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# Volkswagen Cabriolet

A stiff price for a Rabbit, but a breeze on the road.

BY PHIL BERG

• Convertibles are throwback cars. Advances in automotive noise reduction and climate-control systems have made modern cars quiet, isolated cocoons. But peel the top off a car and you're riding in history: the environment assails you—as it did in the innocent days of motoring.

Today, convertibles are rare: only about one out of every 75 cars sold in the U.S. is a ragtop. It's not surprising, there-

fore, that the choice of convertibles is limited and that droptops are more expensive than their hard-roof counterparts. In 1965, a convertible top on a Mustang was a \$200 option. Today, convertibles usually cost several thousand dollars more than equivalent hardtop models. The reason: most are built in small volumes from beheaded sedans.

Finding a four-seat convertible for less

than \$20,000 is no easy task. Until the new Chevy Beretta, Oldsmobile Cutlass Supreme, and Geo Metro I.Si convertibles are ready, your choice for a four-seat convertible is limited to six cars: the Chevrolet Camaro RS, the Chrysler LeBaron, the Ford Mustang, the Pontiac Sunbird, the Volkswagen Cabriolet, and the Yugo Cabrio.

The Best Buy is the VW Cabriolet.





which is priced at \$16,630 including air conditioning and a cassette stereo. Three models are available: the base Cabriolet, the Bestseller, and the Boutique, the last two editions carrying price premiums of \$695 and \$1255, respectively.

The Cabriolet feels solid and tight, and it runs like a 1983 Rabbit GTI—not surprising, because that's the sedan upon which it's based. In 1983, the GTI was a killer machine. Now, however, the Cabriolet's 11.6-second 0-to-60-mph sprint is mediocre. Honda Civics, Acura Integras, and Mazda 323s can run it out of town. But, of course, the Japanese cars don't let you stuff two beach bunnies in the back seat and soak up rays.

Imagine rolling down an endless strip of smooth asphalt next to the ocean, with no particular place to go, a sweet wind massaging your body, happy music coming from the Cabriolet's four speakers, and . . . well, snap out of it. That will happen once a year, unless you live in Bodega Bay. Most likely what you'll do with the Cabriolet is drop the top every other day for the five warm months of the year—popping it back up each time you have to park away from your protective

view. This is not an easy chore in the VW, but in the winter you'll appreciate the Cabrio's tightfitting top, complete with suedelike headliner. The Cabriolet trades some ease of open-air motoring for fine all-weather drivability.

The Cabriolet is hip transport in the sunbelt—especially in Los Angeles—thanks to its mini-luxury-car upholstery, refined performance, and indisputable style. In fact, in warm climes the perky VW seems to be *everywhere*—particularly in all-white Boutique form. We spotted a recent Los Angeles *Times* classified ad that read: "Maroon VW Cabriolet. Everyone has a white one—be different."

When it comes to practicality, build quality, driving manners, and chicness, the VW Cabriolet is an unbeatable value. Even though convertibles by nature almost require that you throw sensible, fiscally responsible thinking out the open roof, the Cabriolet remains a versatile, efficient package that makes good sense.

#### HONORABLE MENTIONS

**Chrysler LeBaron Convertible (\$16,767):** The appealing shape of the LeBaron is compromised by squeaks and

shakes on the road. A 3.0-liter V-6 with a five-speed is available, but it bumps the LeBaron's price well over \$18,000.

**Pontiac Sunbird LE Convertible (\$15,089):** Less expensive than the VW and sporting an electric top, the Sunbird LE is somewhat lacking in overall refinement and performance. An optional turbo engine, which edges the price as high as the VW's, improves acceleration but not drivability.

#### Volkswagen Cabriolet

Vehicle type: front-engine, front-wheel-drive, 4-passenger, 2-door convertible

Price as tested: \$16,630

Options on test car: base Volkswagen Cabriolet, \$15,485; air conditioning, \$825; freight, \$320

Standard accessories: rear defroster

Engine type: SOHC 4-in-line, iron block and aluminum head, Bosch KA-Jetronic port fuel injection	
Displacement	109 cu in, 1781cc
Power (SAE net)	90 bhp @ 5500 rpm
Transmission	5-speed
Wheelbase	94.5 in
Length	153.1 in
Curb weight	2373 lb
Zero to 60 mph	11.6 sec
Standing 1/4-mile	18.3 sec @ 74 mph
Top speed	93 mph
Braking, 70-0 mph	190 ft
Roadholding, 300-ft-dia skidpad	0.77 g
EPA fuel economy, city driving	25 mpg