

Nordstadt 928 VW

A Porsche in rabbit's clothing. By Jerry Sloniger.



Once upon a time, long, long ago — in 1979 actually — a north German magician named Nordstadt waved his wand over a tall, black crash hat and out popped a fully-fanged 928 in Rabbit's clothing. A 145-mph VW Rabbit? Fairy tale stuff for sure, but this really happened. VW on the outside, Porsche on the inside. There never really was a 928 Rabbit because none of the *very* limited series went to the U.S., but there certainly was a 928 Golf, which is the same thing with a Teutonic accent. For simplicity, I'll use that title hereafter.

Incidentally, our top speed figure is no misprint either. This boxy econo-

sedan with a V8 heart from Zuffenhausen was actually 3 mph faster than the contemporary 928. Better aerodynamics, you see. Perhaps a German magazine got it right when they wind-tunneled the 928, a shape designed by rule of thumb. They claimed it had a lower drag figure going backwards, which was certainly not true of the Nordstadt hybrid.

What this curious combination *did* have was panache, in enormous portions. Which was the purpose of the exercise after all: advertising for a large VW/Audi operation in Hannover, bossed by one Günter Artz. By no coincidence, it was often called

■ *By itself in the country, Nordstadt's 928 VW was hard to spot.*

Germany's most imaginative VW dealer in those days. Artz was open to just about any scheme which would sell more Wolfsburg products.

His white brick office with black couches and a police dog before the fireplace was full of scale models of wild but possible VW spinoffs. Several had even been realized, including a set of five Beetles with 210-hp Carrera RS engines replacing the rear seats in 1973. On the other hand, a 928 station wagon idea was dropped. It wouldn't sell more VWs, whereas a 240-hp Golf



definitely would, by association.

This hand-built series was essentially a marketing exercise but hardly a loss leader, even so. Artz couldn't have been surprised by more than 100 firm orders for the ten cars he was permitted to build, from the moment his wondercar was announced. He'd already collected 50 orders for those five 210-hp Beetles. Fleet owners who purchased 100-plus regular Volkswagens went to the head of the line for a 928 Golf and several wanted one despite a strictly

secret price in the "if you have to ask you can't afford it" category.

In the end, six were sold in Germany, two in Austria, and one each in France and Switzerland. Two were ordered with five-speed manual gearboxes, the remaining eight with automatics — an indication of the board-room clientele. A mooted second ten cars apparently never materialized, leading frustrated would-be buyers to beg for the ten winning names so they could offer big second-purchase bonuses.

The low limit was set by two factors. Only five of the dealership's 100 workers did all these specials but that might have been finessed. Far more important, Volkswagen's approval was vital for meeting highly complicated European registration rules. And while Wolfsburg could see ten, they wouldn't condone more. What they did supply, apart from engineering input, was a test track to confirm the top speed claim. Given the slightly embarrassing figure relative to its 928, we can understand why Porsche wasn't keen to test the cars in Weissach.

Nor did Artz buy and assemble Porsche parts for the underpinnings. Instead, he cannibalized brand-new 928s, selling the body panels to repair shops. That left him with an intact chassis, suspension, and drivetrain — including all electrics. Comforts like electric windows, a power sunroof, and central locking were vital to the price class.

The first three cars, including the

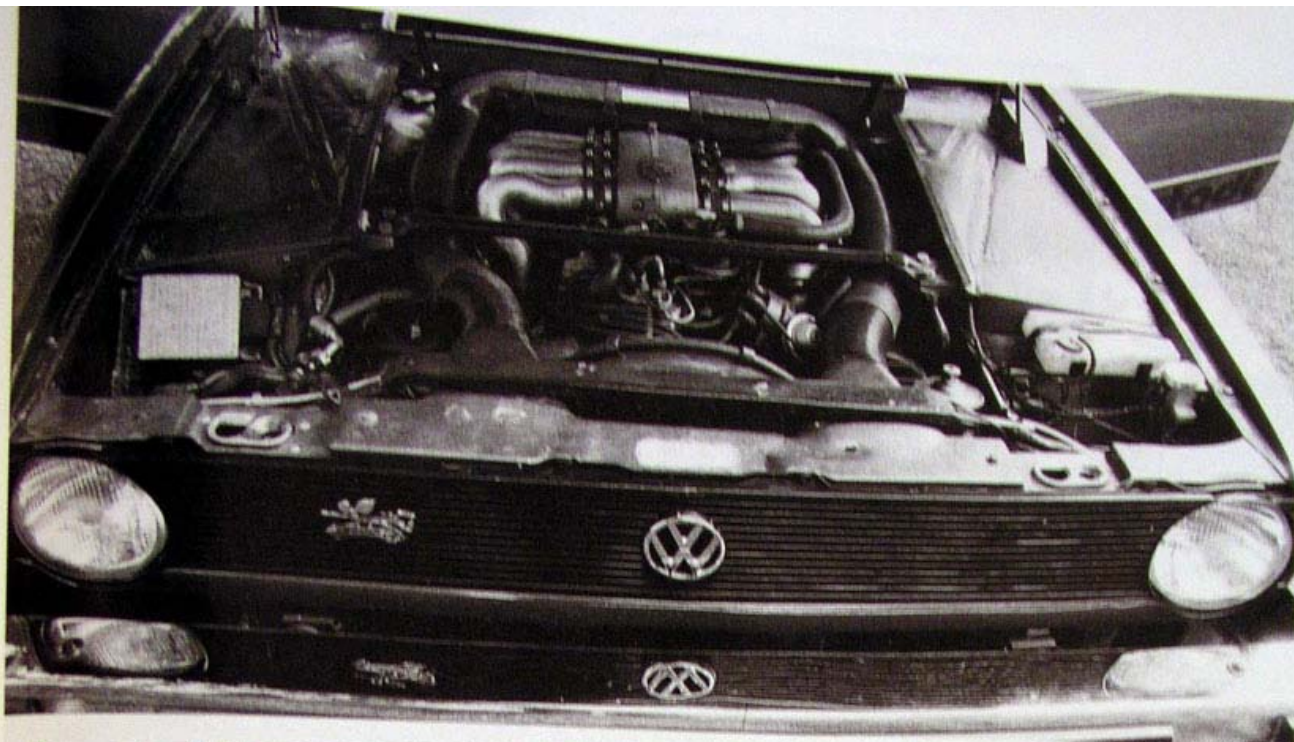
■ **Top, left**—Parking the Nordstadt alongside an everyday Golf tipped the game, although the Nordstadt car's proportions were very nice.

