

Volkswagen's driving machine in its second generation: the Wolfsburg hard-liner softens its approach



1982 Scirocco

by Ro McGonegal

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PETERSEN PHOTOGRAPHIC
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Lately, the trend in foreign-built "economy" automobiles has been to make them bigger, heavier, and roomier than ever before. But in this same lungful of fresh air hangs an improved mileage schedule. How can this be so? By all indication, the secret lies in aerodynamic function. The lower the drag of air on the body of the car, the more easily the car will pass through that air. The easier it slips through the stream, the less fuel is required to make it do so. The 1982 Scirocco is a fabulous example of the "rounder is actually sharper" school, and according to EPA estimates, the soft-curve Scirocco is at least 14% more fuel efficient than previous models.

The man on the street is not apt to believe this. He is faced with a disparity that curdles an image in the mind's eye. The Giugiaro Scirocco appears to be the epitome of the mass-produced wedge shape, the possessor of the crisp, sharp line and Kammed rear end. And when this car is viewed apart from the new Scirocco, one could believe nothing less.

People working in Volkswagen's design center and aerodynamic research department will beg to differ. Their baby has a skin with a 0.39 coefficient of drag, some

10% better than the previous sheet metal. The Scirocco's new shape, literally fitted over the existing wheelbase and mechanicals, has been completely revised. When compared with the old model, the new car's smaller frontal area succeeds in cutting lift by 14%. Windshield and A-pillar treatments serve to reduce wind noise by three decibels on the inside; glass in the



Scirocco's rear quarters is as large as the sheet metal will allow and all of it is recessed. But the most striking piece of all is the huge, curved back light. It is so large that the polyurethane spoiler is positioned over rather than underneath it. According to VW, this new air foiler cuts rear-end lift by 60%, and it is attached to the car only at the ends. The resulting central slot al-

lows air to pass through, keeping the back light fairly free of road scum. The drip rails have been replaced with rain gutters in the roof, a la Honda, and the sideview mirrors are slim-line wind-cheaters. The new car is larger and 110 lb. heavier than the old. Yet EPA fuel mileage estimates of 28/41 mpg are better than those of any previous Scirocco design.

Interior space in the '82 car manifests a more hospitable living area, one that is wide, roomy, and uncramped. There is increased head, shoulder, and leg room for those lucky enough to be in front, as well as more head room for rear-seat sitters. Load-holding capability has grown from 14 to 18 cu. ft. (seat up and measured to the bottom of the windows). The folded rear seat yields an additional 5.7 cu. ft. of carrying space. In all, the new Scirocco is 10 in. longer than the old car, but some of this stretch is condensed into the bumpers. Amazingly, the other critical dimensions (wheelbase, width, height, and ground clearance) remain constant with the earlier model.

Looks good on paper and in the parking lot, but what is the importance of these changes? Does the Scirocco retain its sporty driving habits? Do the extra weight and aerodynamic application improve handling and mileage? What of interior ambi-

Thrills in the new Scirocco will be few and far between



ance; does "ergonomically correct" still apply? Has its nimble step been diminished by a new-found layer of fat?

To answer these questions, we traded empirical assault for four and a half days of intimate association. We spent most of our waking hours in the environs of Volkswagen's flagship model, while it dutifully sucked up the interstate. And there were enough secondary road scaries to gauge the willingness of the engine and suspension, both of which felt like they belonged to a lesser vehicle.

We were vexed by the change. Our cross-country car, the one that was already fully trained and thoroughly inspected before our arrival, had been dispatched to parts unknown. We got the only Scirocco in the pool; it had 498 miles on the clock and break-in oil in the sump. Here was easy come, hoping for easy go, a real torture test in the making. We decided to take the shortest possible route.

Interstates would lead us across Pennsylvania's Turnpike, then on to Route 70 through West Virginia, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. In St. Louis, we would drop south on 44, continuing through the flatlands of Missouri. In the middle of Oklahoma, the

roadway would straighten us west and become good old I-40.

