

Volkswagen's big brother, loaded with American concepts

IT'S RARE that we devote a road test to a European car not currently being imported to the U.S., but in the case of the VW 1500, there seems good reason to make an exception.

The fact is that the car's now available in Canada and Mexico, and significant numbers have been brought in from Europe by servicemen and tourists, so you're likely to see the 1500 with fair regularity in larger cities. Some VW dealers have a limited supply of 1500s for sale — cars gotten through unofficial channels abroad and sold here as used vehicles for a premium. Volkswagen of America, the head organization in this country, isn't talking about official import plans, but it seems likely that the 1500 will be brought in before long as a more expensive companion to the ubiquitous beetle. We were able to get a 1500 for test from an individual, who had a nearly new sedan shipped to the West Coast, then kindly let us put it through its paces.

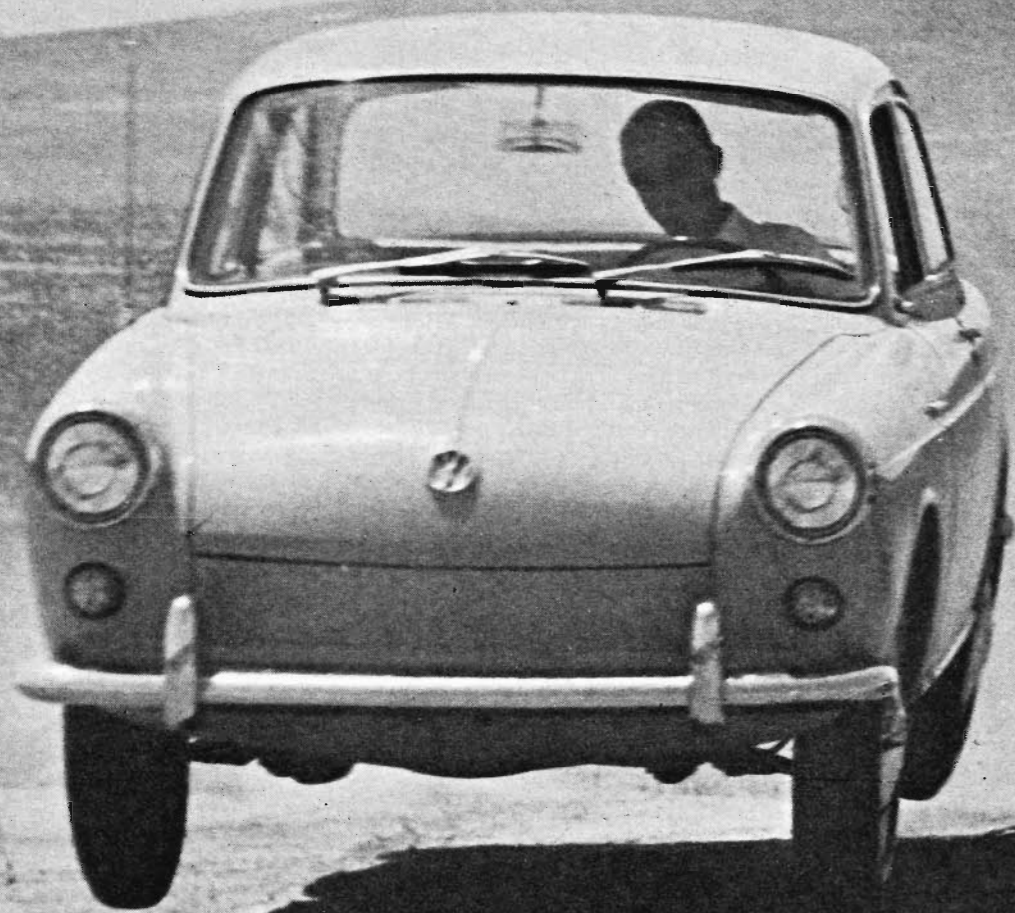
When evaluating the 1500, you have a natural inclination to compare it with the standard 1200 VW, so much so that we drove and tested a new one for direct analysis. Oddly enough, neither car suffers by comparison. Both are top-quality small automobiles, and

each has its own niche in the auto world. That the Volkswagen 1500 is the more desirable of the two seems generally agreed, but it's also a fact that if the 1500 were imported, it'd be more expensive than the 1200. Just how much isn't known, but it should be in the neighborhood of \$500, so that price will be an important factor in any choice between the two cars.

