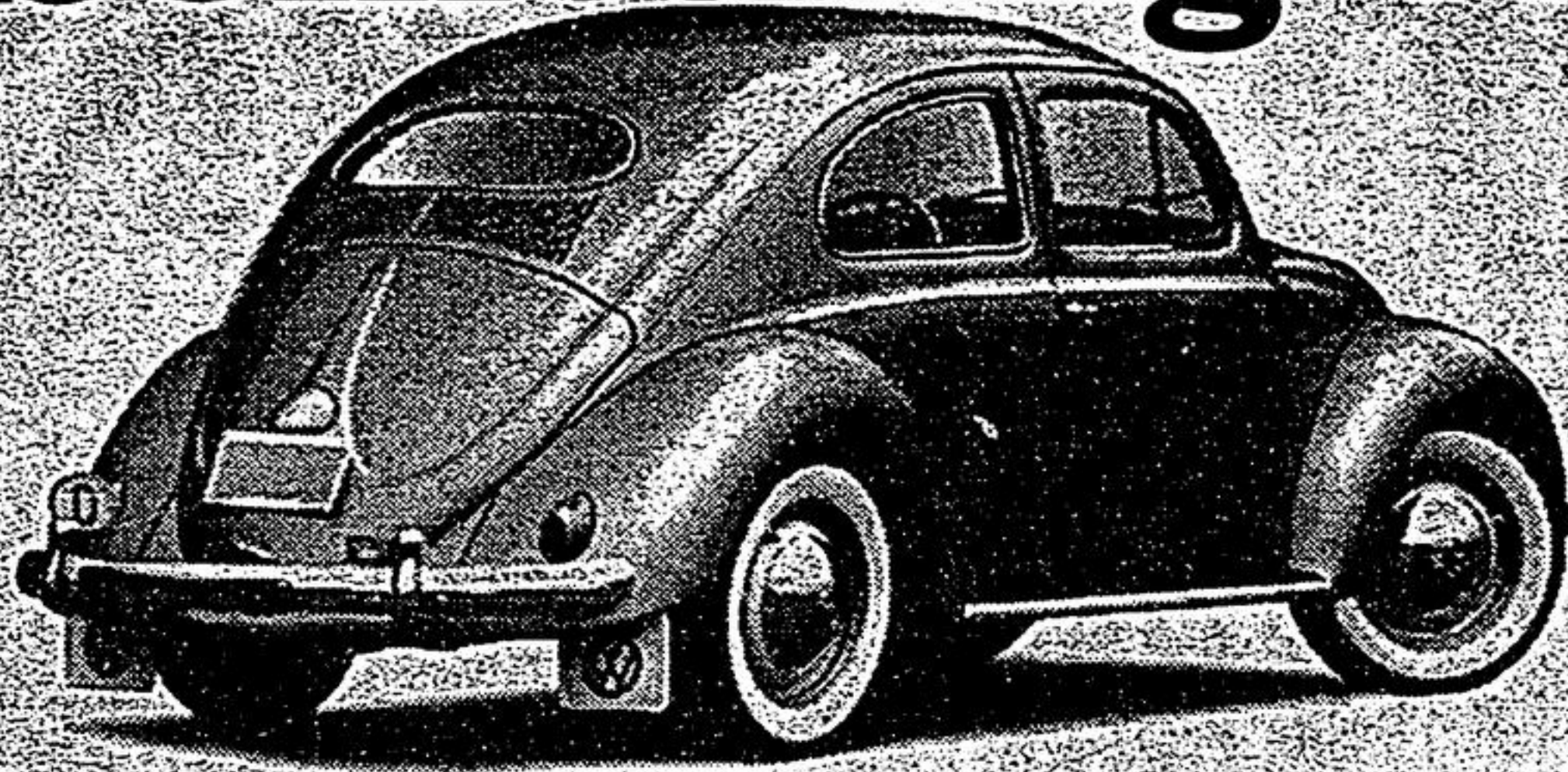


# Wheels

An Advertising Feature of the Economist & Sun and The Tribune

## Something old,



## something new



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**JIM ROBINSON**  
Metroland Staff

I'll admit off the bat I tried hard not to like Volkswagen's New Beetle, really I did.

I was not one of those invited on press trips to drive the New Beetle, which was okay by me as the two or three hours in a car that has been gone over by super-mechanics for any squeak and rattle rarely gives a true idea of what it's like to live with one.

And I also wasn't going to let myself get caught up in all the hoopla about the romance of the Old Beetle being metamorphosed into the new car. Frankly, there was nothing romantic about the old car at all. It was slow, it could be dangerous and it was cramped on the inside. I will admit that as long as you kept oil in it, a Beetle could not be killed, but that only was true in areas where salt wasn't used in the winter.

I did a first short road test of the new car prior to a press event in Toronto where VW Canada turned its dealers loose with 60 New Beetles to drive into the heart of the city and create a media sensation before Beating-off from whence they came.

First surprise was the gutsiness of the beast. I could lay rubber in first and get a chirp in second. It also found the driving position very comfortable, although the far away windshield made it initially feel like driving around in a giant arcade game.

Thanks to VW Canada, they made one of the first production cars available to me for six days.

The reaction from the public was amazing. People came up and asked questions. They tooted their horns and flashed the V-sign. They complimented me on my choice. They also tried to get in without asking. They boxed me into a moving corner behind a slower car to get a better look. One even stole the radio mast when I was inside a building.

Ergo, I had to conclude that this car draws a response from a very wide cross-section of the population, not just car nuts. The conclusion is VW couldn't have made this any more of a people magnet if they'd tried.

The new beetle "is distinctive," said Gerd Reisencker, president of Greenbelt Motors in Unionville. "It's not only for the older generation, it also attracts to the younger generation."

Reisencker said out of the 8,000 1998 Beetles that made it to Canada, 76 have been sold at his dealership and only 38 have actually been delivered.

His oldest purchaser was a World War II veteran from Brooklyn, New York who wanted a car that was distinct and with a diesel engine. The youngest was about 18-years-old, who wanted a cool car.

"It's definitely a cool car."

That said, what is it like to drive? The New Beetle (no one is calling it a Bug yet) is based on the admirable Passat/new Golf chassis, and it is built in Mexico like the Passat. Many of the Passat features are there too, like the front seats with the height-adjustable ratchet system.

Continued on page 18

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