

What's RIGHT — What's WRONG — With 1961 CARS!

IND

MOTOR TREND

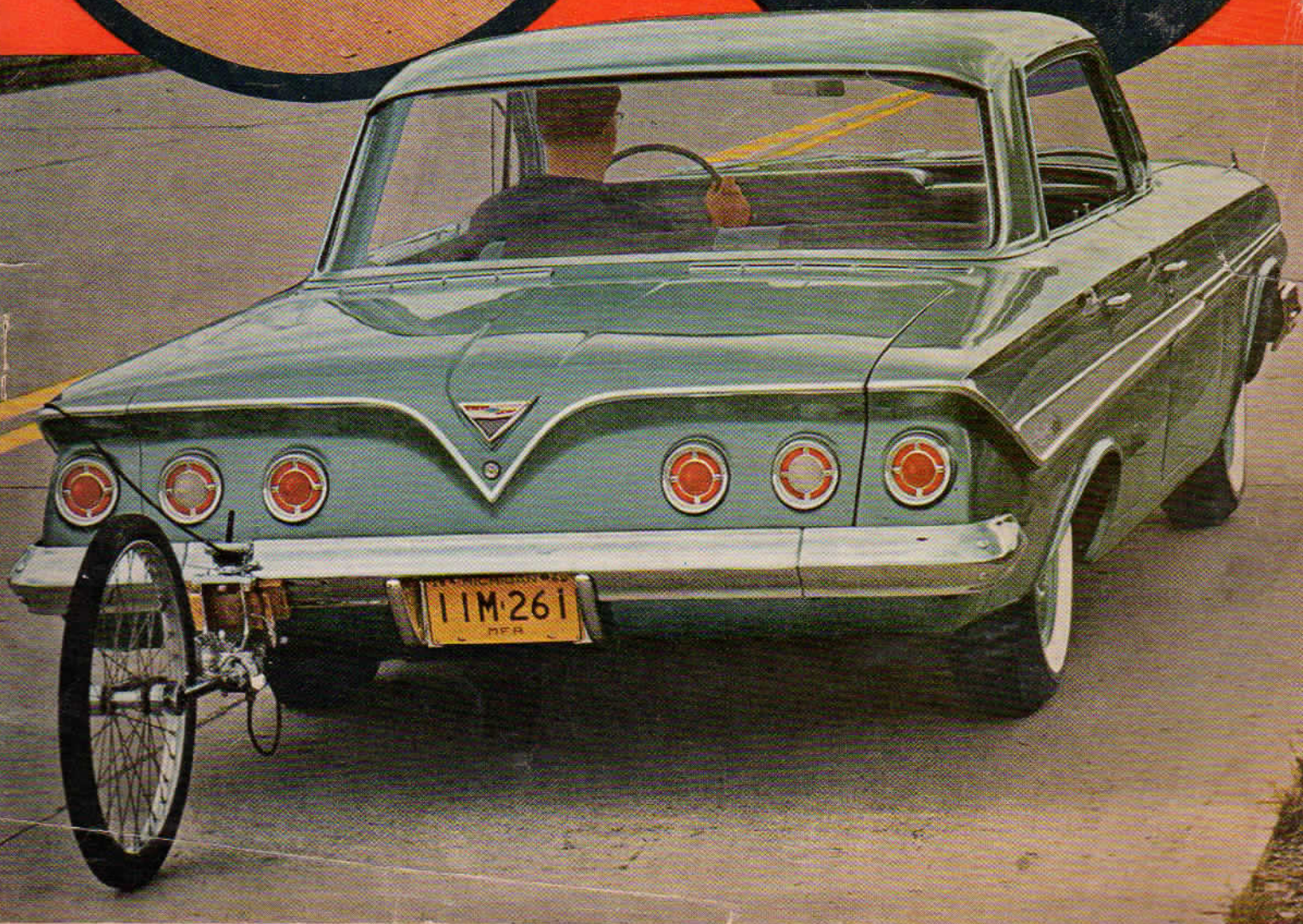
JANUARY 1961 35¢



ROAD TESTS FORD-CHEVY

PLUS CUTAWAY DRAWINGS

*How to Select Engines,
Transmissions and
Axle Ratios*



Road Test



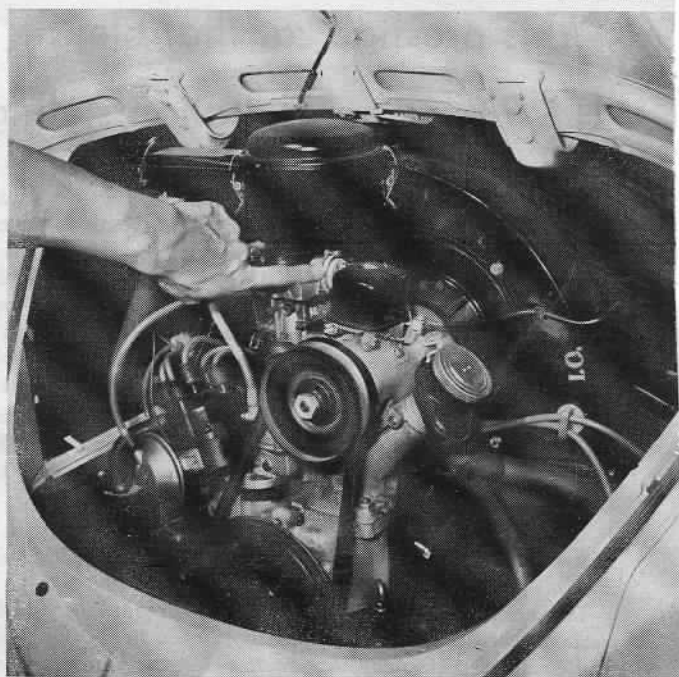
1961 VOLKSWAGEN

THE 1961 VOLKSWAGEN SEDAN provides the kind of happy surprise that comes when an excellent motor car is made even better, and inclusion of the rugged, higher-horsepower transporter engine in this new Volkswagen provides a real surprise, even to long-time owners of previous models of this marque. Four more horsepower at first seem like just too little to talk about, but the boost from 36 hp at 3700 rpm to today's output of 40 hp at 3900 revs makes a world of difference in this 1631-pound (dry weight) automobile.

Much of this new feel comes from a torque increase to 64 pounds-feet at 2400 revs. Immediate advantage is a cruising range of 70 mph, in which the whole car is completely at home. An initial drive found the car purring at 70, on a freeway in a completely effortless bit of acceleration. The second big bonus for '61, of course, is a four-speed fully synchromesh transmission, a feature rarely found on vehicles of this price category.

A person who has not driven a Volkswagen of vintage more recent than, say, 1955, will have difficulty in realizing this is the same automobile, although the familiar beetle-bug appearance is unchanged. The Wolfsburg factory will make much capital out of what they call 27 changes in the new car, although many of these are even more miniscule than some of the vaunted "improvements" of Detroit products.

The more obvious ones include an automatic choke (which may irritate many rabid fans of this marque who prefer to do



Most changes in the 1961 Volkswagen will have to be pointed out to those not familiar with the car. Besides the automatic choke there are 26 others.

amazing results from seemingly minor changes

everything for themselves), an anti-icing carburetor heater, valuable to those owners in colder climates, a re-designed fuel tank for more under-hood luggage space and a gas tank outside vent, which keeps the heady odor of petrol out of the cab. Other changes involve a sheath for the gas pedal cable, a concave washer on the third gear drive pinion to quiet transmission noise and softer mounting of the transmission. There is a transparent brake fluid reservoir for easy checking, a grab bar for the front seat passenger a la MG and inclusion of windshield washers as standard equipment, a typical little VW bonus item.

