

TESTS: CHEVY K-20 • VW/LANDMARK VAN

PICKUP VAN 4WD

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The VW Bus Lives:

VOLKSWAGEN LANDMARK VAN

But the question is, is it past its prime?



The Volkswagen van/bus has endured through the years almost as well as the legendary VW Beetle. Like the Beetle, the van has undergone many changes and is no

doubt a much superior vehicle than it was when first introduced; however, the basic shape and design is very similar to the first one brought in from Germany in 1949.

The Volkswagen obtained for this test started life as a Kombi, a combination passenger vehicle/van with two bucket seats up front and an open cargo area to the rear. The Volks is also available as a Station Wagon with full passenger seating or as a Campmobile complete with a pop top and facilities for self-contained camping.

Volkswagen of America recently entered into an agreement with the National Coach Corporation of Carson, California to transform the Kombi into an Americanized van conversion similar to the customized domestic vans that have gained popularity all across the U.S. in recent years. Volkswagen plans to produce 300 of these units for the Southern California dealer network to test the marketplace and if the test proves successful, the conversion will be distributed nationally.

National Coach takes a rather spartan Kombi and transforms it into a luxuriously appointed touring vehicle. The interior decor group consists of four aircraft-style swivel bucket seats, convertible sofa, wet bar with icebox and storage cabinet, removable dining/game table, carpeting on all floor areas, wood-grained paneling and padded headlining, plus other decorator items. National has also given the exterior a going over with a stylish paint scheme and aluminum alloy turbo-type wheels.

Volkswagen believes the VW/Landmark van fills a need between the family-oriented VW Station Wagon and customized domestic vans. The thought behind this would be the fuel economy advantage of the VW vs. the appetites of full-sized American vans. Unfortunately, this advantage did not fully materialize in our test. More on this later.

The venerable VW is still powered by a horizontally opposed four-cylinder engine, although this engine is considerably different from the original 72.7-cid (1192 cc) powerplant, which was hard pressed to propel the van up hills of any degree of steepness. The offering for model year '78-'79 VW availability remained months away at press time—is an electronic fuel-injected engine rated at 67 net horsepower from 120.2 cubic inches. The 49-state engine can burn leaded or unleaded fuel, whereas the California version must use the unleaded variety only. The horsepower rating has not changed since 1975, so it seems as if VW has squeezed the ultimate out of the current engine without major modifications or a new design altogether.

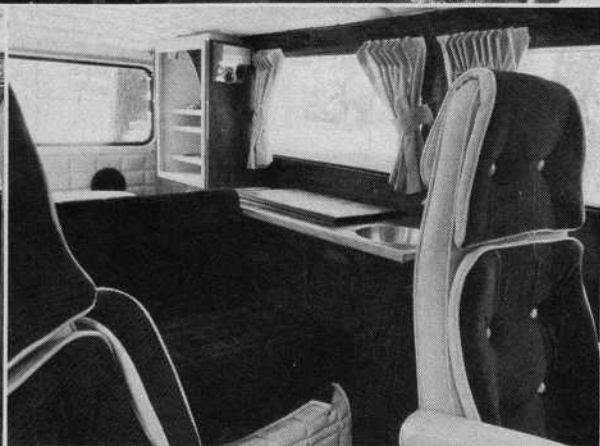
The Landmark conversion weighed approximately 200 pounds more than the 1976 VW Station Wagon tested by PV4 in January '77. This extra weight may also account for the decrease in gas mileage and poorer performance of the '78. The '76 achieved 20.7 mpg in the city/freeway driving cycle, which isn't too shabby for a van with an automatic transmission; however, the '78 could manage only 15.9 mpg, a drop of almost five mpg. So the one advantage that a VW would normally have over a domestic van, fuel economy, is missing in the '78 model. Performance of the '78 was also considerably below that of the '76, with a zero-to-60 elapsed time of 23.4 seconds, compared to 19.9 sec-

onds for the '76. The engine was performing normally with no apparent problems, so the loss in performance is probably due to the additional weight with some loss also attributable to exhaust emission laws much stricter in '78 than they were in '76. Everyday driving of the VW/Landmark, however, shows acceptable performance; keeping pace with freeway traffic is no problem. Engine rpm at 55 mph is 3200, which is just above the peak torque rating. This translates to effortless cruise and reasonable passing ability.

The VW van is similar to most vans in that this type vehicle is more sensitive to side winds and passing 18-wheelers than a pickup or passenger car, except that the VW is even more sensitive than most. The rather soft, independent suspension, combined with the driver sitting on top of the front wheels, accentuates the feeling and falsely gives one the impression that the VW is squirrely. Not so. A day behind the wheel and all concern is gone. Once the behavior is noted, the handling becomes predictable and twisty mountain roads are negotiated at legal speeds with ease.

