

# VW's Scirocco and Rabbit:

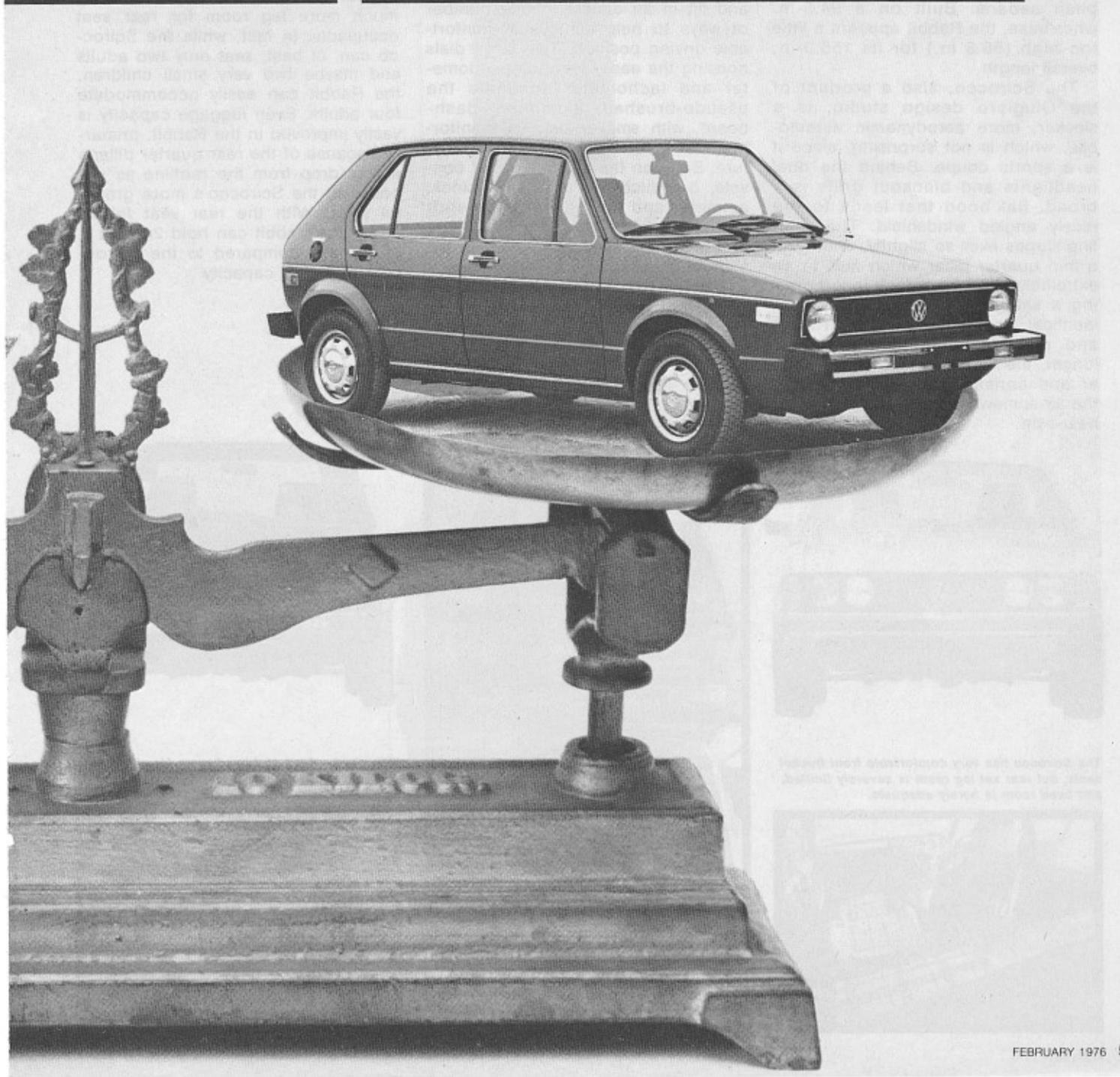
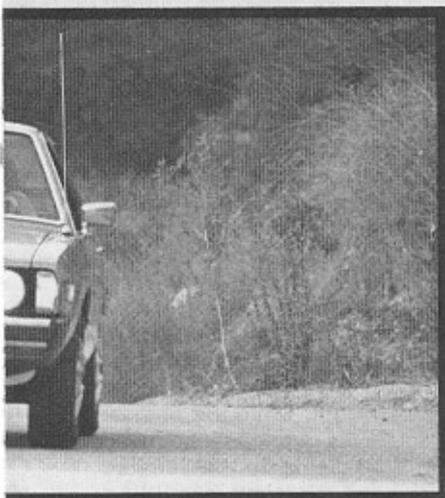
## SO ALIKE AND YET SO DIFFERENT

