

# Car Collector

## and Car Classics

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**1937 Cord 812 Custom Beverly Sedan**  
**Seller Beware: The Purloined Packard**  
**The Grape: A Customized '55 Chevy**  
**VSCCA = Vintage Racing**



**VW —**  
**America's Finest Collection**



# AMERICA'S FINEST VW COLLECTION

## Karl Belcher's Museum for the People's Car

by Kinsley Renshaw

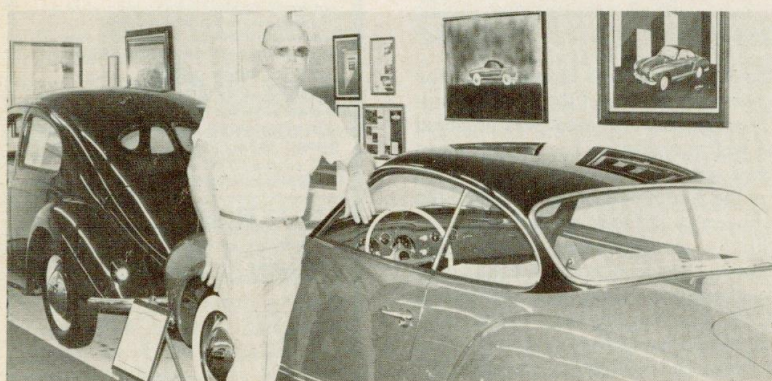
**A**esop tells us that familiarity breeds contempt, but he did not have the opportunity to become familiar with Volkswagen. Karl Belcher of El Cajon, California, has become increasingly familiar with this marque since 1961, when he signed on as mechanic's helper at a VW dealership. Eleven years later, as used car foreman, he left to open his own Volkswagen repair business with his wife, Mary. Their shop now employs six people and has given the Belchers the resources to collect and present the car that has been an important part of their lives. Inspired by years of work with the VW, they have established a museum for this little giant of automotive history.

In 1977 the Belchers began the col-

lection that now numbers nine cars; two currently in restoration, the remainder in original condition or restored. To house this display, a horse barn was remodeled in 1980 for six of the cars and the extensive collection of literature, miniatures, and parts that seem to follow collector cars like the blue cloud following an oil burner. The barn supplemented an existing three-bay detached garage and the single-bay garage attached to their house.

This group of Volkswagens ranges from a 1949 standard sedan — the "beetle," purchased from the president of the Vintage VW Club — to a 1964 1500S notchback which has recently undergone a ground-up restoration. The rarest car in the collection is a 1950

*Hebmuller*, a two-seat convertible produced from late 1948 until mid-1950. One of 696 units produced, *Hebmuller* body number 433 was restored in Germany, purchased by telephone, and shipped by airplane to California in April 1982. It is one of 43 known extant. The Belcher's favorite is the 1958 Karmann Ghia with 498 original miles. They purchased this red and black beauty from the estate of a Dallas VW dealer after it spent 20 years in storage. A 1960 sedan with prototype "Saxomat" transmission, so named for the Sax brothers who designed and built it for Volkswagen, is the collection's showpiece. This four-speed automatic was in production only a short time and is not found on any cars built for export to the US. Accompanying this sunroofed gem to meets is a trailer fabricated by Karl from a Mullins design and trimmed with VW bumper, lights, and wheels. Among its many awards, this beetle boasts four from the "Wheeling '82" show in San Diego including the Best of Show and People's Choice. Another unusual model, at least to American eyes, is the 1963 1500S Ghia, a model which was not exported to the US. Dual carbs and high-lift cam afford the European Ghia more power than standard Ghias. An original 1952 sedan which was exported to France, brought to the US by an Englishman, and purchased from him in California rounds out the Belcher's collection. This car features unique



Karl Belcher stands next to the prize of his collection, a 1958 Karmann-Ghia with exactly 498 miles on it since new. (Mary Belcher photo)





June 1984

11





A rear view of the 1950 VW Hebmüller, a two-passenger convertible produced for almost two years, #433 of 696 built. (Vince Manocchi photo)



This all-original 1952 sedan was imported from France. Note the extremely rare "frog eye" headlights. (Mary Belcher photo)



(left) Another shot of the 1958 Karmann-Ghia coupe. Paintings in the background were done by Karl Belcher's son-in-law. (bottom left) All that was required on this rare (never exported to the US) 1963 Karmann-Ghia coupe was detailing; it was a fine original car. (bottom right) This 1949 standard sedan is one of the older VW's in America. It features a 900cc/25 bhp engine. Note split rear window and tiny taillights. (Mary Belcher photo)







The 1956 sedan has a redesigned dashboard and horsepower is increased to 36. The accessory fender skirts are from Foxcraft. (Mary Belcher photo)

“frog-eye” headlights as original equipment. All of these Volkswagens are in excellent driving condition, and all but the '58 Ghia and the '49 sedan are driven occasionally.

The highlight of the young museum's life has been its role as the site of the 1983 national meeting of the Vintage Volkswagen Club in April. Approx-

mately 50 members of the club brought their cars and about 30 non-member Volkswagens were also in attendance, including six *Hebmüllers*.

The Volkswagen museum may be visited by appointment. Contact the Belchers at (619) 461-5711, during business hours (Pacific Standard Time), to reserve a time. They look forward to



This is the 1950 Hebmüller from the front quarter. Rare even when new, only 43 are known to exist today. (Vince Manocchi photo)



Karl Belcher demonstrates how to crank a beetle. More than two decades have passed since VW came equipped with a “handle.” (Vince Manocchi photo)

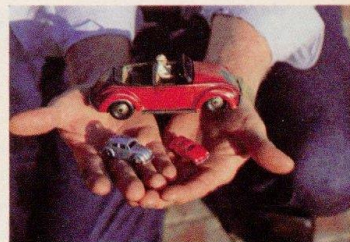
sharing their knowledge and enthusiasm.

