

# ROAD & TRACK

THE MOTOR ENTHUSIASTS' MAGAZINE

11/58



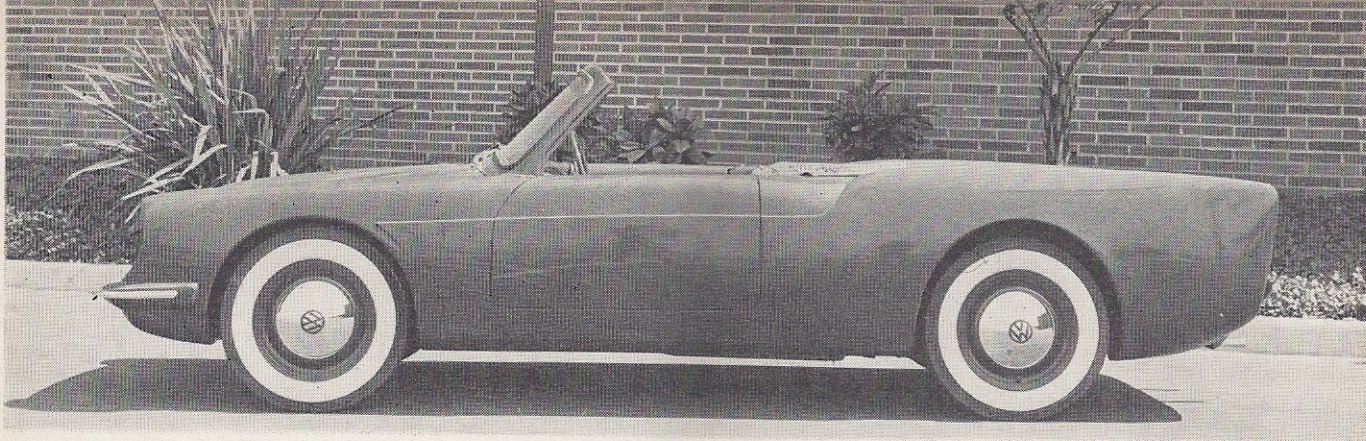
TWIN-CAM MG-A

TESTS:  
FIAT-ZAGATO,  
VW SPORTS,  
FORD TAUNUS

TWIN-CAM

November 1958

50¢ the copy



*Because of its extreme lowness, the Alken body will seldom be seen from this angle.*

## ROAD TEST

# ALKEN-VW

**S**EVERAL YEARS AGO we expressed the thought that Volkswagen should offer an open two-seater roadster for the American market. The new Ghia-Karmann convertible is of course a close approach, though expensive. We also said that VW might be astonished by the size of the untapped market for such a semi sports-type body. Now we have proof, for the Alken firm, of Venice, Calif., has received over 4000 dealer inquiries and over 40,000 requests for more information on its new roadster body.

Forty thousand inquiries doesn't mean that many sales, but it certainly shows tremendous interest. Accordingly, we elected to give one of these cars a complete road test, even though we have tested over a dozen VW's in various forms.

The Alken version accelerates to the various standard speeds much quicker than a standard sedan or Ghia-Karmann coupe, as would be expected, for the Alken body weighs very nearly 200 pounds less than a stock sedan. The car was tested with top up, our usual procedure, and with no top, which is not usual. The open cockpit tends to reduce the performance figures slightly, particularly in the upper speed ranges. However, the Tapley meter drag figures show

