



**McCAHILL
TESTS**

THE RUSSIAN VOLGA ★ ♁



BY TOM McCAHILL

NOTE to anybody who just happens to be frothing at the mouth to own a Russian car: Hey, buddy, I think I know where you can get one if you play your cards right. Bill France, major-domo of the National Association for Stock Car Racing and the same of the Daytona International Speedway, could be persuaded to let his little Red rig go. At least I have that feeling.

Just in case anybody is wondering what in the world France is doing with a Russian car, let me assure you that France is wondering the same thing. Last summer while checking up on the race tracks of the world, Big Bill found himself eardeep in the Belgian automobile show in Brussels. Now almost every country that makes automobiles has been represented at one time or another at the Daytona Speedway so the idea—good or bad—occurred to Bill that a Russian car might prove interesting. Being a swinger of the first water, France found a Russian Volga and bought it on the spot. At this writing he still is not too sure what to do with it. When it first arrived on these shores and turned up at the Speedway it attracted about as much attention as fingernail polish at a nudist camp.

From a styling standpoint—and I can't use the word any more loosely—the Volga resembles a Plymouth of about 30 years ago or, to pin it down, somewhere between 1935 and 1938. It is high, narrow and about as handsome as the underside of a sludge pump.

One day Bill, for no particular reason, said, "How'd you like to test a Russian job?"

"Sure," I said, "but do you know Niki? I don't."

RED RIG resembles Plymouth of 1935-1938 vintage and is high, narrow and about as handsome as the underside of a sludge pump, says Tom. But the workmanship was good and functional. On the sports-car course at the Daytona International Speedway the Volga proved as sporty as 7-Up at a wake and rolled like a Dixie Cup in a typhoon. Steering vodka-bred job takes real arm moxie and is guaranteed to make a big, powerful man out of a 63-pound weakling in less than 90 days, reports Uncle Tom.

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"A dandy little car for running into trees or mowing down peasants," says Uncle Tom.



VOLGA interior has Spartan dash—but no idiot lights! Legroom was high and short.



FIVE EXTRA wheels found in the small trunk puzzled Tom. They simply came with car.



TALKING OVER VOLGA are Tom McCahill and well-known humor writer Henry McLemore.

"Don't worry about him," he said. "You know me."

It turned out that the Volga had been around the track several months. But it was the kind of eye-catcher that failed to tickle my pupils. If you parked a Volga near several other cars, most people would turn their eyes from it without a second glance. That's the kind of car it is.

When I arrived at the Speedway one day to give this little vodka dodger a once-over, I found that Henry McLemore, one of the funniest guys who ever wrote for publication, was using the beast while his Porsche was undergoing overhaul.

It took me about half a minute with the Volga to discover another jim-dandy invention of the Russians that they should list along with baseball, radio and air (I think I heard they invented that). It's safe to say that no car ever came out of Detroit equipped with this feature—

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if that's what it is. In the trunk were five spare wheels. Yep, one wheel with a spare tire on it and then five other wheels—

just wheels, no tires. What are they for? Ask Mr. K.

I will say that those crazy wheels didn't fill me with boyish confidence when I took the car around the Speedway's high banks. The wheels really had me bugged (that, I hear, is something the Russians didn't invent; they're just trying to develop the hell out of it), especially since the extras were the same size as the one with the tire on it and those on the ground. Bill France had the best explanation when I asked him why they put five extra wheels in the trunk.

"They made the back seat too lumpy," he said.

The reason for my concern was that some imports come over with spare fan belts, gaskets and other parts they think might fail. I wondered whether the Russians knew about this idea—and the faster I went the more I wondered. I still don't know the answer but those

hefty cookie cutters did help keep the tail anchored.

The workmanship of the entire rig was sound, functional stuff though some of the material was on the weird side. The headlining felt like a shower mat and the upholstery was almost as lush as a molting sparrow.

The engine is an overhead valve four-cylinder job. You might have guessed that the design was lifted from any one of several engines built by our English cousins, but that is impossible for the following reasons. As any kid brighter than a platypus knows, the Russians invented the automobile shortly after they developed the electric light, the steamboat and the cotton gin. The only thing we get full credit for is the invention of smoking and German measles. So you can see that the car isn't really at all like a Plymouth and the engine isn't English. The Plymouth was a swipe from them, and so were the English engines. It would seem, however, that some Trotskyite knew where Plymouth dumped its obsolete copies of Russian cars and sent a few back to the homeland for further development.

