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RARE HEBMÜLLER

Correctly Restored Type 14 A



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THE HEBMÜLLER



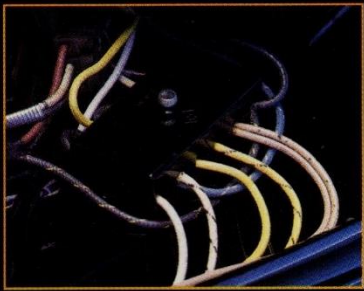
OBSESSION

By Andrew Kiemm

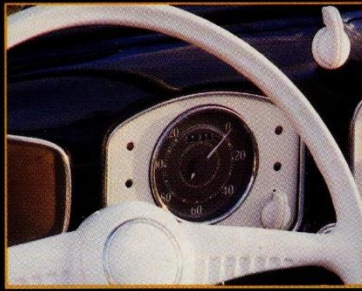
PHOTOGRAPHY: LES BIDRAWN

My involvement with Volkswagens began when I was 15 years old, when my father bought me a 1972 Squareback. It was a project and it did not run but it was all mine; I tried to work on it, but I eventually got fed up with the fuel injection and gave up. I didn't get the fever again until a few years later when my friend Mike Ferraiz bought and restored a 1960 Bug convertible. By this time there was a demand for old Volkswagens from overseas. Both Mike and I started to restore and sell a few cars while attending college, and as I got more involved with the restoration of these old cars I grew more passionate. Because of this passion, I was able to start a small business restoring and selling VWs.





Wire Works provided a new cloth-wrapped wiring harness that closely replicates the original.



The original weathered instrument pod was restored by John, while the steering wheel and horn button were restored by Koch's in Canyon Country.



color. I decided to go with two-tone black with a maroon center. Tony applied the Glasurit line 21, two gallons of black and one gallon of maroon.

While the body and paint were being tended to, the original pan was stripped down by Phil Diaz and sent to Orange County Plating to be powdercoated with semi-gloss black, including the original 16-inch wheels. During this time, the complete front end, crash-box transmission, and the original 25-hp engine also were being completely rebuilt by Bob Mohler of Orange, California.

Once I had the body and pan back at my shop in Orange, I went straight to work putting the pieces back together with help from John McKeighan (aka "Long Hair John") and Rafael Gutierrez. John did most of the fine detail work as well as making sure all the parts being put on the Heb were correct and exact. I also am grateful to Dave over at the Guild, who was able to make the wood bows and tack strip from scratch.

Once the body was on the fresh chassis, I took it over to West Coast Classics to have the canvas top and German square-weave carpet installed. Jesse, who has done many vintage VWs, handled the top and carpet. After he was done it was back to Kustom 1, where resident upholsterer, Octavio Gutierrez, finished off the interior with leather seats and door panels. Once all the major components of the restoration were done it was time for the final detail, which was done mostly by John.

Throughout my involvement with Volkswagens I have been lucky to own and work on some rare models, including a 1958 Ghia convertible, split-window Bugs, a 1958 Rometsch convertible, and a 1952 23-window Deluxe. However, this 1950 Type 14 Hebmüller #433 is by far the rarest and most expensive car I have ever restored; it also is the most difficult, due to the fact I wanted the restoration to be 100 percent perfect. This restoration took more than a year and caused me numerous headaches and heartaches, not to mention a ton of money.

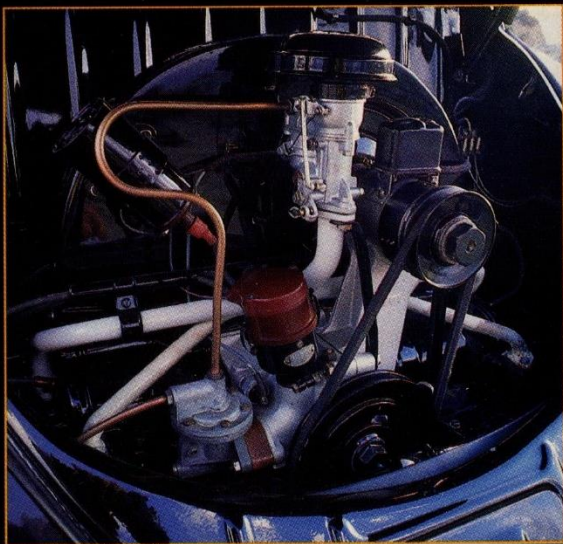
This Heb made its way to me via Ed Economy, who got it through a trade with Mac Jones. My understanding is this Heb was brought from Germany by "Peanut" who lives in San Diego. It was one of three Hebs brought into California some 15 to 20 years ago. Anyway, I'm glad this one made its way to me. As soon as I received

