



B+B Diamant

"We like what we're doing"—Rainer Buchmann, B+B Auto Exklusiv

• Can you imagine the reaction down at Solidarity House when news of the latest import to penetrate our shoreline strikes the first-alert desk? Some poor United Auto Workers analyst, frustrated sick over the futility of the latest contract concessions intended to keep the LTD line pumping a few more units out to indifferent consumers, is bound to fold up his papers and start screaming for cell padding. Think of it: a Volkswagen Rabbit with paint so pearlescent that any insurance company would consider it jewelry, enough on-board electronics to start a war with the Ruskies, and a TWENTY-FIVE-THOUSAND-DOLLAR PRICE TAG! Have those foreigners no mercy?

Well, no, as a matter of fact. But they do have an inspiration that's tough to imagine down in the auto-labor trenches. It's a matter of taking the best cars built in Germany and making them better. Not only is cost no object, it's a goal. In perfecting just such a ploy,

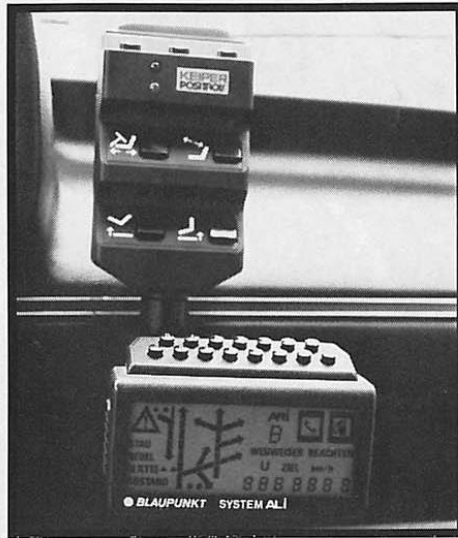
the small firm B+B Auto Exklusiv has promoted itself into one of the world's leading boutiques of high-style, high-end automobiles. Porsche, BMW, Mercedes, and Volkswagen have all enjoyed the satisfaction of having B+B creativity applied to their products. Waves of interest have rippled around the world, and B+B's small (but newly expanded) factory in Frankfurt am Main, West Germany, is systematically churning out a backlog of orders. What better time to move to America?

Actually, it would be premature to place your order just yet, but Rainer Buchmann, one of the Bs of B+B, has recently shopped Newport Beach, California, for real-estate opportunities. A prominent Pacific Coast Highway frontage is high on his list for two reasons: a well-heeled clientele already traffics those environs, and the location is comfortably close to Southern California's epicenter of electronic know-how. All this

means that an American outlet for B+B's German design factory is imminent. Furthermore, Buchmann recently shipped over his most contemporary project as sort of a high-visibility calling card. It's the B+B Diamant on these pages, a car that appropriately enough is typical of designs destined for America.

While your mind may tune to "Turbo Targa" or "rainbow stripes" at the mention of the B+B call letters, Mr. Buchmann reports that the true future of his firm is electronics. As he tells it, the Rabbit convertible series unveiled at the 1979 Geneva show offered an ideal opportunity to gain practical experience with B+B's own car computer. You should realize right off that we're not talking about digital clocks here; the B+B system is undoubtedly the most sophisticated set of silicon chips ever available to the car-buying public. The price, a cool \$3500 (plus your car), should tell you that this is in the IBM

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DANA BARTON



and alloy wheels from the well-known BBS firm; and seen-here-for-the-first-time-ever Dunlop SP Sport D3 tires. Ten color schemes were produced, and each got its own precious-gemstone sobriquet. The very first prototype, on these pages, is called the Diamant ("diamond"), in keeping with the blazing whiteness of its candy coating.