The 1500 is just a little bit more of everything — faster, bigger, quieter, and more deluxe throughout. It's loaded with features that distinguish it from the smaller VW. We became aware of them the instant we entered the car. The fully padded dash is quite different. All three circular instruments are hooded. A central speedometer is flanked by a clock on the right and a dial on the left that includes gas gauge and lights for oil, generator, and high beam. At the lower left of the dash is a series of four square pushbuttons that control windshield washer, wipers, dash- and headlights. Between the buttons are two horizontal turn dials for wiper speed (upper dial) and dash light rheostat (lower dial). A button on the back side of the turn indicator lever is a headlight flasher. One feature which probably will



1500



M
T Road Test

and accessories, seems a natural for prompt importation

be deleted for U.S. versions is the clearance lamps. Mounted high on the front fenders near the door, only one may be lighted at a time. They light when the ignition is off and the turn indicator is pushed to the left or right position.

First notable operating difference between the 1500 and 1200 comes in starting the larger car: The 1500 has a lockable steering wheel. As soon as the engine fires, another change is apparent. The car's substantially quieter than the 1200 throughout its speed range. There's definitely less engine noise and a far lower-pitched cooling blower note. The 1500 has its cooling impeller mounted on the nose of the crank so that the entire engine package is flat — the vertical blower of the 1200 has been eliminated. It's apparently as efficient, quieter, and permits the engine to be mounted in a flat box rather than as the 1200's tower effect.

There are subtle but significant differences (from the 1200) in the way the 1500 drives. For one thing, it has a slightly stiffer clutch, with a longer throw. The gearshift knob is about twice the size of the 1200's, and it was interesting how many drivers commented on the desirability of such a simple item. It

seemed to make the 1500 easier to shift, even though its shifting throws are longer than the 1200's, and there was more slop in the linkage. The synchromesh on both gearboxes is outstanding — smooth, slick, and so light it made gear changing a pleasure.

As far as driving is concerned, the small difference in engine size and horsepower between the two cars makes itself felt in usable performance. The acceleration figures show just how much quicker the 1500 is. This speed differential is valuable all the way to the top end, which is a good

10 to 12 mph faster than the 1200's, conservatively rated at 72 mph. Both cars tend to feel the slowing effects of a prolonged hill, but the 1500 has the advantage of a third gear that'll see a useful 65 mph and can be taken (at the expense and danger of some over-revving) to 75 mph. Transmission ratios on the two cars are identical, including the over-drive top gear at .89 to 1, but the rear axle ratio of the 1200 is 4.375 to 1, while the 1500 is equipped with a 4.125 ratio, accounting for its greater speed potential in each gear.

We couldn't find any great disparity in the handling qualities of the two cars. On paper,



1200



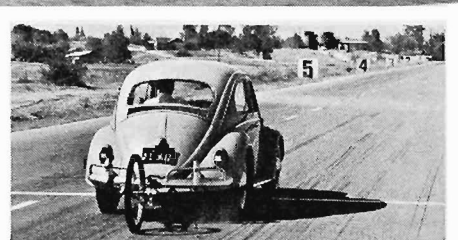
by Wayne Thoms

PHOTOS BY BOB D'OLIVO



(ABOVE) Braking tests revealed how weight shift permitted rear wheels to lift and lock up first. Car remained under control during panic braking, stopped in a reasonable distance.

(RIGHT) The Volkswagen 1200 demonstrated one of the shortest stopping distances from 60 mph of any car ever tested—117 feet. There was no evidence of fade or loss of braking.



1500 1200

the 1500 should be the more stable of the two, if only by virtue of increased tread over the 1200 (.2-inch at front, 2.3 inches at the rear). It did seem to feel better

at high speed, showing what we determined was less tendency to wander from a straight line. However, the 1200 wasn't bothersome in this respect. While pushing the 1500 through hard corners, we found that the VW tendency to oversteer was still present. A comparison of the two cars through the same corner at the same speed indicated about the same feeling of modest oversteer. The 1500's additional torque gave it a shade more control in fast turns. In any case, the oversteer isn't so pronounced as it was on VWs of a few years back, when it was downright dangerous to hot-dog through a corner. We found the steering on both cars quick and feather-light at all speeds.

