

VANAGON IN DEATH VALLEY

When we were told some time ago that VW engineers had been given complete freedom in re-designing the Bus for the '80s, we assumed that we would finally see the end to the air-cooled rear engine configuration that had been with the van for 29 years. Given the demise of the Beetle and VW's ongoing concern to design cars for the future, we were somewhat surprised to see the same drivetrain layout. After driving the new Vanagon, though, we have to say that our surprise turned to delight. For aside from the engine (even that has some new components), the Vanagon is a very new experience in vanning, delivering a level of comfort and handling unequalled in any other make or model.

All of those arguments against owning a VW van—the noise, the danger of sitting so far forward with little or nothing between you and the car in front, and its wayward tendencies in windy conditions—are neutralized in the very first drive. Increased sound deadening has reduced virtually all engine noise in the passenger area, there is much more metal and passive safety components than before in front of the driver, and better aerodynamics and suspension has made the Vanagon as solid on the road as the heaviest Detroit station wagon.

To give the Vanagon a true test, we spent a few days traversing the mountains and deserts of eastern California. We drove from below sea level to over 5,000 feet, from arid heat to icy roads, bucking crosswinds and negotiating hairpin curves. We loaded it down with four adults and enough gear for a crossing of the Darien Gap. And still the Vanagon gave us a touring experience of delight and pleasure.

Wherever we went, Vanagon attracted considerable attention. Much of it was due to the newly designed exterior. The larger windshield area now has an aerodynamic rake to it, and the front and rear light arrangements appear very Rabbit-like. The wheelbase and overall length are increased only slightly, but the

van is five inches wider. Combined with the lowering of the floor four inches, there is now 18 percent more interior room than before.

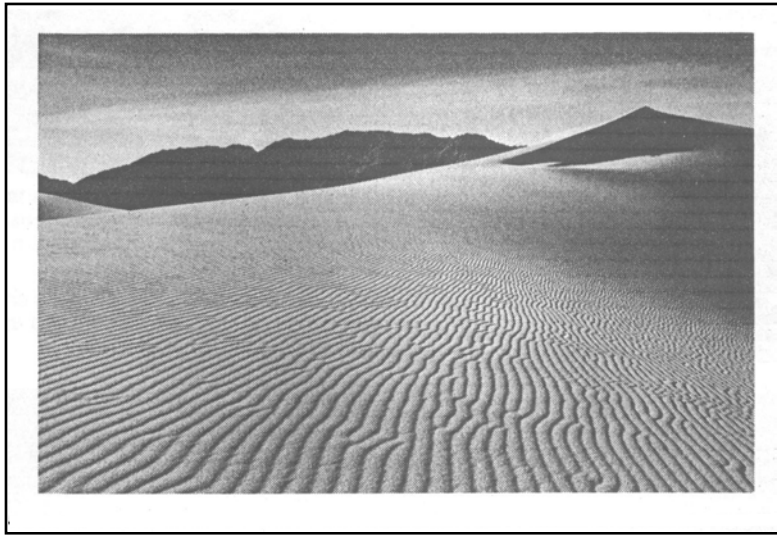
The windows are larger, allowing incredible visibility for both driver and passengers. The middle seat was set too high in past models, forcing passengers to duck slightly for an unimpeded view. Now the location offers excellent viewing. And the enlarged rear window

allows the driver to see back - down the road farther than before. (Perfect for spotting black and whites.)

The "newness" of Vanagon, though, is never so striking as when you climb in. Ergonomics are vastly improved in the areas of seating comfort and steering wheel position. It's not like you're driving a mini-Greyhound anymore. Both front seats are adjustable and offer good lateral support.

The bench seats to the rear are also orthopedically designed for greater comfort and safety.

The ventilation system is superb, with outlets for fresh air and heat seemingly scattered everywhere throughout the compartment. It's possible for almost every passenger to dial in a stream of fresh air. And as a bonus, the middle side windows have been re-designed to slide open easily. The instrument layout is basically Rabbit, easy to reach and operate. We drove the automatic transmission version and found it to be wonderful in city traffic—and on the open road. Whenever a grade loomed into sight, a simple downshift into the 1.45:1 second gear was sufficiently powerful for most hills. The tall first gear was seldom used, although during a series of nasty switchbacks near Panamint Valley it prevented our brakes from heating up. The engine itself has some new parts, including hydraulic tappets and sodium-filled valves and a new piston shape, and the resulting quietness is a revelation to die-hard Bus fans. It fairly purrs, and even with only 67 horses, motivates the Vanagon efficiently. The few times we pegged the 85-mph





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Rear passenger seats show improved design. The side windows are huge and slide open for open-air cruising. Note vent outlets above the window.

Death Valley contains the lowest spot in the United States. It's possible to drive from over 200 feet below sea level to 5000 feet above in less than an hour.

speedometer, we really couldn't tell we were traveling that fast. The Vanagon stuck to the road like a Rabbit, and interior noise levels were the same at 85 as at 65. Keeping the engine cool was no problem, even after some long grades.

It is in the handling department, though, where Vanagon shows great improvement. A 50/50 weight distribution, combined with a re-designed suspension prevents any of the swaying under windy conditions that plagued the van in the past. Solid is the word for



Clean instrument layout is very Rabbit-like. All controls are simple and within easy reach. Thick sound-deadening material underlays the plush carpet.



