



PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR

SUPER SCIROCCO

Improving a good thing

BY JOE RUSZ

AS PRESIDENT OF Recaro U.S.A. Inc, George Venieris was looking for a distinctive way of demonstrating his company's seats to prospective buyers. "I wanted people to try them, not just look at them," says Venieris. So he set out to find the perfect car to use as a vehicle for his marketing scheme. He wanted something modest, yet exciting, a car that would be fun to drive. He chose the Volkswagen Scirocco because "It's one of the cleanest designs around." Also, the car had tremendous potential for becoming an outstanding sports coupe, given a bit of suspension and engine tweaking. Actually, the sort of car Venieris had in mind was a limited production Scirocco/Golf sold only in Europe. And even though the car itself is not available in the U.S., the parts needed to convert an existing Scirocco or Rabbit to GTi specs are. So George set out to build his special display car, never thinking it would attract as much attention as the seats it is fitted with. Apparently, he underestimated the hunger U.S. automobile enthusiasts have for sprightly sports coupes. George confesses that he is only mildly disturbed by the car's unexpected popularity. After all, he's an enthusiast too. Besides he knows that anyone who appreciates his car will also feel the same way about its Recaro seats. "The two complement each other nicely," says the company president.

Although the car and the unique Recaro seats are worth examining more closely, we'll devote the first part of our story to the car because it represents the sort of tailor-made tourer that's finding favor among economy-minded car owners. In the U.S. it

seems the trend has yet to gain momentum, but in Europe independent tuners such as Auto ABT, Autohaus Nordstadt and Oettinger and even the VW factory, offer these cars to the public as alternatives to big, flashy and expensive coupes, sedans and GTs.

Venieris' Scirocco is a 1977 model equipped with the 1588-cc VW sohc 4-cylinder. George chose this car instead of a 1978 because the latter uses a 1457-cc powerplant while the GTi has the bigger engine. Bringing the U.S. car up to European performance specs is largely a matter of inserting Tab A into Slot B—replacing a number of existing engine components with high-performance GTi counterparts.

Beginning with the engine's bottom end, this includes heavy-duty main and connecting rod bearings. George didn't make this substitution and claims the engine has had no problems. But then he is careful about how he drives the car. Next come GTi pistons which, along with a GTi cylinder head, raise the engine's compression ratio from a stock 8.0:1 to 9.5:1. That's sufficient, but for that extra nth, Venieris claims that Audi 80GT pistons and the stock cylinder head give an even higher ratio of 9.7:1. To which we say, bring on the high-octane racing gasoline.

The GTi cylinder head differs from the stocker in that it has bigger intake valves: 38.0 vs 34.0 mm. Also, it comes with stiffer valve springs which raise the engine's redline from 7200 to 7800 rpm. Surprisingly, the camshaft used in the GTi engine is identical to those used in the 1.4-, 1.5- and 1.6-liter VW engines.

According to Venieris, cam timing is juggled to suit each application by advancing or retarding the camshaft. In the GTi, the cam is retarded 8 degrees. "It's something almost anyone can do, yet it makes the engine come alive," he claims. For optimum performance, George advises replacing the stock fuel injection warm-up regulator and the venturi plate with their Audi 5000 counterparts. This modification helps the engine breathe better at high rpm.

In most other respects the stock Scirocco engine is no different than the GTi. The clutch, flywheel and ignition system are the same. The GTi is equipped with an auxiliary oil cooler, but Venieris thinks it's not needed for road use so his car doesn't have one. If the garden-variety VW and the GTi have some similar equipment, they certainly do not share the same performance. For instance, the stock 1978 U.S. Scirocco engine produces 76 bhp SAE net while the GTi develops 110 bhp DIN. And where the stock Scirocco tops out at 104 mph, accelerating from 0 to 60 mph in 10.4 sec and to the end of the quarter mile in 18.0 sec at 77.0 mph, the European GTi reaches a top speed of 113 mph, goes from 0 to 60 in 9.5 sec and covers the quarter mile in 17.3 sec. Venieris' car has similar performance: 0-60 in 9.3 sec, the quarter mile in 17.5 sec at 81.0 mph and a top speed of 118 mph.