Brakes on both cars are perfectly adequate. Our stopping distances were satisfactorily short, in a straight line, and the cars remained under control. We could lock the wheels, but our technique for stopping tests is a rapid pumping the instant the brakes lock, on the accepted theory that a skidding car is unmanageable. It is, we must confess, easier to do under test conditions than in a true emergency stop.

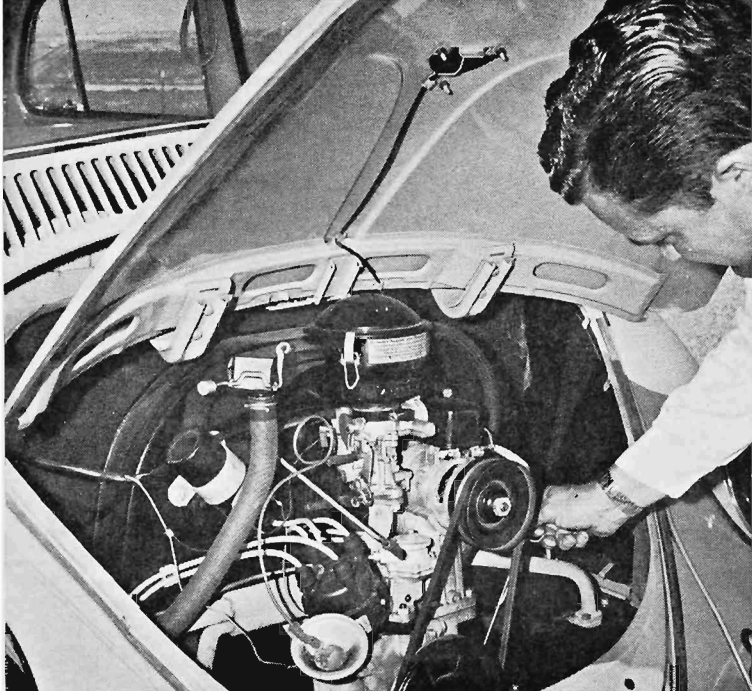
The Volkswagen is noted for its excellence of ride under the worst possible conditions, and the 1500 is built in the same tradition. Wheelbase is the same for the two cars, and suspension is quite similar, so there's very little difference in the two cars' riding qualities. They were far smoother than they had a right to be, considering the 94.5-inch wheelbase.

There's substantially more interior room in the 1500 than in the 1200 with one exception: The 1200 has about an inch more head room. Leg room is about the same in both cars — plenty in front, a minimum in the rear. As for hip room, the

1500 is about four inches wider in the front and two inches at the rear. Attractive detail improvements mark the 1500's interior. There's a pull-down arm rest in the two-passenger contoured rear seat. Also included are side arm rests in the rear, missing on the 1200. The front seats adjust through seven positions of back rake, about four inches measured at the top of the seat top, compared to the 1200's nominal, three-position back rest adjustment. The 1500's doors have molded arm rests on both sides, recessed to act as door pulls. One feature which seems a good safety item is the way the front-seat back rests are locked and can't swing forward when the doors are closed. Each door presses a button in the body which extends a seat locking latch. Visibility to the rear is significantly better in the 1500, due to a much larger rear window.

Without referring to the manual, opening the engine compartment can be something of a mystery. When the driver's door is opened, there's a small lever near the door striker that releases the back compartment. And when the rear deck is opened, there's a handy, shallow luggage area above the engine. Engine access is via an insulated cover beneath a mat. Oil may be checked and added from an external dipstick without getting at the engine or disturbing the luggage. The front luggage area is about the same size and slightly taller than in the 1200. The 1500 doesn't have the 1200's storage area behind the rear seat, nor does the seat fold forward for extra carrying capacity.