Take identical engines and transmissions, put them in equal-sized packages, and the result is two distinctly different cars

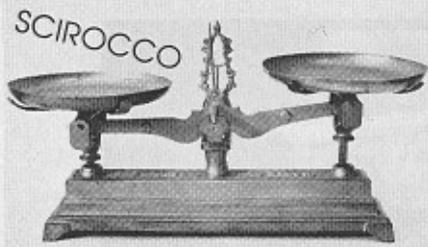


There is an auto industry marketing technique in which a company uses an identical engine/driveline combination in very different bodies to create totally different vehicles aimed at widely separated market segments. Alfa Romeo did it with the Berlina/Spider/GTV and is following the same path with its Alfetta Sedan and GT. Chevrolet's Vega and Monza, in certain permutations, could also be considered examples of this marketing approach. And so it is with Volkswagen's two most recent offerings, the Rabbit and Scirocco.

The difference between cars designed in this manner is in their personalities. After all, if they have the same engine, transmission and even the same chassis, where else could the difference be—except in their prices? But perhaps price is the central question: Can you balance out the extra cost using a car's personality as the criterion?



## STYLING



A vehicle's styling is directly related to its intended use, an abundantly evident fact in the Rabbit and Scirocco. The Rabbit is basically an economy family sedan, and although its Giugiaro-inspired shape is aerodynamic with a flat sloping hood and slightly raked windshield, it is by no means out-of-the-ordinary for European sedans. Built on a 94.5-in. wheelbase, the Rabbit appears a little too high (55.5 in.) for its 155.3-in. overall length.

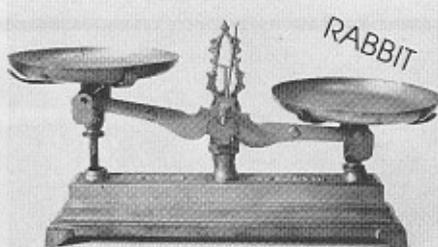
The Scirocco, also a product of the Giugiaro design studio, is a sleeker, more aerodynamic automobile, which is not surprising, since it is a sports coupe. Behind the dual headlights and blackout grille is a broad, flat hood that leads to the Rabbit and measuring a scant half-inch longer, the Scirocco is 4 inches lower and consequently gets through the air somewhat more neatly than its near-twin.



*The Scirocco has very comfortable front bucket seats, but rear seat leg room is severely limited, and head room is barely adequate.*



## INTERIOR FUNCTION



Taken as a whole, both the Rabbit and Scirocco have fairly comfortable interiors, although for different reasons. The Scirocco is more flashy, as befits a sporty coupe, with high-back bucket seats featuring plaid cloth inserts that match the exterior paint. Occupants actually sit *in*, not merely on, these seats, which also recline and tilt in an almost infinite number of ways to help achieve a comfortable driving position. Two large dials housing the easily viewed speedometer and tachometer dominate the pseudo-brushed aluminum dashboard, with smaller gauges monitoring fuel level and engine temperature. Between the seats is a half console, on which are situated a clock, ammeter and the transmission shift lever. The latter is located a bit too far forward, making the 2nd-to-3rd shift an exercise in arm stretching.