Familiarization with the new Scirocco took longer than we had anticipated. Some cars feel *simpatico* after the first minutes of operation, while others require that we thoroughly grasp and understand their purpose, especially if the cars are second or third-generation pieces like the Scirocco. Preconceptions are only that, and the driver finds he must deal with a whole new set of parameters. The engine winds lazily to its peak, giving the impression that the transaxle has been replaced with gear ratios of a much higher nature.

A part of this un-Scirocco-like behavior was traced to the green engine, which was far from being broken in (and wouldn't be for another 1500 miles); but it was the suspension that put us in a quandary. It is flabby and soft, making the Scirocco feel ill at ease with the road, as if all four wheels are moving in slightly different directions. The taut, sprightly feeling that previously marked the Scirocco as a mini-GT can no longer be acclaimed (this car, however, will give aftermarket manufacturers many new product ideas to work on). Winding rural routes allow the Scirocco to exhibit more

body roll than ever before, although understeer is at a minimum and the car recovers from steering input as quickly as always. Rough roads are still a nuisance, transmitting a good deal of flak to the occupants.

But this doesn't mean that the Scirocco is unroadworthy. In some important areas it is more of a road car than the old hatchback. The Scirocco is now possessed of substantial heft, probably the result of its new spring rates, the additional 110 lb., and the increased front and rear overhang. These qualities lend a heavier, more solid feel to the Scirocco, a feeling quite different from its active, high-stepping precursor.

The car is at its best on the high-speed, passing semis on rainy, windswept inclines, and in the blind confusion of snowstorms. At speeds over 60, the Scirocco hunkers to the road; and on slick surfaces, it has a solid, positive feel. There's no hint of untoward movement, only the pull of the front drive and the grip of the Michelin XZX radials. These tires are an important part of the package, replacing the familiar low-friction Continental tires. The XZXs do their job well but are extremely noisy on very smooth road surfaces, so much so that they can become a factor of fatigue. But for

ROAD TEST DATA



1982 VW Scirocco

✓ SPECIFICATIONS

GENERAL

Vehicle type	Front-engine, front-drive, 4-pass., 3-door sport coupe
Base price	\$10,150
Options on test car	A/C, metallic paint
Price as tested	\$10,965

ENGINE

Type	Transverse inline four, water cooled, cast iron block, aluminum head, 5 main bearings
Bore & stroke	3.13 x 3.40 in.
Displacement	105 cu. in. (1715 cc)
Compression ratio	8.2:1
Fuel system	CIS fuel injection
Recommended fuel	Unleaded
Emission control	50 state
Valve gear	Belt-driven OHC
Horsepower (SAE net)	74 at 5,000 rpm
Torque (lb.-ft., SAE net)	90 at 3,000 rpm
Power-to-weight ratio	27.8 lb./hp

DRIVETRAIN

Transmission	5-speed manual overdrive
Final drive ratio	3.89:1

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase	94.5 in.
Track, F/R	54.7/53.5 in.
Length	165.7 in.
Width	64.0 in.
Height	51.4 in.
Ground clearance	4.3 in.

Max. load length w/rear seat(s) folded down

Max. load length w/rear seat(s) folded down	N.A.
Curb weight	2058 lb.

CAPACITIES

Fuel	10.6 gals.
Crankcase	4.7 qts.
Cooling system	4.9 qts.
Trunk	18/23.7 cu. ft.

SUSPENSION

Front	Independent MacPherson strut, coil springs, hydraulic shocks
Rear	Independent stabilizer axle, coil springs, hydraulic shocks

STEERING

Type	Rack and pinion, manual
Turns lock-to-lock	3.9
Turning circle, curb-to-curb	31.2 ft.

