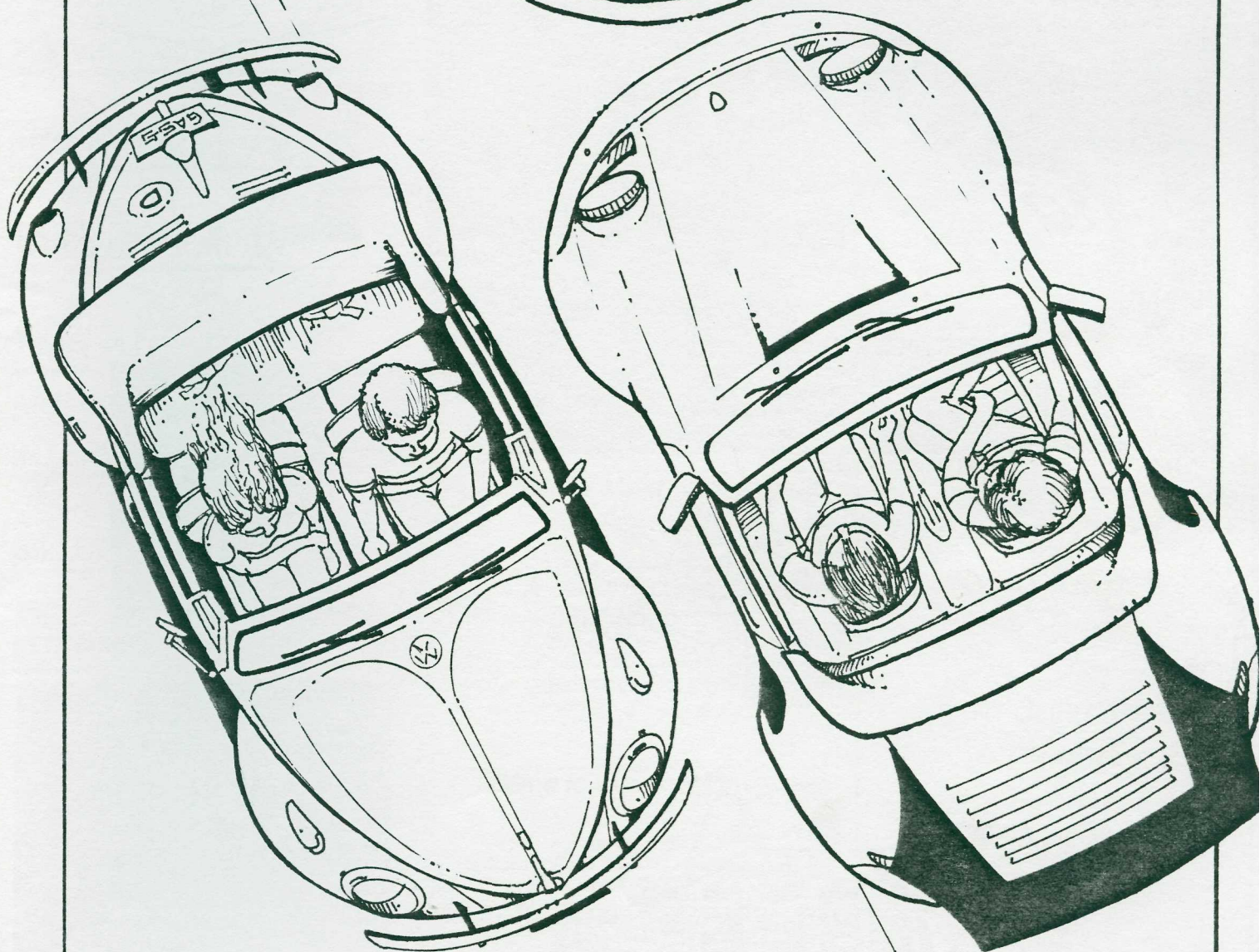


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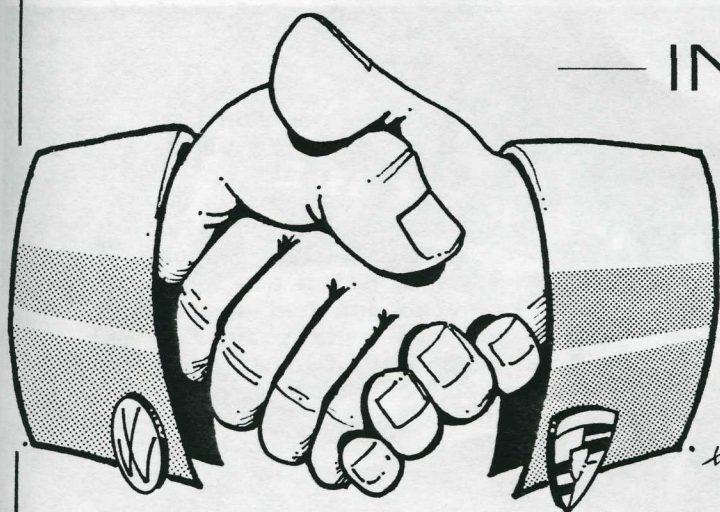
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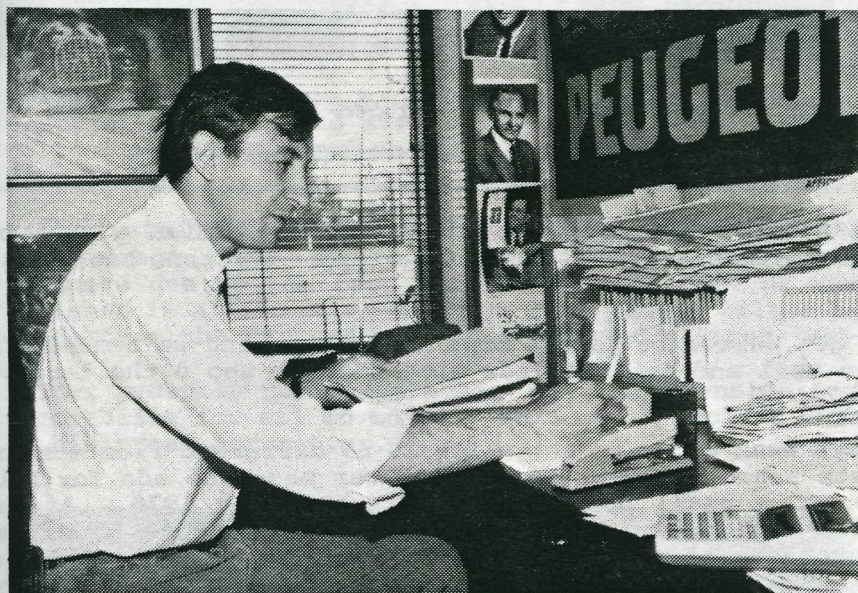
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"VEREINIGTEN DURCH LUFT"





## — INTERVIEW —



Early on when I entered the Volkswagen hobby, I became intrigued by the sales brochures that were given out to prospective customers in the showrooms of VW dealers throughout the country. If you have got a nice VW, or plan on restoring one, these can be quite handy, as they show you just how your VW looked when it was new; and it depicts just what colors were available, what the upholstery looked like and even the numerous accessories that you were able to purchase to personalize your pride and joy. I had picked up a few of the brochures along the way at various swap meets back in the East, but it wasn't until I met Mr. Walter Miller that I really got into collecting the VW brochures. For you see, Walter was just beginning his own business of dealing in the buying and selling of such material and he just happened to have a nice selection of VW items waiting for me to inspect and purchase. So it was, that I now had a good base of sales brochures on which to build and add to.

In due time, my own VW collection grew and grew and I was fortunate to be able to assemble a book that related the history of the VW Beetle. I used my collection of brochures as my medium to tell the story, from the pre-war II days, right through to the last hold out for the Beetle in Mexico.

Through the years I have continued to enjoy the VW phenomena and Walter Miller has continued to thrive with his factory brochure business. I have continued to stay in touch with Walter and have added to my own collection through items purchased from Walter. Recently, Walter had acquired a collection of brochures, books and magazines from a huge estate sale that was owned by Mr. J. L. Elbert of Clinton, Missouri, that took two semi trailers to transport. I thought it was high time that I visit him at his place of business in Syracuse, New York. Since I was planning to attend a large VW show in Toronto, Canada, I started my trip early and detoured to Walter's stronghold in Syracuse.

The location of Walter's business is quite easy to find. All one must do is access the New York Thruway and take the number 35 exit near Syracuse. You then proceed to the first exit of the traffic circle that you first encounter and it's a few blocks down the road on your left side. They are open Monday through Friday from 9:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and the building is quite easy to spot as a number of vintage automobiles sit in the parking lot and there is even an old replica of an early airplane of 1930's vintage sitting beside the building.