Accommodations in the Rabbit are somewhat more impressive due to the car's spaciousness. There is only one drawback to the vehicle's interior design: The perspiration-inducing, all-vinyl seats have a rounded shape that does not properly conform to the human body. They are not actu-



*Luggage capacity in the Rabbit is a cavernous 24.7 cubic feet with rear seat folded, while the Scirocco, with its lower roof and raked rear window, measures only 18.8 cubic feet.*

ally uncomfortable. Rather, you have the sensation that you are about to slide off them at any moment. This one complaint aside, the Rabbit rates higher in interior function than does the Scirocco.

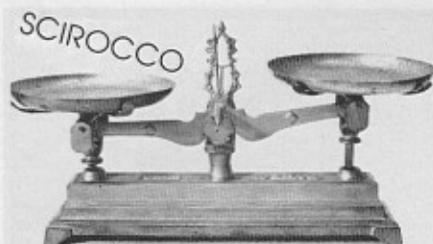
Whereas the Scirocco has practically zero rear seat leg room and scrimps on head room, the Rabbit contains plenty of each. It is no accident that the very factors which make the Rabbit less handsome than the Scirocco on the outside combine to enhance its function as a family sedan. The additional 4 inches of overall height give passengers increased head room, while the shorter hood and steeply angled windshield allow the front seats to be located farther forward, thereby providing much more leg room for rear seat occupants. In fact, while the Scirocco can, at best, seat only two adults and maybe two very small children, the Rabbit can easily accommodate four adults. Even luggage capacity is vastly improved in the Rabbit, primarily because of the rear quarter pillar's abrupt drop from the roofline as opposed to the Scirocco's more graceful slant. With the rear seat folded down, the Rabbit can hold 24.7 cu ft of luggage compared to the Scirocco's 18.8 cu ft capacity.



*With plenty of leg and head room for all passengers, the Rabbit's interior is more functional than the Scirocco's.*



## PERFORMANCE



A good deal of the Rabbit's and, as far as it goes, the Scirocco's interior room comes from the cars' front-wheel-drive design. As stated earlier, both vehicles are powered by an identical engine/driveline combination. Both use a 1.6-liter, in-line, 4-cylinder engine. Along with a nearly square bore and stroke of 3.13 x 3.15 in., this water-cooled engine has an 8.2:1 compression ratio, is fed through a single 2-bbl carburetor and is rated at 71 hp at 5000 rpm and 82 lb/ft of torque at 3000 rpm. In order to save space, the engine is mounted transversally over the front axle, and the drive is taken through a similarly located 4-speed transaxle which incorporates a 3.90:1 final gear ratio. The entire unit is extremely compact and provides easy access for routine maintenance procedures.

Acceleration, as might be expected from two cars so similarly equipped and weighing within 50 pounds of each other (the Rabbit is heavier), is nearly equal. In our testing, the Rabbit had less problem leaving the line and recorded a 3.3-second time to 30 mph, while the Scirocco tended to spin its wheels on the way to a 3.4-second clocking. In the upper speed ranges, however, the Scirocco's more efficient aerodynamics begin to take effect, as the car reaches 60 mph in 10.9 seconds and runs through the quarter mile in 17.62 seconds at 76.92 mph. The Rabbit is not far behind in either category, recording a 0-to-60 mph time of 11.0 seconds while stopping the clocks at 17.88 seconds and 75.44 mph in the quarter. Aerodynamic qualities are also at least partially responsible for the Scirocco's better showing on the *Motor Trend* 73-mile fuel loop, where it averaged 33.18 mpg to the Rabbit's 31.9 mpg consumption rate. (There really shouldn't be such a discrepancy, and we can only relate it to the idiosyncracies of the two cars we had.)