BRAKES

Front	9.4-in. discs, power assist
Rear	7.1-in. drums

WHEELS AND TIRES

Wheel size	5.5J x 13 in.
Wheel type	Light alloy
Tire make and size	Michelin XZX 175/70SR13
Tire type	Steel-belted radial
Recommended pressure (psi), F/R	28/28

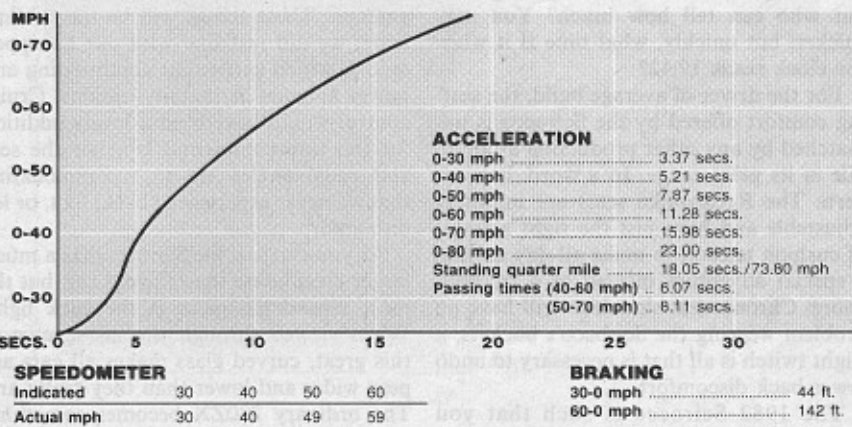
all their gripping power, they seem not to distort the car's overall mileage picture.

For 1982 the Scirocco retains the standard 1715cc engine as well as the same transmission ratios as the old car. While the engine will pull its revs to tachometer redline, it did so less willingly than other Sciroccos. But once the odometer cleared a couple thousand miles, the motor became more limber and fuel mileage jumped to 43 mpg for the last two tanks. Our trip average was 37.2 mpg for the entire 2242-mile run, and the CIS fuel injection processed a little more than 60 gals. of gas.

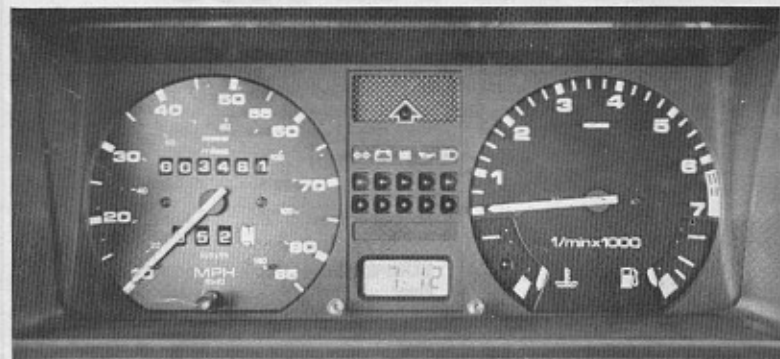
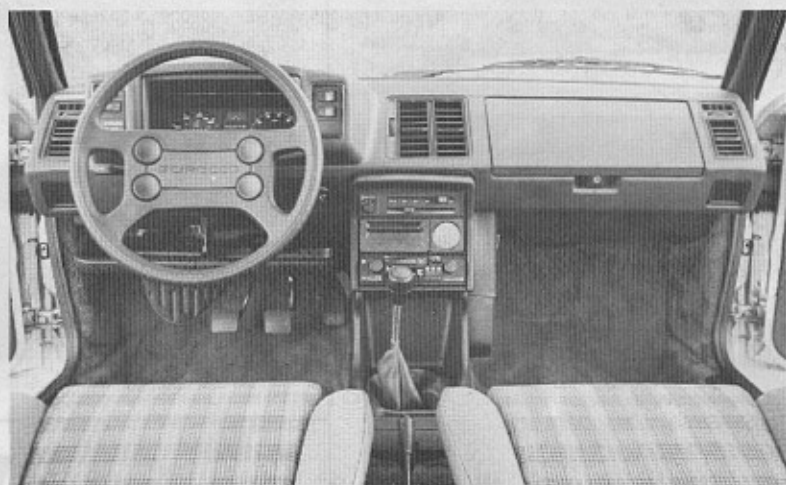
All manual-transmission Sciroccos carry an E-Upshift Indicator Light, a little amber bulb that tells the driver when to shift for optimum fuel mileage. It is doubtful whether the E-Light had any bearing at all on trip mileage, but because of some guilt-ridden addiction to it, we shifted gears every time it came on. As used in the Scirocco, it grates against natural sport driving law; but somehow it fits the scenario as a part of the car's new image.

