's handle does not have the trigger. It is always better to be safe than sorry.

Driving the Clipper around with the hood down does not result in instant hair removal, so long as the side windows are left up.

Rearward visibility with the hood up or down does leave a little to be desired, but for different reasons. With the top in position there are blind spots created by the large expanse of fabric making up the rear three-quarter panels, so it is important to make sure that the door mirrors are set correctly.

This problem does not exist with the hood down, but as the folded

hood sits on top of the bodywork rather than folding into it — like on the BMW 325i Convertible — visibility is restricted. Care has to be taken when reversing in case a small child is in the way.

Refinement is one of the areas which suffers due to the open-top conversion. Most notable is road/tyre roar and exhaust resonance. Both are more than likely a result of the additional strengthening necessary to compensate for the removal of the solid roof.

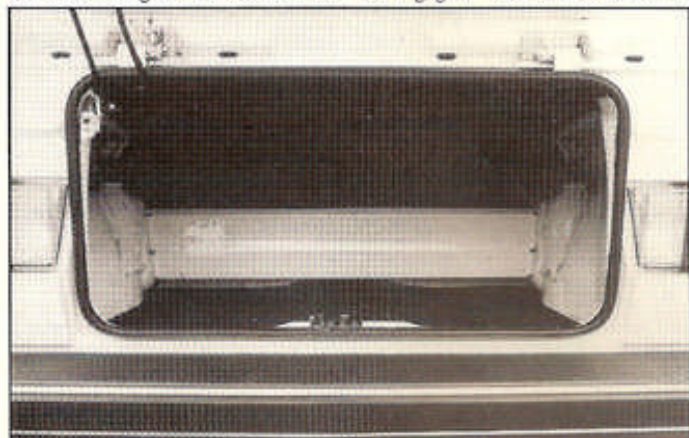
The other area to suffer is the ride, probably for the same reasons. The ride of the Clipper is 'crashy' in comparison with the hard-top. In a way this may appeal to the more 'sporty' driver — especially when viewed in conjunction with the rorty exhaust — but it may become



Rear seat legroom is adequate rather than plentiful



One-piece rear seat folds to increase luggage space to 21.8cu ft



Boot opening is small and narrow, making loading awkward

◀ tiresome for the passengers over a long journey.

Performance is not spectacular in 'hot hatchback' terms and it must be said that weather conditions were not exactly ideal on the day we took the Clipper to Millbrook. Despite the pouring rain and a strong gusting wind the Clipper managed a mean maximum speed in fifth gear of 102mph which corresponds to 6050rpm, just below the peak power point. A wind-assisted best of 106mph (5260rpm) was noted.

A broken red line begins at an indicated 6300rpm, becoming solid at 6700rpm. Taking the latter figure as the engine's limit, this gives maximum speeds of 35, 57, 83 and 106mph for first, second, third and fourth gears respectively.

As we have found so often in the past the Golf is one of the most accomplished front-wheel-drive cars when it comes to putting the power down. Good traction off the line combined with a 'sports' ratio gearbox — the first time this 'box has been mated to this engine in the Golf — enables the Clipper to reach 30mph in 3.1secs with 60mph coming up in 10.5secs, two gearchanges later. The quarter-mile post is reached in 17.8secs at a terminal speed of 76mph with the kilometre distance covered in 32.8secs (96mph).

Despite the lack of fuel injection the 1.8-litre engine endows the Clipper with good low-down flexibility, amply displayed by the ease with which it pulls from 10mph in fourth gear with the throttle fully open. The

incremental in-gear times give an indication of the relatively flat torque curve and show that the Clipper can cover the important 50-70mph overtaking increment in a respectable 7.4secs in third gear.

During its 876 miles with us the Clipper returned an overall fuel consumption figure of 30.0mpg which is not to be sniffed at. The intermediate consumption figures show graphically the effect hard driving has on economy with a best of 35.9mpg after a weekend of open-top 'pottering' and a worst of 20.4mpg for the strenuous test session.