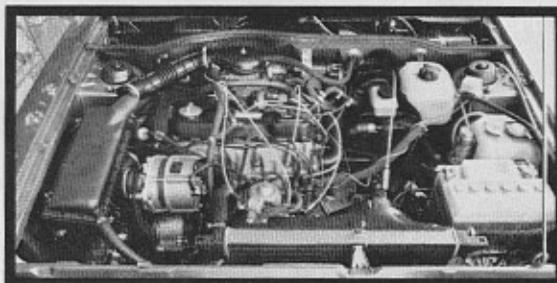
On paper, the chassis design of both cars looks to be identical. There is 4-wheel independent suspension through MacPherson struts in front, with axles located by coil springs and hydraulic shock absorbers at the

rear. Steering is through a very positive-feeling rack-and-pinion unit with a 20.8:1 overall ratio. The only apparent difference is the Scirocco's larger tire size, 175/70 SR 13 as compared to the Rabbit's 155 SR 13. Once on the road course, though, you soon realize that there is something else at work here.

Neither car had that obtrusive feel of front wheel pull which characterizes most FWD automobiles. Understeer was still in evidence, but that is to be expected in FWD cars with 64 percent of their weight centered over the front wheels. The surprising thing, however, was the Scirocco's nimbleness around tight corners, the lightness of its steering and the near-neutral handling characteristics once the initial understeer phase had been passed. This is not to condemn the Rabbit. It, too, was more than capable around curves, but the Scirocco was just easier to drive rapidly.

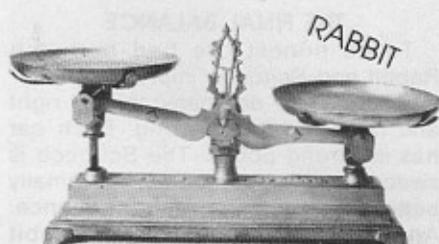
Such a divergence of handling qualities puzzled us for a while until, upon further investigation, we learned the Scirocco uses slightly higher-rate progressive springs at all four corners, while the Rabbit is saddled with linear springs in the rear which do little to inhibit body roll or reduce understeer.

A power-assisted, front disc/rear drum, dual-diagonal brake system is used on both automobiles. But the Scirocco's wider tires, no doubt, account for its superior braking performance. From 30 mph the Scirocco stopped in 32 ft, while the Rabbit was marginally behind at 33 ft. Tests conducted from 60 mph showed a slightly greater separation, with the Scirocco requiring 136 ft, and the Rabbit halting in 140 ft. Brake fade was nonexistent and directional stability excellent, but both cars displayed a tendency to lock up the left front wheel, a strange occurrence in a FWD automobile. With so much less weight on the rear, we expected the rear wheels to be prone to lock up.



Both cars use identical transverse-mounted, water-cooled engines which displace 1588 cc and produce 71 bhp.

## PRICE



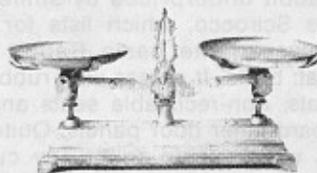
The only category which one car wins with little contest is initial cost. Here the Rabbit has an insurmountable lead, although the Scirocco emerges in better shape than expected. With a base price of \$3499, the Rabbit underprices by some \$1400 the Scirocco, which lists for \$4970. However, the basic Rabbit is just that: basic. It comes with rubber floor mats, non-reclinable seats and cardboard inner door panels. Quite frankly, we seriously doubt any customer would actually buy a car like that, even if he could locate one. VW tells us precious few bottom-line Rabbits are making it to our shores.

To get the maximum benefit from the Rabbit in terms of space, a 4-door sedan is almost a must, and the 4-door has to be ordered with the deluxe interior group and a performance package. We are now talking \$4315. Add to this normal amenities like vinyl upholstery, tinted glass and AM radio, and the Rabbit, as tested, prices out at \$4587.