The E-Light is centered in the Scirocco's main instrument cluster, high between the tachometer and the speedometer. Those dials will look most familiar, but the rest

✓ TEST RESULTS



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of the dashboard has changed and does a great deal to impart a feeling of interior spaciousness that was unknown in the previous Scirocco. This works with deeply concave door panels to promote the illusion of a much wider car. (Such sleight of hand is successful because there really *is* more room inside.) The dashboard controls are favorably placed for an easy reach. Ventilation outlets have increased in size and number, servicing the occupants, windshield, and side window simultaneously. The traditional quartz clock has been taken away in favor of a 24-hour digital job. Great for the military but a bit disconcerting for the civilian. Time passes, but who can tell how much? You may snicker; but quickly, what time is it when the clock reads 19:42?

For the driver of average build, the seating comfort offered by the Scirocco is unmatched by any other production automobile in its price range. In a word, it is superb. The Recaro-like seats are infinitely adjustable and have just the right amount of cushion tension to make all-day driving a special adventure instead of a frightful chore. Chronic seat slouchers will have no problem wearing the Scirocco's buckets; a slight twitch is all that is necessary to undo lower back discomfort.

The 1982 Scirocco is such that you

should want for nothing in the comfort and convenience department. As standard, Wolfsburg provides wonderful seats; a competent AM/FM/stereo cassette (with auto-reverse, memory, electronic tuning, and four speakers); a complete set of gauges; rear window defroster; and the LCD digital clock. On the extra-cost equipment list, we find factory air conditioning, an automatic transmission, and tilt-up sunroof. For the ultimate Scirocco, there is the GL package, which collects all the things one would expect in a second-generation tourer. The GL contains cruise control, power windows, central locking, electric outside mirrors, and an automatic antenna. These things will be the sublime icing; we did just fine with our "stripo" model, which carried air conditioning and power antenna as its only options. Cruise control would have been a lovely addition for this transcontinental lap, but the seat and pedal angles are so accommodating that we never experienced back, foot, or leg discomfort.

As you can see, the Scirocco has a much larger greenhouse than the old car, but the most sensational piece is the back light. When viewed through the inside mirror, this great, curved glass makes all cars appear wider and lower than they really are. The ordinary 280ZX becomes something

akin to Bob Sharp's V-8 racer, and Rabbits look like fattened slot cars stuffed with 928 innards. The rear spoiler and the "SCI-ROCCO" blocks below it squeeze unobstructed vision to a narrow slice. Still, there is plenty of seeing space, so whatever is coming up to pass you will not be obscure.

Another part of the Scirocco's maturation process is its quietness. Wind noise is not obtrusive, and a liberal supply of sound deadener has reduced engine whirr to subtle prodding, but it is still quite usable for seat-of-the-pants thrills.

But thrills in the new Scirocco will be few and far between. Its newly acquired taste for interior expansion, increased exterior size, and convenience tools has changed the demeanor of the car. It still runs as competently (if less excitingly) as in the past; it is quieter and perhaps a bit more frugal with a liter of fuel despite its heftier carriage. But the feel and handling that made the Scirocco what it was is a changed habit, most likely to justify its price increase but more likely to satisfy a new league of American buyers. Scirocco owners will perhaps be appalled by this car's new constitution, but first-time buyers, with no previous Scirocco experience, will doubtless eat it alive. The Scirocco is in transition, being readied for even bigger missions in the future of Volkswagen. 