As usual an owner can expect to return a consumption figure closer to the calculated *Autocar* average figure, which in the case of the Clipper is 33mpg. In conjunction with the 12.1-gallon fuel tank this endows the Clipper with a long cruising range.

The Clipper steers well, with good response, self-centring and tolerable feel despite the lack of power-assistance and the slightly low gearing at 3.8 turns lock-to-lock. In tight parking manoeuvres there is a tendency for the steering to be a little on the heavy side and it is probably advisable to spend £498 on the optional power-assisted steering.

Ultimate handling is good by contemporary front-wheel-drive standards. The Clipper's natural tendency to understeer is offset to some extent by its anti-roll balance, and it can be provoked *in extremis* into rear-end breakaway by lifting abruptly off the throttle.

The Clipper is available only in

two-door form but the large doors do afford reasonable access to the rear compartment. Rear seat occupants will find legroom adequate rather than plentiful but this is no different from any of the car's competitors.

Front seat occupants are better catered for with plenty of leg and elbowroom although some of the taller testers would have liked a little more rearward travel for the driver's seat.

Dashboard and controls are classic Volkswagen: analogue, easy to read and practical. Seats are comfortable and supportive and the driver's seat has the advantage of tilt adjustment with the back of the cushion able to be raised so the driver can be positioned in perfect relation to the non-adjustable steering column.

Gearchange quality is good, if a little notchy, but fast gearchanges proved to be no problem. One slight criticism of the test car was the positioning of the accelerator pedal in relation to the brake. The former was set too high to enable easy heel-and-toeing.

One very useful feature of the Clipper — bearing in mind its convertible nature — is the lockable glovebox. It provides a secure place to store cassettes and other small removable items when the car is left with the hood down for short periods of time. The lock is operated by the ignition key which can prove slightly inconvenient if the driver decides to change tapes on the motorway and remembers they are locked in the glovebox...

The boot space left in the Clipper after the conversion is a bit of a mess and not very substantial. Very much of a compromise.

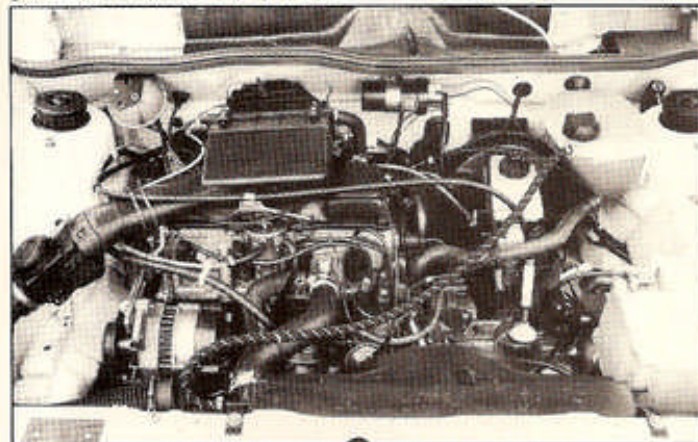
The non-split rear seat back does fold down to increase load area from 9.9cu ft to 21.8cu ft but is not very useable due to a strengthening bulkhead running between the wheel-arches.

The boot lid is shaped to fit around the light clusters but once open the hole is small. Loading has to be achieved through a shallow rectangular opening which could prove to be a problem when loading heavy objects. A space-saver spare wheel is located in a sunken compartment in the boot floor.

