

Butch baby



Volkswagen tried to sell a countrified Golf II in 1989, but the time wasn't ripe for an SUV.

Almost 20 years later, another compact 4x4 from Wolfsburg has entered the market.

Dieter Losskarn took the Tiguan, the Touareg's little brother, for a ride.

Initially sneered at two decades ago, today even erstwhile detractors admit that the martial-looking Golf II Country is one of the legitimate pioneers of today's SUV craze. Before it appeared as a prototype at the 1989 Geneva Motor Show, it was supposed to be called Montana, later renamed to Country. The fuel-injected 1,8-litre engine and four-wheel drive were combined with radically revised suspension mountings to give the vehicle a genuine off-road capability.

Production started in April 1990 at the Steyr-Daimler-Puch factory of Mercedes G fame (today Magna-Steyr) in the Austrian city of Graz. Base for the all-terrain Golf was the

four-door CL Syncro version, built in Wolfsburg and sent to Steyr for conversion. The adaptation used 94 new parts and consisted of an intermediate frame (lifting the body by 180mm), guard rails, externally mounted spare tyre carrier, a mighty bull-bar in front and a skid plate underneath.

But it didn't catch on. It was far ahead of its time – and too expensive. People just laughed when they saw those 'Golfs on steroids' in the showrooms. Volkswagen tried everything, from a cheaper basic version to a life-stylish black chrome model with cream-coloured leather seats. To no avail. The car flopped badly and

'It feels like a mix between a Golf and a Passat and it's agile and dynamic.'



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Volkswagen had to pull the plug after selling 7735 units, less than half of the expected sales figures, in 18 months.

As you can imagine, today the Country is a sought-after and very rare collector's item with an enthusiastic fan club – especially in its chrome version or as one of the limited edition of 50 Country GTis.

Almost 20 years later, compact SUVs are a common sight and, as with the Touareg, Touran and Eos, the guys from Wolfsburg came late, but strong. There is no doubt that Volkswagen's second attempt at a compact SUV will be a huge success. In Germany, they already run extra shifts at the factory to meet the demand and in South Africa there's a waiting list.

In naming the vehicle, VW let Fritz Public have a say. Germany's best-selling car publication, *Autobild*, held a competition and 350 000 people cast their votes. The winning name was a cross-over between a fierce mammal and a cold-blooded reptile. *Leguan* is the German word for iguana and combined with tiger (same spelling in both languages), it resulted in Tiguan – it received 36 per cent of all votes. Runner-up names were Nanuk and Namib.

The Tiguan has an attractive body with similarities to its bigger brother and the Golf, nevertheless with its own style. Every line looks right. Get in, adjust the seat and steering wheel and the car fits perfectly. It combines the look of an Italian loafer with the comfort of a Caterpillar boot.

Even in the back there is enough leg- and headroom. The back seats are mounted slightly higher for better sightseeing – and they've got a reclining function of 23 degrees. Wherever you look, there are storage compartments in all sizes and shapes.

I tried the 2,0 Tdi Sport & Style first. It feels like a mix between a Golf and a Passat and it's agile and dynamic.

Along the coastal stretch between Camps Bay and Hout Bay, it didn't behave like an SUV at all. There was no body roll whatsoever and even when cornering hard, it was like having fun in a hatchback. The seats were very comfortable and gave great side support. The manual six-speed gearbox shifted exactly and the torque of the diesel was more than satisfying. For lazy gear shifters, there's a six-speed tiptronic available for this model.

Volkswagen offers the Tiguan in three different trim levels. The entry-level specification on-road is named Trend & Fun, the high-level off-road one Track & Field and the high-level on-road one Sport & Style. The latter two include 17-inch instead of 16-inch alloy wheels, chrome roof rails, tinted windows, leather sport seats and cruise control. As an optional extra, you can choose the New York 18-inch alloy wheel upgrade, setting you back another R4240, turning the Sport & Style into an even better looker. However, the bigger wheels on the car I drove made it slightly uncomfortable on bumpy roads.

The Tiguan comes with two different nose jobs. The off-road Track & Field version has a shorter front-spoiler, changing the approach angle from 18 to more off-road friendly 28 degrees. There is also a 1,5 mm underbody skid plate and – most importantly – an off-road button, which enables electronic differential locks, a hill descent assistant, finer throttle response and, by recalibrating the ABS, more sensitive braking on loose ground.

As one expects from Volkswagen, the new compact SUV is very safe. It was awarded five stars in the strict Euro NCAP crash testing. To avoid finding out what that means, the Tiguan comes standard with all the contemporary driving aids, like ESP and traction control.

With each new SUV on the market, you start looking for new electronic gimmicks. The Tiguan does not disappoint in this regard. In addition to the optional rear-assist parking camera (R4520), it offers a park-assist parallel-parking aid (R5 000) that scans an available parking space when prompted by the push of a button in the middle console. The driver then turns the indicator on, engages reverse, accelerates and brakes – without touching (!) the steering wheel. An eerie feeling, but fun – I played with it for hours, while passersby thought I was in a hijack, with my hands up while parking. >

OPPOSITE: The Tiguan's two faces: Sport & Style or Track & Field.

BELOW: Perfect luxury: the Tiguan cockpit with touch screen and multi-function steering wheel.





Smart addition is an inverter, which provides both 12V and 230V power outlets, enabling converter-free use of two-pronged devices, like espresso machines, hair dryers, cell-phone and battery chargers.

It was time for the 1,4 TSI Trend & Fun. At first glance, 1,4-litre doesn't sound like much of an engine, but this one is both turbo- and supercharged, resulting in an impressive performance, which I immediately felt when I got behind the wheel.

It's paired with a six-speed manual transmission gearbox, but there is no tiptronic option available for this model.