The new sloping windshield is larger than before, but better aerodynamics prevents increased drag. The lowering of the floor creates easier access for passengers through sliding side door. Gas filler underscores new position for gas tank up front for better weight distribution.

the feel. We found this out dramatically one evening while dodging a coyote on the road. Vanagon came back into line with little effort or sweat expended. The front discs and rear drums-power assisted, of course-control the Vanagon as though it were a much smaller vehicle.

Although Vanagon is slightly longer than last year's Bus, the turning circle is smaller. This is indicative of the engineering work to the steering geometry that

makes Vanagon as easy to drive as a passenger sedan. This is a definite plus for all of mom's about-town driving. It is as tractable in city traffic as can be imagined.

The engine is now approached from above for easier maintenance. The oil filler is located behind the license plate for immediate access, and the spare tire no longer takes up interior room. It is found under the



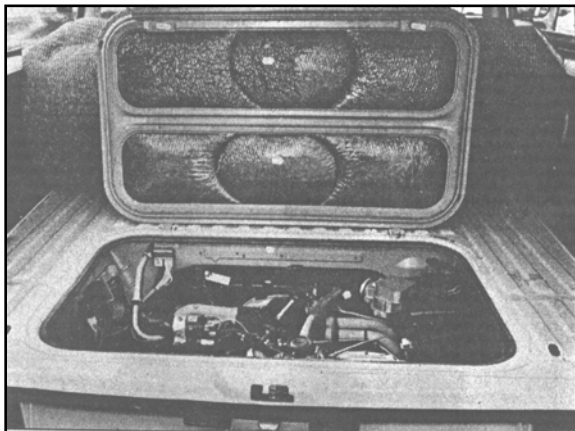
Dante's View lies 5475 feet above the floor of Death Valley, where temperatures of 134 degrees have been recorded. The white area is salts evaporated from an ancient lake bed.



Rear seat folds down for impressive cargo-carrying capacity. There is 176 cubic feet of total capacity in Vanagon.

Orthopedically designed front seats offer increased lateral support. Automatic transmission stick is a bit of a reach, but steering wheel is nicely placed for very un-buslike feel.

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Engine is accessible from cargo area. Note sound-deadening material on compartment lid. Virtually no engine noise invades the passenger area.



Rear window size has been increased by 92 percent! Large Door size reflects greater Interior room, and lowered gate means easier cargo loading. License plate covers oil filler.

front of the car. The gas tank, too, has been relocated to the front of the Vanagon, allowing the cargo area to be considerably increased. The rear seat folds down so that extremely long objects can be transported with little problem.

Few new automobiles of any kind have elicited such positive response from both our staff and the public alike as the Vanagon. Its sheer utility, combined with modern comfort levels and handling, more than offset the seemingly ancient air-cooled powerplant. It may be that VW will replace this engine soon with a water-cooled model, but the question will remain, why mess with a good thing? And Vanagon certainly stands at the head of its class.



VANAGON

Base Price: \$9925 (automatic trans.)

ENGINE

No. of cylinders 4 horizontally opposed
Bore 3.70 in (94mm)
Stroke 2.80 in (71mm)
Displacement 120.2 Cu in (1970cc)
Compression ratio 7.3:1
Horsepower (SAE Net) 67 @ 4200
Maximum Torque (SAE Net) 101 @ 3000
Fuel requirement Unleaded fuel only

ENGINE DESIGN

Engine block Magnesium alloy
Cylinders Finned cast iron
Cylinder heads Aluminum alloy
Valve arrangement Pushrod operated overhead valves, hydraulic lifters
Cooling system Blower off crankshaft, oil cooled
Fuel/air supply Fuel Injection (AFC)

ELECTRICAL SYSTEM

Rated voltage 12V
Battery 54 amp hrs
(63 amp hrs with A/C)
Ignition Transistorized (breakerless)
for Calif./coil and distributor
for 49 states
Firing order 1-4-3-2

DRIVE TRAIN

Clutch Single dry plate
Transmission 4-speed manual;
3-speed automatic

Transmission gear ratios

	Manual	Automatic
1st gear	3.78:1	2.55:1
2nd gear	2.06:1	1.45:1
3rd gear	1.26:1	100:1
4th gear	0.88:1	---
Reverse	3.28:1	2.46:1
Final Drive—		
Rear Wheel Drive	4.09:1	

CHASSIS & SUSPENSION

Unitized with box- side and cross members
Front suspension Independent with upper and lower control arms, coil springs, telescopic shock absorbers
Rear Suspension Independent with semi-trailing arms, coil springs, telescopic shock absorbers
Foot Brakes Dual hydraulic system, power assist. Front, disc; rear, drum Pressure regulator inertial controlled
Hand brake Mechanical to rear wheels
Rims 5½xJx14
Tires~ 185 SR 14 reinforced radial ply commercial
Steering Rack and pinion

CAPACITIES

Engine . 6.3 pts
Fuel tank 15.9 U.S. gallons

LUGGAGE CAPACITY

35.3 cu ft (total capacity 176.0 cu ft)

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase	96.8 in
Front track	61.8 in
Overall length	179.9 in
Overall width	72.6 in
Overall height (unloaded)	77.2 in
Turning circle	34.5 curb to curb
Curb weight	3175 lb (Sta wag)
	3076 lb (Kombi)
	3527 lb (Camper)

PERFORMANCE

Top Speed 75 mph-Manual
EPA rating 17 combined
Test fuel consumption 16-22 mpg

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