



# Happy Anniversary

## The Evolution of the Karmann Ghia

In June 1955, the first unnamed Karmann coupe was born. It was introduced to the press the next month, but the car that would become the Volkswagen Karmann Ghia had a history that began much earlier. In honor of its 60th anniversary this year, we're reviewing the Ghia's path from nameless novelty to yet another VW icon.

### Pre-Production History

**1950** – Unknown to Karmann or VW, Carozzeria Ghia's owner Mario Boano designs a VW coupe. The "paper car" refines previous Ghia styling ideas. Ghia tries building the car, but VW won't supply a chassis. Meanwhile, Karmann and VW discuss building a Beetle-based sports convertible. VW's management rejects Karmann's styling concepts.

**1951** – Dr. Karmann shares the VW sports car idea with Carozzeria Ghia's commercial director, Luigi Serge. Ghia, during this year, decides to build an Exner-designed body on a Chrysler chassis.

**1952** – Ghia builds first in a series of Chrysler show cars, or Styling Specials.

**1953** – Early in the year, Mario Boano's son, Gian, acquires a VW Beetle from Charles Ladouche, the French importer of Volkswagen and Chrysler cars. Within five months, Ghia's Turin, Italy facilities complete a prototype. By late summer, Serge presents this coupe to Dr. Karmann.

**1954** – Karmann's body engineering team designs body tooling and modifies a VW chassis. Only four or five test cars were built. Since the coupe's fenders were welded into the body shell and that shell used many small pressings, there were nearly 140 inches of welds on the outer skin. Many stampings were water-cooled to prevent distortion. A convertible prototype is built.





## Timeline

Karmann Ghia, Type 14 produced from 1955-1974 in Sedan and Convertible body styles. 445,238 produced in Germany and 41,600 produced in Brazil between 1962 and 1975. Styling by Italian, Ghia. Body handmade by Karmann. Floor pan similar to Bug but 12" wider. Engine and transmission changes followed bug production dates.

**NOTE:** VW's model year begins in August. VW made changes during production runs. U.S. delivered VWs are "export" models. Often, they had deluxe trim, the largest available engines and up-to-date suspensions. However, European consumers had a choice of engines and suspensions.

### Karmann Ghia Coupe / Sedan Type 14 1956 – 1974



- 1956 Coupe shown
- 1192 cc 30hp until 1962
- 1493cc 49hp 1963-1967
- Kerb Weight 1887 lbs
- Blade style bumpers 1956-1971
- Brakes: 4 drums, single circuit until 1967
- Front suspension king and link until 1964
- 1965-1974 Ball joint front suspension
- Brake Rotors on front 1965-1974
- Dual circuit Master Cylinder 1968-1974
- 5x205 rims with domed hubcaps until 1965

#### 1955

- **June** – The first unnamed Karmann coupe was completed.
- **July 14** – Karmann offers the press a preview of the nameless VW coupe. VW decides to call the lithe coupe the Karmann Ghia. On September 14th, the car is officially introduced at the Frankfurt auto show. The Karmann-built coupe differed slightly from Ghia's prototype. Changes included twin nostril-type front apron vents, curved side glass, full-width bumpers, wider chrome strips around the windows, relocated front signal lamps, revised rear deck louvers and a repositioned Ghia fender badge.

**1956** – Karmann Ghias are made available in the U.S. Zero-60 time is 34.2 seconds.

**1957 August** – Karmann Ghia convertible production begins. Fuel gauge and an elaborate Ghia-only horn ring are introduced. Vinyl replaces cloth on the door panels. The roller accelerator wheel is replaced with a treadle pedal. September – Convertible model's official introduction at Frankfurt's international motor show. U.S. deliveries begin in 1958. Various body reinforcements compensate for the topless car's reduced body rigidity. All U.S.-bound Ghias get plumber's delight bumper overrider tubes.

**1958 August** – Door hinges get multi-position check straps.



## Karmann Ghia Coupe / Sedan Type 14 1956 – 1974



- 1972 Sedan shown
- 1968-1970 1588cc 50hp Single port engine
- 1971-1974 1588cc 54 hp Dual port engine
- 1960-1969 Taillight lens 8 3/8" x 3 1/4"
- 1970-1971 Taillight lens 10 1/2" x 3 1/2"
- 1972-1974 Square "Europa" Style Bumpers.
- 1971-1974 Flat hubcaps have 1/2" raised edge.
- 4 x130 rims 1966-1974. 4" wide 1966-1970; 4.5" wide 1971-1974

### 1959

- **April** – Revised windows and winding mechanisms.
- **August** – The Karmann Ghia loses the voluptuous front fender dip; headlights are raised two inches and the wheel arch openings are reshaped. Front nostrils are replaced by perky multi-louvered intakes. The quarter windows pop out and there are larger rear lamps. Other changes include a padded dash with grab handle; side trim length is changed; added driver side door arm rest; special Ghia horn ring replaced by semi-circular Beetle ring; steering wheel is dished.

### 1960

- **March** – Steering damper added.
- **August** – Ghia welcomes a new 40-hp 1200cc engine with fully synchronized four-speed transmission, new carburetor with automatic electric choke and a flatter gas tank that increases trunk room. This is the last year for the fuel reserve lever.

**1961 August** – Seat belt anchor provisions are installed. The front VW emblem is revised and the price is reduced to \$2,295 for coupe, \$2,495 for convertible. Worm-and-roller steering gear improves precision.