Quality control on the base VW Kombi is excellent, as is the quality of the Landmark conversion. There is one glaring fault, however. For anyone over 5 feet, 8 inches in height, there is just not enough head room with the aftermarket seats and headliner. Test crewmen taller than 5 feet, 8 inches simply had to scrunch down in the seat or lean their heads to one side to prevent being wedged between the roof and seat bottom. So if you're taller than the average person, better check this accommodation out carefully before purchasing the VW/Landmark.

The Landmark Special Equipment package has as standard four pillow-back swivel bucket seats, a convertible sofa that makes into a full 78-inch dou-



The taller staffers were unable to drive the Landmark VW because of a paucity of head room (above). Otherwise (top right), the van's driver was treated to all the usual VW features. Back bench and intermediate bucket seats boosted the van's passenger capacity (near right). A cooler and sink are part of the Landmark package (far right).

LANDMARK

ble bed with full-length foam mattress, cut-loop nylon carpeting with one-inch foam pad, wood-paneled walls, padded vinyl headliner and door panels, wet bar with a top-fill icebox, stainless steel sink and beverage center, magazine rack, battery indicator, suede cloth curtains and drapes, high-intensity interior lighting, two rear speakers, spare tire carrier and cover, chrome roof rack and ladder, chrome front and rear bumpers, and Quest designer paint scheme. This special package carries a price tag of \$2627. Other optional equipment is also offered.

The test VW was fitted with a 3-speed automatic transmission controlled by a tall T-handled shift lever in the center of the driver's compartment. The steering wheel is almost flat and combined with the uncommon driver's-seat-over-the-front-wheels position, the VW offers the driver a feeling of being at the control of a city bus. But the feeling ends right there. The VW is very nimble in urban traffic and requires only a light touch to maneuver in and out of tight parking spots.

Coupled to the optional automatic transmission is a 4.09:1 rear axle ratio. The standard 4-speed manual gearbox comes with a lower 4:57 gear. Fourth gear in the manual is an overdrive which brings the effective rear axle ratio close

to that of the automatic.

The VW van has independent suspension at all four wheels, a feature which puts this vehicle right up there at the top as far as ride is concerned, especially when rough terrain of either the asphalt or dirt variety is encountered. This particular vehicle did have a suspension-related problem that was not common with previously tested VW vans. Perhaps due to the Landmark seats and interior trim plus the rear-mounted spare tire, the VW's weight was too heavily biased towards the rear, so much so that when at rest, the van's front suspension was almost fully extended, whereas the rear sagged several inches from level. What this rear weight bias does is cause the front suspension to top out when rebounding from hitting a dip in the road. If the dip is hit hard enough, the front wheels will completely leave the pavement. This is very unnerving the first time or two it happens, but what's even more unsettling is when the inside front wheel lifts during a hard turn at speed. A possible cure for this might be to mount the rear tire on the front of the vehicle instead of the rear. Even though the tire and wheel aren't all that heavy, transferring the tire and wheel from behind the rear axle to a position ahead of the front axle should result in a sizable weight transfer that should improve the weight bias. Of course, the tire at the front of the van will not look nearly as nice as it does at

the rear, but test crewmen feel strongly that good handling takes precedence over cosmetics.

This rearward weight bias also created an unusual feeling during the panic-stop-from-60-mph braking test. Hitting the brakes caused the nose of the van to dip considerably because of the extended wheel travel afforded by the suspension being at the top of its travel. Other than the test driver being surprised at the amount of nose dive, the VW stopped in a creditable 168 feet with no side sway, loss of directional control or wheel lockup. In fact, the brakes were rated excellent in all phases of the braking test and in normal driving conditions.

From a base price of \$6135 for the VW Kombi, the VW/Landmark as tested goes out the door at \$9782, which includes \$124 freight but does not include local taxes or vehicle license. So a prospective buyer has to be serious to consider this vehicle at a price of more than \$10,000 ready to roll without a radio or air conditioning. The VW/Landmark is a good looking vehicle, handles well with the exception of the weight bias, is comfortable to drive except for taller people, possesses reasonable performance, but is down on fuel economy from past years. What all this adds up to is an expensive vehicle that has a few shortcomings, which may take the VW/Landmark out of the Good Buy category.

