

Something's coming . . . something big!

1986 Volkswagen

by Mike Knepper

Talk about your peaks and valleys. In 1970, Volkswagen sold 565,000 cars in the U.S. All Beetles. That was 7% of the total U.S. car market. By 1983, the bloom was off the eidelweiss. The Japanese had a stranglehold on the small-car market, and after a decade of falling sales, VW hit its all-time low of 170,000 units. Now VW seems headed for another peak. Sales climbed back up to 225,000 in 1985, and that's more by far than Saab, BMW, and Mercedes combined. But nothing like the old days.

Peaks and valleys.

At one point in Fuel Crunch II, VW held the hot hand. The diesel Rabbit was in such demand drivers would cruise the freeways until they found a transporter carrying the little oil burners and trail it into the dealer's parking lot. Within weeks, the Crunch had fizzled and you couldn't give a diesel away.

Peaks and valleys.

In 1978, amid much hoopla and hope, VWoA opened a Rabbitry in

Pennsylvania to help feed a voracious demand for small cars, and to avoid a strong German mark that made imported Rabbits too expensive against the Japanese competition. Fine for a while, but in 1985 the mark tumbled, the demand for small cars cooled, and VW found itself with an expensive plant working at a fraction of its capacity.

So it seems to go with VW, which is all the more reason to admire the optimistic spirit that VWoA boss Noel Phillips and VW division chief Jim Fuller maintain. And we have to assume there's just cause for that optimism. They have the advantage of being able to look well down the road at what's coming in the next few

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years, and apparently what's coming is going to give VW a big boost up the sales charts and likely give us enthusiasts some good things to play with.

For example, 16-valve engines are going to show up in a variety of VWs, including the GTI. "All-wheel drive" is promised for the Golf and Jetta. And we can expect the VW-developed supercharger—the G-Lader system—shown on a 1.3-liter Polo at the Frankfurt show.

In 1987, VW will bring in an inexpensive entry-level sedan and station wagon it is currently building in Brazil, and which will likely spin off GT and/or GTI versions. Phillips has promised "several new offerings" before the end of the '80s, which we interpret to be replacements for the Quantum, Scirocco, and Vanagon. VW's star is ascending.

But that's for later. VW's immediate future is resting on what it can parade in front of us now, and for 1986 it's a familiar parade. A high-quality, carefully rehearsed parade, but familiar nonetheless.

The star is the Jetta, which won friends and influenced buyers across the country in such droves last year its sales went up 128% over 1984. Credit for much of that success can probably be traced to the growing ennui more and more shoppers are experiencing when they look over the latest Toyonissonda. It's not that the Japanese are cloning each other's cars, it's just that they're so similar. Here is a different approach, and a refreshing change.

The Jetta is essentially unaltered



Last year buyers flocked to the Jetta in droves

from last year, with one significant exception. Changes in camshaft timing and digital ignition control have boosted the 1.8-liter engine in the GLI an additional 2 hp to 102, and increased torque from 105 to 110 lb-ft. And those increases, VW says, have knocked 0.4 sec off the 0-60 time and improved passing response.

The base 1986 Jetta—2-door 5-speed diesel—lists for \$7950. At the other end, the GLI 4-door with automatic is \$10,625.

Obviously believing in that old German saying, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it," VW has seen fit to simply refine the Golf for 1986. The GTI, our Car of the Year last year, shares its powerplant with the GLI, so it gets the same horsepower and torque increases for the new season, which, we are told, have chopped a full half second off its 0-60 time. Further on the performance side, the GTI is the first domestically produced automobile to be fitted with Pirelli's new P600 high-performance radial as standard equipment.

In response to one of the few criticisms owners made about the '85 Golf, the driver's seat is now adjustable for height (standard on the GTI, optional on the Golf). This year a GTI costs \$9190.

The Scirocco, Quantum, and Cabriolet (nee Rabbit convertible) have gotten the usual round of refinements and improvements the annual change of calendars brings. And while long-life spark plugs, convex outside mirrors, and some new colors are good and nice, they aren't exactly the things that stir one's soul. But a soul-stirrer is coming.

This spring, the basic \$9980 Scirocco is getting an uptown stablemate. The Scirocco (name to be determined) will have the 16-valve screamer version of the Jetta/Golf/Scirocco 1.8-li-

You want 4wd? It's coming soon in the Quantum and Vanagon

ter that has been running around Europe, along with special wheels and tires, probably a performance-tuned suspension, maybe some gearing changes to go with the screams, and definitely some bulges, flares, and scoops. At long last, a Scirocco with some beans.

VW has been test marketing a 4-wheel-drive version of the Quantum


wagon in the snow belt and the Northwest and, based on the good reception it's had there, will undoubtedly go nationwide with it very soon. Can a 4-by version of the sedan be far behind? It can't. And look for an "extensive" facelift for the Quantum during the coming year.

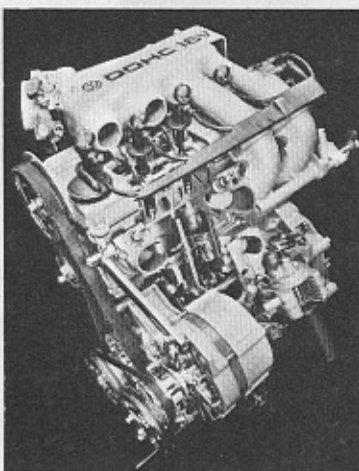
And speaking of 4wd, VW has developed a 4wd Vanagon that uses a radical departure from currently popular systems. It's called the Vanagon Syncro, and is based on a permanently sealed viscous coupling filled with a patented, silicon-based "upside down" oil that thickens incredibly fast when heated.

The coupling is housed in the front axle. A pinion shaft runs forward to the final drive, and a flange shaft runs from the back of the coupling to an output shaft on the 6-speed transmission which has an extra-low bottom gear. Inside the coupling are 48 plates; half of them, with holes around their circumference, are splined to the coupling housing and driven by the flange shaft. They alternate with the other 24, which have deep notches instead of holes and are internally splined to the pinion shaft of the front differential. There's a 0.2mm gap between each plate.

Under normal driving conditions, the viscosity of the fluid in the coupling is quite low and only about 6% of the power is transmitted to the front wheels. However, when the rear wheels begin to lose traction, the outer splined plates connected to the flange shaft rotate faster than the others and begin to cut or shear the silicon fluid. This heats the fluid, which increases its viscosity. As the fluid thickens, the set of plates connected to the front axle begins to turn more rapidly, sending an immediate transfer of power to the front wheels. How immediate? VW says that in *one quarter* of a turn of a spinning rear wheel, the system is transmitting maximum power—50% of the total—to the front wheels. That's immediate.

At \$15,315, the Vanagon Syncro costs \$2175 more than the comparably equipped Vanagon GL. All Vanagons have a larger (2.1 versus 1.9 liter) water-cooled horizontally opposed 4-cylinder that makes 13 more horses and 12 more foot pounds of torque.

The Syncro name, by the way, will be used on all future 4wd VWs, but will not necessarily indicate the vehicle has this fluid coupling system. Some Syncro models will have the Audi Quattro 4wd system. 



The fruit of VW's advanced R&D is finally hitting the U.S. market with the all-wheel-drive Vanagon Syncro and 16-valve Scirocco. The GTI is refined but doesn't get the 16-valver yet.

