

History of the Volkswagen Club of America

We began as a handful of Beetle owners in 1955 who felt the need to organize for our mutual support and benefit – to "help the VW owner enjoy his car to the fullest" as is our motto. Since then, we have grown to thousands, from coast to coast, in Canada, Mexico and several other foreign lands. Our members range from teenagers to retirees, from natives of the fatherland to those whose parents were not yet born when our Club was founded over 50 years ago.

You'll find in our midst every VW model from 1940s era Beetles to the latest luxury offering, including every Bus, Ghia and Audi in between. In short, we are owners and drivers, neither supporters nor critics of the manufacturer, with collectively thousands of years of experience to share with others.



While we were initially a "Beetle Owners' Club," it soon became obvious that there were more Volkswagen enthusiasts than there were Volkswagens. Those were the days when Volkswagen "pioneers" waited patiently for months until the day when their Volkswagen Dealer would call to say that their shiny black Beetle was ready for delivery. And just as this is not exclusively an "owners' club," we ultimately became not just a "Beetle" club. The expansion of models available from Volkswagen created a similar

expansion of members, which began to include Karmann Ghia and Transporter owners. Three unique vehicles appealing to totally different types of people, but Volkswagens all.

The next decade brought us Squarebacks and Fastbacks – "Type IIIs" to some – to attract yet another brand of enthusiast – the performance-minded. The short-lived Type IV introduced us to the early attempts at a luxury sedan from Volkswagen. And just when we thought we had seen the ultimate extrapolation of the original Beetle configuration, along came the Rabbit with a whole generation (or two?) of water-cooled, front-engine, front-wheel drive vehicles. It was almost as if Volkswagen had deliberately reversed every possible feature that made our beloved Beetle "perfect".



But wait! These new models weren't so bad after all! In fact, they began to gather a following all their own! And so it was with our Club. While the passing years brought passing models, the members who owned them found many others with similar interests, problems and solutions. Soon after the first water-cooled Volkswagen was introduced, many owners and Club members began to feel that THIS was "the shape of things to come," and a whole new generation of enthusiasts was born. There suddenly appeared masses of owners of water-cooled VWs with impressive amounts of expertise and the focus began to shift away from the Beetle. In the late

1970s, VWCA was fortunate to merge with the Front-Driver Club, and we turned an important page in our history. Our association with Audi automobiles officially began there too, but many members had already owned them, considering Audi to be the next step up. Is Mercedes next? Today, the membership of VWCA is as varied as the models themselves.



There are those who like to travel (to Europe!), to tour (in their VW!), to tinker (rarely needed) and to talk. But the Volkswagen is still the root of it all. We began to develop Conventions and get-togethers to bring enthusiasts to a common location to share our wealth of information, expertise and stories. As fate would have it, our first Convention in 1956 was held in Greensburg, Pennsylvania, just a short distance from what would 25 years later be the site of the first Volkswagen plant in the United States. In subsequent years, our mid-summer Conventions would feature snow, 110 degree heat, hill climbs, corn-fests, VW-powered airplanes, "Boats-wagen" cruises on the lake and much more. Ask any member with a long strip of "Conventions Attended" patches on a jacket or vest, and he (or she!) can fill an afternoon with stories.



Soon it became impossible to meet ALL our friends and exchange ALL our tales in just one three-day Convention. Thus was born the "Oktoberfest," a less-structured, more social gathering modeled after our original Convention concept. This was almost immediately followed by the "Maifest" – simply an Oktoberfest held in the spring. Our appetite for VW companionship seemed insatiable!



Our more recent history has brought us growth and expansion, but not without some pain. We have learned that being a complete Volkswagen Club requires an efficient organization with many people willing to devote a fair amount of time toward making VWCA a success. Fortunately, with our long history and nation-wide membership, we have enough knowledgeable members to do the job. But there are many more things that we must do to appeal to the specialty enthusiasts who do not

have a club to cater to their needs. In coming months and years, members will see greater emphasis on such topics as performance, car care clinics, rallies, touring and information exchange. There are many small clubs in the US that specialize in Karmann Ghias or Transporters or Type IIIs, but most lack the organization and nation-wide member base to reach their full potential. We feel that further mergers with such clubs could be a great benefit to us both.

The history of VWCA is a colorful one, and those who have lived it have enjoyed every minute. The future promises to be even better, and the activities that await are eagerly anticipated by us all.