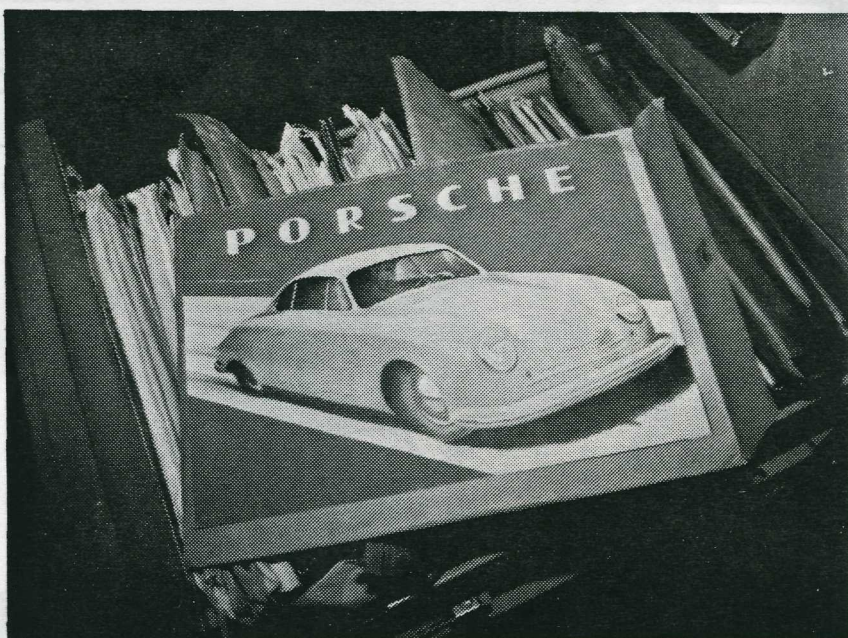
Upon entering the building, you feast your eyes on an early baby buggy carriage that resembles an auto from the 1920's. The walls and shelves are filled to overflowing with toys, hood ornaments, car badges, auto accessories and anything and everything that strikes Walter's fancy. There is even a number of antique pedal cars, one of which as an old puppet, Howdy Doody at the wheel! Then there is a couple of bent over Hitler statues, one of which is for keeping toothpicks in Hitler's rear end and the other depicts Hitler bent over and uses Hitler's rear end for a pin cushion. For you see, Walter buys and sells the auto related printed matter, but he himself enjoys the three dimensional items that adorn his building.

After giving myself a guided tour, Walter soon appeared at age 37, all 6' 3", single, having been recently disengaged and dressed casually wearing boat dockers that were soon discarded in favor of bare feet on the rugs, some of which depicted automobile scenes and some of the



oriental variety that adorned the floors of his building. The phone constantly rang as customers from around the country called in their requests for the precious literature. With a portable phone in hand, Walter or one of his busy workers would actually go to the correct file cabinet that surrounds the rooms and search for the item that is being requested over the phone.

While waiting, Walter opened up some incoming mail that consisted of some old Packard items from 1956 such as matches, promotional models and a leather case with two decks of cards with Packard automobiles featured on the backs and some note paper and pencil. There was another box that he opened that contained a large number of oversized buttons. Each button depicted an automobile scene and were used to keep the "dusters" fastened that were worn when one drove the autos of yesterday that were of the open style.



*The first Porsche brochure from 1948. It was recently sold with an entire collection from Walter's stash of literature.*

As for the size of his business, Walter advertises that he has over 2 million pieces of literature (that's easy to believe) and he also states "if someone is larger (in this business), show me!"

After quite a long time, I was able to get Walter to take a break for lunch and we headed off to a quiet nearby restaurant for a fine meal and an interview with the guy who's the largest dealer of factory literature in the world!

Walter had gone to college and had always been a car freak, which is no different from most of us. But in between sessions at graduate school he started selling car magazine ads for half a buck, 35 cents, whatever. Then he got a small box of auto literature in 1976. At the conclusion of graduate school, he made his decision to try the sales brochure business full time and just happened to make a few good purchases of stuff. He also placed ads in Hemmings Motor News once in a while. It would be two years before Walter even bought his first file cabinet but now he buys them 30 at a clip.

In Walter's own collection he enjoys items that are different and safety related and historic in nature. For instance he has a booklet from the U.S. senate dated 1840 that discusses the feasibility of establishing a steam bus route across the U.S. as a toll road. He also has a Volvo piece from 1950 that shows the installation of seat belts...which at that place in time shows Volvo quite ahead of everyone else in safety. The earliest piece Walter has sold was dated 1889 and was a one page flyer showing a steam car that was produced in Philadelphia. Walter received \$600 for this piece of history and it's duplicate of one that is in the Smithsonian Institution. Another interesting piece of literature Walter sold was a ticket to the very first automobile race in the U.S.