The Scirocco's base price includes the plush interior and fully instrumented dashboard, as well as power brakes and tinted glass. Add in the radio and the handsome alloy wheels, and you have a sticker price of \$5287. True, that is still \$700 more than the Rabbit, and we could all use an extra \$700; but it does show that when equally equipped, the Rabbit and Scirocco are not so widely separated in price as at first indicated. >

## THE FINAL BALANCE

To be honest, we find both the Rabbit and Scirocco impressive automobiles. They do many things right and rarely anything wrong. Each car has its strong points. The Scirocco is swoopier in appearance, marginally better in all phases of performance. And you pay for this. The Rabbit uses its size in a more functional manner and costs less to buy. In reality, the two automobiles are so nearly equal that the only real difference between them is their separate personalities. Do you want a family sedan or a sports coupe? You decide. ■



# VW's Scirocco and Rabbit

## Specifications:

### POWER UNIT

|                    |                                  |
|--------------------|----------------------------------|
|                    | <b>VW Scirocco</b>               |
| Type               | OHC in-line 4                    |
| Bore & Stroke      | 3.13 x 3.15 in./<br>79.5 x 80 mm |
| Displacement       | 97 cid/1588 cc                   |
| Maximum Net HP     | 71 @ 5600 rpm                    |
| Maximum Net Torque | 82 @ 3000                        |
| Compression Ratio  | 8.2:1                            |
| Carburetion        | Single 2-bbl                     |

### VW Rabbit

|                    |                                  |
|--------------------|----------------------------------|
| Type               | OHC in-line 4                    |
| Bore & Stroke      | 3.13 x 3.15 in./<br>79.5 x 80 mm |
| Displacement       | 97 cid/1588 cc                   |
| Maximum Net HP     | 71 @ 5600 rpm                    |
| Maximum Net Torque | 82 @ 3000                        |
| Compression Ratio  | 8.2:1                            |
| Carburetion        | Single 2-bbl                     |

### DRIVETRAIN

|                   |              |              |
|-------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Transmission Type | 4-spd manual | 4-spd manual |
| Final Drive Ratio | 3.9:1        | 3.9:1        |

### CHASSIS

|                   |   |   |
|-------------------|---|---|
| Body/Frame        | Unitized                                      | Unitized                                      |
| Suspension, Front | MacPherson struts,<br>coil springs,<br>shocks | MacPherson struts,<br>coil springs,<br>shocks |
| Rear              | Stabilizer axle,<br>coil springs,<br>shocks   | Stabilizer axle,<br>coil springs,<br>shocks   |
| Brakes, Front     | Disc  | Disc  |
| Rear              | Drum  | Drum  |
| Steering System   | Rack & pinion                                 | Rack & pinion                                 |
| Steering Ratio    | 20.8:1  | 20.8:1  |
| Tire Make & Size  | Continental<br>175/70SR13                     | Michelin X<br>155SR13                         |

### DIMENSIONS

|               |                  |                  |
|---------------|------------------|------------------|
| Wheelbase     | 94.5 in./240 cm  | 94.5 in./240 cm  |
| Track, Front  | 54.7 in./139 cm  | 54.7 in./139 cm  |
| Rear          | 53.1 in./135 cm  | 53.1 in./135 cm  |
| Length        | 155.7 in./395 cm | 155.3 in./394 cm |
| Width         | 64.0 in./162 cm  | 63.4 in./161 cm  |
| Height        | 51.5 in./131 cm  | 55.5 in./141 cm  |
| Weight        | 1897 lb/860 kg   | 1940 lb/880 kg   |
| Fuel Capacity | 10.9 gals.       | 10.9 gals.       |

### PERFORMANCE

|                               |           |           |
|-------------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| 0-30 mph                      | 3.4 sec   | 3.3 sec   |
| 0-60 mph                      | 10.9 sec  | 11.0 sec  |
| 40-60 mph                     | 5.4 sec   | 5.5 sec   |
| Quarter Mile                  | 17.62 sec | 17.88 sec |
| MPH                           | 76.92     | 75.44     |
| Braking, 30-0 mph             | 31.9 ft   | 32.9 ft   |
| 60-0 mph                      | 135.5 ft  | 140 ft    |
| Fuel Economy,<br>73-Mile Loop | 33.2 mpg  | 31.9 mpg  |

