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## Volkswagen ready to fill minivan gap with Routan

By **JIM ROBINSON**  
*Metroland Media Group  
Carguide Magazine*

What was Volkswagen thinking?

It was two years ago, right around this time, when Volkswagen launched the full-size Routan minivan.

Ford and General Motors had already vacated the segment with Mazda also on the way out and Nissan in a holding pattern.

If Ford and GM didn't see a future in minivans, why then did Volkswagen?

VW Canada president and CEO, John White, said at that time, there was still, and remains today, a market for a vehicle that seats seven in comfort.

With Ford and GM absent from the segment, that left 40,000 units a year up for grabs. Also, there are first-time minivan buyers who have been loyal VW owners but, until Routan came along, had to go elsewhere.

White also said VW was also interested in attracting primarily Honda Odyssey and Toyota Sienna buyers. And there is the cachet of being only German maker in the minivan mix opening up a whole new market to plumb.

And, of course, it fleshes out the showroom where Volkswagen has been having a pretty good time of it lately with the new Jetta flying out the doors and the Golf receiving just about every Canadian automotive accolade you can name.

Volkswagen claims it invented the minivan with the Microbus in 1950 and even the first sliding panel door with the 1963 VW camper. And while VW has all kinds of mini- and midi-sized vans and buses in Europe, you don't just slap on a North American set of bumpers and sell it here. You also need to offer vehicles that conform to North Americans' tastes and expectations.

For instance, when it come to air conditioning, North Americans like a blast of cold air while Europeans prefer not to be chilled.

And for things like that you need a lot of expertise, which is why the Routan is being built in Windsor on the same line and using the same platform as



The Volkswagen seven-seat 2010 Routan minivan is aimed to compete head-on with Honda and Toyota. Built on the same platform and on the same assembly line in Windsor beside the Dodge Caravan and Chrysler Town & Country, the Routan will be offered in four trim levels. Styling cues take much from current VW products like the Tiguan-esque front treatment.

the Chrysler Town & Country and the Dodge Grand Caravan. Also, partnering with Chrysler meant coming to market a lot sooner than trying to develop one in-house, not to mention being much cheaper.

And lastly, this is all good news for the economy in Windsor, a city that never seems to catch a break. Essentially, the Routan is the Chrysler with crisper styling with the nose drawing heavily from the Tiguan compact crossover. The seats were made firmer as well as the suspension, in other words, more like a Volkswagen. There are several minor changes, but what you see is what you get, which is essentially a Chrysler Town & Country which is not a bad thing.

While the Americans get a choice of three engines,

the Canadian Routan comes only with a Chrysler-sourced 4.0-litre, SOHC V6 putting out the same 251 hp and 259 lb/ft of torque as the T&C. In front-drive (all-wheel-drive not available) power goes through a six-speed electronic automatic transmission with sequential shift mode. Fuel consumption is listed at 12.2L/100 km city and 7.9L/100 km highway.

I drove a T&C Limited last year and I somehow think I was seated higher in the Routan. The forward view is commanding and, thankfully, the materials used on the dashboard did not cause a reflection on the huge windshield which is a major failing in many minivans of my experience, including the one I now own.

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