

# Drivers Wanted Back

By Scott Farrell, aka "Stealth TDI" (updated in 2012)

*Disclaimer: Think of this as an op-ed of sorts in which I express a view that contradicts popular opinions at VWVortex and other VW enthusiast discussion forums. I have a dry, warped sense of humor. I'm not nitpicking cars. Instead, I'm commenting against those who bash on others for not following current fashion trends. Take this as a different look at the VW scene. Longer version [here](#).*

When I first entered the VW scene in 1995, ten years after buying my first VW, the philosophy for tuning a VW was to make it handle, make it fast, and then make it look good. We were drivers. There was a "*function over form*" mindset in those days. The "posers" were only making their cars look fast. They were "styling" rather than "tuning." Import tuning practices actually degraded their cars, made it look silly, or just made no sense at all. The VW community was happy to laugh at them while focusing on real improvements. But something changed. The introduction of the 1.8T made adding power so easy and inexpensive that just about everyone is doing it. Perhaps the easy power may have caused VW enthusiasts to get bored and succumb to the pressure of import styling. 🙄



I'm not here to tell anyone that my philosophy is best, that anyone else's is wrong, or that there's only one right way to get the job done. Instead, my criticism is directed toward those who insist on telling others they're doing it wrong. Most can hardly post a photo of their car without the immediate response, "needs moar low" or some other tripe. Yes, my "uncool" friends, that's how they spell "more." 🤖 Some critics have spent a lot of time and money to achieve a certain look and think everyone else should, too. Is this because they were ridiculed until they joined the flock and "got it right?" Others like the look of certain cars and think everyone should take that path even if they haven't done it themselves. Similar to political special interest groups, these VW fans are in the extreme minority yet command the bulk of the attention. I have no complaint with people modifying their cars. I like a lot of what I see out there. However, watching people continually mock cars that don't meet a temporary standard gets old really fast. It's easy to be a harsh critic when cloaked behind the anonymity of a keyboard. Here are a few things that cannot be disputed without major chaos at VWVortex:

"Needs Moar Low" is a styling trend which truly impairs the performance of the car. Proponents of this fad lower their car to the point of it being barely functional and then expect everyone else should, too. Some executions look really good! What's baffling, however, is when drivers of ground-scraping VWs get upset over "terrible roads" when they wreck their subframe, bust an oil pan, or rip an engine off its mount and then get advised to sue the city or state for compensation. HELLO!?!? Who altered their car and put it at risk? Why should taxpayers cover the damage? Those who take responsibility for their decisions and use an ounce of prevention should be admired. To insist everyone should be "moar low" to be considered an "enthusiast" is puzzling. As if "moar low" isn't hindering enough, many opt to install the cheapest parts they can find. Frugal shopping is okay. But it's quite amusing to read a rant about how poorly one's car rides on \$350 coilovers. Are cheap coilovers which won't last nearly as long as quality parts really worth the compromise in safety, comfort, and durability? On second thought, perhaps cheap coilovers were never intended to actually upgrade the car. Instead, they're a quick, cheap, styling decision to seek swift approval from lemming leadership. 🙄

Wheels and tires are just as important as suspension when preserving any kind of handling. From a functional viewpoint, tire stretching has to be one of the dumbest fads to hit the scene! Many advocates of "stretching" lower their car to well outside its design limits, buy short, narrow, cheap tires and stretch them onto wide wheels, and then blindly proceed to drive it as if it is still capable of sporty handling, rain or shine. Later comes the rant, "*crappy roads bent my wheels*" or "*a pothole caused a blowout*." More often than not, these incidents

are caused when the owner did at least one of three things to the car: 1) installed larger wheels with ultra-low profile tires, 2) installed cheap wheels or tires, or 3) didn't maintain proper tire pressure. A simple rule for wheels: "Light, Strong, Cheap... Pick two!" A bent wheel either had too little tire, too little air, it was "cheap and light," or ALL OF THE ABOVE. Make smart wheel/tire purchases and drive conservatively with the understanding that stretched-tire cars are impaired for the sake of looks.

Putting it all together, what is the result of the combination of "moar low," cheap suspension, large wheels, and stretched ultra-low profile tires? Besides being a hazard to the public and its property, casual observation suggests it's also a car that can barely maintain the speed limit on surface streets, has to take corners like a wedding cake cart or risk shredding tires, and has to crawl over speed bumps and railroad crossings in order to avoid destroying itself. Being stuck behind one of those "proper" cars on a road with turns or bumps is seriously irritating! "Proper" cars may look cool in photos. But they're NOT cool when holding up traffic.

Back to "more low," enthusiasts have long sought ways to slam their car without sacrificing ride quality or causing costly damage. A few pioneers eventually adapted air ride suspension systems to their VWs. Air rides were drooled over from afar and flocked around at shows. Now there is a variety of kits available. There's also a crowd who believes air ride is for those trying to take the easy way without the "dedication" or "sacrifice" of driving a slammed VW. WHAT? Is this a joke? Air ride is the solution to the right stance at shows and allows a customized ride height for driving on smooth, rough, or truly awful roads. To hate on air ride just because it's not "static" is silly. Being beyond most budgets doesn't make it any less of a functional problem-solver!

As if VW fans can't be petty enough, it's always a pleasure when owners are excited to share their pride and joy and post a topic to share a "build" only to be greeted with, "*Buying a car and slapping on a set of coilovers and wheels is not a build. A build is a restoration.*" Okay. I suppose I agree to a point. But why abuse the owner for it? Just because I didn't buy some dilapidated junker of a car or allow my new MK3 to become one over the past 14 years doesn't mean I didn't do a "build." What else does one call the effort which slowly transformed a 90-hp compact family sedan into a 150-hp, 300-ft/lb daily-driven autocrosser that's 20% faster than stock and achieves over 50-mpg while maintaining a relatively subdued appearance for the sake of thwarting thieves and cops? For the record, restorations which save old VWs from the junkyard are VERY COOL. However, it's unnecessary to treat those who didn't take that path as though they are not enthusiasts.

What's an "enthusiast," anyway? I've been at this a long time. I know my car is an A3 (*platform*), a MARK 3 instead of an "emkay three," and I know what I want from it. In short, I want EVERYTHING from it! It's my daily commuter, tow vehicle, weekend autocrosser, and primary road trip car — currently with over 400,000 miles logged in a little green book. I like it to look good and hope to get it repainted someday. I'd also like to do another turbo upgrade and some head work. But my priority is to minimize downtime and DRIVE IT! I have Bentley manuals for each of my VWs, special tools for odd jobs, and a garage full of spare parts to speed repairs, even for the jobs I know I'll pay someone else to do. Some people want a show car, some want a commuter that's all function and no form, some want a play toy, and some want their VW to do it all. Is any one of those people better or more of an "enthusiast" than the others if they all love their VW and the community the same? Are the ones who turn their own wrenches any more devoted or any more of an "enthusiast" than those who sacrifice their hard-earned cash to pay someone else maintain their VW, cash which could've been used in a different manner like a new pair of shoes or the latest video game? I say "NO!" A "non-enthusiast" just might save your bacon someday, either by helping you on the side of the road, providing information or diagnostic advice, or perhaps giving you some cash to do the maintenance they lack the time, knowledge, tools, or space to do themselves. So let's work on paying each other a little mutual respect. By the way, [here's my "not-a-build" video.](#)