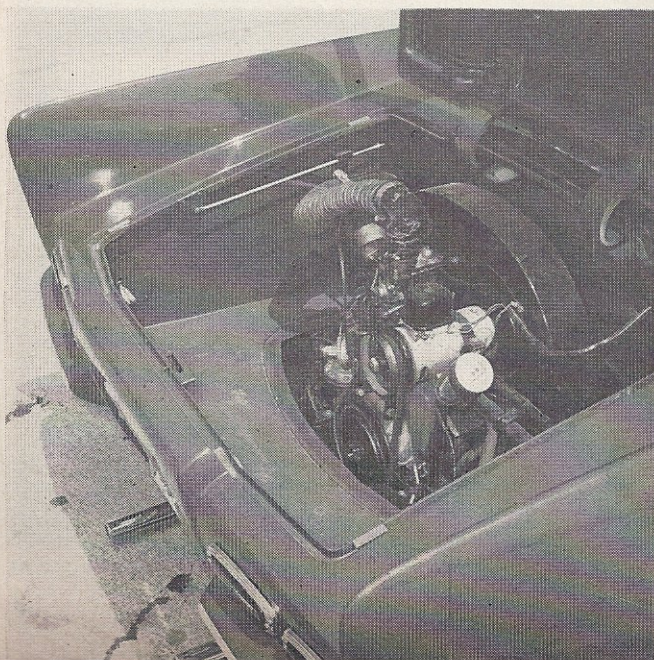
that the air resistance factor is virtually identical to that of the sedan. This is reflected in the timed top speed: at a fraction over 70 miles per hour, it is identical to that of a VW sedan. Comparative figures look like this:

	ALKEN	SEDAN
Timed top speed	70.8	70.2
Acceleration		
0-30 mph	5.8	6.9
0-40 mph	9.8	11.9
0-50 mph	14.8	18.0
0-60 mph	22.3	28.0
0-70 mph	45.0	66.0
ss ¼ mile	21.8	23.2
Drag factor, lb	97	100

Pulling power, or grade ability, is increased in all gears by an average of just under 10 per cent, by virtue of the 11% saving in weight. Fuel economy as well as tire life will also improve in nearly the same ratio, but 65-70 mph cruising takes the same horsepower (drag factor is similar).

In other pertinent characteristics, the roadster's and the sedan's performance are identical in every way. Ride, steering, braking, etc.—all are the same. The lighter body

*The long tail gives plenty of room around the engine.*



*The plunging nose gives no room around the spare and tank.*



PHOTOGRAPHY: POOLE



Squared, finned rear suggests the VW components beneath.

under the spreading body  
a sturdy Volkswagen stands

betters fore and aft weight distribution from 43/57 to 45/55. The roadster handles fractionally but noticeably better, though oversteer is still there. But because of less rear-end weight (with no rear seat), it becomes even more feasible to decamber the rear wheels. About 2° negative camber at the rear and a Ghia-Karman anti-roll bar in front should make the Alken roadster handle with near-neutral steering—a tremendous advantage, in our opinion. As for technicalities, the Alken body is without a doubt the best-engineered piece of fiberglass we have ever seen. It should be: it took a year to develop it, plus a six-figure investment before a single body could be sold. The net result is a price which does not appear cheap in comparison to the various racing shells offered for specials, but the results are well worth while. There are many extras:

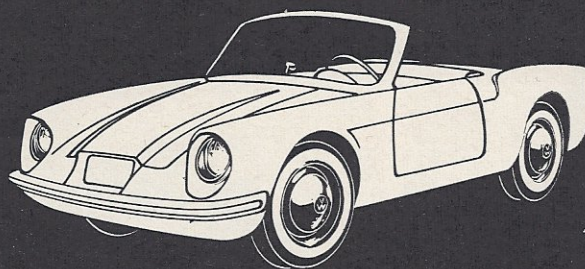
Doors and deck lids hung	\$100, with hinges, etc.
Two special seats	66, not upholstered
Plexiglass side curtains	45, estimated
Doors with wind-up glass	95, with body
Cross seat for third passenger	45, useful too

Even without the options, buying an Alken is civilized, for

Interior trim shows no rough corners or obvious errors.



## ROAD & TRACK ROAD TEST 188



### ALKEN-VW SPORTS

#### SPECIFICATIONS

List price (body)	\$1295
Curb weight	1355
Test weight	1665
distribution, %	45/55
Dimensions, length	162
width	59
height	48
Wheelbase	94.5
Tread, f and r	50.8/49.2
Tire size	5.60-15
Brake lining area	96
Steering, turns	2.7
turning circle	33
Engine type	flat 4, ohv
Bore & stroke	3.03 x 2.52
Displacement, cu in.	72.7
cc	1192
Compression ratio	6.60
Bhp @ rpm	36 @ 3700
equivalent mph	76.0
Torque, lb-ft	56 @ 2000
equivalent mph	41.0