the Heb I completely disassembled it, exercising care and taking notes on all the parts to make it easier to reassemble later. I was unsure whom to trust with the body and paint, but I soon decided to go with Tony Ochoa. Tony has worked on many vintage Volkswagens and I was familiar with his work. The paint and body were the most difficult parts of the restoration since they either make or break the car, especially a car as rare as the Heb. The Heb had been restored some 22 years ago in Germany; at that time the restorer replaced the heater channels and made some other rust repairs using later Bug parts. Tony was able to replace the heater channels and other wrong sheet metal with the correct parts. After a tremendous amount of time preparing the body for paint, it was time to choose the



LEFT and BELOW: Octavio Gutierrez re-covered the repainted seat frames using Biscuit Reno-colored leather with black piping.





ABOVE: The 25-hp engine was rebuilt by Bob Mohler of Orange, California. For the air cleaner, an original late '49 and early '50 Hebmüller offset mushroom-style air cleaner was used. This is the correct unit for this year car; not the "T" style found on later Hebmüllers.

RIGHT: John was lucky when it came time to rebuild the semaphores; they were in very good condition and just needed a little work. The lenses are original and just needed cleaning and polishing.



I tried to pay close attention to everything and it almost became an obsession to get everything right, but I finally realized all I could do was my best. The pictures you see

before you are the result of a lot of hard work from all the people I mentioned above. Without their help, I would not be able to share this very rare piece of Volk-

swagen history. In closing I am proud to say Heb #433 will be put on display in a Volkswagen museum, which is being built by Mr. Kamori in Japan.



By Lee Thomas Hedges

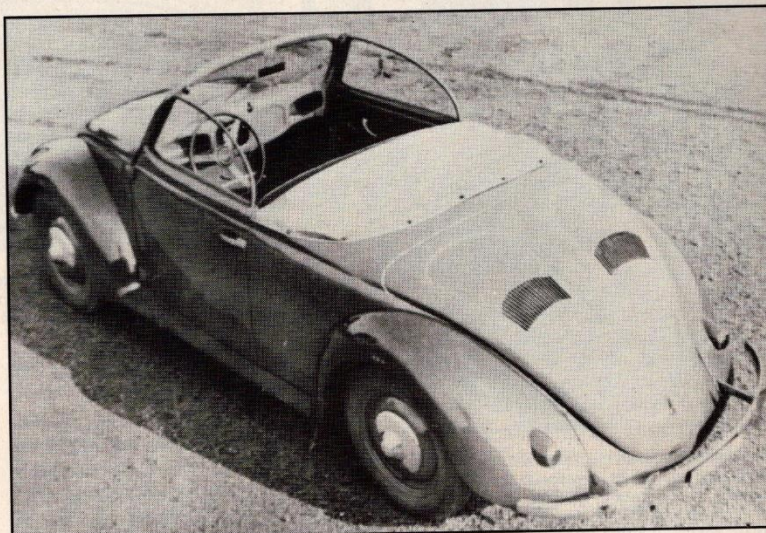
By far the most beloved vintage Volkswagen is the VW Type 14A Hebmüller. Every VW enthusiast dreams of finding one hidden in an old garage, inheriting one from a long-lost German relative, or trading up to get the chance to restore one. And why not? The Hebmüller was mass produced from 1949-'50 and only in small numbers from 1951-'53. There were only about 750 built and little more than 100 remain today in the entire world. Most enthusiasts know the Heb by sight, but few know the real history behind the legend.