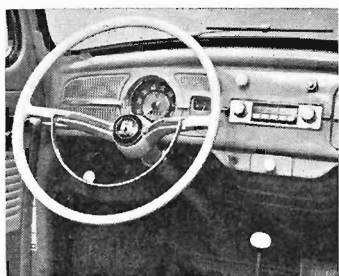
The 1500's heating and ventilating system is much better than the 1200's. The floor-mounted heater knob is the same, and heat flows from ducts near the floor, but the 1500 includes dash levers that open vents to let in fresh air without heat. When used with the heater, these vents divert warm air to the windshield for defrosting. We found that a good ventilation system for highway cruising was to open the fresh air vent and one or both of the rear windows (which



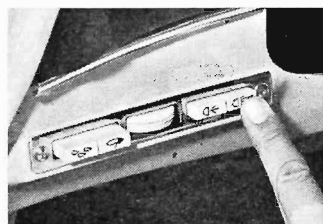
VW 1200 engine is one of the most reliable small powerplants built. The cooling blower is loud, annoying to rear passengers.



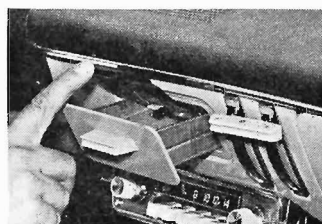
Engine for the 1500 is similar in design but has cooling fan driven off crank nose, is much quieter, forms flatter package.



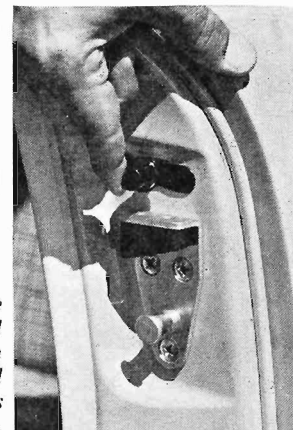
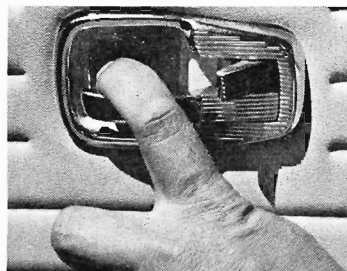
(ABOVE) Seating position in the 1500 is comfortable, offers good leg room. Seat has seven-position rake adjustment controlled by knob near seat base. (LEFT) Dash panel in 1200 is austere in contrast to 1500, with fewer instruments, no padding. Dash is functional, built for economy.



1500's dash buttons are windshield wiper, washer, and lights.



Ash tray on 1500 is covered—levers alongside are for vents.



Detail features on VW 1500 include recessed interior door handles and locking device that releases when door is opened (ABOVE). Control handle for rear deck (RIGHT) is concealed near right door striker.

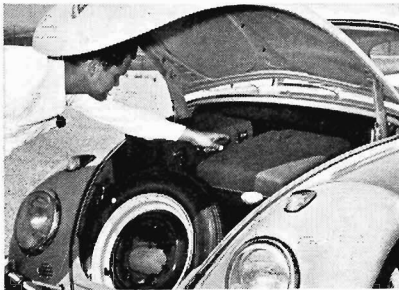
pivot open to the rear), thus eliminating the wind noise from open windows or front wind wings. The rear windows don't open very far. In fact, they're not even hinged but pivot in their rubber seal, an ingenious, low-cost idea.

In the front compartments of both VWs, alongside the spare tire, are two opaque plastic containers. One holds water and is capped with a standard tire inflation valve. When pressurized at a service station, it's the reservoir for the windshield washers. Alongside it is the hydraulic fluid reservoir, readily accessible and never in any danger of dirt contamination.

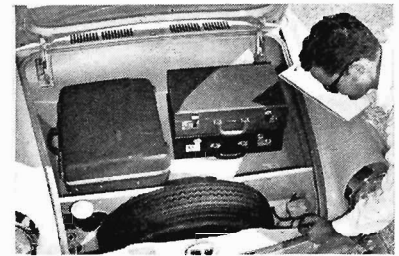
Also produced in the 1500 series is the Variant, a two-door station wagon that looks like a scaled-down version of Corvair's now discontinued wagon. Although we were unable to drive it enough for an objective report, it seemed rugged, with a good amount of usable space for its size. It should answer the needs of station wagon fanciers who like the VW but can't use the larger transporter model.