A closer look at this undelightful little meatball would show that the Ruskies have developed wild chrome decorations and exterior geegaws that were discarded by Detroit a number of years ago.

The front legroom is high and short like our 1930 cars and the rear seat is the same—high and short. There is little elbow room for two big people in the front seat and McLemore and I were rolling all over each other on the high-speed track at fairly low speeds. The windows, which naturally are hand-crank types, also are small 1937ish and the windshield appeared to be made of sugar-glass. The general design matched. The instruments were sparse but, praise Allah, there were no idiot lights. Even the Russians wouldn't lay claim to this American first.

The trunk space is small for a car this big but then, as McLemore pointed out, no one in Russia has much to carry.

Now for the test, and hold on to your bloomers. To steer this job takes real arm moxie, a [Continued on page 134]

McCahill Tests Corvair

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hard to stay with the TR-4s on the way to work, the addition of heavy-duty springs and shocks could make the Corvair owner the happiest guy on the block. If you should dislike being left at the starting gate when the traffic light turns green, a Sprint performance kit will improve 0-to-60 time as much as 25 per cent, according to John, and the whole ball of wax (performance kit and suspension) can be had for roughly a bill (which is a hundred clams to us working stiffs, and pretty rough at that).

In summing up, I think Fitch's Corvair Sprint is one of the best automotive fun buys on the market. Behind the wheel you get the feel of driving a real top imported GT car. With the full treatment, the Fitch Sprint is loaded with style. If it were called the Garibaldi-2000 and John shipped them over from Torino, he'd be back-ordered for five years at \$5,000 a copy—and ten years at \$15,000 per.—Tom McCahill •

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commodity American males had 25 or more years ago. To go from hard left to hard right takes just a little less effort than turning a full-grown oak around in the ground and is guaranteed to make a big, powerful man out of a 63-pound weakling in a lot less than 90 days. Driving the Volga, if it caught on, would put Charlie Atlas out of business.

On the sports-car course the Volga proved about as sporty as 7-Up at a wake and the car rolled like a Dixie Cup in a typhoon. If those spare wheels hadn't been in the trunk I'd probably have landed in Siberia during some of the harder spins. On one part of the sports-car course there were some rubber cones and doing one maneuver I scored 300 by wiping out the lot of them.

On the high-speed track this engine, which we believe develops about 70 hp, proved to be the best part of the whole automobile. The mill, for its size, really is good and apparently well built. No specifications came with the rig and, since several sources disagree on the same car,

no attempt will be made to give any. The Russians aren't well-known for their generosity with facts and figures, you know.

Regardless, the engine is good and top speed proved to be 84.2 mph, in spite of the fact that the speedometer showed almost 140. It was reading in kilometers. Zero to 60 mph averaged 19.1 seconds.

One interesting gizmo was the see-through speedometer, which is illuminated in the daytime by light coming through the windshield. By an odd coincidence, this was a feature of some Chrysler products just five or six years ago.

To get in and out of this little tank is quite easy—as it used to be with American cars—due to the high seat. The mechanical and other accessories under the hood seemed well-made and even the battery looked like one of our better jobs, but I couldn't tell what was inside. The car has see-through sun visors that would be real handy if you were spotting H-bomb blasts. The dark plastic material was much too dense even for Florida's hot sun. A few shades lighter and it would have been a nice feature.

The radio was pretty good but the antenna was as old-fashioned as Abe Lincoln's stovepipe hat and similar to the ones still used on Rolls-Royce and Bentleys. It is dead center on the roof and its position, up or lying down, is controlled by a knob above the windshield. You might forgive Rolls for this bit of antiquity but the guys who invented the radio, it seems to me, should be a bit more modern.

The headlights were good—only one to a side. I was anxious to find out whether the horn played the Internationale but I was foiled. It didn't work. The body, such as it was, was as solid as a tank. This wouldn't be the worst car to roll over in, which mightn't be too much of a trick if you didn't happen to have five spare wheels in the trunk.

In summing up, though the Russians have done quite a job in space with their astronaut scooters, it seems doubtful to this spectator that the Volga would cause midnight oil to burn at General Motors. It is a dandy little car for running into trees or mowing down peasants. And, impertinent though it may sound, Mr. Khrushchev, let me assure everyone that it beats hell out of walking. •