When Heinz Nordhoff took control of factory operations at the new Volkswagenwerk factory in January 1948, he realized three things were critical to Volkswagen's long term success: refinement of the Beetle, development of a worldwide export market, and the expansion of VW's "one model line" trend by developing variations of the Beetle. To create a higher quality product, he implemented stringent development processes along with exacting testing standards. To develop an export program, he enlisted distributors around the world and designed a "deluxe" version of the basic Beetle Sedan. Expansion of the VW model line was the next big step for Nordhoff, and two convertible models were envisioned.

Since the VW factory could not support additional model production, Nordhoff established communication with two of Germany's best coachbuilders, with hope they could handle production. Wilhelm Karmann Coachworks was in Osnabruck and Josef Hebmüller & Sons was located nearby in Wuppertal. Josef Hebmüller had been building horse-drawn carriages since 1889, and in 1919 had begun modifying automobiles for manufacturers. During the years, both firms had built a solid reputa-

VW TYPE 14A:

THE HEBMÜLLER STORY



The first VW-based two-seater Cabriolet, built by the British Forces at the VW factory in 1946 for Colonel Charles Radclyffe, a high-ranking British Occupation operations officer. Notice the "cow catcher" bumpers, the unique decklid louvres, curved windscreen and the rounded-off side windows. This one-off was the grandfather for the VW Type 14A Hebmüller.

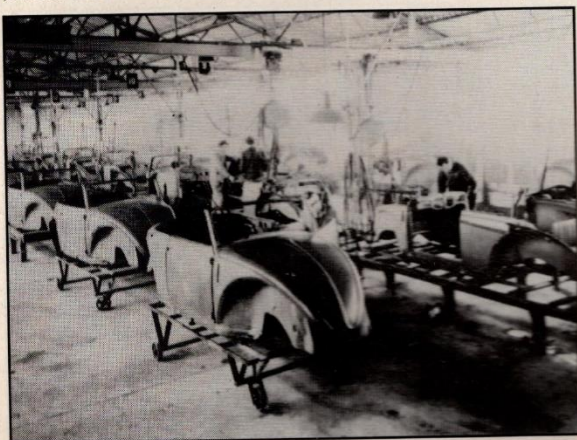
tion for high-quality luxury conversions. When VW met Hebmüller and Karmann in 1948, two Beetle-based convertible models were discussed: one with seating for four and the other for only two. Hebmüller had been building VW Type 18A Beetle Cabriolets since 1947, primarily for police and civil patrols, making it a natural choice for a Cabriolet subcontractor.

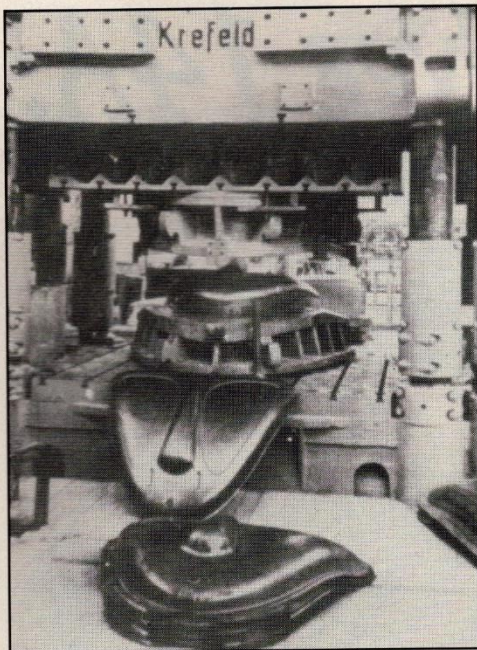
In May 1948 Nordhoff awarded the four-seater Cabriolet project to Karmann and the two-seater project to Hebmüller.

Hebmüller began prototype construction in mid-1948; three were completed later that year, all based on 1945-'46 Beetle Sedans. When the Sedan roof was removed the body flexed badly, requiring massive structural reinforcements to

BELOW, LEFT: Factory assembly lines at Hebmüller & Sons in 1949. The crude rolling dollies were used to transfer the in-process bodies from one end of the factory to the other. Notice the front fender semaphores mounted flush into the panel, unlike the Karmann Cabriolet semaphores which were mounted behind the doors. There are 18 Hebs in this photo alone!