One of the VW's strong points has always been its economy. The 1200 delivered its 28-35 mpg just as scheduled. We anticipated that the slight extra weight and larger

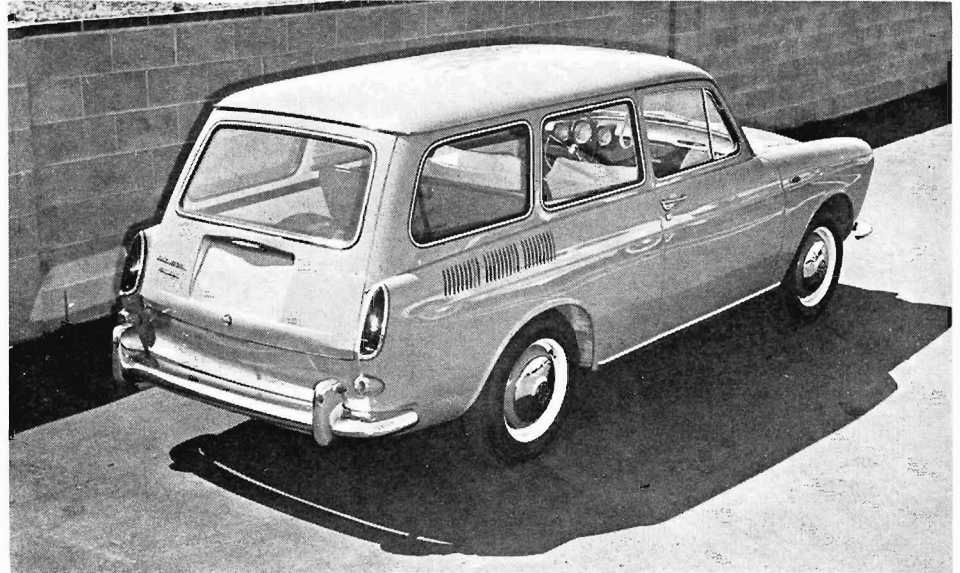
continued



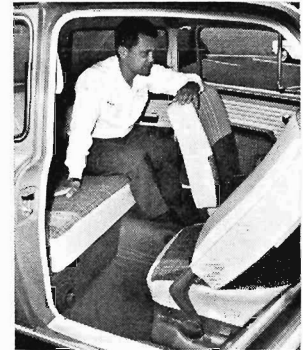
(TOP) Luggage area in 1200 includes a well behind seat. (ABOVE) There's room for other small items under hood.



VW 1500 has slightly more storage space (TOP) plus a handy compartment in the rear atop flat engine (ABOVE).



VW's 1500 station wagon is called the Variant, closely resembles discontinued Corvair wagon. When and if it's imported to the States, it should prove popular with compact wagon fans.



(ABOVE) Station wagon's engine nestles beneath insulated panel. Oil can be checked from external dipstick without opening engine. (TOP RIGHT) Two-door station wagon offers adequate rear seat space for passengers. Seat folds forward and flat (RIGHT) for long, open carrying area. Rear door swings upward, has fixed window. Wagon shouldn't be driven with door open, so lengthy objects can't be hauled as in some wagons.



engine of the 1500 would cut its mileage, and it did when pushed hard through traffic. The bottom was right at 25 mpg. One steady drive under

favorable conditions of speed, traffic, and level terrain brought a high of 35 mpg.

The best conclusions we can draw from the two cars is that the 1200 will continue to keep its advocates happy. The reasons for its continuing dominance of the import picture are sound, based on quality and long-range economy. When and if the 1500 appears on the scene here, it, too, should find success. Our own informal and highly incomplete survey of current VW owners revealed an interest in stepping up to the 1500. Both cars are sure to keep the import pot boiling for years to come.

/MT



VOLKSWAGEN 1200

2-door, 4-passenger sedan

OPTIONS ON CAR TESTED: Radio, whitewalls

BASIC PRICE: \$1675 p.o.e.

PRICE AS TESTED: \$1874.95 (plus tax and license)

ODOMETER READING AT START OF TEST: 2600 miles

RECOMMENDED ENGINE RED LINE: 5500 rpm

PERFORMANCE

ACCELERATION (2 aboard)

0-30 mph	6.75 secs.
0-45 mph	14.65
0-60 mph	32.0

Standing start 1/4-mile 23.9 secs. and 56 mph

Speeds in gears @ 5500 rpm

1st	22.5 mph	3rd	68 mph
2nd	43 mph	4th	74 mph
(@ 4000 rpm)			

Speedometer Error on Test Car

Car's speedometer reading	30	46	52	62	72
Weston electric speedometer	30	45	50	60	70

Observed miles per hour per 1000 rpm in top gear 18.5 mph

Stopping Distances — from 30 mph, 33.5 ft.; from 60 mph, 117 ft.