As for expensive pieces, the one that has demanded the most was a signed factory letter from Eton Ferrari for \$6,500. For you see Walter also enjoys collecting autographs of major car people, such as the presidents of the various car manufacturers through the years. Walter has one of the best collections of autographs in the world which includes Henry Ford, Ettore Bugatti, Phill Hill, Carol Shelby, and Henry Kaiser, Jr.

His range of available literature ranges from the 1880's right through present day and he has sold a lot of Porsche brochures recently that are only a few years old. Walter advised not to buy for investment, just enjoyment. Collect the brochures of cars that you happen to own.

In order to keep merchandise in stock, Walter travels 60,000 miles a year in his 928 Porsche. That is one reason why he is not open on the weekends, as he is out following up leads on automotive related items. He makes at least one trip a year to California, buying literature all along the way. Instead of buying in bulk anymore, he is concentrating on buying quality pieces which come in smaller amounts. If he has room in his car, he will keep it with him, if not, he will just mail it back to Syracuse. Walter advertises a lot, thus he has leads coming in from everywhere and sometimes he buys it over the phone sight unseen and sometimes he must travel to make sure it is what it is claimed to be.



The majority of Walter's customers come through the mail, plus fax and phone lines, with about 3 percent coming from walk in sales. He also explained that about 35 percent of his business comes from outside the U.S. Everyday he has a large stack of request that come in via the fax lines. His staff of seven (plus four part timers) help sort out everything and place it in its proper file and help to pull out the proper items and wrap them up securely for mailing. The shipping table consists of a board mounted on an antique billiard table. With the volume of business, I observed the table might never see use for many years to come.

During my visit, Walter permitted me to browse through the mother load he had recently acquired of two truck loads. Since I enjoy the Volkswagen and Porsche marques the most, I glanced at these two and was quite amazed at the quantity and quality of the brochures. The guy who had assembled these had not only written to the major manufacturer, but had also written to each and every country that was assembling the make. Each piece had been kept in the original envelope that it had been sent in from the factory. In the VW file, there were a few pieces from the pre war era and it picked up again after the war with pieces starting in 1946. As for the Porsche file, it started with the number one piece from 1948, which is quite difficult to find, and continued through each and every year.

At one point in my visit, I found Walter in his parking lot talking on his portable phone with a potential buyer for his 1957 Jaguar Roadster. The interested party bought the car sight unseen and Walter proceeded with plans for his next purchase, a perfectly restored 1965 red 356 Porsche Roadster. Which, in my opinion, was a move upward.

Jay Leno, the heir to the popular TV Tonight Show stopped in recently. Jay enjoys his own collection of antique autos and purchased a number of items that included a Lamborghini piece, a Morgan brochure and even a motorcycle piece. The late actor Steve McQueen enjoyed a vast collection of motorcycles and had purchased a number of motorcycle catalogs through the years from Walter.

Walter's building consists of 4,000 square feet and he has another 10,000 square feet elsewhere for storage. His greatest fear in life is fire and Walter is a dealer in fire proof file cabinets due to the fact that he buys so many of them. No one will insure him because his business is all in paper. While I was there, Walter had one of his employees cut off the match heads from the Packard stuff I discussed earlier just to be safe!

Walter recently purchased a historic 1856 mansion in Syracuse and will use it to display his memorabilia for all to enjoy. This would include everything except the sales literature that is his bread and butter.



*All of this sits on top of the many file cabinets in*

*Walter's business. Can you spot the VW model*

*that dates from the 50's?*

While I was in this candy store of car literature, did I pick up anything for my own collection...you betcha! The four pieces I obtained were an early Karmann Ghia black and white flyer from the mid 50's, a "Motest" gauge pamphlet for VW's dated October 1954, a one sided color flyer from a car dealership that dealt in VW's, Volvos and Mazda circ. 1977 and an interesting one page cardboard "chalkboard" entitled "Let's play Volksy!" that awarded points if you spotted a Bug, Ghia, Bus or even a Porsche. This last piece was printed in Canada and is from the early 1960's and was intended to keep young children busy while traveling in a car.

Walter still sells his literature at the Hersey and Carlisle auto shows in Pennsylvania. So if you attend these shows, look up Walter and add to your literature collection, or you can visit or contact him at: Walter Miller, 6710 Brooklawn Parkway, Syracuse, NY 13211, U.S.A., phone (315) 432-8282.

*Text and photos: Terry Shuler*