■ **Above, left**—Perhaps the rear view was even more revealing.

■ **Below, left**—You began to think it might be a little wider in the hips at that. The car's extra width meant special glass, which was quite costly for just ten cars.

■ **Below, right**—Despite the pure VW look, nothing but the outer door skins were actually taken from a Golf. Flared fenders were needed, but a lot of VWs got that treatment.





gray ghost we drove, used the original, 4.5-liter 928 V8. The rest were scheduled to carry 300-hp, 5.0-liter GT powerplants. These would have been faster yet. All featured the stiffest of three suspensions, meaning the test mule was decidedly jiggly on a cobble-stone street. Weight came out very close to the 928 GT, with more glass but less sound dampening material.

This was the ultimate Q-car. Porsche fans might have wondered about those telephone-dial wheels bearing a VW emblem or the dual pipes, but average viewers needed a normal Golf alongside to be sure this one really was wider and longer. The Nordstadt looked much like any Golf although no

■ **Top**—Of course, lifting the engine lid did rather blow your cover.

■ **Above, left**—Sole Porsche badge on the car was on the steering wheel, which came that way after all.

■ **Above, right**—Interior was both parents and neither. Although it looked pretty 928 to the casual viewer, little was unaltered.

panels were carried over, apart from outer door skins. Even the windshield required a special (\$3,000) mold.

The trim and seats were nearly Porsche and the dash might look like your usual 928, but only the gauges

and their surrounds really were original. The rest was a carefully-arranged "Porsche look." The sole Stuttgart badge was found on the steering wheel. With a good deal more glass area, the Nordstadt drivers didn't feel quite so much like they were sitting in a tub and the car was much easier to park. Front passengers had virtually 928 width but nearly half an inch more headroom. Those in the rear seats found the interior a full 14 inches wider with nearly 3.5 inches of extra interior height. Sitting somewhat more upright gave the effect of greater leg room as well.

Golf lines were vital to VW acceptance as well as VW promotion. Artz



■ **Top**—It does look a little longer and sleeker, doesn't it?

■ **Above**—For Porsche spotters, the telephone dial alloys with VW emblems could be confusing.

took enormous care to get every radius just right, explaining the fine drag figure. Most of the extra length from a standard 928 wheelbase was found behind the front wheel arches. Basically, the car was 8.5 inches wider than a Golf and longer by the same amount. Height wasn't mentioned.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Engine

Displacement: 4474 cc
Horsepower: 240 @ 5250 rpm
Torque: 267 ft/lbs @ 3600 rpm
(Upgraded to 300-hp, 5.0-liter GT engine for the final seven.)

Chassis

Wheelbase: 98.5 inches
Track (f/r): 60.7/59.0 inches
Length: 158.6 inches
Width: 71.7 inches
Curb weight: 3,350 pounds
Fuel capacity: 22.7 gallons
Tires: 225/50VR16

Performance

0-60: 7.5 seconds
0-100: 19.1 seconds
Top speed: 145 mph

Price

Don't ask

To put desire for this decidedly non-cuddly Rabbit into perspective, it's worth remembering that Germans in the late seventies still recalled the fuel shock trauma. Appearing eco-conscious was definitely in. Many workers had considerable say in what their bosses might aspire to. Mercedes and

BMW, for instance, made their high-end model badges a delete option so the shop floor couldn't tell whether the managing director was driving a baseline four-cylinder or the fanciest eight.

A tuner in Frankfurt took the idea even further: b+b did a brisk business giving plain but aging 911s the Turbo look. Later, the boss could buy a real one in identical colors without fearing slashed tires in the company lot. The clear Nordstadt aim here was thus the best of two worlds: 928 speed and handling with VW space and surprise appeal. Porsche's sporting reputation as well as obvious family ties were clearly keys to this combination.

Many might prefer the clean Porsche lines of course, but there were obviously more than 100 souls who would have settled happily for the action in a more modest package. On the road, a Nordstadt 928 Golf beat American V8 transplants for both Germaness and easy revs. This was the ideal high-speed luxury tourer for people who didn't want to flaunt a Porsche. At least the front seat felt pure Porsche, apart from a better view over the hood.

Besides, owners could always spring a small surprise when some small boy in a distant land asked the inevitable, "What'll she do, mister?" ■