

A rare WWII German prototype

Volkswagen KDF- Kommandeurswagen Typ 877

by Victor Ma

This car is one of the the most technically interesting fourwheel-drive Beetles in the world. Combining the 4x4 Kubelwagen chassis and the Type 60 Beetle body, the VW877 was built between 1942-1944 at the Wolfsburg factory in Germany.

Unlike the off-road Beetle 92/82e, the Type 87/92SS has special axle shanks to take the driveshafts. Three prototypes were designed and tested between 1939-1941 by the Porsche workshop at Stuttgart. The Nazi Army supply office tested the cross country ability of the vehicles.

Hitler had conceived the idea of the Volkswagen in 1934, after he got the power. He intended to produce a modern automobile for the masses that he dubbed, the *Kraft durch Freude* (KDF—strength through joy) Wagen. The car cost no more than 1000 Reichsmark.

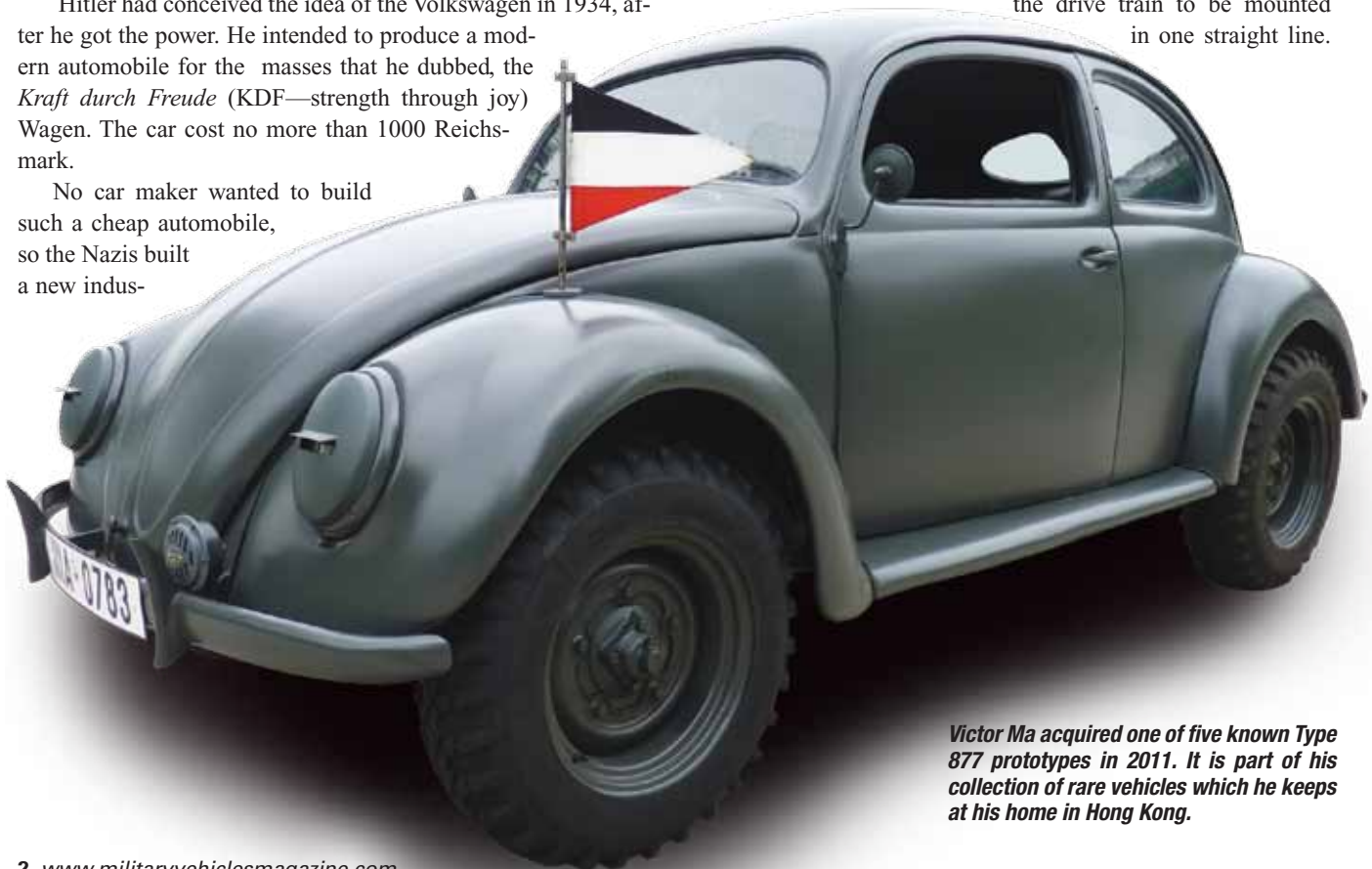
No car maker wanted to build such a cheap automobile, so the Nazis built a new indus-

trial factory at Wolfsburg to build KdF vehicle. Dr. Ferdinand Porsche designed the small, modern car. He had already been enlisted to design a small, National racing car.