SPECIFICATIONS FROM MANUFACTURER

Engine

Horizontally opposed, ohv 4
Bore: 3.031 ins.
Stroke: 2.520 ins.
Displacement: 72.740 cu. ins.
Compression ratio: 7.0:1
Horsepower: 40 @ 3900 rpm
Torque: 64 lbs.-ft. @ 2400 rpm
Horsepower per cubic inch: 0.55
Ignition: 6-volt coil

Steering

Worm and sector
Turning diameter: 36 ft.
Turns: 2.6 lock to lock

Wheels and Tires

4J x 15 welded disc wheels
5.60 x 15 tires

Gearbox

4-speed manual, all-synchro;
floor-mounted lever

Driveshaft

Engine, transmission, and
differential in unit

Differential

Spiral bevel ring and pinion
Standard ratio: 4.375:1

Suspension

Front: Independent, with trailing
arms, transverse torsion bars,
tubular shocks
Rear: Independent, swinging
axles, longitudinal torsion
bars, tubular shocks

Body and Frame

Unit construction on platform
chassis
Wheelbase: 94.5 ins.
Track: front, 51.4 ins.;
rear, 50.7 ins.
Overall length: 156.0 ins.
Curb weight: 1631 lbs.

VOLKSWAGEN 1500

2-door, 4-passenger sedan

OPTIONS ON CAR TESTED: Radio, whitewalls

BASIC PRICE: Not available (not imported into U. S.)

PRICE AS TESTED: NA

ODOMETER READING AT START OF TEST: 670 miles

RECOMMENDED ENGINE RED LINE: 5500 rpm

PERFORMANCE

ACCELERATION (2 aboard)

0-30 mph	5.6 secs.
0-45 mph	11.8
0-60 mph	20.8

Standing start 1/4-mile 21.9 secs. and 61 mph

Speeds in gears @ 5500 rpm

1st	25 mph	3rd	74 mph
2nd	47 mph	4th	85 (@ 4300 rpm)

Speedometer Error on Test Car

Car's speedometer reading	30	45	51	61	72	82
Weston electric speedometer	30	45	50	60	70	80

Observed miles per hour per 1000 rpm in top gear 19.8 mph

Stopping Distances — from 30 mph, 33 ft.; from 60 mph, 148 ft.

SPECIFICATIONS FROM MANUFACTURER

Engine

Horizontally opposed, ohv 4
Bore: 3.27 ins.
Stroke: 2.72 ins.
Displacement: 91.1 cu. ins.
Compression ratio: 7.8:1
Horsepower: 53 @ 4000 rpm
Torque: 83 lbs.-ft. @ 2000 rpm
Horsepower per cubic inch: 0.58
Ignition: 6-volt coil

Steering

Worm and sector
Turning diameter: 36.5 ft.
Turns: 2.8 lock to lock

Wheels and Tires

Steel disc wheels
6.00 x 16 tires

Gearbox

4-speed manual, all-synchro;
floor-mounted lever

Driveshaft

Engine, transmission, and
differential in unit

Differential

Spiral bevel ring and pinion
Standard ratio: 4.125:1

Suspension

Front: Independent, with trailing
arms, transverse torsion bars,
tubular shocks
Rear: Independent, swinging
axles, longitudinal torsion bars,
tubular shocks

Brakes

Hydraulic drums
Front: 9-in. dia. x 1.97 ins. wide
Rear: 9-in. dia. x 1.57 ins. wide
Swept area: 191 sq. ins.

Body and Frame

Unit construction on platform
chassis
Wheelbase: 94.5 ins.
Track: front, 51.6 ins.,
rear 53.0 ins.
Overall length: 166.3 ins.
Curb weight: 1950 lbs.



Although the 1500 has wider tread, cornering abilities of the two cars were judged about equal. The 1500 has more torque, which permits more corner recovery power. It also seemed to

be more stable at its top speed, about 85 mph. If the 1500 is imported, it should find its own group of fans, but we expect the less expensive 1200 to continue its import dominance.