



Volkswagen's Couture Car

The Karmann Ghia brings affordable style to the masses

Was the concept for the Karmann Ghia derived from designs by Virgil Exner or Mario Boano? Was it a practical 2+2 for the ladies or a new option in sports car for the men? No matter the origin or intended driver, the Karmann Ghia was a popular addition to the Volkswagen line.

Development

While some controversy persists as to whether the Karmann Ghia was influenced by the styling of Virgil Exner's d'Elegance, the consensus agrees that the design originated with Mario Boano, who bought Carozzeria Ghia, an Italian automobile design and coach building firm, in 1944. In 1953, after building a show car for Charles Ladouche's Societe France Motors, Luigi Segre, Ghia's commercial director, bought a Beetle from Ladouche. In just 5 months, Segre presented a prototype vehicle built on the Beetle's chassis to coachbuilder, Wilhelm Karmann.





Karmann then presented the curvy coupe to Heinrich Nordhoff and Dr. Feuereisen, VW's Managing Director and Vice President respectively. The men were impressed by the styling, but Nordhoff was concerned that it would be too expensive. After some discussion, the three men struck a deal: Karmann would build the car and Volkswagen would offer it for sale. In June 1955, the first Karmann coupe was complete, but was yet to receive a name.

In July of 1955, the coupe was introduced to the European press with the moniker Karmann Ghia. Two months later, it appeared at the Frankfurt Motor Show and received praise for its "purity of line and perfection of proportion that almost takes one's breath away." (Autosport, February 15, 1957)



**The man who lives on the left owns a sports car.
The man who lives on the right fixes them.**

If the guy who fixes your sports car seems to be living beyond your means, maybe we have a solution.

It's called the Karmann Ghia.

And it was built for people who want to answer the call of the open road without making a lot of expensive pit stops along the way.

That's why we started with the guts of a Volkswagen. The same advances that went into the Beetle to make it so monotonously reliable, went into the Karmann Ghia.

Next, we turned things over to the Ghia Studios of Turin, Italy. (And you know how the Italians are when it comes

to great bodies.)

Then the Karmann Coach Works translated the Ghia design into a reality.

At that point we had a beautiful sports car that was as economical and trouble free as a Volkswagen.

So we stopped right there.



The Volkswagen Karmann Ghia





Popularity

Unique style and form led to a huge public response, helping Volkswagen sell more than 10,000 within the first production year. American industrial designer Walter Dorwin Teague even added the Ghia among his list of the world's most beautifully-designed products.

In a few years' time, the Ghia was seen as a version of automotive haute couture. Ghia was placed in the same "fashion" category as Christian Dior's New Look, symbolizing postwar prosperity with sculpted lines and superior craftsmanship. However, where Dior fashions were the height of excess, the Karmann Ghia was the epitome of styling sanity and mechanical simplicity.

The Ghia quietly slipped into VW's showrooms, letting its quality design and handling speak for itself. Enthusiasts were listening, as demand for the Karmann Ghia exceeded supply during the 1950s. In 1961 the convertible Karmann Ghia was introduced and by 1962, new techniques were developed to replace the hand labor that went into the production of the Ghia, allowing for a price drop in the U.S. of \$135.00 for a coupe and \$200.00 for a convertible.

More Than a Pretty Face

While the Karmann Ghia was acclaimed for its design, it also featured several technological advancements, from a low-profile shape and designing a coach-built body on a widened Beetle chassis. All the Ghia's windows were curved and the door and side-quarter windows were frameless.

The distinctive styling carried over into advertising as well, designed to affectionately poke fun at the Ghia's lack of racing performance. By warning that other drivers would think the Ghia was much more expensive, Volkswagen effectively secured the Karmann Ghia's place among pop culture.

During its production run, the Karmann Ghia received few exterior changes. Larger bumpers and rear signal lights were the most noticeable additions. Like the Beetle, rear suspension was introduced in 1969 and engine displacement increased from 1200cc to 1600cc. As other automotive manufacturers started offering competitive vehicles, the Ghia's popularity waned and in 1974 production ceased. It was replaced by a new, range-topping sports coupe, the VW-Porsche 914.



Maybe you don't want
to drive a wild horse,
or a man-eating tiger,
or a killer fish...



maybe you want to drive a Pussycat.

"These days, 'looking' has become the
only way to get ahead."

One day, a wild horse bit the
eye.

But the Volkswagen Karmann Ghia is
different. It's a Pussycat.

It has all the elements of a sports car
and all the trademarks of a Volkswagen.
Excessively fun. Road-charged. Total
muscle body you get in any of the
available 30 "egg and a half" sizes of

various colors.


And you can drive 40,000 miles on
all of this.

And you can drive a Pussycat for
as little as \$1,000. Or you can
drive it for \$15,000. Or you can
drive it for the whole lot.

And you can get a Pussycat. Or you
can get a Pussycat. Or you can
get a Pussycat. Or you can
get the same Pussycat and the same Pussycat.

Make a VW Karmann Ghia your
Pussycat.

It's a Pussycat. It's a Pussycat. It's a Pussycat.
It's a Pussycat. It's a Pussycat. It's a Pussycat.
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The Volkswagen
KARMANN GHIA 

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