



Thinking Small: The Long, Strange Trip of the Volkswagen Beetle

Andrea Hiott

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Sometimes achieving big things requires the ability to think small. This simple concept was the driving force that propelled the Volkswagen Beetle to become an avatar of American-style freedom, a household brand, and a global icon. The VW Bug inspired the ad men of Madison Avenue, beguiled Woodstock Nation, and has recently been re-imagined for the hipster generation. And while today it is surely one of the most recognizable cars in the world, few of us know the compelling details of this car's story. In *Thinking Small*, journalist and cultural historian Andrea Hiott retraces the improbable journey of this little car that changed the world.

Andrea Hiott's wide-ranging narrative stretches from the factory floors of Weimar Germany to the executive suites of today's automotive innovators, showing how a succession of artists and engineers shepherded the Beetle to market through periods of privation and war, reconstruction and recovery. Henry Ford's Model T may have revolutionized the American auto industry, but for years Europe remained a place where only the elite drove cars. That all changed with the advent of the Volkswagen, the product of a Nazi initiative to bring driving to the masses. But Hitler's concept of "the people's car" would soon take on new meaning. As Germany rebuilt from the rubble of World War II, a whole generation succumbed to the charms of the world's most huggable automobile.

Indeed, the story of the Volkswagen is a story about people, and Hiott introduces us to the men who believed in it, built it, and sold it: Ferdinand Porsche, the visionary Austrian automobile designer whose futuristic dream of an affordable family vehicle was fatally compromised by his patron Adolf Hitler's monomaniacal drive toward war; Heinrich Nordhoff, the forward-thinking German industrialist whose management innovations made mass production of the Beetle a reality; and Bill Bernbach, the Jewish American advertising executive whose team of Madison Avenue mavericks dreamed up the legendary ad campaign that transformed the quintessential German compact into an outsize worldwide phenomenon.

Thinking Small is the remarkable story of an automobile and an idea. Hatched in an age of darkness, the Beetle emerged into the light of a new era as a symbol of individuality and personal mobility—a triumph not of the will but of the imagination.

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