#### PERFORMANCE

Top speed (4th), mph	70.8
best timed run	72.6
3rd (4500)	61
2nd (4500)	40
1st (4500)	21

#### FUEL CONSUMPTION

Normal range, mpg 30/35

#### ACCELERATION

0-30 mph, sec	5.8
0-40 mph	9.8
0-50 mph	14.8
0-60 mph	22.3
0-70 mph	45.0
0-80 mph	
0-90 mph	
0-100 mph	
Standing 1/4 mile	21.8
speed at end, mph	59

#### GEAR RATIOS

O/d (n.a.), overall	
4th (.815)	3.61
3rd (1.23)	5.45
2nd (1.88)	8.35
1st (3.60)	15.9

#### TAPLEY DATA

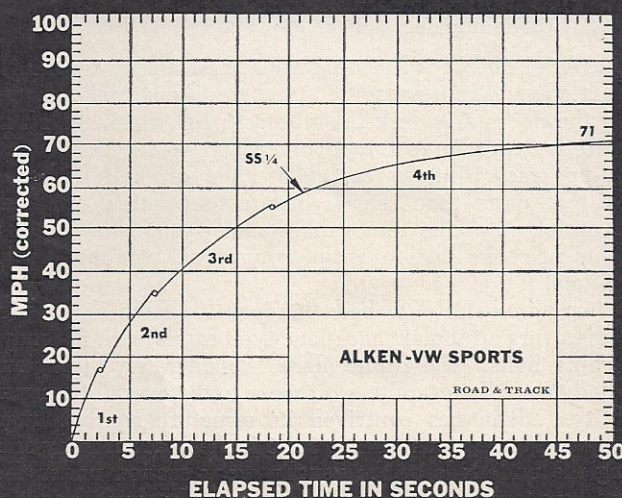
4th, lb/ton @ mph	150 @ 40
3rd	250 @ 33
2nd	370 @ 25
1st	480 @ 16
Total drag at 60 mph, lb	97