BELOW, RIGHT: Six Beetle chassis are towed onto the Hebmüller lot to be mated to the completed Hebmüller bodies, with a worker sitting on each floor-pan and three finished Hebs parked in the background.





The single most distinguishing feature of the VW Hebmüller is the engine lid, with its long scoop housing the brake light. Imagine what a stack of NOS Hebmüller rear deck lids, such as the ones in this photo, would be worth today!

the pan, windshield pillars, sills, and both front and rear compartments. The windshield frame was redesigned with a squared frame at the top, increasing strength and providing enhanced visibility. For the pan, "Z-" section box-shaped beams were fitted beneath the sills to avoid chassis flex and poor door alignment. All three prototypes featured a unique rear engine lid and used the standard "Pope's nose" license/brake light housing, a feature later redesigned for the final production models and which is the single most identifying Hebmüller feature. A prototype Type 14A Coupe also was

In this early 1950 photo there are 28 Hebmüllers shown together, both in two-tone and monotone color schemes. Small logo hubcaps help identify these Type 14As as 1950 models, as the earlier 1949s were fitted with large logo caps.



ABOVE: This 1950 Hebmüller is painted with custom lettering and a cross, possibly the personal car for an important German official. The long rear engine lid profile is clearly evident in this perspective, along with the tiny rear window.

built in mid-1948, but was later destroyed in an accident.

Pre-production testing took place in April 1949 with a single Hebmüller car, which was put through an exhaustive 10,000-kilometer all-terrain course that it passed with full marks. Once Nordhoff saw the finalized Hebmüller two-seater he gave his approval for mass production and soon after, VW placed an initial order for 2000. At that time VW also gave it an official model designation, VW Type 14A, and the Karmann four-seater Cabriolet became the VW Type 15A. The production model VW Type 14A had a redesigned rear engine lid with a beautiful scoop serving as the brake light housing. "Deluxe-" model body trim also was added to match the Deluxe export-model Beetle and Karmann four-seater Cabriolet. The prototype's rear engine lid louvers were relocated

to the rear cowl for enhanced cooling and family resemblance to the Beetle Sedan.

The public's first glimpse of the Type 14A was in March 1949 at the Geneva Auto Show where it drew rave reviews, and production began in June 1949. Each was fitted with the standard Beetle running gear, which included the 1131cc 25-horsepower VW engine, "crash-box" transmission, cable brakes, and 16-inch tires; it could cruise at 60 mph and get 30 mpg. It was marketed, sold, distributed, and serviced by Volkswagen dealerships and service departments. Prices for both the Hebmüller and Karmann Cabriolets were DM7500, 55 percent more than the standard model Beetle Sedan that sold for DM4850. Hebs were available in a variety of color combinations including two-tone and monotone; the most popular combinations were Black and Ivory, Coral Red and Ivory, and solid Black.

Mid-1949 production at Hebmüller was

This photo clearly shows the final detailing stage at Hebmüller. Each body has been fitted with a completed pan, the interior has been installed, the bumpers and body trim have been fitted, and the only thing left to do is install the hub caps.



steady at about 25 cars per month when disaster struck the factory – FIRE! Saturday July 23, 1949 (only two months after production began), a fire broke out in the paint area and advanced onto the production floor, destroying both departments and causing the factory roof to collapse on top of vehicles and machinery. Although the fire occurred under suspicious circumstances and was never fully explained, it took Hebmüller only four weeks to fix the damage and get back on track. By October it built almost 40 cars, and the following month it passed the 100-per-month milestone. Even though production was showing positive signs, Hebmüller's financial support began to weaken, and by the beginning of 1950 funds promised to Hebmüller were withdrawn. This caused the factory to stop production in April 1950 after only 681 Hebs were built. In 1951, Karmann continued limited assembly of Type 14A cars from the remaining parts inventory, with only 15 cars having been built from 1951-'53. By 1952, the Hebmüller company declared bankruptcy.

Volkswagen claims total of 696 Type 14A Hebmüllers were produced, although most Hebmüller experts believe 750 is a more realistic number, since a few Hebs still in existence have body numbers greater than 700. Body numbers from two 1950 Hebs are #705 and #710, and two 1953 Hebs are #730 and #731.

