

In 1974 Volkswagen's policy changed dramatically from rear-engined air-cooled cars to front-engined front-wheel-drive water-cooled cars. At the time, true-blue VW enthusiasts were disappointed, as they felt, rightly or wrongly, that VW had forsaken the philosophy that had been adhered to ever since the brilliant Dr. Porsche developed the Beetle in the thirties.

However, VW soon proved that the company had not lost its knack of developing a world-beating car, as the new generation of VWs quickly set new standards for small cars, just as the Beetle had done previously. In retrospect, the Beetle itself was a phenomenon that was never repeated by anybody, as all copies of the Beetle, including those newer models produced by VW such as the 1500 and 411, were flops. However, the numerous clones that have been bred from the Rabbit have all proven successful. In fact, there is hardly an auto company in the world that isn't building a Rabbit look-alike. But the Rabbit is still leading the world as the yardstick by which others are judged, and indeed was the top-selling model in the world last year.

Although the Rabbit has been VW's most important model, its introduction was actually preceded by the Dasher and the Scirocco. The Dasher has always been a slightly upmarket car, with the engine mounted longitudinally rather than transversely. The second generation Dasher, or Passat as it is known in the rest of the world, has been on sale now for a few months in Europe and, as expected, is similar to the old model but more refined.

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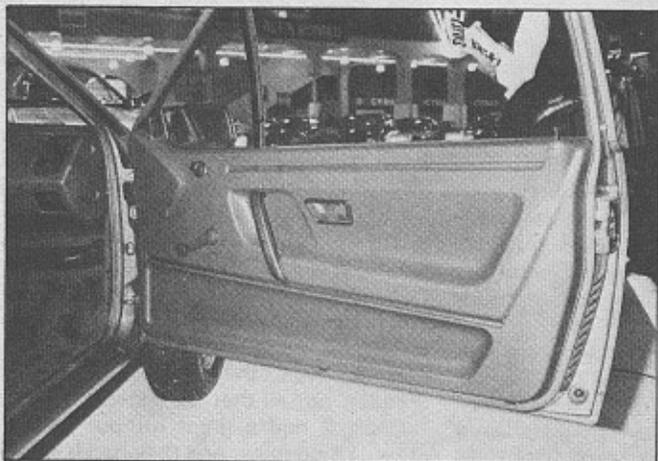
BY JOHN G. RETTIE

VW'S NEW SCIROCCO



SECOND GENERATION SECOND GENERATION

The new Scirocco has rounder lines than the original, but is built on an identical-sized floorpan with the same drivetrain and engine combinations. Increased streamlining has lowered the drag coefficient from 0.42 to 0.38, resulting in improved fuel economy.



TOP, the new Scirocco (La Nouvelle Scirocco) was the center of attraction at the Geneva Auto Show, where it had its world premiere (Première Mondiale). ABOVE LEFT, the door panel is a one-piece molding that blends in well with the dashboard. ABOVE RIGHT, there is a larger crash zone in front of the engine in the new Scirocco. Engine options are unchanged, which means that the car will be powered by the 1700 engine when it reaches these shores, next year. LEFT, every model of the Scirocco has this neat spoiler on the rear window, but only the top-line models will have the name etched in the rear window.

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Now the second-generation Scirocco has been introduced, prior to the introduction of an all-new Rabbit in 82/83.

It is very hard to follow an act such as the Scirocco as it is generally recognized that the original Scirocco is one of the best looking small coupes on the market. This means that the initial reaction on the part of many people to the new-model Scirocco is a bit of disappointment. It isn't as stunningly different from all the other cars as the original car was when it was first launched in 1974. However, this doesn't mean that it isn't a good looking car; it just means that it isn't so greatly innovative.

Generally speaking, the new Scirocco is a slightly bigger and more rounded version of the present car. The lack of rear-seat headroom has often been heard as a criticism of the car, so it is good to see that there is more headroom in the new car and that the rear compartment is a couple of inches longer than before. Indeed, the overall length of the car is increased by 4 inches, almost all of which is taken up by the increase in size of the rear compartment. The wheelbase and track are identical to the present Scirocco and Rabbit, while the width is increased by just half an inch and the height is about the same.

Drive train and engine are identical to those of the present car, so all the improvements are refinements and cosmetic changes. The new Scirocco is more streamlined, with the drag factor reduced from 0.42 to 0.38, making the car more slippery and hence more economical. To help lower the drag, a rather neat-looking rear spoiler is fitted to all models. It is actually about one quarter of an inch off the surface of the rear window, although it looks as though it is stuck to the window.

The interior has been changed quite a bit, with an all-new dashboard that is finished in a plastic material that looks more like leather! The door panels are heavily molded, and blend into the dashboard in a fashion similar to the Porsche 924 and 928.

At first the engine options are going to be the same as on the old Scirocco, but VW is still working on a turbocharged version. There are reported to be 50 prototypes running around Germany, but it is said that VW is delaying introduction until the engineers can improve the fuel consumption.

As the new Scirocco was only publicly unveiled for the first time at the Geneva Auto Show in March, we do not expect to see the car in this country until the end of this year, or even early next year. But we do expect it to be as great a success as the present one. Karmann Ghia has produced over 496,000 Sciroccos since 1974, and we expect the production numbers for the new ones to be even greater over the next 7 years.

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