## Karmann Ghia Convertible Type 14 1956 – 1974



- 1963 Convertible shown
- 1965-1971 Blade style bumpers or bumpers with overrides offered
- 1960-1969 Smaller retro style taillights.
- 1964-1969 Front turn signals 2 1/4" diameter
- 1972-1974 Taillight lens same as Type 3; 13 1/4" x 4 1/8"
- Length of Ghia 165"
- Width 64"
- Height 52"



**1962 August** – Smaller Ghia script from Type III Ghia and the Volkswagen name installed on rear deck lid.

**1963 August** – Fresh air heating system is added and the semi-circular horn ring is dropped. Type III interior door lock controls are installed. Exterior door handles and latch assemblies are changed.

**1964**

• **April** – Convertible tops are changed. Sheet metal pressings replace castings. Various other changes through mid-1965 reduce the top's bulk.

• **April** – Two levers near the parking brake handle replace the former heater knob. Sun visors now swivel sideways. Side trim and interior lights are revised. Basket-weave vinyl seat covers are available.

**1965 August** – Larger 1300cc engine with Solex 30 PICT carburetor improves acceleration; new ball-joint front suspension increases steering precision and the semi-circular horn ring returns. Flat hub caps grace vented wheels. The battery is moved to left side of engine compartment and the air cleaner is now on the right. An ash tray is now mounted below the dashboard that sports plastic chrome trim. The swan-like, fender-mounted, rear-view mirror is replaced by a door-mounted break-away design. Front lid drain tubes are added.

**1966 August** – Type III-inspired 1500cc engine, rear “z” bar, wider rear track and “softer” rear “spring” rate. Front disc brakes. Four bolt wheels. Dual brake circuits. Final drive ratio lowers engine rpm for relaxed cruising. Twelve-volt electric system. A faux-wood dash fascia (mask) with dashboard knee pads sports mini Ghia script. Large speedometer is flanked by smaller gauges. Round, dash-mounted, fresh-air control knobs replace former levers below dash. Door locks now have buttons on door tops.

**1967 August** – Rear side reflectors. Gas filler moved to right front fender--a safety feature. It has a nifty paint protecting rubber flap. Automatic Stick-Shift with new multi-jointed rear suspension. Mirror-shaft mounted interior lamp. Seat backs taller. Trunk release moved inside lockable glove compartment. Front shoulder straps standard. Air conditioning is an option. Trigger-style exterior door handles. Column-mounted ignition switch

**1968 August** – Manual transmission model's swing axles are replaced by new multi-jointed rear suspension (IRS), which improves handling. Separate headrests on front seat backs. Electric rear window defroster. Convertible gets glass rear window. Gas filler on right fender's top has remote release. Locking steering column.



### Type 34 Karmann Ghia 1961-1973



- 42,505 produced in Sedan and convertible form.
- Type 3 Flat engine. 1500cc single carb from 1961-1963, twin carbs from 1964, 1600cc motor from 1966-1969, 12 Volt 1967-1969.
- 1500S had high compression domed pistons.
- With the four headlights and high spec engine the Type 34 was the VW flagship model in the early 1960s. Type 34s were not officially imported into the US

*Type 34 Karmann Ghia 1961-1969, “Razor’s Edge Ghia”, “Der Grosse Ghia” in Germany and “European Ghia” in the US.*





**1969 August** – Larger front and rear signal lamps. Rear lamps include back-up light. Relocated and redesigned rear reflectors, 1600cc single-port engine. Beginning during the 1970 model year there were throttle positioners--either vacuum operated or dashpots installed to reduce emissions. Air intake preheating system thermostatically controlled by engine's thermostat. Evaporative emissions system installed on California cars; this eventually becomes standard on all U.S. models. Detachable rear lid drain tray with tubes.

**1970 August** – 1600cc dual-port engine with Solex 34 PICT-3 carburetor. Thermostatically controlled air preheating system has separate thermostat on air cleaner assembly. Door locks revert to earlier style. Larger defroster outlets. Felt-style carpeting.

**1971 August** – Single blade sturdier bumpers, Type III rear tail lamps. Four-spoke collapsible steering wheel. Dashboard fascia and window sills covered by pebble-grain plastic. Inertia-locking, single-tab seat and shoulder belts. Instrument cluster redesigned. Fuel, speed and time are now indicated within two tunnel-like round dials. Revised vacuum-controlled intake air preheating system. Right stalk on steering column operates wipers. Fresh-air control knobs moved. Door window seals changed and window scrapers revised. Seat covers changed. Engine's compression ratio dropped from 7.7 to 7.3.

**1972 August** – Reinforced front bumper meets new U.S. standards. Alternator introduced during 1973 model year. Fuel pump body and push rod changed. Girling front brake calipers installed. New cylinder head alloy. Engine and transaxle mounts improved. Fasten seat belt warning system. Parking brake warning lamp. Rear "emergency seat" eliminated. Exhaust gas recirculation on California models.

**1973 August** – Rear bumper extended. Meets new bumper standard. EGR on all vehicles. California cars get Solex 34 PICT-4 carburetors and twin-tube intake manifold preheating system. Seat belt starter interlock. Small lamp beneath dash illuminates heater controls. Brake light and fasten seat belt lamp now placed together at the dash's center. VW Owner Security Blanket with Computer Analysis (12-month or 20,000-miles basic warranty) provides free "substitute transportation." VW claims a 0-60mph time of 18.5sec, top speed 90mph.

**1973 Dec. 21** – European Type I Ghia production halts, but U.S. export production continues.

**1974 June 21** – Karmann-Ghia production halts. Coupe's price: \$3,475. A Motorola-built AM radio with stereo eight-track player is a popular option.

To learn more about the Karmann Ghia's influence on pop culture, [click here](#)