BELOW: Authentically restored Hebmüllers command the highest prices in today's market, usually from \$50,000 to \$65,000 when fitted with the original 25-hp 1131cc engine and "crash-box" transmission, 16-inch wheels and cable brakes.



One plausible explanation for this discrepancy is that as Hebmüller was building steam to increase production in early 1950, it may have begun a massive buildup of Type 14A body sections, most of which were not completed when they lost financial backing and were forced to stop production. These unfinished bodies were not counted as completed Hebmüllers, so VW did not count them into the official production record. When Karmann continued production the unfinished bodies were then completed, and may have contributed to the greater number of Type 14 body numbers. Whatever the real explanation, fewer than 110 Hebs exist today of the 700-plus produced from 1949-'53.



VW produced the first Hebmüller sales brochure in mid-1949 with this great cover showing the top folding flush with the bodyline. The black-and-white two-page brochure never mentioned Hebmüller as the manufacturer, but simply called it the Volkswagen two-seater Cabriolet.

For those of you interested in adding a Hebmüller to your collection, there are several available today with varying prices that heavily depend on condition and originality. The oldest known Heb in North America, number 14-006, was recently sold in December 1997 for \$35,000 to a serious VW collector in Texas. He did a great deal of investigation of Heb conditions and prices, and found most Hebs have been modified mechanically, fitted on 1961 pans or with full-synchro trans-

missions and later-model engines. Highest values in the \$50-65,000 range were found with restored authentic Hebs, correctly done with their original pans, 25-hp engines, "crashbox" trans, cable brakes, and 16-inch wheels. Mid-range Heb values in the \$30-35,000 range were unrestored authentic ones that were complete and original but not yet fully restored. Lower-range Hebs were priced from \$25-30,000 and usually weren't authentic restorations, having later pans and mechanical components. Some

continued on page 58

RIGHT: One of the finest and most-driven restored Hebmüllers belongs to Bill Collins in New Hampshire. This Coral Red and White 1949 Heb features accessory Foxcraft fender skirts, extra brake lights, and a very rare original radio. The top folds down completely behind the short rear seat for an elegant profile and unique look.



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HISTORY continued from page 58

would say \$40,000 is too expensive for an old VW, but it is quite possible that an authentic VW Type 14A Hebmüller may command as much as 10 times that price in the future. Get them now while they are cheap!

Two of the nicest restored Hebmüllers in the United States today are a Coral Red and White 1949 owned by Bill Collins in New Hampshire, and a solid black 1949 owned by Dick Christensen in Arizona. Bill's '49 Heb was featured in the April 1993 *VW Trends* and is driven everywhere, having logged more than 16,000 miles since he's owned it, winning awards at each event he attends. Dick's '49 Heb is widely considered the most accurate full restoration ever done on a Hebmüller, befitting his high standards and fine VW collection. In the best original unrestored class, Don Garies' new 1949 Heb #6 from Dallas, Texas is going to be the one to watch. It is original down to its 25-hp engine and "crashbox" trans, with four-wheel cable brakes, 16-inch wheels, and still has an old "banjo" steering wheel. Once it's completed, you can bet *VW Trends* will be the first to feature it in living color.

Since there is precious little information available on the true Hebmüller history, this article could not have been as complete as it is without the previous research done by several legends in the vintage VW world. Articles done by Bob Gilmore, Keith Seume, and Bob Shaill were a tremendous help in getting the facts straight. Also, many of the rare photos in this article are from VW *Beetle Coachbuilts & Cabriolets* by Seume & Shaill, *Essential VW Beetle Convertible* by Seume, and from the personal collection of Bill Collins. 🐞

PRODUCTION DATA

1948 prototypes	.3
1949	.359
April (test car)	.1
June	.27
July	.28
August	.24
September	.17
October	.39
November	.104
December	.119
1950	.319
January	.125
February	.100
March	.77
April	.17
1951 Karmann begins production	1
August	.1
1952	.13
May	.12
December	.1
1953	.1
February	.1
TOTAL	.696