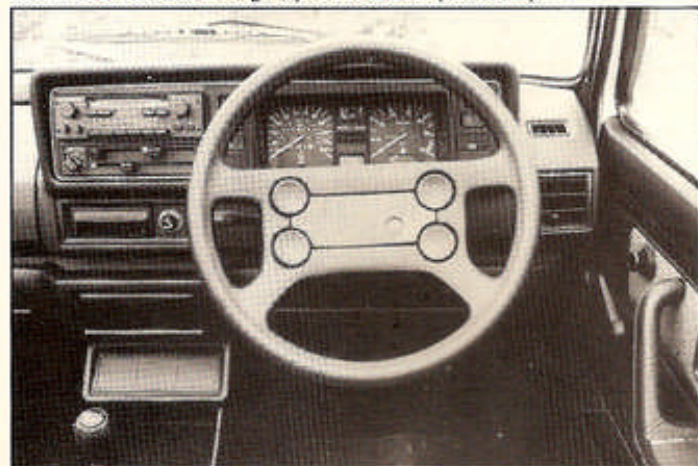
What the Clipper offers is sensible, and on the whole, practical open-top motoring for a basic price of £9686. Volkswagen has managed to keep the price below £10,000 by marketing the Clipper in a low-specification form — no electric windows; no central locking and no useful VW trip computer.

Performance is adequate and fuel consumption good but the ride quality could be improved.

Boot space is minimal and inconvenient to use but this will always be the result when the starting point is a medium/small hatchback. The hood and its mechanism, however, are truly impressive — it can be put up or taken down by one person with minimal effort in less than 30secs and it is this fact which makes the Clipper an ideal proposition for the British climate. ■



