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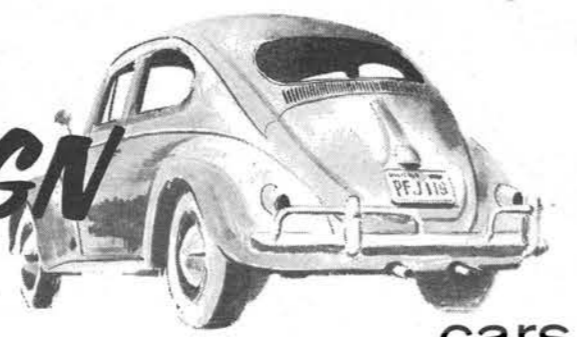
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**FOREIGN**



**cars**

by John Lawlor

A NEW Volkswagen appears more certain than ever. Latest reports in the German press tell of a larger, 45-hp sedan to be introduced in the summer of '61. It wouldn't replace the current model, which would continue unchanged as usual, but supplement it in an expanded line.

Mechanically, the new car would follow established VW practice with an air-cooled, four-cylinder engine in the rear. The possibility of a new VW has long been rumored but this is the first tangible information to be revealed. It comes directly from company officials, according to the reports.

These same officials have constantly denied any changes would be made in the present VW, but they have never said something might not be built in addition to it. And, certainly, plenty of VW enthusiasts would welcome a more powerful version of their favorite car.

Recently, I spent a most enjoyable week-end at the wheel of a Renault Caravelle and found it to be an appealing blend of economy car and gran turismo.

The particular car was the costliest Caravelle, a convertible with both a collapsible soft top and a removable hardtop. Others in the line are a normal convertible and a closed coupe. It costs about \$900 more than the Dauphine from which it derives but it offers a much higher standard of finish as well as its own distinctive styling.

Entry and exit are difficult, but interior comfort is good. The front seats are well designed and incorporate adjustable backs. Legroom is lengthy, though the front wheel wells narrow the foot space. The driver



**RENAULT CARAVELLE** is powered by hopped up Dauphine engine, has four-speed gearbox and removable hardtop at extra cost.

has a particular problem finding a comfortable position for his left foot.

The rear seat will actually accommodate two adults, provided they aren't too large and the trip isn't too far. Still, it is much roomier than the occasional seats in most sports cars.

The whole interior is finished with a leather-like material that adds a satisfying note of elegance.

A little cockpit orientation is necessary to drive the car properly. Minor controls are not marked and are located in unfamiliar positions. The turn indicator switch, for example, is on the right side of the steering column, instead of the left, looking for all the world like a miniature gear shift lever.

The Caravelle has the same 51.5-cubic-inch, four-cylinder engine as the Dauphine but produces 40 hp, a 25 per cent increase, because of larger intake ports and a more radical cam. Performance is not significantly improved, though, because the heavier Caravelle body just about cancels out the gain in power.

With a stopwatch and corrected speedometer, I recorded 0-60 runs that averaged 28.4 seconds, just a second faster than the Dauphine.

The optional, four-speed gearbox was fitted to the car I drove and, while actual acceleration times were no better because of it, highway performance was more flexible. The ratios are well chosen for getting around tight corners and up steep grades.

This transmission has the same, indefinite feel as the standard three-speed unit. A driver unaccustomed to it has trouble find-



**SWING AXLES** of Caravelle pose problem in tight turns at high speeds. Under normal conditions, though, handling is excellent.

ing the gear he wants, there is so much slack in any position.

Reverse is to the left and down, a la VW. A slight catch in neutral is intended to prevent accidental engagement of reverse, but it is still easy to hit it accidentally during a fast downshift from third to second.

Handling qualities are remarkably good for a car with 60 per cent of its weight at the rear. Two factors contribute to this, good steering and a new suspension system.

The steering is much quicker than its 4.5 turns lock-to-lock might indicate because the turning circle is a tight 30 feet. When released in a turn, the wheel literally snaps back to the straight ahead position, though not so violently that the driver ever feels he is fighting it.

Suspension is the new Aerostable system described here in the March issue. To recapitulate briefly, it consists of four-wheel coil springs supplemented by rubber pads on the front shock absorbers and rubber bags on the rear axle shafts. In effect, it is a progressive system that stiffens under loads.

It provides one of the best combinations of a smooth ride and steady handling I've ever experienced in a small car. The Caravelle can be thrown around a corner with much greater abandon than a normal Dauphine or Volkswagen.

Of course, on extremely tight, fast turns, the swing rear axles can become a problem. They assume peculiar angles that make it extremely difficult to tell just which direction the car is going to go. Or whether it's going to go. The rear wheels can be thrown off their normal cambers enough to make traction very uncertain.

For auto and sports enthusiasts, TV Sportscaster Bill Welsh has arranged a 24-day, escorted tour of four European countries this summer. Leaving Los Angeles on August 21, it includes travel through Portugal, Spain, Switzerland and Italy, plus guaranteed reservations in Rome for the Olympic Games.

Also on the agenda are grandstand seats for the Grand Prix at Monza and a tour of the Alfa Romeo factory in Milan.

Two other features impress me as outstanding for a group tour. First, Welsh doesn't plan to cover too much territory in too little time. There's nothing more frustrating than trying to see a dozen countries in a couple of weeks. And second, the schedule is quite flexible. Sight-seeing will be at the participants' convenience rather than at a fixed time, excursions to cities and countries not on the route can be included and even the purchase of a car can be arranged.

Total cost is a reasonable \$1420 including jet fare to and from Los Angeles. Full details can be obtained from CIT Travel Service, 649 South Olive Street, Los Angeles 14, California. •

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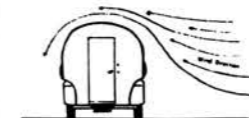


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