VOLKSWAGEN/LANDMARK SPECIFICATIONS AND PERFORMANCE

PRICES

Basic list, Port of Entry	
VW Kombi	\$6135
Standard Equipment	120.2-cid
horizontally opposed Four, 4-spd manual	
transmission, adjustable driver's seat and	
backrest, passenger bucket seat, 2-spd elec-	
tric wiper/washers, electric rear window de-	
fogger, heater/defroster, power front disc	
brakes, 185R x 14C tires	

GENERAL

Curb weight, lb (test model)	3175
Weight distribution, %, front/rear	41/59
GVWR (test model)	4960
Optional GVWRs	none
Wheelbase, in.	94.5
Track, front/rear	54.9/57.3
Overall length	179.0
Overall height	77.0
Overall width	69.3
Overhang, front/rear	46.5/38.0
Approach angle, degrees	26
Departure angle, degrees	24
Ground clearances (test model):	
Front axle	11.1*
Rear axle	8.8*
Oil pan	9.4
Fuel tank	19.0
Exhaust system (lowest point)	10.4
*Clearance is 8.0 in. at front steering knuckle	
and 6.0 in. at rear shock mount	
Fuel tank capacity (U.S. gal.)	15.8
Auxiliary	none

ACCOMMODATION

Standard seats	front bucket seats
Optional seats	2-passenger
	center bench seat, 3-passenger rear bench
	seat
Headroom, in.	34.1
Accelerator pedal to seatback, max	44.9
Steering wheel to seatback, max	15.1
Seat to ground	41.3
Floor to ground	21.9
Unobstructed load space (length x	
width x height)	
With seats in place	36 x 46.8 x 34.0
Rear folded or removed	74 x 60.8 x 55.0
Tailgate (width x height)	48.5 x 28.0

INSTRUMENTATION

Instruments	speedometer, odometer, fuel
	gauge
Warning lights	oil pressure, alternator,
	hazard warning, catalytic converter, over-
	temp indicator
Optional	none

ENGINES

Standard 120.2-cid horizontally opposed Four	
Bore x stroke, in.	3.70 x 2.80
Compression ratio	7.3:1
Net horsepower @ rpm	67 @ 4200
Net torque @ rpm, lb-ft	101 @ 3000
Type fuel required	leaded or unleaded*
*Unleaded only in Calif.	
Optional	none

DRIVETRAIN

Standard transmission	4-spd manual
Transmission ratios: 4th	0.88:1
3rd	1.26:1
2nd	2.06:1

1st	3.78:1
Synchromesh	all forward gears
Optional	3-spd automatic, \$295
Transmission ratios: 3rd	1.00:1
2nd	1.45:1
1st	2.55:1
Rear axle type	spiral bevel gears
and two double-jointed rear axles	
Final drive ratios	4.09:1 (auto),
4.57:1 (4-spd)	
Overdrive	4th gear is overdrive with
manual transmission	

CHASSIS & BODY

Body/frame	unitized with
box-shaped side and crossmembers	
Brakes (std)	front, 11.2-in. dia. disc;
rear, 10.1 x 1.6-in. drum	
Brake swept area, sq in.	252
Swept area/ton (max load)	101
Power brakes	std
Steering type (std)	worm and roller
Steering ratio	17.8:1
Power steering	none
Turning circle, ft	37.1
Wheel size (std)	14 x 5.5J
Optional wheel sizes	none
Tire size (std)	185R x 14C
Optional tire sizes	none

SUSPENSION

Front suspension	independent with
transverse torsion bars, trailing arms, sta-	
bilizer bar and tube shocks	
Front axle capacity, lb	2227
Optional	none
Rear suspension	independent with
transverse torsion bars, diagonal links and	
tube shocks	
Rear axle capacity, lb	2867
Optional	none
Additional suspension options	none

TEST MODEL

VW Kombi, automatic transmission, sliding passenger windows, sunroof, California emission certification, Landmark Special Equipment Package, aluminum alloy wheels
West Coast list price (includes \$124 freight) \$9782

ACCELERATION

Time to speed, sec:	
0-30 mph	5.9
0-45 mph	12.7
0-60 mph	23.4
0-70 mph	38.8
Standing start, 1/4-mile, sec.	23.4
Speed at end, mph	60

SPEED IN GEARS

High range, 3rd (4000 rpm)	70
2nd (5500 rpm)	60
1st (5500 rpm)	38
Engine rpm @ 55 mph	3200

BRAKE TESTS

Pedal pressure required for 1/2-g deceleration	
rate from 60 mph, lb	38
Stopping distance from 60 mph, ft	168
Fade: Percent increase in pedal pressure for	
6 stops from 60 mph	18
Overall brake rating	excellent

INTERIOR NOISE

Idle in neutral, dbA	58.1
Maximum during acceleration	84.2
At steady 60 mph cruising speed	80.8

ON PAVEMENT

Handling	very good
Ride	excellent
Driver comfort	fair/very good*
Engine response	good
*Tall drivers had inadequate head room	

FUEL CONSUMPTION

City/freeway driving, mpg	15.9
Range, city/freeway driving, miles	251