The first models were sold to Nazi party members. The KdF sedan could reach a speed of about 100 kilometers per hour (about 62 mph). When the War began in 1939, all civilian car chassis turn to military use.

THE TYPE 87/877 4-WHEEL DRIVE

The Volkswagen 4-wheel drive system was much better for off road performance. The rear-mounted, air-cooled, flat-four cylinder engine and central tubular back bone chassis allowed the drive train to be mounted in one straight line.



Victor Ma acquired one of five known Type 877 prototypes in 2011. It is part of his collection of rare vehicles which he keeps at his home in Hong Kong.



Like a normal wartime Beetle, the 1941 Type 877 prototype carried a spare tire, 20-liter fuel gas can, rear air filter and twin puller set under the front hood. These items are all original to Victor's vehicle.

Also strengthening the off-road ability were the two independent front trailing arms, torsion bar and shock absorbers and rear independent double joint swing axle with trailing arms and torsion bar and lever type shock absorber suspension, 4+1 speed gear box and two self-locking differential (LSD) at both axles

The first thirty Type 128 Schwimmwagens used the Typ 87/877 4 wheel drive system. Some Type 87 prototypes used Kubelwagen bodies, but never went into mass production.

Most Type 87s were converted to civilian Type 60 bodies with a folding top. This was the new four-wheel drive, cross-country Sedan, Type 877. It is distinguished by wider fenders and wider running boards to cover the wide off road tires.

How many four wheel drive Beetles were actually built has not been determined. According to information from Volkswagen, there were 564 of them been built. Recent studies, however, have indicated that this number is not accurate because all 4x4 vehicle are basically included under the Type 87 model classification, including those with the Kubelwagen bodies.

It is possible there were only 10 Type 87 Kubel prototypes built (with as many as another 100 built at Wolfsburg). Because of the lack of front axles and 4-wheel-drive gear boxes after the outbreak of war, three 4x4 hard top/enclosed bodied Beetles were built between 1940 and 1941 by Porsche in Stuttgart. These were used for testing in the Balkans.

Some Type 87s were built between 1939 and 1941 at the Porsche factory in Stuttgart using either very early Type 62 bodies or Type 82 bodies. An additional folding top model was completed in Stuttgart in 1943.

This is why we can say how many Type 877 were produced. Photos from Porsche's test driving show four distinct Type 877s were tested in May 1940. The 4-wheel-drive Beetle was is too expensive to build—it used too many alloy parts. In fact, Volkswagen only built a handful 82e for use as staff cars.

The British Army built two Type 877s after they took control of the Volkswagen factory production in 1946. Some people hve built composite vehicles using



Wider fenders and running boards are distinguishing characteristics of the Type 87/877.

a Type 128 long version Schwimmwagen 4-wheel-drive train or a Type 166 short version Schwimmwagen 4x4 drive system on a Type 82 Kubelwagen chassis. Combined with a wartime Type 60 Beetle body, they do, indeed, have a 4-wheel-drive Beetle. Such composite vehicles cannot be regarded as original Type 87/877, though.

Today, only five Type 87/877 are known to still survive. One 1943 Type 877 is on display at the Porsche Automuseum in Gmünd, Germany. One built by the British for testing in 1946 is housed at the Volkswagen Auto Museum in Wolfsburg, Germany.

The author purchased a third early prototype from a German collector in 2011. It is now part of the vintage car collector belonging to Victor Ma in Hong Kong, China. The collection also contains a 1942 Type 166 prototype, two 1943 Type 82e vehicles and two 1943 Type 82 Kubewagens. ☘



The 986 cubic centimeter, horizontally opposed, four-cylinder, air-cooled engine produced about 23.5 horsepower at 3,000 rpm. Despite excellent performance, only a handful of the four-wheel-drive Kommandeurswagen were built.