1.8-litre carburettored engine produces 90bhp at 5200rpm

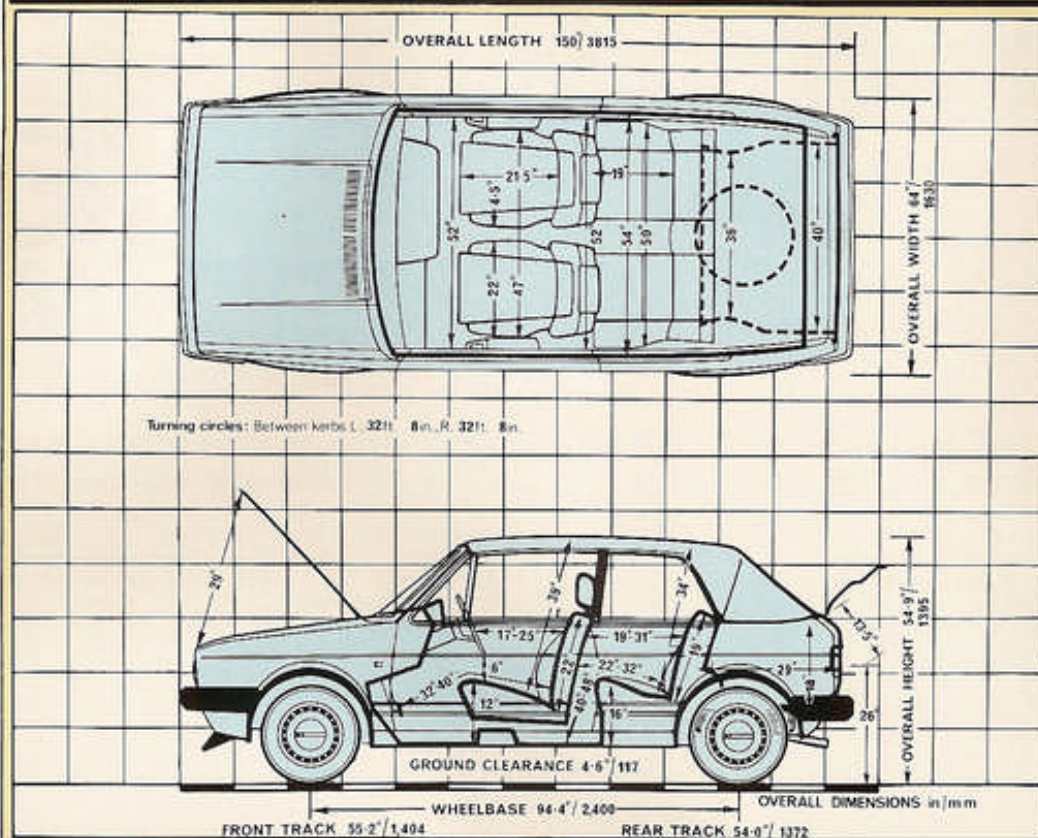


Dashboard and controls are classic VW: well laid out and plain



Visibility is restricted by the hood which does not fold flat

TEST UPDATE



MODEL

VOLKSWAGEN GOLF CABRIOLET CLIPPER

PRODUCED BY:

Volkswagenwerke AG, 3180 Wolfsburg, West Germany and Wilhelm Karmann GmbH, Osnabruck, West Germany

SOLD IN THE UK BY:

VAG (UK) Ltd, Yeomans Drive, Blakelands, Milton Keynes MK14 5AN.

SPECIFICATION

ENGINE

Transverse, front, front-wheel drive. Head/block alloy/cast iron. 4 cylinders in line, bored block, 5 main bearings. Water cooled, electric fan.

Bore 81mm (3.19in), stroke 86.4mm (3.40in), capacity 1781cc (108.7 cu in).

Valve gear ohc, 2 valves per cylinder, toothed belt camshaft drive. Compression ratio 10 to 1. Electronic ignition, downdraught, twin-venturi carburettor with overrun cut off.

Max power 90bhp (PS-DIN) (67kW ISO) at 5200rpm. Max torque 107lb ft at 3300rpm.

TRANSMISSION

5-speed manual, single dry plate clutch, 8.3in dia.

Gear	Ratio	mph/1000rpm
Top	0.89	20.14
4th	1.13	15.86
3rd	1.44	12.45
2nd	2.12	8.46
1st	3.46	5.18

Final drive: hypoid bevel, ratio 3.67.

SUSPENSION

Front, independent, MacPherson struts, wishbones, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar.

Rear, independent, torsion beam, trailing arm, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar.

STEERING

Rack and pinion. Steering wheel diameter 15in, 3.8 turns lock to lock.

BRAKES

Dual circuits, split diagonally. Front 9.3in (239mm) dia discs. Rear 7.1in (180mm) dia drums. Vacuum servo. Handbrake, centre lever acting on rear drums.

WHEELS

Pressed steel, 5.5in rims. Radial ply tyres (Michelin MXL on test car), size 175/70SR13, pressures F25 R25 psi (normal driving).

EQUIPMENT

Battery 12V, 45Ah. Alternator 65A. Headlamps 55/55W. Reversing lamp standard. 22 electric fuses. 2-speed plus intermittent screen wipers. Electric screen washer. Water valve interior heater. Cloth seats, vinyl headlining. Carpet with heel mat floor covering. Scissor jack; 2 jacking points each side. Laminated windscreen.

PERFORMANCE

MAXIMUM SPEEDS

Gear	mph	km/h	rpm
Top (Mean)	102	164	5060
(Best)	106	171	5260
4th	106	171	6700
3rd	83	134	6700
2nd	57	92	6700
1st	35	56	6700

ACCELERATION FROM REST

True mph	Time (sec)	Speedo mph
30	3.1	34
40	5.0	44
50	7.4	55
60	10.5	65
70	14.6	75
80	20.3	85
90	30.3	95
100	—	106

Standing ¼-mile: 17.8sec, 76mph
Standing km: 32.8sec, 96mph

ACCELERATION IN EACH GEAR

mph	Top	4th	3rd	2nd
10-30	—	7.6	5.5	3.5
20-40	10.1	6.7	5.0	3.4
30-50	9.6	6.8	5.2	3.9
40-60	10.7	7.3	5.6	—
50-70	12.6	9.5	7.4	—
60-80	12.8	9.8	10.8	—
70-90	19.3	15.7	—	—