Because one can't properly evaluate the effectiveness of special seats such as Recaros in a car with poor handling, Venieris took special care to ensure that his Scirocco cornered well. Once again, he relied on GTi components for his basic chassis modifications. He installed GTi front and rear springs whose progressively wound coils are stiffer and shorter than stock. These lowered the car about an inch and made the ride a bit firmer, but certainly not harsh. George replaced the stock shock absorbers with Bilstein street shocks and made a few minor changes to the various suspension mounts—like installing heavy-duty MacPherson strut bearing bushings and special rubber bushings for the front control arms. The biggest departure from GTi components is the aftermarket anti-roll bars developed by Quickor Engineering

(6710 S.W. 111th, Beaverton, Ore. 97005). George consulted with the Quickor people and after a fair amount of experimentation, decided that a 0.87-in. front bar and two 0.63-in. rear bars worked best. Incidentally, the rear bar setup is a bit unusual because the two bars are placed above and below the rear L-section axle.

One problem the factory GTi ignores, but which George met head-on, is chassis flex. "It's quite common on unit-body cars, so I installed cross braces between the front spring towers and the suspension control arms to alleviate it," he explains. Venieris says this method of stiffening is used on racing and rally cars and that it improves control in high-speed turns on uneven road surfaces.

Like the factory-built GTi, the Recaro Scirocco is fitted with ventilated front disc brakes and oversize calipers. But unlike the stocker which comes with 13 x 5-in. wheels and 175/70SR-13 tires, or even the GTi which has 13 x 5½-in. rims and 175/70HR-13 tires, George's Scirocco uses 15 x 5½-in. ATS wheels shod with 195/70HR-15 Pirelli P7s. The Pirellis alone undoubtedly contribute much to the car's superior handling.

Just how good that handling is became quite apparent when we ran the Scirocco through our slalom course and around our skidpad. Zigzagging through the pylons at Orange County International Raceway, Venieris' VW averaged 61.6 mph, faster than every car we've tested except the 1977 Corvette which went 63.6 mph. On the skidpad, the Scirocco cornered at 0.831g, just a



tick less than the Ferrari 308 GTS which pulled 0.852g and the Lamborghini Countach at 0.838g. The stock U.S. Scirocco's handling? It's a bit off the Recaro's. Our recent test data on the 1978 model shows a slalom speed of 59.3 mph and a cornering capability of 0.766g.

True for those people who question skidpad and slalom figures as true indicators of a car's cornering ability, we're pleased to report that the Recaro Scirocco exhibited the same stick-to-the-road manners manifested in our track tests. The Engineering Editor said there was "very neutral handling, showing good balance up to the limit." He reported mild oversteer or "tuck in" if he lifted off the throttle during spirited cornering. Our tester credited the GTi suspension with eliminating the moderate roll and high-speed front-end float of the stock VW. His exuberance for the car's handling was perhaps best reflected by this comment: "It rockets over the road at what must be record speeds in the corners, yet it feels safe and secure while doing so."

Happily, the car's ride does not suffer much as a result of this chassis tweaking. There is a characteristic stiffness that shows when one drives over bumps or through those dreaded southern California rain gutters. And the Pirellis do thump, especially when driven over Botts dots lane markers. But there is still plenty of compliance left in the suspension and only the staunchest advocate of boulevard ride will find the car's road manners objectionable.