As interesting a gadget as has ever been found on these gadget-free cars is a queer kind of ignition switch which keeps you from jamming the starter into action when the engine is running. The company says this is required because the engine is now so quiet there's an inclination to try and re-start it because you can't hear it idling. It is necessary to return the switch key fully to the "off-lock" position before you can re-engage the starter. This may cause some little early confusion when re-starting a stalled engine in heavy traffic, but is a worthwhile item for anyone who has ever mistakenly torn the teeth off a starter ring gear.

All electrical connections are now the push-on or plug-in type — a sensible feature — and the fuse box is now located below the instrument panel, just to the right of the steering column — another sensible idea that recalls Porsche practice in this respect. Other changes for '61 include a sun visor for the previously blinded front passenger, a quieter air intake pipe, new paint colors, running board colors keyed to paint, a similar color option in front floor mats, a new leatherette upholstery

material with a pronounced quality "feel," harmonizing fender bead colors, a colored steering wheel, a 0-90-mph speedo (which was dead accurate on our car), a very minor change in the door key slot and a relocation of the lamp dimmer switch to keep from punching it accidentally with the clutch foot.

As to mechanical change in the engine compartment, this is basically the transporter powerplant with heavier, more rugged case and very slight re-design of parts in many, many areas. Obvious visible changes include the air cleaner with pre-heating duct, the new carb, employing automatic choke, a new fuel pump, a new distributor on which the ignition spark advance is controlled by vacuum only, and a generator support which is detachable from the block, and not subject, therefore, to casting fractures, which have provided owners with a nasty job of engine case welding.

Silence is one big feature of the new powerplant and another, strangely enough with added horsepower, is better economy in the middle speed range. Three different drivers on this test all found gas mileage in the excellent zone of 28-32 mpg, which is all the factory claims and then some. On other performance items, the factory again seems to be on the low side with top speed. The checked-out speedometer went briskly up to 75 mph, and might have gone higher, although the factory rates this car with a 72-mph maximum and cruising speed. Car weight is unchanged from last year, and gas mileage might drop off a trifle at day-long flat-out cruising.

Everyone who drove the car liked the transmission, although on the new vehicle the shift down into low gear was a trifle stiff. The engine, as always, revs happily in all gears, and 0-60



Front luggage space has been increased as a bonus from the re-designed gas tank. However, overall storage capacity is still comparatively limited.