CONSUMPTION

FUEL

Overall mpg: 30.0 (9.4 litres/100km) 6.6mpl

Autocar formula: Hard 27.0mpg
Driving Average 33.0mpg
and conditions Gentle 39.0mpg
Grade of fuel: Premium, 4-star (97 RM)
Fuel tank: 12.0 imp galls (55 litres)
Mileage recorder: 2.2 per cent long
Oil: (SAE 15W/40) negligible

BRAKING

Fade (from 76mph in neutral)

Pedal load for 0.5g stops in lb			
	start/end	start/end	
1	29-35	6	50-65
2	35-42	7	50-60
3	35-45	8	50-57
4	40-60	9	50-55
5	50-65	10	50-55

Response (from 30mph in neutral)

Load	g	Distance
10lb	0.15	201ft
20lb	0.37	81ft
30lb	0.60	50ft
40lb	0.70	43ft
50lb	0.76	40ft
Handbrake	0.30	100ft

Max gradient: 1 in 3
CLUTCH Pedal 32lb; Travel 5.25in

WEIGHT

Kerb 18.7cwt/2091lb/946kg
(Distribution F/R, 64.5/35.5)
Test 21.9cwt/2451lb/1109kg
Max payload 794lb/360kg
Towing weight 2646lb/1200kg

COSTS

Prices

Basic	£7775.00
Special Car Tax	£647.92
VAT	£1263.44
Total (in GB)	£9686.36
Licence	£100.00
Delivery charge (London)	£200.00
Number plates	£20.00
Total on the Road	£10,006.36
(excluding insurance)	
Insurance group	5
Total as tested	£10,006.36

SERVICE & PARTS

Change	Interval	
	10,000	20,000
Engine oil	Yes	Yes
Oil filter	Yes	Yes
Gearbox oil	No	No
Spark plugs	No	Yes
Air cleaner	No	Yes
Total cost	£30.45	£79.65

(Assuming labour at £18.50 an hour inc VAT)

PARTS COST (inc VAT)

Brake pads (2 wheels) front	£31.97
Brake shoes (2 wheels) rear	£20.81
Exhaust complete	£164.80
Tyre — each (typical)	£48.23
Windscreens	£63.48
Headlamp unit	£30.74
Front wing	£68.50
Rear bumper	£96.99

WARRANTY

12 months/unlimited mileage, 6-year anti-corrosion, 3 years paint.

EQUIPMENT

Ammeter/Voltmeter	N/A
Automatic	£458.46
Cruise control	N/A
Economy gauge	N/A
Five speed	●
Limited slip differential	N/A
Power steering	£498.00
Rev counter	●
Self-levelling suspension	N/A
Steering rake adjustment	N/A
Trip computer	N/A
Headrests front	●
Heated seats	N/A
Height adjustment	N/A
Lumbar adjustment	N/A
Seat back recline	N/A
Seat cushion tilt	N/A
Seat tilt	●
Split rear seats	N/A
Door mirror remote control	●
Electric windows	N/A
Heated rear window	●
Interior adjustable headlamps	N/A
Tinted glass	●
Headlamp wash/wipe	N/A
Tailgate wash/wipe	N/A
Central locking	N/A
Cigar lighter	●
Clock	●
Fog lamps	N/A
Internal boot release	N/A
Locking fuel cap	●
Metallic paint	£199.33
Spacesaver spare	●
Radio/cassette	●
Aerial	●
Speakers	●

● Standard N/A Not applicable

TEST CONDITIONS

Wind: 14-16mph
Temperature: 8deg C (46.4deg F)
Barometer: 29.96in Hg (1016mbar)
Humidity: 70per cent
Surface: wet asphalt and concrete
Test distance: 976miles
Figures taken at 9469 miles at the General Motors proving ground at Millbrook. All Autocar test results are subject to world copyright and may not be reproduced in whole or part without the Editor's written permission.