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ROAD & TRACK

K 10/56

October 1956

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competition:

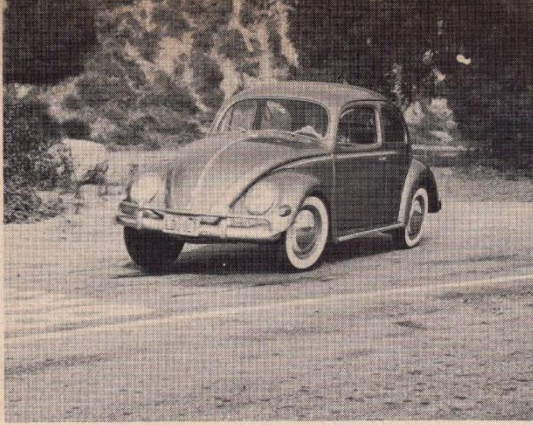
*Complete Le Mans Report
French & British Grand Prix*

salon:

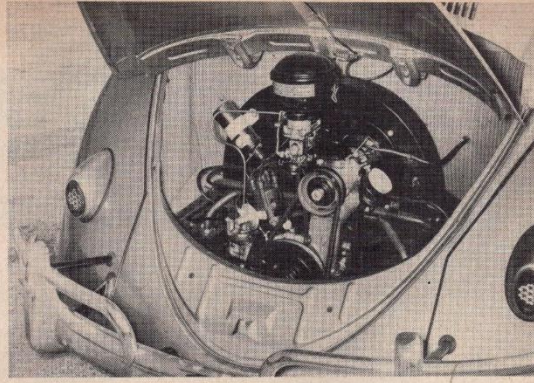
MG-TC

road tests:

*AC Ace
Volkswagen '56*



Limit of adhesion: the VW sticks to the road remarkably well up to this point, but once the rear end breaks loose . . .



Insulating material for engine compartment can be seen here along with new tail lights and dual pipes.

Road Test: **Volkswagen**

For 1956, minor improvements and

THERE IS NO longer any doubt about it—enough figures are in to confirm that Dr. Ferdinand Porsche's little "people's car" has done what no other vehicle manufactured outside the U.S.A. has ever been able to do: it has gained an unmistakable wheel-hold in the garages and hearts of the American car-buying public. And not just the foreign-car-enthusiast set, but the lay public. Of the 51,000 cars imported into this country in 1955, 34,000 were Volkswagens, and for this year the figure should be raised by 10 to 15 thousand cars. Even at this rate demand far exceeds supply, and with most dealers there is a 2 to 4 month wait for the standard sedan and 1 to 3 years for the Ghia-Karmann coupe. Not that all this represents any threat to Detroit supremacy; imported car sales total no more than 1% of the U.S. market. But looking at it in another way, it is significant to note that Volkswagen sales for the first half of 1956 (24,000) are higher than such respected names as Lincoln (19,000), Hudson (16,500), Imperial (7700), and Continental (865). And used VW's are selling for almost as much as new ones. The only mystery is: how did it happen? Especially with practically no national advertising?

Of the various explanations, probably the simplest is that the Volkswagen fulfills a need which Detroit had forgotten existed—a need for a car that is cheap to buy and run, small and compact, light and maneuverable yet solidly constructed, and, perhaps above all, utterly dependable and trouble-free. Without a doubt there

are other European sedans which meet these requirements, but Volkswagen got their cars here in some quantity and gradually established their world-famous service network, so that the major obstacle to owning an imported car—inadequate parts and service—has been largely eliminated. Perhaps the strangest aspect of the VW's popularity in the U.S. is the unswerving loyalty of its owners. And although it is one of the cheapest cars available, it carries none of the social stigma of a low-priced car; thus it can often be seen parked wheel-to-wheel with the finest machinery at the most exclusive country club.

The 1956 model has a shape that is basically unchanged since the first Volkswagen was press-previewed in February of 1939. We have previously published reports on 1953-54-55 VWs (plus variously modified versions disapproved of by the factory!), so the general design of the car has been dealt with pretty thoroughly. Of principal interest here are the relatively minor innovations which distinguish the '56 car along with its definite improvement in performance. The export VWs arriving in the U.S., although rated no higher than the '55 models (36 bhp at 3700 rpm), seem to have an edge over them in performance all along the line. Top speed is greater by about 2 mph, 0-60 time is less by 2 secs., and Tapley readings indicate an improvement in pulling power of 25-30 lbs./ton in all four forward speeds. The increase is especially noticeable (and welcome) in fourth gear where acceleration in the passing speed range (40-60 mph) is better by a good 4 secs. All

With rear seat cushion removed and back folded forward, carrying capacity is limited only to what can be loaded through doors.



Gas tank now has a thin, vertical shape which increases luggage space in the front. Direction blinkers are beside headlights.



photography: Poole

this is probably to the good as far as the average American driver is concerned because it means a little less shifting and a responsiveness that, if still not quite snappy, is no longer sluggish. And since the engine is so under-stressed (remember the theoretical cruising speed of 123 mph at 2500 ft/min piston speed!), this slight concession to U.S. power tastes offers no threat whatsoever to the engine's famed durability. Gas mileage seems to have suffered by 2 or 3 miles per gallon, but Volkswagen mileage is always a debatable subject—the car is so light that even a gentle breeze, if constant over a long drive, can make quite a difference in gas consumed. Then, too, since 4th gear is actually an over-drive and not used much around town, there is an unusually large disparity between city and highway consumption. Our figure for the entire roadtest was 30.5 mpg.