Considering the R47 000 price difference between the 2,0 Tdi and the 1,4 TSI and the high price of diesel, I would prefer the petrol Tiguan.

If 150hp is not enough and you want a tiptronic gearbox, don't despair, the 1,4-litre will be complemented by a 2,0-litre TSI with 197 hp (R335 500 manual; R347 000 tiptronic,

Bound for success: Volkswagen's Tiguan is well priced, attractive and fun to drive.

both Sport & Style and Track & Field) later in the year.

I wonder whether Volkswagen might be planning a special car-nut version of the Tiguan, like the one they did for staff members in 1990 with the limited edition of 50 Country Gtis? If I may, I would suggest a Tiguan R32.

There are a couple of optional extras you should have with the new Tiguan. First of all, I'd like the panoramic glass roof (R8 000), turning the car into a micro-observatory, the manually folding towbar (R5 600), with an impressive towing capacity of 2 500 kilograms, the multi-function steer-

ing wheel (R2000) and the super-bright xenon beams with cornering lights (R8000).

While Volkswagen might be later than BMW with its X3 and some Asian manufacturers, three German and one Swedish compact SUV are still waiting to be released. Audi's Q5, Mercedes's GLK, Porsche's Roxster and Volvo's XC60 make sure there'll be some fierce competition in this market segment towards the end of this year and in 2009. To think it all started with a butch Golf II in heels. ■

Next month: We drive the new (finally square again) Jeep Cherokee from the Drakensberg to Cape Town and into the Kalahari and Namib Deserts.

The low-down

VW Tiguan 1,4 TSI

Price: R265 500 Trend & Fun (R273 000 Track & Field)
 Engine: 1,4 l in-line 4 cyl. – 110 kW/150 hp
 0–100 km/h: 9,6 secs
 Top speed: 192 km/h
 Consumption/100 km: 8,4 litres
 Fuel tank: 64 litres
 Range: 760 km
 Weight: 1 546 kg
 Approach angle: 18° (28°)
 Departure angle: 25°
 Ground clearance: 200 mm

VW Tiguan 2,0 TDI

Price: R312 500 manual Sport & Style
 Engine: 1,4 l in-line 4 cyl. – 103 kW/140 hp
 0–100 km/h: 10,5 secs
 Top speed: 186 km/h (182 km/h tiptronic)
 Consumption/100 km: 7,2 litres
 Fuel tank: 64 litres
 Range: 890 km
 Weight: 1 591 kg (1 605 kg tiptronic)
 Approach angle: 18°
 Departure angle: 25°
 Ground clearance: 200 mm

A more affordable 4x2 version (R247 000) will join the Tiguan range in early 2009.

For more information: www.vw.co.za or the German site: www.tiguan.com. If you want to find out more about the Tiguan's predecessor, the Golf Country II, go to the German fan website www.vw-golf-country.de.

For a similar amount of money (R265 500 to R312 500), you could buy:

Mitsubishi Outlander 2,4 LE AT R299 900
 Toyota RAV4 2,0 VX AT R329 800
 Honda CR-V 2,4 RVSi AT R330 500
 Chevrolet Captiva 3,2 LTZ AT R336 600

Wheels etc.



Hog Mecca

The Harley-Davidson Museum opened its doors in July in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where the legend was born 105 years ago. It hosts one of the most impressive motorcycle archive collections in the world. Over the years, one motorcycle was saved from each assembly line, presumably with the idea in mind that such a museum might one day exist. Willie G Davidson, senior vice president, chief styling officer and great-grandson of one of the founding Davidson brothers, has worked hard to bring this project to fruition.

The museum houses over 450 motorcycles, a further 8 000 artefacts and 15 000 photographic exhibits. The journey back in time starts with the serial number one bike from 1903. This is the oldest Harley-Davidson motorcycle known in existence and was produced by the founders in the original wooden shed.

Some of the most famous Harley-Davidson stories have been born out of their Hollywood appearances in movies, such as *Easy Rider*, and celebrity owners, including crazy stunt-driver Evil Knievel. More recently, five Springer Softails were issued to the film set of *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*; two of these bikes are exhibited in the museum.

Another model on display is Elvis Presley's 1956 model KL, alongside the loan agreement paperwork, completed just days before he became famous and where he listed his occupation as a 'self-employed entertainer'. For more information, visit www.h-dmuseum.com.





A legend reborn

The cutest ever Italian car, the *bellissimo* Fiat Cinque Cento, is back on the streets, more successful than ever. The modern version of the Italian Mini is the ideal weekend getaway car for two. Just imagine a trip through the winelands or a leisurely drive around the coast in this icon of Italian motoring. Prices start at R149 000. See more pics at www.fiat.co.za.

Stuck



I negotiated a small stream in the Pomona area and got bogged down in my Merc ML 320 late in the afternoon after playing around in the surrounding clay. Worse, it started to rain. A passing Hilux bakkie attempted to pull me out, but gave up when he was nearly pulled into the stream as well. Next it was the turn of a woman in a Lada Niva, but still my ML would not budge. A gent in a Toyota Hilux Raider 4x4 then attached a snatch rope to the ML and she dutifully followed the Toyota like a lovesick teenager. My friend Joan Bennie took the pictures, refused point blank to get into the car with me and made me wash up outside.

Charon Dodd, Johannesburg

If you have photographs of a 4x4 getting stuck, e-mail them to wheels@getaway.co.za or post them to Getaway Wheels, PO Box 180, Howard Place, 7450 Cape Town. You could win a Nissan Secure Tech Survival Kit worth R1 000, comprising an Off-Road Tactix manual and DVD, as well as a recovery bag with pull strap, shackles and a pair of gloves. ■