The interior is every bit as delectable. The Diamant's driver's seat is a Recaro C-type with computer memory and sumptuous white leather upholstery. It can be programmed with three distinct sets of fore-and-aft, back-rest-angle, and seat-bottom-angle adjustments, and will thereafter home in on your favorite spot(s) at the touch of a button. The sound system includes state-of-the-art Blaupunkt modular components feeding no fewer than sixteen speakers an ear-twitching 80 watts of power. The final touch is yet another computer system, called the Blaupunkt ALI. This device is *the* James Bond road-information system we've all been waiting for! Punch in a destination code at the onset of a journey and ALI displays a miniature liquid-crystal map of what lies ahead, complete with the locations of telephones, fuel stations, restaurants, traffic congestion, accident sites, inclement weather, or just about anything you're bound to encounter on the way to Grandma's for Sunday dinner. (Except, of course, that luscious lady spy in the Mustang convertible.) ALI will tell you when to turn, what lane is most expedient, and what velocity to maintain. Right now the system is active only in Germany's Ruhr Valley (near Cologne), but there are already 400 units in day-to-day use. (The project is a cooperative effort between Volkswagen, Blaupunkt, and the German government.) As you might expect, the road system must be laced with a maze of wires, sensors, and transmitters, but the mobile transceiver units are, to the contrary, relatively compact and inexpensive

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

Price as tested: \$25,000

Engine type: 4-in-line, iron block and aluminum head, Bosch K-Jetronic fuel injection

Displacement	.....	.97 cu in, 1590cc
Power (SAE net)	.....	110 bhp @ 6100 rpm
Transmission	.....	5-speed
Wheelbase	.....	94.4 in
Length	.....	155.3 in
Curb weight	.....	2300 lbs
Wheels	.....	BBS 6.0 x 14 in
Tires	.....	Dunlop SP Sport D3, 195/60HR-14
Sound system	.....	Blaupunkt tape deck, tuner, 80-watt amplifier, 16 speakers
Road information system	.....	Blaupunkt ALI
On-board computer	.....	B+B Dinfos
Front seats	.....	Recaro model C (driver's side computer-controlled)

(roughly \$300 apiece, says Buchmann). Whether or not America and the UAW will ever be blessed with wired-for-travel highways, it appears that our prosperity level has at least reached a plateau worthy of Mr. Buchmann and company. For that we can be thankful. We predict Southern California will swallow up all he has to offer like a San Andreas Fault, and we wish him the best of luck in the land of cuckoos. —Don Sherman

360 class, at least as far as car computers are concerned.

A few years back, when B+B first delved into this field, it found existing computer hardware woefully inadequate for cars. So with a typically Teutonic sense of duty, this small firm decided to invent its own transducers, display devices, software (computer programs), and hardware (electronic circuits) around an existing Zilog Z80 64 kilo-byte microprocessor. (Zilog is an Exxon subsidiary. Its Z80 chips cost less than twenty dollars each in small quantities.) To date, only 15 percent of the computer's mental capacity has been exploited, but already its performance is unprecedented, at least in a car application available to the public. The B+B Dinfos computer delivers the usual trip-analysis information at the touch of a couple of buttons: fuel used, distance, elapsed time, average speed, and average mpg. It will display four time-to-speed measurements after a standing-start acceleration run. It will flash all the pertinent under-hood data including instantaneous mpg, oil pressure and temperature, water temperature, engine rpm, etc. And it will light up a red warning beacon if any of the vital signs drift into a danger zone. All that, of course, has been done before. What's new is that the B+B Dinfos can be

programmed quickly to spit out just about any additional information pertaining to the car, that it speaks to its operator through alphanumeric (words and numbers) displays, and that it has a built-in crash recorder. If power is interrupted, this computer retains the last 50 seconds' worth of operational data (speed, engine rpm, etc.) in its memory bank to help reconstruct the events leading up to an incident.

Twelve buttons manage the Dinfos from a central control console. Right now, B+B is marketing the system only for Rabbits and Porsche 911s, but the components are modular and adaptable to practically any car. Future designs, for Mercedes sedans, say, may have only three control keys, according to Buchmann. Porsche customers, on the other hand, may demand sweeping banks of switch gear to satisfy their curiosity and gadget lust. The possibilities are endless.

Just to make sure operators didn't suffer ennui during the testing and evaluation of the B+B computer's development, the Rabbit convertibles bearing prototype hardware were decked out in all the latest fashions: pastel paint rich in a pearlescent compound called Iridin; textured convertible tops (in a pattern suspiciously like Holiday Inn shower curtains); tasty wheel flares, front spoilers,