Few obvious changes have altered the appearance of the dash panel. One thing that is new, however, is the grab bar near the upper right panel.

acceleration times of 22 seconds seem excellent for this kind of powerplant and car weight.

On the issue of handling, this VW, which has the front sway bar improvement found on the '60 model and adapted from the Karmann-Ghia sway bar, is excellent in most cases. There is still annoying sway from side winds, even the sudden small breezes one encounters from passing trucks or changing terrain on turnpikes. The car is still an oversteerer and will break loose on hard cornering. But the '61 seems to give even more warning than the already-improved 1960 version, and anyone who wants to drive full-out and has the slightest seat-of-the-pants feeling will feel perfectly fine in very fast bends.

The steering itself feels better than ever, is still very fast, with 2.4 turns lock-to-lock, but no one could complain about operation of the steering mechanism this year. There has been a change in the steering gear box, and a shock absorber has been added to the steering system to take shock and wheel fight away. With all these statistics and data, the car still has not been adequately described, and all three drivers in this test were unanimous in that it proved an absolute tiger, size and horsepower considered.

The difference in the transmission shift points, coupled with the synchro low plus the added horsepower and a much more solid "feel" about the whole car which cannot quite be explained by the specifications, all add up to an almost completely new performance identity to this automobile. The new transmission gearing enables good lugging qualities in second gear and actually lessens the need for a synchromesh low gear, although the fact that you can pull out of low gear in a hurry for a satisfying spurt under trying traffic conditions is a real life saver in any small-engined machine.

All drivers on this test agreed that the current vehicle is excellent in riding qualities, with smoothness possible with a single person in the car, whereas many competitor cars in this area require the weight of at least two persons for a really ideal ride.

In the category of adverse criticism, there were still complaints about the small overall amount of luggage space, although this has been improved by the re-designed fuel tank and the factory now lists front luggage space as increased from a former three cubic feet to a present five cubic feet. This added to space computed behind the rear seat gives a total luggage-carrying space of nine cubic feet.

Other long-standing peeves about VW are still unresolved. There is still no fuel gauge, the rear windows are still sealed, vision isn't as good as it might be and there's almost no knee room for rear seat passengers.

Drivers were divided on ease of entry and exit, and one six-foot-three tester found no discomfort relating to his height, in either getting in or out or in riding. Seat design was generally held to be good, and comfort for front seat passengers beyond criticism. Two out of three drivers objected violently to placement of the radio speaker on the extreme left of the instrument panel — and when placement of the radio speaker becomes a critical thing with car testers, you must know you can't find much to complain about.

All drivers agreed that this 1961 version is the most improved single model to be produced by the German factory, which was far ahead of anyone in Detroit in deciding that annual model changes must go, and steady improvement is the proper way to protect resale value and keep customers laughing and scratching with boundless joy. The scoot produced by this little 72.74-cubic-inch (1192 cc) engine will make old VW admirers even happier and may surprise a good many new customers who haven't felt there was a car in this price and size category that had enough jump to suit them.

The fact that Volkswagen is still soaring in U.S. sales, almost alone among all other imports to this country, indicates that the best road testers of all — the public who pays the price to drive the car — has already rendered an overwhelming "yes" vote on the ubiquitous little Volkswagen. /MT



Test Car

TEST CAR: Volkswagen
BODY TYPE: 4-door sedan
BASE PRICE: \$1665 P.O.E.

Maneuverability Factors

OVERALL LENGTH: 160.6 inches
OVERALL WIDTH: 60.6 inches
OVERALL HEIGHT: 59.1 inches
WHEELBASE: 94.5 inches
TREAD, FRONT/REAR: 51.4 and 50.7 inches
DRY WEIGHT: 1631 lbs.
STEERING: 2.4 turns lock-to-lock
TURNING CIRCLE: 36 feet curb-to-curb
GROUND CLEARANCE: 7.2 inches

Interior Room

SEATING CAPACITY: Four
FRONT SEAT
HEADROOM: 36 inches
WIDTH: 48 inches
LEGGROOM: 43 inches
TRUNK CAPACITY: 9 cubic feet

Engine and Drive Train

TYPE: 4-cyl. horizon.-opposed
DISPLACEMENT: 72.74 cubic inches (1192 cc)
BORE & STROKE: 3.03 x 2.52
COMPRESSION RATIO: 7-to-1
CARBURETION: Single-throat Solex
HORSEPOWER: 40 @ 3900 rpm
TORQUE: 61 @ 2000 rpm
TRANSMISSION: Four-speed manual shift, fully synchromesh
REAR AXLE RATIO: 4.375

Performance

GAS MILEAGE: 28 to 32 miles per gallon
ACCELERATION: 0-30 mph in 6.5 seconds, 0-45 mph in 12.5 seconds and 0-60 mph in 22 seconds
SPEEDOMETER ERROR: Indicated 30, 45 and 60 mph are actual 30, 45 and 60 mph respectively
ODOMETER ERROR: Actual 100 miles is indicated 98.5 miles
WEIGHT-POWER RATIO: 40.8 lbs. per horsepower
HORSEPOWER PER CUBIC INCH: .550