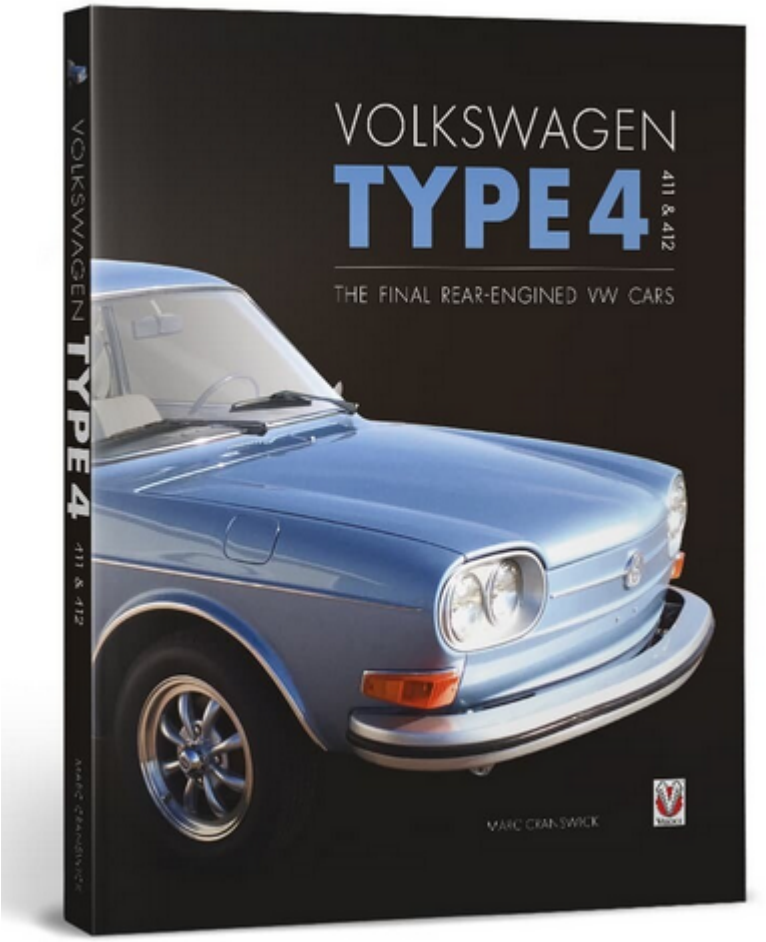
For Your Bookshelf – “VW Type 4 411 and 412”

Published: June 28, 2021

Author: Kieron Fennelly

Online version: https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/for-your-bookshelf-vw-type-4-411-and-412/



Reviewed by Kieron Fennelly.

Author: Marc Cranswick

Published by: Veloce: https://veloce.co.uk/

184 pages (hardback)

UK Price: £35/$60 BUT check Veloce's website for special offers on their books – currently they advise "Get 35% off until further notice when quoting 'STAY-INDOORS-AND-READ'!"

ISBN: 978-1-787151-22-4

This book's subtitle is 'the final rear-engined cars,' the 411 and 412, a worthwhile subject as these now obscure final air-cooled models were in some respects quite a radical departure from the traditional Beetle.

The author shows how VW's one-model policy under Heinz Nordhoff, so successful through the 1950s, was on borrowed time by the late 1960s as VW was overtaken by Fiat. With the 411 and 2, Wolfsburg was attempting to attract the new middle-class clientele which BMW, Rover and Triumph were cultivating with their 2000 models – but the time was out of joint for the relatively spacious 411/2.

The author argues convincingly that the virtues which had propelled the Beetle for so long, thrift and dependable quality were less applicable in the 1970s as increasingly affluent consumers looked for more stylish, more modern designs. However good the car, it seemed that for many the VW logo stood for basic transport: putting the badge on a larger, more luxurious model was not enough to attract people.

Author Cranswick contrasts the 412 Variant (estate) of 1974 with the Volvo 145 estate: at £1,695 the VW undercut the Swede by £500 in the UK while offering the same carrying capacity and performance, yet the Volvo comprehensively out-sold it. VW did not help its air-cooled cause either by introducing the fwd overhead cam Passat in 1973 alongside the 412. In one of the book's more illuminating passages, he explains the series of management changes after Nordhoff died, which led to this contradictory policy, eventually rationalised by former Ford man, Toni Schmucker, who steered VW definitively down the water-cooled route.

Other parts of the text are rather less clear. Rather than deal with 411-2 development chronologically, the story often goes off at tangents and the reader is not always certain whether the author is discussing the preceding Type 3 model, the Type 4 or the Beetle. Later the author looks at the evolution of the general car market, both in Europe and his native North America (which provides most of his reference points). It is an interesting if sometimes repetitive digression, but the reader does wonder whether this was included because without a technical analysis of the 411/2 which the author does not attempt, the story turned out to be rather short. Similarly, an appendix on “sporting VWs” appears to have little relevance to the Type 411 and 412. The book makes good use of contemporary advertising, but rather than take images from VW’s extensive archive, the author has used a variety of hobby photos. These are not only of indifferent quality, but the VWs illustrated have almost all been customised to a lesser or greater degree.

VERDICT

Air-cooled VW enthusiasts will enjoy this book, but for other readers it is disappointingly unfocused.