



# Volkswagen Rims: What You Should Know

If your VW Beetle or Bus is off balance, but your tires are in good shape, you might want to take a closer look at your rims. Over the years, vintage Beetle and Bus rims have experienced subtle changes in height and style that may go unnoticed if you're not sure what to look for. Mid America Motorworks has put together this quick reference on the styles and changes.

## In the Beginning

Two manufacturers supplied the early 16" and 15" rims to Volkswagen: Kronprinz and Lemmerz. Kronprinz (KPZ) manufactured the "Standard" rim while Lemmerz manufactured the "Crowsfoot" rim. The Lemmerz Crowsfoot rim refers to the 3 raised areas around each lug nut hole on the face of the center hub that resembles a crow's foot (this was a strengthening pleat). In the 1960s, Volkswagen took over all production of rims at the factory and produced the Kronprinz Standard rim.

Original wheel diameter/width and bias ply tire sizes:

- 16" Rims – 16 x 3 ½ - 5 ½ x 16 Tires
- 15" Rims – 15 x 4 ½ - 6.40 x 15 Tires (closest radial is 175R15 – most people use 205/175R15)
- 14" Rims – 14 x 5 – 7 x 14 Tires (closest radial is 185R14 – most people use 195-75R14 or 205/70R14)

## Air Cooled Beetle Rim Changes

Beetles through September 1952 used unslotted 16" rims, size 16" x 3 ½". Unslotted rims are often referred to as 'smoothies' due to the smooth rim outside the center hub where the later style slots are located.





October 1952 for the Beetle saw the first diameter reduction of the rims from 16" to 15". The Beetle was still a 'smoothie' unslotted rim. That style would continue through 1965.

In 1966, the Beetle got a slotted rim design. The rim featured 10 slots on a 15" rim. This was a 2 year only rim design for the U.S. Beetle from 1966-1967. The European Beetle only used this rim for the 1966 model. A new hubcap that did not require mounting clips was designed for this rim to replace the well known half moon hubcap.

The U.S. Beetle saw the introduction of the 4 Lug Rim in 1968. The 4 Lug design was actually introduced in Europe with the 1967 model, but didn't make it to the U.S. until the following year. Aesthetically, the wheel looked the same as the previous version, but with subtle differences. The rim was still slotted, but featured 8 slots instead of the previous 10. A new, flatter hubcap was designed to correspond with the new rim design. 4 large 14mm lugs were used and replaced the 5 smaller 12mm lugs. This design would last for the Beetle until 1977.

Custom Beetles beginning in 1972 saw 2 different rim styles. The Baja SE Edition Beetle in 1972 has a spoke style rim that would be available for the Baja Edition and other 'custom' Beetle into the late 1970s. The Sport and Special Edition Beetles had a rim that VW referred to as the 'sport' road wheel and was available from 1973-1979.





## VW Bus Rim Changes

Barndoor Buses, 1950 to February 1955 used unslotted 16" rims, size 16" x 3 1/2", just like the Beetle. The Bus smoothie rim also had the smooth rim outside the center hub.

March 1, 1955 on Chassis #20-117902, VW Buses changed to slotted 15" rims, size 15" x 4 1/2". In Australia, all Buses came with 15" rims from 1955 until the end of 1967.

On December 19, 1963 on Chassis #1222026 (August 6, 1963 on Chassis #1145427 for 1 ton models), VW went to a 14" rim, size 14" x 5". The rim was still slotted, but the slots were smaller. There are 15" rims dated both before March 1955 and after 1964. Due to the production lead times, 15" rims had to begin production in early 1955 to be ready by March 1st. 15" rims dated after 1964 are dealer replacement stock rims to replace damaged or otherwise unusable rims. The 14" Bus rims would remain unchanged through 1970.

In 1971, circular slots were present around the entire Bus rim. Due to the new slot design, the width of the wheel increased to 5 1/2". The new Bus rim design used the flat hubcap beginning with the 1968 Beetle year.

Whether your goals are original or custom looks, it's important to know which rims fit your vintage Beetle or Bus. Using the correct rims can add safety, restore a balanced ride and add a finished look to your Volkswagen.