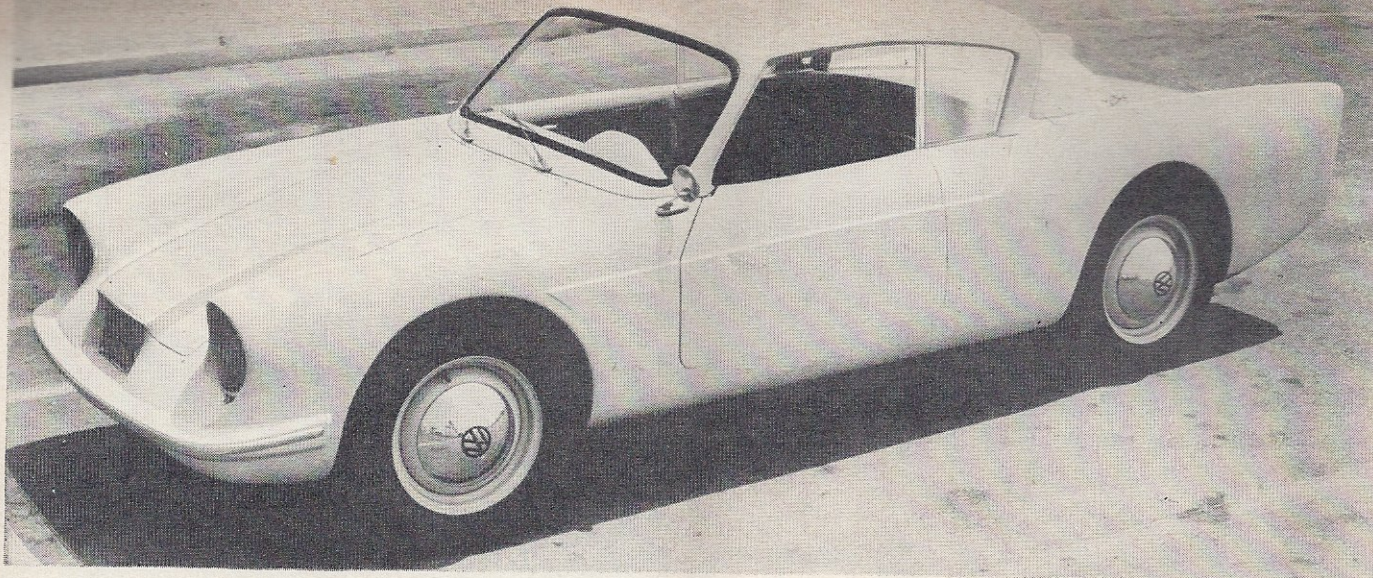
#### CALCULATED DATA

Lb/hp (test wt)	46.3
Cu ft/ton mile	74.0
Mph/1000 rpm (4th)	20.5
Engine revs/mile	2925
Piston travel, ft/mile	1225
Rpm @ 2500 ft/min	5960
equivalent mph	122
R&T wear index	35.9

#### SPEEDOMETER ERROR

30 mph	actual 29.4
40 mph	39.0
50 mph	47.9
60 mph	57.6
70 mph	67.4
77 mph	72.6
90 mph	
100 mph	





*A hardtop, also in fiberglass, was carefully shaped as a complement to the body rather than as an after-thought. It will cost about \$195.*

*Head room over the optional rear seat, which faces sideways, was adequate in the prototype. The squarish look of the car's rear (page 31) grows naturally from the front design, which is more successful (except for the hooded lights) because fewer elements had to be worked in.*



#### ALKEN-VW continued

the "body complete" is ready to drop on a standard VW chassis, and it includes at least a dozen clever, built-in parts which are not usually supplied with shells. Among those often overlooked bits and pieces are:

1. Integral, hooded instrument panel
2. Door posts and sills
3. Drip channels and fender rolls
4. Headlight mounting flanges
5. Front and rear bumpers
6. Integral wheel wells and splash panels
7. Gas tank and battery mountings
8. Engine compartment panels
9. Integral interior panels and cockpit liners
10. Separate windshield frame (no glass)
11. Heater duct outlets

The doors and deck lids use standard American car hinges and latches. These must be purchased separately if you hang the doors and deck lids yourself, but are included in the \$100 extra charge for having Alken do it. Doors with wind-up glass windows cost \$95 when ordered with the body, but more than that if ordered separately or later. The prototype of the removable hardtop was shown to us, and its price includes a wrap-around rear window, as in the photo.

When an all-steel VW body is separated from its chassis, one discovers a tubular, backbone-type frame with 32 body-attaching bolts. The frame alone is moderately rigid, but the body contributes quite a bit more to the overall torsional rigidity. Alken has contrived its structure so that huge fiberglass box sections (about 6 x 6 inches) act as body sills along the underside of the usually weak section under the doors (we are referring to an open body, with no roof

structure to act as a space frame). The multiple VW body-mounting points serve admirably to tie fiberglass beams and a steel backbone (with welded-on floor pan) into a completely satisfactory structure. We drove the car for three days over all types of surfaces, and no rattles or shakes of any kind developed. The structure is, in fact, considerably more rigid than most open sports cars, though we believe it not quite so rigid as that of the stock VW sedan.

Throughout the design, the results of a year's development are apparent. Unavoidably it was proven necessary to perform a simple rework on the front suspension in order to retain the stock static loaded height with less weight. Full instructions for this and for relocating the VW gas filler neck are supplied, of course. It is also necessary to purchase and install a Ford Consul/Zephyr windshield (1951 through 1955 model) in the frame supplied. All the rest is easy, for stock VW components merely bolt in place—even such items as seat adjusters, instruments, headlights and tail lights. In a trial run, Alken demonstrated that inexperienced help could remove a stock VW body and install the roadster body, complete including rewiring, in 19 hours.

As for the styling treatment, most people like it, once they realize that the long tail effect was unavoidable on a stock VW chassis. Frankly, we think the body has a lot of character. It is the work of industrial designer Bill Pierson. Also, we think the going price of a VW chassis (\$500 to \$750, used) is going to suffer from a bit of inflation before long.