The two projects currently occupying the Belchers' time are the restorations of a 1956 convertible and a 1955 Karmann Ghia coupe. The Ghia is body number 1070, the oldest known,



A pair of pedal cars provide a fine counterpoint to the collection. Shown are a Rabbit convertible and a Karmann convertible. (Vince Manocchi photo)

purchased by the Belchers in Davenport, Iowa. In addition to these restorations, work has begun on a new five-bay garage — more space than is now needed. Those unassigned stalls could be taken by the military vehicles the Belchers have been looking for: the *Kubelwagen*, prototype for the Thing, and the *Schwimmwagen*, an amphibious vehicle, both built from 1942 to 1945.



Shades of the Miniature Car Collector: Belcher shows model VW's in three different scales. (Vince Manocchi photo)





Karl Belcher with a portion of his toy Volkswagen collection. (Mary Belcher photo)



Other Volkswagen artifacts on display in a corner of the museum. (Mary Belcher photo)

Examples are known in England and California but the combination of price and condition has not been right.

The walls of the museum are covered with promotional posters, articles on some of the models displayed, photographs of the Wolfsburg assembly lines, and original paintings of each of their cars by their son-in-law. Also on display are many parts and accessories, both aftermarket and NOS. The collection of literature includes manuals, sales and promotional material, and popular works. Several shelves of miniatures and memorabilia supply the finishing touches of the collection.

To keep themselves thoroughly informed about their passion, the Belchers belong to five clubs dedicated to VW, including the *Hebmuller Club*, Split-window Club, and the Volkswagen Club of London. They have also used the Volkswagen archives and Harrah's Museum library for production and technical information. Their invaluable professional experience coupled with their research has given them an important base upon which to build the collection.

This Volkswagen shrine has been assembled by a couple truly devoted to the marque, its promotion as a collectible, and its recognition as a prime collector car. Their motivation, expressed by Mrs. Belcher, is to raise people's consciousness about the VW and promote the idea that it is time to recognize it as a major league collectible.



### THE VWCA: A CLUB FOR VOLKSWAGEN OWNERS

Founded in 1976, with a current membership of 850 ("and growing daily"), the Vintage Volkswagen Club of America is the number one club in the United States for owners of Volkswagens 25-years-old or older. The organization is open to any VW lover, and ownership of an old VW is not a prerequisite for eligibility. The yearly dues of \$15 (US & Canada) and \$22 (overseas) covers the subscription to a fine monthly 12-16 page newsletter which contains restoration tips, news of coming and past events, photos from meets, chapter news, and a classified ad section (VW-related ads free to members).

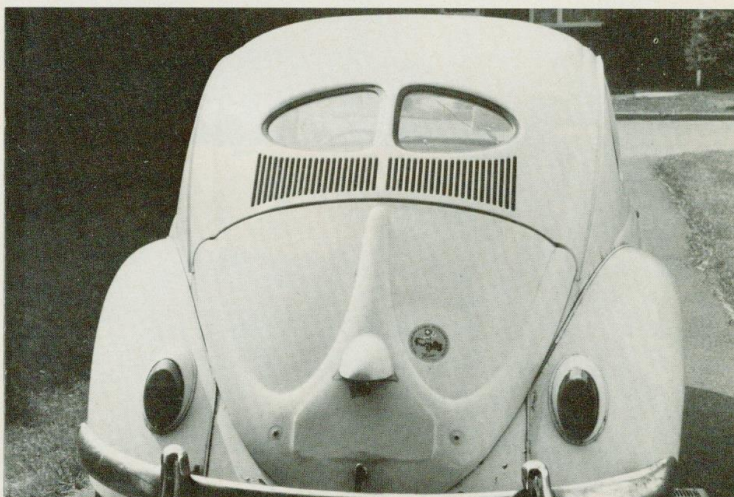
The club is divided into two regions, the Eastern and the Western, which alternate in producing the newsletter. Dues checks should be made out to the VVWCA and sent to either:

**EASTERN REGION:**  
Terry Shuler  
817 Fifth Street  
Cresson, Pennsylvania 16630  
(814) 886-2421

**WESTERN REGION:**  
Joseph Crockett  
3917 Carol Avenue  
Santa Barbara, Calif. 93110  
(805) 682-8196

The next major Vintage VW Club event is in Elmsford, New York, on Sunday, May 20th, and is called the VVWCA Spring Meet. Entrants for the judging or for the swap meet should contact Howard Holmes VW, 175 Saw Mill River Road, Elmsford, N.Y.

A new book on the Volkswagen by Terry Shuler (eastern director of the VVWCA) will be finished later this summer and published by Automobile Quarterly of Princeton, New Jersey. It uses original sales literature as a medium and will cover the years 1938 through 1983. Watch for it this fall!



This 1943 VW Type 82E (KdF body on a Kubelwagen chassis with Kubelwagen engine) carries body #635, making it the 635th KdF body produced at the Wolfsburg VW factory. It is the oldest known VW in America and Terry Shuler has just started a complete restoration of the vehicle. (Only about 1300 KdF bodies were built during the war years, with about half of them used on normal Type 1 sedans and the other half for behind-the-lines use on Kubelwagen chassis.) (Vince Manocchi photo)