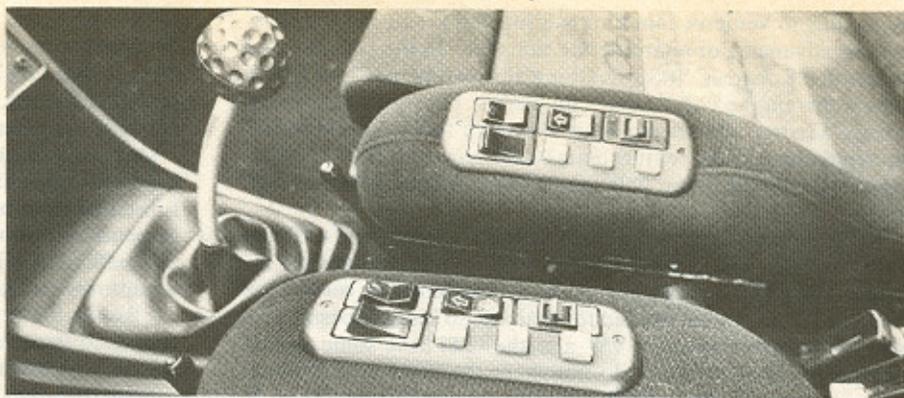
The Recaro Scirocco is every bit a driver's car, a bit jouncy perhaps, but fun to drive. Or, as one staffer reported, "It's quick and fun to dart through traffic with." Admittedly, it's not a car for the casual motorist looking for basic transportation. Another staff member must have thought so too because his comment is perhaps the most apt description of what this super coupe is all about: "It's a car for the super enthusiast who buys a Scirocco for its handling and agility, then wants more."



Super Seat

WHEN WE TOLD George Venieris how much we liked his special Scirocco, he said, "That's very nice, but our business is making seats, not GTi conversions." Sorry, George, but we got carried away—in style! Every time we climbed into his classy demonstrator we were surrounded by Recaro's top-of-the-line C Model. This super seat—or seats, as the car is equipped with two of them—must represent the epitome of present-day seat technology. They are this Scirocco's *raison d'être*, as our test report mentions.

A quick glance at the Idealsitz C, as the German firm calls it, tells you there is something special about this Recaro recliner. The back is articulated in three places, it has hefty seat and backrest bolsters and an adjustable head restraint—plus enough knobs and levers to keep tinkers busy for hours. Those people familiar with sport seats will find the requisite controls for adjusting fore/aft positioning and head restraint height. But they may not be accustomed to the four small knobs which allow pivoting of the seat and backrest side bolsters inward or outward for adjusting seat and backrest width. Nor do they expect to find a small knob which changes the angle of the shoulder rest (the top portion of the



Switches and buttons control seat inclination, heating, back rest shape and stereo.

seat back) or discover the small bar which pulls up and out to vary the length of the lower seat cushion.

One would think that there's enough to satisfy the most demanding driver. Only Recaro doesn't think so. All bodies are not created equal, they say. So there's a special control panel mounted in the inner, lower seat bolster. An assortment of pushbuttons and switches control about all that's left to adjust on an automobile seat. There's a master switch for activating a self-contained electric air pump. Press it and inflate three lumbar-support airbags located in the backrest. Positioned below this switch are three pushbuttons. Press each one as needed and bleed off the air in each support bag to shape the lower backrest to your spine.

Having the backrest perfectly formed, you might want to change the seatback angle. Flip a rocker switch. Touch another switch and send the output of the

car's sound system to a pair of tiny speakers mounted in the head restraint. If the day is cold, press still another switch and activate an electric seat heater (dare we say bun warmer?).

Covered with a wild-patterned, corduroy-like fabric with the adhesiveness of Velcro—"it really grips the body," claims one staff member—the C Model is undeniably the world's most exotic driving seat. But doesn't it tend toward overkill? Not according to Venieris who says it's always been Recaro's philosophy to offer maximum adjustment in their seats. We can assure you that nobody will quibble with him on that subject, but they might blanch when they see the price tag. You see, the ultimate in seating comfort will cost you \$995 per seat. For enthusiasts who value their posteriors or yearn for the sort of exclusivity that only money can buy, the Recaro Idealsitz C is a must.—Joe Ruz