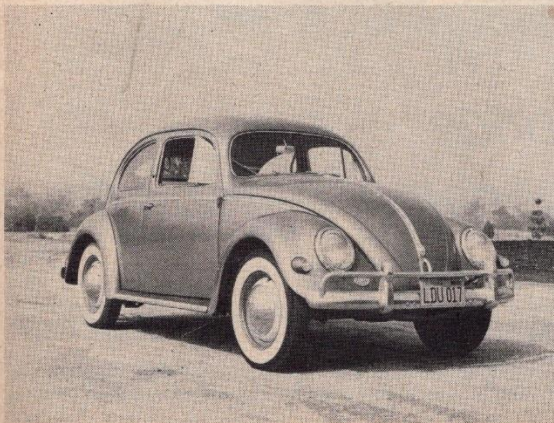
Certain attempts have been made in the '56 VW to give more passenger and luggage room. The front chair seats, now with adjustable backs, have been broadened slightly (doors can no longer be closed with seat-backs folded forward), and the rear seat has been altered to give a little more leg room, but rear passenger headroom (34½" seat to roof) is still barely adequate. On the other hand headroom in the front is a satisfying 42". The front

more performance but no major changes.

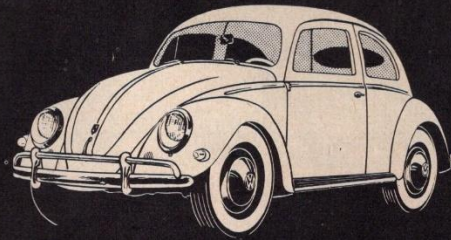
luggage compartment, suitable only for odds and ends in pre '56 models, has now been improved by reshaping the gas tank so that a real suitcase or two can be fitted in. A dubious kink has been put in the gear-shift lever, and the heater knob has been repositioned farther forward. Better insulation pads the engine compartment to deaden the sound of an engine made considerably noisier by standard-equipment dual pipes. Traffic blinkers and higher, larger, brighter tail lights which were added on the late '55s have been continued on the '56s. New and cheerier color combinations have at last been made available along with a lengthy list of gadgets and extras, but there is still no factory-installed gas gauge or warning light, and the momentary panic of running out of gas and switching to the reserve in the midst of traffic is as unpleasant as ever.

The remainder of the Volkswagen's good qualities and bad continue pretty much unchanged. There is some feeling that detail work and finish are not quite up to earlier models, but that may be partly due just to there being more VWs around. With a production goal of 400,000 cars this year, Wolfsburg is bound to encounter some of the pitfalls of real mass production, but as long as service troubles stay low, resale value high, and customers happy, the Volkswagen can remain sure of its position as one of the world's most wanted cars.

Bumper overrides and bars are standard equipment on export models; though susceptible to dents, they do ward off the juggernauts.



R & T ROAD TEST NO. 115



1956 VW SEDAN

SPECIFICATIONS

List price (East).....	\$1495
Wheelbase.....	94.5
Tread, f/r.....	50.8/49.2
Tire size.....	5.60-15
Curb weight, lbs.....	1640
dist., %.....	43/57
Test weight.....	1980
Engine.....	flat-4, ohv
Bore & stroke.....	3.03 x 2.52
Displacement, cu in.....	72.7
cu cm.....	1192
Compression ratio.....	6.60
Horsepower.....	36
peaking speed.....	3700
equivalent mph.....	76
Torque, ft.-lbs.....	56
peaking speed.....	2000
equivalent mph.....	41
Gear ratios, overall.....	
4th.....	3.61
3rd.....	5.41
2nd.....	8.27
1st.....	15.8

PERFORMANCE, Mph

Top speed, avg.....	70.2
best run.....	71.5
3rd (4500).....	62
2nd (4500).....	40
1st (4500).....	21
see chart for shift points	
Mileage range.....	30/35 mpg

ACCELERATION, Secs.

0-30 mph.....	6.9
0-40 mph.....	11.9
0-50 mph.....	18.0
0-60 mph.....	28.0
0-70 mph.....	66.0
Standing start ¼ mile.....	23.2

TAPLEY DATA, Lbs/ton

4th.....	140 @ 40 mph
3rd.....	245 @ 29 mph
2nd.....	360 @ 21 mph
1st.....	460 @ 13 mph
Total drag at 60 mph, 100 lbs.	

SPEEDO ERROR

Indicated	Actual
30 mph.....	30.6
40 mph.....	39.3
50 mph.....	47.1
60 mph.....	56.2
70 mph.....	64.3
78 mph.....	71.5

CALCULATED DATA

Lbs/hp (test wt.).....	55.0
Cu ft/ton mile.....	61.9
Engine revs/mile.....	2910
Piston travel, ft/mi.....	1220
Mph @ 2500 fpm.....	123

